THE VOICE OF DATA PROFESSIONALS & INNOVATORS

SEPTEMBER 2026 | EDITION

DATAGIST

Magazine

COVER STORY

WHEN DATA MEETS CULTURE

The People, Behaviours, and Decisions Behind Successful Analytics Adoption



BRIDGING THE DIVIDE:

Connecting Data Teams, Leaders, and End Users

THE AI WORKPLACE:

WHY DATA LITERACY MATTERS MORE, NOT LESS

FROM DATA TO DECISIONS

What It Really Means to Be Data-Driven

THE TRUST FACTOR

Why People Act on Data They Believe In

+

THE FUTURE OF DATA SKILLS

What Professionals Need to Thrive

ELVIS ODIASE

Data Adoption & Analytics Consultant

Founder of Data First Workplace™

ISSN 2332-2039

WHEN DATA MEETS CULTURE

The People, Behaviours, and Decisions Behind Successful Analytics Adoption

Organisations have never had more access to data, analytics, and AI. The technology is more powerful, the infrastructure is more sophisticated, and the ability to generate insights is greater than ever. Yet one fundamental challenge remains: getting people to actually use these capabilities to make better decisions.

For Elvis, this is where the real data conversation begins.

> ***"Technology solves a technical problem, and the adoption problem is human."***

Elvis Odiase a France-based Data Analytics Expert and the **Founder of Data First Workplace™,** a platform focused on advancing data culture and analytics adoption across organisations. A graduate of Université de Rennes 1, France, and the Federal University of Technology, Owerri, Nigeria, his work sits at the intersection of data, people, and organisational culture.

Drawing from years of experience working with organisations, Elvis has focused on a persistent challenge in the data industry: why organisations can invest heavily in data and analytics yet struggle to get people to use them effectively. This led to the development of the **Adoption Intelligence Framework™**, which helps data leaders bridge the gap between data investment and adoption.

He is also the author of Decisions Over Dashboards, a practical guide that challenges organisations to move beyond producing reports and dashboards towards using insights to drive meaningful business decisions and growth.

His work extends beyond organisations into the wider data community. He convenes the National Data Culture Symposium (NDCS) in Nigeria and the Nigeria Data Awards, platforms that contribute to conversations around data culture, analytics adoption, and the evolving role of data in organisations across Africa.

At the heart of his work is a simple but increasingly important idea: **having the data is only the beginning. The real value emerges when people trust it, understand it, and use it to make decisions.**

These are two very different measures of success. A dashboard sitting on a server that nobody opens is ultimately of little value. The more important question is not, "Do we have the tools?" but, "Are our people using them to make better decisions?" That question requires a cultural answer. Every major wave of enterprise technology investment has eventually encountered an adoption challenge. for instance, Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems in the 1990s and Customer Relationship Management (CRM) platforms in the 2000s. Today, data and analytics are facing a similar challenge.



The tools have become increasingly powerful, but technology does not change behaviour on its own. People change their behaviour when they understand why something matters to them, trust the information they are being asked to act on, and work within a culture that encourages and rewards the use of data.

For organisations seeking to close this gap, the approach should begin with an honest assessment of their existing data culture: understanding where they are today, identifying the specific human and behavioural barriers limiting adoption, and building an adoption programme designed to address those barriers directly.

From Data to Decisions: What It Really Means to Be Data-Driven

It means that when a decision needs to be made, the first instinct is to ask, "What does the data say?", not as a formality or simply to confirm an existing belief, but as a genuine input into the decision-making process. It also means being willing to challenge assumptions when the data tells a different story. In a truly data-driven organisation, data literacy is not a skill reserved for the analytics team; it becomes a baseline expectation across the organisation.

At the heart of this is trust. Adoption is in many ways a downstream consequence of trust. If people do not trust the number on a dashboard, they are unlikely to act on it. Instead, they may return to their spreadsheets, rely on instinct, or defer to a manager's opinion. Organisations seeking to improve analytics adoption therefore need to examine trust first:

- Where does it exist?
- Where has it broken down?
- And why?

These questions are at the foundation of the Adoption Intelligence Framework™, which was developed to map the organisational, cultural, and behavioural barriers that influence trust and analytics adoption. The premise is straightforward: you cannot fix what you have not diagnosed. Before organisations can expect people to embrace their data and analytics investments, they must first understand what is preventing that adoption.

The Trust Factor: Why People Act on Data They Believe In

Trust in data is built over time. It comes from consistent accuracy, transparent methodology, and honest communication when something goes wrong. Employees begin to trust data when they repeatedly see it produce reliable insights that are relevant to their work and decisions. But that trust can disappear just as quickly when an error is discovered and nobody acknowledges it, or when leadership selectively uses numbers to support a conclusion that has already been reached.

