

Stop Killing The KPI Buy-in!

We all want to know what to do to increase buy-in to performance measurement, but sometimes it's more about what NOT to do.

STACEY BARR

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WE ALL WANT TO KNOW WHAT TO DO TO INCREASE BUY-IN TO PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT, BUT SOMETIMES IT'S MORE ABOUT WHAT NOT TO DO.

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Overview

Buy-in is that state when people are committed to something, when they are convinced of its worth for them and no longer have objections or fears that get in their way of adopting it. It's when they feel a sense of ownership about it. Most of us want our people to feel this way about performance measurement, which is one of the harder things in business to get people to buy-in to.

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Question: How do you create buy-in to performance measurement?

Performance measurement has such a terrible stigma. Many people associate it with the inane drudgery of data collection, with pointing fingers and big sticks that come beating down on them when things go wrong, with the embarrassment of being compared with whoever is performing best this month. The emotions people typically feel around performance measurement are frustration, cynicism, defensiveness, anxiety, stress and fear.

What we really want is for performance measurement to be seen as a natural and essential part of work. We want people to associate it with learning more about what works and what doesn't, with valuable feedback that keeps us on the right track, with continuous improvement of business success. The emotions we want people to feel around performance measurement are curiosity, pride, confidence, anticipation and excitement.

How can we create this kind of buy-in?

Answer: You don't have to create buy-in, you just have to stop doing things that kill it.

I used to think performance measurement was about the techniques of selecting, collecting, analysing, presenting and interpreting data to inform decision making. Well I guess technique is still an important part of it, but I've been excited to learn that there's a whole lot more to performance measurement than this. And it's about the people.

Through action learning, the approaches I've used to help people develop performance measures have evolved since the early 1990's. One of the results that consistently happens (over and above the obvious development of performance measures) is the buy-in of people

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at all levels in the organisation. Because this wasn't deliberately designed into the performance measurement approach, it was a pleasant surprise. And it's taught me that getting buy-in is not necessarily the product of a 'getting buy-in' strategy – it could be just as much the product of getting out of the way of 'buy-in emerging'.

The approach to performance measurement that I have been evolving is a simple process of eight action learning sessions, as flowcharted in Figure 1. Teams are facilitated through the process, throughout which they are introduced to snippets of performance measurement theories and case studies and techniques, and supported in applying these techniques for their own performance management. The team might be an executive team, a process team, a functional team, a project team.

Figure 1: The PuMP® Blueprint



Each of these steps, or sessions, in the PuMP® Blueprint does something to allow buy-in to naturally emerge along the way. Here is a summary of how each step DOESN'T stop the natural growth of buy-in:

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STEP 1: DON'T educate the team. DO start the journey from what team members already know, and allow the learning to be discovered. Even if team members feel apprehensive or self-conscious, or if they have divergent views about performance measurement, sharing and acknowledging these views is the only first step toward a new shared vision of performance measurement.

STEP 2: DON'T dictate the team's goals. DO help them explore and decide how they most impact on the corporate goals. If they build their own line of sight from the activities they perform through to the ultimate success outcomes for the organisation, they will get a much deeper understanding of the corporate direction.

STEP 3: DON'T give the team their measures. DO show them how to design measures that best evidence their results. They are the experts in what they do and in understanding the results they produce. While it can save a lot of time by hunting around for existing performance measures related to the results the team owns, they will likely feel such measures are trivial, too generic or just not quite right. And that will stop them from owning them. Designing your own set of performance measures, and being in control of how many you have, is much more exciting.

STEP 4: DON'T be the judge of the team's measures. DO encourage the team to seek feedback from their stakeholders to test and fine tune their measures. The team's customers, advisors, partners and other team members can collectively view the measures from an holistic perspective, and thus offer unbiased and complete feedback about their relevance and suitability. This communication brings the team closer to their stakeholders, to better understand stakeholder needs, which in turn helps them see beyond the tasks they come to work to do and be paid for.

STEP 5: DON'T leave the team's measures vague. DO put the power of how to bring the measures to life in the hands of the team. Help them see that they are not restricted to existing data, they don't have to spend lots of effort collecting new data, they can discover very simple ways to bring their measures to life – and they can decide not to measure something if it just won't be worth the effort.

STEP 7: DON'T knee-jerk react to the team's performance. DO allow the team to interpret and respond to their own measures. Allow them to continually learn how they can improve their outcomes, what the root causes are, where the points of highest leverage are. Have

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strategic conversations with them about their interpretations and conclusions and to link their improvement ideas and targets to the impact on corporate goals, rather than blaming.

STEP 6: DON'T make the team only report upwards to management. DO give the team the space to design how they will report their measures, and the types of supplementary information they need to include to make it usable, for them. There might be some corporate reporting standards to follow, just so long as the team is still able to make the report into a tool to serve their decision making and improvement.

STEP 8: DON'T treat measurement as an end in itself. DO recognise that measurement is a cycle that is a continual part of performance improvement and strategy execution; of working on the business and not just in it. It is a cycle that they now own, and it's up to them to keep it alive in a way that's appropriate for them. This is the key to successful strategy execution, performance improvement and reaching targets.

Conclusion: Buy-in is a natural product of respecting people, and not getting in their way of contributing.

There certainly are many more ways of allowing buy-in to performance measurement to blossom in its own way. Asking more questions and making less statements is a way. Believing that people largely want to contribute, as opposed to people needing to be controlled, is another way. Celebrating successes and reflecting on mistakes as valuable learning is yet another way. And the common thread is to make it safe for people come to performance measurement, and to make it meaningful for them.

With buy-in, some magic starts happening:

- Performance starts improving even before the first improvement initiative is implemented.

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- People have more energy and enthusiasm because they are coming to work for a higher meaning. They have discovered something more motivating than the tasks they do: the impact their work has on others.
- Improvement happens faster, as people focus more on what really matters most.
- Silos between organisational units start melting away, as more conversation and collaboration happens.
- Strategy comes alive, takes on much more presence than the words that succinctly state the vision, mission and goals for the organisation. It's in people's everyday conversations.

Performance measurement is feedback, and feedback is the necessary process for any system to flourish – a fern, a frog, a person, a team, an organisation, a society.

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About the author

Stacey Barr

Stacey Barr is a globally recognised specialist in organisational performance measurement. She discovered that the struggles with measuring business performance are, surprisingly, universal. The biggest include hard-to-measure goals, trivial or meaningless measures, and no buy-in from people to measure and improve what matters. The root cause is a set of bad habits that have become common practice.

Stacey created PuMP®, a deliberate performance measurement methodology to replace the bad habits with techniques that make measuring performance faster, easier, engaging, and meaningful.

Stacey is author of [Practical Performance Measurement](#) and [Prove It!](#), publisher of the [Measure Up](#) blog, and her content appears on [Harvard Business Review's website](#) and in their acclaimed ManageMentor Program.

Discover more about Stacey and practical performance measurement at www.staceybarr.com.



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