The Rise of Adaptive Analytics

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The rise of adaptive analytics

Once bright flares in the field of data analysis, predictive analytics and big data have quickly become mainstream—the familiar light that illuminates today's business landscape. Today's human capital data scientists use predictive analytics and big data when necessary, but the key to real analytical success is in an organization's ability to employ people who can work across many functions with the right statistical tools in ways that directly impact the business, rather than simply reacting to reporting requests.

These new tools and methods of structuring the human capital (HC) analytics team have created a new era, one of adaptive analytics. As defined in The Rise of Adaptive Analytics (hereafter the study), the term adaptive analytics refers to data analysis tools, techniques, and structures that allow high-performance companies to gain insights and answer questions using data, regardless of the type and size of data set. Without a doubt, workforce analytics is the most emergent discipline within HR; unsurprisingly then, the best practitioners are also the most adaptive.

One of the powerful lessons learned from the Institute for Corporate Productivity's (i4cp) current study is that high-performance companies keep HR data reporting as a separate function, which allows them to focus on using analytics to drive decisions, predict trends, improve processes, and get at answers to difficult questions. Well beyond HR's early days of evidence-based decision making, today's HR leaders are increasingly data-savvy, and the best HR leaders and executives make substantial use of workforce data.

Along with the heightened interest in data comes a greater reliance on data analysis tools in HR. New players in the analytics field are using their experience with the open-source development model and its near-infinite customization capacity to entice the next generation of HR professionals. Although the majority of users within HR still rely on standard tools, a few early-adopters are seeing a strong correlation to market performance.

The ability to use diverse analytics tools and methods requires a more adaptive approach to HR analytics, and the structures of HR analytics teams are evolving as a result. Increasingly, analytics professionals are coming from finance, operations, marketing, and other areas that have long relied on statistical or data-driven methodologies. HR analytics departments are rotating people in, using partners on an as-needed basis, or structuring their departments to contain a plethora of statistical skills. Think of building a data-driven business like building a house—the data is the materials, the analytics professionals are the trades people, and the tools are the implements. If you have wood, one carpenter, and nails, it's likely that one type of house will be built. But by assembling a wide assortment of all these elements, any type of structure needed can be built. That should be the endgame for any HR analytics team.
INTRODUCTION

Human capital analytics in 2014

Human resources is an evolving discipline, and like the other major departments in any organization, it tends to change in response to external pressures. New legislation, economic shifts, societal attitudes, and demographic transformations have all played parts in shaping the modern face of HR. The future of HR, however, will be shaped by data, probability, and statistics. The call for HR to become more data-savvy has led to increased recruitment within HR from other analytics-heavy functions such as marketing and finance, and training classes for analytics are available from all the major certification institutes.

All of this points to the importance of people data, but why exactly is it so important? Previous research published by i4cp has shown that the greatest value in analytics is in assisting decision making (i4cp, 2014a), but how is this accomplished in an organization, what does an effective data team look like, and what are the overarching ideals of the most effective analytical organizations? These are questions this Study set out to answer.

The newest and most effective practices use data in ways that allow for multi-purposing and change management.
Responses to the survey upon which this Study is based fell along a central theme: all of the newest and most effective practices use data in ways that allow for multi-purposing and change management. The ability to adapt faster to the external pressures, making the best possible decisions, supported by workforce data, has a direct relationship with the overall success of a company, and those specific practices are explored further within this Study.

**Market Performance Index (MPI)**
i4cp’s Market Performance Index (MPI) is based on self-reported ratings of organizational performance in four key areas—market share, revenue growth, profitability and customer satisfaction—as compared to the levels achieved five years previously. The average of the four ratings determines MPI score.

*High-performance organizations (HPOs)* are those in the top quartile of MPI scores.

*Low-performance organizations (HPOs)* are those in the bottom quartile of MPI scores.

