

Strategic Frameworks

In this Business Planning program, we are exploring the thinking, tools and techniques that enable you to develop strategic or business plans that make a difference.

Identifying Results Oriented Objectives

The Power of Objectives

One of the first things I look at in a plan is the set of objectives. These can tell you a lot about an organisation or group – just in a single page.

Are they focused on the right areas? What is their level of ambition? How clear is their thinking? Objectives shine a light on each of these.

I once was asked to review the plan for one of our national regulators, and I knew when I looked at their set of objectives that they were off-track.

You would have sworn if you looked at their plan that they were a service provider. There was no sense in their plan that they were the national regulator, with responsibilities for consumer protection and compliance. They had lost their way – market capture, as my colleague described it.

Objectives tell a story. Your objectives, what they are about, what accountability they take for results, what order they are in, whether they include issues of quality, efficiency, or fairness, shape the narrative you are telling the world.

What story are your objectives telling? Is it the story you want to tell?

Start with Areas

When I am working with organisations to develop a corporate, strategic or business plan, I always give considerable thought prior to any group process, to the areas about which they ought to have objectives.

These areas form the scaffolding for the structure of the plan. They determine what the group has objectives about – hence their importance.

I work in close concert with the CEO or head of the business group to talk this through.

Are business areas working as independent silos? In which case, they may want objectives that cut across the groupings. Or does the leader want more clarity and transparency about intentions and results? In which case, the areas may follow the group structure.

These areas also allow important internal and external signalling. If there have been criticisms about culture in the pre-consultations phase, then having an area (and subsequently an objective) about culture is a strategic choice that signals that you ‘get it’.

We will be talking this through in our session.

Express Objectives Correctly

Once you have made choices about areas, it is time to develop objectives. This is often done badly.

There can be a high degree of variation in the way organisations write about what they are seeking to achieve.

Sometimes corporate or business plans include in their set of objectives short term initiatives the group is seeking to achieve, written immediately above a very long-term aspiration. You can also find in the same list items that really are strategies.

This lack of exactness in writing about what we are seeking to achieve can mean that the organisation doesn’t clarify and negotiate expected results.

Here is our advice.

Express an objective as an outcome rather than a strategy. A strategy starts with an action word, for example, develop, provide, liaise. If you write something that starts with an action word, you are writing a strategy. That is quite a common mistake, because in the workplace people often talk about and deal with strategies. You have to consciously pull away from that pattern.

An objective is generally written as an intended result such as to ‘increase awareness’ or to ‘achieve as certain level of client satisfaction’.

Objectives can be written with very different levels of specificity. Think about the following examples:

To increase the immunisation rate of infants to 85% by 30 June 2025.

To increase awareness of electoral rights and responsibilities.

One has a target and a target date; the other provides a sense of direction. Both can be an appropriate choice, depending on the context.

Organisations work in different contexts. One organisation may have a culture which favours targets, and timeframes. In this situation, you should choose the first kind of objective. Other people don't want to be limited by a target - they want a sense of direction. Use the second type of wording in that situation.

Either of the objectives outlined above are measurable and would work, at a technical level. It is about looking at what is going to be the best fit for your workplace and your context.

Take an approach to objectives that is going to be acceptable and utilised within your organisation. If you have a CEO who likes targets, include them in your objectives. If you are in a context which is about 'this is the direction we are going', reflect that in your own approach.

Agree on Accountability Lines

One concept that can be helpful in developing results-oriented objectives, is a concept that is not talked about very much.

The concept is one that we have developed in DGR, and it is that of an *accountability line*. This is *the level of results that is reasonable, given the resources and strategies used*.

How can an accountability line be used to develop objectives?

If you think about being in the business of behaviour influence, you could discuss with a group whether they are accountable for raising awareness, or increasing knowledge, or increasing skills, or changing behaviour, or the results of that. Depending upon where they put the accountability line, they could have a different objective, as outlined in the example below.

