

Bulletin | 07 Winter 2021

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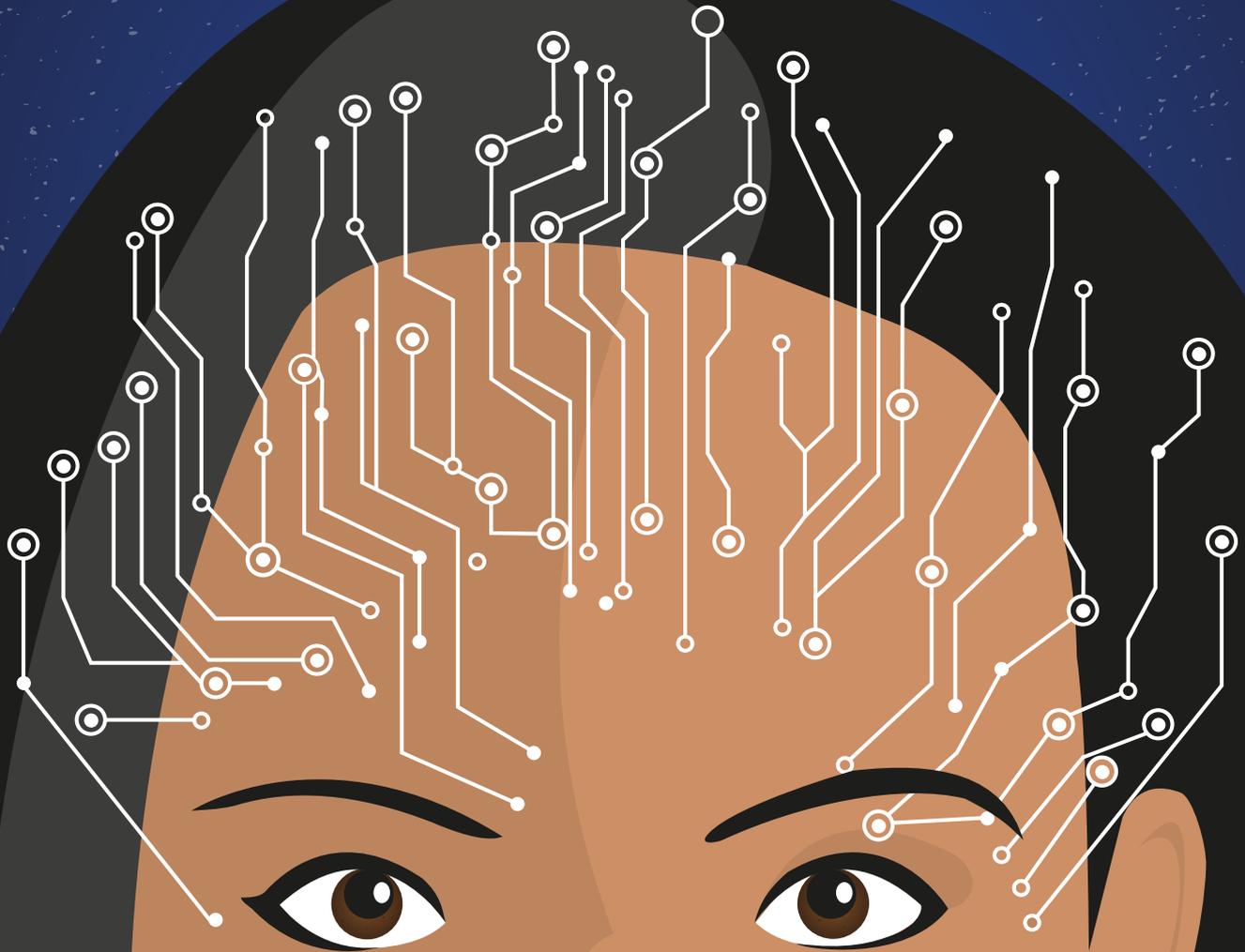
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THE CHANGEMAKERS



DATA

Colin Sales on data quality and governance



Ian Wright

The Year of the Changemaker

Dear Colleagues,

Welcome to a New Year, albeit one involving continued uncertainty. At least we now know it will be uncertain, so it should be less of a surprise! Housing providers are at their best in times of adversity and the sector should be proud of the way it has responded to the challenges of 2020.

The full impact of COVID-related disruption is still taking shape. But we already know that many pre-COVID skills and processes are now redundant. How can we quickly adapt and learn the new skills necessary to thrive in a post-pandemic world?

In part, this will depend on the willingness of housing providers to increase their level of investment in innovation and new ways of working. Of equal importance, however, is the quality of leadership. By that I mean the ability to 'read the future', develop a compelling vision for change and take people with you on a journey of innovation.

Leadership is the primary theme of this latest edition of the Bulletin. We feature four fascinating interviews with leaders, inside and outside the sector, who have these qualities in abundance.

