



# The Art of Persuasive Communication in the Workplace

Qlik Innovation and Design Research Digest, Winter 2016



# Of Many Persuasions

Welcome to the second of our Qlik Innovation and Design Research Digests. Our subject this time is persuasion in business. In particular, we have looked at strategies and techniques we use when sharing and discussing findings in order to influence an outcome.

As always our work on this digest started with some raw research. Advaiya Solutions surveyed over 200 people based in the USA and Canada to understand their methods and approaches to business persuasion. One reason we focussed on the USA and Canada alone is simply because we expect cultural issues to have a strong bearing on the results. Working for a US company with a Swedish soul (and with most of us on the Innovation and Design team being from the UK) we are quite aware of these advantages, or problems, or issues ... let's just call them "features" of an organization.

However, although we felt the survey would benefit from a more homogeneous sample, we most certainly have not ignored cultural effects in this digest. We feature an absorbing and compelling interview by James Richardson with Crighton Nichols of PwC in Australia. Crighton has made special study of knowledge and narrative in indigenous Australian culture and he applies profound insights from the work in his understanding of business culture. "You can't really separate design from narrative or story," he observes "Because they are understood as very much the same thing." This resonates clearly with our own work, but please do read the full interview. It reveals so much about how different cultures can radically differ in their understanding of knowledge and the role of narrative.

## The Tales we Tell

Storytelling - and its limitations - are also in mind as James Richardson shares some of his own personal thinking about the "Unreliable Narrator." This phrase originates in literary and film criticism, but James, as our Business Analytics Strategist, examines how we can use this concept in data storytelling and in business narratives. In particular, rather than chasing "perfect data" he claims that we must accept that "unreliable narration is a given." Sometimes this unreliability is accidental, but often it is a key element of the business of persuasion.

Murray Grigo-McMahon, our Design Strategist, picks up this theme as he considers the hidden persuaders behind our data insights. He reminds us that "when we set out



to persuade we set out to sell.” In doing this selling, we fall back on tricks and techniques to persuade, even if unconsciously. All this talk of unreliability and hidden persuasion may leave you feeling that even data cannot give us dependable insight, but Murray reminds us of Carl Sagan’s “baloney detection kit” as a means of assessing not only the persuasion techniques of others, but our own too.

To get a sense of how these complex issues affect real decisions in the world of business, Scott Humphrey, of Humphrey Strategic Communications, has interviewed some interesting persuaders in the world of data and analytics. Drawing on visualization expertise, deep experience with analytics and high-tech marketing, his conversations range over many of the subjects in our survey with practical clarity. From visualizing a hamburger to the need for “data interpreters” in business, it’s a great read.

## The Leader’s Voice

Finally, we have the survey itself, and I think you’ll find the results fascinating. As I first read through the responses about preferred ways of communicating, I was immediately reminded of work done by Clarke and Crossland in their outstanding book, “The Leader’s Voice.”

As they consider how leaders communicate and persuade, Clarke and Crossland describe “quadrants of communication.” They distinguish first between private and public interactions. Private communication is typically one-to-one, while public is one-to-many. However, they also talk about direct and indirect methods.

The most significant feature of direct communication is feedback and interaction. Whether presenting to a group in person (public and direct) or having a quiet conversation (private and direct) in each case you can gauge the reactions of your audience. And, as compulsive communicators, we adjust our techniques in response. In other words, direct communication is always a dialog in some form, and the best communicators are highly aware of that interaction and work with it.

With indirect communication, on the other hand, responses are delayed. When I send an email to a colleague (a private, indirect contact) they can take time and carefully judge their reply to me - and I am not directly aware of their anxiety, or amusement or bafflement as they do so. As we are often made aware when we get it wrong, indirect communication can be fraught with difficulties. When indirect communication is public (such as a group email) we often face the challenge of ensuring the message can be understood by all the recipients in the various complex contexts in which they read it. And haven’t we all received group emails where that attempt simply didn’t work? Our survey reveals strong preferences for direct and, where possible, private communication. For example, even where a discussion has been indirect, if more discussion is needed the majority surveyed (64%) prefer the follow-up to be direct.

However, perhaps most relevant to Clarke and Crossland’s theme of leadership communication, there is a marked difference in preferences between non-supervisors

and those in supervisory roles. 90% of non-supervisors prefer direct, in-person, communication. But when we look at supervisors or managers, the numbers are considerably lower, between 50–75%.



## Persuaded?

I do hope you will enjoy this new Research Digest. Personally, I find the content engrossing. Meanwhile, please feel free to share feedback and your own insights. We cannot promise to answer every email, but we do look forward to hearing from you.

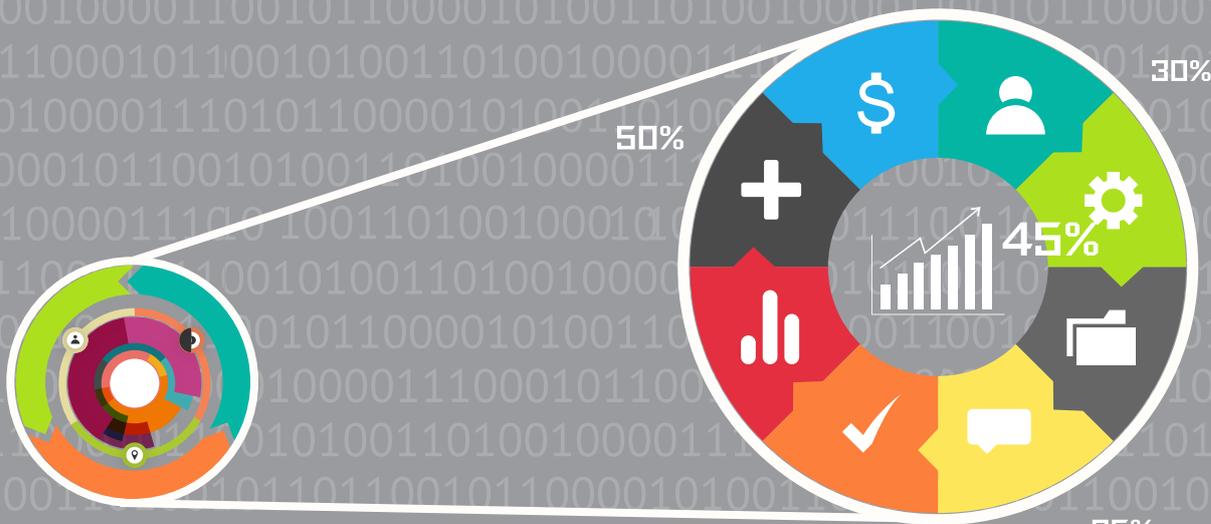
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## Spinning Data Yarns

### When we're looking for insights, how much should we rely on the stories told?

Storytelling is a hot (or should that read hyped?) term in the analytics field right now. This is because it's undeniable that narrative forms have the potential to deliver information in a way that people find compelling, and so hopefully prompt us to take action. People are born storytellers, and a tale with a beginning, middle and an end is a form we're all used to, and as applicable to data as it is to any other time-based aspect of human experience. However, storytelling is rarely that simple. Any narrative has a narrator, and that narrator inevitably has a viewpoint, which may make them unreliable.

The term 'unreliable narrator' was coined by academic Wayne C. Booth in 'The Rhetoric of Fiction' in 1961. In his original work he defined an unreliable narrator as one whose trustworthiness and credibility is consciously compromised in a work of fiction.

Even if the term is unfamiliar, we've all encountered unreliable narrators. They're widely represented in film and literature. Some are obvious, like Holden Caulfield in J.D. Salinger's classic *Catcher in the Rye*, who narrates to us even after describing himself as 'the most terrific liar you ever saw in your life'. Some are terrifying like Patrick Bateman in Brett Eason Ellis' '*American Psycho*'. Many are hidden – take the 2014 Hollywood movie, *Gone Girl*, where the two main characters tell completely

opposing stories, so you slowly learn that at least one of them is unreliable.

Before I get pulled up on this, I'm aware that Booth was at pains to separate the author from the narrator in his literary critical analysis. In fiction 'narrators' are constructed mechanisms by the author or director, with unreliability a technique to throw us off the scent of the author's intentions. This is not usually the case with data storytelling, where we are narrator/authors. There are exceptions – people may adopt a narrative voice when they annotate a data story, and it's not uncommon for one person to author the story while another presents it.

Regardless of these subtleties however, it's interesting and instructive to view data storytelling through the critical lens and consider how narrative works. This is particularly true if we use a more recent definition: "Unreliable narrators are a type of first-person-driven narratives that give the audience the opportunity to make their own interpretations of a story."<sup>1</sup> Questioning the prevailing narrative is something that we do when we dispute someone's presentation of 'the facts' in a meeting, when we deconstruct their data story

In some situations, an unreliable narrative could arise because the narrator has their own agenda and reasons for presenting information with some spin – telling us the facts they've decided they want us to know, but omitting or downplaying things they'd rather we didn't. This is being wittingly unreliable. In business this type of narrative is most commonly seen when someone is trying to persuade their colleagues, customers or suppliers to adopt a course of action, and so present arguments backed with carefully selected data to do so. This is clearly shown in the survey data where people use a variety of means to get others on their side. There can be a dark-side here though, one of the issues undermining BI take-up that I first wrote about years ago is managers' desire to dance with the numbers, usually using spreadsheets to alter data and put their own <ahem> gloss on data trends.

On the other hand, and far more commonly, an unreliable narrative could arise because human brains aren't able to fully recall every single piece of information to replay a wholly accurate narrative. Human memory is inherently unreliable. This is a well-known phenomenon and even has a name, the Ebbinghaus curve of forgetting. The curve says that we predictably edit our memories over time, and start to tell different narratives to ourselves, gradually forgetting pieces of information we subconsciously consider irrelevant and subsequently amend what happened in our brain. It might seem to us like the narrative we're telling is exactly the way events occurred, or what the data says, but we're very likely unintentionally missing out important information. This isn't just a data storytelling issue. The Ebbinghaus effect impacts witness statement accuracy in criminal investigations, especially as time passes and the process of inevitable, unwitting self-mythologizing happens. It's also a problem for historians, especially when interviewing eye-witnesses of even relatively recent events. As John Higgs notes of researching pop culture in the 1960s:

"I noticed a surprising pattern in the data. Time and time again, older books, letters and interviews proved to be far more illuminating than first-hand interviews. It soon became apparent that accounts of events changed over time, and that the 'truth' of

1. <http://study.com/academy/lesson/unreliable-narrator-definition-examples.html>

what happened depended very much of the date of your source... These differing sources revealed the drift away from the raw chaos of what actually happened into a neater, simpler narrative which didn't always match the original sources."<sup>2</sup>

To any audience, these untold stories could be of prime importance; what they actually want or need to know. A narrator may not know they're being unreliable through omission, but rather, they're just telling their audience as much as they can from their point of view, working from within their frame of reference. As such, any audience will gauge whether what they're seeing or being told is accurate enough or not, or whether it's even relevant or not to them, or even if it's understandable by them. Any narrative has an implied reader (to use another of Booth's terms). This is who the author, via the narrator, intended the story for based on a series of assumptions about their ability to read it. The implied reader has two functions:

"First, the implied reader can function as a presumed addressee to whom the work is directed and whose linguistic codes, ideological norms, and aesthetic ideas must be taken into account if the work is to be understood. In this function, the implied reader is the bearer of the codes and norms presumed in the readership. .. Second, the abstract reader functions as an image of the ideal recipient who understands the work in a way that optimally matches its structure and adopts the interpretive position and aesthetic standpoint put forward by the work."<sup>3</sup>



To put it in less academic terms, an implied reader (or audience) acts as the receiver and decoder of what's being sent in the story. If they cannot decode the content, then the meaning is lost. When creating data stories for internal use the implied reader is usually known, but nevertheless they may lack the data literacy to fully read the story or fail to get the context. When it comes to data stories that are published more widely for consumption outside of the originating organization there is a danger of contextual or referential misalignment on top of those issues.

So why is all of this relevant in the world of data and business analytics?

