



Building a Business Intelligence Competency Center

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Abstract

Business Intelligence (BI) and Performance Management (PM) have become increasingly strategic in organizations, regardless of their size or market sector. While initial deployments may have focused on targeted uses, the current trend is to deploy BI more broadly across the organization. As part of this trend, BI and PM are rapidly migrating from specialists toward executives and everyday business users looking for direct and faster access to the data they need to make better decisions and get their jobs done.

To maximize the value obtained from having BI and PM in the hands of this new, wider audience, IT departments are challenged with managing and supporting these new tools and capabilities across divisions, regions and functions. Processes that were already in place to manage conventional applications and platforms are no longer sufficient. Developing an Enterprise-wide initiative with standard technologies and processes is key, and a Business Intelligence Competency Center (BICC) can provide the reusable knowledge, disciplines and best practices to help make these broader BI and PM initiatives possible.

This paper will help you strengthen your understanding, planning and communication of the value of a BICC and how it might work in your organization.

Business problems

To understand the need for competency centers, it is important to first understand the business problems and related information management challenges that many customers face.

BI and PM initiatives rank high among strategic investments but sometimes fail to deliver as promised. Implementations that take a technology-centric approach fall short because they are unable to address a given business need. Narrowly-focused BI and PM projects often result in individual areas within the organization iterating their own solutions for making use of the new toolset. If best practices are developed at all, they're typically not shared across a broad enough cross-section of the organization to truly have an impact. With each business area pursuing its own solutions, economies of scale are not realized, and support resources are unduly strained.

Data quality also suffers because the silo-based environment remains institutionally disconnected. It likely lacks a governance program which traditionally develops and manages a consistent approach to maintaining cohesive policies and process models. BI and PM fail to take root to the degree that they should because the net benefits of broader implementation are not realized – which motivates end users to simply continue working as they have. Regulatory and competitive requirements are increasing the need for greater volumes of work, shorter timelines and increased decision-making precision. As a result, organizations that fail to improve the level of their game risk falling behind, expose themselves to regulatory breach, or both.

A BICC addresses this gap by focusing on the root causes of misalignment. By consolidating representation from key areas across the organization, it can encourage the kind of ongoing discussion that maximizes alignment. Under the BICC umbrella, cross-functional teams identify opportunities for developing, deploying and monitoring best practices and ensuring precise linkages between fast-changing business requirements and the tools that will address them. By

driving business requirements through the heart of all BI- and PM-based initiatives, a BICC is an organization's best means of maximizing business value. It does so by capturing latent opportunities in existing data stores, putting business-friendly tools into more hands at all levels of the organization, and measuring the progress on their information management journey.

Having confidence in the data

Better decisions drive the bottom line, and are in turn supported by quality data. In this case, "quality" means not only accurate data, but consistently available, understandable and relevant data as well. When organizations lack confidence in their data, their decision-making capabilities suffer – which in turn affects organizational performance.

Against that backdrop, companies clearly want to get the most out of their investments in Business Intelligence and Performance Management. And in survey after survey, our customers tell us the kind of obstacles they face in trying to get the full value from these investments:

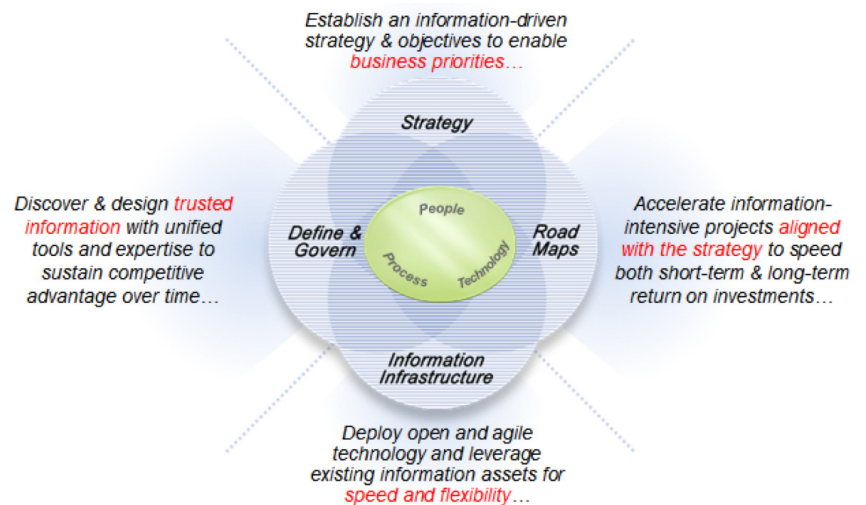
- **Disconnected silos of data** that reduce confidence in the numbers and drive inconsistency across the enterprise.
- **Lack of technology usage standards and best practices**, which results in users seeking their own solutions.
- **Insufficient training and support** resulting in wasted resources, missed deadlines and high rates of rejection by end users.
- **Misalignment between technology projects and business needs.** Incomplete or missing roadmaps and inconsistent executive sponsorship hamper long-term BI and PM success and reinforce institutionalized, inefficient workarounds.

