COMMUNICATE THE EVIDENCE

For some, a logic model is a beautiful thing. So much so that the planning, measuring and analysis of research impact may seem gloriously linear and rational. However, when it comes to assessing and communicating research impact, you’re back in the real world where logic needs to work in concert with the multifaceted ways people engage with information.

Understanding decision makers

**Decision Makers Don’t**

- Make decisions based on data alone
- Absorb all the information you have at your fingertips
- Consider only the information you provide
- Operate in an emotional void

**Decision Makers Do**

- Make decisions based on evidence, values and context (including the political climate)
- Make a multitude of large and small decisions each day and are vulnerable to decision fatigue
- Use instinct and lived experience, public opinion, and multiple information sources to inform considerations around cost/benefit, risk/reward, right/wrong…and your inputs
- Like all of us, have feelings, innate biases and egos that influence their decisions

**TIP:** Ask the following questions to help you understand the decision maker’s needs:

- **Q** What does your decision maker need? What information have they asked for, or what are they being asked to provide?
- **Q** What does your decision maker value and what value lens will they use to view the assessment evidence? What emotional lens might the decision maker use to view the evidence?
- **Q** What other stakeholder concerns does the decision maker have to weigh?
- **Q** How important is this decision to the decision maker in light of the other decisions they need to make?
- **Q** Does the decision maker already understand and support the measures that will be used in the assessment?
**COMMUNICATE THE EVIDENCE**

**Mitigating strategies for the Five Temptations of Decision Makers (1998)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Temptation</th>
<th>Mitigating strategy</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Status over results</td>
<td>Measure performance at all levels, tie strategy and operations to tangible outcomes, and reach agreement with the decision maker in advance that results should be shared for transparency.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Popularity over accountability</td>
<td>Identify or develop metrics and outcome measures that help teams set expectations, monitor progress and make course corrections as needed. Then make the data visual (e.g., matrices, dashboards, etc.) so decision makers and team members can review the results at a glance.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Certainty over clarity</td>
<td>Provide clarity by adopting a standard approach (e.g., the 6 block approach to research impact assessment (RIA)), terms and tools (e.g., RIA glossary and planning template), and a communication strategy to keep key stakeholders informed of the RIA process, progress and results.</td>
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<td>Harmony over productive conflict</td>
<td>Understand what decision makers want to change and why. A carefully constructed assessment will give decision makers a thermostat that kicks in when things stray from the intended path. This can create healthy discussions followed by mitigation planning, risk containment and strengthened strategies and tactical plans.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Invulnerability over trust</td>
<td>Provide real world impact stories to give decision makers insight into areas of uncertainty where no clear pathway to impact may exist. This can help them speak to and plan for vulnerabilities in a way that strengthens their leadership.</td>
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**MORE TIPS: To increase the likelihood RIA results will be used by or influence a decision maker**

- **Engage the decision maker from start to finish.**  
  No one-size RIA fits all. The best way to ensure an assessment will meet the needs of the decision maker is to have their (or their proxy’s) input into the assessment and to check in with them regularly for “fittings” throughout.

- **Develop rigorous sound bites.**  
  Don’t leave your decision maker drowning in data or starved for meaning and clarity. Extract meaning into digestible sound bites—rigorously tied to the evidence—to guide and support a decision and its communication to stakeholders.

- **Keep it short and simple to avoid the “too long didn’t read (TLDR)” phenomena.**  
  Incorporate techniques to visualize data, such as matrices and dashboards that can be used to convey information in easily digestible ways. **Well-designed visualizations** are usually the simplest and at the same time, the most powerful.

- **Prepare to be flexible and adaptable.**  
  Plan to provide the right information for the right person at the right time by tailoring the presentation of information to the needs of the person. Avoid the temptation to try to have them understand everything you do. It’s important for the RIA practitioner to understand the big picture with all its details and complexity but a decision maker doesn’t need to. Be ready to take advantage of opportune moments to pull out relevant information when the timing is right.

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1 Adapted from the book *The Five Temptations of a CEO* by Patrick Lencioni; thanks to Tim Murphy for sharing these strategies