

THE USEFULNESS PROJECT



A ONE MINUTE TO MIDNIGHT PRODUCTION

“HOW MUCH
INSIGHT GETS
USED? ON AN
OPTIMISTIC DAY
I'D SAY
50%... IT'S
DEPRESSING!”

Imagine the scene... an industry event, me the only research agency guy sat at a table of Insight Directors. There's a lull in conversation, so I ask a question that's been bugging me for a while...

“How much of your insight work gets used?”
Cue intakes of breath, momentary soul-searching, and a couple of scratches of the head.

A consensus emerges: 50% at best!
This got me and the One Minute to Midnight team thinking...

So we decided to get to the bottom of what Usefulness in Insight really means, with the purpose of provoking and stimulating the industry (and ourselves) to get more insight used.

We spoke in depth with senior Insight professionals from some of the world's leading brands in a range of sectors, including beauty, booze, entertainment, travel, charity, finance, and the public sector.

50%



Using their knowledge, experiences, expertise, and wisdom we identified and interrogated projects that had the most 'useful' impact and outed ones that didn't. We explored the state of the Insight nation, the best and worst of modern client-agency relationships, delved into the new, the old, and the downright wacky, and together projected what the future of Insight's usefulness will look like.

Here we share their thoughts, feelings, insights, and ideas through the medium of 20 Provocations for Better (More Useful) Insight.

Before we get on to the 20, we'd like to say a big thank you to all those who helped in their generation. We found the conversations fascinating, useful, and pretty damn inspiring... we hope you do too.

Doug and the One Minute to Midnight team



Human Truths That Make Stuff Happen



20

**PROVOCATIONS
FOR BETTER
(MORE USEFUL)
INSIGHT**

WE'VE GOT 4 BUCKETS:

CONTEXTS

THE WORLD THAT USEFUL INSIGHT LIVES IN

DEFINITIONS

WHAT USEFULNESS IS & ISN'T

SPIRIT

THE FEEL OF USEFUL INSIGHT

PROPERTIES

THE PHYSICAL PROPERTIES OF USEFUL INSIGHT

CONTEXTS

THE WORLD THAT USEFUL INSIGHT LIVES IN



CONTEXT

#1

THE INSIGHT NATION FEELS VIBRANT, ALMOST BULLISH

Across industries, Insight feels as if it's in its strongest position ever. Consumer-centricity is feeling like it's really starting to happen, and this – combined with the perception of an increased pace of change – is seen to be a key factor elevating the importance of Insight.

This increase in importance and standing puts a tougher demand and expectation on each and every project to be truly useful, which means we must continuously search for ways of making insight better.

WHAT MORE CAN YOU BE DOING TO ELEVATE INSIGHT'S
STANDING WITHIN YOUR BUSINESS, AND HOW ARE YOU
TAKING CONSUMER-CENTRICITY TO THE NEXT LEVEL?

“You know what? In our business at least, I'd say Insight is at its healthiest. Given the ever more complex world we live in, gut feel of the marketers no longer holds water. We need to put the consumer at the heart of our business and this is where insight comes in.”





CONTEXT

#2

BUT

THERE IS A LOT GOING ON AND THIS CAN CAUSE ANXIETY

With such a diverse range of tools, approaches, and data sources there always seems to be a new thing to be keeping up to date with, or some sense that you could be missing a trick, or that your knowledge set could be a bit better. In general, there's pressure to be pursuing all these new options every single time.

ARE WE ALL A BIT TOO QUICK TO TRY AND JUMP ON
THE NEW WITHOUT LOOKING AT THE SUBSTANCE?



“There’s an avalanche of data sources and you get snow blind. It creates fatigue. There’s a hunger for powerful simplicity. There are more questions, more agencies, more approaches, more anxiety. More stuff, same amount of time. Social media and research makes you think, ‘Shit, why don’t I know about that? Am I stupid? What’s my worth?’ There’s more FOMO. What should I be doing? Where’s my big data and my agile solution?”



