# Data Mesh Radio Episode #84: Driving to Better Data Outcomes with Collaborative Questions

Interview with Jean-Michel Coeur

Listen ([link](#))

**Scott Hirleman**

A written transcript of this episode is provided by Starburst. For more information, you can see the show notes.

**Adrian Estala- Starburst**

Welcome to Data Mesh Radio, with your host, Scott Hirleman, sponsored by Starburst. This is Adrian Estala, VP of Data Mesh Consulting Services at Starburst and host of Data Mesh TV. Starburst is the leading sponsor for Trino, the open source project, and Zhamak's Data Mesh book, *Delivering Data Driven Value At Scale*. To claim your free book, head over to starburst.io.

**Scott Hirleman**

Data Mesh Radio, a part of the Data as a Product Podcast Network, is a free community resource provided by DataStax. Data Mesh Radio is produced and hosted by Scott Hirleman, a co-founder of the Data Mesh Learning Community. This podcast is designed to help you get up to speed on a number of Data Mesh related topics, hopefully you find it useful.

In response to some listener feedback, I'm changing up the format a little bit of the interview episodes. If you want an extended summary of the episode, you can listen to the Sunday weekly summaries and programming notes episodes and going forward, the episode summaries in front of each episode are going to be considerably shorter, just some key points about what I might have learned or some interesting highlights from each episode. Bottom line up front, what are you going to hear about and learn about in this episode?I interviewed Jean-Michel Coeur, who's the Head of the Data Practice at the consulting company, Sourced Group. Jean-Michel shared his simple three question framework for driving good collaboration with data consumers and ensuring data projects/products success. The questions are designed specifically to be non confrontational and promote working together with someone making a data request. After each question, he also explains why he is asking the question, so it is viewed as collaborative clarification instead of pushing for justification. Why do you even want this? Is this really usable versus

setting the tone for collaboration? So his questions are, number one, do you know what this is for? Number two, do you know who is going to use it? And number three, do you know how they are going to use it?

Jean-Michel developed his three question framework after watching people struggle for years to properly request data and/or for the data team to properly understand the use case of data consumers. So they were delivering solutions that did not meet business needs, which wastes everyone's time. Oftentimes, the technical person wouldn't ask the right questions, or they couldn't even get to the end consumer of the data. So they didn't really understand the reasons for the data ask, which meant that what they delivered wasn't as complete as it could have been. The first question, "Do you know what this is for?", helps to set the tone. It is not, "Why do you want this?", which often makes people defensive. This question is to ensure there is a legit use case and clarity around what the person asking for this data and what the actual end user wants. Second question, "Do you know who is going to use it?", further clarifies that there is a stakeholder. If there isn't a specific person or persons that will use it, don't build it. The final question, "Do you know how they're going to use it?", drives towards specifics so you can move away from direct requests where it's just, "Fill out this form and I'll hit all these check boxes," it moves towards collaborating on finding a better solution.

As the data provider, you could even suggest additional data and add value to that. And again, after asking each question, he recommends providing an explanation of why you are asking. This isn't pushback, it's information gathering and when you do deliver on your data project or product or whatever, be prepared for that stakeholder to ask, "So what?" We are driving towards data informed decisions, so what does the data inform us about if you asked the right questions upfront, you should be able to understand "So what?" and be able to help them with insights, which forms better relationships and it's probably also a pretty good thing for that data provider's career to be seen as somebody that's really adding a lot of value. So with that, let's go ahead and jump into the episode. With that bottom line up front done, let's jump into the interview.

Very, very excited for today's episode, I've got Jean-Michel Coeur, which I know I murdered, but people can call him JM. He's allowed that thing when dealing with people who aren't as good at pronouncing French. He is the Head of the Data Practice at the consulting company, the Sourced Group and he's got a long history in data and helping companies to really figure out what they're doing with data and leverage that data. So we're gonna be covering a couple of different things today. What I'm really looking forward to from this conversation and why I had asked Jean-Michel to come on was his approach to thinking about dealing with people outside of the technical side, right. The really business folks. So when we're talking

Data Mesh, especially about the domain folks, he's got a really good framework about kind of actually working with them and extracting from them the information they need but like forming that good, strong relationship. So we can have that good context exchange instead of speaking completely different languages.

Speaking of French and English and then we're gonna cover some different things as well about, kind of the, if you store it value will come and how that's just kind of a silly mindset and how we need to kind of move away from that and the value or the data value chain. So, but with all that as kind of the upfront Jean-Michel, if you don't mind giving people a bit of a background into yourself, then we can kind of jump into the conversation at hand.

**Jean-Michel Coeur**
Sure. Thank you for having me, Scott. I have been in Singapore for about 11 years. So just to help people locate where I am sitting in this world. Before that I lived in Germany for nine years and before that I was leading presale in a technology firm as well based in Boston in the US. So I've been in analytics for about 12 years and that's me.

