



**BIG DATA
@ WORK**

A BOOK REVIEW



a X-TRACT.io perspective on

Big Data at Work:

Dispelling the

Myths, Uncovering

the Opportunities

- By Thomas. H. Davenport.



Every company has big data in its future and every company will eventually be in the data business."



Thomas H. Davenport is a daring man. He has taken one of the most hyped buzzwords in technology and successfully made it consumable for people who do not have technical or analytical backgrounds. *Big Data @ Work* is an ambitious book. It promises to cover all the bases.

What big data means from a technical, consumer, and management perspective; what its opportunities and costs are; where it can have a real business impact; and which aspects of this hot topic have been oversold.

Sounds like a tall order, doesn't it?

Nevertheless, it's a great book. Newbies, especially those who are looking for an excellent introduction to Big Data, will love it. He has given the world a book that accurately and wonderfully explains the rapidly changing world of information technology.

While the book was written with a clear target audience in mind - upper-level managers who are catching up on (or new to) the 'big data' game, it's also a great introduction to Big Data for newbies, which was actually pretty well done.

Davenport has managed to do the impossible - he has shown the potential of Big Data without participating in the hyperbole. *Big Data @ Work - Dispelling the Myths and Uncovering the Opportunities* was absolutely incredible.

THE TECHIE-METER IS BROKEN.

This book broke it. In my opinion, good tech books get a 5/5 when they cleverly explain the subject matter to non-experts. That's what makes *Big Data @ Work* such a recommendable read. This book doesn't give you formulas. It gives you a lot of good solid introductions on basic fundamental topics.

Debunking a popular industry myth that puts data and analytics under the same umbrella.

Almost all businesses across all verticals seem to join the big data bandwagon. But careful what you wish for. The loud, irrefutable truth that Davenport uncovers with clear, conversational language is this: Data is more than analytics on steroids. The thing about the insane amounts of data we've begun generating is that understanding how to use it, particularly becomes a lot more complicated. It has also been exploited. But now, regulators are catching up.

The most important lesson any startup or business owner can learn from this book is this. The importance of data literacy. There is a sheer indestructibility when it comes to companies that have a higher quotient of data literacy compared to those that are always operating on the edge.



He serves a three-course meal with this book. He starts with light fluffy starters that have a crispy tease that Big Data no blip of a fad, served with a giant platter of ramifications of big data for organizations, and jargon-free commonsense about big data for dessert.

But perhaps a little outdated since it's release. We need to remember that the book was written in a period which marks a watershed moment in the Big Data zeitgeist. Much of the business literature on the topic sounds evangelical, telling us how analytics and Big Data will make us all taller, smarter, and more handsome. Like I said before, a tall order.

If one analyses the terrain of Big Data, it will become clear that succeeding with disruptive technology is not a magical one-stop solution. It takes educated faith and strategic persistence for business leaders to use Big Data as a tool to drive the business forward.

At first, you will notice overdone explanations and all sorts of technical definitions that have been stitched into the story to help newbies over this rocky scrabble and if you're like me it will drive you crazy with boredom and frustration. The tedium is overwhelming. Although the idea of Big Data is not precisely defined, the characteristics of Big Data described by the author include unstructured formats, volume of greater than 100 terabytes, existing in a constant flow rather than a static pool, analyzed by machine learning rather than hypothesis, and intended for data-based products rather than internal decision support. These are trends rather than absolutes, as Big Data includes more conventional types of data as well.



While the non-technical reader may find this easing, anyone with even the slightest of exposures to data science may find the case studies infuriatingly ill-suited. Much like using a low-speed electric bike for traversing rocks, ditches, cliffs steep embankments, narrow streams and all the rest

It's short and sweet. But perhaps too short? The entire book seemed like it could have been condensed into a blog post. It's significant to notice that, compared to his previous works, this book is no different. In fact, this book contains exactly what is present in his other books.

Don't get me wrong. It's a great book. But if you dive into this book looking for an extensively detailed description of how you can leverage Big Data - as in what software or applications you can use - you will be unable to find it. The book is more of a high-level (read superficial) survey of how and what companies are doing with Big Data.

There are obvious challenges to writing a technical book that is palatable for people with non-technical backgrounds. This leads us to the interesting dichotomy that lies within this book. What makes it great happens to be its simplicity, what makes it a let down is the fact it is too superficial. And since I'm possibly a little OCD when it comes to content on disruptive technology, I find myself getting off-track from the core idea frequently and spending a lot of time more whitewashed content that was probably written the way it was to become more palatable to a wider audience, that I really needed to consider it's cons in order to pen a review. I can't help myself.

So, there's my completely honest review of Davenport's Big Data @ Work. Yes, it's a great book to get started on because of the sorts of conversations and critical thinking that it triggers. It's certainly a book that will grow on you. You will leave behind the 'Big Data is just a big fad that will eventually fade away' mentality when you finish it. But don't pick it up thinking you will gain a deeper understanding of Big Data.

It's a fascinating read, however. Strangely engrossing.

Rating: 3 / 5.

