



Reflection Workshop

Sense-making as a collaborative effort

Background

Here at Clear Horizon we have reviewed and evaluated a diverse range of designs, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) frameworks and plans, their implementation, reporting, and improvement. Through this, we observe that often the front-end designs are extremely well developed. However, implementation and reporting are patchy, and there is scant evidence of integrating lessons into program improvements. Building on the 'utilisation-focused approach' to M&E, we have been developing and refining tools to improve fit-for-purpose reporting, reduce the burden of collecting and analysing M&E data for reporting purposes, and regularise the lessons learned and improvement cycles embodied in good project management.

This practice note provides an overview of the theory and practice for using *Reflection Workshops*¹. Building on the facilitated processes of summit workshops used in evaluations, the reflection workshops are designed to facilitate dialogue process, and if possible, have dialogue among project staff (and often the donors) related to the context, activities, outcomes, impacts, crosscutting issues, and management responses.

Reflection workshops serve three purposes: firstly, to identify and provide evidence of changes/progress towards the expected (and unexpected) outcomes for the progress reporting to donors (accountability); secondly, to undertake a clear analysis of the implications of evidence and converge upon an agreed set of lessons and management responses² (improvement); and thirdly to document the evidence of progress against the Key Evaluation Questions (KEQs) and Theory of Change (TOC) within the M&E framework for reporting purposes (M&E, knowledge & adaptive management).

This practice note is structured as follows:

- theoretical background of reflection workshops
- objectives of a reflection workshop
- step-by-step guide to conduct a reflection workshop including preparation and detailed processes of a reflection workshop
- good practices and tips for conducting a reflection workshop

Theoretical background

A reflection workshop is a participatory process to make sense of M&E data with multiple perspectives to reach an agreement on the evidence, findings, conclusions and recommendations/management responses. It facilitates collaborative sense-making and more

¹ Reflection workshops is a term used by Clear Horizon, though some refer to them as learning dialogues.

² We use the term 'management response' as this elicits a response from the project, program or organisational management teams. This may also be referred to as recommendations.

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systematic critical thinking to give meaning to data and emerging knowledge in order to be able to act on it. This workshop sees participants testing the evidence, and judging project performance ideally together with key stakeholders. Thus, it is great to engage relevant stakeholders in this process.

A reflection workshop process is mainly guided by the “What? So what? Now what?” reflective framework model that was developed by Terry Borton in 1970³. Borton argued that this model grew out of attempts to systematise intuition; its validity does not rest on empirical or scientific proof but on its usefulness in real situations. In his book “Reach, Touch and Teach”, Borton articulated how this reflective model works by sequentially asking three simple questions: “What? So what? Now what?” This framework was brought to the evaluation arena by Jane Davidson in her book, “Evaluation Methodology Basics: the Nuts and Bolts of Sound Evaluation”⁴. This evaluative thinking becomes guiding principles for the reflection workshop and is aligned with the thinking processes of ORID (Objective, Reflective, Interpretive, Decisional), which is used as a facilitation framework developed by the Canadian Institute for Cultural Affairs in 2008⁵. The [Better Evaluation website](#) provides an overview of the process. Essentially, the process moves through three stages of evaluative thinking:

- What happened? A process to assemble an evidence base
- So what? A process to interpret and judge the evidence
- What now? A process to make action plans/recommendations about what we are going to do

The Clear Horizon reflection workshop was adopted based on summit workshops which are usually carried out at the end of a [Collaborative Outcomes Reporting Technique](#) (COR), Dr Jess Dart developed Collaborative Outcomes Reporting (COR), which combines contribution analysis and multiple lines and levels of evidence, and maps existing data and additional data against the theory of change (aka program logic) to produce a performance story report. COR adds processes of review by an expert panel and program stakeholders through a summit workshop⁶. These review processes bring together the key stakeholders and the evidence that has been collected to form a comprehensive evaluation reporting⁷. Although the reflection workshop process is similar to a summit workshop, a reflection workshop aims to form a comprehensive progress report by bringing together key project staff to collect and make sense of M&E data.

