

**BRIDGING  
THE  
ANALYTICS  
DISCONNECT:  
CHARTING  
A MORE  
DATA-DRIVEN  
PATHWAY TO  
GROWTH**



BY ELLIOT LUM,  
Senior Vice President, Talent Strategy and Program Development

## Executive Summary

# BRIDGING THE ANALYTICS DISCONNECT: CHARTING A MORE DATA-DRIVEN PATHWAY TO GROWTH

## STUDY BACKGROUND

Since 2017, the ANA Educational Foundation (AEF) has conducted an annual qualitative study of key stakeholders: industry, academia, and talent, specifically undergraduate students and new hires. The purpose of the study is to diagnose the talent disconnects across all the stakeholders and propose solutions that have sufficient scale to bring all parties together. The AEF has approached building this bridge between academia and industry from three different angles:

**Year 1 in 2017:**  
The **TALENT** Disconnect

**Year 2 in 2018:**  
The **DIVERSITY** Disconnect

**Year 3 in 2019:**  
The **ANALYTICS** Disconnect

## GROWTH MANDATE

Growth. Every organization is striving for business growth. Talent is seen by CMOs as the most crucial enabler of business growth.<sup>1</sup> Other research has shown that growth companies designate talent as a key investment area for them to capitalize on new opportunities, whether that be launching new products to fulfill unmet customer needs or crafting messaging that drives greater brand affinity and loyalty.<sup>2</sup>

Underpinning these actions are the analytics required to make these decisions. Gary Ottley, senior lecturer at Babson College, shared, “Analytics is the art of using data to make better decisions. It is the tools, software, techniques, and formulas that go into analytics. All of it allows us to make more informed decisions.”

## ANALYTICS BACKGROUND

The term “analytics” is often combined with the term “data” to form the phrase “data and analytics.” The definition of analytics can range from being fairly technical (the systematic computational analysis of data or statistics) to something more business focused (analytics is the discovery, interpretation, and communication of meaningful patterns in data,

and the process of applying those patterns toward effective decision-making<sup>3</sup>).

The use of analytics is not new in marketing. Companies have been running mixed models and conjoint analysis of segment audiences for decades. What is new is the explosion of data that has run across all channels in marketing. The demand for this kind of data science skill set spans industries such as consumer packaged goods, retail, technology, financial services, and automotive.

As Mike Bentley, global chief strategy officer at GTB, shared, “There is an anticipated tidal wave of data that will be produced by innovations in automotive. An autonomous vehicle generates many terabytes per day. Multiply that by a fleet of 100,000,

1. “The Link Between Talent and Organic Growth,” *Forbes* (February 2018).

2. “Marketing Organizational Structure Research,” Association of National Advertisers (2017).

3. “Analytics,” Wikipedia (2020)

and you understand how an organization that makes cars suddenly finds the need to structure the ability to take in and comprehend oceans of data.”

**GROWTH OF MARKETING ANALYTICS**

Despite the tremendous hype generated by the data and analytics field, there is still a lack of clarity in what the term “analytics” means. Jay Kaufman, SVP, global research and insights, NBA, shared, “The phrase ‘Data and Analytics, has become broadly used and there is often ambiguity in what it means. It can range from what a data scientist does at NASA to conducting a complex analysis within Excel. Even within the field of marketing analytics, it is not just working with data. It is about drawing insights from large amounts of information to deduce what that data means to the business.”

Despite this ambiguity, organizations are looking to harness the power of data to drive business outcomes and over the past several years have invested more heavily in marketing analytical capabilities to improve the quality of decision making. Michael Horn, chief data officer, at Huge, shared, “Ten years ago, we looked to data as validation for the creative. In the past five years, data is now the fuel, not the exhaust. It is the input into decision-making, not used as the output to validate the decision.”

