

Theories of Action as Team Sport



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Background

- Landscape Protection portfolio (DPI) has a culture of structured project planning and delivery for NRM projects
- In the past, this has been the domain of a small number of individuals with project planning expertise and not usually involved in the project's delivery
- This paper describes a team approach using a 'design room' process
- Design room is a structured, facilitated project planning process involving a broad range of stakeholders

Aims of design room process

1. To use a rigorous and consistent process to design projects and their evaluation frameworks
2. To involve a broad range of stakeholders in the project design and evaluation planning
3. To build the capacity of LP staff to undertake structured project design and evaluation planning

Implementation

- Two major invasive plant and animals programs designed using this process in 2007 and 2008
- Each program had 10 and 8 component projects respectively
- Project development teams:
 - Service delivery staff (selected based on expressions of interest, majority with no previous project development experience)
 - Key stakeholders
 - Key decision makers

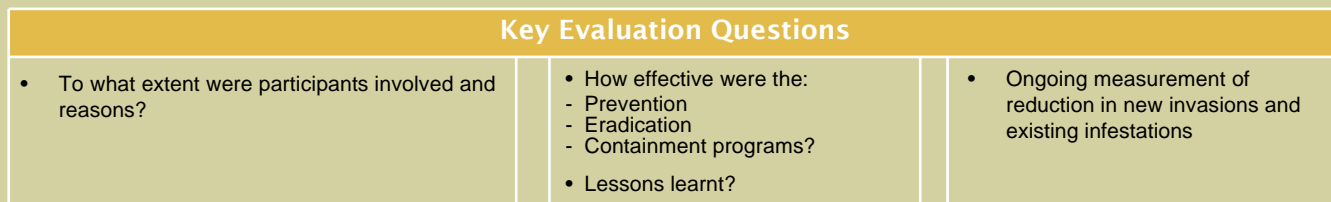
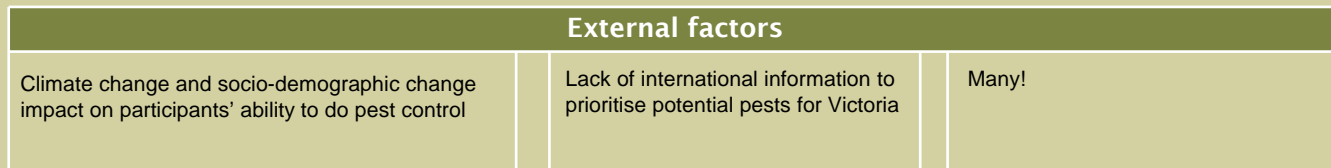
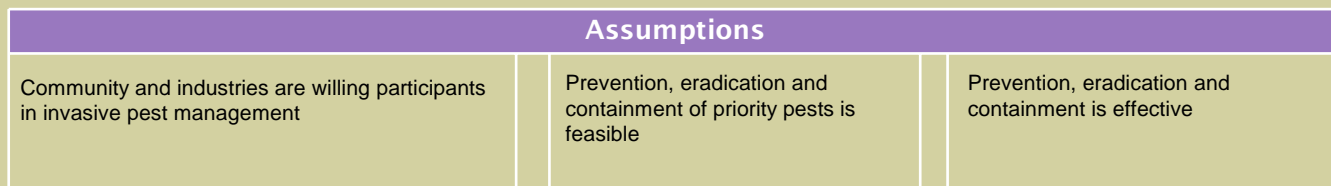
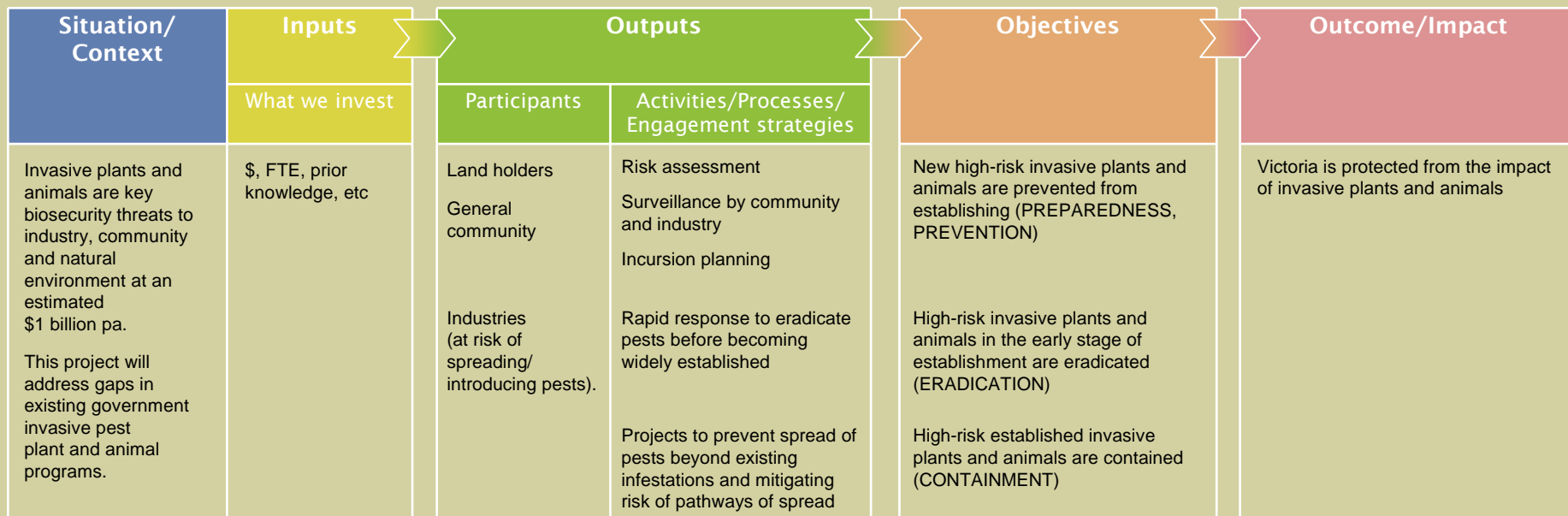
Project development timeline

Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8	Week 9	Week 10	Week 11	Week 12	
<p>Week 1 Workshop (1 day) Introduction to design room and practice ToA</p>	<p>Weeks 2-5 Project team work Project Teams run Design rooms and develop ToAs</p>				<p>Week 6 Workshop (2 days) Project Teams work with subject matter experts on Project summary and Evaluation, Communication and Risk plans</p>				<p>Week 10 First drafts submitted to internal governance group for review</p>		<p>Week 12 Final Project Plans submitted</p>	

Design Room in action



Theory of Action – Invasive plants program



Findings (1)

1. A rigorous and consistent process to design projects and their evaluation frameworks.

The process:

- Applied an “outcome-led” rather than “activity-led” thinking framework
- Articulated clear project objectives by which to evaluate success
- Focussed on linkages, influencing factors and assumptions between each step of the ToA
- Was clear and logical and provided the opportunity for lateral thinking and new ideas
- Enabled high quality project plans to be developed and submitted to project investors

A rigorous and consistent process to design projects and their evaluation frameworks.

- *This model is great, much easier to develop and follow the logic than Bennett's and provides a better communication tool to inform others about the project.*
- *Creates scope for capturing non conventional ideas.*
- *Made one think very much in terms of purpose and outcomes and what we are trying to achieve (not how we are going to do it).*
- *Allowed us to capture and challenge assumptions.*

Findings (2)

2. Involvement of a broad range of stakeholders

The inclusion of a broad range of stakeholders in the design rooms enabled project teams to:

- Incorporate different perspectives into project development - leading to a richer outcome and challenging traditional paradigms
- Clarify the scope and expectations surrounding the project
- Build project ownership at all levels
- Gain equal input from all participants through strong facilitation

Involvement of a broad range of stakeholders

- *Opportunity to have a greater depth of knowledge and input into the projects by including a broad cross section of staff.*
- *Benefit of seeing things from different levels in the organisation, eg policy people and field staff views*

Findings (3)

3. Building the capacity of staff to undertake structured project design and evaluation planning.

- Approximately 50% of LP staff gained project planning skills through participating in design rooms.
- Design room participants rated their confidence in their ability to complete each component of the project documentation (as a result of participating in the design room process) as follows:

Project Component	Mean confidence rating <i>1= not at all confident; 4 = Extremely confident</i>	
Theory of Action	2.8	<i>Fairly confident</i>
Project Summary	2.9	<i>Fairly confident</i>
Evaluation Plan	2.4	<i>Somewhat confident</i>
Communication Strategy	2.6	<i>Fairly confident</i>
Risk Plan	2.9	<i>Fairly confident</i>

Building the capacity of staff to undertake structured project design and evaluation planning.

- *Supported learning for staff taking on a task they may not have been required to do before / or may before done differently before (eg Bennetts).*
- *We realised how much knowledge our group did have that may otherwise have gone unnoticed*

Improvements

- Design room process now being used for funding submissions. Allows full potential of “blue sky thinking”.
- Incorporated root definitions (from Systems Thinking):
“This project is a way to achieve <<Objective X>> by doing <<Activity A>> in order to contribute to <<Long term outcome Y>>”.

Common problems seen in ToA development

Issue

- ToAs had far too much detail so lost their power to tell the project story.
- ToAs developed vertically with horizontal linkages forgotten.
- Project participants included all stakeholders, rather than the project's target audience.
- Project team members listed as participants instead of the target audience (eg the person delivering an engagement activity rather than receiving it)

Solution

- Moved the detail, particularly of Activities to an Implementation Plan
- Once activities summarised, horizontal linkages became clearer
- During brainstorm phase, project participants were segmented:
 - **Direct/target participant or audience**
 - Indirect (might be impacted)
 - Project Owner (eg investor)
 - Project team

Conclusion

- Integrating design room and Theory of Action (modified Wisconsin model) as basis for project development, has led to significant improvements in the thinking and project design skills within LP.
- The modified Wisconsin model was considered easier to use, more effective for capturing logic and challenging assumptions and a better communication tool than Bennett's hierarchy.
- The design room and project development process was an excellent capacity building tool
- The process has moved project development in LP from an individual to a team event.