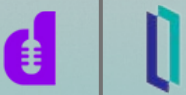# DATA LEADERS WHO'S WHO

Featured in this week's interview

Iman Behzadian,
General Manager Data Science Products
WooliesX

TECHNOLOGY

Editors note

Data has become the core of how we operate as a society, and is central to business success. Data-driven businesses are finding new ways to compete by letting their data uncover unique points of differentiation. The value of data can't be overstated; it has been referred to as the new currency. We are proud to bring you the latest Data Leader's Who's Who and support the increasingly critical role that these emerging and established data leaders play both now and into the future.

The insights these leaders provide will be pivotal in strengthening the position of data in the business community and we thank them for sharing their valuable experiences.

Andrew Aho, Regional Director Data Platforms, InterSystems **|** Felipe Flores, Founder, Data Futurology

STEERING AN EFFECTIVE ANALYTICS ORG

Iman Behzadian
General Manager Data Science Products,
WooliesX

With over 12 years of experience in the field of data science, Iman Behzadian has established himself as a leading expert in translating business needs to models and developing and maintaining data science products for retail and digital marketing applications. Currently serving as the General Manager of Data Science Products at WooliesX, he leads a team of 110 cross-disciplinary data practitioners to drive innovative data-driven solutions that cater to a range of applications, including multi-touch attribution, personalised offers and content targeting. In this article he shares a wealth of insights on all things leadership and strategy in the data and analytics realm.

How do you devise a data strategy? What sets apart the good from the bad?

Devising a data strategy requires careful consideration of several factors, including the organisation's goals, available data sources, budget, and resources. Here are some key steps to follow when creating a data strategy:

- Identify the business goals: Before starting any data-related work, it is essential to understand the organisation's business goals. What does the company want to achieve in the short and long term? How can we translate it to a quantifiable KPI for our day-to-day activities?
- Identify the main stakeholders of the project: Nothing is more disappointing than have a Ferrari parked in the carpark and the client (stakeholder, partner, company) never uses it. It is essential to identify the stakeholders and a key sponsor and understand their needs, concerns, and expectations regarding the organisation's data strategy. This understanding will help you tailor the strategy to meet

"WHAT DATA IS CURRENTLY BEING COLLECTED? WHAT DATA IS MISSING, AND HOW CAN IT BE OBTAINED?"

the stakeholders' needs, gain their buy-in and support, and ensure that the data strategy aligns with the overall business goals.
- Determine the available data: Next, you need to assess the data sources available to you. What data is currently being collected? What data is missing, and how can it be obtained? Evaluating the data sources will help you understand the gaps and limitations of the data available and create a plan for acquiring any missing data.
- Assess the technology landscape: Once you have a good understanding of the data sources, you need to evaluate the technology landscape. What technology is currently being used to store, process, and analyse data? Is it sufficient for the organisation's needs, or are there gaps that need to be filled?

- Define the data governance and security policies: Never have I ever worked in an organisation where they have not aimed to have single source of truth and still, I have not seen this unicorn in action! As part of your data strategy, it is essential to define policies for data governance and security.
- Create a roadmap: Finally, you need to create a roadmap that outlines the steps necessary to achieve the organisation's business goals using data. The roadmap should include milestones, timelines, and resource requirements.

How do you structure metrics to create effective delivery of projects/ products?

To structure metrics for effective project/product delivery, it is crucial to centralise and independently measure the

recognised value generated through a particular stream of work while accounting for all other streams of work and uplifts achieved from them. This avoids double counting and ensures accurate measurement of the value generated. Also, it is important that the success metrics are quantifiable and aligned with the organisational KPIs.

What are the essential qualities of a data leader?

Personally, when I first started my career, I believed I was working in the data industry. However, my perception changed over time, and I came to realise that I was actually in the retail industry. As I progressed into higher-level management roles, I began to recognise that I was ultimately working in the people industry.

A data leader should possess a combination of technical, business, and leadership skills to effectively lead a data team. These essential qualities include strong technical skills, business acumen, communication skills, strategic thinking, leadership skills, adaptability, and data ethics and governance. A data leader should have a deep understanding of data science, statistics, and analytics to be able to proactively approach the business and propose data driven solution tailored to the business problem and also be able to communicate complex data insights to non-technical stakeholders.

