Transcript provided as a free resource by 

Data Mesh Radio Episode #256 How to Drive Towards a Data-Driven Culture with Data Mesh

Interview with Amy Edwards

Listen (link)

Transcript provided as a free community resource by Starburst.
To check out more Starburst-compiled resources about data mesh, please check here: https://www.starburst.io/info/data-mesh-resource-center
To get their Data Mesh for Dummies book (info gated), please see here: https://starburst.io/info/data-mesh-for-dummies/

List of all previous episodes (including links to available transcripts) is available here.
The folder of all previous transcripts is available here.

0:00:00 Scott Hirleman
A written transcript of this episode is provided by Starburst. For more information, you can see the show notes.

0:00:07 Adrian Estala
Welcome to Data Mesh Radio with your host, Scott Hirleman, sponsored by Starburst. This is Adrian Estala, VP and Field CDO at Starburst and host of Data Mesh TV. Starburst is the leading contributor to Trino, the open source project and the Data Mesh For Dummies book that I cowrote with Colleen Tartow and Andy Mott. To claim your free book, head over to starburst.io.

0:00:38 Scott Hirleman
Data Mesh Radio is provided as a free community resource by Data Mesh Understanding. It is produced and hosted by me, Scott Hirleman. I started this podcast as a place for practitioners to get useful information about data mesh, and we're at over 200 episodes. I have now left DataStax, thanks for all their help in founding things, but I've left to start Data Mesh Understanding, which is also helping practitioners to get to the information needed to do data mesh well. We have free implementer introduction and roundtable programs in addition to the more advanced yet affordable offerings, so please do get in touch if you're looking for more information on how to do, how to approach data mesh. Just check datameshunderstanding.com for more info. There's also a helpful organization of past data mesh radio episodes there, if you want to dig into specific topics rather than digging through 200 different episodes. So with that, let's hit the funky intro music and listen to what you'll hear about in this interview episode.

Episode 256: How to Drive Towards a Data-Driven Culture with Data Mesh. Bottom line up front, what are you gonna hear about and learn about in this episode? I

interviewed Amy Edwards, formerly Director of Analytics and Product at Vista. To be clear though, of course, she was only representing her own views on this episode. So here are some key takeaways or thoughts from Amy's point of view. Number one, a potential north star metric for how data-driven you are. How often are people getting interpreting and actioning on the data themselves versus waiting for an analyst to tell them? It's hard to measure, but it's where you want to head, where more and more people are making the effort to interact with data.

Number two, if you want a product or use case to succeed, the absolute most important thing is an engaged consumer stakeholder, someone who really wants the data and for a use case and they know how they want it. If someone isn't leaning in, consider not building a data product for them. Scott note here, this sounds controversial, but it is reinforced in almost every data mesh conversation I have. If you don't have that specific initial stakeholder, the use cases aren't really gonna come out, the value isn't really gonna come out. Number three, similarly, if you are building a data product, you should make sure you are very aligned with your stakeholder. Don't be a request dumping ground. Build iteratively together. Number four, to understand your progress towards being data-driven, you need to actually measure things to track things over time, you know, your progress. You almost certainly will not find the perfect aspects to measure at first, but what you measure will also evolve. But it starts just with measuring something. You don't have to get it perfect.

Number five, there's nothing wrong with starting with using a success metric that you know isn't going to be something you focus on when a data product matures. As products go through phases, so too should your measurements. So start with number of users, as a key early data product success metric. It's easy and somewhat correlated to value driven, especially early in the lifecycle of a data product. Number six, potentially controversial, the adoption curve to not just data mesh, but each incremental data product is steeper than you expect. Try to get more people using each data product more so incremental use cases emerge. That will mean you need to do more handholding than you likely expect to get them to actually use it. Number seven, potentially controversial as well, because that adoption curve is hard, especially across data products, your data team or data product owners might need to do more connective tissue, that interoperability, that interconnectivity work with other data products to enable people to more easily consume the data across domains. Always look to drive more and deeper engagement to create a more data-driven culture.

Number eight, potentially controversial, when thinking about interconnectivity between data products, do you have the consumers create their own bridges or do you pull some of that data from one product into another? If you do pull it in, will that create duplicated data? And is that the worst thing, what is needed today for

where you are in your journey to a truly data-driven culture? These are questions you've gotta answer yourself. There isn't a specific path. Number nine, sometimes you will probably build something that is pretty customized to a use case and you can't adjust your data product easily to fit a new use case, especially a use case combining data across multiple products. See if you can push some of your data into another data product to, again, make things easy for consumers rather than having to create a new data product entirely yourself so that then that use case can exist. If you can just push data in, isn't that a good solution?

Number 10, potentially, or very controversial one, I think, it can make sense to focus more on driving adoption than creating every data product to be highly reusable. If there isn't demand for data and/or if consumers aren't actually leveraging data, a highly reusable data product will still not see much usage. Just because it is reusable doesn't mean anybody's going to use it or reuse it. People using the data is your data-driven north star metric. That's what Amy kept coming back to. She really thought that that's what is going to create success in the long run for your data mesh journey. Number 11, similarly, it's okay to take on data tech debt around your data products. If it's a conscious decision to take on that tech debt, you understand what the work will be to make it the future data product or how it fits in your broader mesh, how to make it more scalable in the future and you made tradeoffs now. That's okay.

12, another, I think, controversial one, duplication of work is better than not having the daily data available to consumers. It's okay to have the same data in multiple places for now as we crawl or walk. When we're running, or even flying, as Amy said, we won't have that duplication. And personal note here, how does this factor into MDM? There's a lot of really interesting things that Amy has a view on about having duplicate data in multiple data products, and I think it's really interesting to evaluate if that fits your own view. Number 13, providing a lot of data analysis capabilities and flexibility to people who aren't confident in their data abilities can overwhelm them. Potentially look to offer them more static views or dashboards early as they get comfortable learning to consume analytics driven insights. You can throw people in the deep end. You can really overwhelm them and then create fear of data because they don't immediately understand.

Number 14, you should want your data analysts to move beyond the work of pulling reports and answering basic questions, but you might have to leverage those data analysts as change agents to teach others to do that, to pull the reports and answer basic questions. It would be great to not have to use them that way, but you will probably need to have some group of people on the ground helping people up their data fluency. A YouTube training course will not be enough. Number 15, when you think of managing data as a product, that means data is part of the product too. So

managing the data should be part of the general product management or software development responsibilities of the domain. But that's an advanced state. You almost certainly won't start there in your mesh journey, you will have a different data product team to that whole lifecycle.

Number 16, when your data product team is too separated from the rest of the domain or the general product aspects of your company, there is a risk of that team becoming siloed and not really understanding the domain to the level they should. Number 17, when you start to build out your foundational data products, your data products might look more like data than products. But you want to move more and more towards that product mindset and output if you can. Number 18, potentially controversial, when building out a data product team, the first hire should be someone with data engineering capabilities. Scott note here, right now, I strongly agree, if we can get tooling or platforms to a better place, maybe that changes. But right now, we're seeing you need somebody who can really put a lot of stuff together at the tooling level as well as the conceptual level.

