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Learning to Measure

Integrating Learning into the Monitoring & Evaluation Practice of Development Projects

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Abstract

The subject of this thesis is the monitoring and evaluating (M&E) of development projects. More specifically we look at what can be described as a growing gap between the theory and practice of M&E, as practice tends toward top-down reporting demands, tighter control, and conditionalities, whereas the rhetoric increasingly emphasise bottom-up, learning and adaptability. Donors and aid agencies focus these years on the effectiveness of development as is evidenced by a series of conferences on the topic. From Paris to Accra, the call is that we must be better, we must do more, but at the same time there is growing discomfort with the tools donors require NGOs to use to receive funds.

The performance culture prevalent in the public sector is defined by smaller overheads, efficiency, and managing by results, all of which emphasise the importance of measurement and accountability. As NGOs predominantly rely on public funding they in turn are susceptible to the rigorous reporting demands, thus leading to M&E practice which increasingly is concerned with upward accountability and demonstrating results and value for money.

While there is growing recognition amongst NGOs that M&E is in fact important, not only for satisfying donors but also to gauge their own effort and learn from experience and use, measuring development is highly problematic

Development is increasingly a people-oriented approach, where intangible and hard-to-measure processes such as participation, capacity building and empowerment have become integral. This means that distinct results are hard to define, measure and report, and also that development is essentially about change; transformational change in peoples lives. Not only is it hard to measure, there is also no bottom line. Reality is complicated, is people oriented, success is not easily quantified, and it is about change; so measuring development must focus on change and on the process. From this perspective M&E supports responsiveness to change, and is very much a way to enhance NGO performance.

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The problem of M&E then is the clash of two trends. Donors, legitimately concerned with the effectiveness and efficiency of NGO, have an expectation of easily readable results and clear causal links between effort and outcome. This is reflected in the Logical Framework Approach (LFA) which is now often a requirement for fund eligibility. As an approach the LFA relies on strong linear logic, emphasises strict adherence to plan and facilitates simplification of complex issues into a digestible format. These are all important for the purpose of extracting information for accountability purposes and this is detrimental to the performance enhancing aspect of M&E.

In this thesis we argue that the LFA is ill-equipped to address the complex reality of development work, and that its institutionalisation acts as a constraint to NGO performance. We will, based on an analysis of projects in the context of systems theory, posit that the complex, dynamic environment, in which development projects operate, requires a very different approach, and that a reorientation of M&E from accountability toward learning may contribute to better organisational and ultimately project performance.

Preface

This thesis is about the paradoxical nature of monitoring and evaluation in development. It has also been very much about finishing something once you have started. Our venture began 6 months ago, when we both ran out of excuses for not finishing what should have been done 4 years ago.

It has been a hard process, no doubt, and in many ways, we have been living the content of this thesis, as we have gone through endless learning loops trying to grasp the entirety of our subject. We have had to unlearn, undo and then sometimes redo – but what was a vague idea about the problems and benefits of the Logical Framework Approach in May, is today a thesis about the influence of learning in M&E.

Not everything has changed though. We did start with the notion that we wanted to look at a problem that went beyond 'mere' organisational importance – we wanted our research question to address a problem of "development quality." We do think the thesis remains true to our overall goal, despite us ending up taking a wholly different road than planned.

We are aware of shortcomings, most of which we have only ourselves to blame for. Writing over the summer was not the brightest idea for instance, as for two months any contact we tried, was out of office. This unexpected turn of things did make us adapt, rethink and plan a different strategy, so whatever else happens from this; we have learned.

We owe our deepest gratitude to our wife and girlfriend respectively, without whom we could never have written this. We also owe them our sincerest apologies for our behaviour in the past month as time got short and stress levels high.

We also owe a big thanks to Ole Busck, our supervisor, for helping, correcting, and suffering our odd shifts and radical turns, and to Jytte Kongstad for being ever helpful in pointing us in the right direction time after time. A final thank goes to those who were kind enough to sport ideas and proofread our rite of passage. Much of what is good in this thesis comes from them, but whatever faults may linger, remain our own.

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Acronyms

AI	India HIV/AIDS Alliance
INGO's	International Non governmental Organisations
LF	Logical Framework
LFA	Logical Framework Approach
LO	Learning Organisation
LOMES	Learning Oriented Monitoring and Evaluation System
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MBO	Management by Objectives
MS	Mellemfolkeligt Samvirke
MSC	Most Significant Changes
NGO	Non Governmental Organisations
OL	Organisational Learning
PCI	Practical Concepts Incorporated
PCM	Project Cycle Management
RBM	Result Based Management
RFC	Recommendations for Change
SAPs	Structural Adjustment Programs
SC	Significant Change
USAID	US Agency for International Development
ZOPP	Objectives-oriented Project Planning

1 Introduction

> *The only man I know who behaves sensibly is my tailor; he takes my measurements anew each time he sees me. The rest go on with their old measurements and expect me to fit them. (George Bernard Shaw)*

This thesis focuses on the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of NGO led development interventions. In recent years M&E has risen to the top of the global development agenda, as calls for better development and better evidence of practice have rallied the global community. The Monterrey Consensus in 2002, the 2005 Paris Declaration of Aid Effectiveness, and the subsequent Accra Agenda for Action in 2008 all point to the high priority of development performance. The growing concern over the effectiveness of aid has led donors to attach conditionality's to funds, hereunder expectations of specific management tools, such as the Logical Framework Approach (LFA).

As requirements for funds grow stricter and the emphasis on management practice and demonstrable results increases, there is however a growing concern that '*how things are done'* is becoming more important than '*what is actually achieved.'* Is the purpose of development being lost in the process of doing it? In this research, we will take a closer look at the practice of monitoring and evaluation in development projects, and examine the impacts of the institutionalisation of the LFA on NGO performance.

1.1 Problem field

Fundamental to the concept of development is the idea of and desire to foster change in the world. The purpose of interventions is to bring about positive change, the focus of development theory is to provide methods and explanations for how this is done, and increasingly management of development is about documenting that proposed change will happen and subsequently that it has (or hasn't!) happened.

Since the early 80's, NGOs have risen to prominence as the main providers of development through the implementation of projects, with governments and aid agencies increasingly taking the role as donors. This has led to the emergence of what some describes as a contract culture in the provision of aid, and further helped emphasise the call for more if not better M&E. These demands for accountability and proof of relevance have in turn led to the introduction

of rigorous performance measures, and donors have tied funds to strict requirements for Result Based Management (RBM) practices and evaluation.

RBM is epitomised by the LFA, which was adapted early on by development agencies as a planning tool. The ability of the LFA to condense complex realities into a manageable logframe, with clear logical links between inputs and outputs, has made the LFA the favoured child of the donor community. This in turn has led to nearly all large donors today requiring NGOs to use the LFA as a project framework. This way LFA can be said to constitute a paradigm within the management of development projects and by inference also the sub discipline of M&E. The current method of M&E are however increasingly being critiqued on several fronts.

In this thesis, we will argue that M&E essentially has two principal functions, one being accountability, in terms of documenting results and effort, and the other is to supplement and support project and organisational performance, by means of relevant information and learning. For NGOs to remain effective providers of aid, M&E must be able to provide both. Given their organisational survival is directly linked to donor funds however, accountability to donors has taken the front seat, and with it M&E practices that are ill equipped to the reality of development. So while donors, NGOs and intended beneficiaries alike have a shared interest in the effectiveness of NGOs, current M&E practice reveal a growing dichotomy. On one side there is the evolution of development becoming increasingly people-centred, concerned with social change through participatory methods and capacity building; a reality which is dynamic, complex and uncertain, and which requires flexibility and ongoing learning to grasp. On the other is the growing demands from donors for clearer, specific, easily measurable, and quantifiable results, by means of standardised and logic frameworks, which assumes that social development can be comprehensibly understood, planned and implemented.
In this thesis, we examine this gap between theory and practice in M&E, and consider whether a reorientation of the M&E paradigm toward learning can help NGOs improve performance and project success.

1.2 Research Question

In this thesis, we examine the growing gap between theory and practice in M&E, and consider whether a reorientation of the M&E paradigm toward learning can help NGOs improve performance and project success. This led us to pose the following research question for this thesis:

What is the problem with the use of LFA for M&E and can a learning oriented approach be a better solution?

To answer our research question, we have posed two sub questions below that should help frame the argument presented in this thesis:

1. **What defines the reality of development?**

   The answer to this question is important to our analysis of development in the context of systems theory, since the theory argues that the environment in which a problem is situated is highly relevant in terms of what solution model should be applied to solve the problem.

2. **What is the purpose of M&E in development projects?**

   As we will demonstrate the purpose of M&E is not easily defined, as NGOs face the problem of having to satisfy both donor as well as beneficiary needs. As these are quite dissimilar the use and purpose of M&E entails choice and preference, both of which have wider implications than deciding 'how to measure.'

Methodology

The purpose of this section is to give the reader an insight in, what we have chosen to entail in the thesis, how we will try to answer the questions asked in *Research Question*, and what empirical sources we have used.

1.3 Choices made

We will in this sub-section elaborate on the choices that we have made in this thesis on what to entail and consequently what to leave out.

We have will relate our discussions in this thesis to single development projects, and the challenges they provide, because single development projects can be seen as core building stones of development work, and most development assistance is delivered via projects[1]. Among the different organisations within development assistance we have chosen to focus on NGOs as they are the primary implementers of development projects. Furthermore the relations between NGOs and Donors are interesting, we will look at M&E, because the LFA is enforced by donors together with an increased focus on accountability, and subsequently there is much critique of LFA. We have chosen to incorporate Organisational learning in our thesis, because System theory promotes learning, and Organisational learning is gaining popularity within NGOs, as it offers suggestions on, how NGOs can improve monitoring and evaluation. To facilitate our analysis we have chosen the learning oriented M&E method Most Significant Changes as our example of LOMES and found a case, where it has been used. It is within this framework that we will attempt to answer our research question.

1.4 Research approach

In this section we will describe, how we intend to answer our research question.

[1] Fowler 1997

1.4.1 Conceptual Framework

The History of Development Assistance: Through a historical approach we will try to show that development theories and strategies have gone from infrastructural initiatives towards social development, making the environment of development assistance more dynamic and complex. When looking at the history of planning, monitoring and evaluation we want to show that although there has been little invention, the LFA has been predominant and become a prerequisite for most developments assistance. It should also be apparent that NGOs have become the primary implementers of projects , and today a great deal of development funding goes through the NGOs. This has raised problems with dependency of donors and facilitated problems such as accountability, demands for use of LFA and raised demands for better performance. The dilemmas faced by NGOs will be discussed further in next section.

NGO Dilemma, projects and Monitoring and Evaluation: In this section we will elaborate on the *ethical imperative* of NGOs, the *business imperative* created by NGO-Donor relations and consequences of these imperatives in relation to accountability and performance. We will use this as an entry to expand the concepts of projects, project management and monitoring and evaluation practice. The purpose is to expand our foundation for a critical assessment of the use of the LFA.

In the summary to this section we will provide the answers to sub-questions one and two.

1.4.2 The Logical Framework Approach

In previous sections we have establish LFA´s position as a method used for planning and M&E within development assistance and we have established the purpose of M&E. In this section we will clarify the basic structure of the LFA to understand the processes, and explore some of its strengths and limitations. Then we will use the knowledge accumulated in the former sections in an attempt to explain, why the LFA used for monitoring and evaluation entails certain problems relating to the context, in which it is being used.

1.4.3 Theoretical Analysis

System Theory: When we have established what the problem is with LFA, we will use system theory to situate the LFA and the environment of development. LFA will relate to hard system, and the complex environment of development will relate to soft system. To find a solution to

our research question, we need to pursue approaches that relates to soft system. Learning is important in Soft system and as a respondent to this, we choose to focus on Organisational Learning.

Organisational Learning: We will outline the origins of the theory in the private sector, and argue its relevance to the non profit sector as a whole. In this section we will use Organisational Learning theory as a foundation for an alternative understanding of M&E, one premised on learning, more so than just being a mechanism for donor feedback. Based on our analyses of development from as system perspective, we will use OL to define a number of important aspects that we believe should be present in a Learning Oriented Monitoring and Evaluation System (LOMES).

1.4.4 Case study

We want to examine the implications of using a Learning Oriented Monitoring and Evaluation System (LOMES) in a development project setting. We do this by first operationalise the LOMES to help identification in our case study. We will then introduce the Most Significant Changes method as an example of LOMES, and use a case study, were MSC has been used, to underpin the validity of our theoretical analysis.

1.4.5 Resolving the problems of M&E

In this section we will bring together the findings from the presiding sections to answer our research question.

1.4.6 Conclusion

In the conclusion we will present our answer to our research question and sub-questions.

1.5 Empirical sources

The material that we have used for this thesis includes published books, Journals, articles and 'grey' literature[2]. In the process of collecting this material we discovered that it proved difficult to get valuable material on the two different M&Es[3] that we considered as an example of LOMES. While there were a reasonable amount of articles and guides, it was difficult to find

[2] By this we refer to material such as field manuals, evaluation reports, papers.
[3] Most Significant Change, Outcome Mapping.

useful reports and evaluations on projects, where one of these methods had been used. We found mainly material that related to MSC, and this became our starting point.

We have both been away from the development environment for many years, and we didn't have any immediate contacts. We therefore tried to establish contact with both IBIS and Mellemfolkelig Samvirke (MS), because they had both experience with MSC. We discovered that an old friend works within CARE, and since we had found material that connected CARE with MSC and Outcome mapping, we made contact. He referred us to the person working with the guidelines for M&E in CARE Denmark. Unfortunate CARE Denmark only suggested their country departments to use Most Significant Changes (MSC), and they could as such not help us with any documentation on the use of MSC. They had no knowledge about Outcome Mapping. In the attempt to create contact to someone, who had knowledge on MSC, we send an email to a former employ at MS, who had written a few articles on MSC. He had been responsible for pilot MSC projects within the MS, though fore some reason MS decided not to incorporate MSC, although it seemed valuable. He shoved great interest in our thesis and forwarded links, material and suggested that we joined a Yahoo group called 'MostSignificantChanges'. However the material he sent us proved inadequate for analyses. Upon joining 'MostSignificantChanges' we posted a request for material and comments on LFA and MSC in relation to M&E. This was done in an attempt to address actors, who had knowledge and experience of using MSC and could relate to the problems stated by us. This resulted in a small number of friendly advices, recommendation of material and forwarded documents. Amongst the documents were one report from Red Cross Denmark, a thesis from Russia and a bachelor project from the Philippines. In the end the report from Red Cross proved not to be suitable. MSC had been used for evaluation of an organisation together with other methods, and the reference to the use of and findings of the MSC was almost not present. The greatest source of MSC material was the file base on 'MostSignificantChanges' that includes at most (approximately) 50 documents MSC related material available on the net. Only a few of these fulfilled our demand, of reports where MSC had been used for either monitoring or evaluation purposes, and among those were only two that seemed to be able to provide the data we needed. One was the report, we chose to use from India HIV/AIDS

Alliance, and the other was an evaluation report from ADRA Laos, which we chose not to use, because it included an analyses, equivalent to what we wanted to do.

The scarcity of material useful for analysis and groups discussion on the subject of the thesis has resulted in a thesis that is more theoretical that empirical oriented. This has the implications that our answers become, highly theoretical.

2 Conceptual Framework

In this section we will look at the history of development assistance to get an understanding of the development environment today, and try to define some of the trends that have led to development projects being complex problems. The findings from the history section will be subject to closer examination as we subsequently take a deeper look at the paradoxical nature of M&E. Finally we will expand the concepts of projects, project management and monitoring and evaluation, which we will subsequently use as foundation for our critique of the LFA.

2.1 The history of Development Assistance

Different development theories/strategies have guided development assistance, since it took of in the 1950-1960s. Development theories/strategies can be linked to the choices of modes used in planning, monitoring and evaluation methods.[4] In this section we will use this linkage between development theoretical paradigms and modes of planning methods to describe the development within development assistance from the 1950s to today. Thereby we can show that development assistance have evolved in complexity; from mainly being used for infrastructural initiatives to participatory, capacity building projects with several stakeholders. In the same period the LF has evolved and today the LFA is considered a prerequisite for most developments assistance, and this together with other factors have had influence on the position of the NGOs today.

International development theory didn't emerge as a separate body of ideas until the last part of the 20th century. The period from the end of World War II to the end of the 20th century has later been referred to as the "*era of development*"[5]. Harry S. Truman made the following remarks January 20, 1949, and it is argued that this launched the *era of development*.

> *"[…] we must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas. [...] The old imperialism - exploitation for foreign profit - has no*

[4] Howes 1992
[5] Chant and MCIlwain 2009 p. 48

> *place in our plans. What we envisage is a program of development based on the concept of democratic fair dealing."*[6]

There were other factors that helped the *era of development* to take off. In the aftermath of World War II, many of the European countries needed help getting back on their feet. A response to this was the launch of the *Marshall Plan*[7], which focused on humanitarian goals together with the establishment of a political and economic block allied to the U.S. Also the state of the European countries resulted in that many of the former colonies declared themselves independent (often supported by the U.S.), and they needed support to cope with the challenges of being a state. The end of World War II meant the beginning of the Cold War, which made the U.S. and its allies use Development assistance as an instrument to stop the Third World from moving towards communism.

2.1.1 Different phases within Development assistance

The focus of Development assistance has changed/developed several times from the 1950s to today. Over this time span Development assistance have emphasised large infrastructural initiatives, securing the poorest basic needs, program focus, capacity building, participation and so on. Although these shifts can be related to certain decades, there is an overlap, and most of them are all a part of current Development assistance today.[8]

2.1.2 Modernisation

In the 1950s and the 1960s there was a general consensus that if one invested money and transferred modern technology into developing countries, this would facilitate a "take-off" in economic growth and the developing countries would catch up.[9] This planning practice among the multilateral and bilateral donors resonated very well with the Modernisation Theory.[10] Modernisation as a theory was promoted mainly by Walt Whitman Rostow and David E. Apter.[11] Rostow with the `Rostovian take-off model`[12] delivered an important concept to

[6] Harry S. Trumann at the 19th. Inaugural Address, 20. January 1949
[7] The man behind the Marshall plan was the US foreign minister George C. Marshall (1947)
[8] Degnbol-Martinussen & Engberg-Pedersen 1999
[9] Ibid; Morse 2004; Tarp 2000
[10] Howes 1992
[11] Malloch 2003
[12] Economic Modernisation happens through 5 basic phases: traditional society, preconditions for take-off, take-off, drive to maturity and high mass consumption, Malloch 2003

Modernisation. While Rostow saw the take-off as a result of development assistance and foreign direct investment, Apter argued that the developing countries themselves should facilitate the economic growth through:

> *"[...] entrepreneurship and innovation, the mobilization of domestic resources—including human and social capital—capital formation and technical progress [...]"*[13].

