

# TRANSFORMING THE INSIGHT FUNCTION

The Future of Insights

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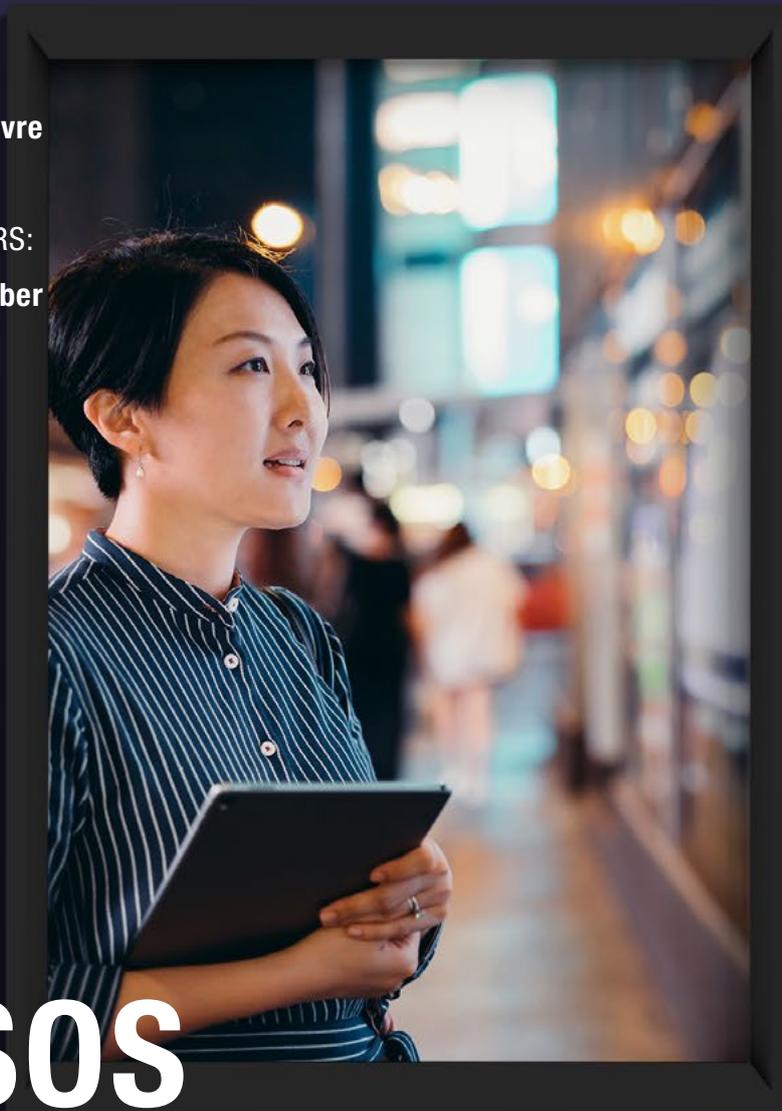
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# IPSOS VIEWS

GAME CHANGERS



## INTRODUCTION

Is your insight function a *real* source of competitive advantage? This is a challenge that has been posed to insight leaders for at least a decade now but the gap between delivery and expectations has only grown in recent years. Indeed:

- While one of the focus areas of the research function had traditionally been to own access to consumer understanding, with the emergence of social listening and new technologies various stakeholders in large companies now have direct access to consumers.
- The culture of "act and learn" has meant that some companies were prepared, at least for a while, to take risks without assessing frameworks on consumer and market dynamics.
- The exponential growth of data sources has led to the creation of new functions within organisations (data centres, digital teams, e-business etc.) as well as competing budgets.
- Insight has been missing a laser focus on the decisions the organisation is able to make and ownership of the outcomes of those decisions.

However, with the pandemic and the enhanced need to understand people's fast-evolving requirements, emotions and aspirations, we are seeing some insight leaders taking a strong and strategic lead within their organisation, addressing the challenges outlined above and giving clear guidance to their business in this new context. We believe this moment represents a formidable opportunity for the insight function to transform and elevate.

In this paper, we present an overview of what we have learned from talking and working with hundreds of clients across many industries and set out what we believe are actions that can be most instrumental in supporting this transformation.