2. John Higgs, 'The KLF: Chaos, Magic and the Band who Burned a Million Pounds' (2013), pp17.
3. [http://wikis.sub.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/index.php/Implied\\_Reader](http://wikis.sub.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/index.php/Implied_Reader)

Business decision makers are increasingly provided with information artefacts in the workplace that are intended to inform them how a situation began and will develop, whether that's triggered by the sales figures for the past quarter or the levels of staff absence over the past couple of months. Often the data is narrated as a series of time-series or chronologically ordered visualisations which are often highly crafted. The question is can the story be taken at face value? Is the narrator reliable?

They might be wittingly unreliable (think of a bar chart where an axis range is used to emphasize difference across a series) or unwittingly unreliable (perhaps omitting a chart that was used in the development of the story). Further, it's often the case that polished visualizations have a strong editorial bias – for example an infographic which uses emotive symbols or colours. To be most effective and ameliorate unreliability and bias, data stories need to be part of the flow of analysis, within the same environment and used actively not passively.

We need to think critically when presented with a data story or series of visualisations. What is required is activity around data stories, not just listening or absorbing. Data analysis needs to be about engagement and participation. This is why it's critical to preserve the context (or viewpoint) of the data that the narrator/author used in building in a data story – as it acts for a springboard to ask questions, test assumptions and flex the original context. This is key in the successful communication of any data narrative.

Unreliable narration is a given. Any business developing its data analysis practice and program should consider how it can use the inherent unreliability in narratives as a trigger to engagement. All stories need to be unpicked, people need to debate, and the author/narrator questioned on reliability. People might not be trying to trick their colleagues with their narratives, but organizations could still end up with misdirected outcomes if they blindly assume what they're hearing and seeing is the whole story.

As D. H. Lawrence wrote, "Never trust the teller, trust the tale. The proper function of a critic is to save the tale from the artist who created it."<sup>4</sup> Never has that been truer than when it comes to data analysis and storytelling.

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4. D.H. Lawrence, taken from 'Studies in Classic American Literature' (1923)



# Hidden Persuasion, Propaganda and Manipulation in Data Narratives

For many of us our job requires us to persuade others to do what we are suggesting. To garner support for what we believe, think, or want. Not as some megalomaniac dictator, but rather and more often to simply work towards a common goal, to support a common interest. But persuasion must not be about manipulation or control and the brutal enforcement of one idea over another. To be successful and beneficial for all, it has to be the meeting of minds, the arrival together at an agreed way forward. When Blaise Pascal suggested that persuasion must be eloquent and “requires the pleasant and the real; but the pleasant must itself be drawn from the true”\*, he wasn’t only talking about how we persuade but also the integrity of that act.

When we set out to persuade it’s all too easy to fall into the ‘dark arts’. These are the techniques and approaches we have all learnt, if not directly by working in politics, advertising, PR or propaganda, then by exposure to them. By now we all know the power of storytelling for persuading others. 10 years ago digital advertising and marketing agencies were repackaging themselves as ‘digital storytellers’ (there’s even a Linked In group called that). Over the last few years storytelling has become one of the hot must have business skills, thanks mostly to the rise of the TED talk and the realisation that ‘death by PowerPoint’ doesn’t help anyone. Today there’s a huge amount of advice on how to be a ‘killer storyteller’, how to make every presentation resonate with the audience, how to be a TED talker.

If you are actively involved in data visualization and analytics then storytelling is seen as an essential part of how you share data insights. You simply have to ‘tell stories with the data’. It’s the key to leveraging the hot engaging and persuasive power of the narrative to support the cool, neutral facts in the data. The narrative helps you frame it, position its impact and stress the importance you have assigned to it. For many years it was the opposite of this, at least for journalists. It wasn’t about ‘data storytelling’. Instead the cool numeric ‘facts’ were used to legitimise and shore up the argument, to add a convincing air of expertise, often ignoring the original context or



any scientific rigour. It's that practice that brought forth the fabulous phrase "lies, damn lies and statistics" (the history of which is a great story in it's own right <sup>1</sup>).

Many of us have chosen to 'flip the script' and now present the data as the story by placing the data via the visualisation upfront, in an attempt to lay the facts bare. However, when we present data we must be careful not to engage in the "prettying of falsehoods"<sup>\*</sup>. We must keep a close eye on the integrity of the act, creating an empathetic engagement with those who we hope to communicate with. Unfortunately we often fall into the same traps and transgressions that all storytellers must navigate. We know that for our stories to persuade they need to be compelling and captivate our audiences. We are told this over and over again. What's more we intrinsically know this as we are all readers, listeners and watchers. We are all the consumers of other people's stories, we know what we want from that experience. As authors and storytellers we look to frameworks such as Dan and Chip Heath's S.U.C.C.E.S.S (Simple, Unexpected, Concrete, Credible, Emotional, Stories, Stick <sup>2</sup>) to help us up our game. We work hard on the craft, the packaging of our facts and our delivery. But if you are competing in a narrative arms race where everyone seems to be presenting the next TED talk then sometimes you may find yourself turning to those afore mentioned dark arts.

In one way or another when we set out to persuade we set out to sell, whether that's an idea, a fact or a falsehood. In the 1950's book *The Hidden Persuaders*, Vance Packard wrote about how the Advertising and Public Relations industry persuades people to buy things by leveraging subconscious or 'hidden' needs. The book offers a much simpler view of people and marketing than we have today. It's written before the advances in behavioural economics and the deeper understanding of motivation we now have, but the 8 hidden needs he identified still ring surprisingly true. They are the buttons that get pushed, that nudge us towards this product or that and have underlined many of the narratives and stories of the commercial world. When we create our business presentations or construct a data visualisation we aren't likely to be embracing these deep psychological tools. We may not be trying to convince our audience that unless they believe that "variance in spend on X has a significant influence on long-term profitability" they will be doomed to be alone in the world. We rarely consciously construct our stories to address our need for emotional security, reassurance of worth, ego gratification, creative outlet, love objects, sense of power, roots or immortality <sup>3</sup>. But it's there under the surface. What Packard identified was the subtlety, power and sophistication of the tools we use to persuade people. The more we feel the need to persuade via a single authorial voice (to tell someone something), the more we are likely to leverage these hidden needs. Even if don't set out to actively manipulate we employ tricks and techniques to make this 'fact' resonate, feel important and engage our audience, so that they remember the value that we have assigned to it. And it's not just down to the storyteller, our audiences are complicit in the exchange, as soon as we take up the role of the narrator, the audience's expectation is set; "here we are now, entertain us". We instantly bring forth this dynamic; storyteller and audience, us and them. We want the audience to accept our story, they want to be engaged and we want to give them what they want. And in that, according to Scott Berkun is the "moral trap of storytelling"<sup>4</sup>. Just how far do you go in giving them what they want?

1. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lies,\\_damned\\_lies,\\_and\\_statistics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lies,_damned_lies,_and_statistics)

2. *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die* Chip & Dan Heath

3. *The Hidden Persuaders* - Vance Packard, also see [http://changingminds.org/explanations/needs/packard\\_needs.htm](http://changingminds.org/explanations/needs/packard_needs.htm)

4. Scott Berkun - <http://scottberkun.com/2015/the-four-lies-of-storytelling/>

As my colleague James Richardson points out in *Spinning Data Yarns* often we unwittingly become unreliable narrators. Where even unbeknown to ourselves, we craft the story to suit an implied reader, to fit our agenda, to support an existing belief. Whether that's by deliberately leaving things out, to help 'clarify the message', or making 'best guesses' when we don't have the supporting data, or skipping over or lingering too long on one fact over another, or even simply changing the order of things to add drama and a more powerful finish. These activities sound pretty devious, but are very much part of good storytelling. They are key to a great narrative and reflect the structures and rhythms we have come to expect, the 'who dunnit', the 3 acts or the hero's journey.

Ultimately the only way to avoid these dark arts is to step away the monologue and the narrator, the authorial voice. If it's truly about a common endeavour then must be about collaboration. That requires shunning of the trappings of the single narrative. It has to be a real exchange, a debate, a shared experience of discovery. Where the facts and insights are teased out, questioned and validated together. Where the narrator has no special status, and it's not about the authority of their position or voice. Where we can get back to the scientific rigour that we believe our data brings to the table and be open to Carl Sagan's 'baloney detection kit' <sup>5</sup>, where we:

- Check the facts or get independent verification,
- encourage debate from knowledgeable proponents for all points of view,
- ignore authority,
- create multiple hypotheses for a single idea,
- question your own ideas and be willing to kill your darlings,
- quantify our findings and open up the data,
- examine every link in the chain of argument,
- employ Occam's razor and select the simpler of two equally well suited hypotheses,
- and always ask whether the hypothesis can be falsified.

All this is about debate, not story, not presentation. Only through this active engagement can we get to the eloquence that Pascal spoke of. Because as Pascal pointed out 400 years ago:

"People are generally better persuaded by the reasons which they have themselves discovered than by those which have come into the mind of others."<sup>\*</sup>

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\* Thanks to Maria Popova's brilliant Brain Pickings for the Pascal references <https://www.brainpickings.org/2015/05/20/blaise-pascal-pensees-persuasion/>

5. The Demon-Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark – Carl Sagan





## “Everything is Knowledge” – A Conversation with Crighton Nichols

During the Qlik Innovation & Design (IAD) team’s travel we met and began a conversation with Crighton Nichols of PwC in Australia. Crighton was struck by the resonance between how we’re beginning to talk about storytelling and design and his ongoing study of Indigenous people’s ‘ways of knowing’ and use of design and story to encode and transmit knowledge.

We thought it would be good to continue the conversation and capture Crighton’s intriguing, thought-provoking and instructive views. Please note that the following has been lightly edited for readability.

**IAD (James):** Why this particular area of study and specifically why the transmission of information and knowledge through story and design?

**CN (Crighton):** My undergraduate degrees at university were in engineering and physics, so I had a very technical background. After graduating, I ended up working in software development. However, I realized fairly early – I was debugging someone else’s code, they were dereferencing a pointer – that this wasn’t what I wanted to spend the rest of my life doing. But I wasn’t sure what I wanted to do instead. A critique of the dominant education system that I share with some prominent educators<sup>1</sup> is that it doesn’t help students discover what they really want to do with their lives. I was certainly one of those people; I ended up working in the corporate IT space for about a decade almost by default. In between contracts I spent a lot of time traveling and reflecting on what

1. For example, see “Changing Education Paradigms”, RSA Animate of a speech by Sir Ken Robinson: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zDZFcDGpL4U> (accessed 22 November 2015).

I was more interested in learning about, which led me to the field of humanitarian development. I was very intrigued by the way different cultures were using information and communication technologies. For example, how in Africa mobile phones are used for a whole range of applications. It was this idea of technology and human development in different cultural contexts that I found fascinating, the way groups of people were appropriating certain technologies in different ways. So, I ended up studying a Master's degree in humanitarian development in Sweden. By the time I graduated I realized this field was one of my passions. It's not that I'd given up on technology; I still find technology very interesting. I just wasn't sure how to apply my interest in technology to my passion for the field of humanitarian development. Soon after I experienced one of those serendipitous moments that led me to enroll in a PhD at Sydney University, with a supervisor who had research funding for me to investigate technology and development, specifically in the design and appropriation of technology.

**IAD:** The thing that struck me in your research was the narrative of globalization from a different perspective. Globalization is kind of bulldozer in terms of indigenous cultures, and the danger of the risk of loss of language, of loss of other views of humanity.

**CN:** Globalization is certainly a double-edged sword. It's not all bad; there are some obvious benefits to it. However, if you look at the way it transpired, a 'bulldozer' metaphor is probably fairly apt. When the European cultures spread across the world and found other indigenous cultures and tried to 'assimilate' them, there was an underlying belief of European superiority and social Darwinism. As a consequence, indigenous cultures around the world suffered at the hands of the colonizing forces. I think it's a mistake, and disrespectful, to divorce globalization from its colonial roots.

**IAD:** Based on the papers you shared with us it's evident that Europeans simply didn't understand that the ecosystem of Australia was a managed environment, and had been managed for 40-50,000 years. They completely overlooked that, and so made some disastrous choices vis-à-vis the management of the ecosystem. This was a managed environment successfully run for millennia by cultures that, from a European perspective, didn't have identifiable education systems. How did the First Australians do this? How did they make use of story and the design artifacts to transmit that knowledge for such an incredibly long period of time?