To address these obstacles, organizations need to have the following key elements in place:

- An information-driven strategy to enable business priorities that align to corporate strategy.
- An enablement roadmap that aligns people, process and technology with this strategy.
- A deployment plan that leverages technology best practices.
- A foundation of trusted information that is governed for consistency & accuracy.

A BICC provides the framework within which an organization can incrementally work through each of these steps to drive the transition from an “application-based agenda” to an “information-based agenda”, and in doing so unleash the latent potential inherent in the pools of data that automated systems have been generating for years.

The Information Agenda



Business drivers

What is a BICC?

As organizations realize that Business Intelligence and Performance Management are more than just tools, and as they look to break through the proliferating silos of data, they are investing resources to help their organization manage information more effectively, make better decisions as a result, and use that capability to gain competitive advantage. To approach BI and PM as strategic assets, many organizations are combining IT resources and BI/PM users into coordinated teams. These emerging organizational structures bring together people - with interrelated disciplines, domains of knowledge, and experiences - with well defined technologies, processes and standards. Their goal: To achieve greater IT and business efficiencies on a foundation of trusted information which delivers more effective decision making across the enterprise.

Although the level of formality may vary from organization to organization, these teams are often known as Business Intelligence Competency Centers (BICC). A BICC is sometimes also known as a Center of Excellence, BI Shared Service center, or Center of Knowledge. Regardless of the term used, these teams can help an organization on a number of fronts to:

- Promote and provide delivery enablement through a consistent set of BI skills, standards and best practices.
- Enable repeatable, successful BI deployments through the development and focus of people, process, and technology.
- Measure success in terms that are relevant to the entire organization, and not just a single team, department or project.

Why do you need a BICC?

As promising as BI and PM can be to organizational performance, their individual and collective potential remains unrealized if traditional technology implementation processes are followed. Processes and standards are often the most overlooked deployment aspects. These are critical for sustained success due to the importance of governing how data is gathered, cleansed, organized, accessed and disseminated. This becomes even more vital with increased focus on compliance and risk.

If these technologies are to extend beyond tactical deployments to become broader-based solutions that support the organization's long-term information agenda, a managed, predictable, repeatable approach is needed. With this more strategic need in mind, a BICC can help organizations define the knowledge, standards and resources to make this happen. A BICC is essential to the strategic deployment of technology because it:

- Maximizes the efficiency, use and quality of BI and PM across all lines of business.
- Drives end user adoption by streamlining integration with routine workflows.
- Encourages alignment between IT and business areas.
- Reduces organizational overhead associated with maintaining data consistency and use.
- Increases the success of deployments by helping them deliver more value, at less cost and in less time.
- Improves business agility and technology management, which in turn drives business efficiency.

In this age of competitive and regulatory pressures, businesses find themselves challenged as never before to exploit every opportunity to improve efficiency and effectiveness for competitive advantage. If BI and PM unleash business potential, then a BICC unleashes the potential of BI and PM.

How a BICC derives value

There are 3 aspects of value for a BICC

- The IT efficiencies and cost savings derived from the economies of scale that are enabled by a BICC
- The business efficiencies and cost savings derived from improved business processes enabled by a BICC
- The ultimate business effectiveness and value from better decision making derived as a result of the BICC activities.

