Introduction

2020 was a year full of terms like “unprecedented” and “unanticipated.” Every industry has been affected in some way by the COVID-19 pandemic, economic fallout and social unrest around the globe. Strategic and business model change has translated, and continues to translate, into new challenges and priorities for function leaders. For the CIO and the whole IT organization, 2021 brings with it the imperative to generate more business value using innovative technologies and approaches to information.

Each IT role faces specific challenges — from planning and supporting digital acceleration to integrating more strategically with the rest of the business. As business partners grow more comfortable with identifying and using technologies, IT leaders will need to become more sophisticated in their partnership and collaboration.

And, despite the challenges, a significant great opportunity exists to transform business operations and models from the ground up, enabling the organization to respond to future disruption quickly and strategically.

This e-book highlights the trends and challenges data and analytics (D&A) leaders will have to reconcile in the coming year and provides specific actions that they can take in response — and to better align their piece of the organization with the business.

IT leaders have learned many valuable lessons in the past year, from how to quickly move entire organizations to remote workforces, how to create a secure work environment and how to prioritize digital initiatives like never before.

But there is more work to be done.

Leading in 2021 will look different from leadership in 2020, but understanding and planning for unknowns and continued disruption across the IT organization is critical to moving forward.

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Data and analytics leaders in the public sector

Public sector organizations are increasingly excited by the opportunities that digital business promises, and agencies have been investing much time and money in digital capabilities, particularly in response to the rapidly changing demands of a post-COVID environment.

However, with the current disruption creating urgency to drive results, directors general and deputy directors are beginning to wonder where repeatable, sustainable value will come from. To succeed in taking full advantage of the potential value of the resulting changes to the economy and to society, government services and technology leaders need to prepare to adapt and evolve.

Given that every digital moment leads to a decision that is powered, or held hostage, by data and analytics, it is no wonder that these opportunities and challenges have come ever more into focus. Siloed data, lack of trust, misalignment to outcomes, a focus on data for its own sake and an assumption that a technology acquisition will be sufficient can be colossal challenges to overcome because there is no quick fix.

2021 will bring its own challenges to the public sector. Vaccine distribution and management and the impact on mission goals are just examples of where chief data officers and other data and analytics leaders will be key players in the reset scenarios.

By 2022, 30% of CDOs will partner with their CFO to formally value the organization’s information assets for improved information management and benefits.
3 trends that will impact public sector data and analytics leaders in 2021

Embed D&A in mission strategy
The role of chief data officer (CDO) is one of orchestration and prioritization. CIOs are accountable for the utility and disciplines of technology assets, and CDOs are accountable for the utility and disciplines of information assets. The CDO is responsible for guiding decision makers at an agency using data insights.

Data literacy increases
Data literacy is not about turning everyone into a data scientist. It is about developing a common understanding of what goals and outcomes are important across the agency, so that all stakeholders contribute to the whole (rather than deflect and misdirect with competing or alternative outcomes). Once a strategic alignment of understanding is achieved, there is augmented decision making, with new insight and new abilities, to be more thoughtful in actions and decisions, without adding time or cost.

D&A implements change management
CDOs are getting on with the work of driving meaningful change in their agencies.
Base your D&A agency on collaboration, cooperation and problem solving. Create awareness among your employees. Stand on your soapbox, give presentations and organize hackathons; but most of all, spread the word about how D&A can help drive mission outcomes.
2 challenges facing public sector data and analytics leaders in 2021

Although D&A leaders will face many challenges in 2021, here are two to begin strategizing for:

Embed D&A in mission results

Moving from technology-centric to data-driven and from siloed separate data strategies to a mission strategy infused with D&A is the future. D&A is no longer simply about dashboards and reports, it’s about augmenting decision making across the agency.

Perception of D&A within the agency

Changing the perception of D&A is vital. In some places, D&A is still seen as a service found within the IT department that runs reports on request. At other agencies, the D&A leader is in a leadership position, with data work split between the agency and IT. In the ideal perception, the D&A leader is outside of IT entirely.
Leadership Vision: 2021 Top Priorities for Data and Analytics Leaders
A Public Sector Perspective

Focus on the top 3 priorities
The top 3 priorities for CDOs are creating a data-driven culture, developing a data and analytics strategy, and standing up a data/information governance program. Use this information to understand how other CDOs are operating. These challenges require new ways of thinking and updated strategies. However, they all require putting data literacy and change management at the top of the to-do list.

Implement adaptive D&A governance
Data and analytics leaders are failing to deliver sustainable business value through D&A because of poor governance practices. Adaptive D&A differs from traditional approaches that tended to be IT-driven, focused on data and standards. Adaptive governance uses mission outcomes to prioritize the work and helps you govern the least amount of data with the greatest mission impact.

2 actions for public sector data and analytics leaders to take in 2021
Given the challenges that D&A leaders will encounter, consider these two actions to help move the agency in the right direction: