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Question #2—How Do We Measure Success?

*What's easy to measure isn't always important;
what's important isn't always easy to measure.*

—Albert Einstein

Develop Success Measures and Verifications

<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Success Measures</i>	<i>Verification</i>	<i>Assumptions</i>
<i>Goal</i>			
<i>Purpose</i>			
<i>Outcomes</i>			
<i>Inputs</i>			

FIGURE 6.1 The LogFrame Helps Define What Success of Each Objective Means

Winning the Peace After Winning the War

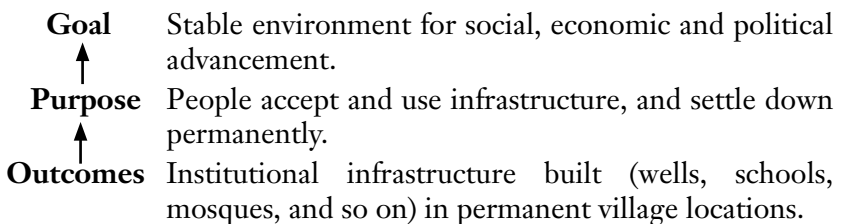
My appreciation of the Logical Framework's power to tackle the big hairy audacious goals multiplied after I served as a consultant to His Excellency the Wali of Dhofar in the Southern Region in the Sultanate of Oman. Oman is a small Arab country tucked beneath Saudi Arabia on the edge of the Arabian Sea. While this example may seem far from your field of work, it shows how this approach can organize people to plan and execute an ambitious and complex change strategy.

In the mid-1970s, Oman was wracked by Chinese-backed insurgents from Yemen who enticed some of the local population to rebel against the government. Following years of fighting, the war ended after the government finally found a compelling way to convince the rebels to lay down their arms and surrender: They paid them in cash.

Having won the war, His Excellency then shifted his attention to “winning the peace”—a much tougher proposition. At the time, Oman's population consisted primarily of nomadic herdsmen without permanent homes. The herdsmen had to constantly move their cattle in search of scarce water, whose location varied with shifting rainfall patterns.

The government's strategy was to put in place a community infrastructure that would encourage stable villages to become established. His Excellency believed that by drilling deep wells and creating several dozen year-round water sources, herdsmen would settle down in permanent locations.

In each community, the government would also put in place Outcomes such as schools, health clinics, mosques, and markets. This new physical and institutional infrastructure would, when accepted and used, produce a stable environment for social, economic, and political advancement. In brief, the logic was as follows:



This approach had never been tried before and there was no guarantee of success. But without the ability to track progress using well-chosen Measures, the government wouldn't know if the strategy was working or if the insurgency was in danger of erupting again.

Over a six-week period, I guided government staff in creating a master Logical Framework, which was exquisitely hand-drawn by Indian draftsmen on a six-foot tall vellum document (both in English and Arabic). This was another gigantic grid that should be recorded in project management history! Between working sessions, our project team staff would gather baseline data, consult with local officials, and travel to remote villages by helicopter, armor-plated Land Rover, or camel.

His Excellency joined us during the final session when the team briefed him about the win-the-peace strategy using the LogFrame. The three-hour discussion that followed targeted communication around meaningful issues. His Excellency accepted responsibility for influencing certain Assumptions beyond the team's control. The good news: The program was successful; and today, Oman remains a progressive and moderate Arab nation.

We'll return to the Oman story later, after making some important points about Measures.

Four Tips for Meaningful Measures

Measures are the instruments on your project dashboard so choose those needed to intelligently guide your project journey. Don't fall into the trap of measuring only that which is easy to measure. Measuring Inputs and Outcomes is most straightforward, *but progress towards Purpose and Goal is what really counts*. The best Measures meet these criteria:

1. *Valid*—They accurately measure the Objective.
2. *Verifiable*—Clear, non-subjective evidence exists or can be obtained.
3. *Targeted*—Quality, quantity, and time targets are pinned down.
4. *Independent*—Each level in the hierarchy has separate Measures.

Tip #1. Choose Valid Measures

Valid Measures capture the essence of an Objective such that changes in the status of Measures accurately reflect changes in the status of the Objective. Let's assume that you manage an internal corporate service function, such as Personnel or Finance. Given the Purpose stated in the LogFrame in Figure 6.2, which four of these nine Measures seem most valid?

