Abstract: Program theories often lay out causal mechanisms for how their activities are thought to achieve proposed goals. Sometimes, though, program theories seem to assume that each step in the causal chain proceeds automatically to the next, ignoring contextual factors that may impede or facilitate individuals' movement through the chain. Understanding a program's successes and failures requires going beyond simple causal mechanisms to investigate which facilitating and inhibiting factors are most significant in the program's action. Explicitly augmenting a program theory with potential facilitating and inhibiting factors can provide a framework for designing a detailed process evaluation to uncover how the program succeeds or fails. Based on the knowledge of which contextual factors are most important in controlling movement through the theory of action, program designs can be adjusted to capitalize on facilitating factors and mitigate inhibiting factors. In this workshop, we will practice identifying relevant facilitating and inhibiting contextual factors and think about how an augmented program theory can inform evaluation design. Illustrations will come from an ongoing evaluation of the Community Knowledge Worker (CKW) program, a community-based farmer education program in rural Uganda. Participants are encouraged (but not required) to come with a program in mind for the practice exercises.

Motivation
Why doesn’t a program work equally well for everyone?

Program Theory
- Detailed description of how program activities lead to program outcomes/impact.
- Causal chain / Mechanism
- Theory guides evaluation design

Where do you get the theory?
- Program documentation
- Social science literature
- Program staff, administrators
- Program participants
- Logical thinking

Exercise, Part I
- Choose one of the three sample programs (SmileHealthy, Education Justice Project, Fun with Books).
- Read through the program highlights.
- Hypothesize a mechanism for the program.
- Record any assumptions.
- Hint: Start with listed activities and outcomes.

Tips for Drafting Mechanisms
- Forward technique: What results from this? (Multiple outcomes?)
- Backward technique: What is necessary for this to occur?
- Missing link technique: What happens between these two steps?
- These can be used in combination.
Agriculture: Community Knowledge Worker Program
http://ckw.applab.org

Context
- About 80% of people in rural areas are involved in agriculture, but some may have a cottage business.
- Traditional farming practices are often low-yield, and crop/animal diseases are common.
- Farmers may use a combination of subsistence and cash farming.
- Rural farmers in Uganda are generally very poor and have little formal education.
- As such, farmers have little capital for investment and little access to agricultural information.
- Telecommunications and transportation infrastructure are poor.
- Cell phone network coverage exists in many rural areas, though it is often spotty.
- CKWs are elected by their community in a community recruitment meeting.
- English is taught in school, but most adults in rural areas have very low proficiency.
- CKWs must have a minimum level of English language proficiency.

Resources
- CKWs are given a smart phone and a solar power charging device.
- The smart phone can access a database of agricultural information in English.
- CKWs receive performance-based monetary incentives.

Activities
- CKWs make the program known to farmers, and farmers can contact CKWs with questions.
- CKWs listen to farmers’ problems, look up relevant information in the phone, and explain it.
- Some CKWs follow-up with farmers at a later date (at their own initiative).

Outcomes
- Farmers learn new, relevant agricultural information.
- Farmers make changes that lead to greater agricultural productivity.

Assumptions:
Health: SmileHealthy
http://www.smilehealthy.org

Context
• “SmileHealthy is dedicated to working with the community to meet the oral health needs of underserved children and families [in Champaign County, IL] by focusing on preventative care, treatment, and education to provide a lifetime of excellent oral health.”
• Oral disease can be a gateway for additional health problems.
• Many oral health problems can be avoided with routine preventative care.
• Many underserved children have never seen a dentist, due to a range of considerations including cost, availability of parents to provide transportation, and varying oral health norms.
• Not all children who qualify for Medicaid make use of services, often due to challenges in managing the application and bureaucratic processes.

Resources
• Mobile dental clinic.
• Local dentists and hygienists volunteer time.
• Basic oral hygiene supplies (toothbrush, toothpaste, floss) are donated or offered at reduced prices.

Activities
• Mobile dental clinics visit area schools to provide cleanings, fluoride treatments, and dental sealants.
• SmileHealthy helps eligible clients apply for Medicaid to cover the cost of the services.
• Children who need follow-up care are referred to a SmileHealthy permanent clinic, and SmileHealthy tracks and supports all children referred for additional care.
• SmileHealthy also provides dental health education programming in area schools, which consists of age-appropriate lessons on oral hygiene, tobacco use, oral piercings, mouth guards, etc.
• Education programs are often accompanied with free oral hygiene supplies (toothbrush, toothpaste, floss).

