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It can often be a challenge to sort good instruments and evaluation practices from fads that can make findings difficult to interpret. This discussion will focus on a discussion of techniques, resources, and must-haves for any evaluation

KEY POINTS AND HELPFUL TIPS

- 1. What does good data collection mean?** This is a difficult question. My pragmatic approach is that the degree that the collected data help you reduce uncertainty to better help you make a decision is an indication of the “goodness” of the data collection. There are certainly some best practices by method, but perfection of an evaluation instrument is not a particularly fruitful goal. It should be good enough to get you data you are comfortable with, but all instruments will evolve. It is important to think more globally of the data you are collecting as tools that help you make informed decisions about your project.
- 2. Evaluation instruments: Where can I find them? And how do I know if they are good?** There are books of vetted evaluation instruments (see the Rubin et al. volume cited below). I also like to look through other sites like Pew (a personal favorite), or the MacArthur Foundation to look at some of their instruments (see Resources below). But, I also encourage you to participate in any surveys that come your way. This exposes you to different questions (and processes) that could be informative. For example, I have adapted consumer scales on tech profiles that are quite useful. And, going through surveys makes you more attuned to what good and bad surveys are. As you develop a sense for what you like and do not like I encourage you to create a database of items, scales or processes you like for future use.
- 3. Using “borrowed” evaluation instruments to their fullest.** I am a big encourager of using “borrowed” instruments. All data (to a degree) but survey data (particularly) are most useful when data can be compared (see Figure 1 on next page). Borrowing scales provides a twofold opportunity: (1) to give you a scale that has been tested and used and (equally important) (2) to provide you with data that can serve as a comparison group to give your results context. Findings without this context can be ungrounded and difficult to assess. If you are borrowing a scale, see if there is also data you can use as a comparison point for better understanding your data.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

MacArthur Foundation: <http://www.macfound.org>

Pew Research Center: <http://pewresearch.org/>

Rubin, R. B., Palmgren, P., & Sypher, H. (1994). *Communication Research Measures: A Sourcebook*. New York: Guilford.

Hubbard, D. W. (2007). *How to Measure Anything: Finding the Value of Intangibles in Business*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

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Figure 1: The power of a comparative data point.