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## TODAY'S REALITY: IN SEARCH OF COMPETITIVE EDGE

In the past few years, and even more so through the pandemic period, many companies have become increasingly aware that they need to show significant improvement on a number of dimensions in order to create a competitive edge. Here are some of the areas they have been addressing:

### ENHANCE CONSUMER OR EVEN HUMAN-CENTRICITY

- Recent research has charted how the pandemic has impacted the way people make decisions as consumers, but also as citizens. Through the ethnography work Ipsos runs globally, we often hear people saying things like, *"Post pandemic, I am more focused on what really matters, making more of life, taking pleasure in the small things. I want to buy from companies that are doing the small things to make a bigger difference in our world"*.
- In this fast-changing environment, it is more important than ever for companies to redefine, refine and constantly adjust their strategy to meet fast-evolving human needs.

### EMBRACE THE POWER OF DATA AND SCIENCE

The ever-growing availability of data sources, as well as the latest scientific developments in data, neuro and behavioural sciences, bring new opportunities to better anticipate people's needs, identify growth areas, forecast demand and realise efficiencies.

### HAVE FORESIGHT, DO SCENARIO PLANNING

- Big questions that all organisations face: what new practices, behaviours and attitudes will stick and, of course, what new trends might emerge tomorrow? The level of uncertainty around the health, social and economic context has meant that scenario planning has become indispensable to get structures prepared for various, and sometimes radically opposite, scenarios so that organisations can rapidly pivot to any of these futures.

### DRIVE AGILITY AND ACTION THROUGH THE ORGANISATION

- In a context that has been constantly changing, the ability to quickly adjust and mobilise resources to conduct changes is more important than ever. For example, how to adapt the supply chain, quickly optimise an e-commerce and omnichannel strategy, see opportunities for innovations, and implement different ways to talk to consumers.

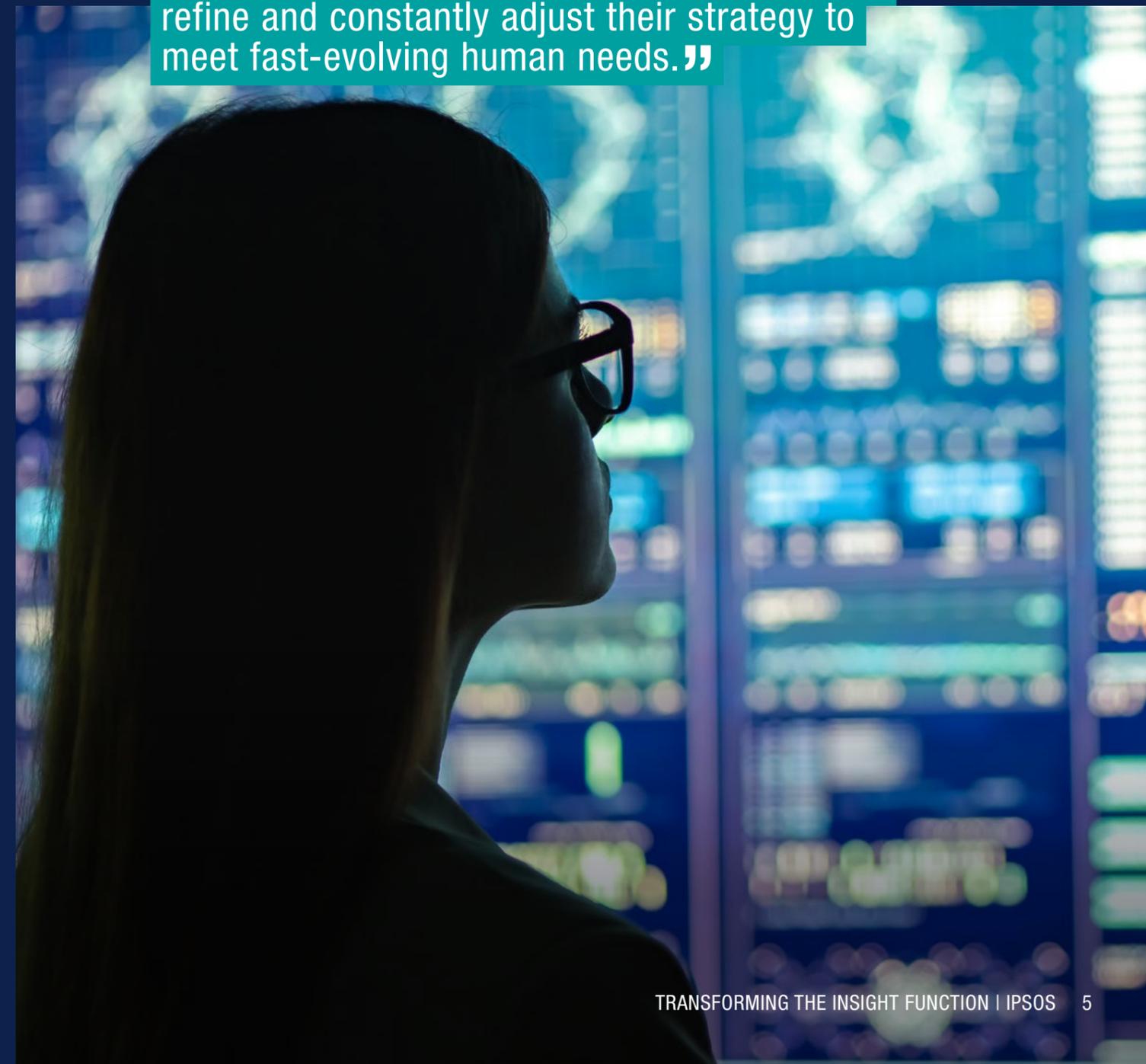
### DEMONSTRATE RETURN ON INVESTMENT FOR ALL EXPENDITURES (RESEARCH INCLUDED)

