



From Data Paralysis to AI-Powered Progress

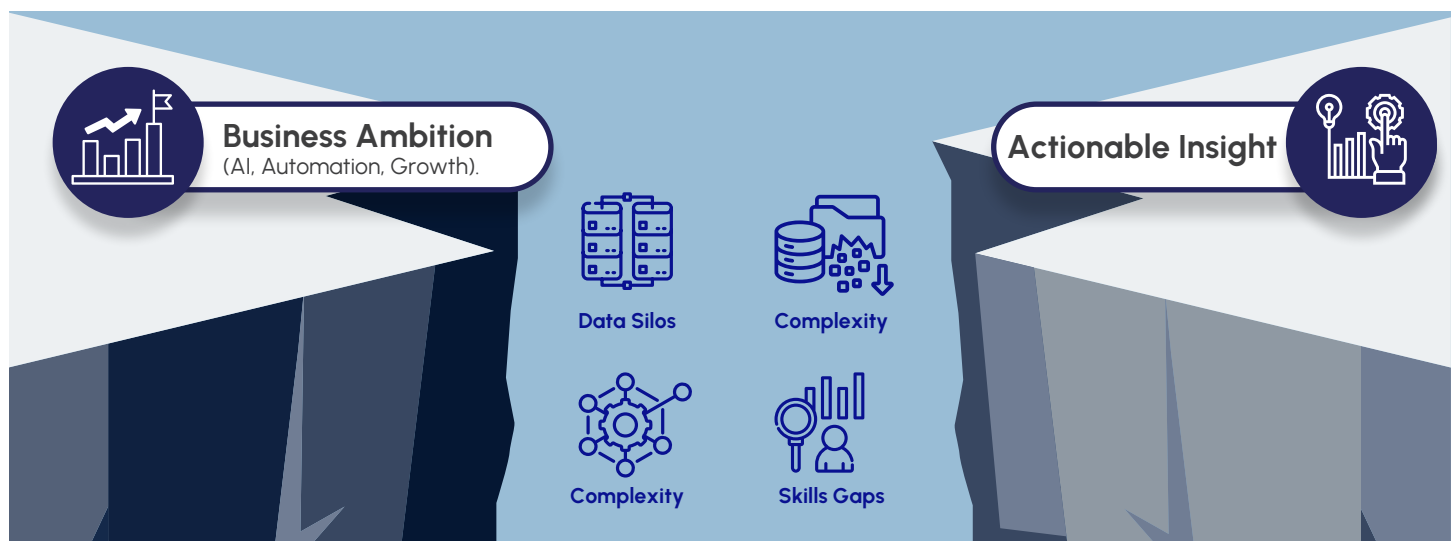
How a modern data intelligence platform
can move your business from insight scarcity
to AI-powered abundance in a hurry

The AI Imperative and the Great Data Disconnect

The mandate from the C-suite is unambiguous: leverage Generative AI, innovate, and embed intelligence into every facet of the business. Organizations are now in a dead sprint to build insight-driven solutions that create new efficiencies, transform customer experiences, and unlock novel revenue streams. Confidence in the potential of data intelligence, analytics, and infrastructure is at an all-time high, yet this optimism masks a difficult reality. The path from capturing data to deriving value is far more treacherous than most enterprise adopters realize.

A significant gap is growing between belief and practice. The single biggest challenge cited by data professionals today is simply keeping pace with rapid data growth, according to a recent Futurum study of more than 800 global respondents. In response, data platforms have become the top investment priority for 2025¹, a trend Futurum is convinced will only accelerate. Yet, the return on these investments can remain frustratingly low and difficult to recognize. When evaluating their current platforms, the vast majority of practitioners point to two crippling factors: integration complexity and an inability to perform advanced data analysis. This friction creates a chasm between ambition and execution, a place where progress can stall and value evaporates.

Figure 1: The Data Value Gap



This chasm is not merely a technical problem. It is a direct threat to productivity and competitive advantage. When answering a basic business question requires weeks and often relies on stale data exports, the business operates in the past. This manifests in several critical pain points.

First is decision latency. The time from question to insight is a core business metric, and for many companies, that is measured in weeks, not minutes. Second is data mistrust; when data lineage/provenance is opaque and access is difficult, confidence erodes, and decisions revert to gut feel. The resulting chaos inevitably leads to innovation gridlock, where data professionals and business experts spend the bulk of their time finding and preparing data, not building solutions that can drive the business forward. And third is the fragmentation of insights. Faced with a centralized bottleneck, business units acquire a dizzying array of BI and analytics tools, each with its own capabilities and data extracts. This not only drives up licensing costs but also creates a high barrier to entry for both users and IT managers, further cementing data silos rather than breaking them down.

