

The Puzzle of the Universal Utilization of the Logical Framework Approach: An Explanation using the Sociological New Institutional Perspective

A logical framework (log-frame) is a matrix that summarize the key elements of a development cooperation project such as project purpose, outcomes, and inputs. Since its adoption by the US Agency for International Development (USAID) in the early 1970s, the log-frame has experienced robust popularity among bilateral international development agencies and international NGOs worldwide. The log-frame approach has become “a standard tool” in international development but the effectiveness of the approach has always been the subject of debate. Critics say that given the existing “complexity” in technical cooperation in developing countries, a simplified “blueprint” approach, on which the log-frame approach is based, is not fit to manage the messy reality of development projects there. Recent studies insist that different management approaches are required depending on the nature of each project. Then, the question is why international development agencies universally utilize the log-frame approach regardless of its known disadvantages in relation to complexity. Unfortunately, no research has unraveled this controversy. The incontrovertible fact that the log-frame approach has remained unused or even unknown in areas other than in international development is also confusing. This paper reviews the literature on the debate over the functional advantages and disadvantages of the log-frame approach and that on sociological new institutional theory, and aims to shed light on the puzzle by examining it through this lens.

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1. Diffusion of logical frameworks

1.1 History of logical frameworks

Originally, the logical framework¹ (log-frame) was developed as part of military planning in the USA. Later, it was adopted by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) then accepted by the US Agency for International Development (USAID) in the early 1970s (Hailey & Sorgenfrei, 2003; Nancholas, 1998). In the beginning, USAID applied log-frames to ex-post evaluation of technical assistance projects (Nakabayashi, 2000). In the mid-1970s, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) followed USAID and adopted the log-frame with a minor modification from the USAID version (Hernando et al., 2013; Nakabayashi, 2000). The German Technical Cooperation Agency (GTZ²) allegedly also introduced the log-frames by the mid-1970s (Kunzel, 2001). This period is called the first generation of the log-frame approach (Gasper, 2000b; Sartorius, 1996).

In the 1980s, European development agencies began to utilize log-frames. Soon, the log-frames spread among some of the United Nations (UN) agencies. In this period, the effectiveness of official assistance became a focused issue among the development communities. The quality of planning, monitoring, and evaluation as well as the participation of local people grew into a set of concerns. Project management methods using log-frames evolved accordingly, and the log-frame approach entered into its second generation (Gasper, 2000b; Sartorius, 1996). GTZ actively promoted “Objectives-Oriented Project Planning” (ZOPP³), a developed version of the log-frame approach, to manage development projects. ZOPP encouraged a participatory approach for objective setting and problem analysis (Hailey & Sorgenfrei, 2003). Similarly, the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA) and the UK Department for International Development (DFID) experimented with stakeholder analysis and sophisticated participatory approaches and incorporated them into a log-frame (Gasper, 2000b).

In the mid-1990s, the World Bank (WB) and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) “finally” adopted log-frames (Gasper, 2000b). In 1992, the European Commission (EC) introduced Project Cycle Management (PCM), a variation of the log-frame approach, as its primary set of project design and management tools. The Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) strongly encouraged its member countries to adopt the PCM (European Integration Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2011). In this period, the log-frames were disseminated among not only governmental agencies but also large international Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). One reason is that NGOs became obliged to submit log-frames by funding agencies to acquire budgetary support (Gasper, 2000b). In parallel with a global diffusion, the log-frame approach thus continued to evolve into its third generation (Gasper, 2000b; Sartorius, 1996).

¹ The log-frame that JICA uses is attached at the end of this paper as Figure 1.

² In German, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit. GTZ is now GIZ.

³ In German, Zielorientierte Projektplanung (see Helming & Gobel, 1997).

When development agencies adopted the log-frame approach, they adjusted it to fit their context and created their own standard (Landoni & Corti, 2011). Japan initiated PCM, an elaborated version of the German ZOPP, after the establishment of the Foundation for Advanced Studies on International Development (FASID) in 1990 (Kunzel, 2001; Nakabayashi, 2000). FASID's role was to train development cooperation practitioners, and to advance research and education in international development. In the mid-1990s, the Japanese version of PCM was formulated by FASID, and JICA started to use it to manage technical cooperation projects (Nakabayashi, 2000).

