Communicate and collaborate with stakeholders

So far, you've learned that a data analyst's role includes responding to data requests from internal and external stakeholders and communicating findings. Organizations may have built in mechanisms for collecting data requests, along with standard templates for presenting information to stakeholders. Beyond the systems that provide a communication framework, data analysts also need communication and presentation skills to engage stakeholders. In this reading, you'll learn how to ensure your stakeholders are well-informed and supportive of your work.

Communication is key

When working with anyone in a professional setting, communication is the key to ensuring everyone understands a project from the moment it starts. Communication prevents misunderstandings, and can save time when final reports are delivered. There are several stages when communication is crucial to a project's success, including:

- Defining the project scope and goals
- Creating a plan or timeline
- Requesting and integrating feedback

Project scope and goals

As a data analyst, one of the first stages of any project is understanding the business question your data project is trying to answer. It's also important to understand the specific goals your analysis can address. For example, is your analysis intended to support a hypothesis, find a trend, or create a summary?

Once you've defined the goals for your project, it's important to define the scope. Defining the scope ensures that you know the limits of your analysis project, including the amount of data you might use, or the type of recommendations you can make once the project is completed.

Defining the scope and your goals with stakeholders ensures that all members of your organization or project understand what role each person will take. This prevents confusion and duplication of work. It can also prevent elements of the project being missed or left unfinished.

Plans and timelines

When all stakeholders agree on the goals and scope of a project, the data analyst can create a plan for addressing it. This might include the data that will be collected, any missing information, support that will be needed, summaries that will be created, or reports that will be generated.

Along with the plan, creating a timeline of milestones or deadlines will ensure that everyone involved understands when to expect deliverables.

Feedback loop

Asking for feedback early and often will ensure that your analysis projects stay on track, and includes everything your stakeholders need. Feedback can start with the development of a plan, and last through the creation of the final report or summary. Receiving feedback before making a summary presentation results in a final product that meets everyone's expectations.

Use tools to collaborate

To ensure the success of your project, you can also integrate tools.

Online tools

Online collaboration tools can give selected stakeholders a live view of your work in progress. With online tools, you can share access to data tables, summary reports, or dashboards. Some stakeholders may require edit access so they can contribute directly to the project. Others may just need review access so they can participate in a feedback loop.

Project documentation

Creating project documentation or a working journal can give stakeholders insight into your analysis process. For larger projects, documentation can make it easier to replicate data analysis in future projects. It can also help others understand your conclusions.

Key takeaways

Having strong communication skills, and integrating useful tools into your data analysis projects, ensures that stakeholders stay informed and contributes to project success. Including stakeholder feedback and maintaining transparency throughout the process ensures that you deliver a project that meets everyone's expectations.

Resources for more information

Working with stakeholders and managing stakeholder relationships is an important part of completing a data analysis project. Learn more about how to work with stakeholders in these articles:

- Learn more about identifying stakeholders and their interests from the University of Kansas:
  https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/participation/encouraging-involvement/identify-stakeholders/main
- In this article, learn more about creating a stakeholder engagement plan:
  https://graduate.northeastern.edu/resources/stakeholder-engagement-plan/