



---

This essay is part of a series, *Controllers' Corner: Two-Minute Essays on Financial Management and Control*, which asks industry thought leaders for their opinions on critical issues facing today's finance organizations.

---

*“Driving company performance is job one, and finance teams are well positioned to lead the charge and improve standards and systems that support decision making.”*

---

## Building Relationships to Drive Better Decision-Making

*Delbert Krause, Director Product Marketing, Cognos Software, IBM Business Analytics*

*In order to build a winning business case for improvements to their own systems and processes, Finance needs to offer benefits to the broader organization.*

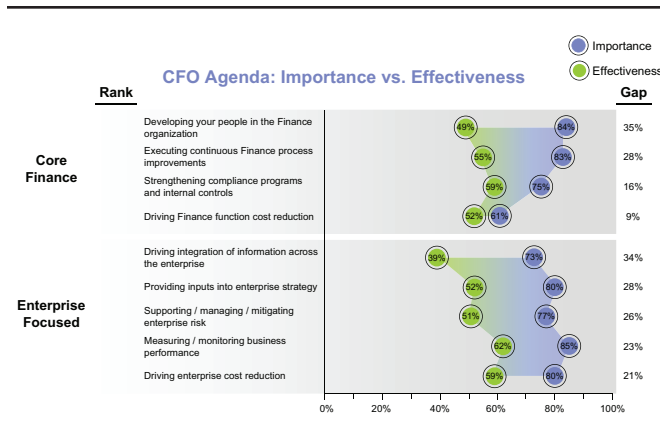
**Q How can Finance organizations build greater efficiency while leading the drive for better decision-making across the organization?**

As organizations continue to evolve their decision making solution ecosystems to drive better performance, they need to ensure that important processes that deliver finance efficiency and standards are easily connected to performance management. In that context, an opportunity exists for Controllers and Finance teams to be catalysts for change – connecting important corporate reporting and financial information assets to the decision making flow.

Everyone would agree that job impact and career management actions are very important and that finance team morale and skill building is a high priority. In fact, the IBM 2010 Global CFO Study, which collected the views and insights of 1,900 senior finance leaders, listed finance talent development and connecting finance to the business among their top-tier initiatives.<sup>1</sup> This is a clear and encouraging sign that finance and accounting teams have the green light to execute meaningful activities to support the broader enterprise.

Driving company performance is job one, and finance teams are well positioned to lead the charge and improve standards and systems that support decision making. The CFO Study highlighted the most important priorities across core finance and enterprise agendas. Each finance leader surveyed compared the level of importance for a given activity with their own organization's ability to deliver. Across the board there was a large gap between the level of importance and the level of effectiveness in these activities, and in fact this gap increases with each survey. This should induce Finance leaders to ask the question: where does he or she or their team fit in closing these effectiveness gaps?





There are activities that can improve the framework for performance, and provide a trickle down benefit for finance efficiency and business insight. Finance teams need to continue the journey that connects key partners in the organization, specifically, information technology (IT) and business leaders. Business leaders cover a wide range of functional areas but a great place to start is in the customer-facing areas such as sales, customer service and marketing. In our experience, successful companies achieve both performance goals and individual contribution and career goals through synergy and teamwork with IT and business leaders.

There is no magic path to building relationships among stakeholders. However there are some tried and true approaches that can help stimulate the conversation that ultimately leads to business improvements.

Let's start with performance process review. Performing an audit of the business requirements, though not necessarily through a formal process, can be invaluable to understanding the current needs of business stakeholders. Underestimated is the simple chat over coffee with someone "in the field" to learn about their challenges from their perspective. How do they forecast? Do they have all the data they need? What data is missing? Are they receiving the reports they need? Are there any particular reports that would be especially helpful? The goal, of course, is to tie these demands back to the processes and data supported in finance. Likewise, a similar conversation with IT can yield all types of important information. What requests from accounting and finance are challenging to fulfill? Is there an item that causes extra resources to be consumed? Bottom line – learn to see needs from the "customer's" perspective.