Accountability Line	Example of a Results-Oriented Objective
<i>Increased awareness</i>	To increase awareness about the danger of HIV/AIDS
<i>Increased knowledge and skills</i>	To increase knowledge and skills amongst the target audience about how to reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS
<i>Changed behaviour</i>	To increase the proportion of our target audience who consistently engage in safe sex behaviours

Accountability Line	Example of a Results-Oriented Objective
<i>End results achieved</i>	To reduce the incidence of HIV AIDS in a specified target population by a specified date

Using the concept of an accountability line to have discussions can lead to useful clarity about the level of results that are needed in a particular situation, in the context of the resources and strategies used.

This is important because sometimes organisations have language which is about behaviour change, but if we examine the strategies which are used, they are more likely to achieve raised awareness.

For example, when organisations introduce a performance management system, and also run an associated short one hour training session, that is generally an awareness raising strategy. So, the HR business plan could include an objective ‘to increase awareness about the requirements of the performance management system’, and also have strategies to organise workplace briefings. But if your business goal is ‘to increase the proportion of leaders who use performance management constructively within the agency’, that is a very different accountability, and you should expect very different strategies.

We need to write objectives that tell us the specific results people are seeking to achieve. Part of strategic thinking is also to look at the planned strategies to see whether they are likely to deliver the objective.

Use Shortcuts to Focus on Results

The other concept that can be helpful in the development of results-oriented objectives is to use short cuts to focus on results.

These short cuts can be helpful, because frequently when people think about what they are seeking to achieve, they focus on tasks, rather than results. This is quite natural, since when you think about what we talk about in organisations, we tend to discuss how we are going in relation to achievement of tasks. But if the tasks are used to develop the objectives, then we end up saying we are engaged in a certain area of activity, because we are engaged in the activity. It fails to give us an opportunity to question the strategies that we are utilising. And encouraging people to question and change their strategies is one of the most important parts of business planning.

Here is the gold.

Public sector programs have distinct patterns, which can be called program types. For each of the program types, you can identify a series of results that the program might be seeking to achieve. These can be organised in a hierarchical form, where you have short term results leading to long term results. The diagrams can be referred to as hierarchies.

Types of Public Sector Programs

There are *two main types* of public sector programs.

Service or product provision programs. These are things that you are doing almost as an end in itself. An example would be electricity or water supply.

Behaviour influence programs. These are things you are doing in order to influence behaviour. Within behaviour influence there are four categories:

- educative (using mass media strategies)
- advisory (providing training, consultancy services, advice)
- case management (individualised support)
- regulatory (fines, jail).

The major strategies that you come across in those program types are in brackets. This information can help you think about what program types you might use in your work.

Multiple Program Types

When you are using these tools to develop objectives, you may find that your work fits in with just one category, like service or product. However, another person may find that their work fits into several categories.

Start with the program type that is dominant.

Have a look at the diagram and pick the levels that are relevant for you. Use that level in the hierarchy to help you develop an objective.

Then go to the next diagram that is relevant to your work. Identify any levels in the hierarchy that are an issue for you and use that line to help develop an objective about that.

Your program can be a combination of program types. For example, you could be providing a service, and running an educative program to help people better access the service. Or you may have a combination of regulatory and advisory program types.

