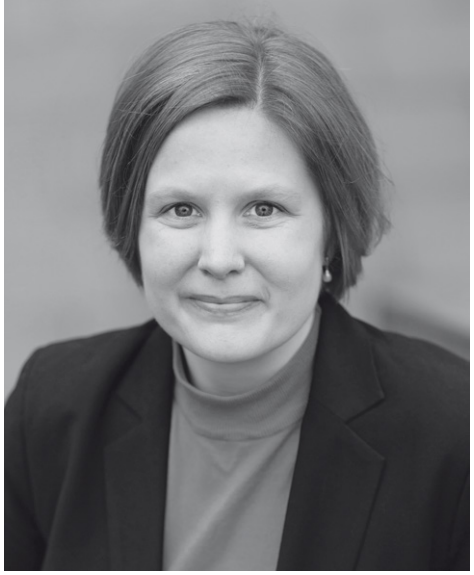
Insideview

Why Getting Started with Data Science Is Scary, and a Necessity

INTERVIEW WITH KIM NILSSON



Dr. Kim Nilsson
CEO and Founder
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Data science receives much attention these days and a lot of companies try to get off the ground in this respect. Would you say companies are struggling with getting started with doing data projects? After all the hype, is it not obvious that any company not doing data science projects will fall behind?

Yes, even though the market has moved in the seven years I have been active in this industry, many companies still hold back from investing in data science and AI. There can be many "fear factors" but they include unclear returns on investment, uncertainty around how to set up projects, hire talent, manage projects, and fear of accidentally going against regulations such as GDPR. I just wish more companies would add "fear of missing out" on that list, as they are certainly missing out on the value in their company data.

Why should companies care and why is it so important to do data science projects?

Since I have been working with companies on data projects, great progress has been made. It is much more common for companies to increasingly add analytics to their operations, making them more competitive. In parallel, startups are appearing in all industries with brand new business models and with data and AI built in from the start. All of this means that soon companies who are not making use of data will be left behind and will lose out. Instead, even small "proof-of-concept" projects – with minimal investment – can deliver significant revenue increases and cost savings today.

What are the greatest challenges, then, to getting started?

There are in general three key challenges: access to data, access to talent, and knowing where to start. Most companies have troves of data in their organization, so most often the data challenge lies in identifying what you have, where it is, and how the data is connected. Once you have data, you may need help understanding what a good use case looks like, where the overlap is between the company's priorities, and what the data allows, and what is easy versus hard to do. Here, a consultant can help. Finally, the question around talent: Do you hire, outsource, or take on consultants? Either option has pros and cons, and requires consideration.

What is your key piece of advice for the companies that want to run their first data science projects?

Do not overthink or overcomplicate it! With relatively little effort it is always possible to find a small project to get started with. By delivering a proof-of-concept project, and demonstrating the value in doing data science, you unlock further motivation and investment towards data science efforts. Then, continue to work in an agile fashion, dividing larger projects into work packages that can be delivered over a few weeks, review, learn, and iterate. Also, do not forget to include all the various stakeholders in the project. This way you can keep everyone on board and excited about the progress, and prevent road blocks down the line.

How, ultimately, do you think data science and AI will change society?

Through our 200 projects with Pivigo, we have seen incredible improvements in profitability and customer satisfaction within our clients' business, and I think a future where the Internet-of-Things combines with algorithms to support our daily lives will be a very exciting one to live in. That said, some of the most impressive use cases lie in improving people's lives, e.g., in healthcare or social applications. For example, we supported the Brain Tumour Charity in understanding their patients' needs better, and re-organizing their services to better support them. Data science projects for greater social good are some of the most rewarding ones to work on.

Thank you for this interesting conversation.