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Small Teams, Big Impact

What lean data organisations are getting right that large ones are getting wrong

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CDAO Fall Boston 2026

This is not a technical team's challenge. It's a company's philosophy

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1

Structure

How many hands does a decision pass through before it becomes an outcome?

2

Trust

Do we trust people to cross boundaries, or do we hire a role for every gap?

3

Priorities

Is the business willing to say no, so the data team can say yes to what matters?

› **Lean data teams are a symptom of how the company chooses to operate**

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27 years: small, trusted teams with shared standards

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2006–2013

ACE Tempest RE (Chubb)

Re-architected a global data warehouse. Ran global IT budget across six locations.

2013–2016

TripAdvisor

Transitioned finance and marketing teams from static reporting to self-service analytics.

2016–2025

BHSI

Built global data org from scratch: one data warehouse for 4 continents and the company's first Data Governance Body.

2026–now

NEXT Insurance

Consolidating three data functions into one organisation, with AI adoption treated as a cultural shift.

› **Every time, focus and shared standards beat headcount**

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The hidden cost of scale: coordination outgrows capability

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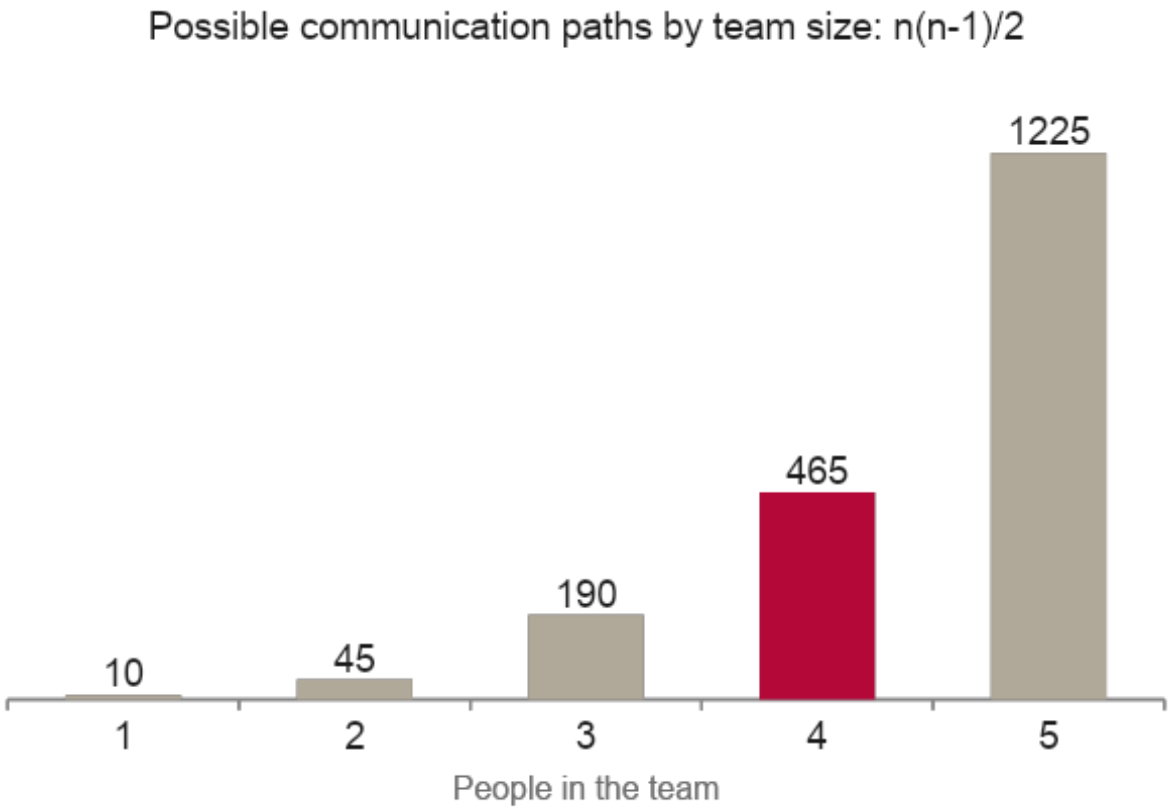

What large organisations quietly sacrifice

Speed. Every added specialist adds a queue, a handoff and a meeting.

Shared context. Nobody holds the whole problem, so nobody can make the whole trade-off.

Ownership. Everyone owns a slice. No one owns the outcome.

