



Sustainable Practice

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Lately, I've been spending a lot of time thinking about indicators of effectiveness. Whether I hear debates about taxes, education or health reform, I find myself feeling frustrated - hearing people take positions but not stop to ask the question, "What indicators can we track to know if we're being effective?" To quote Albert Einstein, "Not everything that counts can be counted and not everything that can be counted, counts."

In these days of global crises - its becoming increasingly clear that metrics and accountability are critical to chart a course for different outcomes. We are at a new crossroads in time where the desire for information and the technology to deliver it are creating an unprecedented level of freedom (and confusion). Many things are being measured and counted...but are we counting what really counts? We measure a lot of things all the time for many purposes. What does that measuring get us? What is the purpose of measuring? Is it to know how well we are doing? To inform our path forward? What exactly is the relationship between metrics and effectiveness? As an industry, LEED has dragged us to a new level of accountability and forced us to measure performance, yet we still fall short at achieving the level of energy reduction we need to safeguard our future. Effectiveness is the gray area between the intention and the measurement. It's the "how" part of the equation - that translates between what we are trying to achieve and what indicators we are tracking/ what indicators we look to for feedback. We have a long track record of counting things that don't really count, whether we think about our social, economic or education systems. Here are some examples:

* Does the census inform the level of infrastructure development we need to support population growth? Do grades or standardized testing really tell us how effective our schools systems are or how well-educated our children are? Does social security, which is based on income data and not financial situation, really provide for those who most need it?

* Does the level of a corporate CEO's salary measure their effectiveness as a leader? Do quarterly profit figures really reflect the value of a company and its performance? Do sales targets, which focus on number of 'sales closed" indicate the quality of those accounts?

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