

Practical Data
Priorities for

2025

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Introduction

Getting your data priorities straight shouldn't be about chasing trends or overcomplicating your strategy. Instead, it's about focusing on what will drive smarter decisions and measurable outcomes. This guide skips the jargon and gets straight to the point: the priorities that will truly set your organization up for success in 2025.

Let's dive into what matters and explore how to position your organization for long-term growth and agility.

Tracey Doyle
Chief Marketing Officer
Analytics8



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PLATFORM NATIVE AI-ENHANCED INSIGHTS

Michael Kollman

Senior Consultant

Leverage AI-Enhanced Insights Directly in Databricks, Snowflake, and GCP

AI integration within platforms like Databricks, Snowflake, and GCP is reshaping how you harness data for smarter decisions. Instead of building AI solutions from the ground up, you can leverage pre-built capabilities embedded directly into these platforms.

Tools like Databricks' Assistant and AI/BI Genie, Snowflake's Copilot and Cortex, and GCP's Vertex AI simplify workflows and enable advanced analytics without requiring extensive technical expertise. By reducing reliance on technical teams, integrated AI accelerates decision-making, democratizes data access, and frees up resources for strategic innovation.

However, you'll need clear prompts and validation processes to avoid misleading outputs, as these embedded solutions may lack the precision of custom-built AI systems.

What is the biggest opportunity this priority presents for businesses?

"We're seeing more integrated AI capabilities in managed data platforms, which is the logical next step for vendors to retain users and increase market share," says Kollman. "While AI hasn't yet had the enterprise impact the buzz suggests, embedding AI capabilities directly into platforms could change that. These services allow technical teams to focus on complex projects while business users take greater control of data exploration and insights. This democratization of AI decision-making is quickly becoming the biggest wow factor vendors are offering."



“In 2025, RAG will no longer feel like a standalone workflow – it will be seamlessly integrated into data platforms, providing a more practical and accessible way to unlock insights from structured and unstructured data alike.”

RAG-POWERED AI

Dunn Williams 

Senior Consultant

Turn Proprietary Data into Actionable Insights Using RAG-Powered AI

Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG) combines your company’s proprietary data with the power of LLMs to deliver actionable, personalized insights. In 2025, RAG will evolve beyond standalone workflows, becoming a built-in feature of leading platforms like Databricks, GCP, AWS, IBM, and Microsoft.

This seamless integration unlocks insights from both structured and unstructured data, transforming isolated information into a strategic advantage. Applications include streamlining workflows, such as prioritizing customer support emails or developing domain-specific research tools. By embedding these capabilities into decision-making, businesses can deliver value faster and with greater precision.

However, success with RAG depends on robust data quality and governance. Platforms equipped with integrated RAG functionality reduce friction, making it easier to extract meaningful insights while ensuring accuracy and consistency across your operations.

What is the biggest opportunity this priority presents for businesses?

“Barriers to insight and actionable analysis will be drastically reduced,” says Williams. “By utilizing local LLMs, businesses can empower employees to derive insights more efficiently and improve personal productivity without relying heavily on dashboards or complex workflows.”

Another Analytic8 Senior Consultant, Aleksandar Kirilenko, adds, “With approximately 80% of enterprise data being unstructured, RAG enables organizations to process this data at scale in real time. It makes qualitative data scalable and transforms previously untapped sources into consistent, actionable insights. By embedding proprietary business data into LLMs, businesses can achieve greater flexibility and deliver precise outcomes, giving them a significant competitive edge.”



“In 2025, Natural Language Processing (NLP) will reshape how users interact with data, making insights accessible to everyone, regardless of technical expertise. This shift reduces reliance on analytics teams and empowers faster, more informed decisions.”

NLP-DRIVEN AI

Emma Van Essen

Senior Consultant

Empower Non-Technical Users with NLP-Driven AI

Natural Language Processing (NLP) removes technical barriers by enabling non-technical users to ask plain-language questions and receive actionable insights. Integrated into augmented analytics platforms, NLP empowers employees to explore data trends, generate insights, and make faster decisions without relying heavily on IT or analytics teams.

According to Gartner, adopting NLP tools can improve decision-making by up to 20% while reducing dependency on IT teams.

However, to fully realize its benefits, businesses need well-trained AI models, clean data, and a focus on fostering data literacy. These steps ensure insights are accurate, actionable, and free from misinterpretation, enabling faster, more reliable decision-making across teams.

What is the biggest opportunity this priority presents for businesses?

