

A close-up photograph of a person's hands interacting with a tablet. The person is wearing a white shirt and a gold bracelet. The background is blurred, showing a wooden chair and a table.

AVOIDING SELF-SERVICE BI DISASTERS

3 STRATEGIES TO SUCCESSFULLY EMPOWER BUSINESS USERS

WHAT'S HAPPENING

Self-service business intelligence (BI) can be revolutionary for a business. Making fast, reliable analytics available to everyone in the organization empowers individuals and teams to move faster and make better business decisions. In fact, Gartner predicts that 2019 is the year when business users leveraging self-service analytics will produce greater output than professional data scientists.

Executives recognize the opportunity in self-service BI: About half of executives say their vision of a data-driven business would allow every employee to become a data analyst and be rewarded for identifying and acting on opportunities gleaned from analytics. Yet they also report inconsistent or nonexistent access to those analytics and management structures that do not allow employees to act on their insights.

It's time to turn theory into practice. But when it comes to making self-service BI visions a reality, senior IT leaders are often stuck between a rock and a hard place. While do-it-yourself BI platforms can do wonders for kickstarting data curiosity, they also threaten to bury your organization under a mountain of reports. This creates untold new challenges for IT teams: How do you give business users the freedom to explore while also ensuring the best reports aren't getting lost in all the noise? How do you guarantee that data and reports are always accurate in this type of environment? What happens when bad data goes viral?

Making the transition to self-service BI requires a clear gameplan.

Here are three key strategies for laying the groundwork to successfully empower business users:

"We're using [Incorta] to report on HR data, so there's very sensitive data being manipulated and handled. It's critical we control who sees what data and when they see it, otherwise it becomes a privacy issue as well. Incorta gives us much more granular control over who is permitted to access and view data than the other options we looked at."

FORTUNE 10 CONSUMER ELECTRONICS MANUFACTURER

STRATEGY #1

SHIFT YOUR TEAM'S MINDSET FROM CONTROL TO EMPOWERMENT

Transitioning to self-service BI starts with coaching your IT team to rethink their relationship with data. In particular, it's important to let go of the traditional gatekeeper mindset and focus instead on finding ways to empower business users to become data scientists in their own right.

This mindset shift toward data democratization is at the heart of self-service BI. With the right culture, tools and processes, your team doesn't need ironfisted control to ensure the data provides valuable insights. Imagine the possibilities if every employee had open access to accurate data and analytics across the entire organization, with the ability to experiment with and "remix" that data however they wanted. From HR to DevOps to Sales, every decision would become data-driven.

Here's the challenge: This vision for the future is not always welcome news to IT professionals who have built their career around data — especially those who specialize in ETL or data governance. It can easily lead to anxiety that data democratization will make them and their skillset obsolete.

Such fears are misplaced. In reality, self-service BI makes the data team's job more interesting – and important – than ever before. As data and BI become a wider and more ingrained part of the culture, a far greater number of decision-makers depend on the team's expertise. What's more, shifting to self-service means that your team is no longer on the hook every time a new view or dashboard is requested – grunt work that takes time away from more impactful, cutting-edge projects.

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One way to communicate the benefits of data democratization is to highlight the competitive advantage to your organization. Studies have shown that the accuracy and availability of data within a company is an important factor in its ability to sustain innovative thinking and problem-solving. MIT Sloan Management Review, for example, found that 80% of organizations with a high ability to innovate share data internally.

STRATEGY #2

STRIKE THE RIGHT BALANCE BETWEEN FREEDOM AND OVERSIGHT

For most senior IT leaders today, the reasons for ditching the gatekeeper model and loosening up control of data are easy to understand. But when it comes to actually implementing a new model? That's another story entirely.

Trying to implement self-service BI without some level of oversight is asking for trouble. Provide too much freedom and well-intentioned business users will undoubtedly make mistakes, such as forgetting to filter out noisy data, or mixing and matching the wrong data. If a report with incorrect data goes viral, it can lead people to make bad decisions without even knowing it, which can hurt the business. What's more, responsibility inevitably falls on senior IT leadership.

On the other hand, with too much oversight, you end up right back where you started – scrubbing data, approving reports, dealing with a growing list of data change requests and building a hodgepodge of reports for every whim of the business. That doesn't work well for modern businesses with a top-down mandate to become data-driven.

Ultimately, it's all about striking the right balance between ensuring accuracy and enabling data curiosity. How do you do it? First, eliminate ETLs and star schemas. These two processes – holdovers from earlier generations of data and analytics platforms – make it impossible to create a true self-service environment because they require the special expertise of data teams.

Next, create “data labs” – environments where business users can access preapproved data and build reports. Think of a data lab as a safe place for people to experiment and explore, where they can get comfortable with foundational data sets before moving onto developing new reports in the wild. For the technical underpinnings, look for tools that can support thousands of data columns – not just simplified data sets that require complex data transformations to answer a limited set of questions.

Finally, as people start creating dashboards and reports, watch the metadata like a hawk. What data or dashboards go viral inside the company? How can these trends help you predict what data employees might look for next? Even more importantly, is there a larger pattern in what data is being requested, analyzed and acted upon — and can you learn anything about the business as a whole from those trends?

