Meeting the needs of your organization with IBM Cognos 8 Business Intelligence

Cognos. software

Abstract

Because automation only goes so far

Today's businesses would be almost completely unrecognizable to organizational leaders from even a generation ago. New systems, technologies, and processes have revolutionized how businesses operate and evolve. Advanced networking capabilities now connect businesses to their stakeholders—and beyond—in ways yesterday's leaders couldn't even begin to imagine. The pace of business has accelerated by orders of magnitude as legacy, manual processes have been relegated to the dustbins of history. Successive waves of investment in technology have also frequently resulted in measurable efficiencies compared to even a few short years ago.

Overview

In many respects, however, this shields a fundamental and significant weakness. For all the countless billions of dollars that have been spent transforming the very nature of our economy and turning it into a paragon of efficiency, we've fallen short on the people side of the equation. Advanced transaction processing systems, for example, can easily crunch huge volumes of data. But they fail to reflect the business insight that turns all that data into opportunity and growth. For all their glitzy success, advanced technologies can't get into the heads of the people who deploy them. They don't know, for example, what goals and metrics the CEO is going to lay out for next quarter. Nor can they read a business manager's mind and predict next year's budget figures. These systems are incapable of knowing what personnel throughout the organization are thinking and planning—and what those plans ultimately mean to operations.

Admittedly, by automating routine, time-consuming tasks, these systems free up time for decision-makers to add strategic value. They also generate and store data that can provide key insights. However, more than any single technology or combination of systems, it is the insight of real people that lies at the root of future business growth. And it is that insight that today's automated systems are not architected to understand.

Business problems

Of course, insight doesn't just happen. Your people need the right information, in the right form, and at the right time, if they are going to leverage their skills to advance the state of the organization. Unfortunately, too many users don't feel they have the information they need to effectively run their business. A recent survey of 1,000 global managers by Accenture highlighted some troubling results:

• 47% of respondents said they don't have confidence in their information.

• 42% of managers admitted using the wrong information at least once a week.

• 59% said they missed information they should have used.

What this means for the average organization is stark: For all their efficiencies, they're doing a substandard job equipping their people to think their way to competitiveness. Companies are losing traction because they've spent so much time, money, and energy on brute force technology and not enough on equipping their employees to get the most out of it.

Business drivers

Automation doesn't spark innovation. It facilitates it. But you'll never even reach that point if your people – the very source of the insight that assures your company's future – can't get the information they need to learn, to react, to pro-act, to decide. The automation revolution is over. It's time for the intelligence revolution to begin.

Better decisions drive better business

Your users are critical to your organization's well being. Wherever they are situated and whatever title they have, it is their insight and intelligence that drives the business. The quality, timeliness, and validity of their decisions literally make or break the company's future.

But are you doing everything you can to facilitate their ability to make better decisions? IT, for example, delivers software and services that are supposed to help them get more done. While these clearly add value, they fall short in a number of areas:

• They cannot access the information in people's heads.

• They are unable to align people around common organizational goals.

• They cannot adapt the unique information each user needs to do his/her respective job.

This costs the organization in a number of ways.

Specifically, users are generally:

• Not informed. They lack timely access to the right information.

• Not engaged. They are passive consumers of information. Unable to self-serve, they wait for IT to deliver reports and do not engage with the information to generate new insights.

• Not aligned. They are disconnected from organizational strategies and processes.

While this state of being may have been sufficient in an earlier, more sedate business environment, it is woefully inadequate today. Organizations that fail to tap their users' potential—from entry-level resources all the way up to C-level executives—risk leaving huge amounts of opportunity on the table. They lack the agility to identify and pursue new market opportunities. They are at increased risk of being non-compliant with toughening regulatory regimes. They leave themselves vulnerable to being outflanked by competitors that have figured out how to leverage the respective strengths of their people. This all flows to the bottom line and, if left unchecked, can ultimately threaten the organization's future.

Fortunately, the response need not be onerously complex. Indeed, attempts to implement technologies — especially BI — that aren't simple and straightforward stand a significantly greater chance of failure than those that limit scope and focus strongly on business alignment. Users both want and need control over the information they require to get their jobs done. They want to access it without undue obstacles and they want it available in a form that aligns cleanly with their role. This connects them to organizational processes and strategies, and ensures they can deliver optimal bottom line value.

