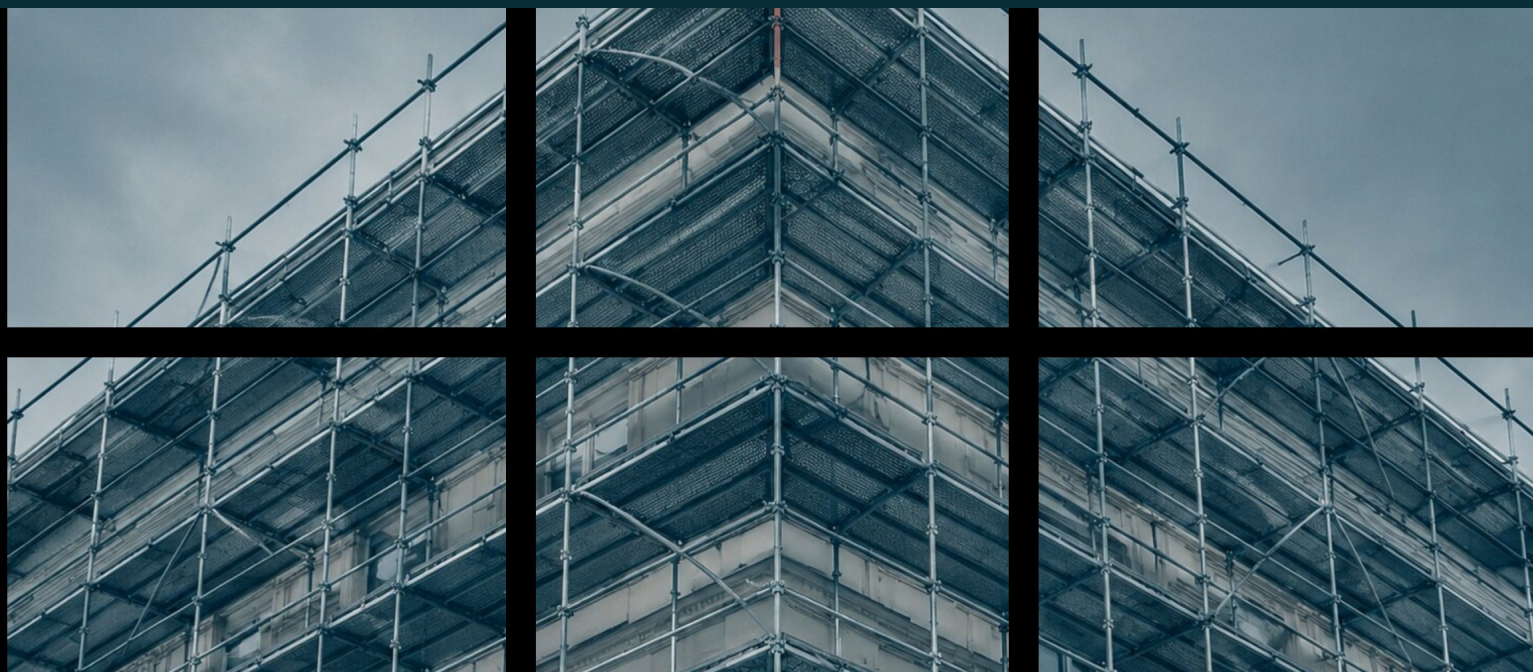


BEYOND THE SCORECARD

When the Target Becomes the Purpose: Why Transformation Programmes Hit Every Number and Change Nothing

On the difference between an organisation that measures its transformation and one that means it



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“Values that cost nothing to hold are not values; they are decoration.”

1. The programme that delivered everything except the point

The closure report was immaculate. Ninety-four per cent of milestones delivered to plan; the benefits tracker showing its green line climbing towards the committed figure; the risk log wound down to a handful of ambers nobody was losing sleep over. The steering committee applauded, the programme director was thanked by name, and the transformation was signed off as a success. Eighteen months later, the behaviours the whole effort had been chartered to change had quietly reasserted themselves. The new operating model was still on the intranet. Almost nobody worked to it.