“NLP creates a path for truly democratized data access,” explains Van Essen. “By enabling non-technical employees to engage directly with data, businesses can accelerate decision-making across teams while alleviating the pressure on analytics and IT departments.”



Joshua Johnston

Principal Consultant

Build Trust in AI Decisions with Explainable AI (XAI)

Explainable AI (XAI) refers to AI systems or models that reveal the reasoning behind their decisions, offering businesses much-needed transparency. This is especially critical in industries like Financial Services, where trust and regulatory compliance are essential.

By making AI decisions clear and understandable, XAI reduces skepticism, strengthens accountability, and fosters confidence in AI adoption.

“ Companies that integrate Explainable AI will not only meet regulatory demands but also build essential trust by showing the 'why' behind AI-driven decisions.”

EXPLAINABLE AI (XAI)

What is the biggest opportunity this priority presents for businesses?

XAI enhances transparency and provides actionable insights into how and why AI reaches its conclusions,” explains Johnston. “This is important when decisions hinge on complex algorithms. This deeper understanding enables organizations to refine their AI models and build trust among stakeholders and customers. XAI’s ability to connect technical outcomes with business strategies is a game-changer — but it does require significant investment of technical expertise and resources.”



“In 2025, the companies that succeed will be those that treat AI as a series of measured investments, not an all-or-nothing leap. They’ll focus on steady, incremental gains, ensuring each stage delivers tangible value and builds long-term confidence from all stakeholders.”

MEASURED AI

Marty Lyman

Managing Consultant

Take Measured Steps, Not Giant Leaps with Your AI Strategy

Scaling AI is a marathon, not a sprint. In 2025, successful organizations will prioritize incremental progress, focusing on clear, measurable ROI at every stage of AI implementation.

By approaching AI as a series of deliberate investments with defined milestones, you can mitigate risks, maximize resources, and maintain alignment with your business goals. This measured approach allows you to build momentum, demonstrate consistent value, and gain confidence from stakeholders as you scale AI initiatives for long-term impact.

What is the biggest challenge or risk businesses should be aware of regarding this priority, and how should they prepare their teams to maintain momentum over time?

“Too often, AI and ML projects are launched as side initiatives without proper resources or strategic focus, leading to missed opportunities and wasted investments. Businesses must balance ambition with practicality, ensuring every AI investment aligns with long-term goals while fostering a team culture of skill development, role clarity, and cross-functional collaboration. This approach helps maintain momentum beyond the initial deployment.”



Tony Dahlager 
VP of Account Management

Build Consistency Across Workflows with a Unified Semantic Layer

A unified semantic layer is the key to turning scattered data into cohesive insights. By standardizing definitions across analytics, machine learning, and data science workflows, semantic layers create a single source of truth that drives consistent decision-making across your organization.