Newly armed with insight, evaluate your processes. Ask what could be done to support these customer needs. Does this imply attacking old issues or raising new issues? Where are the gaps in finance efficiency, such as data standards and integration, that would help meet some of these user requirements? Is it time to revisit the budgeting and planning process to enable sales teams to better manage their pipeline, which in turn feeds more accurate and timely data back to finance?

Continue to embrace best practices that assist in implementing change. Establish a timely review session that includes an honest assessment of all the systems and processes that support performance management. Are there efficiencies that will improve data quality and flow by standardizing on a chart of accounts or critical business views of customer and product?

Are there additional business views that provide better leverage for decisions, better and more timely ways to connect with the audience? Most important, connect the plans to a “rolling ROI,” that is, to an ongoing evaluation of the impact on the business, both quantitative and qualitative. Many C-level executives look for ROI on projects, and the number one question that we receive at IBM is – “How do I build an ROI case for improved planning or reporting?” This is difficult to accurately assess up front. However, what is achievable is a continued and rolling assessment. The goal is to show an ongoing return on the cumulative investment in performance management.

Much of this, of course, is common sense, and many Finance people are already engaged in this manner today. My goal in sharing these thoughts can really be boiled down into three points.

1. Relationship building through the understanding of each other's day-to-day activities leads to greater synergy in business processes.
2. Informal assessments, linked to standard reviews, can unearth important opportunities for both business insight and finance efficiency.
3. Bottom up assessments – from business demands back to finance, accounting and IT – can uncover hidden opportunities and have a direct impact on systems and processes that support decision making.

The opportunity exists each and every day to increase the velocity and value of information to drive company performance. Finance can help lead the way.

## About Delbert Krause

Delbert Krause is a Director of Product Marketing, Financial Performance Management Solutions, for Cognos Software in the Business Analytics division of IBM. In addition to his formal training in finance, Mr. Krause has more than 20 years of experience in consulting, selling, and marketing performance management software solutions for finance, business and IT users. Mr. Krause can be reached at [delbert.krause@ca.ibm.com](mailto:delbert.krause@ca.ibm.com).

## About IBM Business Analytics

IBM Business Analytics software delivers complete, consistent and accurate information that decision-makers trust to improve business performance. A comprehensive portfolio of [business intelligence](#), [advanced analytics](#), [financial performance](#) and [strategy management and analytic applications](#) gives you clear, immediate and actionable insights into current performance and the ability to predict future outcomes.

Combined with rich industry solutions, proven practices and professional services, organizations of every size can drive the highest IT productivity and deliver better results.

## For more information

For further information or to reach a representative:  
[ibm.com/cognos](http://ibm.com/cognos)

## Request a call

To request a call or to ask a question, go to [ibm.com/cognos/contactus](http://ibm.com/cognos/contactus). An IBM Cognos representative will respond to your enquiry within two business days.



---

© Copyright IBM Corporation 2010

IBM Canada Ltd.  
3600 Steeles Avenue E.  
Markham, ON L3R 9Z7  
Canada

Produced in Canada  
December 2010  
All Rights Reserved.

IBM, the IBM logo, [ibm.com](http://ibm.com) and Cognos are trademarks or registered trademarks of International Business Machines Corporation in the United States, other countries, or both. If these and other IBM trademarked terms are marked on their first occurrence in this information with a trademark symbol (® or ™), these symbols indicate U.S. registered or common law trademarks owned by IBM at the time this information was published. Such trademarks may also be registered or common law trademarks in other countries. A current list of IBM trademarks is available on the Web at "Copyright and trademark information" at [www.ibm.com/legal/copytrade.shtml](http://www.ibm.com/legal/copytrade.shtml).

Other company, product and service names may be trademarks or service marks of others.

References in this publication to IBM products or services do not imply that IBM intends to make them available in all countries in which IBM operates.

Any reference in this information to non-IBM Web sites are provided for convenience only and do not in any manner serve as an endorsement of those Web sites. The materials at those Web sites are not part of the materials for this IBM product and use of those Web sites is at your own risk.

P25557



Please Recycle