CONTEXT

#3

THERE IS A MOVEMENT FROM INSIGHT THAT VALIDATES TO INSIGHT THAT PROVOKES

Validation through insight is not dead. It still plays a crucial role (particularly within government and charities), and we still see weaponised insight being used to win battles within businesses or to beat the agencies they're working with. However, the feeling is that insight is much more intelligently used when it happens earlier in the process... as a provocateur and inspiration tool, rather than as a validator.

**HOW PROVOCATIVE IS YOUR INSIGHT WORK REALLY?
SHOULD YOU GO FURTHER?**

“Research came from a risk mitigation element, we used to validate to make sure we didn't make a mistake. Now it's much more about insight. Does our insight make us do something differently, that's much more the measure of success.”



SO IN SHORT, THE INSIGHT WORLD APPEARS TO BE VIBRANT,

perhaps even **bullish**, and within this we may well be seeing a **shift** to insight as a powerful **provocation** tool as opposed to a validating weapon. However, with so much going on and so much change, there does appear to be a level of **anxiety** over missing out on the next best thing and a **pressure** to make every insight project as **useful** as it can be.



DEFINITIONS

ON WHAT USEFULNESS IS AND ISN'T...

DEFINITION

#4

USEFUL INSIGHT IS ABOUT CHANGE

“Insight is useful to our internal clients if it helps them think differently about a problem, if it helps them solve a problem in an original way. It has to change something, we have to do something differently.”

Useful insight is not just about answering questions, it's about asking questions too. It's about change – changing the thoughts and actions of businesses, and even the way that they feel!

**WHAT AREAS OF YOUR BUSINESS ARE MOST IN NEED OF
CHANGE RIGHT NOW AND HOW CAN INSIGHT PLAY A ROLE IN
MAKING THIS HAPPEN?**

DEFINITION

USEFUL INSIGHT IS NOT ABOUT ROI

#5

ROI – that's bullshit! You can't. It's about creating value. It's often about developing thinking and shifting perceptions, and it can be very subtle and about nudging people in the right direction.”

The idea of a clear demonstration of ROI appears to be a myth. As something that is literally impossible to prove, it should not be used as a measure of useful insight. Useful insight has a demonstrative value to the business. It goes back to changing actions, changing behaviour, and indeed changing feelings. This is where insight's value truly lies... insight as a powerful agent for change.

**HOW ARE YOU DEMONSTRATING THE VALUE
OF INSIGHT AND TRACKING THE MIGRATION OF
KNOWLEDGE WITHIN YOUR ORGANISATION – AND
COULD THIS BE IMPROVED?**

#6

“It’s something that feels right but helps you see it in a new way. You knew it ‘kind of’ but now you’ve articulated it and it’s given you a way to communicate it to other people.”

CAN YOU MAKE YOUR INSIGHT FEEL CLEARER AND INTUITIVELY RIGHT TO REALLY STIMULATE DEBATE WITHIN YOUR ORGANISATIONS? ARE YOU MANAGING YOUR AGENCIES SO THAT WHAT THEY DELIVER MAKES SENSE AND IS UNDERSTOOD BY ALL?



#7

USEFUL INSIGHT DOESN'T TELL US WHAT WE ALREADY KNOW

The most frustrating thing is being told what you know, and part of that is the agency not having done their due diligence in finding out what you do know and therefore how to add value on top of that. So Usefulness for me is giving me a new perspective and a new light, and doing it in a way that is quite visual and exciting.

One of the big frustrations from clients is being told what you already know. It's up to agency partners to find this out. But it's also up to clients to be more forthcoming about handing over existing work so that we can build upon that knowledge and not re-invent the wheel.