For leaders, however, trusting data requires something more. It means being willing to act on findings even when they are inconvenient. Sometimes that may mean restructuring a team because the performance data points in that direction, cancelling a project because the evidence does not support it, or acknowledging publicly that a strategy is not delivering the expected results.

Trust in data is not built by asking people to trust it. It is built through consistent action, by demonstrating that the organisation is willing to listen to what the data says, investigate what it reveals, and act on it even when the answer is not what it expected.

When the Numbers Say No: Navigating Data That Contradicts Leadership

This is perhaps the ultimate test of an organisation's data culture. How leadership responds when the data challenges its expectations reveals a great deal about how seriously the organisation is prepared to use evidence in its decision-making.

A strong data culture creates the space for those conversations to happen openly and constructively.

Rather than responding defensively, leaders should approach unexpected findings with curiosity: "What is the data telling us that we may not have understood?" The objective is not to make the data fit the expectation, but to understand what the evidence is revealing and allow that insight to inform the next decision.

The real danger is when uncomfortable findings are met with resistance. Organisations may begin questioning the methodology, scrutinising the analysis, or searching for reasons to discount the result not necessarily because the data is flawed, but because the conclusion is inconvenient. When that happens, the organisation risks turning data validation into a mechanism for protecting decisions that have already been made.

A mature data culture is not one in which the numbers always confirm what leadership wants to hear. It is one in which leadership is willing to listen, investigate, and change course when the evidence demands it.

Fairness in the Numbers: Building Trust Through Consistent Data Practices

Consistency matters because people pay attention not only to the data itself, but also to how the organisation uses it. If employees see that data-driven standards are applied selectively, they may begin to question whether the organisation is genuinely committed to a data-driven culture.

And once people believe that the rules only apply selectively, they are likely to engage with data selectively as well. You cannot build a sustainable data culture where evidence is rigorous for some decisions but optional for others. Fairness and consistency are essential to making data-driven practices credible across the organisation.

Bridging the Divide: Connecting Data Teams, Leaders, and End Users

Collaboration plays an enormous role in building trust and driving adoption, particularly between data professionals, business leaders, and the people who ultimately use the insights. It creates the shared understanding that makes data more meaningful, relevant, and trustworthy.

The challenge is that these groups often speak very different professional languages. Data professionals tend to speak in terms of methodology, accuracy, and technical validity. Business leaders think in terms of outcomes, priorities, and risk, while end users are often concerned with how data fits into their day-to-day work. The data team needs to understand the decisions the business is trying to make, while leaders and end users need to understand what the data can and cannot tell them.

This communication gap is one of the most underestimated barriers to adoption. When these groups operate in silos, organisations can produce technically brilliant dashboards and analyses that never influence a single business decision. Bridging that divide is therefore not simply a communication exercise; it is a cultural intervention that requires deliberate investment in how teams work together.

That same culture must also create room for people to question the data. This is non-negotiable. A culture where people cannot challenge a number is not truly a data culture. In fact, some of the most dangerous dashboards are the ones nobody questions. Errors can compound, assumptions can become entrenched, and decisions can continue to be made on flawed foundations for months before anyone is willing to acknowledge that something is wrong.

Organisations must therefore make constructive challenge part of the way they work, normalising questions in meetings, recognising people who identify errors, and ensuring that challenging the data is seen as a contribution rather than a confrontation.

When people can communicate across boundaries and feel safe enough to question what the data is saying, data becomes more than an output from the analytics team. It becomes part of how the organisation thinks, discusses, and makes decisions.

Recognising the Champions: Rewarding the Behaviours That Drive Data Adoption

It is critically important, yet often overlooked.
Every organisation has people who naturally gravitate towards data, those who build unofficial dashboards, ask for evidence in meetings, or take the time to help colleagues understand what the numbers are saying. These people are your culture carriers.
Recognising and elevating them does more than reward individual effort; it sends a clear signal to the wider organisation about the behaviours that are valued. When people see that curiosity, evidence-based thinking, and a willingness to help others use data are recognised, those behaviours become more visible and more likely to be replicated.
The opposite is also true. When these individuals are consistently overlooked which happens more often than it should, particularly because they are not always the loudest voices in the room, the organisation sends a different message about what really matters.
Recognition is not simply a reward. It is a cultural signal. What an organisation chooses to recognise tells people what good looks like and what behaviours are worth repeating.

