

The *free-role* data professional: a catalyst for data analytics + science job-market stability and innovation

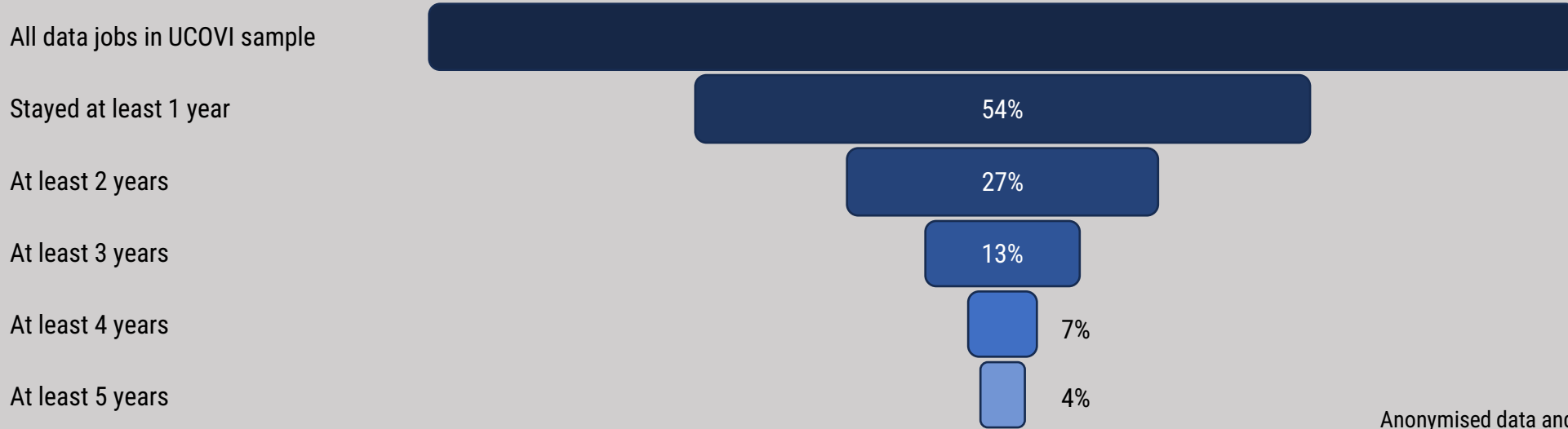
Minimising the causes and consequences of high job turnover in data science and analytics

UCOVI White Paper Q3 2023

In October 2022, UCOVI analysed the career histories of nearly 1,500 former and current data analysts and scientists from their LinkedIn profiles.

On average, data analysts and scientists spend 16 months in their roles before moving on internally or externally.

Only 27% make it past the 2-year mark of a data analytics or science position, and only 13% make it beyond 3 years.



A job market in which nearly three quarters of participants move after two years is an unstudied and generally accepted fact of life for businesses and data team leaders.

At UCOVI, we believe that high turnover in the data job market is a problem.

1. It hinders the growth of the data analytics and science profession.
2. It skews the supply market for tools and technologies around data.
3. It demoralises data professionals and limits what they can accomplish.
4. It reduces the impact that data teams have within their businesses.
5. It limits the ability of businesses and other organisations to innovate with data and release value into the economy.

The next slide is a flow diagram of blocks and arrows. It unpicks in full the negative feedback loop of high job turnover within data science and analytics.

