
Systems Approaches to Logic Modeling

Aligning Logic Models with Organizational Mission: Part I Development of a Student Learning Outcomes Model for a Network of Private Schools

by

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By framing individual program goals and outcomes within the context of the overall mission statement and vision of an organization, logical links between these components can be assessed. In the same way that contextual variables influence the expected outcomes of a program, the degree to which a program logically aligns to the overall mission of the organization can suggest the compatibility and sustainability of a given program. This first example illustrates how a particular program aligns well with the overarching mission of the organization.

Background

The Cristo Rey Network (CRN) is a national association of high schools that provide a Catholic, college preparatory education to young people from low-income families. An important feature of the schools is the participation by each student for five full days each month in a paid work experience at a leading corporation, business or non-profit organization. Through this program all students contribute the majority of the cost of their education.

The original school, Cristo Rey Jesuit High School (CRJHS) in Chicago, opened its doors in 1996. The early success of this school attracted interest from other cities. With private funding to support the development of the CRN and start-up costs for new schools, four additional schools were established across the U.S. between 2001 and 2003. During this time, the CRN developed a detailed, formalized feasibility process for becoming a Cristo Rey Network School and also delineated a set of Mission Effectiveness Standards to which all Network schools needed to adhere. Although each CRN school is unique, these standards provide a common core. Among these nine standards, Standard 8, calling for each school to “understand, assure, and improve how and how well its students learn and grow,” was less developed than other standards. Anticipating large growth in 2004 (when six additional schools opened), the Network believed it was important to begin tracking student outcomes to have data both for self-improvement and to share with the outside world. We were awarded the contract to assist the CRN in identifying student learning outcomes among other tasks.

We believed that in addition to identifying a set of core student learning outcomes, we needed to help the Network develop a fuller logic model. This fuller model would articulate the context or environment in which this core set of student learning outcomes was expected to be realized by including the common program elements that helped define a Cristo Rey Network school and were assumed by the schools to be essential to the desired student outcomes. We saw this work as providing a critical first step to guide all subsequent evaluation activity.

Development of the First Stage of the Model

By using a “backwards” mapping or thinking process, we focused first on the student outcomes of a Cristo Rey Network model education. Student outcomes were defined as attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, knowledge, skills, and behaviors. To this end, we reviewed a variety of Cristo Rey Network documents and other helpful resources. Chief among these was the *Graduate at Graduation*, a short document based on Jesuit principles and revised by Cristo Rey Jesuit High School to include the student work component. The *Graduate at Graduation* named six key characteristics or values that should describe students by the end of their high school education. These values—open to growth, intellectually competent, religious, loving, committed to justice, and work-prepared-- highlighted the holistic nature of the Cristo Rey Network model schooling. Each value was described in terms of more specific outcomes, mixing both short- and long-term outcomes. From this document, we parsed out those outcomes that could be measured right at the point of graduation and called these “student learning outcomes” and those that seemed more distant in time, but were set in motion by a Cristo Rey Network model education we called “long-term” outcomes. Because of the importance of the college preparatory program, we paid particular attention to academic outcomes and elaborated on these separately. To allow for individual school differences, we emphasized cross-disciplinary skills rather than subject matter content.

From there, we began to explore the “strategies” schools use to reach those outcomes. Logic models frequently outline “program activities.” We felt that the notion of activities was too limiting within the context of schools that were governed heavily by values that might be expressed programmatically in different ways by the various schools. Our goal at this point was to come up with a more general model that could be fleshed out and adapted by each school. In addition, we observed that certain policies, such as a professional dress code, were also designed with student outcomes in mind. Thus, we settled on a *strategy* column that included:

- Curricular activities (e.g., faith-based teachings of justice and injustice)
- Non-curricular activities (e.g., retreats, opportunities for sharing culture)
- Programs (e.g., the work-study program, community service)
- Frameworks (e.g., integration of work-study program with the rest of the curriculum)
- Methods (e.g., opportunities for collaboration), structures (e.g. the extended school day); and
- Policies (e.g., professional dress code)

Many of these strategies are intended to address more than one outcome, particularly when combined with each other.

