

The twenty-tile request is a symptom

Somebody asks for a dashboard with every indicator on it. That request is real and the specification in it is wrong, and the useful response is a question rather than a page — because a dashboard that answers no pending decision is one nobody opens twice.

Pierre Robentz Cassion

Lesson 1 of 8

Dashboards and Reporting — What it is for

What this lesson covers

- The request as it arrives
- The question to ask instead
- What each of the seven dashboards here is for
- Three tiles, not twenty
- What to do with the other seventeen
- The tile that should not be there
- Report it whole
- What comes next

The request as it arrives

"Can you build us a dashboard? We want coverage, admissions, defaulting, stock-outs, staffing, funding burn, beneficiary numbers by district and by month, and the indicators from the logframe."

The request as it arrives

- That is twenty tiles and it is a real request — Somebody wants to stop asking for numbers by email, and the dashboard. . .
- It is also a specification that guarantees a page nobody opens twice — Twenty numbers with no ordering is a table with. . .

The question to ask instead

- "What decision are you about to make, and what would change it?"
- They name a decision — "Which six communities get rehabilitation." Now you know the page has one job, the ordering is. . .
- They name a recurring meeting — "The monthly cluster call." Then the dashboard's job is to make that call shorter, and. . .
- They cannot answer — That is the most common outcome and it is a finding rather than a failure
- Write the answer down at the top of the page — in the words they used

What each of the seven dashboards here is for

Project	The decision it informs
WASH coverage	Which six of eighteen communities get water point rehabilitation
Nutrition screening	Where the next screening round and CMAM capacity go
Protection pathway	Which gate in the referral pathway to fix first
Food security	Which instrument the caseload figure is based on
School attendance	Which schools need an attendance response, and which look bad for a reporting reason
SMART survey	Whether the survey's quality permits publishing a prevalence at all
Vaccination coverage	Whether a coverage figure reflects service or a denominator

What each of the seven dashboards here is for

- None of them is "monitor the programme" — Each is a sentence with a verb in it, and the tiles are chosen by whether...

Three tiles, not twenty

- Three headline numbers, at the top, in the size of a headline — They are the ones the decision turns on
- One table underneath — which is the disaggregation the decision needs — by district, by commune, by stage
- One figure — if a shape matters
- Everything else goes behind a link — or into the report, or nowhere

Three tiles, not twenty — In Python

```
TILES = ["households surveyed", "improved source", "basic service", "no E. coli"]  
assert len(TILES) <= 4, "if this fails, something has to leave the page"
```

Three tiles, not twenty — In R

An assertion in the build is a more durable specification than an agreement.

Three tiles, not twenty

- Four is the practical ceiling — and three is better

What to do with the other seventeen

The ask	Where it belongs
Every logframe indicator	The quarterly report's annex table
Historic monthly series	A downloadable CSV, linked from the page
Beneficiary counts by everything	A pivotable export, not a page
Anything updated yearly	The report, not the dashboard
Anything nobody could name a use for	Nowhere, and say so

What to do with the other seventeen

- Offer the alternative in the same sentence as the refusal — "Not on the dashboard, but I will put every logframe. . .

The tile that should not be there — In Python

```
def earns_its_place(tile) -> bool:
    """Would any value of this number change a decision this quarter?"""
    return tile.decision is not None and tile.threshold is not None
```

The tile that should not be there — In R

If you cannot state the threshold, the tile is decoration.

The tile that should not be there

- Ask for the threshold — "At what value of this would you do something different?" A tile whose owner cannot answer is a . . .
- Total beneficiaries is the usual example — It goes up, everybody likes it, and no value of it changes anything

Report it whole — Example

Dashboard scope, WASH coverage project

Question the page answers: which six of eighteen communities receive water point rehabilitation in the next funding cycle.

On the page: households surveyed, improved source, basic service, share with no detectable E. coli; the district table; the source-against-service figure.

Requested and not included: monthly trend (the survey is a single round), every logframe indicator (quarterly annex), beneficiary totals (no threshold could be stated), staffing and funding burn (a different audience and a different page).

Agreed with the WASH coordinator on 2025-02-11. Revisit when the second survey round exists, which makes a trend meaningful for the first time.

Report it whole

- The "requested and not included" paragraph is the deliverable of this conversation — and writing it down is what stops. . .

What comes next

- A page with three numbers on it can still bury the one that matters.

Read the full lesson, with runnable code

[https://data-analysis.cassion.dev/courses/dashboards-and-reporting/
dash-01-refusing-the-twenty-tile-request](https://data-analysis.cassion.dev/courses/dashboards-and-reporting/dash-01-refusing-the-twenty-tile-request)