Objectives	Success Measures	Verification
<p>Purpose An effective and responsive organizational unit</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Fully staffed 2. Achieves objectives in annual plan 3. Comfortable and efficient facilities 4. Operates within budget 5. People arrive at work on time 6. Meets customer expectations 7. High morale 8. Provides results within "X" days of request 9. Admired by the boss 	

FIGURE 6.2 Clarifying Purpose with Measures

The even-numbered Measures are most valid. We can reasonably conclude that an organization that achieves its Objectives operates within budget, meets customer expectations, and provides results within “x” days, is indeed effective and responsive. None of the odd-numbered Measures pass the validity test.

Admittedly, the unit may need to be “Fully staffed” (#1) and have “Comfortable and efficient facilities” (#3). However, you cannot observe that its status of being fully staffed with comfortable and efficient facilities concludes that it is effective. Note this subtle distinction: Being fully staffed and having the right facilities may be necessary to be effective, but they are not a Measure of effectiveness. As such, these would be Outcomes, not Purpose Measures.

“People arrive at work on time” (#5) may be vital in some contexts (i.e., aircraft crews, pro ballplayers, or bank officers who unlock

vaults), but it is less vital in creative or professional work. Google employees, for example, have the freedom to show up when they choose, as long as they perform.

Another distinction: “High morale” (#7) may be present in an effective unit, but its presence does not prove a state of effectiveness because high morale can occur for many reasons (great pay, barrels of fun, friendly folks, and daily donuts—to name a few). There is some correlation, but not causation.

Finally, being “Admired by the boss” (#9) never hurts, but some bosses may admire for reasons that do not include effectiveness.

Tip #2. Make Your Measures Verifiable

Decades before the expression GIGO (Garbage In-Garbage Out) entered our vocabulary, the Measurement/Verification problem was summed up as follows:

The government ministries are very keen on amassing statistics. They collect them, raise them to the n^{th} power, take the cube root, and prepare wonderful diagrams. But you must never forget that every one of these figures comes, in the first place, from the village watchman, who just puts down what he damn well pleases.

—Sir Josiah Stamp, 1911, English economist (1880–1941)

The village watchmen, and their modern-day equivalents, will be found in the Verification column. This third LogFrame column identifies processes and mechanisms for determining the status of Measures in column two. Today’s versions of village watchmen range from no-tech to low-tech to high-tech. Here are some examples:

- Staff meetings
- Decision meetings
- Financial reports signed
- Industry financial comparisons
- Direct observation of behavior
- Instrument reading or test results
- Employee/management meetings
- Industry surveys
- Customer surveys
- MIS reports
- Letters of agreement
- Completed documentation
- Evaluation meetings
- Focus groups
- Industry certification
- 360-degree feedback

Measurement demands objective and verifiable evidence, not subjective interpretation. Personal opinion is no substitute for verifiable Measures. Here's a practical rule of thumb for whether Measures are objectively stated: If being truthful, both a project skeptic and an advocate would agree on the degree of achievement, based on the data presented.

Choose your Measures and Verifications carefully and avoid highly subjective ones. The usefulness of a Measure is determined by how efficiently you can gather accurate data to verify it. A project to train in-home healthcare nurses initially chose "Observe nurses in practice" as a means of Verification, but management later realized that it was too expensive and unreliable to send people along to watch nurse performance. The team substituted "record of complaints" as an easy-to-track proxy.

Let's add means of Verification to the valid Measures of our earlier example, as shown in Figure 6.3.

Think of the Verification column as your project management information and learning system. It forces you to define and concisely summarize how information will be generated, tracked, analyzed, and reported. Look first for already existing and easy-to-use methods, and then supplement those as needed. Remember to collect not only data that shows progress but also offers clues that warn when you are off-track. Having your project team discuss the most effective means to verify your Measures should stimulate creative thinking about how the team will perform, learn, and evolve over time.

