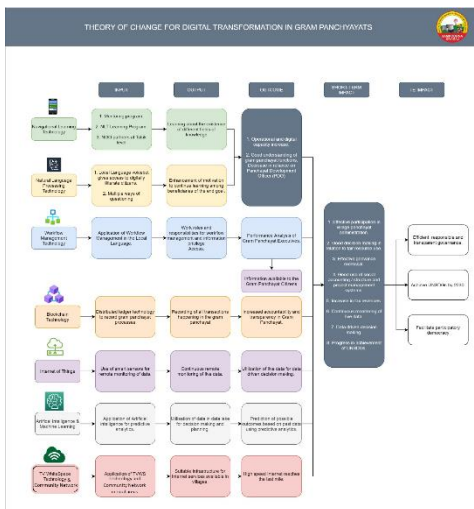


The Imperative of a Theory of Change: Achieving Gram Panchayat Goals

"A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new; when an age ends; and when the soul of a nation long suppressed finds utterance."

***- Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru,
First Prime Minister of the Republic of India.***



On this day, the Adhyakshas, Upadhyakshas, and elected representatives of five Gram Panchayats congregated at the Gram Panchayat chaired by Hebbet Nanjamma. A donor organization had generously provided computers for all these Gram Panchayats, and a separate firm had promised internet connectivity.

However, the members of these Gram Panchayats were unsure of how to leverage these newfound resources. This conundrum led them to reach out for assistance.

"Shankranna, we aspire to effect the changes you've brought about in the villages of Davanagere within our own Gram Panchayats. We're

rallying members from neighboring Gram Panchayats to this cause. Could you provide guidance?" Nanjamma requested of me.

Our team stands perpetually prepared to support Panchayat Adhyakshas and members when they demonstrate a commitment to transforming their panchayats. Consequently, I assured her of my presence. Upon arrival at the village where Nanjamma's Gram Panchayat office was situated, I found the Adhyaksha, Upadhyakshas, and elected members from nearby villages already assembled. The turnout was reminiscent of our previous meeting, with around 50 to 60 participants.

Despite their unfamiliarity with the technology, the new computers were ceremoniously adorned with arasinna, kumkum, and flowers. The enthusiasm to revolutionize the panchayat system using these computers was palpable. They had watched a video showcasing the ease of work in Davanagere villages facilitated by computer use and were filled with anticipation about the potential transformation in their own villages.

My primary intention was to first introduce them to the concept of the Theory of Change (ToC). Subsequently, I would illustrate how it functions as a strategic roadmap for realizing the goals and aspirations of the Gram Panchayat.

"Dear friends, allow me to discuss the theory of change before we delve into the use of these computers in front of us." I began at the start of the meeting.

"You may be wondering what the Theory of Change (ToC) is, or why your Gram Panchayat needs it. In essence, a Theory of Change is a comprehensive explanation and depiction of how and why a desired change can occur in any organization. A ToC provides a foundation for the interventions needed to achieve the short or long-term goals you've set for your Gram Panchayat. It helps visualize and plan your

roadmap to success, maintaining focus on the organization's overarching mission. This method encourages better planning and enables you to understand how change occurs in an organization. It also aids in evaluating the critical factors involved in initiating change."

"But Shankranna, how is the Theory of Change applicable to our panchayats?" Sudarshan, always the inquisitive one, questioned.

"Your query is quite valid. Panchayats, entities providing services to rural citizens of India, are organizations aiming to promote change or uplift rural India. Therefore, they qualify as enterprises," I responded.

"As an Adhyaksha, you lead the Gram Panchayat. You are the change agent, tasked with improving the existing conditions. Our citizens voted for you because they believed that you could bring change once elected as a member of the Gram Panchayat. You and your team of Elected Representatives are expected to work in the best interest of the people and facilitate improvements in the villages, correct?" I posed.

The attendees nodded in agreement.

"For these reasons, you need a goal. This could be introducing digital transformation to your villages or working towards self-sufficient, or 'Atma-Nirbhar,' villages. To achieve these goals, it's crucial to understand the inputs, which could be technologies or processes, and what outcomes they may bring. Planning and mapping your change journey using ToC provides a clear vision of how change can be implemented," I explained.