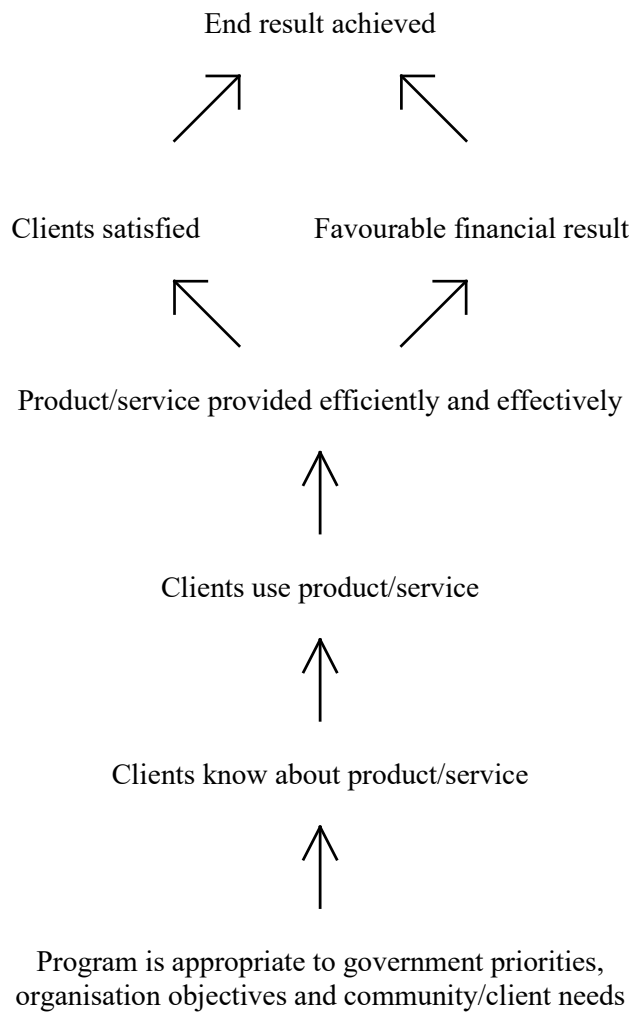
List first the objectives from the dominant program type. Then include the objectives from the sub-dominant program types. If your program is dominant service, then sub-dominant educative, you would have your service objectives first, then your educative ones.

In this way, the reader of your plan would know from the beginning what business you are in and the relative priority of different results you are seeking to achieve.

Using the Program Types to Develop Objectives

Here is an example of how you can use a generic hierarchy to develop objectives.

Product/Service Provision Programs



If you take the service hierarchy outlined above, you can use this as a tool for developing results-oriented objectives around service issues.

Use a two-part process.

First, have a look at the hierarchy to determine which levels in the hierarchy, if any, are an issue in your service environment and pick that level. Then develop a results-oriented objective about that particular level in the hierarchy.

For example, if you look at the service hierarchy you could conceivably say that, in a particular service environment, use of the service is an issue, effectiveness is an issue, efficiency is an issue, client satisfaction is an issue and favourable financial result. You could tick each of those levels in the hierarchy.

The next step is to develop a results-oriented objective about each of those levels.

Level in the hierarchy	Results oriented objective
<i>Use of the services</i>	To increase utilisation of services by 10% by 30 June 2025
<i>Efficiency</i>	To cut the cost of service delivery by 15% by March 2025
<i>Effectiveness</i>	To achieve and maintain accreditation for all accreditable services within two years
<i>Client satisfaction</i>	To achieve an average level of client satisfaction of 85% within this financial year
<i>Favourable financial result</i>	To achieve cost savings of \$600,000 within this financial year
	To achieve a profit of 5% by 30 June 2025

