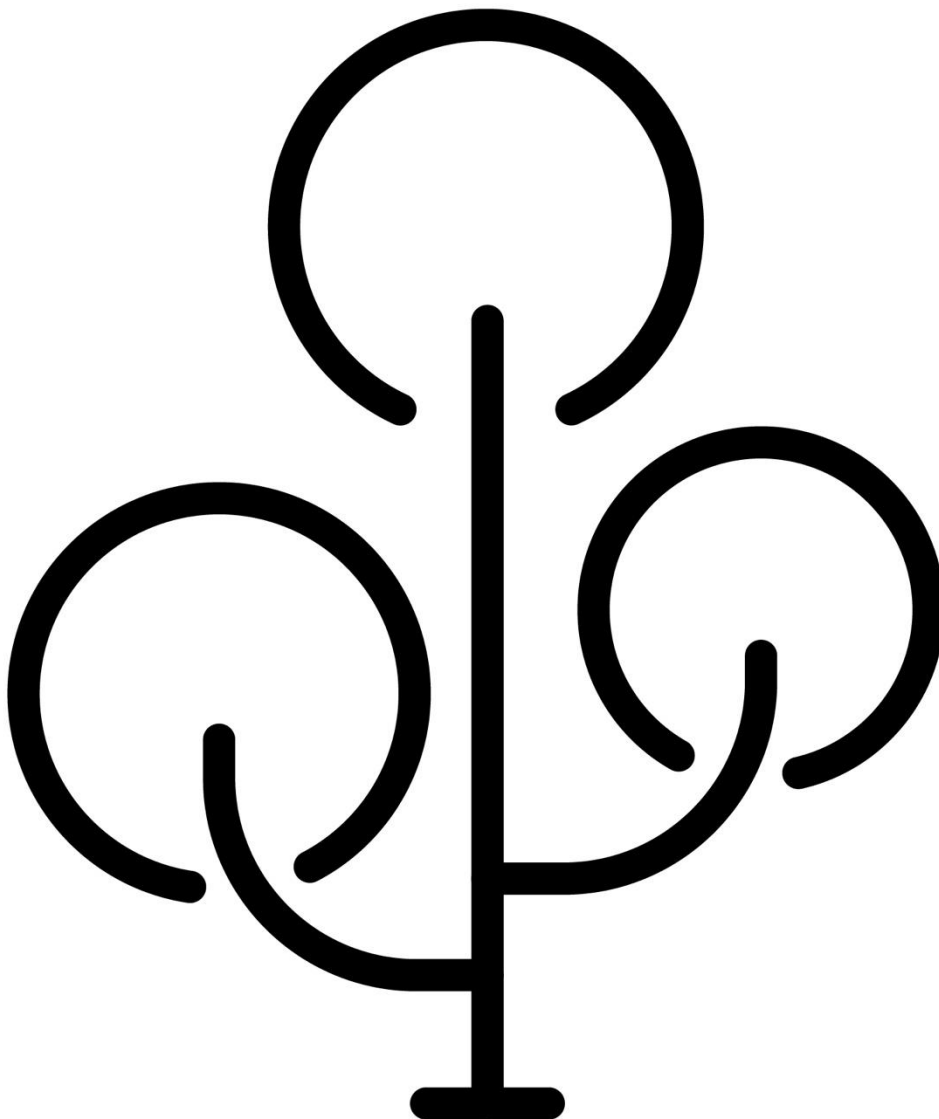




MRS Senior Client Council

Recruiting and Retaining Client-side Insights and Analytics Talent for Success

White Paper Talent Guidelines Document
Version 3.0



Introduction

In today's rapidly evolving and hypercompetitive business landscape, the importance of consumer and market insights cannot be overstated. As organisations strive to stay ahead of the curve, leveraging the latest insights and analytics is essential for informed decision-making.

To meet this critical need, Insights leaders must recruit for Insights teams that should possess a rich tapestry of methodological expertise, spanning diverse disciplines and informed by the latest thinking in the field. By drawing on insights from leading experts and incorporating innovative practices, organisations can enhance their ability to extract meaningful insights from complex data and transform them into strategic actions that drive business growth and success.

And yet, the synthesis of market research methodological expertise is a dynamic and ever-evolving process. The rapid pace of technological advancements has ushered in an era of unprecedented opportunities for data-driven decision-making. From quantitative research methodologies that harness the power of statistical analysis to qualitative approaches that delve into the realm of human emotions and motivations, Insights professionals must possess a comprehensive skill set to navigate the vast landscape of market research. In addition, Insights leaders must now contend with the rise of AI and LLM-based technologies and platforms. By embracing and encouraging the use of these latest tools and techniques, alongside deployment of advanced data visualisation and predictive analytics, Insights teams can transform raw data into compelling narratives and actionable recommendations that resonate with key stakeholders.