Number 19, because of the lack of a really strong user experience, a UX, data products can't really drive demand in and of themselves. Therefore, to see good usage that drives strong value, you need that really engaged stakeholder. It's incredibly difficult, maybe impossible, to create a data product so amazing that people flock to it simply because they have to use it. There are some consumer products out there that do. Finally, number 20, potentially controversial, crawl, walk, run. Build a solid foundation for your mesh in the long run. Scott notes, this would be compared to only building to specific use cases, should you build out a strong foundation of data products to support many use cases or only those use cases you are targeting. This is a very interesting question that comes up a lot. Okay, enough of just me. Let's hear from our awesome guest in this interview episode.

Okay. Very, very excited for today's episode. I've got Amy Edwards here, who's an experienced analytics and product leader, and she was involved in a data mesh implementation. So we're gonna be talking about a whole lot of different things that I'm very excited about, kind of how do you start to think about measuring something, and maybe it's not exactly the right thing, but get comfortable with that, get going, how do you build a data-driven culture in an organization. Just a whole lot of things of like what to measure, why, how to get things going in the right direction. What does a data product team actually look like? This has been something that's really been coming up in a lot of conversations. Like, how does that evolve? What should it start as? Who should they report into? The recent panel on data product management really, really highlighted that. So very excited for that. But before we get into that, Amy, if you don't mind giving people a bit of an introduction to yourself and then we can jump into the conversation at hand.

0:12:22 Amy Edwards
Yeah, happy to. Thank you Scott. And thank you for having me. So as Scott mentioned, my name is Amy Edwards, and I have 15 years of experience. I'm really focused in the data and analytics space. I started my career as a management consultant, really being the data analyst on a lot of those projects, mining the data. Used to carry around a physical hard drive full of client data and just went bonkers on it and that was focused in the healthcare space primarily. Had a career, but took a little bit of a swing at corporate strategy. And then for the past 10 years, I've been at Vista and leading analytics teams there, as well as really helping to support the emergence and the growth of data products at Vista. So I'm happy to be here to talk more about my experience doing that and bringing scalable data solutions to life and establishing a data-driven culture.

0:13:19 Scott Hirleman
Yeah. And Vista's journey has been kind of interesting to watch from afar, 'cause I was actually in... I did training with Zhamak back in, I think, 2021, honestly. And I was with a couple of Vista people in there. So I know you guys are... That they have been working on that for quite a while.

0:13:38 Amy Edwards
Yeah.

0:13:39 Scott Hirleman
So I think one thing that we... Where we wanted to start with is something I've been kind of preaching at people. Hopefully, people are starting to listen, but the whole idea of measuring the perfect thing versus measuring something. And you had a really good anecdote when we were talking in the precall about your fitness journey and kind of getting back into really good shape and things like that. So I'd love to hear how you got... It's almost like that Dr. Strangelove of how I learned to whatever and start loving the whatever. I can't remember the exact thing. But that you kind of have to get over yourself, that you're not going to be measuring the perfect thing at the start and you're gonna figure out what starts to matter. So I'd love to hear the anecdote, but also what you saw about that and where you'd recommend people start as they're figuring out what actually does matter.

0:14:35 Amy Edwards
Yeah, absolutely. I wanted to start here because when it comes to start establishing a data-driven culture, it's like, number one, are you measuring anything? Are you measuring... And maybe not necessarily the right thing, but are you measuring your progress? And it's really important to really separate out the vision versus where you really are today. There are a lot of really great metrics out there to measure many

different things in the ecommerce space. And as you mentioned, I'd like to think about my own personal journey and as I've been trying to get back in shape, and I've had kids over the past few years, I'm like, "Okay, I wanna be able to run... I did a 5K at this time five years ago. I wanna be able to do that." It's like, "Well, you're not gonna do that... " If that's what I'm gonna measure and be like, "Okay, well, I ran under a 10 minute mile before I had kids." Are you gonna do that from the get go? No, 'cause that's just gonna feel like failure. And so it's not about quality, it was about quantity first. It was like, "First, I just gotta get myself out there. First, I gotta just actually go out, run, achieve a certain cadence, quantity over quality, to start, and eventually, that'll start to pick up."

I think the hardest part of that is when is the right time to flip over? When do you change that metric over? When do you move from, "Okay, I do see that now that I've been able to establish five times a week." Okay. You will probably start to see... And I personally have seen it. I have seen my per mile time go down as a result. So you start to see and you're like, "This is awesome. It's starting to get there. Now maybe I can start switching over," maybe not to that like eight minute mile mark that I was five years ago, but maybe let's just... I'm at 10 now. Let's try to do 9:30 instead." And so really piecing apart the vision that's where I want to be. That's my end goal, versus where we are today and what makes the most sense and thinking about products and data products. For teams that I've led, thinking about how do we get people to use, for example, internal data products like dashboards. There's nothing wrong with starting with... 'Cause this is the first thing. You can't get value out of those if people aren't even using it.

So number of users was what we started with. It is what we look at. We wanna see that grow. We wanna see that change. And then it was about after a year, I think for my team, when we started having these dashboards live, that's when we started to flip the switch. We're like, "Great. We see a lot of people picking this up. Now we wanna focus on, well, how often are they power users?" We define for ourselves what's a power user, someone who... We use Looker. Someone who is using Explorers instead of just loading a static view, and they're doing that X times a month. That was what we started to define, and we started to just evolve on our own because we saw that we were making traction and we wanted to just always do better.

0:17:39 Scott Hirleman
Yeah. And I've disparaged the idea of usage as a metric in and of itself, because in vacuum, usage doesn't have any sense. Exactly what you're talking about, if this one data product is for the quarterly board meeting and it's very, very crucial for that one thing, but it's got one user and it gets accessed once a quarter or something that's in tax, really important for tax season. I always think about this with financial services. And as a consumer, tax season is really important for those data products. But

somebody not accessing something around tax when it's in November or December and there's no new tax filing, there's no new anything like that. Of course, they're not accessing it.

So understanding what would good look like even on a usage metric basis, I think you have to get a sense of what is our actual goal. Like, do we want as many users as possible or do we want that super, super deep usage. And we only want three or four users because those are gonna be the ones that are really powering really, really advanced data scientists that are really digging into this problem. And so, how did you start to think about framing that when people do want apples to apples kind of comparisons, like when they wanna say, "Okay, what is this data product... Like, is this data product successful versus this other data product?" And you go, "Okay, how can I make apples and orange comparisons around that usage?" Or were you really thinking about it only at the individual data product level and you didn't really start to say, "What is our full ecosystem?" 'Cause that's where you just start to get more and more complex.

0:19:33 Amy Edwards
Yeah. Well, the teams that I've led, we had multiple products within our universe that we own. And we definitely saw some that were more widely used than others, for sure. But to be honest, I hear you. Seasonality is definitely an important piece to keep in mind. There are just some products that are just gonna be used at certain points than others, and there's not a lot that you could do about that. But at the same time, I think you do wanna strive to build products that can... 'Cause the challenge is that... What we found is the challenge is that once you get someone up and running on it, that's when you can really start to extract more value. Because the adoption curve is actually pretty steep, is what we found. And people are more comfortable using the same type of tool, the same product. And so this is a double edged sword, but we wanted to try to get more use cases in it so that people can be more comfortable with it so that they're not having to... Otherwise, we'd be creating... And we were very early in the journey as well. So I think there just were a lot of basic things to do, as opposed to flipping between data products.