IT Efficiencies

Typically, a BICC is the catalyst for centralizing infrastructure such as servers and standardizing the related software within a “shared services” approach. This may also include centralized data, though in some cases this might be left to various business divisions to maintain. Tenant LOB users will often “subscribe” to this service with potentially significant costs savings compared to maintaining separate silo implementations.

Shared service centers may also provide a central pool of talent for educating and supporting the LOB community of users. This helps maximize tool functionality and best practices adoption – which in turn drive end user adoption and higher levels of self-service by the business. By creating a common location for these BICC functions, IT leverages economies of scale with common education and support programs. This drives costs down and relieves IT of the traditional reporting backlog associated with processing such requests from across the organization.

As a design authority, the BICC typically takes responsibility for common BI-related standards such as naming, design, templates, reporting, and setting up and managing a BI portal, among others. Beyond standards, the BICC may also assume accountability for BI/PM methodologies and encompass portfolio management and project deployment. These common standards make IT more efficient by re-using the standards rather than re-inventing them in different silos. Project planning and execution is streamlined because project managers can draw from pre-built standards that have already been proven.

The BICC is also often responsible for adherence to proper IT processes for security, version control, and production deployment. This reduces compliance- and audit-related risks for IT and the organization at-large, and makes governance more consistent and efficient compared to a silo-based approach.

The BICC regularly communicates the results of successful projects, the status of the BI roadmap, and evangelizes how BI and related PM competencies will address specific business requirements. In this way, the BICC provides clarity on how IT is providing value to the business, not only from a cost savings perspective which results from operational efficiency, but also through value creation which results from business effectiveness.

IT Benefit	How Competency Centers Add Value
Optimized cost of ownership, breaking down silos	Drives shared, standardized IM architecture & software
Improved productivity, responsiveness, backlog	Drives user adoption, enables self-service
Improved compliance, audit, governance, mitigate risks	Ensures adherence to IT processes, policies, standards
IT investments bringing business value	Communication and recognition of success
Innovating new ways to leverage information, maintain a competitive edge	Research information technology trends, advise on new opportunities to add value

Business Efficiencies and Effectiveness:

Investments in these technologies are only valuable if they are tied to business priorities. The BICC provides the critical link by which business strategy is translated into actionable information. The BICC is the focal point for consensus and decisions on sometimes competing priorities and thus determines the technology roadmap as it evolves over time. This ensures proper alignment with strategy and fosters effective and efficient collaboration between the business and IT.

The business must trust the data in order to make effective decisions with confidence. This requires appropriate stewardship to continually improve the quality of the data. The BICC must be aligned with existing Data Governance programs by ensuring both the business processes and IT processes – and in particular the data warehouse/integration processes – are in place and adhered to for data quality assessment and improvement. In some cases, the BICC may even go a step beyond alignment, and may be an early catalyst for such programs since many organizations may lack a formal Data Governance framework with stewardship assignment and accountability.

BICCs are also often the source for reporting on quality and process-related metrics for proper and effective data governance. This in turn mitigates the risks associated with poor, incomplete, or inaccurate data, as it provides a performance baseline for measuring effectiveness, and an opportunity to ramp performance over time.

As mentioned previously, the BICC provides a central service for education, support, and best practices. Also, with knowledge of the data and experience in advanced analytics, the BICC can advise and consult for the business to drive more self-service out to the LOB knowledge workers and power users, albeit, in a controlled, governed manner. The value to the business is a greater degree of

responsiveness and agility to rapidly changing business requirements, without having to go through an IT bottleneck. The business can now focus on improving specific business management processes by making them more efficient – for example, reducing reliance on time consuming Excel maintenance and verification – or enabling more effective processes that were previously starved for information.

With silos of information, it is common to have the same data defined in different ways, or for different data to be mistaken for the same definition. This is often most visible to the business at the KPI/metrics level where data is exposed on scorecards, dashboards and reports. To resolve issues of definition requires clear ownership and accountability. For example, who owns “revenue/headcount”? How should that be defined? How does that drive alignment from strategy to execution down through the organization?

