Often the goal of enterprise data initiatives is an Enterprise Data Warehouse. Whether a single all-encompassing data structure or a federation of smaller data marts, the goal remains the same. And a laudable goal, to be sure. "A single version of the Truth." "A basis for analytics and reporting." "Self-service Business Intelligence."

There is little wrong with these goals...apart from their scope. The end result isn't going to be an organization with data at its core, driving every aspect of the business.

Warehousing your data is analogous to maintaining a warehouse of products for sale. Standing orders can be met. Logistics knows where to find the products and deliver them to regular customers.

Orders come in and can either be met with existing inventory or additional product can be manufactured and delivered to customers. Reactive. Some intelligence can be built around it so seasonality can be determined and more product manufactured and warehoused to meet such demands.

Simply warehousing your data puts it in one place where regularly-scheduled reports can find it. Analysts looking into new analyses can look to the warehouse to see what data might be used to address their needs. Even some predictive analysis can be done to determine new market trends and, thus, open new markets, or new products for existing markets.

None of the above is bad and will keep business intelligence consultants and data architects employed doing useful work. And such solutions, well-implemented, don't harm businesses.

Having data at the core of your business, flowing through each process, informing each decision point is a much larger goal. A goal that makes for a business that reacts quickly, can anticipate trends, can deliver a more personal, and effective, pre-sales and support experience to its customers.

This means knowing the data as it arrives into the organization, at the time and point of arrival, and being able to make decisions, change approaches, based on what's determined right then.

This means using all available data, that generated by business processes and that available "out there."

That means being able to blend data from all the systems in use within an business: packaged, home-grown, cloud-based, and using such a blend for decisions at the time the decisions need to be made.

These decisions should be made in "business time." So some decisions are near-instantaneous (which ad to show to this customer right now--and not the same one we've been showing for six months because a link got clicked at some point in the past.) Others can wait minutes or more. Re-route a delivery because of bad weather at one hub or another. Others, longer. Launch a targeted ad campaign when the first snow falls.

The above implies a continual examination and review of data as it flows through an organization.

There needs to be a great deal of automation in the process because people aren't so good at millions of simultaneous decisions all day every day.

There needs to be a lot of data. Questions about whether thirty or sixty days of data should be readily available have no place in an organization that is determined to have data at its core. Again, automation. People have trouble conceiving of petabytes of data. And traditional warehouses won't hold them.

There needs to be plumbing throughout an organization's systems to bring data where it's needed by the time it's needed.

You don't need a data warehouse. You need a data refinery.