



Working in Concert

ORCHESTRATING ALIGNMENT WITH AN ENTERPRISE DATA WAREHOUSE.

by David Garrett

It's done. Your data warehouse, the opus of planning and execution, is in place and in use. So what comes next? How do you arrange your new tools to orchestrate better, more synergized decisions across the enterprise?

Because as many as tens of thousands of employees rely on the enterprise data warehouse (EDW) for immediate and long-term decisions, it's vital to align the enterprise around a cohesive view of its data. "Your technology architecture has to be seamless," says Lisa Loftis, senior vice president at Intelligent Solutions. "It has to bridge the gap between the insights you get from a robust

business intelligence [BI] environment and the actions the business is taking on a day-to-day basis, on the front line with your customers."

Finding ways to bring departments together and suffuse the corporate culture with the power of an EDW is more than a key to high sales. It's a key to survival.

Much of the work in building enterprise synergy around BI tools is not just technical, but also cultural.

“The technology is the easiest part of this,” says Loftis. She adds that the nuts-and-bolts needs of people and their personalities go hand in hand with the questions of logical data models (LDMs) and master data management (MDM).

According to Loftis, alignment starts with an effort to share high-level strategies throughout the enterprise, because it’s not only C-level decisions that define a firm’s success but also how well the front-line employees make the millions of day-to-day decisions that impact customers. “You have to have a very effective communications plan,” she says, adding that it should be one that articulates the role of each employee with precision.

Alignment also means bringing together the business and technical stakeholders. According to Donald Feinberg, vice president and distinguished analyst at Gartner, high-level managers should also play an active role in technical decisions, from the schema to the platform, metadata, reporting and training. “When everyone feels like they’re picking the tools, then guess what? They use them,” says Feinberg. “The chances of success are much better.”

The chance for partnerships built on shared information is also much better. “If it’s done properly, business must collaborate with IT,” Feinberg adds. “And the word ‘collaborate’ is very different than the words ‘talk to.’”

Promoting alignment through smart technology

Among the hardest tasks in launching an EDW is getting people to use it. “One of the comments I’ve heard many times from IT,” says Feinberg, “is that we’ve built this great data warehouse with everything that everyone wants. Why isn’t anyone using it?”

Thankfully, there are technologies that grease synergy’s wheels and tie the enterprise together. “If you’re going to do active enterprise intelligence,” says Loftis, “you really have to have an architecture and a discipline so that you eventually connect your intelligence applications with your front line and your customer contact activities.”

One such architecture is SOA, or service-oriented architecture, in which a service can be accessed regardless of its back-end design, thanks to standard application programming interfaces built with XML, Simple Object Access Protocol (SOAP) and other common tools. It allows divisions, departments and even project teams to integrate their work without squabbling over the tools for integration. As a result, they can innovate on the platforms they want, yet still tie their information together to support decision making that neatly aligns with top-line objectives.

Hand in hand with SOA come governance strategies and solutions like MDM. By presenting

a single view of core data—such as account lists and customer or product information—across the enterprise, MDM helps end users eliminate costly duplications and mistakes. MDM’s well-governed set of procedures can also standardize the way that master data is accessed, maintained and changed, without inviting downtime.

Being able to link enterprise strategies, objectives and data answers basic questions, such as what data the enterprise has and what data it needs to support new projects. Additionally, by mapping data to decisions, business and IT users understand it quickly, which speeds time-to-value and reveals points where deep access to data can be coupled with new business opportunities.

Finding the right skills

Even the largest firms can lack the skills to meet, then master, the challenge of intelligence-based alignment, turning data into decisions through the alchemy of the data warehouse.

Firms with a strong grasp of the subtleties of logical models can form an in-house team—what Loftis calls a “center of excellence”—that in turn lends its knowledge to business units that need it.

If you lack the human assets to build such a team, engage with the appropriate data warehouse consulting service providers for both the team and training needed for development, deployment and support. They can do more than provide you with the head count you need; they can lend you the data warehouse and project management expertise to cut your time-to-goal. That improves your project’s perception in the eyes of the high-level managers and front-line employees alike.

Even with your project complete, no data warehouse is ever done. It grows as new data is added and new insights are gleaned, giving the enterprise a chance to base decisions on information rising to the level of intelligence. **T**

David Garrett is a former IT director who now writes about the nexus of business strategies and strategic technologies.

Good governance matters

How do you promote alignment and turn warring factions into partners? Governance is key. “One of the things that governance actually does is provide strategic direction to the program, to ensure that objectives are aligned with business priorities,” says Lisa Loftis of Intelligent Solutions.

Donald Feinberg of Gartner agrees. He mentions the Business Intelligence Competency Center, or BICC. “You need to form a group that is put together with people from every single line of business and every single other department: finance, human resources—because training usually falls under human resources—and IT,” he says. Feinberg adds while the BICC can have different structures and meeting times, one thing is vital. “The BICC sponsorship needs to be at a very senior executive level, preferably above even the CFO: the COO, the CEO, the president, the chairman,” he explains. Good governance, he notes, demands the political heft of top-level managers to ensure that strategy and objectives are rigorously aligned. —D.G.