The BICC can be the catalyst and facilitator to help resolve questions of ownership, definition, and consistency in the data. This can then be reflected in the deployed BI/PM environment through features such as business glossaries and data lineage displays. This in turn ensures everyone in the organization can be more effective and efficient because everyone is working from the same playbook of data definitions and meaning. Increased and accelerated adoption of the complete BI lifecycle encourages the creation and use of a “single version of the truth” across the entire enterprise, increasing business confidence in the data being used to drive decisions.

By putting BI tools and processes into more hands throughout the organization, BICCs help drive greater levels of self service, which in turn improves user satisfaction levels and allows more value-added deployment of organizational resources. IT support teams, for example, freed up from managing routine requests for reports from BI-less business users, can reallocate resources to creating value elsewhere.

In this way, a BICC can help enforce more consistent BI standards through registration and guidance, and identify new opportunities to leverage the toolset. This results in an alignment of technology to strategic goals and a clarity of vision for future coordinated BI. It also creates both tangible and intangible value throughout the organization, including competitive differentiation and increased ability to routinely meet ever-evolving regulatory requirements.

Business Benefit	How Competency Centers Add Value
Better alignment with strategy, business & IT collaboration	Drives the technology roadmap and builds consensus on priorities
Improved confidence in data, mitigate risks	Drives information quality (stewardship)
Responsive to changing business environment, improved business management processes	Enables self-service, shared best practices, improved analytics
Clearer accountability for business results, align execution	Facilitates data ownership, common business glossary (KPI/metrics definitions)

More strategically, a BICC also serves to educate key stakeholders about the advantages of employing BI and PM. It helps to build the lines of communication between regions and departments – and in doing so prevents a silo-driven approach to knowledge management. A BICC clearly demonstrates the value of BI/PM investments by illustrating throughout the organization the breadth, depth, completeness, accuracy and timeliness of information. This capability extends beyond mustering support for the next phase of investment to creating a BI-centric culture that supports the organization’s long-term strategic BI/PM roadmap across the enterprise.

Martin's Point Health Care is a not-for-profit regional health care provider which operates four health centers in Maine and New Hampshire. Martin's Point also administers the US Family Health Plan in Northern New England and New York State, as well as Medicare Advantage health plans and health management services in Maine.

In late 2005 Martin's Point took stock of how well it made information available to its employees. Martin's Point was a long-time user of Cognos BI and had an informatics team that was separate from IT and dedicated solely to the creation and maintenance of static reports, as well as the fulfillment of ad-hoc report requests from data consumers. However, the informatics team wanted to overcome obstacles that limited its ability to help end users access information and use it to make decisions.

In order to have a more centralized approach to data that would enable the informatics team to focus on end users' analytical needs rather than report building, the team was restructured as a BI Competency Center (BICC) in late 2005. Since then, Martin's Point has been able to reduce the costs of report creation and improve the productivity of data users as the result of its BICC. Key benefits from its creation include:

- **Reduced reporting costs.** The BICC reviews every report request it receives, and whenever a request can be fulfilled with end-user functionality, a member of the team reaches out and shows requesters how they can independently complete their analytical process on their own rather than through a new report. The aggressive deployment of these end-user driven tools, high enduser adoption, and the BICC's selectivity in fulfilling report requests have reduced the team's report building load by 20 percent.
- **Improved productivity.** Being able to independently build reports, analyze them, and perform various research tasks such as drill downs and queries means that end users spend far less time locating and manually analyzing information from various reports and databases.

More impressively, Martin's Point Health Care realized a 1,185% ROI, along with a payback period of only one month. Longer-term figures are just as impressive, with an average annual benefit of \$335,250.

Source: Nucleus Research ROI Case Study, IBM Cognos BI Competency Center, Martin's Point Health Care, June 2009

According to research conducted by the Business Application Research Center, organizations with a BICC have better alignment between IT and the business, and experience more pervasive use of BI across the organization. This helps them outperform organizations without a BICC in the following critical areas:

- **Alignment:** “The cooperation between IT and business users is much stronger in companies with an established BI competency center.”
- **User Adoption:** “Every department has a higher usage of BI software when a BICC is part of the organization.”
- **Business Value:** “Companies with BICCs outperformed those without competence centers in every single category.”¹

To fully support the organization, the most effective BICCs encompass a broad range of functions, as seen in the graphic below. While all these functions are valuable, it is often best to start your BICC plans with those functions most critical to early success and subsequently add more functions as your BICC matures.