**CN:** A book that focuses on the topic of the sustainability of First Australian knowledge management practices is *Treading Lightly*, co-written by Karl Erik Sveiby and Tex Skuthorpe. Even the reason this book exists is fascinating. Karl Erik Sveiby is a Swedish knowledge management professor who has done a lot of research on sustainable knowledge management practices. At one point he was in Australia and the question dawned on him: How did the oldest continuous cultures on Earth manage and transmit their knowledge between generations? When Europeans first settled Australia, they failed to realize the impact that the First Australians had on the environment. There's a book by Prof. Bill Gammage, *The Biggest Estate on Earth*, which proposes the entire continent was a highly

managed landscape. However, it wasn't seen that way by the colonizing forces. There's another great book on Aboriginal architecture by Prof. Paul Memmott, called *Gunya, Goondie + Wurley*. Most Australians don't believe there is such a thing as Aboriginal architecture, but it was really quite diverse and sophisticated. Just because something isn't obvious or easily understood, doesn't mean it doesn't exist. The bias that people have, and the fact that very few people had even bother asking the sort of questions Karl Erik had, or looked into these topics, was indicative of the current situation in Australia where Aboriginal knowledge often isn't seen as particularly valuable. It took Swedish knowledge management professor to come here and ask questions for it to be really explored. So Karl Erik met Tex, a Noonghaburra Elder and knowledge authority from the Goodooga region in north-western New South Wales, and one of the first questions he asked Tex was: "What is the word for 'knowledge' in your language?" And Tex replied with something along the lines of: "We don't have a word for 'knowledge,' because knowledge is inherent in everything we do, the land we walk on, the trees, the plants, everything... Everything is knowledge." And that was an interesting enough response to Karl Erik that he wanted to learn more. So he and Tex became good friends over many years, exploring each other's cultural understandings of what knowledge meant and how it was transmitted between generations. Eventually, they decided they should write a book together, *Treading Lightly*. This book discusses in quite a lot of detail how the Noonghaburra use narratives for the process of knowledge transfer, and how it forms the basis of their quite sophisticated education systems. For example, the stories themselves have many layers, so you can tell a single story to someone, and their understanding of the story will change over the course of their life, as they reflect on and understand it in different ways. The Elders would never share all of the levels of the story directly with the students; it would be up to the students to question, or to understand and to ask the right questions, but to do that in the right context, as well.

**IAD:** The layering of the stories, the fact that this is a method for the transmission of information and knowledge is done in a layered and nuanced way is instructive and sophisticated. "Storytelling" is a hot term right now in BI and analytics but the level of understanding of what a story is, of a narrative, of the role of the listener, viewer or reader, is very naïve. There's a failing to understand the implied reader, and the work that the reader has to do to extract meaning. So I was very struck by the fact that as an education system the layers are not made explicit. The listener in the First Australian culture has to work to get the meaning from the stories. Is that a fair categorization?

**CN:** Yes, at a high level. The way we go about education in Western society is a process of data manufacture. To change a system that is very factory-like in its design, and obviously its origins are from the period of industrialization, to one where education is inherently personal, requires an entirely new paradigm. The First Australian education system is entirely personalized. It's very much up to each person to decide at their own pace, and based on their own interests,



which stories they would learn, and how deep they would go. There was no requirement for them to have learned certain stories or reach certain levels at any point in time. It was very much driven by their own curiosity and their own engagement with those stories.

**IAD:** I see. If the transmission of knowledge is the role and purpose of these stories, is there a check mechanism or test? Or is that a too European-centric view of how education works? I'm trying to figure out how the success of the story would be gauged.

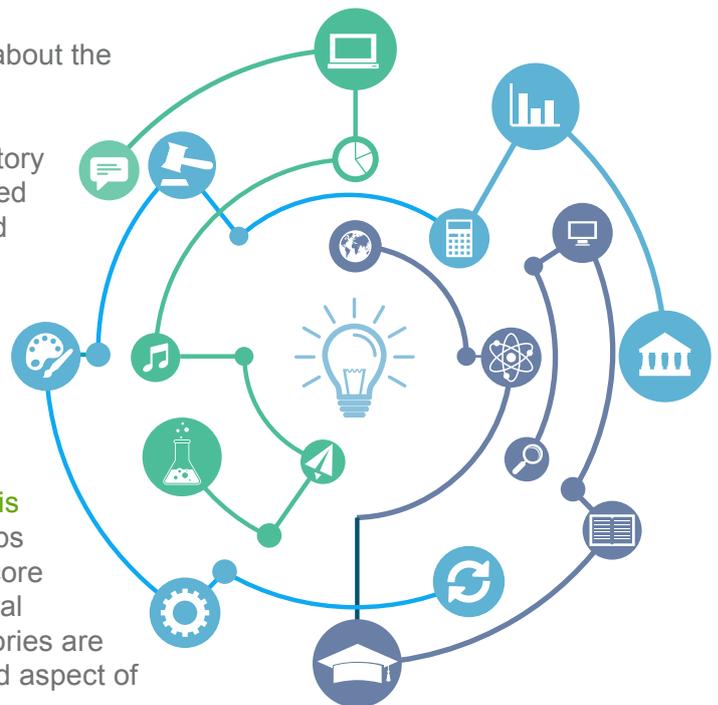
**CN:** Success is a problematic word in this context. There's a concept in aboriginal culture that sometimes gets translated to as the Dreaming, or the Dreamtime. When we talk about knowledge and stories, we're really talking about epistemology [theory of knowledge]. Epistemology is related to ontology [philosophy of being and existence]. When you look at Aboriginal ontologies, the Dreaming is really at the core. One of the key anthropologists that many people refer to when trying to understand Aboriginal Australian culture is William Stanner. He said that "Clearly the Dreaming is many things in one: among them, a kind of narrative to things that once happened, a kind of charter of things that still happen, and a kind of logos or principle of order, transcending everything significant for aboriginal man." Another description of the Aboriginal universe is "basically one in which physical, scientific qualities are irrelevant, and the world takes on meaning through the qualities, relationships, and laws laid down in the Dreaming." The Dreaming is generally described as a continuing period of ancestral creation. So there's a phrase that Stanner uses to describe the dreaming that I really like. He says, "One cannot fix the dreaming in time" -- as in these are not stories of ancestral creation that happened in the past. Instead, the Dreaming was and is "everywhen". It's something that has happened, is happening, and will continue to always happen. The ancestors who created the world in aboriginal ontology weren't gods; although they had seemingly superhuman powers, they were effectively still people and are considered ancestors. The other thing to note is that everything is alive. Every rock, every plant, every animal, everything is alive. Knowledge itself is understood as something that is alive, as well. So, if we were to look at the conversation we're having here, it is a living, dynamic thing. This exchange of knowledge is something that is living and dynamic and evolving, and it should be considered and respected as such. As such, there is a responsibility associated with knowledge that doesn't exist in the same way in Western society. A weak metaphor could be the way intellectual property is treated by companies. Today, industrialized nations acknowledge that we live in a knowledge economy and a knowledge society, yet the First Australians had a similar view for thousands of generations. The things that were most valued in First Australian cultures were the intangible assets associated with knowledge, such as knowledge of the ancestral stories and what they meant.

**IAD:** So the story itself and knowledge of it was seen as valuable in and of itself. I think it's important to note that not all these stores were 'told', that many of them were artifacts. Effectively stories without words.

**CN:** You can't really separate design from narrative or story, because they are understood as very much the same thing. I remember there was an Aboriginal academic I spoke with who was teaching students about Indigenous knowledge systems. He would begin the course by presenting a painting, and he would say, "This painting is your course outline." The students would be very confused by that. How could a painting be a course outline? But the paintings were visual representations of knowledge. Those visual representations of knowledge were often – are often – much more compatible with Indigenous knowledge systems than attempts to write them down. First Australian cultures traditionally weren't written cultures, knowledge wasn't written down in documents or books. Instead, it was communicated through design, through painting, through performance, through narrative and song, and other mechanisms. That's one reason that sometimes it's quite difficult to write about Indigenous knowledge in the sense that by writing about it you fix it in time and space, and so therefore it's no longer dynamic. Some people suggest that there are ways you can still preserve the dynamic, living nature of knowledge in written form, through poetry, for example, and song, where you can express the written form words in a way that does provide space for that dynamic and personal interpretation that goes with the communication of knowledge.

**IAD:** I find that fascinating – that's as much about the process of creation.

**CN:** Yes, Aboriginal designers believe the story of their designs and how they are created is also very important. How designs and artifacts come into being are just as important as the physical objects themselves. In First Australian culture every tree, plant, river has a story about its creation and these are interlinked. No entity is alone. This whole concept of relatedness, that everything is related to everything else is central. The stories of those relationships ultimately originate from that common core of stories that are related to the ancestral spirits, when the world was created. Stories are interwoven together into every facet and aspect of Aboriginal life.



**IAD:** So the stories are not dead artifacts from 40,000 years ago - these are stories that through their retelling stay alive. The idea of a visual representation, or a physical object being a story, is how we're beginning to represent stories around data. You mentioned the mechanism of understanding in your research as yarning, which I think is a lovely word, which I think is an old Norse word...

**CN:** Oh, really?

**IAD:** Yes, it's used here where I am in the north of England. Yarning, I think, is an Old Norse word, coming from their oral tradition, from the oral tradition of the Vikings and the Norse. So by yarning, are you effectively just going and talking, as we're doing right now, with First Australian Elders? Is that the mechanism and the methodology for the research, the listening to a story?

**CN:** Yes, very much so. And I can build out the methodology or the process by which new knowledge is obtained from the ontology and epistemology. So you asked a question before about are the stories the same, or do they change. So the stories are absolutely debated and discussed all the time. Even though the knowledge of the stories is considered law, in a sense a sort of ultimate truth, our understanding continually changes. **So the process of innovation for First Australians, as I described in my research, is one of discovery, as opposed to creation.** The more correct word from my understanding, at least in my research, is it's more about one of discovery. By coming together and discussing and having yarns we make discoveries.



**IAD:** So how does that work in practice?

**CN:** So there's a few general rules or principles. There's the principle of equality, a sense that if people sit down in a circle then everybody is equal in that circle, and everybody should be respected, and so the knowledge everyone brings is understood to be different and valuable. There's this whole notion of valuing diversity that I think is fundamental to First Australian cultures that we don't have in Western society in the same way. Just look at the loss of linguistic and cultural diversity. Even though some groups of people find it (justifiably) tragic, diversity is simply not valued in the same fundamental way by society in general. Next, the mechanism would be something like a yarning circle, where people would sit down and discuss, and it would evolve as a story as people would build on each other's contributions. Of course, there would be disagreements and discussions, but it wouldn't be as confrontational as is often the case in Western cultures. When I was yarning, I wasn't really interviewing the elders. I had to be very careful as it was considered quite disrespectful to ask direct questions. After all, who was I to directly question these Elders and their knowledge, gained after decades of difficult, reflective learning? However, I don't think I succeeded at this. When I analyzed my transcripts, many times I thought, "Oh, that was quite harsh of me, I really shouldn't have phrased it that way."

**IAD:** So the story is interpreted anew each time, in the performance? A bit like a song?

**CN:** It's a bit like music or other arts. There is always scope for interpretation or

variation when performing the music, or creativity when painting a particular design. There's always that scope for interpretation and expression and creativity, but it's probably better understood as a process of discovery, because we're continuing to refine our understanding of the world, as opposed to necessarily creating a new one.

**IAD:** It's intriguing, isn't it? The analogy there could be the difference between a classical European orchestral or chamber piece, and jazz, right? There's the idea of authorial power – the sole person sits and write music which is then is consumed passively – as opposed to something that is collectively created, and lives as part of the experience of sharing it.

**CN:** True, but even then every classical piece ever is never perfectly reproduced. Every performance of the classics is going to be different, and people are going to get different things out of it.

