



## DATA-INFORMED DECISION MAKING (DIDM) - QUICK TIPS

*Data-informed decision making refers to the practice of basing decisions on the analysis of data rather than purely on policy, intuition, or previous experiences. A data-informed decision making process can be beneficial by providing objective insights for setting directions and enhancing communication and interactions among colleagues.*

### Five A's for Data-Informed Decision Making

#### 1. Ask

- Formulate a focused, answerable question: *Are our entry-level salaries competitive with our aspirational peers? Are our staffing (FTE) levels consistent with comparable units? Is our new curriculum attracting and retaining students compared with our previous approach? How research-productive per square foot are we, and can we use that to make a case for more space/staffing?*
- What is the unit of analysis? Are you looking for across-group information, within-group, or both? How does your question relate to the problem you are solving?
- Align the question with organizational goals (e.g., enrollment, research funding, cost of instruction).
- Have a clear objective and agenda.

If you seek salary comparisons, clarify your interest before data gathering whether you want to compare internal (within unit/institution) or external (across units/institutions) data.

#### 2. Acquire

The internet can apprise you of peer (competitor) institutions' degree offerings.  
Industry partners can provide information on shortcomings of your program offerings.

- Search for the best available data/evidence
- Internal institutional data (e.g., enrollment, salaries, space utilization, financial trends)
- External sources of data (e.g., peer institutions or units)
- Bigger and broader database gives you a more panoramic and granular view on the context.

#### 3. Appraise

- Critically appraise and evaluate the evidence. Not all data will benefit your unit.
- Consider relevancy.
- Evaluate data quality.
- Be prepared for the reactions are you likely to get when you share the data, the summary of the data, and/or the interpretation of the data.

#### 4. Apply

- Integrate the data/evidence aligning with your unit or situation.
- Interpret the findings and how to translate these understandings into subsequent action.



- Apply to your context.
- Clarify your mission (e.g., enrollment, research productivity, or student outcomes).
- Apply the evaluated data/evidence into your internal institutional mission.
- Data and resources should be allocated effectively based upon the evidence.

If you have data from other institutions about cost reduction, you can think of similarities to your unit and decide what is relevant to your unit and what aspects of those cases do not apply in your situation due to differences in size of the unit, goals, tasks, the type of unit, and the region or culture.

## 5. Assess

- Monitor and evaluate the results.
- Get feedback from elsewhere and compare your data and results.

## Four Facets of DIDM

1. Use the best available sources of data that are most suitable for your goal.
2. Consider organizational facts, indicators, and metrics in a systematic fashion to increase their reliability and usefulness.
3. Incorporate on-going use of critical, reflective judgment to reduce bias and improve decision quality.
4. Factor in ethical perspectives, including the short- and long-term impact of decisions on stakeholders.

Continuous improvement requires an iterative DIDM process.

## Why and How It Benefits

- Investigates cause-effect connections in professional practice
- Illustrates how scientific principles and local facts interact to resolve your internal problems
- Creates an atmosphere that values evidence and research-based decision making process
- Provides measurable outcomes that result from systematic and scientific methods (e.g., experiments)
- Employs objective, consistent methods rather than subjective randomness

Cost and financial aid strategies that are based on empirical evidence can optimize an institution's ability to attract and retain the desired academic quality, program of interest, racial, ethnic, and socio-economic mix of students.

Changing a journal list used to assess promotion and tenure has ethical implications.

- Enables you to respond to a demand for reliable and valid information
- By using diverse sources of the data, you can obtain the strongest decision possible towards the attainment of your goals.
- Improves the quality of decision by using organizational fact finding and experimentation (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2006).

- Minimizes self-determination bias, prejudice, through a systematic process





## When will DIDM not benefit?

- The use of data in decision making is not transparent
- It is difficult to quantify an important aspect of the decision
- The collection of all required data is extremely time consuming
- There is a lack of awareness in the assumptions you are making about your data
- The data system design fails
- It costs too much.

For allocation of space, you may use the data for internal (e.g., previous cases and results, usage data over time) and external (e.g., algorithms other units or institutions use for space/FTE) sources and prioritize use of resources over efficient allocation of variable-cost strategy (e.g., how may full-time and part-time faculty are assigned). You may want to see previous or other empirical cases before making a decision.