**THE ANALYTICS DISCONNECT**

This report focuses on the analytics disconnect across academia, industry, and talent. It identifies three disconnects at this intersection:

**DISCONNECT #1:**

**A perception problem exists with students who view marketing and advertising as more *qualitative* than *quantitative* affecting the type of talent entering the industry.**

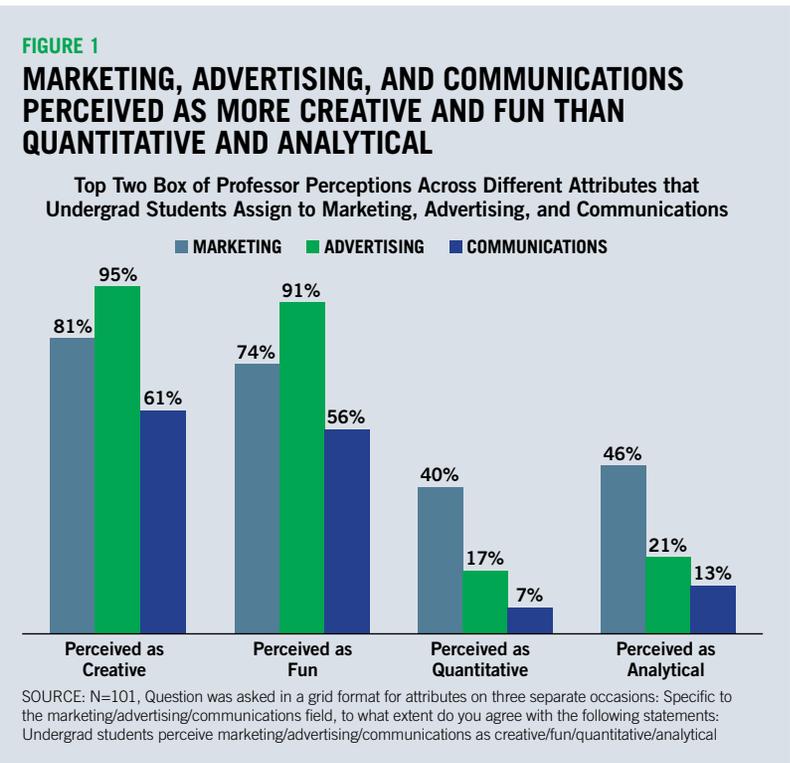
Figure 1 captures the perception that professors have about how their undergrad students perceive marketing, advertising, and communications as much more creative and fun than quantitative and analytical. This data reflects the qualitative sentiments of many professors:

*“At my institution, like many similar institutions, students who gravitate toward advertising are not math- or computer-skills oriented. The perception is that advertising is not a math-heavy major. These students often lack the confidence necessary to acquire analytics skills.”*

— **SALEEM ALHABASH,**  
*Associate Professor of Advertising and Public Relations, Michigan State University*

*“Marketing students tend to be scared of the numbers. In the marketing analytics concentration, 40 percent of the class comes from business analytics, 40 percent comes from marketing, and 20 percent are from other disciplines. What I have found is that the business concentration students don’t fear the math. In fact, most of them are better in the math than I am as well as in coding because they have grown up in these courses. Marketing students might be able to tell the story well but struggle with the calculations of how those numbers were derived.”*

— **Gary Ottley,**  
*Senior Lecturer, Babson College*



*“There is a widespread notion that marketing students are weaker in quant skills as opposed to other business majors, which is backed up by many academic citations. Among those who take this major, there is a tendency to believe “quant isn’t for me as it’s more for finance or accounting.” But the marketing discipline is changing as it is becoming more quantitative.*

— **GEMA VINUALES,**  
*Assistant Professor, Department of Marketing and Business Analytics, San Jose State University*

## DISCONNECT #2:

**Significant obstacles exist for companies to provide real and contextualized data to academia restricts educator’s ability to connect data and analytics to business outcomes.**

There are several barriers preventing a more fluid research partnership between academia and industry:

### **DISCONNECTED EXPECTATIONS BETWEEN “REAL WORLD” AND “PERFECT WORLD”:**

*“In academia, there is a set project where you have a set time and deliverable knowing you will be able to accomplish it. In real life, you don’t have that perfect scenario. There is often not enough time and not enough information. The perfect world doesn’t exist, and in real life, you may only have only a few pieces of information.”*

— **ASHLEE WEISSER,**  
*Vice President, Analytics and Insights at Bloomin’ Brands*

### **LACK OF A “BUSINESS MINDSET” FROM ACADEMIA:**

*“I am a firm believer that there can be a strong relationship between academic research and a business application. There is magic that can happen with this kind of collaboration. There are two components to this. The first is the science behind the research. The second is the money to fund the research. I have had successful collaborations with professors who were practically oriented and understood how our business worked. They balanced their need to publish versus our need to drive business results and maintain a competitive advantage with the results being generated. This business mindset makes it easier for us to fund research where everyone wins. We are not in the business of funding academic research to get ourselves published in academic journals.”*

