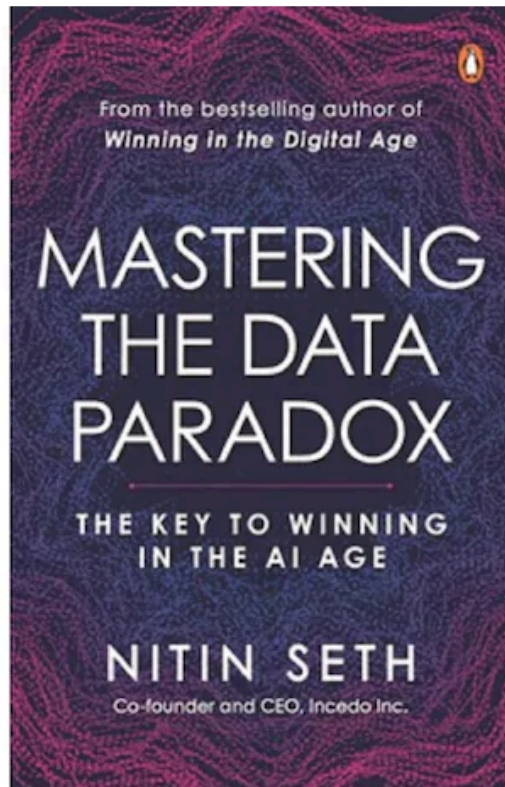


Sensex	↑(0.55%)	Nifty	↑(0.57%)	Nifty Midcap	↑(0.44%)	Nifty Smallcap	↑(0.17%)
79103.07	+ 428.82	24005.35	+ 136.55	55487.50	+ 241.70	8576.40	+ 14.35

[Heatmap](#)
[Home](#) / [Book](#) / Coping with the data flood and drought

## Coping with the data flood and drought

*IIT/IIM grad Nitin Seth's book offers a systematic process to harness wisdom in the deluge of data in our data-first world*



The Data Flood At The Individual Level In Our Contemporary Society Arises, As He Points Out, Because Of The Multiple Contacts We Have At Every Moment With Various Digital Devices Such As Mobile Phones.

Ajit Balakrishnan |

4 min read Last Updated : Jun 26 2024 | 3:59 PM IST

### MASTERINGTHE DATA PARADOX: The Key to Winninginthe AI Age

**Author**

:Nitin Seth

**Publisher:** Penguin

**Pages:**400

**Price:** Rs 799

The author captures the essence of his book in his quote of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's verse: "Water, water everywhere, nor any drop to drink". Coleridge was, of course, writing about Ancient Mariners who had to navigate salty oceans and Nitin Seth is writing about those in our times who must navigate our current world and its oceans of data: "Data, data everywhere, but not a drop of understanding".

Mr Seth is an IIT/IIM grad who has navigated the world of the data ocean as a consultant with McKinsey, a senior executive with Flipkart, and as an executive with Fidelity before venturing out on his own. So, one could say he has navigated through many parts of the oceans of data in which we all live.

The "paradox" in the title refers to the fact that although we are constantly flooded with data, we are unable to easily access all the insights that this data can offer us. It is like living with a deluge and a drought at the same time. This paradox exists, he says, because gathering insights from this flood of data costs too much, or the teams tasked with gathering insights are not often successful at this task, or they don't often have the right data.

A key insight of this book is the author's description of three levels at which the data flood exists. The first is easy to grasp: Data exists at the organisation level, in business firms and institutions of every scale and size. Data also exists at the level of individuals and thus raises issues of which we are all just beginning to become aware, such as data privacy. Data also exists, he points out, at a third level, the level of a nation. This last point raises a new set of issues because a nation's competitive advantage may lie in using this national level data wisely.

Mr Seth extensively discusses data at each of these three levels. As he points out, at each of these levels there are pluses and minuses in the methods we use to deal with data. For example, a lack of data privacy can threaten an individual's existence, but too much of it can be a threat to the society in which the person lives.

The data flood at the individual level in our contemporary society arises, as he points out, because of the multiple contacts we have at every moment with various digital devices such as mobile phones. As individuals, this has made us more "data-driven" than we realise. For example, when we have to decide which restaurant to go to in a city that we are visiting, we quickly use our mobile phone and look up apps such as Yelp and check what the crowd-source data there says. What are the ratings given by users? What

are the comments that users have made? Is the restaurant we are thinking of going to kid-friendly? The restaurant choice issue is just one of the many spheres where the average person looks for a data-driven decision. It could be what books are worth reading and at what prices are they available— and many, many more examples. As the writer points out, we are probably not fully conscious of how we as individuals have become dependent on data to live our lives.

Towards the end of the book, Mr Seth takes great pains to point out how we need to exercise “wisdom” in dealing with the ocean of data flooding our enterprises, our individual lives and our nation. As he points out, when we have a lot of data, we have a false sense of belief that we understand the problem we are dealing with. But the danger is that we may not have seen the consequences of our decisions. Taking a larger view is what he calls “wisdom”. He describes a systematic process to get to use wisdom in a data-first world.

This is the author’s second book. His earlier book, *Winning in the Digital Age* published in 2020, made a big impact because it clearly explained what was quite mysterious at that time: *The Digital Transformation Process*.

Some prospective readers of this book may take one look at its gigantic size and look away from it. But I must point out that the largeness of size comes from the author using charts and workflow diagrams liberally throughout the book to explain or illustrate the point he is making. These diagrams are like those used in business schools and corporate presentations and certainly make complex ideas easy to understand.

---

*The reviewer is an internet entrepreneur; [ajitb@rediffmail.com](mailto:ajitb@rediffmail.com) ([ajitb@rediffmail.com](mailto:ajitb@rediffmail.com))*