



Business Intelligence demands specialist skills

Why do so many Business Intelligence projects fail?

On the face of it, constructing the appropriate BI or reporting solution is straightforward. You need to:

- Take the data from the source systems
- Load it up in a database, manipulating it on the way
- Create reports/analyses/dashboards.

This implies that one needs a Developer to manipulate the data, a Business Analyst to understand what information and reports are required, and a Report Writer to create the analyses.

This is the structure one sees in traditional projects. But when it is applied to BI/Reporting projects it often fails to deliver. Why is this?

> The fact is, BI is different.

A BI project should have significant business impacts, and hence will involve a lot of strategic interaction with managers throughout your organisation. The insight you are after is usually dependent on multiple source systems, which are likely to structure data in different ways and present inconsistent views of common information. Plus the sheer volume of data that needs to be brought together presents unique logistical challenges.

What are some of the specialist skills needed to ensure success?

The ETL Developer role will need to:

- Allow for recovery/failure. He must understand how to manage situations where the data doesn't arrive, arrives twice, arrives late or changes, etc
- Cope with data issues, malformed dates, alphanumeric in numeric fields, missing fields, and even worse cases of "dirty data"
- Develop solutions that run very quickly as the data volumes can be large.

The Business Analyst role will need to:

- Understand the difference between ideal data and the reality of dirty data
- Grasp not just business processes but business drivers
- Help teams in the organisation cope with the changes to their culture and practices that will be driven by the new information
- Be able to work comfortably with everyone from senior business executives to knowledge workers to frontline staff.

The Report Writer role will need expertise in a wide range of information delivery options including:

- User Interface design that uses the appropriate mechanisms
- Ad hoc reporting and querying
- Analysis, trending and predictive graphical techniques
- Both push (email/intranet) and pull (on request) mechanisms.

In the end it comes down to experience and specialisation

First and foremost, what is needed to succeed is **experience**. Experience in Business Intelligence, experience in the commercial environment, and experience in years. Traditional project teams will not possess the blend of understanding and technical expertise that BI demands.

It is also critical to use personnel who are **multi-skilled**. BI projects are highly interactive in nature and generally progress iteratively to the solution. Having multi-skilled people means you avoid an assembly line approach where the delivery process is handed from person to person – with resultant loss of understanding and momentum. For example, having ETL development performed by a staff member with business analysis skills means that when unusual data is found, a meaningful dialogue can be had with the business on how to manage it.

A final criterion for success is **good communication skills**. Successful BI projects require regular and intense consultation with the business. This communication needs to be carried out in terms that the business understands, and not in IT-speak or application-specific jargon. The business consequences of any technical issues need to be spelled out in plain English.

At FDL we employ staff who:

- **Are experienced in BI projects, tools and techniques**
- **Have many years of work experience (typically > 10)**
- **Communicate well**
- **Are multi-skilled in several of the key areas of ETL, Business Analysis and Report Writing.**

That's the main reason our projects succeed.

“ FDL are specialists in business intelligence. They have IP and experience in a range of industries, and are willing to work with mixed teams and manage resources that aren't their own. ”

Vicki Harris
Business Intelligence Manager
Vodafone

Specialist skills will keep you on track