The AI Workplace: Why Data Literacy Matters More, Not Less

The workplace of the future will look less like a command centre filled with dashboards and more like an environment where data fluency is as fundamental as financial literacy. Employees will increasingly be expected to read, interpret, question, and act on the data relevant to their roles, not simply consume reports produced by specialist teams.
AI will take on much of the heavy lifting involved in analysing data, but that does not make human understanding less important. If anything, it raises the value of;

- interpretation,
- judgement,
- context,
- action.

When AI can generate an answer in seconds, the more important questions become:

- Does the answer make sense?
- What does it mean for our organisation?
- What should we do with it?

Organisations preparing for this shift are therefore investing in data literacy across every level of the workplace. They are also building cultures that encourage intellectual courage and the confidence to question assumptions, challenge outputs, and make decisions based on evidence rather than convenience.
Over time, organisations will need to understand their data culture with the same seriousness with which they measure financial performance: knowing where they are, identifying gaps, and deliberately building the capabilities required for the future.
That is precisely the shift Data First Workplace™ was designed to catalyse: moving organisations beyond simply having data to building workplaces where people are equipped and willing to use it.

The Inspiration Behind Data First Workplace™

Honestly, frustration.
I kept seeing the same pattern across organisations, making significant investment in data tools, but limited returns from those investments and very little attention given to understanding why. The industry conversation was largely centred on technology: which platform to use, which cloud environment to choose, which visualisation tool to deploy. The human side of the equation was often treated as an afterthought.
That gap became increasingly difficult to ignore. Organisations were getting better at acquiring data and deploying technology, but not necessarily at getting people to use those capabilities effectively.
I created Data First Workplace™ because I believed and still believe that the next frontier of competitive advantage lies in building stronger data cultures and improving analytics adoption.
Doing that requires more than another technology solution; it requires a different kind of expertise, framework, and organisational intervention.
So I decided to build what I believed was missing.

DataGist Signature Question

If you could leave our readers with one piece of advice for building stronger data cultures, what would it be?

Stop measuring your data maturity by the tools you have deployed and start measuring it by the decisions your people are making differently because of data.
The tools are a means to an end. The real goal is better decisions, made with greater confidence and less reliance on politics, assumptions, or hierarchy. But that change does not happen because an organisation buys better technology. It happens when people change how they think, question, and make decisions.
And people change when leadership models the behaviour, recognises and rewards it, and everyone from the boardroom to the frontline understands that data is not the responsibility of the data team alone. It belongs to everyone.

About Data First Workplace™

Data First Workplace™ is a global platform for analytics adoption and data culture development.

We measure data maturity through our Analytics Adoption Intelligence Platform, track real impact with the Analytics Impact Tracker, and build capability through Data Literacy & Capability programmes designed for organisations ready to become truly data-driven.

We also convene the National Data Culture Symposium, a premier annual gathering of senior data and technology leaders and celebrate excellence through the Nigeria Data Awards.
One goal is to help our clients build a data driven organizations where data truly drives growth.

PICTURES FROM 2026 NATIONAL DATA CULTURE SYMPOSIUM











PICTURES FROM 2026 NATIONAL DATA CULTURE SYMPOSIUM










National Data Culture Symposium & Nigeria Data Awards 2026

The National Data Culture Symposium 2026 brought together senior data and technology leaders from the biggest organizations in Nigeria for a day of keynotes, panels, and honest conversations about data adoption, analytics and the state of data culture across organisations.

The inaugural Nigeria Data Awards celebrated the individuals and organisations leading the change, recognising excellence in data governance, analytics, and innovation.

Data First Workplace™

datafirstworkplace.com

National Data Culture Symposium & Nigeria Data Awards 2027

In April 2027, the National Data Culture Symposium returns for its biggest edition yet, bringing together 250+ senior data and technology leaders for two days of ideas, meaningful conversations, recognition, and connection.

DAY1: NATIONAL DATA CULTURE SYMPOSIUM

A high-level gathering of Nigeria's data and technology leaders, featuring keynotes, thought-provoking panels, real-world use cases, and closed-door roundtables exploring the issues shaping the future of data-driven organisations.

From data culture and leadership to adoption, technology, and business impact, Day 1 is designed to move beyond conversation and create space for the ideas and connections that can shape what comes next.

DAY2: NIGERIA DATA AWARDS GALA

The Nigeria Data Awards Gala will bring together the organisations and individuals setting new standards for data excellence and recognising those turning data into meaningful organisational and societal impact.

Two days. One community. A shared vision for the future of data in Nigeria.

PICTURES FROM 2026 NATIONAL DATA CULTURE SYMPOSIUM








