A non-profit builds a Dashboard that belongs in every boardroom
The Habitat for Humanity case study

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There is a widely held misperception that not-for-profit organizations are not held to the same "bottom line" accountability as their counterparts in the corporate sector. In fact, the exact opposite is true. Think about it. Do you really think that millions of private contributors demand any less accountability than individual shareholders? Or that corporate underwriters pay less attention to the non-profit they support than an institutional investor does? Or for that matter, that non-profits have fat budgets that don't require careful management?

So why wouldn't non-profits take advantage of the same resources and tools that their for profit counterparts do? Denny Bender, Senior Vice President of Communications for Habitat for Humanity International[1], thought the same thing. As the communications chief for the headquarters arm of one of the largest charitable organization in the US, Bender was fully aware of the need for measurement, he just wasn't entirely sure what he could do about it.

His research into the area of measurement led him to Delahaye Medialink, from whom he commissioned a preliminary study on the organizations reputation. The results of that study showed that HFHI was well respected, but vulnerable in a few areas. And, like any research, led to more questions. Was the reputation improving? What factors were contributing to it? And was the reputation having an impact on donations? In order to answer these and other questions Bender required a more comprehensive measurement plan.

He once again contacted Delahaye Medialink and they set up a "Dashboard Development Session" for early January 2001. The purpose of the meeting was to define specific measures of results for all of Bender's team.

Laying the proper foundation

Preparation was key to the success of the offsite. Given that the offsite would be held immediately after the Christmas holidays, Bender sent out a binder to all participants that included the results of the first Delahaye study, as well as any other research that his team had done. This "homework" was to be read and reviewed prior to the meeting.

Then, a week before the offsite, Bender sent out an additional e-mail to all participants that asked them to come prepared to answer the following questions:

1. 1. In what ways do you most influence the success of HFHI
2. 2. If your department/function/job were eliminated how would HFHI be affected?
3. 3. If you were celebrating 100% success in all of your goals for 2001 --champagne corks popping all over the place -- what would you have accomplished? "

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Habitat for Humanity International (HFHI) is a faith-based organization dedicated to building affordable homes for people in need.

Assembling the necessary resources

As with any meeting, especially one as important as this one, the critical ingredients were the right participants. Denny had invited most of his department heads, along with senior representatives from fund raising and development (HFHI's equivalent of the sales department) and programs (HFHI's equivalent of production). In addition to sales and production, there were representatives from customer service, video production, media relations, governmental relations, event management, and marketing. While the meeting could have happened anywhere, Bender felt that it was critical to get everyone "offsite" in order to change his or her perspective, and create a learning atmosphere.

Overcoming major obstacles

The first task was to get everyone past his or her fundamental fear of measurement. More visceral than a fear of flying or giving speeches, fear of measurement probably dates back to our early childhood days of associating rulers with spanking devices to be used across knuckles. It necessary to move all participants beyond these early childhood fears before further discussions can take place.

So right up front, we asked participants how they measured failure. This was, we should note, not on the list of three questions they expected to answer. But it was necessary to set the tone of the day. The best response was: "How long it takes before (HFHI CEO) Millard is in my office yelling at me." While a "time interval between action and punishment" was not a criteria Delahaye normally used, we wrote it down. We also recorded any ideas, no matter how facetious, for success measures, such as the "tear-o-meter" that would measure the impact of watching videos created by the team. The point at this stage was not to define specific measures, but to get everyone in a safe place to talk about how they valued their work and how their work was valued by others.

Another of the major obstacles to measurement is assumption that "what I do can't be measured." Which leads us to step two: Inventing fantasy measurement devices. The "Tear-o-meter" was the first such device in the HFHI session. It would simply attach sensors to people watching HFHI videos to determine the intensity of their reaction. The question, of course, was would that be a meaningful measure relative to the organizations objectives. Which lead to phase three:

Building the framework. Objectives+audience=criteria.

HFHI's mission is to build–affordable homes for and with people in need of a better place in which to live. They do that by assembling teams of volunteers to gather the materials and construct the house. While it would be more efficient to simply raise money and pay professionals to build the homes, the goal wouldn't be achieved because the volunteer component was as important as the homes itself. So any measure of success would require both goals to be accomplished.

The next phase was to identify the various audiences that Habitat needed to reach in order to achieve those goals. The group defined the following: Affiliates, Volunteers, Donors, Corporate Partners, Church Partners, Campus (student) partners, internal HFHI staff, potential donors, current donors, homeowners, foundations, local governments, state/national governments and non-government organizations (NGOs), and last, but certainly not least, the Media.

Then, for each audience, we defined a definition of success. In other words: How did having a good relationship with each of these publics contribute to HFHI's success?

