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The Future of Analytics: Illuminating the Modern Workplace

By Kon Leong

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I'm often asked in which area of business I expect analytics to make the biggest strides in the near future, and my answer is pretty simple, although perhaps counterintuitive: it will be within the workplace itself. Endless resources are spent on gathering consumer data -- and rightfully so -- yet to many companies, the dynamics of their own workplace remain a mystery.

It isn't for lack of data. Written communication is difficult to analyze because it is unstructured, making it inherently resistant to quantification. Without a clear incentive to save this data, companies in the past have treated it as a burden rather than a resource and left it largely unused.

However, within the last decade or so, increased regulatory pressure has propelled companies to begin storing what



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was once considered "dark data." Now that they must keep it, they're looking for ways to leverage it as a resource, and thus the dark data has opened the door for a paradigm shift in analytics. This is what you can expect in the development of analytics over the next few years:

#1: Reactive Analytics Will Fail

Analytics is hot right now, but most of the new players use what I call "The Sandbox Approach." They wait until something compels them to take a closer look at their data, perhaps a security breach. Then they begin collecting data from the people involved to put it in a virtual sandbox where they determine what was taken and where the attack came from. However, when the entire beach of data is unmanaged, so is the data that goes into the sandbox.

It is only once all data across the enterprise is proactively managed, and human-driven analytics and governance begin working in synergy, that analytics will live up to its full potential.

One use case for this relationship is in file analysis: every piece of data within an enterprise can be tagged according to sensitivity, providing companies with a blood flow diagram of where important information lies. Companies can then identify irregular data usage -- abnormal amounts of sensitive data being transferred or data being transferred to unexpected locations -- and neutralize threats before they actually materialize.

Once companies begin proactively managing their employee-made data, they will be able to use analytics for behavioral applications that transcend data security. Which types of organizational networks are most effective? How is information distributed throughout the company? How can interdepartmental processes and communications be improved? What patterns of behavior can we identify in the most effective employees and train other employees to imitate?

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These are questions that unstructured data such as file shares, email content, and metadata will help companies answer in the coming years.

#2: Analytics and Information Governance Will Clash

Although analytics and governance must work in synergy, the two actually share a complicated -- in many ways antithetical -- relationship. Governance focuses on data with an eye toward risk exposure, and that has led to a minimalist philosophy towards data storage: the more data we can delete, the smaller the security risk.



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