**Scott Hirleman**
That's great. And so you've got kind of a broad world perspective as well of how people in different places and organization types work. So we were talking about, you've got kind of a framework about three great questions to ask the, when dealing with the business person but let's talk about kind of how you arrived upon that. 'Cause I know a big pushback that I'm having or a big kind of blocking point that a lot of people are telling me within Data Mesh is that they're struggling when dealing with the business people, especially getting them bought in that they should that they should be either providing data or they should be even just providing the context. So let's talk about kind of what you were doing before you developed this framework and how that kind of worked out and what that's led to with your framework, kind of these three simple questions. So if you don't mind kind of giving people some background.

**Jean-Michel Coeur**
Sure. I think it's because of my background. I started in analytics with dashboards, that was my entry point in analytics back in well, almost 15 years ago now. My first dashboard and I had to ask questions about KPIs and as a technical person, I was not super comfortable asking questions about what type of KPI you want to see and people couldn't explain to me what they wanted to see. And I had to come up with something and then the person I was talking to in charge of credit card could say, "No, this is not what I want to see but don't have time to say what they wanted to see." And then as I evolved looking at more statistical computing behind the scenes
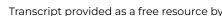
and doing machine learning, I keep having those same questions that I try to ask people, why do you want to do it? What is the reason you want this type of KPIs? And then as I mature a little bit and understand this is a business, especially capital market at that time. Then a little bit more in retail banking and then telecommunications, I started to have more business related questions like how do you want to segment your customer? Do you have a long time value for your customer that is already computing those types of things.

And then I started to lead a few analytics teams and ask my team members to ask the same questions or ask salespeople to ask the same question to the people they were dealing with. However, the challenge is the analytics people and the technical people have time to come up with the right questions. They couldn't figure out how to ask? How you are going to segment your customer for two reasons. First technical people may not talk to the right person who can answer the question so they were stuck. So they couldn't pass the first question. Second, the technical person usually prefers technology, otherwise they would work in the business side of things. So that led me to trying to figure out what would be the simplest way I could help my team understand what the customer was trying to achieve.

And I came up with just three questions which are typical coffee chat questions. And this is how I uncovered a lot of business reasons of doing things while I was on site. I used to do a lot of coffee chat sessions when I was in Germany with some customers. You sit in the cafeteria when you are on a six months project and then everybody sees you and then you have coffee chat questions with everybody. Same thing. My first engagement, a few years back in Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia, I was sitting in the canteen and this is where you can meet most of the people because they don't have to book a room and it's more free chat. And what type of question I could ask with this kind of coffee chat, a question that you ask during a conversation not an interrogatory type of questions like you go to the police station, the policeman asks you 20 questions and you have to answer which usually people wouldn't do in a meeting setting. So the first one I tried to come up with and which was very popular is, do you know what it is for?

I always found people who are looking at information, collecting data and because I need to help them how to do it. So the first question I am asking is, do you know what it is for? Like, just curious. I'm not asking why you want to do that, because that would question what they're doing. That would question the raison d'etre of their job. And I don't want to be offensive, but what is it for, just curious. And I explain if I know what it is for, I'm going to be able to help you better to collect maybe not exactly this information, but the adjacent information that is also useful for your use case. So if I know what it is for, I can help you to do your job better. And usually it resonates with the technical people and sometimes they didn't ask themselves the questions and

they realized, "Yeah, you're right. Let me ask the question." And then they go on and come back with an answer, "Oh, now I know." Okay. So that's good. Well, here's my second question for you.

**Scott Hirleman**
Yeah. And I think that's an interesting point because what you said as well of the non offensive, which you're not pushing back, you're just asking the... And I guess if you ask someone, "Do you know what it's for?" versus like kind of, "Can you please tell me what it's for?" You know what I mean? Like you can figure out how that phrasing works, but exactly what you're saying, you know, you could put that wording in a way that's gonna be combative, but like coming at it from a non combative point of view, I think is the exact right thing. Because then somebody isn't defensive, they're not gonna say, "Well, because I want it." Right? It doesn't flip that switch of requirements exchange versus the conversational exchange. And that you can kind of go into that collaborative negotiation around, "Oh, here's what you're trying to accomplish. Well, I've got some extra data that might be useful in this. Would this be helpful to you?" Or, you know, "Oh, okay. I get what you're trying to get at. This thing already exists or this is a way of looking at it, but I don't think it actually gets what you want. Have you looked at this to help you to frame your question and then let's look at reuse," and things like that. I think it sets up for, like you said, that coffee chat type of interaction instead of the combative or the, "You give me what I want."

