

Using Data to Navigate Change



Anthony Young, senior manager of solution engineering for Tableau, provides strategies to improve the speed and quality of decision-making. A key takeaway: Let go of perfection.

What issues do government organizations confront when they attempt to act on data?

The first issue is fear of what data will actually say. This slows down decision-making and has plagued organizations for decades. The pandemic is happening in real time, and there's a critical need for real-time decisions. Organizations that are leading through this period trust their data, strive for speed to decision and execute decisions based on data. Organizations that hesitate and try to achieve perfection of their data and decisions may find that decisions are being made for them. The second issue is the pandemic has proven that everything is related. Public health, economic security and recovery, and public education are all intertwined with individual safety, and this presents a massive challenge for data management and data integration and sets the stage for what's to come in a post-pandemic world.

How has the pandemic highlighted these challenges?

It has reinforced the notion that data and good analytics drive both speed and quality of response. Organizations with sound data governance, agile analytical processes and collaborative data-sharing agreements with agency partners were well-equipped to lead their people through change, and they are emerging better because of it. Organizations that did not have these standards in place

are still playing catch up. Interestingly, the pandemic set the stage for more near-term change in the form of significant modernization of business processes and technology. As a byproduct, this will improve the way organizations handle common, everyday challenges that arise in the future.

What approaches help organizations make better decisions and lead through change?

Two areas are critical: performance management and data management. I mean performance management in the sense of organizational metrics that showcase mission success or progress. Thinking in terms of "macro to micro," agency-level mission metrics drive strategic direction and provide transparency to citizens. These metrics are conveyed to the mission-driven support organizations, which have their own metrics and KPIs that advance the overall agency mission. All too often, a breakdown occurs when data management can't support the data collection or data integration needs of true integrated performance management. It's absolutely critical that organizations improve the integration of poly-source data and associated data management practices to support both standard and emerging data sources.

How can healthcare organizations best take advantage of AI, ML and other advanced technologies?

Organizations must have a good grasp of their current data and what that data can provide for them for a specific outcome. Brilliant statistical analyses have been performed for years, yet the biggest challenge is tying that data to execution of the agency mission; that is, tying that data to a business process to automate a decision or inform a workflow. There must be an after action tied to the data, or something to gain, or the AI was done for naught.

How can finance analytics help organizations adjust to budget uncertainties and changes triggered by the pandemic?

Budgets are generally formulated high in the organization and executed low in the organization. This creates a disconnect when it comes to understanding spending. Without good analytics to bridge the gap, the people's money is often spent without consideration for how it ties back to the mission. In the post-pandemic world, every dollar will be scrutinized. Organizations should incur only expenses that align with and advance the mission. This is where analytics makes the difference by keeping leadership constantly aware of its position and avoiding expenses that don't add value.

What do organizations sometimes misunderstand about analytics?

Organizations often chase the neon rainbow of perfect data that drives the killer report that automates decision-making; the reality is there will never be a truly perfect dataset. Early in the pandemic, I supported agencies that knew their data wasn't perfect, but they also knew they had to save lives. They executed without hesitation; they built analytical dashboards and evolved them as processes and data collection capabilities improved. That approach enabled them to make increasingly better, more rapid decisions. Other agencies are still working through multiple iterations to get their data and reporting just right; meanwhile they are not making data-informed decisions. This pandemic has proven that it's the unknown questions that we discover along the way that create change and ultimately drive progress.



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