



BRAVINCI

Deep Dive

Successful Data, Intelligence
and Automation for SMEs

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How to approach the
challenges in data and
business intelligence.



Successful Data, Intelligence and Automation

Having high capabilities in the field of data is one of the most important competencies organizations should master to ensure business continuity and/or become more successful these days. This does not only apply to Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), just as much for Midsized Enterprises (MSEs) or Large Corporates (LCOs) and public organizations....

To outline what we are saying here, let us take Google as an example. Since generalist Google started developing Google Maps, specialist mapmakers like TomTom are struggling to keep up with this competition. When a Google algorithm played the boardgame 'Go' against a human world champion, it won. Knowing this, it is not hard to imagine that if Google would start a bank, the financial market would probably be disrupted. The source of all this power? Data. But off course if that would be the only thing you need, there would be way more companies like Google.

So, besides having a lot of data, what did Google do to achieve this?

The recipe to Google's secret

Google has mastered the competencies of data management, data automation and data analytics. It is as simple as that: they grasped the importance of data and both developed and collected all necessary knowledge and skills. This is how Google enables itself to outsmart specialized competitors in many different industries and applications. Companies like Google are great examples of how successful data-driven organizations can become.

In a research on data intelligence within small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) conducted by the Dutch Chamber of Commerce a couple years ago, lots of challenges emerged to the surface why these SME organizations are not getting the most out of their data:

- The data quality inside their organizations is perceived as too low for decent intelligence and automation;
- The data governance processes are lacking or are not sufficient;
- Not able to afford the right software and hardware for data intelligence and automation;
- Not enough employees with data and analytical skills on the payroll;
- Intelligence and automation is perceived as expensive and purely seen as costs.

To stabilize business continuity and realize better results in compliance, commerce and customer experience with data, like Google, you do not have to be a tech company. Any company in any industry is highly benefitted by data competences, either gained in-house or outsourced.



Continue reading this paper to find out how data competence within your own SME organization will overall improve the performance and how data intelligence and data automation will make your organization more effective and more efficient in many ways.

Main challenge: unravelling the status quo of assumed challenges

To be able to conduct data intelligence and data automation and become a so called "data-driven organization", these mentioned challenges should be solved first. The necessary journey to the land of data-driven organizations is a real burden. It is like eating a cake with the size of a skyscraper all by yourself. If you keep looking at this cake nothing will happen, but if you start biting, chewing and swallowing the cake, eventually the skyscraper will become smaller and the horizon starts to emerge.

Let's have a look at the mentioned "perceived" challenges in the conducted research of the Dutch Chamber of Commerce.¹

The five challenges

1. Data Quality, lack of insights to determine data quality

Data quality can only be solved by data intelligence, whether it is to increase data quality or to get the insights on why data is not supporting the decision-making and the development of business opportunities. Start with data intelligence to gain insights in the data quality in the first place and discover the causes of low data quality within your organization. From these insights you will be able to address the causes, which are mostly hidden in inefficient business processes. To improve the data quality, business processes have to be designed in a way that information (data) is entered correctly into the systems.

2: Data governance, how data is handled within the organization

Data governance is a data management concept concerning the capability that enables an organization to ensure that high data quality exists throughout the complete lifecycle of the data, and implemented data controls support business objectives. The key focus areas of data governance include availability, usability, consistency, data integrity and data security and includes establishing processes to ensure effective data management throughout the enterprise such as accountability for the adverse effects of poor data quality and ensuring that the data which an enterprise has can be used by the entire organization.

A data steward ensures that data governance processes are followed and that guidelines enforced, as well as recommending improvements to data governance processes.

And as with many other processes, organizations can decide to either design it or not. But to unlock impactful value, you will need skilled people (sub challenge 4) and the awareness that data intelligence and automation is not a cost case, but a high potential business case. Because data governance skills are often lacking, creating the business process for data governance is a bottleneck for many organizations. But, as stated in challenges 4 and 5, those are to overcome. It just requires a different mindset.



3: Affordable software

The perception of many decision-makers within small- and medium-sized organizations is that software for intelligence and automation is very expensive; that large initial investments have to be made to get access to these resources. Many times decision-makers have good indications of the costs of intelligence and automation, but less insights in the potential business value of intelligence and automation.

When something costs 100.000 euros per year, it already sounds expensive if you do not know what you will gain in cost decreases and revenue increases.

With the rise of cloud based platforms such as Google, Amazon, Azure, Watson and Alibaba, no big initial investments have to be made to get access to high quality intelligence and automation software, compute, memory and storage. Because you are a small organization, you might not need a full software license but only 0.25 of a license. These platforms will give you access to affordable resources on a pay as you use subscription, so you do not have to buy software. These cloud possibilities makes the relative costs of resources for small organizations more in line with the relative costs of big organizations that tends to be lower because of economies of scale.



4: Making highly skilled people affordable

Because data specialists, like data engineers, data scientists, data architects, data analysts and data stewards, are being perceived as expensive, smaller organizations will not hire these employees easily. The other way around, people with above average data and analytical skills do not have a priority to have a career in working for smaller organizations, because they perceive these organizations as employers that pay less and provide less of a working challenge.

We also see examples of some brave organizations hiring people with data and analytical skills, heavenly invest in them and nevertheless see them leave. So we acknowledge there is a real challenge in recruiting, training and keeping data specialists within smaller organizations.

For smaller organizations it is not efficient to hire a full team of different data specialists. For example smaller organizations need a data analyst for 20 hours per week, a data engineer for ten hours a week, a data scientist for five hours per week, a data steward for four hours per week and a data architect for one hour per week. In other words they only have budget for 1 FTE, but they will need an employee that is above average skilled in different data competences. Finding a person who is specialized in the whole field of intelligence and automation, as multitalented as that, are very rare and therefor expensive.

But it is about mindset. There are other ways to capture the added value of data specialists. Smaller organizations can broaden their horizon by looking into managed services in this play of field. Data expertise as a service. An external supplier where you can define and combine the different roles of data expertise that are necessary. This team of experts will blend with your internal employees and form a virtual Intelligence and automation team.

The five challenges (II)



5: Data intelligence and automation is merely seen as a cost case

If something costs one million euros, it is quickly perceived as expensive. But investing a million to earn five million back, the investment is a bargain. So to summarize costs without quantifying the earnings gives a perception that intelligence and automation is expensive. The solution would be to create a roadmap to cope with all the challenges and backed with a real business case.

Conduct a research to discover potential intelligence and automation business cases and write down the data-driven value propositions. This research should deliver an intelligence and automation roadmap to address low hanging fruit, but also the business cases that emerge later in time. Quantify the benefits and the costs for every data-driven value proposition to create a sound indication what value you will unlock by becoming a data-driven organization.



Conclusion

The challenges addressed by the research of the Dutch chamber of commerce for smaller organizations are not blocking. At Bravinci we believe that they can be met, so smaller organizations can become data-driven too. But when you do start out, be sure you know what you are doing. Successful data strategies do not start with a tool, but with data competences and a good plan.



ABOUT BRAVINCI

We dream of a Dutch ecosystem of data-driven SMEs. With better insights, organizations can accelerate their strategy to success, reduce risks and create more business opportunities. In short: more successful business. That's why we offer accessible and affordable managed data services for SMEs.

In our hub of services, we develop data strategies that focus on analyzing, streamlining and converting data into actionable information for all layers within an organization. We want to grow into an organization with a large permanent and flexible capacity to help SMEs with an effective digital transformation.



Many companies lose value because they have neither the time nor the resources to make data work for them in a way that makes the organization more effective and efficient in its operations. That is unnecessary.

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