**Jean-Michel Coeur**
Yeah. Especially, you realize you are in a meeting room and then you are kind of a policeman asking a bunch of questions, as a consultant to people who see you the first time and they wonder why they should ever answer to any of your questions, because, well, this is their job and you are just here to help them not asking 20,000 questions.

**Scott Hirleman**
You can be kind of seen as a gatekeeper to the information they need and that you're making them jump through hoops instead of that collaboration. And I liked when we were talking about this, especially, I like the way that the tone of this sets is that collaboration. I think, you know, when we talk about Data Mesh negotiation, collaborative negotiation is very helpful because it's like, "Oh, you want this one, you know, you want these 15 parts of data. Well, number eight is gonna take us an extra eight weeks. We can get you the other 14 in six weeks, but the other one is gonna kind of double up our time. Is that really a value to you?" And I think that transitioning into that kind of collaborative exchange of context instead of, "Okay, we'll give you what we think you want." Instead of like, "Let's, make sure we're both headed down the right path." But I like where this is headed. So, do you have anything you wanted to add further on the first question, or do you wanna jump into

the second?

**Jean-Michel Coeur**
No, I was going to move to the second question to help out when we are stuck on the first one, because sometimes people don't know what it is for and they don't know how to answer your question. So then I came up with a second one. Well, if you don't know what it is for, do you know who is going to use it? And that usually leads to either some kind of example or use case on how people are going to take the data forward. So usually if it's a head of business lines you end up with people looking at some dashboard of some sort with some KPI. So back to my original background, starting analytics with dashboard and KPIs. So this is where the second question, I came up with. Who is going to use it? It leads to the end user. So that means if you build a data platform and you have a Data Mesh approach, if you don't know who is going to use it, well, that's a problem because you have no guarantee that what you do is going to fit the purpose of why you are doing it.
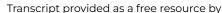
It's like you built a house and you don't know how people are going to use it. So you decide to put three bedrooms, one kitchen, and three bathrooms, and then you realize that the family that comes has only one kid, they don't plan to have another one. There are two people and a three bedroom maybe doesn't get it, but you didn't know because you didn't know who was going to use it. So, same thing when we collect data, if we don't know who is going to use it, it's difficult to have a remote idea on how it's going to be used, which is the third question.

**Scott Hirleman**
Do you find with that second question that when they answer, who is going to use it, that you should then go talk to that end user as well? Because what I've been finding with, like, it seems like it's a silly kind of life hack, Data Mesh hack of going to and stop playing telephone between the data engineering folks or the telephone between the consumers and the producers, and it's like, well, what do you mean the consumers and the producers never speak? Have you found that? Because that can kind of undercut the person that's coming to you and making the ask as well, so how have you found dealing with that to make sure that you're aligning with what that person is telling you, but also what the end consumer is looking at?

**Jean-Michel Coeur**
At the beginning, I was asking more about who is the end user, a blunt question upfront. Who is the end user and what are they going to do with that? And then that was a little bit too confrontational, where basically it's too obvious that I want to skip the person I'm talking to, and I want to go back to the end user, because I believe I may have more information from the end user as well. However, by asking, do you know who's going to use it? And explaining why I am interested in that answer, I

don't undercut really the person I'm talking to, I'm making them part of the journey, part of the conversation, because the next proposal is, well, here is how you could help me identify this person, and I am going to empower the person in front of me. In order to identify those people and I try to have the person in front of me leading the journey to get introduced, because obviously if I am a consultant in the company, the person in front of me is not going to introduce random new people to his boss or to an end user, which kind of maybe has a lot of requirement and known to be a little bit harsh, because the person in front of me is living in that company, it's their job to know who I can escape, I can leave as a consultant, but that person will still be there.

**Scott Hirleman**
I don't know if you've ever seen the movie '"Office Space," but there's a guy whose job is to take the requirements from the engineering department to, I think the sales department or customer service, and they're like, "Okay." So you physically take the paper request, he's like, "Well, sometimes I do it myself, but usually it's my assistant that's doing it." And they're like, "But what is it that you do here?" And so that question, if you ask it in the wrong way, I could see it being exactly kind of what you said, of undercutting them, and what is it you do here, I'm just trying to end around you versus like, "Let's make sure we're all in this together and that I'm serving what you need." But serving your end user is serving your needs better than anything else, so let's make sure we're all kind of in alignment. And then that happy kind of all team work together. So I like the approach, especially instead of just, "Who is the end user?" versus like, "Do you know who's gonna use it?" I think it softens it a lot more, right?