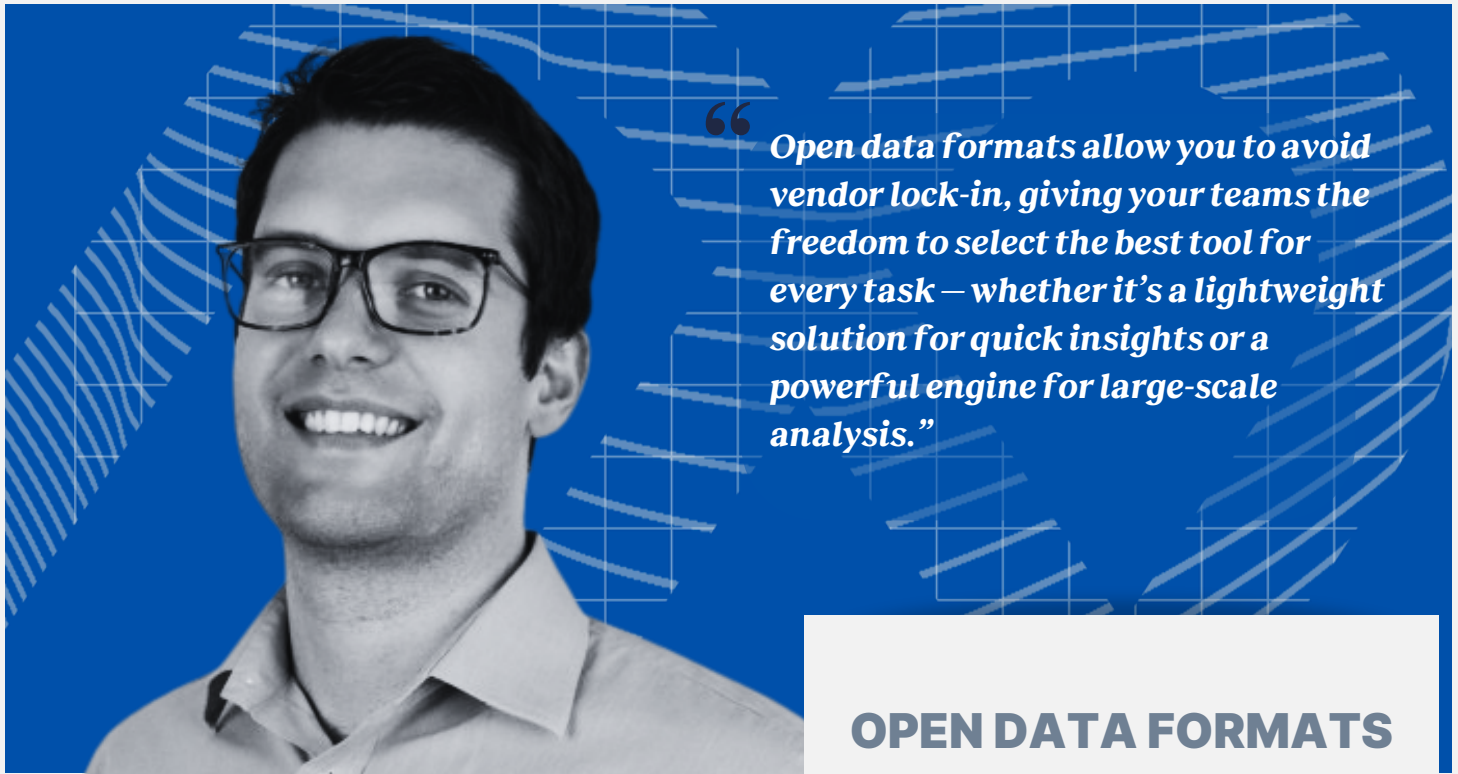
This approach eliminates silos, streamlines collaboration, and ensures teams work from accurate, aligned data. Building a semantic layer requires upfront investment to align definitions and workflows, but the long-term benefits — faster decisions,

improved accuracy, and cross-functional alignment — are transformative for any organization managing data across multiple platforms.

What is the biggest challenge or risk businesses should be aware of regarding this priority?

Most semantic layers are restricted to a single ecosystem, which limits flexibility," Dahlager explains. "Organizations should consider adopting platform-agnostic solutions, or even open-source solutions, to ensure scalability and adaptability as data environments and business needs evolve."

“ Semantic layers were once a staple for managing consistency of definitions and data assets, and in 2025, they’re making a powerful return. Semantic layers will transform how companies align decisions across platforms, breaking down silos and enabling cohesive, data-driven actions.”



“Open data formats allow you to avoid vendor lock-in, giving your teams the freedom to select the best tool for every task – whether it’s a lightweight solution for quick insights or a powerful engine for large-scale analysis.”

OPEN DATA FORMATS

Brian Buxton

Managing Consultant

Embrace Open Data Formats for Greater Flexibility

Open data formats like Delta Lake, Apache Iceberg, and Parquet are reshaping how organizations manage data by decoupling storage from compute.

This flexibility lets your team query a single shared data source without duplicating datasets, which reduces costs and keeps you from vendor lock-in. Whether it's using DuckDB for lightweight analyses or Databricks for enterprise-level workflows, you can scale operations efficiently while selecting the best tools for specific tasks.

Note that open data formats require strong data governance to prevent risks like sprawl and fragmented access. Be sure to establish a clear structure for organizing and managing data to maintain security and consistency.

What is the biggest opportunity this priority presents for businesses?

“Beyond cost savings and vendor independence, the real opportunity with open data formats lies in fostering innovation. Teams can experiment with diverse tools and architectures without being constrained by a single platform, allowing businesses to adapt quickly to changing demands and drive strategic growth.”



Eric Heidbreder

Senior Consultant

Free Your Teams for Higher Value Work

Technical debt refers to inefficiencies and costs from quick, short-term decisions made to deliver data analytics solutions under tight timelines. These compromises often prioritize speed over long-term stability, creating hidden barriers that slow scalability and innovation.

Left unchecked, technical debt compounds, tying up your data teams in reactive fixes instead of enabling them to focus on strategic projects. Like financial debt, it grows more expensive the longer it persists, limiting your organization's ability to scale and adapt effectively.

