

# The Global Project on Measuring the Progress of Societies: A Toolkit for Practitioners

*Jon Hall*

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# Overview

- Measuring the Progress of Societies: An Introduction and Practical Guide
- A Frameworks for Progress
- Lessons For Success
- A Quality Framework for a **Set** of Indicators



# Measuring Progress Means

- Providing key indicators on the position and progress of a community
- Looking at economic, social and environmental concerns side by side and the links between them
- Discussing where we have come from and where we are heading



# The Global Project Philosophy

## How to Measure?

- Selecting indicators of progress is (mainly) a technical issue
- We are developing best practices

## What to Measure?

- Defining what progress looks like is a **political** issue. We can advise on how to set up a process that is legitimate and reflects the shared values of a society. But the **choice belongs to the society**.



# An Introduction and Practical Guide: A New OECD Book



- Written by Dennis Trewin (former Chief statistician from Australia) + OECD
- Draws heavily on the Measures of Australia's Progress experience
- The book provides a toolkit of approaches that will assist those who want to develop a set of progress measures



# An Introduction and Practical Guide: A New OECD Book



## Part 1: Context and History?

- Roles of indicators in government and society
- Leading an indicator project

## Part 2: The 6 Steps of Developing a Project?

- Defining the Issues; Identify Partners
- Producing a first cut; Getting the information out
- Building knowledge; Ensuring Continuity
  
- Contributed articles from the likes of Geoff Mulgan, Ken Prewitt, Roy Romanow and Pali Lehola



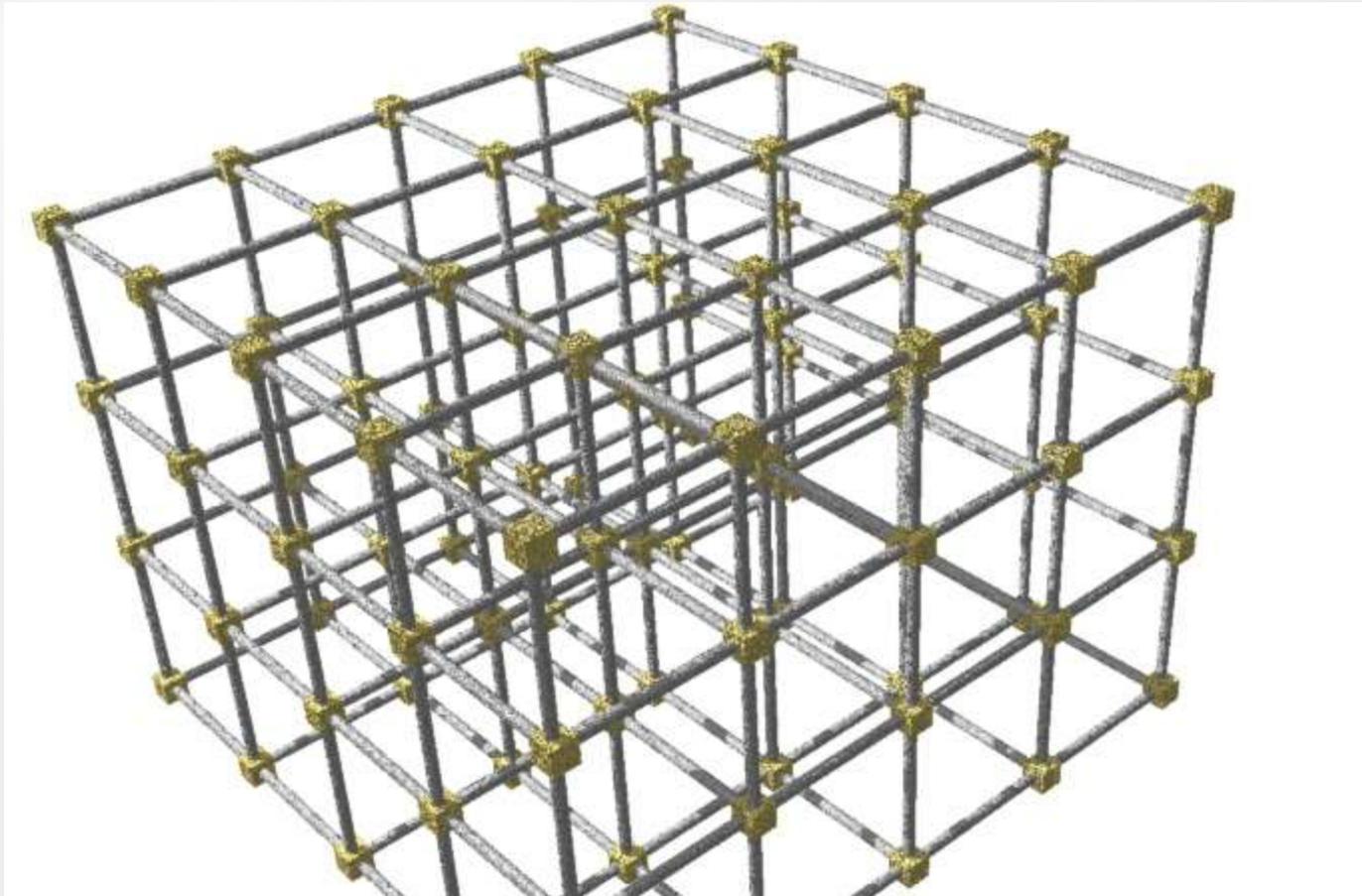
# An Introduction and Practical Guide: A New OECD Book