IBM® Cognos® 8 BI version 8.4, more than any other solution before it, opens BI up to the widest internal audience and turns the promise of better decision-making into day-to-day, growth-focused reality.

The Solution

The solution for everybody

How can one set of tools meet everyone's needs?

Flexibility and scalability. Where other BI solutions focus on meeting the needs of individual decision-makers within the organizational hierarchy, IBM Cognos 8 BI version 8.4 takes a much broader-based perspective. It isn't good enough to put information into the hands of the precious few. Making it available to one department or team leads to a lopsided situation where some entities are in the know while others are not.

Delivering knowledge

If company-wide decision-making is to be improved, information must be available to everyone. And not just any information: It must be higher-quality, broadly-sourced, timely, and pervasive. It must adapt to the different types of roles within your organization, including executives, professional users, business managers, financial and business analysts, and business users. By scaling to the unique needs of each of these audiences, IBM Cognos 8 BI version 8.4 addresses the costs outlined above — not engaged, not informed, and not aligned — as follows:

1. Engaged. IBM Cognos 8 BI version 8.4 extends BI to a broader range of business users than ever before. It scales and adapts to all roles within the organization, ensuring the widest possible range of people can access the information they need to push the organization forward.

2. Informed. Greater access to information through advanced search capabilities paints a complete, contextual picture every time. Users aren't forced to work in the dark, so they make decisions based on trusted data.

3. Aligned. In-the-know users contribute significantly more to organizational operations and strategies. They're connected. They know where they stand relative to the broader organization and they feel like an integral part of a dynamic firm. IBM Cognos 8 BI version 8.4 actively encourages cross-functional collaboration, which further drives alignment and maximizes each individual's and team's contributions.

In short, information is the currency of your business. IBM Cognos 8 BI version 8.4 gets it to the people who can turn it into business opportunity.

Tools that get used

What's changed in version 8.4? Why does this matter? IBM Cognos 8 BI version 8.4 features a range of new capabilities that promise to transform how information is accessed and used, and how these changes drive improvements to organizational efficiencies. Some of the key enhancements include:

- **Reporting.** With IBM Cognos 8 BI version 8.4, users can create more visually appealing and interesting reports. By providing a simplified user experience and even enabling annotations, the system better engages users and encourages them to share insights across the organization.

- **Analysis.** Designed for exploration and analysis, IBM Cognos 8 BI version 8.4 provides a broader range of analytical capabilities, ensuring business users have access to trusted information that includes data and report lineage and a broader range of data sources.

- **IBM Cognos 8 Go! Dashboard.** More dynamic and interactive dashboarding is available in version 8.4 with IBM® Cognos® 8 Go! Dashboard . Beyond allowing transparent, timely access to organizational data, rich visualization capabilities allow anyone to leverage and interact with critical data in a form that makes the most sense for them. Instead of spending time hunting down data sources and writing individual, static reports, users at all levels of the organization can set up a dashboard once, then track performance over time.

- **Scorecards.** Like dashboards, these tools illustrate performance over time and provide real-time insight that drives better decision-making. Beyond dashboards, scorecards link this performance to organizational strategy and help users understand how their specific roles connect to and ultimately drive company wide performance. Scorecards are often used by organizations to effectively engage staff at all levels when implementing performance improvement frameworks such as Six Sigma or ITIL.

**Using data to create a better,
more cost-effective curriculum**

- **IBM Cognos 8 Go! Search.** Finding the right information represents a critical first step in analyzing and improving business performance. IBM Cognos 8 BI version 8.4 provides full content search of structured and unstructured data. With dynamic content creation, users can create queries based on search items that can be refined in Query Studio. Plus, IBM® Cognos® 8 Go! Search is easily integrated with third-party portals and search applications, which provides the broadest range of users with access to ranked and relevant content.

- **IBM Cognos 8 Go! Office.** One of the most significant barriers to BI adoption has been lack of familiarity. Conventional solutions force users to adapt to complex interfaces that are separate from their usual productivity applications. In many cases, users simply abandon the applications entirely. IBM® Cognos® 8 Go! Office in version 8.4 works seamlessly with Microsoft® Excel® and other end user tools. Users can continue to work with their everyday tools and take advantage of the greater robustness of BI-sourced data.