**Analytics Effectiveness Index (AEI)**
i4cp's Analytics Effectiveness Index (AEI) is based on the those respondents who indicated a “high” or “very high” response to the following four areas on these questions:

- **Quality of data used in analysis**
- **Frequency of use in decision making**
- **Adoption among all business units**
- **Satisfaction with results when human capital analytics were used**

How do you rate your organization on the following areas of human capital analytics in decision making against your industry? The average of the four ratings determines AEI score.
FINDING 1

The best analytical tools are those that grow with the user

Use of open-source technologies such as R and RapidMiner are correlated to higher market performance (MPI) and analytics effectiveness (AEI), as does use of SuccessFactors, a cloud-based HCM system. Although use of many of the software platforms currently available on the market have high correlations to both market performance and analytical ability, open-source software deserves attention due to its low rate of adoption (5% for R and 3% for RapidMiner, in terms of reported overall usage).

EMC’s Joseph Kambourakis, lead data science instructor at EMC, a consistent leader in emergent technologies and innovation, says that “R is also slightly better adapted to the way data scientists think when compared to tools such as Java or Python, which are more adapted to the way computer scientists think” (Data Informed, 2014).

The statistical tools with the strongest correlations to analytics effectiveness.

### Analytics platforms ranked by market performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Platform</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SuccessFactors</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R Statistics</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RapidMiner</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MATLAB</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visier</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MetricsThatMatter</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognos</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JMP</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPSS</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excel w/ add-in (e.g. QI Macro)</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAS</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAP</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oracle</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excel w/out add-ins</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tableau</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percent of respondents indicating high effectiveness at their organization.

Source: i4cp
FINDING 2
Integration of technologies leads to better data

HR technology firms have finally caught up to the needs of today's HR professional, by having compatible systems. In previous studies, i4cp has found that integration of technology (having technologies that are able to speak to one another) is one of the biggest obstacles to achieving reliable, accurate data (i4cp, 2012). However, as data analysis skills have grown within the HR function, so too have the systems to support those skills so that it is now possible to have a worldwide system that provides accurate and consistent HR data.

Richard Mutter, group head of HR technology for HSBC, spoke to ComputerWeekly.com about the dilemma many organizations are now confronting.

“Over the past four years, we have deployed a global learning management system, a global resource system, and global reward, help desk and mobility systems. We have got the number of HR systems down to 300 now. I would class that as an achievement.

The biggest challenge now is whether to go for a single provider, but at the disadvantage of being beholden to a single company, versus going for best of breed and leveraging competition in the market” (Goodwin, 2011).

Although a completely integrated system is now possible, it is still rare, as only 30% of organizations that participated in the survey for this Study indicated they used an integrated enterprise-wide level technology. Yet, those that did reported success, with a statistically significant correlation to both MPI and AEI.

Using the same technology across the business isn't just about operational efficiency, it relates to a 2013 i4cp study on HC analytics dealing with the topic of data governance. Having a consistent platform makes it easier to keep definitions, storage, security, and transfer of data constant and regular, which affects all usage of that data down the line (i4cp, 2013).

Methods to ensure HC data integrity across the organization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>High-performance organizations</th>
<th>Low-performance organizations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internal HR working group</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Careful attention to a consistent data management process</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common data definitions/data dictionaries</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrated enterprise level technology</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data council (cross functional stakeholders)</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Strongest correlations to market performance

Source: i4cp
EMC's Data Lake

Data lake is a general term for a data management system that incorporates very large enterprise-wide data sets in their original format. While the term is not exclusive to EMC, the world's largest data storage service provider, the company is one of the first to systematically deploy and use the data lake concept.

Rich Georgeu, senior director of technical support for education services at EMC, says one of the biggest reasons to have this service is data integration. "Traditionally we had used multiple systems, and each BU [business unit] drives their own reporting needs, so you can end up with information silos and one-off projects."

As noted in this Study, having an integrated, enterprise-wide technology is one of the practices most highly correlated to effective use of analytics, but the process to integrate all of these disparate technologies and platforms requires meticulous planning and execution.

Lead by the information technologies group at EMC, the data lake project aims to use data for its most practical purpose: driving better business decisions. This goal includes operational efficiencies such as better use of big data, and enhanced tools for data science, but the main goal is simply to make EMC better at joining together all of the data that it possesses, and turning that data into actionable information.

Each BU within EMC is helping make the data lake vision a reality, including Georgeu's education services group, "Our project has just kicked off, we are entering into the EMC data lake into Q1 maybe Q2. So far we at the stage you would expect, doing requirement planning and criteria and standardization."

