

Why Tomorrow's Top Executives Will Speak Data

By John Carrafiell, Co-Founder and Co-CEO, BGO

Over the past four years, I've come to believe that data science is no longer an optional function for real estate firms—it's foundational. But what's less often discussed is this: the true lever for transformation isn't the technology. It's culture. In most organizations, the adoption of data science begins with curiosity. A pilot program. A dashboard. Maybe a hire. But unless it is driven from the top with conviction and consistency, it rarely becomes embedded in decision-making. It remains a sidecar—not the engine. That's why, at our firm, we chose to place data science at the center of the enterprise's investment culture—and also at the center of the CEO's desk.

Over time, a few clear lessons have emerged. Here's what we've learned:

First, buy-in is everything. You can publish white papers and run workshops, but unless senior leadership signals that data will guide action—not just inform it—the initiative won't take hold. People follow priorities, not presentations.

Second, dedicated talent matters. Data science is not a part-time function. It requires specialists who can translate fragmented data into actionable insights. But it also requires a team who can interpret those insights in the context of risk management, capital deployment, and evaluating new opportunities.

But talent alone isn't enough. What makes our approach distinctive is how closely our data science function is woven into the rhythm of our investment activity. Rather than working in isolation, our data scientists operate alongside deal teams, gaining exposure to market context and decision-making in real time. That proximity creates a two-way exchange: investment professionals become more fluent in analytical tools, while our data scientists develop sharper intuition for what matters in a live deal environment. It's not integration for

its own sake—it's deliberate knowledge transfer, and it's become a key part of how we scale better decisions.

Third, data science becomes most powerful when paired with experience. Real estate—like many legacy industries—has an ingrained apprenticeship model. That's valuable for learning the fundamentals of investment decision making. But it can also reinforce blind spots. Data offers a dispassionate lens that helps challenge assumptions—not override them, but pressure-test them. At its best, it's not data versus human judgment. It's data with judgment—each sharpening the other.

I've seen this play out in real time: data pointed us to invest in markets others overlooked—and to exit ones others still viewed as safe. In both cases, our conviction was powered not by analysis and judgment alone, but equally by evidence.

What's clear to me now is that tomorrow's executives—regardless of their background—will be judged not only on their operational and investment acumen but on their fluency in data. Not technical fluency, necessarily, but strategic fluency: the ability to ask the right questions of the data, understand its limits, and use it to help lead decisively.

This shift energizes teams and elevates the organization. It attracts talent that wants to solve hard problems. It creates a culture where learning outpaces legacy.

Data science doesn't replace human judgment. But it does sharpen it. And as AI and machine learning reshape the landscape, leadership itself must evolve.

Forward-looking leaders of tomorrow must embrace the continuous learning that innovation in AI and the data sciences will require and lead their organizations along that journey with conviction. From the front. And from the top.

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