

Sparking Curiosity: Operationalizing a Data-Driven Culture

A DATA-DRIVEN CULTURE COMBINED WITH THE RIGHT DISCOVERY TOOLS CAN CULTIVATE CURIOSITY. BUT HOW DO YOU GET THERE?

Businesses had to quickly pivot to respond when the pandemic hit. They introduced new products and services, streamlined supply chains, implemented revised operating models, secured the remote workforce, and did whatever they could to retain and serve their customers.

All these changes required speedy decision-making. Some companies, having instituted a data-driven culture before COVID-19 struck, were able to lean on rapid, actionable data insights to get them through the pandemic challenges.

Take the example of grocery chain Harmons, which instituted a modern BI platform several years ago that everyone—from the CEO to individual store clerks—could access based on their role. Senior leaders “see everything from HR to accounting, capital expenditures, labor reports, total store expenses, and gross margins,” [says Todd Jensen](#), vice president of sales for the 19-store chain.

Store managers can view labor schedules and costs, plus product sales right down to individual-item levels. Even produce managers can view the top sellers in their department.

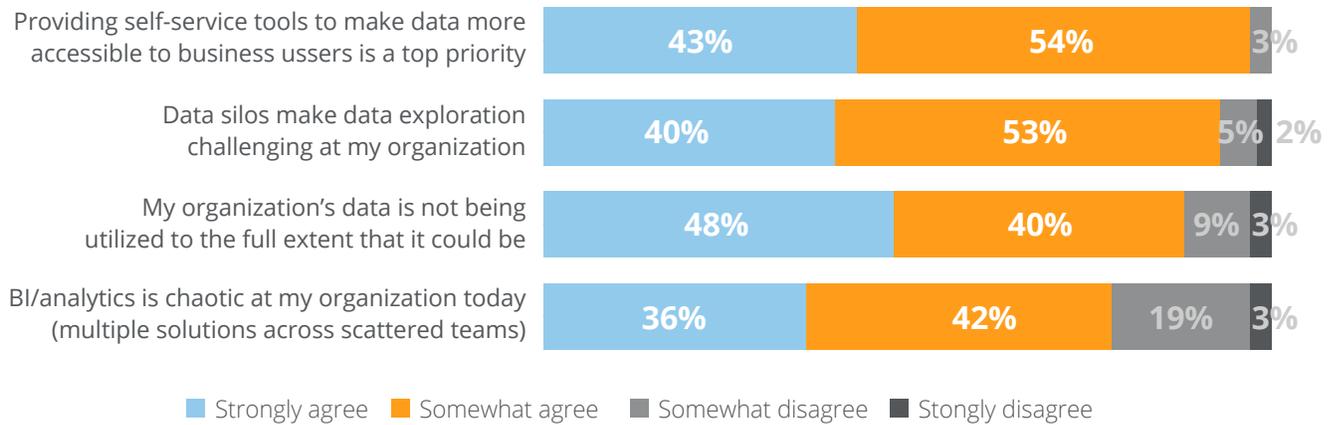
Having implemented a modern business intelligence (BI) infrastructure and begun the transformation to a data-driven culture before COVID-19 struck became a significant advantage. As products such as hand sanitizer, toilet paper, and water started flying off the shelves, Harmons was able to run a consolidated report—in less than 30 minutes—of the top 4,000 items requested by its customers and turn that over to its suppliers and other supply chain partners.

There were some surprises in the data. For example, Spam hadn't been on Harmons' top 100 product list in years. But suddenly during COVID, it was in the top five. “Knowing our data put us ahead of other national retailers,” Jensen says.

The Challenges Inhibiting Data Exploration

A data-driven culture, combined with the right discovery tools, can cultivate curiosity. This, in turn, can help achieve a variety of business outcomes. But how do you get there? First there are some obstacles to overcome.

Figure 1: Organizational Use of Data Today



Source: IDG

Companies have made significant investments in traditional BI and analytics tools in their efforts to drive business objectives, yet they still struggle to provide exploration opportunities to their employees. That's evident in the ways data is being used within organizations. Respondents to a recent IDG survey cited a variety of issues (see Figure 1).

These challenges can slow down a business's ability to respond with agility to market forces and get products and services to their customers. When BI reports aren't collated from all data sources, or when critical information is sitting in a spreadsheet on a user's desktop, decisions continue to be based on gut feelings rather than true data insights.

