

Making data-informed decisions: Skills

Skill #1: Identifying an opportunity to make a data-informed decision

Framing a learning question that, if addressed through better use of data, would lead you and your team towards more positive change. This includes defining a challenge that could be addressed by an action that is within your sphere of influence as a decision maker, articulating what data would help to address that challenge, and encouraging stakeholders to listen for and define inquiries of their own.

Skill #2: Drawing meaningful conclusions from data

Developing valid conclusions from data—often using critical thinking skills—such as distinguishing causation from correlation, interrogating data sufficiency, contextualizing data, etc.

Skill #3: Measuring data-informed decisions' effectiveness

Defining different ways to measure whether a data-informed decision is effective. This includes identifying any unintended consequences of decisions and evaluating their outcomes to understand effectiveness or return on investment.

Skill #4: Communicating data-informed decisions

Developing and delivering compelling narratives (according to different audiences and needs) that explain decisions, the data behind them, and next steps, including generating or cultivating a shared vision behind them. This includes fostering collaborative decision-making and negotiating inconvenient decisions, which might adversely affect some stakeholders, in an empathetic way. It also includes reinforcing a decision using evidence besides data, such as sharing examples from other contexts, contrasting against historical decisions, etc.

Skill #5: Evaluating data quality

Identifying the political and social characteristics, preferences, biases, and asymmetries that people involved in the data-informed decision transferred to the process and which may influence the decision or its consequences. This includes asking questions of the data collection, management, and analysis process to understand the strengths and weaknesses of resulting insights and whether the data accurately reflects a representative population and the voices of marginalized communities (if relevant).

Skill #6: Balancing data-informed decisions with other priorities

Balancing the desire to be evidence-based with the realities of navigating political economies, managing and negotiating priorities of other stakeholders or partners affected by the decision, and prioritizing decisions based on other considerations including your own ethics and sphere of influence, shared values, feasibility, and potential impact.

Making data-informed decisions: Skills and subskills

Skill #1: Identifying an opportunity to make a data-informed decision

1a Identifying an opportunity to make positive change Recognizing how data can help to achieve impact by addressing a question or opportunity.

1b Defining a learning inquiry Articulating a specific question that can be answered with the help of data.

1c Articulating information needs Identifying what data, information, and evidence will help to answer a question.

1d Cultivating an environment of inquiry and learning Encouraging those around you to proactively seek data that can help them to answer questions, even if doing so might challenge convention.

Skill #2: Drawing meaningful conclusions from data

2a Contextualizing data Finding relevant information that can add perspective to data to help you to accurately interpret it.

2b Distinguishing signal from noise Discerning quality, fact-based information from other types of information (like misinformation) that could negatively impact a data-informed decision.

2c Differentiating between correlation and causation Isolating cause-and-effect, challenging questionable claims of correlation or causation, and identifying what additional data can help you determine causation.

2d Working with limited or poor data quality Acknowledging data limitations, knowing tactics to address them, and feeling confident moving forward with data-informed decisions even when those gaps persist.

Skill #3: Measuring data-informed decisions' effectiveness

3a Developing indicators to measure a decision's success Thinking proactively of ways to measure whether your decision was effective.

3b Managing unanticipated consequences of decisions Listening for unanticipated consequences of your decisions, such as scenario planning or political economy analyses, mitigating or responding to them, and measuring them.

3c Refining your decision-making process Leveraging new insights about the effectiveness of your data-informed decisions to inform your decision-making process.

Skill #4: Communicating data-informed decisions

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| 4a | Facilitating collaborative decisionmaking | Inspiring collective ownership by guiding discussions with stakeholders to arrive at a shared data-informed decision. |
| 4b | Reinforcing a data-informed decision | Validating a data-informed decision using other information, such as by sharing examples from other contexts or highlighting potential efficiency gains. |
| 4c | Negotiating inconvenient decisions | Communicating decisions, which might adversely impact certain stakeholders or outcomes, using empathy and tact. |
| 4d | Delivering compelling and ethical narratives | Developing and delivering decisions through persuasive and compelling narratives that are tailored to different audiences, timed appropriately, and respectful of your ethical values. |

Skill #5: Evaluating data quality

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| 5a | Analyzing deficiencies in the data and resulting decisions | Asking questions of the data collection, management, and analysis process to understand the strengths and weaknesses of resulting insights. |
| 5b | Identifying biases embedded in your decisions | Identifying the politics, social preferences, and biases that stakeholders may have imparted onto the data to inform a decision. |
| 5c | Ensuring gender equality and social inclusion | Understanding whether the data is representative of the voices of marginalized communities and the people you serve. |

Skill #6: Balancing data-informed decisions with other priorities

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| 6a | Navigating uncertainty in the decision-making process | Balancing evidence with external unknowns including lack of transparency, corruption or ulterior motives, and changing conditions. |
| 6b | Making decisions with limited time or resources | Balancing data-informed decisions with the need for speedy decision making or resource limitations that affect feasibility. |
| 6c | Navigating the political economies surrounding your decision | Identifying "winners" and "losers" of potential decisions to ensure smoothest possible implementation of data-informed decisions. |
| 6d | Reflecting on and embedding your values into decisions | Ensuring that your decisions reflect your ethics and values, and negotiating potential trade-offs between them and what the data suggests. |