I think one thing we found also, at Vista, we're split up in domains. But for example, everybody wants to look at order volume. There's not one product to look at order. You can look at it, actually, in a lot of different dimensions. And not every data product was built by... We had many different data product teams. So if you made them bounce between different data products, that actually... A lot of people just didn't. They just stuck with what they knew. So there was a little bit of strategy in terms of like, "Okay, how do I make this very valuable? How do I get more people... " And maybe it's less about, "How do I make my data product more valuable?" but, "How do I really help feed this data-driven culture? How do I keep with this

momentum that we have, that great, they're in this product? How do we get them to want to use more data? How do we help enable that?" And that was really what, I would say, we were more focused on.

0:21:44 Scott Hirleman
Did you have... So I've had this... There's this kind of slider scale on how big or how small data products are. And what you just said there as well brings up this question of... You said, a lot of times, people stay within one data product. So you can think about on the greater scale of your implementation, what's the friction between those things, but was there any sense or any kind of pull towards creating these Frankensteinian type of data products that are just these massive, massive things just so that somebody doesn't have to go into a different data product, but then it becomes this thing that is it's own mini warehouse and it becomes hard to evolve and things like that? Was there any pull towards that, or was that something where everybody was cognizant that that's an antipattern to really start to head in that direction?

0:22:41 Amy Edwards
We were definitely a little bit more decentralized, but I think the way that my team saw... We... There were some data attributes that my team was able to surface, and we're like, "Great. We have a data product." They're like, "Wow, but I really wanna be able to marry it to this, this, and this, 'cause I think that'll drive a... And that already existed in another data product." So it kind of became more of like a, well, I can do the work and pull what someone else curated into my data product, or I push what I did into someone else's data product. And there was already a lot of critical mass in this one certain, in certain areas, to be honest. And so thinking about, we wanna really help people get to data and improve... Like, use data in their day to day. What is the right way to do it to get them to use it? What do I think is the path of least resistance for them?

So we thought about the path of least resistance for us, but we also thought about the path of least resistance for them. But you do bring up a good point. I think we just haven't gotten to that point of this Frankenstein where everybody started pushing everything in one direction. But I think... And that's something that will have to be managed over time, but it is really just trying to figure out like, what is the best I can do to help accommodate what my customer wants? Because that's what products are. Products, you have to be customer focused. "How do I fit this into their life, and how do I help them adopt this thing?"

0:24:11 Scott Hirleman
Yeah. I think it's a tough question, and it's one of those things of... I'm seeing people create kind of almost recipes and go, "Hey, if you want to answer this question, here's

the recipe for this." But then you're kind of prebaking things for people and you're not creating this capability to explore as much, but you are pre-answering their questions that are the most common questions. So it's this kind of push and pull of... Like, how do you think about... You were talking about friction and things like that. How do you think about creating that desire and that, maybe the belief in self? I can't think of the exact word that I'm trying to think of, but like, somebody thinks that they're capable of going and doing this instead of only looking at the precanned answers that they're capable of going and building up their own view of things. How do you balance between those, of like, Hey, we want this to be self serve in terms of we're serving up insights versus we're serving up data for people to create their own insights, versus like, Are we serving up even the insight and the so what? Like, what should they do with this insight? How did you think about balancing those, or was that decided at a corporate level?

0:25:35 Amy Edwards
I feel like I heard maybe two different questions in there, Scott. I feel like there was a question maybe in there at the beginning on like, how do you balance out getting to what the customer wants, something totally customized for them. And then there's a second part of the question, of like, and then taking it that next step of... 'Cause pulling data doesn't derive insights. You have to actually triangulate and really digest what you're seeing and create, and figure out what is this telling me? And so just to... That's how I... Does that sound right to you, that there was these two parts?

0:26:11 Scott Hirleman
I have a history of asking sometimes seven part questions, so two is pretty good for me.

0:26:18 Amy Edwards
Okay. I'm gonna start with the first one, the first part, where you asked about people who want totally customized product. I think we were looking at where is the opportunity right now? There was a lot of opportunity for us to inject and grow a data-driven culture at Vista. And if you wanna create something totally customized, we can do that. And we did that. That's actually where my team started. We had a team that was ready and willing and they already had all these, basically, user stores ready to go, and they were like, "This is exactly what I want. This is what I need." And we're like, "Perfect." We have an engaged customer that is already telling us everything they want, and we can build what they want, and we went ahead and did that.

And then that data started to... People started to get wind of these data products, heard about it. And then they found out, "Oh, and these are totally different stakeholders in the company. I really like that. But could I marry it with this?" And

we're like, "Well, again, thinking about what is the path of least resistance, okay, well, we're not gonna create something totally... 'Cause what you just asked for is not gonna fit into what we just created custom to this team. However, if I add it to this other data product, I know you're gonna get what you need." And so it was a little bit of really dependent on what the use case was and how do we meet it at that point in time, and who are our target customers. We did have a very specific group of customers more recently where we were trying to really help support a group of product managers. And so that became the team that we really wanted to focus in on and really support to ensure that we're developing products in this specific area using data and evidence. So that's how we balance that. It was no like catchall sort of like, "Well, we only create custom," sort of thing.

0:28:18 Scott Hirleman
Well, and how do you think about reusability in there? Because that's the thing where Zhamak has been pretty against creating something that's overly customized, at least in the delivery mechanism, so other people couldn't leverage it. Or you think about the upstream, the source aligned data products shouldn't be overly customized. They should be... You shouldn't necessarily throw in absolutely everything you can into them. It should be customized to what the initial use case are so that you can add to them, but that it's about delivering data at the source aligned thing and then delivering more closer to the insight or data plus insight at the consumer aligned data product or the aggregate data product. So how did you think about balancing, "Well, we need to build something that somebody can actually use, 'cause if we just deliver them data, that doesn't really... Like, hardly, anybody's gonna go, "Oh, thank you for this data. I'm going to derive all of the insights. I want this around my specific question or my specific use case." So how did you balance all of that back and forth of customization versus reusability? But a lot of times people are saying overly reusable? Like, if it serves no... It ends up serving no one, because it's supposed to serve everyone and it ends up satisfying no one.

0:29:41 Amy Edwards
Yeah. To be honest, it really was directed by each of the individual customers, and I think it almost achieved the right balance sort of organically. Now, I'm not gonna say that the balance that we achieved is exactly the balance. I think it still remains to be... I think it's a good point that you can't... If you create something custom for everyone, you're gonna have too many things to manage. And eventually, that's not scalable. You need... The point of this is to create... Products should be... We need to create scalable solutions. Otherwise, it's way too much... I mean, this is a misuse of the term, but it's going to generate a massive source of tech debt over time when you have a lot of different things to maintain, a lot of different things that you're probably not maintaining that well. And so I definitely see the challenge of, yeah, long term customization isn't where you wanna go.

I'll be honest, I wasn't thinking down that path quite yet because we were still just so focused on adoption and trying to figure out what was the path of least resistance to get data in people's hands in the fastest way. And really kind of creating that... It's almost like creating that need. You didn't have it before. Now you have it. And then one day, I'm gonna probably need to consolidate and probably put it all in one place, but now, you know you can't live without it. So you're gonna have to figure out how to come over here one day. That's how I'd like to think about it, that we were just so heavily focused on really trying to inject data as fast as we can into the organization.