Just because you *can* measure something doesn't mean you necessarily should. Give careful thought to choosing the most appropriate indicators. Some indicators may give the information you would

Objectives	Success Measures	Verification
Purpose An effective and responsive organizational unit	1. Achieves objective in annual plan 2. Operates within budget 3. Meets customer expectations 4. Provides results within 'x' days	1. Quarterly & annual reviews 2. Monthly budget reports 3. Periodic customer survey 4. Tracking logs

FIGURE 6.3 Adding Means of Verification Makes Measures Trackable

ideally like to have, but the means of getting this might be impractical, too complex, or too expensive. Ask these questions to refine your information needs:

- *What* kind of data will be collected? How and how often?
- *Where* specifically will we collect this data, and who will do it?
- *How* will data be turned into usable information?
- *How* will that information be used? By whom?
- *Who* else will it be shared with?
- *How* will it be analyzed and reported? By whom?
- *What* is the most cost-effective means of Verification?

Tip #3. Target Your Measures

The process of putting numbers and dates on Measures is called *targeting*. Begin with the basic indicators and then elaborate on the required Quantity, Quality, and Time (include Cost and Customer Measures, if appropriate). Note this progressive targeting:

a. **Choose the Basic Indicator**

Level 1 and 2 managers use new reporting systems

b. **Add Quantity (how much)**

80 percent of level 1 and 2 managers

c. **Add Quality (what kind of change or how good a change)**

90 percent of users rate new system as better than the old system

d. **Add Time (by when), Cost (amount), and Customer (who)**

Eighty percent of level 1 and 2 managers use new system by October 1st; and 90 percent of users rate new system better than the old system.

How do you set the right quantitative targets? Choose targets that are sufficient to achieve impact at the next higher level. Setting target Measures is often by negotiating with stakeholders on what is realistic, doable, and warranted. As a first step, you might write in the indicators, but leave blanks for the numbers and dates unless they are readily known. Otherwise, just specify the indicators and set targets after further analysis or consultation. Sometimes, rather

Vague	Better	Best
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve Sales 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve sales by 30% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve sales of product “X” by 30% in 6 months; with half of increase coming from new customers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve Teamwork 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce team conflicts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce team conflicts requiring medical care by 40% next month

FIGURE 6.4 Make Measures Clear by Adding Targets

than locking in a single number, it’s appropriate to state a rough range.

The targeting process can boil down to negotiated agreement or reliance on past experience. At other times, you may need to define the minimum target levels required to make the necessary ROI, they evaluate the likelihood of reaching those levels. When all else fails, choose a reasonable SWAG (see Glossary for definition).

Figure 6.4 shows some examples of how targeting makes vague Objectives come alive.

How many Measures does each Objective need? Choose the minimum number that clearly demonstrates the progress towards achievement of each Objective. While a single Measure will sometimes suffice, multiple Measures are usually necessary for all but the simplest Objectives.

Tip #4. Choose Independent Measures at Each Level

Because Goal, Purpose, and Outcomes are separate and independent, Objectives, their Measures must be as well. It’s logically fallacious to expect Measures at one level to capture performance at another level. Remember, Measures *describe* the Objectives, they do not *cause* them.

Returning to our workshop example in Chapter 3, would you accept “80 percent of participants *learn* concepts” as a valid Measure of the Purpose Objective: “Participants *apply* concepts after workshop?” Just say no. Participant learning is an Outcome in this LogFrame; so Purpose Measures would have to describe the behaviors that constitute “apply.”

Keep in mind that the nature of Measures at each level varies.

Goal Measures tend to be broad macro-Measures that include the long-term impact of one project or multiple projects aimed at the same Goal.

Purpose Measures describe those conditions we expect will exist when we are willing to call the project a success. Defining Purpose level Measures can be tricky because Purpose often involves expected changes in the behavior of people or within a system as a result of delivering project Outcomes.

Outcome Measures describe specific tangible results that the project team can make happen and commits to doing so. Describe them as completed results (using the past tense verb form, such as “System developed” or “Training completed”). Doing so makes them easier to visualize in your mind’s eye.

Input Measures deal with activity, budget, and schedule. They are described further in Chapter 7.

Remember what Measures are designed to do: Create a shared understanding of what conditions will exist when the Objectives are accomplished.

Measures Sharpen Vague Objectives

The OSRP sealed-source recovery team mentioned in the last chapter employed the LogFrame to build consensus on a strategy to produce their primary deliverable—a comprehensive work plan. Clear Outcome Measures enabled these team members to agree on what the work plan would consist of, and what they were shooting for, even before they knew its specific technical content. Figure 6.5 identifies Success Measures for their work plan.

Make Your Measures Rich and Robust

Like masterfully brewed Kona coffee, the best Measures are rich and robust. They are rich in capturing the essence of the Objective, and robust in providing a way to monitor and manage this project element.