The resulting chaos leads to innovation gridlock, where data science teams spend the bulk of their time finding and preparing data, not building the models that drive the business forward.

¹ Source: Futurum Research, 1H 2025 Data Intelligence, Analytics, and Infrastructure Decision Maker Survey

What's Hindering Data Democratization?

Achieving the necessary speed and trust is proving incredibly difficult because three fundamental hurdles stand in the way of true data democratization. These are not purely technological issues. A persistent, outdated perception that data platforms are complex tools accessible only to a cloistered few prevents companies from embracing modern practices designed to simplify and accelerate access for everyone.

The High-Value Data Accessibility Problem

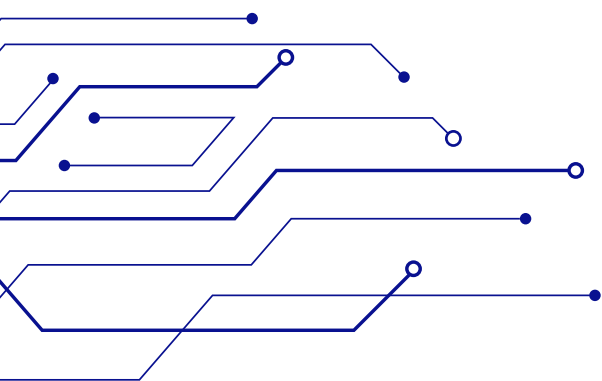
The most valuable data for day-to-day operational decisions is rarely housed in a pristine, centralized data warehouse or lakehouse. It also flows throughout operational and SaaS applications like Salesforce, ServiceNow, and Workday. Extracting this data remains a complex and brittle process, dependent on specialized ETL/ELT pipelines that are slow to build and prone to breaking. And the promise of "zero-ETL" remains elusive, leaving a trove of real-time insight untapped and forcing decisions to be made on lagging indicators rather than active, live signals.

The Technical Skills Barrier

Traditional data platforms were built for a small cadre of technical experts. Writing SQL, managing infrastructure, and optimizing queries for responsiveness require a skillset that most business users and even many data analysts lack. This challenge is compounded by modern workforce dynamics. Career instability and employee turnover mean that deep, institutional knowledge of brittle, legacy systems is constantly walking out the door. This reality creates a crippling dependency on overloaded central IT and data teams, resulting in increased lead times and frustrated stakeholders.

The Proliferation of Shadow IT

When faced with delays and complexity, ambitious business users do not simply wait. They find workarounds. They export data to spreadsheets, subscribe to unapproved BI tools, and create their own ungoverned data marts. This "shadow IT" is a rational response to a broken system, but it creates massive security and compliance risks. It guarantees multiple versions of the truth, erodes the value of the official data platform, and makes governance impossible. In this way, the very attempt to get insights more quickly ultimately makes the entire data landscape more chaotic and less trustworthy.



"If your data experts spend most of their time finding and preparing data, you don't have a data team. You have a team of highly paid system stewards and data wranglers."

The Four Principles of a Successful Data Intelligence Platform

To escape this cycle, enterprises should adopt a new architectural approach. Data is no longer a centralized library to be visited; it's a decentralized nervous system that must be intelligently managed. A modern Data Intelligence Platform can serve as the engine for this transformation, built not as a simple repository but as an integrated system for insight delivery. Its success rests on several non-negotiable principles.

Principle 1: A Unified and Open Governance Core

The foundation must be a single, universal catalog that governs all data assets—tables, files, models, and dashboards, regardless of their query engine, location or format. In today's landscape, this requires an unwavering commitment to open standards like Apache Iceberg™ to prevent lock-in. In return, this approach provides a complete and trustworthy map of the entire data estate, ensuring consistent security, clear lineage, and simple discovery.

Principle 2: AI-Augmented User Experience

The platform must use AI to serve the user, not the other way around. Doing so means moving beyond arcane syntax and empowering users to ask questions in natural language. The system must automatically generate the necessary code and have a semantic understanding of your data to provide a conversational interface that allows users to "chat with their data." This transforms the experience from technically intimidating to intuitively collaborative, dramatically lowering the skills barrier without losing control of data.

Principle 3: Frictionless, Zero-ETL Data Ingestion

The platform must make it trivial to connect to high-value data from business applications and databases. The goal is to eliminate friction entirely, minimizing data movement through techniques like query federation and providing simple connectors that ingest data without complex pipeline development. This breaks down silos, eradicates shadow IT, and ensures analysis is always performed on the most current and trusted data.

