



## Discussion Summary

### Topic: OM Clinic: Is there an OM/OH Lite Approach?

**Discussion:** April/May 2017

**Summary:** June 2017

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**Original Question from Dale Hill**, Senior Independent Consultant and Board Member at Partners for Development, Partnership for Quality Medical Donations, Princeton University, D.C.:

"With reference to the outcome harvesting/mapping study of knowledge sharing referenced earlier, I and my colleague found the client team (aid staff, not the developing country client team) uninterested and unwilling to absorb the complexity of the outcome mapping table and diagrams. In other words, they wanted the method to be used to describe what really happened in their program, but did not seem to need the assurance of rigor that comes with the full use of the method. Incidentally, the lack of adequate resource allocation also meant that the substantiation stage never took place. I wonder if anyone has thought of preparing an "outcome harvesting lite" approach."

### Summary of Responses

**Ricardo Wilson-Grau (Brazil):** In over fifty applications of Outcome Harvesting, I have never done it the same twice because it is utilisation-focused. The first of the (ten) principles underlying the six Outcome Harvesting steps is Ensure usefulness throughout the evaluation. The design of a harvest focuses on what intended users need to know from the findings and the evaluation process in the light of their uses for the process as well as the findings. Users and evaluators alike must accept a continuous responsibility to make certain the Outcome Harvesting process and findings correspond to emergent uses as well as the original ones. Specifically regarding Dale's question about substantiation, you only verify the accuracy of the outcomes or deepen understanding by bringing in different perspectives or both only if it is useful to do so.

In sum, OH can be designed to be heavy or medium or light depending on what are the principal uses for the primary intended users of the OH application. You simply customise and contextualise accordingly, and continuously.

**Mark Cabaj (Canada):** I agree. I am doing two OHs concurrently, and there are important differences in both that reflect their different context: e.g., different user preferences, resources, timing, material, etc.

**Karana Olivier (US):** 9 out of 10 times, I do an OH without calling it as such. I do tell the client in advance that I use an Outcome Mapping lens in my analysis and assessments but I generally use the client's existing language with tweaks to shift focus to boundary partners. Am I doing OM an injustice?

**Heidi Schaeffer (Canada):** In my experience with OH the most time consuming and most meaningful is the engagement to deepen ownership and connection between the users and the questions and outcomes. A light approach is perhaps when there is less coaching and engagement with users (fewer users defined) and then the challenge is to be utilization focused enough that the OH is as useful as possible. Perhaps there are important shortcuts or insights people have using a U-FE approach to define useful questions and outcomes with clients/partners?



**Daniel Buckles (Canada):** A recurring theme in this and other discussions is that every evaluation needs to be designed to fit context and purpose. In effect, there is no fixed methodology to be applied mechanically. Rather, there are methods (OH and OM, among others) that can be scaled from more detailed to less detailed to fit context and purpose. Scaling, in turn, requires the exercise of judgement by those involved (including stakeholders, if needed). The flexibility of OH and OM is a sign of a good method, when used thoughtfully.

Context and purpose may also call for combining a method (OH or OM) with other methods and tools. Karana, I would say that you can't do OM an injustice by exercising judgment in your design. Acknowledging the lens, as you do, is a good thing too as it educates clients in the diversity of what evaluation has to offer.

**Jeph Mathias (India):** I think everyone who does OH always modifies it to the local project, its needs its language, its methods. While there is a step by step methodology given I see that only as a guideline. Ricardo on the Outcome harvesting website ([outcomeharvesting.net](http://outcomeharvesting.net)) has just put up a very interesting article that expands his 6 steps into 10 and includes an reflexive loop in their methodology. This is a great paper but it is not THE way to do OH. There is no one WAY to do OH. For me `OH is a way of thinking about change in complex contexts involving these axioms:

- Significant change (aka development) is new behavior attitude relationships or policies of those who are part of the context.
- Our job in OH is to collect significant verifiable new behaviors.(expected and unexpected)
- we need to find a coherent way of assessing program contribution to these changes. (Note that program outputs may well contribute to outcomes in actors, so you do get into outputs, but only if they have contributed to outcomes)
- and we have to somehow assess significance i.e. what do all the changes together mean. What does all this imply for the programme up to now, what does it imply for the future, what do all the changes in behavior mean for the actors in the situation? And how do we answer the evaluation questions on the basis of these changes.

So I reckon what matters is that you focus on verifiable outcomes, assess contribution and attempt to unravel the significance of what you find.

**Fred Carden (Canada):** I think you are on the right track to adapt to an organization's own language - that helps them with making sense of your work and using it more effectively.

**Simon Hearn (UK):** Take a quick look at the any of examples in the resource library and you'll see that the way people use OM varies some mention it in passing, others adopt the principles, and some use one or two of the tools. Outcome Harvesting and the RAPID Outcome Mapping Approach are two examples of approaches which started with Outcome Mapping and adapted it for particular purposes.

But for someone new to OM I think there are two challenges. First, to learn the principles and tools to a sufficient degree that they are confident to begin to adapt (or to adapt in a way that is consistent with the principles), and second, to understand when to adapt and what to adapt. This latter usually comes with experience of the methodology and the context but I think hearing examples of how others are adapting OM is a great learning experience for newcomers.

**Dr Jacques Somda (Ouagadougou):** I fully agree with Simon that before undertaking adaptation in any approach or tool, particularly OM and OH, there is need to have good understanding of it and then to assess whether OM and OH can be useful to the programme and project they are trying to apply in, and how best they can be used. Otherwise, the risk of abusing the approach is very high and readers may be confused.

**Abdou Fall (Dakar):** Flexibility and adaptability of OM and its instruments and different context is one of its key characteristics.



**Mariam Smith (Sweden):** Outcome Mapping and Outcome Harvesting are like cultural tools for mediating action in a particular complex setting with particular people (agents), demands that we think of OM and OH in need of constant adaptation. Every situation will have its own unique tensions between agents and tools in that particular context. From my own experience, I see OM and OH as excellent tools which help us to focus on people, seeing changes in human behaviour from multiple perspectives by ourselves being clear about our own perspectives (how we see the changes as significant, etc). So, I presume that if you keep the tools too in tact, you might lose some creative ways of achieving the purpose of the tools (the underlying approach) and if you adapt them too much you might also loose those purposes (approach).

I also fully agree that an understanding of the approach is very valuable before adaptation (so you dont throw out the purpose by accident). One of the best ways to get that understanding, I believe, is by tagging along with someone who knows the approach (and the tools) well and you can see how they worked and adapted OM and OH in that whole tension of context-people-tool.

**Nand Lal Banstola (Nepal):** I agree with Dr Jacques that the risk of abusing the approach is very higher and it is really confusing for readers and related stakeholders. I recently tried to apply OH for the project designed with linear approach but found it very difficult to adapt within its norms and values. I have very good communication with Jeph so that thinking to have good discussions with him. In my experience, that I am trying to adopt synthetic models in some of the projects but this really dilutes the real principle & values of OM.