

>> Recipe for Performance Management Success

A Business Intelligence Competency Center manages PM standards and drives success.

By Sandra Gittlen

With the economy in tough straits, organizations are counting on their performance management (PM) initiatives to give them unparalleled insight into their business to make them agile and competitive. However, some organizations fail to see this critical outcome because they are missing the most important PM ingredient: a Business Intelligence Competency Center (BICC).

The BICC serves as the epicenter for a sophisticated and results-driven PM strategy, according to David O'Connell, senior analyst at Nucleus Research. It is the foundation—and evolution—for setting PM standards, shortening project cycles, gaining buy-in from stakeholders, and expanding PM's enterprise reach. "A BICC is a strategic tool for companies to get the most from their performance management and business intelligence investment," O'Connell says.

Chris Sorensen, team leader for data management at Calgary's WestJet Airlines Ltd., credits a focus on creating a solid BICC, in conjunction with his IBM Cognos 8 Business Intelligence and Performance Management solution, for some of his company's PM accomplishments. "Our BICC, in conjunction with the business, is working toward more centralized PM, including developing a standardized environment," he says.

Here are some expert tips for implementing your own top-notch BICC:

1. Start with a Cross-Functional Team

The BICC, while influenced by IT, should not be solely navigated by it. Instead, you should pull in stakeholders from business units that will be the target of your PM strategy. "What you're trying to do is deliver business value across the entire organization," says Forrest Palmer, an executive with IBM Cognos' Business Intelligence and Management Group. For instance, to gain visibility into your payroll processes with PM, finance, HR and other hiring managers should be at the BICC table, Palmer says.

O'Connell says that BICC participants have to know they have the backing of management so they feel free to become fully engaged in the process.

2. Focus on Data Standardization

A primary goal of your BICC should be to foster data standardization. Users who are close to the data and the processes for accessing that data can shed light

on commonalities across systems. For instance, at WestJet the BICC made sure to define what constituted a "guest" or "booking" in the enterprise data warehouse. Sorensen says this up-front work adds to the consistency and integrity of the analytics that the performance management solution provides.

"It's important to focus on information understanding, trust and relevancy so that users can have confidence in their decision making," Palmer says.

3. Enable Self-Service for Users

When implemented correctly, a performance management solution removes IT from the everyday information-gathering and report-generation duties typically involved in PM. Therefore, the BICC should work to elevate the role of IT from carrying out tedious queries to implementing strategic modules that enable users to set their own reporting parameters, alerts and thresholds.

"We want our users to come up and share creative solutions to problems with other users, so we give them the tools, training and collaborative environment to slice and dice the data in a way that makes sense for them," Sorensen says.

4. Create a Feedback Loop

As users become more comfortable with PM tools, they often will have suggestions for how to improve the quality of the data as well as procedures for alerts and reports. O'Connell says companies have to account for this via a feedback loop into the BICC or else users will become frustrated.

At WestJet, the BICC stays close to users through user groups and training sessions, which Sorensen says has led to a more efficient PM implementation. The company also has plans for a central portal for communicating the latest PM environment news and events to its user community.

5. Cheerlead Results to Your Managers

The BICC should be the champion and voice of PM projects, communicating milestones to management and other critical stakeholders. Proving there is a structure and standards for your PM project instills confidence when it's time to ask for an increased budget and to expand your PM scope.

For more information on succeeding at Performance Management and Business Intelligence initiatives, visit www.ibm.com/cognos/champion.

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