- **Best Practices & Standards Management** – providing a clear process and repository for approving and sharing best practices and standards.
- **Advise & Consult** – providing a functional area of the business with advice, guidance, mentoring and “internal consulting” so they can become more self-sufficient.
- **Community Services** – where the BICC designs and builds content, such as reports and data packages, for use by the business. This is sometimes referred to as the “report factory”.
- **Communication & Evangelism** – how the BICC communicates status, progress, accomplishments, successes, and the overall roadmap to the business at large.
- **Enterprise Technical Architecture** – how the BICC directs/builds/supports the technology infrastructure that supports the needs of the business.
- **Support** – how the BICC provides a BI/PM-related help desk function to the business, or otherwise supports a broader help desk function.
- **Education** – how the BICC trains the business or related IT functions on the best use of BI and PM technology.
- **IT Governance Alignment** – how the BICC plugs into broader IT Governance processes such as change management, portfolio management, vendor management, and license management, among others.
- **Data Governance** – how the BICC creates a suitable framework, or interfaces with an existing Data Governance program.
- **Business Strategy Alignment** – how the BICC plugs into the business strategy to ensure technology-related initiatives are meeting the most important needs and priorities of the business.

Solutions

Identifying the value is one thing. Making it happen is quite another. Consider the following steps to make a BICC a reality within your organization:

1. Acknowledge the need, urgency, and willingness for change

A BICC's design is influenced by a range of factors, including business culture, historical deployment activity, specific business pains and measures of success. As broad as they may seem, it makes more sense to start with a limited focus.

Consideration for forming a BICC is driven by a need and urgency for change, specifically around the ability to meet business demand for better decisions using BI technology. Who is feeling the pain? Who is raising the need for change? How is this being expressed? Is there a willingness to institute change, at least in some parts of the organization?

To make change happen and to make it persistent requires sponsorship at the highest levels. It is vital to have a C-level or VP-level sponsor of the BICC initiative because the primary goal is to optimize business performance driven by business strategy and priorities. Without executive commitment to an overall BI-related vision, it will be difficult to get buy-in from other stakeholders to utilize information as part of the day-to-day operation and management of the business and to ensure alignment to reach strategic goals. The sponsor must be a firm believer in driving the culture around measuring the business to manage it effectively, to use BI as part of the management philosophy, and to ensure that all levels of management are aligned with the vision.

Executive sponsors should therefore be committed to making change happen. They should be the guiding force to nurture the development, growth, funding and navigation of company culture to drive the BICC from idea stage to reality. They will be primary drivers for building an initial guiding team and establishing critical early momentum.

Because a BICC evolves over time, so, too, must its sponsorship. Sponsors may change depending on maturity, scope and priorities. Once competency is established, the scope can expand. Over time, the BICC can play an increasingly strategic and proactive role in the organization. Bear in mind, however, that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to BICCs. It all depends on each organization's specific needs and the dynamic considerations of human capital, managed process, culture and technology infrastructure.

For example, in the early start-up phase, the BICC may be sponsored by the CIO as a catalyst for change. The CIO may see a need for better business partnership, but recognizes that the initial foundation-building for the BICC may need to start within IT. This insular approach helps to quickly improve the data foundation and generate some early wins for the business.

As time progresses, and with foundational elements in place, the sponsorship focus might shift to, for example, the CFO. This extended perspective allows the BICC to deepen its investments in broader competencies, including performance management and the integration of historical views – from the data warehouse – with future views to build stronger financial planning, budgeting, and forecasting capabilities.

