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TIME FOR ANALYTICS TO STEP INTO ERP'S DRIVER'S SEAT?

Is your ERP project aligned with the needs of a data-driven organization?
Let your organization reap great benefits through two key efforts.

Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems have a core purpose: supporting the day-to-day operations of the organization. Consequently, ERP implementation projects tend to focus on such core functionality. Using ERP data for analysis in Business Intelligence (BI) tools, however, risk not getting enough early attention, in my experience.

Two main challenges

Using ERP data for BI is easy enough if the out-of-the-box reports and analytical capabilities provided with the system are enough. However, legacy BI-requirements and the demand for non-ERP data often make the situation more complex. Likely, a lot of hard work must be done before BI needs are met by the new ERP landscape. Chances are the final list of reports ends up being “need to have” instead of “nice to have”. Let alone “wow, we can do this?”

In particular, the BI team faces two challenges with hard to predict consequences:

1. The data set the new ERP system is able to provide might not satisfy existing BI needs. Early discovery of data gaps increases the ability to fill such gaps, or at least manage stakeholder expectations.
 2. Adapting an existing BI solution to a new ERP platform could force the use of new technology. New technology that might prove more time and resource consuming to implement than expected.
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Early involvement

So, what can be done to mitigate the impact of such challenges? My experience has revealed two key efforts that have significant benefit:

1. *Involve the BI team in early ERP project workshops.*

Generally, the BI requirements gathering activities are separate from the rest of the project and typically kick in once the stage is already set. Joining forces with other project teams early in the game will not only spare valuable time of key experts in the organization, but it will also provide the BI team a better understanding of the operations from the start.

2. *Enable the BI team to uncover problems early.*

Provide the BI team with a platform on which to build a prototype from the project start. Gradually discovering technical and data issues is much better than discovering them all at once. Even an initial dummy ERP implementation with fictional data would serve an important purpose in discovering technical limitations and would reduce the risk of betting on a solution that turns out to be unfeasible.

These efforts can provide additional positive effects:

- A plan that includes early BI deliverables would effectively mandate the BI team to push the rest of the project more.
- Being part of early workshops will give the BI team a better understanding of the operations. It will enable the BI team to become a powerful catalyst for requirements. Not just a receiver.

Wow today, is need to have tomorrow

In conclusion, with more and more organizations facing the need to be data-driven, the “wow, we can do this?” of today is sooner or later going to turn into “need to have”. Increasing the BI team utilization during the ERP project will elevate the organization’s foundation for future analytical capabilities. Perhaps data needs should even drive the choice of ERP system?

At Capacent, we support companies in creating lasting value out of data.