The experts' opinions: What to look for in analysis of planning platforms

Anaplan

The pressures that are driving your organization to consider a connected planning platform can come from finance, sales, operations, or from any combination of the three. That means that every company's criteria for deciding on a solution can be slightly different, making your decision process complex, highly dependent on your business's specific needs, and, at times, fraught with confusion. Therefore, the right connected planning platform needs to deliver value across your entire organization.

In this information age, analysis from third-party experts is especially valuable. Not only does this analysis touch on the strengths and shortcomings of various solutions, it usually also includes commentary that frames the questions organizations should have in mind while selecting a platform, and offers advice about managing the human factors critical to the success or failure of the connected planning platform once it's in use.

Because this material is so important to your decision-making process, we've collected reports from Gartner, Forrester, Ventana Research, Nucleus Research, IDC, and the Harris Poll in one place. Through this expert analysis, you'll get a better understanding of what the right solution looks like for you and what steps you'll need to take to get the most from this solution.

The push for investment in connected planning platforms comes from multiple functions within the business. That perspective is reflected in the analysis.

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Finance

In order to assume the strategic role demanded of finance in modern organizations, data must be readily available and planning platforms must make it easy to use that data. Unfortunately, many businesses can't do that. According to Constellation Research, organizations without a centralized planning platform spend 20 percent of their planning time simply collecting data, and another 30 percent of their time validating those data. The time spent managing the data means less time spent analyzing and planning.

A modern planning platform slashes the time needed for "low-value data collection and validation efforts" and expands finance's opportunity to function as a strategic partner to the rest of the business. "Before [deploying a planning platform] we used to spend 80% of our time on data entry and only 20% actually analyzing the data and planning," said a planning systems manager interviewed for Forrester's Total Economic Impact study. "We've flipped that on its head now because the data is already there."

According to the Forrester study, "increasing the efficiency of workforce planning responsibilities enabled teams to increase the frequency of existing tasks." That could translate in the ability to make decisions more frequently, or it could give the finance team the opportunity to implement new initiatives. "For example, the workforce management team supporting contact centers for a financial services company increased the frequency of service-level reporting from three times a day to hourly," the report said.

The research makes it clear that Anaplan is ideally positioned for finance teams looking to become more agile and strategic. The Anaplan platform should be considered by organizations "that want to pivot their business and operating plans quickly, have agility in building their data models and hierarchies, or have business units with individual requirements," according to the IDC report. Anaplan "also has a proven track record of being deployed in use cases that extend beyond the financial budgeting function into other finance use cases," IDC said.

Because Anaplan incorporates data from virtually all departments multiple times a day, "users can perform modeling functions that were previously too time-consuming," the IDC report continues. "With scenario and continuous planning quickly becoming the norm, Anaplan is well-positioned to capitalize on the increased demand for FP&A solutions. An ever-growing library of connectors to third-party applications increases Anaplan's value proposition in leveraging a broad range of organizational data."

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Sales

Sales planning – including territory and quota development and compensation management – needs to be data-driven, but when the data not available it becomes a guessing game for everyone involved. Forecasting becomes a frustrating, time-consuming process; territory and quota development are highly dependent on the intuition and institutional knowledge of sales managers; and opaque sales compensation processes are frustrating to the salespeople and make it hard for sales managers to use compensation to most effectively influence selling behaviors. All of these challenges damage sales' position within the organization, contribute to lower morale on the selling team, and contribute directly to sales team churn.

According to Forrester, a modern planning platform enables better alignment in modeling techniques across the sales organization, which "(speeds) integration and (facilitates) better collaboration between different stakeholders, particularly distributed field sales and sales operations leaders."

"Sales planning solutions that support xP&A seek to ensure changing revenue objectives are continuously monitored, updated and mirrored in sales quotas and territories, incentives and rewards," Gartner said in its report. "This is particularly true in business environments where the sales planning process must factor in a great deal of market volatility or business model complexity."

The Anaplan Platform is especially well positioned to help manage sales processes and share data with other parts of the organization to bolster sales' strategic role in the organization. "Anaplan has many examples of customers using its application in multiple business functions," IDC reported. "Anaplan's Data Hub allows users to build their hierarchies and models from the ground up, with a lot of flexibility to adapt to complex use cases. It offers 30+ statistical algorithms and optimization solutions natively within the software to deliver more accurate forecast or optimized scenario-based planning. Anaplan is also working on advanced forecasting techniques powered by machine learning, which will be announced in the near future. To help sales leaders understand changes as they happen, Anaplan offers reporting and visualization capabilities out of the box and integrates with business intelligence (BI) tools such as Tableau for enterprise-wide reporting when users have advanced visualization requirements," said IDC.

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Supply Chain

The increasingly challenging environment in which supply chain managers work, requires them to plan based on a number of changing variables – not just the usual supplier issues but other factors.

For example, the Forrester Total Economic Impact study interviewed a senior manager of supply chain at an automotive manufacturer. This manager said their organization "used the connected planning platform to monitor budgets and change the derivative mix of vehicle production across the company's geographic markets. "This enabled the organization to maximize its variable profits while mitigating environmental noncompliance fines. The senior manager went on to say that "information centralized in Anaplan guided changes to the company's vehicle lineup that delivered a benefit of more than $40 million by reducing the cost of noncompliance of carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions." The organizations Forrester interviewed "adjusted procurement and distribution practices, empowered by a unified view of inventory, supplier capacity, and granular volume forecasts through Anaplan."

Another organization interviewed by Nucleus Research said the Anaplan platform had a direct impact on its ability to operate its supply chain profitably. "With visibility to its inventory reserves and cost breakdowns to components and products, the company managed its production costs and limited budget adjustments. Furthermore, Anaplan enabled the manufacturer to perform revenue forecasts at the SKU and customer level with capabilities to drill down into net income," said the Nucleus report.

"Since supply chain processes represent a substantial part of the company's operations, Anaplan's home-grown supply chain solutions were a selling point instead of piecemealing modules in a bundle deal from other vendors," said Nucleus.

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About Anaplan

Anaplan is a transformative way to see, plan, and run your business. Using our proprietary Hyperblock™ technology, Anaplan lets you contextualize real-time performance, and forecast future outcomes for faster, confident decisions. Because connecting strategy and plans to collaborative execution across your organization is required to move business FORWARD today. Based in San Francisco, we have 20 offices globally, 175 partners and more than 2,000 customers worldwide.

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