

EVALUATION OF SYSTEMIC CHANGES

The results and lessons learned from the evaluations of the Finnish future organisation Sitra

What is Sitra?

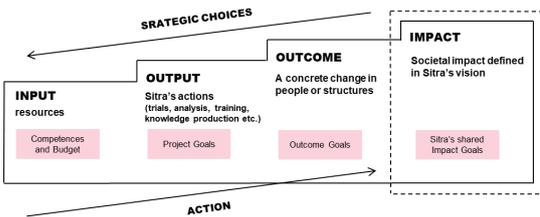
The Finnish Innovation Fund Sitra is Finland's fund for the future. Our role as a future-oriented fund and think-and-do-tank involves producing long-term foresight analysis, creating the preconditions for reform, spurring everyone towards making a change and providing opportunities for co-operation. To tackle the big challenges of our time, we bring together change-makers from all sectors of society to develop the successful world of tomorrow.

METHODS

Sitra's impact evaluation approach

Sitra has monitored and assessed its projects by using the input-output-outcome-impact results chain (IOOI) in the goal-setting and setting measures for the goals. The IOOI framework helps in illustrating a theory of change of a project, i.e. what kind of resources, outputs and activities and changes are required to bring about the societal impact – the ultimate goal of the action.

The traditional use of the logic models bases usually on linear thinking, but we see our actions and the operational environment more complex since Sitra addresses innovations aimed at systemic change. These are often generated in networks of different actions, actors and environmental factors and as a combined effect of them, which makes them complex.



Sitra's operations are guided by eight impact goals, all of which are interlinked and aim at achieving sustainable well-being.

The impact evaluations made of Sitra presented here combine the three classical purposes of an evaluation: accountability, learning and developing, and knowledge production. Each of the evaluations has answered three key questions (see the figure below). Our impact evaluation approach, emphasises the applicability of the evaluation in developing our own activities and in learning in futures work.

The evaluation tasks and questions for evaluating the futures work of Sitra



IMPACT GOALS

Each impact goal has been evaluated by independent evaluators

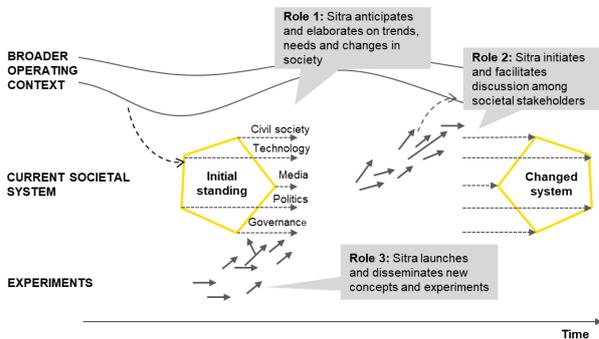
- 2016**
 - Addressing well-being in a holistic way**
Owal Group Oy
 - Moving to a regenerative and collaborative economy**
4Front Oy, VTT Oy
- 2017**
 - Building competencies for a complex world**
Owal Group Oy, 4Front Oy
 - Empowering individuals and communities**
Owal Group Oy, 4Front Oy
 - Sitra is a nationally and internationally recognised, responsible and independent future-oriented organisation (think-and-do tank)**
TNS Kantar Oy & KPMG Oy
- 2018**
 - Adjusting to planetary boundaries**
Gaia Consulting Oy
 - Developing inclusive and adaptive governance**
Frisky & Anjoy Oy, 4Front Oy, Augmented Leadership Institute
 - The possible directions of future development are well known in Finland**
TNS Kantar Oy, Meedius Oy, MDI Public Oy
- 2019**
 - Summary assessment**
4Front Oy, Owal Group Oy
Supervisory Board as a client

RESULTS

Sitra's role in facilitating and promoting systemic change

According to the summary assessment, Sitra has played an important role as a change agent and promoter of systemic change in the society. Sitra is seen as an actor that, by virtue of its independent position, is able to operate at the interfaces of the existing system and from the outer sphere. Thereby, Sitra can bring forth new initiatives and perspectives as well as challenge the established system.

This evaluation applied the framework of a multi-level perspective of societal change in analysing Sitra's roles as a change agent and a facilitator of systemic change (Geels and Schot 2007). Based on this evaluation, Sitra operates at all levels of the model and in three specific roles.



See Geels, F.W. and Schot, J. (2007). Typology of sociotechnical transition pathways. Research Policy, Vol. 36, 399–417.

LESSONS LEARNED

New mindsets, capacities and collaboration are needed in systemic evaluation

The main principles of Sitra's evaluation approach have been 1) taking into account the long-time span of societal changes, 2) applying a holistic approach to systemic changes, 3) focusing on contribution of an organisation (instead of attribution when it is not possible), 4) supporting learning and development during the evaluation process and 5) using methodologies that are appropriate for the evaluation purpose and context. The last one emphasises that the appropriateness of the methods strongly depends on the phenomena and the contexts that are being evaluated.

Our experience is that implementing these principles in practice requires new kind of mindsets, capacities and collaboration.

What are our key lessons learned?

- 1. Societal impact through evaluation.**
Evaluation has strengthened our understanding of societal impact as a systemic change: making Sitra's role and contribution visible and providing tools and frameworks to describe and validate the impact paths in concrete projects.
 - 2. New ways of collaboration.**
In a constructive and comprehensive evaluation process, there is a need to make choices and interpretations of boundaries of evaluation. Useful evaluation requires constant learning and mutual sense-making between the evaluators and evaluation commissioners.
 - 3. Systems perspective in methods.**
Evaluating systemic changes requires systemic methods and frameworks. Hence, we must change perspective from project-based to systems oriented approach and use context sensitive methods.
- + Communicating the systemic societal impact poses a challenge.**
How to make complex results understandable for the public and stakeholders without too much of reduction and oversimplification?



Katri Vataja
Director, Foresight, Insight and Strategy
katri.vataja@sitra.fi
@KatriVataja

Pinja Parkkonen
Specialist, Impact Evaluation
pinja.parkkonen@sitra.fi
@pinjaparkkonen

Sitra on Twitter
@sitrafund

Hungry for more?

Katri Vataja, Mikko Dufva & Pinja Parkkonen (2019): **Evaluating the Impact of a Futures-Oriented Organization.** World Futures Review. 11(4), 320–330.

www.sitra.fi/en/topics/strategy/#impact-evaluation