By the end of the 1990s, log-frames and the log-frame approach had become a standard tool for the majority of bilateral development agencies and large international NGOs (Gasper, 2000b). Nowadays, log-frames are known as “a universal tool” for project management in international development (Dale, 2003; Hailey & Sorgenfrei, 2003; Hummelbrunner, 2010). Mysteriously though, log-frames have scarcely been exercised or are even unknown in sectors other than the international development community (Hailey & Sorgenfrei, 2003).

1.2 Log-frames and the log-frame approach

It is essential to understand the distinction between log-frames and the log-frame approach. A log-frame is a matrix, typically four by four, which contains the key elements of a project. These elements are inputs, activities, outputs, project purposes, and overall goals. They are described in the vertical columns of a log-frame. Elements in the horizontal columns are narrative summaries, indicators, verification sources and important assumptions. Wide variations of log-frames are observable among development agencies. Some use different terminologies for key elements in the log-frames. Some add additional rows in a matrix including a timeline of activities. Others just simplify a matrix (Bakewell & Garbutt, 2005). JICA uses the Project Design Matrix (PDM), which includes a project title, a target region, duration, and beneficiary groups in addition to the key elements mentioned in the above discussion.

Meanwhile, the log-frame approach is a method to manage the entire cycle of a development project by employing a log-frame. The log-frame approach covers project planning, implementation, and evaluation. This approach typically emphasizes participatory planning with local people to formulate key elements in a log-frame. Various log-frame approaches exist (Roduner et al., 2008), and PCM, which JICA employs, is a representative type of log-frame approach.

2. Debate over the log-frame approach

2.1 Two types of management approaches in development

Development project management approaches can be categorized largely into two groups. One is the “blueprint” approach. The log-frame approach is referred to as blueprint approach because its foundation serves as a blueprint indicating a clear path to a project goal using linear logic. In this approach the focus often tends to be getting things done in accordance with the plan. A contrasting project management is the

“process” approach (Bond & Hulme, 1999). Process approaches disregard the effectiveness of a well-structured pre-designed plan for development projects because too many things are unknown to develop such a plan at the start of a project.

Apparently, the two approaches view the significance of pre-planning differently. The former believes that “failing to plan is planning to fail⁴,” while the later maintains that project implementation is “a long voyage of discovery⁵.” Thus, both approaches have distinctive characteristics.

2.1-1 Blueprint approach

A remarkable merit of the log-frame approach is the simplicity of the log-frames. In fact, this simplicity is a common reason for NGOs to choose log-frame for their project management (Falgari et al., 2013; Golini et al., 2015). A simple four by four matrix provides a concise summary of a project. It is extremely helpful for busy decision makers in development cooperation agencies and recipient governments and allows them to grasp the outline of a project easily (Jacobs et al., 2010; Roduner et al., 2008). Similarly, accountability and transparency are recognized as an advantage of the log-frame approach. By using a log-frame, development agencies can logically explain the concept of a project; the linkage among budgets, actions and expected outcomes; and the progress and achievement of a project to their sponsors and stakeholders. These characteristics make the log-frame approach stand out since being accountable and transparent is critical to securing authorizations and budgets for development agencies (Bakewell and Garbutt, 2005; Ika, 2012, Roduner et al., 2008).

A number of manuals and textbooks advocate the log-frame approach as an ideal management tool for development projects (Bell, 2000; Biggs & Smith, 2003). These advocates highlight its robustness against learning and claim that the approach makes it possible any adjustments during a project by taking account of learning as the project proceeds (Biggs & Smith, 2003).

In addition, the log-frame approach has the utility for the capacity development of local people. For example, PCM, a variation of the log-frame approach, requires participatory processes with partners and targeted beneficiaries to analyze problems, identify objectives, select strategies and eventually formulate a log-frame. The log-frames allow development practitioners to enlighten local counterparts on the importance of thinking through the logic of an intervention and to understand how inputs and activities are expected to contribute to outputs and the project purpose (Jacobs et al., 2010).

The log-frames also serve as a communication tool among all those who are involved in a project. By going through the log-frame formulation process, all stakeholders come to share a common understanding of the objectives, outputs, and activities of a project. Therefore, when any revisions to a project become necessary, stakeholders are able to discuss the exact issues for the re-creation of the log-frame together.

⁴ An adage attributed to Benjamin Franklin.