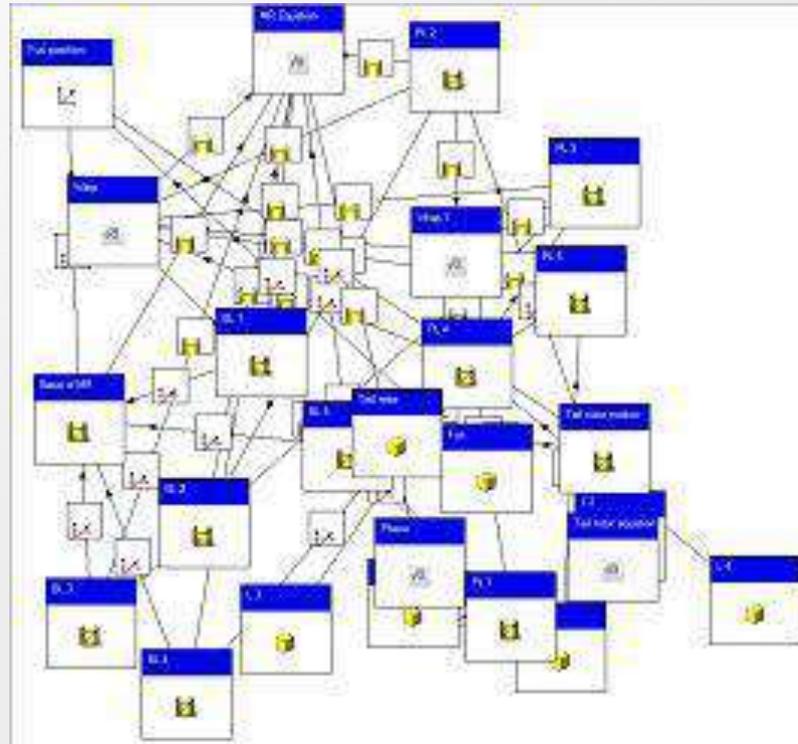
- First draft will soon appear on [www.oecd.org/progress](http://www.oecd.org/progress) for comment
- Will be a living document - over the coming months it will be refined through broad peer review
- Includes references to other Global Project work (a framework for progress, lessons about successful sets of indicators)