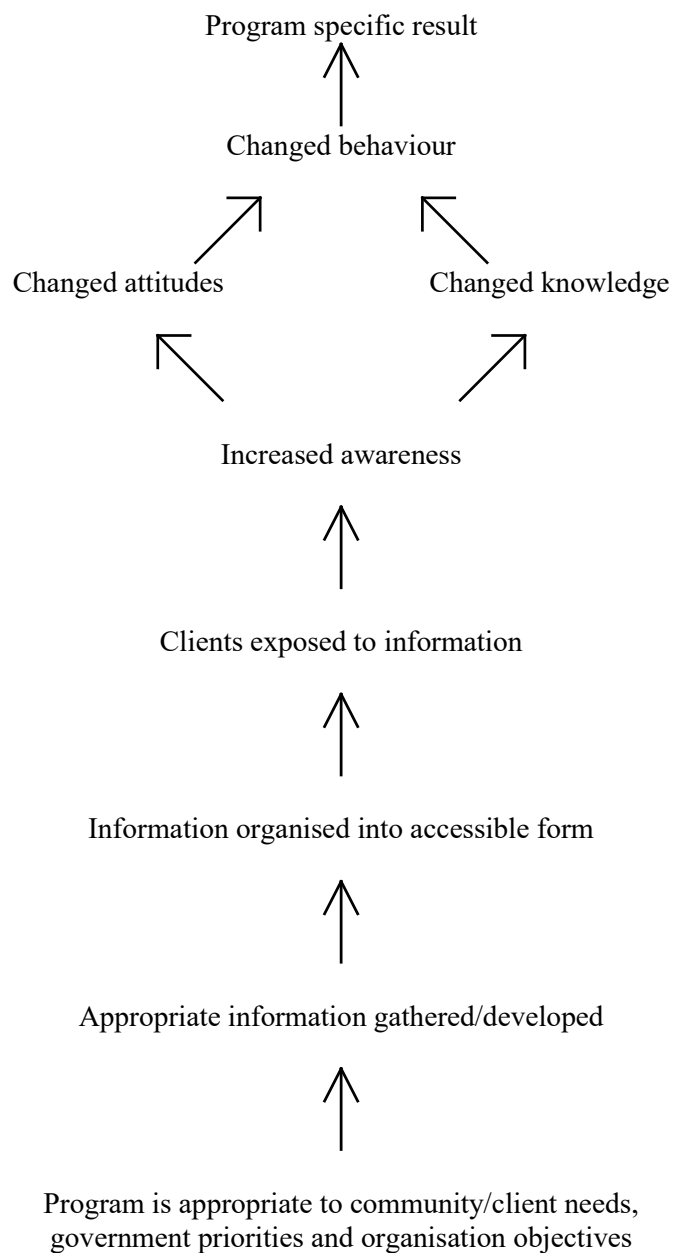
The accountability line in a service environment is often above clients satisfied and favourable financial result.

Educative Programs

These programs are seeking to effect behaviour change, often by using mass media strategies.

Examples of educative programs would include programs to persuade parents to immunise their children and campaigns encouraging people to reduce their exposure to the sun.

Behaviour Influence - Educative



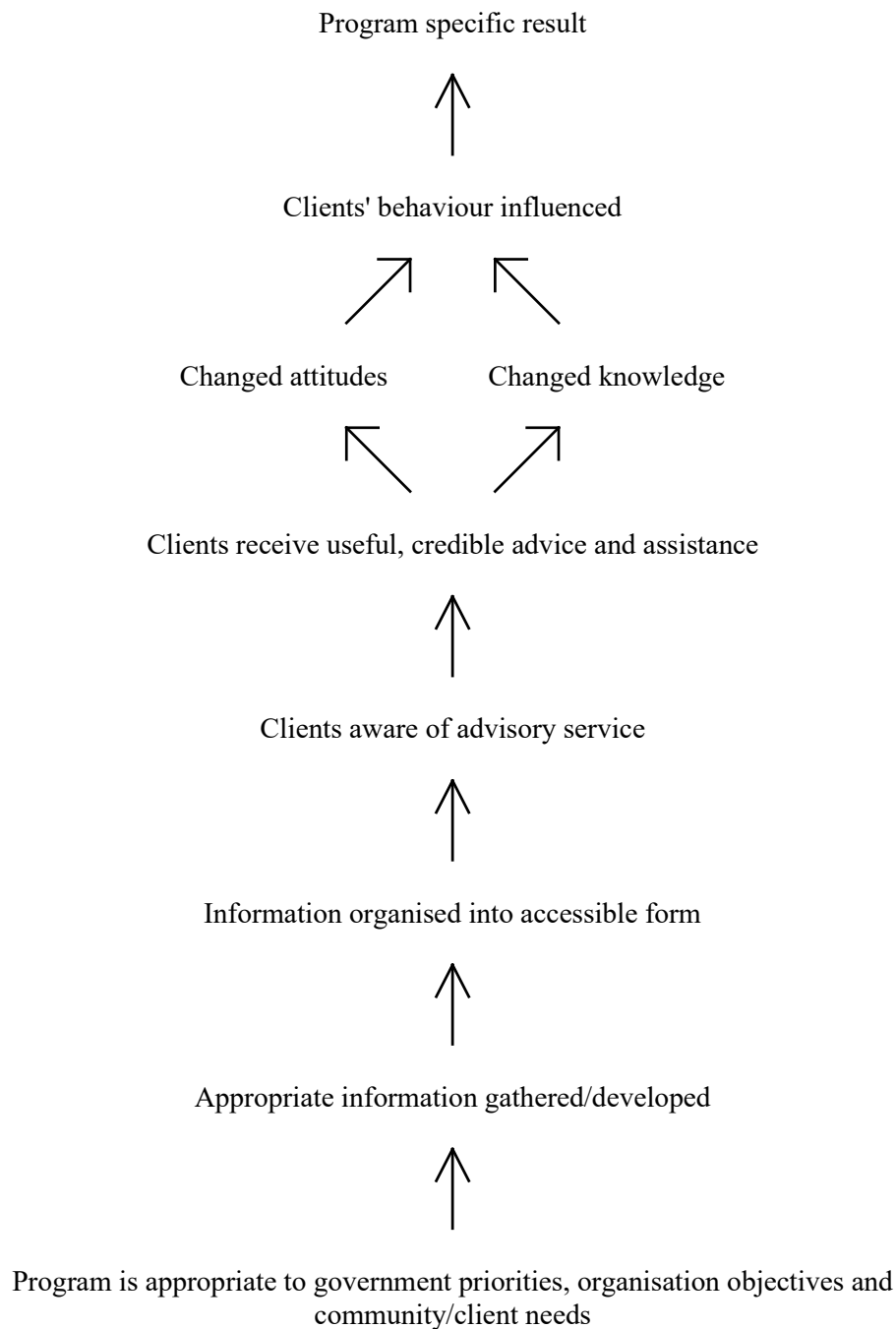
The educative hierarchy has two basic levels of choice for an accountability line. The accountability line will generally be increased awareness. It is difficult to do more than increase people's awareness using mass media strategies. But if it is a hugely funded program, your accountability line might be changed behaviour. Examples of results-oriented objectives for each of these levels are:

