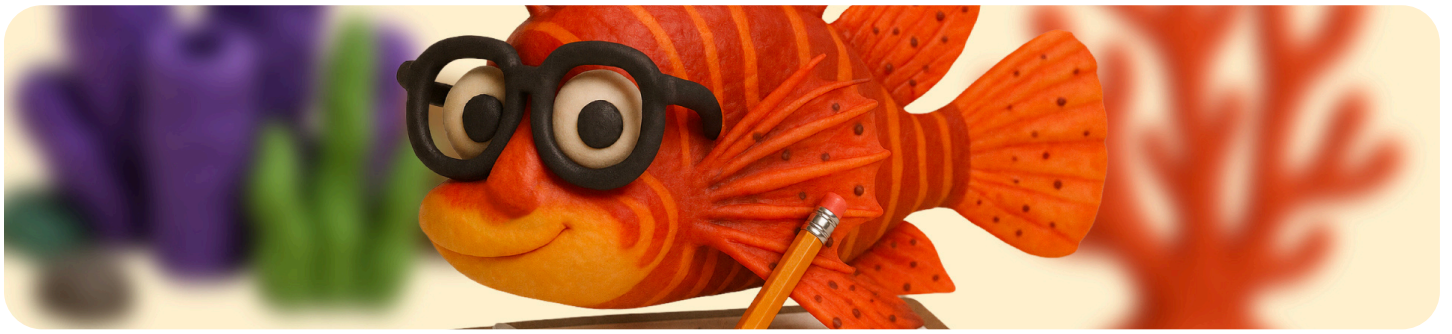




Session outline

session title	Building resilience and change: Theory of Change for uncertain environments
duration	120 minutes
when and how to use this session	This session helps youth organisations map out the change they want to achieve and the steps needed to get there. It introduces the Theory of Change (ToC) as a practical tool for strategic planning, monitoring, and evaluation, while also integrating risk and resilience thinking. Participants will learn how to build a clear and realistic roadmap for change, and how to strengthen it by identifying assumptions, risks, and mitigation strategies. This session is particularly useful in complex or restrictive environments, where organisations need to plan strategically while remaining flexible and resilient.
objectives of the session	• To understand the Theory of Change concept and its uses • To develop a visual and narrative roadmap leading to desired change • To integrate risk awareness and resilience thinking into planning • To reflect on how organisational context shapes strategy and impact
session description and outline	In this session, participants are introduced to the Theory of Change as a way to map how change happens, from activities to long-term impact. The session combines theoretical input, practical examples, and hands-on group work.

	Building on resilience thinking, participants will explore how risks, assumptions, and external factors influence their strategies. They will then apply these concepts to develop their own Theory of Change, grounded in the realities of their organisation. By the end of the session, participants will have a clearer, more realistic roadmap for their work, one that is both strategic and resilient.	
methodology	Step 1: Arrival, introduction & connecting strategy to reality Welcome participants and briefly introduce the session. Explain that Theory of Change is a tool that helps organisations move from "What do we want to change?" to "How do we believe that change will happen?" It supports organisations in planning, prioritising, and making strategic choices in complex environments. If participants previously attended the resilience session “Building resilience and change”: Invite them to briefly reflect on the risks and challenges they identified. Reflection questions: • Which risks or external factors felt most relevant for your organisation? • How might those factors influence the change you want to achieve? • What does resilience have to do with planning for impact? If participants did not attend the resilience session “Building resilience and change”: Facilitate a short discussion on uncertainty and planning.	10 mins

Reflection questions:

- Have you ever had to change a project or strategy because circumstances changed unexpectedly?
- What external factors most influence your organisation's work?
- How do you usually decide what success looks like?

Pulse check

Raise your hand if you:

- Have used a Theory of Change before.
- Regularly plan your work based on long-term impact.
- Have had to adapt your plans because of political, financial, or organisational changes.
- Have ever completed a project but struggled to explain how it contributed to wider change.

Transition

"Whether we are responding to risks, planning a campaign, designing a project, or developing an organisational strategy, we are all making assumptions about how change happens. Theory of Change helps us make those assumptions visible, test them, and build a clearer pathway from our activities to the impact we want to achieve."

Step 2: What is a Theory of Change? (Concept & context)

20 mins

Facilitator introduces Theory of Change (ToC) as a practical planning tool that helps organisations understand how their activities contribute to long-term change.

Facilitator input:

A Theory of Change is:

- A way to explain how and why change happens.
- A roadmap connecting activities to long-term impact.
- A tool for planning, monitoring, evaluation, and communication.

Introduce the basic chain:

Inputs → Activities → Outputs → Outcomes → Impact

Explain each level:

- Inputs: resources invested (people, funding, time)
- Activities: what the organisation does
- Outputs: direct products or services delivered
- Outcomes: changes experienced by participants or stakeholders
- Impact: long-term societal change

Frame the context:

- Youth organisations operate in changing and sometimes restrictive environments
- Planning must be both strategic and adaptable

Make the link to resilience explicit:

- A Theory of Change helps you anticipate challenges, not avoid them
- It makes your assumptions and risks visible
- It supports you in adapting while staying focused on your goals

Step 3: Case Study - Theory of Change in Practice

30 mins

Present the following example and invite participants to analyse it together.

