

ENOUGH BY DESIGN · CHAPTER NINE

How to Know It Worked

Chapter Nine of Enough by Design

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Chapter Nine of Enough by Design

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Chapter Nine of Enough by Design. The whole book, with every chapter, is at business.hautelumiere.life/library/enough-by-design (DOI https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23989348).

A NOTE BEFORE YOU READ

This work is offered for education and leadership development. It is not legal, financial, accounting, investment, medical or psychological advice; take the advice of a qualified professional who knows your circumstances. Companies and events are described from the public record as the author understands it; characterisations are the author's analysis. Examples are illustrative, and no particular outcome is promised to any reader.

ABSTRACT

The most useful measurement in this book costs nothing and takes two minutes. It is a sentence written down before a change is made, saying what the change is expected to do, how that will be seen, and by when. Most organisations skip it. They make a change, wait, look at whatever figures happen to be to hand, and decide whether the change worked. Almost always they decide that it did. The reason is not dishonesty. It is that a person who has invested effort in a change, and who chooses after the fact which figures to look at, will find figures that agree with them. This is so ordinary that it is easy to miss, and it is the reason the earlier chapters of this book, from chapter 4 on, have asked for a prediction to be written first.

CHAPTER NINE

How to Know It Worked



How to Know It Worked

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A number written before

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Chapter 5's studio wrote its prediction before rebuilding the search on its planting library: the senior designers' "can you look this up" interruptions, estimated from timesheets at around three hundred senior hours a year, would fall. Chapter 11's household wrote its prediction in month one: the credit-card balance would be gone by the year's end. The studio's prediction was a composite's and its result is not reported, because a composite's result would prove nothing. The household's prediction, also a composite's, turned out to be wrong, and the household wrote down why. In a real firm or household, that written-down wrongness is the most valuable thing the whole exercise produces. It is the only thing that can teach the people who made it something they did not already believe.

This chapter is about measurement: what to count when the work of this book is done in a real team or household, how to read the counts honestly, and how to avoid the two failures that measurement in this area is prone to. The first failure is counting the wrong thing. The second is counting the right thing until it stops meaning anything.

The ledger that cannot see

Ammanuel Santa Anna's *Ecstatic Economics* spends a long passage of its first chapter on a measurement failure, and it is worth reading as a warning for this one. Gross Domestic Product, he notes, was developed in the 1930s to measure industrial output, and counts the volume of monetary activity without distinguishing what that activity does. His examples are plain and uncomfortable. A car accident, a divorce, an oil spill: each raises GDP. A parent raising a child at home, a community garden, an elder teaching the young: each contributes nothing. And then the sentence that summarises the problem:

> *A forest standing contributes zero. Cut it down, and GDP increases.*[81]

His conclusion is not that GDP is wicked. It is that it was built for one job and has been asked to do another: "The GDP can't see this because it was never designed to."[81]

Every team and household that does the work of this book is in danger of building a small GDP of its own. It will count what is easy to count, which is usually money spent and hours logged, and it will not see what the work was for, which is usually something like ease, capability or knowledge that circulates. A team that measures the success of chapter 5's intangible inventory by how much was spent on training has measured its input and called it an outcome. It has built a ledger that cannot see.

The rest of this chapter is about building a ledger that can.

What to count

Five measures recur across the tools in this book. None is perfect. Each tracks something the work is actually trying to change, and each can be counted by a team or household without specialist help.

1 · Blocked gaps that became chosen or closed. Chapter 4's capability map sorts every gap between what a team or household is able to do and what it actually does into chosen (left alone, respected) and blocked (something converts resources poorly). The count of blocked gaps, quarter by quarter, is the single most direct measure of the work, because removing designed blocks is what the work is for. A falling count of blocked gaps, with the chosen gaps left alone, is the result the method is aiming at. A falling count of all gaps, chosen included, may mean the team is being pushed to close gaps it had good reason to leave open, which chapter 10 warns against.

2 · Knowledge held by one person. Chapter 5's intangible inventory asks, of the most valuable intangibles, whether each is held by only one person. Chapter 11's household kept the same count as its single-keeper list. The number of important pieces of knowledge with only one keeper is a direct measure of designed fragility, and it can be counted on a single page. In the composite household, three of four such pieces had a second keeper by the year's end. In a real team, the count is the measure.

