

Do you start with Data or the Outcome?

What is the biggest challenge that organisations have today with data?

The Data Warehouse technician will tell you it's the technology they are using, the Business Intelligence Analyst will tell you that it's the quality of the data, the Data Scientist will tell you it's the volume of the data... I am going to disagree with all of them, I believe it's knowing what they want the data for!

Everyone knows that we are in the age of data; the more data people have the more they can use it to drive their decisions. However, the problem is that because that is what we are all told, we just go out and collect loads of data without actually working out what it is that we are looking to achieve from collecting the data. We have forgotten the old Golden Rule - Always Start With the End in Mind.

In a previous life, I used to work as a Personal Trainer, and the first question I would ask anyone who wanted to engage my services in the fitness industry was, 'What is the one thing that you are looking to achieve from your training?'. The answer determined the strategy that I would employ to help them get there. So why aren't we doing that when it comes to our data and what we want from it?

The number of times I have had a stakeholder come to me wanting me to give them some data to support a particular hypothesis is amazing to me. This is like putting the cart before the horse, 'I think this is what the result should be, now let's go and find some data to support that!' It sounds like a bit of an oxymoron, but this thought pattern happens more often than you might think.

So, what am I suggesting as a better way to approach the problem of how to utilise data? It is a far superior approach to engage your Analyst teams to answer a question rather than just asking them to provide the business with a bunch of data. For example, if your Learning and Development team is looking to make informed decisions about where to focus their efforts on training a sales team they could just go to the standard sales reports and try and draw their own conclusions. Alternatively, they could go to the Analyst Team with a list of the training courses that they offer and ask them to provide intelligence on which salespeople could benefit from improvement in the various areas the courses are directed at.

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So, the steps are quite simple:

- Work out what you want to know and formulate it into a succinct question
- Give the question to your Analyst team, without any further information
- Let your Analyst team answer the question based on the data they have

This approach empowers the Analyst team to actually look at the data and work out which lens to look at the data from, rather than being told the lens up front. This will often provide a very different result than expected as the data is telling the story rather than the data being molded to a pre-determined outcome.

Don't get me wrong, those of you who have spent 20 years in an industry will have some idea and/or expectation on what the data is going to say and that is completely fine and part of your value to the organisation. My encouragement though is don't share that with the Analyst team up front as this will just create a potential bias in the data. Lead only with the question that you are looking to have answered through data, as this will give you a clean answer, if your Analyst team is working effectively.

Another key benefit of this approach is that you are actually empowering the Analyst team and getting value from their expertise. Your business doesn't need its Analyst team to simply be providing the same numbers that it has always been providing, rather it needs the Analyst team to be uncovering things that have never been looked at before, in order for the business to innovate and grow. How can a business innovate if it's not asking better and different questions? It's even better when those questions are being answered through unbiased data!

The number of clients that Fujitsu Data & AI is helping with adoption of this philosophy is growing everyday so if you are looking to see true value from the data you are already collecting, or need help on your data driven journey please contact a Fujitsu Data & AI specialist now.

Contact

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