**IAD:** Absolutely. The act of listening, the act of being there is not passive, even the physical coming together to listen, and the difference in performance. I think when you were talking about the difference between creation and discovery, if you look at the role of the people in that distinction, the creation idea says 'I'm separate' -- and I took this from Karl Sveiby – and is based idea that people are separate from the environment they're in, and therefore can stand outside of it and create this thing. Where the discovery idea says you're within and inherently, intrinsically part of the environment, and are discovering things within it. So that, I think, is very interesting. **We talk about discovery all the time, about having a journey through data, through an information space, often seen as a story.**

**CN:** Yeah. There's another quote from some African researchers working with the Indigenous communities in Namibia. They propose that our views of where a story comes from and who has permission to voice it are also cultural. For instance, a Western constructivist view is that authors control narrative, and listeners determine meaning, is in stark contrast to cultures where stories are owned by ancestors or the land.

**IAD:** I think we have to careful here not to make too a direct connection with the somewhat mundane and quantitative world of business intelligence. However there are strong similarities regarding the activity of telling story, and the fact that the story is a living artifact that is, even in ancient cultures, something that is alive, is part of that interaction, and has those different layers. In terms of your day-to-day role and your day-to-day work life, what do you take from your academic research and your interest in these knowledge systems? How are you, or are you able to apply this in what you do for PwC every day to keep bread on the table? Even in how you think, I suppose, even in how you think and approach things.

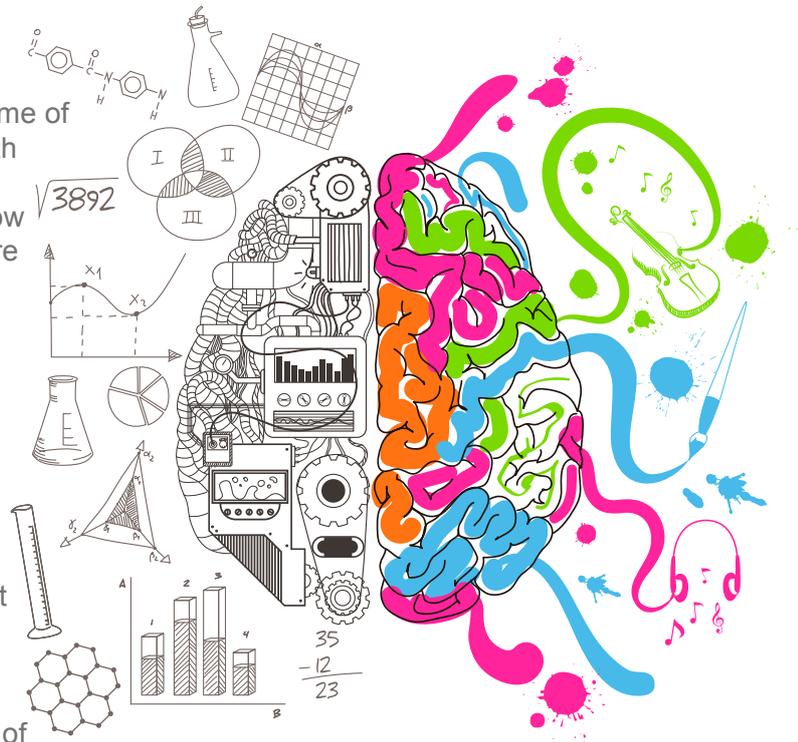
**CN:** That's happening in a couple of different ways. Firstly, there's an organization in Australia called PwC Indigenous Consulting. It's majority-owned by Indigenous

people, and majority staffed by Indigenous employees, but it's also partnership with PwC so can leverage the brand and everything else associated with it. I've been working with them to try and understand how insights like this can be applied. What I would like to do is focus on design and innovation at the cultural interface. The cultural interface being the space where the different knowledge systems meet, and there's often a lot of tension there, but it's also potentially a space for a lot of innovation. It's always been understood that way in Aboriginal cultures. There's a term, 'ganma', which refers to the mixing of fresh and salt water, and is used as a metaphor for describing the space where different knowledge systems meet.

**IAD:** There's that wonderful image you use to show that concept.

**CN:** Yes, exactly. So I believe there's much that can benefit all Australians, First and Later, if we're to explore some of these concepts together. I started with design, and just tried to understand what Aboriginal design meant and how it was understood, and then to explore design at the cultural interface.

Through that, by being an engineer, I realized that there are very few Indigenous or First Australian engineers or architects or any of the more technical professions. First Australians are reasonably well represented in the artistic design space, and in the musical design space, and in the performing arts, but when you look at the more technical design fields – with a stronger, mathematical component – there's very poor representation. That's true of the physical sciences generally. I was originally curious to understand why there are so few First Australian engineers. But that's now sort of extended to all of the STEM subjects [science, technology, engineering, and mathematics]. Why is there such poor representation in these disciplines? And a lot of it comes down to a question of relevance – in both directions: First Australians don't always understand the relevance of these subjects to their cultures, and vice versa; these particular professions don't understand the relevance and value of Indigenous knowledge to their fields.



**IAD:** So it's breaking down barriers.

**CN:** The proposal is to try and break down existing barriers to understand what STEM subjects look like at the cultural interface. The idea would be that not only would we encourage more first Australians to consider careers in the STEM

subjects, or to consider studying STEM degrees at University, and then going on to the professional world, but it would actually enrich these professions by incorporating Indigenous perspectives into them. Ultimately, there's an assumption that I'd like to overturn. That assumption is that First Australian knowledge systems and cultures have very little to offer the STEM disciplines. What could First Australian knowledge systems and cultures have to offer engineering or science or technology or mathematics? I believe there's a fascinating amount that could be learnt together should we actually be willing to have those conversations. So I'd like to continue my research and explore STEM at the cultural interface. It's a logical next step, but it's not easy to convince people with traditional or conservative perspectives to consider something that to them is really quite radical.

**IAD:** It sounds laudable. It's instructive and horrifying how long it takes to change our views of different cultures. I'm drawn back to that idea that Europeans didn't realize that Australia was a managed environment. That type of thinking is still present the lack of mutual comprehension, exactly as you have described, right? It's the same problem repeated many hundreds of years later, but not quite to the same extent.

**CN:** What I just described are the direct actions that result from my research, but there are also the indirect influences. My research has altered the way I understand knowledge itself. For example, I lead an innovation team, and the way I perceive how members of my team are learning is different because of these perspectives. **What I've learnt through my research has changed the way I see the world, and it's reflected in many indirect ways, in my interactions with the people I work with and meet. One of the principles that struck me the most, and that we don't seem to have a very good grasp of in Western cultures, is that of respect – particularly of respect for other ways of knowing.** So every time there's a discussion or a meeting in which only some people are dominating, and they're imposing their view on others, and believe there's only one way of understanding and doing things, it's something I've become very aware of. It's fundamentally changed the way I perceive these engagements and the dynamics that are occurring in these cases. **I often wonder what would a Western society look like where people are brought up to respect other people's ways of knowing, and especially if they were different to understand that there is value in those differences, and respect for the diversity. What would our world look like then?** What would it look like if we had a different approach to the knowledge that we're sharing, and we made sure that there was that sense of responsibility with that knowledge. I think that just because we could design certain things, the question of whether we should would receive a lot more attention. Again, it's not to say we should be ultra-conservative with these things. That's not what I'm saying at all. It's just that we should be paying more attention to ethical questions. So the final dimension in the –'ologies', with ontology, epistemology, methodology, is axiology - the question of values and ethics. If more effort and attention was paid to that dimension, and done so from a default a position of respect, how that would change the way we work with our clients, the way we work with each other and information. It's said that we live in a knowledge

economy, but what does that really mean? What are we valuing here? Are we valuing knowledge as something that we use for ultimately profit motives? Or is it beyond that, and should we be thinking more about what does it mean for society? I guess the question I've been wondering is: When do we go from knowledge to wisdom?

**IAD:** If you look at the dominant discourse around the knowledge economy right now, it's often using 'mining' and industrial terms like that. It's not coming from the idea that information is a value in and of itself, unless of course it's a profit producing unit. There's also talk of 'infonomics', of applying monetary value to the information. Seen through this axiomatic lens it's kind of revolting, but you can understand why within the tradition of Western culture that would occur. I think the thought process you're having around how we understand knowledge, and do we put it in a context of respect, and the ethics of that is very timely. Because we lack the kind of framework that it seems is present in some older cultures.

**CN:** I think the reason we've gotten ourselves into this position is because we lost sight of that element of relatedness, that we are all ultimately connected. And that's why stories, I think, are so powerful sometimes, because they help us reconnect with each other.

**IAD:** I see, so now you're a custodian of some stories, in that you've been through that process of the narrative, and now you have to tell the story of the storytelling, and to pass the story on in turn.

**CN:** Absolutely.

**IAD:** Many thanks for sharing your learning with us Crighton – it was fascinating to talk with you today. All the best for the future, wherever your yarn takes you.





## Breaking Down the Barriers to Persuasion

Persuading a skeptical group to be open to your viewpoint—let alone be persuaded—can be extremely challenging. Nicholas Kelly, Visualization Lead at Deloitte LLP, is an expert in user interface design and leads technical workshops that deliver best practices in data visualization and analytics for Deloitte clients across all different functions and industries.

With his extensive experience in facilitating workshops, Kelly knows only too well how difficult it is to influence, convince and convert individuals and groups and believes strongly in personal interaction and communication to gain consensus or buy-in. He only conducts his workshops in person—he held one workshop remotely and achieved only 60 percent of the day’s objectives. Kelly attributed the less than stellar results directly to the fact that all parties were not in the same room—of the 20 attendees, half attended via remote videoconferencing.

“I find working through videoconferencing, email or other digital means less efficient because I believe people’s body language, posture, energy level and eye contact are crucial to successful persuasion,” he said. “I tend to use humor and sarcasm in these sessions and I find they often don’t translate very well remotely, especially if attendees can’t see my facial expressions or hand gestures.”

## Everyone Relates to Food

Kelly recalls one recent workshop attended by a group of technical engineers who were highly skeptical about visualization—skeptical to the point that Kelly wondered if the workshop would ever get off the ground. What did he do to gain consensus and some trust? Get them to think about and visualize something they could all relate to—food. In this case, it was a juicy hamburger with all the fixings.

When Kelly asked the engineers if they would eat the burger, most responded ‘yes’. Kelly then put up a slide of the same burger, but with three negative health-related data points to consider if you ate the burger—you would gain weight, increase your risk of heart disease, and experience bad cholesterol gains. Presented with this new information, most respondents changed their decision. “I have way more success in convincing clients about the power of data visualization when I use examples that are personally relevant to the attendees,” Kelly said. “Believe it or not, that simple, but personal and relatable item gained their support and buy-in for the rest of the day.”

Every Kelly-led consulting engagement commences with a lab and workshop that allows all the key stakeholders to come together in a creative brainstorming session. These workshops cover the latest trends in visualization, best practices, ideation and innovation through to formulation of wireframes and creation dashboard prototypes. According to Kelly, an intimate user experience is a key part of these client sessions to ensure successful alignment of business objectives with the actual use cases.

“The art of effective persuasion is a fundamental driver to getting things done in an organization,” Kelly added. “If I’m not aligned with the vision and the mission, I am going to be far less motivated and most likely less productive.”

## The Data Interpreter

Claudia Imhoff is a leading thought leader and influencer in the fields of business intelligence and analytics and President and Founder of the Boulder BI Brain Trust (BBBT) and Intelligent Solutions. In her roles, Imhoff receives hundreds of briefings from BI and analytic vendors annually looking to influence and persuade her viewpoints. Some of the findings of the study clearly resonated with her.

“The Qlik survey clearly illustrates that understanding the work situation and one’s particular role in the organization is the key to the type of persuasive argument or behavior one would use,” Imhoff said. “The job role versus most frequently used methods is very telling—I need to understand my audience and then use the most appropriate persuasive behavior, be it a one-on-one meeting, a conference call or a structured presentation.

“From my viewpoint that is the key to the whole thing—you need to understand your role and your audience and then you create the appropriate persuasive behavior,” Imhoff continued. “You also need to understand the culture of the organization in which you work and from that you can create a very effective persuasive behavior that will be most effective with your audience.”

Imhoff has been studying the movement in organizations towards implementing more advanced analytics. “With advanced analytics comes data visualization because you simply can’t understand and comprehend massive data points without effective data visualization,” she said. According to Imhoff, this movement has spawned the data interpreter, “a person who can look at this information, study it, understand the underlying data and then create a story about the data.