⁵ See Hirschman, 1967, p 35.

2.1-2 Process approaches

Process approaches emerged from a belief that technical cooperation projects cannot be designed in advance. These approaches give the highest priority to learning and flexible adaptation during implementation. The history of process approaches is as old as that of the log-frame approach. However, unlike the log-frame approach, process approaches have various origins and it is not possible to cover all of them here. Therefore, this section deals with only a few of the major approaches of this type.

In the 1960s, when the history of development cooperation was yet short, attempts to transfer technology from the developed world to developing countries often failed. Practitioners began to realize that the transplantation of best practice did not work, and they were obliged to collect information to identify the right solutions. They visited rural areas and surveyed. Their visits tended to be short and the surveys relied on large-scale questionnaires. During the 1970s, the limitations of this approach became apparent. The information collected was inaccurate and expensive. A call for cost effective methods to understand rural conditions and local people intensified (Chambers, 1992, 1994).

In the late 1970s, “Rapid rural appraisal” (RRA) emerged as a countermeasure to this demand. RRA provides a technique to quickly learn from local people about the realities and challenges. Collected data was normally analyzed by outsiders⁶. A bottleneck was that often outsiders saw only what they thought would be good for the local people. Later in the 1980s, RRA evolved into “participatory rural appraisal” (PRA) which focuses more on facilitation of local knowledge to find solutions (Chambers, 1992, 1994). Meanwhile, Korten (1980) proposed a “learning process approach.” This approach allows a local community organization to embrace errors, to learn with people, and to build new knowledge and institutional capability through actions. However, the momentum of learning was lost during the 1990s as the focus moved on to beneficiary participation (Bond & Hulme, 1999).

In parallel with these developments, various process approaches have been created and have been borrowed from other fields such as business administration. A common concern of the proponents of process approaches is the poor results seen in projects that have been managed by blueprint approaches. These commentators suggest that the log-frame approach dismisses the muddled realities of projects in developing countries (Bond & Hulme, 1999).

Bond and Hulme (1999) summarize five key elements shared commonly among the various process approaches. The first element is “flexible and phased implementation.” This element emphasizes a small start with pilot activities a long timeframe; experimentation before further action is taken; and an action learning cycle. The second element is “learning from experience.” This insists that we allow errors, link implementation and planning, seek iterative adaptation to lessons learnt, avoid expansion before finding success, and apply appropriate knowledge and technology to local contexts. The third is “beneficiary participation.” This element calls for problem analysis by local people, the beneficiary’s involvement in

⁶ Development practitioners.

planning, monitoring, and evaluation, resource mobilization by local people, and the empowerment of beneficiaries. The fourth is “institutional support,” in which avoiding the bypassing of existing systems is a core idea. This element shows the necessity of political support for existing institutions, developed authority, utilization of existing systems, capacity development of local people, organizational transformation rather than creation, and the facilitation of other beneficiary organizations. Finally, the fifth element is “program management.” Management is principal concern of process approaches and pays attention to qualified and motivated leadership, new professionalism, retention of key staff, a series of small-scaled technical cooperation efforts, long-term technical cooperation as facilitators, flexibility in the project management unit (PMU), the need for creative management, and coordination among development cooperation agencies.

2.2 Criticisms of the log-frame approach

Despite its popularity, the log-frame approach has always been a subject of debate. Critics question the effectiveness of the log-frame and the log-frame approach in practice (Biggs & Smith, 2003; Fujita 2011). For example, Gasper (2000a) points out three flaws repeatedly observed when log-frames are used. The flaws are metaphorically termed as “logic-less frame,” “lack-frame,” and “lock-frame.” “Logic-less frame” happens when a log-frame is imposed by a funding agency after the frame of a project has been developed. Under such circumstances, the implementation agency is inclined to create an illusion of logic. “Lack-frame” is observed when a developed log-frame is too simple and omits vital elements of a project. “Lock-frame” takes place when a log-frame becomes too rigid to permit any adjustments, thus blocking potential learning through project implementation.

Although the log-frame approach aims to manage projects with adjustment from learning, its management principle is to follow the routes described in the pre-designed plan. A pitfall is that the log-frame often fails to reflect the messy reality of what is happening in a project in a timely fashion. Roduner et al. (2008) criticized the tendency for log-frame users to forget that the matrix is a mere summary rather than a detailed description. As a result, a log-frame produces confusion rather than clarity (Hummelbrunner, 2010), and frequently remains unused in the field of development (Slade, 1981; Fujita, 2011).

