B30   **Data Warehouse - Top Ten Tips for Success and the Ten Worst Practices**
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Experience has identified some best and worst practices. This session will highlight some of the techniques that have proven very successful. In addition to the Top Ten, we will discuss what it means to be successful and how to communicate your success to management and to the user community. We will also discuss the role of the business sponsor and how to get buy-in from management. The tips for success will be contrasted with the ten worst practices for unsuccessful projects.

B30

Ten Best & Ten Worst DW Practices

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IBM Data Management Technical Conference

Anaheim, CA   **Sept 9 - 13, 2002**

Ten Best

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Use What You've Got

Use what has already been purchased - Most installations have an RDBMS which will serve them well as the store for the data warehouse as well as a query or report writer. By using what is already available, the cost of the data warehouse is reduced and the organization does not have to spend as much time and money on the training and the learning curve required for bringing in as many new software products.

Your Plan Sets Your Deadline

Don't let management set an artificial deadline - The data warehouse project manager needs to be proactive, develop a project plan complete with tasks, deliverables, durations and assignment of responsibilities. The project plan will produce a completion date that management can now see and, hopefully, will accept.

Build a Small Good Team

Assemble a small team of good people for the data warehouse project. Since the data warehouse is new, and all the good people are already actively involved with other projects, management will often try to staff with people who have nothing to do. Don't accept incompetents or naysayers on the team.

Choose the Right-Sized Application

Choose an application of reasonable size. The initial pilot should not be so large that the inevitable performance problems of a very large data base will jeopardize the success of the project. Nor should it be so small that little is learned about managing a data warehouse.

It Should be of Value

Choose an application that makes a real contribution to the organization. Every organization has a wealth of data warehouse opportunities. There is never a reason to choose a data warehouse application that will be a throw away or will make no contribution to the company.

Demand Skills Transfer

If a consultant is engaged, be sure that *Job One* is skills transfer. Too often consultants come in, work their magic and leave without teaching the IT staff how to develop the next data warehouse application.

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Committed Sponsor

The sponsor should desperately want and
need the capabilities of the data warehouse.
This helps to ensure their support when
problems arise (they will).

Vendors' Claims Need Support

Ask the vendors to back their claims with seasoned references and written assurances of their product's capabilities. Don't be snowed (or let your users be snowed) by flashy demos.

Allow Time for Training

Allow adequate time for training. Even if the tools are intuitive, training is still required to understand the data and know how to validate the query results.

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Clean Data Required

Clean the data - The users will walk away if their reports and queries are wrong. Dirty data will deliver incorrect reports.

Measure Results

Measure results, usage and report benefits - If you don't know how the data warehouse is being employed and you don't know how it benefits the users, it will be difficult to ask for the budgets and resources necessary to maintain and enhance what has already been built.

Ten Worst

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Accepting an Unrealistic Schedule

Almost every data warehouse project manager has been given a set delivery date. These dates usually have very little relationship to what can actually be accomplished. Management sometimes thinks that creating a scheduled end-date is part of their job description and only they have the innate ability to determine the delivery date. They may not know what they want but they do know exactly when they want it. They know that if they don't give you a date you will take forever and have nothing to show for it. The especially bad news is that they don't trust your ability to plan and manage the project.

Taking on a Failing Project

The word is out. The project is in deep trouble and you have been given the mantle of the project manager who is either going to be the hero or, much more likely, the captain of a sinking project. The project is already far behind schedule. Milestones have been missed, and the architecture is unsuitable for a project of this magnitude. The key people, both IT and the business have either left the project or want nothing to do with it. The morale of the remaining team is in the dumper. Worst of all, management still expects the project to come in on time and with all the original function and a little more.

Using a Dysfunctional Team

You know who they are. They are the poison people in your organization, the ones who no one else wants and, lucky you, you've got them all. They are the ones with the bad attitudes, terrible work habits, poor social skills, obsolete technical knowledge, enemies throughout the organization, a side business, or a hobby or interest that takes 90% of their time. They don't respect each other and their dislike of each other is apparent. You don't have a chance with this sort of team.

Choosing the Wrong Sponsor

How do you recognize this sponsor? There will be some telltale signs such as:

1. A trail of bodies – this sponsor has caused the professional demise of countless other project managers.

2. The sponsor is usually surrounded by one or more sycophants.

3. Initial flattery giving way to venomous outbursts for minor perceived offenses or deviations from the sponsor's plan.

4. A reputation for putting his or her interests above all others and definitely above the interests of the organization.

Accepting Unrealistic Expectations

There is a feeling among some users that if they don't ask for everything now, they will never get it and they want it all in the first release.

The other notion is "This is the time to stretch, don't be timid, push the frontiers." Important - stay with proven methodologies and technology.

Users suffer from "expectation inflation" unless they are constantly reminded of what they will be getting and when. Expectations must be managed early and often. Follow-on notes or minutes of the meeting will reinforce the agreed-upon position.

Sitting Still for Scope Creep

Creep happens; every project will have scope creep. Your job as the project manager will be to control it, not just document it.

There are two wrong answers to the request for additional function, "yes" and "no."

Understand the new function's importance to the business and to the project. If the business determines it is very important and of high priority, your response should be, "I'll get back to you and let you know how badly this will impact our schedule." Management should also know that scope creep analysis takes your time and effort away from the original set of agreed-upon deliverables.

No Written Project Agreement

Since you like and trust everyone on the project, you don't really need to agree upon and document a scope that will indicate what you will deliver and when. You don't need to specify responsibilities, service level agreements, levels of data quality, or acceptance criteria. ***Wrong***

Hand the project agreement to the team, use it as a base for comparison with what the team members are doing, and to make it clear that fulfilling the project agreement will be the team's primary measure of success.

If scope creep does happen, the project agreement should be changed to reflect a later schedule or other adjustments.

Not Developing a Project Plan

Estimates should come from those who will be performing the job. Ask them for the best case, worst case and most realistic case and use the most realistic estimate with a 20% allowance for unanticipated problems. Add time for other project related activities, non-project related activities, as well as for training, illness and personal time off and adjust for the person's skill and job experience

Someone with data warehouse project experience with a should review and validate those estimates. Actual duration is at least double the effort time, and in companies that thrive on meetings actual duration can be three times as long as effort time.

IT Drives the Project

The project should always be driven by the business. IT will sometimes initiate a data warehouse project and as a way to demonstrate the value of IT to the business.

Every line of business has data warehouse applications crying for implementation. If the business has not already done so, uncover those applications, solicit business partnership on the project and implement something that is of substantive value to your organization.

The Wrong Software

Many data warehouse projects are under the total direction of a line of business. Software vendors may have sold their entire package convincing management that the only way to succeed is to use the vendor's full range of integrated software and services.

Your organization has standards. and may include query tools, ETL tools and other data warehouse related software.

What is your degree of authority to make important decisions?

Marketing the Project Yourself

You don't have the weight, position or the charisma of your sponsor

In early discussions with the business sponsor, enlist support to promote the project and the noble team who will be building it. You want the business sponsor to be delivering the testimonials, authoring the pieces describing the benefits of the system and speaking about the wonders of your data warehouse implementation to all who will listen. For your part, be sure to give all the credit to the users of the system, to your team and to your sponsor. Take no credit yourself – it will come to you indirectly; be patient.

Summary

- Follow *Best Practices* based on what others have learned.

- Avoid the minefields – know what will kill your project.

- Build a network, both internally and externally.