

The BI paradox

We know BI is important, but how do we get it to deliver, asks Steve Parry



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It seems we're often told how the benefits that BI confers are essential for our growing businesses in this increasingly competitive and globalised environment. The paradox is that we're equally often told that BI initiatives fail to deliver.

How does your organisation rate? The table below describes some of the characteristics of organisations balancing readiness and return. To improve the chances of success for BI in your organisation, it is important to pick a path that recognises where you currently are, and where you intend to be.

Where there's already a 'business pull for BI', we may need to deal with a frustration borne out of a failure or inability to deliver on the technical side. Suggestion: augment technical capability. Think big, but plan to implement small. This keeps the chance of success and of demonstrating early return high.

Where there has already been a 'technical push', the organisation does have technical capability, and there may even be existing BI solutions in place. There is a problem if there has been poor take-up or

understanding from business representatives. Suggestion: align business and IT. Some specific activities that can help with business and IT alignment are: business modelling, prototyping, scoping, and a better methodology for working between business and IT representatives.

Where thinking about BI has 'lagged', there may be ambivalence, or even scepticism with regard to the use of BI. Suggestion: perform a high impact proof of concept. Deal with inertia and scepticism with a high-impact proof of concept using your own data where possible. Capture the imagination of business representatives with a tangible display of BI. Show that BI projects are within the grasp of the organisation. Turn sceptics into advocates.

By giving some thought to the position you're in, a targeted strategy can be followed to put right what may have gone before. This may involve dealing with the inertia that can exist, and kick-starting BI with a high impact project. If you're having difficulty getting it rolling, do something that gets traction, creates interest, and above all gives value. P

return – how easily can we make a business case for BI?

Business pull for BI	BI leaders
Characteristics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In these organisations there is a well-understood need for better decision support information – but a frustration due to an inability to deliver • Difficult to express business requirements in a form that is usable by IT resources • Hard to decide on a meaningful scope for BI projects • There may be no in house capability, and no wish to commit resources to developing BI 	Characteristics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Probably already enjoying the benefits of BI using own or outsourced resources for development • Likely to be successful on their own • View BI as a continuous and changing part of business planning
BI laggards	Technical push
Characteristics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In these companies, there has been no real attempt to use transaction data for anything other than running the enterprise. • It may be felt that there are more important things to do than build a BI solution – and even if it were important, there is no capability to deliver such a solution. 	Characteristics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is sometimes referred to as a 'build it and they will come' approach • In these organisations there will have been BI initiatives, but these are not seen as being successful in meeting a specific need • There may be poor take-up or support from the business for these solutions

readiness – how able are we to deliver BI solutions