Other criticisms include the external forces that use the frames, the neglect of local management traditions, the domination of external concepts, the assumption of an easy linear progress, the bypassing of local institutions when they lack the capability to implement a plan, the static nature of the frame approach, the tendency to avoid modifications during project implementation, and the over-emphasis on visible results (Bakewell & Garbutt, 2005; Biggs & Smith, 2003; Bond & Hulme, 1999; Dale, 2003; Fujita, 2011; Gasper 2000a, 2000b; Hermano et al., 2013; Jacobs et al., 2010; Power et al., 2002; Roduner et al., 2008; Yamaswari et al., 2016). These arguments echo Gasper’s (2000a) disapproval of the theoretical soundness of the log-frame approach given that it has been put into practice widely with

relatively little accompanying theory.

2.3 Project management approaches which fit complexity

2.3-1 One size does not fit all

Neither the log-frame approach nor the process approach fit every development project. Recent studies note that different management approaches are required depending on the nature of projects. The question is how we can identify appropriate approaches for a certain type of project.

The “cynefin framework”⁷ proposed by Snowden and Boone (2007) provides an answer to this conundrum. The Cynefin framework puts situations into five "domains" defined by the nature of cause and effect relationships. These "domains" are: (a) simple, (b) complicated, (c) complex, (d) chaotic⁸, and (e) disorder⁹. The framework offers different decision-making contexts to enable decision makers to identify how they perceive situations. That is, for “simple” projects, in which a cause and effect relationship is clear, the blueprint approach is a preferable solution. The blueprint approach is also valid for “complicated” projects because in this category the cause and effect relationships can still be seen through a detailed analysis. However, when the relationships cannot be known before action but only retroactively, as is the case for “complex” projects, the process approaches are required (Hummelbrunner & Jones, 2013; Snowden & Boone, 2007).

Golini and Landoni (2014) name six characteristics of international development projects. These characteristics are powerless customers, many stakeholders, risky political and physical environments, resource shortages, cultural barriers, and vague project outputs. All of these represent the complexity of international development projects. Ika and Hodgson (2014) refer to international development projects as an “extreme case of socio-political complexity” because of political instabilities, economic uncertainties, fragile institutions and insufficient human capacity. Additionally, local people’s resistance to change as well as the diverse and even contradictory opinions and expectations among stakeholders make development projects far more complex (Ika et al., 2010). If not all projects, at least those that involve a large number of stakeholders and those that aim for institutional reforms are certainly complex. Projects in fragile countries and post conflict countries are no doubt complex. Considering the complex nature of international development projects, it is reasonable to apply process approaches rather than to rely on blueprint approaches.

Many studies support the validity of process approaches for complex international development projects (Andrews, 2013, 2015; Andrews et al., 2013; Bakewell & Garbutt, 2005; Biggs & Smith, 2003; Bond & Hulme, 1999; Chambers, 1994; Dale, 2003; Gasper 2000a, 2000b; Hummelbrunner, 2010; Hummelbrunner & Jones, 2013; Jacobs et al., 2010; Korten, 1980; Morgan, 2002, 2009; Slade, 1981; Yamaswari et al., 2016). Varieties of tools, other than those mentioned in the earlier section, have been

⁷ “Cynefin” means habitat in the Welsh language.

⁸ This domain is not applicable to the discussion here. Therefore an explanation is left out.

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advocated for complex development projects. For example, Hummelbrunner and Jones (2013) refer to the following as examples of effective tools for complex projects: (i) problem-driven iterative adaptation (PDIA¹⁰), (ii) strategic assumption surfacing and testing (SAST¹¹), (iii) solution focus¹², (iv) deliberative processes¹³, (v) viable system model¹⁴, (vi) GIZ¹⁵'s capacity WORKS¹⁶, and (vii) network management and co-management¹⁷.

2.3-2 Comparison of two opposing approaches

Comparison of the blueprint approach and the process approach is helpful for the discussion here. Andrews (2015) compared two contrasting project management approaches and examined which one is likely to bring outstanding functional improvement in public sector reform. One approach is “solution and leader-drive change” (SLDC) and the other is “problem-driven iterative adaptation” (PDIA).

