LOGICAL FRAMEWORK APPROACH FOR PROJECTS

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INTRODUCTION

Irrespective of the size, operating sector and economic orientation, organisations of all types need to fulfil their objectives in order to either sustain or develop themselves. This mantra becomes increasingly important, the moment an organisation wants itself to be seen differently. Projects by virtue of their unique nature, with the backing of requisite funding, and constrained by time [2], go a long way in determining the success of this organisational pursuit. If the size of the project is too large, with many stakeholders and their relationships, the planning and execution of any project would hold centre-stage. And to achieve satisfactory results it would perhaps largely depend on a system wherein innumerable dots, having complex relationships, are connected constructively. The logical framework approach, also known as LFA, is considered an immensely useful tool to plan, implement or evaluate such organisational projects.

But is the logical framework approach in itself enough to bring project success? Or should the project managers first understand the difference between the process and the design to bring about desired results? Apart from the above-mentioned, this paper would try to find out whether the logical framework is useful for smaller projects where logic pursuit could be tedious? Should stakeholders of smaller projects be ignored? If the stakeholders are not considered, then would the project be participatory in nature? There are many questions that can be raised and this paper is an honest attempt to address some of the issues mentioned.

WHAT IS LFA

The “logframe” was originally developed by the United States Department of Defense, and adopted by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in the late 1960s. Since then it has been applied and modified by many bilateral donor nations including Germany, United Kingdom, the European Union, Canada and Australia. [3] Alternatives to the “logframe” do exist e.g. “A training manual produced by FAO in 1986 with Activities as a row between Input and Output, creating a matrix with 5 rows and 4 columns. ZOPP replaced Inputs by Activities in the bottom row (GTZ, 1988). They saw activities as a crucial feature of the logical framework whereas inputs could be specified elsewhere in the project documentation. The NORAD matrix has only three columns - the middle column combines a description of indicators with the means of verification. [1]

LFA critics point out that the ‘logic’ in the “logframe” can be complicated and consequently difficult to master. Mastering the “logframe” logic can itself be a tedious and a challenge in itself. This has led to the mushrooming of “logframe” tutoring in international aid receiving countries on a massive scale. [3] Actually, the “logframe” constitutes the enumeration of outcomes of an analysis in a way that project’s goals are apparent to the stakeholders of a project in a systematic and logical way[4]. Let us look at it in detail to be able to understand the way it works and how beneficial it could be. The logical framework (also known as “logframe” and “project framework”) is presented as a conceptual and analytical tool for undertaking sector analysis, project planning, and project management [1]. To understand it well, one has to delve a little deeper into it.

PROJECT PROCESS VS PROJECT DESIGN

The logical framework is nearly always confused between a process and a final design- a design that connects different cells in a 16-box matrix[1]. All the top and left-column cells of the matrix are labelled. If a project manager happens to find the matrix and begins connecting the cells in a logical way, the task would be a huge one and a lot of time could be wasted. Cells like “costs” and monitoring methods would be connected without having the purpose of a project identified. If the distinction between the matrix and the process is misunderstood, the project manager would focus on the figure no. 1 which is a structural output of a logical framework process. The logical framework approach is supposed to “set out the project / programme’s objectives in a systematic and logical way. This should reflect the causal relationships between the different levels of objectives, to indicate how to check whether these objectives have been achieved, and to establish what assumptions outside the
control of the project / programme may influence its success." [4] There are close links between the logical framework and the basic document format, above all in the section / paragraph headings on overall objectives, project / programme purpose, results, activities, means and cost, assumptions and indicators. [4].

THE MATRIX

Figure no. 1

Unlike the previous figure, the matrix, below summarizes the final design of the project, and it usually comprises 16 frames organized under 4 major headings [1]. A matrix built on it would look like as given below.

Figure no. 2

The framework, as illustrated above, is gradually put into place after considering various aspects by the project manager. As there is a distinct cause – effect relationship it would be wise to look at it more deeply.

Looking closely at it, we would find that the first column is actually a four-level “objectives tree” with the top cell covering long-term objectives having “purpose” (immediate objective) cell underneath it. Below lies the “outputs” cell and the “inputs” cell at the bottom completes this column. There can be many problems in connecting the cells logically. The first one may arise whenever the planners or project designers begin to include lofty ideals as project goals for reasons best known to them. The
scope of the project is stretched as far as to include all perceivable tangible and intangible goals within its purview. Further, designing a project doesn’t come about easily to anyone. Inexperienced project managers sometimes fail to distinguish between the “goal” and the “purpose” of a project and the project ends up having too many “purposes” which make the “outputs” unachievable and the inputs inadequate. “While there may be more than one long-term objective or goal, there is usually only one main and primary immediate objective for each project. But some researchers have gone on to assert that the “logframe” should never have more than one goal and one purpose. [3] On the contrary, if there are to be more than one goal, this implies there are a number of subprojects under the umbrella of a more generalized project.” [1] a) But that doesn’t mean only one. The most important point is to begin designing the “logframe” by identifying the central problem (or opportunity) and the immediate desired impact as precisely as possible. [1]

The next step is to find out the results or “outputs” –which are project deliverables- tangible or intangible goals or services. The guiding principle should be that the outputs must provide the conditions necessary to achieve the immediate project objective. [1]

Finally, project inputs are entered into the box in the lower left corner of the logical framework matrix. [1]. Contrary to the figure shown above (notice “activities” at the bottom of the first column), the logical framework doesn’t need to cover any information on activities. Detailed activity and implementation charts (GANTT charts or PERT/CPM drawings) are available with project documentation. The most important purpose of the logical framework is to summarize the key elements of the project’s design rather than present self-contained and comprehensive project information. [1] Once the first column is ready one completes building up the hypothesis for the project and “all hypotheses have assumptions and risks.”[1]. Risks or Assumptions are factors, which are outside the control of the project but which nevertheless influence the cause-effect relationships integral to project design.[1] Finding out the assumptions/risks valid for the project is perhaps the most challenging task for a project manager. Many project managers might face a Herculean task of ignoring a risk that would not affect a project design.

