

DIGITAL SUPPLY CHAIN INSTITUTE

# TALENT & ORGANIZATIONAL PLANNING



A GUIDE TO CLOSING  
THE DIGITAL SUPPLY  
CHAIN SKILLS &  
PERFORMANCE GAP



## About Digital Supply Chain Institute

The Center for Global Enterprise's (CGE) Digital Supply Chain Institute (DSCI) is a leading-edge research institute focused on the evolution of enterprise supply chains in the digital economy, and the creation and application of supply chain management best practices.

## How DSCI Can Help

DSCI is a membership-based, not-for-profit institute whose members are focused on executing the supply chain of the future. We perform research, conduct pilots, communicate the Digital Supply Chain story, and link members with companies that are going through similar journeys. DSCI is a program of The Center for Global Enterprise (CGE). Visit our website [dscinstitute.org](http://dscinstitute.org) to learn more or reach out to Vivek Ghelani, Project Manager, DSCI at [vghelani@thecge.net](mailto:vghelani@thecge.net).



THE CENTER FOR  
GLOBAL ENTERPRISE

## About The Center For Global Enterprise

CGE is a New York-based nonprofit, nonpartisan research institution devoted to the study of global management best practices, the contemporary corporation, economic integration, and their impact on society.

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# Introduction

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**“The Digital Supply Chain will require human capital, people, to work across organizational boundaries within their company to an extent that we have not traditionally seen.”**

George Bailey, Executive Director & Chief Research Officer, DSCI

Transforming to and running a Digital Supply Chain requires firms to organize and behave in ways significantly different from the past. New business models, new data sources, new technologies, enhanced processes and increased risks all contribute to an operational landscape that requires new ways of working and new skills to match; finding and recruiting new talent may not be enough. Where can traditional firms uncover and attract digital talent? Are your recruiting strategies updated to account for your more digital competitors? Firms also face the reality that bringing bright new digital skills into traditional processes may not necessarily deliver improvements in supply chain performance and may meet resistance.

This research is about uncovering winning strategies for addressing the talent needs of firms undergoing digital transformation. In our conversations with supply chain leaders, we found that the digital “skills gap” was top of mind for all, yet few firms had begun to execute talent plans to address the challenge. This white paper will help you develop action plans to address the talent gap and accelerate your firm’s transition to a Digital Supply Chain.

Given recent major disruptions related to COVID-19, firms must ask themselves how these changes respond to talent and skills gap issues. In speaking to our member firms, many expressed an immediate shift to online learning as a means of continuous learning and development during times of social distancing. High-quality platforms are now available to enable effective social collaborative learning that is delivered virtually. Firms interviewed also reaffirmed the increased importance of more integrated supply chain behaviors. Development efforts must deliver action learning programs to support this shift in mindset. Firms also mentioned an inevitable shift of employment to more on-line fulfillment operations as a means of coping with the changes in customer behavior as well as the displacement of supply chain associates.

# The Core Issue – Taking Action on Talent

In our annual Digital Supply Chain survey, we asked several questions about the talent side of the equation and found some surprising answers. The majority of firms acknowledged that their current talent pool is inadequate to execute the firms' digital business strategies. At the same time, respondents also noted they were either unable to or haven't taken significant actions to close the digital talent gap. This paper will focus on understanding more deeply the barriers to planning and ultimately taking action on people, a key driver of Digital Supply Chain transformation.

**Most organizations must take immediate action to improve their supply chains**

Q. Is your organization's current supply chain talent pool adequate for executing your organization's near term and next level strategy?

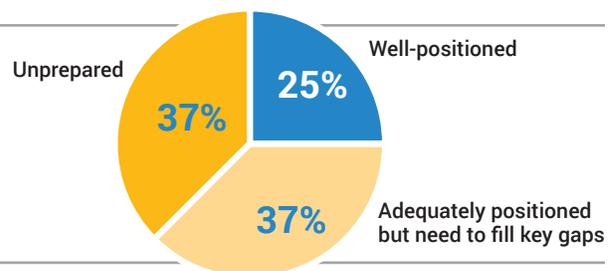


Figure 1 DSCI Annual Survey – Current Talent Pool Adequate?

