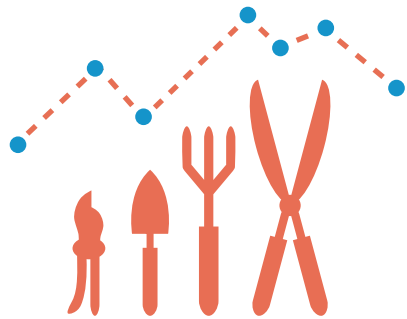




From little things,
big things grow:

Cultivating a data culture for
analytics success





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For data analytics success, culture comes first

Think back over the last few months at your workplace. How often did you observe employees wrangling data in spreadsheets instead of company-approved tools? How many times did you listen to managers lament that their teams don't collaborate? Did you overhear executives mutter about wasting money on data platforms no one uses?



Sound familiar? You're not alone. These problems share the same cause: an organisation recognises the value of data, but has failed to cultivate a data culture.

According to Gartner, this is a more common scenario than you might expect. While 80 percent of CEOs claim to consider data an asset, only 10 percent say their organisation treats it that way.

Data is a tremendous opportunity, and businesses know it. IDC research shows organisations have rapidly improved their abilities to leverage data and analytics. More than a third have even progressed to more mature data analytics stages, up from seven percent in 2014. They see data as a tool to drive sales, understand customer segments and identify innovation and investment opportunities.

However, when organisations prioritise technology and strategy above culture, even the most promising initiatives can be derailed. (Management consultant Peter Drucker wasn't kidding when he quipped that culture eats strategy for breakfast.)

A non-data culture will gobble up time, money, infrastructure and resources, leaving even the smartest IT executives wondering what went wrong.

The good news is that a data culture can be the difference between realising returns on your analytics investment and justifying yet another failed IT project. It is unsurprising that high-performing organisations are going beyond just using data and analytics. They are putting them at the heart of everything they do – including culture.

But what does a data culture look like, and how can you cultivate one in your organisation?

Let's take a closer look.

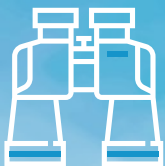
Employees wrangling data in spreadsheets?



Spot the
difference:

Data culture vs. non-data culture

Before we dive into how to create a data culture, let's break down the difference between a data culture and a non-data culture. Your organisation may have elements of both – most do.



Data is not readily available to
those who need it



HALLMARKS OF A NON-DATA CULTURE

A non-data culture does not necessarily mean that an organisation doesn't value its data. Instead, it indicates that data is not readily available to those who need it. It's like walking past a shop with a Closed sign in the window – even if you can see workers scurrying about inside, you can't buy anything.

Why can't employees access data? The barrier is often the IT department itself. When IT maintains tight control over reporting and analytics, restricts the amount of self-service data it provides or offers limited training in business intelligence tools, it creates a data bottleneck.

Employees still want to make use of data, but going through the approved channels seems arduous and time-consuming.

Some start looking for solutions outside of the IT department. They say to themselves, "If analysing data in spreadsheets is easier than going through IT, why not?"

IT shadow solutions proliferate as the disconnect between IT and business users increases. Without the watchful eye of the IT team, employees have no guarantee that their data is clean, current or accurate. Teams look at the same data sets with different perspectives and interests and arrive at conflicting conclusions.

Sure, employees are using data. But their insights are far from transformative. They could even be detrimental to the business.

Poor change management and slow user adoption are also signs of a non-data culture. If employees don't understand technology, why it adds value, or how to use it, adoption stagnates.

Common reasons for this include:

- IT handing change management responsibilities to the business too soon after deploying a data analytics solution
- The business has evolved and current data analytics tools – and the data they contain – are no longer relevant.

No matter what the cause, a non-data culture is a one-way ticket to diminished productivity, low morale and a reduced ability to glean meaningful insights from data.

HALLMARKS OF A DATA CULTURE

Imagine working in an organisation where everyone has access to the right data to do their job. Business decisions are guided by facts, not gut feel. All employees use sanctioned analytics tools to uncover data insights.

User adoption is at a record high. Shadow IT solutions are rare. Data is clean, accurate and relevant, and the IT team works in close collaboration with the rest of the business. Best of all, executives use data to guide where the business should go, instead of to make sense of what has already happened.

This is not some utopian fantasy. This is what a true data culture looks like.

Characterised by instant access to relevant data, a data culture supports information discovery and a practical, forward-thinking approach to doing business.

