

Excerpt from

# Gartner Business Quarterly

Proven Guidance for C-Suite Action

## 3 Steps Data and Analytics Leaders Should Take During a Crisis

by Steve Shapiro and Sanchi Bhat

With every new crisis, data needs shift drastically. Information that once dictated decisions may no longer be relevant; at the same time urgent requirements suddenly appear.

For example, at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, companies needed to immediately start tracking local case counts, new regulations and health equipment supplies to make a series of rapid decisions about where and how employees should work.

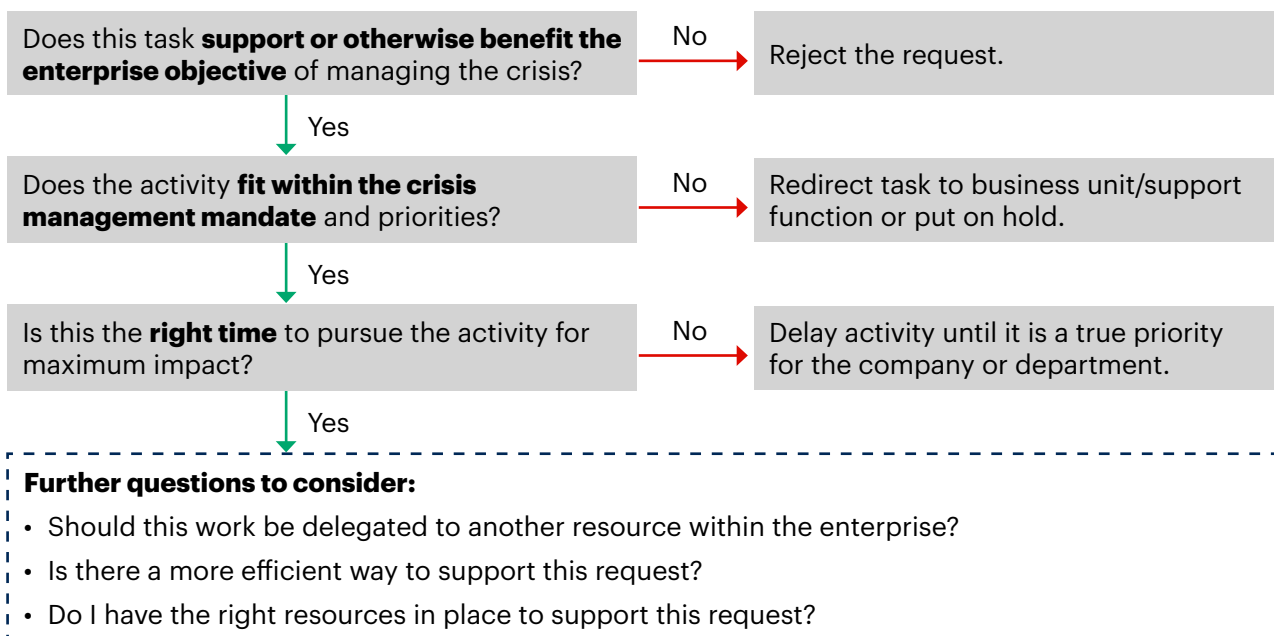
Data and analytics (D&A) leaders can't be passive players here — they have the visibility, expertise and tools to get information flowing freely. But in order to do so, they need to take three steps at the onset of a crisis: create D&A capacity by

redirecting resources, break down resistance to data sharing, and support innovation at speed with suitable models and tools.

### **Step 1: Triage D&A Projects to Free Up Crisis Response Capacity**

Before you leap into action, ask: How has the crisis changed business goals? Use these priorities to create criteria for deciding which projects should be postponed or canceled and which need extra resources (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1. How to Triage for Crisis Management**



Source: Gartner

#### **As part of this process:**

- Identify D&A assets for evaluating risk, aiding situational awareness and analyzing outcomes for new objectives.
- Coordinate with business team leaders to swiftly pivot resources.
- Have teams document disrupted projects so they can reassess later.

#### **Step 2: Break Up Resistance to Data Sharing**

A crisis can be an opportunity to break down the walls that all too often keep data locked away in various departments.

Take a few hours to map stakeholders by their clout and how resistant they may be to the D&A team based on prior experience.

