Summary of session 1: Leveraging data and analytics

Speakers:
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The session explored the role of data in the London insurance market, focusing on its value, challenges in utilisation, and the organisational structures required to extract insights effectively. The discussion opened with an overview of the complexities of working with data in a market where information flows through multiple hands, from brokers to underwriters, operations teams, data professionals and other TPAs. The analogy of data as oil was used to illustrate the process of refining raw information into actionable insights, highlighting the often underappreciated effort involved in making data usable.

A key theme was the fragmentation of organisational structures and the difficulties in aligning different teams around a common data strategy. Many firms operate in silos, with disparate systems and legacy technology hindering seamless data integration. The challenge is compounded by varying perceptions of data's value across business units, as well as cultural resistance to adopting new processes. It was noted that in a market where policies are complex and claims infrequent but high in value, traditional analytical techniques may not always be directly applicable, requiring tailored approaches to data science and analytics.

The importance of data ownership and accountability was emphasised. In some cases, exposing incomplete or inaccurate data to senior executives created a sense of accountability that improved data entry and usage across teams. However, barriers to data quality remain, including a lack of clear business cases for investment, the difficulty of measuring the value of insights and resistance from front-line staff who may not see immediate benefits from improving data capture.

The conversation also addressed the strategic dilemma of whether to invest first in acquiring high-quality data or in hiring analytics professionals to extract insights from existing datasets. It was argued that without a clear vision for how data would be used, firms might struggle to determine what information is most valuable to collect. Additionally, firms need to balance efficiency-driven business cases with long-term investments in data strategy, moving beyond short-term cost savings to focus on growth, customer experience, and competitive positioning.

A case study was presented of an insurer leveraging algorithmic underwriting and a structured risk lifecycle to streamline data collection, enhance portfolio management and refine pricing strategies. The discussion highlighted how structuring data from the outset enables greater automation and efficiency, reducing friction in processes such as renewals and claims. However, challenges remain, particularly in data validation, accessibility and ensuring business teams can self-serve insights without relying entirely on technical specialists.

The session concluded with roundtable discussions where participants shared their own challenges and strategies. Common themes included the need to improve data standardisation, break down organisational silos and develop clear frameworks for measuring the value of data-driven insights. Many firms are still grappling with legacy systems and unstructured data, and while technology solutions exist, operational challenges, cultural resistance and regulatory considerations continue to act as barriers to progress.

Key Takeaways

1. **Cultural and organisational change is as important as technology**
   While technological advancements enable better data utilisation, successful implementation requires cultural shifts and alignment across business units. Improving data quality is not just a technical challenge but an organisational one, requiring clear accountability and engagement from all teams.

2. **Data standardisation and integration are critical for business value**
   Many firms struggle with fragmented data sources and a lack of standardisation, making it difficult to derive meaningful insights. Investing in structured data models and ensuring consistency in data entry and processing is essential to unlocking the full potential of analytics.

3. **The business case for data must go beyond efficiency gains**
   While cost reduction is often the easiest metric to justify data investment, firms must develop frameworks for measuring value in terms of growth, customer experience, and competitive advantage. Organisations need to shift their mindset from treating data as a cost centre to recognising it as a strategic asset that underpins long-term success.