

Nekst Data Literacy – White Paper

How to thread data literacy into the fabric of your business culture.

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Organisational culture is a topic that really started to take shape and form in the early nineteen eighties, it was around this time frame that executives started taking notice of corporate culture and the impact that it has on the organisation's overall performance. If it is the case that the organisation is not performing, what cultural elements are impacting the negative performance and how do we change this? There is a lot of literature from an HR perspective in tackling some of the issues that arise from poorly performing organisations and the need to make a cultural shift in order to get the performance levels back on track. Five identified ways that executives can effect cultural change could be as follows:

1. Model behaviours. Leaders must walk the talk and lead by example.
2. Establish a purpose to believe in.
3. Set Expectations and help people build the required skills.
4. Reinforce a culture of accountability.
5. Make it personal for your team.



As organisations move forward into the fourth industrial revolution, and the impact of ever-increasing data volumes into businesses takes effect, are you considering the impact on your business culture for those individuals who have previously never been exposed to data, data solutions, Business Intelligence technologies and other systems that leverage data in their day-to-day jobs. Let's take a

look at point number 3 above, in the context of the 4th Industrial Revolution, and in most reviews and recommended steps that executives can take, they all include or refer to building out the required skills.

With the fourth industrial revolution in full swing, it is impacting our businesses today through the initiation of digital transformation programs and emerging technologies like AI, Robotics, Process Automation, Machine Learning and others. Underlying these systems and initiatives is data. The question must be asked if your employees are skilled in understanding the language of data. Do they understand how data is ingested into the business, how it is transformed and processed and how that processed data, now information, ended up in a dashboard presented to them on their screens. Do they have the skills to read, work with, investigate and communicate with that data effectively so as to contribute to the overall successful performance of the organisation?

Model Behaviours.

The impact that increasing data volumes and complexities will have on the organisations that we work in will be, if not already, significant. The higher up the corporate ladder one gets, the higher the value of the decisions are that get made. Executives are not immune to a lack of exposure in data literacy skills. In a recent survey it was found that up to 32% of executives across a sample of 7 300 individuals, believed that they had the required data literacy skills in place to perform in their job function. So, if executive leadership needs to walk the talk, starting at the top is a great need for leadership to increase their data literacy skills. In so doing, and showing by example how the increase in these skill levels can make a positive impact in the decisions they make, how much more effective then would the general increase in data literacy skills of all employee's impact the business overall?

Establish a purpose to believe in.

Digital transformation brings to the table the prospect of job creation for jobs that are still yet to be defined. Your purpose today may soon be something



of the past, as new systems and technologies begin to lay a path of direction of the business never previously considered. Think of Netflix, that started their business in 1997 in the early days of the internet. The business was about on-line ordering and physical delivery of your favourite movie on DVD to your home. Did they have the vision back then of what the company has become today? Their purpose was to provide their customers their favourite movies, and that still remains today, however with the advancement of systems and technologies they found a way to supply a global market that was just waiting to be serviced. What is your purpose and who are the clients you are servicing and how can the data in your business provide you insights into new ways or improvement of service delivery, or perhaps discovering new potential markets to sell to?

Set Expectations and help people build the required skills.

In many cases we have found subject matter experts who are highly academically qualified who have not been exposed to data, yet their job function is placing more and more demand on them to interact with data on a daily basis. This finding has demonstrated to us that traditional academic learning paths have not included data literacy skills in the curriculum. Setting the right expectations today must include the knowledge of how data is impacting our world and making provision for upskilling in the language of data for those employees who are lagging behind. Building out the required data literacy skills can be done in one of two ways. You can build out your own internal data literacy programs, which is time consuming, and a full-time job and the content needs constant attention and updating, or you can outsource this training requirement to a professional body that focuses on this.

Reinforce a culture of accountability.

How can we hold each other accountable for the work and the performance levels required in our organisations? By knowing that the person you rely on to deliver has the appropriate skill levels in place is a good starting point. However, the fact that that

individual has a university degree does not guarantee they have the knowledge and experience when working with data. A large bank once confirmed that for a period of three years they were making regular decisions based on certain calculations of data presented to them, only to realise at a point that the calculations were inherently flawed. The executive stated that they were happy on the consistency of the decision, despite the wrong calculations, rectified the calculations and moved forward. They were happy with the accountability of the decision makers based on the information they had, recognised the negative impact on the business from prior decisions and moved forward collectively as a team toward better performance. What if this team had the required data literacy skills in place to recognise the flawed calculations earlier and avoid the bad decisions? What would the impact have been to overall performance over time?

Make it personal for your team.

Assessing current data literacy skill levels is not about having a stick in your hand ready to beat someone up because they are lacking in their skill set. Its about understanding each individual's level of proficiency and then placing them on a path to improve their own personal skills, with the understanding of the potential impact that individual's contribution can have on overall performance through the process of upskilling.

Conclusion.

Here we have explored but a few mechanisms for culture change. There are many, but the acknowledgement of the impact of ever-increasing data volumes into our businesses and organisations culture will help you identify which paths you will need to take. The introduction of Data Literacy skills development will assist your organisation's ability to leverage the current data assets at your disposal, ensure high levels of success in your digital transformation programs and equip your people with the skills required to tackle the jobs of the future driven by the digital transformation process.