And we weren't creating, I would say, completely custom... So we were either creating custom scalable solutions for a very specific group of people that were our main business partners, but then we were also then just really pushing our data in the direction of other data products. I already know we have these other stakeholders across the organization that really want this data that exists in this data product that we built. It's just not in the way that they need it, and they wanna join other data sets to it. Well, if we push it over here... So I wouldn't say that what we were doing when we were at that Frankenstein mode... It's still scalable in terms of being able to... It's not scalable over time if we don't organize it well and maintain it well, but I think it wasn't so much this like, Okay. Well, it's static, and it's only this view. There's still a lot of opportunity to manipulate the data within those other data products.

0:32:17 Scott Hirleman
Yeah. I think what you're talking about is a conscious choice of taking on tech debt, where historically in data, it hasn't really been a conscious choice, it's just been part of the operational way that people have done data. And so if you make a conscious choice, at least you're actually saying, "Okay, I understand the tradeoffs here. And if the tradeoffs make sense, why wouldn't I do it?" versus, "Hey, the long term vision is, this is the way exactly the data mesh should work. So we don't have to fit to that at the start." Adelle McDonald at ANZ Plus was on while back. And I always laugh 'cause she was eight and a half months pregnant when she was on, and it was just having the time of her life kind of thing. She just thought it was hilarious, to be honest. But she was talking about kind of sneakily adding more and more capabilities because they weren't really ready to push a ton of the work into the domains, but they kept adding more and more software capabilities around data to their developer platform. And so then they were ready. And they were like, "Hey, we know that we're not ready to really do full fledged data products in this really scalable way, but we're setting ourselves up so we can." But it's like that idea of I know where the end state is, but I don't have to try and match that immediately. I mean, you've got...

0:33:47 Amy Edwards
No. Yeah. That's a really good point.

0:33:50 Scott Hirleman
You've got kids. They're growing up. You're not like, "Okay... " I don't know how old they are, but like, you're not saying, "Okay, I have to have their college majors picked out right now," and they're 3 or 4.

0:34:03 Amy Edwards
Well, I think it's all about the journey too. It's all about... I think that's a really good point that you brought up, that it is conscious taking on of tech debt, but not to the level of tech debt that we operated before. I think that's a really important piece to keep in mind. So when we talk about... You know, we're still building scalable data products. It's just maybe not this one stop shop where, okay, well, this data point you could technically get in three different data products. Okay. So it's a little bit duplicate, but there's still refreshable reports that people can manipulate to be able to get the data they need, as opposed to relying on an analyst every month, tapping them on the shoulder and saying, "Hey, I need that report again. Hey, I need that report again." And so it's relative to where we have been. And in terms of that reliance on a data analyst to be able to pull the data, it was all about how do I get people to grab the data that they want on their own? How do I create that self service? And so while that self service could happen in many places, and it's a little bit duplicate, it was... That's what we wanted. It's almost like we wanted to get people to just start working that muscle. That was really important.

0:35:18 Scott Hirleman
And I think that's a conscious choice of tradeoffs. If you're like, "Okay, we, absolutely do not want duplicate work," then it can be that there's higher friction to getting towards information, to getting towards data, but it does mean that you have that more concrete closest source of truth. Zhamak really hates the idea of a single source of truth 'cause it just doesn't really make sense. It doesn't hold up in the real world. But if you do have three different products that have the same type of data point, maybe somebody might be leveraging them in slightly different ways, and it's like, "Okay, is this perfect?" But again, you're making a choice if you're informing people. I think that's another road to go down with that data-driven organization of like, how do you get people informed as to how they should be going about this? Because it's not as though you just go, "Hey, here is the data. Go do the thing." Versus like, how do you get them motivated to do it, but also get them comfortable and feeling like they are in a spot where they can go do that and it's not going to lead to trouble.

0:36:29 Amy Edwards
Yeah. And I think this goes well with something else that you and I talked about, the role of the data analysts. It's kind of... I think what I was looking to achieve, where I was trying to get to was a place where our people were accessing data. They knew

what data existed and they were accessing it. So when it comes to these things, for example, we're talking about what do you measure? Okay, great. If you finally figured out what is this... What is my north star metric? Or what is my lighthouse metric? What is the thing that defines success for me? Who's responsible for measuring it? Well, I would want to... Who's responsible for measuring it and monitoring it, and also looking at those more diagnostic metrics of figuring out, "Okay, why did it go up and down?"

Okay. Well, maybe we do build some sort of a dashboard, call it a product, if you will, to help enable non-analysts to get to it. But we gotta get them to be looking at it, as opposed to waiting for an analyst to tell them, "So how are we doing? What do we need to do next?" This is something that, in a truly data-driven culture, it is infused across every... It's across every role. Every role is empowered to be able to look at this and see this. It's not just isolated to the data analyst to do these, what I consider more basic sort of reports. I think there's a lot more, and that's really what I was trying to get at with making that data accessible, trying to meet those needs, those immediate needs, that least path of resistance for our stakeholders so they could start having it as part of their day to day.

0:38:04 Scott Hirleman
Yeah. I think it's tough to get people to, a, want to do that if they're not already wanting to do it, but it's also getting people to be comfortable that they're good enough. Did you have anything around training... And I'd love to wrap in what you were talking about as the role of the data analyst, but did you have anything to enable people to feel like they were at that level?

0:38:29 Amy Edwards
I think we learned that we needed that. I think what we originally launched was... For those that are familiar with Looker, just explores. And so you can have on the left hand panel, you see all the different metrics that are available, and you can do all kinds of different visualizations, you can drag and drop, all this fun stuff, very flexible. But they don't know how to use it. All they see is this left hand panel and this blank canvas, and they were like, "Wait. What?" And so we learned very quickly that that high level of flexibility is not the place to start. We gotta get people up and running. We maybe just need to start off, instead of having a dashboard, have looks which are basically static... Sorry. Instead of having... Just coming out with an Explorer words ultimate flexibility, you come out with a look, a dashboard. That is a little bit more static, but at least it's starting to get them to see like, "Okay, this is how you access it," get more familiar with it, familiar with what data exists, work with them to actually build it. And then over time... It's very hard for a dashboard to be static over time, and we always learn as we go along, "Oh, this visualization should actually be this," or, "I'd love to put this metric alongside this metric over a different time span," etcetera. We

do it with them.

So we actually had... I led a team that... I led not only data product, but I also led the team of analysts that were embedded within product teams, that were using these products. And first, what we found was that... We did find that our analysts were using the Explorers more than our intended end user, 'cause it was two complex. So then we started to get to the point, "Okay." It's like if you know the data exists in a data product, do a pair... We call it just a pair programming session. Do it with them. Have them drive. Walk them through it step by step. And so our analysts were kind of playing this role of being the adoption leaders of like, "Hey, the data does exist. Here it is. And we'll learn as we go along together, and we'll adapt what we've built before. If we have a static view, we'll add to it together," etcetera. So that's kind of the journey that we took to realize that like, okay, you can't come out with this ultimately flexible thing, and learning the adoption piece is just so incredibly critical, and you have to take baby steps. It's like you don't just throw the baby in to swim, you let them wait in the water a little bit. You let them get comfortable a little bit. It's kind of that same thing. Don't just let them drown, throw them in and just let them drown. 'Cause I think that's what happened when we launched some of our initial things.