The OVI s (objectively verifiable indicators) which are achievements and not mere “completion/ milestones” and the monitoring systems measuring performance in terms of efficiency and effectiveness - usually available with MIS (Management Information Systems) complete the top row of the matrix.

Once matrix is put up, a systematic/ logical connection of the cells becomes evident. The following figure enumerates how the “logframe” is read by project planners/ managers. As is apparent, it is read from the bottom to the top, and not vice-versa.

Figure no. 3

Vertical and Horizontal Logic

Source: [4]
ADVANTAGE LOGFRAME

Despite its inherent systematic logic, the logical framework has had a chequered history, falling in and out of favour of development planners and managers over the last 20 years. It is therefore not surprising that varied opinions and questions exist on the value of this process tool for designing and managing the development process. Even ardent critiques do notice its exhaustiveness and participatory nature. In order to succeed at project design, the project manager should be as precise as possible in separating log-term objectives (goals) from the immediate (purpose) ones.

Also, a stakeholder analysis of its constituents is a must for all project managers. A stakeholder is any individual, group of people, institutions or firms that may have a relationship with the project. In order to maximize the social and institutional benefits of the project / programme and minimize its negative impacts, the stakeholder analysis identifies all likely to be affected (either positively or negatively), and how. It is important that the stakeholder analysis takes place at an early stage in the identification and appraisal phases of a project / programme.

“LOGFRAME” CRITICISED

From aid receiving nations to authors and writers, the logical framework approach has been criticized time and again. Critics point out that the most common and difficult issue is identifying, in tangible ways, the intended immediate objective of the project, or its purpose. Equally difficult is to ensure that the project is delivered with accountability. This is the most important element of the logical framework and the most difficult to address. The answer may lie in the participatory nature of the design process of the framework.

Also, it is pointed out that a huge effort is required on part of project managers to master the logic that connects different cells of the matrix coherently. Lack of connection between any two adjacent cells on the middle two columns of the matrix would make the matrix incoherent. Some other criticisms of LFA as given by MacArthur (1994) are that a) precise description of a project leads to inflexibility in project design; b) the project framework system is neutral because it does not encourage project designers to take into account the points of view of all stakeholders. Again, this may distort project design by allowing project designers to ignore the views of some stakeholders, and c) project designers tend to complete the logical framework as the final step in project appraisal (after the project has been designed).

Some solutions MacArthur suggests are as follows: a) encourage project designers to enter the “inputs” from various stakeholders as “Assumptions” to highlight the fact that project success depends on participation from all stakeholders; b) Design projects to be process oriented rather than as a blueprint. This will involve setting times for periodic reviews of the project within the project plan. It will also involve constructing a series of project frameworks to reflect the new circumstances that unfold during the life of a project. While the solution may be correct, but are not the only ones imaginable. A thorough study would help provide the answers.

CONCLUSION

Organisation needs to fulfil its goal, and projects help achieve those goals. As shown above, the logical framework approach (LFA) gives the project manager necessary impetus to go to the details and prepare a failsafe project design where the constituents/ ingredients are intertwined with each other meaningfully; where the relationships between these are not only precise but logical too. But even the best and the most experienced of the project managers can make mistakes. Yet, the fear of making mistakes should not in any way hinder the project manager to keep working on a logic that brings cohesion and coherence different activities of a project (in the different cells of the matrix). One does feel that giving due consideration to the constraints of time and resource, the logical framework approach is a tool that should not be ignored by any planner - public or private while designing a project either at its planning, implementation or evaluation stage. The detailing necessary to achieve the cohesion between different stages of a project lifecycle would itself be an asset that is worth inculcating by any organisation – small or big.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


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Abstract

Project management is a rapidly evolving branch of study, where inputs are as important as the environment in which they operate. The logical framework approach (LFA) was developed in the US, further developed by others, to find a single tool that could be used to effectively plan, implement and evaluate projects. The USAID (United States Agency for International Development) and later by Europe Aid and others primarily tried to help an aid receiving agency to be able to achieve outcomes that were perceived achievable under different aid programmes. The paper primarily focuses on logical framework approach based on a manual published by Europe Aid and a critique of LFA published in Kenya related to agricultural research. The paper in no way tries to establish the usefulness or efficacy of these two competent and erudite publications. Rather it tries to ascertain the LFA applicability to a wider usage in the current world. The paper is neither a renunciation of the logical framework approach nor a reiteration of the same. In fact, it’s an attempt to enunciate the usefulness of its adaptive qualities. Depending on the size of the project a project manager should decide whether it should be used or not. The immense importance and usage of the logical framework approach can’t be ignored, especially so, when the project-size is huge in terms of the magnitude of its impact, time and resources consumed and the people getting affected by it. If the logical framework is used and applied to all projects, without showing any consideration for the aforementioned, the project management exercise would be a time-waster where people would be simply bogged down by the activity and never impacted by its usefulness.

Key words

Framework; Monitor; Evaluate; Project; Matrix;

JEL Classification

H43; O22