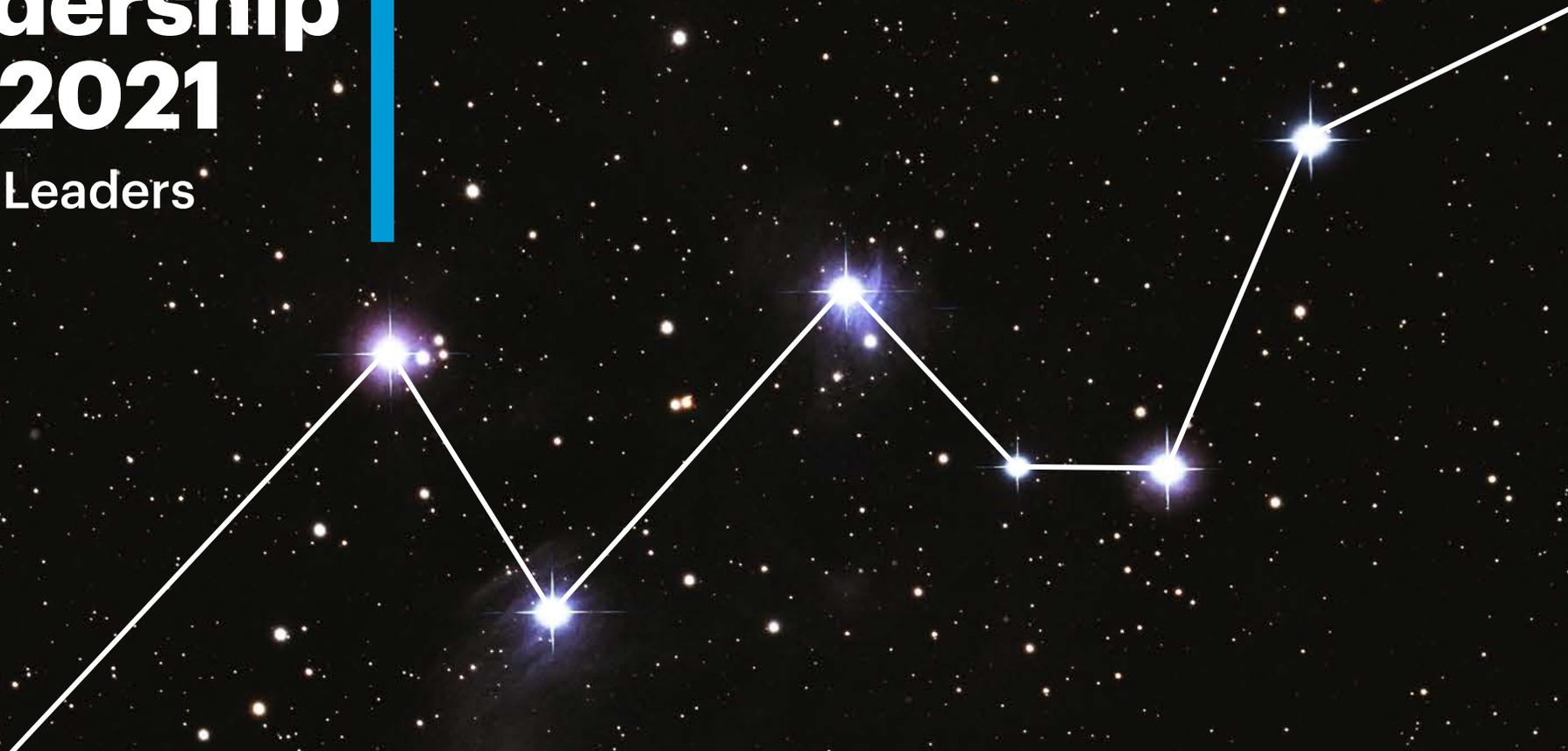# Gartner®

Top Priorities for IT: Leadership Vision for 2021

Data and Analytics Leaders

Introduction

2020 has been 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.

Chris Howard
Chief of Research, Gartner

Increasingly, CEOs and boards of directors — after investing much time and money into data and analytics — are beginning to wonder where repeatable, sustainable value will come from. For digital business in particular (and D&A in general), the pressure is acute as time is running out.

Given that every digital business moment leads to a decision that is powered, or held hostage, by data and analytics, it is no wonder that chronic issues have become more acute. 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.

