

# Managing Performance across complex partnerships

## THE "DILBERT" APPROACH TO PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

In terms of performance management and measurement we've come a long way since my early career in the Public Sector. Having spent a few years in Retail Management, where we measured everything to try to understand the business, I recall a conversation I had on my first day in a major Government Department.

*"What do you measure around here?"*

*"We don't"*

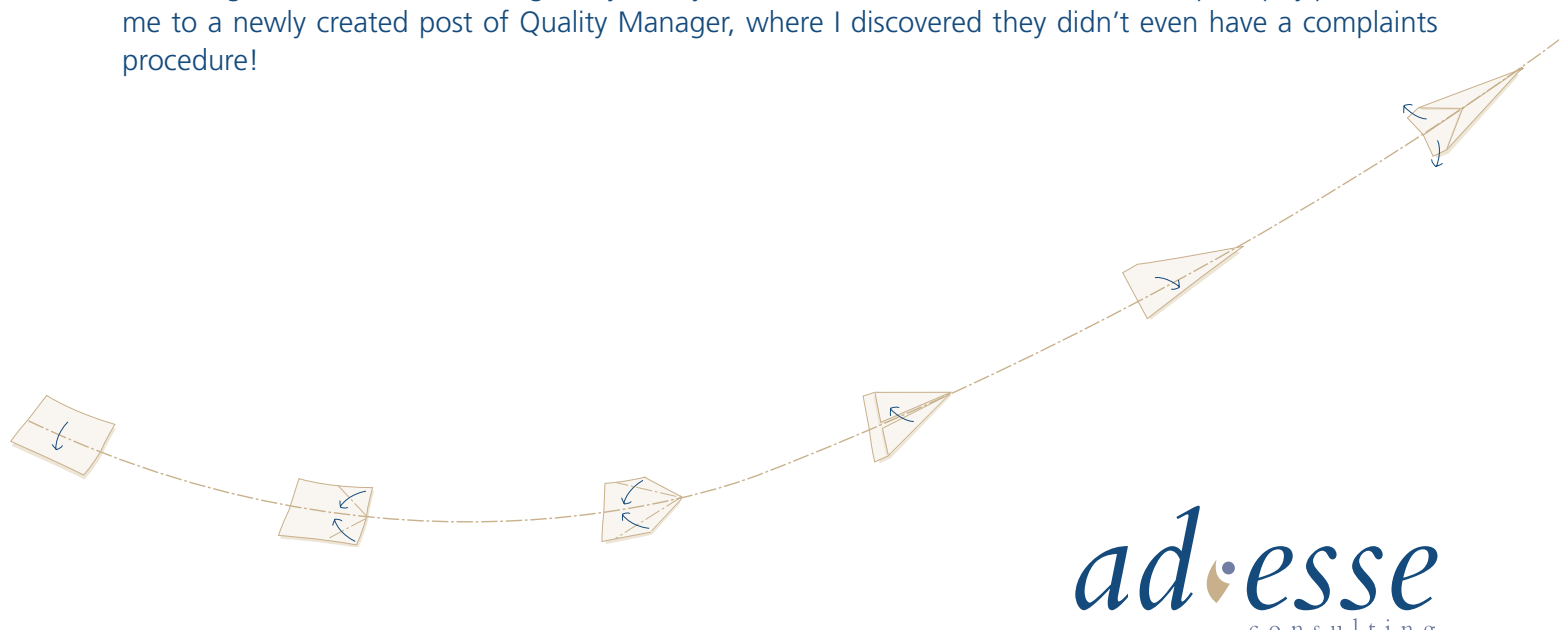
*"How do you know how well you're doing?"*

*"The work gets done"*

*"How do you know it gets done properly?"*

*"No one complains"*

Following this Dilbert-like exchange they clearly ear-marked me as a trouble-maker and promptly promoted me to a newly created post of Quality Manager, where I discovered they didn't even have a complaints procedure!