The Modernisation Theory promotes a number of primarily economic measures, for how developing nations should catch up economically with a focus on large infrastructural initiatives to kick-start the process of growth within the developing countries. The effect of this would eventually 'trickle down' and affect all the social groups.[14]

During the 1960s a growing critique of the Modernisation Theory and its limitations arose. There weren't many signs that supported the theory of 'trickle down'. Instead many developing countries experienced the rise of a dual economy consisting of a small group of rich people living in the city versus a large poor rural population.[15] At the same time the stories of 'White Elephants' started to surface. 'White Elephants' were clear failure projects, where modern technology wasn't adapted to the local market, surrounding infrastructure and local management.[16] The main critique of the development strategy vision by Modernisation Theory was that the poor gained very little from the development resources, and the technology wasn't tailored to the local conditions.[17] The Modernisation Theory mainly worked through projects believing that the process of facilitating change could be described in "*[...] simple and mechanical terms.*"[18], as it would take place in controllable and predictable environments. This approach is now often referred to as a blueprint approach.[19] The appraisal methods typically used by the organisations in the 1950s and 1960s were impact assessment and social cost-benefit analysis.[20]

[13] Malloch 2003 p. 5
[14] Howes 1992; Morse 2004
[15] Degnbol-Martinussen & Engberg-Pedersen 1999
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Howes 1992 p. 381
[19] Howes 1992
[20] Roche 1999 p. 18; Howes 1992 p. 378

2.1.3 Dependency

Dependency Theory came as a response to the problems that modernisation endured. Notably that in some cases the poor became poorer. Dependency theory emerged in Latin America and then through the New International Economic Order[21] it spread to rest of the developing world.

It was influenced by Marxist theory on capitalist imperialism and was in many ways the opposite of the Modernisation theory. The dependency theory argued that although there was no longer colonial exploitation, it had been replaced by a form of neo-colonialism. The argument was that the peripheral area of the world market, through unequal exchange, still was exploited by the core area, and the rich were therefore still responsible for the problems of the poor. The dependency theory had an important influence on the new genre of Social development[22] interventions[23]. Two persons, who were to have great influence on social development in the 1970s and later, were Freire[24] and Nyerere[25].[26] In the 1970s Tanzania and Jamaica formed independent economies based on the argumentations of the dependency theory. In Tanzania this was facilitated by Nyerere, who emphasised "*[…] the ´self-reliant´ and ´socialist´ aspects […]*"[27] and industrialization to reach national independence. In the end the Tanzanian experiment failed. Dependency theory would later influence social development[28] and empowerment.[29]

2.1.4 Basic Human Needs

During the 1970s and the 1980s the critique of the Modernisation Theory continued, which led to an increased concern with "Basic Human Needs". The World Bank took the lead among the donors focusing on the poor as a productive force, who should be used to spread and increase

[21] It consisted of proposals put forward by developing countries in the 1970s, on terms of trade, increased development assistance, developed-country tariff reductions and other means. It was done through United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and had the purpose of changing the international economic system in favour of the developing countries.
[22] In the 1970s there was an increased focus on separating economic and ´non-economic´ (social) development (which later became known as social development)
[23] Oakley, Pratt and Clayton 1998
[24] Paulo Reglus Neves Freire
[25] Julius Kambarage Nyerere
[26] Oakley, Pratt and Clayton 1998 and Morse 2004
[27] Morse 2004 p. 24
[28] Oakley, Pratt and Clayton 1998
[29] Howes 1992

the growth of capitalism. This was a slightly adjusted modernisation theory.[30] It was combined with argumentation, led by International Labour Organisation that basic needs (food, water, a place to live, health education, work and so on) should be fulfilled. The collective goal was to fight increasing poverty in developing countries, and make these people part of a world economy that could spread to all corners of the world. [31] This was mainly done with integrated rural development projects aimed at the economy of local societies, especially small scale farmers. In this period international and local NGOs became a bigger part of Development assistance, as they began to function as channels for funding.[32]

There were several critical responses to the Basic Human Needs strategy.[33] Firstly the integrated development projects showed that the local- and central government often lacked the capacity to coordinate these projects. Secondly there was a great trust in the top-down way of planning, which proved ineffective. Thirdly the elite within the developing countries saw the focus on the poorest as an attempt from the West to undermine the demand from the developing countries for a new economic world order, where the access to trade, investment and technology were more important than the needs of the poor. The increasing critique facilitated a shift away from Basic-Human-Needs towards Neo-liberalism.[34]

In the beginning of the 1970s the Logical Framework (LF) as a method emerged in development assistance. The LF, founded in Management by Objectives (MBO) [35], was a response to problems, encountered by the USAID in the modernisation period with lack of objectives and standardised appraise in their projects. The LF was based on the same notion as that of the 1960 that the environment, in which change happen, was controllable and predictable environments. At first the LF was used to make a standardised presentation of projects to systemise their project approval and later in 1970s the USAID also started to use it to improve the design of their projects. The LF was a reflection of the "*[…] control and command planning culture of the 1960s*"[36] and the "[...] *clearest concrete expression of the blueprint approach.*"[37]

[30] Nakabayashi 2000
[31] Degnbol-Martinussen & Engberg-Pedersen 1999, Morse 2004
[32] Degnbol-Martinussen & Engberg-Pedersen 1999
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.
[35] MBO focus on first to identify primary objective, then work out the best strategy on how to reach the objective under a specific set of conditions
[36] Hailey and Sorgenfrei 2004 p. 13
[37] Howes 1992 p. 383

Except from the LF there were no developments of new appraisal and evaluation methods in this period.[38]

2.1.5 Neo-liberalism

Through the 1980s and 1990s there was an important shift in the dominant development strategy, when the World Bank and IMF, inspired by Milton Friedman, incorporated the ideas of Neo-liberalism into their development strategy. The new strategy focused on 'rolling back the state', which led to demands for liberalisation and straightening out the macro economic balance in the developing countries.[39] The World Bank and IMF developed Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), which offered loans and aid to the governments in the developing countries in exchange for liberalisation. Much of the development assistance given by the West, in this last decade of the Cold War, went to Western oriented developing countries and democracy, and poverty wasn't as important.[40] Alongside SAPs that focused on the national level, there was a parallel focus on local development facilitated by NGOs, which we will elaborate on in the sub-section 2.1.6.

The 1990s was influenced by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the fast economic growth in south-east Asia Countries. The West moved a great share of their Development assistance to East Europe to the so called transition countries. Neo-liberalism was still dominant in donor perceptions in this period of time.[41] This meant gradual withdrawal of large donors from direct investment at the project levels and increasing attention to the sector program levels.[42] The withdrawal of donors from direct investment resulted in a decrease in official funding, this was however followed by an increase in funding through NGOs[43] and a heavy increase in the number of these.[44] This development has resulted in a "*[...] contractual climate [...]*"[45] between donors and NGOs. At the same time there was a rising concern on the effectiveness of official aid, and this lead to increasing demand from donors on accountability, impact and

[38] Howes 1992
[39] Degnbol-Martinussen & Engberg-Pedersen 1999
[40] Morse 2004, Degnbol-Martinussen & Engberg-Pedersen 1999
[41] Howes 1992
[42] Degnbol-Martinussen & Engberg-Pedersen 1999
[43] Howes 1992
[44] Edwards & Hulme 1995 in Edwards and Fowler 2002
[45] Haley & Sorgenfrei 2004 p. 7

effectiveness.[46] In this period the LF evolved to, what we today generally refer to as the Logical Framework Approach, and has become one of the most used methods within development assistance.[47] This has lead to the LFA becoming a "*[...] pre-requisite for funding from many [...]*"[48] donors. The increased focus on accountability, impact and effectiveness, together with the rigorously use of blueprint approaches[49], has "*[...] had important implications for the expanded NGO sector [...]*"[50]

2.1.6 People-oriented Approaches

During the Modernisation, Basic Human Needs and the beginning of the Neo-Liberalism was a reflection of what donors conceived as development.[51] As donors withdrew from direct development assistance, alternative views such as participation, capacity building and empowerment came into play from NGOs. This period was known as the age of ´micro-intervention´ and ´people oriented´ approaches, a period where terms like participation, capacity building and empowerment became fashionable.[52]The NGOs recognised that it was difficult to identify the needs of the poor rural people, when coming from outside the target group.[53]These three approaches can be closely interlinked, for example when wanting to increase the capacity of poor people; this can be done through participation and will often lead to some form of empowerment.[54] They are all an important part of development assistances today and are by many organisations incorporated in their way of performing development assistance.

The participation school emphasises that the anticipated beneficiaries of development projects and programmes should be involved in the planning and implementation of those projects and programmes[55], because it empowers the beneficiaries and create a sense of ownership. It also facilitated a shift in paradigm from the control attitude of the outsiders (Dependency) to the

[46] Haley & Sorgenfrei 2004; Crawford and Bryce 2003
[47] Dale 2003; McCaul. 2000
[48] Crawford and Bryce 2003 p. 364
[49] Morse 1992
[50] Howes 1992
[51] Ibid.
[52] Morse 2004
[53] Howes 1992
[54] Dale 2004
[55] Howes 1992

facilitation of a process of self-development. The participation approach lead to the development of Rapid Rural Appraisal as an alternative appraisal method and this later developed to Participatory Rural Appraisal.[56]There have been different initiatives to incorporate a participatory approach in the LFA, most notable in ZOOP[57] and the PCM[58].

Capacity Building became popular in the 1990s and is today an important strategy in development assistance, which is supported by the 'Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness' that incorporated Capacity Building in the 'Statement of Resolve'. Capacity is defined as

> *"[…] ability of individuals, organisations or systems to perform appropriate functions effectively, efficiently and sustainably."*[59]

The term 'capacity building' was for decades equal to supplying funding, material and technical assistance.[60] This relates very well to development assistance during the period of modernisation, which was done through improved infrastructure and technical assistance. Since then the approach has changed towards being more people-oriented in practice and is today defined as the process of developing human and institutional capacity:

> *"Capacity development is the process by which individuals, groups, organisations, institutions and societies increase their abilities to:*
>
> *1. Perform core functions, solve problems, define and achieve objectives*
>
> *2. Understand and deal with their development needs in a broad context and in a sustainable manner."*[61]

During the 1990s Empowerment became an important aspect of social development in the "*[...] understanding of social transformation.*"[62] As a concept in development assistance Empowerment "*[...] locates the primary problem of the poor in the localized power structures by which they*

[56] Howes 1992
[57]Objectives–oriented Project Planning (ZOPP) by The German Aid Agency (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ))
[58] Project Cycle Management (PCM) by Japans Official Development Assistance (ODA)
[59] Milèn 2001 p. 1
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid p. 5
[62] Oakley, Pratt and Clayton 1998 p. 17

are directly confronted in their day-to-day lives."[63] The ideas of Empowerment draw upon Freire (1972) and his notion on the underdevelopment being a result of centuries of oppression had resulted in a 'culture of silence' where the oppressed had no say.[64] The acceptance of the importance of local power structures to bringing about wanted change has led to the incorporation of Empowerment into development assistance.[65]

People oriented strategies such as participation, capacity building and empowerment are closely connected and have become important parts of development practice in development today. These, among others, are inherent in social development. Social development is identical with social "*[...] transformation and change [...]*"[66] and it challenges the importance of monitoring and evaluating the "*[...] 'progress' of dynamic social development processes [...]*"[67] When we refer to social development in this thesis, we relate it mainly to these three terms: participation, capacity building and empowerment.

2.1.7 Summary

In this section we have pointed out several aspects of development that together form an important background for the discussion of this thesis. The most important points are:

Development assistance is a complex environment. The static goals of modernisation have been replaced by people oriented strategies such as Participation and Capacity building, which are less straight forward, involves multiple actors and are difficult to incorporate into the linear logic, prevalent in planning.

Monitoring and evaluation have become increasingly important in development. Public polices in the 1980s have seen aid agencies gradually leaving the implementation of development to NGOs, while assuming the role of donors instead. This has led to demand for more and better M&E practice emphasising upward accountability.

LFA has become an institution in development assistance today. From being a simple framework for project design, made to solve problems encountered during the modernisations

[63] Howes 1992 p. 392
[64] Oakley, Pratt and Clayton 1998
[65] Howes 1992
[66] Oakley, Pratt and Clayton 1998 p. 14
[67] Ibid p. 26

period, to being an approach that can be used throughout the whole project cycle. The spread of the LFA has been facilitated through aid agencies as a requirement for funding.

We will in the following sections use these findings to place our discussion in a larger framework. In the next section we will look at NGO dilemma and development in relation to projects, project management and M&E.

2.2 Donors and Beneficiaries - The Twin Imperatives of NGOs

As stated in the introduction, development is about facilitating change. Given the evolution of practice outlined in the previous section, with development becoming more and more people-centred, the raison d'être of NGOs essentially then is about social transformation[68]. Underlying the drive for change is what Madeley has labelled the *ethical imperative* of NGOs[69]; in other words the bottom-line of the not-for profit sector is a values-driven approach to attain social equity for the world's poor.[70] Crawford explains the ethical imperative as deriving: *"from the mission of the aid agency to address limits to sustainable development encountered by the beneficiary.*"[71] This implies that NGOs are accountable to intended beneficiaries for the provision of the best aid possible. The emergence of a contract culture between donors and NGOs however presents a contrasting bottom-line to the ethical imperative. As NGOs are largely dependant on public funding to pursue their goals[72], the organisational sustainability of NGOs then poses a *business imperative*[73] - to remain solvent, they must be responsive to their donors.

The two imperatives noted above mean that NGOs essentially have two bottom-lines, which not only makes management more difficult, but it also puts the needs of primary stakeholders at risk. If we place this in a traditional for-profit perspective, where business survival is intimately linked to satisfying customer needs, the ethical imperative implies that project beneficiaries (customers) hold NGOs accountable for quality of development (product).[74] NGOs however are not depending on the satisfaction of primary stakeholders to survive. Because of the business imperative 'success in a developmental sense' risks being decoupled from 'success in an organisational sense.'[75] This is a central issue to this thesis. Power et al. elaborate that: "*Organisations may have clear goals and well-defined routines, yet lack adequate incentives to ensure that action*s *are consistent with intentions*," and refer to this as "*the alien hand syndrome,*"[76] meaning: "*an organisational learning disorder which […] involves a disconnection between organisations*

68 Hailey & Sorgenfrei 2004; Britton 2005
69 Madeley 1991
70 Hailey 2000
71 Crawford 2004 p. 70
72 Fowler 1997
73 Madeley 1991
74 Ibid.
75 Power et al 2002
76 Ibid p. 24

intentions and actions"[77]. This dilemma has several implications, with a worst case scenario being that NGOs:

> *"may provide inadequate and at times appalling 'service' to marginalised individuals and communities without any repercussions. As long as the donors are satisfied, the organisation can continue not only to operate but also to grow, thrive, and expand."*[78]

Also there is no reason to think that the two imperatives are of equal weight from a NGO perspective. The power dynamics inherent in the competing demands on the NGO are hardly balanced since one is directly linked to the sustainability of the organization:

> *"To the degree that a conflict persists between an INGO's mission and self-preservation, the former is often, unconsciously, sacrificed."*[79]

With the delinking of developmental from organisational success, Edwards and Hulme point to the further problem that information flows from M&E could potentially be streamlined. First of all, if funds are linked to specific project or organisational successes, problems or negative unexpected outcomes risk being 'left out' from reports, thereby losing potentially valuable learning experiences.[80] Secondly, given that impact is hard to measure, and almost impossible to assign clear-cut attribution to, NGOs may emphasise short term "successes" instead, leading to a focus on outputs rather than longer term impacts. This then 'documents' their viability to donors, so they remain eligible for funds, but managing for outputs entails a series of problems, which we will explain in our critique of the LFA. Thirdly, when NGOs know that continued funds are linked to the delivery of pre-established goals, this may lead to project tunnel vision, where unexpected outcomes may go unnoticed.[81]

2.2.1 Twin Imperatives, Multiple Implications

The contractual climate of development practice, which underpins the business imperative, means that donors have rising expectations of accountability from NGO.[82] Whereas accountability traditionally was understood as:

> *"the means by which individuals and organizations report to a recognized authority, or authorities, and are held responsible for their action."*[83],

[77] Snyder & Cummings 1998 in Power et al. 2002 p. 24
[78] Power et al 2002, p. 24
[79] Ibid p. 25
[80] Edwards & Hulme 1995. We will discuss the concept and importance of learning in organisations in subsequent chapter.
[81] Gasper 2000
[82] Fowler 1997, Edwards & Hulme 1995

global concerns over the effectiveness of aid, as described in section 3, means that the scope of concern has widened. Rather than a straight-forward focus on efficiency and delivery of planned outputs at project level, donors increasingly expect NGOs to demonstrate developmental effectiveness as well: Crawford describes this as:

> *"the extent to which the combined impact of an aid agency's portfolio of projects is in fact positively contributing to sustainable development ."*[84]

On the surface then this may be perceived as a joining of the two imperatives, but as a result of the messy reality of social development,[85] where:

> *"Measuring performance in relation to the kind of development subscribed to by most NGOs is an extraordinarily difficult task, particularly in relation to 'empowerment' and other qualitative change"*[86]*,*

a gap is widening here between theory and practice.[87] The response from donors, to manage the complexity of measuring social development practice, has been to require steadily more stringent reporting requirements, chaining funds with requirements of specific management and M&E frameworks, epitomised by the LFA, and standardising quantitative methods.[88] While these initiatives have been helpful in turning the focus on development impact, at least on a theoretical level, practice has seen a growing focus on micro-management. The difficulty in quantifying impact measurement has led to a focus on easier-to-measure output indicators on the assumption of a linear relation between them. Where this has failed to materialise, the assumption has been it was a failure of management, thus leading to tightening of controls, more specific M&E targets and further emphasis on managerialism[89].

The underlying assumption of this practice is that the problems of 'underdevelopment' and the 'solutions' to them can be linked sufficiently by thorough planning and tight management to ensure a planned outcome. Along with the expectancy that impact can be attributed to specific interventions, this presupposes a very high level of project control and predictability; an

[83] Edwards and Hulme 1995 p. 192.
[84] Crawford 2004 p. 73
[85] Edwards and Hulme 1995; Woodhill 2005; Hailey, James and Wrigley 2005
[86] Edwards and Hulme 1995 p. 195.
[87] Britton 2005
[88] Edwards & Hulme 1995; Gasper 1997; 2000; Earle 2003.
[89] Crawford 2004, Fowler 1995.

assumption that bears little resemblance to the understanding of development as inherently complex, and which has been heavily criticised.[90]

> *"The basic linear principles on which development aid is allocated do not correspond to the complex, contingent way that development actually occurs."*[91]

We will look at the assumption of linearity later in this section, when we place social development in the context of systems theory.