- With an increased emphasis on providing shareholder value, many organisations are closely examining their spends and need to show ROI or value against various budgets.

We have witnessed some of the leading insight teams earning their seat at the table through taking a strong leadership role on the dimensions set out above. One of the ideas

behind this paper has been to share some examples of how these successful initiatives have materialised.

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# HOW THE INSIGHT FUNCTION CAN BECOME A DRIVING FORCE

Our intention here is to bring some perspectives on how the insight function can transform, for example through new ways of working and rethinking needs, when the right talent and skills are in place.

This is because it is clear that, throughout the industry, the role of insights does and should move as follows:

FROM	TO
Being an impartial observer of the consumer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bringing the voice of the consumer-citizen to the table</li> <li>Driving human-centricity through the organisation</li> </ul>
Telling the business what happened	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pointing the business to <i>what might happen</i></li> <li>Foresight, scenario planning</li> </ul>
Data acquisition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Humanising data</li> <li>Looking at multiple data sources and scientific approaches to triangulate, speed up and enhance decision-making</li> <li>Taking ownership of business decisions</li> </ul>
Using research as judge and jury	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Using research to identify growth opportunities, develop world-class products and brands</li> <li>Having a POV, being provocateurs, challenging the status quo</li> </ul>
Belonging to marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Servicing and inspiring various parts of the business</li> <li>Driving collaboration and action</li> <li>Demonstrating the value of spend for the business</li> </ul>

But what does success look like, in practical terms? We identified several components which

seem to be particularly evident where insight functions have been able to elevate their role.

## KEY SUCCESS FACTORS: A CHECKLIST

### CHAMPION A CULTURE OF HUMAN EMPATHY

Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) professor on empathy, Sherry Turkle, says that many organisations are rethinking their culture, post-Covid. This is because they realise that they were good at making rules, but they took a lot of false steps and did not show real empathy for their employees and customers. They now need to rethink how to be better at empathy in an environment that embraces friction and uncertainty.

The insight team is best placed to take the lead in setting corporate programmes whereby all executives, including the most senior ones, can benefit from getting close to people's real lives. PepsiCo, with their programme "HumanEyes", alongside others including L'Oréal, GSK and CPW, have successfully established immersion programmes, encouraging everyone within their organisations to insert themselves into another person's problems and listen and engage with consumers and citizens in a way that really resonates.

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### OWN FORESIGHT, IDENTIFY GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES

Strong insight teams tend to take ownership of the area of trends and increasingly work on trend predictability. Some companies have teams dedicated to imagining the future, examining developments in key regions, and exploring the implications for strategy. More generally, scenario planning is an area that several insight teams are looking at developing.