# Frameworks



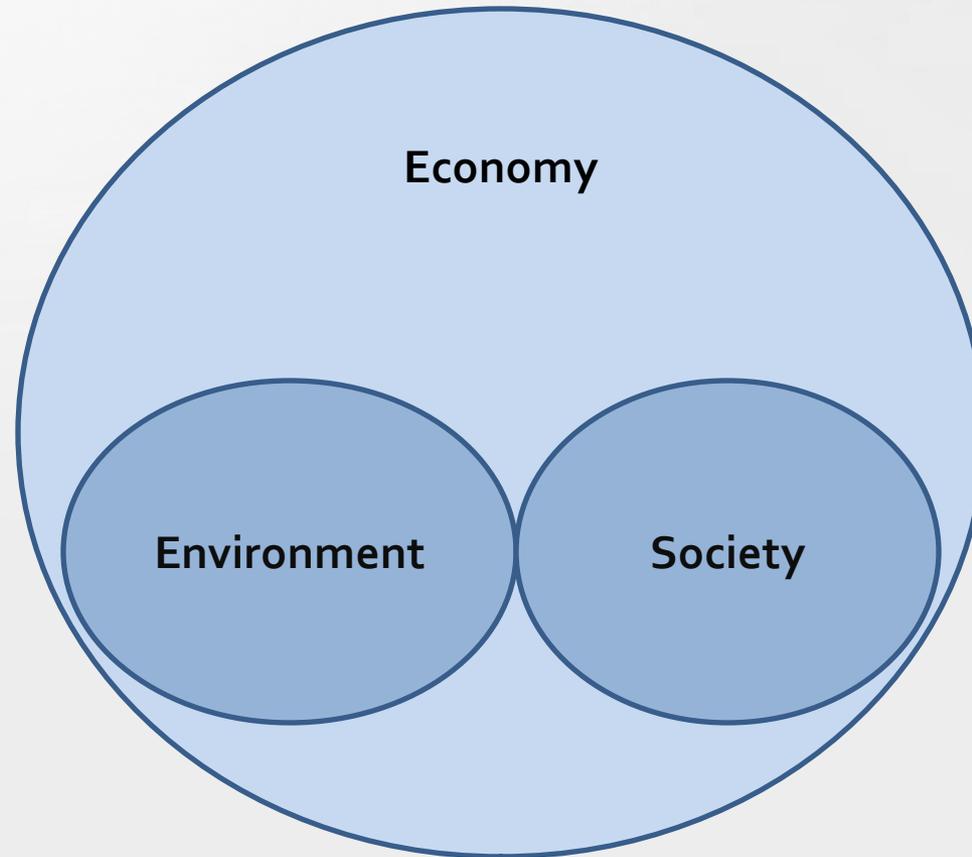
# Frameworks can help...



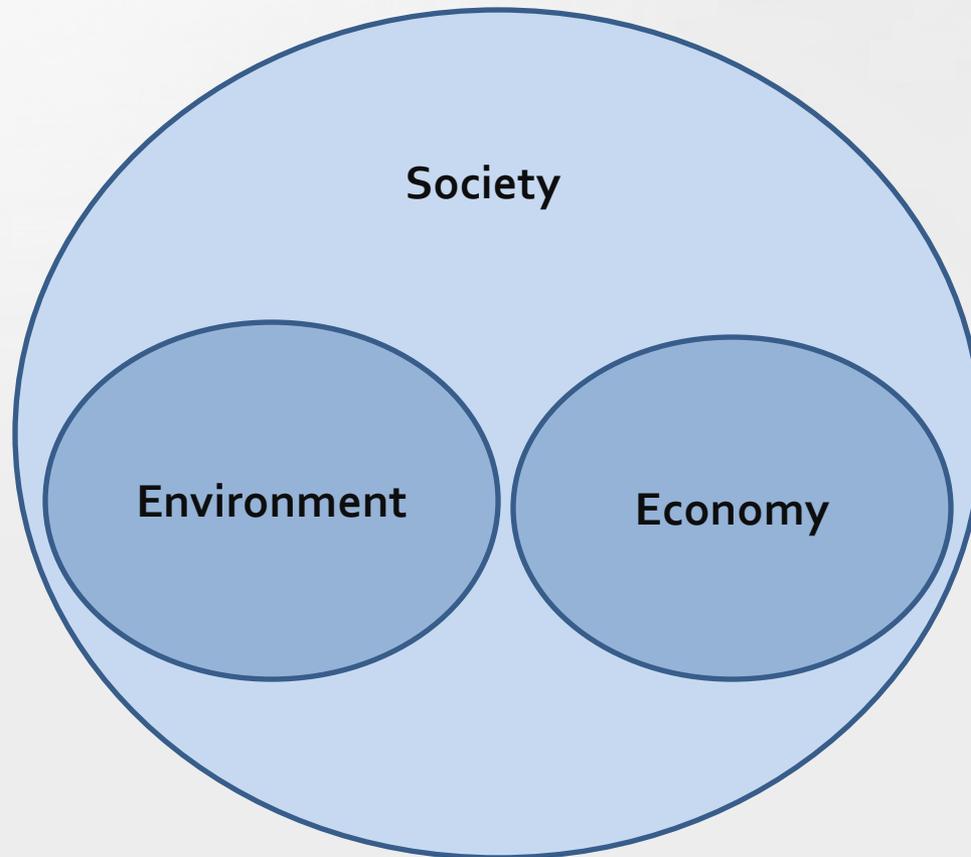
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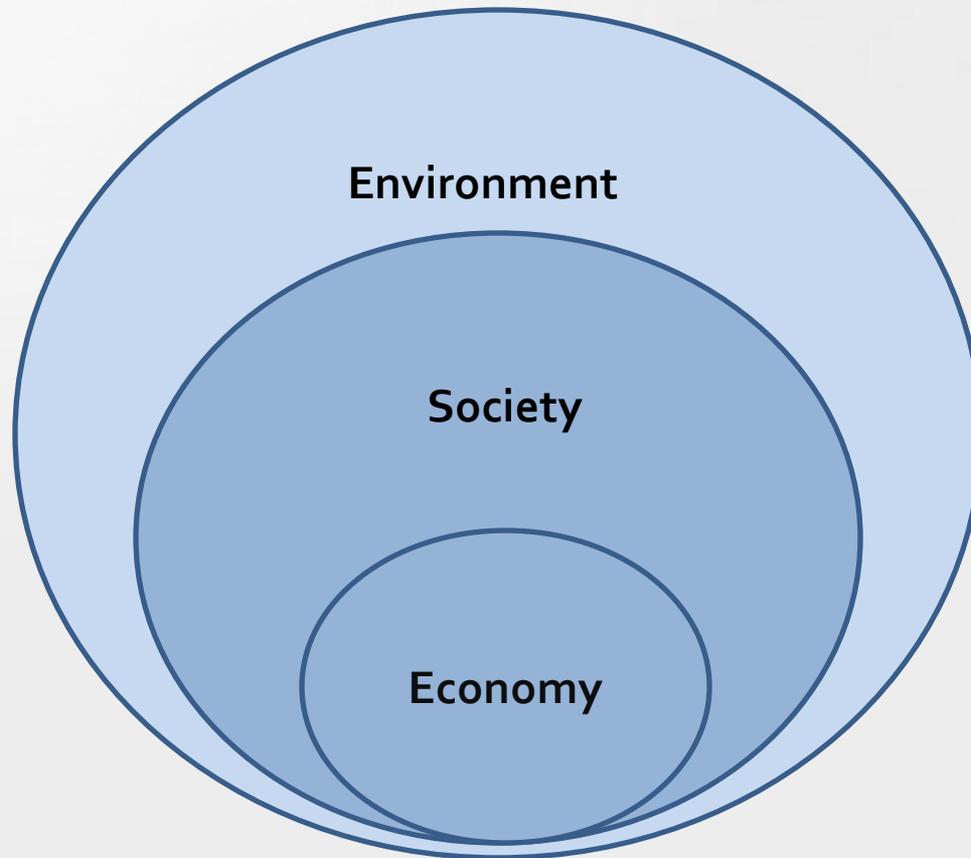
# What is Progress?



