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**Why Data Teams Underperform

(Even When the Tools Are “Best in Class”)**

A practical perspective for data, digital, and business leaders

Executive Summary

Most organizations don't struggle with data because of a lack of tools. In fact, many have invested heavily in modern data platforms, analytics tools, and dashboards.

And yet, the same complaints keep surfacing:

- Reports take too long to produce
- Insights arrive after decisions are already made
- Business teams don't trust the numbers
- Dashboards go unused

When this happens, the instinct is often to blame the technology—or to buy more of it.

In reality, data teams underperform far more often because of **how they are structured and supported**, not because of the tools they use.

This paper explores why capable data teams fail to deliver consistent business value—and what organizations can do to change that.

The Disconnect Most Leaders Recognize

The pattern is familiar.

Data teams work hard. Requests keep coming. Dashboards get built. Models are refined. Yet business leaders still say they lack timely, actionable insight.

From the business side:

- “We don't get answers fast enough.”
- “The data doesn't match what we see.”
- “We're not sure which report to trust.”

From the data side:

- “Requirements keep changing.”
- “Data sources aren't clean.”
- “We're reacting instead of building.”

Both perspectives are valid. The disconnect lies in how data work is organized.

Why Better Tools Don't Fix the Problem

Modern data stacks are powerful. But tools alone don't create clarity.

Common issues include:

- Multiple sources of truth
- Poorly defined metrics
- Unclear ownership of data assets
- Limited business context within data teams

Without alignment, even the best tools amplify confusion rather than reduce it.

Technology accelerates whatever structure already exists—good or bad.

Where Data Teams Actually Get Stuck

Underperformance usually traces back to a few structural issues:

01 Unclear Business Ownership

Data teams are asked to “support the business” without clear priorities or decision rights.

02 Constant Interruptions

Ad-hoc requests crowd out strategic work, leaving teams in reactive mode.

03 Translation Gaps

Analysts understand the data. Business leaders understand the problem. Too often, no one fully bridges the two.

04 Talent Misalignment

Highly skilled analysts spend time pulling data instead of generating insight.

The result is effort without impact.

The Cost of Low-Impact Analytics

When data doesn't influence decisions, organizations pay a quiet price:

- Decisions made on intuition instead of evidence
- Lost trust in analytics
- Frustration within data teams
- Difficulty justifying continued investment

Over time, data becomes a reporting function instead of a strategic asset.

What Actually Works: Aligning Data With Decisions

Organizations that get value from data do a few things differently.

Start With Decisions, Not Dashboards

- They define the decisions data is meant to support—before building reports.

Clarify Ownership

- **Metrics, data sources, and definitions have clear business owners.**

Embed Analysts

- **Data professionals work closely with business teams, not as a separate service layer.**

Protect Focus

- **Teams balance responsiveness with dedicated time for higher-value work.**

This approach shifts analytics from reporting to decision support.

What This Looks Like in Practice

In practice, progress is gradual.

Organizations begin by simplifying metrics and clarifying priorities. Analysts spend more time understanding business questions and less time reconciling numbers.

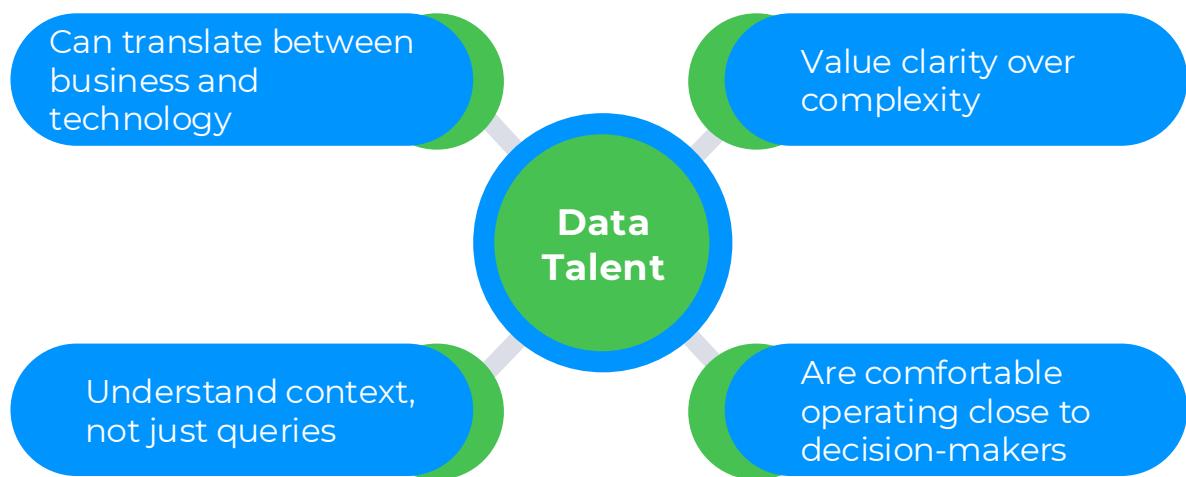
Over time:

- Fewer reports get used—but more decisions improve
- Trust in data increases
- Data teams feel connected to outcomes, not just outputs

The volume of analytics work may decrease. Its impact increases.

How Organizations Build Stronger Data Teams

Organizations that succeed tend to look for data talent that:



The most effective data teams are not the largest or the most technical. They are the most aligned.

Closing Thoughts

- Data teams don't underperform because they lack capability. They underperform when structure, priorities, and expectations are misaligned.
- When analytics is built around decisions—and supported by the right talent model—data becomes what it was meant to be: a driver of better outcomes.

Rockwoods helps organizations strengthen data teams by aligning analytics talent with real business decisions and delivery needs.