To remain competitive, even within own organisations, fighting for share of voice and securing seats at the most important decision-making tables, Insights leaders must promote and embed a culture of continuous learning and professional development. By doing so, Insights professionals can stay ahead of market trends, anticipate disruptive forces, and harness the power of emerging methodologies to address the ever-evolving needs of their businesses.

Attracting and retaining talented Insights individuals in these teams is one of the greatest challenges for our profession. As the demands of the Insights function shift to keep pace with the competition, an Insights leader must overcome multiple challenges to realise a successful and repeated cycle of talent acquisition and retention.

Specifically:

1. **High Competition:** Analytics talent is in high demand, and there is intense competition for experienced professionals with specialised skills.
2. **Evolving Skill Sets:** As data tools and technologies continue to evolve, skills required for Insights & Analytics professionals are also changing rapidly.
3. **Limited Talent Pool:** The number of experienced analytics professionals is limited, and it can be challenging to identify individuals who possess the right mix of technical skills, business acumen, and soft skills.
4. **Retention:** Once top talent is recruited, leaders need to ensure they are motivated, engaged, and provided with opportunities to grow and advance their careers.

This paper seeks to underline the fundamental skills required in a modern, highly effective client-side Insights & Analytics team, how those skills can be nurtured and retained and, in turn, offers contemporary thoughts on how Insights function leaders can begin to think and plan for future talent strategies where AI tools and applications impact our ways of working.

There are five fundamental categories of skills and attributes required of individuals in an Insight team:

- Business acumen
- Interpersonal and relationship building
- Market research solution knowledge/experience
- Qualitative and quantitative data analytical skills
- Organisational activation and change management

It is obviously ideal to attract and retain Insights team talent and individuals within that team that possess the entire range of skills, but this is not always possible and may possibly be less important in some larger teams. Where we now rely greatly on tailored platforms to deliver specific outcomes (e.g., category management, brand building, social-listening, revenue management and innovation developments processes, for example), functional leaders may choose to recruit specialist talent, highly proficient in any one (or more) of these disciplines.

Nonetheless, to overcome the perennial challenges of impacting change, influencing business decision making and effectively positioning the Insights function as a key driver of organisational growth, technical and relationship skills combined are the optimum requirement. If this ideal combination cannot be recruited for initially, Insights leaders should have a clear view on how they can help to develop team members personal and professional growth to meet the needs of the function and wider business.

Let's first look at these key core skills in more detail:

Business acumen

In today's fast-paced and data-driven business landscape, organisations are increasingly recognising the critical role of Insights & Analytics teams in driving strategic decision-making and gaining a competitive edge. As the demand for actionable insights continues to grow, so does the need for team members who possess not only technical expertise but also strong business acumen. Effective data analysis and interpretation are no longer sufficient; insights professionals must demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the business landscape in which they operate. The following guidelines outline the key skills that Insights & Analytics team members need to display business acumen, enabling them to contribute effectively to organisational success.

Key Skills for Displaying Business Acumen in Insights & Analytics:

1. Domain Knowledge:

- Deep understanding of the industry and market dynamics.
- Familiarity with key trends, competitive forces and regulatory landscape.
- Knowledge of customer behavior, preferences, and segmentation.

2. Strategic Thinking:

- Ability to align data analysis with overall business goals and objectives.
- Aptitude for identifying opportunities and risks through insights.
- Capacity to think holistically and anticipate future trends.

3. Financial Literacy:

- Understanding of financial statements and key performance indicators (KPIs).
- Ability to relate data insights to fiscal impact and business value.
- Proficiency in cost-benefit analysis and ROI assessment.

4. Stakeholder Management:

- Effective communication and presentation skills to convey insights to non-technical stakeholders.
- Active listening and empathy to understand diverse perspectives and requirements.
- Collaboration skills to foster strong relationships with business leaders and cross-functional teams.

5. **Business Strategy Alignment:**

- Capability to translate business questions and challenges into analytical hypotheses.
- Proficiency in designing research methodologies and analytical frameworks to address strategic needs.
- Agility in adapting insights to evolving business strategies and priorities.

6. **Ethical and Legal Awareness:**

- Knowledge of data privacy regulations and compliance requirements.
- Ethical understanding of handling sensitive data and ensuring data security.
- Commitment to maintaining confidentiality and data integrity.

