

Mind the gap

While most business leaders appreciate the value of aligning data with strategy, few have the tools to perform this complex task, leaving much of the processing to an over-burdened finance function. Glen Westlake of IT Performs tells Nigel Ash how to bridge the gap.

In too many enterprises, there remains a worrying disconnect between the strategic heights of the business and the lower levels where data, in both great quantities and widely varied formats, are generated.

Glen Westlake, a senior partner with IT Performs, says: 'The enterprise performance management (EPM) proposition seems simple. Take your ERP system, measure your business, align operational goals with the strategic objectives and then press the button... but then nothing happens.'

Too much room for error

He believes that EPM goes wrong for a series of reasons. Among them is the fact that companies rarely articulate their strategies clearly in the first place. And even when they do, they often fail to define how they are going to measure all the performance metrics. And, even if they manage to get that right, they are stumped by a lack of reliable clean data to analyse.

Westlake continues: 'Because of the complexity of the task, EPM is increasingly centring on the finance function, which is, after all, where all the nerve ends of the company report to and from where the blood supply of cash is regulated.'

'The challenge, however, is that finance's workload continues to increase, not least with regulation and compliance issues. People are too busy doing their day jobs to implement a process in which the finance function can reach across the enterprise and drive it forwards.'

'And the key point here is that EPM is a process, not a product. It is not a shrink-wrapped IT solution you buy and plug in. It is a change-management exercise that has to cover people, process and technology – the three pillars of every business. Done well, it creates a powerful link between a company's strategy and its data – the many millions of pieces of information about markets, customers, suppliers and products that all too often a company does not even realise it knows.'

Bridging the gulf

IT Performs is an 11-year-old niche consultancy that focuses on enabling enterprises to bridge this often yawning gap between strategy and data.

Westlake explains: 'Regardless which of the four leading technology suppliers – SAP, Oracle, IBM or Microsoft – your company deploys, we know how to build that bridge. The technology tools may be getting ever smarter, but the issue is always how you can get the full potential out of the IT you have bought.'

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IT Performs' solution lies in a single forensically-organised data warehouse in which all the disparate data from every corner of an enterprise is gathered, validated, cleaned and standardised. Because it works with any ERP system, this data warehouse will remain a reliable and constant resource as companies grow their business and upgrade their IT.

Westlake continues: 'By tapping into a comprehensive collection of accurate data, any top management can ask a strategic question and get the right answer. Just as importantly, the impact of changes made




subsequent to that response can also be monitored and evaluated on a continual basis.

'EPM must be created by a partnership between the business and IT to create a business intelligence centre of excellence. The database is built to mimic business processes and the tools are configured to cleanse, mine, measure and analyse the data to support strategy.'

'These tools, once only affordable to larger organisations, are now being targeted and packaged for smaller companies, providing information to everyone, not just the executive team. In fact, Business Objects, the market leader in this space, recently launched its Edge Series, specifically targeting smaller enterprises.'

'With better information, you will make better decisions. Some companies facing recessionary pressures may not want to invest in EPM, even at a time when the right decisions are becoming absolutely crucial. We, however, are working with enterprises, which appreciate the power of effective EPM in both tight and booming markets.'

For companies looking for a way to bridge the gap between strategy and data, IT Performs offers a clear solution to create a data warehouse that makes accessing all your valuable data an easy and reliable process. ■

Further information 
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