**Fifteen years later and we certainly have lots of measures, but problems remain with:**

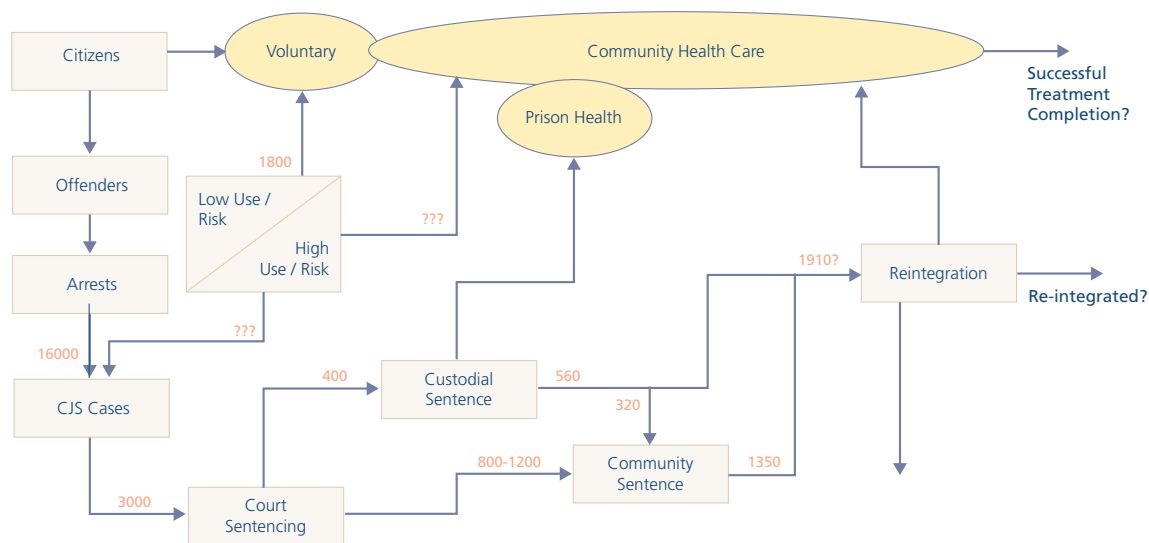
- Too much focus on things which are easy to measure – for example time to respond to a query rather than the satisfactory response
- Measures which drive the wrong behaviours – for example the recent revelation that the Government’s target to be seen by a GP in 48 hours had driven surgeries to advise people who were happy to wait for an appointment in a few days to ring back on the morning they were able to see the doctor as they couldn’t do advance bookings due to the target
- Technically incorrect measures – for example a patient dying on a trolley in an NHS hospital accident and emergency department is not counted as dying in the hospital’s care

The general problems in performance measurement are also massively exacerbated when it comes to applying the principles to often complex partnerships such as Local Strategic Partnerships, Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, Drugs Partnerships etc.

**PARTNERSHIP WORKING - A COMPLEX PICTURE**

In 2004 I reviewed a partnership which was funded by the Home Office, managed by a combination of Area Criminal Justice Strategy Boards and Drugs Action Team and delivered across Health, Police, Probation, Prisons, Courts and the CPS. This was before we factored in between 10 – 20 voluntary sector partners! It was aimed at reducing offending by getting offenders into appropriate treatment and the wiring diagram below will give you a feel for the complexity of partners!

*Cross-cutting Drugs Partnership*



Collecting the performance measures found a combination of issues...

**TECHNICALLY FLAWED MEASURES**

Many of the measures related to how long offenders had to wait between assessment and treatment. This in itself is a useful measure, but was technically flawed as “treatment” was measured in terms of seeing someone from Health who promptly conducted another battery of assessments which could take at least a few weeks. Much of this assessment had already been collected by the Police and arrest referral specialists and simply ticked a box against the measure, but delayed treatment of the individual. Delay was a major causal factor in the problem outlined below: attrition rates.

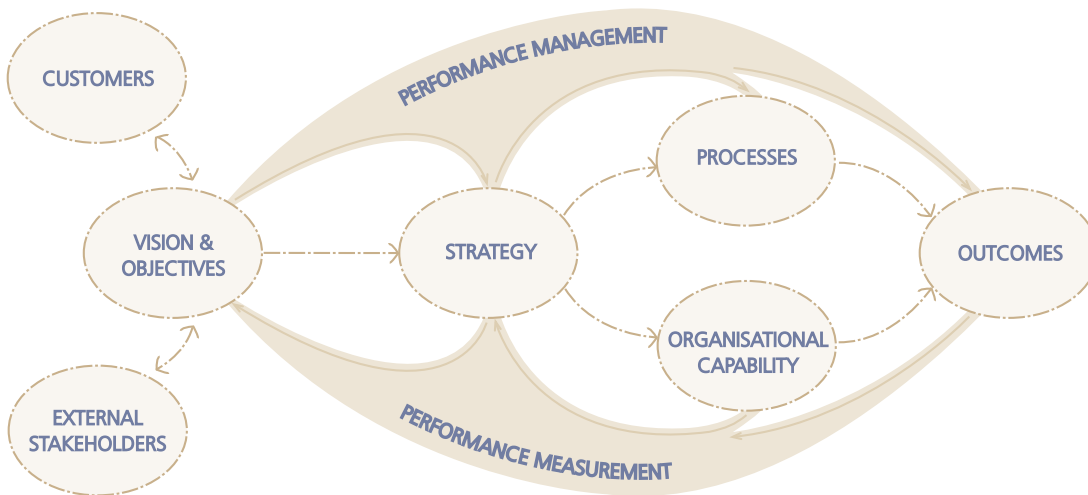
### FEW, OR NO, MEASURES OF EFFICIENCY

With such a difficult group of clients, the attrition or drop-out rate was always going to be high. What was more surprising was that it wasn't even measured and understood across the partners! Needless to say, the partners were staggered to find thousands of offenders starting the process and tiny percentages ever completing it. Without these measures of attrition across the whole system, the partnership never knew where to focus improvement activity. This also helped them to work out the true costs of a treatment completion (output) from the process.

### SCOPE OF MEASUREMENT NOT DEFINED, AGREED AND SEGMENTED

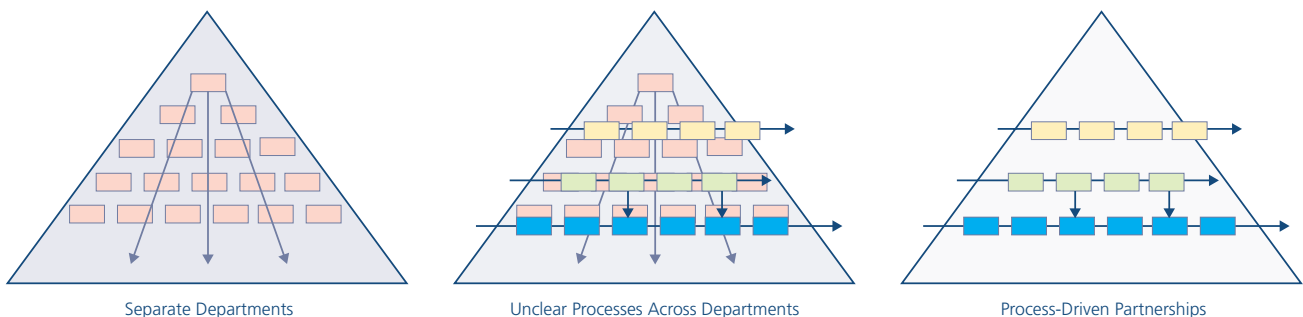
All of the partners dealt with different client groups. When looking for volume data to see the flow of people through the system we realised that some parts of the system would measure total population (e.g. Health, Housing, Community-based Services) and some would measure individual offenders (Police, Probation, CPS etc.). This meant the partnership Board could not track success rates through the system.

### SUCCESSFUL "OUTPUTS" AND "OUTCOMES" NOT AGREED



These were largely missing altogether! The partnership knew there were 16,500 offenders with drug-related offending issues starting the process, but no idea how many successfully found their way through, or out of the system. Even the definitions of "successful outcome" were not clear, as strictly-speaking the number of treatment completions is an output.

*Process-driven partnerships cut across traditional government departments*



In the absence of any success measures associated with the partnership, people working within the process (or pathway) will focus on their own Departmental measures, which rather defeats the object of the partnership, or funding, in the first place! Worse still, some of the Departmental measures and targets can often work in opposition to what the partnership is trying to achieve.

## APPLYING PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT TO PARTNERSHIPS

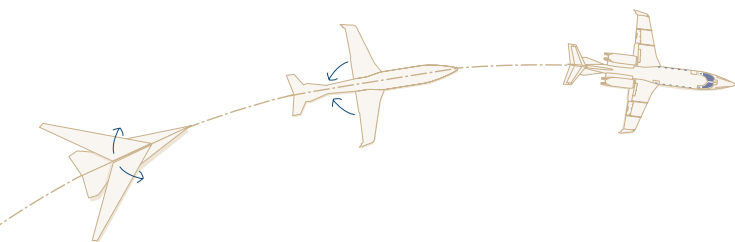
The Ad Esse Performance Management Model provides us with a framework for organisations and partnerships. Without a clear and agreed vision, the partnership I reviewed was always going to struggle. In partnership working it's critical to understand that the parties involved will have their own targets and measures, but mapping back from the vision to agree strategic objectives is vital for developing a balanced set of measures for the partnership.

There are a number of characteristics that partnerships display that might suggest our approach would add value:

- A lack of appropriate measurement systems
- Confusion over the difference between outputs and outcomes
- A lack of understanding of why different, balanced, measurements might be of benefit
- A need to debate what is really important to measure at the highest level of the partnership
- Numerous existing projects and activities aimed at delivering results, but unclear how their success will be measured
- Complex, multiple partners and stakeholders (often with conflicting, or differing, needs and expectations)
- A multitude of "required measurements" and a view that all of these are strategically important

But before you go out and start applying this approach, a word of warning. Getting the approach right is crucially important. We'd rather see a partnership with no measurement system than one with the wrong measurement system! A few simple pointers include:

- Start with a clear vision, but don't ignore the fact that partner organisations will have their Departmental masters to serve as well



- Once strategic objectives have been agreed, define outcomes, outputs and measurements from those objectives. Strategy Mapping can be helpful for seeing the cause and effect linkages between objectives
- Defining the key processes required to deliver the partnership's strategic objectives will help you to define useful process measures, but assess these against the functional / departmental measures to see they don't clash / contradict

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