**Jean-Michel Coeur**
Yeah, like a coffee chat. And the last one as well, and I always explain, do you know how they are going to use it? And I always explain, "The reason I am asking is, we now have an opportunity to potentially build two dashboards instead of one, or to suggest something." There's always a case where a data analysis practitioner is invited to a meeting to present the result of any kind of study. And in some cases, you present, for example, a dashboard or a graph or like a logistic regression or whatever, and the business stakeholder is looking at you and asks you, "So what? What should I do?" And the analytic partitioner, usually they are not usually from the business side, they don't know and on the other side, the business leaders expect those analytic partitioners to suggest business decisions. It may not be fair to data people who are not running the business, but at some point, I believe we need to be able to suggest a couple of things, even if we don't run the business. So if we want to be partnered with business leaders, especially in the Data Mesh approach where the domain is very important, the domain in which we collect the data, we process it and we render it or we make it consumable by the business leaders in this Data Mesh construct, we really need to understand how the business is going to use the data,

and we need to be able to make some proposal to them, even if we don't run the business.
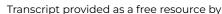
**Scott Hirleman**
Yeah, and I think that context exchange. There are business people who aren't willing to give enough to get, you've gotta give the context to get the valuable information, and so if you're stuck in that place, there's nothing really you can do to convince that person to play nicely versus do that. I think most people understand that, and most people understand that it's, "Hey, I'm trying to make sure I serve you best, so let's talk about this." And what I've found whenever I'm dealing with data, I'll surface two or three insights where I say, "Hey, I saw this from this different perspective, you asked me to do this, but I saw these two or three other things that kind of popped up. I wasn't just doing the task at hand, I was looking for insights, and so I understood what you were trying to look for. This is additional context, or here might be an additional data source or... the way that you were hoping the data to shape out," you might talk to a data scientist and you say... "Well, the way you were hoping for this to shape out, it doesn't really shape that way, but let's approach it from this other angle, and let's get at it from here are three different data sources that we might get to get to the same answer and the same question" instead of, "here's the thing, drop it on your desk and leave."

Within Data Mesh, we want consumers to get out of the report consumption style where you're consuming the insights, it's like you should be consuming more data to drive your own insights, but, one, that's not gonna happen all the time, two, if you can provide those insights for somebody, you're shortcutting for them, if it takes you an extra minute or two to actually review what this looks like, you might have some additional insight and then it gives you that business context to add more value and that person's gonna talk you up to other people too. So it's good for your team, and your career and all that. But yeah, do you have any specific advice on how to handle if people are pushing back on any of these questions or where the conversation can go or where you found it most successful to kinda take it when you're just using this, 'cause it is a simple framework, but I think it feels powerful.

**Jean-Michel Coeur**
Yeah, maybe two things. Each time I ask questions, I almost always say, literally, the reason I am asking is, and I explain, and I say the reason I am asking. 'Cause I try to justify everything I do all the time, so the person in front of me or beside me in a coffee chat will understand where I am coming from. So it's super important... It's empathy, you need to understand each other where we are coming from. So that's the first aspect, each time I ask a question and I don't ask two questions, you know, without going into some explanation.

And the second aspect is, when I am asking, do you know how they're going to use it? In fact, I prepare myself for the key questions once I am in front of any business leader. Well, I would love to understand better how you are going to use it. And in my head, in my mind, I want to know if it's real, if they really have a use case, if they really are going to use that data in a way that is useful for the business. Because too often, it's just... Yeah, but I want to know the insight just in case. Well, if you have no intention to take any specific action, I'm going to push back to the business leader, because there is no reason why we have a lot of people working, extracting data, processing data, putting a recommendation engine that work together if at the end of the day, no action will be taken with the data that we provide. It's like I provide you a car, but you are never going to drive it. Well, maybe I shouldn't provide you a car. That's okay, maybe that's okay.

**Scott Hirleman**
Yeah, the episode I had with Katie Bauer also had that kind of conversation. And the insight of what is valued is not necessarily valuable, and what is valuable is not necessarily valued, so you kind of can end up in a little bit of a political game, but exactly what you've talked about, you can have that conversation and you might get to a point where you're saying, "Well, this isn't very valuable," And then you kinda have to figure out how do I deprioritize this, or do I still just have to do it and kind of have that? But it does give you that like, "Hey, why don't we set what you're actually trying to do, if we were talking about metrics, and if you find that this is one tenth or 10X, what you were expecting, what are you going to do with it? What will you do with that information?" And if the answer is, well, "I'll just be more informed." Well, then it's not actionable. Why should I be spending my time on things that aren't gonna be actionable?

**Jean-Michel Coeur**
Also on the flipside, if the person realizes they are not too sure what they're going to do, I may come up with suggestions, or I may come up with different types of information, or complementary information that we can provide, so it becomes actionable. So I'm going to help the business leader anyway to make it more actionable, if this one is not actionable at all. So it's like, I'm going to push back, but at the same time, I am here to help.