By embodying these key skills, Insights & Analytics team members can enhance their business acumen and contribute effectively to their organisation's growth and success. With clarity across the Insights team as to (e.g.) current operational and commercial objectives or current and forecast financial performance, it will be easier to ensure all research and analytics investment is clearly observed to be in service of achieving those goals. Indeed, research outputs configured to 'speak the language' of our stakeholders is much more likely to be absorbed and acted upon. And to that point, we must then consider the interpersonal and relationship skills that can help to make that process ever more effective.

Interpersonal and relationship building

Successful Insights & Analytics professionals understand that insights are only valuable when they are understood, embraced, and acted upon by key decision-makers. The following guidelines outline the key interpersonal and relationship-building skills that are essential for Insights & Analytics professionals to thrive in their roles.

Key Skills for Displaying Interpersonal and Relationship-Building in Insights & Analytics:

1. Communication:

- Clear and concise verbal and written communication to convey complex insights to non-technical stakeholders.
- Active listening skills to understand stakeholders' needs, concerns, and expectations.
- The ability to adapt communication style and language to resonate with diverse audiences.

2. Collaboration and Teamwork:

- Strong collaboration skills to work effectively with cross-functional teams and diverse stakeholders.
- The ability to foster a culture of teamwork, trust, and knowledge-sharing within the Insights & Analytics team.
- Openness to feedback and willingness to incorporate different perspectives and ideas.

3. Relationship Management:

- Building and nurturing relationships with key stakeholders across the organisation, such as executives, business unit leaders, and department heads.
- Developing a deep understanding of stakeholders' goals, challenges, and decision-making processes.
- Proactively engaging stakeholders to understand their evolving needs and align insights accordingly.

4. Influencing and Persuasion:

- The ability to influence and persuade stakeholders to adopt data-driven insights and recommendations.
- Skill in presenting insights in a compelling and persuasive manner, highlighting the business value and impact.
- Using storytelling techniques to create engaging narratives around data-driven insights.

5. Empathy and Emotional Intelligence:

- Developing empathy to understand stakeholders' perspectives, motivations, and emotions.

- Demonstrating emotional intelligence in navigating sensitive situations and managing conflicts constructively.
- Cultivating a supportive and inclusive work environment that encourages diverse viewpoints.

6. Negotiation and Conflict Resolution:

- Proficiency in negotiation techniques to find win-win solutions when addressing conflicting priorities or resource constraints.
- The ability to handle conflicts diplomatically, finding common ground and maintaining positive relationships.
- Resilience and flexibility in adapting to changing stakeholder dynamics and resolving issues effectively.

7. Client Service Orientation:

- A strong focus on delivering exceptional client service and exceeding stakeholder expectations.
- Proactively seeking feedback from stakeholders to continuously improve insights delivery and value-add.
- Demonstrating an elevated level of responsiveness, professionalism, and commitment to stakeholder satisfaction.

By cultivating these interpersonal and relationship-building skills, Insights & Analytics professionals can not only enhance the impact of their insights but also build strong partnerships with stakeholders, fostering a data-driven decision-making culture within the organisation. Effective growth in these competencies in turn drives an Insight steam to be much more proactive in its engagement across the organisation alleviating irrelevancy and the oft-quoted and wholly undesirable positioning as 'knowledge or research order-takers'.

Insights, as the generators and disseminators of knowledge, have an obligation to see themselves as a horizontal function across their organisations (and not just to support the Marketing function alone). Market and consumer knowledge is, itself, a business asset and Insight leaders must recognise the imperative role we have in extracting maximum value from all the knowledge assets for which we are responsible and accountable.

Market research solution knowledge/experience

Market research serves as the bedrock for informed decision-making within organisations, providing valuable insights into consumer behaviour, market dynamics, and competitive landscapes. To effectively execute market research initiatives, Insights teams require a diverse set of methodological expertise that encompasses various disciplines. In this section, we delve into the summary of major disciplines of market research methodological expertise, which collectively equip corporate Insights teams with the skills necessary to tackle a wide range of business needs. By understanding and mastering these key disciplines, Insights professionals can navigate the intricacies of market research, uncover actionable insights, and enable evidence-based strategies that drive organisational growth and success.

Key Skills for Displaying Market research Solution Knowledge/Experience in Insights & Analytics:

1. Quantitative Research:

- Proficiency in designing and executing surveys, experiments, and statistical analyses.
- Knowledge of sampling techniques, questionnaire design, and data collection methodologies.
- Expertise in analysing numerical data to derive insights and draw conclusions.

2. Qualitative Research:

- Skills in conducting in-depth interviews, focus groups, and observational studies.
- Ability to uncover deep insights, motivations, and attitudes through qualitative data analysis.
- Proficiency in synthesising qualitative findings to inform strategic decision-making.