Addressing technical debt should be a strategic priority. By resolving unfinished projects, broken pipelines, and data quality issues, you can free your teams to focus on higher-value initiatives. This sets the foundation for a scalable, reliable infrastructure that drives innovation, long-term growth, and agility across your organization.

ADDRESSING TECHNICAL DEBT

What is the biggest challenge or risk businesses should be aware of regarding this priority?

"The hardest part is convincing non-technical stakeholders the value of alleviating technical debt," Heidbreder explains. "Prove your case by calculating ROI: Estimate the value you would gain by addressing the technical debt; compare that to the estimated cost to address the debt (dev, testing, deployment, etc.), and factor in the cost of delay."

“ Even though it doesn't show up on a balance sheet, technical debt is real, quietly capping your data team's ability to deliver true value. When they're constantly patching broken pipelines and addressing data quality issues, progress takes a back seat. ”



“*In 2025, the companies that succeed will be those that align data use with core business priorities and make it integral to daily operations.*”

OPERATIONALIZED ANALYTICS

Abram Balloga

Consulting Director

Embed Data in Decision-Making

Operationalized analytics transforms data from passive dashboards into an active playbook by embedding data insights directly into daily operational routines.

This methodology promotes 100% adoption of analytics in day-to-day business activities, ensuring that decision-making at every level — from executives, to middle managers, to front-line employees — serve broader business objectives. It also encourages interdepartment alignment and reduces irrelevant activities, ultimately unlocking meaningful value from data initiatives.

Operationalized analytics requires a cultural shift made possible with alignment and support from leadership.

What is the biggest opportunity this priority presents for businesses?

“The greatest promise of operationalized analytics lies in optimization of process execution,” says Balloga. He emphasizes the potential to saturate operations with analytics, driving clear prioritization and alignment with organizational goals. “A host of other benefits then cascade from truly data-driven operations — inherent de-risking, leaner ops, increased resilience, heightened scalability, standardized management by metrics rather than by line-of-sight, and a value system against which to cut costs and focus innovation efforts.”



Sean Costello

Principal Consultant

Leverage SPC for Proactive Improvements

Businesses make large investments in data products and services but then do not know how to use data to make improvements in day-to-day operations. Statistical Process Control (SPC) provides a disciplined framework for transforming data insights into actionable improvements.

Unlike traditional dashboards, which often signal false alarms and overwhelm users with metrics beyond individual control, SPC tools like control charts (XmR charts) enable teams to distinguish routine fluctuations from meaningful data shifts that require intervention.

SPC breaks down complex metrics into manageable elements. Process owners can connect data patterns with specific actions and proactively address operational inefficiencies. SPC lets you

know whether your process changes were effective and can alert you when outside factors may be influencing your processes.

What is the biggest opportunity this priority presents for businesses?

"SPC provides a clear framework for acting on your data," explains Costello. "It's not just about tracking metrics but understanding when and why to take action. With SPC, businesses can shift from reactive fixes to proactive improvements, enhancing processes, outcomes, and overall organizational agility."



DATA GOVERNANCE TOOLS & POLICIES

Julia Liceaga

Consultant

Address Data Governance Fatigue with Actionable Solutions

In 2025, data governance moves beyond policy creation to focus on actionable solutions that embed governance into daily operations. By implementing tools like data catalogs, lineage tracking, and access controls, organizations can ensure data remains trustworthy, accessible, and aligned with business goals.

For effective data governance, businesses must integrate governance frameworks into their workflows and prioritize clear, practical tools over theoretical approaches.

What is the biggest opportunity this priority presents for businesses?

This priority gives businesses a chance to lay a solid foundation for data literacy,” says Liceaga. “By fostering a data-driven culture, organizations can greatly enhance decision-making.” However, she cautions, “The biggest challenge lies in overemphasizing the tool while neglecting the importance of governance policies. A well-designed governance framework is essential for lasting success.”

“Data governance is no longer just a theoretical priority – in 2025, it's about implementing tools and strategies that embed governance into daily practices while unlocking AI capabilities. Organizations that prioritize governance solutions that make their data trustworthy, accessible, and usable across the board will be the ones that succeed.”

**DATA FABRIC**

Chris Voss

Managing Consultant

Simplify Data Access Through Active Metadata and Virtualization

Data Fabric is for managing complex data landscapes. By using active metadata and virtualization, it creates a unified view of your data without the need for physical replication or costly integrations.