Unilever's Consumer Market Insights (CMI) division was one of the first to organise such a specialist team. Under the leadership of Bill Marshall (Global Director, Human & Cultural Futures), this team is dedicated to imagining the future – both near and long-term – and advising Unilever's management on the implications for marketing and business strategy. In addition, since Unilever is a purpose-led company, sustainability (partnering with the Chief Sustainability Officer Rebecca Marmot and her teams) is also a key part of the role – bringing a specific lens to also interpret what the research means in this context. Bill, who has much experience in leading multicultural knowledge and insights teams, ensures that the function is highly interconnected to the rest of CMI as well as to top management. He works with colleagues in Unilever's different divisions so that they can also interpret top-line trends and foresight from a specific category and brand focus. All of this helps to ensure that cultural insight and foresight are at the heart of important business decisions and means that CMI is actively helping to drive business impact.

**ESTABLISH A DATA STRATEGY; IDENTIFY PRIORITY BUSINESS AREAS TO BE EXPLORED THROUGH DATA AND SCIENCES**

The world of data is broad and often pre-empted by finance, IT or sometimes digital teams. In some places though it is insight teams who have taken the lead in driving productivity, efficiencies and enhanced forecasting in the area of sales and marketing. Their scope can also be extended to covering the area of consumer retention and designing interventions to reduce churn rates, for example. Credibility is established through developing use cases and working with the business leaders to optimise activation.

One illustration can be found with Reckitt, who last year launched their interactive Marketing Excellence Village to drive marketing transformation by engaging marketers across the entire organisation. The Insights & Analytics (I&A) team plays a critical role in developing this transformation, and it has come together as one function under the leadership of Elaine Rodrigo. She believes in the power of one I&A team, who seamlessly connect all data and insights, to build consumer-centricity and drive faster, better data-driven business decisions. Data & Analytics under Richard Moule is a key pillar of I&A, with a scope progressively extending from media and marketing spends, to revenue management and trade optimisation. Key to the success of this team has been their ability to engage with business leaders in markets and to demonstrate how their work empowers markets to fuel their own growth. Elaine highlights the importance of having data "storytellers" in her team, people who are data savvy but who can also bring texture and context to the numbers, tell a story, and connect the dots to answer the big business questions.

**INTRODUCE AGILE WAYS OF WORKING, COLLABORATION AND ACTIVATION**

At a time when companies need to quickly adjust, advanced insight teams can establish a culture of agility, encouraging "sprint" approaches, insights on demand and experimenting with real-time data. They are also uniquely placed to democratise knowledge and recommendations through collaborative platforms.

Agile is an increasingly important way of working in GSK Consumer Healthcare. As Zoe Ruffels, Global Head of Consumer & Business Insights & Analytics, puts it, *"In Insights and Analytics, we have very successfully applied 'Agile' to the development of our innovation products and processes, enabling us to bring richer ideas to the business, accelerate production and delivery and ultimately reach much stronger outcomes."*

**IMPLEMENT A PROCESS TO PROACTIVELY DEMONSTRATE THE VALUE OF RESEARCH**

This includes being able to show the impact of the investment in research, of course, but also be involved in evaluating the success of the initiatives and decisions that are taken, for example through building effectiveness models.

*This is a broad and much-debated topic that deserves a more in-depth treatment. It is the subject of a separate paper in this series.*

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# A TRANSFORMATION PROCESS

So, what needs to be in place in order to successfully inspire and implement tangible action?

Beyond specific initiatives, for an insight function to take effective leadership within an organisation it certainly needs a clear strategic

vision, alongside strong (and sometimes new) skills from the teams – both hard (e.g. data literacy, expertise in B-Sci) and soft (e.g. storytelling, facilitation skills).

We have started to articulate this in four steps:

## 1 DEFINE VISION AND IMPACT

- Define stakeholder motivation
- Set the ambition for business impact and measurement of success
- Define priorities and scope of transformation

## 2 EVALUATE GAPS AND BUILD A PLAN

- Understand how the role of insights should move for prioritised behaviour change
- Define key capability gaps and approaches
- Build implementation and activation plan including KPIs

## 3 LEARNING JOURNEY AND TRAINING

- Create rich content to address specific hard and soft capability needs
- Plan roll out journey, geographies, levels

## 4 MAINTAIN MOMENTUM

- Establish ways of working with partners
- Facilitate peer coaching sessions
- Track KPIs to monitor progress and impact

## 1. DEFINE VISION AND IMPACT

**The mission:** Some of the insight teams we have seen being most successful are those which have real clarity in their mission. Reaching this level of clarity can involve redefining the vision of what they need to do.