"But how can an organization implement change that will add value to the current system?" Paropakari Padmini queried.

"You've likely observed some necessary changes in your villages. You may also understand how technology is propelling global development. But if your Gram Panchayat cannot derive value from these technologies, their introduction would be a failure," I pointed out.

"To ensure that the introduction of a new method or technology truly enhances the existing system, you can chart the change journey using a ToC diagram. Creating a roadmap of your technologies or processes can improve planning and prioritize what you aim to achieve in the short-term and the long-term," I clarified.

6.1 "To start with, a Theory..."

"In such instances, the Theory of Change (ToC) can be employed to reflect on an organization's goals. A Theory of Change outlines how and why a desired change is expected to occur within a project. It encompasses factors such as inputs, outputs, outcomes, short-term impact, and long-term impact. By using these elements, we can use ToC to map the goals of your Gram Panchayat clearly."

"For any Gram Panchayat to achieve its goals, you need a process that outlines the objectives clearly, and that brings in the tools necessary to ensure the plan's success," I continued.

"Once these tools are in place, the first question is: what input do we get from the chosen tools or processes? For instance, if your panchayats aim to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs) by 2030, you need to consider what tools and processes you'll use to attain this goal. To combat Zero Hunger (SDG 2) in your villages, for example, you could use integrated technologies to reinforce the Public Distribution System (PDS), like facial recognition for authentication or blockchain technology for enhanced security. For this, you'll need to carefully evaluate the

outcomes of using these tools and how they contribute to your ultimate goal."

"The outcome of implementing blockchain to achieve SDG 2 might lead to traceability of resource movements within the system. Or the short-term impact might be an increase in food grains for the locals. All these developments contribute to the development and accelerated achievement of SDG 2 when you employ modern technology. The ToC also gives you an understanding of how this change happens."

"Initially, we want to expedite all work through computers," Hebbet Nanjamma interjected.

"For this, we have to consider transitioning from a manual workflow to a digital platform," I began explaining. "Initially, you need to integrate workflow automation that fits the needs and functions of your village panchayat. As a result, the work process becomes significantly more streamlined, saving resources for both the citizens and the GP office. This collaboration also clarifies employee roles and ensures that information is available to all. In this process, the inputs are the online application forms, grievance sections, and databases stored in applications and letters."

"So, what's the result of integrating the workflow into our village panchayat?" Nanjamma asked.

"That's the right question," I responded. "By increasing the digital capacity of employees in the GP office, productivity and customer satisfaction rise, and there is a significant reduction in the likelihood of errors in the process. With the automation of workflows, the village panchayat can store information in a database as the process goes online. This will help assess the efficiency or performance of your village panchayat and facilitate effective planning."

6.2. The Impact

"Impact is crucial when it comes to the Theory of Change or any initiative for that matter. If there's no impact from a project, the purpose of initiating the project in the first place is lost. Impact is categorized into short-term and long-term. The short-term impact reflects the benefits of using the adopted tools to bring about change. In this case, if we adopt a digital system, there will be improved decision-making in the Gram Panchayats, more effective grievance redressal, and better project management systems," I concluded.

Then, what is the long-term impact?" Paropakari Padmini inquired.

"A very good question, Padmini. The long-term impact is generally the ultimate goal of the project. If a Gram Panchayat decides to adopt a digital platform, for instance, the goal of this change could be to enhance accountability and transparency within the system or to create a more efficient system. The Theory of Change provides a comprehensive roadmap of the project, identifying potential challenges. It promotes accountability and awareness of potential difficulties.

