



KPI or “We can discuss everything but not without numbers”

## Description

# « On peut discuter de tout mais pas sans chiffre »

I am lucky enough (or at least I live it as such) to live in a small village bordering the Ile de France region, which is quite representative of the neo-rural alliances of the current years. In my neighbors, I count a precious couple of friends, she, daughter of cattle breeders, having grown up in her parents' farm, and who spends her time trying to put in my hands a whole series of animals, dog, horse, goose, pogoona, with which I am definitely null and not very comfortable, certainly the only one of my friends who discusses the state of the fences we cross when we walk. He, a computer engineer in a big Parisian company, is delighted to see my son in the evening because they can exchange on absolutely fascinating subjects like the overclocking of ram bars. This makes for some pretty rewarding Sundays when, after walking the animals in the countryside (which reminds me of a few years ago, when it was my children I was carrying across the fields), the discussion, back around a tea, drifts onto the managerial practices of big companies, which include KPIs. I like changes of atmosphere, I am served!

## KPI or ICP

KPIs, Key Performance Indicators, also exist in French. They are then called KPIs, Key Performance Indicators, much less classy in the lexical register of consultants that we are, but just as useful. Behind this precious acronym lies the whole series of measurements that we carry out in companies to frame our action and with which I traumatize my students and employees, the evolution rates, the transformation rates, the contribution rates, the realization rates, the retention rates and other attrition rates – I could go on and on. In the field of transition consulting, it is of course the GHG balance sheet that is the key, and I invite you, for those who have not yet had the opportunity, to read my “excellent” article on the subject here.

### Structuring the action based on KPIs

Why is it useful to structure the action starting from KPIs? I remember a very good article in the Sociologie du Travail magazine that explained how, in the web design profession, the use of the so-called client's desiderata was used to arbitrate the conflicts of representation of the profession between editorial designers, computer scientists and graphic designers. In one of my activities, i.e. managing a point of sale, this arbitrary arbitration based on a customer's verbatim is also frequent and, as in any complex and versatile job, the same questioning can lead to different answers depending on the angle of view one chooses. It is therefore important to try to rationalize the debate by producing a certain number of figures.

Should we conclude that “we can discuss everything but the numbers”? I like this sentence for its symbolic invitation to discussion... The equivalent of the . at the end of a text message, because if you have teenagers living under your roof, you know that putting a period at the end of a text message is a final refusal that can hurt the recipient of the text message for life, yes, it does ... In my other memories, there is also one of the very first social studies classes of the pre-preparatory

school of hypokhâgne which dealt with the staging of numbers, I unfortunately forgot the details but I remembered that numbers, like any human activity, are subject to a limited rationality and that it is anyway interesting to question the socio-economic conditions of the production of these numbers – even if they turn out to be unavoidable starting points for decisions.

### **“We can discuss everything, but not without numbers”**

From this *bébêtes* and KPI Sunday, from these reflections on the notion of mathematical rationality, but also from the months I have just spent accompanying SMEs engaged in the transition, I draw two major conclusions. At the risk of getting angry with the left, I think that the current government is not only right to draw inspiration from the managerial practices of companies (for me, management is not a “dirty word”, it is just a discipline that is part of the sphere of organizational management sciences), but that we could even draw more inspiration from them.

“From my point of view, the current imperfections of public action are much more related to a lack of managerial process, than to an excess.”

In the field of politics, even more than elsewhere, ideologies are at work and give rise to debates on posture that go much further than our oppositions in terms of social representations at work. If I take the example of organic farming, which I know well, the debate has a strong tendency to be structured in two camps, the resolutely “for” ones who militate for its development without worrying about the conditions of its implementation, and the resolutely “against” ones who have developed a battery of arguments that are all equally intelligent. However, this ends up producing deleterious effects that are not unrelated to the difficulties that the sector is currently experiencing, and it is therefore urgent to pose the problem differently.

In addition, I would like to replace the phrase “We can discuss everything except the figures” with the phrase “We can discuss everything but not without figures”. And I would add a reference to Desproges: “One can discuss everything but not without figures, and not with everyone...”



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