



## Survey Results: Seven Strategic Business Intelligence Mistakes

A few months ago we published a popular article that presented some of the top mistakes organizations were making in business intelligence and analytics implementations (<http://www.statslice.com/industry-viewpoint-series-top-mistakes-to-avoid-in-analytics-implementations>).

After that article was published, I decided to post a question to a few of my favorite LinkedIn groups and ask the group members what business intelligence mistakes they could add to the discussion. The response was outstanding and I summarized their comments into the seven categories below. I made their contributions anonymous and edited them for grammar, flow, and clarity, but the following paragraphs are the result of dozens of responses from a bunch of very savvy business intelligence professionals.

### **Mistake 1. Business Disconnect from IT**

Okay, everyone says this, but it's so important that you simply cannot leave it out. The job of translating what the business needs and to how to implement that through IT is the big problem and it always has been. In our prior articles about how to become an analytics rock star, we challenge you to really understand your organization's business—to do some deep dives into what your company is all about. Once you do, prepare for some interesting conflict. Unfortunately, IT data experts are often treated with significant hostility from business people because they are perceived as some sort of threat when that person is actually their "best friend." It is a knee jerk reaction: "Oh my goodness, an IT person who knows how the business really works, I must reject this notion [and ideas] immediately."

### **Mistake 2. Visualization and Dashboarding**

Do not "over pack" the dashboards with data. We've all seen them: mazes where users get lost and never come back. Analytics dashboards should be, well, analytical. And used as such. What could possibly be more unproductive—users who use dashboards to copy/paste/export data into Excel, transform the data, and then present it to colleagues and senior staff members on spreadsheets? I hear about it all the time.

Then there are the actual visual issues: one organization had dashboards that were built for 24" monitors running 1920x1200 resolution for a small (but powerful) group of users. It was noticed that these users couldn't see well and therefore giant fonts had to be used. Those same dashboards were also used by several people with 19" monitors and 1024x786 resolution. As a result, they had to constantly scroll up and down for information. The hope was that in a year everyone with access to the dashboards would have 24" monitors. A year later, nothing had changed.

### **Mistake 3. Lack of Data Understanding**

Understanding the data is also something that organizations must obviously keep in mind. It's so obvious they don't always do it. Dashboards are created with rule sets. What constitutes a sale and how that data is displayed are objectively defined in order to get the data on the dashboard. If this definition is lost or misunderstood, the same data may mean different things to different people, leading to distinctly different conclusion. Buy-in and thorough understanding of data should be the job of the business units, not necessarily IT, but it has to be clear! After all it the data that drives what is visualized.

Organizations continue to implement without any solid data cleansing, analysis and profiling. The result: prettier and faster dashboards with bad data.

### **Mistake 4. Scorecard Development Flaws**

One of the biggest and most common mistakes relates to scorecards. Many customers document the KPIs (key performance indicators) they want and then create the scorecard that initially defines the KPIs. Then when they look to connect scorecard to a data source they realize that either the underlying data does not exist or that they do not have the same amount of historical data to calculate the desired KPIs. Explain to your customers that they should derive their KPIs first from their existing data and then determine a method to obtain data to add additional KPIs to their scorecard.

### **Mistake 5. Ignoring Agile/Lean Development**

Take some quick baby steps and test the waters for data quality, team chemistry, and clear understanding the desired project objectives. When you use rapid prototyping or agile development methodologies to get quick feedback, you will often uncover some important and key problems (and ideas) that you can quickly analyze and deal with before you spend large amounts of budget and time.

## **Mistake 6. Don't Forget the Goal**

A major goal of business intelligence and analytics should be the conservation of executive time. In other words, quickly getting to a succinct view of a particular business scenario. This is harder than it looks and, unfortunately, a dependence on tools to get there is not always helpful. The essence is to find a few, probably no more than seven or eight, drivers that determine 80% of a particular target business result. It takes knowledge of the business agenda at hand, a measure of creativity, and quality data—plus collaboration with knowledgeable associates. Learn to recognize the right KPIs when you discover them. All of this has very little to do with technology and requires leadership by senior executives and an active participation by the business managers—even more so than IT participation.

## **Mistake 7. POTUS (Politics of the User Systems)**

One of the group contributors mentioned that an influential department manager found out about the new business analytics initiative and was furious because he believed it would seriously undermine his and his team's existence in the organization. Their main function was to manually produce various reports and data. He successfully shut down the project. No amount of persuasion and education helped. Business groups can have pre-conceived notions about outcomes, data sources, team skills, and their future roles. They might also lack the capacity to be intrigued and excited about new insights. Managers playing turf battles and not allowing interactions and shared knowledge between the users, subject matter experts, and the IT development team, can create serious team issues.

## **One Last Thought...**

One contributor submitted his own list. Because he said it so well, and there just happened to also be seven mistakes on his list, I just had to include his commentary as well. While some of the core mistakes below are covered in our original article, it's never a bad idea to reiterate fundamental issues that can lead to problems. Here is his list of why things failed...

1. Not having a clear vision about the business model and the agreed-upon business goals
2. Not having the support of executive (C-level) management
3. Not having a team of managers and business analysts dedicated to the project
4. Not knowing the maturity of the organization from the perspective of governance, use, management, architecture and quality of data

5. Not having adequate professional, technical, and management skill levels with the depth of knowledge required
6. Not selecting the right consultants as partners
7. Not focusing on the planning, execution and delivery of the final product or solution

Great job everyone! Thanks for all your ideas and excellent contribution.



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## **About StatSlice**

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