3 · Time to an answer. Where the designed scarcity is access to knowledge, as it was in chapter 5's studio, the simplest measure is how long it takes a person who needs a piece of knowledge to get it. It can be sampled rather than tracked: once a month, ask five people to time how long their last three questions took to answer, and from whom. A falling median, with fewer answers coming from the same two or three people, is what an opened library looks like in figures.

4 · The intangible ratio. Chapter 5's inventory produces a ratio of intangible to tangible investment. It is a descriptive figure, not a target, and the chapter is careful to say so. Its value is in the change of its composition rather than its size: whether investment in methods, standards and teaching is rising relative to investment that sits in one person's habits. Read alone, it can mislead; read beside measures 2 and 3, it shows whether the firm is investing in what it says it values.

5 · The enough line's stability. For a household, and for a team that has set something like one, the enough line from chapters 2 and 11 is the measure of the inner side of the work. Its test, as chapter 2 sets it, is

whether the line held still while the other figures moved. A line that moves every quarter is the goalpost of Santa Anna's notes on financial freedom, the one that "keeps moving".[82] A line that moves rarely, and only for a reason written down, is a household that has decided what enough means.

Santa Anna's field guide names the spirit of these five in five words: "Track vitality, not just velocity."[83] Velocity is how much moved. Vitality is whether the moving made anything more alive. The five measures above are attempts, imperfect and deliberately small, to count the second.