- **IBM Cognos 8 Go! Mobile.** As workforces become more mobile and users expect to interact with their data on any device, wherever they are, BI solutions need to keep up. Conventional solutions force report writers to create new reports for every platform. These static reports are time-consuming to create and they typically support only read-only capability on the target device. IBM® Cognos® 8 Go! Mobile in version 8.4 automatically reformats reports for a wide range of environments, ranging from BlackBerry to Microsoft Excel and the Web. Report authors, already overwhelmed with requests from business partners, can write one report, then not worry about where or how it will be consumed. Similarly, users can interact with their reports in an airport lounge just as richly as they can in their office.

It's all about alignment

What are the organizational benefits of IT/business alignment and how does IBM Cognos 8 BI version 8.4 make alignment a reality?

By shifting greater BI functionality into the hands of users across the organization, IT also sets the stage for significantly enhancing its relationship with business partners and, in doing so, lays the foundation for a more agile organization.

Because the majority of users within an organization currently lack widespread access to BI tools, they typically submit requests to IT when they need reports generated to support their business activities. This inefficient workflow introduces significant delays to decision-making, as these requests must be queued. IT teams, despite their technical knowledge, often lack the innate knowledge of the businesses they serve. These blinders result in inaccuracy and lack of precision in much of the work returned. Although this process consumes major resources at all levels of the organization, it fails to meet the underlying business need.

IBM Cognos 8 BI version 8.4 changes the paradigm of BI by moving day-to-day routine workflow away from IT and putting it where it belongs: Directly in the hands of the business users who rely on the data. Because the request-queue infrastructure is essentially no longer required, IT spends more time strategically partnering with the businesses it serves instead of fulfilling repetitive requests for static reports and data accesses.

This drives alignment and ensures business partners have access to the tools and processes they need to meet organizational goals and strategies. At the same time, this alignment ensures all business users — from the front lines to the executive ranks — leverage a common foundation, enabling them to work "from the same page". Rather than disputing the validity of information, users can spend time collaborating from a single version of the truth.

By shifting the focus of value-added work in this way, IBM Cognos 8 BI version 8.4 allows key resources in IT, financial services, and every constituent business area to achieve their full potential without getting bogged down in inefficient processes that fail to add bottom line value. By accessing a full range of capabilities — from reporting and analysis, through dashboards and scorecards — operational managers can align their decisions to the organization's strategic goals. This allows every employee to understand how their decisions affect the company's performance. The result? Companies work smarter and are positioned to compete more effectively.

Conclusion

Summary

You wouldn't think of running your business without comprehensive tools to manage networking, mobility, back-end processes, desktop productivity, and a whole range of other capabilities taken for granted in today's automated economy. Going without even one of these now-essential tools could easily compromise your ability to compete and render you vulnerable to rapid changes in your surrounding markets.

Add Business Intelligence to the list of must-have tools. It represents the only way to capture the insight of your most important assets — your people — and turn it into competitive advantage. Your people are on the front lines every day. They possess the deep business insight that drives strategies and the tactics used to achieve them, but only if you empower them to easily access the information they need to turn that insight into action.

IBM Cognos 8 BI version 8.4 combines an industry-leading set of capabilities with a user interface that seamlessly integrates into a broad range of existing tools. It empowers your users at all levels of the organization while simultaneously building a solid foundation for continuous improvements to your performance management capabilities. Its unique scalability and flexibility take BI out of its traditional realm of individual, selected teams and puts it where it can do the most good — on the desktops and in the hands of everyone who can take advantage of it. IBM Cognos 8 BI version 8.4 isn't just a new set of BI tools. It's where BI needs to go to unleash your people's potential and fuel the growth of your business.

About IBM Cognos BI and Performance Management

IBM Cognos business intelligence (BI) and performance management solutions deliver world-leading enterprise planning, consolidation and BI software, support and services to help companies plan, understand and manage financial and operational performance. IBM Cognos solutions bring together technology, analytical applications, best practices, and a broad network of partners to give customers an open, adaptive and complete performance solution. Over 23,000 customers in more than 135 countries around the world choose IBM Cognos solutions.

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