

Reflections on the IASP Global Conference and Performance Measures

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I had the distinct pleasure of being a first-time attendee at the IASP 2024 Global Conference in June and participating in many inspiring sessions. I also enjoyed the opportunity to network with many fellow strategists and heard a theme in terms of constructive feedback: there was an unmet need for practical advice on how to develop performance measures. The theme of the conference was “Unlocking the Future,” so performance measurement may not have been a good topical fit but as the new social media manager for the IASP seeking content to market, I had a lightbulb moment to author this article on developing performance measures. And if there is an ongoing interest, I would love to hear from you to see how we can continue to work to meet this need.

Performance measures are second nature to me. I am a pragmatist at heart. I keep a daily planner to track my personal activities and relish the dopamine rush I get when I check off a task. Professionally, I have developed hundreds of performance metrics over my career in the form of short-term goals, long-term goals, strategic goals, and individual performance measures for myself and my direct reports. I fully believe in the importance of measuring what matters, data-driven decision-making, and performance feedback loops.

But where does one who is charged with developing performance measures start? First, a strategist is really a specialized facilitator, so it is important to understand that the strategist should not develop metrics without the input of those responsible for achieving the metrics.

Once you have those people in the room, start with the strategy: what is the mission of the organization and what are its goals? In other words, where is the organization going? This “where are we going” is your first input into developing measures. Often, the organization will be trying to improve something but sometimes it is about maintaining an already excellent position.

Next, is there a specific date by which the organization should arrive at its destination? If not explicitly stated, a strategist should assume some measure of success will be demonstrated by the end of the strategic plan’s date.

Now you have the “where are we going” and “by when should we get there.” That is the easy part. The harder part about performance measures involves answering this question: “how can we prove to ourselves and others that we have achieved our goals?” There are four types of performance measures to consider.

Performance Measure Type	Description	Examples
Input	A measure of resources used by an activity or process. Some inputs relate to workload. Others relate to the number of resources used in a process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applications received • Dollars spent • Staff hours used
Output	The number of units of a product or service produced or delivered.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews conducted • Widgets made • Children immunized • Number of non-compliant products replaced
Process	Describes aspects of the business process, such as completion rate, processing time, backlog, error rates, and so on.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of days to respond to customer inquiry • Percentage of defective items produced
Outcome	Measures of ultimate benefits associated with a program or service. Also known as results.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduction in deaths • Improvement in air quality • Improvement in test scores • Increased customer satisfaction

As strategists, we work with our clients (internal or external) to guide them through the process of developing performance metrics. They should be quantifiable, meaning they can be counted more than once or measured using numbers. Here are some questions to ask:

- How can we prove success using data?
- Is the data available or easily accessible?
 - o If not, will it be easy to create or would it require a significant amount of additional labor to gather?
- Do we own the data and have control over it?
- How often is the data calculated?
 - o Does that time fit within the strategic planning cycle?

If any of these questions indicate that the data is not available or easy to collect, consider brainstorming a different performance measure. There are some strategic goals that do not lend themselves to measurement. If that is the case, document that finding and identify related data that would help management best understand what is being done to accomplish the organization's strategy.

I can go on and on about performance measures, balanced scorecards, performance assessments, and how to develop all of them, but let me know if this was helpful and what you would like me to write about next month. I would love to keep this going. Also, for those of you with a unique challenge, feel free to email me at smgarcia@smgstrategy.com. I would happily give free advice to my IASP colleagues.