2.2.2 Implications for the Thesis

We have shown that the reason d'être of NGOs, the *ethical imperative*, is to generate solutions to the problems of 'underdevelopment,' essentially meaning improving the lives of intended beneficiaries. The *business imperative* however means that the organisational success of NGOs, the ability of the organisation to continue working, is dependant on donors funding. The consequence of this is that the effectiveness of NGOs relies on the ability to satisfy both imperatives.[92] Despite there being no inherent obstructions to the simultaneous pursuit, concerns with the effectiveness of development aid have led to the institutionalisation of the Result Based Management methods and an M&E practice, which in essens emphasises reporting over performance.[93] Edwards and Hulme describe the current donor driven approach of M&E as a change, in how accountability is conceived as:

> *"The type of appraisal and monitoring and evaluation procedures insisted on by donors, especially their reliance on 'logical framework' approaches and bureaucratic reporting, may also distort accountability by overemphasising short-term quantitative targets, standardizing indicators, focusing attention exclusively on individual projects and [...]a tendency to accountancy rather than accountability, audit rather than learning."*[94]

The concept of accountability in current practice is important to our analysis, and in our argument for a learning oriented M&E practice we will discuss this in more detail. For now it's sufficient that we acknowledge that NGOs must address both imperatives, and conclude that M&E currently overemphasises the business imperative to the extent that organisational effectiveness suffers. Strategies implemented to ensure 'better developmental success' have

[90] Checkland 1981; Korten 1984; Fowler 1995; Roche 1999; Roper et al 2003; Hailey and Sorgenfrei 2004
[91] Fowler 1995 p. 297 in Edwards and Fowler 2002.
[92] Edwards and Hulme 1995; Crawford 2004.
[93] Woodhill 2005; Dlamini 2006.
[94] Edwards and Hulme 1995 p. 197.

essentially done the opposite, leading us to think there is a gap between theory and practice in M&E.

We will in the coming sub-sections lay the foundation for a closer analysis of the Logical Framework Approach, by expanding on the concepts of projects, project management and monitoring and evaluation practice.

2.3 Project Management

We have previously outlined the evolution of development practice and described how the evolution of strategies and methods of delivery has led to increasing levels of complexity in the management of development projects. In this section we will examine the concepts of projects, project management and monitoring and evaluation practice to situate our critique of the LFA as the dominant M&E method. This should then lead to the identification of aspects in an alternative approach of M&E based on organisational learning.

2.3.1 The Development Project

For the purpose of our study, we have chosen to narrow our focus to the project level of development. Although many, if not most, organisations are operating at programme or sector levels of support, the project remains the core building stone of development work – that is, the vast majority of aid is delivered via projects.[95] Some estimates say that as much as eighty-five to ninety per-cent of global aid expenditure is in the shape of project-based aid.[96]

The over-all popularity of projects combined with the ad hoc nature of projects means that the many definitions of the term, variations however, are often slight.[97] For the purpose of this thesis, the definition offered by Christensen and Kreiner provides a good starting point.

Although their work is predominantly done from a business perspective, Christensen and Kreiner's broad outline of projects, as tasks that in terms of organisation share a set of attributes and conditions[98], apply equally well to projects in development. With reference to their work, we therefore consider projects to be defined by the following four features:

Projects are *unique*; meaning that an organisation is not structured around solving the specific project problem, and that it therefore requires extraordinary approaches.[99]

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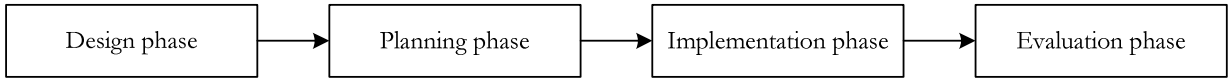
[95] Fowler 1997
[96] Madeley 1991
[97] PMI 2000; Lindegaard and Olsson 2005; Crawford 2004.
[98] Christensen & Kreiner 1991
[99] While the majority of work by NGOs, unlike that of many businesses, may be in the form of projects, the individual project is still unique It involves its own structure, independent from fixed structure of the implementing organisation, meaning that the specific goals, timeframe and of a project will differ from the overall purpose of the organisation, Christens & Kreiner 1991

Projects are *complex*; a project goes beyond tasks that may be unique but require relatively little effort to solve the problem. Implicit in a project lays the notion that the problem is complex enough to warrant an allocation of personnel, resources and time to get it solved.
Projects are *temporary*; inherent in a project is the completion and dissolution of the project at a certain stage. This means that as part of the planning phase, criteria will be selected for how and when the project is concluded.
Projects are *goal oriented*; as projects are designed to address a specific problem, all activity happens with specific reference to the project goal. Unlike 'normal operations', that proceed according to established procedures in a project, procedure will be explicitly specified in reference to solving the problem.[100]

As projects in this sense are assumed not to follow a pre-established set of comprehensive guidelines, project implementation requires certain activities up front. Christensen and Kreiner illustrate these phases in figure 1[101] as the *programming phase* and the *planning phase* that are needed to clarify the 'what is the goal' and the 'how do we get there' before the project implementation.[102]

Figure 1

Traditional notion of project phase



Adapted from Christensen and Kreiner 1994

Finally, due to their ad hoc nature, there is a high degree of uncertainty involved in projects. This requires a final phase, the *evaluation phase,* which is necessary both for accountability purposes to see, if the project achieved, what was planned, but also to *learn* and generate knowledge from the process.[103] The mention of learning in the evaluation phase will be subject to more attention in the section 6.

[100] Christensen & Kreiner 1991 p. 22
[101] Ibid. p. 30
[102] Ibid p. 28
[103] Woodhill 2005

In development this process has become standardized in the Project Cycle Management Framework (PCM), see Figure 2[104] below, which incorporates the donor-implementer relationship to provide a general concept of project management. On the operational level, management practice has essentially become synonymous with the Logical Framework Approach, as a response to demand from donor community[105]. The specifics of LFA will be discussed in more detail in section 3.

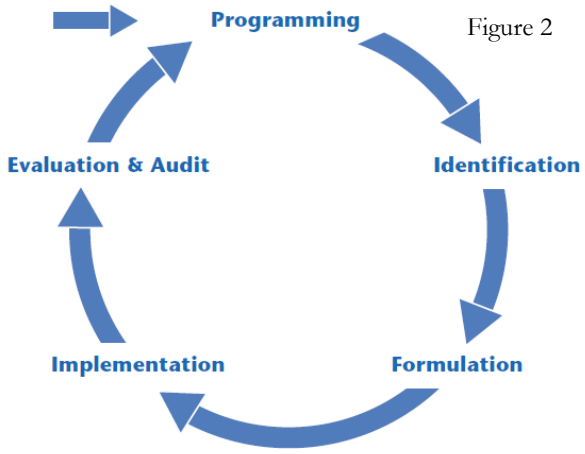


Figure 2

2.3.2 Managing Uncertainty

As mentioned above, a defining characteristic of projects is the large degree of uncertainty. Christensen and Kreiner argue that projects can be categorised in terms of this uncertainty, namely 1) "*operational uncertainty*" and 2) "*contextual uncertainty*"[106]. Operational uncertainty is described as the difference between the amounts of information necessary to reach the project goal versus the amount of information available at any given point.

Reduction of operational uncertainty is commonly achieved by expanding the planning and design phases to increase the amount of information available and implementing systematic and structured guiding frameworks. Contextual uncertainty is related to the amount of turbulence, understood as changes in factors outside the project's control in the project environment, and

[104] European Commission 2004, p. 16
[105] Gasper; 1997; 2000; Cracknell 2000; Bakewell & Garbutt 2005; Britton 2005.
[106] Christensen & Kreiner 1991 p. 37-39

is defined as the difference between the knowledge and premises the project is designed and planned on, versus those the project is evaluated on.[107]

As contextual uncertainty can only be understood retrospectively and is caused by external factors, it is impossible to reduce beforehand; the only countermeasure is openness to learning and adapting to the turbulence[108]. From a management perspective, the reduction of uncertainty seems beneficial and instrumental for project success. This is arguably the logic underlying donor demands for better management and M&E, and the reason why donors have required NGOs to implement the LFA.[109]

As we will explain in further detail in the following section, the LFA proscribes the reduction of operational uncertainty by focusing heavily on pre-project planning and design and adherence to the linear logic of the logframe[110]. The problem is, however, that there is often an adverse relationship between the reduction of 'operational uncertainty' and that of 'contextual uncertainty'.[111] The whole purpose of operationalising goals and systematising procedures (which in development is often referred to as the 'blueprint approach'[112]) is to steady the project and make it resilient to changing environmental factors; this resilience, however, also leads to openness to contextual uncertainty, since it makes projects less flexible. In low turbulence environments this may be negligible[113], but in environments characterised by a high degree of turbulence, such as social development, the risk grows exponentially.[114] Here a narrow focus on planned activities can lead to a failure to detect and react to important change – change that may indicate the project is off track in relation to the new reality.[115] This dilemma between operational and contextual uncertainty creates a conflict between the ongoing need *to learn* and the need to *provide planned outcomes*.

[107] Christensen & Kreiner 1991
[108] Ibid; Checkland 1981. This relates to the notions of soft systems and organisational learning that will be addressed later in this thesis.
[109] Earle 2002; Reeler 2007
[110] Gasper 2000; Bakewell & Garbutt 2005
[111] Christensen & Kreiner 1991
[112] Den Heyer, 2001; Gasper 1997, 2000
[113] Which is also the type of problem, the LFA originally was designed to handle.
[114] Christensen & Kreiner 1991
[115] Ibid.

From this we gain that in complex realities, the planning phase of projects can only take the implementation so far. The more comprehensive your initial plan or framework for action is, the less adaptable you are to emergent change.[116] Where contextual uncertainty is high, as earlier showed is the case in development projects, there seems to be a need to integrate learning cycles into projects to expand the knowledge base and if necessary take adaptive action. It follows then that the push for more control and stronger M&E logic from donors in order to manage increasing levels of complexity is in fact a counterproductive measure in terms of project success;[117] at least in an uncertain reality.

This takes us to the discussion of the increasingly important subcomponent of management, monitoring and evaluation.

[116] Britton 2005
[117] Checkland 1981

2.4 Monitoring and Evaluation: Measuring Development

While M&E is implicit in the project concept,[118] the evolution of donor-NGO relations paired with the growing focus on aid effectiveness has put the term to the top of the development agenda. Aside from the donor community, NGOs themselves are also interested in better M&E practice, as it is increasingly being linked to how organisations perform instead of being merely means of control.[119] This connects M&E to our discussion earlier regarding the conflicting imperatives of NGOs. In this section we review the concept of M&E and break it down to help illuminate our claim of a gap between theory and practice.

2.4.1 M&E – Separate but equal, or?

The question whether monitoring and evaluation are separate entities or parts of a whole divides the development community, and there is no absolute answer.[120]. There seems to be relative concurrence that monitoring involves ongoing collection of data, whereas evaluation is more understood as taking place less frequently, but involving more comprehensive judgments of the data.[121] The difference seems to be less about, what they each do and relate more to their purpose. In other words the reason for *why* monitoring and evaluation is done, or how practioners perceive this, seems to be a main divider. Christie for instance argues that: "*there is a big difference between monitoring and evaluation*"[122] based on a notion of monitoring being done for: "*accountability for money and 'results'*"[123], whereas evaluation: "*is more about learning from experience – to improve practice and programs, and plan future work.*"[124] Opposite this perspective is the notion that: "*planning, monitoring and evaluation are not discrete events, but are designed to be cyclical with each one feeding the other.*"[125] The lack of agreement is supported in a study of M&E practice in eight UK

[118] Christensen & Kreiner 1991 p. 31 & 44. While they only make explicit mention of the evaluation phase, it is understood as the need to continually evaluate project implementation to increase knowledge and decrease contextual uncertainty.
[119] Woodhill 2005; Britton 2005; Crawford and Pollack 2004.
[120] den Heyer 2001
[121] Woodhill 2005; Christie 2008
[122] Christie 2008 p. 6
[123] Ibid.
[124] Christie 2008 p. 6
[125] Earl & Carden 2002, in Roper et al. 2002 p. 357

NGOs, where reviews of policy documents revealed that in some organisations the terms 'evaluation', 'review', and 'monitoring' were used interchangeably.[126] Others recognised that:

> *"at the operational level M&E are separate tools, each with its own application […] but failed to make a clear distinction between the two."*[127]

Despite the plurality of opinions, there is overall acceptance that monitoring and evaluation are linked in some form or another. Also, there seems to be overall agreement between donors, organisations, practioners and researchers alike, of the importance of M&E in the current practice of development, albeit for varying reasons.[128] For the purpose of this paper we acknowledge monitoring and evaluation (M&E) may have distinct functions, but given their interconnectedness, we consider M&E an integrated process.

2.4.2 The purpose of M&E

M&E has become entrenched in development practice, as the strategies to achieve development emphasising social change have meant the notion of success has become more difficult to measure.[129] Traditionally evaluation practice essentially has amounted to the assessment of, what has been achieved in relation to what was planned. This is a function of the 'hard systems'[130] thinking that underpin the management models (today epitomised by the LFA) that have been dominant in development management since the 1960s. This 'accountability aspect' has been reinforced by the 'contract climate' present in current development, as we pointed out in our discussion about the conflicting imperatives of NGOs explained earlier. As NGOs rely on donors and ultimately tax payer money, the need to demonstrate effectiveness is obvious and legitimate. Donors are themselves accountable to either back donors or governments, who in turn face elections.[131]

The emerging emphasis in the global community regarding the effectiveness of aid implicates that NGOs now must account for their overall impact as well, which has led to and increased focus on M&E in terms of measuring performance. The importance of evaluation in regard to organisational performance was made clear by Albert Hirschmann already in 1967, with the

[126] Mebrahtu 2002
[127] Ibid p. 502
[128] Christie 2008, Woodhill 2005; Hailey and Sorgenfrei 2004; Mebrahtu 2002
[129] Hailey and Sorgenfrei 2004; Guijt 2007
[130] See section 5.1
[131] Reeler 2007

publication of "Development Projects Observed",[132] it failed to enter M&E practice to a large degree. This is changing however. As NGOs have evolved and become larger, and donor demands for more comprehensive reporting practices have increased, the development sector has seen the rise of managerialism.[133] Organisational performance is back on the agenda.

Given the above discussion, M&E can then be said to have two main aspects: to demonstrate accountability for funds to donors and to support performance by providing relevant information to facilitate sound management decisions. The latter implicates that increasing the organisational performance of the NGO, its capacity to respond and manage, will in turn translate into better project performance and thereby developmental 'success'. These two aspects of M&E align with the twin imperatives, and while the rhetoric is that M&E has strong implications for performance (meaning measuring impact), the institutionalisation of the LFA and steadily stronger demands for results seem to counteract this.[134] We will examine this in more detail in the coming section.

2.5 Summary

In this chapter we have answered the first sub question of our research, and shown that current development, understood as people-centred and focusing on social change **is a complex environment.**

We further outlined that **M&E has become increasingly important** in development and that the **LFA has become an institution in development assistance** today. These aspects of development form an important background for the future discussions in this thesis.

We then looked at the NGO dilemma and development in relation to projects, project management and M&E. Here we found that the purpose of NGOs is to solve the problems of beneficiaries and thereby improving their lives (*ethical imperative*). Meanwhile the *business imperative* means that the NGOs existence is dependant on donors funding. We have argued that NGOs must address both imperatives to be effective, but that reality often reflects an overemphasis on the *business imperative* to the detriment of NGO performance.

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[132] World Bank 2004
[133] Reeler 2007
[134] Crawford 2004, Reeler 2007

Looking at projects within development we found that reducing operational uncertainty leaves organisations open to contextual uncertainty, meaning that the more NGOs try to control project reality, the less adaptable they become to emergent change.

Finally we outlined the M&E sub-function of project management, where we found that M&E can be said to have to have two main purposes: **To demonstrate accountability and to support organisational performance, both of which are necessary components for NGO effectiveness. We also showed that given the trends outlined in section 2.1 current M&E practice is skewed toward an emphasis in the accountability part – This answers sub-question two.** We will in the following section look more in to the LFA and relate it to some of the findings in this chapter.

3 The Logical Framework Approach

> *For every complex problem there is an answer that is clear, simple, and wrong.*
> *(H. L. Mencken)*

We will start this section elaborating on the origin and theoretical background, followed by a description of the different processes in the LFA. After the description of the LFA we will relate the critique of the LFA to the M&E related arguments made earlier in this thesis. This should illustrate the basic problems with the LFA working in a complex environment.

The History of the LFA took its beginning in the late 1960s, when the US Agency for International Development (USAID) asked the two American based consultant companies Fry Associates and Practical Concepts Incorporated (PCI) to develop a framework for project design. The result was the Logical Framework (LF), which was ready in the early 1970s[135]. The development of the Logical Framework was a response to a number of project evaluations, which had identified certain elements responsible for the limited success that USAID endured. It was two of these elements, which created the foundation for the Logical Framework. USAID found that it was unclear, why certain interventions were chosen, because there was no clear objective for the project prior to the implementation, and furthermore they had no standardised format by which to appraise the projects. This meant that the corner stone in the Logical Framework became "*projects needs objectives*"[136] and "*standardised appraisals need to be in place*"[137]. The thought behind LF came from Management by Objectives (MBO), which is a tradition within American management science. The main element in this tradition is:

> *"To first specify what the primary objective of any effort is and, then, to work out systematically the best strategy of work organisation and resource requirements needed to reach that objective under a specific set of conditions"*[138]

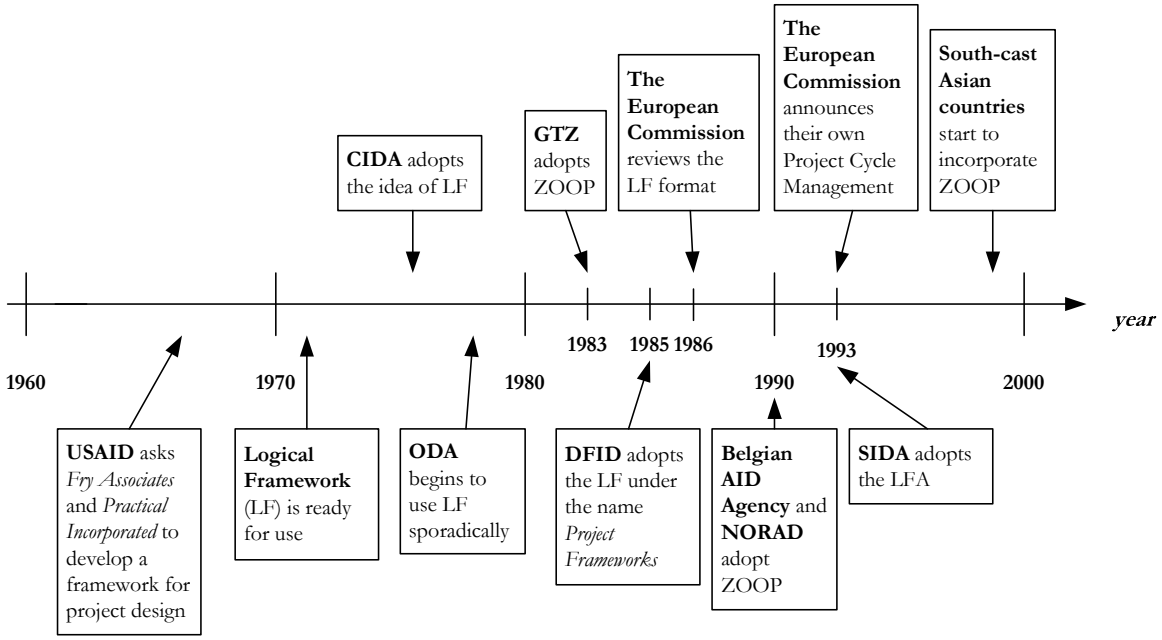
The Logical Framework was initially used by the USAID to make a standardised presentation of projects to systemise their project approval. In the next decades the LF evolved to, what we

[135] USAID incorporated the LF in 1971
[136] McCaul, 2000 p. 1
[137] Ibid. p. 1
[138] Ibid. p. 1

today generally refer to as the Logical Framework Approach, which involves identifying, preparing, appraising, implementing, monitoring and evaluating design.[139] In the same period the ideas behind the LFA was adopted by great number of aid agencies.

figure 3

LFA timeline



As we showed in section 2, the LFA is today institutionalised as the method to be used for planning and M&E.

