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**Harmonising Definitions of Goal Terms in Health and Development Contexts:
An Inductive Synthesis of the Goal Framework**

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ABSTRACT

Introduction

Most academic literature use '*goal*', '*aim*', '*objective*' and '*target*' as synonymous terms, but development and healthcare sectors define them as distinct etymological entities with varied and confusing interpretations. This review sought to constructively harmonise and differentiate each definition using a thematic framework.

Method

An inductive synthesis of definitions of the goal terms collected from 22 literature sources selected through a systematic internet search. Thirty-three specific definitions were reduced through serial category-building to single general definitions, and a set of theoretical themes generated as characteristic framework of each goal.

Results

Seven conceptual themes evolved from the synthesis, including the object, scope, hierarchy, time-frame, measurability, significance and expression of each goal term. Two terms, '*goal*' and '*aim*' are thematically similar as broad objects of immeasurable terminal impact, with long-term timeframe. They signify organisational success, expressed as general purpose statements. '*Objective*' is differentiated as a specific object of measurable intermediate outcome, with short-term timeframe. It signifies intervention effectiveness, expressed as a S.M.A.R.T. statement. '*Target*' is simply a specific quantifiable level of an indicator.

Conclusions

Goal, aim, objective and target are conceptually different. New frameworks for writing complete goal statements are proposed, including *I.T.* and *O.I.T.T.* frameworks for aim and objective respectively.

Key Words: Goal, Aim, Objective, Target, Definitions, Framework

Key Points:

- Terminological confusion of goal concepts is universal
- Definitions of Goal, Aim, Objective and Target need differentiation and harmonisation;
- Thematic Framework induced for Goal Definition and Statement
- Aim Statement should include Impact and Timeframe (I.T.) components
- Objective Statement should include Outcome, Indicator, Target and Timeframe (O.I.T.T.) components

INTRODUCTION

Most goal-setting articles use the terms *goal*, *aim*, *objective* and *target* interchangeably, as similar in the concept of goal (Locke et al. 1981; Locke & Latham, 2002; Day & Tosey 2011), which Lee et al. (1989) defined as “*That which one wants to accomplish; ... concerns a valued future end state*”. A preliminary review by the author (Ogbeiwi, unpublished) of 50 goal-setting articles published from 1982 to 2013, found the majority, 30 (60%), use the term *goal*, 17 (34%) *target*, and seven (14%), *objective*, but all used the terms synonymously in the different contexts of their studies. However, relatively few articles, seven (30.4%), provide a definition of the term used (Yearta et al. 1995; Locke & Latham 2002; Locke & Latham 2006; Locke and Latham 2013; Fitsimmons 2008; Day & Tosey 2011; Nanji et al. 2013). In the same definition, Locke and Latham (2006), describe a *goal* as an expected “*object or outcome*”, “*the aim of an action*” and “*the level of performance to be attained*”, which have interpretative references to ‘objective’, ‘aim’ and ‘target’ respectively. In fact, Locke et al. (1981: 126) assert that a goal means the same as an objective, being “*the ultimate aim of an action...*”. Apparently, the synonymous usage of these terms are supported by Collins English Dictionary (2006), in which aim is an “*intention or purpose*”; goal and objective are similarly “*an aim or purpose*”; and target is “*a fixed goal or objective*”. Even though Day and Tosey (2011) recognize Jones and Duckett’s (2004) distinction of targets and goals as “short-term” and “longer-term” aims respectively, they still prefer to use the terms interchangeably in their article. However, Mullins (1999: 115) in a textbook on management and organisational behaviour separates goal from objective. According to Mullins (1999: 115) “Goals are translated into objectives” This indicates that, hierarchically, a goal is conceptually higher than an objective. Nevertheless, Mullins also interlaces their meanings by stating that, while goal could vary in meaning, from a broad organisational purpose to a specific measured achievement (Mullins 1999: 116), objectives could be specific organisational goals as well as the “*aims to be achieved and the desired end-results*” (Mullins,

1999: 123). Thus the academic sector seems to confuse the distinction of the goal terms, which are undoubtedly the key conceptual pillars on which every effective goal-setting practice should rest.

