In most enterprises up to now, analytics has been something separate from day-to-day operations. That’s about to change.

Analytics is something new for most of us, and therefore scary. But as it moves from the realm of the data geeks and into the general enterprise where most of us live, it’s helpful to recognize that there is nothing new in the way this situation is unfolding.

We have all seen this movie before. A new technology cluster comes into view that promises to expand the production possibility frontier (that’s economic speak for “It is going to help us do more stuff”). Organizations that want to do more stuff (all of them, basically) and that also want to be perceived as being in front of the curve undertake a series of explorations in the form of task forces and pilot projects to tease out a risk-adjusted path forward. A vocal cohort of enthusiasts, evangelists, early adopters and analysts talk up startup companies that are advancing the new technology. Conferences, webinars and podcasts ensue. If the opportunity associated with the technology cluster is big enough and if the underlying technologies are complex enough, new roles are created.

This is where we stand today with analytics. Organizations are test-driving a variety of new roles to see which combination provides the fastest and least disruptive path to enterprise competence in creating competitive advantage via differentiated information management (a.k.a. analytics). We have data scientists, chief analytics officers, chief data officers and chief digital officers popping up all over the place.

And here is where remembering the past is helpful. What we have learned through the painful birthing process of other C-level executives such as the CIO and the CISO is that their success depends on how they relate to the rest of us. Getting the full value from analytics will require changing behavior across the enterprise.
In most enterprises up to now, analytics has been something separate from day-to-day operations. Again, though, we have lived through this kind of technology expansion before. IT itself, not so long ago, was something done by others. That changed, and we can learn from how that change was effected as the same thing happens with analytics.

The CIO at a northern Californian clothing company was once asked by his chairman why IT cost so much. The CIO responded that he would be able to deliver twice as much IT functionality at half the cost and a quarter of the time if users, particularly executives, were more technologically literate and took some personal responsibility for managing the digits in their domain. The same holds true for analytics. If executives and rank-and-file employees embraced analytics as part of their professional identity, as a skill set for which they took personal responsibility, organizations would be able to create unbreakable bonds with customers and provide shareholders with above-market returns. That’s a big “if.”

And yet that is what must happen. In analytics, real value is achieved only when workers take action in real life. In most companies, the part of the analytic process in which insight induces actual action in the workplace is all but forgotten. Analysts provide the insight but then presume that executives will take appropriate action. That gap has to be closed up.

And so the big question about big data is, How can we initiate the behavioral changes that are needed? Stanford professor B.J. Fogg posits that for any behavior to occur, three components must be present: motivation, ability and a trigger. Most analytic initiatives only focus on creating the trigger — the insight. The worker has to be motivated and have the ability to act on that insight for analytic value to happen.

What is your organization doing to change behavior around analytics?

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