The careful planning before entering headlong into a massive integration project is the most important lesson from EMC's work so far. The understanding of how the end-user will interface with the data, in terms of the requests that will be made, how they will be handled, and allowing each BU owner to have control over their own data governance, are the ingredients for making this massive project come off smoothly.

Georgeu sums up for any organization interested in a similar undertaking, "For all the reasons we talked about, the bottom line is this allows us to have the information to help the business."
FINDING 3
Internal data is more valuable than external data

Research has shown that having the ability to integrate external data (such as market or demographic data), with in-house data will be a best practice for high-performance companies in the near future (Davenport, 2013). In addition, i4cp research on agility (2014c) and customer-focus (2014b) has shown the need for organizations to have and understand external data. However, the greatest business impact will not be in attempting to mitigate or control the external world, but in making sure the business has the capacity to adapt internally to any possible changes brought about by those external forces.

When survey respondents were asked to identify the human capital analytics products that had the greatest impact on the business, the two cited with the highest correlations to MPI and AEI were enterprise-level risk assessments and leadership assessment/development. This is adaptive analytics at its most basic; the best use of data is in pinpointing true (not perceived) strengths and weaknesses, allowing for a more fluid response to external pressures.

Risk-assessment in particular is an area that has benefitted from the increase in adaptive analytics. As high-performance organizations are learning to use internal analytic strength, the ability to properly assess potential threats is increasing. Examples of this can be seen at insurance companies such as Liberty Mutual, where actuarial professionals use their expertise to predict internal risk, identifying possible dangers with statistical precision.

**HC analytics projects ranked by greatest business impact**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High-performance organizations</th>
<th>Low-performance organizations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enterprise level risk assessments</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership assessment/ development</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Succession planning</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retention</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment trends</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement analytics</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rewards analytics</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales program/ effectiveness analytics</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market/customer analysis</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: i4cp

The best use of data is in pinpointing true (not perceived) strengths and weaknesses.
FINDING 4

Reporting is not the optimal use of HC data

Knowing how fast you are going is not as useful as steering the vehicle. High-performance companies understand this concept, and use HR analytics in ways that can answer business questions and provide insights into employees and talent strategy, rather than simply determine the current turnover rate (for example).

By removing the reporting function from the main HC data team, either through automation, dashboards, or by creating a distinct function, people-data professionals can use their time in a more productive manner. Of course, reporting is still important, but is not the endgame; it is a small fraction of what makes up a highly analytical team.

Take the numbers to the Board

When survey respondents were asked to rate the degree of analytics usage at different levels of the organization, the point that had the highest correlation to market success (and analytical success) was at the board of directors level.

In earlier studies, analytical ability of leaders has been linked to success, and this finding reinforces the notion that the best leaders are those who understand and make use of data for decision-making (i4cp, 2012). Boards of directors are largely concerned with CEO compensation and the executive pipeline for succession. This is directly related to the use of HC analytics in risk assessment being the best usage of HC analytics data. Truly change-ready organizations have top-level leaders who understand and trust the data, and find ways to use HC analytics to get the answers they need.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analytics team structure ranked by greatest business impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Separate reporting function</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stand-alone analytics department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part of the BI group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: i4cp

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analytics reporting for business impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Board of directors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All of HR</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Truly change-ready organizations have top-level leaders who understand and trust the data.

Source: i4cp
How McKesson structures its data team

Adaptability is a priority at McKesson Corporation, one of the world’s largest distributors of pharmaceuticals and medical supplies and providers of health information technology and care management tools (#15 among the Fortune 500). Remaining adaptable to changing conditions, such as the massive changes in the U.S. health care structure with even more changes assured, is critical. The ability to correctly interpret and react to data is essential; this capacity is what separates successful health care organizations from those that only exist as management training examples.

Amit Mohindra, vice president of the Workforce Intelligence Center of Excellence at McKesson, has long understood the need for analytical ability and adaptability, and has structured his team, which sits in the talent management & diversity organization within HR. Following are just a few of the tenets of Mohindra’s approach to ensuring that McKesson maintains a competitive edge with respect to workforce analytics and planning.

