

Presenting the finding nobody commissioned

The committee asked whether the programme works. The answer is that the evaluation could not have told them, the seven-point gain was the school year, and the number in the last three proposals is not an effect. Here is how to say that in a room.

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Lesson 7 of 8

Dashboards and Reporting — The room

What this lesson covers

- The three unwelcome findings
- Lead with the decision, not the finding
- Bring the thing that would have been true
- What not to do
- The questions that will come, and the answers
- The number in the last three proposals
- Report it whole
- What comes next

The three unwelcome findings

- "The programme did not do what you thought." — Hard, and it is the one people prepare for
- "We cannot tell." — Harder, because it sounds like a failure of the analyst rather than of the design
- "The number you have been using is wrong." — Hardest, because somebody put it in a proposal, and the room contains the...
- All three arrive in this sector regularly — and the difference between a career-limiting meeting and a useful one is...

Lead with the decision, not the finding

- Not this — methodology, then data, then results, then the awkward part at minute eighteen when half the room has. . .
- This — the recommendation, then the one sentence that supports it, then the detail for whoever wants it

Lead with the decision, not the finding — Example

"My recommendation is that you do not expand the programme on the basis of this evaluation, and do not discontinue it either.

Literacy rose seven points in programme schools. It also rose in the schools without the programme, by slightly more. The seven points are the school year.

Separately, this evaluation was not large enough to detect the three-point difference you would act on, which was knowable before it ran. I can show you what a study that could detect it would need."

Lead with the decision, not the finding

- Sixty seconds, and the room now knows what you are asking for — Everything after that is answering questions rather. . .

Bring the thing that would have been true

- "Here is what we would have seen if the programme were working at the size you care about." — Then show that it is not. . .
- And bring the cost of knowing — "Sixty schools instead of twenty-four" is a concrete, priceable thing, and a committee. . .
- A recommendation makes an unwelcome finding survivable — Without one the meeting is about whether you are right; with. . .

What not to do

- Do not soften the number — "Roughly flat" for a -0.96 with an interval from -3.5 to $+1.6$ is a kindness that gets quoted. . .
- Do not offer the flattering disaggregation — There is always a subgroup where the programme looks like it worked
- Do not blame the data — "The data quality was poor" is usually false and always sounds like an excuse
- Do not apologise for the finding — You did not cause it

The questions that will come, and the answers

Question	The answer
"Can we look at it by district?"	Yes, and here is the multiple-comparison count first
"The other agency reports 76%"	Different indicator; here is the definitions panel
"Can you re-run it excluding those schools?"	Yes, as an exploratory analysis, labelled
"So it doesn't work?"	No — the study could not detect an effect of the size you care about
"What do we tell the donor?"	This, in three sentences, and I will draft it

The questions that will come, and the answers

- The last row is the one to volunteer — The committee's real problem is often not your finding but what they now have to...

The number in the last three proposals

- Establish it privately first — Take it to the person who owns the number before the meeting
- Separate the error from the person — "The improved-source figure omitted delivered water, which the JMP definition. . .
- Say which direction and how much — 79.7% to 82.3% is a correction that makes coverage look *better*, and saying so. . .
- Bring the corrected version, the change log entry and the check that would have caught it earlier — A correction with a. . .

The number in the last three proposals — Example

Change log: 2026-07-29, improved source corrected from 79.7% to 82.3%.
Delivered water was omitted from the JMP improved list. The definitions document had it right; the analysis code did not. The pipeline now asserts its computed values against the definitions document, so the two cannot disagree silently again.

Report it whole — Example

Steering committee, 14 March

Presented: no detectable effect on literacy (-0.96 points, 95% CI -3.5 to $+1.6$), and the finding that the design's minimum detectable effect was 4.9 points against a threshold of interest of 3.

Recommendation: neither expand nor discontinue on this evidence. A design able to answer the question needs about 60 schools; randomising the order of the next roll-out costs nothing and would give a comparison group that does not have to be argued for.

Agreed: the 7-point gain will not be used in the next proposal. The programme team will consider randomising the 2026 expansion order.

Deferred: whether to fund a larger evaluation.

Report it whole

- The "agreed" line is the meeting's output — and writing it in the room is what stops the seven-point gain reappearing. . .

What comes next

- The last lesson turns the course on the seven dashboards this platform ships — what each one is for, what each refuses to show, and the one that exists because a number in this very course was wrong.

Read the full lesson, with runnable code

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https://data-analysis.cassion.dev/courses/dashboards-and-reporting/  
dash-07-when-it-is-not-what-they-wanted
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