3. Secondary Research:

- Familiarity with leveraging existing sources such as industry reports, databases, and academic research.
- Competence in conducting comprehensive literature reviews and synthesising findings.
- Knowledge of data mining and information retrieval techniques to extract relevant insights.

4. Consumer Behavior Analysis:

- Understanding consumer decision-making processes, factors influencing behavior, and purchasing patterns.
- Expertise in applying psychological and behavioral theories to interpret consumer insights.
- Ability to analyse consumer segmentation and personas to drive targeted marketing strategies.

5. Competitive Intelligence:

- Skills in gathering and analysing information on competitors' strategies, products, and market positioning.
- Proficiency in conducting competitor benchmarking and SWOT analyses.
- Knowledge of industry trends and market dynamics to identify competitive advantages.

6. Brand and Customer Experience Research:

- Competence in measuring brand perception, awareness, and loyalty.
- Ability in designing and analysing customer satisfaction surveys such (e.g., Net Promoter Score (NPS) studies).
- Ability to assess customer journey mapping and touchpoint analysis to optimise the customer experience.

7. Market Segmentation and Targeting:

- Knowledge of segmentation methodologies, including psychographic, demographic, and behavioral segmentation.
- Competence in identifying target audiences and developing effective targeting strategies.
- Proficiency in using clustering and profiling techniques to understand market segments.

8. Pricing and Market Analysis:

- Skills in conducting pricing research, including conjoint analysis, price elasticity, and willingness-to-pay studies.
- Expertise in market sizing, demand forecasting, and trend analysis.
- Knowledge of pricing strategies and competitive pricing analysis.

By possessing a diverse range of market research methodological expertise in these major disciplines, Insights teams can address a wide range of business needs and generate actionable insights. This comprehensive skill set enables them to employ the most suitable research methodologies to tackle various challenges and support evidence-based decision-making in corporate organisations.

Qualitative and quantitative data analytical skills

In the realm of Insights & Analytics, the ability to effectively analyse and derive insights from both qualitative and quantitative data is paramount. The convergence of qualitative and quantitative analysis, along with broader analytical skills, equips professionals with the tools necessary to navigate the complexities of today's data-driven landscape. The following guidelines explore the essential skills and competencies in qualitative and quantitative analysis, as well as connected broader analytical skills, that empower Insights professionals to unlock valuable insights and drive strategic decision-making. By combining these capabilities, professionals can harness the power of data to uncover actionable insights and facilitate data-informed strategies for corporate success.

Key Skills for Displaying Analytical Skills in Insights & Analytics:

1. Qualitative Analysis:

- Proficiency in analysing unstructured data, such as open-ended survey responses, interviews, and focus group discussions.
- Ability to code, categorise, and interpret qualitative data using methodologies like thematic analysis and content analysis.
- Skill in uncovering themes, patterns, and insights from qualitative data to inform decision-making.

2. Quantitative Analysis:

- Expertise in statistical analysis, including descriptive statistics, inferential statistics, and multivariate analysis.
- Proficiency in using statistical software such as SPSS, R, or Python for data manipulation and analysis.
- Ability to interpret quantitative findings, identify trends, correlations, and statistical significance.

3. Data Visualisation and Reporting:

- Skill in visually representing complex data using charts, graphs, and dashboards.
- Proficiency in data visualisation tools such as Tableau, Power BI, or Excel.
- Ability to create compelling and insightful reports that effectively communicate key findings to stakeholders.

4. **Hypothesis Testing:**

- Knowledge of formulating testable hypotheses and selecting appropriate statistical tests.
- Proficiency in conducting A/B testing, t-tests, chi-square tests & regression analysis.
- Ability to interpret hypothesis test results and draw meaningful conclusions.

5. **Data Mining and Text Analytics:**

- Competence in extracting actionable insights from large datasets using data mining techniques.
- Proficiency in text mining and natural language processing to analyse textual data.
- Skill in sentiment analysis, topic modeling, and sentiment classification.

6. **Predictive and Prescriptive Analytics:**

- Understanding of predictive modeling techniques such as regression analysis, decision trees, and machine learning algorithms.
- Proficiency in leveraging historical data to forecast future trends, customer behavior, or business outcomes.
- Ability to provide prescriptive recommendations based on predictive insights to optimise decision-making.

7. **Critical Thinking and Problem Solving:**

- Analytical mindset to break down complex problems into manageable components.
- Capacity to identify key factors, evaluate options, and make data-driven decisions.
- Skill in applying logical reasoning and critical thinking to solve business challenges.

8. **Data Integration and Synthesis:**

- Ability to integrate data from multiple sources and perform comprehensive data synthesis.
- Proficiency in merging and cleaning datasets to ensure data accuracy and consistency.
- Skill in connecting insights from different data sets to provide a holistic view of the business landscape.

