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Are We Using Data, or Just Collecting It?

We spend enormous energy getting our data right. Then we hardly use the data that's already right.

You know the exercises. The clean-up drive. The "can someone verify this number before the meeting?" The two teams sent off to reconcile why their figures don't match. I've run plenty of them, and they matter — but these drives **assume the problem is the data itself**. The belief is that once it's clean, and everyone trusts it, good decisions will naturally follow.

Sometimes they do. Far from often enough. **Getting a number you can rely on and actually putting it to work are two different things**, and most of us are far better at the first.

Think about the figures you don't argue about at all. The ones that turn up every week, look about right, and get a nod before everyone moves on. When did anyone last really question one of them — turn it over, look at it from another angle, ask what it's actually telling you? Mostly they just pass through. Reliable, and idle.

That's the more expensive gap, and the easier one to miss. **A number people doubt at least sparks a conversation**. A number everyone accepts, and no one examines, just sits there — doing none of the work it could.

The pull is always to gather more, check more, tidy more. But there's a limit to what cleaner data can give you. Instead, the real opportunity is in data intelligence. That becomes even more critical as we face the next frontier: questioning the data produced by AI.

So before the next push to improve the data, let's ask the harder question about the data we already rely on: are we using it, or just collecting it?