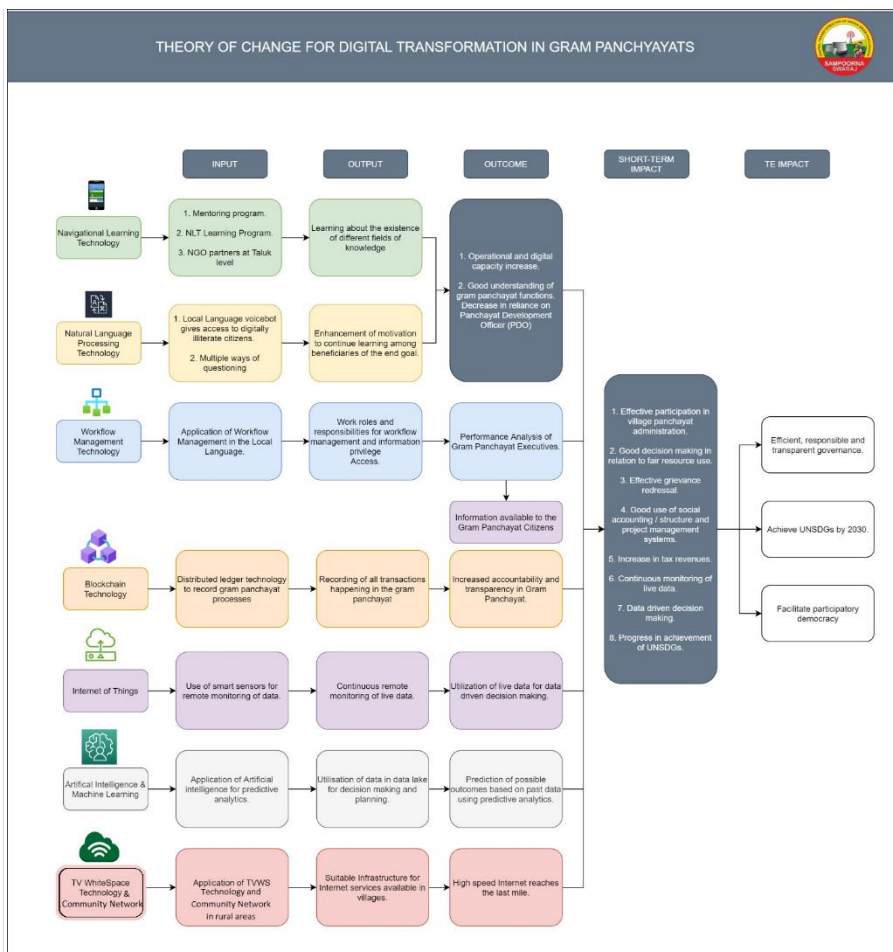


Figure 6.1 illustrates the mapping of technologies involved in facilitating change in Gram Panchayats.

As shown in Figure 6.1, the Theory of Change can map a change journey from its inception, helping to clearly define the project's vision, including Inputs, Outputs, Outcomes, Short-Term Impact, and Long-Term Impact.

"What is the use of this map, Shankranna?" Nanjamma asked, as I presented the Theory of Change map.

"Great question, Nanjamma. There are several benefits. As an Adhyaksha or an Elected Representative, your duty is to secure development funds from the government and other funding agencies, not just from taxes collected by your gram panchayat. Funders are typically willing to provide resources only when they're confident that the project will have a positive impact on the community. Using the Theory of Change, you can effectively present your proposal to the funders. The Theory of Change is a powerful tool to clearly present your plans. It also helps test the assumptions of your proposal, assess its feasibility or need for improvement, outlines a development pathway, and most importantly, aids in decision making.

For instance, you could explain to potential funders the applications of certain technologies:

- **Blockchain technology:** A distributed ledger technology to record every step of Gram Panchayat processes, documenting all transactions and increasing accountability and transparency.
- **Internet of Things (IoT):** The use of smart sensors for remote monitoring of data, enabling continuous monitoring and utilization of live data for data-driven decision making.
- **Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning:** Application of AI to predictive analytics, utilizing data on the 'Datta Sarovara' (Data Lake) for decision making and planning, predicting potential outcomes based on past data.
- **TV White Space Technology and Community Network Technology:** Application of TVWS/Community Network in rural areas to provide basic privileges for Internet services, ensuring high-speed Internet access even in remote areas.

As I was explaining this, Nanjamma and the others exclaimed, "Oh, is that so?"

"We've briefly discussed a few frontier technologies that can aid the transformation of your Gram Panchayats. In our next meeting, we will delve into each technology one by one, and I will provide relevant examples. I will also discuss how these technologies can help you achieve the goal of a 21st-century Digital Gram Panchayat."

"Let us begin with Navigated Learning Technology next time," I concluded our conversation.

