

Project Definition: Using the Logical Framework

The Logical Framework Approach (LFA) was initially suggested for use in development projects by the USAID (it is believed to have been used first by the military), and it has seen wide acceptance among other donor organizations, such as the European Union, etc. It has been considered a prerequisite for a successful project. If the project is not properly defined, the chances of its planning and execution being successful are rather grim. The advantages of applying the LFA are not limited to development projects. In his work entitled *Strategic Project Management Made Simple*,¹ Terry Schmidt extended the application of the LFA to strategic projects, under the central premise that the main reason why most strategies and projects never get off the ground is the ad-hoc, obsolete methods used to turn the initial rough ideas into actionable plans. The LFA provides guidance on how to avoid these problems.

This brief note aims to provide an overview of the LFA to be used by project teams in the project definition phase.

The Logical Framework

The Logical Framework (LF) is a tool used during the project selection or definition stages, which then carries over into the planning, monitoring and evaluation phases. It provides a structured way of describing the main elements of a project and highlights the relationships among these elements. It forces the project team to clarify many aspects of the project that are usually bypassed initially, but which create issues with much more difficult solutions when they reappear later in the execution phase of the project.

¹ Terry Schmidt, *Strategic Project Management Made Simple: Practical Tools for Leaders and Teams*, Hoboken: J. Wiley, 2009.

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The framework is usually displayed as a 4x4 table with 16 cells, although the content of some of these cells varies from one institution to another. It is important to stress that project management is a team activity, meaning that we need the different participants to work as a team, where all members share information and contribute to development from the very beginning. Filling in the LF provides a good opportunity to bring the core team (and even some external stakeholders) together around the table to form a consensus and communicate the shared objectives for the project. The LF helps to summarize and share the different players' visions regarding the four critical questions in any project:

- What are we trying to accomplish with the project and why?
- How will we measure success?
- What other conditions must exist for the project to be successful?
- How are we going to get there?

The following diagram illustrates the four main blocks of the LF as related to the questions above. Note that although the concepts are shared by many different applications of the LFA, the specific names may differ from one implementation to another.

Objectives	Success Measures	Verification	Assumptions
Ultimate goal 1	Measures of ultimate goal	How will we get the measures 2	External conditions needed
Project purpose	Measures of project purpose		3
Project outcomes	Measures of project outcomes		
How we are going to do it	4		

Block 1: Objectives

In the objectives column, the LFA classifies objectives into three groups, from the highest to the more operational levels:

- *Ultimate goal* – this corresponds to the big picture impact of the project: the strategic objective to which this project, and usually other projects, contribute.
- *Project purpose* – the impact we expect the project deliverables to generate, the immediate effects of the project. What are the benefits, to whom?
- *Project outcomes* (or outputs) – what the project will deliver: what the team can, must and commits to make happen to achieve the purpose.

Each outcome is a necessary ingredient in the recipe to achieve the next higher-level objective. The logic goes like this:

- IF the project purpose is achieved, THEN the ultimate goal can be achieved.
- IF the project generates the outcomes, THEN the project purpose can be achieved.
- IF the project resources are available and the activities are performed, THEN the project will deliver the outcomes (this refers to the resources and activities that will be described in Block 4).

Consider, as an example, the project to build the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao.² The *ultimate goal* was a turnover in the city's economic profile, from a declining industrial focus to a services city. The *project purpose* was a museum that would attract visitors to the city, thus placing Bilbao on the tourist map. Finally, the *project outcomes* were the construction of a museum with an emblematic architectural design that could house a permanent collection owned by the Salomon Guggenheim Foundation.

Notice that to achieve the ultimate goal, the Guggenheim museum was just one of the many projects launched by the city of Bilbao. Other projects included the modernization of the subway stations with a design by Norman Foster, an overhaul of the airport and the Zubizuri bridge over the Nervion River, both designed by Santiago Calatrava, etc. We can envision the different projects as part of the objective tree, as in the following illustration.



It is a common concern for the project objectives to be SMART, referring to the following characteristics:

- Specific, detailed enough for everyone to understand the same things, avoiding ambiguity.
- Measurable, so that we can track our progress toward the goal. If we are able to measure something, we really know something that we can talk about. If we cannot measure anything, our knowledge is probably insufficient.

² See <https://www.guggenheim-bilbao.eus/en/> for some details on this project.