

The Tyranny of Metrics

Description

[Tweet](#)

[The Tyranny of Metrics, by Jerry Z Muller, Princeton University Press, RRP £19.95/ \\$24.95, 240 pages](#)

See [Tim Harford's review of this book in the Financial Times](#), 24, January 2018

Some quotes: Muller shows that metrics are often used as a substitute for relevant experience, by managers with generic rather than specific expertise. Muller does not claim that metrics are always useless, but that we expect too much from them as a tool of management. !.

The Tyranny of Metrics does us a service in briskly pulling together parallel arguments from economics, management science, philosophy and psychology along with examples from education, policing, medicine, business and the military.

In an excellent final chapter, Muller summarises his argument thus: "measurement is not an alternative to judgement: measurement demands judgement: judgement about whether to measure, what to measure, how to evaluate the significance of what's been measured, whether rewards and penalties will be attached to the results, and to whom to make the measurements available".

The book does not engage seriously enough with the possibility that the advantages of metric-driven accountability might outweigh the undoubted downsides. Tellingly, Muller complains of a university ratings metric that rewards high graduation rates, access for disadvantaged students, and low costs. He says these requirements are "mutually exclusive", but they are not. They are in tension with each other,

Nor does this book reckon with evidence that mechanical statistical predictions often beat the subjective judgment of experts.

!and perhaps most curiously, there is no discussion of computers, cheap sensors, or big data. In this respect, at least, the book could have been written in the 1980s.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
I THE ARGUMENT	
1 The Argument in a Nutshell	17
2 Recurring Flaws	23
II THE BACKGROUND	
3 The Origins of Measuring and Paying for Performance	29
4 Why Metrics Became So Popular	39
5 Principals, Agents, and Motivation	49

6 Philosophical Critiques 59
III THE MISMEASURE OF ALL THINGS? Case Studies
7 Colleges and Universities 67
8 Schools 89
9 Medicine 103
10 Policing 125
11 The Military 131
12 Business and Finance 137
13 Philanthropy and Foreign Aid 153
EXCURSUS
14 When Transparency Is the Enemy of Performance: Politics, Diplomacy, Intelligence, and Marriage 159
IV CONCLUSIONS
15 Unintended but Predictable Negative Consequences 169
16 When and How to Use Metrics: A Checklist 175
Acknowledgments 185
Notes 189
Index 213

Search inside this book using a [Google Books view](#)

Category

1. Books

Date

03/04/2026

Date Created

29/01/2018

Author

admin