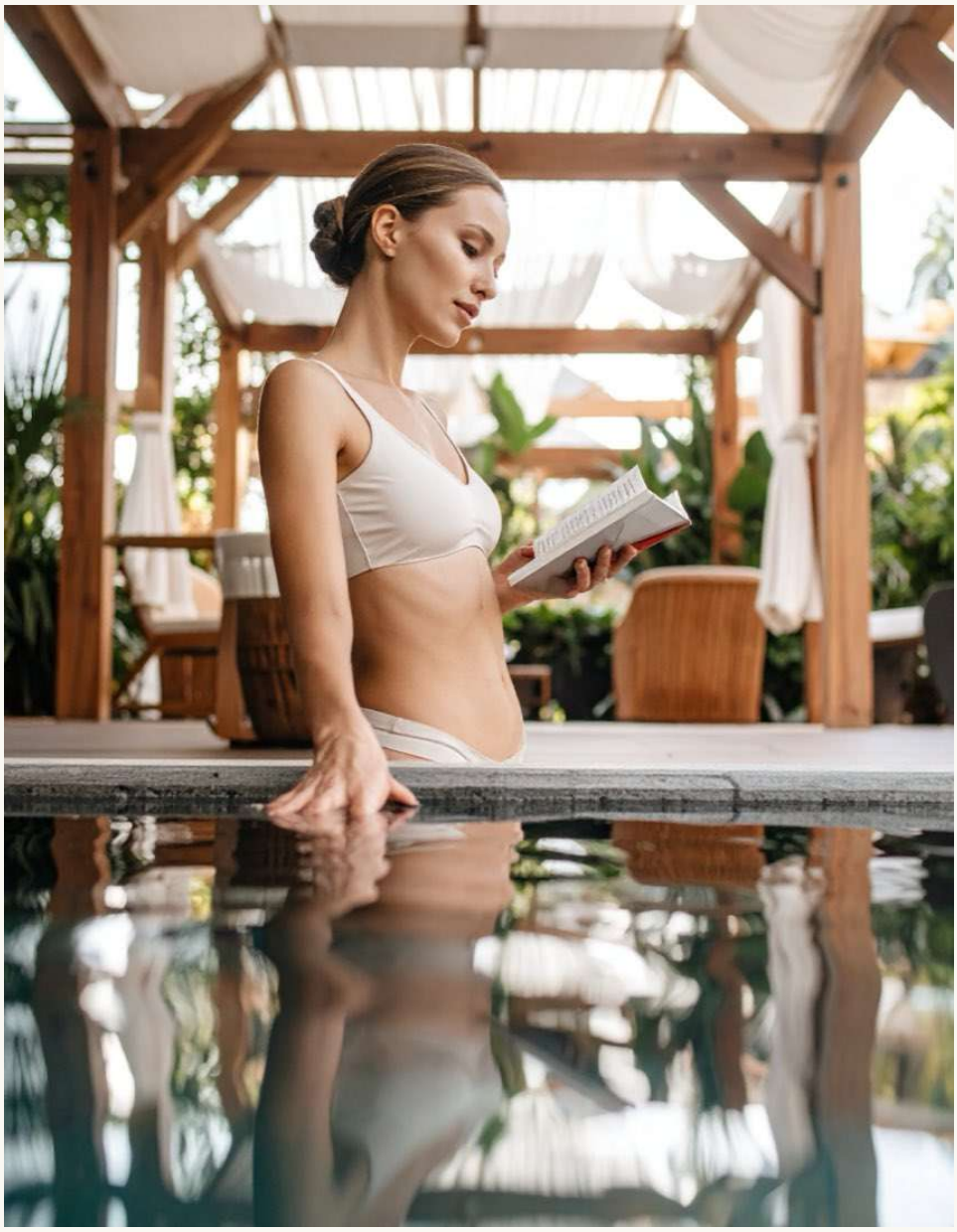
Leading and lagging

Measures behave on different clocks, and confusing the clocks is a common way to misread a result.

A leading measure moves soon after a change and suggests whether the change is taking. Time to an answer is a leading measure: if a library's search is rebuilt, the median time to an answer should begin to fall within weeks. The count of single-keeper knowledge is a leading measure too: a handover either starts or it does not.

A lagging measure moves later and shows whether the change mattered. The count of blocked gaps is lagging: a team's experience of its own work changes slowly, and a quarter is short. Any financial result is lagging, often by more than a year, and is shaped by so many other things that a single team's change will rarely be visible in it.

The practical rule is to write predictions on both clocks. For the change chosen in week three of chapter 8's twelve weeks, write one prediction for a leading measure, to be checked at week twelve, and one for a lagging measure, to be checked at a year. If the leading measure moves and the lagging one does not, the change took but may not have mattered. If neither moves, the change did not take, and the first question is whether it was ever made as designed. If the lagging measure moves and the leading one did not, be suspicious: something else probably moved it.



The baseline

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The baseline

A measure without a baseline is a number without a meaning. Before the first change, every measure the team intends to use should be counted once, in the same way it will be counted later.

This sounds obvious, and it is routinely skipped, because the baseline is collected at the moment when people are most eager to start. Chapter 8's twelve weeks place the baseline in the first three weeks for exactly this reason: the claim grader, the inventory and the capability map are the baseline. A team that runs them properly has its starting figures without any separate effort.

Two finer points matter. First, count the baseline more than once if the measure is noisy. Time to an answer will vary from week to week for reasons nobody controls; two or three samples before the change give a sense of the ordinary range, so that a later figure inside that range is not mistaken for an effect. Second, write down how each measure was counted. A count of blocked gaps made by the whole team in a ninety-minute session will not be comparable with a count made by the leader alone on a Friday afternoon. The method of counting is part of the measure.



When a measure becomes a target

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When a measure becomes a target

The second failure of measurement is subtler than the first, and it has been named many times.

In 1975 the economist Charles Goodhart, writing about British monetary policy, observed that any statistical regularity will tend to break down once pressure is placed on it for purposes of control.[84] Four years later the social scientist Donald Campbell set out a parallel claim about social indicators: the more any quantitative indicator is used for social decision-making, the more it is subject to corruption pressures and the more it tends to distort the processes it was meant to monitor.[85] In 1997 the anthropologist Marilyn Strathern, writing about audit in British universities, gave the idea the form in which it is now most often quoted: "When a measure becomes a target, it ceases to be a good measure."[86]

Every measure in this chapter is exposed to that law. A team rewarded for reducing its count of blocked gaps will find ways to call blocked gaps chosen. A team rewarded for reducing single-keeper knowledge will produce handover documents nobody reads. A household that treats the stability of its enough line as a score will stop moving the line when its needs genuinely change, which is the opposite of what the line is for.

Three practices keep the measures honest, and each is built into the tools.

Keep measures descriptive, not evaluative. None of the five measures is tied to pay, promotion, standing or blame. They are the team's own view of its own work. Chapter 10's conversation with the board is explicit that no number will be promised; this is why.

Pair every count with a sentence. The Prediction Register below asks, for every result, a sentence on what happened. A count of blocked gaps that fell from nine to five means little alone. The same count with the sentence "two closed because the approval rule changed; two were reclassified as chosen after a conversation with the people affected" means a great deal, and the second half of that sentence is where Goodhart's law would show itself.

Appoint someone whose job is to doubt. Chapter 8's sceptic, and chapter 10's script for that role, exist for this. A person who reads the register at week twelve and asks whether the figures moved because the work changed or because the counting changed is the cheapest protection against a measure turning into a target.

Reading a result honestly

At week twelve, and again at a year, the team reads its register. Four outcomes are possible, and each has an honest reading.