³ Borton, T. (1970). *Reach, Touch and Teach: Student concerns and process education*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

⁴ Davidson, J. (2004). *Evaluation Methodology Basics: The Nuts and Bolts of Sound Evaluation*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications Inc.

⁵ Stanfield, R. Brian, ed. (2008). *The Art of Focused Conversation: 100 ways to access group wisdom in the workplace*. Gabriola Island, BC, Canada: New Society Publishers.

⁶ Dart, J. & Roberts, M. Collaborative Outcomes Reporting. Retrieved from <https://www.betterevaluation.org/sites/default/files/COR.pdf>

⁷ Roughly, A. & Dart, J. (2009). Developing a Performance Story Report: User Guide. Commonwealth of Australia. Retrieved from <http://www.cifor.org/wp-content/uploads/dfid/KNOWFOR%20monitoring%20tool%20kit/9.%20PSR%20guide.pdf>

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Objectives of a reflection workshop

The objectives of a reflection workshop are important to define in advance and be agreed by all participants. They vary but could include:

1. **Contextual:** to generate a better understanding of the context, trends, risks and associated issues
2. **Reporting:** to synthesize data, analysis, findings and management responses required to develop a report for donors or an external audience
3. **Narrative:** linked with the above, to generate a narrative related to the performance of the project or program
4. **Improvement:** to identify and reach agreement on the management responses for the team
5. **Experiential:** to build ownership of the analysis, findings and management responses across the project team
6. **Quality assurance:** to create a safe space where the quality assurance of evidence can be undertaken collectively

Step by step of a reflection workshop

Planning and preparing for a reflection workshop

The preparation for a reflection workshop is an important part of the process, as with any facilitated workshop. Typically, a scoping is undertaken by the facilitator with the key decision makers, and a reflection workshop facilitation plan may be developed. Considerations for the preparation include:

1. **Scoping process** to build agreement on:
 - a. the objectives, scope of the program to be considered (i.e. the Theory of Change forms a good base for this discussion)
 - b. timeframe to consider (often associated with reporting timeframes, and conducted 2-4 weeks in advance of reporting deadlines)
 - c. participants who will attend the reflection workshop
 - d. the logistics (location/venue, space of the room, audio-video (AV) requirements, lunches, invitation etc.)
2. **Agenda** to be shared with the participants, highlighting their level of engagement expected in the workshop. An example of an agenda for a reflection workshop could be seen in Annex 1 below.
3. **Facilitation plan** that clearly articulates the agenda and how each session in the reflection workshop will be presented and facilitated. A good method is to use Magic



Walls⁸ for each of the components of the evidence matrix (e.g. one for context, one for each KEQ or pillar of the program, one multi-sectoral with crosscutting issues, risks etc.). The three components include: evidence (approximately 60% of space required), findings (30%), and management response/recommendations (10%).

4. **Engagement of key participants** in the workshop is very critical to be able to form a comprehensive reporting. The organiser/facilitator should send out the invitation a few weeks prior to the reflection workshop and ensure participants' attendance in the reflection workshop. Suggested participants for the reflection workshop include:
 - a. internal or external facilitator/s to facilitate the reflection workshop process
 - b. program implementers – all key project staff, volunteers, coordinator/s of the project, contact person/s responsible for M&E data collection and reporting
 - c. If required, donor or program stakeholders may be invited into the workshop. Ideally beneficiaries will be invited.
5. **Key evidence inputs** required for a reflection workshop, which are generally crowdsourced from the team in advance and populated into an **evidence matrix** (see Annex 3):
 - a. all activity and financial information related to the project or program
 - b. synthesising the monitoring data over the last reporting period
 - c. evaluation data related to outcomes or impacts
 - d. any other relevant information
6. **Strength of evidence** to be clarified for analysis and interpretation of evidence. Generally this is consistent across the project, though it may be that some components have a higher strength of evidence (e.g. pilots or prototypes) and others are lower (e.g. more established or complex components). The strength of evidence can be classified according to the following rubric:
 - a. **High confidence** is indicated by evidence provided in a written document supported by formal institutions such as journal publishers or Government official website, multiple sources of independent opinions, large sample sizes etc. The evidence substantiates clear and trustworthy conclusions. Further research is very unlikely to change the composite rating.
 - b. **Moderate confidence** is indicated in non-peer-reviewed publications, a limited scope of respondents including potentially some associated with the project, and/or difficulty to triangulate the evidence broadly. The evidence substantiates clear and trustworthy conclusions. Further research may change the composite rating.