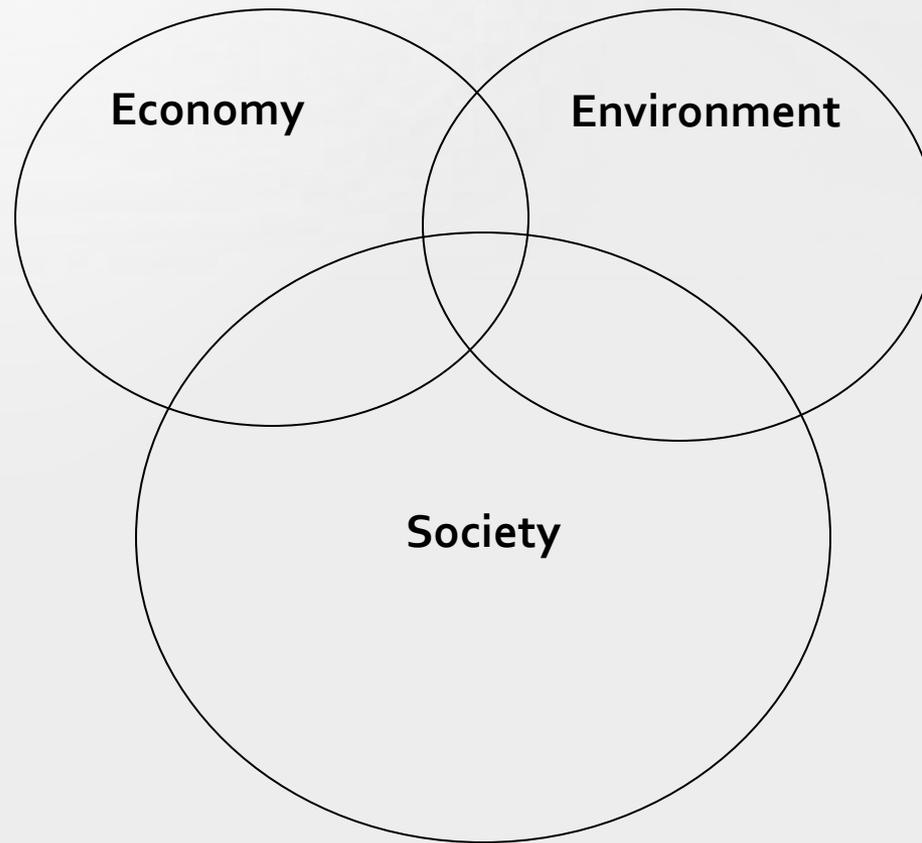
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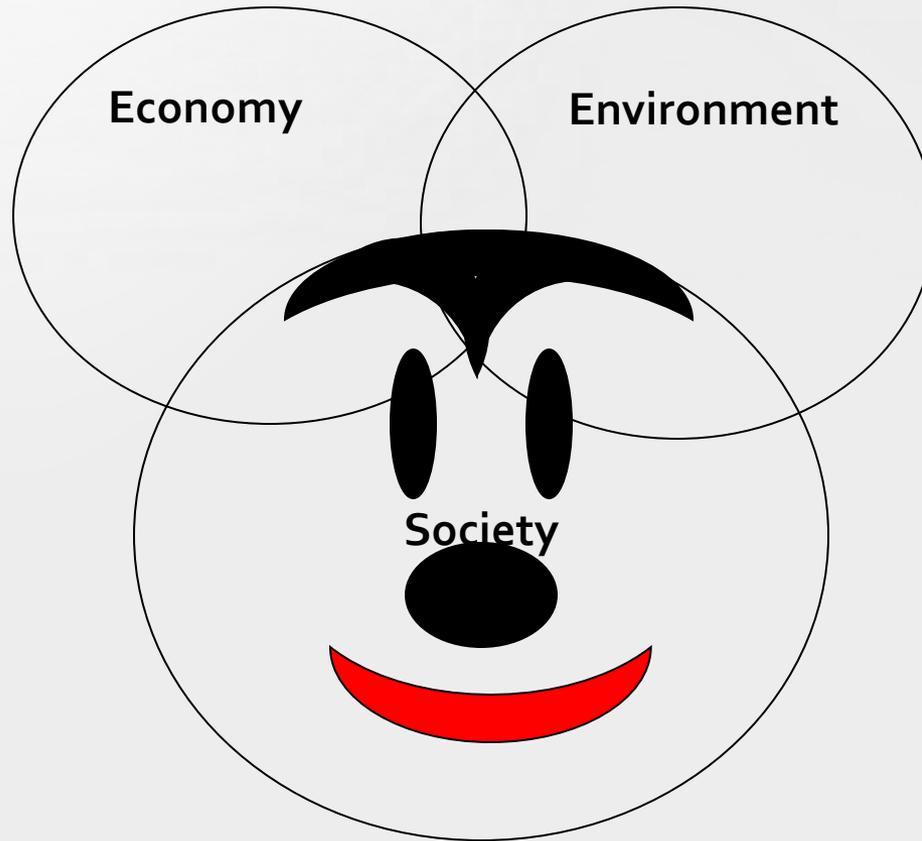