**Scott Hirleman**
Yeah, it's again, you're not that gatekeeper, it's not a yes or a no. It's kind of a no, but, like a no, but let's figure out where we could get it to do that, or, you want that insight. Well, we've got something that's pretty similar, why don't we look at that and see if that gives you kind of the insight and then we can figure out from there, it's not exactly what you want, but is it gonna get you 90% of the way there with no incremental work or 80% of the way there with 20% of the work or whatever. It gives

you a stronger foot in the negotiation, but it is again, that collaborative negotiation of you're both just trying to drive business value. I like that. So, did you have anything else you wanted to add on kind of your three questions or did you wanna jump into kind of the "data field of dreams" concept that we were talking about?

**Jean-Michel Coeur**
Yes. I would love to discuss this one, because I have seen over and over again in the past, maybe the past six, seven years. The idea is, I mean talking a lot with technical people, they understand that the business is struggling with data. So the idea is let's build a kind of data platform with a more open format, which will provide better access to data, etc. And in such a way that if we built it, they will come. And then I've seen customers collecting a lot of data, like terabytes of data, sometimes terabytes of data every day. Because, well, for sure this data must be useful to somebody. So let's make sure that we have a data platform at the end of this fiscal year. So we tick the box and our job is done. And six months into the next fiscal year well you still don't have any use case. So in fact, the data platform is not really used.

So it becomes a white elephant in the room where, oh, we thought if we are going to build it they're going to come, but without talking to the potential users, and it's difficult to talk to the potential users because you need to understand what they're going to do with it. Back to the third question. And you need to be able to discuss maybe some business challenge they got. And the challenges, the business leaders are going to talk to you about. I would like to have an incremental uplift of revenue by customers in a specific segment of 2%. And as a technical leader, you are like, oh yeah, okay. How am I going to do that?

Well, with data, you can propose a few things like, how your customers are segmented. Do you know the distribution of your customers, in terms of revenue in every single segment, for example? And asking all those questions in order to come from a statement and work backwards from that statement and figure out what type of information could be useful to achieve that end goal. And it may take many, many steps in order to get there. But that reasoning is much more complex if you are in tech mode and your bosses, the management chain, is pushing you to get this data platform up and running as soon as you can.

**Scott Hirleman**
Yeah. Gøran from NAV in I think episode 37 or so said, I can build the coolest, best data platform that our developers will not want to use, right? I think that conversation, you know, and you also said something that I think has really resonated with me, which was collecting data isn't that difficult, but it is costly, right? Like it's costly to store it for that. Well, but we might use it and people are like, well, you can just store it in, you know, cold storage in the cloud. And it's really not that expensive

and blah, blah, blah. But it's like, but you don't know what you have. And if you then decide that you're going to use it, cleaning it up is so expensive and like getting it into the format that you would actually want to use it because you didn't have the intentionality around how it was stored.

You know, you had mentioned storing to the use case, if you aren't storing it to the use case, that clean up, especially when you're trying to look back and it might be that the application that's generating the data has gone through three or four major revisions over this time. And so the formats aren't the same. And so trying to match that up and like, it will enrich the data historically, it's so insanely time consuming and expensive, and one out of a thousand times, it's probably worth it. Are you willing to bet that you're going to have that one out of a thousand times, it's going to have a 1000X return on investment?

**Jean-Michel Coeur**
Nope. The other aspect that a typical data platform approach has is you forget the window of opportunity. You assume that it's a long term project and it doesn't matter how long it takes to build it. Well in this world, speed matters more than anything else. So if it takes two years to build a data platform that is useful, well, you have missed a few windows of opportunity to potentially increase your revenue, increase your revenue per customer, increase your top line, or be more efficient with your way, even your internal processes. So it's more important to catch a window of opportunity to get potential incremental revenue, as opposed to making sure your data platform is super, super, super rock solid from the get go. That's what I would call water for data platform, which by the time you think it's ready. Well if you look at the cloud provider, they released another 100 services, which you could use to build the same data platform in a tenth of the time that it took you.

**Scott Hirleman**
Yeah. I think there's a concept of return on investment and some people think of, so you know, I used to work in the investing world, and let's say you make an investment and it returns 100X your money. People would say, that's a great investment. Well, if it takes, you know, 1000 years, right 100 years, 1000 years, or whatever, versus something that doubles your money and it takes, you know, a year and a half or whatever there's this concept called internal rate of return and it's, how much is, are you returning on it? How quickly, right it has kind of that time value of money concept. And so I think there is that opportunity cost concept that you need to put in Doron Porat in her interview, which I think was number 68 had talked about that, you know, sometimes it's, you might be able to build this way better and it might be something that's great right now, but also you think about kind of the long term that the vendor is going to build something where it's their main focus.

