



DO YOU HAVE AN UNHEALTHY OBSESSION WITH THE SINGLE SOURCE OF THE TRUTH?

3 KEY MINDSET SHIFTS FOR MODERN DATA EXECUTIVES

incorta

THE ERROR AT THE HEART OF “SINGLE SOURCE OF TRUTH”

You need master data management (MDM) – there’s no getting around that. But the obsession that many data experts have with establishing and protecting the “single source of truth” often ends up more harmful than helpful. The problem is viewing “single source of truth” as a prerequisite destination that must be reached before any “real” work can begin on analytics and BI. In fact, MDM is itself a continual journey, one that advances in parallel with agile analytics and self-service BI.

The underlying problem is not the relentless pursuit of accurate data — clearly, accuracy is of paramount importance when it comes to analytics and BI. The problem is the over-centralization of control, which leads to bottlenecks that prevent individuals and teams from running at full speed. That’s trouble in a data-driven world, where outmaneuvering the competition depends on teams making better decisions faster.

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What’s needed is a culture of data curiosity – an environment that empowers individuals and teams to ask and answer their own business questions with data. For data experts and their teams, that means letting go of control.

But that’s easier said than done. How can you enable self-service business intelligence without compromising on data accuracy?

Here are three key ways data executives and teams need to rethink their approach to delivering a “single source of truth” to avoid the unintended consequences that stem from this outdated mindset.

KEY #1

LET USERS BE YOUR GUIDE

We need to stop thinking it's our job as data executives to control the truth. When we fence off a portion of the truth, we are effectively dictating all that we ever believe will be useful – and that's a mistake.

It's a common assumption that the main goal of a data executive is to build out a “golden warehouse” that becomes the ultimate source for “the truth” within an organization. In theory, this approach seems to make sense: it guarantees the fidelity of data and greatly reduces the chances that any team arrives at a false conclusion because they have started with bad data.

In reality, it's not that simple. The downside of this approach can be deceptively hard to spot. Even if you succeed at guaranteeing high levels of data fidelity in certain respects, you are also inadvertently (and often invisibly) limiting the scope of questions your teams can ask in the first place, in turn limiting their ability to come up with creative solutions to business problems. Simply put, your teams don't know what they don't know, and that can be hugely detrimental to the types of step-change advances that are born out of cultures of data curiosity and free enquiry.

The key insight for data executives is that business users are the ones who should be ideating and posing the questions they need to ask to run the business. To keep data fidelity high, provide access to key, strategic data sets through governed processes, without preconceptions about what questions teams may want to ask or what problems they may be looking to solve.

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“Our employees can't wait weeks for the information they need to do their jobs. But at the same time, we have billions of rows of data in our database. It's no small challenge to quickly slice and dice that amount of information.

With Incorta we are now in the business of creating frameworks, and allowing the business user to dive into their own data.”

ALAN DAVIDSON,
DIRECTOR IT INTRASTRUCTURE, BROADCOM

KEY #2

BECOME A CONSTANT GARDENER

Data is always evolving and being used for new needs and purposes. Exactly what people want from data can change daily, and sometimes they don't even know until they find it. This means the job of the data executive is morphing from gatekeeper to gardener: regularly pruning, guiding growth and sowing the fertilization for business-changing ideas that grow out of data.

Pruning refers to the continued duty of the data executive in weeding out bad data or course-correcting when inaccuracies or mistaken conclusions begin to arise. However, it shifts the mindset from “permission” to “forgiveness” — the point is not to exert as much control as possible, but rather to adapt to a style of informed and constant vigilance, and be prepared to nip any problems in the bud. Those moments when problems appear can be deeply educative: what was the intended result? How can you help this team or individual to correct their thinking or verify their hypothesis? Why were they asking this question in the first place?

To successfully guide growth in a company's BI prowess, data executives should not seek to control when and where data is used, but rather develop the foresight to see what data needs are developing or where the next important questions might come from. The simplest way to begin this shift is simply paying attention to the most popular data requests at your organization. Work to ensure the accuracy of high-impact data as it comes into demand — you might be surprised by what your teams are asking for when you take the time to really listen to them.

By fertilization, we mean working to create an environment with accurate, accessible data and a culture that encourages experimentation and asking new questions of that data. This means sowing the seeds of data curiosity far and wide, and becoming an exemplar of a flexible, inquisitive approach to data and BI. Unilaterally deciding what you think might be useful or placing limitations on what can be explored runs contrary to this shift in philosophy.

The job of a data gardener is never truly done — but that should not be discouraging or daunting. Rather, savvy data executives embrace this new, dynamic approach to their jobs as an integral part of how data and self-serve BI will work as the world moves towards a post-ETL reality.

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KEY #3

FUEL INNOVATION THROUGH CURIOSITY

Disruption and business advances cannot always be planned. However, we can endeavor to create business cultures and environments with the right tools and resources to give rise to disruption. “Single source of truth” thinking is no longer the way to build these environments.