— **ALEX GENOV,**  
*Head of Customer Research at Zappos*

### **DATA CONFIDENTIALITY THAT MIGHT GIVE AWAY COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE:**

*“The first big barrier is that it is hard to give students access to data due to contractual requirements around keeping data confidential. If we can give them access, there need to be specific constraints of what can and can’t be shared. The second big barrier is the kinds of questions we as a business want answers to that help us gain a competitive advantage. We would*

*need to find the right joint project with academics where we would be comfortable having the results published in a public forum.”*

— **JACOB PEWITT YANCEY,**  
*Director of Consumer Insights and Analytics at VISIT FLORIDA*

### **TIME-VALUE TRADEOFF DIFFICULT TO JUSTIFY:**

*“People don’t have time to figure out how academia is going to help them with their specific projects. It’s hard work to structure a working relationship where you can get that kind of commitment across the board. One of my data science heads asked “Why don’t you work with a particular school on a project we have?” The thing is there is a lot of time that needs to be invested to do that and we don’t necessarily have that time to put on the calendar to ensure a quality experience for us as well as the professor and the students.”*

### **COMPANY CLEARANCES DIFFICULT TO SECURE:**

*“When working with business and legal affairs, they are responsible for managing corporate risk where they want to protect our intellectual property. They want to understand what data is going outside the walls of the company and why. They will then want to know if the data can be cleansed and disguised in what way. Getting those clearances is a time-consuming affair when other business priorities might be more pressing.”*

— **DAS DASGUPTA,**  
*Corporate SVP, Head of Data Science and Digital Transformation at Viacom*

### IMPACT OF THE RESEARCH DISCONNECT

Difficulty in forging meaningful research relationships results in those relationships not being leveraged for the benefit of students. As Mia Vallo, VP, Insights and Analytics, National Geographic Partners and Adjunct Professor at Georgetown University School of Continuing Studies, shared, “Being in both the industry and in academia, one of the struggles that I keep seeing in academia is the lack of opportunity to work with real-world data. I have the advantage where I have access to the tools already, but not all professors have that. Academics will try to compensate by bringing in a guest speaker, but that person is typically just for one class instead of the entire program. It’s hard for academia — professors and students — to get access to real-world data as we all need to be mindful of data privacy and confidentiality.”

Having the ability to work with real data helps maximize student learning with the tools to help them analyze data and also frames the context of what action they can take from that data. As Michael Horn, chief data officer at Huga, shared, “The risk of hiring entry-level talent straight from school is that students will often learn techniques in isolation. They are not adequately prepared for the business challenges and collaboration with internal and external partners to drive toward an outcome.”

Several academics acknowledge the importance of getting access to industry data:

*“We need access to data. It is hard to teach analytics and make data-driven decisions when you don’t have access to a good data set. If we want to train students on data analysis, we need to have data. And data tends to be proprietary to companies. Thus, partnering with businesses has become a priority. Moreover, companies may benefit from students’ insights into how they can improve their businesses as well as identify potential interns and future employees. It is a win-win for all.”*

— **GEMA VINALES,**  
**Assistant Professor, Department of Marketing and Business Analytics, San Jose State University**

*“The amount of data that is becoming available to businesses is growing exponentially. When students graduate and start working, they will often encounter very large data sets which might seem overwhelming to them. Our job is to get them exposed to data sets and get them to think analytically about the data. We analyze how different variables might be connected to each other and spot opportunities that could be useful for marketing purposes. But it is a big and sudden jump from university to the workplace, and we need to have more industry involvement where they can come to the classroom to talk about how to manage this jump.”*

— **HEMANT PATWARDHAN,**  
**Professor of Marketing, Winthrop University**

### DISCONNECT #3:

**The shortage of data and analytical skills is not just technical as employers place a premium on the combination of *hard* and *soft* skills together with a *business mindset*.**

There have been several studies pointing to the data and analytics skills shortage:

- A 2018 KPMG CIO report reports that the data and analytics field suffers from the greatest skills shortage.<sup>4</sup>
- A 2018 LinkedIn Workforce Report reports that every major city is suffering from a data science skills gap.<sup>5</sup>