So you're, you might be able to build something that's more tied to your use case right now, but let's think about how we wanna think about how we evolve the platform going forward. Do we wanna have to put in all of the work all of the time, or do we wanna catch that uplift of services getting better that we're using? And I think there is a balance, right? I think there are lots of times when you wanna build things yourself and it does get kind of frustrating just going out and buying services, you know, where it does take a long time to integrate them. You know, it feels like, yeah, I should be able to drop in and this thing just goes, but like, it's something where you really do want to focus on why are we doing this? Does this make sense? Are we just building for the sake of building, 'cause we think this is cool or do we have that use case? So, you know, do we need to integrate this, you know, super real time capability right now when we don't have any users for it for the next 6 to 12 months? Like let's focus on the things that matter.

**Jean-Michel Coeur**
Yeah. The other aspect is as we play with cool technology and the technology becomes cooler and cooler or hotter and hotter, depending on how you see it. Tendency in a company is to become tech oriented and everybody is kind of a tech company at the end of the day because you use technology to support your business. But let's think about your core business. If your core business is banking should you build everything yourself? And it's always buy versus build that I have seen in the past 30 years and the equation is still not solved forever so to speak because, well, it always depends. It depends on the period. It depends on the type of solutions you want to buy or you want to build. And some of the solutions you are going to buy because it's off the shelf solution and you are not like in banking, you are not going to build your own core banking system.

So you tend to buy an off the shelf solution now in terms of analytics, if you want to implement or to have a Data Mesh approach for a data platform that you want to implement either you do it completely yourself, or you can also use open source, but then you become the open source integrator. Okay. So you want to compete against the cloud service provider. Good for you. Well is it your real business? So those types of questions are tricky to answer because it depends.

**Scott Hirleman**
Yeah. What is the value add here? What is the value add now? And, over time and things like that. And when you are coming across people that are kind of doing that, if you build it, they will come or if you store the data, the value will come. Like how have you found... What's an appropriate way, or what's a useful way to have that conversation with them to get them to the side of, let's not do that. Because you know, you might know that you're right, that you shouldn't be headed down this path, but we also need to figure out how we have that conversation again, in that

non combative way. And that we can exchange the information and kind of move forward with what's valuable to the organization.

**Jean-Michel Coeur**
I might jump to the second question, because in that case, the first question would be a little bit to ask. Lke, imagine you talked to somebody who built a data platform for a year and you ask him, do you know what is it for? It's a little bit harsh. I would go either to the second or the third question. Do you know how people are going to use it in order to understand the consumable part of the platform? And which might be very different from one domain to another domain, if we have a Data Mesh approach. Because if we miss the consumable path, it's kind of... You do 90% of the work is data collection, cleaning, processing, etc, and maybe 10% is a dashboard, for example. If you remove the dashboard, there is no solution, because the customer, the consumer, cannot see it. And you did 90% of the work, but 90% of the work leads to zero on a consumer standpoint. So understanding the consumable aspect of things, how people are going to consume the information we provide to them, whether it's a recommendation engine, it's a clustering algo, it's an API for developers, it's a dashboard, or just access to the data through SQL queries, it's super important otherwise we miss the 10% that tick the box.
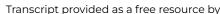
**Scott Hirleman**
Unfortunately, the audio cut out here on us. So it might be a bit of an awkward transition, but Jean-Michel's gonna get back into kind of his answer to this specific question that I previously asked.

**Jean-Michel Coeur**
So when people, for example, built a data platform for several months, it's hard to just ask them, "What is it for?" Because that would be very much too confrontational. So always trying to get from the consumable angle. And go straight to the first question: Do you know how they are going to use it? Because that leads me to understand who are the consumers and what type of format we need to provide the data to those consumers. Whether it's an algorithm, which will be embedded in another application, like recommendation engine or clustering algo, for example, or an API for developers, or a dashboard for direct consumption by business leaders, or it can be direct access to data through SQL queries.

And I believe understanding how people are going to consume it is super, super important, because that's the primary reason why we collect the data. Why we have producers who are producing the data to the platform is because consumers are going to consume that data to do something about it. And that helps me to guide people who built the data platform to start to look for the users. And it's a journey. If somebody built a data platform for six months without talking to any user, it's

difficult to suddenly wake up and, "Oh, by the way, how are they going to use it, do you know?" "No, I don't." "And the data we collected has the right data?" "Not sure." Well, maybe it's time to talk to somebody, and it's never too late, because the data platform, you can argue, is there. Hopefully it has been built with the proper data governance process in place, data protection, all those good things, which needs to be done anyway. And that may speed up the second part of building that data platform into a more Data Mesh approach, where you have a smooth kind of transition from producers to consumers.

