# Outcome Mapping and Outcome Harvesting: common concepts, differences and uses

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## How are OM and OH related?

Outcome Mapping (OM) and Outcome Harvesting (OH) are closely related approaches to monitoring and evaluation. Informed by Outcome Engineering[2], OM was developed in the late 1990s and was first comprehensively described in 2001 by Sarah Earl, Fred Carden and Terry Smutylo, then working at the evaluation unit of Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC). IDRC developed OM with partners as a guide for implementing organisations to build learning and reflection on stakeholder and system changes into their research programmes. The 12 steps of OM are presented in Figure 1. The practice of OM has continuously evolved as practitioners learn together, particularly since the formation of the Outcome Mapping Learning Community (OMLC) in 2006.

OH was inspired in part by OM. Its development started in 2002 in response to different evaluation challenges faced by its lead originator Ricardo Wilson-Grau and the co-evaluators and evaluation users who developed the approach with him. Although the concepts of OM offered Ricardo and his colleagues some answers to these challenges, they saw a need for guidance on how to consistently and robustly record observed outcomes for monitoring and evaluation and a process to follow for evaluation. Both participation in and recording of observations using the OM monitoring tools can be valuable for evaluation but the evaluation step itself in OM is limited to the development of an evaluation plan following the principles of Utilisation Focused Evaluation[3]. The six steps of OH are presented in Figure 2; in addition, there are nine principles to guide adaptation.

The development of OH was also prompted by the experience of Ricardo and colleagues that detailed planning using OM intentional design steps is not always possible or fruitful, such as with interventions with a very high level of complexity. For such interventions, they found it can be more useful to plan light and monitor and evaluate intensively. It was with these realisations in mind that Ricardo and colleagues developed the OH approach using Outcome Mapping concepts but focused on monitoring and evaluation.

Ricardo continued the development of OH while also serving as a steward, board member and first chair of the OMLC before moving on to create the OH Forum and Community in 2016.

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[1] OM and OH continue to evolve. Accordingly, this is a 'living document' that may be updated over time.

[2] Outcome Engineering was conceived by Barry M. Kibel, Ph.D. of the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation. Outcome Engineering is a combination planning, self-management, and self-evaluation system. It was developed for use by initiatives that aim to promote fundamental and sustained change in the lives of individuals, families, groups, organizations, or communities. https://lemosandcrane.co.uk/resources/Kibel%20-%20Outcome%20Engineering%20Toolbox.pdf (Accessed 12.11.20)

[3] Patton, M. Q. (2008) Utilization-Focused Evaluation: 4th edition. Thousand Oaks, Ca: Sage Publications
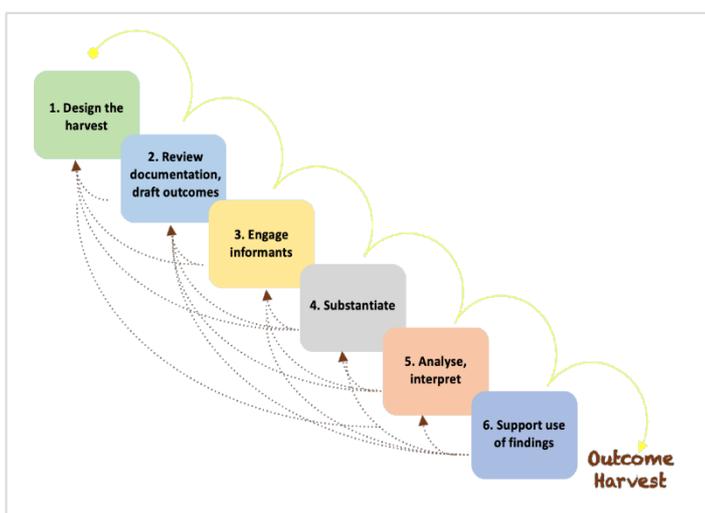
Figure 1: The 12 steps of Outcome Mapping[4]



Figure 2: The six steps of Outcome Harvesting[5]

### What do OM and OH have in common?

Both are participatory approaches that support evaluative thinking and practice. Each is highly suited to situations where *relations of cause and effect were not fully understood when planning or implementing[6]* an intervention. They share a

particular way of thinking about change with the following characteristics:

1. **Actor centred.** Rather than measuring activities, outputs or ultimate changes in human or environmental well-being that an intervention seeks, OM and OH are focused on the behaviour changes of the actors an intervention can influence and through which lasting social change can be realised. The actors influenced by an intervention are called boundary partners in OM and social actors in OH.

2. **Outcomes as behaviour change.** For both OM and OH, an outcome is a change in behaviour of an actor influenced by an intervention. Changes in behaviour are understood broadly to include changes in activities, relationships, policies or practices and may be expected or unexpected, positive or negative. For example, a government actor responds to lobbying by a civil society organisation not by adopting the ideas it promoted (which would be a positive outcome) but by excluding it from future dialogues (an unexpected, negative outcome).

3. **Contribution not sole attribution.** Both approaches recognise that interventions and the actors they influence exist in a wider system, therefore attributing an outcome solely to an intervention is unrealistic. Since others are likely to have helped bring about the outcome, OM and OH focus on identifying the contribution of an intervention to the outcome.