0:41:09 Scott Hirleman
Yeah. And I think that really wraps in well with the question that we were talking about in the precall again, of like what is the data analyst's role? It sounds like what you're thinking of is they're kind of a transition agent. They're a change agent to getting people to more and more data fluent as they're helping them along, but then I think you said that we're kind of underutilizing what a data analyst really could be in the long run. So I'd love to think about, or I'd love to hear what your thoughts are on going from the start, that crawl, walk, run, even... Or if you wanna do it in water, it's much more dangerous...

0:41:52 Amy Edwards
Yeah, true.

0:41:52 Scott Hirleman
To be like, "Oh, you can just crawl in water." No, that doesn't work when you're in a swimming pool. But how you think about that approach to moving things or what you saw with that. And then maybe in that same analogy of, historically, we have had sink or swim for data products or projects before data products that were data projects. They were kinda sink or swim. So how do you think about that in the here and now as we move forward where a data product can come out and it's not very baked? Is it in product status or whatever it's called. It doesn't really matter. But how do you think about that as the equivalent journey with that data analyst? So again, sorry for having two questions intertwined with each other, but I think they wrap

together quite nicely.

0:42:49 Amy Edwards
Yeah. So with regards to data analysts, you said using them as a change agent. I do wanna clarify, I wish I didn't have to use them as a change agent. And I've lived in a world where I feel like analysts wear so many hats. Shout out to all the analysts out there. I used to be one, hands on keyboard. But they do a lot. And in some organizations, I've seen that they have to play the role of the data engineer 'cause there just aren't enough data engineers and they're just kinda strapping things together. And then in this particular scenario, we're talking about how they're being those change agents, training people how to use reports and how to pull data. And we realize that that was critical though. So I wish I didn't have to ask the analyst to do that. And what I don't know and what I am challenged with right now is, is there a specific role here for that? Is there something, or is that part of the product manager's role? Who owns that responsibility of really that adoption piece? It's almost like you think about products, for example. Who is responsible for the installation instructions? What is that role? That's almost like what I think about when I think about these data products.

And so I ended up using analysts. That's what I had available to me. And part of that was, I knew that that was necessary in order for our analysts to be able to be freed up. If we can't train them up, if we can't train non-analysts... And I call this... Actually, there's some literature out there about the rise of the citizen analyst. If we can't achieve the rise of the citizen analyst, the analyst will continue to be playing the role of the citizen analyst and not be tapping into their super powers, which is doing more than just pulling reports and doing some diagnostics. Should be pursuing higher complexity business questions that everybody agrees we need to get to, but the to do list of the citizen... If we don't have the citizen analyst, the analyst's to do list is just too big to get to those fancy fun things and high value things. It wouldn't make sense to. It is not to say that you should forego the basics, but it's like if you don't have the basics, then you're just not keeping track. I like to think of it out it as, it's the health of your product. Everybody needs to know the health of their product. If you don't know the health of the product, then doing all these MRIs and CTs without knowing the basic vitals, it's like, "Well, that seems a little bit weird." I don't think that's how you practice medicine, although I'm not a doctor.

0:45:34 Scott Hirleman
Well, and I hate the concept of the citizen data scientist for the exact reason that I like the concept of the citizen analyst, because the citizen... Data science is overly steeped in statistics and a lot of very specific things, and it's about going in and finding this data raw and processing it, versus enabling the citizen analyst is... It is somewhat of... I've talked about this with Marisa Fish was the one who came up with

the, or came to me with the concept of, are you giving someone the data or the insight? But I extended that to, are you giving someone the data, the insight or the so what? And that we're pulling people in that citizen analyst role into... That we're at least giving them the insight or we're no longer giving them just the so what of, "Hey, here's the insight, and what does it mean, and what should you do from it," we're trying to pull them more and more towards the insight, and maybe they can start to move more and more even in towards generating their own insights from the data as they get more comfortable. But again, it's that crawl, walk, run. You can't just go and say, "Hey, you now have access to all the data. Generate some insights," when people are like, 'I don't know what... "

0:46:52 Amy Edwards
So scary. No. Yeah. I have so many analysts that are like, but if I train them... If I give them access to this, I know there's gonna be something that happens, that I'm gonna be like, "No!" And so you're 100% right that there's definitely... And that's where... Our analysts, we have them embedded in product teams. They're working hand in hand. And they were really in that... As much as I didn't want them to be taking on this extra role, they were within the teams, they were embedded in the teams and can really understand and really see how is the data being used. That data literacy is an important piece, and this is where I think about it as, I do think that there is this separate role out there with regard to... It's not just being able to learn how to use a data product, but it is that data literacy piece, for sure. But I agree with the rise of data scientists, I've seen those terms out there, and I find that very scary.

0:47:51 Scott Hirleman
And I don't know that they're generating very much value for a regular person that's not focused on data science, is doing data science, versus when they're doing analytics, when they're doing queries. Like, of course, that, not necessarily in and of itself, has value, but it's a much greater chance of generating value and much lower chance of creating something that's of significant negative value.

0:48:12 Amy Edwards
Yeah. I also wonder if the citizen data scientist term is out there too, because I think that there's a lot of... I also believe that there's a lot of people out there that don't really know the difference between an analyst and... I've seen job descriptions and I was like, "I'm a data scientist." And you're actually more of an advanced data analyst. That line sometimes can be so blurry. It is very blurry, I think. But I hypothesize that could be the case too. But as someone in the analytic space, I do find the rise of the citizen data scientist term... If that truly is what someone believes in, I find that maybe too big of a step for where we are right now.

0:48:51 Scott Hirleman

Agreed. Maybe we can get there. So I think this transitions well into what we were planning on talking about, of some of the things you were pointing about, about who owns what when it comes to a data product and data product success. How do you see data product teams... At beginning of a journey, how do you think that they evolve? How do you think about... Should it be a separate, should it be part of the product team? Who should they report into? How do you... Is it that it should just be software developer duties that just get put on them and they're developing the data product? How do you think about that at the start of a journey? And Zhamak shared her vision of everybody is just kind of a generalist developer. And maybe somebody is a little bit more focused on data, so they're the data product developer, but they're still just a software developer around data. But I don't think we're anywhere near that right now. So I'd love to hear how you thought about that at the start and what you saw that kind of worked around the data product team. And as data products and as domains matured, did that change at least the dynamics, even if it didn't change exactly how you were structuring the team, but maybe you were seeing some things where you'd say, "Maybe we could review structuring this team in the future?"