From our interviews with stakeholders inside large companies, it is clear that many are rethinking what is expected from them – including highlighting any gaps compared with where they are now. A central question here is identifying how they can contribute to the business. Two points stand out here:

- The insight function needs to be strongly endorsed by the most senior management in the company, for example the CEO and CMO, and this needs to be communicated to the entire organisation.
- This should extend to having a clear reporting line into the key influencers and decision-makers for those big decisions, for example on growth strategies and strategic decisions.

### A clear role versus other functions:

This starts with clarity on the decisions the organisation wants, and is able, to make. It is then about ensuring that the insight function is able to cut through *at the right moment* – to help the organisation make the right decision without waiting for briefs.

At the same time, the team must establish clarity about what they want to “own” (what they are doing, what other departments are doing *and* how they work together). For example:

- Partnering with CRM to help design interventions that will reduce churn rates.
- Connecting with digital/e-business teams. For example, some insights people are partnering with their digital teams to help optimise expenditure and targeting through a process that bridges marketing growth strategy and digital activation. It is important to clearly define who owns the process and execution.

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## 2. EVALUATE GAPS AND BUILD A PLAN

Once the aspiration is set, the next group of questions are all around being open about where the skills or capability gaps are. What might get in the way of moving from where the function is today to where it needs to be in the future? This could include short-term questions (for example around resourcing or specific skills gaps) to more fundamental points (for example on how to fully leverage many different sources of data).

All of this means that the research team of today needs a rather different blend of skills to the research function of the past. The collective CV of CMI needs to include many different skills (as highlighted below).

### THE CONSUMER MARKETS INSIGHTS (CMI) CV:

- Empathy with the consumer, including a grounding in relevant scientific thinking (neuroscience, psychology, behavioural science)
- Organisational acumen – i.e. the ability to connect and integrate with other groups and show leadership influencing skills
- Business acumen
- Data fluency and scientific literacy
- Storytelling skills
- Facilitation skills

## 3. LEARNING JOURNEY AND TRAINING

Then there are the questions around how the elevated insight function is able to both adapt to external changes *and* drive behaviour change across the organisation. Formal and informal learning programmes may be required here, for the team and potentially for other teams as well. For example, customer empathy is one area which is being given particular focus in many organisations.

Partners and suppliers may be able to support, for example on the “soft skills” that may be required to change mindsets, or to provide external challenge, or to embed protocols and procedures.

The more “strategic” researchers may need to take time out to explore exactly what needs to happen next in terms of ongoing training,

learning and reflection. In some cases, for example, a need has been identified for business analysts or business translators who understand the data world but are also able to operate at another level, in terms of understanding business implications and working on a peer-to-peer level with other decision-makers.

At Ipsos, we have been involved with designing and implementing specific learning programmes for clients who had a need to both trigger a change of posture from their insight leads and enhance their “hard” skills, for example in the arena of data and behavioural science. In this instance, experts in those specific areas, and others such as change management, are called in to make sure that the teams do embrace the new behaviours and skills that are expected from them.



## 4. MAINTAIN MOMENTUM

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we have the question of keeping going so that all this good practice becomes an accepted part of the organisation.

This is an ongoing mission which prompts a number of questions to consider along the way, including:

- Where are the success stories and are we communicating them? How do we ensure the insight function consolidates its role as a real influencer?
- Have we identified KPIs which will support the behaviour change we would like to see, and are they becoming part of the “language” of what we do?
- When it comes to deploying and applying the insights, are there lead users or role models elsewhere in the organisation and are they acting as advocates or ambassadors?



## IN SUMMARY

This is an exciting time for insight leaders.

If we get this right, there is a huge opportunity for the insight function to help drive cultural transformation and to future-proof the company, making it better equipped to address the opportunities and challenges of new, hybrid realities.

Insight is uniquely placed to become the engine of change. It opens the window for the whole company to deeply understand humans. And it provides the light for acting upon that understanding to develop better products and services as well as, ultimately, better business results.

# TRANSFORMING THE INSIGHT FUNCTION

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The “Future of Insights” series presents new thinking about how our industry is transforming. Shaped by Ipsos’ Global Client Organisation, these white papers are based on the very rich discussions we have been having with our clients about how research is changing and how to elevate its impact. We very much welcome your thoughts, and look forward to further engaging with many of you on each of these topics.

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