**ARE YOU SHARING ENOUGH
OF YOUR EXISTING INSIGHT WORK
WITH AGENCY PARTNERS SO THEY DON'T
RE-INVENT THE WHEEL?**

DEFINITION

#8

USEFUL INSIGHT PENETRATES DEEPLY OVER TIME

You know you have truly useful insights on your hands if you see one or some of the following:

RAVENOUS REQUESTS

PEOPLE TRULY WANT TO USE IT

“ You know when it’s a useful piece of insight because people bite your hand off to use it.”

UNFAMILIAR FANS

IT TRAVELS WITHIN THE BUSINESS

“ People who weren’t even in the debrief were quoting the project back to me and I’m thinking ‘wow, this has really landed’.”



IT'S PART OF THE LINGO IT BECOMES PART OF A NEW LANGUAGE

“ It gave us a common language to talk about a specific problem – that really has lived on.”

TOOLED UP LIKE A SWISS ARMY KNIFE IT'S USED IN MULTIPLE WAYS BEYOND ITS ORIGINAL PURPOSE

“ Useful insight is like a Swiss Army knife. You start applying it to things beyond its original purpose.”

SHOULD EVERY PROJECT YOU RUN HAVE A USEFULNESS RATING? THIS WOULD ENABLE YOU TO SEE THE PATTERNS SO YOU CAN RE-FOCUS SPEND ON THE MOST USEFUL PROJECTS.

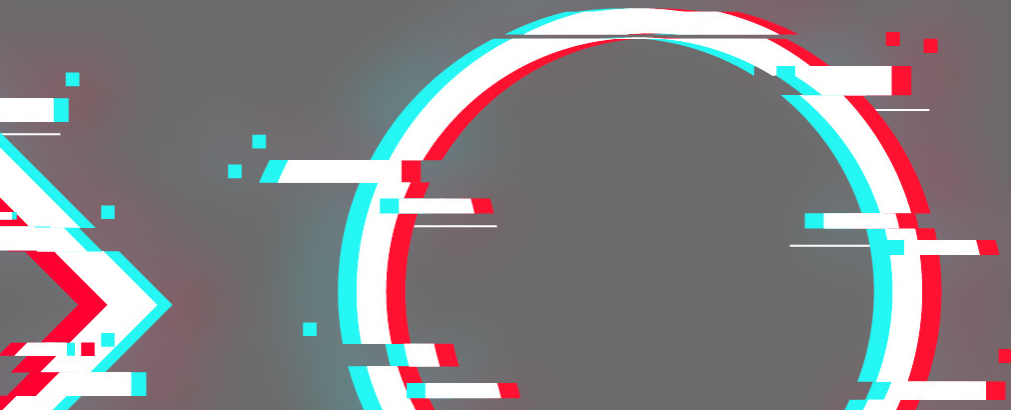


AGES LIKE A GREAT BOTTLE OF RED IT CREATES A LEGACY

“ The project has almost taken on a life of its own now. Because it's about the life of our audience it just gets referred to and referred to. I'd say it's having more impact now than 12 months ago when we launched it.”

SO USEFUL INSIGHT IS ABOUT BEING

a valued agent of change within the business. It's something that feels **intuitively right**, tells you something **new**, or **reframes** what you already know in **fresh** ways. It can become a part of the **language** of the business, get used **beyond** its original purpose, and be something which people genuinely want to use.





SPIRIT

THE SPIRIT OF USEFUL INSIGHT

#9

**USEFUL INSIGHT
IS BRAVE**

*The most useful projects can
be the hardest to fund...*

“ The issue with this project was getting budget in the first place, as no-one was asking for it but then they didn’t know how they lived without it once they had it. ”

The most useful projects often require vision and bravery to commission. In many instances they were the projects that helicoptered out from specific business objectives and were more about exploring the lives of the audience. From segmentations that the business thought they could maybe have done without, to the truly exploratory pieces which at the time seemed like ‘nice to haves’, but ultimately proved hugely thought-provoking. These projects often aged well – increasing their potency over time due to the fact that action isn’t necessarily immediate, but can be reflective and profound.

WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU WERE TRULY BRAVE? HOW CAN YOU BE BRAVER? HAVE YOU STOOD BACK AND TRIED TO SEE THE BIGGER PICTURE WITH A LESS IMMEDIATE BUSINESS OBJECTIVE?



#10

**USEFUL INSIGHT
IS CLEAR AND
UNAMBIGUOUS**

The best way to achieve that is
to start as you mean to go on

“ Challenge us, ask the questions. Don’t just accept the brief, we’re too busy and you might get a shitty brief. Really try and find out where we want to be because sometimes we don’t even know where we want to be. ”

The most useful projects have real clarity to them. And if the clarity is not there, the agency partner must make sure that they get it. In many instances, early stage tenacious questioning took projects to better places and achieved this clarity. Agencies should be doing as much as possible in these sessions, leaving no stone unturned.

**SHOULD THE BRIEFING
MEETING BE RE-FRAMED
AS THE ‘INTERROGATION’
MEETING WHERE
YOU CHALLENGE AND
STRESS-TEST THE
OBJECTIVES, APPROACH,
AND DELIVERABLES VS.
MERELY BRIEF?**

#11

USEFUL INSIGHT
IS PASSIONATE

It is dedicated to knowing what stakeholders really want and takes them on the journey too

“You can talk a good game, but it’s all about how that work gets used – do you actually really care? With the best agencies you feel like they’re on a journey with you as well, I want to feel that.”

The most useful projects are delivered with passion – the desire to do something truly useful shines through. One of the biggest success (or failure) factors was getting to the actual end user of the research and hearing from them directly. The most useful projects continue this passion throughout the process – finding ways to keep stakeholders engaged throughout – whether that’s WhatsApp groups, some video snippets, or other well-timed communications.

SHOULD YOU BE MORE BULLISH ABOUT GIVING ACCESS TO THE MOST SENIOR STAKEHOLDERS, EVEN IF IT’S FOR A 5 MINUTE CALL? AND WOULD A COMMS PLAN FOR PROJECTS ENSURE ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT THROUGHOUT THE PROCESS?



#12

**USEFUL INSIGHT
GENERATES EMPATHY**
They make people feel the
consumer (aka human beings)

**“It was analytically light
but you could feel the
consumer coming off the
page. It sounds strange
to say, but actually the
consumer doesn’t come
out enough in research.”**

Time and again the word ‘feel’ came up when describing the most useful projects. You can feel the ‘consumer’ through the work – they’re quote or video-heavy. But you can really feel the consumer through quant too – this isn’t just qual. They make stakeholders feel. This emotionality gives real impact, enabling real empathy and often real change. One question is are we actually getting out and meeting our audiences enough? There is a lot to be said for the simplicity of a ‘connect’ session in terms of creating real experiences that live on.

**IS YOUR INSIGHT
EMOTIONAL ENOUGH?
HOW DO YOU GET MORE
EMOTION INTO IT? HOW
DO YOU CREATE THIS
REAL HUMAN EMPATHY
BETWEEN YOUR
STAKEHOLDERS AND THE
‘CONSUMERS’?**



SPIRIT

#13

**USEFUL INSIGHT
HAS ITS OWN
PERSONALITY**

*Often through its own identity
& language*

“For us it was a framework and it had a great name. There was a beautiful sense of familiarity but also revolution – articulation of all those thoughts and hypotheses that all those teams were having and dropped it into a singular expression. It created a language that still lives on.”

The most useful projects almost take on a life of their own. They often have (and can give people) a shared language. This can create great debate or align around what they've heard, noticed, and processed. Not everything should or needs to be socialised – but the most useful projects usually are. They also have artefacts that express this personality and language.