I have watched versions of this closure meeting more times than I care to count, and the shape of it is always the same: the programme was run faithfully against its targets, and its targets turned out not to be the same thing as its purpose. We are, as a profession, extraordinarily good at delivering the first and strangely careless about the second. This is a perspective on that gap — on the difference between an organisation that measures its transformation and one that actually means it.

Let me state the position plainly, because a perspective earns nothing by hedging. A transformation governed entirely by its metrics will hit its metrics and miss its purpose, and it will do so precisely because the metrics were in charge. The target is not a neutral instrument. Past a certain point it stops describing the change and starts standing in for it.

2. Why we reach for the target — and why the instinct is sound

It would be easy, and wrong, to treat the appetite for targets as a failure of nerve or imagination. The instinct is sound, and any honest account has to begin there rather than with the caricature.

A transformation without measurable commitments is not a transformation; it is a mood. Boards have sat through enough "culture programmes" that dissolved into workshops and laminated posters to be rightly suspicious of anything that cannot be counted. The discipline of naming a number — cost-to-serve down by a fifth, cycle time halved, the customer-satisfaction score lifted ten points — forces a soft aspiration into something a programme office can plan against, a sponsor can be held to, and an investment board can weigh. The whole apparatus we have built up over two decades — the business case, the benefits map, the stage gate, the balanced scorecard — exists to convert intent into accountability. That apparatus has rescued a great many transformations from being expensive theatre.

So the case for target-driven transformation is not weak, and it deserves its full weight before any part of it is dismantled: targets are how an organisation refuses to lie to itself about whether anything actually happened. Take them away and you are left trusting that change occurred because everybody felt busy. That is not a trade most experienced sponsors will make, and they are right not to make it.

The problem is not that we measure. The problem is what measurement quietly turns into.

3. The mechanism of corrosion

Here the argument turns, and it turns on a mechanism rather than a slogan.

Goodhart's observation — that a measure which becomes a target ceases to be a good measure — is endlessly quoted and rarely traced. It is worth tracing, because the corrosion is mechanical and predictable, not a matter of anyone acting in bad faith.

Consider a service transformation, assembled here from several I have seen so that it belongs to no one in particular. The purpose, as written in the vision, was to rebuild customer trust after a bruising couple of years. The purpose, as operationalised, became two numbers on a wall: average handling time and first-call resolution. Both were sensible proxies. Shorter calls and fewer call-backs do, on the whole, go together with a service that works.

Then the numbers went up on the wall, and the proxies began to eat the purpose:

- Advisers learned that the quickest route to a good handling-time figure was to close the call, not the problem — a courteous redirection to a form counted as a resolution while the customer's actual issue rode on unresolved.
- First-call resolution was protected by discouraging the second call: warm, capable people quietly learning to make ringing back feel like an imposition.
- Team leaders, measured on their teams' averages, began coaching to the metric rather than to the person, and the most conscientious advisers — the ones who stayed on the line because someone needed them to — became the statistical problem on the board.

Every number improved. The trust the programme existed to rebuild declined, because the organisation had, with complete sincerity, optimised the thing it could count in place of the thing it cared about. Nobody cheated. That is the unsettling part. The gaming was not a moral failure by individuals; it was the rational response of competent people to the signal the transformation was actually sending them, which was: the number is the point.

A target is a proxy for something you value. The moment the proxy carries the weight of consequence, people optimise the proxy — and the distance between the proxy and the value becomes the exact size of your failure.

This is the quiet violence of a purely target-driven transformation. It does not arrive announcing itself as a betrayal of the purpose. It presents as success — on a dashboard, in green.

4. What "values-driven" actually means — and what it does not

At this point the word values has to be rescued, because in most transformation settings it has been ruined. It has come to mean the poster by the coffee machine, the five abstract nouns a workshop settled on, the "values roadshow" running alongside the real programme and quietly descoped the moment the timeline tightens. If that were what values-driven transformation meant, the hard-headed sponsor would be entirely right to ignore it.