The most interesting aspect, for me at least, is the way each of these leaders have surmounted challenges in their innovation journey. For Amanda Garrard, the challenge has been innovating on a shoestring. For Dominic Maxwell, it involved giving up his job and plunging head-first into a start-up. For Jonathan Carrier, it involved constant

reinvention of the business case for innovation until his Board took notice. And for Maff Potts, it involved exiting the sector and, instead, setting up a social movement. We call these people 'changemakers.'

For those of you who may have gotten a subscription to ancestry.co.uk over the festive period, then the chances are that you are also aficionados of the history of social housing. If so, you will recognise that our sector originated as part of a social movement. Over the intervening fifty years, of course, the sector has become increasingly professional and commercially focussed.

Most people I meet in the sector are incredibly passionate about their mission and the wellbeing of their tenant customers. But the one thing that appears to have been lost amongst many — in my mind at least — is that passion for transformative social change.

We intentionally conclude with the Maff Potts interview, in the hope that it will stimulate interest not just in Camerados but in the value of social movements to the sector and help you rebuild your own piece of the housing movement.

I hope you find the stories of our 'changemakers', and our other articles by Colin Sales and Helena Moore, as interesting as I did. As ever, your feedback — good and bad — is invaluable.

Until the summer bulletin, stay safe and innovative!

Ian

Founding Partner

Delivery Partners





How accurate is your data?

Colin Sales
CEO at 3C Consultants

The adage “what gets measured gets done (or improves)” is so true, particularly if you have confidence in the accuracy of the insight on which progress is being based.

However, how many organisations can claim they are confident that the information they assess provides the insight they need? How many can, hand on heart, claim they have complete confidence in the accuracy of the management information they receive? How many have the processes in place to provide such assurance? Worse still, many fail to realise that the data they hold is potentially their most valuable asset, if managed correctly.

Data is an asset that can transform their organisation into an inspirational place to work for both executives and colleagues alike, reducing stress and improving effectiveness, not to mention providing the foundation on which excellent, tailored and proactive customer services are built.

Why high-quality data is essential

Indeed, what is the cost of poorly managed data to your organisation? Consider ‘time to fix’; poor or wrong decisions leading to re-work; non-compliance or non-delivery of strategic goals; inefficiency; poor performance; unsatisfactory outcomes for tenants and poor value for money. The list goes on.



Traditional data management approaches have focussed on periodic data cleansing and purging exercises. These can be effective for a week or so, but the data quickly starts to go awry due to poor controls surrounding data collection, processing and management. 3C Consultants have too often been asked to assist in data cleansing projects, only to be asked to repeat the work a few years later. When you consider research that suggests data quality degrades at 2% per month, perhaps annual data cleanses are nowhere near frequent enough? It is an incredibly concerning statistic that Data Analysts spend over 50% of their time fixing or cleaning data before they can analyse it. This should not be accepted and is not sustainable.

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With increasing governance focus on data quality, unless there is an attempt made to embed good data management practices into a social housing organisation, its long-term sustainability will ultimately be brought into question. It is no coincidence that over the last 8 years, the RSH Sector Risk Profile has increased the reference to data each year — 'data' was mentioned only 6 times in 2013, increasing to 32 times in 2020, with data integrity and security having its own section.

