

Executive Summary

The key to making BI pervasive is getting users to adopt and use the BI tools that an organization purchases for them. This seemingly straightforward statement is actually very complex given all the variables that go into making a BI tool easy to use. This is why the penetration of active BI users in organizations is only 24%.

Certainly technology plays a big role in increasing adoption and usage and making BI pervasive: new visualization techniques, search-enabled BI, in-memory analysis, Office integration, dashboards, high-performance systems, and integrated BI platforms all factor into the equation. But, interestingly, the users whom we interviewed for this report and who responded to our survey focused largely on the “soft” issues involved in making BI pervasive: sponsorship, marketing, training, support, monitoring, and prototyping. Users also mentioned the importance of good design, architecture, and project management and scoping skills.

Key Results. The biggest impediments to BI adoption (i.e., obtaining licenses for all users) are the time and complexity to deploy BI tools followed by the cost of BI licenses, according to our survey. Recognizing these challenges, BI vendors are making strides to reduce the complexity and costs of BI tools.

Once BI tools are in-house, the biggest impediments to greater usage are poor data quality, overly complex tools, slow query response times, lack of executive backing, and the existence of other tools, according to respondents. To accelerate usage, they recommended integrating BI with Microsoft Office, implementing dashboards, embedding BI into a business process, and delivering highly interactive and self-service BI.

Systems Theory. Our telephone interviews with BI practitioners revealed that BI initiatives have either positive or negative momentum. Many BI teams seem stuck in a negative feedback loop where, despite Herculean efforts, BI teams find it difficult to gain traction and widespread user adoption. Conversely, some organizations have the opposite problem: they are cursed with success and can't seem to keep up with user demand.

This dynamic suggests that systems theory might be the key to unlocking the secrets of pervasive BI. Applying the limits of growth archetype, we discovered that BI initiatives have both positive- and negative-reinforcing loops and two key points of leverage: usability and project management. BI managers can exploit these leverage points to extricate themselves from a negative feedback loop.

But delivering an easy-to-use solution is no easy task. BI teams must address design, architecture, support, and change management issues, each of which comprise multiple factors that ultimately affect whether BI becomes a pervasive resource within an organization. Managing projects is more straightforward but still requires finesse to manage project scope, build a team, and establish standards and goals.

By understanding system dynamics driving BI initiatives and the variables that affect leverage points of usability and project management, BI teams can focus their efforts to ensure widespread deployment of BI solutions.