

Business Intelligence Puzzle

The following puzzle represents the challenge of knowing how to use the data at hand to produce actionable results – this is the core purpose of Business Intelligence. I hope you find the puzzle amusing, challenging, and illustrative. If you need a hint, check the bottom of this page. The solution is on the back, but feel free to contact us if you need help with it. 1866-797-9032

The Problem

The XYZ Corporation, recently bought by ABC Multinational Corporation, was facing restructuring to eliminate redundancies. Under pressure from local interests, the ABC chairman decided to give XYZ division managers a sporting chance. “One week from today, I will call in the ten XYZ division managers. They will stand in a line, one in front of the other, and each will have a blue flag or a red flag placed on the back of his/her collar. Anyone who cannot call out the colour of his/her flag will be forced to resign, and their division adsorbed into ABC. Nobody will be allowed to look around or communicate in any way. You will be able to see only the colour of the flags in front of you.”

The Business Intelligence team leader at XYZ gave the managers a plan by which he could guarantee that nine of the ten would keep their jobs. The XYZ President wasn’t convinced at first, but he drew a few diagrams to illustrate that his plan would work no matter the order or number of flags.



1. The flags don't have to alternate



2. There can be more blue than red



3. There can be more red than blue

His plan worked!

Can you figure out how he did it?

Hint #1: The last person in line has a 50% chance, but his answer helps the person in front of him.

Hint #2: Go in with a plan. Is there an even or an odd number of blue flags in front of you?

Solution

The person at the back of the line can tell if there are an even or an odd number of red flags in front of him. He calls out “Red” if he sees an even number of red flags, or “Black” if he sees an odd number of red flags. Each manager will know the colour of his/her flag by paying attention to what has been said.

The key is for everyone to establish an even/odd count. The first time they hear someone call out “Red” everyone notes the count is odd. The second time someone calls out red, the count is even. The third time it’s back to odd, and so on. When it’s your turn, check if there’s an even or odd number of red flags in front of you. If it matches the running count, you’re red. If not, you’re blue.

Why this works

If the person at the back sees an odd number of red flags in front of him, he says “blue”. If you are the next person in line, and you see an even number of red flags, your flag must be red (If your flag had been blue, you’d see the same number of red flags as the person behind you). So you call out “Red”. You are safe. The person in front of you heard you call out red, and since they are keeping track, they know this means you saw an even number of red flags in front of you. They can use this information to make their call.

Example

Follow the solution through this example to see it in action. Here, person #1 happens to get lucky (there’s a 50/50 chance that he/she will).

Sees	3 red	2 red	1 red	1 red	1 red	1 red	1 red	0 red	0 red	0 red
Count	even		odd	even				even		
Says	blue	red	red	blue	blue	blue	blue	red	blue	blue

Business Intelligence: turn data into actionable information

It’s one thing to store data in your enterprise applications (like CRM and ERP systems), and it’s quite another thing to leverage that data to drive your business vision, and demonstrate measureable improvements to operations. Getting everyone on the same page, and following a definite strategy with executive vision is key to ongoing success of your Business Intelligence system.

Let The BI Builders help turn your data into actionable information. We have helped hundreds of clients harness the power of their business data - whether launching a promising new venture or keeping it on course as the business matures. The BI Builders provide innovative strategy and tactical technical services when and where required. This can include Assessment and Review Services, Design Services, Development and Deployment Services, and Training and Sustainment Services. We apply the right resources to help you connect the dots.