After extensive conversations with Network stakeholders as well as stakeholders from the currently operating schools during the development of this model, we revised the model dropping and adding some items, and changed specific language. We wanted to be particularly mindful of the various approaches and emphases of the different Catholic sponsoring groups represented by the Cristo Rey Network schools. These discussions

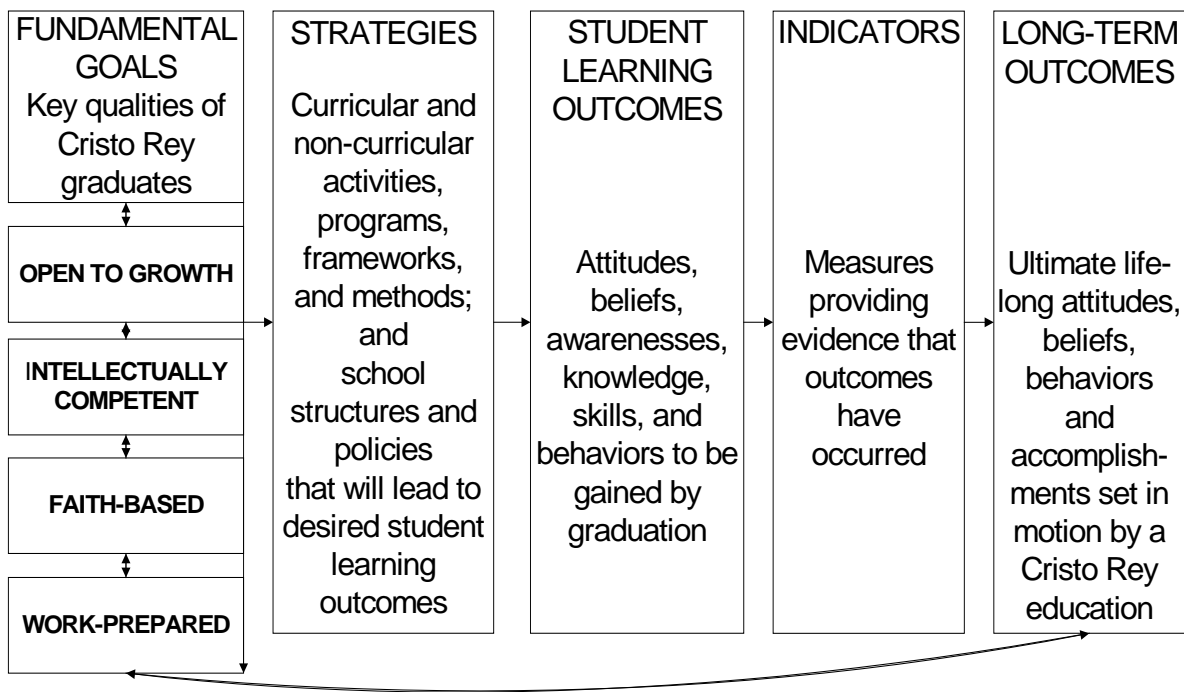


Figure 1. Abbreviated Normative Student Learning Outcomes Model.

prompted the decision to delineate four “fundamental” goals rather than the six values outlined in the *Graduate at Graduation*. These four goals, which can be defined as key qualities of Cristo Rey Model School graduates, are:

- Open to Growth
- Intellectually Competent
- Faith-based, and
- Work-prepared

The building blocks of this part of the model are shown in Figure 1.

Purpose of Model

At this stage of the development of this model, we saw it serving several important purposes. Major among these were, to:

1. Develop a common language on the fundamental goals of a Cristo Rey Network Model education and concomitant student learning and long-term outcomes.
2. Highlight general program strategies that are intended to lead to those outcomes.
3. Identify and agree on a common set of indicators that would show whether the outcomes have been met.