Understandably, a situation of terminological confusion was declared in the development sector since early 21st century with respect to the diverse understanding of core technical terms in popular usage (OECD 2002). This, according to Niels Dabelstein of Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), predicated the publication of numerous glossaries aimed at standardising definitions in the sector (OECD 2002: Forward). However, the author's preliminary review of glossaries of development organisations revealed a lack of coherence on how each term is defined and stated is still prevalent in the sector, despite seeming agreement on the differentiation of goals, aims, objectives and targets as non-synonymous entities (OECD 2002; Save the children 2003; UNFPA 2004; UNDG 2011). It is therefore the purpose of this paper to review the range of definitions of these four goal terms in contemporary development and healthcare literature with a mind to constructively harmonise them for a uniform application by goal-setting practitioners. Towards this, this review hopes to address a basic question in goal setting: how do we clearly *define* and *state* goals, aims, objectives and targets?

METHODS

A systematic search for credible literature sources with definitions of the four goal terms began with browsing standard electronic health and health management databases using key phrases. Initially, PubMed, Medline, Health Management Information Consortium and Google scholar databases were searched with the phrase: '*Definition of goal, aim, objective and target in health management and development.*' When no relevant results were obtained, the search terms were pruned, first to '*Definition of goal, aim, objective and target in health management,*' then later to '*Goal, aim, objective*

and target in health management.’ With no satisfactory results, the search strategy was widened to include google search engine, using more specific phrases: *‘Glossaries of monitoring and evaluation terms’* and *‘Toolkits for monitoring and evaluation’*. A final search was done with the phrase *‘Goal setting in the NHS.’* The main inclusion criteria for relevant literature included availability of definitions of at least one of the four terms, publication date after the year 2000 (21st century) and credible institutional association. On the last criterion, a lot of internet blogs and personal opinion materials were excluded, such as the extensive on-line write-ups by Rob Kellock (2012), RapidBi (2007) and Fundsforngos (2013). Many goal-setting research articles were also excluded for lack of definitions.

Table 1: Literature sources reviewed

LITERATURE TYPE	SECTOR	SOURCES REVIEWED
Published glossaries (n=7)	Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD 2002) • Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA 2007) • The World Bank (Mackay 2007) • American Red Cross, and Catholic Relief Services (Chaplowe 2008) • African Development Bank & Islamic Development Bank (AfDB and IsDB 2008) • United States Agency for International Development (USAID 2009)
	Healthcare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS 2008)
Manuals / Toolkits with glossaries (n=4)	Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • United States Agency for International Development (D’Agnes and Slater 2009) • United Nations Development Programme (UNDG 2011)
	Healthcare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Save the Children (2003) • Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS 2010)
Information sheets on goal setting (n=9)	Healthcare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University Hospitals Bristol NHS Foundation Trust (Bristol 2009) • Victoria Department of Health, Australia (Victoria 2010) • World Health Organization (WHO 2016) • South Devon Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust (South Devon 2012) • Barts Health NHS Trust (Barts 2016) • Salford Royal NHS Foundation Trust (Salford 2011) • Derbyshire Community Services NHS Trust (Derbyshire 2012)

LITERATURE TYPE	SECTOR	SOURCES REVIEWED
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Swansea NHS Trust, Wales (Swansea 2016)
	University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> University of Western Australia (Bannister 2002)
Power-point slide-share presentations (n=2)	University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Murray State University, USA (MSU 2012) Lidhiya-babu (2014) – Related to MSU (2012)

The searches produced 22 usable sources, with 20 (90.1%) published since 2007. They included seven glossaries, four manuals, nine information sheets on goal setting, and two slide-share presentations (Table 1). They were from three sectors: 11 (50%) from healthcare, eight (36.4%) from development, and three (13.6%) from universities. A total of 12 definitions of the term 'goal' were found in 19 sources, 14 definitions of 'objective' in 13 sources, five definitions of 'target' in five sources, and two definitions of 'aim' in two sources. The text data of the total 33 definitions were analysed qualitatively through an inductive harmonisation process involving serial category building. With this, the initial list of specific definitions of each term were reduced to primary, secondary and tertiary general categories. The primary categories were formed by grouping together definitions with similar concepts in their statements, and each category labelled with a general descriptive theme. Similar to thematic steps described for grounded theory analysis (Glaser 1978), successive categories were formed through further identification and comparisons of conceptual themes in the primary categories. In the final stage, a single tertiary definition as well as a characteristic framework of theoretical themes were generated for each goal term.

While the reviewed literature documents may be few and the sources less orthodox than academic articles, the collected definitions represent the collaborative products of many sectors, organisations, and professionals in different parts of the world. In particular, the OECD (2002) glossary was adopted by its membership of 34 countries (mostly developed countries) and multi-national, multi-agency

organisations. Besides, the non-OECD sources also represent the work of several organisations, including non-governmental charities, universities, and healthcare institutions (Table 1).

RESULTS

What is a Goal?

Table 2 shows 12 definitions of goal were reduced to five primary labelled categories, three secondary categories and one tertiary general definitions. The largest primary category with most literature sources relates to OECD (2002: 24) definition of goal as a “*higher order objective*” and “*development objective*” and WHO’s (2016) “*overall objectives*”. The other four primary labels show that goals are also ‘broad, long-term improvements’ or ‘broad, long-term outcomes’ or ‘collective, shared end-results’ or ‘personal aims’ (Table 2). These categories indicate that while development organisations define goal as a higher type of objective, the NHS healthcare organisations define different types of personal goals that are either short or long term.

Table 2: Category Building from definitions of the term *goal* in reviewed sources

Initial or primary categories	Secondary categories	Tertiary category
<p>Broad, Long Term IMPROVEMENTS</p> <p>1. “A broad, long-term improvement or change that a program or project intends to make. A goal is a formal statement of a desired <i>impact</i> on a target; it is wider in scope than an objective (a formal statement of a desired <i>outcome</i>)” (D’Agnes & Slater 2009: 7).</p> <p>2. “...relating to improving health and wellbeing status through changes in mortality, morbidity, disability, quality of life and equity.” (Victoria 2010: 1)</p>	<p>Broad, general statement of desired or expected long term improvement, change, outcome, impact, guiding principles or aspirations</p>	<p>A higher order achievement, broad, long term, impact that are common or overall, end result,</p>
<p>Broad Long-term OUTCOMES</p> <p>3. A broad statement of a desired, usually longer-term, outcome of a program/intervention” (UNAIDS 2008: 3; UNAIDS 2010: 61);</p> <p>4. “An expected or desired outcome of a planning process. Usually, broad, general expression of the</p>		

<p>guiding principles and aspirations of a community “(MSU 2012: 17), of an organisation (Lidhiya-babu 2014: 77)</p>		
<p>Collective, Shared END-RESULTS</p> <p>5. Common Goal: a formal statement of a development improvement that represents the confluence of PHE outcomes, e.g., an end result generated by implementing PHE interventions in a synergistic fashion. (D’Agnes & Slater 2009: 7)</p> <p>6. “A specific end result desired or expected to occur as consequence of at least in part of an intervention or activity” (UNDG 2011: 7)</p>	<p>An end result that is a higher order objective, or a long-term common or overall objective, or development improvement — that all results of intervention contribute to</p>	
<p>Higher Order OBJECTIVES</p> <p>7. “The higher order objective to which a project, programme or policy is intended to contribute (USAID 2009: 5).</p> <p>8. “The higher order objective to which a development intervention is intended to contribute. A development objective (OECD 2002: 24; Mackay, 2007: 140; AfDB & IsDB 2008: 22; SIDA 2007; UNDG 2011: 7).</p> <p>9. “Overall objectives” or goals (WHO 2016).</p>		
<p>Personal AIM</p> <p>10. “A plan to achieve a particular activity or function” (South Devon 2012)</p> <p>11. “A goal is something you want to achieve” (Swansea 2016).</p> <p>12. “Personal goal – what you want to achieve. You could think of what you want to achieve in a short-term (3 months or 6 months) or a longer term period” (5 yrs, 10 yrs) – (Barts 2016)</p>	<p>Something you plan or want to ‘achieve’ in the short or long term</p>	

From the definitions of a goal, the six descriptive themes identified include - its object, scope, hierarchy, time-frame, significance and measurability. A goal’s object is identified as outcome, impact, objective or purpose. OECD (2002: 24) describe goal as a development objective, equated to an impact, which they defined as *“positive and negative, primary and secondary long-term effects produced by a development intervention – directly or indirectly, intended or unintended”*. The scope is “broad” (MSU, 2012); “generic” (UNAIDS 2008; UNAIDS 2010), “common” (D’Agnes & Slater, 2009), or “overall” (WHO 2016). Hierarchically, it is an “end-result” (UNDG, 2011), a “higher-order” (OECD 2002), “higher-level effect” (USAID 2009), or a collective result of a set of objectives (Salford 2011; Victoria, 2010). Derbyshire

(2012) treats goal as a generic term for the entire “ladder” of achievements with three levels: leading from “immediate or mini goals” to “Specific goal” to the “long-term or overall goals.” In its time-frame, goal is long-term (USAID 2009; Chaplowe 2008) or “far sighted” (D’Agnes & Slater 2009). According to South-Devon (2012), long-term goal is “*something you want to achieve in the future*”, and short-term, “*smaller attainable and manageable chunks which will help you achieve a long term goal.*” In its significance, a goal is the basis for assessment of an organisation’s purpose, vision or aspiration (Lidhiya-babu, 2014), which helps to inspire performance (UNAIDS 2008, D’Agnes & Slater 2009; MSU 2012). In measurability, while Lidhiya-babu states that a goal “may not be *strictly* measurable or tangible” (slide 78), to D’Agnes and Slater (2009), it may be indirectly “*measurable in terms of the desired changes in the factors you are trying to influence.*”

What is an Aim?

Table 3 shows the primary categories based on two source definitions and the single secondary definition harmonized from them. Five themes are identifiable from the definitions, including the scope, object, time-frame, significance and statement of an aim. The scope of an aim is “broad” (Save the Children 2003) or “overall” (Bristol 2009). The object includes “goal” (Save the Children, 2003), “hope”, “desired result” or “purpose” (Bristol 2009). Only Save the Children define the time frame as “long-term”. In its significance, an aim provides a “broad structure”, for the project (Bristol 2009), and represents an “*agency’s mandate, principles and values... fundamental standards against which the success of the work can be measured*” (Save the Children 2003). In its statement, an aim should be written as broad statement “phrased positively” (Bristol 2009). Both sources gave examples of aim statements:

- “To improve the care received by patients who develop leg ulcers” (Bristol 2009),

- “To improve the health of children under five in district X” (Save the Children 2003: 336).

Both statements include broad achievements, but do not state any time frames.

Table 3: Primary and secondary themes of an aim

Primary definition categories	Secondary definition category
<p>Broad Long-Term Goals “The broad, long-term goals set for a piece of work, for example to improve the health of children under five in district X.”</p> <p>“Relates to agency’s mandate, principles and values = fundamental standards against which the success of the work can be measured” (Save the Children 2003: 336)</p>	<p>A broad statement of a long-term goal or desired result which expresses the overall purpose of a project, reflects the organisational mandate and serves as the standard of success</p>
<p>Overall Purpose or Expected Result “What you hope to achieve, i.e., the overall purpose of the project.”</p> <p>“Written as a statement of what you want to happen as a result of the audit [or action]. Phrased positively. For example, ‘To improve the care received by patients who develop leg ulcers.’”</p> <p>“Provides a broad structure for your project”</p> <p>(Bristol 2009)</p>	

What is an Objective?

A total of 14 definitions were reduced to five primary labelled categories, three secondary definitions and a single tertiary definition (Table 4). The five primary labels indicate that objectives are ‘exact targets’, ‘measurable results’, ‘short-term goals’, ‘desired outcomes’ or ‘medium term changes’.

Table 4: Categories of definitions of an objective

Primary definition categories	Secondary definition categories	Tertiary definition category
<p>EXACT TARGETS</p> <p>1. Precise targets – that are necessary to achieve goals (MSU, 2012, Slide 17, Lidhiya-babu, 2014, slide 43)</p> <p>2. Specific achievable target which is challenging to the employee (Swansea 2016)</p>	<p>Specific, precise, challenging and achievable targets that are milestones towards achieving the goals</p>	<p>Specific goals that are short-term outcomes, measurable and achievable targets, or realistic and timed intermediate results</p>
<p>MEASURABLE RESULTS</p>	<p>Statements of</p>	

<p>3. Detailed statements of quantitatively and qualitative measurable results the plan hopes to accomplish (MSU 2012: 17; Lidhiya-babu 2014: 43)</p> <p>4. End results of planned activity (Lidhiya-babu 2014: 43)</p> <p>5. A statement of a desired program / intervention results that meets the criteria of being Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-phased (UNAIDS 2008, UNAIDS 2010)</p>	<p>specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-phased results or goals that a plan of activity hopes to achieve that will contribute to the longer term aim at the end of a program or intervention</p>	<p>that represent milestones towards the aims</p>
<p>SHORT-TERM GOALS</p> <p>6. Statements that explain how plan goals will be achieved (Victoria 2010: 1)</p> <p>7. Specific, time bound and measurable goals for projects or programme which contribute to the longer term aims, for example, to achieve 80 per cent immunisation coverage in the next 5 years in district X. (Save the Children 2003: 339)</p>		
<p>DESIRED OUTCOMES</p> <p>8. specific outcomes or competencies to be achieved in terms of skills, content, mastery, attitudes and values (Bannister 2002: 9)</p> <p>9. The “outcome” or the result that you anticipate for each sector (D’Agnes & Slater 2009)</p> <p>10. Sometimes referred to as the intermediate result, Short-term outcomes (D’Agnes & Slater, 2009)</p> <p>11. The desired state that it is intended to achieve – the desired outcome. (WHO 2016)</p> <p>12. A statement of the condition or state one expects to achieve (USAID 2009: 8)</p>	<p>The specific, short-term or medium-term outcome or change that represents the intermediate results, state or condition that an intervention expects to achieve at sectoral or project level</p>	
<p>MEDIUM-TERM CHANGES</p> <p>13. What changes the project is hoping to achieve (Save the Children 2003: 339).</p> <p>14. In scope, Objectives are short or medium term impacts such a behavioural change, Measured by: impact evaluation (Victoria 2010: 1)</p>		

Overall, seven broad themes - the object, scope, hierarchy, timeframe, measurability, significance and statement of an objective are identified from the definitions. The object includes: exact targets or

milestones, measurable sectional results, short-term goals, outcomes and mid-term changes (Table 4). Most sources give the impression that objective is an outcome, defined by USAID (2009) as *“the results or effects caused by or attributed to the project, programme or policy. Often used to refer to more immediate and intended effects.”* Regarding its scope, it is specific or narrow. Hierarchically, they are placed at the intermediate result level, between immediate-level outputs, and terminal-level impact (USAID 2009; UNDG 2011). Hence, they are smaller units of, or steps towards, an aim (Bristol 2009; Victoria 2010). Accordingly, D’Agnes and Slater (2009) states that an *“Objective is moving you towards your overall aim and provides targets and milestones.”* In time-frame, it is short-term (Save the Children 2003), which could be 3 or 6 months (Barts 2016; WHO 2016), 12 months (Salford, 2011) or 5 years (Save the Children, 2003). These figures have a median of 9 months. Barts (2016) assert that a timeframe of 5 years is applicable to long-term goals. In its measurability, objectives must be measurable quantitatively or qualitatively (MSU 2012), *“in terms of quantity, quality, time and money”* (Salford 2011). In significance, it is an essential tool for measuring the effectiveness and efficiency of organisations (Libhiya-babu 2014).

In objective statements, most sources report they must satisfy the S.M.A.R.T. criteria, including being Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timed (Doran 1981). According to Lidhiya-babu (2014: 43), the statement should specify *“what is to be accomplished by when and should be quantified if possible.”* For example:

- “The risk of diarrhea reduced by 50% in the target population in 6 months” (WHO, 2016)
- “To achieve 80 per cent immunization coverage in the next 5 years in district X” (Save the children, 2003: 339).

A review of the framework of the first statement by WHO (2016) reveals the specific outcome is *“The risk of diarrhea reduced,”* the target is *“50%”*, and the time frame is *“6 months.”* This objective does not state how the outcome will be measured. Similarly, the second statement include a target *“80%”*, the means of measurement *“immunization coverage”* and time frame, *“next 5 years”*. However, it does not specify the specific outcome that the immunization coverage measures.

What is a Target?

Table 5 shows the three labelled primary categories obtained from the five source definitions, and the subsequent reduction to three secondary definitions, and a single tertiary definition. The primary labels reflect that a target is either a ‘particular value’, ‘specific objective’ or ‘step or milestone’ (Table 5). The three themes of target are its object, expression, and time frame. The object is either an *“objective”* (UNAIDS 2008; UNAIDS 2010), *“results”* (USAID 2009: 11), *“rungs on the ladder”* (Derbyshire 2012) or *“The desired value of an indicator”* (UNDG 2011). The object shows its connection to an objective, as well as to the calibration of an indicator, which is defined as a quantitative or qualitative variable that serves as means to measure a desired achievement or change (Chaplowe 2008). Hence in expression, a target is stated as a numeric value of an indicator, which should be *“realistic, achievable and specific”* (Derbyshire 2012). In its time-frame, its attainment refers to a particular point in time (UNAIDS 2008; UNAIDS 2010) or *“a specific date in the future”* (UNDG 2011). Thus in the example given by UNDG (2011), the stated indicator is *“literacy rate”*, the target is *“85%”* and the time frame, *“the year 2010.”*