**Figure 1** illustrates a key finding from the DSCI annual survey. Of the 312 responses to the question, "Is your organization's current supply chain talent pool adequate for executing your near term and next-level strategy?" only 25% felt they were "well-positioned." A full 75% of the respondents reported that their firms were "unprepared" or "needed to fill key gaps." The implications of this survey question are clear: most organizations must take immediate action to improve their supply chain talent.

**A majority of firms do not have a supply chain driven digital talent strategy**

Q. Does your organization's have a "digital talent strategy (that is a talent strategy specifically adapted to new digital skills)?"

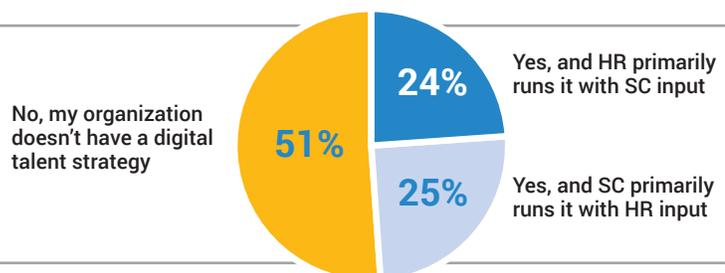


Figure 2 DSCI Annual Survey - Digital Talent Strategies

In **Figure 2** we see the results of the follow-up question about filling the talent gap. More than half of the firms surveyed reported that they did not have a talent strategy that has been adapted for the digital skills gaps. 24% of firms surveyed reported that they have active talent strategies, but that a separate human resources department was performing the actions. That leaves 25% of firms with an active supply chain specific action plan. Clearly, firms must act. Success in implementing digital business strategies depends on it.

# Attacking the Problem – The Digital Supply Chain Talent Model

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To address these issues, the DSCI research team developed a three-part talent model, designed to guide research as well as provide a robust action-planning framework.

*The three components of the model are:*

- 1. Talent attraction and acquisition**
- 2. Talent development and skill-building**
- 3. Talent integration and performance improvement**

## 1. Attract and Acquire: Finding and Winning the Right Talent

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This component looks at the way digitally-savvy firms position themselves to attract new digital talent. The best performing companies showed us that specific actions were taken to signal to potential recruits that they were seeking employment at the “right place” – the right company. Winning firms communicate with recruits that they value digital skills appropriately and they offer more than a traditional transactional job. The roles these firms are seeking to fill focus on creative business problem solving rather than simple technical skills. The best firms project an “**Employment Brand**” that is data-driven, community-oriented, and non-traditional, in ways that resonate with desirable, digital skill rich candidates.

## 2. Build and Develop: Developing Digital Talent and Skills

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Once a firm has successfully attracted and recruited digital talent, they must have plans in place to develop their talent further. The firm must build upon key skills their talent will need for the specific business environment they will perform in while developing them as an inter-company network performer. These performance behaviors are usually not developed naturally; they require explicit capability building actions from firms. Building a culture and community of data-driven employees requires setting leadership examples and rewarding digital skill-building behaviors.

## 3. Integrate and Perform: Driving Cross-Functional Integration and High Employee Performance

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Developing a community of data-driven individual task performers is not the end of the story when seeking to incite a Digital Supply Chain transformation. In new and innovative digital business models and segments, information and processes become highly integrated. In the best examples,

we call a supply chain “end-to-end” in that its planning, sourcing, manufacture, and delivery to customers is seamless, with business performance measured on high levels of customer happiness, at managed costs. This seamless integration doesn’t happen on its own. A well-crafted Digital Supply Chain talent plan takes organizational, not just individual attributes. Integration involves organizational designs, as well as employee mindset and cross-functional behaviors. Supply chain transformation is not just about hiring new employees; it’s about creating the conditions for higher levels of organizational performance and commitment.

