

Everyone Can Win the Data Tug of War

Managed self-service analytics can be a huge triple win—for users, IT and the enterprise

Today's Environment

Most of the clients we work with have a vision of becoming data-driven organizations, but many struggle to find the right balance between self-service and centralization. When clients engage Point B for Business Intelligence (BI) Strategy and Roadmap projects, they often ask for recommendations on how to integrate user-centric data analytic tools into their enterprise data architecture. It's not uncommon for enthusiastic power users within organizations to adopt these tools on their own—making leaps forward in analytics and productivity, but putting the organization's data security and reporting integrity at risk.

Point B's Perspective

Point B helps organizations achieve a three-way win—one that addresses the concerns of IT, unlocks the power of self-service data analytic tools for users, and benefits the enterprise with greater insight into data. In the process, we help clients eliminate the common obstacles of organizational change, transition costs, and adapting existing data architecture to support the capabilities of the new analytic tool.

One of our clients, a state department of education, is a great example of transforming a data tug of war into an era of new insight and opportunity. The department asked us to analyze its enterprise data architecture to see how a new data analytics tool could fit in. The challenges were clear: From the perspective of users,

IT was slow-moving, bureaucratic, and did not understand the operational meaning of the data. What's more, the data warehouse structure had become so complex that it was difficult even for IT to produce accurate reports. As a result, the departmental power users had resorted to simply asking IT for data dumps, which they would then analyze using their own favorite user-centric data analytic tools. The situation came to a head when a legally-mandated report was prototyped in a week by a power user with a market-leading visualization tool—while it took four months to produce a less robust version of the report using the organization's traditional BI platform.

Everyone agreed that the existing enterprise BI tool had become increasingly difficult to support, and trained resources were tough to find. Recurring performance problems made IT reluctant to commit to major new report development.

Creating a win for all stakeholders

A data analytic tool is only as effective as its ability to meet the needs of all its diverse stakeholders. To that end, our client was experiencing common challenges:

IT pressures: IT often feels bound by constraints that other departments are not—including security, performance, enterprise validation and staffing. Our client's IT group supported the move to a scalable, easy-to-use BI tool, but was concerned about how they could manage support requests for a self-service tool.

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Individuals with experience in the existing data model had very real concerns about their future: the sunset of the tools that they built their careers on; the need to re-architect for a new data model; and how to extend the security model to the new user-centric data analytic tool.

User needs: Users wanted more agile, responsive reporting as well as more knowledgeable and agile business-oriented partners in IT. They were concerned about increasing bureaucracy and any loss of self-service and control.

Executive goals: Executives wanted to stop the finger-pointing between IT and users when problems arose, and to control the security risk of having Personally Identifiable Information (PII) on laptops and workstations. They were also concerned about transition costs, disruption to the organization, and the financial impact of the transition and additional staff.

Harnessing existing energy and resources

Based on a close look at all stakeholder needs, we made a number of pragmatic organizational recommendations that reflected our client's limited budget for new resources and the lack of spare capacity.

When it came to human resources, we recognized that our client already had what it would take. The key was to mobilize its power users—departmental champions who already knew and used the new data analytic tool—to provide level 1 support and end-user education to other users. This relieved IT of the potential burden of supporting a much larger, decentralized self-service user base.

At the same time, that change would have to benefit the power users who would be taking on new responsibility. We recommended our client make the new user-centric data analytic tool an official tool for the enterprise. Enterprise licensing would enable our client to put greater control in users' hands by giving them access to more data, while also addressing the concerns of data security and integrity.

Point B made additional recommendations to support the transition and put guardrails in place for productive, secure use: restructuring the data into business-centric data marts to simplify reporting and set enterprise standards; standardizing on the new data analytics tool for BI reporting and analytics; retraining IT people on the new data analytic tool; and setting up a request ticketing workflow to reflect the support model.

The Bottom Line

We see it in our clients' organizations every day: Modern user-centric data analytic tools are unleashing new insight, informing better strategic decisions, and redefining the value of data to the enterprise. Organizations can reap the rewards of these advanced data analytic tools without sacrificing security and other benefits of centralization. An unbiased point of view can provide the fresh thinking to help you look at resources and roles differently. The key is to find a solution that's truly a three-way win—for users, IT and the enterprise.

For organizations feeling the tensions of a tug of war between users and IT, it pays to step back and look at the situation from an enterprise point of view. Together, the right level of executive sponsorship, together with a clear roadmap, is critical to arriving at a solution that moves everyone to become more data-driven.