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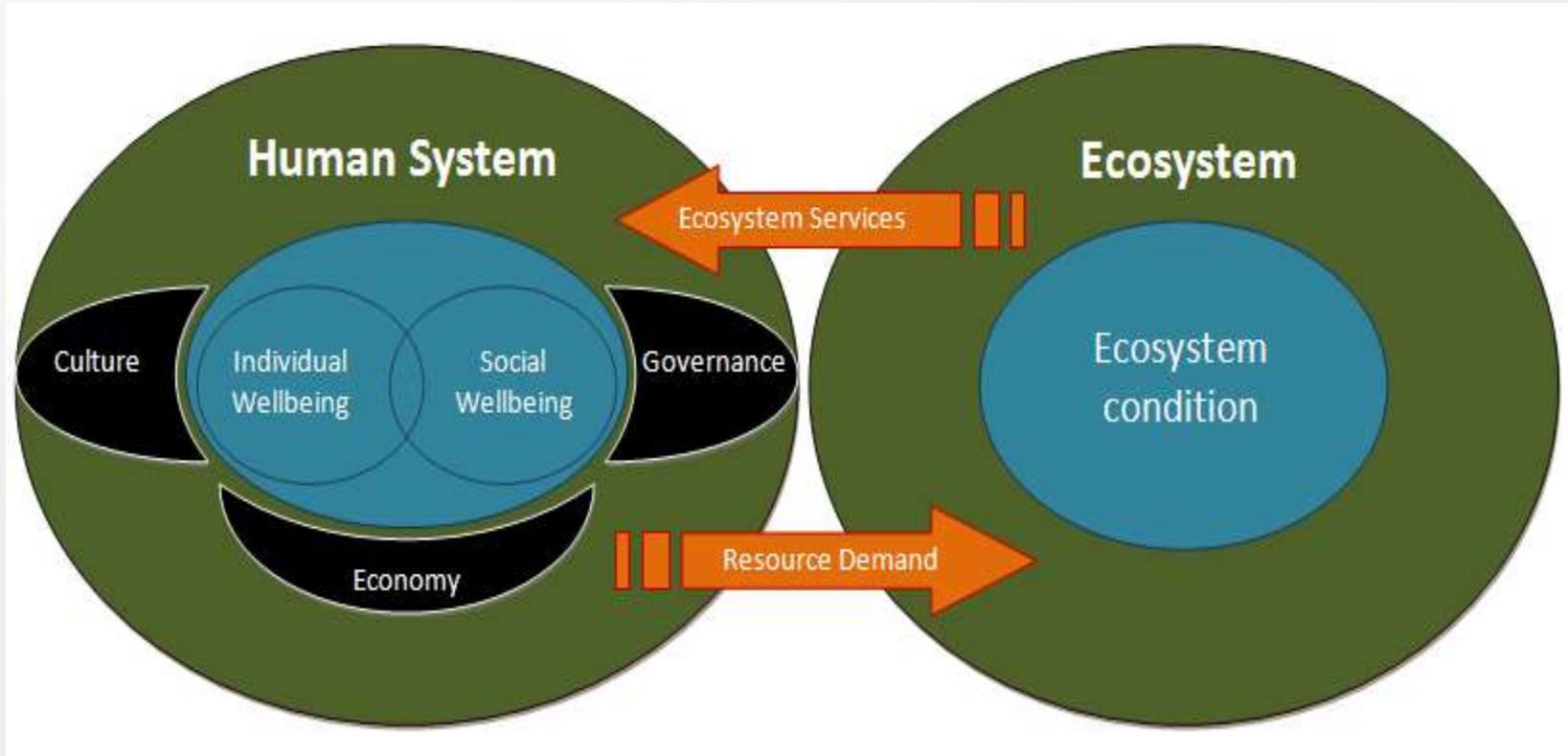
# What is Progress?



