



Empowered by Data

How to build
inspired analytics
communities

Eva Murray

WILEY

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By
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Foreword

Do you remember your first career-related cause?

Do you remember the first time in your business career when some issue, some topic, some concern grabbed you and didn't let go? Some people remember the first time they encountered an unfair human resources decision. Or when they helped turn around an unhappy customer. For so many of you reading this book, what comes to your mind is likely what comes to my mind: the joy of data. Or, more specifically, the discovery that you love data and you want others to love data too.

Maybe you want your colleagues to understand the importance of a question well asked—and well answered. Or you want to bring together people around the idea that data can build better processes, better companies, and better work environments. And maybe most critically, you want to bring teams together to find smarter ways to have happier, more satisfied customers. You want to inspire others with data the way that data have inspired you. You want to create meaningful connections that have impact on people's lives.

This is the book for you. This is the book that will help you bring those people together in a community that's more than just shared interests. Eva Murray has written you a book that will help you build a successful community. Not just a user group, your community will be one of collaborative relationships, inspirations, and aspirations.

I was lucky—I joined Tableau Software (now a Salesforce company) as head of marketing when the company had just a few thousand users. Eleven and half years later when I left, the company had millions of users across its multiple

products, including Tableau Public. It's because of the growing, evangelical, and inclusive communities of people using data that the company became so successful.

And no one is a better example of what it means to build an inclusive community than Eva. She's had an incredible journey, building a huge data community of data enthusiasts and defining the path for how to bring them together. Her advice and insights in this book are unparalleled. They're not only smart but practical. Motivating and guiding the development of a community is hard work, but Eva has written you a roadmap that will have you feeling confident, supported, and prepared.

So, follow Eva's advice. But follow it only if you want to have an impact, build better businesses, and, most important, help and inspire people around you. Follow it because you want to start a cause—your personal cause of building an influential community that lives and breathes data.

Elissa Fink

May 2020

Acknowledgments

This book started as a 15-minute presentation at the Wharton People Analytics Conference 2019 in Philadelphia and grew over the following months into a firm idea, then a proposal, and finally the book you are holding in your hands.

There are a number of people who were part of that process, and I want to thank them and acknowledge their contributions to this project.

First and foremost, thank you, Andy, for your unwavering support, your help and feedback and for being by my side. Thank you for reminding me to take breaks, for giving me the space to write and for celebrating with me when it was done. I learned so much from you about making valuable contributions to the communities I am part of and it helped me become the community builder I am today. I am very fortunate to have you in my life!

Thank you to our #MakeoverMonday community and the wider Tableau and analytics community. I love being part of these networks and being connected to all of you, helping you learn and learning from you in return. Dozens of people in these communities have shaped my path over the last few years and I am ever grateful that you did, because you gave me the opportunity to work in an industry and a job I love, making a difference in people's lives.

Thank you to Marian who patiently and diligently read through this entire book, giving me feedback and listening to my questions and concerns. I'm lucky to have you as a friend and look forward to each of your visits to London.

Thanks also to every single person who said yes to having their story feature in this book. I loved finding out more about the communities you run and are part of and to work your stories into these pages so others can be inspired, learn from your journeys and connect with you. You helped me make the suggestions, recommendations, and ideas in these chapters become relatable and real. So Meera, Zunaira, Samo, Ash, Elizabeth, Sarah C, Pippa, Diego, Emily, Pascal, Fi, Simon, Maria, Sarah B, Natasha, Louisa, Caroline, Sam, Joe, Paul, and Katie: Thank you!

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PART I

If You Want a Data Culture, Build a Community

When you picked up this book, you were likely looking for an alternative solution to building your data culture, for suggestions beyond selecting the “right metrics” and building a good relationship with your chief data officer.

There are many reports out there about building a data-driven culture for your enterprise, plenty of “10 steps” lists and surveys resulting in recommendations. Those suggestions can be helpful in establishing a data culture, but the missing ingredient is the *human* element.

Having worked with thousands of analysts across the world and through my conversations with organizations, I have found that the most effective way of establishing a data culture within your business is to start by building a community.

And that is what this book will deliver for you: thoughts and ideas behind analytics communities. We will explore what they are, what they can look like, how they operate within organizations, and how you can set up your

own community. After a few chapters, you will have enough information to get started. You will read about people who have started data communities within their organizations and what made their communities successful. You can take the suggested activities, events, and initiatives in the second part of the book, combine them with the templates provided, and start building your community today.

Why Do Organizations Aim to Become Data-Driven?

In Gartner's Fourth Annual Chief Data Officer Survey (2018), more than a third of all respondents (36%) stated that having a data-driven culture in the organization was *critical* to the success of data and analytics teams. Gartner's report further sees the responsibility for establishing a data-driven culture with the chief data officer.¹

The *Harvard Business Review* agrees with this sentiment, stating that a data-driven culture must be initiated and driven by the people in top management.²

Leading analytics software firm Tableau considers culture the missing link for success in an environment where data are strategic assets for many organizations.³

Clearly, there is something beyond collecting and analyzing data, something that requires not just a significant shift in the collective mindset of your employees but also in the approach taken to the concepts of data literacy and data democratization. Extracting value from your data requires more than having a select few people work with the data to generate information and insights. Organizations are increasingly embracing data and the insights they contain, helping them arrive at better decisions that improve processes, products, services, and actions.

While the media may suggest that robots and AI are about to take over the world, most organizations are not quite there yet. Many businesses rely

¹Mike Rollings, Alan D. Duncan, Valerie Logan, "10 Ways CDOs Can Succeed in Forging a Data-Driven Organization," Gartner, May 22, 2019, <https://www.gartner.com/doc/reprints?id=1-1OBMC46L&ct=190726&st=sb>

²David Waller, "10 Steps to Creating a Data-Driven Culture," *Harvard Business Review*, February 6, 2020, <https://hbr.org/2020/02/10-steps-to-creating-a-data-driven-culture>.

³Tableau, "Data Culture: Your Missing Link to Thriving in the Data Era," nd, <https://www.tableau.com/en-gb/data-culture>

heavily on spreadsheets and manual processes; even though there is clearly a shift to more sophisticated systems and tools, the shift is still very much a work in progress.

Nevertheless, organizations across different industries, geographies, and sizes are using data to improve their decision making. They are progressing from understanding what happened in the past toward predicting what will happen in the future. The more data they collect and analyze, the more their questions evolve and the more their demands for improved analyses, more sophisticated predictive models, and more data-driven decisions increase. As a result, organizations require more sophisticated analytical skills among their people.

What Does Data Give Us that Experience Cannot?

Those of us who have gained experience over time might be tempted to ignore data and go with what our intuition, our gut, tells us. And in businesses across the world, there are many situations in which decision makers act based on their experience rather than on hard facts.

Sometimes there are no data available. Sometimes the decision is too urgent; it cannot wait for analysis and its results. And sometimes the decision makers think they know best and there is no need to query the data.

However, there is so much value in the data, and there are things we might not be able to see or know from just experience or observation. Take, for example, a soccer match. You are the coach and your team is playing. Every player wears a tracking device that captures their position on the pitch, measures their heart rate, and calculates their acceleration. These data give you insights for each athlete, specific to their position, so you know how many dives your goalkeeper made and in which direction to prevent the opponent from scoring.

Throughout the match, these data mean you know exactly how far your players have run, at what speeds, what their heart rates are, and how they compare to their training or other matches they have played.

Based on experience, when you look at your right winger, you are confident that she can play the entire game and perform at the expected level. But the data might tell you otherwise. You might see, based on the tracker in her shoes, that her running has become unbalanced, favoring one leg,