• **Don’t let workforce analytics be an island.** Mohindra has established relationships with other analytics groups in the company, including areas such as inventory, marketing, and pricing analytics. His aim is to establish a large internal labor market for analytics talent to expand and diversify career paths for analytics professionals within the company. He hopes to establish Workforce Intelligence as a “net exporter” of analytics talent into the organization. Mohindra explains: “although McKesson is an analytical company, analytics is relatively new for HR. It was important for me to make the connections across the organization so that we could benefit from the business’s experience with analytics and also strengthen the talent dimension to the business’s use of analytics.”

• **Diversify your workforce analytics talent profiles.** Workforce Intelligence’s reputation drives lots of internal applicants for open positions. Mohindra has hired internal talent from HR, finance, operations and IT. Each brings a different skill set, perspectives and relationships that are all vital to an evolving workforce intelligence practice. True to the “net exporter” philosophy, Workforce Intelligence has also supplied business units with analytics and technology talent. “I was fortunate to recruit a business partner with a passion for workforce planning—a financial planning and analysis and finance systems professional.
Mohindra says.

- **Create matrix relationships across the organization.** Workforce Intelligence is a center of excellence (COE) within a COE—the talent management & diversity COE. However, Mohindra strongly believes that analytics needs to happen in the BUs. His **three-year workforce intelligence roadmap** calls for establishing a strong COE to build the analytics infrastructure and then eventually devolving analytics accountability to business units. “We don’t want to build an ivory tower here in headquarters. The action happens in the business units (BUs). Workforce analysts in the BUs are closer to the business and most familiar with the data. We want the BUs to have a strong capability in workforce analytics,” Mohindra says. The workforce analysts he refers to are newly created roles that sit in BU HR teams. They work with the Workforce Intelligence COE on enterprise initiatives and work independently on BU initiatives. Mohindra says he treasures his accountability for developing the people in these roles—equipping them with the knowledge, skills, and abilities essential to performing world-class workforce analytics at McKesson.

- **Organize for success.** Mohindra believes in a clear separation of reporting and analytics. At McKesson, basic HR reporting is owned by the HR shared services team. Any complex request beyond their capability is escalated to Mohindra’s team, which has been reorganized into three pillars: analytics, workforce planning and operations & technology, each with a leader reporting to him. The operations and technology pillar is also accountable for all of talent management and development, not just Workforce Intelligence. The separate analytics pillar allows for a career path within workforce analytics from analyst to manager to director and—as with the other two pillars—is a robust pipeline for Mohindra’s role. “I personally feel that the data reporting role is a good feeder pool for analytics – these folks are familiar with our data and related issues and can play to that strength in their professional evolution towards analytics.”

- **Have an array of tools, not just one.** While Excel is used extensively, the Workforce Intelligence team leverages a number of other tools for its work. Mohindra is partial to Stata, which he learned in graduate school and allows him to “get a real feel for the data” like no other tool. The team uses SPSS, and Mohindra is encouraging all his analysts to learn R along with him for its flexibility and positive budget impact (it’s free compared to SAS, which Mohindra believes is very powerful, but also very expensive). Mohindra is also intrigued by a data visualization capability offered by MicroMacro which offers a unique view of the distribution of variables that invites drill down and comparison.

Mohindra’s work embodies the concept of adaptive analytics. By having a clear strategic vision, communicating a roadmap to success, and building operational capability over time, he has created an analytics team that allows for flexibility of talent and tools. That flexibility positions McKesson to be able to meet the analytics challenges of the future in whatever form they come.
Conclusion and recommendations

The field of human capital analytics, as judged by media attention, Internet traffic, and symposium topics, is at the forefront of modern human resources. Just as HR as a discipline is undergoing constant change, so too are sub-disciplines such as performance management and human capital analytics. As discussed in this Study, the ability for HR practitioners to use data in a way that assists in dealing with both internal and external changes can is directly related to the analytical ability of the organization and the overall success of that organization.

Four key findings help explain this idea of adaptive analytics: adaptive technologies, integrated technologies, a focus on areas of control, and a streamlined structure. The following four recommendations stem from those core concepts:

1. Use statistical software that is as flexible as you need it to be.
   Although there is not currently a large number of users, possibly due to the sharp learning curve, RapidMiner and R are both open-source and adaptive analytical programs that are leveraged by minority...
of high-performance companies, although with greatest impact making the adoption of open-source technologies like these a next practice.