Then make a case that demonstrates how sharing data is critical to achieve crisis management goals. Focus outreach on the most influential and most unyielding executives (see Figure 2).

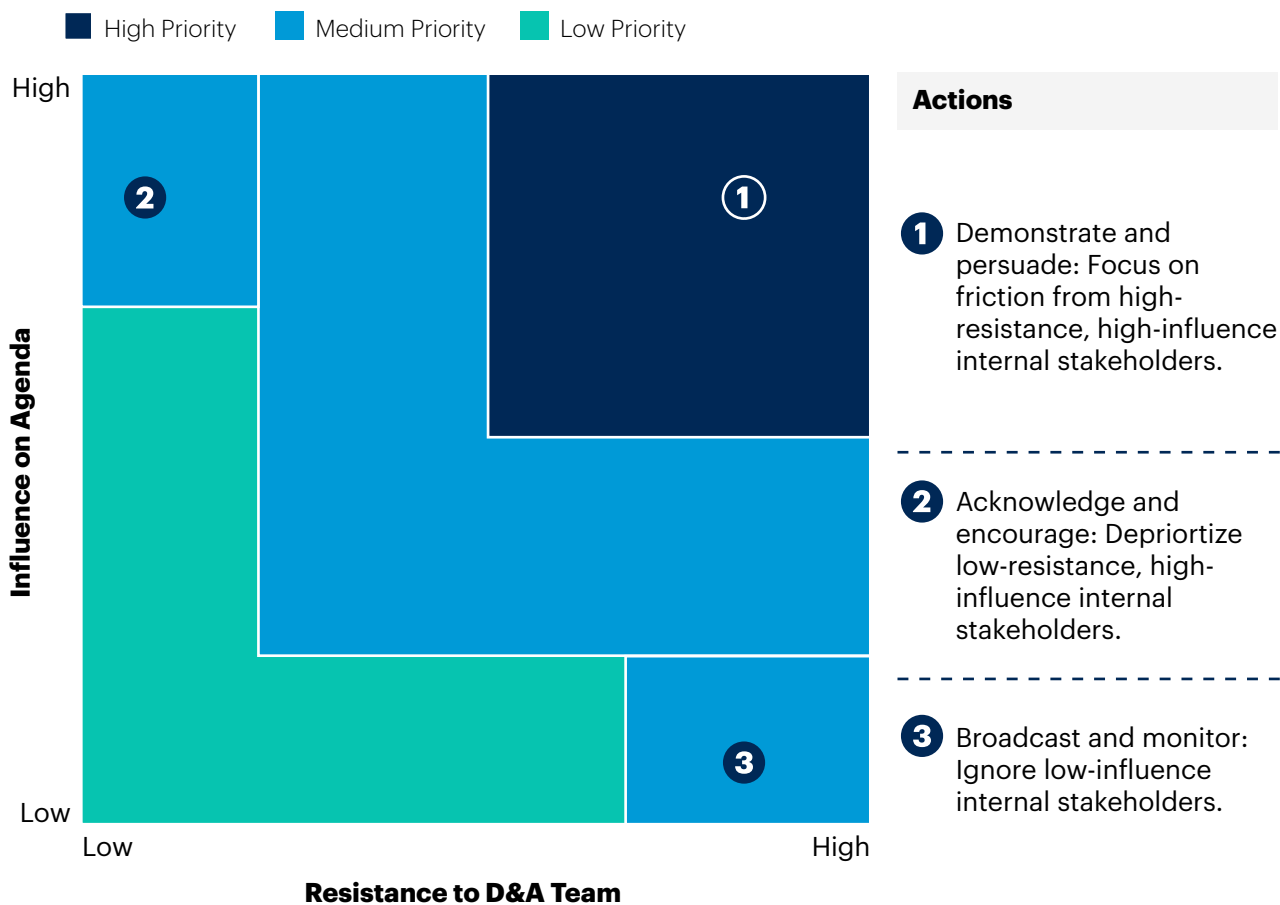
#### **In your conversations:**

- Make sharing the default position and request justification for the exclusion of any resources.
- Don't ignore your supporters — acknowledge and encourage their continued backing.

Take another step as well: Use D&A expertise to quickly integrate data sets. This help will avoid inaccuracies and duplication of effort.