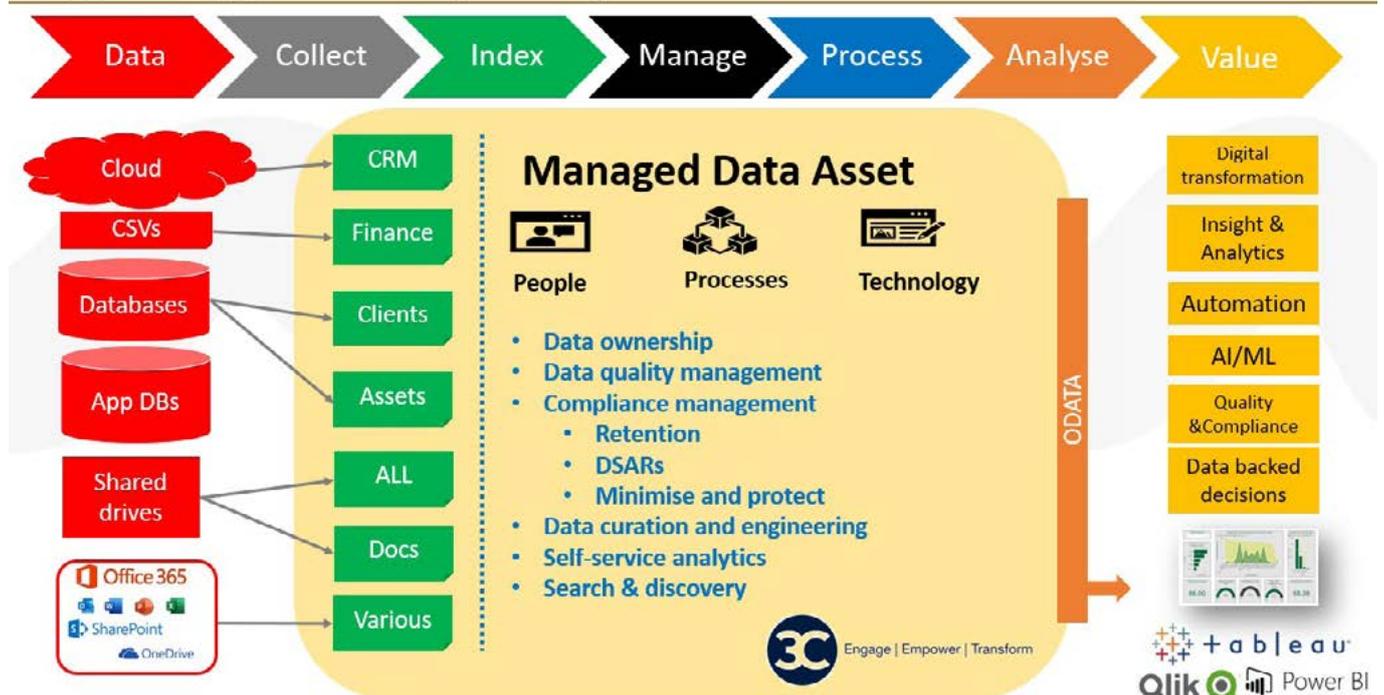
The importance of data governance

GDPR has, at its heart, data protection by design and default. Information governance now has various maturity models and frameworks. They are all designed to support standardisation of best practice, operationalising and embedding good data practice. Discussions on data quality with most social housing organisations reveal that few have progressed anywhere near where they would have liked to in either GDPR or data governance. Most will accept they have challenges around data quality, but struggle to know where to start. Many have a level of distrust in key performance information, knowing that it will often rely on human, potentially self-motivated compilation and correction before it is published. Should this information later prove to be wrong, the consequences can be disastrous for those involved. In some cases, it costs careers and occasionally it even costs lives. Recent headlines on the Grenfell inquest demonstrate that too many knew there were problems but carried on. Wilful blindness is no defence.

Why is solving the critical problem of data quality so challenging?

At the recent DIN CIO Forum, this question was asked and top of the list of responses was 'legacy' systems. Many housing organisations have a kaleidoscope of IT systems, with bespoke or half-used modules and a plethora of local Excel spreadsheets. This could not be further from an ICT strategy that empowers an organisation with accurate, uniform data that provides 'one source of the truth' This acts as a barrier to the effective transformation to a more

Supporting your data journey...





effective, efficient and value for money business model. Directors responsible for business transformation will already have recognised that transformation in the way accurate data flows within an organisation is a precursor and catalyst for the success of more general business transformation initiatives. 'Decision by Data' should sit at the heart of an organisation if strategic ambition and good governance is to be properly achieved.

What is the solution? Where should we start?

The first step is 'discovery'. A map cannot tell you how to get somewhere unless you know your starting point. Historically, this discovery exercise was labour intensive, involving many hours of analysis. However, advances in technology now mean that a new breed of data quality assurance tools can be connected to your data sources, quickly and accurately revealing the state of your data landscape, so providing the reliable starting point on which strategic data decisions can be made. Such tools can also help you to, far more swiftly, correct any data issues and they can then provide 24x7 automated monitoring to ensure data quality and compliance is maintained, proactively and immediately alerting those accountable should data standards slip. This plays an invaluable part in the achievement of culture change, swiftly identifying those that need guidance or development. The question should not be if you should use such assurance tools, it should simply be when. Indeed, the recently announced UK Government Data Quality Framework advocates automated monitoring as fundamental to success of a data quality initiative.

Many organisations who have started their data journey often consider the introduction of Data Lakes and Data Warehouses as solutions to better managing and drawing insight from their data. However, such initiatives often come at a significant and considerable cost and history is littered with horror stories of over-spend and failure. It is no wonder why many decide to wait and avoid the cost, distraction and risk associated with such ventures.

Is there an easier, cost effective and assured way of achieving the same outcome, without the said cost, distraction and risk? The jury is still out, but there is the potential for the same data assurance tools to draw all the data from your disparate data sources, classify and sort it and ensure that data quality is assured. In so doing, the costs associated with implementing aspects of a Data Warehouse could be reduced whilst providing greater assurance that the data held in the Warehouse is accurate. The business case for a Data Warehouse would therefore become ever more compelling, addressing concerns around another old adage: 'rubbish in = rubbish out'

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The business rewards that high-quality data can bring

I passionately believe that if we change the sector's modus operandi with regards to data management practices, we will deliver long term, valuable and sustainable social housing provision for the country. The wonderful thing about the social housing sector is its purpose and there are few others that can boast the impact they have on the future of individuals, families and communities. We cannot afford to knowingly compromise this due to poor quality data, for the sake of our tenants, our colleagues and ourselves.

Managing data properly has the power to propel organisations to become more efficient, better governed, better places to work, easier to manage and importantly, customer centric. When you consider the wastage, frustration and insecurity associated with poorly managed data, can you afford not to place it central to strategic thinking? I sincerely believe that the time has come to embrace your data and the insight it provides. Those that do, will be those that flourish. ■
