



Creating a Data Analytics Mindset

How to shift planning efforts to focus first on data and analytics that fuel better decision-making.



Leaders at organizations face a constant challenge to drive change, optimize costs, and maximize resources. For many, arriving at these decisions requires data and analytics.

Arguably, decision-making is largely driven by analytics in today's competitive landscape, and organizations around the world continue to inch closer to holistic data-driven decision structures affording smarter and more efficient operations.

These advantages don't come easily. They require careful consideration of how one manages process and data collection from the outset. There are several considerations one must make to develop and refine their organization's data and process management strategy to unlock stronger, more accurate data analytics.

Working Backward Is the Best Way Forward

Time and again, management personnel face reporting requests from leadership. In groups that oversee agency management, these requests may be as basic as "Evaluate our agency partners and report back." It is a simple query that drives a complex chain of events: pulling together evaluations, engaging agency partners and day-to-day marketers, sending out a survey, and reporting on the findings. Often lost in translation is the very question the analysis was trying to answer in the first place.

Instead, the process could be reframed by starting with a discussion around the desired outcome. For example, what is the purpose of the evaluation and what implications might stem from its findings? Understanding the end goal of the analysis could inform how data is captured and therefore improve the relevance and insights of the findings.

Historically, planning to survey agency partners may have started with discussions about who will be evaluated and what questions will be included in the survey, which makes sense when creating a project plan. But starting with an outcomes-first mindset will provide an opportunity to bring data analytics to the fore. How this begins can vary based on one's business objectives but commonly will follow two main criteria to spark the conversation: "How will these analytics be used?" and "What audiences need to be considered when results are delivered?"

This shift in mindset ensures data is collected in the most effective way. However, it is important to remember that data is just numbers if it doesn't directly translate to analytics that can drive meaningful conversation and change.

An overhaul of one's planning can feel overwhelming, but large changes are not required. Small steps to change the conversations around planning can start the shift toward larger change. Looking at the desired analytics as a starting point can improve time savings, prevent work redundancies, and enrich leadership's conversations.



Having Planning Conversations with Data Analytics in Mind

In general, planning is essential to meeting one's business objectives in any area of business. Finding alignment should sit at the core of these conversations to ensure valuable analytics.

There are several areas on which it is important for stakeholders to align:

A data dictionary.

Having a core set of universal terms throughout the organization is one of the top areas of importance. This is because it removes any inconsistencies across data and helps with comparisons of key metrics.

For example, if there are two different terms used interchangeably, such as "business unit" versus "department," it can take time to align on which term should be used (i.e., which will make the most sense when reporting up to leadership).

Having small inconsistencies can wreak havoc on data output and insight into analytics down the line.

The level of data.

Evaluators should consider up front how granular the data should be in order to provide the most value. It's much easier to roll up data at the end of the road than it is to do the opposite and try to retroactively break down data to a deeper level.

This issue is often encountered when looking at geography. Is collecting data at the region level enough or is there more value in a deep dive into individual countries to understand any inconsistencies or areas that require further attention? The axiom of it's better to have it and not need it than to need it and not have it applies here.

Trending data.

Putting consideration into what type of trends are important to measure should happen at the start of planning. Often times, short-sighted thinking focused on the question "What do we want to accomplish right now?" will limit the benefits of analytics down the road.

Stepping outside the day-to-day to consider how data could be measured over time ensures that the efforts made up front don't only have an immediate effect on analytics but ultimately drive value over time.

Trusting the Process.

Data and analytics are areas of business that continue to evolve and change — sometimes too fast for people to keep up — but embracing that change and meeting the challenge head-on could mean huge implications for decision-makers down the road.

Organizations that give sharp focus to analytics now and put in the time and investment to producing reputable output will quickly gain ground on those who don't.



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