ToC Wings - Systematizing experiences and ways forward

Dr. Sabine Hoffmann, Lisa Deutsch
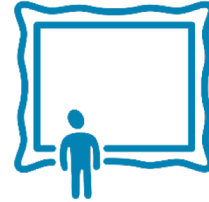
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For what purpose are ToC useful?

Finding a common vision

Analysing contexts and actors

Creating the bigger picture

Identifying Interdependencies

Making the implicit explicit

Planning interventions

Monitoring and assessing change

Triggering reflection and learning

At what stages of TDR can ToCs be developed with which functions?

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Analysing contexts and actors

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Monitoring and assessing change
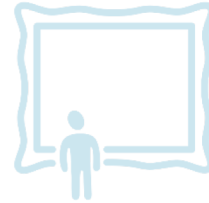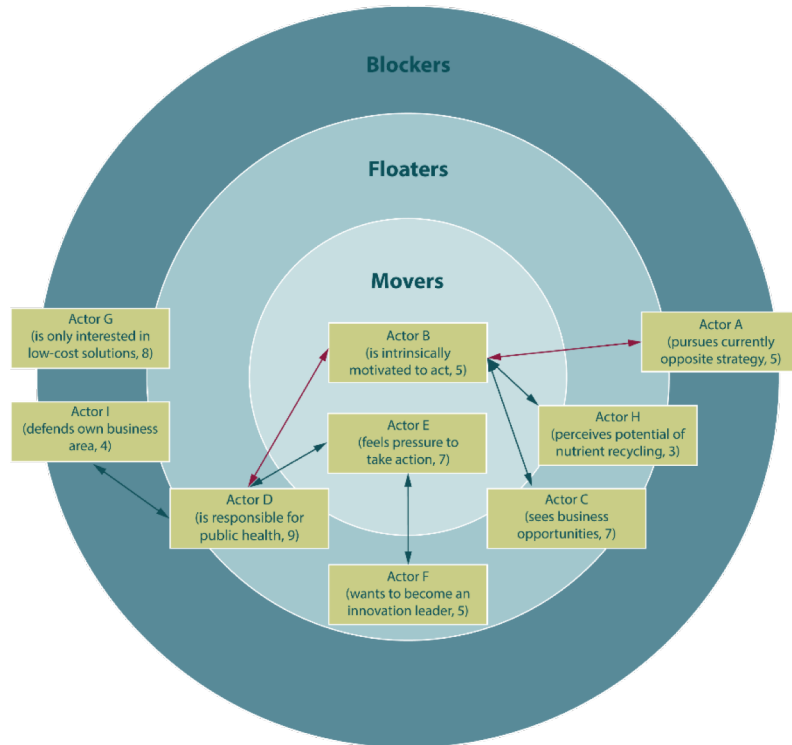
Triggering reflection and learning

Ex ante, in itinere and ex post of Wings Phase II + III

Figure 1: Actor analysis (Deutsch et al. 2021, adapted from Retolaza Eguren 2011)

Actor analysis

- Identify key actors relevant to induce desired long-term change

- Classify key actors as either movers, floaters, or blockers

- Discuss their interests (or not) in the desired long-term change and rate their influence in realizing this change

- Define strategies to win over floaters, deal with blockers and strengthen alliances with movers

Let's do integrated research!

Challenges and strategies for leading a 'Theory of Change' (ToC) process with interdisciplinary teams

Challenge 1: Managing time while dealing with differing perspectives

- Alternate formal and informal interaction formats (e.g. group workshops with bilateral coffee breaks)
- Explore differing assumptions of team members through scenarios and discuss their consequences for your overall vision and specific research activities, instead of forcing a consensus

Challenge 5: Fulfilling both service and science roles of ITD

- Plan how to collect, systematize and make use of assumptions from the very beginning
- Go beyond facilitation: perform an integrative science role by digging into the different knowledge fields involved, and identify inter-linkages and synergies between them

Challenge 2: Balancing between concrete and abstract discussions

- Use actor's analysis (e.g. movers, floaters, blockers) to arrive at people-oriented statements
- Apply guiding questions to ground the discussions and elicit concrete answers
- Include and give voice to junior researchers with good contextual knowledge

Challenge 4: Obtaining buy–in and overcoming reservations

- Explain the purpose of ToC both at the beginning and throughout the process
- Rename the tool if causing too much confusion
- Choose a good intervention mix, being synergistic with on-going activities and include both low and high-hanging fruits

Challenge 3: Ensuring group discussions while balancing comfort and discomfort

- Break up understimulating comfort zones and arrange new and diverse working group compositions
- Prevent counterproductive discomfort zones by treating each perspective with genuine curiosity
- Take time to reflect individually, then start with group brainstorming and jointly formulate milestones on sticky-notes instead of formulating them individually

How can the ToC approach be further developed?

o Combine ToCs with **actor analysis** (distinguishing between movers, floaters and blockers) and **scenario analysis** (exploring different assumptions about change processes and their consequences)

o Use ToCs to **monitor social change processes**, **explore underlying causal mechanisms** and **trigger regular reflection** on own role in such processes

Deutsch, L., Belcher, B., Claus, R., & Hoffmann, S. (2021). Leading inter- and transdisciplinary research: Lessons from applying theories of change to a strategic research program. *Environmental Science & Policy, 120*, 29-41. doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envsci.2021.02.009

Deutsch, L., Belcher, B., Claus, R., & Hoffmann, S. (2021). Challenge accepted! Coping strategies for using 'Theory of Change' within interdisciplinary research teams. *ITD 2021 Conference,* Zurich