**Scott Hirleman**
Yeah. Yeah, and I think a lot of what you're talking about, as well, is the data product management, or just kind of product management principles in general. Having a product mindset. Some of it's even product marketing, right? You go out there and you say, "Do I have a use case? Do I have consumers?" I want to go out there and say, "Here's what we're thinking about creating. Do I have consumers? Are there people who actually will consume this?" 'Cause if the answer is no, then don't do it. Right? When we think about data, we need to make data reusable, but that doesn't mean that you should go out there and produce all the data that could be useful. Right? We need to make it so that it's usable in multiple use cases, but if you're just focusing so much, I find this again, of "this could be useful" versus there are so many things that could be useful if you've got infinite money. Or "it could be useful" might have an incredible return when you do find something that's useful, okay, then I get it, right? But 99.9% of the time, it's not the case, so please stop.

**Jean-Michel Coeur**
I had a former colleague of mine who had this wonderful sentence, "It's like buying all the tickets from the lotto in order to win." Yes, if you buy all the tickets, you are going to win. Of course you are going to win. At what price?

**Scott Hirleman**
Yeah. It's the return on investment, it's all of that. Yeah. But what are you actually trying to accomplish, and if you do do this, what will you accomplish? I fully agree. So we've kind of talked about this, interwoven throughout the entire conversation, but I'd love to kind of get you to share your thoughts about that kind of overall data value chain. One thing that we had talked about was, in Data Mesh, there's some conversation as to what exactly is a data product, does that extend all the way through into the consumption model or not? If it is a dashboard, is that part of the data product or not? What are the actual output from the insights perspective, are we trying to focus on serving data so people can get to insights, versus we're serving out the insights. I think that gets a little too nebulous and cute in a lot of ways. Versus, again, what are we trying to accomplish? So just if you could give people your thoughts around what you've seen about that, like how do you actually execute

towards what the outcome needs to be to drive business value? You talked about going 90% of the way, 95% of the way, but if you go 95% of the way and deliver 5% or 0% of the value, why did you do it? Right?

**Jean-Michel Coeur**
Yeah, I think it depends. I try, and there is no single answer. I see the kind of raw data product as at least a data set, like, technically speaking a denormalized data set that has all the information in it. Now, that data set as it stands will be very useful to data analysts who want to crunch the data, access the data directly, using... It can be SQL, but it can be any other specific language, etc. Then you have the business leaders who want to see that same information in the data set but they want to see it in their dashboard. You could argue that the dashboard is a derived data product from the data set, because a dashboard has been built after the data set has been produced. And, in fact, a data set might have been moved into a data warehouse, or be straightly accessible from the data, like using SQL, whatever, and then accessible for the dashboard.

Or that same data set becomes a training data of a specific model, in order to, for example, cluster or segment your customers. So your labeled customers that are clustered would be a derived product of that data set. So you could have this concept, depending on who is consuming. The more technical people consuming that are closest to the raw data product, the less technical consuming they are further down the line, because you need to transform the raw data product into something that is palatable by those people, whether it's a dashboard or it can be some simple KPI sent by email, it really can be anything. So we have, on the data value chain, we have the first part is getting the raw data extracted from applications, from any type of interaction, into the data platform, transform into a consumable format, and in the consumable format you have the second type of value chain, if I can say, where you start with the raw data product, into potentially a derived data product, depending on who the consumers are.

**Scott Hirleman**
Yeah, and I think, we talk about in Data Mesh that we wanna raise everybody's data literacy, but there are people who just want to consume and they just want reports pushed at them. And in certain ways that's bad, but in certain ways we still have to really think about how we serve that constituency, because if we just leave them entirely behind, we might be leaving a lot of business value out of what we're doing. I think the consultant's answer is the thing that frustrates people when they really dig into Data Mesh, but it's the only answer that makes sense, which is, It depends, right? It's very much dependent, you have to adapt. You can take learnings, but you have to adapt things to the situation at hand.

**Jean-Michel Coeur**

And you need to be able to interpret a dashboard, and to some extent do it yourself, by selecting things, learning how to use the tool, not to build dashboard but at least to navigate. As opposed to sitting down in a meeting, look at the PowerPoint presentation where somebody copy-paste all the visuals from the given dashboard, which completely defeats the purpose.

**Scott Hirleman**

And is somebody able to say, "I want these insights," and then they look at the dashboard and then they go, "So tell me what it says." Right? Like, Okay, you're the one who asked for this, and yet you're the one who can't interpret it. It might be on the analytical person that they might not have made the greatest dashboard, but in general I would say that's probably on the business person, that there are people who just want insights pushed to them, they want that consumption model. And so there's frustration around still having to serve those people. Does everybody need to get to a certain data literacy level? I think we do eventually, but we also, if we're leaving too many people behind, you're leaving that business value on the table. So it's a balance, but it's very, very frustrating for data people to deal with the people who just want the, "so what?" When, it's like we need you to participate in helping us figure out the "so what," right? Of what data is gonna be useful to you and let's interpret it together, at least. Not just, I'm going to ship you the answers.
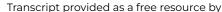
**Jean-Michel Coeur**

Yeah, I try to help my colleagues, telling them, "Regardless of what you are going to present, regardless of the format you are going to present, the stakeholder is going to ask you, So what? Be prepared. If you are prepared, awesome."