SLDC is a synonym of the blueprint approach. The idea of SLDC is that abnormal success emerges when “reforms are introduced through a disciplined, formal project process; solutions are fully identified up-front and are the focus of change; the reform is fully planned out at the start and implemented as planned; a champion drives the process; and a pure-form best practice solution is produced” (Andrews, 2015, p. 197). Meanwhile, PDIA, a variation of the process approach, underlines that abnormal success happens when “reforms are introduced through an iterative process more reflective of ‘muddling through’; change is motivated by a problem, not a solution; the reform content emerges through a process of experimentation and trial and error; with multiple agents playing different leadership roles; producing a mixed-form hybrid that is fitted to the peculiar context” (Andrews, 2015, p. 197).

Evidence in this study supports the conclusion that PDIA has an advantage over SLDC especially for complex public sector reforms with no clear solutions and difficult political circumstances. SLDC works best when reforms are technical and under top-down leadership (Andrews, 2015). Nonetheless, the blueprint approach, or log-frame approach, has been dominantly employed by the global international development community. The primary reason for the universality seems not because of the lack of alternative tools. In fact, there are many alternatives but they are treated as supplements to the log-frame approach. No research in the field of international development has explained why this inconsistency occurs.

¹⁰ See Andrews et al., 2013.

¹¹ See Mason & Mitroff, 1981.

¹² See Jackson & McKergow, 2002.

¹³ See Culyer & Lomas, 2006.

¹⁴ See Espejo, 1990.

¹⁵ In German, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit.

¹⁶ GIZ GmbH, 2015.

¹⁷ Carlsson & Berkes, 2005.

3. Sociological new institutional perspective

3.1 Relevance to apply sociological new institutionalist perspective

Why do the majority of international development cooperation agencies count on the log-frame approach regardless of its known disadvantages in regard to complexity? Considering the lack of theoretical base which supports the merits of the log-frame approach over the others in a complex situation, it sounds irrational to support the universal usage of the log-frame approach with economics and political science's functional reasoning. One way to solve this puzzle is to see the phenomenon through a sociological view of organizations - new institutionalism.

Sociological new institutionalists refute the functional explanations of organizational behaviors. They pay attention to the complexity of organizational behaviors and try to establish paths through which phenomena may be explored (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991). A primary assumption of sociological new institutionalism is that the institutional environment¹⁸ strongly influences how organizations behave (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Zucker, 1987). This view regards central goals of organizational activity to be obtaining societal, professional and political approvals and being legitimate.

Other sociological perspectives, such as resource dependence theory¹⁹ or the theory of weak ties²⁰ can be applied to explain organizational responses to the surrounding environment. However, sociological new institutional theory is thought to offer a better interpretation to the irrational responses of organizations than the others.

3.2 The log-frame approach viewed through the lens of sociological new institutional theory

This section introduces three core notions of sociological new institutional theory. Then these notions are applied to examine the "one-size fits all" application of the log-frame approach within the international development community. Three notions are: (1) "rational institutional myths" (Meyer & Rowan, 1977); (2) "decoupling" (Meyer & Rowan, 1977); and (3) "institutional isomorphism" (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

3.2-1 Rational institutional myths

The surrounding environment strongly influences not only the behaviors but also the formal structures in an organization (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Therefore, the formal structures that are supposed to enhance technical efficiency in the organization are legitimized by the environment. As a result, paradoxically, the organization is obliged to adopt a certain structural forms even if the forms don't improve any functional efficiency. Meyer and Rowan (1977) call this contradiction "rational institutional myths."

The concept of "rational institutional myths" accounts for the development agencies' heavy reliance

¹⁸ An "institutional environment" is defined as "the elaboration of rules and requirements to which individual organizations must conform if they are to receive support and legitimacy" (Scott, 1987, p. 498).

¹⁹ See Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003.