Despite this skills gap, the marketing and advertising industry has looked to capitalize on opportunities created by the explosion of data. IPG acquired Acxiom, a database marketing company, in 2018 for \$2.3 billion<sup>6</sup> while Publicis Groupe purchased Epsilon for \$4.4 billion in 2019.<sup>7</sup> Brands have also been building this capability, such as when McDonald’s acquired Dynamic Yield, a personalization technology company, for \$300 million in 2019.<sup>8</sup>

Christopher Outram, chief data officer at RUN, Publicis Media, explained this trend: “In the next five years, I would not be surprised if agencies had five to 10 times the amount of engineering talent. Marketing is transforming into Marketing Technology, where we have moved from being a relationship-based business to a data-driven business.”

4. “What’s Driving Data Science Hiring in 2019,” Datanami (January 2019)  
5. LinkedIn Workforce Report, LinkedIn (August 2018)  
6. “IPG Confirms \$2.3 Billion Deal to Acquire Data Marketing Company Acxiom,” *Adweek* (July 2018)  
7. “Publicis Group Completes a \$4 Billion Acquisition of Epsilon,” *Ad Age* (July 2019)  
8. “McDonald’s Is Acquiring Dynamic Yield to Create More Customized Drive-Thru,” TechCrunch (March 2019)

**PLACING A PREMIUM ON SOFTER SKILLS TO COMPLEMENT THE TECHNICAL ABILITY**

The data suggests that there is a lack of technical skill to harness the power of marketing technology.<sup>9</sup> What this research uncovered was that interviewed respondents felt that technical skills were readily available. What is lacking is the technical skill combined with softer skills to influence business decisions. Figure 2 shows the top hard and soft skills that employers are looking for when hiring a data scientist.

Luisa Martinez, senior research manager, media planning and programming at Univision Communications, shared, “There is lot of analytics and data science talent. What is lacking is talent specifically for media, where it’s hard to find the right skill set to merge different sets of data together.” Dustin Engel, VP of corporate development and investments at PMG, shared, “The fundamental disconnect is the lack of practicality of how to apply the hard skills into driving action.” Many others shared this sentiment:

*“When I interview candidates, I find that they are very well equipped from the programming perspective. They have a solid grasp on the tools. That proficiency doesn’t necessarily lend itself to telling a good story. There is so much duplicative data with so many different ways to look at it that it’s hard to figure out what is the right story to tell. My team helps interpret the data and translate it to what it means to the business. There is a human aspect to it even*

**FIGURE 2  
TOP HARD AND SOFT SKILLS FOR A DATA SCIENCE ROLE REQUIRED BY EMPLOYERS**

SPECIALIZED SKILLS	BASELINE SKILLS
Data Science	Research
Python	Communication Skills
Machine Learning	Teamwork/Collaboration
SQL	Problem-Solving
Apache Hadoop	Creativity
Big Data	Writing
Data Analysis	Presentation Skills

SOURCE: Burning Glass (2020) — data quantified from employment landscape sourced through proprietary technology; Specialized skills, also referred to as hard skills, require specific domain knowledge or technical training; Baseline skills are foundational skills such as problem-solving, organization, and collaboration. These skills are often referred to as “soft skills.”

*as we move more towards machine learning which can generate lots of reports. However, what computers can’t do is interpret that data.”*

**— DAWN HAVILAND,  
Director, Consumer Insight, Measurement  
and Analytics, The Walt Disney Company**

*“Many individuals have technical expertise, which are skills that can be taught and mastered. The ability to distill insights and present them in a compelling way is much harder to train if that person doesn’t have*

*those kinds of traits, or desire to be front and center. I have team members who don’t feel comfortable in front of a group, preferring to crunch the numbers behind the scenes, and they add enormous value to our analytics product. However, the ability to provide insight, foresight, and strategic thinking to decision-making as a result of data analysis is a much more difficult skill to master.”*

**— KEVIN MOELLER,  
Head of Media Insights and Analytics,  
PepsiCo North America**

*“If you can’t communicate your analysis as if you are having a cocktail party conversation, it doesn’t matter how good the analysis is. Business writing and verbal communication are just as important to the analyst as the analysis itself.”*

**— HILARY DECAMP,  
Chief Research Officer, LRW**

*“The biggest gap that I see is communication skills. We can produce great analytics that are bulletproof and created with the highest level of integrity, but packaged in the wrong way, so the findings get lost. It’s important to prioritize the storytelling aspect, where interpersonal skills are so crucial. Executives are constantly getting reports and are overloaded with data. They won’t know what to focus on if it is not a compelling story.”*

**— KATE KENNEY,  
Director, Global Operations and Strategy, Citi**

9. “Marketers Say Automation Is a Key Focus But Many Lack Skills,” *MarketingWeek* (August 2019)

“When I think about my team and an analytics team, on one side, there is technical capability which is taking raw data and conducting an analysis. On the other side, there is a collection of softer skills: how to present effectively, unlock insights, understand how to position an idea that can resonate with an audience who is often not technical. I am expecting my team to have a point of view and position the findings so that action can be taken. What I am finding when reviewing graduating students who have done engineering or computer science or data science is that often they don’t come with these softer skills.”

— JENNIFER BRETT,  
Head of North American Insights,  
Marketing Solutions at LinkedIn

**ACTION PLAN**

Figure 3 sets out an action plan to help address three disconnects.

	DISCONNECT #1	DISCONNECT #2	DISCONNECT #3
<b>Key Disconnect</b>	A perception problem exists with students who view marketing and advertising as more <i>qualitative</i> than <i>quantitative</i> affecting the type of talent entering the industry.	Significant obstacles exist for companies to provide <i>real</i> and <i>contextualized</i> data to academia which restricts educator’s ability to connect data and analytics to business outcomes.	The shortage of data and analytical skills is not just technical as employers place a premium on the combination of <i>hard</i> and <i>soft</i> skills together with a <i>business mindset</i> .
<b>Opportunity</b>	Update the perception of marketing and advertising from just fun and creative to include quantitative and analytical.	Build bridges between professors and analytics executives to produce marketing and advertising case studies for the benefit of students.	Offer broader foundational softer skills for data and analytics executives and students entering into the industry.
<b>Key Mechanism</b>	The “Best Jobs Ever” campaign developed with McCann Worldgroup to elevate the perception of marketing as a career choice on campus.	ANA Talent Forward and Marketing Knowledge Center creating a forum for academia and analytics executives to interact and create the foundation for case study creation.	ANA Data & Technology and ANA Marketing Training Development Center resource deployment through certifications, conferences, workshops, and online training.
<b>Industry Support</b>	ANA CEO Bob Liodice said, “The Best Jobs Ever campaign is rooted in a simple, powerful idea: The marketing industry offers some of the best jobs young people have never heard of.” He added that the campaign is designed to optimize the talent pipeline from college students through to CMOs. “This campaign demonstrates just how creative, innovative, and powerful a career in marketing can be.”	“Case studies highlight specific problems in a very unstructured way. It can test technical proficiency, quantitative skills, and business acumen that simulates what happens in industry and the decisions that were made based by those who made them,” said Ainul Huda, VP, Analytics, Marketing, and Audience Development, Condé Nast.	Bill Tucker, Group EVP at ANA shared, “One of the biggest pressing priorities of the CMO is understanding the complexity of the data & technology landscape and identifying how to leverage technology and data in a privacy safe manner to drive growth and eliminate waste. The ANA is investing significant resources in building out the right infrastructure — inclusive of talent needs — to service members in this area.”

## KEY STUDY TAKEAWAY: THE GOVERNANCE OF CRITICAL THINKING

Subodha Kumar, Paul R. Anderson Distinguished Chair professor of marketing and supply chain management at the Fox School of Business at Temple University, shared, “There is still a gap between what universities are providing and what industry needs. We hear a lot of companies complain mainly that students don’t know how to approach a business problem.”

Problems by very definition are ambiguous and often require an approach from multiple, diverse angles. Solving a business problem is less about getting the right answer than it is about answering the problem in a way that influences stakeholders to act on that issue. Both academia and industry are united in their perspective about the importance of critical thinking when analyzing data.

