Leading Through Change

In this Q&A, Jeremy Blaney, senior manager of customer success at Tableau, highlights how organizations can use data to lead through change while still meeting privacy and compliance requirements.

What is top of mind for government organizations in terms of data analytics and data management right now?

Leading through the unprecedented amount of change brought by COVID-19 continues to require the use of data and analytics. The first task was to create stability so agencies could keep employees healthy and safe and continue to meet mission and service expectations. Now, as organizations think through re-opening, the new normal is still being defined. Leaders are focusing on what needs be done to adapt the organization to emerge, grow, and become more digital and data-based. The data imperative underpins all of it — from the early days of the pandemic to where we are now and where we need to go.

How has the massive shift to telework made data management more complex?

A recent statistic said some agencies now have more than 95 percent of their personnel operating in a telework environment. Organizations have faced challenges getting people on private networks because many employees did not have laptops or they lacked the appropriate credentials. Even when employees could access private networks from public domains, additional layers of security prevented them from accessing systems and data stores they routinely use to accomplish their job. Agencies are working through these challenges both for "pre-pandemic" employees and new employees. All of this puts the idea of platform agility and data governance front and center. Many organizations are heeding the call, quickly standing up secure and stable environments that can evolve as this new normal continues to define itself.

How can agencies improve data management and governance?

As I mentioned, the first priority of many organizations as they began to lead through the change brought about by COVID-19 was to stabilize. Doing so required not just the use of internal data, but also public data about how and where the virus was spreading. Multiple functional areas — HR, finance, operations — within these organizations needed this data. Pursuing public data in silos isn't particularly effective. Instead, organizations should be thinking about how they can create single sources of truth through data governance models that support secure widespread access.

What role do automation and machine learning play in managing data and strengthening security and compliance?

Machine learning improves search relevance and ranking so that people use the right data, which certainly benefits compliance. In addition, with relevant data, as identified through a machine learning algorithm, people can get started with their analysis much faster. On the smart analytics front — artificial intelligence, machine learning statistics, natural language — all of this helps organizations manage their data, because it increases the speed at which they can find high-quality insights or discover those unknown unknowns that exist within data. That capability is especially important now as organizations try to map out how to adapt to the new realities of doing government business.

How can organizations help employees make the best use of self-service analytics?

People have been self-servicing analytical needs for years because they need to answer their own questions rapidly. But are people asking the right questions and are they doing all that in the most efficient digital forms? Proficiency is one of the core capabilities defined in the Tableau Blueprint, which is a prescriptive, proven methodology for becoming a more data-driven organization. Proficiency speaks to the need to educate people to see and understand data for decision-making. That includes educating them on how to work with data, measuring the value that they derive from their use of data, and institutionalizing best practices that drive behavior change and informed decision-making.

What kinds of functionality should agencies look for when they select a data management solution?

Data compliance, governance and trust are all woven together in a complex web. In general, data management capabilities need to be governed and self-sufficient so that the solution can respond to an ever-changing data landscape. The solution must provide visibility and control to drive trust in the data environment as a whole. Discoverability — enabling people to quickly and competently find the right data for their analysis — is also important. And last but not least is scale. Data volumes, analytical use cases and data variability are increasing every day. Effectively managing data scale requires repeatable processes that keep data and metadata up to date.

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