Linking the Model to the Mission and Structure of the Organization

We were also interested in articulating the context or environment in which this model was intended to function. By placing the model in the context of the organization's structure, we wanted to help ensure that the Normative model (as it was to become known) would not be seen or used as an entity in isolation. Moreover, by this proximity we wanted to provide a means to assess the degree to which the schools align (or misalign) with the core values of the Network organization.

To this end, fundamental goals, program strategies, student learning outcomes, indicators, and long-term outcomes were linked to the *organizational structures and processes* that apply to all the schools. This is shown in Figure 2 which begins with the feasibility and start-up process for each school, as well as the Mission Effectiveness Standards that represent the core values and assumptions underlying the organization and the criteria that each school is expected to meet. The school's mission statement provides the bridge between these organizational structures/processes and the other common important elements of a CRN school that *speak directly to the education of its students*. These include the "Critical Elements of the School Environment" and "Target Students," which follow directly from the Mission Statement, and describe each attribute common across CRN schools. An example of "Critical Elements of the School Environment" states that the schools are small in size by design (maximum enrollment of 400 to 500 students at full capacity). Another example recognizes that each school supports the diversity of cultures within their school community; still another states that the work/study program and curriculum are mutually dependent and inter-connected. "Target Students" are defined (among others) as economically disadvantaged, have limited access to available resources, are motivated, have at least average academic ability, and are employable.

The resulting Normative model, in full detail (which is not shown), is six pages in length. It is important to note that when presented to the Network or schools, the model is shown with its links to the organization's mission, structure and values.

Additional Purposes of Full Model

In this context the full model, serves the following additional purposes:

4. Frame the Cristo Rey Model program within the context of the Network's Mission Effectiveness Standards.
5. Link individual school mission statement, critical elements of the Model school environment (including the target student population), and the overall fundamental goals to these Mission Effectiveness Standards.
6. Agree on the elements that are essential to future replication of the Cristo Rey Model.

The Normative Model was well received by Network stakeholders. We, and the stakeholders with whom we worked, envisioned the Model as a dynamic tool that would help inform hiring decisions; serve as a guide for conversations regarding school mission,