Objectives	Success Measures	Verification
<p>Outcome:</p> <p>Team prepares a clear, comprehensive, actionable work plan for developing disposal options for sealed-sources.</p>	<p>Outcome Measures:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. By 4/30, Action Plan completed which specifies a logical process for identifying options, conducting analyses, and selecting the preferred pathway for disposal of sealed-sources. 2. The Action Plan identifies key tasks, responsibilities, schedules, Assumptions, and budgets to complete the appropriate analyses. 3. The Action Plan is based on the Logical Framework or equivalent planning concepts. 4. The Action Plan development process includes involvement of key project stakeholders. 5. The Action Plan formally allows for effective task coordination and communication among team members. 6. The Action Plan budget and schedule supports the DOE baseline planning process. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Completed document 2. Inspection of plan 3. Peer review of plan 4. Attendance records 5. Team member feedback 6. Budget analyst feedback

FIGURE 6.5 Clarifying the Project Outcome with Measures and Verification

The Oman project Goal was a “stable environment in which social and economic conditions improved throughout the Southern Region.” The complexity and multiple dimensions of this Goal required a comprehensive set of Measures and Verifications, as shown in Figure 6.6.

For a fascinating look at a strategy to “Win the Peace” after an insurgency, see the full LogFrame at www.ManagementPro.com.

Objectives	Success Measures	Verification	Assumptions
<p>Goal: Stable environment in which social and economic conditions improve throughout Southern Region/Dhofar.</p>	<p>Goal Measures:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Literacy rate improves: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Percentage of persons who can read and write at 3rd grade level increases from ____% in 1977 to ____% in 1982. 2. Health standards improve: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Percentage of population affected by diarrhea, tuberculosis, trachoma, and other high-incidence illnesses and diseases declines from ____% in 1977 to ____% in 1982. 3. Security situation improves: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Percentage of population carrying weapons declines from ____% in 1977 to ____% in 1982. b. Military incidents and injuries or death resulting from armed conflict declines from ____% in 1977 to ____% in 1982. c. Number of enemy "adoo" who have not surrendered declines from 1977 estimate of ____ to a number which is effectively nil by 1982. 4. Economic well-being improves: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Average per capita income from productive work activities reaches ____ by 1982. b. Income distributed such that percentage of population at or below "marginal" level as defined by government is less than ____% in 1982. c. ____ persons employed in livestock, agriculture and fisheries by 1982. ____ persons employed in ____ enterprises which are non-agriculture or fishing by 1982. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ministry of Education figures and estimates. 2. Ministry of Public Health figures and estimates. 3. Ministry of Defense figures and estimates. 4. OHEW figures and estimates. 	<p>Assumptions to reach Goal:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Providing direct improvements in the health, education and economic status of Dhofaris will result in the support of the government, rejection of insurgent influence and national unification and stability. 2. Maintaining population in the Jebel, Negd and coastal areas and preventing mass migration to Salalah is essential. Providing direct services to those areas is a means of encouraging permanent settlements and the development of communities.

FIGURE 6.6 Clarifying the Goal of Achieving a Stable Environment in Oman

Choose Valid Verifiers

An unusual story from the Oman community development project shows what can happen when you don't have a good means of Verification in place. To provide health care in 15 isolated rural areas, the Omani government set up a "flying doctor service" whereby health aides would helicopter in to remote areas weekly to provide services.

To stem the possible outbreak of a particular disease, they planned to inoculate 95 percent of the population in these remote villages in 12 weeks. They estimated the population to be 6,000 and ordered twice the amount of vaccine necessary to provide a buffer against possible spoilage. Their means of Verification was to count the number of inoculations given. Great verifier, right? Figure 6.7 shows the horizontal logic.

On the day I accompanied the flying doctors, long lines of Omani villagers were already waiting when the choppers arrived. They seemed eager to get their injections, and the early results were impressive. After just four weeks, project records showed some 4,500 people had received inoculations. In the fifth week, this jumped to 5,700; in week six, it passed 6,000. The eighth week, even more people showed up, and the figure climbed to 7,500 people.

Wait! Something was wrong. After ten weeks, their records indicated that they had injected 9,000 people, 150 percent of the estimated population! The managers in charge huddled and concluded that their population estimates must have gone haywire. Only later, after interviewing villagers, did they discover the true problem.

