



City of Joensuu

Transforming municipal decision-making with a deeper view of budgeting

Overview

The need

Joensuu spends over half of its budget on health and social welfare. Tracking healthcare spending is vital to ensure that the city's services will deliver value to citizens both now and in the future.

The solution

The city's health services department worked with IBM Premier Business Partner Tricons Oy to build an analytics solution that integrates financial and healthcare data to deliver a revolutionary level of insight.

The benefit

Staff can spend more time analyzing figures, instead of finding information – saving costs. Accurate, trusted data enhances decision-making, helping the city provide more efficient health services.

Citizens want to know that their tax euros are being spent on public services that deliver the best possible value – which means that government organizations need to keep a sharp eye on every cent that they spend.

To ensure that its own citizens were being taxed fairly, the City of Joensuu needed to ensure that it was being properly reimbursed for the healthcare services it provides to citizens from other municipalities. This meant it needed deeper insight into data from both its financial and healthcare systems

With help from Tricons Oy, an IBM Premier Business Partner, the City of Joensuu transformed its healthcare reporting capabilities with a set of analytics solutions from the IBM® Watson™ Foundations portfolio. By providing decision-makers with real-time insight into healthcare activities and funding, the solution will contribute to savings totaling up to hundreds of thousands of Euros.

“Healthcare evolves continually, so it is vital to monitor trends and patterns and make sure that your services are correctly balanced to meet the needs of your population. That’s why analytics is vital – not just to help you understand how to meet today’s challenges, but also to prepare for the future,” says Dr. Ari Laakkonen, Director of Medical Services, City of Joensuu.



Solution components

Software

- IBM® Cognos® Business Intelligence
- IBM Cognos Data Manager

IBM Business Partner

- Tricons Oy
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Recognizing current and future needs

Like most Finnish municipalities, the City of Joensuu devotes more than 50 percent of its annual budget to healthcare and social welfare services. To ensure that taxpayers' money would be invested wisely, the city wanted to find a better way to track the health services it was providing, and the associated costs.

The city also recognized that the Finnish healthcare sector is in a state of evolution. To improve strategic planning and ensure that all citizens have local access to high-quality healthcare, Finland's municipalities will soon be re-organized into five large regions. Joensuu needed to prepare itself for this change.

“Our city is already a member of a larger healthcare service district, but the regional system will make us part of something even bigger. Before that happens, we have to make sure our own operations are in order. We need to know exactly what services we are providing and which of our processes we might need to change.”

Deeper insight is the key

To respond effectively to these two challenges, the city realized that it needed more insight into its financial and healthcare data.

Dr. Ari Laakkonen, Director of Medical Services at the Center for Social and Health Services, City of Joensuu, explains: “Previously, we did not have a tool that we could use to look backwards at healthcare spending.”

The city's existing financial and operational reporting processes were mostly manual and relied on spreadsheets, which limited its opportunities for useful analytics.

“Using spreadsheets was very awkward and slow, and the information was not always correct,” says Laakkonen. “Situations change so rapidly nowadays that we need a solution that gives us information in real time.”

Building a solution to leverage data

The City of Joensuu had already initiated a data warehousing project to combine data from its healthcare, social welfare and financial administration systems. The health services department began looking for a powerful analytics solution that could leverage this data and deliver reports much more quickly and flexibly.

The city selected IBM Cognos® Business Intelligence and IBM Cognos Data Manager software, and engaged Tricons Oy to help with their implementation.

“We saw immediately that Cognos was a good solution for us, so we wanted to implement it as quickly as possible,” comments Laakkonen. “The experts at Tricons made this possible with their technical know-how, and they added value by suggesting new ways that we could use the solution.”

Gaining unprecedented visibility

The solution is now in active use by senior managers within the city's health services department, who use real-time insight into healthcare activities and finances to support decision-making and identify opportunities to drive efficiency.

The feedback from current users has been positive. “We can integrate data from our patient management and financial systems and use Cognos to compare the figures,” says Laakkonen. “Although we cannot yet estimate the overall effectiveness of our healthcare services for the population, we can calculate the cost-efficiency of those services – and this is already a revolutionary achievement in the field of municipal decision-making.”