### ACADEMIA PERSPECTIVE ON CRITICAL THINKING

*“When working with data, it’s important to ask really good questions. It might start off with one question and then evolve. One shouldn’t take the initial question at face value, though. Instead, one should interrogate it and push to understand the dimensions of that particular problem.”*

— **ED TIMKE,**  
*Instructor of Advertising and Society and Innovation and Entrepreneurship, Duke University*

*“In our brand strategy course, we challenge our students to think critically. What is the problem? How do we know that is the right problem? What are the tools that might help us solve that problem? What are the sources of information that can help provide answers to that problem? After having healthy debate around this issue, we teach students how to use and manipulate data sets. We then continue to ask more*

*questions that help our students understand the why behind the how.”*

— **MATT STEFL,**  
*Clinical Professor, Marketing and Co-Director, M-School at Loyola Marymount University*

*“The best critical thinkers digest everything and question just as much. They are the ones reading James Baldwin as well as learning how to code. They tend to wrestle with lots of intersecting ideas and then look to engage with faculty who challenge and push their thinking forward.”*

— **OLUWATOSIN ADEGBOLA,**  
*Associate Professor, Strategic Communication, Morgan State University*

*“Critical thinking means to be able to take in and evaluate information of multiple types and from multiple sources. Ideally and over time, as students evolve intellectually, they develop a*

*valuable form of skepticism, not easily granting evidence the stamp of truth, whether that evidence comes from me, emerges in our classroom readings, or emanates from the myriad outlets students tune in to outside of class. In the classroom, they learn to think critically and ask hard questions of scholarly material. My role is to facilitate this, putting forward various perspectives and types of evidence with an aim of collectively arriving at deeper understandings. In all of this, there is more overlap between the qualitative and quantitative elements of intellectual work than may seem apparent. “*

— **JENNIFER SCANLON,**  
*William R. Keenan Professor of Gender, Sexuality, and Women’s Studies, Director of Gender, Sexuality, and Women’s Studies Program, Bowdoin College*

*“Critical thinkers take charge of the data when writing their essays. A student might be faced with tons of statistics where they can’t put the input into a mathematical equation. It’s important for them to choose the data and extract a story from it that captures in prose something non-obvious about a piece of history a student might be examining.”*

— **PAUL FREEDMAN,**  
*Professor of History, Yale University*

*“Critical thinkers should be able to think across disciplines. Their analysis and assessment of situations are not pigeonholed within a marketing*

or advertising role but can see how decisions affect other functions within an organization. A lot of the students get educated to think within a silo. This is where critical thinking comes in, so they can think outside of their own discipline.”

— **SUJAN DAN**,  
Associate Professor of Business,  
Rhodes College

**INDUSTRY PERSPECTIVE ON CRITICAL THINKING**

“The number one most important attribute is curiosity. The reason is because curiosity reflects someone who is self-motivated to keep their skills as sharp as possible. They love to learn, and with that curiosity, they are the ones who are going to push themselves to figure out what is that story to the problem we are looking to answer.”

— **DAWN HAVILAND**,  
Director, Consumer Insight, Measurement  
and Analytics, The Walt Disney Company

“There is a healthy skepticism that strong critical thinkers exhibit. They challenge the assumptions of what is presented and don’t look to skip steps to jump to a conclusion as they know they might end up in the wrong place. They then cull through the forest to find the trees without getting distracted. What they find is the cohesive underlying pattern, and don’t get bogged down in the extraneous detail, to find the one to three things that the client should do.”

— **HILARY DECAMP**,  
Chief Research Officer, LRW

“Critical thinking is crucial when approaching analytical problems. It’s not just about computational competency but also how to contextualize and interpret the data. Then, analysts need to think about the business implications and what those implications mean when they interact with executives. Analytic professionals need to be prepared to think on their feet and have a point of view, which is what I try to emphasize with my team.”

— **RICHARD SHAKARCHI**,  
Managing Director, Marketing Analytics and Insights,  
TD Ameritrade