2. **Ensure that the organization has a fully integrated enterprise-wide system for data gathering.**
   The best approach to making certain that there is full data integration is by using one system. If that is not possible, make sure that the data definitions and collection methods are identical across the platforms, and that they are communicating with each other as seamlessly as possible.

3. **Focus analytical efforts on leadership and risk assessments.**
   These efforts provide the most value in exchange for the time and money invested, and have been shown to have the largest correlation to market performance. It only makes sense: attention should only be spent in those areas where you have some control—predictions of the external market are useless if nothing can be done about them.

4. **Separate the reporting function from the rest of the HR analytics team.**
   Reporting is necessary and can contribute to the success of an organization, but the more time spent on reporting means less time spent on the more impactful workforce analytics efforts.

Adaptive analytics isn't a specific tool or process. It is an approach to analytics that high-performance companies are taking to ensure that every type of challenge, decision, or company-wide effort is able to be supported by the right data at the right time. Having the adaptive structure, the best adaptive tools, and the right perspective about analytics are the cornerstones of this most advanced usage of business analytics.
About this study

Human capital analytics remains one of the most current and critical issues in HR year after year. *The Rise of Adaptive Analytics* builds on the research from both i4cp and other leading organizations to show the need for a new way of approaching human capital analytics: with speed and rapid adjustments becoming the standard. Predictive analytics, big data, and external data are not answers in and of themselves, but rather all fit into the framework of a quickly customizable approach to data. This Study was conducted by i4cp in partnership with the American Management Association (AMA).

All data referenced in this report is from the i4cp 2014 survey, *Human Capital Analytics in Decision Making*. The survey had 550 respondents, 24% of whom represented global or multinational corporations, 58% were from organizations with 1,000 or more employees.

Breakouts by organization size, industry and other demographic factors are available in the interactive data workbook for this Study, which is available to all i4cp member organizations through the i4cp website.

Study data

Want to know more about the data behind the Study? i4cp members may request the survey dataset by contacting their account manager.

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Author and contributors

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Lorrie Lykins, i4cp’s Managing Editor & Director of Research Services, edited this report.

For more information or to contact the author, please go to i4cp.com/contact

Special thanks to Amit Mohindra, whose knowledge of the practical application of these advanced techniques helped explain the impact that high-performing individuals can have at successful organizations.

i4cp’s Workforce Analytics Exchange

This survey is a product of i4cp’s Workforce Analytics Exchange group. This group is comprised of representatives from the following organizations:

- AbbVie
- Amway
- DaVita
- Federal Reserve Board
- Hertz Corporation
- Kaiser Permanente
- Kaplan Learning Solutions
- Liberty Mutual
- Lincoln Financial Group
- Lockheed Martin
- McKesson
- State Street Bank
- Toyota
- Wells Fargo

i4cp’s gratitude goes out to the exchange group contributors, whose dedication to the study of workforce analytics made this research project possible. Their time and expertise were essential in the production of the initial survey instrument, in the final analysis of the data, and in the source material for the case studies.
About i4cp

i4cp is a human capital research firm that discovers the people practices that drive high performance. Ranked among the fastest-growing companies on the Inc. 500|5000 list for three consecutive years, i4cp provides its extensive member network of leading global employers and government institutions with the research, peer collaboration, tools, and data essential to developing and executing workforce strategies and practices that deliver higher market performance. To learn about i4cp and i4cp's People-Profit Chain™, an empirical model to increase organizational performance up to 3x, go to i4cp.com/ppc

Visit i4cp.com to learn more.

About American Management Association

American Management Association (www.amanet.org) is a world leader in talent development, advancing the skills of individuals to drive business success. AMA’s approach to improving performance combines experiential learning—learning through doing—with opportunities for ongoing professional growth at every step of one’s career. AMA supports the goals of individuals and organizations through a complete range of products and services, including classroom and live online seminars, e-learning programs, webcasts, webinars, podcasts, corporate and government solutions, business books and research. Organizations worldwide, including the majority of the Fortune 500, turn to AMA as their trusted partner in professional development and draw upon its experience to enhance skills, abilities and knowledge with noticeable results from day one.

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