²⁰ See Granovetter 1973, 1983.

on log-frames. Jacobs et al. (2000) affirm that the log-frames bring significant merits for development agencies in terms of accountability to domestic stakeholders (e.g. taxpayers) because a well-designed log-frame justifies financial inputs in a project by linking the inputs to actions and expected results. However, the pressure on accountability intensifies when the goals of organizations are vague, as is often the case for those in the public sector. Frumkin and Galaskiewicz (2004) found that governmental organizations are more vulnerable to environmental pressures than for-profit organizations because of the lack of performance indicators (e.g. sales and profits). Borrowing the sociological new institutional view, and taking note of the fact that the majority of bilateral international development agencies are government owned, it can be said that these agencies prioritize their legitimacy to domestic stakeholders (e.g. taxpayers) for their survival, even if the log-frames hinder effective and efficient project management abroad.

3.2-2 Decoupling

“Decoupling” is a strategy that organizations accept and superficially adopt new structures without necessarily incorporating them into existing ones (Boxenbaum & Jonsson, 2017). As mentioned earlier, although legitimization is indispensable for organizational survival, it possibly, sometimes unavoidably, harms the efficiency and the functionality of organizations. To manage the surrounding pressures which affect organizational functionality while maintaining existing practices intact, organizations “decouple” their technical core from legitimizing structures (Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

Existing studies furnish examples of decoupling observed among various organizations. For example, Meyer and Rowan (1977) illustrate how decoupling emerged in schools when they were forced to adopt curricula that were not in compliance with their local context. Some scholars seek to find out how decoupling occurs. Chi (2012) explored how environment impact assessments (EIA) are localized and tailored to fit the local context in China. To respond to international pressures and to reduce the influence of both international sponsors and local social groups, China employs a decoupling strategy and superficially adopts the imported system while keeping existing practices (Chi, 2012). Tilcsik (2010) analyzed the process of decoupling by looking into intra-organizational conditions and suggested that decoupling is carried out not by the organization but by particular decision makers who have the power to pursue their ideologies and interests.

For development agencies, a decoupling strategy can be a rational response against the excessive expectations of stakeholders. International development is indeed complex (Ika et al., 2010). The effects of activities in a project cannot be known before actions are actually taken. Therefore, the logic presented in a log-frame may be an illusion no matter how hard practitioners work to develop a detailed design. Decision makers, on the other hand, normally refrain from giving a green light unless being convinced by a clear story of how a goal is achieved even if the story is an illusion. Here, a gap between what needs to be done in a project and what is specified in a log-frame is generated. In such situations, development

agencies are likely to decouple the actual activities in a project from the scenario in a log-frame (Jacobs & Wilford, 2010). Applying a decoupling strategy, development practitioners in a project enjoy the flexible adjustment of inputs and activities to manage disorganized reality while avoiding the disadvantages of the log-frame for complexity and, at the same time, maintaining the best use of the log-frame for accountability.

3.2-3 Institutional isomorphism

Institutional isomorphism is the process through which organizations gain increasing similarity in their structures when placed into the same institutional environment²¹ (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). This process is thought to be directed by a desire to create organizations to conform to the environment. As a larger number of organizations conform to the environment, they become more deeply institutionalized, and this institutionalizing process subsequently leads to institutional isomorphism (Meyer & Rowan 1977). DiMaggio and Powell (1983) argue that institutional isomorphism supposedly results from a process that stimulates the diffusion of ideas, practices, and prescribed structures among organizations within the same organizational field²². They recapitulate the three pressures that lead institutional isomorphism. They are coercive pressures, mimetic pressures and normative pressures.

Coercive pressures result from power relationships and politics (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). They are observed when influential organizations demand that subordinate organizations act in a certain way to be legitimate. Coercive pressures are likely a reason for the universal utilization of the log-frame approach among bilateral development cooperation agencies, since the agencies face identical pressures from their domestic taxpayers to show tangible results from their activities and to justify the money spent in unseen foreign countries. Similarly, some diffusion of the log-frames approach among NGOs are caused by this type of pressure as funding agencies often demand NGOs to submit log-frames in exchange for their financial support (Gasper, 2000b).

Mimetic pressures arise when environmental influence is uncertain and the performance of organizations is hard to measure. Under such conditions, organizations commonly tend to follow in the footsteps of peers that are perceived to be successful or influential (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Boxenbaum & Jonsson, 2017). As mentioned earlier, governmental agencies experience greater uncertainty in their performance measurement than private firms do (Frumkin & Galaskiewicz, 2004), thus mimetic pressures on government sponsored development agencies are likely to be intense. Hence, it is possible to speculate that memetic pressures are a cause of the ubiquitous adoption of the log-frame approach by development agencies.