In a data culture, a sales team leader won't examine last year's sales to predict if her team will reach its annual target. Instead, she will analyse the data to determine which types of customers are most likely to buy, and instruct sales representatives to reach out to those customers first. This predictive, data-centric approach supports her team to maintain focus and work towards a common goal.

Similarly, an online gambling business with a data culture may choose to make business intelligence software available to every employee. Instead of insights being available to only a select few, all employees can access and interpret data at their convenience. Data informs all decisions, from determining payout amounts to choosing which games to focus on for the next quarter.

Most importantly, employees are empowered to make decisions in ways that create value for the organisation.



Top benefits of adopting a data culture

- 1 Ability to make real-time decisions (86%)
- 2 Efficiency in operations (85%)
- 3 Improved processes (82%)
- 4 Better business continuity (81%)
- 5 Improved customer satisfaction and retention (77%)

*Source: Microsoft Asia Data Culture Study 2016.



Why a data culture matters

If you've ever entered a long distance running event on a whim, chances are you've learned a painful lesson about the importance of preparation. Without adequate training, just staying in the race – let alone achieving a PB – can feel impossible.

Running a 10km when you're more couch potato than pro athlete isn't easy. Apart from stiff muscles the next day, however, the side effects are usually minimal.



Organisations are more agile, competitive and responsive

When your organisation isn't prepared to do business in a data-driven world, it's a different story. From poor visibility to missed opportunities, the consequences of maintaining the status quo – a non-data culture – are serious.

Here are three compelling reasons to cultivate a data culture to the top of your training regime.

1. AVOID EXPENSIVE MISTAKES

From Michael Phelps' record-breaking medal haul to Sally Pearson winning gold in the 100-metre hurdles, the 2012 London Olympic Games are remembered for many reasons.

But there's one hiccup we bet organisers would sooner forget – and that's the time they oversold the synchronised swimming event by 10,000 tickets after making a single keystroke mistake in an Excel spreadsheet.

When employees process data by hand, mistakes happen. By reducing manual handling and re-keying of data, as happens in a data culture, the risk of costly errors is significantly reduced.

2. NO MORE MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

The pace of business change has accelerated to the point where if you blink, you might miss it. As new opportunities, markets and technologies emerge, organisations are challenged to identify and leverage those that will add the most value.

Without the right data, it's just a guessing game – and a risky one at that.

An organisation that cultivates a data culture puts timely, relevant data at employees' fingertips. As a result, it is better placed to capitalise on emerging opportunities.

3. IMPROVED DATA VISIBILITY AND READINESS

We all know that businesses need data to make informed decisions. But when data takes weeks to prepare, as is the case in a non-data culture, insights come too little, too late. Reports are outdated before they make it to the CEO or CTO's inbox, and competitors with access to more timely data surge ahead.

In a data culture, on the other hand, information is always ready to report on. Decision makers have instant access to the data they need to make quick, informed choices. Their organisations are more agile, competitive and responsive.



Signs your organization is ready for change

They say that during wartime, soldiers in the trenches get used to the sound of bombs going off. It becomes their new normal.

The horror of war aside, operating in a non-data culture can be a similar experience. Employees get used to spending eight hours a day manipulating Excel spreadsheets. They assume that every team in every company is as frustrated by IT as they are.



In fact, an executive might not realise that their organisation's approach to data is debilitating entire departments until someone points it out.