**WHAT PERSONALITY
DOES YOUR PROJECT
HAVE AND HOW WILL AN
INTERNAL BUSINESS
PARTNER DESCRIBE
(AND PROMOTE) IT TO
SOMEONE ELSE?**



SO IN SHORT,

useful insight feels **brave, pure,**
and **clear,** has **passion,** its own
personality, and creates a real sense
of **empathy.**

THE PROPERTIES OF USEFUL INSIGHT

PROPERTY

#14

USEFUL INSIGHT HAS POWERFULLY
DISTINCT OUTPUT THAT LIVES ON

You know the money chart when you get to it in any debrief. Almost when you see it you want to print it out and put it on your wall. Something that becomes a template and a one pager that guides people on that topic. It should be very visual and punchy – no ambiguity. Even in a brand audit which can be a bit boring, you’ve got that one slide and when the marketing team come over with a brief you’ve done a million times then you can say ‘Well did you follow the seven golden rules?’. Then you don’t have to talk to them, you can just point at the chart and tell them to f*ck off.

Whether it’s a framework, tool kit, videos, questions, or a chart, the best projects have succinct outputs that get to the nub of the project and implications quickly – and usually visually. They become the references that live and help Insight teams distribute the findings.

HAVE YOU THOUGHT, EVALUATED, OR
CHALLENGED WHAT MAKES A KILLER OUTPUT?
HAVE YOU PROVIDED EXAMPLES OR GUIDANCE OF
KILLER OUTPUTS TO YOUR AGENCY PARTNERS?



PROPERTY #15

**USEFUL INSIGHT GOES FAR
ENOUGH BUT NO FURTHER**

“

We're moving away from firm recommendations toward illustrating the opportunities or tensions. We have well-paid marketers and creative agencies who come up with the answers. I think the danger of the agency coming in and saying 'you do this' is that often the research company are not the best people to come up with the creative solution to the problem. If it's a validation piece you do want a hard recommendation. It's a yes or no, and we need an agency who gets off the fence. But if it's up-front, pure insight, show us the opportunity and potential and it's up to us – the brand owner – to make that happen.

The most useful projects are the ones that are able to gauge how far to go with their recommendations dependent on where they are in the development cycle. However, there does seem to be a trend of holding back a little from tighter recommendations, and of moving more to provocations or stimulating questions as this can engage the actual users of the research to develop the solution. This can create an added layer of ownership, direction, and ultimately usability.

**SHOULD THE RECOMMENDATION VS.
PROVOCATION BALANCE BE CLEARLY DEFINED AT
THE START OF A PROJECT SO THERE IS CLARITY
ON HOW FAR THE AGENCY CAN GO?**

PROPERTY #16

**USEFUL INSIGHT GOES AT THE
RIGHT SPEED FOR ITS PURPOSE**

“

We give our creative partners 2 weeks to come up with the big idea and then tell them it's 8 weeks to research it. That is a very difficult conversation to have with business partners.

VS.

“

Things are not changing at a greater pace – that's recency bias. There's a slow movement – like slow cooking – so there needs to be slow insight too, as that's where the most value usually comes.

Sometimes research can still afford to be slow when we're early in the development phase and being brought in at the right time. Taking time, going deep, and reflecting are often vital ingredients to creating useful deliverables. But there is a real tension with timelines further down the funnel, as insight isn't moving fast enough for modern development cycles. Creating the balance between quality of reflection and speed is a challenge, and knowing when to apply either will be vital for the future of Insight.

**ARE YOUR STAKEHOLDERS BRINGING YOU INTO
THE PROCESS EARLY ENOUGH, AND IS IT TIME
FOR INSIGHT TO FIGHT HARDER FOR THIS?**

PROPERTY

#17

**USEFUL INSIGHT IS DESIGNED
WITH THE END USERS IN MIND**

“

The audience for insight is not the insight team, it's our internal partners. We did a big bit of work and I sent it to the Marketing Director and she just said 'What am I supposed to do with this? No-one will understand it'.

Almost universally, the most useful projects and insights were simple. It's useful if anyone can pick it up and use it. It's useful if you (the client team) can present it easily too. Reports are still way too long, and we need to find ways to enable agencies to produce work that is clear, meaningful, and easily disseminated to the audience that will actually use it.

