Midlands Analyst Network

Sharing skills & learning from each other's knowledge and experience

MAN Huddle questions/comments follow up

'Rules of Thumb' for assessing the quality of analysis, with Fraser Battye (Strategy Unit) and Danielle Jefferies (The King's Fund)

Summary of the Huddle

In this Huddle Fraser Battye (Strategy Unit) and Danielle Jefferies (The Kings Fund) explored with us, how to spot high-quality analysis-quickly and if non-analysts learn how to do this to.

How do you assess the quality of analytical work? When you first receive a report, what are the first signs and signals you are looking for? The author(s)? The layout? The methods? Data sources? Drafting? And - of all the quick tests of quality you are performing - could a non-analyst be primed to see the same things? Are there any 'rules of thumb' that non-analysts could use to assess the likely quality of analytical work?

At this huddle, we examined these questions They will presented the results of a project, which drew on interviews with senior analysts, and suggested a 'checklist' of pointers which non-analysts could use to get a first-approximation assessment of analytical quality.

Huddlers were asked to share their own rules of thumb and if they had any quick tests to sort the analytical wheat from the chaff?.

Below is a themed view of the question and comments raised in Menti and Jen and Justine have kindly provided us with some answers/responses.

1. **Analytical Quality – Signs, Standards & Judgement**

- Focuses on how to spot good analysis and what criteria matter most.
- How to check/measure if an analysis is laid out with care?
- What makes the overall presentation impactful?
- Could we develop a CASP-like checklist to assess analysis reports?
- Do the "rules of thumb" differ depending on the type of product (e.g. dashboard vs report)?
- Just as when detecting phishing: look for typos, errors, blurred visuals/graphs
- The evidence must be presented clearly and simply - keep the text aligned to the data
- One of the key things is the sample - especially at small geographies
- Important to communicate these rules of thumb to analysts and decision makers – maybe via lunch and learns or e-learning
- Does this relate to analyst accreditation or assurance of quality?

2. **Analysts & Decision Makers – Relationships, Roles & Room Access**

- Raises systemic and cultural questions about who gets heard and when.
- Is one of the problems that we don't have analysts in the room where decisions are made?
- We bring in consultants without using in-house resources to assess their quality
- Step before all this is getting a clear brief – it's up to the analyst to seek that
- One to add might be encouraging decision makers to ask good questions – not just ask for "data"
- It is useful to train junior analysts, but without training senior leaders it's useless
- There's an opportunity to educate senior leaders on *when and how* to use internal vs external teams
- Aiming this at senior leaders could improve how analytical work is commissioned
- Thank you (x2) + "Completely with you on this Fraser :)"

3. **Storytelling, Persuasion & Presentation**

- Explores the tension between communication and credibility.
- How do you balance storytelling with not manipulating the audience?
- With the rise in storytelling (e.g. patient stories), are we risking more persuasion than information?
- I'm surprised presentation quality ranked so highly for non-analysts - in my experience it can mask poor quality
- How do you "sell" accurate analysis when it contradicts preconceptions or anecdotes?
- How can we apply this in a small, internal team where output is more ad-hoc and informal?

4. **Bias, Credibility & Transparency**

- Reflects concern about what's missing, who's trusted, and unconscious influence.
- If something is surprising and doesn't feel plausible, how do you account for unconscious bias?
- Should we ask what data might be missing and how that affects results?
- How do we ensure credibility without perpetuating publication bias? (not all orgs have same privileges)
- Would a decision maker really want to see the code?
- Mohammed A Mohammed's approach to investigating mortality could be a useful rule-of-thumb example

5. **Practical Tools, Resources & Training Needs**

- Suggestions for tools and support to embed this thinking across the system.
- Could this be turned into a short training course with data-type specific guidance (e.g. surveys vs dashboards)?
- Can some of the experts' tacit and learned knowledge be made explicit for others?
- Links to publications please (x2)
- I am mostly self-taught as a non-analyst – not found anything suitable for beginners

- Super helpful tips for a non-analyst – really engaging
- Interested in how this work shapes how analysts present data
- I think it would be useful to add something about spotting good/bad use of AI in analysis/reporting

6. Data Governance & Overload

- Zooms out to the wider system pressures affecting analytical quality.
- Data sharing and governance is complicated. Can we make it simple?
- How do we handle information overload?