Blue squares relate to data analysts/scientists as individuals

Orange squares relate to the data profession, user community, and supply market

Green squares relate to businesses and organisations

Black squares relate to the wider economy and society

Blue arrows mean one square causes/leads to another

Magenta arrows mean one square negates/reduces the impact of another

Existing Data Job Market Dynamics

Data analysts/scientists as individuals

The data profession, user community and supply market

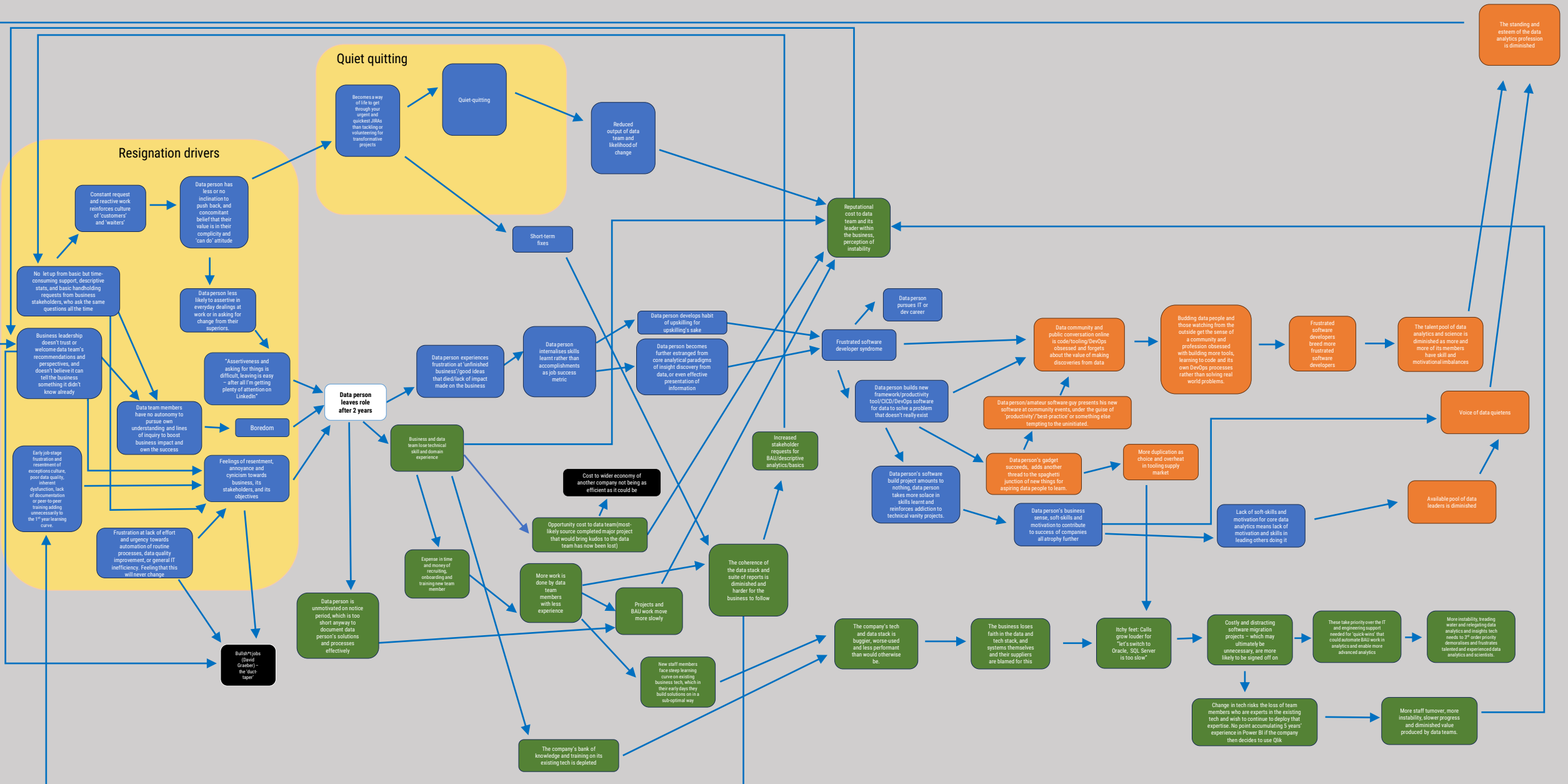
Businesses and organisations

Wider economy and society

Key factor cell: Resignation/free-role project

Causes →

Attenuates/Prevents →



When a data professional announces they are leaving a company for another job, the company typically offers one or more of the following to prevent their departure:

1. More money.
2. Promotion (material or cosmetic).
3. Persuasive assurances about the company's commercial trajectory and/or exciting projects and upgrades in the team's pipeline.
4. Reduced time in the form of a sabbatical or day/half-day off within the working week.

Even if these types of counter offering were generally successful in preventing resignations*, they come with their own drawbacks and are rarely sustainable.

Instead, organisations should take a proactive approach to retaining their best data scientists and analysts through the offer of a **free role**.

*27% role retention after 2 years suggests this is not the case.

The free role would be offered to high-performing data analysts and scientists after two years of employment. It would involve the following:

1. The data analyst agrees with their manager and director a project or corpus of projects that they believe would add value to the business and that they would like to undertake.
2. The data analyst works on the agreed projects full time over the course of one year, save for 2 hours per week to answer questions from and provide support to less experienced team members, and check in with their manager.
3. At the end of the free-role year, the data analyst presents the value of their work to their manager and senior stakeholders in the business, with an optional request for extension of the free-role period if:
 - a) it is required to complete important work in the scope of the agreed project.
 - b) additional value-added project ideas are crystallised during work on the original project.

Now let us run through the negative feedback flow diagram again.

But this time replacing the white square where the data professional leaves after 2 years with a square where they are offered a free role...