Metadata provides essential context, such as data lineage and quality, while active metadata updates this information in real time. Virtualization abstracts the complexity of diverse data sources, allowing your organization to access and analyze data across on-premises systems, cloud platforms, and other environments.

This architecture reduces the barriers created by traditional approaches, enabling consistent governance, faster decision-making, and integrated insights.

What is the biggest challenge or risk businesses should be aware of regarding this priority?

"Misunderstanding what a Data Fabric is — and how it differs from a data lake — is a common challenge," Voss clarifies. "A Data Fabric connects and organizes data seamlessly across systems using metadata and virtualization, while a data lake stores data in one place. Businesses that treat a data lake as a Data Fabric risk creating a chaotic, siloed structure instead of achieving the streamlined governance and access a fabric enables."

“Data Fabric isn’t just about unifying your data; it’s about reducing complexity. By providing seamless access and governance across systems, it enables faster, more informed decisions without the need for costly integrations.”



“Companies should empower domain experts to define and own their data products. Data mesh enables more efficient, accurate insight generation and supports faster, data-informed decision-making.”

DATA MESH

Abutaleb Haidary

Principal Consultant

Empower Domains with Data Ownership

Data Mesh redefines how organizations manage data by decentralizing control and empowering domain experts. This approach gives business domains ownership of their data products, aligning control with those who best understand the context and needs.

By distributing ownership, Data Mesh reduces bottlenecks, enhances agility, and allows organizations to scale data strategies more effectively.

However, success depends on a cultural shift and strong data governance to maintain consistency and accountability across teams.

What is the biggest challenge or risk businesses should be aware of regarding this priority?

Haidary explains, “Data Mesh is fundamentally about business processes. If you decentralize data ownership without clear governance, you risk creating organizational chaos. To successfully implement data mesh, a cultural shift at the organizational level is essential. Strong alignment across teams and clear policies are critical to avoid fragmentation in how data is managed and used.” He adds, “By empowering those closest to the data to take ownership, Data Mesh increases trust, streamlines delivery, and supports more effective scaling as organizations adapt and grow.”



“2025 will demand that data teams do more with less – it's about laser-focused investment, not just scaling back. Companies need to back the projects that drive real value and be ready to let go of the rest.”

**PURPOSE-BUILT
DATA TEAMS**

Kevin Lobo 

VP of Consulting

Maximize Impact with Focused Data Teams

In 2025, tighter budgets mean data teams must prioritize projects that deliver real value, cutting back on efforts that don't align with core business goals. This approach isn't just about saving costs — it's about recalibrating resources to focus on high-impact initiatives that generate measurable outcomes.

By streamlining priorities, organizations can improve efficiency and results. However, this strategy comes with a risk: stretched teams can face burnout if not adequately supported. Consider balancing internal capabilities with external expertise.

What is the biggest opportunity this priority presents for businesses?

“This is a massive re-prioritization opportunity,” explains Lobo. “Companies can use this moment to eliminate bloated, non-ROI-generating projects and recalibrate their data teams to focus on what truly drives value. In doing so, organizations should look for opportunities to optimize their cloud spending and shift personnel from IT-centric functions toward business domain-driven initiatives, ultimately aligning resources more closely with strategic priorities.”



David Fussichen 

Chief Executive Officer

A note from Dave

I've spent more than 20 years in data and analytics, and I love thinking about what's next.

In 2024, our clients shared a wide array of challenges and priorities with me, but one underlying theme emerged in every discussion: their data and analytics initiatives must serve the business.

I am excited about advancements that will enable our clients to run a wider range of analytical workloads. I'm paying particular attention to how LLMs can access data warehouses, data lakes, and other repositories where structured data resides.

While 2025 promises exciting progress, it's important to remember there is still no easy button and that tech alone won't solve your problems. The fundamentals remain critical: you still need to model your data and prioritize data governance; if you're not yet on a modern cloud platform, that should be priority; and always make sure your data and analytics initiatives are aligned with your business goals.

At Analytics8, we're ready to meet you wherever you are in your journey. Whether you need to modernize, optimize, or tackle immediate challenges standing in your way, we've got the expertise to help you make meaningful progress — and see real results.

I can't wait to see how far our clients push boundaries in 2025. I hope this guide helps as we look ahead to what's next.

“ In data and analytics, the goal is always the same: deliver real business impact. As we head into 2025, I'm excited to see how our clients continue to push boundaries, solve complex problems, and use data to drive results for their organizations.”