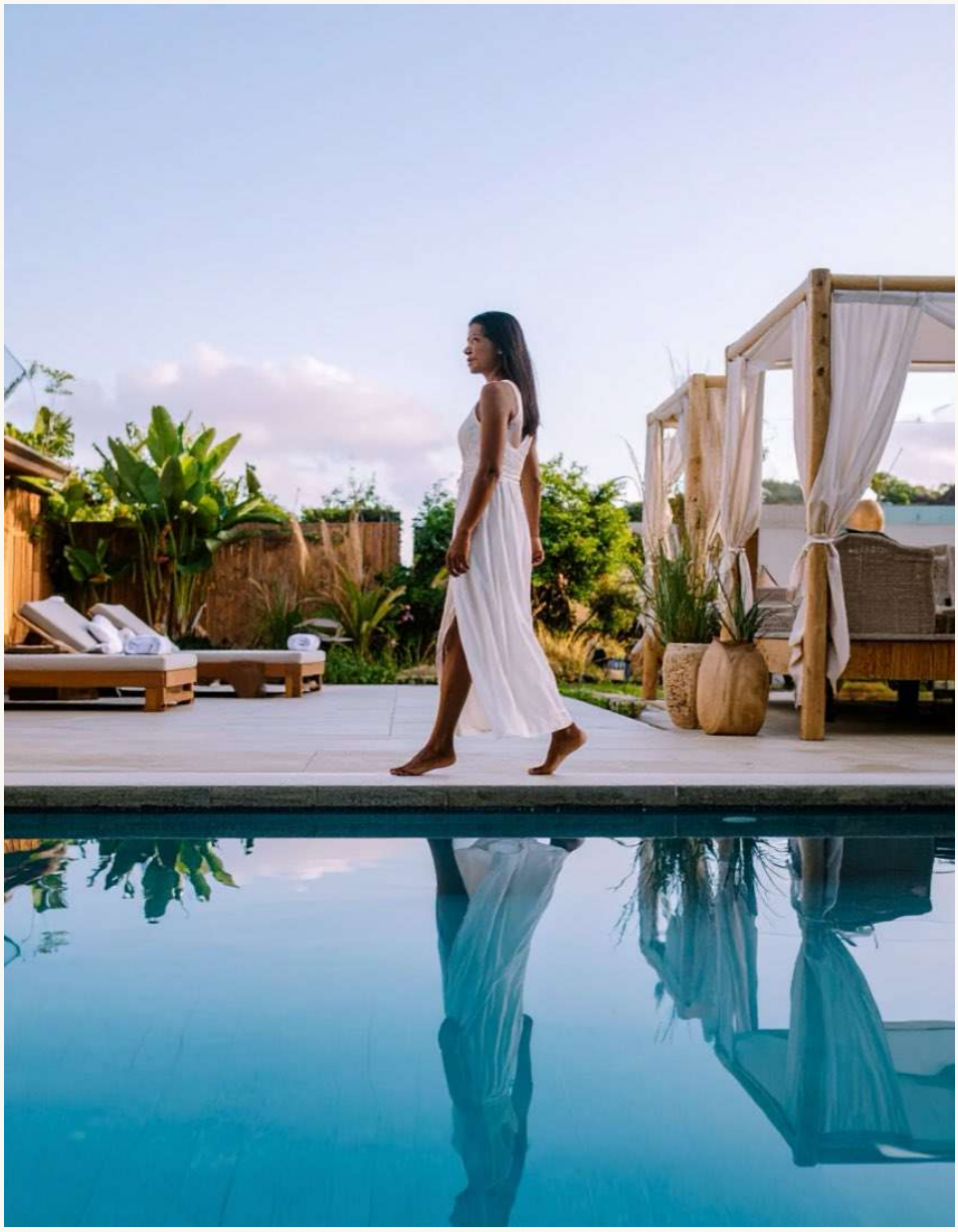
The prediction came true. The honest reading is that the change may have worked. It is not yet that the change worked. A single team, over twelve weeks, is one case, and many things changed in those twelve

weeks besides the one the team made. The right response is to keep the change, write down what else changed in the same period, and look again at a year.

The prediction did not come true. The honest reading is that the team has learned something. Either the change was not made as designed, or the block it removed was not the one that mattered, or the measure was not the right one. Each of those is worth knowing. Chapter 11's household learned why its card balance was not cleared: a slow autumn, and a holiday it chose to keep. It would make the same choice again. A team that treats a failed prediction as information will make better predictions next quarter. A team that treats it as embarrassment will stop writing them.