By possessing qualitative and quantitative analysis skills, along with broader analytical capabilities, Insights professionals can extract meaningful insights from data, provide valuable recommendations, and support evidence-based decision-making. These skills enable them to bridge the gap between raw data and actionable insights, directing stakeholders to persist or change course as necessary but always, ultimately, to drive business success.

Organisational activation and change management

In the fast-evolving world of business, change is not merely a constant; it's an imperative. Organisations must adapt, innovate, and evolve to stay competitive and relevant in their industries. Amidst this ever-shifting landscape, Insights & Analytics teams have risen to prominence as indispensable agents of transformation. Their ability to harness data and generate actionable insights has become a cornerstone of informed decision-making. However, the journey from insights to impact does not conclude with data analysis alone.

To truly thrive in today's complex business ecosystem, organisations require professionals who possess a unique and pivotal skill set – the capability to orchestrate organisational activation and change management. These individuals are the architects of transformation, guiding their organisations through the process of adopting new strategies, technologies, and mindsets based on insights generated by the Insights & Analytics teams.

It should be noted that several of the key skills under 'Business Acumen' and 'Interpersonal and relationship building' are foundational to being successful at 'activation'. Nevertheless, there are additional specific attributes an Insights & Analytics professional can display in driving stakeholders and the wider organisation to adopt new strategies, tactics and behaviours on the back of new insights.

Key Skills for Displaying Organisational Activation & Change Management in Insights & Analytics:

1. Action-Oriented:

- Proactive mindset that drives the initiation of data-driven actions and solutions rather than merely identifying problems.
- The ability to make swift, well-informed decisions based on insights, without excessive analysis paralysis.
- A willingness to take calculated risks when pursuing data-informed opportunities for improvement and growth.

2. Results-Oriented:

- The ability to define clear, measurable objectives and goals for insights-driven initiatives.
- A commitment to making decisions based on data and KPIs, ensuring that actions align with desired results.
- Flexibility to adjust strategies and tactics based on real-time feedback and results to maximise impact.

3. **Project Management:**

- Planning and prioritisation, setting clear objectives and highlighting key tasks to ensure timely execution.
- Effective resource allocation, whether it's personnel, technology, or budget, to support data-driven initiatives.
- Identifying potential risks and implementing strategies to mitigate them is vital for project success.

4. **Impact-Driven:**

- The unwavering commitment to achieving tangible, positive outcomes and results through data-driven strategies.
- The capability to evaluate the real-world impact of insights-driven initiatives and adjust accordingly.
- A dedication to learning from both successes and failures to refine strategies and drive even greater impact.

5. **Measurement and KPIs:**

- The capability to identify and select key performance indicators (KPIs) that align with the organisation's objectives and reflect the impact of data-driven decisions.
- Proficiency in data analysis techniques to measure the effectiveness of initiatives and track progress toward desired outcomes.
- The commitment to continuously monitor and refine measurement strategies to ensure relevance and accuracy.

6. **Change Management:**

- Ability to plan for and navigate organisational complexities and the steps needed for successful change adoption and the mitigation of resistance.
- Skills in influencing and persuading key stakeholders to adopt data-driven decision-making.
- Proficiency in project management is vital for planning and executing initiatives that result from insights.

7. **Change Catalyst:**

- The capability to inspire and motivate others within the organisation to embrace change and adopt data-driven practices.
- Encouraging a culture of innovation by fostering an environment

where new ideas are welcomed and experimentation is encouraged.

- Passionately advocating for the value of insights and analytics as catalysts for positive change within the organisation.

In an era where the ability to adapt and thrive amid uncertainty defines organisational success, those who master the art of organisational activation and change management emerge as indispensable leaders. Through this lens, we truly uncover the power and impact Insights & Analytics professionals have to guide their organisations toward sustainable growth, innovation, and excellence.

Laying the Foundations of Recruiting and Retaining a World-Class Insights team

Building a high-performing Insight team is crucial for organisations seeking to harness the power of data-driven decision-making. Recruiting and developing the right talent with the necessary skills and characteristics is a key challenge faced by leaders in this field. The following guidelines provide recommended best practices for attracting, developing, and retaining top talent in Insight teams.

Clarify the Skills Required for the Team:

- To start, it is essential to have a clear understanding of the skills needed for the Insight team. Identify the priority skills and attributes required for success. This clarity will guide the recruitment process effectively.