0:50:09 Amy Edwards
Yeah. For me, a truly data-driven organization, a data product team is a product team. To isolate data as a very specific siloed thing... Again, data it should be part of the whole fabric of the organization. It's not this thing that exists over here and that we're trying to shop it out. That's the challenge that I've had, where it's kind of we're trying to sell this product. We didn't get that... There wasn't that buy in from the start. And so I think over time... And should you get that buy in? Well, maybe not, to be honest, because maybe then you'll never stand up data product team. It's kind of a chicken or egg sort of situation. If you wait for that alignment, you may never, ever start. And so I definitely see that conundrum. I understand that conundrum. But I think in a world where data is truly valued in the organization, I think it's more... It's one of... It's a tool. It's in the toolkit of every product team. How do I use... Okay, great. How do I monitor the health of my product? That should be something I'm... That should be something that product managers should be building and making sure that they have readily available to themselves. Data can also be other data products models that are driving experiences, AIML that is driving experiences.

Again, it's just another thing in the toolkit of product teams to be able to elevate the customer experience. It's another thing... It's a foundational thing in their toolkit to really make sure that they're understanding who is my customer? What are they buying? What does their journey look like? Etcetera. So I'm a firm believer that over time, that these worlds collide, essentially. That there still will be data platform teams. I think that's a totally separate topic. But in terms of using data to drive your product development and your experiences and to understand what's happening with your products, I think that really starts to become more infused, that that needs to

become more infused in order to become a data-driven organization.

0:52:33 Scott Hirleman
Yeah. Well, and so I could interpret what you said a couple of different ways. When you said it's just part of the product team, do you think of it as a separate product team to start, that there is a separate team around the data product, or do you think it's just you say, Hey, this is a product and you are responsible... You, product manager, are responsible for the data that is coming out of this, thus, you as the product manager are also the data product manager, or do you think of it as a separate product entity and that you think that it should be a separate team, or do you think it kind of depends or it's going to evolve and that at the end of the day, it is just part of the domain's product, and so it becomes that it's under the product manager, but data product management right now is so complex and complicated, and so, because everything is still very, very nascent and new and we don't really know how to do this, that you have to have a separate team of a couple of developers or a developer and a product manager that are specific to the data products? So I'd love to hear, if someone came to you and said, "Amy, I'm at the start of my journey. How should I build out my data product teams?" what would you advise them and maybe what would you say, two, three years into the journey, where you think it might evolve to?

0:53:54 Amy Edwards
So I think because I know, data... You can't just take any software and you're off the street and say that you're gonna do data engineering work, and you can't take any software engineer and tell them that you're gonna be a data scientist now. So knowing that there are just those... And that's why these are very separate functions and areas of expertise, as well as analytics. I do think in many cases, as a separate team does make sense.

But here's an analogy I wanna put out there. It's like how, when you think about a group product team, a domain comprised of several product managers. And let's say, for example, it's a website and you have your product team that's focused on front end and I'm focused on back end. It's analogous to that. Okay, great. So here's our product group. We have this product team that's focused on frontend, this product team that's focused on backend, this product team that's focused on data, this product team that's focused on the... And then we have platform teams. I think they need to be organizationally aligned, I guess I would say, is how I like to think about it. Again, they don't necessarily have to be totally built into the same product team, that front end team doesn't have to fully own all of it, but I think it's that alignment within the team, within... That they're part of the product organization, almost. I think that's one thing I see. I see them tend to pop up in separate areas of the organization, and I think that silo can be very risky in terms of then just trying to... It becomes a barrier,

almost, to trying to build products.

0:55:43 Scott Hirleman
So do you think that they should be reporting more into the product org versus the data org? 'Cause I think this has been a question of... I mean, even a former colleague of yours, Jill Maffeo, was talking about this on the panel, of where should they report into, and does it start in the data team because it is more about the data than it is being a product at the very start and then it slowly should change into reporting in to the product team or reporting in to the domain, depending on how you do product management, or how do you think of that at the start versus... And what would be some sign posts that you think maybe I should change?

0:56:23 Amy Edwards
Yeah.

0:56:24 Scott Hirleman
I know it's a hard, hard question.

0:56:25 Amy Edwards
It's a hard question. Yeah. And I think it's tough. The argument you put out there have both, have their merits. Definitely, it's a very specific space. And it's also very new, and I think that's why it's hard for us to say, hard for me to say, does it report in to product versus doesn't report in to a data and analytics organization, whatever the equivalent of the data and analytics organization is.

I think... I'm trying to... I'm very much thinking out loud here. This goes back to my comment earlier about how I see the challenge of, if you don't have that buy in immediately, you shouldn't bother starting to build data products. But at the same time, if you wait for that alignment, you may never even build a data product. I do think building it out to start from a data and analytics organization is... If you put that real world lens on it, I think everything that I've stated about like, "I'd love to see it all integrated, I'd love to see it... " That is the vision. That's how it should work. Then there's reality. And the reality is those that fully understand what it takes to be able to create data products, the amount of work it takes, the amount of manpower it takes...

I think one thing, when we really started to organize as data product teams at Vista a few years ago when we brought a CDO in, was the fact that we were able to finally build out our teams with data engineer. We needed more...We've been needing more for years. I saw it for a good part of my time at Vista. And we got the manpower we needed to really make that happen. And so I see how important that is. I don't think we could have gotten there if you didn't have somebody who fully understood what it takes to build out a data and analytics organization. So I think it's one of

those, like, it would need to shift over time. I don't think that there's a right or wrong... I think for now, it's gonna shift over time, unless you have a product leader who is extremely adept at data and analytics, slightly raise my... I'm a little bit of both here. But again, you need to have somebody who really understands, I think, what it takes to build a data and analytics organization and what it takes to have a data-driven culture. And that would be the time when those teams could fold into product.

0:58:56 Scott Hirleman
Yeah. I think, essentially, if I were to sum it up in a pithy and yet, not complete enough way would be that data products, at least at the start, are more data than they are product. And eventually, you wanna get to them being more product than they are just about the data. If you really understand how products work, then it should just be another product. It should be another aspect of a greater product portfolio, greater product strategy. But at the start, it's more data than it is product, 'cause we don't know how to build these right now.

0:59:32 Amy Edwards
That's a really good point. And if I think about the early years of when we started this too, I mean, a lot of our data products... Again, I tell people that there are three types of data products. There's curated data sets, dashboards, internal data access points, and then the customer facing models or... Etcetera. Most of our time early on was at that lower level of curated data sets, which I think there's just not a ton of appreciation for if you're not an analyst, because you don't know that like, "Okay, well, what does the data look when you don't have a curated data set?" It's pretty awful. It's only if you've, actually know how to write SQL, have tried to put raw data together and had to parse your own JSON files do you really understand, "Oh, I need that help. I need that foundation to start in order to really elevate the organization." So that's a great way to think about it, that I think it's a start, it's more data than product.

1:00:33 Scott Hirleman
It's building that foundational layer so that you can actually build out to something greater and greater. But you have to have the buy in and the momentum to actually say, "We need to do some of this blocking and tackling. We need to do some of this base level work. We need to build out the foundation," because otherwise, we're just trying to build out these things on a shaky foundation, and we're just building out more and more tech debt instead of like, how do we build this for the long term? If you wanna build this for the next quarter, okay, just keep going on these things that are not sustainable in the long run, versus if you wanna do products, you have to do the...

1:01:06 Amy Edwards
Yeah, I can't agree more. And just one point I just wanna throw in there, I got to build

out a new, a data product team from scratch at Vista during my last few years there. And it just so happened to work out that the first hire... I would do it again, this, in a second. The first person we were able to recruit was a data engineer. And I would absolutely say that's the first function you need to bring in to start, again, that foundation. It is that foundation that needs to be established first. And I think that data engineers are really important piece to make that happen.