The figure moved in the right direction, by less than predicted. The honest reading is usually that the prediction was optimistic. This is the commonest result, and it is fine. Write the size of the shortfall down; over a year, a team learns how optimistic it tends to be.

Something unpredicted happened. Chapter 11's household had one of these: an evening in month nine when an adult opened the bank app at eleven at night and did not tense. Unpredicted results are often the most important ones, and they are the easiest to over-read. Write them down, in the words of the person who noticed them, and treat them as a question for the next quarter's prediction rather than as a finding.



The humility of small numbers

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The humility of small numbers

The research cited in this book is mostly about economies and large samples: hours of work across countries since 1870, intangible investment across American business, well-being across hundreds of thousands of survey responses. The measures in this chapter are about one team or one household. That difference deserves to be said plainly.

A single team cannot establish that a method works. It can establish, over time and with honest records, what happened when it tried the method in its own conditions. That is a smaller claim and a more useful

one for the people in the team, because their conditions are the only ones they can change. It is also exactly the kind of evidence that larger studies cannot provide, because a study can tell a team what tends to happen on average and cannot tell it what will happen in its own building.

There is a second humility, which chapter 3 named. The research on scarcity and the mind is contested; the research on income and well-being does not support a natural ceiling on "enough". A team or household that measures its own enough line should not believe it has discovered a fact about human nature. It has recorded a decision it made, and whether it held to it. That is all the measure says, and it is enough.

Measuring the inner side

The hardest thing in this book to measure is the one Santa Anna's book cares about most: the bodily experience of sufficiency, the bracing at a bank balance that is, in his phrase, "objectively fine".[87] It would be easy to build a score for it, a rating from one to ten, and track it weekly. The chapter recommends against that, for Goodhart's reason: a feeling rated weekly becomes a feeling performed.

What the tools do instead is collect evidence in the person's own words. The Quarterly Enough Review in chapter 12 opens with each person writing one moment, from the last quarter, when they had what they needed and wanted nothing more. Kept over a year, those pages are a record that no score can match. A team or household can read them back and see whether such moments became more frequent, and what they shared. It is qualitative evidence, and it should be called that. It is also the evidence closest to what the work is for.



A measurement plan, in one page

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A measurement plan, in one page

Put together, the chapter's advice fits on a page, and the tool below is that page. Before the first change: choose two or three of the five measures, count the baseline, and write down how. For each change: write one leading prediction and one lagging prediction, with dates. At each check: record the figure, a sentence on what happened, and what else changed. Let the sceptic read it first. At a year: read the whole register, and write one sentence on how optimistic the team turned out to be.

None of this needs software. A sheet of paper kept in a folder, and read aloud once a quarter, is sufficient, and has the advantage that nobody can quietly edit last quarter's prediction.

The Tool: The Prediction Register

For a team or a household. One page per change. Fill in the top half before the change; the bottom half at each check. Keep every page in date order.

The change. In one sentence: · Chosen in: week ___ of the twelve weeks (chapter 8) / quarter ___ · Owner:

The kind of scarcity it addresses (chapter 1): material · positional · designed · habitual

Baseline (before the change).

MEASURE	HOW IT IS COUNTED	BASELINE COUNT 1	BASELINE COUNT 2 (IF NOISY)

Choose from: blocked gaps (chapter 4) · single-keeper knowledge (chapters 5, 11) · time to an answer (median of a sample) · intangible ratio (chapter 5) · the enough line's stability (chapters 2, 11) · your own.

Predictions (written before the change).

Leading: will move from ___ to ___ by (date, usually week twelve).

Lagging: will move from ___ to ___ by (date, usually a year).

What would tell us the change was not made as designed:

Check 1 (week twelve). Leading figure: ___ · One sentence on what happened: · What else changed in this period: · Read by the sceptic: name · Their question:

Check 2 (one year). Lagging figure: ___ · One sentence on what happened: · What else changed:

Reading. Tick one: came true · did not come true · right direction, smaller · something unpredicted. In one sentence, what did we learn?

Decision. Keep · grow · stop. Why, in one sentence:

Optimism note (at a year, across all pages). How many predictions came true, how many fell short, by roughly how much?

Measures here are descriptive. Do not tie any of them to pay, promotion or blame.

A note on method

The studio and household referred to are the composites of chapters 5 and 11; their figures were set by the writer and are not evidence of any result.

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