

Attribution diagrams: a tool to understand your role within the bigger picture

One of the main questions that we get asked is "how can an organisation estimate their true impact?" i.e. the impact that is attributable to their own programmes as opposed to other external factors. For example, for a mentoring and job-matching programme targeted at low-income people-- for every client who succeeds in getting a job, to what extent was that due to the mentoring as opposed to other factors e.g. access to childcare.

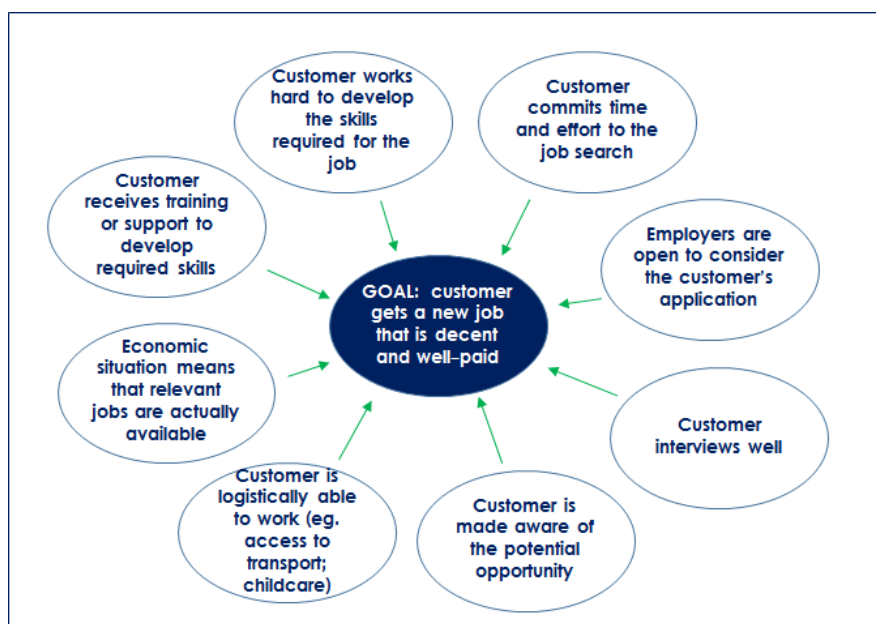
Sometimes we can use robust analysis (e.g. using control and treatment groups) to pinpoint this "attribution effect". But in many cases, it is too expensive or time-consuming to carry out this kind of analysis. Therefore, organisations often need to make reasonable estimates of their attribution, justified by a clear rationale.

At Just Cause we have found the following exercise to be very useful in unpacking the rationale for a programme's "attribution".

- a) Draw a circle in the middle of a piece of paper and inside it write your main target impact. For example:



- b) Draw a series of circles around your central circle. Use them to show all of the key factors that influence the change you are aiming to achieve. In other words what "preconditions" or "assumptions" are necessary in order for the change to take place. For example:



c) Next to each of the circles, list the main people or organisations that influence each factor. Your own programme should feature in some but probably not all of these lists. Highlight your own organisation with an asterisk or in a different colour to show how your own intervention sits within the wider picture of factors influencing change. For example:

