Tips regarding (i) Development of Metrics and (ii) Evaluation of Metrics

The Program Prioritization Implementation Team offers the following “ways of looking at things” to help you in the Program Prioritization process.

1. Imagine that you are being asked by another university to review a unit similar to your unit at Boise State. The other university wants you to tell them if the unit is doing what it should be doing, whether it is doing it well, and whether it is doing it efficiently. You must make your recommendations based on examination of written information and data only.

   • When creating metrics: What sort of information and data would you want the university to provide to you to enable you to do a good job of evaluating the unit? That set of information and data will constitute a good set of “metrics” for a unit of your type.

   • When evaluating proposed metrics: Would the proposed metrics enable you to do a good job of evaluating the unit? What key information is missing? Which metrics are not really useful in your evaluation?

2. Many metrics are difficult to interpret without some sort of a standard to which to compare. For example, department X produces 10 graduates per year. Is this good, average, or poor performance? Comparisons can be made to benchmarks (e.g., nationwide, the average department of the same size produces 20 graduates per year), to peers (either inside or outside the organization), to targets (e.g., five years ago, the department stated that by this year, they would have increased their number of graduates to 16 per year), and/or to previous data (e.g., the number of graduates has doubled over the last five years).

3. A set of metrics must be able to distinguish between a strong program and a weak program. If a metric would produce (for the particular aspect of the program measured by the metric) the same result for a strong program as for a weak program, then it is of little use.

4. Every program has a purpose for existing and should have clear objectives to achieve. Will the information provided by the proposed metrics clearly demonstrate that the program is (i) doing well at achieving its objectives or instead (ii) needs to undergo substantive change?

5. It must be possible for a metric to have a value (e.g., “less than 100”) or magnitude of response (e.g., a weak answer and evidence regarding alignment with mission) that indicates that the program is not doing well and needs change. If any possible response to the metric makes a program look good, then it is not a useful metric. Similarly, it must be possible for a metric to indicate that a program is, in fact, doing well. If any possible response to the metric makes a program look bad, then it is not a useful metric.

6. Metrics may need to be normalized to enable comparisons to be made. For example, it may be necessary to put productivity in terms of the FTE of staff that are contributing to that productivity.

7. It is easy to measure “activity,” but metrics based on activity are often of little use in understanding the impact of the program. Examples of activity measures are: number of customers served, number of applications processed, number of pigeons released...

8. “Meaningful evidence”: that’s what metrics should provide.

9. Finding “opportunities for improvement” is one way to make lemonade out of lemons in this process. And you won’t identify those opportunities unless you take a really hard look at your operations and are willing to put forth information/metrics that indicate “soft spots” in your program.
More thoughts from two sources on the web:

**Modified From Brandongaille.com: 3. Metrics Gone Wrong**

With so many numbers being measured, it is easy to spend time measuring items of less importance.

**Focusing on Quantity, Not Quality**

Ignoring the quality does not help you to determine the current effectiveness of programs that may seem effective on the surface, but do not deliver profits.

**Looking at Action/Activity, Not Results**

It is relatively easy to measure action or activity. However, determining the actual results or impact of your efforts requires more in depth analysis.

**Thinking Efficiency, Not Effectiveness**

A difference exists between effectiveness metrics and efficiency metrics. This looks at doing the right things compared to doing the wrong things well. An example of this is filling the seats up for an event, but all the wrong people attend for the show.

**Metrics that Create Vanity**

These are considered metrics that make you feel good and sound impressive but actually lack any form of solid contribution to the company. Examples of vanity metrics are Facebook likes, re-tweets, and press release impressions.

**Taking the Easy Way Out**

Being able to directly measure the impact of a program can be a daunting task; it is much easier to focus on tasks that are easier to quantify. However, if the metrics you create are of little use in actually evaluating the impact of a program, there is little reason to measure them.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Examples of less-than-useful metrics</th>
<th>Examples of useful metrics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Speed</strong></td>
<td>Driver A’s average speed is 60 (60 what? Are we breaking the law?)</td>
<td>We have a problem: Driver A’s average speed is 65m/hour on the freeway, and 50m/hour in the city. His city driving speed is 15 m/hour higher than our company standard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sales</strong></td>
<td>103 bicycles sold last month (So what? Are sales doing well or not?)</td>
<td>We’re on track: 103 bicycles sold last month; our target was 100; last year at this time we sold 75.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Help Tickets</strong></td>
<td>155 open help desk tickets (So what? Is that good or bad?)</td>
<td>We have a problem: We have 155 open tickets, which is 75 tickets more than last week at this time. 8 agents are handling the 155 tickets at an average of 20 tickets each. That is 5 tickets more per agent than our help desk standard.</td>
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