AI360 podcast

Season 1, Episode 15: Data Estate Readiness for GenAI

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Soumyadeep Bakshi: Welcome to AI360, where we give you a 360-degree view of an AI topic in 360 seconds. And today's episode is a special one. It's a follow-up to a previous episode on enterprise data management. Today we will get much more tactical and dive into specific recommendations on how to improve your data estate. To help with this, I'm joined by my colleague and friend Dominic. Dominic, thanks for being here. Why don't you start by giving us an introduction?

Dominic Rasini: Thank you. I'm Dominic Rasini. I'm a principal in Deloitte Consulting. I spend a lot of time helping our clients with their end-to-end data transformation. My representative experience stems all the way from talking about data strategy and aligning the data goals of the organization with their enterprise strategy to implementation, operating model transition, and ongoing operations of the capabilities and service delivery models that those clients are adopting.

Soumyadeep Bakshi: Well, it's great to have you with us here today. So let's set the stage. You've partnered with many organizations on data management strategies. So from your perspective, what does the current data management landscape look like for most companies?

Dominic Rasini: Data management is not a new concept since the creation of tables and tabular data and databases—you know, there's been a need to manage data across the enterprise. And I think one of the things that we could say about the way data management is being viewed today is

a lot is still the same. It's modernized in some ways. It's moved to the cloud. But there are still these legacy approaches related to structured data management, metadata management, and database management that really are anchoring a lot of data management practices in what has been done in the past. There have been some philosophical changes. I think data management—managing data as a product is an example of one where a lot more focus is on the data itself than the specific application. But generally, a lot of data management practices are still steeped in this legacy structured data approach to how to manage data in the organization.

Soumyadeep Bakshi: So let's move on to the next big question, which is around what are some of these challenges that companies specifically face when they're looking to adopt Generative AI, especially with regards to their data?

Dominic Rasini: It's a big topic at the moment, isn't it—the adoption of Generative AI. And there's been a lot of talk and a lot of discussion around what does it really mean to have your data estate in order. Well, there are a couple of things that we need to keep in mind. The first thing is, 80% of data nowadays is unstructured. It's videos. It's pictures. It's PDFs. It's digital assets that previously did not necessarily exist. And the volume of that data has exponentially increased. So what this is forcing our clients to do is to consider—do they need new capabilities and additional skill sets to effectively manage, maintain, and use that data for the purposes of Generative AI? That's the key challenge that I think people are facing, moving from pilot to production. And unless our clients have a perspective on how they would like to evolve their data management practices, they may not be in the strongest position to try and realize those use cases that are going to be so transformative to them.

Soumyadeep Bakshi: So basically, it's clear that the road to Generative AI adoption isn't really straightforward. Many organizations have gotten started on it, but the journey is not finished yet. So how should organizations think about addressing these challenges? What sort of capabilities and practices do they need to put in place?

Dominic Rasini: Great comment about the journey. If we were to look at current data management activity in two segments, we could say that a lot of our clients have invested in Modernization 1.0. Moving to the cloud, utilizing elastic compute, looking at the scalability and flexibility that the cloud enables. But new things need to be managed. New datasets need to be managed. New data assets need to be managed. Topics like vectoring, topics like knowledge graphs, topics like introducing prompt engineering and RAG engineering. These weren't things being discussed at water coolers a few years ago, but now they are. That's going to require additional skill sets in data management teams to be able to effectively manage those assets that are going to make them usable for those business applications that our clients covet at the moment and want to achieve and scale.

Soumyadeep Bakshi: I love that idea that this is Data Modernization 2.0. It really highlights that we are in a new era today. So as companies build out these new capabilities, there is going to be a workforce and organizational impact to it. What does that look like?

Dominic Rasini: You know, it can be a "how long is a piece of string question?" so I'm just going to focus on something that I see a lot of conversations revolving around. And it's the proximity between the business and IT. I think that that is going to get incredibly close. When we talk about stewardship of data assets and the use of data assets, the management of their quality, the utilization of those assets in different applications—business owners and business stakeholders are going to need to make some pretty important decisions about how that asset is used and how it's incorporated into any Generative AI sort of application. But really it's these extended and mature data operations teams who are going to be responsible for a lot of that work. So that tightness between the IT side and the business side is going to be critically important moving forward. And I'll just add one other piece, which is end users are changing as well. We're getting out of a scenario where reporting and analytics are what's getting delivered by data teams, to applications that are going to be put in the hands of front-line and everyday workers to optimize their practices. So this means that IT teams are also going to be spending much more time working with representatives from the business who they may not have had an interaction with before.

Soumyadeep Bakshi: So it's not just about technology; it's a holistic shift across people, processes, and technology. So let's make this very actionable. So for organizations and decision-makers who are listening in today and wondering how they can get started on this journey, what are some practical next steps to execute Data Modernization 2.0?

Dominic Rasini: I think the most important one is to take a very, very hard and detailed look at where you are in that modernization journey. Investments in the past? Obviously paying off and were important to make. But how far are you along in really achieving Modernization 2.0? And then identify what gaps exist between Modernization 1.0 and Modernization 2.0, in terms of new technologies. What does that mean in terms of introducing new skill sets into your data operations team? What does that mean in terms of revisiting the operating model that currently exists between data stewards, data councils, and IT delivery teams? I think that we're at a point where we really need to understand the nature of the problem and how big that gap is to really help our clients achieve the scalability that they're looking for to realize Generative AI enterprise transformation.

Soumyadeep Bakshi: Dominic, thank you so much for walking us through those steps and sharing your insights with us today. To all our listeners, thank you for tuning in to AI360. As a side bonus, our team has been working on some interesting updates to the show. So like, subscribe, and stay tuned for our next episode. Thank you

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