Here, an advantage of institutional isomorphism led by mimetic pressures is that the followers can

²¹ See Scott, 1987.

²² DiMaggio and Powell (1983, p. 148) define the organizational field as "those organizations that, in the aggregate, constitute a recognized area of institutional life; key suppliers, resource and product consumers, regulatory agencies, and other organizations that produce similar services or products."

achieve visible improvement with little expense. This benefit may result in a boom in the diffusion of practices. “A rough sketch of transition and transformation of LF²³ among donors (1970 to 1999)” described by Nakabayashi (2000) shows a kind of trickle down dissemination of the log-frame approach from the champions of bilateral development cooperation agencies, such as USAID and GTZ²⁴, to follower agencies.

Normative pressures stem from professionalism in a certain institutional environment. Similar educational and training experiences and common professional values make organizations adopt identical practices (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Boxenbaum & Jonsson, 2017). This view suggests that the universality of the log-frame approach may be a reflection of the professionalism commonly possessed by development agencies.

4. Conclusions and suggestion for further research

4.1 Conclusions

This paper aimed to shed light on the puzzle of the universal employment of the log-frame approach among development agencies by looking into it through the lens of sociological new institutional theory. For this purpose, the paper reviewed the literature on the history, diffusion, characteristics, advantages and criticisms of log-frames and the log-frame approach, the traits and relevance of rival approaches, and the concepts of sociological new institutional theory.

Sociological new institutional theory suggests that environmental pressures are a primary driver of development agencies’ behavior. This view offers a relevant insight into the question “why do international development agencies identically rely on the log-frame approach regardless of its known disadvantages in complexity?” Three notions of sociological new institutional theory further refine the question. First, the notion of “rational institutional myths” explains the discrepancy between the universality of the log-frame approach and its weakness for managing complexity. “Decoupling” illustrates how practitioners in a development field secure maximum flexibility to control messy reality while maintaining the strength of log-frames to ensure accountability. Finally, “institutional isomorphism” suggests that the universality of the log-frame approach among development agencies all over the world is caused by one or a combination of “coercive,” “mimetic” and “normative” pressures.

4.2 Further research

The scope of this literature review is limited to the interpretation of an essentially unaccountable phenomenon, namely the universality of the log-frame approach, through the sociological new institutional perspective. Pieces of evidence that support or reject this interpretation are indispensable. Quantitative studies to examine the statistical significance of the explanations constructed by the

²³ Log-frame.

²⁴ Currently it is GIZ.

sociological new institutional perspective are certainly desired. Moreover, qualitative case studies that explore and explain what are actually going on within a development agency are acutely needed. This is because exploratory and explanatory studies allow development practitioners to understand the reality of what is happening inside their agencies so that they are able to remedy their practices, if needed, to improve organizational performance. Besides, the studies contribute to the refinement of sociological new institutional theory.

The exploration of intra-organizational behavior in terms of the universality of the log-frame approach echoes a recent interest within sociological new institutional studies. Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) urged scholars to look further into the institutionalization process across time and space, and the roles of various actors in the process. Some scholars have begun surveying the institutionalization process. Yet, the majority of studies remain focused on the creation of new institutions by a select few champions, or “institutional entrepreneurs,” who play a central role when it comes to institutional changes (Garud et al., 2007; Hardy & Maguire, 2008; Leca et al., 2008; Levy & Scully, 2007; Maguire et al., 2004; Sanders & Tuschke, 2007; Tilcsik, 2010; Tracey et al., 2011). Meanwhile, a limited number of studies have examined the power of other ordinal actors, or “distributed agency.” In contrast to institutional entrepreneurs, distributed agency includes all of an organization’s members (Whittle et al., 2011).

The significance of those peripheral actors in institutional work²⁵ requires acknowledgement (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Lawrence et al., 2011). Garud & Karnøe (2003, 2005) claim that it is unrealistic to say that outcomes can be traced to one single actor because a wide variety of distributed agencies are involved in the process of interactive emergence. This statement is supported by multiple institutional studies, such as studies on the development process of wind turbine technologies in Denmark and the USA (Garud & Karnøe, 2003), the formalization of transnational law in the USA and the UK (Quack, 2007), and the introduction of a new information system in the UK (Whittle et al., 2011). Researchers from the international development field also underscore the significance of distributed agency. For example, Andrews (2014) criticized that the lack of engagement with distributed agency in the reform process limits success when it comes to externally supported public financial management improvement. Lambino (2013, 2014) observed a similar phenomenon during the reform process of environmental ratings and disclosure policy in the Philippines. Still, the further accumulation of cases is vital to enable institutional studies scholars to understand how a disparate set of actors, each pursuing a separate vision, can become coordinated (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Lawrence et al., 2011).