“The data interpreter operates between the business user and the technical data scientist, interpreting the findings of the data scientist into terminology that the business user understands,” Imhoff said. “That is a very powerful persuasive behavior—being able to express complex analytic results in business terms is something that a data interpreter must do to persuade his or her audience of the validity of the fact and results being presented.”

Karen Steele is a veteran high-tech marketing executive for such companies as Informatica, VMware and Cloud9 Analytics. Steele recently co-founded Alloy, a marketing strategy consulting group providing a powerful synergy of marketing strategy, brand development, go-to-market strategy, communications, media, and strategic events management skills.

Steele believes marketing communications is in many ways the ultimate art of persuasion. “The reason we put out marketing messages is to try to make an imprint,” Steele explained. “It could be to change behavior, entice interest or consideration, or get someone to buy from us directly. If you look at every step along the way in a classic sales funnel, there is some flavor of persuasion that takes shape in part of the messaging,” Steele said. “Ultimately, persuasion comes down to the strategy behind the story you are telling and the outcome you desire.”

Steele has been contemplating the myriad of different forms of media and which has the most potential to influence or persuade more rapidly. “We use different persuasive techniques—as well as different forms of media—to get people to think differently about you,” she said. “There are many marketing angles around the art of persuasion. It is front and center of all of our communication strategies and tactics as we talk to customers, prospects, influencers and colleagues.”

Steele was quick to point out that although she is describing outbound marketing campaigns, the same principles apply to internal audiences. “If you are trying to build consensus around an idea or project or decision, you still need to build a campaign, no matter what form it takes. You may not call it a campaign. You may be presenting a business case, program or project you want approved. Similar steps, similar actions.”





# The Art of Persuasive Communication in the Workplace

Qlik Innovation and Design Research Digest, Winter 2016





## Introduction

On behalf of Qlik's Innovation & Design team, Advaiya conducted research to determine how a desire to persuade work colleagues affects the ways in which we share information, and to what extent discussion is encouraged in that situation. To carry on this research, the IAD team and Advaiya prepared a survey to identify the behavioral aspects under which different methods and approaches for persuasion are used by business users. Data was collected from a cohort comprising business professionals from the US and Canada working with team of at least six people. This report provides the details of this research, with key findings of the survey. It helps understand business users' persuasive communication style, and provides an alternate way of thinking about how people tell and use stories within the workplace.

## Executive Summary

Persuasion is a type of communication that many business users need to perform in their work roles while managing teams or making proposals. This report highlights the perception and experience of business users while undertaking persuasive communication at the workplace.

For business users, the choice of methods and approaches used for persuasion depends on their organization's decision-making culture, their job role and the size of team they work within or manage.

Methods of persuasion depend on the situation and context. Persuasive methods are either direct like an in-person meeting, presentation or conversation, or indirect like an email or document sharing or a mix of both.

The use of various approaches to persuade team members depends on the scenario or topic that is under discussion. Business users still believe that the use of personal knowledge and experience almost always works best, but in some instances feel they need data or evidence to carry the audience.

While making a proposal business users take a cue from background information and earlier experience and think about audience knowledge into the topic. They also consider about the possible disagreements that may arise.

Overall business users believe that the art of persuasion plays a significant role in leadership in a modern business and a desire to persuade the audience consciously affect the ways in which they share information.

## Research Objectives and Methodology

Organizations today want better communication and enhanced productivity to drive business value and achieve better results. Persuasion is a key management skill that managers, executives, professionals and team, leaders use to manage internal teams. It's not only those in sales roles that need to persuade people of their way of thinking. Knowing how to persuade others is a leadership skill prompting action with helping building positive relationships and an effective atmosphere in the workplace.

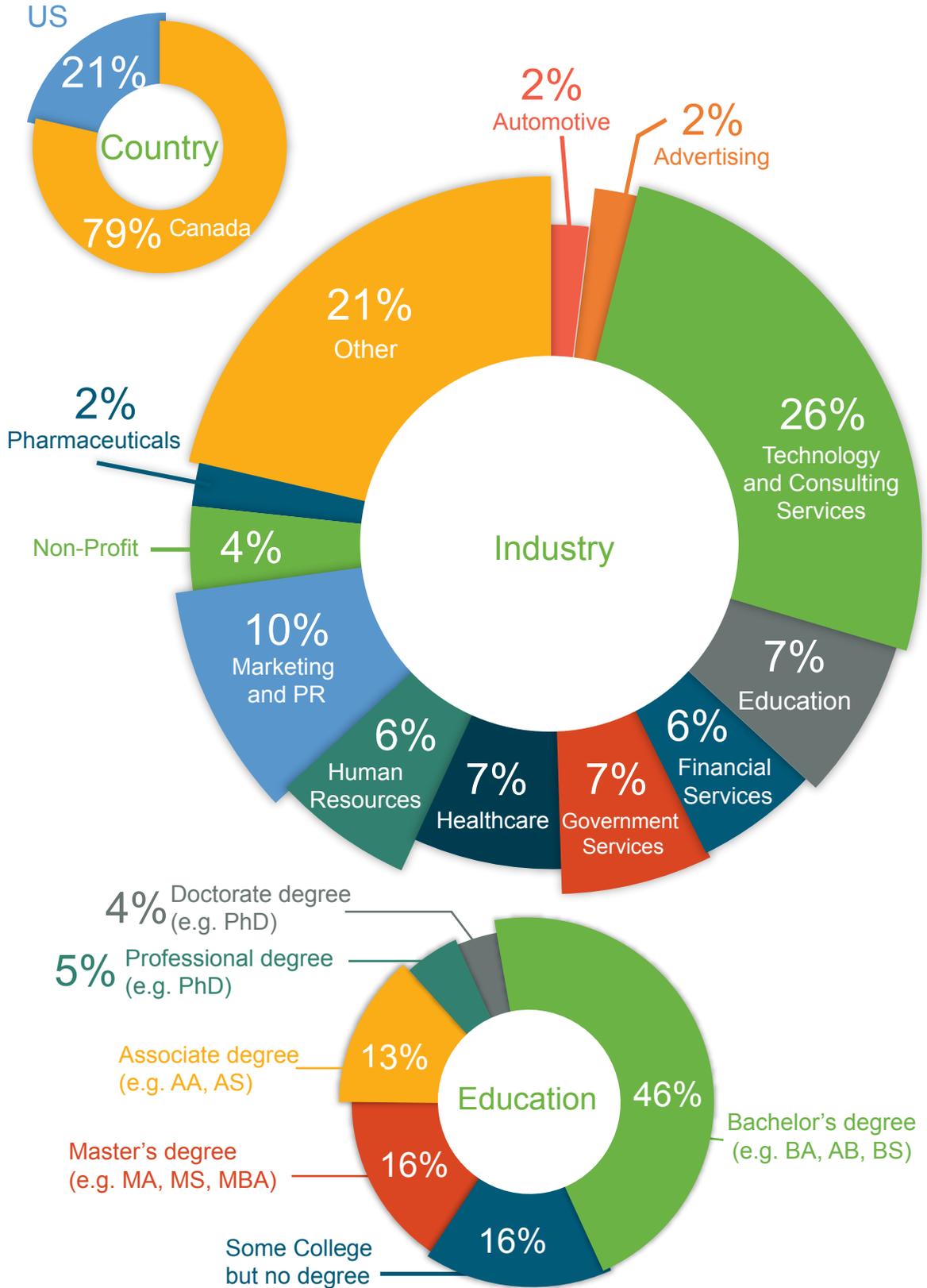
Business users go about the art of persuasion in various ways. This research has been conducted in order to better understand the varying styles of persuasion and discover the methods used to persuade and convince others in the workplace.

### Methodology:

For this research Qlik surveyed business professionals from the US and Canada. The survey was conducted online, and respondents were recruited via an email invitation containing an embedded link to the survey. The email invitation was sent to qualified business professionals who are full-time employees and work with a team of at least six people at their workplace.

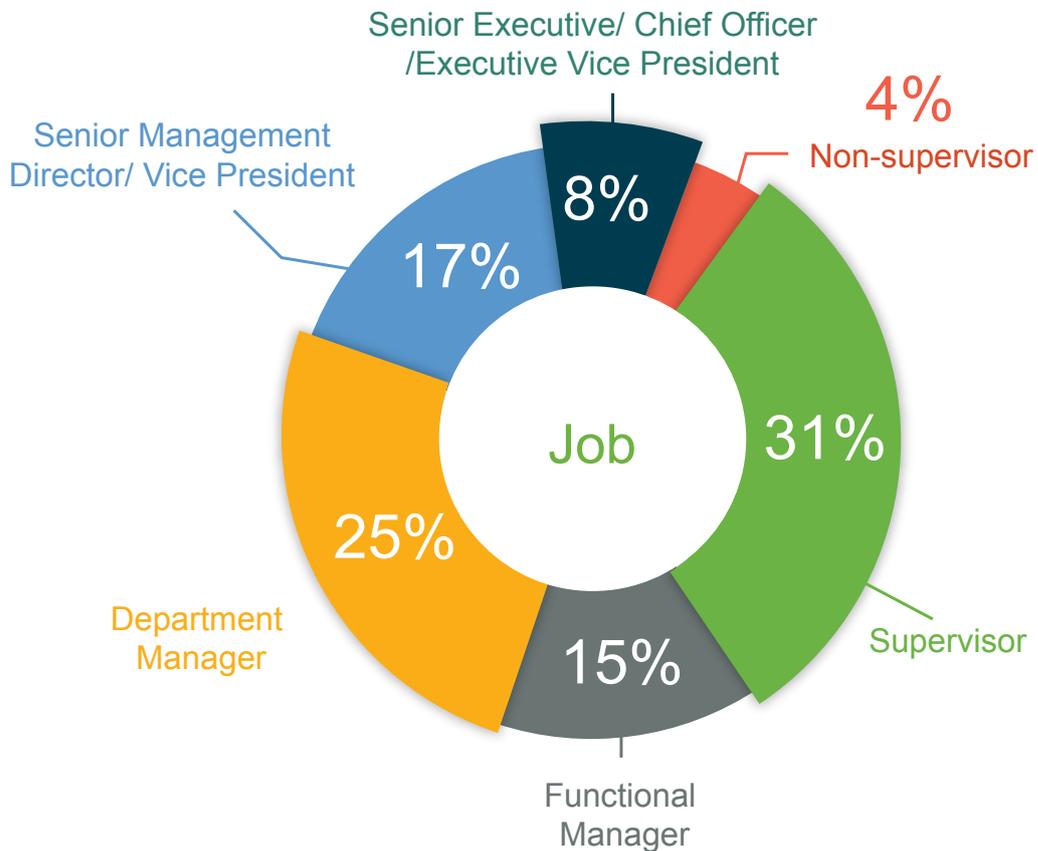
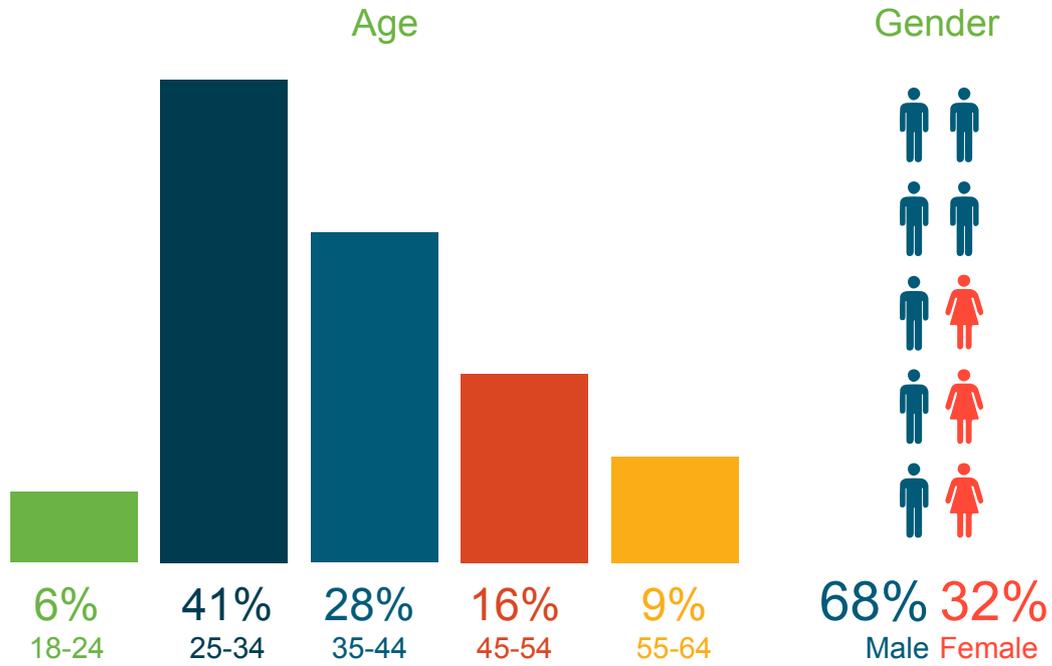
## Description of the population

The total 206 survey respondents can be described as:



## Description of the population

The total 206 survey respondents can be described as:



Persuasion is a communication skill that people use consciously or unconsciously while interacting with teams. We use it while convincing or reinforcing attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors and to carry our opinions. How much persuasion managers need to use is heavily influenced by their organizations' decision making style and culture.