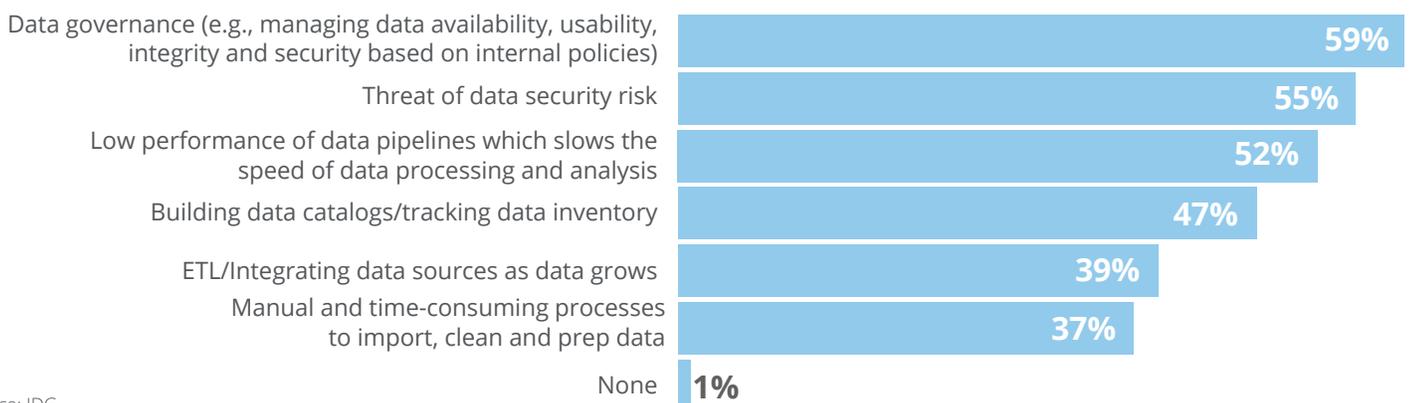
"I refer to this as 'managing by anecdote,'" says Ben Schein, vice president of data curiosity at Domo. "It's where one story, rather than actual circumstances, frames the decision."

Digging deeper, there are IT challenges that inhibit users' ability to gain access to data (see Figure 2). Survey respondents said that data governance—managing data availability, usability, integrity, and security—is the No. 1 hurdle they're facing with enabling data exploration. They're also constrained by the low performance of data pipelines, which slows the speed of data processing and analysis.

That said, having tools and policies is not the only answer to overcoming these challenges.

"You cannot just say, 'Here is a flexible tool; go have fun,'" says Schein. "People need to be ready to experiment. They need to feel like that is encouraged and that if they need to change things after the first try, that is OK. If the culture remains resistant to change, then no tool will allow for that curiosity to flourish."

Figure 2: Challenges Inhibiting Data Exploration



Source: IDG



The Need for a Data-Driven Culture

The vast majority of the IDG survey respondents cited difficulties with their data environment. It's clear that traditional BI tools aren't sufficiently encouraging data exploration. A modern BI-for-all approach is required, one that has buy-in from the top and takes advantage of grassroots energy and knowledge to spark data curiosity.

"The CIO's role in this is to reduce dependency on IT and on tools that limit curiosity," says Schein. They should seek to eliminate, for example, the need for users to wait in line for their data queries, as well as restrictive data access limitations due to security or governance issues, he notes. This "spoon-feeding" approach to data accessibility dries up a natural desire to ask questions and further examine information.

"It can't be about locking things down," Schein says. "With the right levels of governance in place, people are given accountability to explore on their own and they understand that their curiosity comes with responsibility."

The harder part is sparking the initial curiosity, he says. An IT leader can provide a modern platform with self-service functionality and enable business users to go after the data. But it's important for the process to be rewarding. People have to be able to ask questions and see the results quickly.

"The best way to get people interested in data is to show them that it works," says Schein. "A dynamic system that offers interactivity—that lets people drill down, highlights outlying data, and is constantly evolving—is impactful."

Imagine a retail store manager who can see in his BI platform that some products are selling better than others. He can now walk out to the floor to visualize product placement and displays and start asking questions such as these: Did we

change the presentation of that item? Are we out of inventory on similar products? That curiosity is sparked by providing data in a relevant way.

"The other thing that CIOs and leaders must do is to let people fail," Schein says. "Sometimes there is cultural resistance. Someone might say, 'I never code,' or 'I don't do BI reporting.' To overcome this, organizations must flex their change muscles. You need to encourage people to try different tools and technology while giving them the freedom to make mistakes."