Here's what happened: Less than 20 percent of the population had actually received a shot. But this same 20 percent kept returning

Objectives	Success Measures	Verification
Outcomes 1. Population inoculated against disease	1. 95 % of population of 6,000 people inoculated within 12 weeks of project start	1. Count inoculations given

FIGURE 6.7 Measures and Verification for the Oman Inoculations

week after week on the false belief that if one injection is good for you, lots of them are even better.

Program managers fell into the trap of measuring what's easy to measure (number of inoculations) rather than what was really important (*who* actually received inoculations). With a more valid way to verify, they would have detected the problem earlier. Chalk it up to inadequate education, poor means of Verification, and the lag time in analyzing collected data.

Fortunately, there were no serious long-term health effects to those who received multiple injections. Rest assured that the managers corrected their methodology after discovering their error.

The Goal Measures in Figure 6.6 summarizes how Oman envisioned the stable environment that it sought.

The Importance of Purpose Measures

Purpose Measures are the most important in the hierarchy. Why? Because that's your primary aiming point, the what-should-occur result you expect *after* you deliver what you can. Goal Measures are important too, of course, but they often reflect the result of multiple projects and outside factors, and are, therefore, not impacted by your project alone.

Set Purpose Measures before you set your Outcome Measures. That way you can target and tailor your Outcome Measures at levels sufficient to achieve the Purpose level impact (as indicated by Purpose Measures). The act of defining these establishes the synergy between the Outcomes and Purpose.

Getting From Here to There

Purpose level Measures describe the result of a transformation, from the way things currently are to how we would like them to be. They have a special name—the End of Project Status (EOPS) Measures. EOPS, describes your “walk-away-feeling-proud” indicators, or the conditions that would be in place when you declare the effort a success.

Perhaps your project involves managing soft factors such as attitude and behavior shifts. These hard-to-describe changes can be clarified using “from-to” language. Ren Powers, an accomplished IT project manager, was responsible for an education campaign for employees in a financial service firm whose laptops carried sensitive financial data. Employees sometimes bypassed the recommended

From (The way it is now)	➔	To (How we want it)
• boring and useless		• interesting and helpful
• outdated and old		• future and cutting-edge
• pain in the ass to do		• easy to comply with
• old-fashioned “fuddy duddy”		• innovative
• only benefits me at work		• helps my entire life
• roadblock		• enabler

FIGURE 6.8 From-To Thinking Helps Pinpoint Needed Change

security procedures because they seemed cumbersome and took more time. Her project’s Purpose was “Employees understand the need for security and follow defined procedures.” Figure 6.8 shows the From-To thinking.

These insights helped her develop a program designed to shift attitudes before attempting to shift behavior. Outcomes included the roll-out of a compelling and entertaining online cartoon featuring a black panther, coupled with “Panthergrams”—monthly newsletters with articles on personal and business security issues. Remember that having a clear sense of Purpose—pinned down with Measures—gives an aiming point for the Outcomes.

She recognized that changing employee attitudes about security procedures was the key to behavior change. Her Purpose Measures were stated using a From-To analysis illustrating necessary employee attitude shifts, where the “To” conditions describe the desired project EOPS. Once their attitudes shifted, their willingness to take security procedures Measures shifted into high gear.

Managing Complex Enterprise-Wide Change

There was trouble at the Fircrest School for the Developmentally Disabled. The school is home to some 800 adults and children who suffer from serious physical and emotional developmental disabilities.

Fircrest is funded both by Washington State and Federal funds, and it is managed by the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services.

A few years ago, several disturbing incidents indicated that residents were being improperly treated and their quality of life was low. There were some unexplained injuries to residents and even one suspicious death. Visiting experts noted overuse of psychoactive medications and restraints. Quality assurance was lacking. Medical and nursing care records were not timely and accurate. Too many nurses were assigned to administrative duties and too few to resident care and treatments.

Following an audit, the school's federal certification was revoked—along with millions of dollars of federal funding. This presented management with a serious problem that needed solving quickly and effectively. Project Manager Katie Cameron used the Logical Framework with her project team to develop a strategy to improve the safety, health, and quality of care in order to regain federal certification.