Outcomes
• Improved oral health.

Assumptions:
Criminal Justice: Education Justice Project
http://www.educationjustice.net

Context
• “The mission of the Education Justice Project is to build a model college-in-prison program that demonstrates the positive impacts of higher education upon incarcerated people, their families, the communities from which they come, and society as a whole.”
• The Danville Correctional Center (DCC) is about 45 minutes east of the University of Illinois.
• Students at DCC have access to lower-division courses through another program.
• EJP students develop a strong group identity and actively support the program.

Resources
• University faculty and graduate students volunteer to teach in the program.
• A building located in the center of the facility is dedicated primarily to education.
• An educational resource room.

Activities
• Short workshops and semester-long upper-division college-level courses in a variety of disciplines.
• Extra-curricular educational activities, such as a theater group.
• English-speaking students can also gain experience as language tutors for speakers of other languages.

Outcomes
• Although EJP’s objectives are much broader, for this activity, consider only the outcome of reduced recidivism (return to prison).

Assumptions:
Early Literacy: Fun with Books
http://www.chsofnj.org/ecpecc_funbooks.html

Context

• “Fun with Books and Music is a nine week interactive family literacy program [in Trenton, NJ] with cycles in English and in Spanish. The program uses children’s literature and music to support the development of pre-literacy skills and school readiness in young children.”

• The program also supports parent-child bonding through interactive activities.

• Fun with Books is run by the Children’s Home Society of New Jersey under a larger program called Family and Children Early Education Services.

• Children who have difficulty with literacy often face ongoing academic problems.

• Trenton was once a vibrant working-class manufacturing town, but experienced a tremendous downturn by the mid-1970s, followed by “White flight.”

• Program staff are predominantly white, and come from near-by middle-class suburbs.

Resources

• Paid program staff.

• Materials for interactive craft activities.

• Parents take the new book home to add to their home library.

• Families are also provided with dinner.

Activities

• Each week, program staff review the themes of a new book with parents and discuss how parents can make reading a fun part of their daily activities at home.

• Parents then engage with their young children in structured arts, craft, and music activities, as well as reading the book with their young children at the end of the session.

Outcomes

• In a study of this project, evaluators found that staff and participants had very different ideas about the goals and theory behind this program. For the purposes of this activity, consider the theory that might be put forward by the program designers for the outcome of improved pre-literacy skills.

Assumptions:
Grease and Grime
• Individual contextual factors
• Regulate flow through the mechanism
• Grease: facilitating factors
• Grime: hindering factors
• Often two sides of the same coin!
• Can be incorporated into the model as moderators.

Exercise, Part II
• Identify potential grease and grime.
• Focus on what the program can respond to.
• Think of a few initial elements of an observation plan.
• Identify potential implications for the program.
  (If you found this one was important, the program might do that.)

System Characteristics and Implementation Conditions
(from Foster-Fishman and Watson, 2012)

System Characteristics
  Mindsets
  Components
  Connections
  Regulations
  Resources
  Power

Implementation Conditions
  Readiness
  Capacity
  Diffusion
  Sustainability
  System Alignment

Some Categories of Grease/Grime

Recipients
  Psychological
  Openness, Enthusiasm
  Commitment, Grit
  Hopefulness
  Risk tolerance

Contextual
  Preparedness
  Access, Other obligations
  Social support
  Resource availability

Implementers
  Psychological
  Skill
  Enthusiasm
  Commitment, Grit
  Hopefulness

Contextual (Organizational)
  Communication
  Managerial efficiency
  Resource availability

Interactions
  Psychological
  Trust
  Rapport (staff/staff, staff/recipient, recipient/recipient)

Contextual
  Poignancy/relevance
  Aligned goals
  Language/cultural barriers/competence
  Program fidelity
  “Dose”

Environment
  Cultural/community norms/tabooos
  Political context
  Economic context
  Natural environment?
**Preliminary Model for CKW-Farmer Interaction**

![Diagram of the Preliminary Model for CKW-Farmer Interaction]

**Resources for Program Theory-Based Evaluation**


