

# System Level Theory

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# 1.

## Research Question

What are the necessary components of a system level theory?

# 2.

## Methodology

# 3.

## Conceptual Framework

What should be in a system level theory? And Why?

Element	Sub-element	Exemplars
Defined problem and clear system boundaries	Defined problem	Origin/drivers or causes
		Magnitude
		Persons/groups (target cohort)
		Consequences
	Clear boundaries for system	What is in and out of scope?
		The system's interactions and influences are defined
		External factors at play
Defined intended outcomes	Defined outcomes	
Informed by and consistent with multiple sources of evidence and theory	Multiple evidence sources	Social science theory
		Prior evaluations
		Stakeholder theory
		Intervention observations (eval only)
Methodological individualism	Methodological individualism	Individual actors
Causal explanation	Variables defined	<i>Sub-element rating</i>
		Intervention variables (eval only)
		Outcome variables
		Drivers or causes of problem
	The middle' defined	Causal mechanisms/steps between variables (intervening processes)
Necessary conditions for causal links to work	Enablers (events/conditions)	
	External events and conditions (risks)	

### **Making it work for Outcomes FW and Evaluations**

Tricky – though it can be done!

### **Overlap at sub-element level**

Still working out how to deal with this!

### **Are some elements/ sub-elements more important?**

More wedded to some elements than others

# 4.

## Analysis grid



Sub-element	Exemplars	Present (Yes)	Partial	Absent (No)
Defined problem	Origin/drivers/causes	At least three of four exemplars are present	One or two of the exemplars are present	None of the exemplars are present
	Magnitude			
	Persons/groups (target cohort)			
	Consequences			
Clear boundaries for system	What is in and out of scope?	Each of the three exemplars are present	One or two of the exemplars are present	None of the exemplars are present
	The system's interactions and influences are defined			
	External factors at play			
Defined outcomes		Outcomes are defined including through level of explanatory detail (linking outcomes to activities, indicators/measures)	Outcomes are referred to though with minimal explanatory detail	No outcomes are referred to
Multiple evidence sources	Social science theory	At least two exemplars are made explicit	One of the four exemplars are made explicit	None of the four exemplars are made explicit
	Prior evaluations			
	Stakeholder theory			
	Intervention observations (eval only)			
Methodological individualism	Individual actors	Theory grounded in methodological individualism (noting explanation must match phenomenon). So individuals and individual actions are central to theory	Individuals and individual actions referenced at least once	No reference to individuals or individual actions
Variables defined	Intervention variables (eval only)	Evaluations: All three exemplars present Outcomes: FW: Outcome variables and drivers/causes present	Evaluations: One to two exemplars present Outcomes: FW: One exemplar present	None of the exemplars are present
	Outcome variables			
	Drivers or causes of problem			
The middle defined	Causal mechanisms/steps between variables (intervening processes)	Causal links between variables are made explicit	Some attempt to connect variables but explanation limited	No reference to causal links
Enablers (events/conditions)		Enablers are defined with explanation	Enablers are alluded to	No enablers are defined
External events and conditions (risks)		External events and conditions are defined with explanation	External events and conditions are alluded to	No external events and conditions are defined

# 5.

## Early findings

Sub-element	Exemplar (where applicable)	Overall rating
Defined problem		X
Clear system boundaries		X
Defined outcomes		✓
Multiple evidence sources		X
Methodological individualism		X
Variables defined		X
	Intervention variables (evaluation only)	✓
	Outcome variables	✓
	Drivers or causes of problem	X
The 'middle' defined		X
Enablers (events/conditions)		X
External events/conditions (risks)		X

# 6.

## What next?

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