



TenStep Supplemental Paper

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There are Structured and Unstructured Approaches to Starting a Metrics Program

There are two approaches for organizations looking to start collecting metrics. One is a formal, structured approach and one is an unstructured “let’s do it” approach.

The structured approach

One way to get a metrics program started is to get a set of key stakeholders together and go through an exercise to put a formal process in place. The overall steps would include:

Identify criteria for success. First you need to define what success means to your organization. You would normally look at your business plan, strategy, vision, departmental objectives, etc. If you have no guidance at your department level, see if any of these documents exist at a division or company level. If you have no guidance at all, the group will need to spend some time to identify a candidate set of criteria that would signify success for the organization.

Assign potential metrics. Identify potential metrics for each of your criteria that provide an indication of whether you are achieving success. This is a brainstorming exercise so that you identify as many potential metrics as possible.

Look for a balance. The potential list of metrics should be placed into categories to make sure that they provide a balanced view of the organization. For instance, you do not want to end up with only a set of financial metrics, even though they might be easiest to obtain. In general, look for metrics that provide information in the areas such as cost, effort hours, project success, quality, productivity, client satisfaction, business value, etc.

Prioritize the balanced list of metrics. Depending on how many metrics you have identified, prioritize the list to include only those that have the least cost to collect and provide the most value to the organization. If this is your first real effort to collect metrics, you probably want to capture a minimum core set.

Set targets. The raw metric may be of some interest, but the measure of success comes from comparing your actuals against a predefined target.

Collect and analyze the information. Now the hard part - set up the processes to collect the metrics and analyze them on an ongoing basis.

The unstructured approach

There is another approach that can work. The basic philosophy is “just collect something, even if it’s wrong.” This is similar to the Nike ad campaign of “Just do it!” In this approach, some key people in the organization get together and look for information that can be easily captured, and from which certain aspects of success can be inferred.

This is not as bad as it sounds. You basically look for metrics that can be captured easily and start to capture and analyze them. After you collect the data over time, you get a sense for whether the metrics are providing value and whether you need to find more or



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different ones. This approach gets you into the habit of collecting and analyzing metrics first and allows you to improve your metrics over time

Your metrics should include client satisfaction

Some organizations choose to put a lot of emphasis on objective metrics that speak for themselves rather than subjective metrics that leave open the chance for bias. Capturing cost metrics is an example of objective metrics. Counting the number of Help Desk calls is also fairly objective, once you define exactly what a “call” is.

However, surveys can provide the fastest and cheapest way to gather good information when you are starting. After all, all the metrics in the world won't make you look successful if your customer has the perception that you are not. Simple surveys can be used as a substitute for the hard, objective metrics. For instance, it may take a lot of work to determine the time required to resolve Help Desk tickets by severity level. On the other hand, you could send out a simple survey to some portion of people who submit problems to the Help Desk. One of the questions would ask the user how satisfied they were with the time it took to resolve the call. The feedback to this survey question probably goes a lot farther to help you understand whether you are meeting expectations than if you were just relying on the length of time to resolve a problem ticket.

Summary

Deciding to start collecting metrics is a great first step, but now you must decide how to get started on the work. You need to capture metrics that give you some indication of whether (or how well) you are meeting your organizational objectives and expectations. If this is not easy to determine, then look around for as many metrics as you can find that are easy to collect and provide some indication of your work

You also need to include some survey, “opinionated” metrics, especially when you are just starting off. Survey metrics can show how well you are meeting expectations, what level of quality you are delivering and how easy your group is to work with. Later, you may be able to find more objective metrics to utilize in some of these areas. However, at this point you can get more value from gathering the perception of your client, analyzing the feedback, and improving your processes over time. Then, continue the measurement process to ensure you continue to move in the right direction.