Their Purpose statement appears in Figure 6.9 and is rich with excellent Measures and Verifications. Note how the Measures pin down what would otherwise be a vague Purpose. There are enough specific and targeted Measures, along with related data sources, to permit an evaluation of the project's impact.

Notice the interplay among the horizontal elements of Objectives, Measures, and Verifications at each level of the LogFrame. This “horizontal thinking” builds a common vision based on measurable Objectives that can be verified. The full Fircrest LogFrame is included in the Appendix to demonstrate best practices usage, while a larger downloadable version is on the website. You'll note that it is jargon free and easy to follow, even for generalists unfamiliar with this type of organization.

The good news: The Fircrest project team successfully implemented their action plan and regained certification. Today, they are one of only three such schools in the nation that continue to meet federal standards.

Special Situations Demand Special Measures

When confronted with stubborn Objectives that are just too difficult to measure directly, consider these three special types of Measures/indicators.

Objectives	Success Measures	Verification
<p>Purpose:</p> <p>People who live at Fircrest are safe and healthy, receive quality care, and their human rights are protected.</p>	<p>End of Project Status:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A 50% reduction in resident injuries that require nursing or medical care (or other intervention) occurs between 1/1 and 10/31. 2. No unusual or suspicious resident deaths occur between 1/1 and 10/31. 3. An 80% reduction in restraints and time out use will be achieved between 1/1 and 10/31. 4. A 25% reduction in number of residents being prescribed psychoactive medication occurs between 1/1 and 10/31. 5. 75% of residents are engaged in paid work activities for three more hours per day by 9/1. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.1 Review and summarize incident reports. 1.2 Review and tabulate injuries from medical notes. 2. Review coroner reports 3. Review and summarize restraint and time out records. 4. Review pharmacy and drug administrative records. 5. Collect, review and summarize resident production records and paycheck information.

FIGURE 6.9 Fircrest’s Purpose Statement, Measures, and Verifications

Leading Measures

Look for leading indicators when the key Success Measures won’t be available for a long time and you need earlier data to adjust your plan. Leading indicators show up in every context. The index of leading economic indicators accurately predicts economic activity months later. Interest rate changes predict new housing starts. Retail computer sales indicate future microprocessor demands.

The “Big Mac Index” is a leading indicator that has been fun and informal, yet functional for nearly two decades. According to the theory behind this index, when a McDonald’s Big Mac hamburger is cheaper in a given country than it is in the United States (expressed in U.S. dollars), then that country’s currency may be considered

undervalued and usually goes up in a short time to correct the imbalance. Don't knock it—as a leading indicator it has made millions for currency traders who are hip to its value.

The Strategic Project Management workshop LogFrame in Chapter 3 included two Purpose level Measures for “Participants apply concepts after workshop.” But these could not be measured until weeks after the workshop was over, which was too late for fine-tune adjustments. How could I, as the instructor, know during the workshop whether application was likely or not? The solution was to add the leading Measure shown in Figure 6.10, which could be determined during the class.

With this Measure in mind, I can occasionally ask, “Tell me how you plan to apply these ideas.” Then I can count the bright faces and eagerly raised hands, subtract the quiet-faced hand-hiders, and make a good prediction about future participant application.

More importantly, this leading indicator gave us ample opportunity to modify the workshop pace or emphasis if people weren't getting it. Keeping track at this level (Purpose) versus simply tracking the agenda to maintain the workshop schedule (Input level) permits continually adjusting the workshop direction to best achieve learning Outcomes.

How nimble is your project? Do you have leading indicators of purpose? That way you can spot trouble before it strikes! Are you Purpose-focused?

Projects that benefit most from leading Measures are those emergent or “learning by doing” efforts that involve frequent adjustments and ongoing modification in order to redirect the Outcome strategy during implementation.

Objectives	Success Measures	Verification
Participants apply concepts after workshop.	During workshop, 90% of participants identify at least one way to apply concepts and commit to doing so.	Each person verbally shares their plan.

FIGURE 6.10 Adding a Leading Measure

Proxy Measures

When direct Measures are too difficult, expensive, or unreliable, choose a proxy Measure as a substitute that closely correlates with Measures of interest. While proxies are never as accurate as direct Measures, they are often the best you can do. We use them all the time and they aren't just for tracking projects.