Saving time with trusted data

As a result of the project, the City of Joensuu has gained new faith in its data, saving time and encouraging a more proactive approach to fact-based decision-making.

“Faster reporting with IBM Cognos software cuts our costs by approximately EUR5,000 to 6,000 a month.”

—Dr. Ari Laakkonen, Director of Medical Services, City of Joensuu

Laakkonen elaborates: “We had a hunch that Cognos would help us a lot, but we could not have imagined it would be as effective as it actually is. We are able to really drill down into the details of the data; and more importantly, 99 percent of the time we can trust that the information we get is correct, accurate and reliable. This means we can give really strong evidence to the municipality’s decision-makers when a change needs to be made.”

Using the Cognos solution, the City of Joensuu’s health services department will be able to generate reports more quickly and easily than ever before, providing a real-time view of the organization’s finances.

“With our old solution, producing reports took two or three hours,” describes Laakkonen. “With Cognos, reports take just a couple of minutes, giving us time to concentrate on more essential work. Accelerating our reporting will save us approximately EUR5,000 to 6,000 a month in working hours.”

“In addition, it is now easy to compare the trends in the number of patient visits and the costs between different health facilities, on a single screen. This used to take many hours and require much printing of documents.”

Major efficiency savings

The project has also turned the spotlight on some of the organization’s processes, inspiring a more disciplined approach to operations. For example, during the first

two months of the project, the city was able to identify EUR10,000 in unclaimed revenue – an amount that might otherwise have slipped through the net.

“In the course of the project, we discovered that some of the services we provided had not been invoiced, for example from insurance companies,” says Laakkonen. “Combining all the benefits that we believe we can achieve with Cognos, I would say we are talking about remarkably large sums of euros per year. Perhaps the biggest impact of the project is that it enables us to run our operations more efficiently and cost-effectively.”

Foreseeing the future of healthcare

Looking to the future, the City of Joensuu is planning to investigate predictive analytics with IBM software, opening up a host of interesting applications.

“To invest our resources in the right place and at the right time, we need insight into the future: for example, looking at diseases that are becoming more common, and changes in demographics,” says Laakkonen.

“We know, for instance, that diabetes is becoming more common in our population. With Cognos, we will be able to see more accurately how the disease develops in different geographical areas or age groups, and then target preventative care more precisely.

“Or let’s take depression in the 15-20 age group as an example: we will be able to see the trends in the number of cases of depression that are diagnosed, and react appropriately in terms of service provision. In principal, we will be able to follow up on any health phenomenon and adjust our services and cost structure accordingly.”

Laakkonen concludes: “So far, we have only seen a tiny part of the potential of the IBM solution – IBM Cognos is like a Rubik’s cube: there are so many different ways of combining and looking at the data.”

About the City of Joensuu

Located in the North Karelia region in eastern Finland, Joensuu is a growing city and municipality that borders Russia. It was established over 160 years ago, and is today home to 75,000 people. The City of Joensuu provides healthcare services for two other municipalities via a subscriber-producer model, serving nearly 100,000 people across the whole region. In 2014, the budgeted healthcare expenditure of the region was approximately EUR139 million.

To learn more about the City of Joensuu, please visit www.joensuu.fi

About Tricons Oy

Founded in 1986, Tricons Oy is a Premier IBM Business Partner that provides customized IT solutions that are designed to deliver long-term benefits. With extensive industry-specific expertise, the company draws on the latest technology to provide autonomous solutions that improve the customer's operations.

To learn more about Tricons Oy, please visit www.tricons.fi

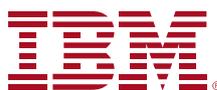
About IBM Business Analytics

IBM Business Analytics software delivers data-driven insights that help organizations work smarter and outperform their peers. This comprehensive portfolio includes solutions for business intelligence, predictive analytics and decision management, performance management, and risk management.

Business Analytics solutions enable companies to identify and visualize trends and patterns in areas, such as customer analytics, that can have a profound effect on business performance. They can compare scenarios, anticipate potential threats and opportunities, better plan, budget and forecast resources, balance risks against expected returns and work to meet regulatory requirements. By making analytics widely available, organizations can align tactical and strategic decision-making to achieve business goals.

For more information

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