From Data To Impact

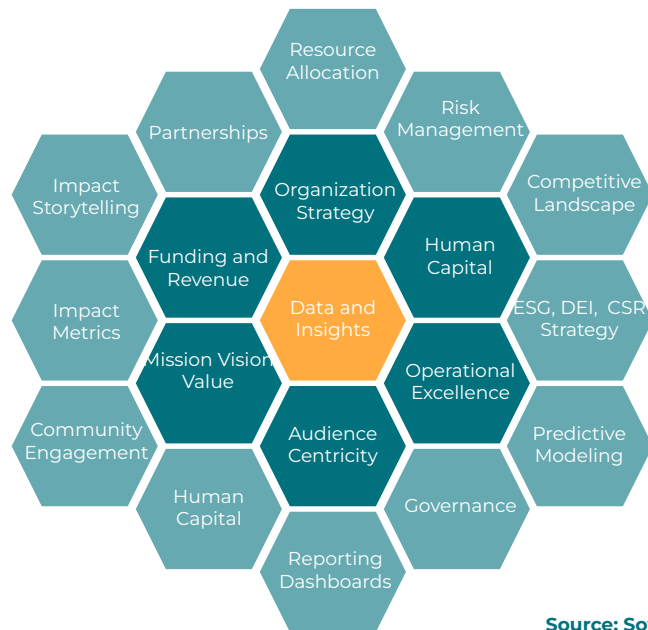An 8-step framework to integrate data into your social impact strategy and execution.

Data is at the core of organizational impact

The Data Imperative

Agile and effective data practices are critical to the design, delivery, and measurement of every aspect of organizational success.

Smart organizations recognize the opportunity to connect, simplify, measure and advance both business and social impact goals, and the accretive value of their intersection.

Organizational Core Informed By Data and Insights

Resource Allocation
Risk Management
Partnerships
Competitive Landscape
Impact Storytelling
Organization Strategy
Human Capital
Funding and Revenue
Impact Metrics
Data and Insights
ESG, DEI, CSR Strategy
Mission Vision Value
Operational Excellence
Community Engagement
Audience Centricity
Predictive Modeling
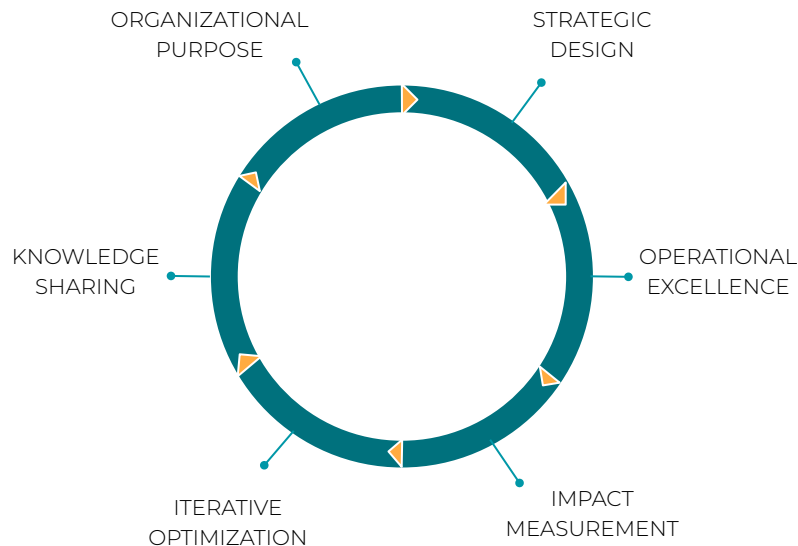Human Capital
Governance
Reporting Dashboards

It drives a virtuous cycle of innovation and growth

A Cyclical Approach to Data Driven Impact

The integration of data is not limited to a specific part of strategic or tactical execution. It permeates throughout.

The impact of each step must contribute to the entire life cycle of activities, whether those are focused on strategic, operational, or governance activities.

Smart, inspiring leaders can develop strategies that bolster scalable growth in both business and social impact, applying reliable insights to all facets of decision-making.

ORGANIZATIONAL PURPOSE

STRATEGIC DESIGN

KNOWLEDGE SHARING

OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE

ITERATIVE OPTIMIZATION

IMPACT MEASUREMENT

Source: Sowen 2024

Starting Your Journey Is Often The Hardest Part.

There's no silver bullet solution. But based on our work with over 200 organizations we've identified some common starting points:

1. It's Never a Straight Line

Growth is rarely linear, and the journey from data to impact will rarely follow a set plan.

There's real beauty in that, and an opportunity for leaders, to create sustainable, meaningful solutions.

2. But There Is a Path

No single methodology will ever apply to all scenarios, but there are always signals in the noise.

Implementation may vary, we find that this roadmap is a great place to start for organizations.

3. It Starts with Getting Real

It's hard to know where to go, much less how to get there, if you don't know where you are.

Use the Sowen Data Accelerator to assess your data maturity, literacy, and capabilities. It's fast, free, and completely confidential!

CLICK HERE

Sowen Data Accelerator: a free, 15 minute data assessment for your organization.
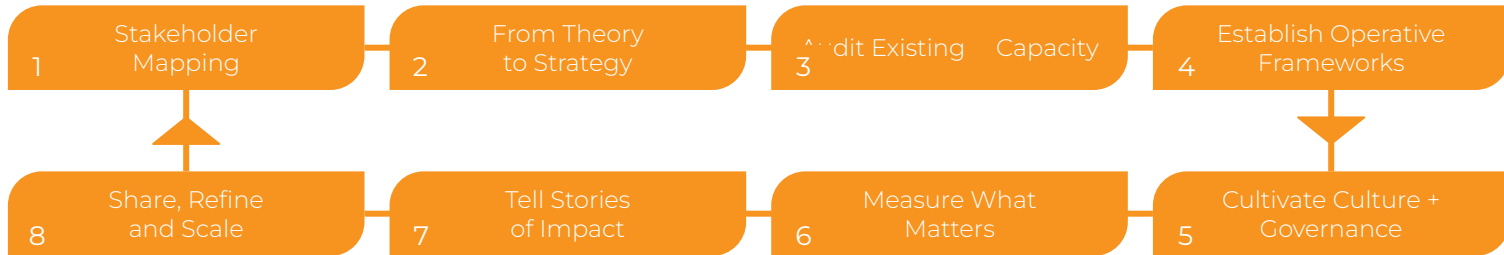
Eight Stages of Driving Data to Impact

8 Steps To Your Journey from Data To Impact

The virtuous cycle of data integration is designed to insert evidence based thinking into every critical aspect of strategy, execution, and measurement of your organization's vision, mission, and purpose.

It is designed to bring together the technical and human knowledge, tools, resources, and capabilities that will perpetuate a true and sustainable cultural change.

1 Stakeholder Mapping	2 From Theory to Strategy	3 Audit Existing Capacity	4 Establish Operative Frameworks
8 Share, Refine and Scale	7 Tell Stories of Impact	6 Measure What Matters	5 Cultivate Culture + Governance

Source: Sowen 2023

Step 1: Map your Stakeholders

ACTION 1: BRAINSTORM

Write down all internal and external stakeholders including employees, customers, board members, partners, funders, and more.
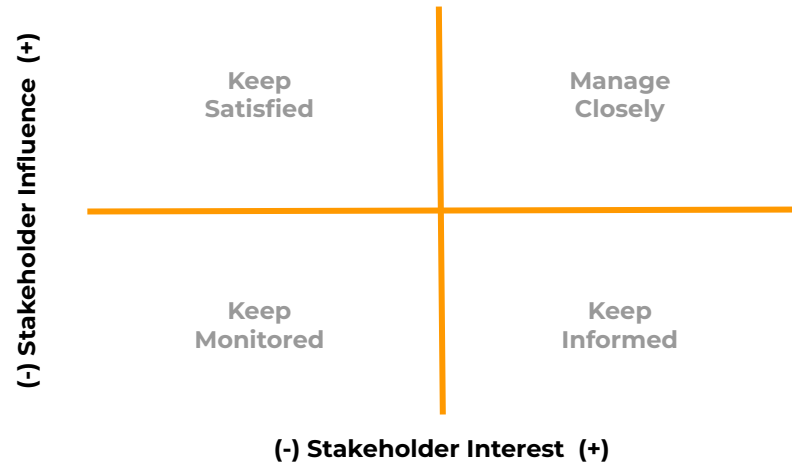
ACTION 2: NEEDS AND WANTS

For each stakeholder, write down the needs and wants based on what matters to them most.