› **Hiring to fill every gap buys capability at the cost of coordination.**

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Our answer: One Data Org, one team instead of three functions

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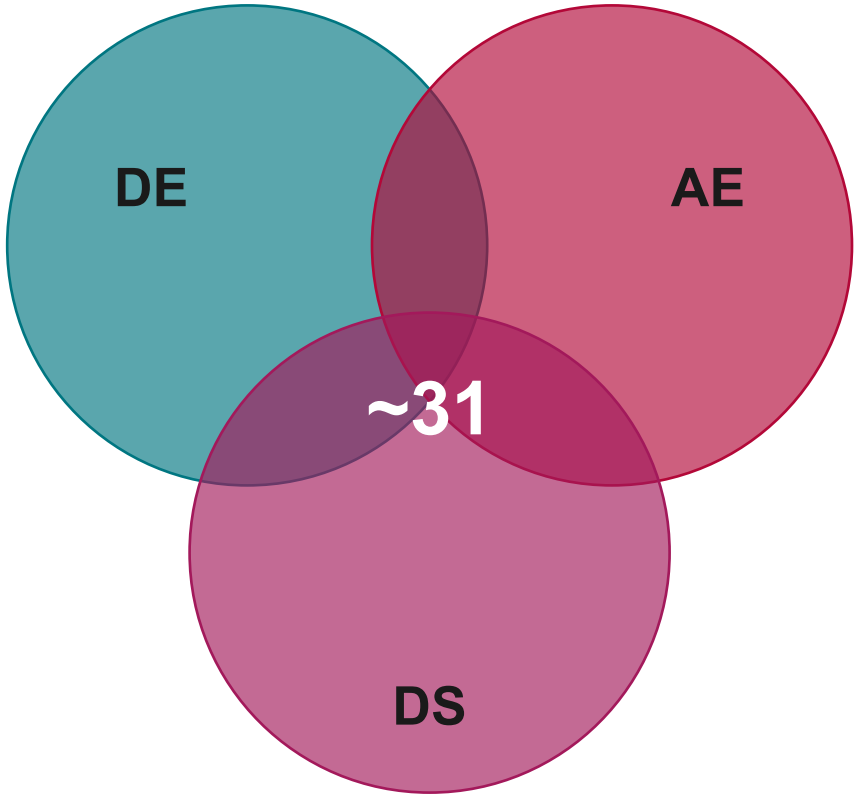

1 **One roadmap**

Prioritised against business outcomes, not by function.

2 **Versatile people**

Engineers, analysts and scientists who understand each other's craft.

3 **High trust**

Fewer approval layers, clearer ownership, faster decisions.

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What a small, unified team shipped

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Databricks

Migration

Migrated from Redshift ahead of schedule (5 months) & under budget

~90%+

Genie MVP

Benchmark accuracy for natural-language self-service BI on governed data.

~1/3

of revenue via D2C

Digital acquisition runs on attribution, LTV and segmentation from this team.

CFO + CPO

LTV rebuild

Finance and Product co-own the definition. Data builds it.

› **Small team, business-owned outcomes, shipped to production**

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A philosophy for data team design: four principles

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1 Versatile over specialised

Hire for range and curiosity first. Add a specialist when the work is proven and recurring, not for every gap.

2 Trust over handoffs

Give small teams end-to-end ownership. Replace approval chains with clear standards and guardrails.

3 Platform over projects

Invest in the foundation (governed data, a semantic layer, certified spaces) so the next question is cheap to answer.

4 Outcomes owned with the business

Every priority has a business sponsor who co-owns the result and the definition of success.

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If you stripped it back to the highest-leverage work

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What would remain

- Trusted, governed core data
- A shared semantic layer with certified definitions
- Embedded partnership with Finance, Product and Claims
- Targeted, measurable AI deployment on key high-value workflows

What you may be over-investing in

- A role for every gap, and the queues that follow
- Bespoke reports and one-off dashboards
- Committees and handoffs that exist to manage seams
- Tool and vendor sprawl, platforms that nobody owns

› Strip away the excess: if you don't miss it, it was never driving real impact.

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What leaders outside the data team must do

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1

Fund a platform, not a queue of requests

CFOs and CEOs set the funding model. Lean data teams need foundations, not ticket volume.

2

Co-own outcomes and definitions

Business leaders sponsor priorities and agree on metric definitions, as Finance and Product do with us on LTV.

3

Be willing to say no

Fewer, clearer priorities is the real operating model. Headcount does not fix an unfocused strategy.

› Monday morning: what would your data team stop doing if you trusted it more?

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