Affiliates:	# of houses built per $ raised
	$ spent per house
	# of orders for HFHI printed materials
Volunteers	# of CCYP / GV participants
Donors	average $ gift per donor
	ROI for Communications and Dev $ spent to solicit donations
	average Communications dollars spent per donor acquired
	# of formal donor complaints (PSC
Corporate Partners	Retention over time (period of partnership)
	# of gifts/services
	total $ contributed
	% of # of participants
Church partners	Number and % of participation by denomination
Campus chapters	% of eligible schools who have a chapter
HFHI staff	Retention rate
	Morale (job satisfaction/confidence in organization survey)
	Diversity
Homeowner	Rate of repayment
	% of foreclosures
Prospective donors	Marketing (Comm.) $ spent versus # of donors acquired
	Marketing (Comm.) $ spent versus # of houses built
	# of complaints per month (PSC)
	$ per opportunity to see increase (cost per impression)

Once we had determined the overall objectives for each audience, the next step was to specifically define how communications contributed to those goals and what criteria we would use to measure the communications effort.

The following 34 specific measurement indicators related to Communications were identified. Since one of the objectives of a dashboard is to communicate only those most important numbers, some sense of propriety was needed. Normally no more than ten measures should be on one dashboard. We therefore gave each person ten "five" votes that he/she could cast for a particular measure. We used these "votes" to determine the top ten priority measures.

1 Affiliates - A monthly pulse check to determine how many houses built or under construction; how many volunteers; satisfaction of relationship with HFHI; status of

mortgage collection; status of closing activity. Also analyze their extranet "Partnernet" traffic for increase in usage and registration as a % of total potential.

#2 Media -Message impressions per month, message tone and content.

#3 Donors - Track % of list who make donations and the communications dollars spent. Determine ROI for the internet site (total $ spent, # of donations, average $ per gift) per donor.

#4 Prospective Donors - Compare marketing $ spent versus # of donors acquired

#5 Internal Staff (HFHI) - Track Creative Services work order performance (# of jobs, % of jobs delivered within 48 hours of deadline and within x % of budget)

#6 Homeowner - # of homeowners quoted in media; % of positive and negative coverage

#7 Prospective Donors - $ per opportunity to see (cost per impression)

#8 Corporate Partners - % renewal, % satisfaction with communications and with program.

Other areas/criteria - not prioritized:

Government: # of people on our side
                    # of houses built by volunteer teams of public officials (U.S. Senators, mayors)

Affiliate: # of orders for print material

Volunteers: # of Collegiate Challenge, Jimmy Carter Work Project (JCWP) & Global Village event participants
                    # of Campus Chapters
                    # and % of online event registrations
                    # of visitors to internet website
                    # of Partner Service Center (PSC) requests for info on volunteering
                    # and % of quotes from volunteers in media

Church Partners: make it part of affiliate pulse check
                     # and % of affiliates with church relations committee
                     exposure/penetration of "church-related" messages
                     # of PSC requests and complaints about religion/churches

Donors: # of PSC requests for info on donations

Prospective Donors: marketing $ spent versus # of houses built
                     # of PSC complaints per month

Campus Chapters: % of colleges with campus chapters
                       # of messages communicated to students
                       % of students becoming volunteers/donors
                       CCYP web page activity on internet website

Internal Staff: # and % of readership of employee news

Homeowners: # of PSC requests for info on how to get a house

Before leaving the meeting we agreed upon the next steps that included:

- Review and validate "Dashboard" measurement indicators and prioritization

- Assign an individual advocate or sponsor for each of the Top 8 indicators

- Document the objective for measuring each indicator

- Baseline indicator numbers, percentages, and goals to be achieved; determine performance levels, i.e., what constitutes "poor/unacceptable, satisfactory/acceptable, good, excellent, outstanding"

- Document the audience/universe for each indicator, i.e., who/what is being measured

- Determine a presentation methodology: how often, format, to whom

- Determine a data collection methodology: how, by whom, how often

- Set milestones for "Dashboard" completion

To date; of the next steps have been completed or moving toward completion. HFHI is well on its way to putting its dashboard in place. The results have been encouraging. The "MediaScope" gauge on the Dashboard - a weekly précise of all national and local television news coverage - has become a valuable source of homeowner stories and testimonials for a variety of other Habitat departments. Two new members to the web service team have been authorized due to a growing appreciation for the income generation and message sharing success of Habitat's corporate web site, as tracked by the Dashboard.

In summary, the Communication Dashboard has become the springboard to a new era of measurement at Habitat for Humanity International.

Celebrating its 25th Anniversary year, Habitat for Humanity International is an ecumenical Christian ministry dedicated to eliminating poverty housing. Founded by Millard Fuller, along with his wife, Linda, Habitat for Humanity International and its affiliates in more than 2,000 communities in 79 nations have built and sold more than 100,000 homes to partner families with no-profit, zero-interest mortgages.