**Scott Hirleman**

Yeah, I think that makes sense. The stakeholder will always ask you, "so what?" I think you've got a lot of good quotes. If you create it, they will come or if you store it, value will come. And I really like the collecting data isn't that difficult, but it is costly. I really think that's a really quotable one. It has been a really, really great conversation, is there anything that we didn't cover that you think we should? Or is there any kind of summation, any way that you'd want to sum up the conversation for people to kind of reiterate anything we covered or anything that you'd wanna say there?

**Jean-Michel Coeur**

Yeah, I think there are many of the things that we can cover, but that will be for the next podcast. Here we were already focused on getting the value for the stakeholders and how to ask the right questions in order to get to that, or at least to get closer to some of the value. And even if I have been in this space for a certain time, asking those questions every day is always refreshing and it forces me as well to

think... To think through in what I am doing. Currently I am working on a project where we need to establish a relationship using kind of a graph technology. And I am asking myself, how the user is going to use that? And I'm asking again, myself, what are they going to do with it? Because depending on what they are going to do, the processing logic and the dashboard we are building will be extremely different, so we better need to figure out how they're going to use it at the beginning of the project, as opposed towards the end when you do the project hand over to the end user, and then at that time the end user just ask one question, "What is it for?" And that's the question they return to you.

**Scott Hirleman**
Yeah. And that's the horrifying question, when you've put in a whole lot of work like, not even the so what, but "what is this for? Why did we do this?" It's like, yeah, that alignment, you need to have that, a lot of people have talked about within Data Mesh, when you're doing your proof of value, your initial implementation, whatever you wanna call that kind of minimum viable Mesh or whatever, that you really do need to find a consumer driven use case, you need to find something where there is somebody who has a need and a desire, and that you can align to that and that you can build something out that's gonna have value, 'cause if you just... Again, if you just create these data products to share data, that data might have some value to somebody, but if you don't have an idea of who or how you're really gonna structure that, they're gonna have a lot of work on their end even to leverage it. So at best case, and a lot of times they just aren't willing to put in that work, so you've created... You've spent a lot of time and effort on nothing, so let's avoid that if we can.

But, well, Jean-Michel this has been such a very, very useful episode for folks, especially just popping it up to a higher level about how do we actually have these conversations, how do we get to these valuable context exchanges, 'cause a lot of what we talk in Data Mesh is you have to exchange these contexts, but I don't think we've had anybody on that, especially in such a simple but not simplistic framework, like a framework that can work and what are the pitfalls or what are some potential things of... Instead of why, it's like, "Do you know what it's for?" Not, "Why are you doing this?" And the non confrontational side, so if people wanna follow up with you, what's the best place to do that, and what do you want people following up with you about in general?

**Jean-Michel Coeur**
Yeah, I guess the best place is LinkedIn, they can look at my profile on LinkedIn at Sourced Group. I'm based in Singapore, and I think I am the very few guys who have blue hair, probably the only guy around who has blue hair, so they will spot my profile easily. I am passionate about analytics organization, helping customers to structure their analytics organization, but also advanced analytics like machine

learning, AI, yes, sure. If I am a business leader I will say AI, but because I am in tech I will say machine learning.

**Scott Hirleman**
Yeah, I know that's fun difference is, there really isn't one, but there kinda is.  Well, again, thank you so much for spending the time. And thank you everybody for listening.

**Jean-Michel Coeur**
Thank you, for having me Scott. I really appreciate it, thank you.

**Scott Hirleman**
I'd again like to thank my guest today, Jean-Michel Coeur, who is the Head of the Data Practice at the consulting company, the Sourced Group, as per usual you can find a link to his LinkedIn, if you'd like to get in contact with Jean-Michel in the show notes. Thank you.

Thanks everyone for listening to another great guest on the Data Mesh Learning Podcast. Thanks again to our sponsors, especially DataStax, who actually pays for me fulltime to help out the Data Mesh community, if you're looking for a scalable, extremely cost efficient multi data center, multi cloud database offering and/or an easy to scale data streaming offering, check DataStax out, there's a link in the show notes. If you wanna get in touch with me, there's links in the show notes to go ahead and reach out. I would love to hear more about what you're doing with Data Mesh and how I can be helpful. So please do reach out and let me know as well as if you'd like to be a guest, check out the show notes for more information. Thanks so much.