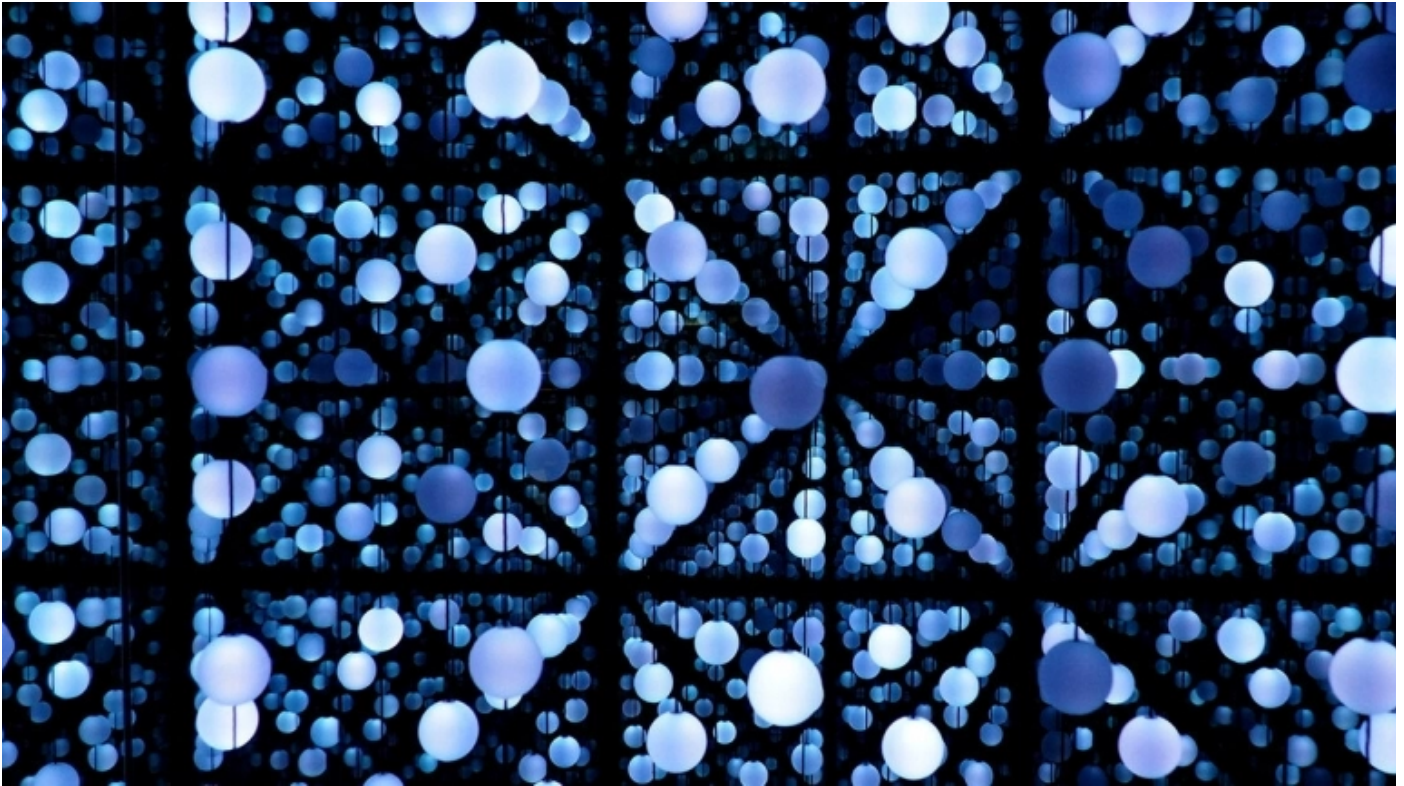


# Death By Data, Lessons in Digitally Transforming

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## Steering behaviour towards success

These insights are based on experience working on cutting edge technology for over 20 years.

As everyone knows, COVID has put a spotlight on Innovation and digital transformation. However, large-scale errors in digital transformation have often occurred. It is the contention of this article that often some organisations would have better success if they opted for evolutionary, not revolutionary change. Minor adjustments are often all that are needed.

