

You get what you measure

In my current role I'm responsible for management of an IT portfolio of projects and programs worth +/- 300 million, in support of a pharmaceutical R&D organization's technology capabilities.

As a part of that role, I am in the process of defining the Key Performance Indicators that we will track and publish. Recently, while exploring financial tracking and how best to surface where we are relative to plan, as well as percentage of resource distribution by type across activity type (relevant to some questions we have, but not terribly exciting) one of my team members questioned surfacing "bad data". I have a VP I work for that has a great phrase - "The sterilizing effect of sunshine on data". I have since appropriated that one, and used it here. My point was and is, if we show it and measure it, we will improve it.

There is too often a culture of "if my data looks bad, I should bury it", or at a minimum, not surface it in an exec level dashboard. I am of the counter opinion, that **by showing it, and measuring it, we will build incentives to change it**. This is powerful, but also a little dangerous in that we do **"get what we measure"**, meaning I need to be thoughtful on the KPIs I publish to avoid unintended consequences. If I track on time delivery for example, will quality suffer as a result of teams looking to avoid a late flag? If I track budget, will scope suffer or user experience suffer?

When you publish and measure any data or activity, think through the potential consequences of that decision - people will focus on what is measured, sometimes at the expense of other critical areas.

As I work through the process on this portfolio, I am trying to be thoughtful as to what I measure, how I publish it, and correspondingly, how I reward or correct my teams. This is part of a balanced score card approach to portfolio reporting, and a much deeper topic, but I would leave you with this note - think through what you publish and what you measure. Do not be afraid to publish and measure your challenging data, as it gives you the opportunity to baseline it, show improvement against it, and tell a success story!