



Thoughts from Linda:

Impact & Excellence

Sheri Chaney Jones
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"Numbers will tell you amazing things if you know how to listen."

In this 2014 book by Sheri Chaney Jones, you will take a 'deep dive' into this statement and find a most helpful guide for your nonprofit, governmental organization, and for-profit entity. Her premise is that data and measurement are incredibly useful but of most value when data-driven strategies help you align your mission, culture, and performance. She shows the power of measuring impact over more conventional metric paradigms.

As she notes, this book will help you validate your own theory of change and what you put forth into the world as your value for social impact. You will learn how to go beyond measuring what your organization did (your outputs) to measuring your outcomes, i.e., your impacts on individuals, families, and communities. You will see many illustrations of ways to measure short-, mid-, and long-term impacts and ways to demonstrate this value to all key stakeholders.

Many nonprofits have adopted this book over the past decade as funding has become tighter for all social sectors and public opinion of governmental agencies and nonprofits is at a remarkable low. The book builds on her original research with over 200 governmental agencies and nonprofits. She found a clear positive causal relationship between organizational outcomes and cultures that value data and measurement.

The important point is that data is not – contrary to much past emphasis—making the social sector more like the business environment. Rather, the power is in using measurement to capture the good that mission-driven organizations do for communities and express it clearly through data.

Sheri Chaney Jones serves as President of Measurement Resources Company in Columbus, Ohio, today and teaches a course called Creating Measurement Cultures as part of Ohio's Certified Public Manager's Program. She holds a master's degree in industrial and organizational psychology from Central Michigan University and has been a key advisor to several governmental organizations, including the Ohio Department of Aging. She offers this entity as a great example in the book of a high-impact department. The skillful use of data and impact measurement persuaded lawmakers to give older adults the option to stay home and receive care versus other more expensive options. Her work helped control the budget for Medicaid in Ohio and helped provide much more compassionate and effective solutions for seniors in that state.

The book is divided into thirteen chapters and has two appendices filled with useful information. Chapters include The Call to Be More Strategic, High-Performance Measurement Cultures, The Reality: We are Not as Good as We Think, The Five Cs of Easy and Effective Impact and Excellence, Taking the Next Step. There are also five chapters on one of her 'Five Cs.' Workbook-oriented, each chapter ends with a series of questions for you and your team to assess your approach and progress with each idea presented.

I particularly liked the chapter entitled Letting Go of Excuses, The "Five Cs" of Easy and Effective Impact and Excellence. This chapter takes the reader through a well-known formula for change, The Gleichen's Formula, with a solid explanation and examples to illustrate the formula in action. This chapter includes the story of the 2011 movie Moneyball and the example of General Manager Billy Beane's data-driven approach to building a team with the Oakland As. He revolutionized the game with this approach. This chapter includes the introduction to the bi-partisan Moneyball for Government movement, a growing effort to expand the evidence-based, data-rich process for evaluating potential government programs and their impact on society.

Jones notes that the 'Five Cs' of easy and effective impact and excellence have the power to transform any organization. As she says, "these five elements entail proven, practical strategies for all social-sector organizations, regardless of size, budget, and activities. These motivational strategies can be easily incorporated into any organization's culture and accommodated by any budget. They can often be implemented with current staff and volunteers and do not require an infusion of additional resources. The bottom line for today's social sector is this: sustained success requires more than merely collecting data and running reports. Lasting change will depend on taking appropriate action as it relates to the Five Cs."

Her "Five Cs" are as follows:

1. Making changes to organizational culture and leadership
2. Clarifying organizational mission
3. Measuring the right things and capturing the impact
4. Communicating the results effectively
5. Making data-informed changes and celebrating success

In closing, here is her compelling vision: "Imagine a world where government and nonprofit organizations are fully realizing their respective missions—eradicating disease, minimizing personal and societal hardships, and strengthening communities. What if, as a result of effectiveness throughout the social sector, the public's tax burden decreased and our individual quality of life increased? Such a world can exist. It begins with embracing a culture of excellence supported by data-driven outcomes measurement within every nonprofit and government organization."

Her vision paints a powerful picture of what is possible. Her framing of the 'Five C's' offers a clear pathway for the journey.

This delineation itself provides a familiar theme, offered in many books and consultants, and in literature today. Still, her evidence-based approach to the use of data itself for impact is well worth the read. I encourage every nonprofit leader to make this book a staple for your leadership team.