⁸ Magic Walls are used by Clear Horizon as an adhesive wall that enables panels of paper (A5 or A6 size) to be written, stuck on the wall, moved, or thrown away. It enables participants to easily engage with the information, as well as keep/drop/change/add throughout the day.



- c. **Low confidence** signifies evidence that is written in a text provided by a third party, relies on a single independent respondent's claim, and/or relies on internally produced documents or opinions. Further research is likely to change the sufficiency rating. A low confidence rating does not permit a conclusion, and cannot be accepted in reports by donors. For example, DFAT does not accept evidence categorised into the low level of confidence.

Conducting a reflection workshop

Through practice and experience, several approaches have proven to be useful for conducting and facilitating the reflection workshop. There is no single approach; however, the following can be a useful starting guide.

1. Introduction and ground rules

- a. Facilitator provides a friendly welcome for all participants to the workshop, introduce facilitator/s and participants, and sets up ground rules of the workshop.
- b. Facilitator asks participants to recall and write their main achievement within the last reporting period. This often provides a long list of 'key messages' that the team would like to express in the reporting.
- c. Facilitator presents the agenda, purpose, process and outputs of the reflection workshop. Often this is already clarified, though important to receive any feedback at this point.
- d. Separation into groups if appropriate. A mix of the team is important for team building, capacity building, as well as testing existing hypothesis. The other option is grouping participants based on the EOPO (end of program outcomes) they are working on.

2. Purpose, process and sequence of a reflection workshop

- a. Facilitator provides an overview of the current M&E framework and plan, including M&E data limitations relevant to the reflection workshop.
- b. Review the scope of the program (theory of change, timeframe) and agree with participants.
- c. Introduce the evidence populated on evidence matrix format that has already been synthesised. The evidence matrix should be presented on the Magic Walls.

3. What happened? – objective thinking

- a. Facilitator presents the evidence that has been collated prior to the workshop that are presented on the Magic Walls – may include a magic wall for each Key Evaluation Question or component of the Theory of Change, plus an extra one for context and another one for crosscutting issues, risks, etc. The evidence collated is objective and includes the activities, outputs, observed outcomes, financial tracking etc.

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- b. Groups are formed and roam around the room reviewing the evidence put forward – generally groups are requested to keep, add, change or drop. This process enables the groups to collectively ensure all the evidence is an accurate reflection of the groups’ combined thinking.
 - c. Facilitator may further direct participants to rate the evidence, from low to high, based on the strength of evidence rating agreed in advance.
- 4. So what?** – reflective and interpretive thinking
- a. Facilitator assists participants to interrogate the evidence and co-develop findings. The findings are a reflection and interpretation of the data. They could be evaluative (i.e. what have been the outcomes or impacts), relate to the project implementation (e.g. how could have things been done better, what worked well, what didn’t work well etc.), challenges to achieve the expected outcomes or anything else that may be relevant. For more questions to ask a reflection workshop, refer to Annex 2.
 - b. The groups may come up with a long list of findings, which are then whittled down and prioritised based on the key messages. Other groups may roam the room with post-it notes to create suggestions, whereby the original group returns to reflect on this input.
- 5. What now?** – decisional thinking
- a. Facilitator asks participants to identify and discuss the key lessons and management responses. This process generates the decisions that ought to be considered, which reflects what needs to be changed or improved moving forward.
 - b. It’s important that the management responses are specific, though not too numerous. They should be practical and not overly aspirational.
 - c. Groups will then provide a ‘weather report’ for each of the Magic Walls. This is where all the participants get together, and one nominated person from each Magic Wall presents to the rest of the group. The weather report should include a summary of what happened, the main findings and the management responses. It may be necessary to use voting (traffic light coloured stickers, namely green – keep; orange – modify; red – remove).
 - d. If the donor or external participants are invited, it is useful for them to be invited prior to the weather report.

