



## Has Your Data Fallen Through the Looking Glass?

When the Governor of a state or the CEO of a corporation considers the outcomes they want to create, they focus on the perspective of the people they serve, (a horizontal view,) *not* their internal organizational structure, (a vertical view.) Naturally, Leaders in such organizations want the service they provide to appear to its audience in terms that relate to their audience. It is of utmost importance that the data provided to an organization's constituents is communicated in efficient and effective formats to reflect the specific needs of that constituency.

To illustrate: as a citizen, if I own a pond and I want to know what rules apply in case I want to plant water lilies or build a deck, I *don't* want to know that there are possibly as many as fifteen programs, across two counties and three state agencies that have jurisdiction over my pond. I *do* want



to tell a government agency representative the address of my pond and have them give me clear information about the conditions that apply.

Or, as a commercial customer, if I've purchased a garage door opener at Home Depot and they have a subcontractor install it, I don't want to have to figure out who I call to get it fixed. I want to call Home Depot, mention my sales receipt and have them handle it.

As citizens or customers, we want governments and organizations to appear seamless. We don't want to know about the internal structure. In order to present a seamless aspect, an organization or

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community of organizations must find ways to bring all of their data seamlessly to bear on their service, regardless of the source. As information providers, we know that all of the customer-centric organizational structures and functions in the world can't get this job done unless the data is available and usable across those structures.

So, where is our data? Can you say silo? And how did most of the data get siloed? It was created by units in the organizational structure. Most likely these structures were formed around a funding source. Too often we've stored and organized our data around the organization structure, and unfortunately, we are left with data design by chart of accounts, a totally vertical organizing scheme.

No wonder executive leaders are unable to get the clear, pertinent, concise information they require in order to make strategic decisions. And no wonder customers are frustrated, being passed from department to department, chasing down answers to their questions like Alice down the Rabbit-hole.

If you are an information technology provider or a business executive and you feel that the time is ready to attack this challenge in your organization, here's a hint: *concentrate on "data integration."* It's a broad subject, and I've compiled these useful guidelines to help you get started.

**1.** The way you structure your data is strategic, so it has a long-term effect on your organization. Plan strategic data architecture flexible enough to fit your future needs. Many strategic data designs and tools are now available to make this possible.


**2.** Because data architecture is strategic, make a strategic investment in a qualified data architect employee or consultant. Give that person

authority over data architecture design and definition of common data.

**3.** Be sure your data architecture is *highly cohesive and loosely coupled*. Highly cohesive suggests that the various kinds of data relate well to each other and integrate easily. Loosely coupled means they are not so intertwined technically that a change to one area impacts another. There are many technical ways to isolate information systems so that they can share data without affecting each other internally.

**4.** Concentrate your investment of time and energy in data that is horizontally common across your organization. Create standard data definitions and provide cross-referencing abilities to add other data unique to the silo, such as function, product or service.

**5.** Support enterprise data architecture principles at the executive level. Only the person at the top and the executive team own the horizontal view of the organization and can make strategic decisions about data architecture direction. When lower departments are in conflict, the top is where governance of strategic data decisions should be made.

**6.** Clearly understand that today, data restructuring doesn't have to mean a huge redesign and conversion of all your data systems. There are up-to-date tools and approaches that can give you incremental options. You can target your investment to the 20% of your data that will bring 80% of the data integration benefit. 

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