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# Q&A: Is your data in place?

BY TAN ZHAI YUN

**D**ata is one of the key pillars of digital transformation. It allows a business to make informed decisions, understand its customers' habits and behaviours, and create benchmarks against which progress can be measured.

But managing data can be difficult. *Digital Edge* speaks to Tan Chin Kuan, senior director of solutions and value engineering at Qlik, a global data analytics service provider, to find out what businesses can do to master data management and analytics.

**Digital Edge:** What is the role of data in digital transformation?  
**Tan:** According to our recent study with International Data Corporation (IDC), businesses in the Asia-Pacific that used data to create new avenues for innovation and disruption recorded improved operational efficiency (77%), revenue (75%) and customer satisfaction (73%).

There is a myriad of examples to showcase the importance of data in digital transformation, from retailers analysing point-of-sale data to create personalised customer experiences and manufacturers using data and analytics to detect performance issues early, all the way to security firms using edge analytics in video cameras to detect events that may cause alarm.

Many Malaysian businesses joined e-commerce platforms for the first time due to the pandemic. This expanded their customer reach and also gave them access to more digitalised or structured data. What is the next step they should take in their digital transformation journey?

Organisations that want to reap the full benefits of data will need to establish a data catalogue. Data cataloguing will not only give an overview of all types of data available in the organisation but also provide users with a straightforward process to access the most relevant and valuable insights for the task at hand.

Businesses should also implement data democratisation. This means making data accessible to everyone within a secure governed framework without limiting agility. If companies can prioritise accessibility of data, employees will become more eager to use data to work smarter and innovate.

Oftentimes, data is seen as a secondary priority and relegated to the IT department or a single point person to handle. What is the right way to handle data in an organisation?

Data should no longer be a secondary priority but take a first-class seat for all businesses.

In most cases, data collection is the responsibility of the business management team while the storage, security and distribution of data is done by the IT department. However, this siloed approach is likely to result in reduced operational efficiency and morale. Data should be everyone's responsibility, not just [the] IT [department]'.  
 IT departments should see their role transform from a gatekeeper to an enabler, working with business users to define a data framework that releases data from siloes. The data should be used as an asset to enable more downstream use cases.

Take one of Indonesia's leading banks, PT Bank Tabungan Pensiunan Nasional Tbk (BTPN), for example. To leverage on the vast trove of data it was previously idly sitting on, BTPN worked with Qlik to enable real-time processing of its data. This allowed it to quickly analyse data to form actionable insights and drive business growth, like providing faster and more personalised customer service.



**"If companies can prioritise accessibility of data, employees will become more eager to use data to work smarter and innovate."**

Tan



**How would you suggest data upskilling be done in companies?**

I recommend a three-step process.

First, communicate the power of data from the top down. These discussions are especially crucial among the senior leadership team. For example, functional leaders can mandate discussions to begin with a data point. This will encourage employees to search for data and increase their confidence in making data-driven decisions.

Second, determine all employees' current skill levels using surveys and assessments. Once the evaluation is complete, customise training programmes to empower individuals across the organisation. Companies can also tap on free assessment and training resources online, including those offered by The Data Literacy Project.

Third, continually assess the best way to use data as it grows rapidly in volume and complexity. Companies should regularly evaluate their data tools and invest in the right technology to ensure employees can easily access relevant, high-quality and secure data. Without it, any initial interest in data may lead to distrust or discouragement among employees.

Ultimately, leaders need to understand that data and analytics will only work if their employees are comfortable. Not everyone needs to become a data scientist. We just need to empower them to have confidence in reading, analysing and using data effectively.

**Can you share some best practices of Qlik's clients in Malaysia?**

Tenaga Nasional Bhd (TNB) is an excellent example. As more people are working remotely during the pandemic, it is more important than ever to have a reliable electricity supply. TNB uses data to ensure this. A performance dashboard, paired with data collected from calls reporting power disruptions, helps teams analyse the type of costs incurred (preventive or corrective) and quickly identify power supply issues.

By acting as an automated reporting system, the dashboard helped TNB to reduce cost and enhance customer experience, as fewer electricity interruptions were recorded.

We can also learn from how Al-Ikhsan Sports, the largest sports retailer in Malaysia, is leveraging

## 4 DATA PERSONAS AND HOW TO HELP THEM

**Data aristocrat** — She's top of the line in data issues. She can learn communication, leadership and mentoring.

**Data knight** — She's almost there. She can improve on data and statistical knowledge, leadership and in telling stories with data.

**Data dreamer** — She is just starting to learn the ins and outs of data: What is data, how to question data and asking good questions about data.

**Data doubter** — She's not convinced yet. Really hone in on helping her understand the importance of data and get her involved in data projects.

SOURCE: THE DATA LITERACY PROJECT

data to drive business growth. With 135 stores across the country and a promising e-commerce platform, the retailer needed smart, real-time insights into which store locations were performing best and the best-selling products for each store.

So, Al-Ikhsan worked with Qlik and R-Systems to integrate the data across all its systems, providing a clear overview of its performance and products. Thanks to this, Al-Ikhsan captured more market share, recorded higher single-digit same-store sales growth in its first year of using Qlik Sense, and expanded its store network by 20%.

**How can small-and-medium-sized enterprises begin adopting data analytics, given their budget constraints?**

There is no better time than now to adopt data analytics, thanks to the advent of cloud-based solutions. Cloud analytics plays a big part in bringing down costs significantly. Without the need for on-premise servers, companies can rely on an analytics vendor or third-party partner to manage the setup and maintenance, and deploy the platform anywhere.

This frees business leaders from worrying about infrastructure or constant software updates and allows them to focus on more pertinent matters, like empowering their employees with data literacy skills.

Companies embarking on their data analytics journey should start by setting clear data goals to easily define what tools are needed to achieve them. Once the goals are mapped out, they should choose an analytics platform to accommodate all use cases within a unified, governed framework. ■