**THE ROLE OF CRITICAL THINKING IN DATA AND ANALYTICS**

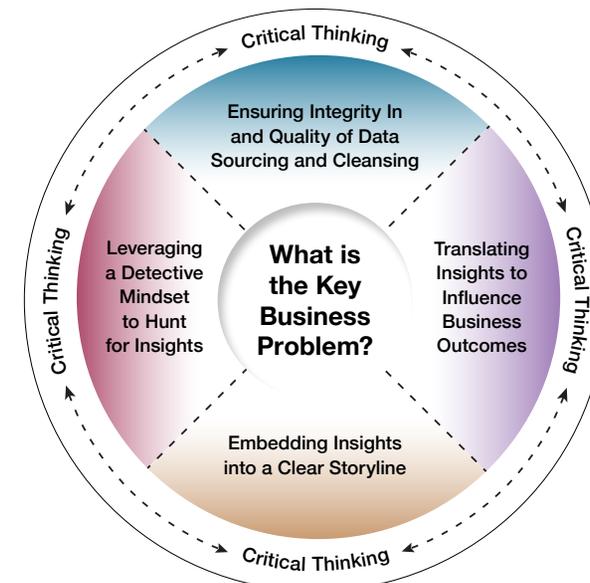
Data can play a crucial role to make key business decisions. The data itself doesn’t make that decision. People ultimately make those decisions.

Research has identified four key areas to drive decision making to answer a business problem leveraging data as seen in Figure 4:

- Ensuring Integrity in and Quality of Data Sourcing and Cleansing
- Leveraging a Detective Mindset to Hunt for Insights
- Embedding Insights into a Clear Storyline
- Translating Insights to Influence Business Outcomes

**Ensuring Integrity in and Quality of Data Sourcing and Cleansing.** The underlying theme, whether a company is working with a partner or building an internal analytics capability, is that there is an entire process to get the data to a point where it has

**FIGURE 4**  
**CRITICAL THINKING GOVERNING THE DECISION MAKING LEVERAGING DATA AND ANALYTICS**



integrity. Integrity, however, does not translate into usability. Integrity means that the data can be trusted to be acted on by the organization because it has been vetted with analytical rigor and discipline.

“The way that I think about it,” said Mary Brewer Blanks, director, marketing capabilities at Red Hat, “is ‘Bad Data In, Bad Out.’” Ciju Nair, senior director global commercial analytics at Kellogg Co. and

adjunct faculty at Northwestern University, added, “We get inundated with data, so it’s important to have the right data from the outset, from when/how we source it all the way through the to the application of that data to a business use case. If we are not disciplined at every stage, we lose the integrity and fidelity of that data. Garbage in, garbage out.”

**Leveraging a Detective Mindset to Hunt for Insights.** After ensuring the data quality, the next phase is to determine the insights that can be generated from this data. Report creep is what many organizations are looking to get away from, which just captures the data in a very static way. Ed Lucas, VP of business analytics at Toll Brothers, shared, “There is a prevailing perspective that the main purpose of analytics is report generation versus analysis and actionable insights. It’s a culture shift where we move from generating reports in Excel and saying ‘I’m done, here are your numbers,’ to having that data available for making decisions in real time. We need to get people thinking about analytics as a forward-looking strategic business driver versus a backwards-looking tool to substantiate results.”

But in conducting quantitative analysis, there is a balance of discipline and creativity to approaching the data set and unlocking the value from it. Dan McKinney, VP of data and analytics at Entercom, explained, “The way that I think about analytics is that I am a detective where I can go and piece information together to provide an explanation of a business problem that is then backed by data and insights.”

Abby Mehta, SVP, Marketing Analytics & Insights at Bank of America, adds, “It’s important to make sense of the numbers instead of just posting them. The “why” and the “so what” behind the data rather than just that this number went up while this went down, is what I am looking for. It’s a huge missing skill that prevents us from getting into the insight behind the numbers”

Analytics isn’t just about numbers. It’s a language that tells the story of human behavior. Being a detective requires a lot of spadework to put all of the pieces together that build up to this bigger picture. It is that bigger picture that helps the organization get on the same page around the insight without getting bogged down in the minutia of how the insight was derived.

### **Embedding the Insights into a Clear Storyline.**

Insights need to be contextualized against what problem the business is facing. The insight helps shift the perception of the organization from one way to look at something to a different way. The story around why that insight matters and how it affects the business is what the analytical community most struggles with.

Luisa Martinez, senior research manager, media planning and programming at Univision, shared, “I never studied to be a storyteller but I became one after being in media for 14 years where I learned that data goes way beyond just being a reporter. It’s important to know the audience, who you are catering to, and how that research might affect decision-making.”

Getting the story crystal clear is of critical importance. Fran Sapir, manager of marketing enablement of Red Hat, pointed out, “There is a tendency to build stories that try to include every possible insight because there is always more to share.” She continued to explain: “As a result, I think people can, very quickly, become overwhelmed. We have a responsibility to try to be empathetic to how they will receive this information and adjust accordingly.”