Principle 4: Invisible and Intelligent Infrastructure

Users should never have to think about infrastructure, period. Compute should be responsive (even serverless), elastic, and seamlessly integrated. The platform itself must be intelligent, automatically optimizing performance and surfacing insights within a user's everyday workflow. No more "knob-fiddling," no more digging through documentation, and most importantly, no more waiting for IT to provision resources.

Figure 2: Leveraging Metadata for Unified Governance



The Solution Realized: The Databricks Data Intelligence Platform

This modern platform is not a theoretical ideal. For users of the Databricks Data Intelligence Platform, it is a reality. The company's open data lakehouse was engineered from the ground up to embody these four principles, systematically eliminating complexity and accelerating the path from data to value.

- **Unified Governance:** Databricks Unity Catalog provides a single, open governance layer for all data and AI assets across any cloud.
- **AI-Augmented Experience:** The Databricks Assistant generates SQL from natural language, while Databricks Genie provides a true conversational BI experience, allowing anyone to ask complex questions and get answers in seconds.
- **Frictionless Ingestion:** Lakehouse Federation allows querying data in place across disparate sources, while Lakeflow Connect delivers on the promise of zero-ETL, enabling a few-click process to ingest data from sources like Salesforce into governed tables.
- **Invisible Infrastructure:** SQL Serverless provides data warehouses that are instant, elastic compute, while built-in predictive optimization ensures workloads get faster automatically, maximizing performance while managing costs.

The result is the realization of the Five-Minute Mandate. In less time than it takes to make coffee, a business user can connect to live Salesforce data, use the AI Assistant to create a view joining opportunities and accounts, build an interactive dashboard, and use Genie to ask follow-up questions—all without writing a single line of SQL. With the Genie API, these insights are no longer trapped in a dashboard; they can be embedded directly into collaboration tools like Microsoft Teams, making data an ambient part of the daily workflow.

Figure 3: “The Shift is On”



Source: Futurum Research, 1H 2025 Data Intelligence, Analytics, and Infrastructure Decision Maker Survey

The perception of data platforms as complex tools for an elite few is a relic of the past. The Databricks Data Intelligence Platform proves that speed, governance, and ease of use can coexist. It empowers every employee—from the C-suite to the frontline analyst—to become a data practitioner.

For the experts, the role is fundamentally changing. They are no longer just shifting left toward data sources or right toward monitoring tools to fight fires. Instead, they are shifting up toward the business. AI-infused, open data intelligence platforms are breaking down barriers, allowing data professionals to transition from system stewards to strategic business innovators. This shift will finally close the gap between data and decisions for the entire enterprise.

Important Information About This Report

AUTHORS

Brad Shimmin

Vice President & Practice Lead, Data Intelligence,
Analytics, & Infrastructure | The Futurum Group

PUBLISHER

Futurum Research

INQUIRIES

Contact us if you would like to discuss this report and
The Futurum Group will respond promptly.

CITATIONS

This paper can be cited by accredited press and analysts,
but must be cited in context, displaying author's name,
author's title, and "The Futurum Group." Non-press and
non-analysts must receive prior written permission by The
Futurum Group for any citations.

LICENSING

This document, including any supporting materials, is
owned by The Futurum Group. This publication may not be
reproduced, distributed, or shared in any form without the
prior written permission of The Futurum Group.

DISCLOSURES

The Futurum Group provides research, analysis, advising,
and consulting to many high-tech companies, including those
mentioned in this paper. No employees at the firm hold any
equity positions with any companies cited in this document.



ABOUT DATABRICKS

Databricks is a unified data and AI platform that brings
together data engineering, analytics, and machine
learning under an open lakehouse architecture. It enables
organizations to collaborate across data, AI, and business
teams to turn raw data into actionable insights at scale.
As enterprises increasingly focus on cost optimization,
Databricks integrates FinOps principles to help teams
monitor, manage, and optimize cloud spend tied to data and
AI workloads. This alignment of performance and financial
accountability allows organizations to balance innovation
with efficiency.



ABOUT THE FUTURUM GROUP

The Futurum Group is an independent research, analysis,
and advisory firm, focused on digital innovation and market-
disrupting technologies and trends. Every day our analysts,
researchers, and advisors help business leaders from around
the world anticipate tectonic shifts in their industries and
leverage disruptive innovation to either gain or maintain a
competitive advantage in their markets.



CONTACT INFORMATION: The Futurum Group LLC | [futurumgroup.com](https://www.futurumgroup.com) | (833) 722-5337

© 2025 The Futurum Group. All rights reserved.