3.1 The Analytical Phase and the Logframe

The LFA can be split up into two parts, where you make a distinction between the Logical Framework Approach (LFA) and the logframe. The product of the analytical phase is gathered in the 'Synthesis' phase in the logframe, which summarises what the project intends to do, how, what the key assumptions are and how the objectives will be monitored and evaluated.

[139] AusAID 2003 p. 3

3.1.1 The Analytical Phase

Prior to the analytical phase, the main focus area of the project (and some of the development problems and opportunities within this area) has already been identified. This helps the persons participating in a preparation mission to focus and structure the direction of the analysis.

Step 1: Stakeholder Analysis

Numerous evaluation reports and studies have shown that a common cause of project problems is that among development planners, there is a lack of knowledge about the people affected by development projects.[140] It is therefore one of the key ideas behind most versions of the LFA that the Stakeholders should be involved as much as possible into planning. Furthermore the projects should address problems faced by beneficiaries and meet their needs and interests.[141] It is important to identify any stakeholder, who may have a relation to the project; that is individuals, groups of people, institutions or firms. This should be done very early in the identification and appraisal phase of the project.

The stakeholder analysis is a very important phase, where planners identify biases, expectations and concerns of the different interest groups, which helps to guarantee a more cohesive and sustainable project. Many projects have not been a success because of inherent conflicts between the stakeholders, who all may have different views on the problems, the wanted results and technical concepts.[142]

During the process of analyses there has to be made a decision on, which objectives to pursue in the project and which area to focus on, and thereby whose interests and views to give priority. The best way of handling this would be, if a consensus was reached between the different stakeholders, however it often ends in a compromise.[143] This facilitates the danger of "*no-body is really committed[…]*"[144], and it can therefore be more suitable to give priority to core stakeholders instead of a compromise.

[140] NORAD 1999 p. 24
[141] European Commission 2002
[142] McCaul 2000 p. 2
[143] European Commission 2002
[144] Ibid. p. 36

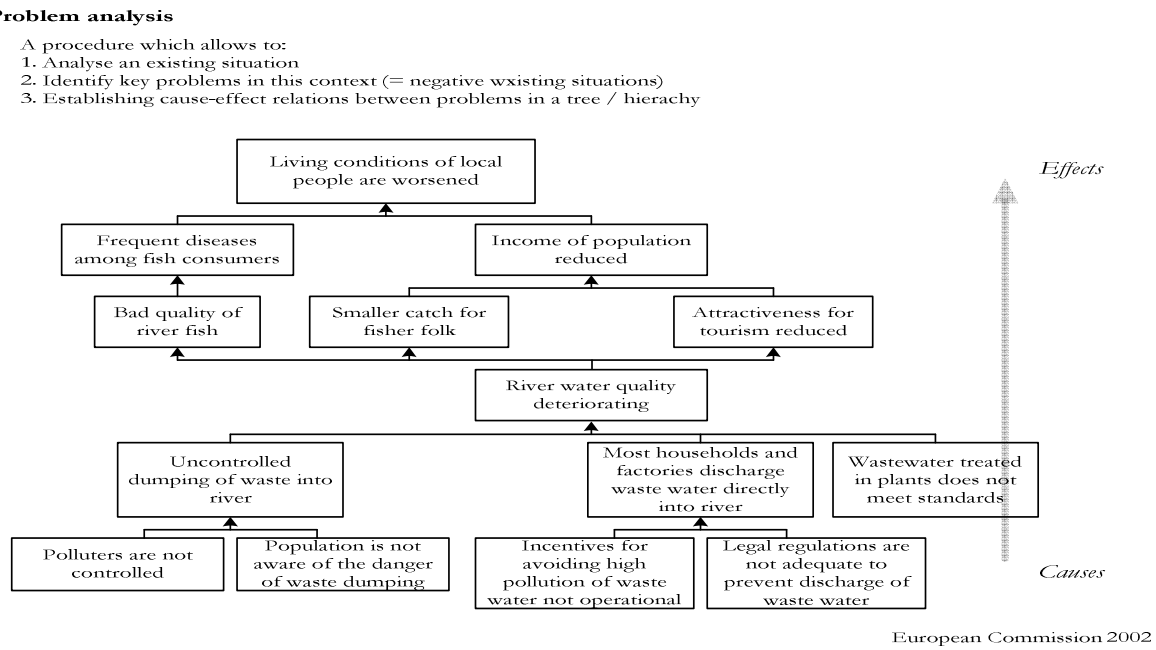
Step 2: Problem Analysis

The Problem Analysis identifies the negative aspects of the chosen focus area and establishes a cause and effect between the problems that exists within that area. A tool to illustrate the cause and effect between these problems is the problem tree.

A problem tree is made by starting to define the framework and subject of the Problem Analysis. This would often be a specific sector; sub sector, area etc., or the problem analysis could be conducted in connection with an ongoing project. Then all key stakeholders (who were identified in the stakeholder analysis) are invited to a workshop to give their view on the problems, they experience in the chosen area.[145]

The Stakeholders write down the problems, they find most important on some blank cards with one problem per card. These cards will be placed on a blackboard, and one specific problem will be chosen as the main Objective/problem. Hereafter the problems relating to the starting point will be sorted out into a series of cause-effect relations (called objective method).

Figure 4[146]



[145] AusAID 2003
[146] European Commission 2002 p. 36

The strength of the Problem Analysis lies in the process, because it is a learning experience, where the stakeholders get aware of the complexity of the situation through negotiation, discussion and argument. Stakeholders get to know, how other stakeholders see or experience the problems, and they get a sense of ownership to the project, because they have helped to shape it.[147]

There has been critique of this process. It is argued that it would be better to focus on lacks instead of problems, because focus on problems can lead to negativity and frustration among the participants. The counter argument is that the 'lack of something' implies that the solution is the provision of 'something', and that in many cases there can be several different ways of finding a solution to a particular problem, which means that focusing on problems encourage creativity.[148]

Step 3: Objectives Analysis

The focus of the objective analysis is to transform the problem tree into a tree of objectives that suggests future solutions to the problem. This means that the trees cause-effect relationship is changed into a means-end relationship. Now the roots on the tree are means that the group can achieve its objective through and hereby have positive changes on the branches.[149] When the Objective tree is complete, it provides a "*picture of the future desired situation*"[150].

Step 4: Strategy Analysis

This fourth and final step in the Analysis Phase focuses on selecting which, strategy(ies) to use to achieve these objectives. Inherent in the choice of strategy(ies) is selecting, which objectives that should be included in the project, and what the Project Purpose and overall Objectives should be. First the stakeholders should identify objectives that are not desirable, feasible or pursued by other projects. Then each mean is looked at as *"a possible means of strategy for achieving*

[147] McCaul 2000
[148] Ibid.
[149] Ibid.
[150] European Commission 2002 p. 39

the core objective of the project."[151]. One mean or a combination of means (clustering) [152] can be picked out as an alternative strategy to that of the complete objective tree. The different strategies that are found should then be assessed to find the most feasible strategy. Depending on what the scope of the intervention is, the selected strategy(ies) can result in either a projects-sized intervention (one single project) or a programme that consists of several projects.

3.1.2 Logframe

The findings in the Analytical Phase are used both directly and analysed upon to help develop the logframe. The purpose of the logframe is to provide a summary of the whole project design. The logframe also goes under other names like the logframe matrix and the logical framework matrix, and there are also different formats of the logframe. However the difference is small and the substance of the different logframes is basically the same.

The logframe is generally visualised as a table with four columns and four or five rows, which is illustrated in figure 5.

figure 5[153]

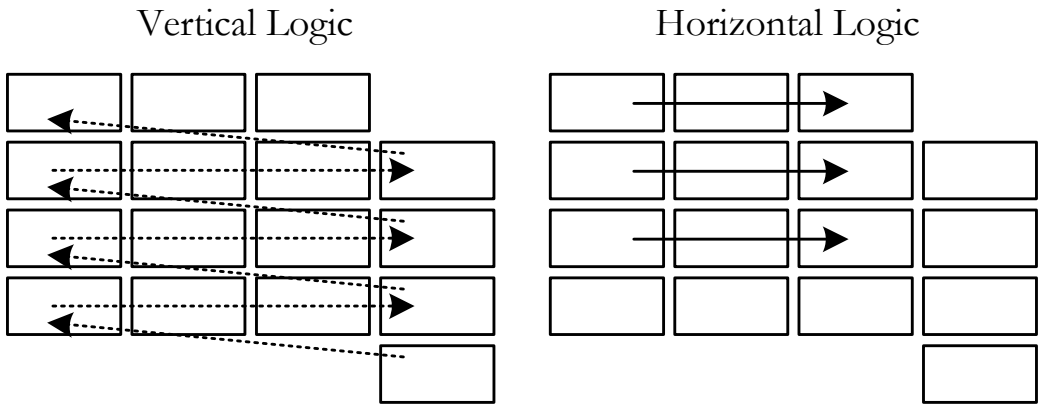
Objectives	Measurable indicators	Means of verification	Important assumptions
GOAL: *Wider problem the project will help to resolve*	*Quantitative ways of measuring or qualitative ways of judging timed achievement of goal*	*Cost-effective methods and sources to quantify or assess indicators*	***(Goal to supergoal)*** *External factors necessary to sustain objectives in the long run*
PURPOSE: *The immediate impact on the project area or target group i.e. the change or benefit to be achieved by the project*	*Quantitative ways of measuring or qualitative ways of judging timed achievement of purpose*	*Cost-effective methods and sources to quantify or assess indicators*	***(Purpose to Goal)*** *External conditions necessary if achieved project purpose is to contribute to reaching project goal*
OUTPUTS: *These are the specifically deliverable results expected from the project to attain the purpose*	*Quantitative ways of measuring or qualitative ways of judging timed production of outputs*	*Cost-effective methods and sources to quantify or assess indicators*	***(Outputs to purpose)*** *Factors out of project control which, if present, could restrict progress from outputs to achieving project purpose*
ACTIVITIES: *These are the tasks to be done to produce the outputs*	**INPUTS:** This is a summary of the project budget	Financial out-turn report as agreed in grant agreement	***(Activity to output)*** *Factors out of project control which, if present, could restrict progress from activities to achieving outputs*

The logic of the logframe structure works in both a vertical logic and a horizontally logic, which is illustrated in figure 6.

[151] McCaul 2000 p. 4
[152] Clustering, of objectives often happen if they are of the same type
[153] DFID "Guidelines on Humanitarian Assistance", 1997 in BOND 2003 p. 4

figure 6[154]

How to read the Logframe



adapted from European Commission 2002

The vertical logic describes:

> *"[…] what the project intends to do and clarifies the causal relationships, and specifies the important assumptions and risks beyond the project manager's control."*[155]

While the Horizontal logic:

> *"[…] defines how project objectives specified in the project description will be measured, and the means by which the measurement will be verified. This provides the framework for project monitoring and evaluation."*[156]

When the logframe is constructed, it is important to keep in mind that the logframe essentially is a draft, providing only a "*snap shot in time*"[157]. As with the analysis phase that needs to be reviewed and updated during the project period. The same consequently goes for the logframe. There are certain considerations when constructing the logframe, a optimal logframe should provide a plan of action that is clear and logical, and can be used in relation to cost and

[154] European Commission 2002 p. 37
[155] Ibid. p. 41
[156] AusAID 2003 p. 15
[157] Ibid. p. 16

contracting.[158] There is a danger if the logframe becomes too prescriptive, because it can have a negative effect on the flexibility of the logframe, which again will influence the implementation of the project.

The Vertical Logic

When the project description is written down, the whole chain of causality in the project design is split up according to the different levels in the first column (Intervention logic). Each level provides the rational for the next level down the hierarchy. This is an *if-then causality* that is expressed according to these terms from the bottom up: If inputs are provided, then the activities (next level) can be undertaken. When the activities are undertaken, it will result in outputs being produced. When outputs are produced, they will support the project purpose, and this should contribute to reaching the goal. Taken the other way from the top down the goal helps define the purpose, the purpose defines the output and so on.

The process of coming from Strategy Analysis to intervention logic can begin in two different ways:

1. If the project from the beginning is designed to contribute to a specific sector or national objectives, these objectives will be referred to as the goal in the logframe and will be the starting point.
2. If this is not the case, the process of making the logframe starts with choosing an objective from the hierarchy of objectives in the objective tree, which describes a sustainable benefit to the chosen target groups. This objective is the project purpose. Identification of the overall objectives can then be done by choosing one ore more of the objectives from the top of the tree, which describes the long-term benefits of the project purpose.

The output and activities are found using the logic in the 'means-to-ends'. The objectivities in the 'objective tree' that lead to the project purpose are selected as outputs and the objectives that produce the outputs are translated into activities.[159]

[158] European Commission 2002
[159] Ibid.

A project is always influenced by factors outside the control of project managers. The project is often placed in a poorly resourced and unstable environment and dependent on change in the behaviour of stakeholders, and this should be anticipated in the logframe. It is the function of the fourth column in the logframe, to identify the assumptions that are necessary to reach the stated objectives. The understanding of these assumptions is an essential part of good project design. A common source of project failure is, when assumptions, are not identified and addressed.[160] The process of identifying the relevant assumptions starts from the bottom and work upwards. Each level should contain the necessary and sufficient conditions for the next level above. Some of the Assumptions can be found in the objectives tree, in those elements not included in the project. It is important that the assumptions are worded as positive conditions and formulated, so that they can be monitored.[161]

One of the problems with this process is that it can be difficult for the stakeholders to reach consensus on objectives and then reducing the objectives to a simple linear chain. Also the level of detail used to describe the objectives, both too much and too little, can prove to be a burden. The biggest danger lies in oversimplification of the objectives, ignoring unintended effects and hiding disagreements and making it into a blueprint approach with rigid objectives.[162]

Horizontal Logic

The vertical logic clarifies, depending on certain assumptions, what the project intends to do and how. The horizontal logic establishes the basis for monitoring and evaluating the project[163]. The first step in establishing the horizontal logic is to identify the indicators that could be used to measure on the achievement of the objectives.

The input box specifies, what should be transferred into the project in relation to human, technical or material resources in order to carry out the planned activities and the cost box specifies the cost of the inputs.

[160] AusAID 2003
[161] NORAD 1999; European Commission 2002
[162] AusAID 2003
[163] Ibid.

Identifying Indicators

Indicators are used to measure and verify, if the project achieves its objectives. They are a response to the question: "*How do I know whether or not what has been planned is actually happening or has happened?*"[164] Indicators supply the basis for "*monitoring project progress (completion of activities and the delivery of outputs) and evaluating the achievement of outcomes (component objectives and purpose)*"[165] The measured data can be either: Quantitative, qualitative or behavioural. The qualitative data should be made measurable when possible. There are no golden rules on, what makes good indicators, however there are tools like SMART[166] and SPICED[167] that can be helpful. Donor organisations and NGOs mostly have a mandate that states that projects also should prioritise for example gender and capacity building, which the formulation of the indicators should reflect.[168]

Formulating the indicators facilitates analysis of whether objectives are measurable or not, which helps the framework for monitoring and evaluation. The dangers can be that it is difficult to find measurable indicators for higher level objectives and 'social' projects or a risk of downgrading less quantified objectives or establishing unrealistic targets.

Means of Verification

It is necessary to consider the different means (and cost) of collecting information for each indicator. Choosing indicators can depend on the cost and practicality of collecting them. The means of verification should entail: How it should be collected and from which source, who should do it, how often and in what format. It is important to keep in mind that resources and capacity restraints are encountered by those, who collect the information.

Some of the general problems associated with identifying indicators and means of verification are the difficulty of attaining practicable valid indicators that can be quantified, especially when working with social oriented projects or the top rows in the logframe. This can also result in too much focus on the lower rows to entail which influence other factors provide; the use of

[164] AusAID 2003 p. 25
[165] Ibid. p. 25
[166] Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Timely
[167] Subjective, participatory, interpreted and communicable, cross-checked and compared, empowering and diverse and disaggregated
[168] McCaul 2000

standardised indicators; confusion on what is indicators, targets or outputs; tunnel-vision and lack of flexibility caused by the workload that can be associated with finding and updating indicators and targets.

3.2 Benefits and Drawbacks of Using the LFA

Proponents of the LFA argue that the strength of the LFA lies in the analytical phase, however, the discussions on the LFA mostly centre on the logframe. It promotes ownership and transparency, which are some of the criteria for ensuring a successful intervention. During the planning phase and the creation of the logframe the stakeholders are forced to think through the different elements involved, which also facilitates the logic and coherence of any intervention. The LFA doesn't guaranty success, but it helps diminish pitfalls like "*poor planning, lack of participation, lack of clear objectives, and absence of real measurements of what is meant by success.*"[169] There are many benefits connected with using LFA, for instance fundamental questions are asked, and weaknesses are analysed, providing relevant information for decision makers. Also it facilitates better communication and understanding between decisions-makers, managers and other partners involved, and not least the use of LFA and systematic monitoring ensures continuity in the approach, if the original staff is replaced.

The LFA was a response to problems in evaluating Development Aid in the 1960s. Since then development assistance has shifted focus several times on what constitutes best practice, towards more focus on social development. As noted in section 2 it challenged the importance of M&E to show how dynamic social development processes progress[170]. In the same period the LFA has gone from being a small USAID tool used to make presentation of projects and systemising project approval, to becoming a universally used tool useful in all phases of a project. Both development assistance and the LFA have developed since their origin and the question is if they are still compatible?

The LFA as an approach reflects the business and logistic planning ideas that ruled, when the LFA was developed. The LFA advocate that one can understand and control a change, which

[169] Mc Gaul 2000 p. 7
[170] Oakley, Pratt and Clayton 1998

one facilitates through outputs and service delivery, which again by intended routes gives intended results. These ideas originate from corporate and military planning, and the LFA attempts to transfer the same sort of clarity and order on to projects within development assistance.[171]

While the LFA is powerful in the planning phase, it losses momentum, when it is used for monitoring and evaluation, under circumstances, where unintended effects and routes prove important.[172] This might happen, when stakeholders have very different priorities, and interaction in a programme is complex, situations that more often is the rule rather than the exception.[173] The LFA approach to monitoring and evaluation is called RBM. This means that one need to evaluate a project based on its stated goals and objectives, and that the objectives agreed upon at the beginning of the project phase are used to determine accountability. RBM has dominated evaluation theory and practice up to this day. This form of routine-monitoring is insufficient for monitoring or evaluating effects within the projects[174], given that "*unforeseen routes and unintended impacts*" [175] often prove to be of great importance.