Formalise an effective recruitment process:

- Employ effective recruitment tactics: Implement strategies to attract the most suitable applicants. Utilise various channels, including free or low-cost options as well as specialist recruiters and team referrals, to reach a wide range of candidates.
- Collaborate with HR or recruitment agencies: Provide a comprehensive brief about the role, essential criteria, and the types of individuals suitable for the position. Ensure alignment between your expectations and the hiring process.
- Design an efficient selection process: Develop a streamlined process that suits both your organisation and the candidates. Craft interview questions that assess the desired skills and characteristics effectively aligned to your specific needs for the team.
- Establish the decision-making process: Clearly define how the final selection decisions will be made, ensuring transparency and fairness.

Thoughtful Onboarding of New Staff:

The onboarding process plays a critical role in setting up new team members for success. Consider the following best practices:

- Define roles in the onboarding process: Assign specific individuals who will play key roles in welcoming and supporting new team members.
- Begin onboarding before day one: Create a positive and engaging experience for new hires even before their official start date. Assign a buddy within the team to provide guidance and support during the initial days.
- Foster connections with stakeholders: Help new team members understand the organisation's dynamics and facilitate their

interactions with key stakeholders. Early introductions and relationship-building can have a lasting impact on their success.

Setting Clear and Attainable Initial Targets:

Setting goals and targets for new team members is essential for their development and alignment with organisational objectives. Follow these practices:

- Consider formal initial targets: Establish measurable goals that align with the team's objectives. Regularly review these targets during the first three months.
- Prioritise development activities: Schedule dedicated time for development activities and discussions to support the growth of new team members.
- Show empathy and support: Understand individual aspirations and provide opportunities that cater to their personal and professional needs. Offer creative ways to recognise and reward team members beyond traditional monetary incentives.

Navigating the Future

Designing and Leveraging Skills Competency Frameworks for Client-side Insights & Analytics Teams

In the ever-evolving landscape of Insights & Analytics, where data-driven decisions reign supreme, organisations are increasingly recognising the need for structured approaches to assess, develop, and sustain the skills of their client-side Insights & Analytics teams. In this era of rapid technological advancements and the growing importance of artificial intelligence (AI), staying competitive requires not only cultivating current competencies but also anticipating future skill requirements.

These frameworks serve as powerful tools for shaping talent development, ensuring teams are well-equipped to tackle complex challenges, and keeping pace with the transformative influence of AI. Here, we explore the key elements of constructing a competency framework, deploying it effectively for skill growth, and maintaining its dynamism in a world where adaptability is paramount.

Constructing a Skills Competency Framework:

- **Identify Core Competencies:** Begin by identifying the fundamental skills and knowledge areas that are essential for your client-side Insights & Analytics teams. This may include technical proficiencies, soft skills, and domain-specific expertise.
- **Define Skill Levels:** Categorise competencies into different skill levels, from foundational to advanced, to create a clear progression path for skill development.
- **Incorporate AI Competencies:** Recognise the significance of AI in the field and integrate competencies related to AI, machine learning, and data automation to stay ahead in the AI-driven world.

Deploying the Framework for Skills Growth:

- **Assessment and Gap Analysis:** Conduct skill assessments to identify individual and team-level strengths and weaknesses. Use this data to design targeted training and development plans.
- **Training and Development Programs:** Develop training initiatives that align with the competency framework, offering a mix of formal training, mentorship, on-the-job learning, and access to relevant resources.
- **Continuous Evaluation:** Implement regular assessments and performance reviews to monitor progress and adapt training programs as needed.

Maintaining Dynamism in a Changing World:

- **AI Integration and Upskilling:** Continuously update the competency framework to integrate emerging AI and data science skills. Encourage ongoing AI upskilling and provide resources for staying updated.
- **Flexible Framework Structure:** Design the framework to be agile, allowing for adjustments as the industry evolves. This may involve adding new competencies, revising skill levels, or adapting to changing market dynamics.
- **Data-Driven Insights:** Leverage data analytics to gain insights into skill gaps and learning effectiveness. Use data to refine the competency framework and training strategies.

In an era where data is a strategic asset and AI is an enabling force, a well-designed Skills Competency Framework is not just a tool but a compass guiding client-side Insights & Analytics teams toward success, ensuring they remain adaptable, skilled, and ready to embrace the future of their field.

Nurturing a Growth-Centric Learning Environment for Client-Side Insights Talent in an AI World

As emerging technologies continue to reshape the business landscape and the way we work, client-side Insights & Analytics leaders must anticipate and understand their impact on the skills and experience mix required in their teams. Among these technologies, the rise of AI platforms and Generative Language, Image (GLM/GIM) and Data Models like ChatGPT, Claude, et al, has the potential to revolutionise the discipline. The following guideline explore how Insights leaders should consider incorporating these technologies, harnessing their benefits, and adapting their talent recruitment strategies to meet the evolving skill demands.