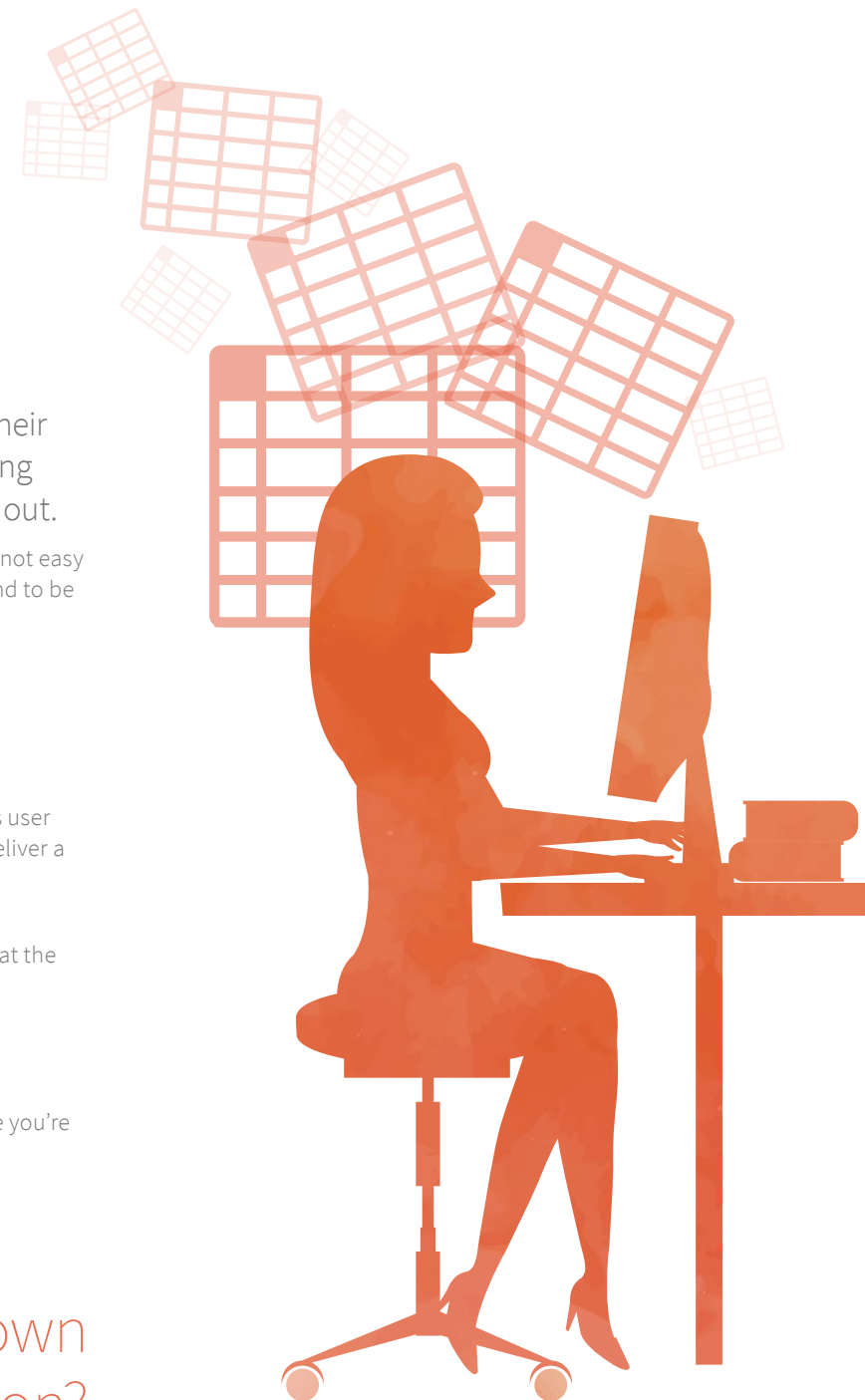
Even when you know what to look for, the warning signs are not easy to identify. This is especially true for CEOs and CTOs who tend to be more removed from day-to-day operations.

Keep an eye out for:

- Employees that spend most of their day working in Excel spreadsheets
- Misalignment between IT and the rest of the business – is user adoption poor? Have technology investments failed to deliver a return on investment?
- Employees who say they are so bogged down with data preparation they can't make improvements based on what the data tells them
- Concerns about increased use of shadow IT solutions.

If you observe any of these in your organisation, chances are you're overdue for a culture transformation.

Employees bogged down with data preparation?



Cultivating a data culture:

Before you start

There's nothing wrong with wanting to jump in and build a data culture straight away. A little enthusiasm is a great thing.

At the same time, it's wise to check that you're laying the bricks on a strong foundation.



Creating a supportive, collaborative work environment

We recommend organisations get these basics right before starting their data culture transformation:

CREATE AN EXECUTIVE VISION

Every organisation needs a leader to craft its executive vision and decide how it will use data. New companies and start-ups address this requirement by recruiting CTOs early.

In established organisations, however, there's often an assumption that the CEO can take care of all things data-related. While that may have been true a decade ago, it is no longer the case today. A CTO or CIO is a must-have for making sense of the modern data deluge.

THINK CULTURAL SHIFT, NOT SYSTEMS

Cultivating a data culture isn't about finding the ideal business intelligence platform. Instead, it is about creating a supportive, collaborative work environment that helps employees extract business value from data. For better results, focus on changing mindsets, not systems.

ADOPT A MATURITY MENTALITY

If your organisation is like most, data maturity will vary across departments. Your data scientists, for example, will have a different opinion about what makes an ideal data culture, compared to a team that works with finance spreadsheets.

Instead of adopting a one-size-fits-all culture, think about how to bring each team from where they are now to their data culture utopia.

For data scientists, this could be as simple as improving access to raw data. For finance workers, it's likely to mean a more comprehensive solution involving automated reporting and analytics dashboards.