Table 5: Reduction of primary definitions of a target in source literature

Primary definition categories	Secondary definition	Tertiary definition
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	categories	category
Particular VALUE 1. "A particular value that an indicator should reach by a specific date in the future. For example, 'total literacy rate to reach 85 per cent among groups X and Y by the year 2010.'" (UNDG 2011) 2. The desired value for an indicator at a particular point in time. (UNAIDS 2008, UNAIDS 2010: 69)	A particular value of an indicator to be reached at a particular future time frame	A desired result or milestone toward the long term goal expressed as a particular measurable value of an indicator
Specified objective or RESULT 3. "The objective a program / intervention is working towards expressed as a measurable value." (UNAIDS 2008, UNAIDS 2010: 69) 4. "The specified result often expressed by a value of an indicator, that a project, program or policy intends to achieve." (USAID 2009: 11)	A specified objective or result to be achieved expressed as a measurable value of an indicator	
STEPS or MILESTONES 5. Your targets are the rungs on the ladder (towards your long-term goal at the top) (Derbyshire 2012)	Specific milestones to the long-term goal	

DISCUSSION

The terminological confusion in the definitions of *goal*, *aim*, *objective* and *target* is universal and understandably justifies the global efforts to unify their meanings through multilateral consultations over the past two decades (OECD 2002). This review is however the first attempt to inductively harmonise their definitions according to a framework of thematic concepts that differentiate them and provide a guide to a constructive formulation of their statements. Despite their non-academic sources, the literature reviewed has sufficient evidence to show that the terms are not synonymous as used in academic literature, but can be differentiated thematically on the bases of their object, scope, hierarchy, time-frame, measurability, significance and expression.

Overall, the review finds a difference in understanding of the goal terms between the development and healthcare sectors. In the health sector, the term goal has a generic reference to all types of

intervention results, instead of its rendition as a “*higher order objective*” by development organisations (OECD 2002). In addition, the shared framework indicates that the term *aim* is analogous with the non-generic development *goal*. Thematically, both are similarly objects of impact: broad terminal results with long-term timeframe and poor immeasurability; markers of organisational success, expressed as general purpose statements. Objectives can be distinctly differentiated by their object of outcome: a specific intermediate-level results with short-term timeframes and measurable indicators. They are markers of intervention effectiveness, expressed as milestone statements that satisfy the SMART criteria (Lidhiya-babu 2014; WHO 2016). Similarly, a target is definable by its object as a numeric value of an indicator. Moreover, these thematic frameworks also have implication for how the statements of each goal-term are written. For instance, the statement of an aim could be constructed on a lexical structure with at least two basic components - a broad, overall *impact* and a terminal long-term *timeframe*. The S.M.A.R.T. framework expected for an objective statement necessitates that it is written on a structure that has at least four components - Specific intermediate-level *outcome*, Measurable *indicator*, Attainable *target* and Realistic, Timely short-term *timeframe*.

In the final synthesis, some propositions are inducible from this review. First, in healthcare the term *goal* is generic for all anticipated achievements of an intervention, including aims, objectives and targets. Secondly, an objective as a sub-goal represents a quantifiable milestone towards an aim as the overall goal (Save the Children 2003; Bristol 2009). Thirdly, writing statements of aims and objectives could be guided by the components of a thematic goal framework. An aim statement should compose of components of the *impact* and *timeframe (I.T.)*, while an objective statement could be written with a framework composed of four basic components: *outcome, indicator, target and time-frame (O.I.T.T.)*. Clearly, the proposed frameworks are not alternative to Doran’s (1981) S.M.A.R.T. criteria, rather they provide templates on which S.M.A.R.T. goals could be written. Accordingly, the published examples of

aims and objectives statements in some reviewed sources are considered incomplete. This reveals a need in organisations to review the construction of statements of their aims and objectives for a more effective goal setting practice. For example, the Save the Children (2003) aim statement could be re-written on the I.T. framework as, *'To improve the health of under-five children (IMPACT) in district X in the next 5 years (TIME-FRAME)'* and the WHO (2016) objective statement could be re-phrased on the O.I.T.T. framework as, *'To reduce the risk of diarrhoea (OUTCOME) in the target population such that the incidence of diarrhoea (INDICATOR) in the decreases by 50% (TARGET) in 6 months (TIME-FRAME).'*

CONCLUSIONS

The four terms of goal, aim, objective and target are thematically different according to their object, scope, hierarchy, timeframe, measurability, significance and expression. These concepts also provide structural bases for the components of lexical frameworks for writing statements of aims and objectives. In particular, the I.T. and O.I.T.T frameworks are recommended for writing complete aim and objective statements respectively. However, the efficacy of these frameworks to improve the quality of goal-setting practices and motivate better outcomes of interventions needs further research.

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