Surveys and evaluations of LFA projects have shown that using LFA is not a guarantee for success, and the reason for this can be blamed on both the method itself and the people using it.[176]

Other concerns that arise, when the LFA is used for M&E is that: It often lacks a time dimension, inappropriate indicators, insufficient verification process and lack of flexibility.[177] When there isn't a time dimension incorporated, the management of the project becomes difficult, especially when it comes to monitoring. It is argued that in theory, the indicator is inappropriate, because the objectives (input, activities, output, outcome and impact) in definition are measurable in themselves. It could be more relevant with indicators that highlight differences between planned and actual implementation to capture unexpected changes.[178] The

[171] Gasper 2000
[172] Ibid.
[173] Ibid.
[174] Howes 1992
[175] Gasper 2000 p. 23
[176] Ibid
[177] Woodhill 2005
[178] Crawford & Bryce 2003

verification process is often insufficient because the planners don't think through the practicalities of the chosen indicators.[179]

One of the biggest concerns with the LFA is the lack of flexibility. In theory there is room for modification and regular update, this is however rarely done when the logframe is created.[180] This is often referred to as a lock-frame and there are several reasons for this.

Firstly the logframe presents a summery of the important aspects of the project, but users tend to see the logframe as the project design.[181] The logframe can promote logical thinking, when users accept that the logframe is a simplification and when not it can be seen as a fixed format, where lack of logic is accepted. Secondly many organisations see the LFA as "*a perceptive, formal requirement for securing project funds*"[182]. When the LFA is used as a formal requirement it "*narrow perceptions, close options and legitimise choices already made*"[183] Thirdly it often happens, when many people have been involved, and a lot effort has gone in to preparing the logframe and the result is seen as a 'valuable artefact' or 'fragile framework'.[184] Fourthly the combination of long distance and low trust from donors makes it difficult to modify logframes, because donors fear that there will be a loss in accountability.[185]

Easily measurable quantitative indicators are preferred in the logframe. This means that important details and aspects are left out, which could be important for the management of the project. This is even more evident when working at program and organisational levels, where a larger number of stakeholders are involved and cross cutting objectives make development less linear and more complex.[186]

The thought behind the LFA was Managing by Objectives (MBO). There is critique that it should not be problem based, this is supported by experience, which shows that solving a "*problem often creates a new problem.*"[187] It also seems that the LFA is cultural challenged, while the

[179] Ibid
[180] Bakewell & Garbutt 2005
[181] Gasper 2000
[182] McCaul 2000 p. 7
[183] Ibid p. 7
[184] Bakewell, & Garbutt, 2005 p. 6-7
[185] Gasper 2000 p. 22
[186] Woodhill 2005 p. 6
[187] Ibid. p. 6

integration of the LFA seems to be easier in South America than in Africa, suggesting that it is loaded with culturally based values and assumptions.[188]

When the logframe is used for M&E, the focus is often on the activities and outputs, neglecting the important outcomes that link between output and impacts. There is a lack of attention on the work processes and the relations between stakeholders. The focus then becomes upward accountability and the delivering of the intended outputs and impacts.[189] This relates to the argument that the LFA is a 'contract' between donor and NGO, specifying what the NGO should deliver to receive funding. Therefore making changes to the LFA can demand considerable negation.

3.3 Summary

We have in the previous sections discussed some of the aspects of M&E and the development environment. In section 2 we noted that M&E was challenged by social development. This was supported by Edwards and Hulme in section 2.3 we say that NGOs have difficulties when measuring performance relating to social development. This also relates well with sub-section 2.4, where we argue that '*contextual uncertainty'* is inherent in projects. These arguments support that development assistance work in a complex environment. We also fund that NGOs have an *ethical imperative* and a *business imperative*. The first claims accountability to beneficiaries, the second to donors.

When we relate these findings to the critique, of the LFA, we find that a great deal of the critique relates to the complexity, in which the LFA is used and the demand for accountability. Much of the critique of the LFA is based on the Theory of change of the LFA. The LFA is based on a notion that development assistance takes place in a controllable and predictable environment. Together with proper planning the goal of the project will therefore be achieved through a linear relation. This Theory of Change explains why qualitative indicators have low priority, and LFA doesn't measure unintended effects because it is not relevant, when all

[188] Bakewell & Garbutt 2005 p. 5
[189] Ibid.; Edwards and Hulme 1995

factors are encountered for in the planning. That the use of LFA for M&E seems to focus on activities and output and lacks flexibility can be explained by both theory of change and donor relations. According to linear relations activities and outputs should lead to outcome and impact, and as such it is easier to both measure and deliver activities and outputs. If linear relation exists, there is no need to make changes to the logframe. The *business imperative* means that the logframe can be seen as a contract on what should be delivered; this means that revaluating the logframe can be difficult. The *business imperative* implies accountability towards donors, the LFA as such seems sufficient for upwards accountability. There is however no build in processes in the LFA that secures or promotes downwards accountability.

In this section we found that the LFA has a very different view on the environment of development. The LFA presumes that all change can be predicted and controlled, however reality is much more dynamic and complex. It seems safe to argue that when a method does not relate to the reality, in which it works, there can't be trust in this method to improve performance. We will in the following section put this context into system theory in the aim to narrow in on the answer our research question.

4 Theoretical Analysis

> *The only man I know who behaves sensibly is my tailor; he takes my measurements anew each time he sees me. The rest go on with their old measurements and expect me to fit them. (George Bernard Shaw)*

In this section we will place development in the context of systems theory to illustrate a flaw in current M&E practice, as the proposed solution model does not take the complexity of the problem into account. We will use this to argue that a learning based approach is more suitable to the current development environment, and will outline Organisational Learning Theory before we, in the final sub-section of this chapter, will try to integrate learning and M&E, aptly frased Learning Oriented Monitoring and Evaluation System (LOMES).

4.1 Systems Theory

We have in the preceding sections demonstrated that development projects operate in a reality that is complex, unpredictable and defined by change. Projects themselves are characterised by high levels of uncertainty, both because of the inherent difficulty in defining succes when transformational change is the overarching goal, but also because of the innumerable variables the project has no control over. This is hard to align with a global aid agenda requesting more effective aid, leading to demands for better reporting of results and better and more M&E. Current M&E practice is caught in a "*season of accountability*"[190], where demands for measureable results are opposed by a reality that is increasingly difficult to predict, leading to even tougher demands. As managerialism becomes prevalent, a dichotomy arises as:

> *"the 'speak' is becoming more participatory, bottom-up or horizontal there is, paradoxically, a strengthening of pressure for upward, vertical accountability to the North."*[191]

In contrast to the complex picture of reality, our discussion of the LFA showed that the underlying assumption of the approach is of a linear relation between problems and solutions. In other words, given the institutionalisation of the LFA, the concept of *linearity* is now

[190] Reeler 2007 p. 4
[191] Ibid, p. 4

prevalent in project management and M&E.[192] Current practice represented by the LFA not only assumes development is predictable, it also presupposes that a direct causality exists between input and impact.[193] These assumptions are epitomised in the logframe, where the vertical logic in the left hand column describes, how input eventually lead to impact, if the plan is followed.

> *"The structure of the logframe suggests that everything will go according to plan: programme activities, outcomes, and goals are all laid out in advance, as are indicators with which to monitor these."*[194]

Recalling our discussion about the ethical and business imperatives of NGOs, it may seem that current M&E practice actually prevents NGOs from prudently pursuing their ethical imperative – essentially meaning that the practice of M&E is partially counteracting the purpose of M&E. To explain this we look toward Systems Theory.

4.2 General Systems Theory

System theory is concerned with the concept of systems understood as 'wholes'. According to Checkland the notion of a 'system' is understood as:

> *"a set of elements connected together which form a whole, this showing properties which are properties of the whole, rather than properties of its component parts"*[195]

'Systems thinking' imply that the world can be understood in terms of complex interacting 'wholes' that have inherent characteristics attributable to 'wholeness' rather than properties of component parts.[196] Within systems theory Peter Checkland conceived a way of 'thinking about systems' to make the theory as a 'whole' more practically applicable with specific reference to the complexity of, what he called "*Human Activity Systems.*"[197] Checkland's work was the result of an extensive research program examining the applicability of systems engineering, strongly situated in the hard sciences in solving management problems (involving human activity

[192] Edwards and Hulme 1995; Fowler 1997; Gasper 1997; den Heyer 2001, Crawford and Pollack 2004
[193] Engel and Carlsson 2002; Taylor and Soal 2003,
[194] Earle 2002 p. 2
[195] Checkland 1981 p. 3
[196] Ibid.
[197] Ibid p. 115

systems).[198] The problems encountered, led him to formulate two distinct branches of systems theory, which allows us to perceive projects as systems:

1. *Hard systems*, that entails the selection of means to achieve an end, at the beginning and which thereafter are given – this is also referred to as closed systems,
2. *Soft systems*, which recognise that in some situations, part of the problem is to define the nature of the problem(s), wherefore solutions are difficult to plan.[199]

4.2.1 Hard Systems

This approach presumes an understanding of the world as a closed environment with little permeability to external influences. It implies a:

> *"objective reality where[...]systems are mechanistic processes, with stable, or predictably varying, relationships between the relevant variables"*[200]

This means that implementation will simply be a matter of execution, once the design phase is concluded, and relevant activities are planned. Knowledge of the problem is presumed to be complete upfront, and the project is considered to be in control, or have sufficiently planned adaptive strategies that can respond to external interference.[201] Once a project concludes, the success can then be measured by simply comparing the achieved results with those planned.

Hard systems are associated with systems engineering and system analysis approaches that influenced early project management practice.[202] Hard systems work along clear logic linkages and assume a high level of linearity, and research in this way of thinking is responsible for the introduction of inputs, outputs, and project logic models (such as the LFA) into management practice.[203]

When applied to social systems, hard systems approaches have been highly criticised for oversimplifying a complex reality, by operating on the assumption of closed system

[198] Crawford 2004
[199] Crawford 2004
[200] Crawford and Pollack 2004 p. 646
[201] Checkland 1981
[202] Crawford and Pollack 2004
[203] den Heyer 2001

conditions[204] –which we have shown in this paper to be a rare scenario in social development practice.

4.2.2 Soft Systems

The notion of soft system emerged from Checkland's work with describing human activity systems, when applying systems engineering as a problem solving model.[205] Soft systems problems are characterised as unstructured, meaning that "*the designation of objectives itself is problematic.*"[206] Given the problem area in soft system concerns 'human activity systems' (in our case social development projects), the problem itself is hard to define objectively. As stakeholders invariably relate differently to, what constitutes a problem, the planning for its solution become more a question of negotiating perceptions, rather than applying the cause-effect logic mentioned above.[207] Giving a clear definition of soft system is difficult, as it basically entails the opposite of a 'hard system'. In an attempt to delineate soft systems, Crawford & Swete describes them as *typically* featuring most of the traits summarised below:

> *cannot be easily defined so that all stakeholders agree on the problem to solve,*
> *require complex judgements about the level of abstraction at which to define the problem,*
> *have no clear stopping rules,*
> *have better or worse solutions, not right and wrong ones,*
> *have no objective measures of success,*
> *require ongoing iteration, to create more knowledge, to assist decision making*
> *have no given alternative solutions (these must be discovered)*
> *often have strong moral, political or professional dimensions.*[208]

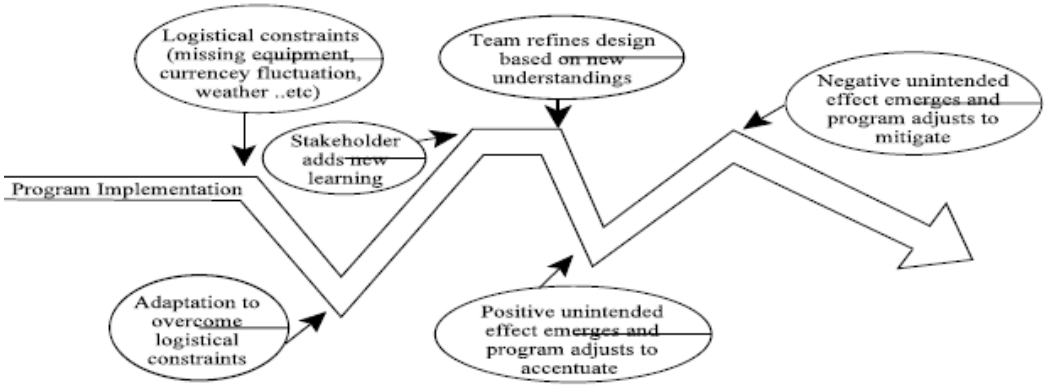
Crawford and Pollack refer to soft systems in terms of project permeability, stating that soft systems are expressed in the lack of clear boundary and/or notion of, what will and will not affect the project.[209] A soft systems approach then leads to a broader, less definitive and

[204] Earle 2002; Gasper 1997; Dale 2003
[205] Checkland 1981
[206] Checkland 1981 p. 155
[207] Ibid.
[208] Crawford & Swete 2007 p. 4
[209] Crawford and Pollack 2004

interactive understanding of systems, befitting the reality of social development projects outlined in this paper. Managing the unstructured problems of such systems requires an entirely different approach, than the linear logic imbedded in hard systems. Instead a soft systems approach emphasise continual learning and exploration.[210]

The figure below outlines, how a project signified by high permeability could negotiate progress according to a soft system approach. As unintended effects emerge, and factors outside the project's control force adaptive action, design assumptions are undermined and should be changed, as knowledge is updated.

Figure 7. [211]



Adapted from den Heyer 2001

This approach also supports Christensen and Kreiner's discussion on how to cope with contextual uncertainty in projects, as both emphasise iterative learning cycles to deal with a changing and unpredictable environment.[212]

4.2.3 Soft Systems and the LFA

Placing social development projects and the current implementation of M&E systems in a systems context, it is clear that the line of thinking underpinning current M&E practice brings a hard systems approach to development projects. The institutionalisation of the LFA has

[210] Ibid.; den Heyer 2001; Mowles, Stacey and Griffin 2008.
[211] Den Heyer 2001 p. 32
[212] Christensen and Kreiner 1991

introduced a theory of change that assumes that development problems can be defined objectively, a solution model can be planned, appropriate activities can be implemented, and that goals will then be achieved.[213] We have also found that the reality of social development practice seemingly aligns much better to the concept of soft systems. That is, the development project is a multi-stakeholder environment defined by ill-structured problems that are difficult to objectify, high permeability and involves complex moral and political aspects. This then means that we have a hard systems solution being applied to a soft system problem.

As explained above the diverging nature of problems in hard and soft systems mandates very different solution strategies. The failures of traditional hard system thinking applied to management problems were indeed, what led Checkland to theorise soft systems in the first place:

> *"Systems engineering, impressive enough as a way of carrying out technological projects, failed when attempts were made to apply it […]to the messy, changing, ill-defined problem situations with which managers have to cope."*[214]

4.2.4 Soft Systems and Learning

As said above, social development projects, understood as soft systems, require a different theory of change, than the one offered by current M&E and the LFA. Donor expectations for better results as well as practice are circumvented by their insistence on reporting practices and management tools that fail to acknowledge the reality they apply to. NGO dependency on donors for funds means that these are continually implemented in projects despite evidence that the solution models seem inadequate. The hard system thinking underlying the LFA, operating on the grounds of complete predictability and linear cause-effect relationship between activities and outcomes, act as an inhibitor for the learning approach deemed necessary to respond to soft system problems.[215]

> *"the implicit value system of soft systems methodology is that never-ending learning is a good thing"* [216]

[213] Reeler 2007
[214] Checkland 2001 in Crawford 2004 p. 30
[215] Checkland 1981; Mowles, Stacey & Griffin 2008
[216] Checkland 1981 p. 20

Taking it a step further, Reeler argues that in social development projects, where conditions are unfavourable to a hard systems approach, practice may:

> *"Be profoundly counter-developmental and destructive for people and their relationships and lead to a real experience of failure and set-back, characterised not by crisis but rather by defeat.[217]"*

The learning approach suggested by the soft systems approach is concerned with iterative action and ongoing reflection to facilitate adaption and action to handle ill-structured problems.[218] As already mentioned, this aligns with Christensen and Kreiner's cyclical learning strategy for managing contextual uncertainty.[219] The need for learning is further emphasised by a growing body of literature linking organisational performance with their ability to learn. Here the connection between soft systems thinking and organisational learning has been expressed by Senge in his seminal book "The Fifth Discipline" from 1990.[220]

> *"seeing interrelationships rather than linear cause effect chains, and seeing processes of change rather than snapshots".[221]*

Organisational learning and Learning Organisations Theory push the message that learning is imperative to performance, and both have become prominent in business management strategies.[222] They have been adapted by the development sector as well, but implementation seems to have stalled in some cases at the upper levels management, or learning has been understood merely as the acquiring of more knowledge.

> *"Knowledge management provides a seductive answer by suggesting that learning can be captured as a commodity that can apparently be easily managed […] However there is a danger that NGOs are loosing sight of the nature of knowledge and as a result managing knowledge becomes and end in itself rather than a way of enabling organisational learning.[223]*

Britton's statement above could well apply to current M&E practice, where information is extracted from the project for the purpose of satisfying reporting demands, *instead of* using M&E to enhance performance – 'knowledge as commodity' in other words. The learning approach suggested in soft systems and by organisational learning assumes deeper levels of

[217] Reeler 2007 p. 6
[218] Crawford and Pollack 2004
[219] Christensen & Kreiner 1991
[220] Senge 1990
[221] Senge 1990 p. 73
[222] Roper et al 2002; Britton 1998; 2005; Christie 2008
[223] Britton 2005 p. 8.

learning, a dedication to process and a learning-to-action approach. In the following section we will go into more detail about organisational learning, before we end this section by proposing an alternative learning-oriented approach to M&E.

4.2.5 Summary

Based on a systems theory perspective we found that the context, in which a project operates, is highly important, in terms of how projects solve the problems of underdevelopment. Soft Systems defined as highly uncertain, complex, prone to external influence and involving multiple actors, require different solutions to manage reality compared to hard systems, where comprehensive knowledge can be assumed at the planning stage, and where external factors outside the projects control are limited. We showed that current practice of M&E in many regards resembles a hard system approach to a soft system problem, which has a series of implication, for how M&E functions. We finally linked the management of soft systems problems to Organisational Learning Theory, which will be discussed in the section.

