

Outcome Mapping Tool

From Decision to Consequence - Thinking Through What Might Follow

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A decision is not an event - it is the start of a sequence. What we choose sets in motion a chain of outcomes: some intended, some unintended; some immediate, some delayed; some affecting only ourselves, others affecting people around us.

This tool has two parts. Part 1 asks you to be specific about the outcome you want - before you begin comparing alternatives. This is the foundation. Without clarity here, everything that follows is comparison without a reference point.

Part 2 takes each alternative and maps the range of outcomes it might produce: what you intend, what else might follow, the time horizon, the people affected, and the spread from best to worst case. A final summary page brings the alternatives together for comparison. Overlooked outcomes are consequences you could foresee if you looked for them, such as gaining the income you need but losing the flexibility you valued (Chapter 13 of LIFE: Our Uncertain Experiment).

How to use this tool

Use this tool alongside Step 1 (Frame the Decision) and Step 4 (Weigh the Options) of the Decision Cycle to ensure you are comparing alternatives against a clearly stated desired outcome.

Part 1 - Desired outcome Complete this before mapping any alternatives. The desired outcome is the reference point against which everything else is measured. Be specific: a vague desired outcome produces a vague comparison. If you cannot state it clearly, return to Step 1 (Frame the Decision) of the Decision Cycle before continuing. Keep the objective (what you are choosing to do) separate from the outcomes (what you need to result from it), and ask whether each outcome is something you need or something you want.

Part 2 - Mapping alternatives Work through each alternative separately. Distinguish carefully between intended outcomes (what you are trying to achieve) and likely downstream consequences (what may follow, including unintended effects). Be realistic about time horizons - decisions that look good in the short term often look different over a longer period.

Best to worst case The spread from best to worst should reflect realistic possibilities, not optimism or pessimism. If you find yourself writing similar ranges for every alternative, revisit whether you have distinguished the alternatives clearly enough.

Summary comparison Complete this last, after mapping all alternatives. If the summary shows no clear preference, return to Part 1 and check whether your desired outcome is stated specifically enough.

PART 1 Define Your Decision and Desired Outcome

Complete this section before mapping alternatives. Connects to Step 1 (Frame the Decision) of the Decision Cycle.

The decision I am facing	
What I am choosing to do <i>(my objective)</i>	
The outcomes I need <i>(for me and others)</i>	
What success looks like	
What I most want to avoid	
Who else has a stake in this	
My timeframe for deciding	

LIST YOUR ALTERNATIVES

Note each alternative you are considering. These become the focus of Part 2.

1	
2	
3	
4	

PART 2 · ALTERNATIVE 1 Outcome Map - Alternative 1

Work through each dimension below before moving to the next alternative.

Alternative 1	Name or brief description:
Intended outcomes <i>(what I expect to happen)</i>	
Unintended outcomes <i>(what else might also happen)</i>	
Overlooked outcomes <i>(what I would see if I looked for it, such as something I value that this could cost me)</i>	
Short-term effects <i>(immediate to 6 months)</i>	
Longer-term effects <i>(6 months to 2+ years)</i>	
Who is affected <i>and how</i>	
Best case <i>(if this goes well)</i>	
Most probable outcome <i>(realistic expectation)</i>	
Worst case <i>(if this goes badly)</i>	
Boosters <i>(what would make a good outcome more likely)</i>	
Does this deliver the outcomes I need, or only the objective?	☐ Achieves it well ☐ Partially achieves it ☐ Does not achieve it

PART 2 · ALTERNATIVE 2 Outcome Map - Alternative 2

Work through each dimension below before moving to the next alternative.

Alternative 2	Name or brief description:
Intended outcomes <i>(what I expect to happen)</i>	
Unintended outcomes <i>(what else might also happen)</i>	
Overlooked outcomes <i>(what I would see if I looked for it, such as something I value that this could cost me)</i>	
Short-term effects <i>(immediate to 6 months)</i>	
Longer-term effects <i>(6 months to 2+ years)</i>	
Who is affected <i>and how</i>	
Best case <i>(if this goes well)</i>	
Most probable outcome <i>(realistic expectation)</i>	
Worst case <i>(if this goes badly)</i>	
Boosters <i>(what would make a good outcome more likely)</i>	
Does this deliver the outcomes I need, or only the objective?	☐ Achieves it well ☐ Partially achieves it ☐ Does not achieve it

PART 2 · ALTERNATIVE 3 Outcome Map - Alternative 3

Work through each dimension below before moving to the next alternative.

Alternative 3	Name or brief description:
Intended outcomes <i>(what I expect to happen)</i>	
Unintended outcomes <i>(what else might also happen)</i>	
Overlooked outcomes <i>(what I would see if I looked for it, such as something I value that this could cost me)</i>	
Short-term effects <i>(immediate to 6 months)</i>	
Longer-term effects <i>(6 months to 2+ years)</i>	
Who is affected <i>and how</i>	
Best case <i>(if this goes well)</i>	
Most probable outcome <i>(realistic expectation)</i>	
Worst case <i>(if this goes badly)</i>	
Boosters <i>(what would make a good outcome more likely)</i>	
Does this deliver the outcomes I need, or only the objective?	☐ Achieves it well ☐ Partially achieves it ☐ Does not achieve it

PART 2 · ALTERNATIVE 4 Outcome Map - Alternative 4

Work through each dimension below before moving to the next alternative.

Alternative 4	Name or brief description:
Intended outcomes <i>(what I expect to happen)</i>	
Unintended outcomes <i>(what else might also happen)</i>	
Overlooked outcomes <i>(what I would see if I looked for it, such as something I value that this could cost me)</i>	
Short-term effects <i>(immediate to 6 months)</i>	
Longer-term effects <i>(6 months to 2+ years)</i>	
Who is affected <i>and how</i>	
Best case <i>(if this goes well)</i>	
Most probable outcome <i>(realistic expectation)</i>	
Worst case <i>(if this goes badly)</i>	
Boosters <i>(what would make a good outcome more likely)</i>	
Does this deliver the outcomes I need, or only the objective?	☐ Achieves it well ☐ Partially achieves it ☐ Does not achieve it

SUMMARY Comparing Your Alternatives

Use this page to bring together your outcome maps and identify the alternative that best achieves your desired outcome. Connects to Step 4 (Weigh the Options) of the Decision Cycle.

	Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3	Alternative 4
Intended outcomes				
Unintended outcomes				
Overlooked outcomes				
Short-term effects				
Longer-term effects				
Who is affected				
Best / Worst case				
Delivers the outcomes I need?				

REFLECTION

Which alternative comes closest to achieving your desired outcome?

Which alternative carries the most acceptable risk in the worst case?

Are there unintended outcomes that change how you see any of the alternatives?

What is holding you back from choosing the option that seems strongest?