

## Video 34

Generating reports and dashboards.

In the previous section, we looked at how to analyse data and how to present the data that is analysed effectively sometimes using visualisations. Very often in data analysis, the outcome requires us to present a lot of information, so multiple analysis, multiple tables, multiple visualisations. This is where reports and dashboards come in.

The objective of most business analysis is to present a report of findings and next steps. Planning and creating this report or presentation requires time and thought. But the good news is presentation and reporting skills can be improved through planning, preparations, and lots and lots of practise. So how do we actually build effective reports or dashboards? Again, a good report or a dashboard requires that you use a framework. Starting with, defining the objective of your report, understanding who the intended audience is, figuring out, what is the most efficient way to convey the information that you have in your analysis and then, accessing what exactly do you want the audience to do next once they look at the report. So let's look at each of these steps independently.

To create effective business reports or dashboards, the first step is to make sure that you know what the objective of the report is. Why are you actually



creating the report. There could be many different reasons. Sometimes we create reports to provide an update, to represent a function, to educate an audience, to fill up an agenda, to sell an idea, to defend a position, to be provocative. It's important to figure out what is the objective and keep the objective simple and relevant. The objective/outcome cannot be more than 3 or 4 key points that you want to put to your audience. Once you have the objective defined why you are generating the report or the dashboard, the next is to understand what sort of an audience are you dealing with because the kind of information you present and the way you present it depends a lot on the type of audience you have. How large is the audience, what is the background of the audience, what do they already know about the subject and therefore, what is the appropriate level of detail for this audience and what is in it for the audience. It is always important to understand what is called, 'what is in it for me', why should anybody in the audience pay attention to your report, what do they get out of it. And therefore, are you addressing that specific question for every member in your audience.

The type of audience you have will make a huge difference to the way you present your results. For example, supposing you are presenting to a bunch of very senior management executives, irrespective of how important the analysis is,



typically with senior management, you want you have limited time and you need to make sure that your points are made effectively. So usually, you will present an executive summary first, with key takeaways or action items. Then provide context and background data and then make sure that all the assumptions that you have used in doing the analysis are listed upfront because you have limited time and attention from a very senior audience. However, supposing that you are doing a work in process, a work in progress presentation, or you are trying to educate an audience, then the order of presentation of information is reversed. You will first provide context and background information, then look at all the assumptions and then say, these are my current conclusions and takeaways in a logical order. If you use the second approach for a very senior audience, they will not have the patience to sit through all the context and the background information because they probably already know it, they want to know what is the result, what is the outcome, what is it that you want them to think about.

Once you have the audience determined, then you want to think about what is the most effective delivery method. Is it in the form of a report, is it in the form of a dashboard, will it be a presentation, will it be interactive or is it a static presentation, is it a high level analysis or very detail oriented. Again,

a lot of these questions are answered based on the knowledge of the audience.

A business report typically will include all of these elements. The executive summary, introduction and objective definition, methodology and data description, key findings which may be a mix of tables, charts and text, the summarization and the next steps, if applicable. All relevant, supporting information should go into the Appendix. Once you create that report or dashboard, you should make sure that you end with key conclusion or takeaways and link to those, the next steps or recommendations specified for different parts of the audience. Those are broadly how a report or a dashboard is structured.

Next, let's look at sample business reports and dashboards to understand how they create it, what information they.. are contained in reports and dashboards.

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