As a young man applying for a summer cowhand job on a Texas cattle ranch, John Huchton encountered a proxy Measure of his qualifications. To start the interview, the wise and grizzled old ranch boss said, "Show me your pocket knife." The boss carefully ran his thumb across John's knife blade and concluded, "It's sharp. Son, you're hired." The boss later explained that a dull blade meant a lazy cowboy—one unprepared to quickly cut a rope tangled around a calf's leg, or slice the head off a threatening rattlesnake.

What proxies might you use for hard-to-measure process dimensions of your project (as distinct from tasks and timeline)? How will you know that people are engaged and committed? How would you measure open communication? Effective coordination? Stakeholder support? Remember, you can't manage what you can't measure.

Unobtrusive Measures

The very act of measurement can distort data accuracy. The overbearing boss who asks his timid secretary how she likes working for him will get the answer he wants, not the truth. Unobtrusive Measures come in handy when attempts to measure more directly would produce unreliable results.

One Measure on the Oman LogFrame concerned how secure villagers felt. How could they make this determination? The chosen unobtrusive proxy Measure was the percentage of the population who carried visible weapons to the village market versus the percentage who did not.

But sometimes an outward observation isn't always focused on what you think is being observed. Southwest Airlines is famous for friendly flight crews. But it's tough to measure a friendly personality during an interview because anyone can fake being nice for an hour or two. So, in the early days, Southwest went unobtrusive. They would fill conference rooms with groups of prospective employees and ask each candidate to make a brief presentation to the group.

As each candidate spoke, Southwest staff, hidden behind one-way mirrors, watched the facial reactions of the candidates listening to presentations. Candidates were judged not on their presentation delivery, but on how they encouraged and supported the other presenters. Audience members who actively listened and gave encouraging facial feedback were perceived to be just the kind of genuinely friendly folks Southwest wanted distributing their peanut snacks.

The Magic of Measures

Adding real-world Verifications and Measures is the crucial step that tethers the grandest of dream Goals to the anchors of reality. Tacking metrics in place energizes the project by increasing confidence in all who read, study, or hear of the project—precisely because those Measures and Verifications have been consciously and formally embedded from the start.

Setting Measures in advance for Goal, Purpose, and Outcome Objectives is essential. If direct Measures don't work, try proxy, unobtrusive, or leading Measures. Remember, if you cannot measure your Objective with some ease and validity, then you don't have an Objective, you have dreamy-eyed fluff.

Key Points Review

1. Having valid Measures in place for all Objectives strengthens confidence in the project design, and reduces later squabbles. Because Goal, Purpose, and Outcomes are separate and independent Objectives, it makes sense that their Measures must be separate and independent as well.
2. Avoid the trap of measuring what's easy rather than what's important. Inputs and Outcomes are most easily measured, but progress towards Purpose and Goal is what really counts.
3. Purpose Measures are the most important because that's your aiming point—the what-should-occur result you expect after you deliver what you can. These EOPS Measures describe the

result of a transformation—from the way things currently are to how we'd like them to be.

4. Make sure your Measures:
 - Are specific in terms of Quantity, Quality, Time, Customer, and Cost.
 - Measure what is important about each Objective.
 - Consist of separate and distinct Measures at each level.
 - Pass the validity test—changes in the status of Measures are attributable to changes in the status of the Objective.
 - Include practical means of Verification.
5. For Objectives that are too tough or expensive to measure, get creative in selecting leading, proxy, or unobtrusive Measures.
6. Think of the Verification column as your project management information and learning system. It forces you to define and concisely summarize how information will be generated, tracked, analyzed, and reported. Look first for already existing and easy-to-use methods and then supplement those as needed.

Application Step #2

Question 2—How Do We Measure Success?

Review the list of Objectives you completed in Step #1 following the previous chapter. Make sure you have a solid statement of Goal, Purpose, and Outcomes.

1. Beginning with Purpose, develop clear Measures using QQT (Quality, Quantity, and Time). Describe each with complete sentences, phrases, or bullet points. At the same time you set Measures, add means of Verification. Measures which can't be verified are worthless.
2. Develop Measures for the Goal, along with means of Verification.
3. Develop Measures for each project Outcome, along with means of Verification.

4. Set them aside for a few days and take a fresh look later. Invite input from others. Continue to improve your Measures; don't prematurely freeze them.

In addition, select a few Measures that track the performance of your project team and management process. These process gears need to turn easily and mesh smoothly to maintain good teamwork.