### **Translating Insights to Influence Business**

**Outcomes.** Having a powerful story centered around a core business insight doesn’t necessarily drive organizational action. Michael Hugo, senior director of marketing, analytics, and growth strategy at Reynolds Consumer Products, recounted, “When evaluating a specific marketing program, I determined that the return was not worth the investment and made the recommendation to discontinue the program to the brand. The CMO was puzzled why this program was then still in another brand director’s plan after he had seen me make that specific recommendation for its removal. It was made clear that it was my role to make sure that we don’t repeat these kinds of programs again. I needed to inject myself more into each brand’s business plans and be responsible and accountable for changing the behavior of my key stakeholders, even without direct control of their spending.”

Insights generated in a vacuum will not achieve a desirable outcome to change organizational behavior. That story needs to influence key decision-makers

who might then make a resource allocation decision, for example, based on what is recommended in a presentation. With a marketing problem, Mark Kaline, the SVP of data marketing and analytics at the ANA, indicated there is a growing need for a translator to put insights into business terms where the CMO can make actionable decisions. Mike Bentley, global chief strategy officer at GTB, agreed that “without that layer of translation, that data and insight can get dismissed if we are not talking the same language as our business stakeholders.”

Mohammed Chaara, chief data scientist at UPS, advanced this translation idea: “I think about communications as a spectrum of languages when, for example, you have a creative marketer, an engineer, and mathematician working on a business problem together. They all speak in different languages, which is why communication becomes so crucial. If the audience during a presentation uses a more creative language, then you need an analytics translator who can understand what a mathematician is saying so that a creative person can understand it in terms where they can act on that idea. There is a certain emotional intelligence that governs translating these different languages.”

Research participants shared strategies that have helped them drive business outcomes:

- **Become the Chief Sales Person:** Ultimately, the value of analytics must be unlocked to influence decisions that can drive better business outcomes. It's how, for example, Robert Reyes, director of analytics, consumer, and marketplace

insights at Nestlé S.A., helped his organization refocus digital media targeting efforts that overspent in certain segments and tied it more closely to product sales. He explained, “I have used analytics as a tool to improve marketing. I'm not paid to play with numbers. I need to arrive at data-driven recommendations to influence decisions. My livelihood depends on my ability to sell to the chief sales person. If I'm not influencing in this way, the value of my group diminishes.”

- **Expect that Organizational Data Literacy Takes**

**Time:** Shoshana Collins, data science manager at Red Hat, shared, “We talk a lot about data literacy in the context of learning overall. Just think about how many years of language we take in school. It takes years to drill those foundational concepts into our thinking. So it's unreasonable to expect that we can build real data literacy with just one stats class. Data needs to be woven into the organizational fabric so that people are deeply engrained in the habit and practice of interpreting data, where drawing insights from data is the critical part of someone's job responsibility. Data is everywhere. And that needs to be woven into the foundation of all of these courses to make data literacy relevant and intuitive. That reinforcement is crucial to the marketing function so we are able to use data as an organization to be more powerful and effective.”

- **Understand Centers of Organizational Power:**

Every organization has an inherent balance of power where decisions are made and how budget

is allocated. An analytics executive at a technology company explained that “it tends to be the engineers and analytically driven folks. Data becomes the currency in which tech organizations speak, whereas that might not be true in other kinds of organizations where that language translation must occur.”

- **Build Cross-Functional Relationships:** Marketing influence extends across the enterprise, affecting other functions. This is why Jennifer Brett, head of North American insights, marketing solutions at LinkedIn, encouraged her team to connect with their cross-functional counterparts. “It's important to get to know your own team, your managers, and other people in different groups. Get to know someone on the sales side. What do they think about marketing? What are their core priorities? Similarly, get to know folks in finance to understand how they think about how to connect marketing investments back to sales. Relationships are so crucial to your success both within and outside of your department.”

- **Focus on Value Creation, Not Vanity Metrics:**

Brett continued: “Too many marketers are sharing vanity metrics like click-through rate or engagement rate. They are not showing value of the marketing organization. To show value, you need to get down to things like how many new customers we got from leads and how much revenue they added to the business. It's important for the marketing organization to see that they are adding value to the business instead of being seen as a cost center.”



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