That is not what it means. Values-driven transformation is not the softer option; it is the harder one, because it asks for something a target lets you avoid.

"A number tells you what to do when the case is clear. A value tells you what to do when it is not – and it is the unclear cases that decide whether a transformation was ever real."

The purpose of stating a purpose is to equip people to make the judgement no metric anticipated. The adviser deciding whether to stay on a difficult call is not consulting the scorecard; there is no line on it for "this person is frightened and needs ten more minutes." What guides them is whether the organisation has made unmistakably clear what it is for – and whether it has made that clarity credible by standing behind the people who act on it when the number takes a short-term knock. Values that cost nothing to hold are not values; they are decoration. Values-driven transformation is the discipline of naming the purpose sharply enough, and backing it consistently enough, that a stranger three levels down can make the right call in a situation nobody at the centre foresaw.

That is a governance question, not a poster question. It shows up in what gets rewarded when purpose and metric pull in different directions, in whether a manager who missed the number for the right reason is shielded or punished, in whether the sponsor can say what the whole thing is for without reading it off a slide.

5. The false binary, and the test that dissolves it

I have been setting values and targets against one another for the length of an argument, and I should now concede that the opposition is, in the end, false – because the failure I have been describing is not "too many targets." It is targets that have come loose from the thing they were meant to serve.

The reconciliation is not a balance, as though the trick were forty per cent values and sixty per cent metrics. It is a hierarchy. Targets belong beneath purpose, as its instruments and its evidence, never as its replacement. A well-set target is an expression of the value – a hypothesis that says if we really are rebuilding trust, we would expect to see this move. A badly-set one has forgotten it was ever a proxy and now believes it is the goal.

There is a plain test for which of the two an organisation is actually running, and it costs nothing to apply. Watch what happens at the edge – the moment a target and the purpose visibly collide.

1. When hitting the number would clearly damage the very thing the number exists to protect, which one gives way? If the number always wins, you are running a target-driven transformation whatever the vision statement claims.

- 2. When someone misses a target for a reason the purpose would applaud, what happens to them next? The answer, repeated two or three times, teaches the entire organisation what the transformation is really about far more powerfully than any communication plan.
- 3. Can your sponsors state the purpose without reciting the metrics – and can they say what the metrics are for? If the only available account of the change is the scorecard, the purpose has already been eaten.

None of this is an argument against measurement, and I do not want to be misheard as making one. It is an argument for keeping measurement in its proper place – subordinate, instrumental, and permanently under suspicion of drifting free of its purpose. The most useful discipline I know is to pair every headline target with a second question that never appears on the dashboard: if we hit this, will it have done what we hoped? Ask it at the outset, and ask it again at every gate. The organisations that keep asking it are not the ones with the tidiest metrics. They are the ones least surprised, a year after closure, by what their transformation turned out to have actually changed.

Target-driven logic	Values-driven logic
Asks did we hit the number?	Asks did hitting it do what we hoped?
Treats the proxy as the goal	Treats the proxy as evidence for the goal
Rewards the result, however reached	Attends to how the result was reached
Fails silently, in green	Fails visibly, and can therefore be corrected
Delegates judgement to the dashboard	Reserves judgement for people

6. The judgement you cannot put on a dashboard

The reason this matters – the reason it is worth a practitioner's conviction rather than a shrug about getting the balance right – is that transformation is finally a claim about behaviour, and behaviour answers to purpose long after it has stopped answering to the programme. The scorecard goes dark the day the programme closes. What people believe the organisation is for does not.

So the question a sponsor should be asking at the final gate is not whether the numbers are green. It is whether, when the reporting stops and the advisers leave and the next difficult year arrives, the people left holding the organisation will make the choices the transformation was supposed to make ordinary. No target can carry that weight. Only a purpose that was made clear enough, and defended consistently enough, to outlive its own measurement.

We are fluent, as a profession, in the machinery of targets. We are far less fluent in the harder thing they were always meant to serve. Closing that gap is not a matter of measuring less. It is a matter of never letting the measure forget what it was standing in for.