The universality of the log-frame approach identified among development cooperation agencies is a unique case for institutional studies. One reason is that the intra-organizational behavior of development agencies is a distinguished subject of sociological new institutional research. Unlike ordinal domestic

²⁵ Lawrence and Suddaby (2006, p.216) refer institutional work as “the broad category of purposive action aimed at creating, maintaining, and disrupting institutions.”

organizations, development agencies are composed of cross-culturally distributed bodies²⁶. This includes: (a) headquarters in parent countries, (b) overseas offices in host countries, and (c) project teams at recipient organizations. Distributed agency is also dispersed not only physically, but also cross-culturally. Since it is assumed that physical and cultural distance influences the behavior of actors (Hofstede, 2001; Jensen & Szulanski, 2004; Li, 2005; Salomon & Wu, 2012), looking into the trends of distributed agency in cross-culturally separated bodies should provide valuable insights in institutional studies and foster a better understanding of the puzzle of the universality of the log-frame approach.

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²⁶ Multi-national corporations share similar characteristics with development agencies. See Ghoshal & Bartlett, 1990.

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Figure 1

Project Design Matrix

Version ●
Dated ●●,●●,●●

		Model Site:					
		Objectively Verifiable Indicators	Means of Verification	Important Assumption	Achievement	Remarks	
Project Title:							
Implementing Agency:							
Target Group:							
Period of Project:							
Project Site:							
Narrative Summary							
Overall Goal							
Project Purpose							
Outputs							
Activities		The Japanese Side		Pre-Conditions		The ●● Side	
		Inputs		<Issues and countermeasures>			

要約

開発協力プロジェクトの目標、成果、活動等をマトリックスで整理したロジカルフレームワーク（ログフレーム）は、1970年代初頭に米国の国際開発庁で採用された後、一気に二国間開発協力機関や国際NGO間で普及。ログフレーム・アプローチという開発プロジェクトの運営手法として進化し、今や国際開発の世界では「標準ツール」と呼ばれるようになった。JICAの技術協力プロジェクトでも義務付けられるこの手法は、常に批判に接しながらも、多くの開発協力機関が代替を見つけられずにいる。

批判は、外部要因の影響が強く、関係者が多岐にわたる複雑なプロジェクトでは、ログフレームのように事前にプロジェクト目標達成への「ロジック」を組み立てることは不可能だ、というものだ。実際に複雑性に適した事業マネジメント手法は数多く提唱されている。では、どうして開発協力機関は、複雑なプロジェクトの最たるものと比喻される開発途上国での技術協力プロジェクトで、ログフレーム・アプローチという、必ずしも複雑性に適さず、開発協力分野以外では殆ど知られていないツールが使用され続けているのか。

残念ながらこの不可解な現象を解明する先行研究はない。しかし、「組織を取り巻く環境が組織の活動を決定する」という社会学の視点で見ると答えが見えてくる。つまり、ログフレームは、効果的な事業運営ツールとしての有用性よりも、対外説明責任の観点で開発協力機関にとって有益だからだと解釈することができる。本稿は、ログフレーム・アプローチの有効性や批判を巡るこれまでの先行研究と、社会学的新制度派組織論の文献のレビューを通じて、これまで論じられなかった「なぜ開発協力機関がログフレームに依存し続けるのか」という謎の解説に光を当てる。併せて、更なる解明にむけての今後必要な研究を提案する。

本稿の目的は開発援助の議論を広く紹介することにあります。本稿の掲載情報は信頼できると考えられる情報源から作成しており、作成には万全を期しておりますが、その正確性、完全性を保証するものではありません。詳しくは原論文をご参照下さい。また、記載された付加価値、政策含意や留意点は作成者個人の責任で執筆されており、作成者が属する組織の見解とは必ずしも一致していません。