ACTION 3: CATEGORIZE

Use the Mendelow Matrix to segment your stakeholders and tie their needs and wants to your priorities.

THE MENDELOW MATRIX

This approach allows you to segment your stakeholders to groups according to their influence on your organization, and their interest in your activities.

(-) Stakeholder Influence (+)

| Keep Satisfied | Manage Closely |
| Keep Monitored | Keep Informed |

(-) Stakeholder Interest (+)

Step 2: Move from Theory to Strategy

ACTION 1: DEFINE FUNDAMENTALS

MISSION
What the organization does and for whom.

VISION
What the organization wants to achieve in a medium-long term (+5 years).

VALUES
The beliefs, philosophies and principles that drive the organization.

PURPOSE
The fundamental reason for which the organization exists.

ACTION 2: INFORM AN ACTION PLAN

An action plan that details how the organization will achieve clear goals and objectives that serve its mission, vision, values, and purpose.

A strong organizational strategy is:

- **Specific-** clear, measurable, and agreed.
- **Realistic-** In line with available resources.
- **Measureable**- clear milestones and metrics.
- **Limited**- 3-5 year plan.
- **Prioritized**- maps urgencies and dependencies.

Step 3: Audit Existing Data Capabilities

Here are the types of questions organization should be able to answer in a meaningful audit. While far from exhaustive, this usually provides a good starting point.

AREA 1: KNOWLEDGE

- Do we have the right internal and external data?

- Do we understand our competitors, stakeholders, and environment?

- Do we use the data we have to make strategic and tactical decisions?

AREA 2: PEOPLE

- Are we aligned behind the same vision, mission, purpose and clear goals and objectives?

- Do we have the right people, with the right skills and knowledge, in the right roles?

- Does leadership support data best practices with resources and runway?

AREA 3: PROCESS

- Do we have data and knowledge sharing processes across teams?

- Do we use insights to measure efficiency, effectiveness, and impact?

- Do we have a clear data architecture that supports the entire organization?

AREA 4: TOOLS

- Do we have the right tools for data management, reporting and knowledge sharing?

- Do people use the data and tools available to them optimally?

- Can we continually test new data tools and innovations?

Step 4: Establish Operative Frameworks

Your operative model will dictate how data and knowledge will be shared and used across the organization. To start, assess which framework is right for your organization:

	FEDERATED	HYBRID	CENTRALIZED
Decision Making	- Team level - Highly flexible	- Centralized - Allow some team flexibility	- Highly centralized - Minimal flexibility
Good for	- Large organizations - Strong data management skills	- Mid-sized organizations - Evolving data maturity and usage	- Small organizations - Low data maturity and usage
Pros	- Flexibility and speed in deployment - Allows for tailored solutions	- Allows subject matter expert decisions - Enables some tailoring of solutions	- Quicker setup and management - Lower risk of teck mismanagement
Cons	- More complex to set up - Harder to modify and evolve	- Higher risk of miscoordination - Requires regular monitoring	- Solutions are never ideal - No flexibility in implementation
Keys to Success	- Strong data skills at the team level - Clear definitions of standards - Excellent internal coordination	- Secure data hardware and software - Create very clear processes - Continually monitor implementation	- Manage expectations - Clarify ownership and process - Have a super strong tech team

Step 5: Cultivate Culture and Governance

Three pillars are central to creating a data driven culture. Focusing on these to create a process of cultural growth that places data as a core component of organizational culture and work.

ACTION 1: ACCESS

Employees, leaders, and sometimes even stakeholders need to be aware and then be able to find relevant data that is accessible in a timely and reliable manner to inform decisions and activities.

ACTION 2: LITERACY

Employees and leaders need to have the knowledge and skills to interpret and analyze the data available to them, to use the tools, and follow the processes that will lead to optimized decisions.