Embrace AI and LM Applications as additions to your Insights toolkit:

- Explore the potential: Understand how Gen-AI platforms and GLM/GIM tools can synthesise disparate knowledge sources, enhance data analysis, automate insights generation, and enable advanced natural language & image processing capabilities.
- Identify, formalise and embrace the benefits: Leverage AI platforms and GLM/GIM tools to expedite data analysis, gain deeper consolidated and connected insights, improve decision-making, and deliver more impactful communication outputs and recommendations tailored to your different stakeholder audiences.

Foster Learning and Adoption:

- Invest in upskilling: Prioritise continuous learning to familiarise Insights professionals with AI technologies and GLM/GIM tools. Encourage them to explore relevant training programs, workshops, and certifications.
- Promote experimentation and sharing: Create a supportive environment that encourages Insights professionals to experiment with AI platforms and GLM/GIM tools, fostering creativity and innovation in leveraging these technologies. Most importantly, put in place the forums and open-access resources that share, educate and instruct new discoveries and successes.

Future Skills Capability and Competency Adaptation for Client-Side Insights Teams in an AI World

Whilst, here in 2024, we are only just taking early steps in our respective AI-impacted professional environments, there is going to be perpetual discourse and debate on how human work responsibilities will continue to be impacted by this technology.

Much of the focus and trial of AI-impacts today is focused on increasing efficiency of repetitive tasks, once designed, administered and delivered by humans. In addition, early adopters are also looking at the capabilities of AI-applications to optimize repeatable models, such as concept, product and ad-testing protocols through advances in use of synthetic respondents that now enable increased testing opportunities where previously budgets and timing limitations precluded us from testing our commercial assets as much as we would have liked. In turn, AI-applications are also enhancing and optimising creative tasks from concept ideation and incremental asset creation, as examples.

AI is indeed reshaping the role of Insights and Analytics professionals, freeing them from time-consuming foundational tasks and enabling them to take on higher-value strategic and innovative work. With AI handling tasks like data summarization, simple analysis, and even concept generation, Insights teams can focus on advanced roles that directly impact organizational strategy and innovation.

As leaders, we should therefore be considering what new capabilities and competencies we may need to promote, design and train for in future. As a thought-starting guide, we can provide a list of professional competencies that may either be new to the Insights team or that highlight are deserving of an increased focus of planning and action.

The following list of capabilities and competencies are those we believe should be considered as priorities amongst Insights professionals to remain competitive and valuable in an AI-empowered environment.

1. Higher-Level Strategic Insight Generation

- With AI handling repetitive tasks, Insights professionals can focus on identifying emerging trends, opportunities, and threats. This capability involves synthesising insights from various sources, translating data into strategic recommendations that guide product development, marketing, and business strategy.

2. Ethical and Responsible AI Oversight

- As AI tools become embedded in insights workflows, understanding the ethical implications of AI-generated insights is critical. Insights professionals will need to manage and audit AI processes to ensure

data accuracy, avoid biases, and uphold ethical standards in how AI interacts with human respondents and data. This is, for an extended period at least, a perpetually evolving task if we consider that societal and cultural norms of yesterday may no longer be valid or appropriate tomorrow.

3. Human-Centred Design and Consumer Empathy

- AI can process data but, so far, lacks the nuanced understanding of human behaviour and emotion. Insights professionals should develop deep empathy with consumers and apply human-centred design principles to frame research questions, interpret qualitative insights, and develop customer-centric strategies.

4. Scenario Planning and Predictive Analytics

- Leveraging AI for predictive analytics allows insights teams to project potential future scenarios. Professionals should develop expertise in scenario planning and understand the use of predictive models, helping them to guide business planning based on projected market shifts or consumer behaviour trends. This will be imperative, if only to be effective in instructing AI-applications in what we need them to deliver.

5. Innovative Research Design and Methodology Development

- With the support of AI, Insights professionals can experiment with advanced methodologies, such as synthetic respondents and virtual environments, to conduct more innovative research. This includes designing custom methodologies that integrate AI-driven insights to produce richer and more nuanced data. There are also, of course, many opportunities to evolve non-AI driven methodological advances and outcomes, where consumer discovery connections and touch-points must evolve to changing behaviours and need-states. Again, perhaps increased 'thinking time' offers space and freedom to Insights professional to tackle more existential challenges.

6. Experimentation and Prototyping with AI-Enhanced Concepts

- AI can assist in generating early-stage concepts, but testing and refining any genuinely new or radical ideas requires human input. Insights professionals will need to take on roles in prototyping, testing, and refining AI-enhanced concepts or product ideas, focusing on consumer reactions and usability insights to drive innovation.

