Survey Analysis

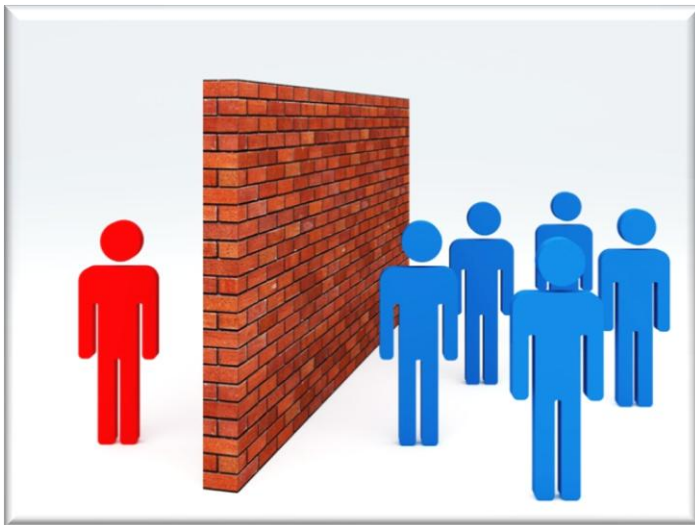
What are the barriers to implementing effective and efficient Management Information

A survey conducted by
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during October & November 2013

Survey Question

How much of a barrier to implementing effective and efficient Management Information are the following?

a. Cost
b. Availability of reporting tools
c. Lack of executive support
d. Lack of internal knowledge/expertise/resource
e. Lack of external knowledge/expertise/resource
f. Lack of demonstrable benefits
g. User engagement and acceptance of change
h. User training
i. Difficulty accessing data / data dispersed in many systems
j. Long systems and reporting development timescales

About this Survey

This survey is not

A scientific study

Statistically representative of the business community

No attempt has been made to ensure equal representation by industrial sector, organisation size or respondents job role.

This survey is

The thoughts of experienced individuals who are either implementers or recipients of Management Information.

The survey and findings are designed to be thought provoking, not definitive.

Key Findings - Summary

Low / Medium Barriers

- Availability of reporting tools
- Lack of external knowledge/expertise/resource

Medium Barriers

- Lack of demonstrable benefits
- User training

Medium / High Barriers

- Cost
- Long systems and reporting development timescales
- Lack of internal knowledge/expertise/resource
- User engagement and acceptance of change
- Difficulty accessing data / data dispersed in many systems

High Barriers

- Lack of executive support

Key Findings

High Barriers

- Lack of executive support

I find this a somewhat perplexing, although not unexpected conclusion. The reasons for this must be various and complex.

However it is interesting that when considering the responses in relation to organisation size the "high Barrier" conclusion is more pronounced in organisations larger than £100m turnover.(see summary by organisation size).

Does this reflect the current economic climate; executives have more important concerns at present, or does it reflect a more systemic state of affairs? This survey can't answer these questions. However for MI practitioners this has to be a concerning finding and indicative of the need to effectively "sell the solution" at a senior level.

It takes work to "get executive support." And then more work to "keep executive support". And then even more work, time and effort to get "executive sponsorship."

Executive management is always going to be a key stakeholder in any Management Information implementation, so gaining their support is a critical success factor. A convincing business case may well be the mechanism of achieving executive support but, leadership can often change and priorities shift, executive support must be continuously affirmed.

It may also be helpful to find someone who can "champion" the project at the executive level. This champion does not necessarily need to come from a technical background (probably helps if they don't). However they must be someone who sees the value in the overall project for the organization and can promote and evangelise the benefits accordingly.

Key Findings

Medium / High Barriers

- Difficulty accessing data / data dispersed in many systems

Getting the right information into the hands of the right decision makers at the right time is key to the successful implementation of an MI system. However, this survey indicates that access to data is a significant barrier to achieving this objective. This barrier being particularly evident in larger organisations where perhaps performance measures have to be derived from a number of differing data sources.

The significance of this barrier in larger organisations may also be reflecting the more divers and complex data architecture that are frequently encountered within larger organisations.

Where data availability is a problem, there is a risk of compromising integrity and omitting data because it is too difficult or expensive to collect or purchase, even though it might be the most relevant. This is probably more likely to be true of data indicating more qualitative, social variables, and it is important that the analysis takes any such omission into account.

Toolsets which enable a "horizontal" or "federated" view of data across an organisation help mitigate this barrier but there still remains the potential issue regarding consistency of data definition when data is held in dispersed systems. Organisations (particularly larger ones) need to be committed to managing data as an enterprise asset, not locally held resources.

Key Findings

Medium / High Barriers — Long systems and reporting development timescales

Speed of implementation is perceived as a significant barrier. It emphasises the fact that as the velocity of data increases (social and "Big" data) the need for Management Information systems to respond in a timely (quicker) way has become more important than ever before.

Implementers of Management Information systems need to develop techniques that enable the timely delivery of systems, or alternatively methodologies which enable user benefit (partial scope) early in the implementation, with functionality progressively enhanced, to full specification, throughout the implementation life span.

Waterfall development methods are increasingly proving to be inadequate and time consuming for modern Information needs. New agile development methods need to be adopted. This however is not without its own challenges as:

- Old Habits Die Hard – the waterfall approach is safe with "the Process" becoming the excuse for slow delivery.
- Agile methodology needs to be carefully managed or scope creep will kill the time line.
- For Agile methodologies to work well department boundaries need to be broken down.
- Don't give up to easily – no one said it was easy, but if you are going to fail, fail quickly and move on.

Key Findings

Medium / High Barriers

- User engagement and acceptance of change

Medium Barriers

- User training

User engagement, acceptance of change and training tend to be related. However the survey indicates that achieving user engagement and acceptance of change is a greater barrier than that of delivering user training.

The up front user engagement process is a difficult one to get right, along with the change management processes that encourage acceptance.

My experience is that you can't start engaging users too soon in the implementation process. This is best achieved through using an "agile" approach with user input being repeatedly sought, agreed and incorporated throughout the implementation process. One way of achieving user engagement can be:

- Make a Strong First Impression – develop a killer Proof of Concept
- Gradually expose the depth of your solution – draw users into your vision but don't play all your cards at once.
- Announce features and improvements in-app - Plan and stage the release of new functionality
- Talk with real users during trials – engage face to face, listen and remember "the customer is always right".
- Gradually Increasing Engagement – gradually increase user exposure, make a strong first impression each time.

Key Findings

Medium / High Barriers   - Lack of internal knowledge/expertise/resource

Low / Medium Barriers   - Lack of external knowledge/expertise/resource

The resources available to implement new Management Information systems are important.   The findings of this survey are that there is an acknowledgement that internal resource is a notable barrier but that external parties have the appropriate expertise (to supplement the internal deficiency).

The one question this does raise however is the processes organisations implement in order to ensure that internal resource are adequately trained and skilled up to meet the demands of ever changing tools and techniques. An internal appreciation (vision) of the art of the possible is essential in support of a robust business case etc.

Internal resource has traditionally been seen as the 'poor cousin' of its external counterpart and there will inevitably be an implementation cost penalty if organisations always resort to using third parties rather than ensuring the correct level and evolving internal skill set.

This survey endorses the fact that lack of internal resource, knowledge and skill is detrimental. There needs to be the right balance of internal resources to enable organisational innovation, agility and implementation capability which can then be supplemented by external resource.

Key Findings

Medium / High Barriers

- Cost

Medium Barriers

- Lack of demonstrable benefits

Cost and benefit cant be considered in isolation, assessment of cost (affordability) has to be considered alongside the ability to demonstrate the benefits that are to be achieved. It is therefore unsurprising that the response profile of both of them was similar, although Cost appears to be the bigger barrier.

It was notable that the analysis by size of organisation indicated that demonstrating the benefits was more of an issue for organisation with turnover greater than £100m perhaps an indication of the higher level and rigour and detail required for decision taking within larger organisations.

In my opinion the lack of demonstrable benefits is the more concerning barrier. (because if you can demonstrate benefit cost justification tends to become less problematic). This finding suggests that vendors and/or external consultants are failing to demonstrate sufficient benefits to establish convincing, well balanced, cost / benefit analysis.

Strategies to demonstrate benefits need to be improved. My favoured method is to conduct representative Proof of Concept studies with organisational relevance to demonstrate benefits, however this does require vendor support in order to make the Proof of Concept as low risk (low cost) as possible.

Key Findings

Low / Medium Barriers

- Availability of reporting tools

Abraham Maslow has been quoted as saying "If you only have a hammer, you tend to see every problem as a nail." Those words are more true than ever before as an increasingly complex and interconnected world makes selecting the right reporting and analysis tool crucial.

This survey encouragingly finds that respondents felt that availability of reporting tools is the lowest barrier to implementing effective MI. As such this probably acknowledges the breadth of reporting and analytical tools now available. It emphasises the fact that barriers to implementing new Management Information systems is not limited by the availability of an appropriate toolset, but other, more organisationally orientated factors .

To help digest and make sense of their data, organizations need to select, from the wide variety of tools available in the marketplace today, the reporting and analysis tools that can best present data in a relevant and timely manner. However organizations do need to find a way to determine which tools are most suitable to meet the varied needs of their users, but the good news is there are plenty of tools out there, typically they include:

- **Self-Service Reporting & Analysis** – empowers users to explore data and find persuasive ways to display data,
- **Self Service Data Mashups** – combining data from multiple sources to pivoting and drilling down into data
- **Professional Reporting** – formatted reports enabling consistency, scalability and automated distribution.
- **Performance Monitoring (Dashboards)** –enable users to quickly and easily monitor performance.
- **Scorecarding** –highly summarized with key performance indicators measured against predefined targets.