What do you wish senior leadership knew or understood?

Leveraging ML and AI and automation does not mean automating the workflow the way that they are done today. Rather, it requires a rethinking and redesigning of business processes to fully harness the potential of these technologies. Additionally, it's important to recognise that ML/AI and automation are not

"I BELIEVED I WAS WORKING IN THE DATA INDUSTRY. HOWEVER, MY PERCEPTION CHANGED OVER TIME, AND I CAME TO REALISE THAT I WAS ACTUALLY IN THE RETAIL INDUSTRY."

silver bullets, but rather tools that should be used strategically to augment human capabilities, rather than replace them entirely. Ultimately, successful implementation of these technologies requires a holistic approach that considers both technical and organisational factors.

What have you found to be the key ingredients to make data analytics capability create an impact on business outcomes?

To make data analytics capability create an impact on business outcomes, it is crucial to ensure that the data team is fully embedded in the business process and that they work collaboratively with other disciplines. This requires cross-functional, multi-discipline squads working

together to ensure a shared understanding of data limitations and capabilities, as well as common goals. Additionally, data analytics capability should be designed with a focus on creating value for the business, aligning data models and analytics processes with the targeted business outcomes.

In summary, the key ingredients for successful data analytics capability include integration of the data team into the business process, collaboration with other disciplines, a focus on shared goals, and alignment of data models and analytics processes with targeted business outcomes. By adopting these principles, data analytics can drive meaningful impact on business outcomes, creating value for the organisation.

Overall if I want to highlight one learning more than other it is ensuring that AI models are explainable and transparent is crucial for gaining trust and understanding how the AI product is making decisions.

What is the best way to structure your data and analytics teams? What processes and methodologies are key to underpinning analytics project success?

To structure data and analytics teams for success, it's important to have cross-disciplinary teams. This ensures that data analytics is integrated into the business teams which benefits both parties: data practitioners understand the business opportunities and risks while the operation teams will have a better appreciation for the data capabilities and potentials for further efficiency. Furthermore, all types of data practitioners, from Scientists to engineers and analysts need to collaborate in the same team rather than having separate teams. This will facilitate learning among the analytical teams and enable horizontal moves and better team retention.

What legacy do you hope to leave behind you at your organisation?

I hope to create a culture that values data-driven decision-making, promotes collaboration and cross-functional teamwork, and fosters a sense of ownership and accountability for driving business results.

Additionally, I aim to build a team of talented data practitioners that they see there are new learning opportunities in their everyday job and see me committed to providing an environment for continuous learning and growth. Ultimately, our legacy in the long term will be measured by the culture that we leave behind rather than the products and projects that we deliver.

How do you build an effective analytics organisation?

Building an effective analytics organisation involves a multifaceted process that requires careful planning, execution, and continuous improvement. Defining the strategic objectives of the organisation is the first step. This involves identifying key business problems that can be solved with data, setting clear goals, identifying KPIs and decide what is out of scope. Once the objectives are set, roles and responsibilities of the analytics team are defined.

A data strategy and infrastructure is developed to identify relevant data sources, define data quality standards, and implement appropriate data storage, processing, and visualisation tools. Hiring and developing talent is critical, as it is the team that will execute the data strategy. Creating a culture that values data-driven decision-making, fosters collaboration, and provides opportunities for training and development is also key. Finally, the organisation must make conscious decision and allocate a good percentage of their

investment in the early days to developing the foundation which does not have direct link to business KPIs and sales (while still have clearly defined technical KPIs and measure of success) but it contributes to future success in the long run and significantly reduce time to market and the required investment for future business cases.

What are some of the lessons learned you've encountered when getting AI products into production?

There are many lessons learned from all the past products that we deployed to production: Ensuring that the data used to train and test AI models is representative, unbiased, and of high quality is critical. Setting realistic expectations around what the AI product can and cannot do is important. Ensuring that the product can scale to meet the needs of the business is also critical. Collaboration between data scientists, developers, and business stakeholders is important, and regular monitoring of performance is necessary to ensure ongoing success.