7. Complex Data Integration and Custom Model Management

- AI creates opportunities for more complex data integration. Insights professionals should be comfortable working with multiple data sources, managing custom AI models, and understanding how to fine-tune models for business-specific questions. This could require deeper knowledge of data architecture and familiarity with AI model parameters. In practice, this will likely involve the connecting of previously unconnected data-points or intelligence perspectives. AI, in theory, can only work with what is in front of it. Inherent complexity in consumer lives will always require human consideration in how to solve such challenges for which there is no current 'how to' guide available.

8. Organisational Knowledge Management

- With AI possibly supporting the generation of a wealth of new data and insights, the role of organising, curating, and maintaining knowledge will become essential. Insights professionals can lead initiatives to manage organisational knowledge effectively, ensuring all paid, earned and owned knowledge assets (AI or non-AI generated) are preserved, accessible, and actionable for all teams.

9. Enhanced Client and Stakeholder Engagement

- AI may improve internal efficiency, but externally, Insights professionals need to build deeper engagement with clients, stakeholders and customers alike. Enhanced communication skills and the ability to articulate insights into meaningful recommendations and action that impact business outcomes will be critical to maintaining strong stakeholder relationships. Allied to this, how to communicate the differences between AI-generated and primary consumer insights will be imperative as corporations assess risk exposure when acting on AI-generated decision inputs.

10. Continuous Learning and Commercial Literacy

- Regardless of how AI-tools evolve, staying up-to-date with the latest advancements in consumer intelligence and data analytics will be essential. Insights professionals should commit to continuous learning, not only to remain competitive but also to leverage new capabilities effectively in their own roles. Insights teams put themselves at risk by not keeping platforms and tools up-to-date and relevant to business need. Even the greatest trackers require periodical re-appraisal and refreshment and Insights teams should always pre-prepare stakeholders to handle such changes (e.g. KPI's may pivot, new survey methodologies are deployed, new visualisations emerge).

11. Innovation Leadership and Future-Readiness

- Leader in the Insights space will benefit from developing a forward-looking mindset, seeking out new tools and methodologies, and cultivating a team culture that embraces innovation. This includes fostering and formalising a "test-and-learn" approach to adapt to future changes in the industry. It also encompasses a much greater pro-active engagement with consumers above and beyond performance measurement, satisfaction grading and product testing. Truly effective future-readiness involves being open to ambiguity and not being afraid to offer strategic viewpoints on what maybe yet to come. Our businesses want to hear our expert voices and opinions, even if they decide not to act on such advice. Nonetheless, better informed the outcome will be.

These competencies reflect mostly a shift from a reactive to a proactive and strategic role for Insights professionals, allowing them to provide more value in guiding company decisions and contributing to future strategies. By considering increasing our talent and teams competency in these skills, leaders can empower their functions to evolve alongside AI, optimising traditional insights roles into influential, future-ready influencers and drivers of improvement across the organisation.

Adapting Recruitment Strategies for an AI World

With the priority capabilities and competencies laid out, it is certainly our primary desire that we can bring our teams and talent along the journey of disruption and discovery. We also must be prepared to adopt new skill-sets into our teams from outside. Thus, having a clear process for recruiting and profiling this new talent requirement is important now to be prepared for what is to come.

Conclusion

Embracing the AI Paradigm

As AI tools continue to evolve, speculation has arisen regarding the potential redundancy of traditional Insights professionals. The advent of this new technology undoubtedly poses challenges for the Insights profession, necessitating a careful examination of its impact on our work and professional lives. Nevertheless, historical evidence shows that previous industrial revolutions and disruptions did not render human beings obsolete. Rather, they prompted change and adaptation, enabling us to harness the resourcefulness and indispensability of human insight. While AI will undoubtedly bring about transformations, the prospect of complete redundancy appears unlikely, especially if we are proactive in engaging with it.

In light of the ongoing AI journey, the role of an Insights Leader is to navigate the current technological landscape, assessing how these developments can be leveraged to benefit their teams and stakeholders. By embracing AI's potential today, Insights Leaders can proactively adapt to further changes that lie ahead. It is crucial to recognise that AI is not a replacement for human expertise but rather a valuable tool that can enhance the insights generation, extraction and socialisation process.

Whilst AI's long-term impact remains uncertain, it is essential for Insights Leaders to foster a mindset of continuous learning and development within their teams. Exploring the possibilities offered by AI and staying abreast of advancements will enable Insights professionals to adapt and seize opportunities presented by evolving technologies. Moreover, by nurturing a culture of flexibility and openness to change, organisations can position themselves advantageously for an uncertain future.