[4] Source of image: Earl, S., Carden, F., and Smutylo, T. (2001) Outcome Mapping. Building learning and reflection into development programs. IDRC, Ottawa, Canada.

[5] Source of image: Ricardo Wilson-Grau. In addition, there are 9 OH principles which guide how it is adapted for each application.

[6] Wilson-Grau, R. (2018) Outcome Harvesting: Principles, Steps, and Evaluation Applications, IAP

4. In both OM and OH, the planning and practice of evaluation are **strongly inspired and informed by Utilization Focused Evaluation (UFE)**. This puts the information and process (learning) needs of the primary users front and centre of an evaluation. OH explicitly puts this into practice by requiring that decisions throughout a harvest are based on how harvest users intend to use the harvest.

## How do OM and OH differ?

While OM and OH encapsulate a common way of thinking about change, as methods they differ in several ways.

1. **Purpose.** OM has 12 steps which cover intentional design (planning), monitoring and planning an evaluation. The six OH steps and its nine principles are equally relevant to monitoring or evaluation but do not cover planning or design.

2. **As frameworks for assessing progress.** The second distinction is closely related to the first. Monitoring and evaluation using OM involves assessing progress towards the anticipated changes - *outcome challenges* and *progress markers* - described in the intentional design. With OH, an open process is used to identify and describe observed changes, regardless of any planned results. It is then optional to reflect on if, or how, the observed outcomes provide evidence of implementation of a plan. Therefore, OH can be used with or without an (OM) intentional design, to reflect on progress in different results frameworks, or in the absence of a results framework.

3. **Requirements for recording outcomes.** In OH, outcomes are written as *outcome statements* with core requirements for how to describe the outcome itself, its

significance, and the contribution of the intervention. These requirements need to be met for the outcome statements to be credible and usable as evidence in evaluation. In OM, outcomes are recorded using an outcome journal, documenting observations of change of a boundary partner towards their outcome challenge. Like OH, the outcome journal requires a description of change, the contribution of the programme (and other actors), and sources of evidence. However, unlike OH, OM does not specify what information is needed when describing an outcome and programme contribution, nor why the outcome is significant.

4. **Direct and indirect outcomes.** Both OM and OH are concerned with changes of behaviour of actors influenced by an intervention. There is, however, a difference in whose behaviour changes are considered. OM is used to define or monitor behaviour changes of actors influenced *directly* by an intervention, defined in OM as *boundary partners*. In contrast, when using OH, you define outcomes as changes in behaviour of *social actors* influenced directly or indirectly.

Let us consider an example in which an NGO capacity development intervention that introduced social accountability tools to several, diverse NGOs through training. A direct outcome could be that one of the trained NGOs independently used these social accountability tools for the first time to systematically prepare evidence of the effects of environmental damages by a company and present that evidence to a court. If that court then issued a fine to the company in part because of the evidence presented by the NGO and if such a court response to civil society evidence was unusual or even unprecedented, then OH would register the court's action as an indirect outcome of the

intervention that introduced social accountability tools to the NGO.

In OM, the training programme would record the outcomes related to how the NGO behaviour had changed - that they used the tools from the training to submit evidence to the court. The change in behaviour of the court is outside the influence of the training programme and would constitute the NGO's outcome. If the training programme wants to know this then they would have to rely on the NGO to record that outcome and share it with them, or use a complimentary approach like OH or Most Significant Change to explore outcomes beyond their boundary partners.

## In conclusion: how do you decide whether to use OM or OH, or combine them?

**Design of an intervention:** If you want to design an intervention using the thinking common to OM and OH, you will need to use OM as OH does not have steps or principles to use when planning an intervention.

**Monitoring**: Both OM and OH are options for monitoring and can be used separately or in combination.  OM intentional design steps include options for distinguishing the actors you can influence directly (boundary partners) from other stakeholders, as well as developing a monitoring framework for the anticipated changes of these boundary partners, the strategies you will use and the performance of the implementing organisation(s). This framework can be monitored using OM tools or OH, depending on the tools and processes preferred by users. In addition, OH can also be used for monitoring when there is no OM intentional design, for instance in contexts with a high level of complexity / uncertainty where detailed process design that is possible with OM may be less useful, or when there is an existing theory of change against which to assess progress.

**Evaluation**: While both OM and OH prescribe a Utilisation Focused Evaluation approach to the evaluation design, OH goes further by defining a process and principles to guide evaluations for both learning and accountability purposes. In contrast, there is no defined process or principles for using OM in evaluation, though the common conceptual framework it shares with OH can be used to direct data collection and interpretation, and the actor-based monitoring framework can be used as a framework to assess observed changes.

Crucially, every use of OM or OH should involve careful adaptation of the steps and principles in a particular context. The common thinking that cuts across OM and OH means that adaptation can also include the blending of the two approaches: in some applications, it may, for instance, be sufficient to design an intervention using some of the OM steps, then monitor or evaluate using OH. In other cases, an OH evaluation can open the eyes of those involved to a new way of understanding their work and inspire them to use OM when designing their next project. Both approaches have their niche and their use separately, together, or with other approaches should depend in each case on the monitoring, evaluation and learning purpose.

## Where can I learn more about OM and OH?

Outcome Mapping Learning Community

Outcome Harvesting Community

*This brief was produced by the Facilitators of the Outcome Harvesting Community and the Stewards of the Outcome Mapping Learning Community*