

Defining and Implementing an Effective Data Quality Strategy

By Daragh O'Brien

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Executive summary

INFORMATION IS a mission critical, value adding asset of your organisation. Poor quality information impairs the effectiveness and success of the enterprise. Numerous drivers exist to address the problems caused by poor quality information, ranging from statutory compliance, to the costs and risks of failure in CRM and ERP implementations to achieving value from mergers and acquisitions, through to the risks of liability for loss and injury arising from poor quality information.

Ultimately, we find ourselves in the Information Age faced with an Information Age imperative. Most managers find themselves faced with an 'impressive mass of misleading, inaccurate, inconsistent or just plain irrelevant data' that obscures the important facts and information that they require to effectively run the business. Some commentators have compared today's managers to Coleridge's Ancient Mariner with 'data, information everywhere but not a drop that is fit to drink'.

A number of thought leaders have developed methodology frameworks that draw on the proven principles of quality management as applied in manufacturing. Dr. Tom Redman, Larry P. English, and Danette McGilvray, each a leader in the field, present structured approaches to addressing this Information Age imperative. Each of these frameworks have common core themes and elements which contribute to the development of sustained and sustainable improvements in the quality of information.

However, improving the quality of information and the management of information quality in your organisation requires change. This change must be

managed and must be aligned with the strategic needs of the business. The focus should be on achieving sustained improvements in quality rather than on 'heroic measures' to fight fires as they flare up. This requires a 'new philosophy' and the adoption of a clear governance model to manage the quality of information and to stress the importance of information as an asset to the organisation. This requires the application not just of proven quality management techniques, but proven techniques of project management and change management to ensure embedded change and long-term, continuous improvement of the quality of your information asset.

The business case for improving the quality of information is compelling once it is constructed based on sound measures of the real levels of quality in your information. The full extent of the business case and likely measures to be included depends on your industry and the strategic objectives being pursued.

As with all change, there are obstacles and barriers that must be overcome to ensure success. Aligning your information quality message with clear strategic priorities, delivering value quickly through small projects rather than a 'big bang' approach, seeking governance at appropriate levels and expressing the 'information quality agenda' in language that your stakeholders are familiar with will all help lower barriers and enlist support to overcome obstacles.

The pursuit for information quality is a journey which requires planning and regular course corrections. It is achievable, however, and will deliver substantial and sustainable benefits to your organisation.

About the Author

DARAGH O'BRIEN is a senior project manager with a leading telecommunications company in the Irish Republic. He has nearly a decade's experience with complex information management projects from 'single view of customer' to 'compliance controls', with hands-on experience of both technical issues, information quality challenges and the strategic change management needs at the heart of such projects.

Daragh is a charter member of the International Association for Information and Data Quality (IAIDQ) and a member of the Irish Computer Society. He sits on the board of directors of the IAIDQ and chairs the IAIDQ's Irish Community of Practice, which is run in partnership with the Irish Computer Society under the 'IQ Network' brand. He lectures on legal issues in informatics on the European MSc in Business Informatics in Dublin City University.

A regular presenter at information quality conferences internationally, Daragh is currently collaborating on a book on the non-statute common law issues that apply to information quality. He has written numerous articles on information quality management issues.

Daragh's personal blog site can be found at www.obriend.info where he writes on information quality topics and other matters. He also maintains the IAIDQ's [IQTrainwrecks.com](http://www.iqtrainwrecks.com) website (www.iqtrainwrecks.com).