## DSCI TALENT MODEL

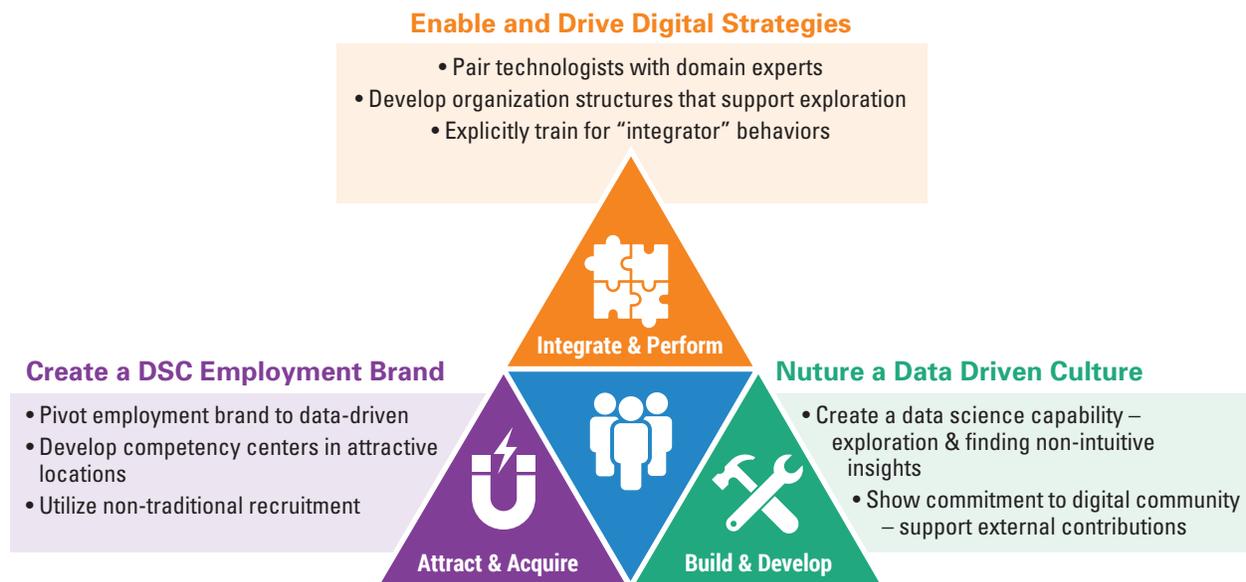


Figure 3 The DSCI Talent Model

**Figure 3** above shows the three main categories of the DSCI Talent Model for action planning. The following are key research findings for each of the model elements.

### RESEARCH INSIGHTS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR DSC TALENT PLANNING



#### Talent and Organizational Strategy Key Findings: Attract and Acquire

- **Sourcing data science talent.** Many of the firms we interviewed told us of serious efforts to develop meaningful partnerships with universities in the area of data science and data analytics. Partnerships included sponsoring and involving Ph.D. students in researching business problems for the firms, as well as developing curriculum. One key observation is much data-related talent is found outside of supply chain and business school programs, and instead is sourced from math, statistics, and engineering departments.

- **New roles are being invented and developed.** Some firms mentioned that they were co-developing concepts of blended technical programs such as “data science engineering.” This is a creative solution that attempts to address the real issue of data acquisition, cleansing, and alignment, before creating and deploying data science models based on business understanding.
- **Leverage internally developed data science communities.** Firms described the importance of developing Data Science Centers or competency communities. Supply chain leaders should seek talent in such hubs and recruit them to focus on supply chain business challenges.
- **Consider looking outside firms for key data talent.** Outsourcing, investment, and acquisition of firms with key talent are strategies that have been executed by firms seeking skills, especially for key data leadership roles.
- **Geography matters in talent strategies.** Recent research has shown that 60% of job growth is expected to occur in just 25 cities in the U.S. over the next decade. A large concentration of young, educated workers will be best found in these hubs. It is possible that national talent acquisition strategies are too broad, and instead a regional approach in growth geographies is more appropriate.
- **Look for talent outside your industry sector.** Some research is pointing out that supply chain knowledge is more transferable across industries than may be popularly thought. To increase your chances of finding needed talent, don’t restrict yourself to only your firm’s industry for experienced candidates.
- **Research has shown disconnects between HR and Supply Chain** on competency requirements and hiring practices.
- **Become an attractive employment brand** for data scientists, analytics engineers, and big data specialists and customer-centric process designers.
- **Develop an acquisition plan.** Evaluate your segmented digital supply chain plans and prepare a skills gap inventory. Which skills are missing? What roles need to be filled? Target specific skills needed for the segment strategy. Augment teams initially with outside consultants in data science, analytics, IoT, etc. and learn what is specifically needed in your recruitment. Pair outside consultants with internal associates to improve knowledge transfer and development during digital pilots. Expand acquisition plans, communities, and networks based on pilot outcomes.

#### EXAMPLE: WAYFAIR

Wayfair’s Technology blog at <https://tech.wayfair.com> illustrates an open communications channel that does more than just share tips for developers. If you look carefully at the images and ideas presented at this publicly available site, you will see employment branding at work. Images and profiles of current tech employees, diversity, work-life balance, and challenging collaborative work. Wayfair has been successful in recruiting thousands of data-savvy tech workers. You should take notice of how they address the talent market.

“Leaders can’t just command that the organization become more digital. They need to build a supportive culture that embraces collaboration, risk-taking, and experimentation.”

Kane et al. — Achieving Digital Maturity

## ATTRACT AND ACQUIRE: IMPLICATIONS FOR TALENT PLANNING



**As you develop and evaluate your Digital Supply Chain Talent plans, consider the following questions:**

- *Are you developing digital skills partnerships with universities and other sources of talent?*
- *Are you looking for the right skills? The right roles? Are roles described in ways that are up-to-date with the latest language and technologies?*
- *Are you creating and communicating a talent brand that is attractive to digitally skilled talent? Does your employment brand demonstrate a community of like-minded employees that is visible to talent prospects and recruiters?*
- *Do you have a plan for where to seek talent? Outside firms? The right geographies? The right sectors?*
- *Have you aligned your talent plans with your HR departments and clearly communicated your needs?*



### Talent and Organizational Strategy Key Findings: Build and Develop

- **Build data-centric supply chain communities.** Our research has shown that organizations should consider investing in the building of thoughtfully designed data-centric supply chain communities where co-located data-skilled talent works on supply chain problems. Data-centric skills, like data engineering, data analytics, and data science, are best married to functional experts with experience in framing critical supply chain performance problems. By creating a working environment where technical skills and functional skills can collaborate on specific, clearly defined supply chain problems that are well chosen for urgency and impact, firms will reap the benefits of digital strategies more rapidly.
- **Learning and development is no longer a “nice to have.”** Our interviewees, members, and literature searches this year all have indicated that firms no longer think of digital learning and development to be an optional investment. Whether its new talent that needs functional training in Supply Chain Management (SCM) or digital training to bolster the efficacy of supply chain “translators” who can blend functional and digital knowledge, the intersecting needs of staff all need development pathways to become more effective in executing digital strategies. There is a distinctive shift to support for lifelong learning and an expectation that firms need to build a higher level of digital literacy among a broader range of associates. Recent studies have pointed out that production work and transportation services (supply chain positions) will have the highest job displacement rates (6 million jobs lost by 2030 in the U.S.). This will place additional pressure and urgency on the re-skilling plans of forward-thinking firms.

- **Be realistic** about the ability to re-train modest technicians into highly functioning analytic experts. In our DSCI annual survey, we asked respondents, “how will you close the (digital) talent gap?” For the first time since we began gathering this type of data, firms reported that the development of talent (57%) was the primary approach over the acquisition of talent (31%). This shift towards development brings with it some adjustments in expectations about which roles, skills, and types of development are feasible, and which transitions may be beyond reach. Developing supply chain analysts into data scientists, for example, may not be possible given the extensive education, dedication, and drive required for demanding technology roles. Also, managers should consider the array of needs in developing complex data-driven strategies. Our research has shown, for instance, those data scientists who are required to do all their data-engineering are a flight risk. Be sure to balance out development with current capabilities and be open to acquiring talent to fill key gaps.
- **Supply Chain Management and analytical problem solving are key skills.** We examined a study of 243 supply chain hiring managers designed to enhance understanding of competency requirements of supply chain planners and analysts and identify different personal preferences of hiring managers toward job candidates’ competency profiles. The study indicated that SCM managers involved in hiring ranked SCM knowledge and problem-solving skills as three times more important than general management skills. The implications are that Human Resource Management (HRM) and SCM experts should invest in joint efforts to define objective requirements to ensure a candidate’s profile matches the needs, strategic goals, and organizational culture (Flothmann et al, 2018).
- **Leadership Imperative.** Our research showed that new forms of digital-human interaction need thoughtful leadership attention now. In one recent example, Walmart Inc. faced a strike by thousands of workers in South America in the wake of the retailer’s push to increase automation at its physical stores. About 17,000 Walmart workers in Chile went on an indefinite strike in as many as 124 of the retailer’s 375 stores across the country. The automation push “isn’t Walmart’s idea, it’s the way our clients have decided to shop,” said Monica Tobar, Walmart Chile vice-president of human resources in an interview. Tobar said, “The world is going through a digital transformation and we need to be a part of that” (Lombrana, 2019). Perhaps the missing idea in these comments is that to avoid labor disruptions in operations, leaders need to approach human and digital interactions with greater sensitivity and preparation.
- **Plan for the displacement of associates who cannot make the transition.** For associates whose skills have become out of date and are unwilling to undertake re-skilling to meet new job requirements have a clear and transparent plan for their displacement.
- **Training should be targeted at service levels and needs simultaneously.** Development curricula should be created and published showing associates what they should be learning and providing direction on providers (internal vs. external) and the handling of training costs.

“People with the right skills, knowledge and attitude are at the center of a company’s digital transformation. Leaders need to implement digital workplace strategies that develop the right talent and realize they cannot rely on technology and processes alone.”

Craig Moss, Director, DSCI

## BUILD AND DEVELOP: IMPLICATIONS FOR TALENT PLANNING



**As you develop and evaluate your Digital Supply Chain Talent plans, consider the following questions:**

- *Have you invested in and supported the development of supply chain knowledge communities where data-driven digital collaboration can grow?*
- *Are you developing and running digital leadership and functional learning programs that are accessible to the right staff? Are you taking advantage of these programs in ways that allow for cross-functional collaboration to be practiced and encouraged? Do your programs address the leadership aspects of transformation?*
- *Have you assessed the skills and capabilities of your current staff? Of your current teams, how many do you think could be developed into more digital players, and which do you think may need to be transitioned out?*
- *Are you clear about what skills are the most needed for your digital supply chain strategic implementation? SMC and analytic skills? Problem-solving skills?*



### Talent and Organizational Strategy Key Findings: Integrate and Perform

- **Organizational considerations are critical in driving supply chain transformation.** In our research on talent, we focused on the acquisition of key talent needed for digital transformation as well as aspects of the development of existing and newly acquired talent. In our data gathering interviews with supply chain leaders responsible for digital transformation, we also found that higher levels of performance depend on more than just the right sets of individuals. End-to-end supply chain performance requires both higher levels of integration across organizational functions, as well as possibly re-designing the interactions among functions. High functioning individuals can make unlocking higher levels of performance possible, but their impact may be limited by inefficient organizational structures or lack of cross-functional collaboration.
- **Digital Talent Strategies must be aligned to digital transformation goals.** Talent acquisition, development, and integration plans should be tied to the overall Digital Supply Chain transformation strategies. Develop a segmented digital transformation plan, then develop a targeted set of skills needed to execute it. Talent plans may include outsourcing to consulting teams, recruitment, and tapping into shared organizational resources, among other things.
- **Firms should consider adopting** the same techniques used to create happy customers to facilitate productive employees. Recent literature has described the “digital workforce” as a concept that creates a positive employee experience. “Employee experience, (that is) the perceptions and feelings caused by complex interactions with colleagues, systems, and processes, has a powerful effect on performance” (Mann 2019).

- **Organizational re-design to smaller, more agile business units.** Several firms we interviewed have described their shifts away from hierarchal org designs towards smaller, independent, cross-functional business units. In one example, this org redesign led to a 70% reduction in lead times.
- **Digital projects have lifecycles.** Several interviewees mentioned that their Digital Supply Chain projects were not at all static in terms of skills required. Project life cycles demanded different skills during problem definition, design, build and run. They also described the importance of integration behaviors, which are not just skills and tools used by team members, but how they interact with each other. One firm called the combination of role, skill, and interaction characteristics “personas.” This is a rich characterization of the complexity of digital talent planning. It is a dynamic, complex leadership challenge to obtain the right mix of people driving your digital strategies.
- **Digital projects still require standard project management approaches.** One firm told us not to ignore the benefits of keeping transformational projects managed according to standard operating procedures. Having a formal innovation approach in place, supported by an existing innovation culture, ensures that digital projects are deployed logically. Conventional project methods, such as assess, test, and deploy, are still relevant. The idea that digital is a new normal, and that projects are being implemented according to plans will create less of a shock on employees compared with calling all digital projects “transformational.” This idea is particularly important given some of the literature we encountered, which highlighted that the cultural adoption of an analytic mindset is “overwhelming and difficult to manage” for practitioners. Perhaps the shift away from intuition-based decision making to more analytic decision making is a source of this discomfort.
- **People Performance Factors Matter.** Our research highlighted that firms might be able to deploy algorithms to improve operational performance but must not ignore the impacts of doing so on employee psychology. More accurate digital forecasting may remove human biases and enhance operational performance, but the cultural adoption of predictive analytics may have barriers to implementation created by practitioners.

## INTEGRATE AND PERFORM: IMPLICATIONS FOR TALENT PLANNING



**As you develop and evaluate your Digital Supply Chain Talent plans, consider the following questions:**

- *Does your digital supply chain transformation plan adequately consider how your organizational structure promotes or inhibits integrated end-to-end behavior?*
- *Do you have a digital talent strategy that is explicitly linked to your segmented transformation goals?*
- *Do digital collaboration tools enable your workforce?*
- *Where does your digital transformation start in the organization? Smaller agile business units? Broadly across multiple segments?*
- *Are you utilizing a rapid project life-cycle approach to implementing your digital supply chain actions? Who do you have staffing these project teams? Do you have the right mix of talent and skills?*
- *Is there a standard project management approach to implementing digital supply chain plans? Are project teams left to create their plans or align with an organizational approach?*
- *Are there human emotional considerations that may allow bias or create implementation barriers if left unaddressed?*

# Taking Action: Key Insights for Talent and Organization

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In summary, talent and organizational planning is a key driver of success for leading and implementing the digital supply chain. We strongly advocate action planning now. Avoid ending up in the category of many firms, recognizing your talent plans are not up to the job, and at the same time, failing to move the needle on making progress. Some key leadership actions to take up now are:

## ***DEVELOP NEW (NON-TRADITIONAL) DSC TALENT PLANS***

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- Attract and retain scarce digital talent using new creative sourcing
- Evaluate your organizational culture as well as your current skills
- Build and interact with communities – pay attention to geographies – outside sectors
- Develop bold new roles now to harvest benefits in future (“data science engineer”) – SCM and problem-solving skills are still kings

## ***DEVELOP ACTION PLANS AND SET GOALS***

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- Align with HR (research shows signs of misalignment)
- Pay attention to culture and build your employment brand
- Drive a Leadership Imperative around digital human interactions
- Build communities - be realistic about training, but don't minimize the importance
- Develop and launch purposeful training that helps with skills as well as attitudes and behaviors

## ***DRIVE PERFORMANCE AND ACTION***

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- Develop organizational strategies to suit “new and different” or a “part of operating model” culture
- Consider creating smaller, independent, cross-functional BUs to speed transformation
- Promote and reward integration behaviors critical to end-to-end digital implementation
- Recognize and counter-act emotional responses to boundary spanning requirements that are “overwhelming and difficult to manage” for practitioners.

**“Digital workplace strategies designed to transform supply chains need to account for people, experience and skills, not just systems, and processes.”**

Andre Soldo, VP – Global Operations Strategy, Dell

# Organizational Structures

What should your initial organizational approach to developing your digital capabilities and outcomes look like? Decisions about centralization, decentralization, outsourcing, and organizational acquisitions require a target structure to ensure strategic alignment.

One approach is illustrated below. The guiding principles for this approach are as follows:

- Data science is not the same as data analysis. Data science is strategically utilized to develop non-intuitive insights and patterns in an exploratory manner. Analytics are less exploratory and predictive, and therefore require a skill set that is more directed to functional reporting.
- As an initial approach, try to develop a small “Data Exploration Center” that is centralized and whose direction is set by enterprise strategy. Rare and expensive, top data science talent should be protected from more mundane data engineering (quality and cleansing) tasks, and instead focused on business-specific scientific questioning and hypothesis testing for the enterprise.
- Data analytics talent may be decentralized and aligned with functional performance reporting and analysis.

## DATA EXPLORATION VS EXPLOITATION: AN ORGANIZATIONAL DESIGN EXAMPLE

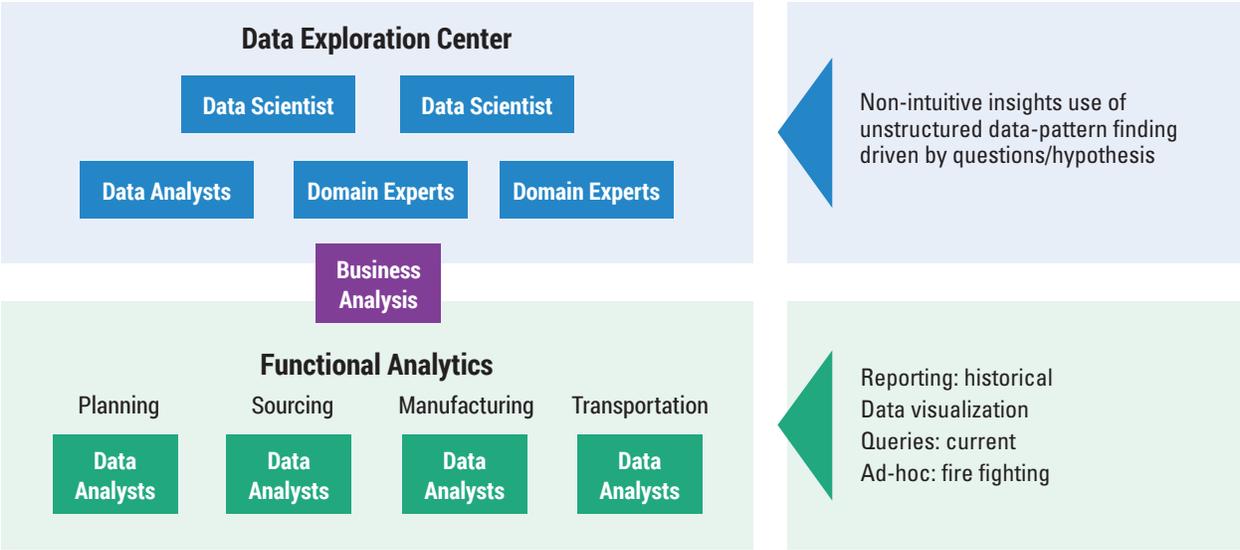


Figure 4 Data Scientist and Analysts

# Appendix

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## KEY ROLE DEFINITIONS

### Data Scientist Profile

- **Highly skilled, highly trained** individuals experienced in building sophisticated analytic models with explanatory power, as well as predictive power.
- Data Scientists are capable **data modelers**, evaluators of **data quality**, data miners, mathematicians, statisticians, and computer programmers often rolled into one **unique** person. They often define business problems and explore hypotheses utilizing data rather than creating reports.
- Data Scientists are comfortable working with **high volume data** sets, with high velocity, and of a wide variety of both **structured and unstructured data**. They can ascertain the relevancy of disparate data sources and find ways to connect them with **integrity and validity** in search of answers to **complex problems**.
- Data Scientists can be rare and difficult to recruit and retain and are drawn to top digital native organizations like Amazon and Google, who they feel may better value their unique capabilities.

### Data Steward Profile

- **Data stewards** are individuals that have a key responsibility in championing, sponsoring, or ensuring data quality, integrity, alignment, and analytic availability.
- **Data stewards** must **understand** and **influence** key business processes that generate transactional data, as well as safely replicate and allow for the access of analytic data stores to the firm's data consumers.
- **Data stewards** are responsible for the **key strategies/structures** that **enable** enterprise data dictionaries, cross-functional data definition and changes, data analytics and warehousing processes, such as ETL1, and data set duplication for analyst consumption.

### Data Engineers Profile

Data Engineers are responsible for:

- Key **actions/processes** that enable the effective design of enterprise-wide data dictionaries
- Cross-functional data definition and changes, data analytics and warehousing processes, such as ETL
- Data Quality and Alignment
- Data provisioning for analyst consumption
- Data lake architecture, development, and deployment

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## CONTRIBUTORS



**Dave Kurz, EdD**  
Research Fellow  
**Lead Author**



**Christopher Caine**  
President, CGE



**George Bailey**  
Executive Director  
and Chief Research  
Officer



**Marko Kovacevic**  
Executive Director –  
Member and Community  
Engagement



**Craig Moss**  
Director



**Shawn Muma**  
Technology  
Research Lead



**Vivek Ghelani**  
Project Manager



**Monica Consiglio**  
Chief of Staff, CGE