Level in the hierarchy	Results oriented objective
<i>Awareness</i>	To increase awareness of electoral rights and responsibilities
<i>Changed behaviour</i>	To increase the immunisation rate of infants to 85% by 30 June 2025

Advisory Programs

These programs are seeking to effect behaviour change, often by using consultancy services, one to one advice and assistance, and training programs. Examples of advisory programs include business attraction programs and evaluation advisory programs within an organisation.

Behaviour Influence Program - Advisory



There are three basic levels of choice for an accountability line using the advisory hierarchy. The first is "*clients receive useful, credible, advice and assistance*". This would be a good choice in two contexts.

First, if a group were providing services which are short term in their nature, such as a telephone information and referral service. This level of result would be reasonable in that context.

Secondly, "*clients receive useful, credible, advice and assistance*" would be a reasonable accountability line for a group that had just been set up, and in their first 12 months, or indeed in their first three months, were seeking to establish their credibility with their intended target audience.

The next choice of accountability line would be increased knowledge, or indeed, *increased knowledge and skills*. This would be a good choice of accountability in a context where a group was providing capacity building support and wanted to make it clear that they were accountable for changing knowledge and skills, and that the target audience was accountable for changing behaviour.

Changed behaviour would be a useful accountability line in a context where long term or extensive services were being provided.