2. Interlock business & IT. Build a guiding team.

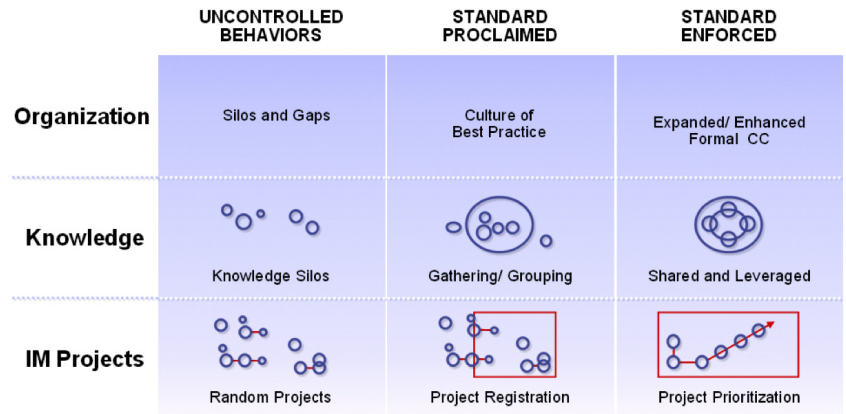
A BICC becomes most critical when there is a recognized need that crosses functional boundaries. To succeed, this cannot be a strictly IT-driven initiative. The business needs to be actively involved in the creation and operation of the BICC. In general, if IT tries to push BI or PM into the business, the investments are not necessarily in line with the business needs and the benefits are not always realized or recognized by the functional areas.

This thinking extends deeper into the functional areas of the business. Who are the business users who work with data on a regular basis? Who are the analysts and power users in the business who are responsible for providing content to others or doing deep analytics in support of management? Finally, who are the IT teams involved in supporting the delivery of information?

Whatever answers are returned, recognize that the need will not be the same in every area of the business at any point in time. Those who are feeling the pain now and see the urgency for change are typically prime candidates to be early participants in the formation of the BICC. They will help form the initial BICC community and become the guiding team to drive the first steps to success.

The business should be driving the investment decisions and priorities. To be successful, the business must partner with IT to ensure solutions, processes and infrastructure align with the organization's strategic investment decisions. With the establishment of effective BICC governance processes, with the right representation from the business, the elements are in place to ensure effective communication between the various functional areas and IT. This maximizes the return on efficient use of IT resources while ensuring that each functional area has sufficient means to meet its needs.

3. Develop a Strategic plan through Organizational Readiness

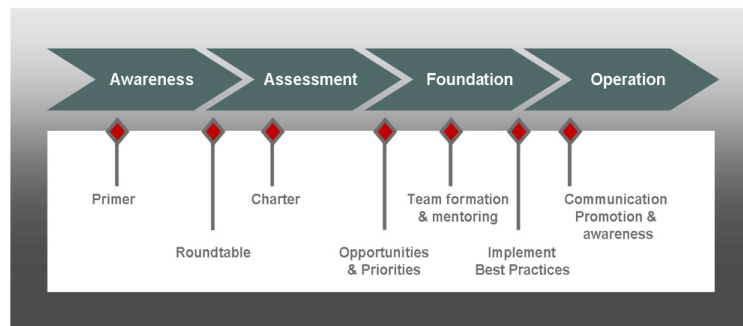


Assessing your maturity and readiness for BICC

BICCs can take on many forms depending on the needs, size and objectives of your organization. The setup and alignment of people will be influenced by many factors and becomes easier and clearer as you take the initial steps forward.

An important first step is to review your organization’s perception of the BICC and the maturity level of the effort. Keep in mind that some of the pieces may already be in progress, even if they aren’t formally identified as being part of a BICC. The following questions can help you determine where you may be along the continuum:

- Is a BICC a new concept to your organization?
- Do you already have a BICC in place and want to improve it?
- Are you ready to take the next step toward a BICC?



Based on the answers to these questions, you should be able to identify the maturity level of your BICC. Moving through these three phases will help you drive toward enterprise success with your BICC.

1. Are you pushing awareness of the BICC concept and philosophy through your organization?
2. Have you moved on to formalizing your BICC plan and service case?
3. Are you ready to, or have you already started the process of, implementing your BICC?

