



A Commentary on Information Management Today

Brian Shorter

Brian Shorter, Editorial Advisor, is a Health Care Strategy Consultant for SAS Canada in Victoria, British Columbia

...the last in a three-part exploration of the challenges that health care will need to master in achieving true strategic value from its vast data holdings.

Data Management...how ready am I for the future? Am I there yet?

The first article in this series looked at our corporate data holdings. Had they been assembled with thoughtful care as to their quality, consistency and relevance? ...or were they more like a scrap yard for dumping the tattered leavings of our operational front-line systems? The second article then looked into ways to establish good quality data holdings that could produce real strategic value to our organizations using contemporary tools to integrate, manage and analyze them. Concepts of decision support through modeling and predictive business analytics were introduced.

At the close of this final article in the series we will be able to offer you a simplified tool that can help 'scorecard' your organization's maturity towards a true strategic business analytics goal.

How might we describe this 'idealized state', as an end goal of business analytics? Elements of this state should include,

1. We will know enough about the demographics, dynamics and morbidity of our consumer populations to construct reliable algorithmic descriptions of their disease-related characteristics and its relationship to health service needs.
2. We will be able to optimize health system performance by assessing a variety of alternative health service delivery scenarios against population health needs to determine the best possible planned allocation of limited resources.
3. We will be able to closely monitor health system performance against plan. Deviations and their causes can be promptly identified. The impact of alternative remedial actions can be readily evaluated.
4. Overall health system performance is maximized.

If some of these statements appear lofty and unreal, take a look at the private sector. To stay in business in today's hyper-competitive economy, is to be well informed of not only what's happening today, but what's likely to happen in the future. It's an example that we ignore at our peril.

Supposing for a moment that we accept the foregoing idealized state as a target...supposing we would like to see our CEO's as empowered with information as their opposite numbers in major cut-throat industries such as finance, shipping lines and manufacturing? We need to be building high-performing enterprise business analytics environments. Like eHealth environments, these are not made overnight. A long period of sustained commitment to the culture and the process is required. In a previous article we discussed the key dimensions which included,

- a. Corporate commitment, culture, and support for quantitative management styles.
- b. High quality data from transaction systems, external and comparative sources.
- c. Analytical skills, organizationally located as a central pool of competence and deployed in a way that makes them available to all consumers.
- d. Contemporary analytical software tools, with powerful quantitative capabilities, quality assurance and massive data management scalability.

Obviously, putting these elements in place and leveraging value from an organization's strategic information resource takes time. Where might your organization be on the continuum between data anarchy and business analytics? Here is a simple self-assessment tool that should help give you a rough idea where your organization stands. The five-part scale reflects the degree of agreement with a set of status statements.

DIMENSIONS OF READINESS – BUSINESS ANALYTICS		1	2	3	4	5
A	Executive management and the Board are well informed of the future health services needs of our consumer population.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
B	Executive management and the Board have an appreciation for the role of predictive analytics in strategic decision-making.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
C	My organization has a Vice President directly responsible for strategic planning and performance improvement.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
D	My organization believes in quantitative measurement of performance and clinical quality at all levels of management.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
E	A decision support team with skills in accessing, statistically analyzing and presenting management decision information exist in my organization.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
F	Our Decision Support Team feels intellectually challenged by requests from executives and client departments.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
G	My organization has a data governance policy that has strong executive support.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
H	All departments understand their data stewardship responsibilities and participate fully in the data governance process.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I	Our data governance processes are supported by a capable leader and a skilled central staff resource.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
J	My organization has appointed a data architect.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
K	My organization is in the final stages of building a formal enterprise data architecture.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
L	My organization has well developed data integration and data quality competencies.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
M	My organization has migrated from multiple data warehouses to a single shared enterprise information resource.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
N	My organization investigated the ability of its current OLAP (on line analytical processing) tools to meet future BA (business analytics) needs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
O	My organization is examining an 'industrial strength' suite of powerful business analytics software tools to meet its future decision support needs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
TOTALS						
Scoring scale: 1=Totally disagree, 3=Neither agree nor disagree, 5=Fully agree						

Well, how did you do? Although it's always tricky to assign discrete numbers to as complex an issue as business analytics, let's see how they might be interpreted...

Score	Interpretation
75–55	Your organization is among a limited number of advanced users of business analytics in Canada, and probably well on the way to achieving significant strategic advantage from your information resources.
54–30	Your organization has recognized the need to make progress towards a business analytics future, but may be experiencing some difficulty resolving particularly knotty legacy data or technology issues.
29–10	Your organization is probably still planning its migration to a business analytics future but has not made substantial progress to date. As funding agencies become more performance-focused, you may be disadvantaged in the competition for resources.

...your video store probably knows more about your future viewing needs than your health authority knows about your future health needs...it's worth a thought?