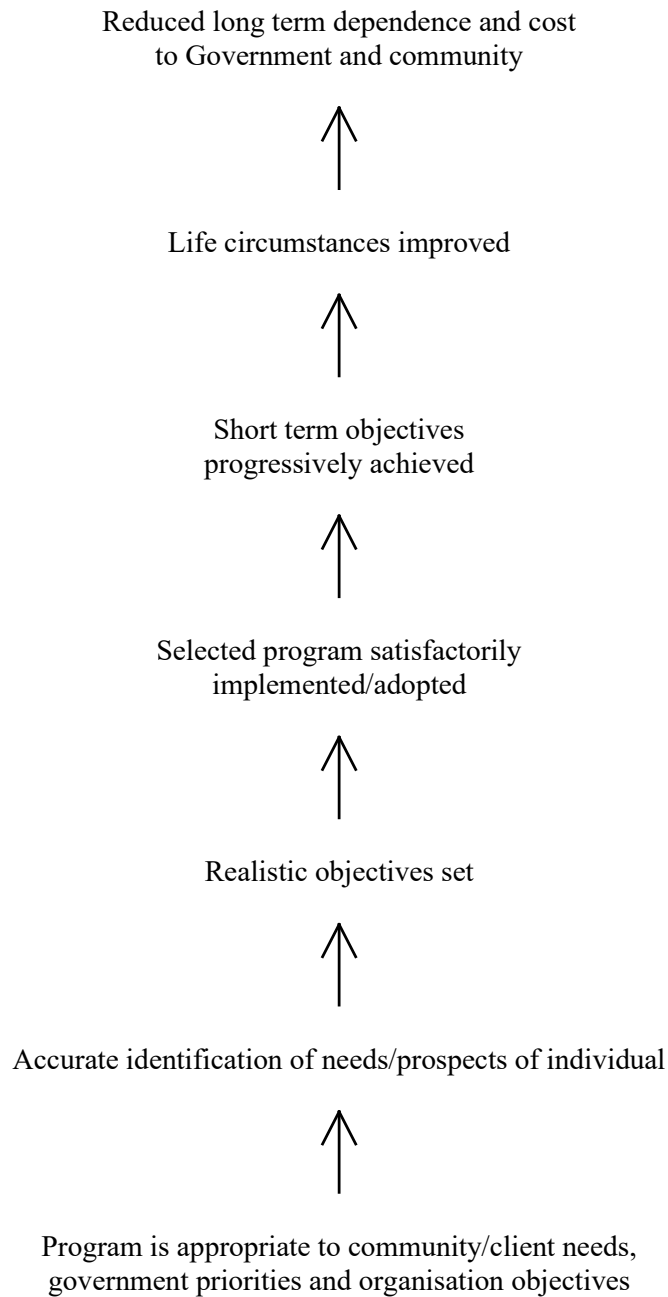
Examples of linking results-oriented objectives with specific levels in the hierarchy are as follows.

Level in the hierarchy	Results-oriented objective
<i>Clients receive useful, credible, advice and assistance</i>	To increase client satisfaction with the advice and support that they receive to X level by a specified date
<i>Knowledge and skills</i>	To increase the knowledge, skills and capacity of indigenous communities to manage economic development
<i>Changed behaviour</i>	To increase the adoption of sustainable farming practices within the Riverina region

Case Management Programs

These programs are seeking to effect behaviour change, often by using one to one counselling and intervention. Examples of case management programs would include probation and parole programs and programs within an organisation to rehabilitate staff with a work-related injury.

Behaviour Influence - Case Management



Business Planning – Strategic Frameworks

The accountability line in a case management program will generally be "*short term objectives progressively achieved*".

