Are You Walking Your Walk?
Rate Yourself with This Easy-to-Use Grid

**Are you truly attuned to people's needs or merely talking the talk?
Here's a proven way to find out for sure.**

By Mark Mitchell, Robert Nale, Dennis Rauch, & Samuel Wathen

A tenet of the quality movement is the need to measure outcomes to be sure you're meeting your goals.[1] Consider the following hypothetical mission-driven goals:

- We want to expose more youth to cultural events.
- We want more people to have access to free medical services.
- We want to provide more job-retraining seminars for displaced workers.

In each case, you've spelled out noble outcomes. But how will you know when you've been successful? Will simply increasing performance over last year be enough?

First, be sure your goals are quantifiable and measurable. A restatement of the first goal above could be "to increase youth attendance at cultural events sponsored by the Arts Guild by 15% over the next 18 months." You can better assess performance against this newly-stated objective.

> Importance-performance analysis can help you walk your walk.

You Cannot Improve That Which You Do Not Measure.

Next, use importance-performance analysis to see how well you're meeting your goals. The importance-performance grid is a simple tool that will help you make easily-understood presentations of your performance. The following case study shows how it works.

A Research Study You Can Replicate

The executive director of the Cultural Council, a nonprofit arts and culture organization, asked us (professors in the College of Business at Coastal Carolina University) to help him determine whether the Council was meeting its stakeholders' needs.[2] The Council wanted the answers to two crucial questions:

- Are we doing the right things?
- Are we doing these things well?

These are vital questions for every organization. They zero in on the importance and performance of an organization's outcomes. To find out the answers, we first developed a survey (reproduced in Figure 1).

To create this survey, we asked the executive director to list 15 outcomes the Cultural Council wanted

to measure. We then developed scales to measure the importance (from 1 = "Not Important at All" to 5 = "Very Important") and performance (1 = "Very Dissatisfied," 5 = "Very Satisfied") of each outcome.

We sent the survey to people who support the Cultural Council by paying membership fees. The executive director e-mailed a cover letter to this group, along with a link to the online survey.

When results came in, we plotted them into an importance-performance grid similar to the one in Figure 2. This grid contains four quadrants:

Concentrate Here: High Importance, Low Performance

Keep Up the Good Work: High Importance, High Performance

Low Priority: Low Importance, Low Performance

Possible Overkill: Low Importance, High Performance

Outcomes that plot into Box A deserve attention because their performance rating falls below their importance rating. This mismatch reveals unmet needs, which could provide market opportunities. Outcomes that plot into Box D reflect wasted performance resources that might be better shifted to improving outcomes in Box A. In contrast to

Figure 1: Cultural Council Survey

Below is a list of outcomes we seek to achieve as your Cultural Council. Please tell us the relative importance of each outcome, in your opinion. Next, please tell us your relative level of satisfaction with our efforts to achieve each outcome to date.

Importance	Performance
How <u>Important Should Each Outcome be</u> to the Cultural Council? 1 = Not Important at All 2 = Not That Important 3 = Neutral 4 = Somewhat Important 5 = Very Important	How <u>Satisfied Are You With Our Current Efforts</u> to Achieve Each Outcome? 1 = Very Dissatisfied 2 = Dissatisfied 3 = Neutral 4 = Satisfied 5 = Very Satisfied

List of Outcomes for the Cultural Council:

___ ___ sponsoring arts education in local schools

___ ___ providing arts education for adults

___ ___ providing youth music scholarships

___ ___ giving artists the opportunity to display their work in the Cultural Council's gallery

___ ___ delivering musical events for our community

___ ___ delivering theatrical events for our community

___ ___ working to create audiences for the community's artistic and cultural events

___ ___ providing broad-based cultural festivals for our community

___ ___ providing grants to the area's arts-related organizations

___ ___ maintaining a Web site for communicating about artistic & cultural events in the community

___ ___ offering merchandise for sale to support the arts

___ ___ providing merchandise for sale to show Cultural Council membership and support

___ ___ furnishing business and organizational education to support artists and arts-related businesses

___ ___ soliciting financial support for arts programs from interested individuals

___ ___ soliciting financial support for arts programs from interested organizations

Figure 2: Importance-Performance Grid

HIGH Importance	**A** Concentrate Here	**B** Keep Up the Good Work
LOW Importance	**C** Low Priority	**D** Possible Overkill
	LOW Performance	**HIGH Performance**

Outcomes that plot into Box A can be seen as market opportunities and likely deserve greater attention and resources.

Your Action Plan

The use of importance-performance analysis can help you "walk your walk." But you must be willing to evaluate your practices to see if the items that monopolize your time and resources are, in fact, critically important to your success and if the outcomes realized are meeting performance standards. Here's an action plan for your consideration:

- **List outcomes** you believe are critical to your organization's success. See Figure 1 for ideas.
- **Create scales** to measure the importance and performance of each outcome. Again, see Figure 1 for examples of scales you might use.
- **Use collection methods** such as surveys or focus groups to gather people's feedback about each outcome's importance and performance (see, for instance, the survey in Figure 1).
- **Graph your data** on an importance-performance grid such as the one in Figure 2. (You can use one of several software programs that use means or top-box percentages to create quadrant charts.)
- **Classify combined measures** into the four quadrants shown in Figure 2 (Concentrate Here; Keep Up the Good Work; Low Priority; and Possible Overkill).
- **Assess** the information you've collected. When you collect data this way, strategic directions become fairly straightforward, even if strategies themselves do not. For example, you may discover you're devoting a great deal of time and money on a service that's satiated—something your service recipients find fairly unimportant. That doesn't necessarily mean you should drop that service. It does mean you should take a good look and decide whether you're allocating resources in the right place. Or you may find you're underperforming in a key area and, again, need to scrutinize your efforts.
- **Develop plans** based on your evaluation of the results.

Boxes A and D, outcomes that plot into boxes B and C reflect a good match between importance and performance ratings.

The results of the study are proprietary, and we can't violate the organization's confidence. But we can tell you they were encouraged to "keep up the good work!" ∎

FOOTNOTES

[1] For an in-depth discussion of the quality movement, continuous improvement, and total quality management (TQM), see articles in *Nonprofit World,* such as "TQM: How the Q Lost Its Tail" (Vol. 18, No. 6), www.snpo.org/members.

[2] The Cultural Council is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization that acts as a catalyst and partner with its county's arts and culture organizations to expand their audiences.

> Evaluate your practices to see if the items that monopolize your time are critically important to your success.

> When you collect data this way, strategic directions become fairly straightforward.

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Keep on Walking

To continue walking your walk, read these *Nonprofit World* articles at www.snpo.org/members:

- Using Your Outcome Measurement System (Vol. 18, No. 1)
- Looking for a Win-Win Partnership? Look to the University (Vol. 18, No. 4)
- Developing Your Outcome Measures (Vol. 17, No. 6)
- Four Steps to Evaluation Success (Vol. 23, No. 2)
- Using Surveys & Focus Groups to Gather Market Data (Vol. 13, No. 3)

Also see Learning Institute programs online: Outcome Measurement (www.snpo.org/lino).

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