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Avoiding the Business Intelligence Burden

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If an organization is unable to manage the business intelligence solution that they choose to deploy, it simply becomes a matter of time before it dies on the vine. To avoid this, it is necessary to formulate practical methodologies that address certain tenants to proper business intelligence.

Burdens of Poor Business Intelligence Selection

Many firms have attempted to deploy business intelligence (BI) software, only to discover that managing the care and feeding of the system caused too great of a burden on their accounting, finance, and IT personnel. In order to mitigate these risks, it is essential to consider how the BI solution will work once deployed, as well as the quality and quantity of staff available to operate it. Areas to discuss prior to selecting a business intelligence solution include:

- **Frequency of manual tasks:** How often will a user be required to manually populate fields within the system?
- **Staff proficiency:** Will those tasked with reviewing data, such as lawyers, immediately understand how metrics are calculated and be able to find relevant information?
- **Points of failure:** If an employee tasked with entering information into the system leaves the firm, will somebody be available to adequately fill the void?

Quality Metrics and Proper Alignment

The metrics and reports that a firm chooses to include in their BI solution must be seen by all audiences as actionable. In essence, those at the firm should feel that their actions impact the metrics. For example, if the chosen metric is expenses, staff should have some control over those expenses before they are budgeted and incurred. Showing an audience that they are over budget on expenses a month after somebody else made the decision to spend money will undermine the business intelligence solution.

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Proper alignment is an often-overlooked aspect when determining what to include in a business intelligence solution. The adage "what gets measured gets managed" is spot on. The organization should ensure that the metrics for each audience are properly aligned with client, compensation, and firm goals (in that order). If clients value fast service and cost control, then presenting primary measures of billable hours and aged accounts receivable is not properly aligned.

Legal Team Adoption Rates

For a business intelligence solution to be judged as a success, lawyers must use it. A key factor in influencing adoption rates is how intuitive the system is to use. If a solution requires already busy professionals to hunt for information they need, then it quickly becomes a source of frustration and is disregarded. Adoption rates will also be low if lawyers do not understand the metrics. Many lawyers do not have, nor desire to have, the accounting and business backgrounds to interpret information that may be second nature to the CFO. Therefore, it is beneficial for the BI solution to contain a mix of summary and supporting details. It should also highlight variances and issues that demand attention in order to ensure that lawyers address those issues before they become problems.

Another pitfall that reduces adoption rates occurs when lawyers receive information from systems that are not in agreement with the BI solution. Simple timing differences between the business intelligence solution and reports and inquiries from the core line of business systems can lead to the dreaded "multiple versions of the truth" scenario. Highly adopted business intelligence solutions are comprehensive, one-stop shops. Systems that are not generally end up being cumbersome at best.

Solution Accuracy

Perhaps the most important aspect of a business intelligence solution is accuracy, especially when the solution is initially launched. Once the audience discovers or suspects that the business intelligence solution contains errors, they will discount it. Even rumors of inaccuracy can cause lawyers to ignore the solution.

Cost Effectiveness

Lastly, a good business intelligence solution will be cost effective. If it is overly costly to manage and extend, the system risks becoming stale and ineffective. The best BI solutions will evolve as the business climate changes. Oftentimes, it must be expanded to incorporate new client and firm goals. If the time and cost requirements to increase the capabilities of the solution are too high, then the firm is less likely to make any changes at all.

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