DEPARTMENT OF
PRIMARY INDUSTRIES

Theories of Action
as Team Sport

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Victoria
The Place To Be

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

Workshop (1 day)

Introduction to design room and practice ToA

Weeks 2-5

Project team work

Project Teams run Design rooms and develop ToAs

Week 6

Workshop (2 days)

Project Teams work with subject matter experts on Project summary and Evaluation, Communication and Risk plans

Week 10

First drafts submitted to internal governance group for review

Week 12

Final Project Plans submitted

Design Room in action

Theory of Action – Invasive plants program

Situation/ Context	Inputs	Outputs		Objectives	Outcome/Impact
	What we invest	Participants	Activities/Processes/ Engagement strategies		
Invasive plants and animals are key biosecurity threats to industry, community and natural environment at an estimated $1 billion pa. This project will address gaps in existing government invasive pest plant and animal programs.	$, FTE, prior knowledge, etc	Land holders General community Industries (at risk of spreading/ introducing pests).	Risk assessment Surveillance by community and industry Incursion planning Rapid response to eradicate pests before becoming widely established Projects to prevent spread of pests beyond existing infestations and mitigating risk of pathways of spread	New high-risk invasive plants and animals are prevented from establishing (PREPAREDNESS, PREVENTION) High-risk invasive plants and animals in the early stage of establishment are eradicated (ERADICATION) High-risk established invasive plants and animals are contained (CONTAINMENT)	Victoria is protected from the impact of invasive plants and animals

Assumptions		
Community and industries are willing participants in invasive pest management	Prevention, eradication and containment of priority pests is feasible	Prevention, eradication and containment is effective

External factors		
Climate change and socio-demographic change impact on participants' ability to do pest control	Lack of international information to prioritise potential pests for Victoria	Many!

Key Evaluation Questions		
• To what extent were participants involved and reasons?	• How effective were the: - Prevention - Eradication - Containment programs? • Lessons learnt?	• Ongoing measurement of reduction in new invasions and existing infestations

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** *1= not at all confident; 4 = Extremely confident*
Theory of Action	2.8 *Fairly confident*
Project Summary	2.9 *Fairly confident*
Evaluation Plan	2.4 *Somewhat confident*
Communication Strategy	2.6 *Fairly confident*
Risk Plan	2.9 *Fairly confident*

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.