# What is Progress?



# The Global Project Framework



# Human System: Human Well-being



Measuring the Progress of Societies



# Human System: Human Well-being

- Measures outcomes, including health, knowledge and understanding, freedom and security, relationships, work and play, and subjective well-being
- Individual and social/relational wellbeing
- The other domains of the Human System represent the supports for human well-being and measure means or outputs -Economy, Governance, and Culture



# Human System: Culture



Measuring the Progress of Societies



# Human System: Culture

- It comprises the creative, expressive, and symbolic aspects of a way of life, including art, crafts, food, games, gardens, literature, language, music and religion



# Human System: Economy & Governance



Measuring the Progress of Societies



# Human System: Economy & Governance

- Economy: the stocks and flows of an economy (income and wealth)
- Governance: democratic participation, access to services, order and safety, political rights, responsiveness, and transparency



# Ecosystem: Ecosystem Condition



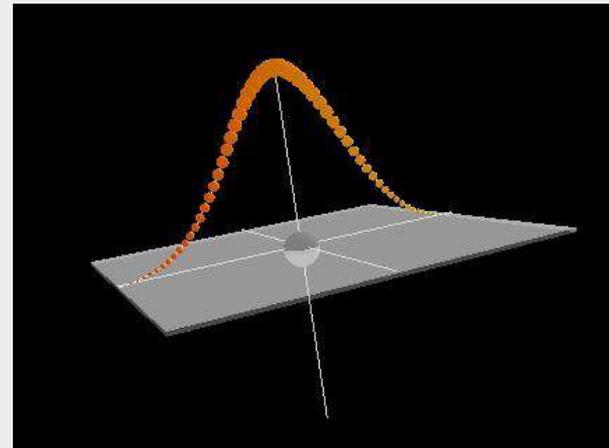
# Ecosystem: Ecosystem Condition

- It measures the ecosystem's health, including:
  - air quality
  - atmosphere
  - land
  - freshwater
  - oceans and seas
  - and biodiversity



# Distributions

- Can look at
- Distributions of each indicator ... within or across regions, population groups (intra-generational)
- Inter-generational (temporal) change (both backward and forward looking)



# Cross-Cutting Areas of Progress

But what about... Happiness, Poverty, Vulnerability?