Paying close attention to the most popular types of pulls and dashboards can allow you to stay ahead of internal data trends and ensure you're prepared to provide trusted, “approved” data when users want it instead of constantly working to keep up.

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Similarly, your team also needs to know how dashboards are being used. They need to know which missing data are most requested, and they should be active in commissioning, retiring or updating dashboards. This is a slightly different approach to the “single source of truth” concept that is often evangelized in the industry, and it works much better. When your IT team takes a more active role in sanctioning (or repairing or deleting) data and dashboards, they can be more flexible and adapt to the needs of the organization.

STRATEGY #3

BUILD A COMPANY-WIDE CULTURE OF DATA CURIOSITY

As a senior IT leader, your success in implementing self-service BI hinges on the success of your business users. You want them to adopt the data tools and technology you provide quickly, use them effectively and spread the word broadly. In other words, you want to create a culture of data curiosity that spreads across the entire organization.

How do you do it? By investing in education and proactive support in three key areas that underpin BI: data curation, explanation and perspective.

“We’re an organization that’s generating more than 10 times the revenue of 10 years ago, and Incorta has managed that growth flawlessly. The analytics solutions we’ve used in the past couldn’t scale fast enough to handle that rate of expansion.”

AJIT OAK,
SR. MANAGER OF BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE AT BROADCOM

As you transition to self-service BI, make sure you curate some key data sets for individuals and teams, taking care to explain how they work and when to use them. If you’re an Incorta user, check out the Business Schemas feature, which gives IT teams an easy way to abstract out all the technical complexities of a data set for business users. You’ll empower business users to build their own analytics dashboards while keeping them consistent across teams by removing ambiguity around business terms.

You also want to spend time educating business users on the basics of analytics and BI – what it is, what it’s used for, why it’s a strategic priority for the business, and how it can help them take more ownership of their work and advance their career. Make every touchpoint engaging by using real-life examples of how actionable insights had an impact on the business.

Finally, employees should see data-driven decision making at every level of the organization, especially the very top. Encourage senior leadership to model data curiosity and share the impact of self-service BI. As a senior IT leader, walk the walk—let go of data control by encouraging and rewarding employees for being data analysts and acting on the insights they glean from self-service BI.

THE FUTURE IS BRIGHT: HOW INCORTA MAKES SELF-SERVICE BI A REALITY

Everyone from industry giants to small and medium enterprises are searching for ways to bolster — or simply enable — their self-service analytics and BI capabilities. As self-service BI becomes a business imperative, how can you harness its power for your company without opening yourself to unacceptable risk?

Fortunately, we have the tools to answer these questions about the future of analytics and your business:

1. Establishing a new, better relationship with data:

IT and data experts are some of your most valuable resources. Their talents are best utilized when they have the time and mental space to tackle the high-level business problems that can truly make a difference for your organization — not when they are dealing with an endless stream of minor requests and troubleshooting. With Incorta, [Keysight Technologies](#) was able to free up 13 of its 15 BI support staff to take on more innovative projects. (Learn more about their Incorta implementation in this [on-demand webinar](#)).

Conversely, leaders in all parts of the enterprise benefit from fast, customizable and direct access to analytics that can make a real difference for their business strategy and performance. This “crowdsourcing” of insight across the enterprise represents the next step in the evolution of BI.

2. Experimentation with confidence:

For years, IT teams have searched for the right combination of tools and strategies to balance data governance and democratic access to insights. With Incorta, you can finally move beyond the legacy model of the star schema and ETL processes with the confidence that there is no degradation in data fidelity or security. Today, a [Fortune 10 Company](#) uses Incorta to bypass data modeling, allowing for the most complex of queries and reports to be returned in seconds. A global coffee company massively improved profitability across 28,000 stores. Meanwhile, global security company [Nortek trusts Incorta](#) to keep its data secure and inform high-level decision-making.

3. Crowdsourcing innovation:

For a truly effective and pervasive culture of data curiosity, insights must be available at what we call the speed of thought. Your quickest thinkers need tools that can keep up with them, helping to identify trends in real time and instantly prove their hypotheses. [Incorta](#) features out-of-the-box integration with Oracle, IBM, MS, MySQL, Salesforce.com, HDFS, Tableau and more, enabling an environment in which insight can be summoned as fast as you need it.

The future of BI is self-service. Is your company prepared to make the leap without inviting disaster?

THE DIRECT DATA PLATFORM™

incorta

ABOUT INCORTA

Incorta is the data analytics company on a mission to help data-driven enterprises be more agile and competitive by resolving their most complex data analytics challenges. Incorta's Direct Data Platform gives enterprises the means to acquire, enrich, analyze and act on their business data with unmatched speed, simplicity and insight. Backed by GV (formerly Google Ventures), Kleiner Perkins, M12 (formerly Microsoft Ventures), Telstra Ventures, and Sorenson Capital, Incorta powers analytics for some of the most valuable brands and organizations in the world. For today's most complex data and analytics challenges, Incorta partners with Fortune 5 to Global 2000 customers such as Broadcom, Vitamix, Equinix, and Credit Suisse. For more information, visit <https://www.incorta.com>