By 2023, data literacy will become an explicit and necessary driver of business value, demonstrated by its formal inclusion in over 80% of data and analytics strategies and change management programs.

Source: Gartner

By 2022, 30% of CDOs will partner with their CFO to formally value the organization's information assets for improved information management and benefits.

Source: Gartner

3 trends that will impact data and analytics leaders in 2021

CDO embeds D&A in business strategy

The role of chief data officer (CDO) is one of orchestration and prioritization. CIOs "own" technology assets, and CDOs "own" information assets. The CDO is responsible for guiding decision makers at an organization 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 organization, 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 organizations.

Base your D&A organization 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 business outcomes.

2 challenges facing 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 business results

Moving from technology-centric to data-driven and from siloed separate data strategies to a business 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 business.

Perception of D&A within the organization

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 organizations, the D&A leader is in a leadership position, with data work split between the business and IT. In the ideal perception, the D&A leader is outside of IT entirely and reports to the COO or CEO. Here, CDOs are central to the business strategy.

2 actions for 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 organization in the right direction:

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.
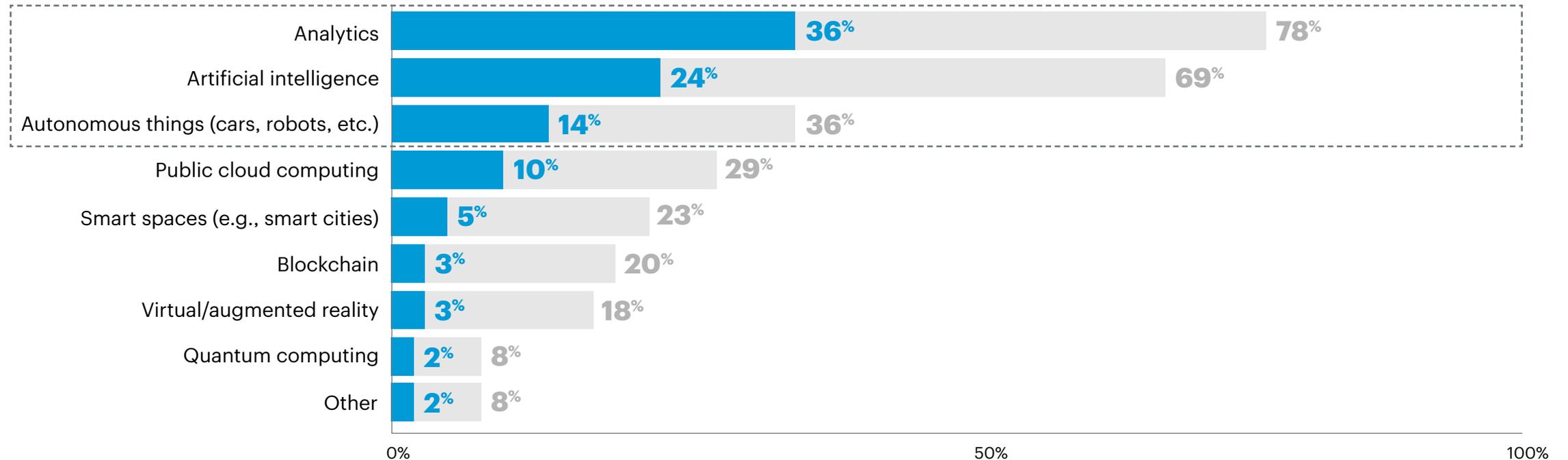
Implement adaptive D&A governance

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 business outcomes to prioritize the work and helps you govern the least amount of data with the greatest business impact.

The heat is on: Boards of directors place analytics and AI as the No. 1 and No. 2 priorities

Top game-changer technologies to emerge stronger from COVID-19 crisis

■ First choice
■ Sum of top 3

Technology	First choice	Sum of top 3
Analytics	36%	78%
Artificial intelligence	24%	69%
Autonomous things (cars, robots, etc.)	14%	36%
Public cloud computing	10%	29%
Smart spaces (e.g., smart cities)	5%	23%
Blockchain	3%	20%
Virtual/augmented reality	3%	18%
Quantum computing	2%	8%
Other	2%	8%

n = 255, all respondent, excluding "can't say"
Q. Which will be the top 3 game-changer technologies for your industry to emerge from the COVID-19 crisis?
Source: View From the Board of Directors 2021, CIO Research, July 2020

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