

# Creating a 'Business Intelligence Culture' to help change & compete in tough times

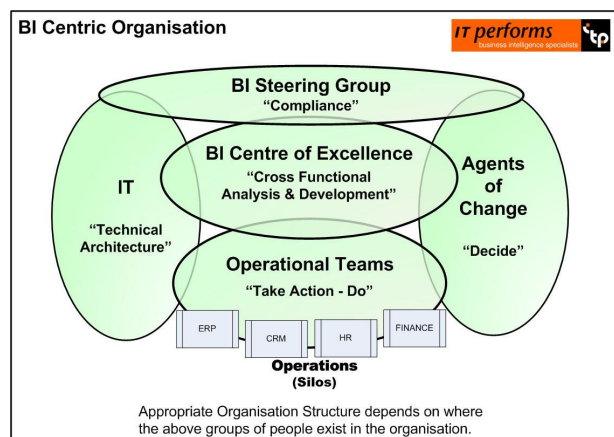


We all know that our data has massive potential and can be unlocked using Business Intelligence (BI) solutions; however it is the people and corporate culture that enables real benefit to be obtained from BI. Glen Westlake of **IT Performs** explains how to create a BI Culture and use BI technology to enable change in order to be more competitive.

This article provides some practical advice on what companies need to consider to take advantage of their data asset by establishing a 'BI Culture' to enable change. This advice is based upon many years of real world experience to help you understand what activities are necessary to obtain an advantage from corporate data by combining Change Management and Agile Development Methods.

In many organisations Business Intelligence (BI) and Data Warehousing are driven by IT, but the best results are obtained when solutions are actively guided by business leaders who see the value in their information and can use it to improve the organisation. Today's BI technology is functionally very rich; hence technology is no longer a barrier to success. Making the best use of the technology and optimising the business benefit by enabling people to make better decisions and to act quicker is the real challenge!

For organisations to fully capitalise from BI, they must use it as an enabler to change and incorporate BI into a change management programme. The following diagram shows how a 'BI Centre of Excellence' fits in an organisation to bridge the gap between IT, Operations and Decision Makers.



Providing the right information to the right people at the right time can have a huge impact on your organisation, however companies often struggle to get the full potential from BI as it is given to people that are too busy 'doing their day job' and who are not motivated to explore new information or find better ways of working. To unleash the real power of BI it needs to be managed by business focused data analysts with executive sponsorship. It can then be actively devolved into operational units, improving effectiveness and gently enabling change. BI used correctly will motivate and drive the workforce in the direction of the corporate strategy. This is what is meant by a 'BI Culture'.

## Align your BI Strategy to your Business Strategy and create a 'BI Culture'

As the BI solution enables change, the business will demand more of the BI solution; therefore it must rapidly adapt to keep in step with the business changes. A good BI solution will continually evolve and must be open to change. Many organisations struggle to adapt their BI solution as they are large technology based projects with long time scales. Modern BI technology can now be deployed and adapted very rapidly. It is usually people and process that slow deployments down, not the tools being used. To fully enable the 'BI Culture' a suitable technology delivery methodology is essential. Fortunately such a methodology already exists and has already proven itself - the Agile Development Methodology. Agile is now the approach of choice for BI, replacing the traditional waterfall methodology, although for many companies this will require a major change.

### How Agile Are You?

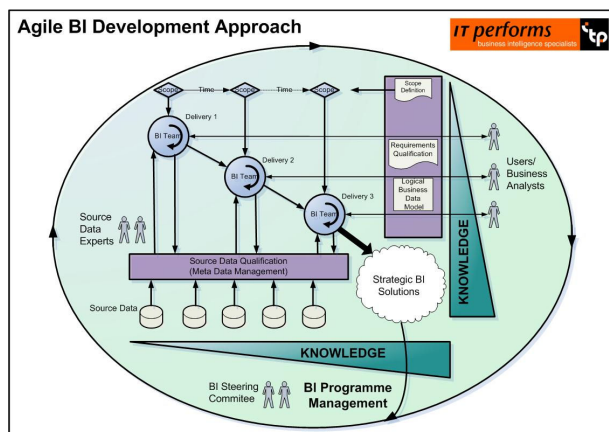
In any project, from school work to the most complex software development project, you will know more about it at the end than the beginning. It's hardly rocket science. So why, when thinking about the implementation of software projects, do so many companies plan every small detail at the start of the project and set it in stone?