Additional Resources

As you work to put these priorities into action, we've rounded up a selection of resources — including blogs, LinkedIn discussions, and webinar recordings — designed to help you refine your strategy, strengthen governance, and enhance your organization's data-driven capabilities.

Data Strategy

7 ELEMENTS OF A DATA STRATEGY

Discover seven essential elements every organization needs for a successful data strategy. Align data initiatives with business goals, ensuring long-term success and measurable outcomes.

HOW TO DEVELOP A DATA STRATEGY ROADMAP

Learn how to create a comprehensive data strategy roadmap that prioritizes your initiatives and outlines the path to reaching your milestones.

AI and LLMs

EXPLORE PRACTICAL USE CASES FOR GEN AI

Learn about four real-world applications for gen AI, from improving data quality to enabling personalized customer experiences. Learn how this transformative technology is driving innovation across industries.

5 PILLARS OF AN EFFECTIVE GEN AI STRATEGY

Explore the essential pillars for crafting a successful gen AI strategy. This guide provides insights into aligning AI initiatives with organizational goals while ensuring scalability, security, and long-term impact.

PRIVATE LLMs: BALANCE SECURITY & CONTROL

Explore how private LLMs provide orgs with the security, control, and scalability needed for gen AI workloads. Get insights for safeguarding sensitive data while unlocking powerful AI-driven insights.

SHIFTING THE AI NARRATIVE

Talk around AI often leans on fear, with warnings about data privacy risks and intellectual property leakage dominating the narrative. Patrick Vinton highlights safe, governed methods for effectively harnessing AI.

Data Governance

IMPROVING DATA QUALITY WITH EFFECTIVE DATA GOVERNANCE

Learn how to leverage data governance to improve your data quality, including best practices and tool suggestions, plus common missteps to avoid.

DEFINING DATA GOVERNANCE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Learn how to establish clear roles and responsibilities within your data governance framework to ensure accountability, streamline processes, and drive organizational alignment.

DATA DICTIONARY VS. DATA CATALOG VS. BUSINESS GLOSSARY

Understand the differences between a data dictionary, a data catalog, and a business glossary, and learn how each plays a unique role in managing and understanding your data assets effectively.

HOW TO BUILD AN EFFECTIVE DATA GOVERNANCE PROGRAM AND STRATEGY

Explore actionable steps for creating a comprehensive data governance program that aligns with your business goals, ensuring data quality, security, and trust across your organization.

Data Teams

HOW TO BUILD AN EFFECTIVE DATA ANALYTICS TEAM

Discover strategies for assembling and structuring a high-performing data analytics team that aligns with your organization's goals, fosters collaboration, and drives impactful insights.

ADVICE FOR HEADS OF DATA: BUILDING AND LEADING HIGH-IMPACT DATA TEAMS

This session covers how data leaders should approach building and leading effective data teams, including: what to prioritize, how to support your teams, and advice to foster a data-driven culture.

THE ROLE OF DATA LEADERS IN DRIVING CHANGE

What defines an effective data leader? Joshua Johnston explores the critical qualities that distinguish impactful data leadership, including adaptability, communication, and strategic vision.

Technology and Infrastructure

BI AND ANALYTICS TOOL EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

Discover five components of our framework for selecting and integrating BI tools. This workshop covers tool fit, data platforms, transformation strategies, intangibles, and seamless migration.

HOW TO FUTURE PROOF YOUR TECH INVESTMENTS

This discussion delves into common pitfalls of future-proofing your technology. Explore tips to avoid over-engineering your solutions while ensuring you can scale up and down as needed.

“DATA MESH IS DEAD?”

Tony Dahlager discusses evolving perspectives on data mesh and its role in modern strategies. Share your take on whether data mesh holds value for organizations today.

5 FOCUS AREAS TO OPTIMIZE YOUR DATA AND ANALYTICS SPEND

In this series, Tony Dahlager shares how to maximize the value of your investment in data and analytics, covering: cloud spend, data transportation costs, cloud data platform optimization, the modern tech stack, and talent strategy.

STREAMLINE YOUR DATA ARCHITECTURE WITH A DATA LAKEHOUSE

Explore how a data lakehouse combines the strengths of data lakes and warehouses, simplifying management and enabling real-time insights for better decision-making.

Making sense of seemingly infinite data analytics approaches and technologies can be overwhelming.

Analytics8 helps you cut through the noise and implements practical, flexible, and modern solutions to transform your organization with data-driven decisions.

Our services

Strategy & Planning | Implementation | Adoption & Maintenance

Contact us

