

THE CHANNEL KEEPS IT · CHAPTER NINE

Measuring What Is Given

Chapter Nine of The Channel Keeps It

Ammanuel Santa Anna

Santa Anna, A. (2026). Measuring What Is Given. In The Channel Keeps It (ch. 9). Luminous Prosperity Inc. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23989042
Luminous Library Licence 1.0 · business.hautelumiere.life/library/the-channel-keeps-it

THE LICENCE

Measuring What Is Given
Chapter Nine of The Channel Keeps It

The Channel Keeps It · Chapter Nine. The Haute Lumière edition, 2026. © 2026 Ammanuel Santa Anna.

Released under the Luminous Library Licence 1.0 (hautelumiere.life/library-licence): free to read, share, quote, translate and teach, non-commercially, for ever. The Author keeps every other right, including every commercial right.

Published by Luminous Prosperity Inc. for Haute Lumière. Author ORCID 0009-0008-3244-0306.

DOI 10.5281/zenodo.23989042 · this record's page: business.hautelumiere.life/library/the-channel-keeps-it/09-measuring-what-is-given/

Please cite as: Santa Anna, A. (2026). Measuring What Is Given. In The Channel Keeps It (ch. 9). Luminous Prosperity Inc. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23989042

Chapter Nine of The Channel Keeps It. The whole book, with every chapter, is at business.hautelumiere.life/library/the-channel-keeps-it (DOI https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23989022).

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

Every chapter so far has run into the same difficulty and stepped around it. The gift economy is valuable, the evidence says, and fragile, and a leader would like to know whether hers is healthy. But the obvious way of finding out, counting the gifts, is one of the surest ways of damaging them. The difficulty is not hypothetical. Chapter 3 showed how a fine became a price and a payment nearly halved the supply of new donors among women. Samuel Bowles's review named four ways an incentive crowds out what it rewards, and one of them, conveying distrust, applies to measurement as much as to money. A team that discovers its manager is logging who stays late has been told, without a word, that staying late is now a performance. Some people will stay later. Some will stop. Almost nobody will go on staying late for the reason they used to.

CHAPTER NINE

Measuring What Is Given



Measuring What Is Given

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE CHANNEL KEEPS IT · CHAPTER NINE

The problem with counting gifts

Every chapter so far has run into the same difficulty and stepped around it. The gift economy is valuable, the evidence says, and fragile, and a leader would like to know whether hers is healthy. But the obvious way of finding out, counting the gifts, is one of the surest ways of damaging them.

The difficulty is not hypothetical. Chapter 3 showed how a fine became a price and a payment nearly halved the supply of new donors among women. Samuel Bowles's review named four ways an incentive crowds out what it rewards, and one of them, conveying distrust, applies to measurement as much as to money. A team that discovers its manager is logging who stays late has been told, without a word, that staying late is now a performance. Some people will stay later. Some will stop. Almost nobody will go on staying late for the reason they used to.

This chapter sets out how to measure a gift economy without becoming the thing that ends it. It is the most technical chapter in the book and, for a leader who has to report to a board, probably the most useful.

What there is evidence for

Organisational researchers have a name for the economy this book describes. In 1988 Dennis Organ called it organisational citizenship behaviour: individual behaviour that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognised by the formal reward system, and that in the aggregate helps the organisation function. Helping a colleague with a heavy workload, orienting a new hire, speaking up with a suggestion, attending a meeting nobody had to attend: these are the examples that recur in the literature, and they are exactly the items that turn up in the *Give* column of Chapter 2's audit.

In 2009 Nathan Podsakoff, Steven Whiting, Philip Podsakoff and Brian Blume brought together the research on what such behaviour is associated with.[32] Pooling 168 independent samples, covering more than 51,000 people, they found that at the level of the individual, citizenship behaviour was related to managers' ratings of performance, to reward decisions, and to lower turnover intentions, turnover and absence. In a smaller set of thirty-eight studies at the level of the unit, it was related to productivity, efficiency, lower costs, customer satisfaction and lower unit turnover. The relationships with unit performance were somewhat stronger in studies that followed units over time than in snapshots, which the authors took as partial evidence that the behaviour helps cause the performance rather than only accompanying it.

That is the strongest general evidence available that the economy nobody invoices shows up, eventually, in the figures somebody does invoice. It has limits a leader should know before quoting it. Most of the studies are correlational. Many rely on ratings by managers or by the people themselves. And the finding that citizenship behaviour affects reward decisions has a shadow: once people learn that helping is noticed and rewarded, some of the helping becomes a bid for reward, which is the crowding-out problem arriving through the back door.