Normative Student Learning Outcomes Model for Cristo Rey Network Schools

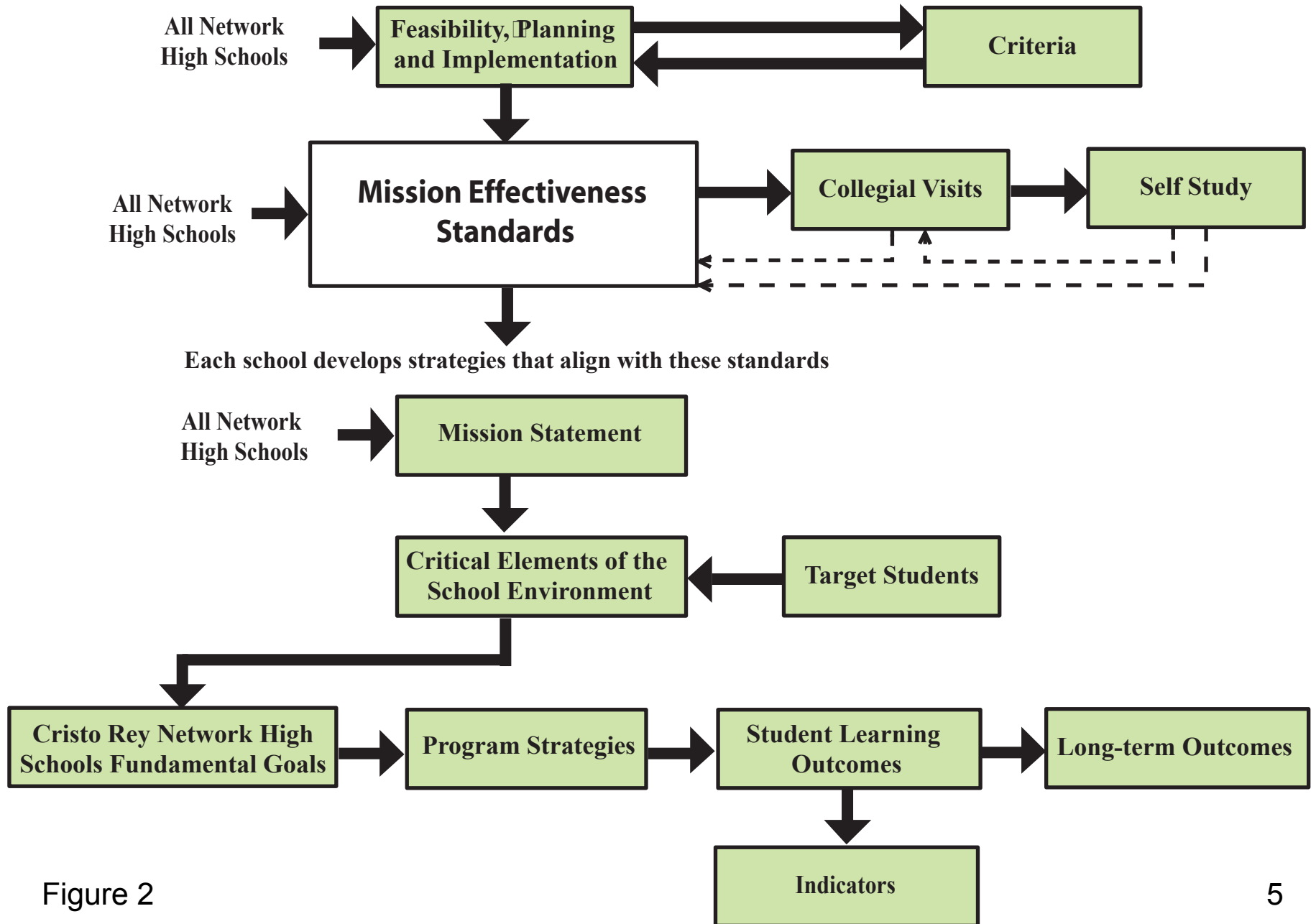


Figure 2

curriculum, teaching strategies, non-academic program development, school climate, and assessment; and become a means for self-review.

Ultimately, we saw each school creating its own context specific model that outlined not only its additional “Critical Elements of the Environment” but also its specific strategies for meeting student learning outcomes. Finally, the Normative Student Learning Outcomes Model for Cristo Rey Schools is intended to be a living document to be used, debated, refined and changed, if needed, by the Network and by the schools. It provides a key reference for the evaluation work and is designed to encourage each individual school to express its uniqueness while staying true to the core values of the organization.

Conclusions

This first example demonstrates a case study where the program and mission of the organization are well aligned. Placing a logic model within its organizational structure, as we have for the CRN schools, provides for a check and balance to insure the compatibility of a program with the organization’s principles and core values. It is particularly useful for programs operating in multiple sites, where each is expected to adhere to a set of principles and/or structures. It is equally useful in organizations where departments may offer different programs and/or services that feed into that an organization’s overall mission.

We think that there are many advantages to placing a logic model in its organizational context. First, it asks stakeholders to reflect on whether the organization’s core competencies and core values are well-suited to sponsor the program in question. Second, it may curb or eliminate at an early stage of development programs that are not aligned with the organizational goals. Third, it may identify redundancies or supportive linkages between the program in question and other programs offered by the organization. Fourth, it provides an opportunity to tailor the model to specific programs and strategies by the individual sites or department and maintain the core values of the organization. Fifth, it can prevent the development of a new program in an organizational vacuum and help sustain well-aligned programs over time.

Summative evaluation becomes more efficient when agreed upon common outcomes and strategies are articulated across an organization and assessed in a uniform way. Formative evaluation can examine the alignment of site or department strategies within the overall organizational mission. In addition, sites and departments are free to gather their own unique information while staying true to the purpose of the program and mission of the organization.