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**Subjective wellbeing** –can be considered alongside objective wellbeing for many areas (health, work, crime etc)



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But what about... Happiness, Poverty, Vulnerability?

**Subjective wellbeing** –can be considered alongside objective wellbeing for many areas (health, work, crime etc)

Some social phenomenon are best considered by considering multiple dimensions. Eg **poverty**



For the whole paper

See [www.oecd.org/progress/taxonomy](http://www.oecd.org/progress/taxonomy)

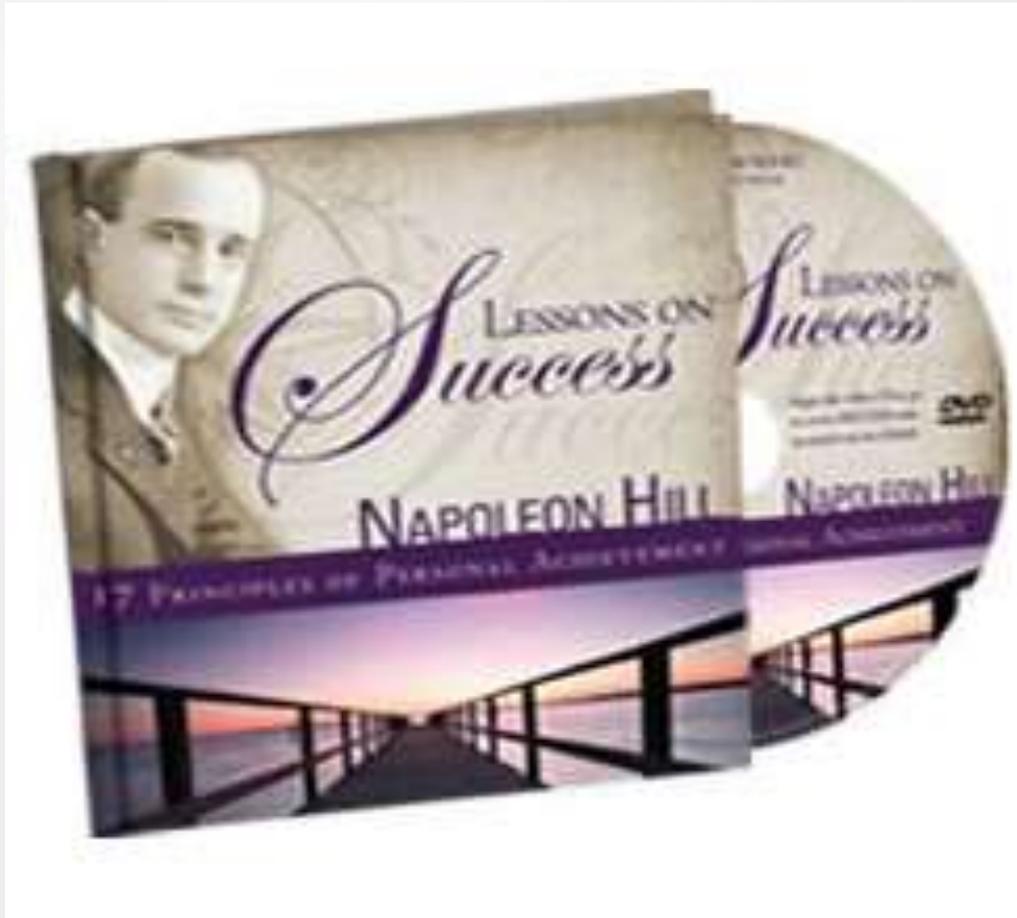


# Progress Indicators: Progress Towards What?

- Can track performance towards goals or targets
- Can track change over time
- Can rank individuals (or hospitals or countries) relative to one another
- All of these can foster progress in different ways



# Lessons About Successful Sets of Indicators



# The Global Project

But while there is a large and growing movement looking to build a more evidence-based democracy....