So the evidence says the gift economy matters to performance, and it says, by implication, that measuring it in a way people can see as tied to reward will change it. Both halves govern what follows.

Four rules for measuring a gift economy

Rule 1. Measure the group, not the person. Akerlof's cash posters shared a norm. Fehr's conditional cooperators responded to what the group did. Cascio's warehouse figures were firm-wide. The unit at which reciprocity operates is the group, and the unit at which it should be measured is the group too. A count of volunteered shift cover across a team is a reading of the team's gift economy. The same count broken out by person is a league table, and a league table converts a gift into a competition.

Rule 2. Measure the return, not the gift. The healthiest sign in a gift economy is not how much is given but how much circulates back. A unit where a few people give a great deal and nothing returns to them has a high gift count and a failing economy. Chapter 4's Circulation Map counts pools for exactly this reason. The measure that matters is the share of giving that is returned, received and answered.

Rule 3. Keep the measure away from the money. No figure from this chapter should feed a bonus, a performance rating or a pay decision for an individual. The moment it does, the gift line and the contract line have been joined, and Chapter 3's rule four, that money and meaning travel on separate lines, has been broken. If a board wants these figures to influence pay, the right place is the unit's overall budget or a shared gain, not anybody's individual award.

Rule 4. Say what the number cannot see. Every reading of a gift economy is partial, and an honest one says so in the same breath as the figure. This is not modesty. A number reported without its limits invites a decision it cannot support.

What to count

With the rules in place, a small number of measures do most of the work. A unit should choose no more than four, and should be able to collect all of them without asking anyone to report on their own generosity.

Unprompted cover. How often, when someone is ill or absent, is the gap filled by a volunteer rather than by assignment? Most rotas and shift systems already record who covered; adding whether it was asked for is a small change. Rising unprompted cover is Akerlof's gift coming back, in the most literal form available. Maren's kitchen in Chapter 5 chose this measure, and it is the best single measure for any unit that runs shifts.

Turnover after the first year. Cascio's six percent at Costco is the model. Overall turnover mixes people who never entered the exchange with people who were in it and left. Turnover among people past their first year reads whether the exchange holds once people are inside it. It is already in every payroll system.

Pools on the map. The number of shaded circles on the quarterly Circulation Map. This is a count the stewards make, not one anyone reports on themselves, and it measures Rule 2 directly. A falling number of

pools, with saplings beginning to send arrows of their own, is the clearest reading of a gift economy coming into balance over a season.

Items in Return. The count of items in the *Return* column of the Three Obligations Audit, repeated quarterly for the same relationships. It measures Mauss's third obligation at the level of a relationship between two groups, which is where most organisations' gift economies quietly stop.

Suggestions adopted, and the time to answer. If a unit wants a measure of ideas offered, it should count not the number of suggestions but the share of suggestions that receive a specific answer within a set time, adopted or declined with a reason. This measures Mauss's second obligation, receiving, which Chapter 12 calls the cheapest act in the book and the one most often skipped. A suggestion that disappears is a refused gift.

Two measures are deliberately missing from this list. The first is any individual count of helping, such as peer-recognition points per person. The second is any survey that asks people to rate how generous their colleagues are. Both break Rule 1, both invite the competition the rules exist to prevent, and both convey to people that their generosity is under review.

How to collect without crowding out

The method of collection matters as much as the measure. Three practices keep it from becoming surveillance.

Use records that already exist. Rotas, payroll and the minutes of meetings already hold most of what is needed. A measure built from existing records adds no new act of reporting and sends no new message.

Let the stewards count, not the managers. The people who draw the map and run the audit should be the stewards of Chapter 8, one of whom is a generous giver herself. When the counting is done by people inside the gift economy, it reads as attention. When it is done by management, it reads as inspection.

Tell people what is counted and why, once. Hidden measurement, discovered, is the worst case: it confirms the distrust Bowles warned about and adds deceit. Telling the team, in one sentence, that the unit now counts unprompted cover across the whole team, never by person, so that it can see whether its changes are helping, is usually enough. Then stop talking about it.

How to read the numbers honestly

A season's figures will move. The hard part is saying what the movement means, and what it does not.

Every reading should answer four questions, in writing, before anyone draws a conclusion. Chapter 8's week thirteen uses these as the report's structure.

What did we change, and when? List every change: corrections to pay, gifts made, incentives removed, the immune-system repair, the start of the ledger. Give each a date. A reading that does not know when things changed cannot say what caused anything.

What did we measure, before and after, from what source? Give each figure with its source and the period it covers. Compare like with like: the same quarter last year as well as the quarter before, because many units, like Maren's kitchen, have seasons.