Basically Step 3, Step 4, and Step 5 are the main steps in the reflection workshop. These steps are based on the theories presented on the theoretical background above, and inform the facilitation of the workshop. A summary of the process, sequence and suggested sub-questions to ask for each step in the reflection workshop are outlined in Annex 2.

6. Closing



- a. Depending on the purpose of the reflection workshop, the closing will summarise the information to improve the learning process, to inform improvements of the program, reporting structure or the like.
- b. Facilitator asks participants to reflect on the reflection workshop process, reporting needs, and how to operationalise the management responses.

Output of a reflection workshop

The outputs of the reflection workshop are documented into the evidence matrix, which can then easily be converted into a progress reporting template for external purposes. See Annex 3 for an example of an evidence matrix.

Good practices and tips

When assessing how good a reflection workshop is, there are two main areas to look at:

- At the **process** level, a good reflection workshop will bring insights and realisations for participants, and their assumptions are surfaced. Participation from a diverse range of stakeholders will help to get voice from all relevant stakeholders.
- At the **outcome** level, a good reflection workshop will provide an opportunity to thoughtfully use the evidence and findings. It provides an opportunity to learn from the previous reporting period. It encourages action to improve the current M&E system and plan.

Techniques applicable for reflection workshop facilitation:

- **Evidence matrix** is a template to map M&E data against Theory of Change and KEQs of the project. It helps to map existing data and work out what new data to collect. Examples of an evidence matrix can be seen in Annex 3 below.
- **Weather report** is a quick 3- to 5-minute presentation for each group to present on findings, conclusions and recommendations on the evidence matrix. Each group nominates one representative to present their group discussion. The representative will present:
 - Context: this should be high-level “macro” contextual factors such as the radar and satellite images of the region
 - Evidence: overview of the evidence, such as the observations from the past week of rain, maximum temperatures, etc.
 - Findings: the key messages, such as forecast for main towns over the next week
 - Management responses: what to do differently, such as take a hat or an umbrella to work tomorrow?
- Voting – using the traffic light system. It is a voting system to judge the validity of findings, the strength of evidence to support findings and to get agreement on main findings. The facilitator asks participants to collect a set of green, orange and red dots, some post-it notes and a sharpie. The facilitator asks participants to review and discuss the results chart by considering whether the results look right; if there is anything

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missing; whether there are assumptions that are not identified; whether the context is appropriate; what the possible implications are, etc. The group will then interact by voting using the coloured dots:

- **Green** dot: if the result is excellent, accurate, a fair reflection of the project and based on high confidence evidence. This means no change is required.
- **Orange** dot: if the result is okay and reflects part of story, i.e. needs context and the result is supported by medium confidence evidence. However, there may need to be a slight change to the wording, where a post-it note would often be included to explain what needs to change.
- **Red** dot: if the result is not a reliable reflection of the evidence, not a priority, or is not feasible. Also, if the supporting evidence to back up this finding is categorised into low confidence. This means the evidence, finding or recommendation should be dropped.
- Post-it: make a comment (post-it/card)



Annex 1: An example of a reflection workshop agenda

Time	DD/MM/YYYY
09:00 – 9:30	<p>Opening</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet and greet • Workshop expectations • Review workshop agenda, process and purpose of the workshop <p>Purpose and process</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and confirm scope of activities for the workshop • Introduce that reflection workshops are part of the progress reporting and the role of the facilitator is not the content expert, but as the process facilitator
09:30 – 10:30	<p>Test and confirm relevant program outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree on the reporting period • Present scope of the Monitoring and Evaluation plan which is relevant to the progress reporting (audience, purpose, key evaluation questions) • Overview of the monitoring and evaluation methodology and data limitations <p>What happened? Objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain the methodology of the reflection workshop using shower curtain and sticky dots • Present preliminary data/evidence and findings for all Key Evaluation Questions (KEQs), TOC and components of the Progress Reports in the last six months
10:30 – 10:45	Break
10:45 – 13:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interrogate and discuss the preliminary findings (what's good about it, what's bad about it and what's missing?)
13:00 – 13:45	Lunch
13.45 – 15:15	<p>So what? Reflective and Interpretive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and assess what the key findings were for each KEQ and TOC component • Discuss what the key messages were for each KEQ and TOC component (success findings/stories AND issues/challenges)
15:15 – 15:30	Break
15:30 – 16:30	<p>What now? Decisional</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and discuss the key lessons, recommendations and/or management responses • Reflect on the reflection workshop process, reporting needs, tool needs and aggregating to a program-level report • Discuss next steps for reporting
16:30 – 17:00	Closing