Dynamics if free role offered to analysts at 2/3 years' tenure

Data analysts/scientists as individuals

The data profession, user community and supply market

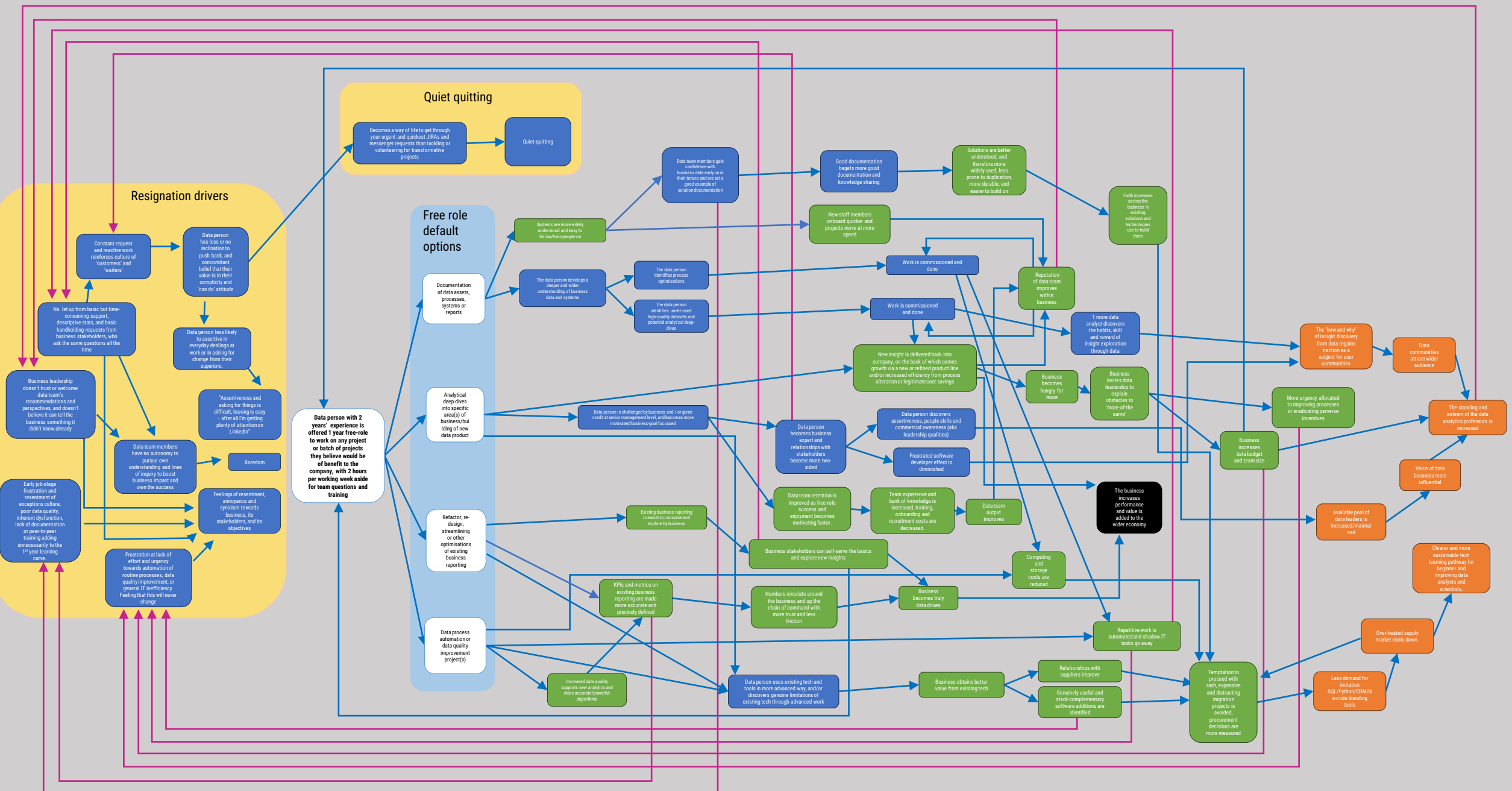
Businesses and organisations

Wider economy and society

Key factor cell: Resignation/free-role project

Causes

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The offer of a free role to a high-performing data analyst or scientist...

1. Helps a business retain and deploy its most likely source of data-driven innovation
2. Re-engages the analyst emotionally within the team and company, boosting their morale, focus and output.
3. Reduces staff turnover within a business's data team, saving recruitment costs and providing stability.
4. Repletes the business's bank of technical and domain knowledge so that tools are used to their full potential, supplier relationships improve, and technical debt is reduced.
5. Makes businesses more data driven and the data profession and community more business driven.

A business offering a free role to a data analyst or scientist should consider...

1. Is the analyst or scientist “worth” the offer in terms of:
 - a) Ability and skill?
 - b) Tenure, knowledge of business, past performance?
 - c) Potential in idea proposed for free-role project?
2. How will the business “check in on progress” so that the analyst is not micro-managed (defeats the purpose) but the business can spot a clearly failing project early enough to cut losses?
3. How does the business ensure the analyst on the free role is still sufficiently engaged with their team?
4. How does the data team leadership motivate team members who are not offered free-roles?
5. What is the upper limit on the number of team members who are on a free-role at any given time, and can the data team still broadly meet business expectations with experienced members on self-guided projects?
6. How does the business ensure that rejection of a free-role offer does not reflect badly on a data person?

Organisations can (and should) modify the default timings and arrangements set out earlier to suit their needs.

But it is also important to remember that constant check ins and caveats do not constitute “freedom” any more than a time period of six weeks (or something similarly short) constitutes a “role”.

For any questions, email enquiries@ucovi-data.com