If you're not already in the throes of a crisis, don't wait for the next one to get started. Document data connections using techniques such as graph analytics. This exercise can take two months to complete but it's worth the time because it helps clarify the relationships between data sets from different business units. For instance, you might reveal how shifts in demand or supply shortages would affect the entire value chain.

**Figure 2. How D&A Leaders Can Work With Enterprise Executives to Rapidly Refocus Resources**



Source: Gartner

### Step 3: Build Tools to Support Speedy Innovation

As the crisis evolves, so should the use of data. Position data as a foundation for generating and testing ideas that respond to emerging challenges and opportunities (see Figure 3).

For example, a healthcare executive told us in 2020 that his team built dashboards based on algorithms from the earlier Ebola outbreak to forecast supply needs.

The ability to see the organization adjusting resources as necessary helped ease the minds of clinical staff while still informing them of the challenges.<sup>1</sup>

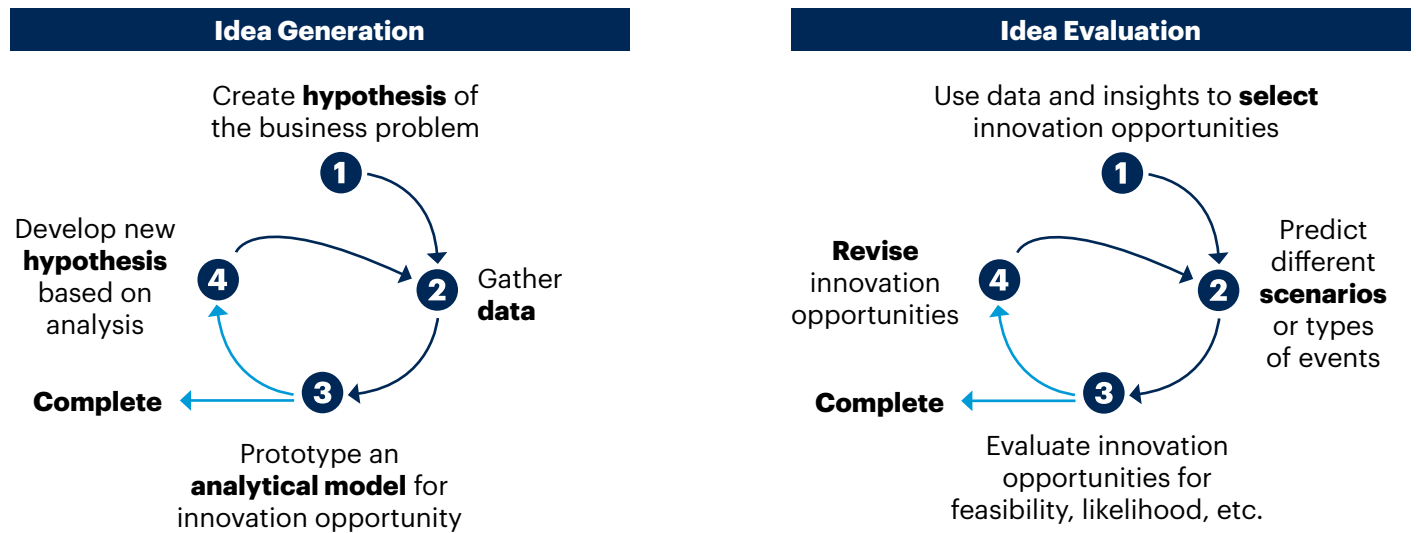
To help leaders generate innovative ideas that respond to the crisis, gather data pertaining to the immediate problems and analyze it alongside a business unit's innovation team. This helps expose new opportunities and develop new hypotheses.

To support evaluation of those ideas, use data to select opportunities, predict outcomes and forecast performance under different scenarios.

#### For both stages, keep these tips in mind:

- Use simple models to inform decision making.
- Use business expertise from across the firm to develop scenarios.
- Keep a repository of all hypotheses, regardless of outcome, to develop lessons learned after the crisis ebbs.

**Figure 3. Data-Driven Innovation Process Steps**



Source: Gartner

<sup>1</sup> Gartner Podcast: Dispatches From the Front — Intermountain Healthcare

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