Annex 2: A summary of the process and suggested sub-questions

Step	Thinking process	Key question	Sub-questions ⁹
Summarising and assembling the data/evidence	Objective	What happened?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What was expected to happen during this reporting period and what actually occurred? • What facts are known by the group? • What is the context of the program or project, and how has this changed? (<i>The context analysis could cover Social, Technological, Economy, Political, Legal and Demographic changes</i>) • What are the key activities and outputs that were delivered during this reporting period? • What evidence of outcomes or change in behaviours, practices etc. have been observed? • What risks have been monitored or identified? • Did anything else change as a result of the program? (<i>looking for unexpected results</i>)
Interpreting and judging the results	Reflective & Interpretive	So what?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does the objective data mean? • What were the issues or challenges? • Are there any gaps in the evidence? • Which of the results do (or do not) reflect your own view of the key outcomes of the program so far and why? • To what extent is the program on track with the original TOC and were the assumptions about how change would occur accurate? • Which part of the program/outcome is required to be improved? • To what extent we hold our principles in the program implementation? • What are the key areas of success and what are the key issues discussed? • What are the key messages for communication and reporting purposes? • To what extent is the likelihood of the risks to happen? To what extent have the risks actually occurred? Is there anything to note that program staff should be aware of?
Reflection, action, recommendations	Decision	What now?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What decisions need to be made as a result of the evidence? • What are the key lessons or management responses? • Is there anything to note from the management responses from the previous reporting period? • To what extent do we follow and take actions based on the previous management responses? • Is there anything in the theory of change that needs to be dropped, changed or added?

⁹ These sub-questions have been developed for the Reflection Workshop process, based on those identified in Summit Workshops, ORID and other approaches. These sub-questions are a sample of what could be included, as these would be tailored based on the objectives of a reflection workshop.



Annex 3: An example of an evidence matrix

Key evaluation question (KEQ) & TOC	Sub-questions	Evidence to support (what happened?) ¹⁰	Findings (so what?) ¹¹	Recommendations (what now?)	Other points that are important to note
KEQ 1: Effectiveness (EOPO 1)	Sub-question 1.1				
	Sub-question 1.2				
	Sub-question 1.3				
KEQ 1: Effectiveness (EOPO 2)	Sub-question 1.1				
	Sub-question 1.2				
	Sub-question 1.3				
KEQ 1: Effectiveness (EOPO 3)	Sub-question 1.1				
	Sub-question 1.2				
KEQ 2: Value for money (all of EOPOs)	Sub-question 2.2				
	Sub-question 2.2				
	Sub-question 2.3				
KEQ 3: Appropriateness (all of EOPOs)	Sub-question 3.1				
KEQ 4: Sustainability (all of EOPOs)	Sub-question 4.1				
	Sub-question 4.2				
Context update					
Relevance					
Gender equality					
Disability rights & social inclusion					
Other crosscutting issues					
Challenges					
Risks					
Principles					
Foundational activities					
Management responses					
Other areas to note?					

¹⁰ Evidence can be provided with different levels of rigour, and thus have differing implications on the findings. For example, anecdotal evidence or key informant interviews can be included as opinions; expert panels can be included with a higher level of rigour to validate information; randomised control trials may have the highest level of rigour. The evidence provided should be a composite of all available and relevant information.

¹¹ Findings are a consolidated analysis of the evidence to draw conclusions. This can be cross referenced through experts, advisory groups or technical reference groups as required.

