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Volvo Group's Journey to Data Adoption and Collaboration with Qlik

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As a university student, I was rather naive. You get so much data and information handed to you upfront, no questions asked. You don't have to do the legwork of sourcing and verifying it to make sure it's both accurate and what you need for interpretation and analysis. From there, the possibilities are endless, and the learning begins.

In the professional world, however, nothing comes easily. When I started working at [Volvo Group Trucks Operations](#), I realized I spent 90% of my workday hunting for information. It takes time to search for the right figures and put everything together to paint a cohesive and clear picture for your colleagues. Often, you're still looking for data right until it's time for the presentation. And after the presentation, the cycle begins again.

Volvo Group is a household name with many different truck brands, such as Volvo Trucks, Renault Trucks, Mack Trucks, and UD Trucks. We also manufacture buses, construction equipment, and laser machine engines for marine applications. When it comes to industrial applications, it's quite a broad portfolio.

We have a couple of thousand suppliers and a couple of million trucks per week that need to be up and running. When our products experience breakdowns, we have to get service parts out to them, and as VP Business Control I am part of that team that keeps our end-to-end service market logistics going and improving. The challenge lies in how to connect with the right suppliers for the right spare parts, and find the most efficient way of getting the right parts to the right trucks at the right time.

It's a highly complex material flow, so my division is a playground for people who love working with and optimizing data.

Inefficient Tools Lead to Unsatisfactory Analysis

When I came to the company almost nine years ago, there was a strong push for all of our employees to use MS Excel. We had to be proficient in the program to do our jobs well, but using Excel itself was insufficient.

One colleague would manually crunch numbers using a calculator and painstakingly enter numbers twice—once into the spreadsheet, and once into his calculator—to get the information he needed. Not only was this inefficient, but it left a lot of room for error.

My team also used to spend an excessive amount of time gathering data and making it understandable and presentable. If the data doesn't look quite right, it usually indicates some sort of underlying problem, but we often didn't have the time to investigate and escalate the issue because sourcing data took so long. Instead, information got passed along from one person to the next without proper analysis.

This created a culture where teams and individuals quickly became siloed. The internal impact is that you miss out on opportunities to improve your workflows or are unable to quickly identify suppliers whose products aren't up to your standards or other internal processes impacting you in a negative way. This all has a cost, both immediately and over the long term.

Today, Volvo Group is much more intent on simplifying and automating data-gathering processes, which frees up analysts' time to better analyze, understand, and utilize information. If an organization of our size can make this change, we know that anyone can do it.

Shifting Gears: Leading By Example

We within Finance truly started accelerating our data journey about four years ago, when my previous boss and a couple of senior managers took their data needs into their own hands. They started using [Qlik](#), running their own applications and experimenting with the platform.

Don't just upgrade your #technology. Upgrade your thinking, attitudes, and data culture. @qlik

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These leaders became strong change agents. They led by example, challenging others within the organization to not just upgrade their technology, but to upgrade their thinking and mindset around data gathering and transparency.

Over time, their commitment to Qlik had a ripple effect. It wasn't just about getting people to use such a simple and straightforward tool; users needed to become engaged and excited to learn something new versus continuing with Excel or other lackluster tools.

As a leader myself, that curiosity and willingness to learn is something I love to see. Developing new skills keeps our people sharp and employable as they continue in their career. I can't fault my colleague for using a calculator and Excel, but it's an example of someone who didn't have the coaching, support, or encouragement necessary to find a better way to complete his tasks. Learning and adopting a new tool requires buy-in on all levels.

Luckily for us, Qlik is simple to use and can easily be applied to different users and departments, which became the selling point for my team. As finance people, we're not the best at programming, so we needed a tool that's user-friendly and straightforward. As soon as our internal change agents could

demonstrate that Qlik was the right tool for us, it became much easier for the finance people to overcome any resistance, get aligned, and dare to start using Qlik.