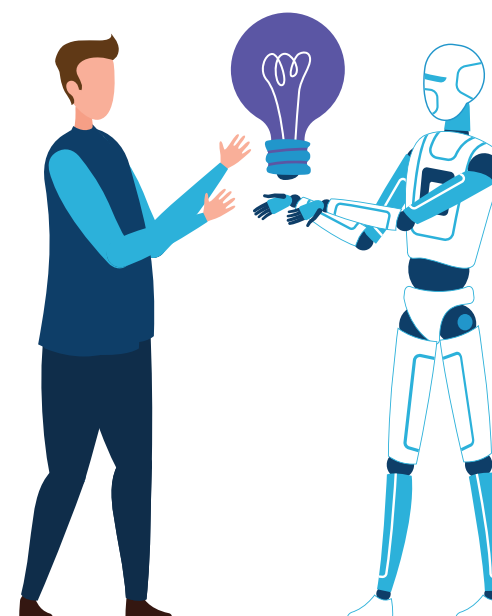
Inspiration for the transformative power of a culture of curiosity comes from surprising sources. Consider personal styling service Stitch Fix, which focuses intently on fostering a culture of data curiosity. Chief Algorithms Officer Eric Colson, whose title alone signals a dedication to analytical thinking, boasts of their “algorithms for recommender systems, merchandise buying, inventory management, relationship management, logistics, operations — we even have algorithms for designing clothes!” Stitch Fix’s commitment to data science, augmented by its deliberately cultivated culture of data curiosity, is considered one of its key differentiators in a crowded, competitive field and has helped the company grow annual revenue to \$1.2 billion. Colson reiterates why flexibility and access are key to curiosity: “Requiring [data scientists] to ask permission or request resources will impose a cost and less exploration will occur.”

Across the business world, Analytics Centers of Excellence have been built to enable digital transformation and catapult organizations into a near future when everyone is a data scientist. This is no coincidence: smart minds see that encouraging this curiosity for learning and insight from data can be the firestarter for the type of change that revolutionize organizations.

As part of its continued push for innovation, global semiconductor powerhouse Broadcom (an Incorta customer) adopted the goal of dramatically reducing the time it took to get information to every employee and a company-wide initiative of “doing more with less.” With Incorta, Broadcom was able to roll out self-service analytics capabilities to finance, sales and marketing, with future plans to expand into accounting, research and development, and supply chain management. The day-to-day business users have effectively been given the tools and capability to be data curious and drive innovation in their own right, while the IT department has freed itself from the grind of maintaining legacy systems just to break even and won back the time to leverage data in more creative ways to solve higher level problems.

Setting the stage for disruption requires looking inward and disrupting some of the processes — and mindsets — that we take for granted as data executives. The “single source of truth” must be seen not as the end goal, but as a condition for establishing the type of culture in which any team or employee can uncover the next big thing that defines the trajectory of your organization.

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INCORTA: THE RIGHT TOOLS FOR THE MODERN DATA MINDSET

Rethinking the “single source of truth”

Why is it so hard to create a “single source of truth?” Because it’s an illusion.

Every business exists in a state of continuous change, and so does their data. As a data executive, your job is to continuously digest and ensure the availability of data as it grows, supporting users in self-exploration and discovery. You need a tool that can rapidly and accurately integrate new data sources like Salesforce, Zendesk or Magento and keep business insights current. Incorta has proven their ability to do just that and more with [Oracle NetSuite](#) — what can Incorta do for you?

Building a BI sandbox — while accounting for every grain

Obsessing over a “single source of truth” is unhealthy. It places invisible limits on your team and stifles their ability to find creative solutions to important business challenges.

With Incorta, ensuring data fidelity and accuracy does not mean confining your business’ teams to a space with little room for growth. “No-data-warehouse analytics” means that users across the business can be empowered to approach the data on their terms and ask the questions they didn’t know they wanted to ask — all while allowing you to be certain they are working with the right data.

Setting the stage for disruption

Curiosity killed the status quo. By creating space for the brightest minds to explore, you can begin to set the stage for disruption at your company. The best insights come from data, of course, but the most unexpected insights come from broad and regular experimentation – not the occasional “let’s try something crazy.” As BI becomes self-service and more and more of your company expects open access to analytics, data executives must learn to stop viewing the “single source of truth” as an end in itself and begin to regard it as the means to a culture of data curiosity. This is the path to true disruption and real digital transformation across the entire organization.

Incorta has already set companies like Broadcom and Shutterstock on the path to digital transformation, helping them dominate their respective industries. True change — true disruption — starts from within, and Incorta can help you become the data executive of the future who leads your company through this transformative process.



THE DIRECT DATA PLATFORM™

incorta

ABOUT INCORTA

Incorta is the data analytics company on a mission to help data-driven enterprises be more agile and competitive by resolving their most complex data analytics challenges. Incorta's Direct Data Platform gives enterprises the means to acquire, enrich, analyze and act on their business data with unmatched speed, simplicity and insight. Backed by GV (formerly Google Ventures), Kleiner Perkins, M12 (formerly Microsoft Ventures), Telstra Ventures, and Sorenson Capital, Incorta powers analytics for some of the most valuable brands and organizations in the world. For today's most complex data and analytics challenges, Incorta partners with Fortune 5 to Global 2000 customers such as Broadcom, Vitamix, Equinix, and Credit Suisse. For more information, visit <https://www.incorta.com>