1:01:43 Scott Hirleman
Yeah. And in talking to Zhamak about what she's building with Nextdata and stuff, I keep trying to pitch her on this tagline. She keeps saying no. But to me, it should be, building data products shouldn't suck, because it does... You need that data engineer because the leveraging... You have to really, really understand the tooling to get the tooling to do the work instead of do you understand the concepts. But if we can get to a level where it's abstracted away enough from the tooling that we can actually have that, then I don't think that you need to hire that data engineer first five years down the road. If the industry has evolved well enough, maybe you still want somebody who has software engineering around data as kind of their role instead of, "Hey, I build pipelines," instead of, "I've been doing a bunch of this software engineering around data work, and the automation and things like that," versus, specifically, building and managing pipelines. But I think right now, we don't have that option. It's just... It's like, too bad. That's the way it is.

1:02:50 Amy Edwards
Yeah. I actually have come up with this analogy about how... I think about the data engineers, they're like the plumbers. They're the rough plumbing behind the wall. They're helping... 'Cause we actually have this analogy of us that we talk, passive capital or CDO, data is like water. And so thinking about data like water, our data engineers are the rough plumbers. They're the ones that are helping to bring those pipes into the wall. It's not pretty, it's not the fun stuff, but at least it's bringing water into the house. The analysts are helping to install those faucets, allows you to access that data. And the data scientists are building things like an irrigation system, something that's not necessary, but it's really nice when you have it. And so that's how I like to think about it. And none of that happens without that rough plumbing. If you don't have the pipes to start... Yeah, and again, going back to what you said, building data product first is just a lot of data to start.

1:03:56 Scott Hirleman
So I think this wraps well into... You talked about it a little bit earlier, but one big thing that we wanted to talk about was what did you see that led to good success around data products? And if someone were to say, how do I, not necessarily ensure, but raise my probability of having a successful data product? what would be the couple of things that you would talk about? You mentioned engage stakeholder. What do

you think are the things that that goes right or that causes data products to have a much higher chance of going right, of being productive, of being of value?

1:04:39 Amy Edwards
I think I can only really say, I think you've mentioned the alignment. It is that alignment. I think is just so crucially important really embedding... It goes back to that question of... You asked, do they report into product? Do they report into data? I mean, let's not even think about those lines, be embedded within the product teams. They are your customer. Get that alignment. Don't wait for... Almost try to be like Apple. They don't even release the product... By the time the product is launched, there's all this hype before. Get that buy in to start so that once that product is launched, people are just using it. They want it immediately, as opposed to throwing something out there and seeing, "Is anybody using it?" And so, really, I think alignment... I had spoken to a former colleague about this recently, and he's been trying to really establish more of a data mesh setup at the organization. And I told him, I was like, "The buy in, I think it's the alignment with the stakeholders. Bring them along immediately." I know it's a more technical start usually, but it becomes more of a, what is the outcome you're trying to achieve together with them? And so that you can push forward together and have that adoption almost there to start.

1:06:00 Scott Hirleman
Yeah. I think the data field of dreams... I think you do have to think a little bit about, "What should I add to this data product that people might want?" But a lot of what you're even talking about is, if somebody really, really wants this, that's far different than the question of, "Hey, if we created this, would you want it?" And that thing of people never really turned down the opportunity to see more data. Because who knows. It might be, versus like, we need this. We need this to actually achieve a goal, and having that engaged person that says, "I need this for a specific reason, and I'm going to put my name on needing this," versus, "Yeah, yeah. That could be kind of nice to have." That dichotomy doesn't seem to be brought up enough.

1:06:45 Amy Edwards
Yeah. If we think about Apple again, what data products are not today, or at least even like dashboard data products, they're not... It's hard to be... I'd love to hear your perspective on this. It's hard to be super innovative when it... It's hard to create the iPhone of a dashboard data product. Apple has created this sort of like, "Oh my God, I need this." They've created their own demand sort of thing and whatever. But dashboard, it's kind of... I'm trying to think. It's kind of more a little bit table stakes. It's a little bit... It's a commodity. It should be a commodity. It should be something that everybody needs, and it's fairly basic and it has its... But you can't... It's just hard to... Apple has a ton of designers in it. Data product teams don't have designers. We only have a UX. We don't...We're building in existing... When you're creating dashboards, at

least, you're building with an existing tooling, third party tooling. And so there's not a lot that you can do to make it look flashy and sexy and fun and intuitive like an Apple product. And so that's where you have to get that tie in elsewhere, is... Unless... You can build totally from scratch and create this beautiful, bright, shiny dashboard data product, 'cause you've been given those resources.

1:08:16 Scott Hirleman
Well, and I think... So I used to cover semiconductor stocks way, way back in the day. That was my first job outta college. And so I think about the iPhone and I think about stuff like that, and to me, data products are the semiconductors that are sitting inside it. They're the things that are the workhorses that enable things to get done. And so whether you wanna use the word sexy or not, I think sometimes that can be a problematic word in data. But that, does it have to be that, does it have to be this thing that's flashy that people are really excited about the flash versus the, "What does this enable me to do?" I literally just got... Today, I got some kitchen scissors delivered. And I've always had a problem where I just... If I don't have one space and I don't have five pairs of kitchen scissors, I never have any ever. I can never find any of 'em. So I just got a bunch delivered. And so I'm really, really excited about that because it just means I don't have this problem anymore. And is that something that's gonna make people super, super excited? Maybe, maybe not, but it's like, this is the value table stakes, like you said, the core of what we need to do so that we can build these amazing things that are consumer facing. 'Cause internally, at least for myself, I don't make really... When I make a a meal, I might make something fancy, but I don't plate it. I don't think about how should I decorate this plating because that's for the external customers.

And maybe we do wanna think about internal customers and things like that. And if you make your partner a nice meal or something like that, maybe you do focus a little bit more on the platting. But it's something where I don't know that it needs to be to be super successful and super valuable. Can we get over that need? Because it is... Like people have been talking about, there isn't a UX for a data product.

1:10:23 Amy Edwards
There isn't. Yeah.

1:10:26 Scott Hirleman
Or there is a UX maybe, but there definitely isn't a UI. And so is the UX just the documentation or is the UX on the data platform, or is it... How do you think about that? So I just start to wonder how do we get to a space where we might be able to have that really, really blockbuster thing that's built on top of the data product? Or is it the data product? I don't know that it's ever gonna be the data product. Or even if it's the consumer aligned data product, what does it enable? What business did...

Like, data for the sake of data is just expensive ones and zeros. So is it the thing that enables this amazing business result?

And you talk about that... I think it was NAV was talking about anytime that they have a successful result of a data product, they always have the producer of the data, even if it's an end business result, the producer of the data gets to be the one that presents this amazing use case and all the value that was delivered, because they wanna thank the people who actually enabled it by creating the data. But at the end of the day, data is powering things. It's not the thing itself. If you just have... Unless you're selling data, data for the sake of data, it's just... So does it have to be, or does it have to be to make it the shiny thing? Is that why generative AI is taking off, 'cause it's the shiny thing and it's something totally new instead of actually doing good quality data?

