

Inside Perspective

Getting the Right Balance – Internal vs External Business Intelligence Skills

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One challenge a lot of organisations face when implementing or looking to enhance their Business Intelligence capability is deciding on the right mix of internal and external skills to provide the necessary organisational elasticity required by the business. Understanding the elements that make up a BI capability and the importance of those elements in the success of the overall initiative can be a useful starting point.

There are typically four areas where specific skills are required. They are as follows:

- Business engagement and requirements definition
- Data warehouse architecture and build
- Report and dashboard tool development
- User education and training

The skills requirement for each of these areas is different and in assessing the appropriate approach, it is important to understand the ideal skills profile, the duration of the requirement and the implications of having the wrong skills. The framework below has been designed to facilitate this decision making process.

Area	Skills required	Duration	Sourcing model	Implications of having the wrong skillset
Business engagement and requirements definition	Strong business & process understanding Good relationships with business stakeholders	Ongoing	Internal – Business Analyst	Low adoption due to solution not meeting business need

Area	Skills required	Duration	Sourcing model	Implications of having the wrong skillset
Data warehouse architecture and build	ETL architecture and design Data warehouse architecture and design	Point in time and ad-hoc afterwards	External – Business Intelligence specialist	Low confidence in and adoption of solution because of data quality & performance issues Significant backlog of reporting requests from business stakeholders
Report & dashboard tool development	Report writer & integration skills Dashboard design & integration skills Self-service tool knowledge e.g. Powerpivot	Ongoing	Internal and external for initial project to ensure rapid delivery Internal once steady state	Limited agility to respond to changing business demands
Training and Governance	Strong business understanding Good relationships with business stakeholders Understanding and management of corporate data models	Ongoing	Internal – Business Analyst	Low adoption due to poor product knowledge and support Progressive decrease in adoption due to degradation of solution integrity

Industry analysts like Gartner and recruitment specialists like Michael Page, point to a skills shortage this year, with the area of BI seen as the biggest technical priority according to the majority of CIO's surveyed in Michael Page's 2011 CIO Viewpoint survey. According to Michael Page, CIO's are trending towards service providers who can offer CIO level peers to execute projects because of a lack of internal capacity. The ultimate success however of any BI initiative, depends on getting the right blend of internal skills to ensure the solution is relevant and utilised, and right level of specialist external skills to ensure technical quality and robustness of the platform.