## What people say about their organizations' decision making culture:



**39%** of respondents believe that their organization's decision making culture is very collaborative, while **35%** believe that it is somewhat collaborative, where being persuasive is key to moving forward. A considerable minority of organizations still display autocratic management styles.

Total number of respondents = 206

## Most preferred & used methods and approaches for persuasion

While making a proposal to a group, people use different methods and approaches in different scenarios to persuade their audience.

### Top two preferred methods



65% prefer an in-person meeting or presentation

34% prefer 1-to-1 phone calls or in-person conversations



### Most frequently used methods:



38% almost always use a structured presentation to the group

36% almost always use 1-to-1 meetings



### Top two persuasive approaches:



Use of knowledge and experience (57%)

Use of data (47%)



Total number of respondents = 206

## When disagreements happen:

There are many situations, when disagreements happen about business proposals; when this happens presenter and audience adopt a number of approaches.

### Presenter's Plan

- Most of the time, persuaders prepare presentations or documents specifically to anticipate disagreements
- In certain circumstances persuaders contact team members individually before making proposal to avoid disagreements

Usually if people in the audience do not agree or are not satisfied with the proposal, they do not keep quiet and let the proposal proceed, instead:



### Audience reactions

- 45% of people discuss the objections openly with the group
- 40% of people discuss the objections privately in 1-1 meetings or over phone calls



40% of respondents report that in group meeting or presentation they allocate about a quarter of the meeting for debate and discussion.

Total number of respondents = 206

## When making a proposal to a group:



**46%** of respondents “almost always” take some time to lay out background information



**80%** of respondents either “almost always” or “often” take time to project forward and outline possible outcomes when making a proposal

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**56%** of respondents either “almost always” or “often” expect that the audience will continue later with their research on the subject



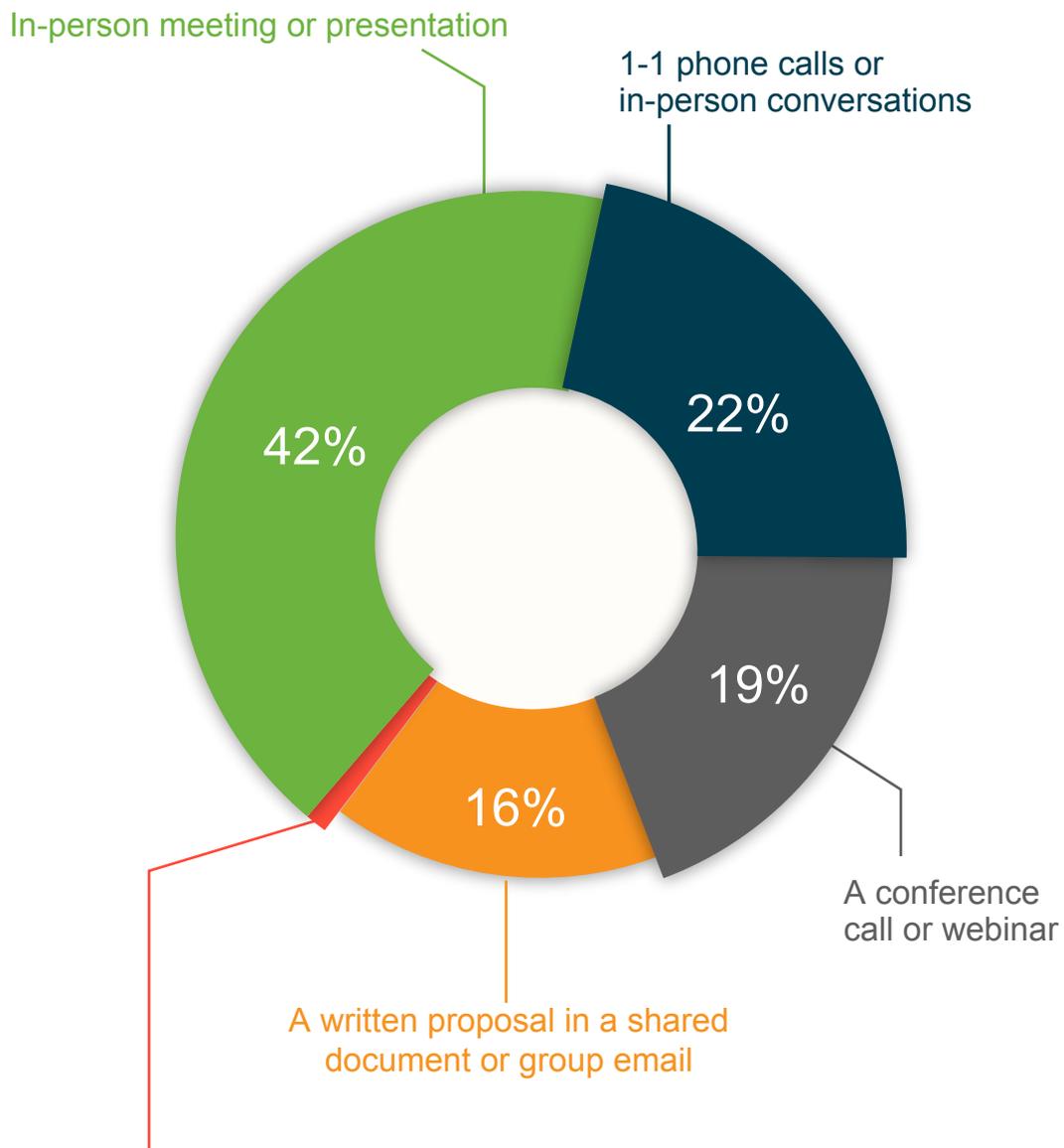
**42%** of respondents “often” expect that more discussion will be required about the proposal while

**27%** of respondents “almost always” expect this to be the case

Total number of respondents = 206

## If more discussion is needed:

42% of respondents prefer an in-person meeting or presentation; while 22% of respondents prefer 1-1 phone calls or conversations.



Total number of respondents = 206

## Persuasion behavior varies by job role and seniority:

Job Role	Most Preferred Method	Decision Making Culture	Widely Used Approaches
Non- supervisor	An in-person meeting or presentation (90%)	Somewhat collaborative (44%)	Use of knowledge, experience and data (56%)
Supervisor	An in-person meeting or presentation (60%)	Very collaborative (32%)	Use of knowledge and experience (52%)
Functional Manager	An in-person meeting or presentation (50%)	Somewhat collaborative (47%)	Use of knowledge, experience and data (53%)
Department Manager	An in-person meeting or presentation (75%)	Very collaborative (48%)	Use of knowledge and experience (62%)
Senior management/ Director/ Vice President	An in-person meeting or presentation (67%)	Somewhat collaborative (42%)	Use of knowledge and experience (64%)
Senior Executive/ Chief Officer/ Executive Vice President	An in-person meeting or presentation (56%)	Very collaborative (56%)	Use of knowledge and experience (50%)

Job Role	Most Frequently Used Methods
Non- supervisor	Almost always: A structured presentation to the group (33%) Often: A written report or other reference documents (67%) Sometimes: Live group chat, An email thread or 1–1 meetings (33%)
Supervisor	Almost always: A structured presentation to the group (37%) Often: 1–1 meetings (37%)   Sometimes: A written report or other reference documents and An email thread (35%)
Functional Manager	Almost always: 1–1 meetings (37%) Often: A structured presentation to the group or email thread (37%) Sometimes: A written report or other reference documents (40%)
Department Manager	Almost always: 1–1 meetings (44%)   Often: An email thread (42%) Sometimes: Live group chat (33%)
Senior management/ Director/ Vice President	Almost always: A structured presentation to the group (42%) Often: 1–1 meetings (56%)   Sometimes: An email thread (42%)
Senior Executive/ Chief Officer/ Executive Vice President	Almost always: A structured presentation to the group, 1–1 meetings or An email thread (42%)   Often: Live group chat (37%) Sometimes: A written report or other reference documents (44%)

Total number of respondents = 206

Respondents who are Non-supervisor = 9; Supervisor = 63; Functional Manager = 30, Department Manager = 52; Senior management/ Director/ Vice President =36; Senior Executive/ Chief Officer/ Executive Vice President = 16

## Persuasion experience based on organization's decision making culture:

Respondents report varying of organizational decision making cultures which has a bearing on their experience of using persuasion at their workplace.

### Very collaborative

44% of respondents who are saying their organization's decision making culture is very collaborative are involved with team of more than 100 people

#### Top two preferred methods



74% prefer an in-person meeting or presentation

44% prefer a written proposal in a shared document or group email



#### Top two widely used methods



60% use a structured presentation to the group

51% use 1-1 meetings



#### Top two widely used approaches



61% use knowledge and experience to persuade others

51% use data to persuade others



- **46%** of respondents report that if audiences do not agree with proposal they discuss objections openly with the group
- **33%** of respondents say they prepare a presentation or document specifically to anticipate disagreements from audience when trying to persuade

Total number of respondents = 206

Respondents having very collaborative decision making culture = 80

## Somewhat collaborative

42% of respondents who are saying their organization's decision making culture is somewhat collaborative are involved with team of more than 100 people

### Top two preferred methods



61% prefer an in-person meeting or presentation

32% prefer 1-to-1 phone calls or in-person conversations



### Top two widely used methods



47% use a structured presentation to the group

40% use 1-1 meetings



### Top two widely used approaches



50% use knowledge and experience to persuade others

37% use data to persuade others



- **50%** of respondents say if people do not agree with proposal they discuss objections openly with the group
- **49%** of respondents say they contact team members individually before making any proposal to anticipate disagreements from audience

Total number of respondents = 206

Respondents having somewhat collaborative decision making culture = 72

## A Mixture of collaborative and autocratic

52% of respondents whose organization's decision making culture is an equal mixture of collaborative and autocratic are involved with team of more than 100 people

### Top two preferred methods



55% prefer an in-person meeting or presentation

36% prefer a written proposal as a shared document or group email



### Top two widely used methods



45% use live group chat group

45% use 1-1 meetings



### Top two widely used approaches



59% use knowledge and experience to persuade others

55% use data to persuade others



- **50%** of respondents say if people do not agree with proposal they discuss objections privately in 1-1 meetings or phone calls
- **40%** of respondents say if any disagreement happens they continue with the proposal as usual and deal with it as it happens

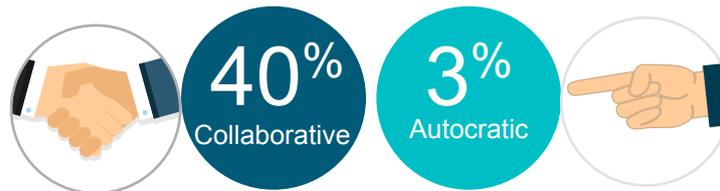
Total number of respondents = 206

Respondents having mixture of collaborative and autocratic decision making culture = 42

## What people involved with different size of teams say about persuasion

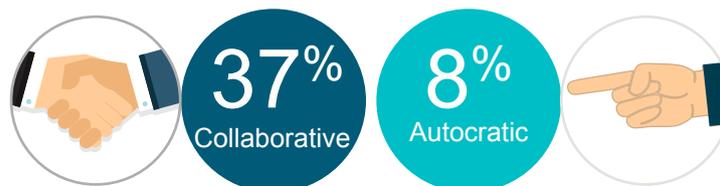
Team size seems to have little direct impact on the experience of persuasion.