4.3 Organisational Learning

In this subsection, we will explore the concept of 'organisational learning' with reference to its role in promoting organisational effectiveness. In particular, we will focus on organisational learning from a NGO perspective and provide the theoretical foundation for a learning oriented approach to monitoring and evaluation. While learning as a management approach hasn't entered development practice until relatively recent, learning as a concept is ingrained in development. Current linking of learning and performance was anticipated 40 years ago by Freire's "Pedagogy of the Oppressed,"[224] coupling critical reflection with action for change. The enormity and complexity of the subject of development, which in some form or another seeks to addresses global inequity, means there is a moral, an ethical imperative, to do it right. As explained in the previous section, it is also impossible to establish clear solutions, even in incremental approaches such as project, so development amounts in many ways to action-research, where what we learn may be as important as the result achieved.[225]

> *"Development is, or should be, a knowledge-based endeavour. The importance of learning what works, and why, is essential to success. Knowing what does not work is almost more important. Knowledge, however (too often confused with information), involves awareness, consciousness and the familiarity that develops with experience and learning.*[226]

4.3.1 Origins

In the for-profit sector Organisational Learning (OL) rose quickly to prominence during the 1980s. The development sector was somewhat slower in the uptake of OL ideas, as management was still only gaining foothold as an area of importance, but also because of lack of "*cross-pollination*"[227] between the two sectors. Since the 1990's, where organisational performance increasingly was acknowledged by NGOs and donors alike, OL has rapidly entered development rhetoric.[228]

OL is an expanding field of inquiry, consisting of a wide array of theoretical approaches.[229] The literature on OL covers a broad range of perspectives from psychology, information systems, to

[224] Roper et al 2002 p. 6
[225] Roper 2002, in Roper et al 2002
[226] Smillie 1995 in Van Brabrant 1997 p. 8
[227] Crawford and Bryce 2003 p. 364
[228] Roper et al 2002
[229] Easterby-Smith and Lyles 2003 in Roper et al 2002

organisational development, and addresses specifics of learning such as 'individual learning', 'experiential learning', 'organisational learning' (OL) and 'the learning organisation' (LO)[230]. In their comprehensive review of the field, Easterby-Smith and Lyles outline four main theoretical approaches in the field, and show how these are situated in relation to one another:
Figure 8. [231]

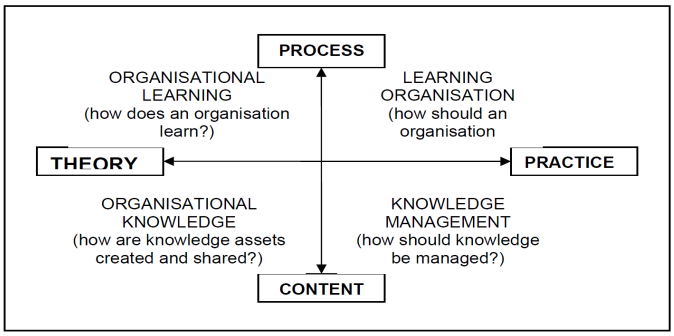


Figure 7. Easterby-Smith and Lyles (2003)

Some authors draw precise distinctions, emphasising the importance of considering them separate entities, while others give note to differences, but focus on the shared qualities. Based on our review of literature, it is no surprise that the first approach is predominant in the research literature, where the nature of learning is the primary subject, whereas the holistic approach is favoured by practioners more interested in application and utility. Roper et al. makes little mention of organisational knowledge or knowledge management (KM), but emphasise that the terms OL and LO often are used interchangeably.[232] Britton's use of the term 'organisational learning' seems to support this, as he employs it much as a headline phrase for ideas stemming from both OL and LO.[233] For the purpose of this paper we align ourselves with Britton's approach, as we are concerned with the importance of learning (OL) in terms of organisational performance (LO), specifically related to M&E practice (strongly related to KM practice), for which a more holistic perspective seems prudent.

[230] Easterby-Smith and Lyles 2003
[231] Ibid. p. 14
[232] Roper et al 2002 p. 2
[233] Britton 2005

4.3.2 Definitions

As we eluded to in our discussion of soft systems problems, the ability to learn is fundamental to operate successfully in complex and unpredictable environments. When planning is no longer understood in terms of a blueprint approach, assuming comprehensive upfront knowledge of problems, learning and subsequent action to adapt and respond to change, becomes essential to organisational survival.[234] The notions of environmental (contextual) complexity and the link between learning and performance are at the heart of OL theory.[235] Senge describes this as:

> *"organisations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole together."*[236]

This makes OL normative in its approach, as a positive correlation between increased learning and improved organisational performance is expected.[237]

Underpinning OL is the concept of learning as a process. In daily terms learning is often aligned to the uptake of knowledge. This leads to an understanding of learning as simply 'accumulation' of knowledge. From an OL perspective learning is more than that. Britton divides learning into the two concepts of '*learning that'* and '*learning how'*:

> *"**learning that** involves acquiring information. Here, learning is seen as a product: learning has taken place when information is acquired, whether the information is used or not. **Learning how** involves developing an ability to do something. Here, learning is seen as a process leading to an outcome: learning only takes place when the ability is used in practice.*[238]

In development terms both aspects are important in that *learning that* holds value for interpreting a change, and *learning how* relates to the ethical imperative to facilitate change. The process approach is key to OL, as it is in the process of doing and reflecting that learning occurs, and is linked to performance.[239]

To help elucidate what organisational learning entails in practice, we will look at the concepts of individual and collective learning.

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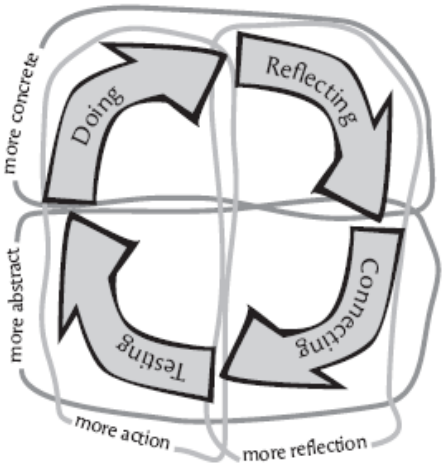
[234] Fowler 1997
[235] Senge 1990; Argyris 1992; Christensen & Kreiner 1991
[236] Senge 1990 p. 79
[237] Crawford 2004
[238] Britton 2002 p. 6 (boldness added)
[239] Ibid.

4.3.3 Individual learning

Individual learning is concerned with personal development. It relates to, how we respond to our experience, our effectiveness and how we solve problems.[240] Kolb's model of the experiential learning cycle seen to the left[241], also known as the 'learning cycle,' demonstrates how learning is conceived as an ongoing cycle doing, reflecting, connecting and testing.[242] The learning cycle unpins the iterative learning process deemed essential for operating in soft systems, where action leads to reflection and connection, before testing leads to renewed action. It is in its most basic form a monitoring system, where continued reflection increases the knowledge base, we base decisions on, leading to supposedly better decisions.

Figure 9



While the cycle is useful to understand the iterative nature of learning, the importance of individual learning in relation to OL is debated.

Based on the argument of the 'reflective practioner' Schön argues the importance of the individual.[243] The concept is that the individual employs two types of action: "knowledge-in-action" and "reflection-in-action." *Knowledge-in-action* refers to the cumulative know-how, conscious and unconscious, of the practioner, which is used to structure and design plans leading to action. *Reflection-in-action*, on the other side means the practioner assumes a 'testing' approach to ongoing practice, where he is not basing action on accumulated knowledge and theory, but instead is constructing it in the process.[244] Schön's concept is important, as it places both formal and informal knowledge in the individual, as well as the process of learning. Senge however argues that individual learning in itself is no guarantee for OL, as:

[240] Britton 2002
[241] Britton 2005 p. 41
[242] Ibid.
[243] Schön 1983
[244] Ibid.

> *"Individual learning, at some level is irrelevant for organisational learning. Individuals learn all the time and yet there is not organisational learning."*[245]

4.3.4 Collective learning

Given the quote above there is more to organisational learning than mere accumulation of learning individuals.

> *"without individual learning there can be no question of organisational learning. On the other hand, an organisation has not automatically learned when individuals within it have learned something. Individual learning is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for organisational learning."*[246]

Learning then must happen at both the individual as well as the collective level. The central aspect of OL is the process, by which organisations can translate individual to organisational learning. Crawford articulates this as:

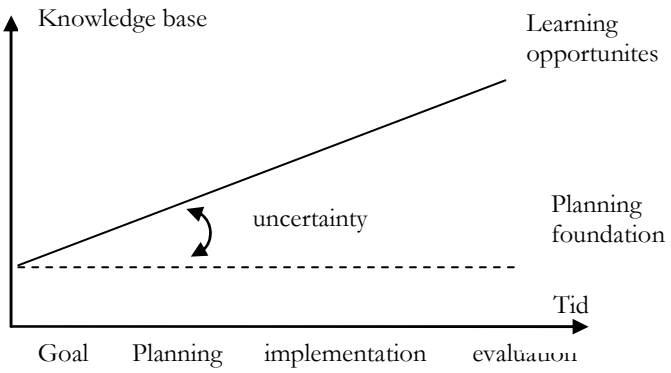
> *"a process in which modes of thought and action may become 'mainstreamed' through the interaction of human and non-human actors within a network"*[247]

In social development projects this translates to a process, where optimal learning requires the involvement from all stakeholders, not just the implementing organisation, for the purpose of making as much information as possible explicit, in order to make the best decisions in a complex reality. This in turn requires a highly participative approach with flat power structures to create an environment of trust. Trust is important to involve stakeholders and facilitate learning and implies an environment, where there are no repercussions for "negative information". Based on Christensen and Kreiner's analysis of contextual uncertainty we see in figure 10 below[248] that learning potential increases, as the reality of the project moves away from, what was planned. In other words, "perceived crisis" provides the best learning, potentially.

[245] Senge 1990 p. 236
[246] Swieringa and Wierdsma 1992 in Britton 2002 p. 8
[247] Crawford 2004 p. 145
[248] Christensen and Kreiner 1991 p. 43

Figure 10

Contextual uncertainty throughout a project from project onset
(translated from Christensen & Kreiner 1991)



4.3.5 Learning Loops

The notion of learning loops is the organisational equivalent to Kolb's learning cycle, but is understood as a structured approach to problems, and involves a normative approach to how learning is used. Learning loops concern a cyclical approach to action learning that may occur throughout a project, as challenges or situation emerge – often spontaneously.[249] Like Kolb's learning cycle learning loops involve a continuing sequence of action, reflection, connection and renewed action. Depending on the complexity of the problem, loops may be iterated several times. The underlying idea of learning loops was for organisations to shift from 'single-loop learning' to more advanced 'double-loop learning' to increase organisational capacity by learning from their experiences.[250] The three levels of learning-loops entail:

1. *Single-loop learning*: is limited to a relatively simple reactive approach to problem. Analysis stays within established project parameters, and the aim is to define the problem, then apply a solution.
2. *Double-loop learning*: implies a deeper reflection over not only the problem, but also the within the system where the 'problem' is situated. Analysis is expanded to a questioning, why the problem arose, followed by critical reflection whether there are structural problems

[249] Argyris 1992
[250] Den Heyer 2001

3. *Triple-loop learning/Deutero-Learning*:: is concerned with the meta level, and focus not only on learning but on learning how to learn. Analysis focuses on paradigm shifts and radical transformation.[251]

Learning-loops are important, as they reflect how problem-based learning connects to life experiences. In complex systems, problems and unexpected change will invariably occur, and project success is intimately linked with how organisations approach these. Emphasising deeper learning, than mere symptomatic fixes, may provide opportunities for generating new knowledge that can improve performance on both an operational as well as strategic level.[252]

4.3.6 Implications of Organisational Learning for Development projects

We have throughout this thesis showed that the reality of social development projects is immensely complex and unpredictable. Above we have outlined some of the characteristics of organisational learning theory, which is concerned, with organisational performance in such environments. The theory focuses on high levels of flexibility and iterative learning, in an effort to continually generate knowledge to support improved decision making. As such OL is a theory, which heavily stresses the needs for ongoing information flows. As pointed out knowledge without reflection and subsequent action is irrelevant from an OL perspective, as the value of learning is, in how it influences organisational performance and behaviour.
As learning first occurs at the individual level and must be translated by ongoing reflection and discussion between all stakeholders to make it to organisationally useful learning, OL involves a strong call for participatory interaction, as well as being disempowering to facilitate trust.

A learning approach implies that the process of monitoring (possible learning loops) amount to more than information extraction for the purpose of 'staying on track.' The process orientation of OL means that the focus shifts to relations and what emerges along the way. This allows for planned objectives to remain relevant by either adjusting implantation along the way (single loop learning) or reconsidering the validity of the initial plan based on new knowledge (double loop learning).

[251] Argyris 1992; den Heyer 2001
[252] Britton 1998; 2005

As we have outlined previously, current development projects are often contracted to an NGO, with a donor expecting the delivery of pre-determined outputs, where concerns about effectiveness and the focus on immediate results has led to the institutionalisation of the LFA. If however the soft system nature, the dynamic and uncertain reality of development work is accepted, the current model M&E "*will be recognised as a recipe for failure and must give way to more adaptive models"*[253].

4.3.7 Summary

In this section we have showed that a learning approach is a critical factor for organisational performance and thereby developmental success, when working in unpredictable environments. Organisational learning theory emphases a radically different approach to management and M&E practice than the control and accountability driven practice prevalent today. Based on a review of OL literature we find that organisational performance in social development projects depend on strategies that deemphasise control and reporting. Together with our analysis of systems theory, and based on the conceptual framework laid out in the preceding sections, we will in the following section outline aspects in an alternative, learning oriented approach to current M&E practice.

[253] Woodhill 2005 p. 11

4.4 Learning Oriented Monitoring and Evaluation System: LOMES

> *A man should not strive to eliminate his complexes, but to get into accord with them; they are legitimately what direct his conduct in the world. (Sigmund Freud)*

Our discussion in sub-section 3.3, showed that to be successful (or in other words, effective), NGOs much satisfy both the needs of beneficiaries in terms of developmental success as well as donor needs for accountability. We subsequently demonstrated that concerns in the global development community regarding the effectiveness of aid has resulted in emphasis on accountability (accountancy) and cost-efficiency, leading to demands for more comprehensive M&E practice and the institutionalisation of the LFA. Our analysis of development in a systems context however, revealed that current M&E practice is in fact counterproductive to performance, and that it further tilts the balance of the accountability-performance bottom-line of NGOs toward donor needs.

In our analysis of projects as soft systems, we have shown that tighter controls and comprehensive planning strategies is a step in the wrong direction. Based on the foregoing discussion, where we established that learning is critical for organisational performance, we will in this section attempt to operationalise a Learning Oriented Monitoring and Evaluation System (LOMES) for the purpose of improved NGO performance. The premise for this is that, in complex systems, where emergent reality cannot be sufficiently anticipated into planning, the measurement of success must include ways of capturing change processes from project start to end. When change itself is a goal, the planning phase of aid projects is actually more akin to a vision[254], where actual meaning and relevance is negotiated along the way - as learning occurs, knowledge increases and adaptive action can be taken[255]. Current M&E practice in development projects often does not reflect this.

[254] Crawford and Pollack 2004
[255]Woodhill 2005; Crawford 2004; Christensen & Kreiner 1991

4.4.1 Accountability vs. Learning

In order to address the performance side of M&E, learning must be incorporated and *importantly* take precedence over the collection and processing of data linked to predetermined indicators. This brings back the inherent tension between accountability and learning.[256] Woodhill acknowledges the importance of solid information and accountability to funders, but makes explicit that the virtue of accountability is less important than the needs of NGOs to learn (where learning leading to action for better practice is implicit):

> *"an exclusively technical information and external accountability-oriented approach needs to be replaced by an actor-specific learning approach that enables different individuals and groups to continually improve their performance, recognising that they are working in highly dynamic and uncertain contexts".*[257]

Using M&E for performance rather than mere reporting purposes then requires a rethinking of the entire process. This means focusing on the learning processes that enable stakeholders to continually improve their performance, while acknowledging the highly dynamic and complex contexts projects operate in.[258] A vital part of an effective LOMES then is to underpin management behaviour and strategy, facilitate trust between stakeholders, and emphasise information management that leads to action and inclusion of partners[259]. To help illustrate th differences we draw on the work of Aubel in the following section.

4.4.2 Contrasting approaches – Reasons to Learn

> *The usefulness of NGOs for the world's poor will depend greatly on their ability to overcome their learning disabilities. Crudely put, if NGO's do not learn from their experience they are destined for insignificance and atrophy as agents of social change. NGO's urgently need to put in place principles, strategies and systems which will ensure they know and learn from what they are achieving [...] and then apply what they learn.*[260]

[256]Some authors relate to accountability-performance paradox, while others make reference to accountability-learning. (Judi Aubel 1999;den Heyer 2002; Hailey & Sorgenfrei 2005) Based on the discussion in this paper, where NGO performance is intimately linked to learning, we consider them overlapping for our purpose.
[257] Woodhill 2005 p 8
[258] Dlamini 2006.
[259] The concept of partners in development rhetoric leads to thinking about stakeholders as being equal in terms of power over and in relation to the project. This is a far cry from reality. A learning orientation must acknowledge that power imbalances affect opportunities for learning and there must be efforts to overcome or deconstruct these (Oakley & Clayton 1998; Taylor & Soal 2003)
[260] Fowler 1997 p.64

In her "*Participatory Program Evaluation Manual,*" Aubel contrasts *the blueprint* and the *learning process approach.*[261] She defines the blueprint approach as a top-down approach to evaluation, where M&E essentially is about:

> *"determining the extent to which the activities and objectives were accomplished on time. Primarily quantitative information is collected in order to verify the number of activities accomplished. In this approach, there is no structured system for understanding why activities were accomplished or not, nor how they were carried out.*[262]

As the name implies, all action and measurement in a project makes explicit reference to the pre-planned framework in the blueprint approach. Aubel assigns the framework values such as objectivity, quantitative methods, measured by external evaluators, by means of preconceived indicators, for reporting to superiors.[263]

In contrast to the blueprint approach stands the learning process approach, which adds the important dimension of *how* activities are implemented and not just on *what*. Key to this approach is that: "*mechanisms are developed to help program staff learn from both the successes and problems encountered in implementing the activities in order to improve the program in the future*".[264] This shifts emphasis from 'objective'[265] end state comparison between achieved and planned results, toward an ongoing monitoring of practice and focus on process. By applying the learning cycle (action, reflection, connection and adaptation)[266] throughout the entire project, the plan itself is subjected to revision as knowledge accumulates thus leading to possible change in original goals and strategies[267]. To describe the Learning Process Approach, Aubel defines the following key concepts: "*holistic analysis, emerging strategies from iterative learning, emphasis on qualitative methods, subjective judgement, and involvement of stakeholders*".[268] Looking at the two approaches, from a learning-oriented perspective, M&E is very different from an LFA (blueprint) based approach.

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[261] Aubel, p. 4. These concepts were originally introduced by David Korten in his book on development programming "Community Organization and Rural Development: A Learning Process Approach" (Korten 1980)
[262] Ibid. p. 8 (underlining added)
[263] Ibid.
[264] Ibid. p. 8
[265] For a deeper discussion on objectiveness in relations to management and measurement in terms of hard and soft approaches see Crawford & Pollack 2004 or Stacey and Griffin 2008
[266] Kolb 1984
[267]. Taylor and Soal 2003; Aubel 1999.
[268] Aubel 1999 p. 10. While Aubel argues that both quantitative and qualitative methods are necessary, she adds emphasis on qualitative methods, given the learning process approach's focus on processes.