1:11:58 Amy Edwards
Generative AI is definitely the bright shiny thing. It's a very distracting, shiny thing for a lot of people. Although it is cool, and I think there's a lot of potential. But no, I think data products, they're not going to be bright and shiny on their own. I think the point I was trying to make was that we don't have the opportunity to be bright and shiny to sell ourselves internally. And that's where that stakeholder alignment becomes so important because they're the ones that are gonna package it up and make it come alive. And so we hear a lot about today, everybody, if you aren't doing personalization, you're trying to do personalization. And what is at the core of personalization? Data.

1:12:38 Scott Hirleman
Data.

1:12:38 Amy Edwards
It's data. And so it's really... And getting that... And this is where I think data product leaders need to... There's a lot of influencing and partnership that we need to do around what are the type of experiences you're trying to create? How can my team help support your team? How do I get that buy in? How do I get that alignment? How do we work together? How do we line up our roadmaps so that we can do this? That's what a huge part of my role has been at Vista over the past, in the last year I was there, has been really trying to really align those roadmaps and really help find... Really start to inject data into the experience and inject machine learning and AI into the experience. And so that's where I think it's not only for those internal facing like, "Okay, you guys need data to be able to know the health of your product, so tell me what metrics you want, what data, what format," etcetera. There's definitely that, but then there's also the even higher value, in my opinion, data products, which are those experiences, those data-driven experiences that you've totally rely on. And this is where it goes back to the whole like, will there ever be a mix of data product and

product? Yeah. I think when it's a fully data-driven, I think in that, personalization is a great example of where it really all comes together.

1:14:03 Scott Hirleman
On that... Initially as data mesh was coming onto the scene, that was actually what a lot of people were calling a data product, was a product that was heavily enabled by data. And so I think that that's... I don't think that that's what we wanna call a data product, but I do think that that's what we wanna call... That's where we wanna head, that it's... We have the internal facing data product of allowing other people to leverage it, but that we also think about that the product teams themselves are so advanced and capable around their own data that they're consuming so much of their own data, that they're just kind of putting things into that same packaging for others. Some organizations are requiring anybody that's consuming data, they must consume it from their own data products that other people can then access. And so then they're like, "Oh, okay, we have to really, really up the quality, 'cause if we're the ones that are using it, we also have to do this." It's an interesting pattern. I don't really recommend it, but it's an interesting pattern that a lot of people are using.

And so is that where things go or... I don't know. It's just... It's an interesting thought experiment, and it's an interesting thing that I love to hear people's feedback on, but I don't have an opinion on it. And so when people are like, "Hey, what should I do?" I'm like, "I don't know. There these different approaches. And if you do 'em well, either one can be successful."

1:15:29 Amy Edwards
I think there's a lot for us to learn. I agree. I I don't think that there's... Do we have to be so, I guess, strict about the definition of a data product and who should be doing what. But I think it's important to recognize that data itself requires a lot of work, a lot of the early stage data curation, all that stuff that not only was needed to power internal facing data products. If you don't have that foundation, forget about building a model that is real time, facing in the customer experience. These all come together. That's kind of like... There's a crawl, walk run too when it comes to data. You can't just go to having personalized experiences when you don't have your data pipelines straightened out.

1:16:22 Scott Hirleman
Yeah.

1:16:23 Amy Edwards
And so yeah, I think... But again, how exactly we do that, we're learning as we're going along.
1:16:29 Scott Hirleman

Yeah, totally agree. It's a... But some of the challenges with these conversations is, a lot of times, people are like, "I would it wrapped up in a bow so I have all the answers," and it's like, unfortunately, data is messy. It's always gonna be messy. It's not that it's a one or a zero. It is that data is about encapsulating information. And so learning how to do data is about encapsulating what are you trying to actually accomplish instead of, this is the way, and anyone telling you this is the single way, they're selling something. I don't know what they're selling, but they're selling something. Well, this was great. I really enjoyed the conversation. I think we covered a whole heck of a lot of things. Is there anything that we didn't cover that you'd like to, or any kind of point that you'd like to make as kind of a button on the content of the episode?

1:17:17 Amy Edwards
Yeah. I would say, my biggest message probably, I think we talked a lot ton of stuff, so I don't have a ton more to add other than just really trying to bring home the point that if you're on a data product team and you're not day to day working very closely with your intended customer or stakeholder, that needs to become a bigger focus area for you. I would say that, don't get... One thing... Again, one of the biggest lessons I learned is that data products can't be built in silo. It's just, a product that sits in a closet doesn't do anything. And so don't let it sit in the closet. Don't let it be hidden away. Find those users, get those users and bring that data to life.

1:18:04 Scott Hirleman
Is the point to create a data product, or is the point to encapsulate information for leveraging for a use case? That's where I think some people get focused on the point is the data product and the point is what does it enable.

1:18:19 Amy Edwards
Agreed. Yeah. And I think thinking back to the beginning of our conversation today, Scott, we were talking about how we build their data products, customer versus not. For me, the point was a data-driven culture. How do I get more people to get their hands on the data? It wasn't about how many products do I build or how many is this... This is my product, and how do I just get more people to use this data?

1:18:43 Scott Hirleman
Fully agree. Well, I'm sure there'd be a lot of people that would love to follow up with you. Where's the best place to do that? Anything specific you'd people following up about?

1:18:52 Amy Edwards
Yeah, you could definitely reach out to me on LinkedIn, would be the best way to reach out to me. And happy to talk about really... I'm really passionate about creating, really injecting data into product development and creating data-driven cultures. So

happy to chat about any of those topics.

1:19:13 Scott Hirleman
Well, and I'll drop the link to your LinkedIn in the show notes as per usual. But again, Amy, thank you so much for your time here today. Really enjoyed the conversation. And as well, thank you everyone out there for listening. I'd again like to thank my guest today, Amy Edwards, formerly Director of Analytics and Product at Vista. You can find a link to her LinkedIn in these show notes as per usual. Thank you.

Hopefully, that interview episode was really useful for you. Please do consider getting in touch with guests from the show from these episodes. Most have said they'd really love people to reach out to them and please as well, if you've got a minute, rate and review the podcast somewhere. It really is honestly super helpful for other people looking into kind of data podcast to kinda get this in front of them. Data Mesh Radio is again, provided as a free community resource by Data Mesh Understanding. It's produced and hosted by me, Scott Hirleman. In April of 2023, I left DataStax who were wonderful in getting the data mesh community stuff started, so give them a shout for streaming and real time AI needs, but I left to start my own industry analyst kind of Information As A Service Firm. Our offerings are affordable, and you can do them on a one off or a month to month basis, throw it on the credit card, don't worry about going through purchasing and things like that. The services include lots of practitioner roundtables, one on one data mesh planning or feedback sessions and tailored introductions to other data mesh practitioners that are focused around your topics of interest, what are you actually running into challenges with.

We also have some free programs around introductions and round tables that people can kinda check out as well, check the show notes or just go to datameshunderstanding.com for more info or helpful resources. As always, if you have suggestions for guests or topics, please do get in touch as well and have a wonderful rest of your day. Now, let's hear that funky outro music.