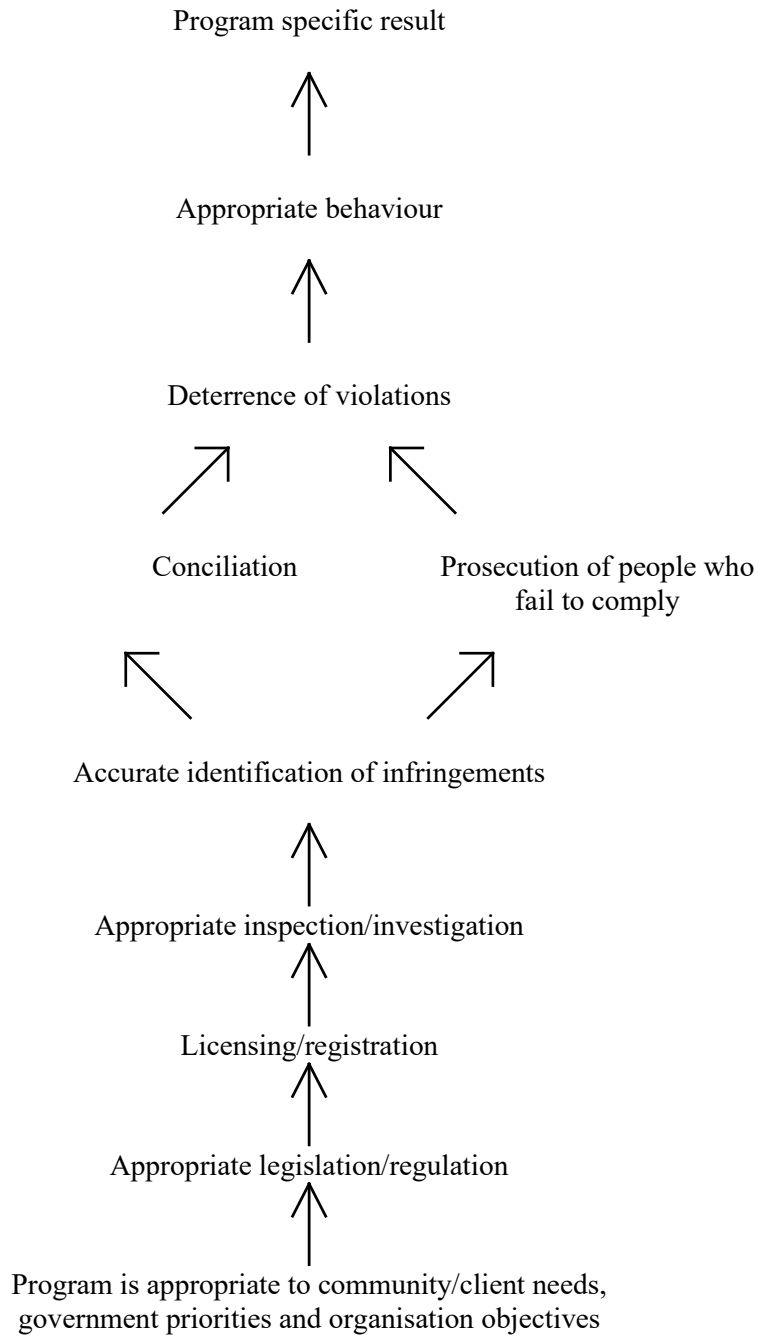
Examples of linking results-oriented objectives with specific levels in the hierarchy are as follows.

Level in the hierarchy	Results oriented objective
<i>Selected program satisfactorily implemented/adopted</i>	To prepare a current case plan for all children under the supervision of the region, by 1 October 2025
<i>Short term objectives progressively achieved</i>	To increase the proportion of clients who achieve the objectives in their case plan to 85% within 18 months

Regulatory Programs

These programs are seeking to effect behaviour change, often by using means such as fines and prosecutions. Examples of regulatory programs would include pollution control programs and drink-driving programs.

Behaviour Influence Program - Regulatory



Your accountability line for regulatory programs will generally be appropriate behaviour. Appropriate behaviour in a regulatory context is compliance. An example of having an objective about appropriate behaviour in a regulatory context is *to achieve a compliance rate of 85% by 1 March*.

But if you think about what the issues are in your team, you might say, our issues are about appropriate inspection and investigation. As an example, you might have an objective to increase the consistency of inspections and investigations within the Newcastle team.

Examples of linking results-oriented objectives with specific levels in the hierarchy are as follows.

Level in the hierarchy	Results oriented objective
<i>Appropriate behaviour</i>	To achieve a compliance rate of 85% by 1 March 2025
<i>Appropriate inspections / investigations</i>	To increase the consistency of inspections and investigations by regional offices
	To reduce the average cost of investigations by 25% by 30 June 2025

Be Comfortable with Debate

When you first see these hierarchies, they may look strange. But as you get accustomed to this way of thinking, it can be liberating because you have access to tools that let you decide what level of results you are going to deliver. And that is a core decision that is worth discussing and debating.

Leaders that become familiar with these concepts and use them to make decisions are special. Use these tools and ways of thinking every day, and you will be a powerful communicator and force for good.

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About DGR Consulting

DGR Consulting provides high level services in strategic planning, business planning, evaluation, management development and leadership coaching. Our success is based upon high quality, ethical and competitive services.

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- Board Governance Management System

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