

BI USABILITY MIND MAP

The four main components that affect usability are design, support, architecture, and change management. Each contains three or more subcomponents that consist of multiple implementation practices. BI teams should apply these components and practices to ensure their BI initiative remains in a positive reinforcing cycle.

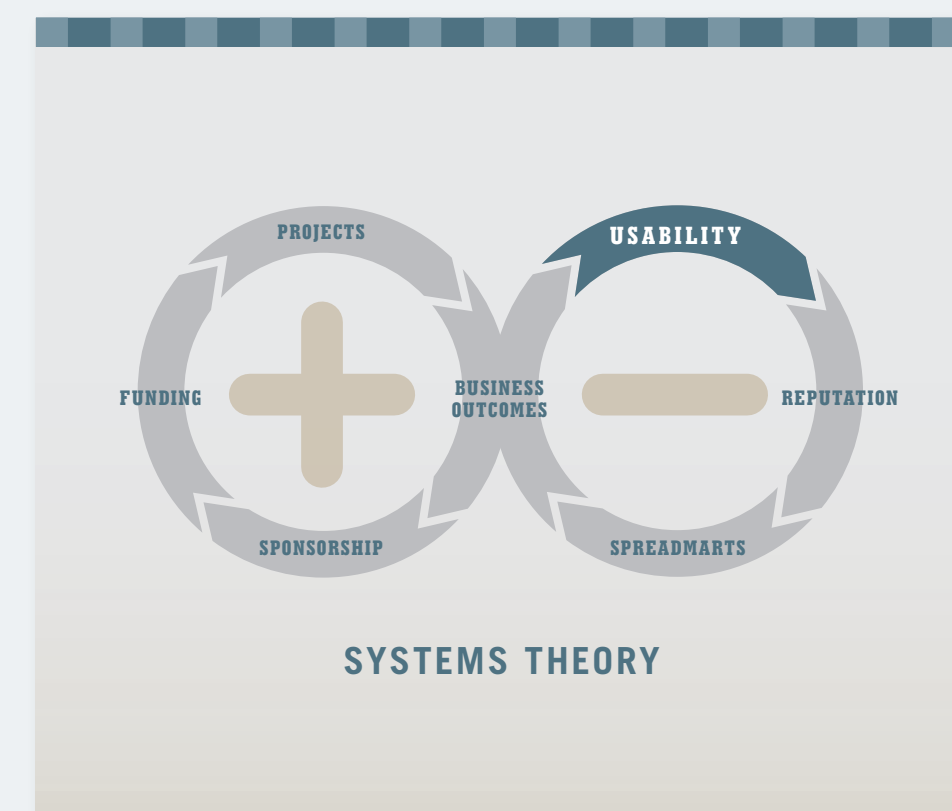


BI DYNAMICS | Systems Theory

Systems theory provides a "limits to growth" archetype that we can apply to BI. It consists of two adjacent feedback loops: one that inhibits growth (a negative reinforcing cycle) and another that accelerates it (a positive reinforcing cycle). Both hinge on a condition called "business outcomes" that represents the BI solution's value to the organization.

The "slowing action" cycle on the right shows how a lack of usability in a BI solution gives the BI team a bad reputation, causing users to create spreadmarts (renegade BI systems or data shadow systems built outside of IT) rather than use the corporate-provided BI tools. This negative business outcome causes executive sponsors to question the value of their BI investment and reduce funding, which impacts future projects and limits a BI team's ability to deliver a usable solution. The cycle usually repeats until the organization either cancels the BI program or the BI team figures out a way to halt the downward spiral.

On the left, we see the growing action that comes as business sponsors fund new BI projects that lead to positive business outcomes. Once a BI project demonstrates that it can reduce costs, increase revenue, advance business



strategy, or deliver consistent information and improve decisions, executives are likely to boost funding for new projects, adding even more business value. This positive reinforcing cycle accelerates until it reaches the natural limits of its growth and begins to reverse course (hence the name "limits to growth").

In the world of BI, each element within the feedback loops (usability, reputation, spreadmarts, sponsorship, funding, and projects) is a leverage point that BI teams can use to alter the cycle of growth or decline. USABILITY is perhaps the most critical and the most challenging.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Wayne Eckerson is the director of TDWI Research at The Data Warehousing Institute. Eckerson is an industry analyst, consultant, and educator who has served the DW and BI community since 1995. He speaks frequently at industry events and works closely with BI teams to optimize the agility and value of their BI initiatives.

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