Scott M. Meis[1]

Comments on Establishing Appropriate Measurements for the Performance of Buildings and the Serviceability of Facilities by Francis T. Ventre

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Francis Ventre's paper presents a history of measurement, essential criteria and a development strategy for measurement improvements. All three are based on an implicit model of technology development as a rational process involving both undisputed change and sequential cooperation between users and methodologists. From my perspective, as a practising organizational statistician, I see two major problems with Francis' vision and strategy.

First, I question the undisputed nature of measurement improvements. While he acknowledges their political aspects, I believe he underrates the significance of associated changes in power and accountability. In most cases ambiguity and disinformation are as useful to those who have vested interests in the status quo as information improvements are to others who want change. Those who stand to lose power or autonomy resist such improvements. Unless sufficient authoritative commitment or supportive consensus exists, any measurement change is doomed.

Second, I question the simple sequential model of technological change implicit in his suggested improvement strategy. In that model, measurement users identify and specify what measures are needed, and the precision required. Measurement specialists then respond by developing appropriate measures. In my experience, new technology development practically never works in this unidirectional way. While users are often quite specific about the inadequacies of their present information, their ideas about specific improvements required are usually far less exact. Measurement specialists, on the other hand, have difficulty identifying the specific applications and significant implications of their measures. Successful development of new measures requires sustained contact and exchanges between users and measurement specialists throughout the process.

[1] Scott M. Meis, Chief, Socio-Economic Information, Canadian Parks Service, Environment Canada, 10 Wellington Street, Hull, Quebec, Canada, K1B 4M7, (819)997-6605.