**DOES EACH DECK NEED A DE-JARGONING AND
SIMPLIFICATION FILTER? ARE YOU WORKING
WITH YOUR AGENCIES TO GET TO MORE
CONCISE, MEANINGFUL OUTPUT?**

PROPERTY

#18

**USEFUL INSIGHT HAS
NOTHING TO DO WITH SPEND**

OBSERVATION

GOALS

We spend a quarter of our budget on our tracking study and a good few days a month working on it, and I don't really think we get very much value out of it. It's the least useful work we do.

Consistently, the least useful projects from a bang for buck perspective are Tracking projects. It costs a lot, it doesn't engage, and it's at the bottom of the usefulness ladder. It has to be done... but often quite grudgingly. Some are looking for ways to add value to Trackers, whereas others are seeking to do them less painfully.

HOW CAN YOU MAXIMISE THE VALUE OF YOUR TRACKER AND MAKE IT WORK HARDER? AND IMAGINE IF YOU DUMPED YOUR TRACKING – WHERE COULD THAT INSIGHT SPEND TAKE YOUR BUSINESS?

PROPERTY

#19

**USEFUL INSIGHT MAKES
CONNECTIONS AND JOINS UP THINKING**

“

The most useful insights were often insights built on insights – you’ve adapted them and built on them. It’s bullet 4 on that page and a point from slide 12 from a previous piece of work, merged with a conversation you’ve had in the lift and a thought you had in the shower.

Clients explained that, increasingly, they are looking to connect their research – often at a more strategic level, bringing various Insight pools together across the business. Useful insight is also about the skills of internal teams to evolve and adapt insights across a range of bodies of work. But it doesn’t yet seem as if there is too much cross-working with their bigger data brothers and sisters. They often report into the same places, but don’t often work horizontally with one another.

IS IT TIME TO REALLY EMBRACE THE BIG DATA PARTNERS AND SEE WHAT POWERFUL THINGS CAN BE CREATED TOGETHER? AND HOW WELL ARE YOU BUILDING ON THE COMBINED INSIGHT FROM ALL THE PROJECTS THAT YOU HAVE RUN?

PROPERTY #20

USEFUL INSIGHT IS EFFICIENT

“We commission fewer projects – we do fewer but bigger and longer – because there is so much stuff out there. Desk research has got a lot more important and is some of the most useful work we do.”

In general we saw a trend toward fewer (but often bigger) projects, and an increase in desk research and usage of trends. The smarter clients have really turbo-charged the usefulness of trends to place them in real contexts – making them active rather than passive.

ARE YOU GUILTY OF COMMISSIONING WORK THAT MAY ALREADY EXIST? AND HAVE YOU FULLY PURPOSED TRENDS YET?

AND THERE WE HAVE IT,

the final provocation –
and a counter-intuitive one no less – a
research agency suggesting that the industry
does less commissioned work!

SO IN SUMMARY, HERE ARE YOUR TOP 20





BUT WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

THE BOTTOM LINE

To get truly useful insight you must challenge yourself, your stakeholders, and your agency partners...

CHALLENGE YOURSELF TO...

- Be an agent for change
- Elevate Insight's standing within business
- Apply tracking measures for Insight's usefulness

CHALLENGE YOUR STAKEHOLDERS TO...

- Be open to provocation
- Roll sleeves up and get involved early in the process
- Commission the braver, bigger picture programmes

CHALLENGE YOUR PARTNER AGENCIES TO...

- Interrogate the brief to get your knowledge
- Bring the human to life in research
- Create projects with personality and killer outputs



Let's challenge ourselves to make Insight the most useful provocative agent of change it can be to improve your business's story moving forward.

To really challenge your insight to be as useful as possible, get in contact with One Minute to Midnight with briefs or to ask for a Usefulness Workshop for you and your Insight team.

YOUR AGENCY PARTNER, ONE MINUTE TO MIDNIGHT



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