At the same time, users should be encouraged and empowered to act on the data they see. Giving them this freedom cultivates ongoing curiosity.

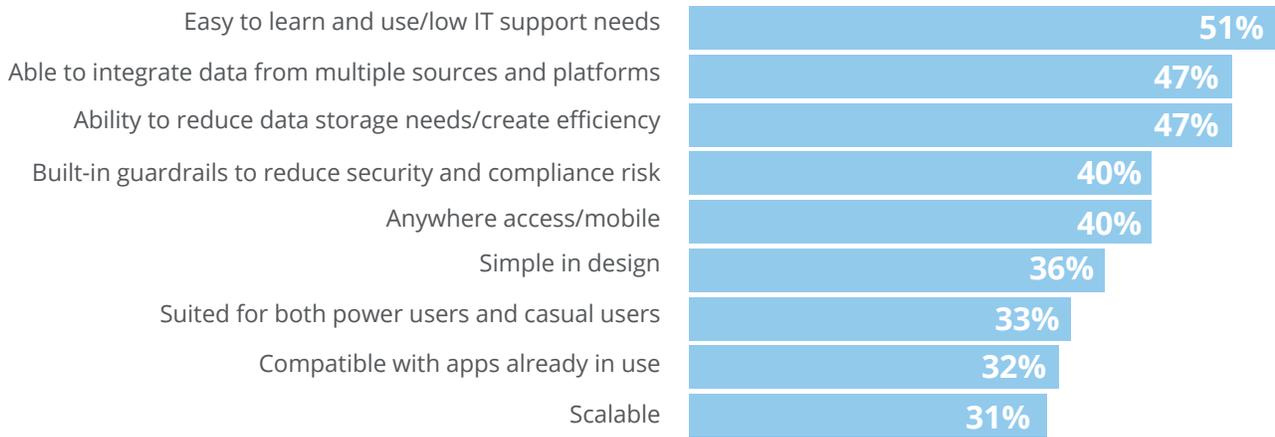
The Nurturing Role of Discovery Tools

A modern BI platform has a huge role to play in data exploration. The right one offers holistic data integration; 90% of the IDG survey respondents agree that it's critical or very important to integrate multiple data sources to improve data exploration outcomes.

The right [platform](#) offers extract, transform, load (ETL) graphic modeling tools to speed the ingestion, cleaning, and transformation of data. Another approach is to leverage a solution that automates data workflows and pipelines so developers can easily combine data from multiple databases.

In addition, IT leaders should explore BI platforms with intelligent-action tools and capabilities. For example, self-service functionality with baked-in governance and security helps individuals rapidly get answers to their queries and empowers them to explore on their own.

Figure 3: Software Functionality That Encourages Data Access and Exploration



Source: IDG

"We aspired to be a data-driven organization but didn't have a clear understanding of how to get there," says Sophie Shawdon, senior data analyst at ClearScore, a financial technology company. "For some people in our organization, data is quite scary."

ClearScore implemented Domo's BI platform company-wide, and now users are empowered with self-service functionality to get the data they need on their own.

"Because it's such an easy tool for visualizing information, people don't come up to me asking how much money we made yesterday or how many users we just signed up. They just go find that information themselves," she adds.

That fits with what IT leaders want in order to give their business users the freedom and confidence to access and explore data (see Figure 3).

"With today's workforce becoming increasingly mobile, the platform must also be responsive and device-ready without sacrificing functionality," Schein says. "Only then can employees continue consulting, questioning, and using the data to collaborate or act on, regardless of where they are."

Next Steps: How to Get Started

Instituting a data-driven culture doesn't happen overnight. It starts with implicit buy-in from the top of the organization toward enabling data exploration, followed by modeling how data exploration works.

"Business leaders and managers first have to demonstrate the 'why' of data curiosity in order for their people to follow suit," Schein says.

Next he suggests identifying individuals who already exhibit naturally higher levels of curiosity. "Get them excited about data, and show them the possibilities, and then you can develop a grassroots effect around data curiosity."

A powerful, modern BI platform—one that doesn't limit users or the organization and keeps pace with the need for business agility and speed to market—is also critical.

"Only with these elements in place can organizations ensure that their people tap into data as easily as they breathe—and use it to fuel digital innovation and growth," Schein says.

Watch a demo to see how Domo can help you

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