

## Title: *Purposeful Program Theory: Effective Use of Theories of Change and Logic Models*

This review of *Purposeful Program Theory: Effective Use of Theories of Change and Logic Models* by Funnell and Rogers offers both an analytic reading of the book in question and my personal response as an evaluator, whose main practice and research is based in the discipline of higher education.

The purpose of this book by two Australian authors is to: introduce the audience to the full complement of contextual elements found within program theory; offer practical suggestions to engage with theories of change, theories of action and logic models; and provide substantial evidence for this approach through scholarly literature, practice case studies together with the authors' combined experience of 60 years. Even though I have 10 years employment and research experience in evaluation and engage in evaluation activities on a daily basis, this book has reminded me that program theory is neither a lightweight nor insignificant activity. It takes careful decision-making, a commitment from stakeholders, a strong sense of 'what is the point?', and, most importantly, 'what is the purpose?'

The audience for *Purposeful Program Theory* ranges from novice to experienced evaluation practitioners and can be read sequentially by newcomers or dipped in and out of when needed by more seasoned evaluators. In addition, the exercises at the end of each chapter offer great stimuli for both students and workshop participants to generate discussion focused on elements within *Purposeful Program Theory*.

The book is structured in five parts and these are: (1) 'Key ideas in program theory'; (2) 'Assessing your circumstances'; (3) 'Developing and representing program theory'; (4) 'Resources for developing program theory'; and (5) 'Using program theory for monitoring and evaluation'. Each of these five parts are interlinked through case studies with appropriate logic model diagrams, summary tables to reinforce key points, and complementary information that identifies traps for the unwary with associated activities to avoid or minimise these issues as they arise. The provision of examples that compare a poor logic model to an improved logic model for specific cases offers the audience very practical examples of the different outcomes determined by different approaches. In some ways, this book takes the almost daunting task of developing a program theory and breaks it down to consumable elements that can be worked through in a sequenced flow with a project team.

### ■ Authors

Sue C Funnell and Patricia J Rogers

### ■ Publisher/year

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The sheer breadth and depth of the examples provided continue to illustrate to the audience that through the considered decision-making pathway, each program theory in responding to the situation, context, objectives, stakeholders and outcomes, must therefore be unique to the program. For all visual learners (myself included), the logic models that provide the visual representation of the *Purposeful Program Theory* development are an invaluable resource to keep the project team on track, explain the program theory to all stakeholders and for succession planning should a key stakeholder change.

There are several key messages within this book that resonate strongly with my experience and I am sure will be within the experience of many evaluators. First, the human side of program theory is an essential element. Regardless of who is involved, it is critical that the stakeholders (including internal or external administrators, participants and evaluators) be involved in the development of the program theory, have ownership of the purpose for undertaking it and that there be a succession plan or process should a significant stakeholder change during the time frame of the program. Second, that each program, or suite of programs, is unique and the quality of the program will rely on the local and contextual conditions under which the program is delivered (OECD 2009a, 2009b). Therefore, the considerations undertaken in each development process would need to respond to the local and contextual



conditions and, as a result, that each logic model outcome would be unique. Third and final, program theories are adaptable and able to respond to change, subsequent interventions and changes in objectives, and to incorporating outcomes from other programs.

The authors have employed a multifaceted evidence-based approach to portray the elements within program theory; for example, the quotations from Carl Weeks, the comparisons with Voltaire and the reference to the IKEA Effect from Wikipedia all provide connections from theorists to popular culture. Depth of evidence is then provided by the extensive experiential knowledge of the authors and their case studies vignettes. Furthermore, the published works of scholars from the field and the incorporation of the logic models from these scholarly works strengthen the overall argument of this book and make for an interesting read.

Now to a very personal request as someone who is a very practical learner, and I know others may cringe at this, but I like glossaries. I find a glossary very useful as I can read all the terms and then dip in and out of a book. This is not necessarily a criticism of this book, simply a request for a resource that I find helpful. This book introduces the terms in sequential order and as I have read this book from cover to cover there is no real need for a glossary. However, when I come back to this text at a later date I will read it in a much more random way and this is where I would find a glossary helpful. As I mentioned, this is a very personal request and does not diminish the major contribution this book offers to the discipline of evaluation.

In summary, *Purposeful Program Theory: Effective Use of Theories of Change and Logic Models* is a substantial Australian contribution to the concept of program theory and the discipline of evaluation. With 60 years of collective experiential knowledge, the way in which Funnell and Rogers manage to break down

program theory into the development of theories of change and theories of action with clear decision-making steps that result in succinct logic models derived, is to be admired. I would recommend this text as a must-read to all evaluators. Whether you are new to evaluation, dip in and out of evaluation depending on your role at the time, or are a long-time evaluator, *Purposeful Program Theory* is an excellent resource that offers a comprehensive, evidence-based argument of the benefits of program theory.

### References

- OECD 2009a, *Supporting quality teaching in higher education: phase 1*, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Paris, viewed 2 July 2012, <http://www.oecd.org/edu/imhe/supportingqualityteachinginhighereducation-phase1.htm>
- OECD 2009b, *Supporting quality teaching in higher education: phase 2*, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Paris, viewed 2 July 2012, <http://www.oecd.org/edu/imhe/supportingqualityteachinginhighereducationphase2.htm>



Reviewed by **Lyn Alderman**

Manager  
Academic Quality and Standards  
Learning and Teaching Unit,  
Chancellery  
Queensland University of  
Technology  
Brisbane  
Email: [lyn.alderman@qut.edu.au](mailto:lyn.alderman@qut.edu.au)