ankura

Decision Intelligence Spotlight

From Business Intelligence to Decision Intelligence

Combining data engineering, data science, AI, and economic analysis to improve business performance



AUGUST 2026

Trusted Data • Causal Insight • AI-enabled Analytics • Economic Analysis • Better Decisions

Better Data Creates the Opportunity to Ask Better Questions

Organizations are investing heavily in integrated data platforms, business intelligence, and AI to better understand their operations and markets. These capabilities create significant value by giving decision-makers timely access to trusted information. However, better data and more advanced technology also create an opportunity to ask and answer more sophisticated business questions.

A dashboard can show that revenue declined, costs increased, or customer retention changed, but the next questions are often more complex: What is driving the change? What is likely to happen next? What would happen if the business intervened? And, ultimately, what should the business do?

Answering these questions requires more than any single technology or analytical method. Data engineering creates an integrated and governed information foundation. Data science and AI identify patterns, process complex information, generate predictions, and enable analytical capabilities to operate at scale. Economic analysis provides frameworks for understanding behavior and incentives, estimating causal effects, evaluating tradeoffs, and optimizing decisions. Combined with business expertise and human judgment, these capabilities transform an established data environment from reporting infrastructure into a powerful engine for decision-making and performance improvement.

From Business Intelligence to Decision Intelligence

Business questions can be considered along an analytical continuum. Each stage builds on the capabilities before it and moves the organization further from observing performance toward understanding what drives it, anticipating outcomes, evaluating potential interventions, and determining the action expected to create the greatest value.

Analytical Stage	Business Question	Business Purpose
Descriptive	What happened?	Monitor performance
Diagnostic	What factors are associated with the outcome?	Identify potential drivers
Predictive	What is likely to happen?	Anticipate future conditions
Causal	What caused the outcome, and what would an intervention change?	Determine which actions affect outcomes
Prescriptive	What should we do?	Select the action expected to create the greatest value

Descriptive analysis establishes visibility through dashboards, KPIs, and recurring reporting. Diagnostic and predictive analyses extend that foundation by identifying relationships within the data and estimating future outcomes. Together, these capabilities help organizations understand where performance is changing, which factors may be associated with the change, and what is likely to happen next.

However, relationships and predictions do not necessarily establish what caused an outcome or which intervention will change it. Causal analysis estimates the effect of a decision, policy, program, or other action by considering what would likely have happened without it. This distinction is essential: Predicting which customers may leave, for example, does not identify which intervention will cause them to stay.

Prescriptive analysis moves from estimating outcomes to selecting actions. It combines expected behavioral responses with costs, benefits, operational constraints, risk, and organizational objectives to determine which available action is expected to create the greatest value. Applications include pricing, staffing, inventory management, procurement, marketing, and resource allocation.

Bringing Decision Intelligence to Life

Practical applications demonstrate how data science, AI, and economic analysis can improve revenue, margin, cost, and operational performance. Integrated data, governance, and business intelligence establish the foundation for more advanced analysis. Once these capabilities are in place, the same data environment can support more sophisticated questions by combining internal data with relevant external signals, such as competitor pricing, vendor costs, and market and consumer trends.

Economic analysis and data science provide methods for making this transition. Rather than simply identifying changes in prices, costs, or customer behavior, these methods can help determine what is driving those changes, anticipate future outcomes, evaluate potential interventions, and identify the actions most likely to create value. These capabilities can be applied across a range of business areas to improve decisions and performance.

Action Area	Illustrative Business Questions	Potential Analytical Methods
Pricing and Promotions	How will customers respond to a price change? What price maximizes margin or profit? Do promotions generate incremental demand or primarily shift purchases across time?	Elasticity estimation, regression analysis, causal inference, and optimization
Sourcing and Negotiations	What should the organization be paying? Which supplier characteristics explain cost differences? Where does the organization have negotiating leverage?	Should-cost modeling, multivariate regression, and benchmarking

Demand and Supply Planning	What will future demand be? What factors drive changes in demand? How should inventory, capacity, or other resources respond?	Forecasting, demand estimation, and optimization
Customer and Market Strategy	Which customers are most valuable? What factors are associated with retention? Which interventions actually change customer behavior?	Customer profitability analysis, churn modeling, segmentation, and causal inference

1 Action Area, 5 Levels of Analysis

Not every organization or business problem will require the same type or level of analysis. The process should begin with the business question, followed by an assessment of the available data and selection of the appropriate analytical approach. The objective is to translate an established data foundation and relevant market intelligence into understandable, actionable business decisions.

Within pricing and promotions, for example, descriptive analysis may identify the organization's and competitors' current prices; diagnostic analysis can identify factors associated with differences in price, volume, and margin; and predictive analysis can estimate demand at different prices. Causal analysis can then estimate how a price change would affect purchasing behavior, while prescriptive analysis combines these findings with costs, constraints, and business objectives to determine the price that creates the greatest value.

Combining Technology, Economics, and Human Judgment

Creating actionable decision intelligence requires complementary capabilities rather than a single technology, analytical method, or area of expertise. Data engineering establishes an integrated, governed foundation of internal and external information. Data science and AI identify patterns, process complex information, generate predictions, and enable analytical capabilities to operate at scale. Economic analysis provides frameworks for understanding behavior and incentives, estimating causal and behavioral responses, evaluating tradeoffs, and optimizing decisions. Business expertise and human judgment identify the questions that matter, incorporate institutional and industry context, evaluate feasibility and risk, and translate analytical findings into practical action.

Bringing these capabilities together moves an organization from knowing that business performance or market conditions have changed to understanding what is driving the change, anticipating what is likely to happen, evaluating how potential interventions could affect outcomes, and determining which action is most likely to create value.

In this way, the enterprise data environment becomes more than reporting infrastructure. It becomes the foundation for a continuous cycle of measurement, analysis, decision-making, implementation, and performance improvement, helping organizations translate investments in data, analytics, and AI into measurable business results.

How Ankura Can Help

Ankura combines business and economic expertise with data engineering, data science, AI, and custom solution development to turn complex business questions into practical decisions and measurable performance improvement.

1 Establish the Data Foundation	2 Answer the Questions That Matter	3 Build Decision Solutions	4 Operationalize and Measure Results
Integrate, govern, and enrich internal and external data so analysis begins with trusted information.	Apply predictive, causal, economic, and optimization methods matched to the business decision.	Develop custom analytics, AI-enabled tools, and workflows that embed insight into day-to-day decisions.	Pilot, implement, monitor, and refine solutions to drive adoption and measurable financial and operational value.

From insight to action: Ankura helps clients design, build, and sustain the capabilities that improve business performance.

Contacts



Meade Monger
meade.monger@ankura.com



Thijn van der Heijden
thijn.vanderheijden@ankura.com



Kelly Cruise
kelly.cruise@ankura.com

Ankura Consulting Group, LLC (“Ankura”) is a leading global consulting and expert advisory firm that partners with organizations at critical inflection points. Driven by its mission — *Driving Excellence, Delivered with Humanity*™ — Ankura delivers end-to-end solutions across conflict, crisis, performance, risk, strategy, and transformation by combining the judgment of seasoned, multidisciplinary experts with advanced technology and analytics. With more than 2,000 professionals serving 3,000+ clients around the world, Ankura brings deep industry insight, collaborative problem-solving, and innovative tools to help clients protect, create, and recover value. For more information, please visit ankura.com.

© 2026 Ankura Consulting Group, LLC