Case Study: Increasing Youth Participation in Local Decision-Making

A National Youth Council notices that very few young people participate in municipal consultations. Young people report that they do not know how decisions are made and do not believe their voices matter.

The organisation launches a one-year project.

Activities

- Organise workshops on local democracy.
- Train youth representatives.
- Create a toolkit explaining local decision-making.
- Facilitate meetings between young people and municipal authorities.

Outputs

- 200 young people trained.
- 20 workshops delivered.
- Toolkit distributed nationally.
- 15 meetings organised with local authorities.

Outcomes

- Young people report greater understanding of local decision-making.
- More young people attend consultations.
- Municipalities begin involving youth representatives earlier.

Impact

- Young people have greater influence over local policies.
- Local decision-making becomes more inclusive and representative.

Facilitated discussion

Divide participants into small groups.

Ask:

- What was the intended impact?
- What outcomes needed to happen before that impact could occur?
- Which assumptions can you identify?
- What external factors could affect success?
- What risks might the organisation face?

After 10 minutes, debrief together.

Facilitator notes:

Participants often struggle with assumptions. If needed, provide examples:

Possible assumptions

- Young people are interested in participating.
- Municipalities are willing to engage.
- Participants have time to attend workshops.
- Youth representatives feel confident enough to speak up.

Possible risks

- Local elections change political priorities.
- Municipalities refuse to cooperate.
- Young people experience consultation fatigue.
- Funding ends before the project is completed.
- Highlight that a Theory of Change is not a prediction. It is a hypothesis about how change happens, which can be tested and adapted over time.

Step 4: Tools for building your Theory of Change

20 mins

The facilitator introduces two practical approaches.

By the end of this exercise, participants should have a draft Theory of Change showing the logical links between inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and impact, together with key assumptions, risks and possible mitigation measures.

Backward Timeline

Start with the impact and work backwards.

Example:

- Impact: Young people influence local policies.
- Outcomes: Young people participate in consultations.
- Outputs: Young people receive training and opportunities to engage.
- Activities: Workshops, meetings, resources.
- Inputs: Staff, funding, volunteers.

Forward Timeline

Start with available resources and move forwards.

- What resources do we have?
- What activities can we realistically deliver?
- What outputs will these create?
- What outcomes might follow?
- What impact could be achieved?

Logic check

Ask participants:

- Does each step clearly lead to the next?
- Are there any missing links?
- Are we assuming something without evidence?

	Link to resilience Assumptions and risks are not weaknesses. They help organisations anticipate challenges and prepare alternative approaches if circumstances change. Facilitator note: Participants often find it easier to understand Theory of Change when they can see a complete example. Before moving into the group work, consider showing a visual Theory of Change diagram and briefly walking participants through each stage, explaining how activities contribute to outputs, outcomes and impact, and where assumptions and risks may affect the pathway.	
	Step 5: Group work – building your Theory of Change As a group, participants build a Theory of Change for a real organisational priority, programme, campaign, or strategic objective that they are currently working on. If participants come from the same organisation, they may develop a shared Theory of Change. If they come from different organisations, each participant or group should select one concrete initiative from their own context. Guide them through the steps: 1. Define your impact (vision) 2. Map your outcomes and outputs (backward timeline) 3. Identify your activities (forward timeline) 4. Check the logic between each step 5. Identify: ○ Key assumptions ○ External risks ○ Possible adaptations (link to resilience)	30 mins

	Facilitator role: • Move between groups • Ask probing questions • Support clarification Guiding questions: • What change are you trying to achieve? • What needs to happen before that change occurs? • What could prevent this from happening? • How would you adapt if conditions change? Presentation & peer reflection Each group briefly presents their Theory of Change. Ask participants: • What is your impact statement? • What is one key assumption? • What is one major risk? • What was most difficult to define? Facilitator highlights: • The importance of linking strategy to reality • The value of making risks and assumptions explicit	
	Step 6: As a group, participants reflect on how they can apply the Theory of Change in their organisation. Guiding questions: • How will you use this Theory of Change in your work? • What would be your first next step after this session? • How will you revisit and adapt it over time?	10 mins

	Facilitator closes by reinforcing: ● A Theory of Change is not fixed, it evolves ● It helps organisations remain strategic while adapting to challenges ● Combined with resilience thinking, it becomes a practical tool to navigate uncertainty
preparation	Familiarise yourself with the terminology and concept, you can create a presentation or use the one provided. You can decide to print or project the scenario.
material/ space needed	● Flipcharts ● Markers ● Post-its ● Projector if using the presentation
results/ takeaway/ outcomes	Participants: ● understand the components of a Theory of Change; ● develop a draft Theory of Change for their organisation or initiative; ● identify assumptions and risks; ● integrate resilience considerations into strategic planning.