In the former M&E is seen as an integral part of the work and practice of the organisation, and it should underpin both the ongoing project as well as lead to lessons for the future.[269]

4.4.3 A Questioning Orientation

The above shows that a learning orientation in M&E implies that NGOs should continuously question themselves.[270] This should go beyond, what Argyris and Schön defined as single loop learning, meaning actions should be more than problem-fixes (symptoms); Learning should lead to a consideration of project logic, underlying processes, and relations to its environment(2nd loop learning), and ultimately also to reflection on organisational purpose and practice (3rd loop or deutero learning). [271]

The impetus for M&E is to continually reflect over practice, and both monitoring and evaluation should become critical functions in an NGO practice. It should not be cursory add-on to satisfy donors, as some reports suggest it is.[272] A learning focus in M&E means that a questioning position will apply to all organisational processes, as information stemming from M&E should be reflected upon with the purpose of being *utilised* both within an ongoing project, as well more broadly in the organisation. When viewed in this way, M&E goes from its role in current implementation as a reporting tool to becoming instrumental to development practice itself. In this perspective M&E is no longer "something" imposed from the top down, but a source for improving project and organisational performance. By being integral to the ongoing function of the NGO, M&E can assist in enhancing the overall capacity of the organisation.[273]

4.4.4 Impact over Outputs

Impact is a word with several meaning in development rhetoric, but we use it much in the way it is applied in the LFA, which is as an overall goal. Oakley, Pratt and Clayton describe impacts as the long-term results of interventions concerning transformational and sustainable change. Examples of impacts are: "*increased standards of living, human resource development, gender equality, and*

[269] Aubel 1999
[270] Dlamini 2006
[271] Argyris and Schön 1978.
[272] Bakewell and Garbutt 2005
[273] Dlamini 2006

increased political awareness of environmental issues."[274] Impacts are in a sense, what development as a field is all about.[275]

Arguably information on a projects impact is really, what is most interesting to stakeholders: In M&E systems geared toward accountability however, the long term nature of impacts and the difficulty in assigning direct attribution means focus is shifted downward in the hierarchy of results. Here indicators are easier to identify and make quantifiable.[276] This runs the risk of tunnel-visioning outputs, since the linear relation between outputs, objectives, outcomes and finally impacts are given in the blueprint; [277] if outputs measure up, the rest will follow is the logic.[278]

By shifting the focus of M&E from result based measurement to processes and change, the learning approach will also implicitly focus more on the impact level of development rather than output level.[279] In figure 11 below, Oakley, Pratt and Clayton outline, how M&E relates to the point of measure

Figure 11[280]

Point of Measurement	What is Measured	Indicators
Outputs	Effort	Implementation of Activities
Outcomes	Effectiveness	Use of outputs and sustained production of benefits
Impact	Change	Differences from the original problem situation

(Oakely, Pratt & Clayton, 1998)

Instead of rigidly adhering to the blueprint approach, and the convenient but 'hard-to-find-in-the real-world' linear logic, a learning focus allows for adjustments to activities and thus to

[274] Den Heyer 2001,p. 26
[275] Oakley, Pratt and Clayton 1998
[276] Ibid.
[277] Oakley, Pratt and Clayton 1998. See also Christensen and Kreiner 1991 for a broader discussion on the result-chain in project management.
[278] As we have shown a linear approach is rarely applicable to a soft system problem field.
[279] Oakley, Pratt and Clayton 1998; Woodhill 2005
[280] Oakley, Pratt and Clayton 1998 p. 33

outputs throughout the project. As activities are adjusted to enhance the projects performance, outputs change accordingly. By taking a flexible approach to activities and outputs, and aligning performance with the overall goal, project management and the M&E systems is based around providing impact level success.[281] This dynamic can be seen in figure 7 in section 4.2.2.

4.4.5 Participation

The main purpose of Aubel's line of argument aligns itself with our analysis of development from a systems perspective, where a learning approach is imperative to handle soft system problems. M&E in this respect then is to augment learning for the purpose of improving practice in the immediate system, but also to generate knowledge to build overall organisational capacity. In contrast to the supposed objectiveness[282] of quantitative, external-led evaluations of the blueprint approach (the LFA), Aubel stresses the importance of including all stakeholders (incl. project beneficiaries, field staff and managers) in the M&E process.[283] This should be understood in a comprehensive sense, so as to include the knowledge, skills, abilities, experiences and capabilities of both beneficiaries and change agents for generating useful data about the projects. This will help include informal knowledge to inform decisions; build trust amongst stakeholders to facilitate sharing of information otherwise withheld or overlooked.[284]

Aside from enhancing organisational performance, the participation aspect of a learning-oriented M&E can also be perceived to hold value in itself.[285] As beneficiaries are included into the process, they ideally go from being subjects of a development process to assisting in the facilitation of the process. The pursuit of learning in M&E systems necessitates that information is shared between stakeholders, that all stakeholders reflect on it and that the resulting learning leads to action. If implemented in full the learning process can increase the

[281] Oakley, Pratt and Clayton 1998
[282] In their analysis of hard and soft projects in development, they argue that the perception of quantitative methods as being objective is questionable, as choice of indicators itself involves subjective choice. Crawford & Pollack 2004
[283] Aubel 1999
[284] If M&E is perceived to be merely an exercise of extracting information for the purpose of funding purposes, there's a strong incentive to withhold information of negative experiences that would be invaluable from a learning perspective. Likewise it enables the detection of unintended effects (positive and negative).
[285] Dlamini 2006

capacity of, not only the implementing organisation, but also intended beneficiaries in this way.[286]

4.4.6 Practicing what you preach

A further aspect is that the sharing of information, which is inherent in learning, increases transparency and thereby supports downward accountability.[287] Also it clarifies the connection between stakeholder input and organisational action;[288] both of these are potentially empowering.[289] Given our findings in section 3, regarding the nature of current methods and strategies of development practice, M&E, that facilitates participation, increased capacity, and empowerment of intended beneficiaries, can be said to be 'development in its own right.'[290] NGOs are value based organisations, and their legitimacy depends in no small part on practicing what they preach. This also means that M&E must be seen by primary stakeholders and field staff as important and relevant to their lives and work, which only stresses the need for a participatory approach to M&E.[291] If M&E is perceived as a method of top-down control, there is a risk it will be sidelined or only be used formally.

> *"One organisation which supports a range of local NGOs in preparing logical frameworks for donors, stated that these organisations only ever use it because it is a requirement, 'it is never used voluntarily or because the client thinks it is a good idea".*[292]

4.5 Summary

In this section we analysed social development projects in the context of systems theory. As a result we established that current M&E practice resembles a hard systems approach, while the social development project resembles a soft system problem. This means that current practise is to use a hard system approach to solve a soft system problem, which has a series of implications for the functions of M&E. We then linked Organisational Learning Theory (OL)

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[286]Taylor and Soal 2003
[287] Engel & Carlsson 2002
[288] This underlines the importance of the learning leading to action. If the *what* and *why* is not followed by a *now what,* the process has essentially been a waste. Action is implicit to a learning approach(Britton 1998; 2005; Woodhill 2005; Crawford 2004)
[289] Oakley and Clayton 1998
[290] In her paper Dlamini makes a compelling argument for why M&E should also underpin overall developmental purpose, based on value frameworks. She argues that, as NGO reasons for being are value based, NGO practice should also be value driven – in other words, the type of development pursued should be reflected in the methods used. Dlamini 2006
[291] Taylor & Soal 2003; Dlamini 2006
[292] Bakewell & Garbutt 2005, p. 6

to the management of soft system problems, which led us to conclude, that organisational performance in a complex and unpredictable environment is closely aligned with an organisations ability to learn. We related the importance of learning to an organisations increased capacity to respond to change and continually asses new information for the purpose of action or changing presumptions. Based on OL, we then outlined a series of important aspects of a learning based alternative to LFA driven M&E, the Learning Oriented Monitoring and Evaluation System (LOMES).

In the following section we will, by means of a case study, examine the analysis of this section to see if a LOMES can be said to influence organisational performance.

5 Case Study

To help us examine the implications of using a Learning Oriented Monitoring and Evaluation System (LOMES) in a development project setting, we will use the reasons, outlined in the section above, why M&E should be learning-oriented. We have chosen to operationalise these reasons, to help identification in our case study. Based on the section above we believe that the following areas are inherent in a LOMES.

- **Participation** should be part of the LOMES process. All stakeholders should to some extend be included in the process. There are three advantages that can be drawn from this. Firstly it opens up for the collection of informal knowledge from the stakeholders, in the form skills, abilities, experience and capabilities. Secondly making the stakeholders part of the process generates trust. Thirdly being a part of the process can result in capacity building and empowerment.
- The LOMES should **focus on Process and Impact.** The process of M&E should be done internally, by those who should use the knowledge created. It should capture change processes from the beginning to the end to support management behaviour and this should be done continually. By focusing on impacts instead of activities and outputs and by the means of qualitative methods it should deliver knowledge that support project strategy.
- A LOMES method should be **Action oriented**. The learning that has been accumulated both through the participatory approach and the focus on process and impact should be reflected upon and used if valuable.

In the next section we will introduce the technique of Most Significant Changes (MSC). As an example of a LOMES and then explain the background and processes of the MSC.

5.1 The 'Most Significant Change'

This section serves the purpose of introducing the technique of Most Significant Changes (MSC). We will look at the MSC as an example of LOMES and afterwards examine its use in a case study and relate it to our theoretical analyses. Prior to the case study we will explain the background and processes of the MSC.

Rick Davis developed MSC in 1995 in Bangladesh during the fieldwork for his PHD on organisational learning in non-governmental organisations.[293] The MSC is a technique, which according to Davis and Jess Dart, "*[…] is a form of participatory monitoring and evaluation"* [294]. MSC includes stakeholders both in deciding, what sort of change there should be recorded, as well as in the analyses of the collected data. It is used to provide data on performance throughout the project cycle to assist managing the project, and in addition generates data on impact and outcomes that can be used in evaluation of the performance of the project.[295] The MSC is a qualitative M&E system[296] that encourages the participation of stakeholders.[297] It uses the collection of stories to describe significant change from field level as a method for collecting data. The stories are reviewed by groups of chosen stakeholders, and the most significant stories are passed upwards to the next group.[298] Eventually the people involved in the project will choose one story to be the most significant.

"*[…] MSC is suited to monitoring that focus on learning rather than just accountability, it is also an appropriate tool when you are interested in the effect of the intervention on people's lives and keen to include the words of non-professionals.*"[299]

5.1.1 MSC as a LOMES

We will in the following look at, why MSC is an example of LOMES. The central part of the MSC is the process of story telling and selecting the most significant change (SC) story. When stakeholders participate in the selection process, they engage in a search for significant

[293] Davis and Dart 2005
[294] Ibid p. 8
[295] Ibid.
[296] Keriger 2004
[297] Willetts and Crawford 2007; Sigsgaard 2004
[298] See figure 11 p. 75
[299] Davis and Dart 2005 p. 13

outcomes and reflect over the value of these outcomes. This process alone contributes to project performance, because it encourages analysis and reflection and thereby improves staff capacity in this area. Contrary to the problems related to LFA on simplifying measurement the MSC "*[…] can deliver a rich picture of what is happening […]*"[300]. Therefore it is very well suited to discover unexpected changes[301]. The MSC has also organisational value, because the selection process can be used to identify different values within the organisation during selection process and facilitate communication between levels on these values. This communication can help the organisation to facilitate a shared vision between the stakeholders. The MSC promotes learning through out its cycle, constantly facilitating analytic and reflective situations and creating an *"[…] on-going conversation between stakeholders.*"[302] This relates very well to double-loop learning, as we described it in section 7.

We argue that MSC is a LOMES, because the MSC process facilitates participation, knowledge sharing and learning through the SC story selection and tries to encompass all changes by looking at impacts and by documenting all decisions. As we pointed out in section 6, these are all important aspects in LOMES.

5.1.2 The MSC Process

To understand MSC and what it delivers, it is necessary to get a deeper understanding of the processes in the MSC works. Davis and Dart have defined the implementing of the MSC as a ten step process. They do however encourage that the MSC adapts to change as this demonstrates that organisational learning has taken place.[303] The ten steps are[304]:

1. *How to start and raise interest*
2. *Defining the domains of change*
3. *Defining the reporting period*
4. *Collecting SC stories*
5. *Selecting the most significant of the stories*

[300] Davis and Dart 2005 p. 12
[301] Keriger 2004
[302] Ibid p. 2
[303] Davis and Dart 2005
[304] Ibid. p. 15

6. Feeding back the results of the selection process
7. Verification of stories
8. Quantification
9. Secondary analysis and meta-monitoring
10. Revising the system.

The first step will only take place in the implementation phase and serves to introduce MSC to a number of stakeholders and to create interest and commitment.
The second is defining, what domains of change that should be monitored. The domains are broad categories like: [305]

"Changes in the quality of people's lives"
"Changes in the levels of people's participation in the project"
"Changes in people's behaviour"

The purpose of making them broad is to give stakeholders the freedom to make their own interpretations of, what is a change within a given domain. This makes them different from indicators that should be interpreted the same way by all.[306]
The third step is to decide how often to measure the changes within these domains.
The fourth step is collecting the stories. First of all an open research question should be formulated to guide the process. Below is an example of such a question:

"Looking back over the last month, what do you think was the most significant change in the quality of people's lives in the community?"[307]

If formulated proper this question can set boundaries in form of time (last month), place and domain (community and quality of peoples lives), and facilitate that respondent use their own judgment (what do you think) and is selective in only naming one change (most significant

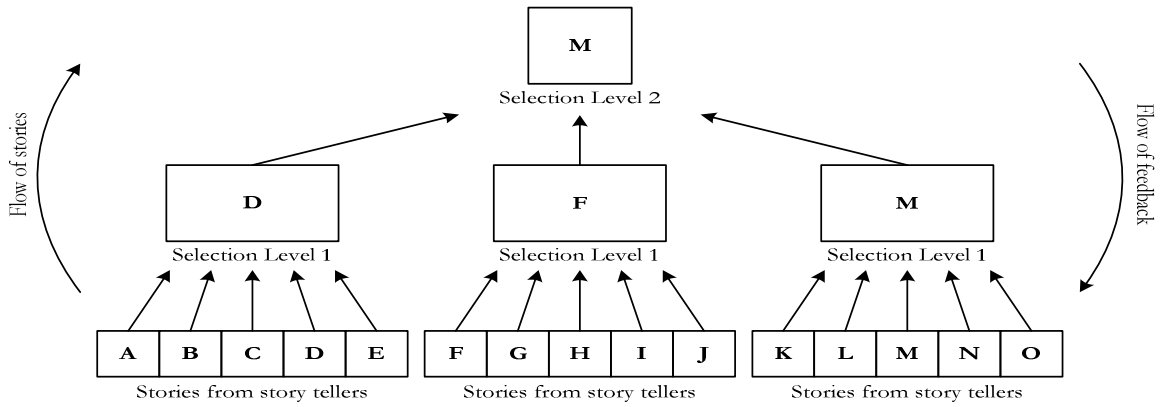
[305] India HIV/AIDS Alliance p. 13
[306] In the LFA an indicator should be constructed, so if it is measured by two different persons, the result would be the same.
[307] Davis and Dart 2005 p. 23

change).[308] Whose stories that should be collected depend on domains chosen. The stories can be captured in different ways: The fieldworkers are asked to write down stories, they have heard through their work; by means of interview; through group discussions where people share their most (SC) stories, and the respondent can document their own story. It is important the respondents explain, why they think their suggested change is significant, since those who should review and discuss the stories otherwise may not understand why it had significance to the respondent.

Step five is selecting the stories that are most significant. The MSC uses a hierarchy process for selecting the stories. The people involved in selecting the stories should choose, so that each selection level has "[…] *line management responsibilities […]*"[309] to those making the prior selection. The last group (selection level two in figure 11) would involve donors and representatives of different stakeholders.[310] The figure below illustrates a suggestion, on how this process could be visualised.

Figure 12[311]

Flow of stories and feedback in MSC



Davis and Dart 2005

This selection process secures that the burden of measuring does not rest on one individual or a group. Story selection often happens within groups through analysis and discussion, which promotes participation and learning through discussion and reflection. The process of selecting

[308] Davis and Dart 2005
[309] Ibid. p. 30 (higher in the management chain)
[310] Ibid.
[311] Ibid. p.

the most SC story should be documented, and choices should be augmented and passed on to the next selection level and to the respondents.[312]

Step six is about giving feedback on the outcome of the selection process. The result should be communicated back to the respondents, giving information on how the selection process was organised, which SC story there was chosen to be the most significant and why. Giving feedback can: facilitate a search for similar changes among the respondents in the following report period; it also shows that the stories have been read and analysed; it can "[…] *expand or challenge participants´ views of what is significant*"[313], and it can facilitate an open discussion on what significant change is. Not least it shows the beneficiaries that participation makes sense, when their contribution leads to action.[314]

Step seven is the verification of stories, often those chosen to be most significant at the different selection levels. Verification can be done by visiting the site/person, where the change has taken place. Verification is done, because a story could prove to be false, misunderstood or exaggerated. On the other hand verification could also show that the change was more important than first assumed and important details could be extracted.[315]

Step eight is quantification. Although that MSC emphasises qualitative reporting, quantification can be used in three ways: It can within the story quantify the number of people involved, as well as the amount of activities and effects; after the process of selection the participants could be asked about information on changes similar to that of the most SC story and last it can be used in step nine where the whole set of SC stories is available to the appearance of specific changes.[316]

Step nine opens up for adding legitimacy and rigour to the process by using "*secondary analysis*" and "*meta-monitoring*"[317]. This is mainly not participatory, most often it is done by a specialist or a person in the project with M&E skills.[318]

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[312] Davis and Dart 2005
[313] Ibid. p. 35
[314] Ibid.
[315] Davis and Dart 2005
[316] Ibid.
[317] Focus on the process of the stories, such as: Difference in numbers of collected stories, which stories are selected and so on. Davis and Dart 2005 p. 40-41
[318] Davis and Dart 2005

Step ten is about revising the MSC system based on the findings. This means changes in domains, how often to run MSC method, which participant to use and so on.[319]

The MSC is most effective in projects or programs, there are: complex and have diverse outcomes, focus on social change, participatory, designed to have continuous contact between field staff and beneficiaries, having problems with conventional monitoring systems and delivering customised service to beneficiaries. As an M&E method it has none or little value, when it is used for monitoring something expected evaluation of a terminated project and evaluation reports used for accountability purposes. Obstacles to implementing the MSC process can be as those encountered by Mellemfolkeligt Samvirke (MS) in their pilot projects in Zambia and Mozambique some of the contestant were influenced by "*[…]logframe-terrorism[…]*"[320] and could not stop relating to the terms of output, indicators and outcome.

Having shown above that MSC is an example of a LOMES we will examine the degrees to which it contributes to improved performance. As an instrument for this we will used the areas inherent in LOMES, which we identified in the beginning of this section.

5.2 Case Study

Community Driven Approaches to Address the Feminisation of HIV/AIDS in India

In this section we will first give a small description of the empirical material before moving on to the findings in the project.