### People involved with team of less than 100



- 40% of respondents believe that their organization's decision making culture is **very collaborative**, while only 3% say it is autocratic
- 66% of respondents consider "An **in-person meeting or presentation**" as most preferred method for persuasion
- 51% of respondents say they mostly use their **knowledge** and experience to persuade others

### People involved with team of more than 100



- 37% of respondents believe that their organization's decision making culture is **very collaborative**, while only 8% say it is autocratic
- 63% of respondents consider "An **in-person meeting or presentation**" as most preferred method for persuasion
- 60% of respondents say they mostly use their **knowledge** and experience to persuade others

Total number of respondents = 206  
Respondents manage team of less than 100 people=111  
Respondents manage team of more than 100 people=95

## Conclusion

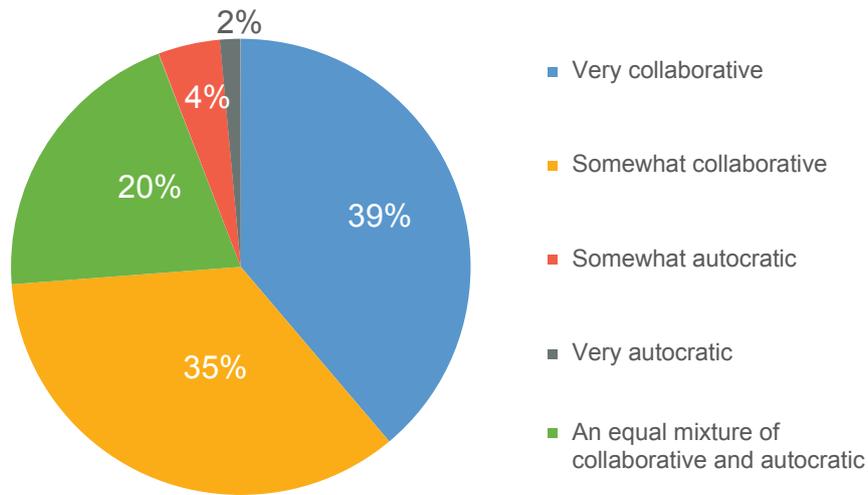
Workplaces are filled with diverse personalities and require various interaction methods and approaches to drive better collaboration and action. Persuasion has always been an important management skill, but one that becomes more important with the rise of collaborative management styles. To persuade someone effectively, the research shows that people need to be well-prepared, and have enough knowledge, and data/evidence to convince others to accept your proposal. People rely on techniques like presentations and group discussions that enrich knowledge, enhance learning, and reinforce enthusiasm and awareness to persuade successfully.



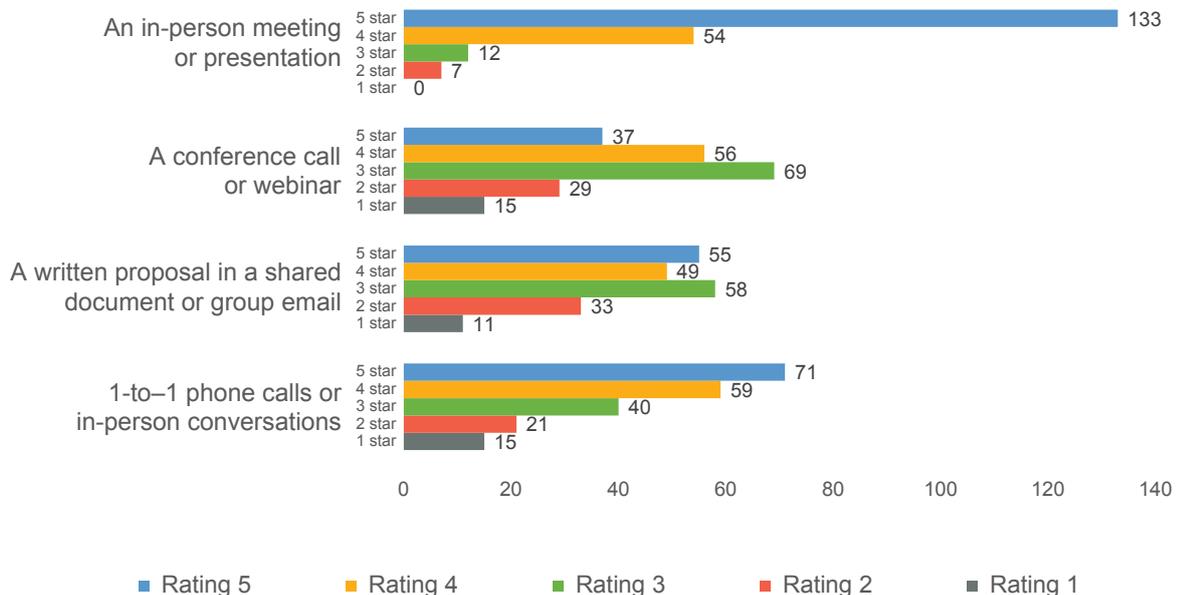
# Appendix

## Survey Responses

1. Which of these best describes your organization’s decision making culture? (Select One)

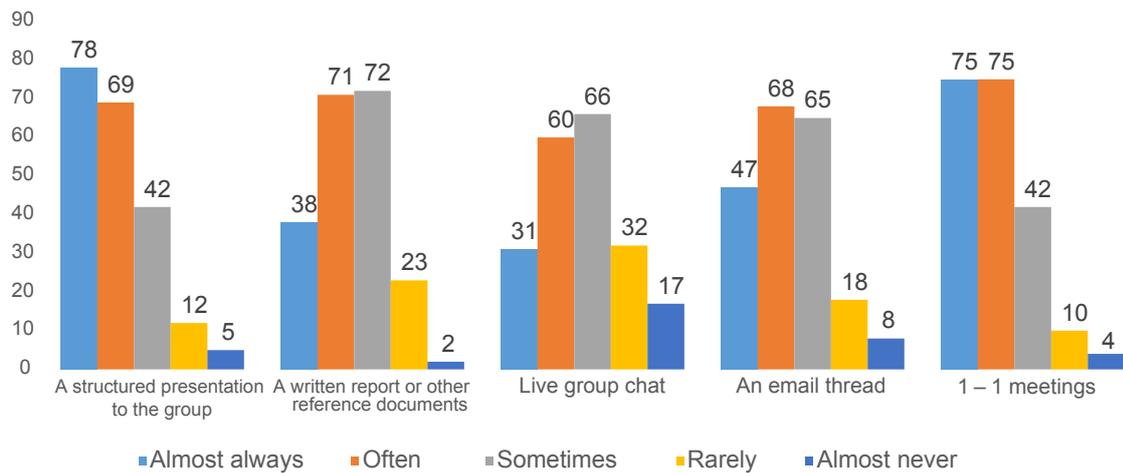


2. If you need to persuade or lead a group of people, which of these methods do you prefer? (Provide 1-5 stars for each option)

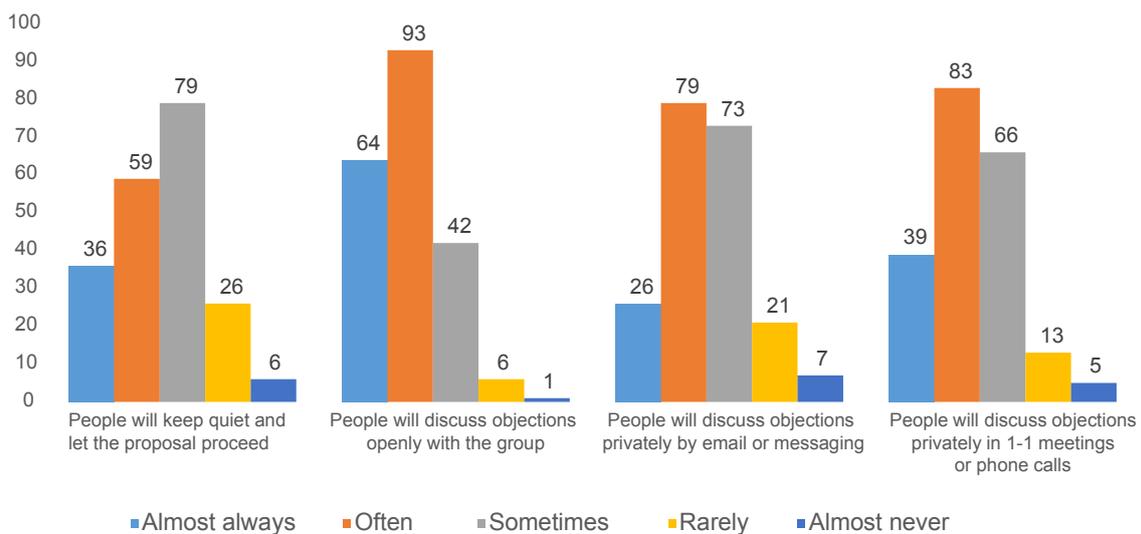


Total number of respondents = 206

### 3. How often you use below methods at workplace to persuade or lead a group?

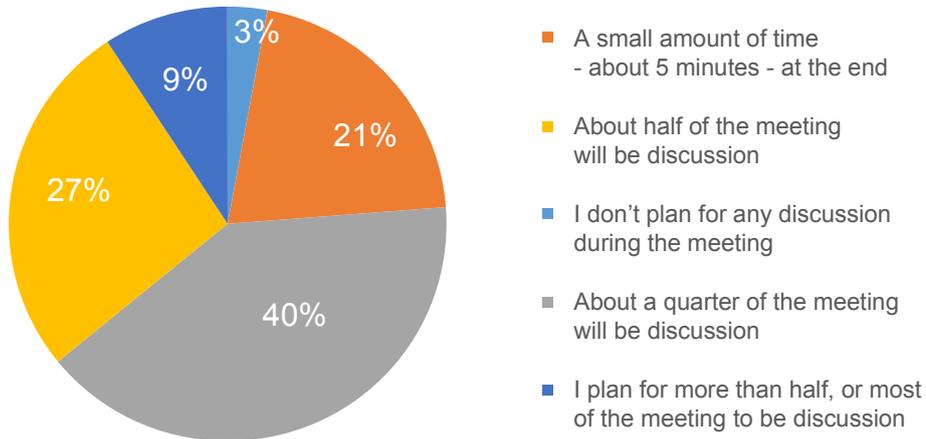


### 4. Some people may disagree with your proposal. How likely are you to come across the following with your group?

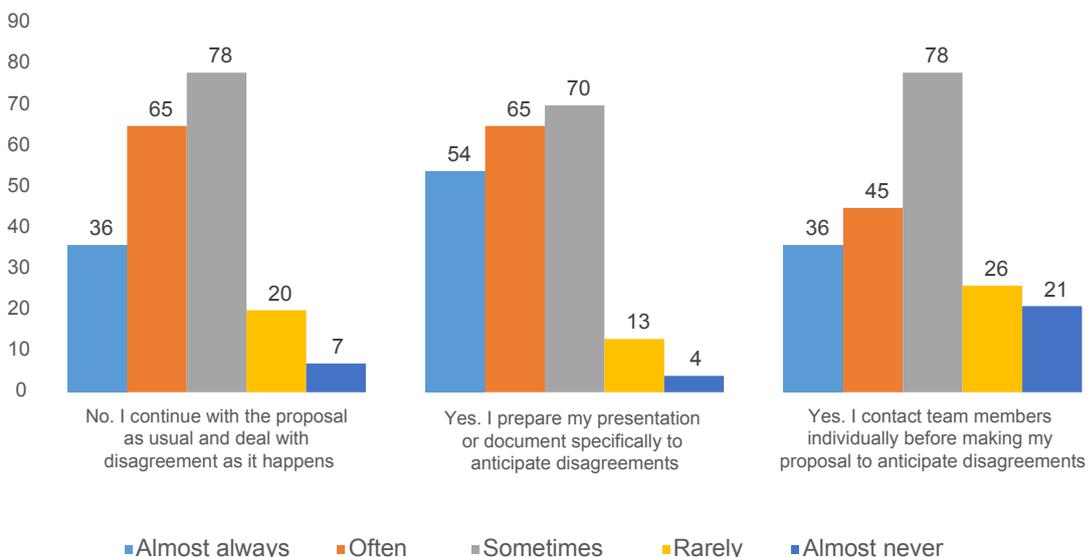


Total number of respondents = 206

5. When planning a group meeting or presentation, how much time do you plan to include for debate and discussion? (Select one)