[QlikView](#) and [Qlik Sense](#) are the two solutions we use most broadly today. They're flexible enough that each user can select the appropriate solution to solve their unique business challenges.

Organic Growth Fuels Long-Term Adoption

Qlik makes it easier for users to obtain data, which gives our team the time and opportunity to engage with their colleagues about the data itself. In other words, we are increasing opportunities for collaboration. When users have a better understanding of what the data shows, they can communicate and exchange ideas with others, and as a result, they can make better business decisions.

Having accurate, timely data leads to making the right decisions, faster. @qlik

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It was only recently, though, that our team began adopting Qlik on a large scale. Despite there being no formal Qlik deployment, I've seen an organic growth in our adoption rate, along with an organic change in people's attitudes towards data. Qlik has definitely become more internalized over time, and I have some theories as to why that happened.

When you simply present people with data, they can be a little distrustful of the information. And rightfully so—it's healthy to question numbers and results, and people want to see the proof in how you came to your conclusion. So it's important to empower people with the tools, skills, and access to information to satisfy their curiosity and give them a reason to trust the numbers they see.

With Qlik, we present people with raw data in an accessible format and give them the freedom to play around with it themselves. They then gain a greater understanding of how others reach certain conclusions, and how those conclusions fit into the bigger picture. You don't have to convince them of anything because, given the proper context, they've convinced themselves.

People regain control over their time and are more informed and confident about the data they have. As the saying goes, knowledge is power. And by putting power into the hands of the users, you're creating data trust and transparency within your organization.

Getting Key Business Results

Leaders love results. Yes, we've seen a shift to embedded, autonomous decision-making and increased interactions between our employees, but these results can be difficult to quantify. It's here, then, that leaders can become instrumental in sharing a vision for what a change in data culture can mean to their whole organization.

Such shifts can make a company a better and more attractive employer and increase employee retention. Everyone wants information as soon as possible, which creates heavy workloads within the finance community. If you have a closing or an estimate or a necessary purchase to make, for example, finance professionals often end up working overtime. Our data gathering happens so quickly now that none of our Qlik users feel the need to work past midnight anymore. When you have the tools that help you both manage the data and help reduce the stress and strain on your employees, you improve your employee engagement and start building a reputation in the industry for being an attractive employer.

Leveraging modern data management tools makes people's jobs easier, and it also satisfies employees' expectations around digitization and automation. Automating tasks, just like automating certain parts of a

data analysis workflow, is to be expected and embraced, especially if you execute it strategically. Let me give you an example.

We have a foundry in Sweden where they automated a rather simple forklift task by installing an autonomous vehicle that could take a portion of an engine and put it into a machine. Previously, there was one person handling that task, but when they implemented this autonomous vehicle, they could reallocate four employees.

There's this misconception that all workers are resistant to automation, but when we asked the employees what they thought about this change, they were extremely happy about it. They thought the task was repetitive and boring, so they were happy to rid themselves of it and focus on the more interesting aspects of their roles.

By automating the simplest tasks, you're freeing up people's time to use their skills, creativity, and competencies at their best. This, in turn, boosts employee engagement and allows employees to upskill and reskill for the jobs of the future.

Handing Over the Keys: Empowering Employee Success

Our organization is still in the early phases of our data-driven journey, and we're always uncovering new ways to foster employee curiosity. When we help our people find new opportunities for data to solve business problems, it further increases collaboration and fuels organic Qlik adoption. It can make the difference between a company that's successful now, and one that's still successful five or 10 years from now.

Adopting a new solution often requires passionate, influential change agents who enthusiastically support others and demonstrate the impact. @qlik

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As a leader, you need to have a clear understanding of where you want to go before you decide which route to take and figure out how fast you can get there. Only when we start to make data easily accessible and reduce our team silos can we begin to access the real gold mine in the grey areas between those silos.

With the right coaching and the right business intelligence tools like Qlik, leaders can help their employees and their organization discover the route to success.