Business Intelligence: The Savvy Manager's Guide
David Loshin
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Business Intelligence: The Savvy Manager's Guide is among a series of three Savvy Manager's Guides to be published this year by Morgan Kaufmann. Reflecting on this book's origins and orientation, David Loshin recounts his past desire for "...a straightforward book that I could have used for a quick lookup or a more in-depth read, without having to spend a huge amount of money on a technical book that only briefly addressed a topic of interest."

If Loshin's statement echoes your own feelings as a technical manager interested in business intelligence (BI), this reasonably priced tome will be a useful reference. IT personnel will be pleased with the number of complex topics touched on—everything from data profiling to vector parallelism. Be forewarned, however, that the book's objective is to review issues surrounding BI tools and techniques, not delve into implementation details.

The book's structure is a marked plus. Chapters are clearly delineated by subject matter (Business Rules, Data Quality, and A Guide to Public Data, for example). Management issues are conveniently grouped and summarized at the end of each chapter. Readers are warned, for example, of the religious wars surrounding data warehouse development: one camp advocating quick-win marts, the other promoting a central repository from which data marts are ultimately spun.

Consistent with its tendency to raise but not resolve issues, Loshin demurs from advocating one approach over another. Instead, he merely offers a confusing opinion that "...perhaps there is some common ground that might apply to both approaches, in an iterative sense, to achieve intermediate results while conforming to the concept of an information factory driven by an enterprise warehouse."

A valuable 19-page Quick Reference is included at the end of the book for hurried readers. This section recaps Loshin's main points surrounding the book's major topics.

Among the book's strongest chapters are those describing the nuances of data profiling and data quality, respectively. Thirty-five pages provide helpful examples while covering issues such as cardinality, sparseness, and the many types of errors found in data. Elsewhere, components of the U.S. Postal Services' address standard are described, a welcome inclusion given

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these components' pivotal role in householding processes and the removal of duplicate mailing records.

Loshin's comfort with these data-centric topics is not surprising having previously written the 491-page *Enterprise Knowledge Management – The Data Quality Approach* (Morgan Kaufmann, 2001; ISBN: 0124558402). Strong professional credentials arise from his code optimization work performed for data mining pioneer, Thinking Machines Corp., and data validation work performed at Morgan Stanley Dean Witter.

Oddly, the ability of business managers to benefit from this book is hindered by two important omissions. First, business leaders are given little help with the thorny subject of quantifying a BI project's planned costs or benefits, despite a commendable "Business Case" section at the beginning of each chapter. Additional planning statistics—such as the one reporting data profiling tools' capacity to reduce the cost of a data warehouse project by 35 percent—would have been helpful. An early chapter entitled The Value of Business Intelligence could have distinguished itself by providing savvy managers with concrete examples of ROI spreadsheets tailored to BI projects. Instead, its attempts to assess BI's value are diluted with statements such as, "Treating data as an asset is important...because it allows us to build the business case for investing in BI when we can show how the value of the data asset is improved."

Some individuals caution against a myopic focus on dollars and cents to justify BI initiatives (see *Revisiting ROI: Is Positive Payback Achieved?* at http://www.dw-institute.com/research/display.asp?id=6734&t=y). Faced with uncertain economic environments, though, it is reasonable that executives seek to define the financial benefits of virtually any project. Arguments centered on the abstract economic value of data, per se, make for tough sledding.

A second notable lapse is the absence of industry-specific success stories for managers who would like to learn from past BI successes or failures. In part, this appears to have been a conscious decision. Indeed, Loshin floats the view that firms may gain an advantage when decision makers resist defining their activities along traditional industry lines. When pressed to sell a project or establish benchmarks for success, however, savvy executives expect their staff to demonstrate an awareness of historical precedence.

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Managers impatient with technical material may balk at the cumbersome writing style exhibited in some sections. For example: "Assertions revolve around specifying some business constraint on the relationship between the abstract data instance and the values bound to individual data attributes."

IT leads wishing to understand BI's corporate role and related technical concerns are more apt to overlook these blemishes, however, and view *Business Intelligence: The Savvy Manager's Guide* as a reasonable starting point for additional BI readings.

[Editor's note: the other two books in the series are *Semantics in Business Systems* and *Web Services* and *Service-Oriented Architectures*.]

President of Market ConsulTeks, Inc., in Dallas, TX, ***Steve Mong*** *has more than 13 years of experience developing Fortune 500 marketing, sales, and financial systems. stevemong@marketconsulteks.com*