Surely it makes sense to perform the first part of the project, define short-term requirements, examine results and then plan again for the next stage?

This is even more relevant to BI projects where the business requirements continually change and the knowledge about the data, both quality and what it represents, continually improves during the project.

Another advantage of the Agile methodology is that constant testing and integration ensures that any faults are detected and corrected on a regular basis. This constant testing and development provides a much closer and more regular, face to face, collaboration between the end users (Business) and developers (IT) ensuring that the next stage of the project is a success.

Our approach to Agile focuses on delivering quick business benefits, whilst contributing to the strategic solution and ensuring knowledge, both technical and business, is continually increased and captured:



Everyone works on the basis that requirements will change and data issues will arise. The Agile methodology caters for this and continually learns from the experience – how honest and refreshing!

Agile is best deployed for BI projects using small, multi disciplined, self organising teams which combine technology, data and business process expertise. The pro-active inclusion of the business, allows the BI team to extend further to include goal setting and changes to work practices. Allowing actual business benefits to be monitored and included within the project; therefore providing a much more focused and accountable technology delivery.

Business driven technology, rapidly deployed by elite, multi-functional delivery teams within a controlled and managed framework. The utopia for any organisation wanting to be competitive in tough times and take advantage of their data and the advances of modern BI technology!

If you can get many of these cross functional 'SWAT' teams operational at once, being managed under a coherent BI Programme, aligned to the Business Strategy, significant business wins will follow.

### Change Management is Key ...

The main obstruction to fully exploiting BI is often working practices and the company's internal processes and structures. Strong executive sponsorship of these initiatives is essential for them to overcome traditional ways of working and barriers to change to provide the real benefits that dynamic businesses demand in today's competitive world – success from BI depends on the successful management of change, most easily achieved by creating a BI Culture.

### How to Create a 'BI Culture'

- ◆ Align your BI Strategy to your Business Strategy – use BI as an enabler to change.
- ◆ Design your BI Strategy around 'logical' business models, not constrained by your existing systems. This will better meet your strategic drivers and enable source systems to be changed with less impact on Management Information. (Plug & Play Operational systems).
- ◆ Perform top down, 'blue sky', business analysis alongside bottom up data analysis – where the two easily map, will provide quick wins. Gaps will indicate future system enhancements or new data capture requirements.
- ◆ Define KPI's that are affected by operational activities. This will allow operational staff to get direct feedback, allowing low level activities to align with the high level strategy. (Drill down from top to bottom).
- ◆ Correlate 'lead' indicators with 'lag' indicators to predict and manage future performance.
- ◆ Establish an organisational structure that can deploy BI into the business, use it for change management and then measure the impact. (BI Culture)
- ◆ Use the BI initiative to form a cross organisational 'committee' to better integrate different areas of the business and provide cross functional insight into your organisation's performance. This group should also oversee Master Data Management, Data Governance and Meta Data Management.
- ◆ Define the long term BI Roadmap but accept that short term tactical solutions may be necessary. Ensure any short term deployments are managed within the longer term strategy (bigger picture).
- ◆ Implement and manage BI as a continual programme and not a single project.
- ◆ Use multi skilled, self organising SWAT teams, working together to deliver the solution.
- ◆ Adopt an Agile development methodology to provide iterative solutions on a continual basis. This will pro-actively engage IT and the Business together, enabling them to cope with change and provide quicker results. Avoid the 'waterfall' development methodology for BI, which requires the final solution to be defined in detail before development – BI projects always evolve during development – cater for this evolution.
- ◆ Use BI to validate your data and then implement Data Quality initiatives to resolve any issues. Make this a business led function, not an IT exercise – stop the dirty data at source, don't continually clean it!
- ◆ Do not compromise on quality, if necessary manage the scope instead.

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