



**Dynamics Matters**  
**Podcast**

How to create a data strategy

**With Laura Graham-Brown Solution Specialist, HSO**

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*“Without data you’re just another person with an opinion” – W. Edwards Deming*

Why do we need data? Because ‘data tells the story’. That is, according to HSO Solution Specialist and data aficionado, Laura Graham-Brown. *“Data can tell you where you’ve been, what you’ve done, what your organisation has done, what’s happened, and what other people have done.”*

*“If you don’t have the data, you don’t have the proof and you can’t predict what’s going to happen – data tells the story.”* A story that helps organisations know more about their customers, their products, their suppliers and vendors, and themselves.

Having a handle on your data allows you to predict outcomes. To react to changes in the environment. And to make decisions with a greater degree of accuracy and certainty of outcome. Most organisations understand the value of data, and yet many struggle to manage it well. This can be down to the size and complexity of an organisation, the number of systems holding data and their ability to ‘talk’ to one another, and how willing people in the organisation are to work to a consistent data agenda. There are many reasons delivering a successful data strategy is challenging, but by addressing this last point you will increase the chances of success. And it begins by finding a stakeholder.



## You need a data owner

To instil a data led culture you need a data sponsor. A point Graham-Brown was keen to emphasise *“One of the key things to have, is someone to own the data.”* The level of that person is important for influencing take up as Graham-Brown continued: *“You need someone in the business, preferably at director or board level, to turn around and say ‘I am responsible for data in this organisation’. Without that buy-in, you will hit roadblocks.”*

It may be yourself together with others within the organisation who define and implement the data strategy – a need that gave rise to the role of Chief Data Officer - but having that high-level stakeholder gives the data agenda the importance it needs, and ensures acceptance and buy-in. Once you have your high-level owner, it’s nearly time to define your data strategy. But not quite because first you must do this.

## Understand what the business needs from

The old proverb suggests: 'A man without a vision for his future, always returns to his past'. A past where decisions are based on guesswork, work conducted in silos, and data is not used to support operations. You don't want to go back to this. So before creating the strategy and plan you must first do two things:

**1. Wearing your business hat:** Understand what the business needs from data

This is your starting point. What challenges are you attempting to solve, and what business objectives are your data efforts supporting. Knowing where you're going will keep future work focused on an end goal.

**2. Wearing your technology hat:** Learn about the data eco-system

You will need to learn how the business is managing data today because this will become your starting point of action. Questions you will need to find answers to include: where is your data coming from ... who's using it ... who owns it ... what happens to it once it's been drawn down and used ... what restrictions and guardrails are there ... what systems are being used to store it ... and what governance is already in place.

Graham-Brown believes there are some fundamentals you need to uncover *"You need data on your data. You need to understand how clean your data is and how much data you have. For example, do we have sales for the past ten years, or is everything a bit of a guess because nobody actually has the records."*





## Now it's time to bring people inside

Being responsible for implementing a data strategy is one of the most politically challenging roles in an organisation. And the larger the organisation the more challenging it becomes. This is because data touches everything. It has a role to play in every function of an organisation. And different departments and business units will be operating to their own agendas. So you will have to play the game. To influence others to support your data initiatives. And to follow the path you set out. It's difficult. There are agendas at play and many egos to placate, and this is where having high-level sponsor pays out in spades. And it's why when setting any data strategy, it's the first thing you do.

Once you have your data owner, once you have set your objectives, once you know the layout, you can begin defining and rolling out your data strategy and plan.

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