

Anatomy of a Failure: 10 “Easy” Ways to Fail a BI Project **by Ciprian Jichici**

In the past 10 years, business intelligence (BI) has gone through the typical journey of a “hot” technology. It started with the mystery of the first implementations, fresh out of the academic world; went through the buzzword stage; and ended up in the technological mainstream. Next to this horizontal evolution, there has been a vertical one, in which BI has descended from the top of the organization to the masses and begun addressing a much broader set of business needs.

Regardless of the phases through which it has gone, BI has been—and, some argue, still is—an architectural challenge. In real life, BI architects have to deal with multiple technologies, platforms, and sources of data. Today, we do have some kind of architectural guidance for most of the components that play together in complex BI solutions. Yet we still lack the proper architectural guidance on the complicated topic of being successful in making them play nicely together. Finally, the success equation of a BI project has one more key element—people—who are tightly connected to processes and culture.

From an architectural point of view, three of the most common reasons for failure are the inability to recognize that BI needs consistent architectural planning; unfortunate selection of technologies; and over-focusing on technological issues (such as performance and data volumes) too early in the process. When it comes to data, failure to reveal relevant information and granularity mismatch (together with poor query response times) are two of the “easy” ways to derail a BI project.

But perhaps the number-one reason for failure that is related to data is assuming that BI is synonymous with having a data warehouse. Finally, from a person’s point of view, failing a BI project is as easy as assuming that end users have the know-how to use the tools; not getting them the appropriate levels of detail; and, of course, going over budget (which, oddly enough, occurs many times as a result of previous success).

It is safe to say that it is quite difficult to get BI right and quite easy to get it wrong. To summarize the preceding, the easiest way to fail your BI project is probably a “first build the plant, then decide what to manufacture” approach.

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