

11/4 Study Guide Questions

Discussion/Readings

- How can a nonprofit prove that it's making a difference?
- What can/should be measured to determine that?
- What are the measurement approaches presented in our readings?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses in each of those approaches?
- Overall, what are some organizational benefits to these social program evaluation/cost-benefit/SROI approaches?
- What are some draw-backs, unexpected or hidden costs, and/or unintended consequences?
- As a nonprofit leader/manager (or an NPO investor/supporter), how might you utilize one or more of these measurement/evaluation approaches? How might you mitigate that approach's inherent weaknesses/risks? And what maximum benefits might you be striving to achieve for the sake of your mission and organization's ability to fulfill that mission?
- Of the nonprofits we've had as guests this semester-to-date, which quadrant would you place each in the Theory of Change/Operational Strategy matrix articulated by Ebrahim/Rangan, i.e. Niche, Integrated, Institutional, Ecosystem? And what are some of the measurement as well as strategy consequences to each nonprofit by being located in that quadrant?
- How would you characterize the relationship between measurement or evaluation and strategy?
- A quote from Jed Emerson in one of the readings talks about quantitative measurement being "the visible spectrum of light" of a nonprofit's value-proposition performance. What are some of the ways in which the readings suggest that a nonprofit stakeholder might assess the qualitative, non-visible spectrum of a nonprofit's performance?
- Do you agree with the James Irvine Foundation's statement that the effort to evaluate a nonprofit's worth has less to do with whether or not an effective measurement system is developed and more to do with creating a culture that values the process of self-evaluation? Why or why not?
- How might Collins' "hedge-hog" concept of what an organization is passionate about, what differentiates them as best-in-class, and what drives their economic engine align with the "theory of change" concept?

Potential questions for Lauryn Bianco, Director of Community Outreach, HOPE Inc.:

- What current emerging trends or debates are happening in philanthropy or the nonprofit sector, and what is your assessment of the value of these changes?
- What advice do you have for nonprofit leaders to build their organization's evaluative capacity and capability? What are your lessons-learned from your own experience with this endeavor?
- You serve as both a paid professional and a volunteer leader in the nonprofit sector, tell us what you're learning from each role and how each role is changing your approach and practice?