# The Global Project

..... There is very little evidence of how and under what circumstances sets of “progress” indicators have most impact (or indeed what impact they have)



# LASSI

We need some Lessons About  
Successful Sets of Indicators.....



# What makes a successful set of indicators?

- Not an easy question to answer
- Not easy to define or measure key concepts such as 'success', 'use', 'influence'
- Indicators take different forms (league tables, policy targets, performance measurement), are designed for different purposes (public awareness, advocacy, problem solving, management tools), by different agencies and at different geographic levels – can we generalise?



# What is 'success'

- Depends on objectives of indicator set
- Assumed to be:
  - Awareness and regular use of indicators by target audiences
  - Mention in media
  - Use in politicians' speeches
  - Clear influence of data on policy change or social outcome
- But complexity of interaction of information, knowledge, decision-making and outcomes makes it difficult to unambiguously claim 'success' or 'failure'



# Lessons from the literature on social science evidence

- Policy 'process' is rarely clean and linear
- Different types of 'use'
  - Instrumental (Problem-solving)
  - Tactical/symbolic
  - Conceptual (problem-framing, 'enlightenment')
- Instrumental use of evidence is rare
- Framing a problem can be as important a role as solving it



# Lessons from the literature on indicators

- The importance of a conceptual framework
- The importance of an appropriate (inclusive/participative) process for establishing it and the related indicators
- The way the data is structured, presented and communicated (no such thing as a 'value-free' indicator)
- Measurement does not necessarily induce appropriate action
- The importance of appropriate institutionalisation of the indicators
- All this in addition to robustness of measurement



# Case Studies Overview

- 5 case studies:
  - EU Structural indicators
  - UK Sustainable Development indicators
  - Measures of Australia's Progress
  - Measuring Ireland's Progress
  - Santa Cruz Community Assessment Programme
- Methodology: combination of interviews with key actors and desktop research



# LESSONS

- Be clear about your objectives and how you expect to achieve them
- Be realistic about what an indicator set can achieve
- Never underestimate the importance of the process
- Think long-term: be persistent and flexible



# Be clear about your objectives

- An indicator set is not an end in itself
- It is as important to focus on the intended outcomes, and the political/social processes and institutional arrangements, as on the measurement task.
- Different objectives need different approaches –an indicator set cannot simultaneously inform policy, educate the public, frame issues, and increase accountability.
- The constraints of the institution undertaking the work will shape the approach.



# Be realistic about what an indicator set can achieve

- Change from indicators is likely to be gradual and subtle
- Manage the expectations of stakeholders.
- Direct policy use of indicators is rare and difficult to identify
- The most important role of indicator sets may be in framing the issues and defining the problems, rather than suggesting the solutions.



# Be realistic about what an indicator set can achieve

- Indicators can help to clarify and quantify policy objectives and strategies, but there is a danger in excessive use of targets.



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- Hitting the Target and Missing the Point



# Be realistic about what an indicator set can achieve

- Indicators can help to clarify and quantify policy objectives and strategies, but there is a danger in excessive use of targets.
- If indicators are to be used for benchmarking purposes then they must be accepted as valid by stakeholders
- Need incentives to encourage compliance
- Local indicators may stand a greater chance of encouraging change



# Never underestimate the importance of the process

- Indicators must be credible (technically sound), salient (relevant to user needs) & legitimate (reflect shared values).
- Building legitimacy requires including potential users (policy makers, stakeholders such as NGOs) in the process from the start, as well as technical experts.
- The process may bring more benefits than the indicator set itself. A process can create new relationships and build shared understandings of issues among across different groups.
- While a truly inclusive process may take time, it will lower the risk of failure later on.



# Think long term:

## Be persistent and flexible

- Change takes time: Years and decades, rather than weeks and months.
- Do not expect the indicators to be a one-off exercise; it needs to be repeated on a long-term basis.
- For long-term stability, indicators need to be institutionalised.
- If you want to encourage policy change you need the support of policy stakeholders.
- Be prepared to adjust the indicator set and methods as needs change and you learn from your mistakes.



# Coming Very Soon:

## Quality Framework for Sets of Indicators

- Considerable amount already done on the quality of an indicator
- Much less on the quality of a set ... the sum of the parts is different to the whole. Need to consider
  - How was the set selected (inclusive process etc)?
  - Are the choices transparent?
  - How are the linkages displayed?
  - How are the indicators presented?
- New quality framework could be a tool for auditing sets of indicators



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“Statistics are people with the tears  
washed away”

*Ruth Sidel*