ACTION 3: GOVERNANCE

The organization at large, and leaders specifically must ensure that data is appropriately managed across all teams and individual functions to assure data security and compliance.

SUGGESTED PATH TO ENABLING A DATA CULTURE

1. Prioritize gaps that are impacting the organization's work.

2. Identify internal or external sources of knowledge and learning.

3. Identify the data champion that will guide the cultural growth.

4. Tie changes to performance metrics that matter to the organization.

5. Create and deploy a data literacy programs and activities.

6. Establish clear channels of data communication and feedback.

Step 6: Measure Impact that Matters

Not everything that can be measured should be measured. And not everything that is measured is actually meaningful. Here are some action steps to focus on what matters:

ACTION 1: DEFINE SUCCESS

If there isn't a common understanding and agreement across all key stakeholders on what "success" is, you have no shot of demonstrating impact.

ACTION 2: MEASURE ACTIVITIES VS. IMPACT

Clearly separate between measuring activities (which are great to assess team level activities and execution) vs. impact (which tells you whether you are achieving goals and objectives.

ACTION 3: APPLY LOGIC MODELS

Logic models forces a rigorous process of thinking through all the elements that make an initiative or project succeed or fail thoroughly and dramatically increase success rates.

ACTION 4: CREATE FEEDBACK LOOPS

Use outputs, outcomes and measures of impact to continually improve tactical and strategic activities and decisions. This is the only way to get better, faster, and more effective.

CLICK HERE

To learn more about logic models, and their critical role in strategic design, execution, and impact measurement.

Step 7: Turn Data into Stories of Impact

Your data journey will require investment from internal and external stakeholders. Demonstrating the value of their investment to both will justify existing resources, and make the case for future growth.

ACTION 1: AGGREGATE

Make sure all relevant data from all sources is aggregated, cleansed, and matched in a way that allows for data analysis.

ACTION 2: DEFINE

Define metrics for success that tie between your activities and organizational strategy through clear goals and objectives.
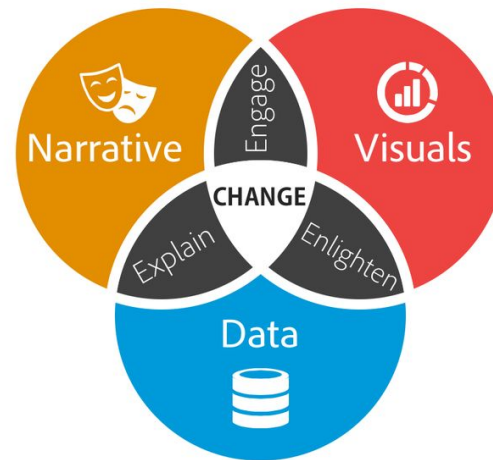
ACTION 3: ASSESS

Evaluate the contribution of data and analytics to achievements and changes in the metrics as best as you can.

ACTION 4: SHARE

Share your stories of success internally and externally through dashboards, reports, presentations, and evidence based storytelling.

KEY COMPONENTS OF DATA STORYTELLING

Source: Forbes 2022

Step 8: Share, Refine and Progress

Data Maturity is a journey, not a destination. Smart organizations leverage both successes and failures to continually inform, improve, and optimize their work.

ACTION 1: SHARE

Regularly use collected metrics and performance indicators to assess and improve program design, execution, efficiencies, and effectiveness.

ACTION 2: EXAMINE

Regularly reassess your data and analytics strategy in light of emerging trends and technologies such as AI, Machine Learning, Data Security threats, etc.

ACTION 3: DEVISE.

Continually devise and improve enterprise processes, roles, skills, tools, and protocols to maintain and increase your data maturity, and to drive sustainable impact at scale.

ACTION 4: SUPPORT

Continue launching new and improved processes, tools, and capabilities while focusing on adoption, literacy, and integration, and the tools and resources that will enable them.

Connect With Us

Sowen is a social impact consultancy dedicated to advising companies and organizations on harnessing their data to create the impact they want to see in the world.

We work with an array of organizations across industries, sectors, areas of impact, and size, to help them get faster and farther in their social impact journey.

Contact us at info@sowen.co

Visit our website at www.sowen.co