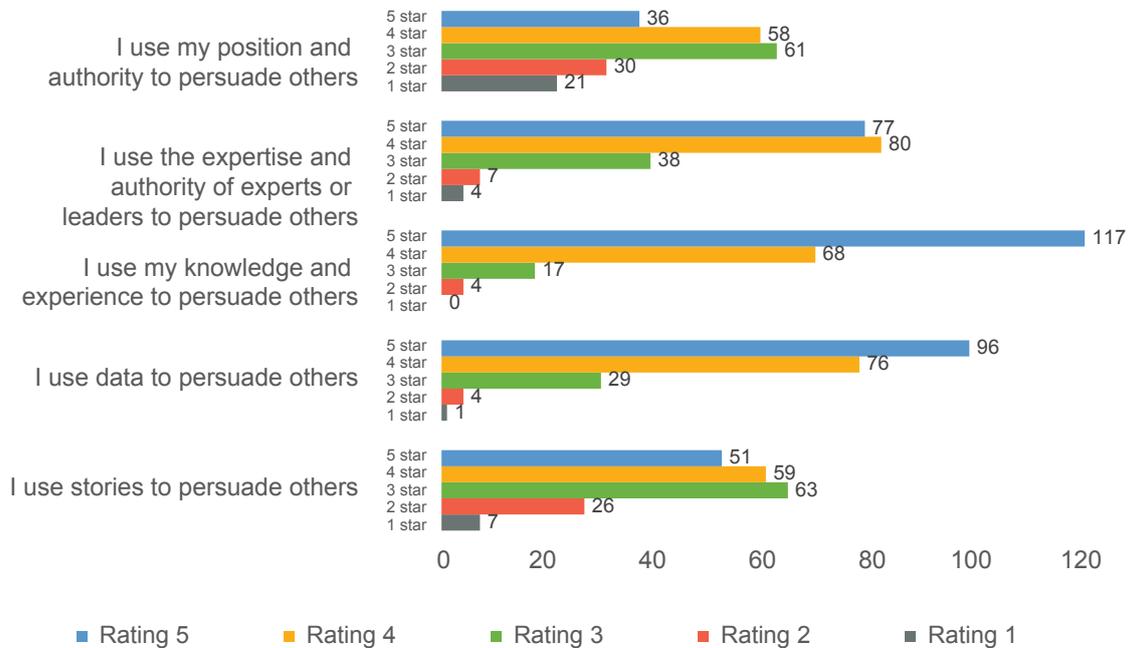


6. If you expect others to disagree with your proposal, do you change your approach to the meeting? And how often are you required to do this?

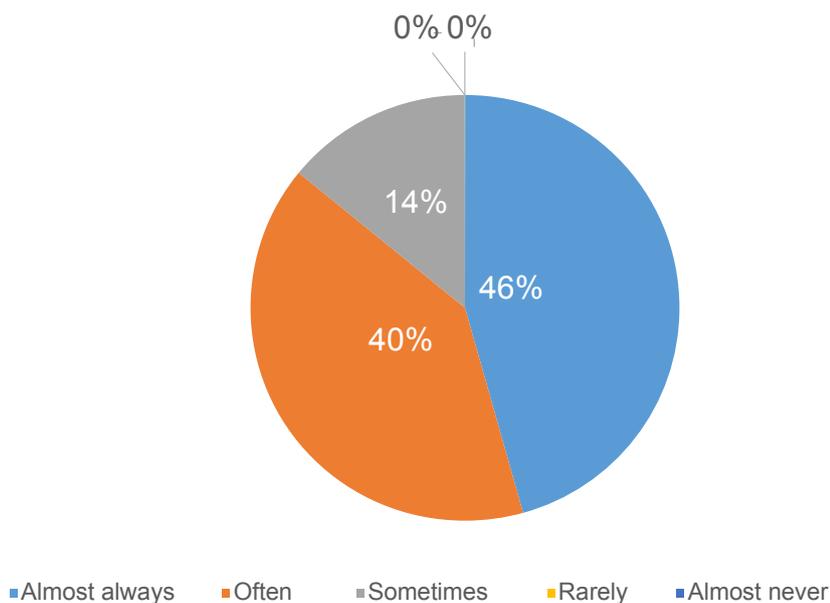


Total number of respondents = 206

7. When making a proposal to a group, which of the following best describes your approach? (Provide 1-5 stars for each option)

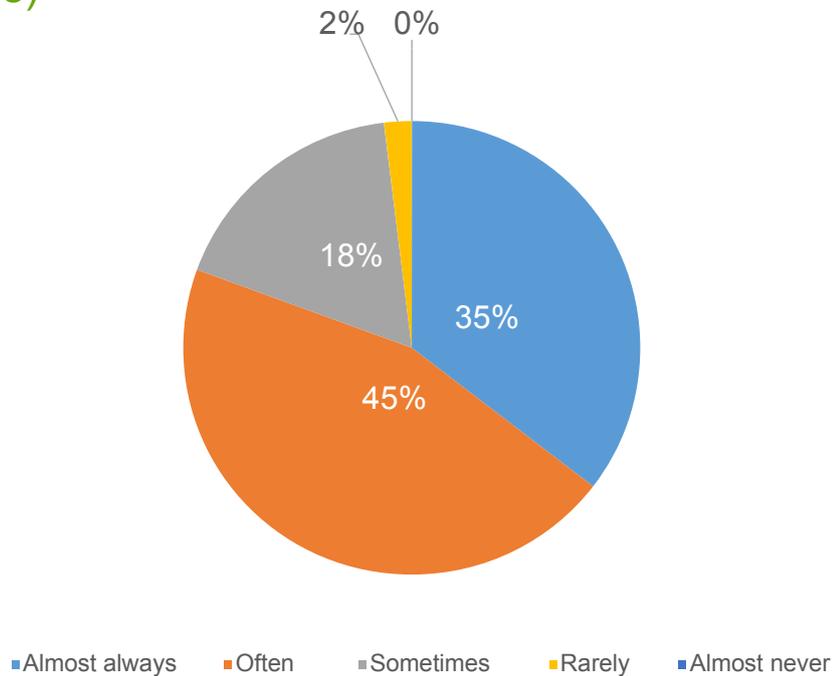


8. When making a proposal to a group, do you take time to lay out the background information and what has happened previously? (Select One)

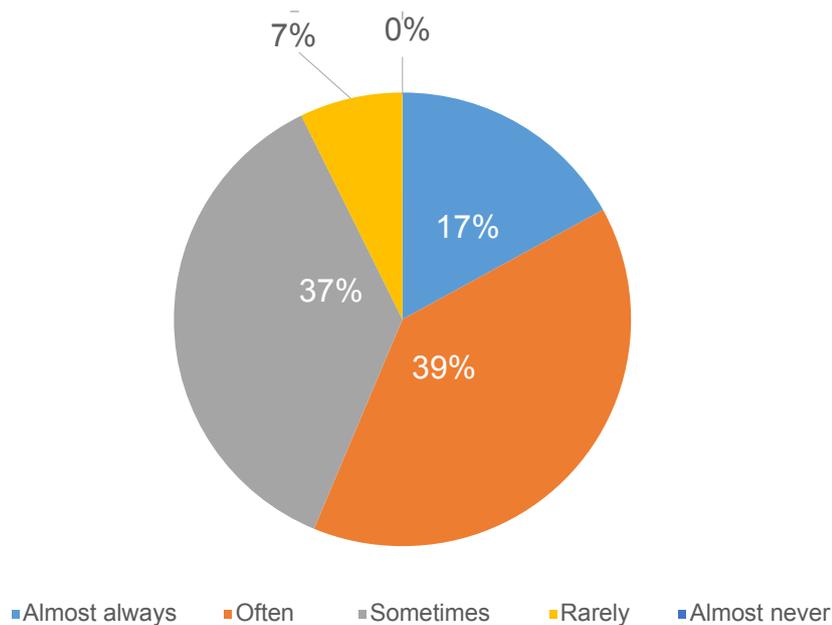


Total number of respondents = 206

9. When making a proposal to a group, do you take time to project forward or to predict possible outcomes? (Select One)

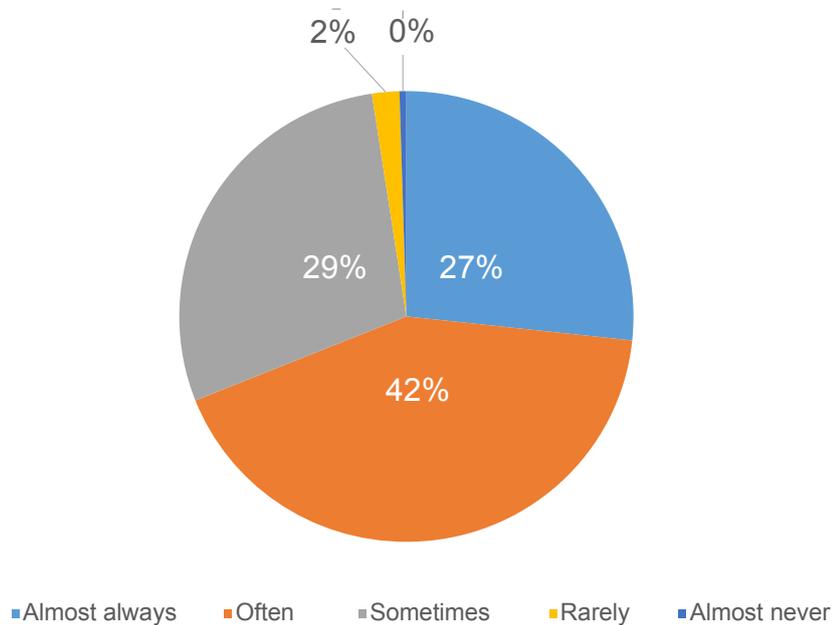


10. When making a proposal to a group, how often would you expect your audience to continue later with their own research into the topic? (Select One)

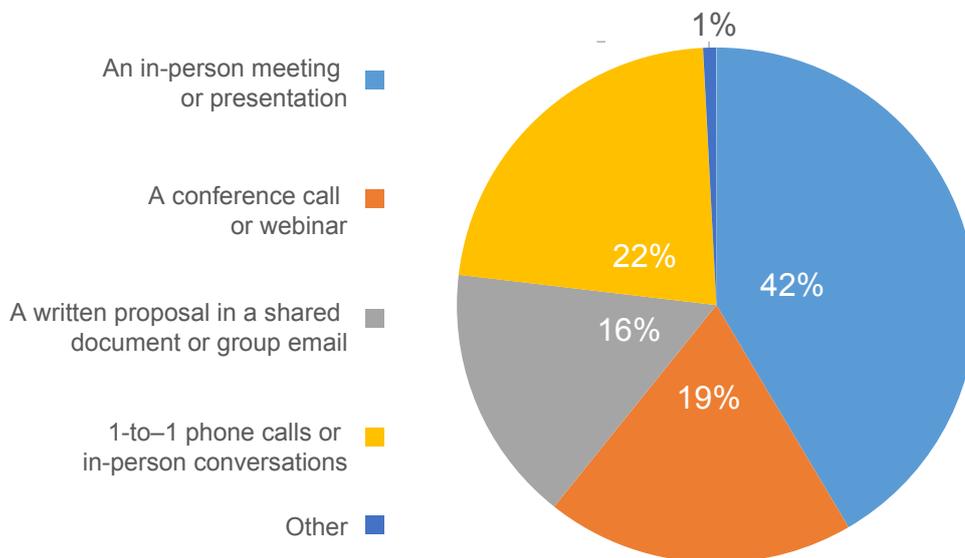


Total number of respondents = 206

11. When making a proposal to a group, how often would you expect there to be more discussion required? (Select One)



12. If more discussion is required after a proposal, which of these methods do you prefer? (Select all that apply)




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Total number of respondents = 206

This survey is prepared by Advaiya Solutions, Inc.

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