This project (Community Driven Approaches to Address the Feminisation of HIV/AIDS in India) was started in the beginning of 2006 on the initiative of India HIV/AIDS Alliance (Alliance India) and supported by DFID challenge Fund. This was a pilot project that was be implemented in six Indian states. Alliance India was formed in 1999[321]. The purpose was to

[319] Ibid.
[320] Sigsgaard 2004 p. 5
[321] on the purpose of supporting the International HIV/AIDS Alliance's global strategy

support community action focused at reducing the spread of AIDS and consequences of AIDS. The project was to support:

> *"[…] information and services amongst women, their families and their communities (including healthcare providers) in order to reduce stigma and discrimination and contribute to creating an enabling environment […]"*[322]

And the expected outputs of the project were:

> • *Increased informed demand Increasing awareness and knowledge of HIV/AIDS and SRH to reduce stigma and discrimination and to create demand for accurate information and quality services (health, legal and social services).*
>
> • *Increased access to services and support Increasing linkages between women project beneficiaries and HIV/AIDS and SRH service delivery and support mechanism at the community level.*
>
> • *Increased NGO and community capacity Increasing skills and knowledge of partner NGOs, women project beneficiaries and their communities to undertake project activities and contribute to increasing informed demand and increasing access to relevant services and support.*[323]

This project was evaluated in the beginning of 2007 over a period of one month. The report we have used for our analysis 'Stories of Significance: Redefining Change – An assortment of community voices and articulations' is an analysis of the experience from using MSC to evaluate the project. The MSC process took three days. The first day was used to introduce and train the NGO and establish the domains of change, and the last two days were used for collecting the stories and the selection process. According to Alliance India there were a few concerns with using the MSC for evaluating the impact of the project: How do you measure impact after only one year? How do you train teams in one day in using the MSC? How have little or none experience with analysis of data?

The MSC was used together whit an existing M&E system that emphasised the quantifiable to measure the measurable changes facilitated by the project. However this didn't provide insight into the impact of the projects, so the MSC was chosen for the purpose of:

> *"a) To gauge the unintended outcomes and impact the project may have had on the lives of the target population; and*

[322] India HIV/AIDS Alliance 2007 p. 8
[323] India HIV/AIDS Alliance 2007 p. 12

b) To reflect on and learn from the results."[324]

In this evaluation the MSC was not used to assess on the success of the project, instead it was used to complement other M&E's that were to be used for final evaluation. However the findings resulted in a number of surprising changes, critical observations and recommendations on new initiatives.

The MSC process used for this evaluation resembles very well, what Davis and Dart describe. Among 19 partners in 17 districts, 6 sites were chosen for evaluation. The first day each iNGO defined their own domains through discussion on, what changes they wanted to measure. To some extend they largely reflected the objective and activities with in the project. Most of the iNGOs had domains in common and had between two and three domains. The chosen domains were:

> *"Changes in quality of peoples' lives, changes in levels of people's participation in the project, changes in support group's level of influence on it's members, changes in people's behaviour, and changes in staff capacity"*[325]

The second day field staff collected stories from target population using a prepared interview guide. The stories was collected through individual interviews, group discussions and field staff writing their own experiences. The third day each site used on selecting the most SC story within each of their domain, that happen with in the project cycle and could relate to the project. Each selection was explained in relation to, why this story was selected. These stories were sent to Alliance India headquarter, where the final level of selection would take place.

5.2.1 Findings

Participation

When we look at participation, we focus on, if the evaluation process shows that there is a desire to incorporate different stakeholders in the M&E process.

[324] Ibid. p. 8
[325] India HIV/AIDS Alliance 2007

In this MSC evaluation there are participation based processes. The selection groups were in most cases a mix of program staff, field staff, outreach workers and in some cases a beneficiary would also participate.[326] Each group was responsible for formulating the criteria's for the most SC story, and this process created a lot of reflection and new knowledge for the participants. As expressed by a Member of a NGO in Manipur:

> *"I interact more deeply with the community today. I never did earlier. The experience was different. I learnt an enormous lot."*[327]

The MSC method promotes participation, and this is also visible in this evaluation. One could argue that beneficiaries could have been more involved in the selection process. Their participation was mainly in delivering the stories. A result of the MSC was that many of the participants were surprised by the process because of the deep engagement in their communities. The evaluation also showed the value of working in groups and engaging with other stakeholders.

In relation to the working process IA experienced that those, who had established criteria's for the selection prior, worked through the selection process faster and more focused. AI also observed that staff, who worked in "*[…]an effective work environment and supportive organisational culture[…]*"[328], enjoyed their work and became more skilled and confident. This was also visible in the selection phase, where these organisations often were recognized by lesser hierarchy, showed outreach workers and volunteers actively participating and voicing their opinions. This was in contrast to the organisations with more hierarchy, where the staff was not keen on disagreeing with their supervisors. A small number of the AI staff argued that they through the stories had gained knowledge, on how to make their technical support visit more effective.

Focus on process and impact

There were some concerns from AI, if the teams could handle the assignment with such a short time to learn. However, all was done internally withonly with a little help from a facilitator. The iNGO chose the domains themselves, field staff collected the stories from beneficiaries, and field staff and all stakeholders were in different degrees represented in the selection process.

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[326] Ibid.
[327] Ibid. p. 31
[328] India HIV/AIDS Alliance 2007 p. 29

When looking at the program outputs and the argument for using MSC it seems clear that the focus was on the process and not on activities and outputs. This is supported by the domains chosen, although that they in some degree related to the objectives and activities in the project. One example of this is the domain *"Changes in people's behaviour"*[329]. This was chosen in hope to tell, what strategies worked, and if awareness had lead to behavioural change. Choosing to focus on the process could seem optimistic with the project only being one year old. The results of the evaluation however justified it by giving valuable findings.

The purpose of using the MSC was to measure the unintended outcomes and impacts of the project, and what effect it had on the lives of the beneficiaries. This was obviously in the domains, which were designed as seemingly open question, and the result was an amount of useful information. Some of the main findings were that the increased awareness and knowledge resulted in better self-confidence, because many of these women learn to understand - and if necessary - treat their disease. At the same time they experienced that they were not alone; others endured the same problems. The increase in self-confidence was felt as an increased quality of life and led to changes in their behaviour. Women, who before getting familiar with the project, would stay in their house doing choirs and submitting to their husbands sexual demands, now shared their knowledge with other women in the community and told their own men, to accept, a no to sex reply and the use of condoms. One way of sharing was through plays and meetings, several of the stories suggested the incorporation of a wider range of media. Another essential finding was the importance in using group sessions. The stories showed that change in behaviour was more likely to happen when information was passed between people and not dictated. Also these groups resulted in strong collectives, several women referred to them as family, which had therapeutic and supportive effect. These collectives were seen as strong by the community, and some of the collectives helped needing women outside the collective. The groups also had the surprising effect on the women that they had fun, which they are not supposed to have in their culture. Within the *domain of Changes in staff capacity* an important discovery were that staff members became role models for others in their community. These were just some of the unintended changes, there were discovered by using the MSC and showed the strength of the method.

[329] India HIV/AIDS Alliance 2007 p. 26

Action Oriented

The purpose of the evaluation was to reflect and learn from the results and according to us; this should also lead to recommendations for change (RFC). One RFC was that more attention should be given to increase the awareness and knowledge of men.[330] This was not anticipated in a program where the main focus was on stigmatised and discriminated women. Other findings were: the importance of financial independence, the value of addressing boys and men and other power structures; the request for "*[…]innovative and sophisticated relations with the media*"[331] and others.

To better performance there need to be a response to relevant findings, and we can't say that this has been the case in this evaluation. The implementation of these recommendations for change would have happened after the evaluation and there is no material on this.

5.2.2 Connecting LOMES to Improved Performance

As a means to enhance organisational performance a LOMES should be participatory to create trust between stakeholders, and facilitate the gathering of informal knowledge, that may not have been capturing by a more regular M&E approach. It is important that all stakeholders are included in the M&E process and that their knowledge and skills are used for generating useful data that could be incorporated into project management.

In sub-section 4.4.5 we argue that a participatory approach in LOMES hold value in itself, because it can facilitate an increase in capacity in individuals and the organisation. The findings from the case study show that most of the field staff experienced a sense of achievement, when seeing that their hard work paid of. They also reported that as a result of using the MSC, they felt that their capacity in evaluation was enhanced. There was also and empowering effect in asking for the stories where "*Almost every one of them was feeling important that they were asked to think and choose.*"[332] Furthermore, as this process delegated responsibility, Field staff reported that this had led to them to reflect over and discuss the stories. Being given responsibility and the implicit show of faith and display of trust in this act, was found to have been an empowering

[330] India HIV/AIDS Alliance 2007 p. 32
[331] Ibid. p. 32
[332] Ibid. p. 31

experience for most of the field staff. The process of reflecting and discussion generated learning and improve their capacity in those areas.

From the above we find that the MSC technique as an example of LOMES could be said to have had an influence that might not have been the case in a regular evaluation. The story process helped build trust trough participation. The assignment of responsibility facilitated a sense of empowerment, and led discussions amongst field staff and primary stakeholders that arose because of the MSC approach. This then helped India Alliance collect important informal information about the project and gave them valuable insights from field staff that would not have been captured by a traditional external-led evaluation; from this, we argue that the MSC to a small extent facilitated improved performance, and better relations between the CSO and the NGO.

To enhance organisational performance it is important that there is flexibility so that action can be taken to adjust to changes in the attempt to enhance performance. A LOMES can contribute to this by focusing on process and impact and thereby facilitating information on unidentified changes, thereby giving project management a sounder knowledge base on which to base action.

We found that the use of MSC lead to the capture of several unexpected changes such as the increasingly levels of confidence amongst local women, the empowering aspect of women's groups and the importance of spreading information in different ways. These findings were not anticipated originally and resulted in recommendations such as: integrating vocational training and securing "*non-threatening and non-hierarchical spaces*"[333] and use of different media to spread information. This seems to implicate that the focus on process and strategy has lead to recommendations to enhance the projects performance.

To improve performance a LOMES should facilitate reflection over the collected knowledge and this reflection should lead to recommendation for change and consequently change. In the MSC process there has been reflection on the information retrieved and it has lead to recommendation for change. We can however not say that these recommendations have resulted in change as the implementation of these would have taken place after the evaluation.

[333] Ibid. p. 32

We believe that the findings in our case study support the argument made in sub-section 4.4 that a LOMES can improve organisational performance.

5.2.3 Summary

In this section we have introduced the MSC as an example of LOMES, for the purpose of examining the use of a LOMES and how it influences organisational and project performance. Having already outlined several aspects of a learning oriented approach in the previous section, we chose to look specifically at the following areas in the case study: participation, focus on process and impact and action orientation. Looking at the case study we found that there were signs of both increased capacity and empowerment as a result of the participatory aspect of the MSC. We also found that from the beginning there was a strong focus on process and impact and that both resulted in valuable information. We could however not find any signs of learning leading to specific, corrective/augmentative action as a result of using MSC. There was however evidence that using the MSC lead to unexpected findings, reflection and consequently recommendations for change in praxis.

This section concludes the small and in no way conclusive case study. We did however see several signs attributable to the use of MSC which facilitate improved organisational performance, and therefore lends support to our theoretical analysis in the previous section. In the following section we will bring together the findings from the entire research so that we can ultimately provide an answer to the research question we posed at the beginning of this thesis.

6 Resolving the problems of M&E

> *"If the only tool you have is a hammer, you tend to see every problem as a nail."*
> *(Abraham Maslow)*

The purpose of this section is to bring together the findings of our research so that we may answer our research question in the conclusion.

6.1 Bridging the Gap

In the introduction to this thesis we stated that the international development community at large is concerned with the effectiveness of development today. We supported this statement in section 3, and argued in our conceptual framework that M&E is seen as an increasingly important aspect of effectiveness. While we have said that NGOs and donors have a shared interest in the effectiveness of NGO, we also illustrated in section 3.3 that the different needs of primary stakeholders and donors mean that to be effective, NGOs must satisfy both needs; the two imperatives of NGOs. The practical implementation of the business imperative however, the *how* NGOs can keep existing, has led to an M&E practice that obfuscates the ethical imperative, the reason *why* NGOs exist. In other words, there is presently a conundrum in M&E, where effectiveness of development essentially suffers *as a consequence* of donor requirements for specific M&E practice, which were demanded by donors specifically for the purpose of *ensuring* effectiveness.

In this thesis we have argued that NGOs are caught in a dilemma between the conflicting demands from the two imperatives, and that this has led to a gap between theory and practice in M&E. On one side we have the LFA, perceived by the donor community as the pre-eminent tool for reducing the complex problems of development to manageable pieces This has led it to become a de facto requirement for NGOs, in order to be viable for funding. As an approach the LFA takes a scientific and positivist perspective to problem solving.

On the other hand, we have the learning-oriented approach we presented in section 5, following our analysis of the LFA in a systems context. This analysis demonstrated that the

underlying principles of the LFA are inappropriate for the dynamic and ill-structured problems, the soft system nature, of social development projects, and that these require an altogether different approach. Based on Checkland's Systems Theory and Organisational Learning Theory, we argued that successful project management in soft systems require organisations to be flexible, and actively pursue ongoing learning to be able to respond to inevitable but unpredictable changes.

The argument is that by taking a learning approach, M&E primarily becomes a means to support both the operational but also the strategic management of the organisation. By capturing change and providing ongoing information about the development process, a learning approach allows project managers to make better decisions based on sound information. At the strategic level a learning approach leads to better knowledge about what works but also what doesn't, and facilitates the integration of valuable tacit knowledge from stakeholders at the operational level. Focusing on learning also means that mistakes or negative effects are not trivialised as a management error, but rather reflected upon to improve future performance.[334] At the operational level this means better responsiveness to unexpected change, where unplanned positive effects can be augmented and integrated in the project, and unforeseen negative effects can be addressed and corrective action taken.[335]

While our argument in section 5 revolves specifically around how to improve organisational performance when operating in complex and unpredictable environments, the implications of a LOMES relate directly to the ethical imperative of NGOs. Ongoing learning increases the project managers' knowledge of reality, rather than having to rely on a, however well planned, outdated snapshot of reality. This then enable project managers to respond to changes in beneficiary needs, previously unknown differences between partners or upper and lower management, or discovering flaws in the planning logic. In other words, a learning oriented

[334] Christensen & Kreiner (1991) argue that the greater the variance is between planned and actual outcomes, the greater teh learning potential is See section 5.2.4 figure 10, p. 60

[335] This is illustrated by figure 7, p51.

approach facilitates improved NGO performance in a complex and dynamic reality. When managers can better respond to change, more successful projects should follow.

This leads us full circle to where we started namely the overarching concern about the effectiveness of development, and the gap between the theory and practice on how to achieve this. In this thesis we posit that theory and practice can be realigned, first by acknowledging that social development is a soft system problem, and secondly by reorienting practice toward a more flexible approach; since the inherent complexity in the system can not be managed away, project success instead must centre on how to best respond to complexity. This led to the formulation of a Learning Oriented Monitoring and Evaluation System (LOMES), based on our findings in section 3 and 4, here we pointed out that the underlying principles of the LFA limit the approach, and mean the LFA is not an adequate tool for the understanding of developmental reality. The positivistic concept of a clear causal logic, can not sufficiently anticipate how and what changes will happen over the several years projects usually run. Additionally, by way of Christensen and Kreiner's concepts of operational and contextual uncertainty[336], we showed that the element of control inherent in the logframe serves to further constrict responsiveness to change, which we demonstrated in section 5.1 to be essential to operate in complex environments.

6.2 The Twin Imperatives - Revisited

Based on our analysis of the current problems in the M&E of social development projects, we have found that the LFA represents a solution model that doesn't fit the structure of the problem it addresses. To overcome this, and reorient the purpose of M&E back to address the concerns of aid effectiveness of the global development agenda, we suggested a learning oriented approach in section 5.3. At the operational level this would have a series of implications. For NGO's to adapt such an approach would mean that project planning would become less structured to better allow for adaptable action during the implementation phase. As M&E would focus on process monitoring to facilitate learning cycles, original blueprints

[336] Christensen and Kreiner 1991.

would be prone to adjustments as learning would lead to action. This would essentially mean that accountability, understood as to be held accountable for the delivery of previously agreed upon outputs, would no longer be a relevant yardstick. Instead of the traditional application, accountability should instead be aligned more with what Cavill & Sohail have coined "*Strategic Accountability, which refers to how INGOs are performing in relation to their mission.*"[337] This brings us back to the problem of the twin imperatives.

We argued in section 3.3 that the required use of the LFA and the quantification of M&E, meant that focus was shifted from impact and outcome level to more easily measurable outputs. A LOMES however means that projects can be managed to focus on the greater goals, impacts and outcomes, as the initial plan acts more like a beacon than a blueprint. While strategic accountability may be harder to quantify and therefore to manage in volume in busy donor organisations, a shift will remove the structural constraint on how NGOs can manage for development success as per the ethical imperative, rather than current practice where:

> *"'accountability' is essentially a technical fix that leaves unequal social and economic structures almost completely unchallenged"*[338]

To be feasible in a development climate where NGO-donor relations are defined by contracts, a learning approach must be accompanied with an understanding of accountability that goes beyond the current practice of accountability a lá accountancy. If accountability can be re-wrought to hold NGOs accountable for their efforts toward achieving sustainable developmental impact, this will then open the door for a much more performance driven M&E, such as the LOMES outlined in this thesis and supported by sub-section 5.2.2. This would mean that the business and the ethical imperatives would overlap, rather than contradict each other. From a donor perspective, M&E would function more in support of current efforts in the global development community[339], and emphasise the overall effectiveness of aid rather than documenting how well a project was executed.

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[337] Cavill & Sohail 2007, p. 234

[338] Cavill and Sohail 2007, p. 247

[339] The rhetoric of the Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda for Action, is that the global community increasingly is concerned about the impact of development, and that more efforts should be put into making development more effective.

7 Conclusion: Managing Projects in the Real World

We have in this thesis argued that the institutionalisation of the LFA is in part a function of a performance culture, which seems to be the dogma of current public management practice. Much of the drive behind this practice, seems to come from a positivist understanding of problems, where complexity can be reduced to manageable components, for which we can formulate solutions, that will lead to expected goals if managed according to plan. Based on theories formulated by Christensen and Kreiner and Peter Checkland, we have argued that when problems become increasingly complex, this solution model no longer applies, and will in fact prove detrimental. The more effort is put into reducing the operational uncertainty, the more vulnerable the project becomes to contextual uncertainty. We therefore argued that to be successful in a dynamic and complex environment, NGOs must relinquish notions of control, accept the uncertainty, and instead focus on learning, to expand upon the incomplete knowledge base a project was design. This will improve responsiveness to unforeseen but inevitable effects and allow for ongoing adjustments to align the project with the reality in which it operates – and not try to fit emergent reality into how a project was conceptualised.

While we consider the argument of our thesis sound, NGOs operate in a reality where the LFA currently defines how projects should be managed, and it remains a requirement to be eligible for funds. As such NGOs cannot stop using the LFA, nor should they necessarily from our point of view. As mentioned in section 4, the LFA remains a valuable tool to for planning and identifying problems. The vital part is that the planning phase should not be seen as conclusive, but rather as providing a starting point. Christensen and Kreiner state that in a complex environment:

> *"The plan does not become a goal in itself, but it rather becomes a tool by which the project can orient itself, recognise the challenges and new opportunities, which a learning process entails"*[340]

As argued in this thesis, one of the means to do so has been the further institutionalisation of the LFA, which we have shown to be counterproductive in the way its currently implemented.

[340] Christensen and Kreiner 1991, p. 70.

Rather than coming with recommendations for putting a stop to one tool or promoting another, the meaning of this thesis has been to point out the need to address the gap that exists between desire and demands, between theory and practice in current M&E practice. Rather than suggesting a new orthodoxy we suggest that in social development projects, learning should be a focus point and integrated, *in some form,* to adress the current neglect of the performance enhancing capacity of monitoring and evaluation.

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