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Data Delivery Center of Excellence

by jonathangeiger

The data delivery center of excellence (DDCoE) differs from the data integration center of excellence (DICoE) I described last month in terms of its focus, its typical role and the complexities with which it needs to deal. The DICoE is focused on providing an integrated set of data, regardless of how the data is eventually used. To accomplish this, the team deals with complexities of the source systems, data quality issues, the negotiations needed to define the enterprise view, and the transformation and integration work required to achieve it. The DDCoE has the integrated set of quality data as its starting point. Its focus is on providing business information, understanding how people want to see and use the data, accommodating activities that business users want to perform on their own, developing some data delivery capabilities, selecting and supporting the associated technologies and providing communications about how the available data can be leveraged.

Deliverables

While the integration team focused on understanding and delivering the enterprise data view, the DDCoE is focused on delivering information. Knowledge about how people want to use information is critical. It impacts the tools to be provided, the standard reports and queries that could be developed by the center of excellence (CoE), the education and information that need to be provided to the business community and the safeguards that need to be put in place to prevent inappropriate data access and use. One of the critical success factors for the DDCoE is its ability to maintain positive working relationships with the business community so that they can effectively play this role.

Data Access

One of the aims of an effective business intelligence (BI) program is to provide business users with the ability to get to their data with minimal intervention by a support organization. Hence, much of the work of the DDCoE is in supporting businesspeople who want to get to the data. This is very different than the data integration activities, which are typically centralized. The DDCoE must understand people's backgrounds so that they can structure and deliver appropriate education. The education should have two major components: business data and technology. The business data component explains the information that is available to the business community and provides tips on how they could leverage it. The technology component explains how to use the tools for accessing the data.

Even though business users want the freedom to access data without intervention, they also want some of the standard reports provided to them. The DDCoE is often tasked with that responsibility. In addition, the DDCoE should be vigilant so that it can identify applications developed by individual users that have mass appeal and benefit. The DDCoE productionalizes these applications and communicates information about them to potential users.

A problem that often plagues companies is that each set of business users selects and acquires tools to meet its needs. I often hear from companies that "we have one of everything." While having multiple tools is often advisable, having too many tools is detrimental. Lack of tool standards limits portability of applications and people, makes additional training necessary, constrains collaboration among groups, increases software licensing costs and often requires redundant data marts.

The DDCoE must address end-user tool proliferation. The team should maintain an inventory of the tools that exist and where they are used. It should also maintain a list of the people who access data and the type of access they need (e.g., key performance indicators displayed on dashboards, OLAP, data mining, etc.). It should then work with representatives from the business community on establishing a standard set of end-user tools, developing the expertise needed to support users of these tools and providing educational offerings.

Leveraging the BI Environment

Perhaps the most significant role of the DDCoE is its promotion of business intelligence capabilities. The DDCoE needs to maintain ongoing communications with all business areas to understand how they are using information, strengths of the existing environment and opportunities for improvement. In addition, the DDCoE should know how other companies in the industry are applying information. Armed with this information, the DDCoE can identify business applications used by one group that may have applicability elsewhere and applications that should be developed to keep up with competitor capabilities. The perceived weaknesses of the environment should be investigated, and if there is business value, the DDCoE should initiate actions to address them.

The DDCoE plays a vital role in promoting increased business value from the BI environment. It performs this function by understanding how people are using the environment, standardizing on the tool set to be employed, providing standard queries and reports, and continuously interacting with the business community. Unlike the DICoE, which performs a centralized function, this group provides both centralized support and coordinates distributed activities. While technical skills are paramount for the integration team, the soft skills are critical for the DDCoE team members. **DMR**

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