What else changed in the same period? A new manager, a busy season, a change in the local labour market, a reorganisation next door, a price rise. Write them all down. This is the list that keeps a team from crediting its own work with what the calendar did.

What do we now believe, and what can we not tell? Write the belief plainly. Then write what the evidence cannot separate. Chapter 5's kitchen could not tell whether the correction, the gifts or the absence of inspection did the work, and said so. That is not a weak report. It is the only kind a board should trust.

A unit that runs the sequence in more than one team can do better. If two comparable teams start the sequence a quarter apart, the second serves for one quarter as a rough comparison for the first. This is not a controlled experiment, and it should not be reported as one, but it separates some of what the calendar did from what the team did. A larger organisation can stagger the start across several units deliberately, which is the nearest most firms will come to the design that Raff and Summers could not have at Highland Park.

The figures a board will ask for

Boards will usually ask for two things this chapter has so far kept at a distance: money, and individual accountability. Both can be given without breaking the rules.

Money. The True Cost of a Wage from Chapter 6 translates turnover into cost, and turnover after the first year is already on the list of measures. A falling churn cost is a figure in currency, with its assumption stated, and it is often large enough to carry a board on its own. Productivity figures for the unit, already collected, can be placed beside the gift-economy measures, with the four questions answered, so that the board can see whether they moved together.

Accountability. The board can and should hold the sponsor accountable for running the sequence, for closing the gaps between pay and what is owed, and for the unit-level measures. What it should not do is ask for the gift-economy measures broken out by person. If a board member asks, the answer is the evidence of Chapter 3, stated plainly: the moment these figures are attached to individuals, they begin to measure a competition rather than a gift. Chapter 10 sets out a script for that conversation.

The deepest measure

There is one more reading, and it cannot be put in a table.

Ecstatic Economics warns, in its account of what goes wrong when good intentions meet economic reality, that "If a cooperative measures its success only in financial terms, it will gradually drift toward extractive behavior." The warning applies to any organisation. What is measured is what is attended to, and what is attended to grows. A unit that measures only output will, over time, become a unit organised around output, and the economy nobody invoices will be squeezed into whatever room is left.

The book's own answer, in its account of what all its working alternatives share, is the feedback loop: "making the impact of economic decisions visible, felt, and somatically real." The measures in this chapter are an attempt to make the gift economy visible without making it a performance. But the last test is the one the book keeps returning to, and no figure stands in for it: whether the people giving feel that what they give is received. The only instrument for that is the question Chapter 8's listeners ask, put to the people at the pooling points, and the answer, written in their own words.

A season in which every figure improved and the generous steward says, privately, that nothing has changed for her, is a season that has not worked yet. A season in which the figures barely moved and she says that, for the first time in years, she feels her giving is returned, is a season that has. Report both, with the figures first and her words beside them. A board that hears both will understand what is being measured.

The Tool: The Season Report

A two-page report, prepared at the end of each quarter by the stewards and the sceptic, for the sponsor and, in summary, for the team.

Page one · The figures.

MEASURE (MAX FOUR)	SOURCE	SAME QUARTER LAST YEAR	LAST QUARTER	THIS QUARTER

Below the table, two lines:- What none of these figures can see:- What would have to be true for these figures to mislead us:

Page two · The reading.

1. What we changed, and when. (List with dates.)
2. What else changed in the same period. (List: staff, season, market, organisation.)
3. What we now believe. (Plain sentences.)
4. What we cannot tell. (Plain sentences.)

5. In their words. Two or three sentences, without names, from the people at the pooling points, in answer to: "Has anything changed in whether what you give here feels returned?"
6. Next season. What we will keep, what we will stop, what we will try.

A check before it goes out. Read the report aloud with the sceptic. Strike any sentence that credits the team's changes with a movement the second list could explain. Strike any figure that names or could identify a person.

References

1. Podsakoff, N. P., Whiting, S. W., Podsakoff, P. M., & Blume, B. D. (2009). Individual- and organizational-level consequences of organizational citizenship behaviors: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 94(1), 122–141. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0013079. A meta-analysis of largely correlational studies; the unit-level findings rest on a smaller set of thirty-eight studies, and the causal reading is partial.

Measuring What Is Given

Ammanuel Santa Anna · Luminous Prosperity Inc. · Haute Lumière

Set in Cormorant Garamond and Manrope.

Read the Business Library at business.hautelumiere.life/library.

Luminous Library Licence 1.0 · hautelumiere.life/library-licence

REQUEST A CONVERSATION

business.hautelumiere.life/book/?kind=gainshare

The Business Library

business.hautelumiere.life/library/

The packages

hautelumiere.life/pricing/