



## Data-Informed Strategic Leadership

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A [recent study](#) found that 97% of leaders feel that being strategic is one of the most critical leadership skills. [Another](#) reported that 96% of leaders feel that they don't have enough time to meaningfully commit to strategic planning. Sound familiar? When leaders are intentional about building strategic thinking, planning, and working time into their schedules, they tend to be more successful at organizing and coordinating teams and efforts around shared goals and visions; yet finding the time for it is challenging.

One way to build your own and your organization's strategic thinking and planning efficiency is to use data to help inform strategic decisions. Researchers from [MIT Sloane](#) have found that when leaders have and use good data to help with strategic thinking and planning, they increase their organization's success, sustainability, and capacity to reach their goals. Below are three actionable recommendations to consider if you want to increase your strategic leadership skills.

**Build data-driven strategy into your organization's culture.** Many organizations struggle to implement evidence-based decisions [because data is not embedded in the culture or](#) fiber of the organization. Further, [many professionals avoid data because they find it intimidating](#); empirical studies are not often written for practitioners and complex charts and graphs without context or explanation are usually more confusing than helpful. Shifting the culture takes leading by example and showing others how you use evidence-based information to lead strategically. For instance, you may share data and information that led to a big agency decision. Or you may create easy to read data visuals or write ups so that others in your organization can connect evidence-based information to actionable strategies. (We do just that with the [National Leadership Consortium Bulletin](#) if you want a place to start).

**Use quality data to inform strategic efforts.** [Experian](#) estimates that bad data (e.g. unreliable and inconsistently collected data) costs organizations 15% to 25% of revenue. Leadership Institute participants often share that they/ their coworkers are frustrated by the amount of data they collect that doesn't help them make better decisions. Using validated and verified 'good' data, for example CQL's [POM](#)<sup>®</sup> to measure quality of life outcomes, the Consortium's [OPPI](#) to holistically examine agency practices, or HSRI and NASDDDS' [NCI](#)<sup>®</sup> to look at systems trends in service quality or workforce support can substantially improve data usefulness and make your strategic efforts more impactful.

**Create a set of strategic data priorities.** Prioritizing which data is critical for your organization, or creating '[value modes](#)' that guide the types of information you gather and use to inform strategic decisions, gives your data purpose and clear alignment with agency vision and goals. Leaders who prioritize effectively focus on collecting data and information that informs current strategic priorities. Identifying value modes or data priorities helps you know what kind of data and information can be useful and helps you avoid the temptation to create a survey to answer every question that comes up in strategic meetings.

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