Once you have established the need, have a committed set of executive-level sponsors, and have identified the initial set of business stakeholders, you have the core elements in place to build a BICC plan and prepare the organization accordingly. This involves a number of steps including:

- a) **Awareness.** Ensuring all appropriate groups – including IT and business organizations with a vested interest – are aware of the purpose and value of a BICC and the intention to build one within the organization.
- b) **Assessment.** Use a series of in-depth roundtable sessions and functional maturity assessments to determine the current “as-is” state, the desired “to-be” state, the BI/PM strategy and prioritized roadmap to achieve the desired state. Also establish an appropriate timeframe and build a BICC governance structure that includes an approved charter of authority, scope, and roles and responsibilities. This step may require a business case to justify and fund the development of the BICC.
- c) **Foundation.** Start the process to build up and launch the BICC including the execution of the initial BICC functions (e.g. best practices and standards, education, etc.), typically in conjunction with a set of BI/PM initiatives and projects. Start communicating to a wider audience within the organization about the BICC strategy and roadmap, and that the BICC is now “open for business”.

d) Operation. Now that the BICC is off and running, it is time to consider expansion (more functions, more geographies), improvements or refinements, and opportunities for greater efficiencies (e.g. outsourcing some functions.)

The right selection of people and appropriate skills are critical to the success of your BICC – but only after you define the scope. The most successful BICCs maintain a mix of technical and business skills, either internal to the consolidated teams or accessible within the organization as required. It is up to the BICC to determine which skills, roles and staffing requirements are needed. As the BICC matures and the scope of its function diversifies, additions and changes to the roles and skills will be required to meet the service and capacity needs of the organization. Staffing the BICC should not be viewed as a point-in-time effort. Rather, it is an ongoing competency that will require additional investments in education and certification.

4. Think strategically, but act tactically in incremental steps that add immediate value

Look for opportunities to bring quick but valuable “wins” to the organization. Projects with long development cycles and extensive scope can impact a sense of momentum and lower commitment to the BI/PM vision.

The most successful BICCs are formed through a pragmatic development effort that matures over time. Based on our experience with customers implementing BI and PM solutions, consider the following:

- Start small
- Think strategically
- Systematically accelerate

Because BI and PM solutions have a cultural impact on an organization, small simple steps will yield greater return as users adopt the BI or PM standard, and the BICC's success and the projects it services drive subsequent successes.

5. Measure success & recognize value of improvement (Business Effectiveness)

With some early successes accomplished, it is important to then continually measure the benefits that the BICC has brought to the organization, both directly in terms of efficiencies and productivity in IT and the business (i.e. business process improvements) and indirectly by improving the overall decision making capabilities.

Once wins are established and success can be quantitatively measured (more users, improved data quality, more cross-functional views of business performance), those successes should be regularly communicated to the broader community of users, executive management and the business in general. Success will generate interest for new initiatives, further expanding the benefits of BI and PM.

Conclusions

While BI has always held the potential to transform business, its ability to accomplish that has often been hampered by internal obstacles to adoption. Only by removing these obstacles can organizations realize the full value from investments in BI and PM. By helping promote a BI-centric culture throughout the organization and by facilitating adoption in areas of the organization that have traditionally been bypassed, BICCs can help organizations unlock capabilities in their data and their people, and become more agile and competitive in the process.

As BI and PM become more strategic, IT departments are looking for ways to manage and support deployments across divisions, regions and functions. A BICC can provide the centralized knowledge and best practices to help make this broader BI/PM initiative possible. The time to move ahead with one could be sooner than you think.

- “Enterprises will expect IT leaders in charge of BI and performance management initiatives to help transform and significantly improve their business.”
- “A BICC is a necessary precursor to moving from a tactical approach to BI to a more strategic view. It helps sustain the organization’s interest and efforts around BI.”

Source: Gartner Predicts 2009: Business Intelligence and Performance Management Will Deliver Greater Business Value. December 18, 2008

Establishing a successful BICC depends on the right planning. Organizations that take a measured, well-managed approach synergizing people, process and technology are more likely to succeed. Those that do will gain wider support, contribute significant cost savings to the corporate balance sheet and help take business intelligence to the next strategic level.



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Endnotes

- 1 *Organization of Business Intelligence*, Business Application Research Center (BARC) Institute, Wurzburg, August 2008.

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