

Description:	The point of contribution analysis is to capture the contribution of an intervention in terms of the role played by the programme alongside the other external factors. The process involves testing the plausibility of the theory of change and building a 'contribution narrative' drawing on an iterative process of collection of evidence.
Type of evidence:	OfS Types 1 (narrative) and 2 (empirical).
Strengths:	Although contribution analysis is focused more on contribution than attribution, it is considered systematic enough to allow for causal inferences, based on a structured review of the evidence.
	It is concerned with the programme theory of an intervention, but also emphasises the need to take account of external factors which affect outcomes and impact. Therefore, it is particularly useful in fields of social research where there are often many different contributors to change.
	Contribution analysis can identify the factors affecting change which is useful when you're looking to expand or replicate the programme.
	Contribution analysis can be applied at different stages of a programme – at the start, during and afterwards. It does not need a control group or a baseline measure.
Weaknesses:	The approach mainly develops qualitative insights which tend to be limited in terms of quantifying the extent to which the outcome is attributable to the programme (or other factors).
	This is a relatively new approach and not well understood. There appear to be few examples of its use outside development studies.
	Contribution analysis is an iterative process and could be quite burdensome if evidence needs to be collected repeatedly in order to refine the contribution analysis.
Mixed Methods:	Contribution analysis can use all kinds of evaluation evidence – ranging from qualitative insights to experimental/quasi-experimental studies. In-depth case studies could be used to analyse a range of different types of evidence in context. Consultations with stakeholders or subject matter experts is usually important as these groups can offer insights into the external factors that influenced the outcomes.
Expertise:	High.
Requirements:	The analysis works best with a fixed programme of activities based on an established theory of change. It is not appropriate if the activities are evolving over time and would not be useful if you were looking to test alternative theories of change.
	Because the process of developing the contribution analysis requires careful thought, in depth analysis, evidence gathering, and an iterative process of testing and re-testing, contribution analysis can be time consuming and expensive.
Ethical considerations:	The work could be based on using existing monitoring and evaluation data, or if additional data is needed to strengthen the contribution story, then primary research might be needed. This would have ethical considerations to minimise risks if it involved collecting data from individuals.
Work planning:	In brief the six steps in a contribution analysis are: 1) to set out the question(s) to be addressed; 2) to specify the theory of change; 3) review existing evidence; 4) set out the contribution narrative and test if it stands up; 5) gather additional evidence to support or refute the contribution narrative; and 6) revise and strengthen the contribution narrative
	In the first instance, the existing evidence can be used to test the theory of change (i.e., why you think the programme would produce the desired outcome). The evidence should help the evaluator to determine whether the programme logic seems to have been achieved. The evaluation also needs to consider whether the programme was implemented as intended. If some steps in the logic chain have not been achieved, the theory may be at fault or there may have been a failure in implementation. A failure of implementation could mean the programme theory is still plausible despite poor results.

Contribution analysis includes gathering evidence about the external factors influencing the outcomes. The 'contribution story' shows the extent to which the programme has been implemented as intended and considers the share of outcomes that can be linked to programme activities.

New evidence usually needs to be gathered to underpin the contribution narrative, although there is no imperative to use any particular methodology to collect this – it would depend on the needs and constraints of the evaluation. The work continues as an iterative process until the contribution analysis is good enough to answer the questions set out in step one.

Analysis:

The analysis stage is focused on establishing the plausibility of the theory of change; the extent to which the programme was implemented as envisaged; the extent to which the evidence supports the theory of change; and the extent to which other factors played a role.

Reporting:

The analysis produces a narrative about how the programme contributed to outcomes and the external factors which produced outcomes. The results could lead to the programme's success being re-evaluated if the external factors are found to have had a strong positive or negative influence on the programme's success. It could be that the evaluation recommends further research into the external factors which supported or worked against the programme's aims.

Useful links:

Mayne, J. (2020) A brief on contribution analysis: Principles and concepts

<https://evaluatingadvocacy.org/doc/A-brief-on-contribution-analysis-Principles-and-concepts.pdf>