Cultivating a data culture:

5 steps to success



1. DEVELOP A PLAN AND A STRATEGY

You've heard it before, but it's worth saying again: If you fail to plan, you plan to fail.

What is your strategy? What is the rollout plan? What does success look like, and how will you get there?

Data culture is not just an IT issue, and it is not just a business issue. For a balanced outcome, choose your team carefully. If IT has complete ownership, you may end up with a cost-effective solution that focuses on support, not innovation. If business teams are in control, you risk going over budget in pursuit of results.

With equal powers, IT can keep an eye on costs, while the business side can ensure solutions meet their requirements.

2. INTRODUCE TECHNOLOGIES GRADUALLY

You may need to implement a new data platform to support your data culture transformation. This is especially true if you wish to:

- Improve access to key data
- Automate data collection and preparation to reduce burden on staff
- Move to a user-friendly, self-service platform to drive adoption

If this applies to your organisation, try to avoid making too many changes at once.

Start with one business unit first. Find out what it needs, develop a proof of concept, and use that as an example to show other teams what's possible. Seek feedback and continually refine your approach.

3. GROW THE DATA PLATFORM

From an IT perspective, growing the data platform means developing a road map for extending the data platform across the business. What is the next most important issue, and how can you help different business units get value?

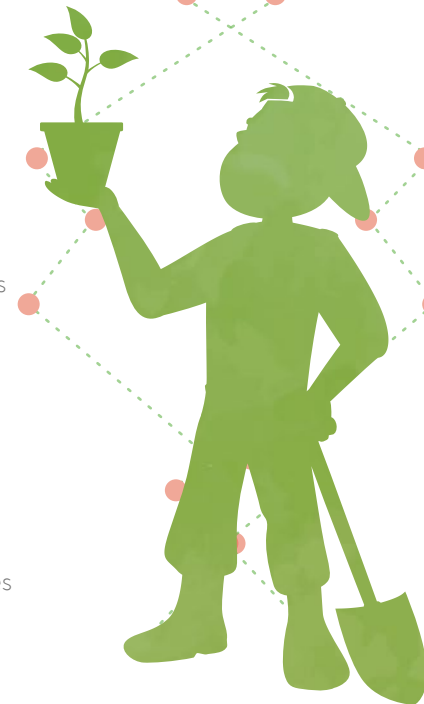
4. FOLLOW AND REPEAT

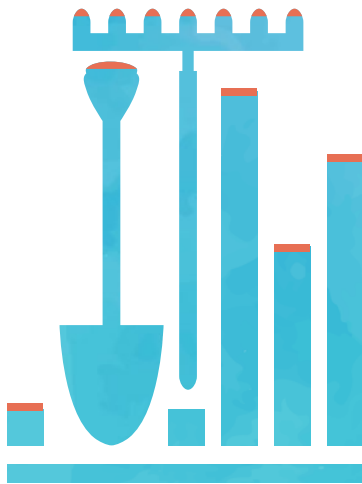
By this stage, your data platform should contain most of the data sets your organisation requires. If an employee needs a data set that is not stored in the data platform, IT should provide access. It is then the IT department's responsibility to assess whether the data platform should be extended to meet ongoing needs.

5. REINFORCE STEPS 1-4

As with any IT project or cultural shift, there's no such thing as set and forget. For long-term success, be proactive about ensuring processes are followed, roadmaps are updated, and priorities are measured by value.

The result will be a data culture that keeps teams productive; employees satisfied and the bottom line booming.





Seeds planted in the nutrient-rich soil grow into strong plants. Any flower, tree or fungus can flourish under the right conditions.

It's the same with businesses. By nurturing a data culture that supports real-time information discovery, data democratisation and predictive intelligence, organisations thrive. Employees are more productive. Processes are more efficient. Data is consistent and valuable. And organisations have everything they need to grow to new heights.

But like your favourite houseplant, a data culture also needs regular care to stay healthy. Sharing this responsibility across the organisation will produce the most transformative outcomes.

How will you take action to cultivate a data culture today?



This “How to guide” is a joint effort by Yellowfin and Antares Solutions



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Antares is large enough to deliver the latest solutions but small enough to move quickly with your projects. Our philosophy is simple; we believe you know your business better than anyone. We work with you from the inside out – partnering with your organisation to understand your unique business needs. Using this insight, we build IT solutions tailored to fit your organisation that help improve the way your ‘people’ work. Our ultimate aim is for technology to be less visible, so you can spend more time growing your business, and not your systems.

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