Studies suggest small [behavioural nudges](#) can steer organisations in significant ways. [Virgin Atlantic has used it](#) with success. An article in Forbes on [nudges in organisations](#) cites Sunstein, who wrote a [short guide to nudges](#) and its use in steering behaviour. Choice not coercion, enabled by openness and simplicity, nurtured in the right environment is key. The [Behavioural Insights team \(UK gov\)](#) uses an EAST framework – Easy, Attractive, Social and Timely. [BETA](#) is an Australian government team with the same approach.

## Data Deluge

Over the past 20 years access to information has changed. No longer scarce, [information is now readily available](#), at our fingertips. An overload of data can now [affect our everyday decisions](#), including investment and business related. In this environment, filtration is more important than availability of information. It requires mental adjustment. Misdirection is easy.

Gathering data and seeing patterns is easier now. But inferring the right patterns needs deeper thought. Business agility is more a factor of being able to reach a distilled version of available data. Computers simply repeat processes at speed. Humans guide that process and this is where organisational behaviour becomes important

Details are important. Relevant details even more so, to avoid the onslaught on data it brings. Grasping the interplay between various component elements of an operation is key. This is as big a challenge digitally as traditionally, but unappreciated too often.

## Speed of Thought

Once as a technical head, delivering a new data warehousing solution was my responsibility. It was for a manufacturing firm under new ownership. There was a treasure trove of "data" digitally retrievable at each manufacturing stage. I had an awesome project plan with fancy project management software. Instead, new owners insisted on first tracking a simple operational status only. This, at launch, was a simple web form offering Active/Stopped options.

Inside the first quarter, we had developed a top 20 list of breakdown causes. Across 5 primary stages of the operation, it meant we developed 100 breakdown causes. Sourced directly from line workers in real time. It grew direct engagement, breaking through layered silos. One of the twin production machines for a stage was particularly erratic. This helped trace the cause to an overhead air vent, causing a temperature drop. The fix was redirection and insulation. Productivity of that process jumped from 55% to 85%.

This simple form took less than a week to deploy with infrastructure. The insights were invaluable and proved highly productive.

## Nudge your Operations

While technically simple, the form referred to above was timely, low cost and non-disruptive. It aided direct engagement with key operations. Clear focus allowed a "simple" solution, uncovering a wealth of useful information to build upon. It wasn't perfect, but enough to get things moving.

Another project needed new infrastructure rolled out at points of operation first. I kept operations personnel engaged at every chance. I simply enabled and facilitated relevant discussions. I wasn't going to use it, they were. By trusting them to work it out, they did. I earned trust, they earned capability, everyone profited. Transparency aided its adoption. They were eager when the new digital platform began rolling out. It was "their" system.

The lesson – Develop Trust in your operations teams. Let them learn. Facilitate and learn from them. That is how you build a learning organisation.

## Take Away

Resist blind focus on capturing data, hoping magical patterns emerge. Confirmation bias could lead to inferring one with less, or no real value. Technology, is only a part of any digital transformation. Draw on the wealth of operational experience. Behavioural nudges can aid this process.

For example, time is not the only resource, you can reduce the scope. Filter down to the essential next steps. Go beyond the obvious to see these "filters". Experience aids insight, but balance it with the knowledge that [it can also be deceptive](#). Ensure a clear understanding of the interplay between the various moving parts.

A strategy I personally use is an open discussion of the task. An impromptu meeting, without any tech aids or prior preparation, can sometimes work wonders. It helps uncover unconscious knowledge, encourages creative thought and is a great insight into strengths and weaknesses. Facilitate accordingly, methods like [design thinking](#) go far here.

With the technical tools at our disposal now, it is tempting to jump right in. Move fast and break things is a great quote, but sometimes unnecessary. Be prepared to step back, engage, and think things through more. Remember, discussions are a two way street. Organisational rhythm is important. Hard to determine and develop, while easy to destroy.

The knowledge resources to do this right are usually in the organisations. All it takes might be a little nudge.



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Erle is an ex-technologist, exploring its intersection with business. He has helped enterprises leverage the Open Source business model since 1998.