



Getting Started in Information Quality

By Kathy Hunter, Client Services Director, Kynetika Ltd.

Is the Time Right?

Timing really is the key to success. You are aware of information quality problems but, is your company aware? Unless an organisation appreciates the need for improvement, it will be nearly impossible to obtain funding. Indeed, you will find it hard to implement your initiatives and continuing success will almost surely evade you.

First things first

Before you start, you must set the scene within your organisation. A campaign to engender support is needed to ensure your success. In order to achieve success, three things must be present. The first is essential and the next two are down to you.

A clear and obvious problem resulting in - *Pain!*

Unless you have people, at a high level in the company, worried due to a problem associated with data, you won't get the right backing to ensure success. It's likely that the pain people are experiencing is not obviously associated with poor quality information. The pain may be due to lost sales, customers leaving or unnecessary costs that reduce profits but, if you can relate that pain back to an information quality problem, you will have the keys to getting an information quality initiative underway. In order to back up your assertions that the pain is due to quality problems, gather evidence to make the connections clear to all. Here are some suggested ways of getting that evidence.

- Advertise on your intranet that you are looking for information quality problems and ask people to contact you to discuss their issues (stand back and await the onslaught!)
- Conduct lunchtime forums in individual departments asking people to come and tell you about problems they are having
- Send out questionnaires to middle managers within the business asking them to answer questions about information quality problems and suggest they pass the questionnaires around to people that work for them.

Once you have the problems, identify the data involved and then profile the data to get valuable insight. If you have profiling tools, by all means use them. If you don't yet have profiling tools, this can be achieved using MS Access or SQL queries of the appropriate databases.

Typical queries would involve uniqueness checks, counts of nulls and duplicates, lists and distributions of values within key fields, and verification of required foreign key relationships across tables. All should be evaluated within agreed data definitions.

Publish the results, discuss with people within the business areas and find those key relationships between the data problems and business costs.

The ability to get people to visualise the vision of a business without information quality problems

To help people visualise the vision, you need to fully understand it yourself. Review the situation and walk your way through to your solution. Draw yourself a picture of this solution - literally. Based on the problems you've discovered and the pain they are experiencing, ask yourself the following questions:

- What systems have problems?
- What business areas are experiencing issues?
- After the improvements you will undertake, what will be different?
- What will the business area be able to do to capitalize on the improvements?

Graphically depict the answers to these questions. Keep your visualisation simple so people can hold onto it and take it away with them. Once this is complete, review it with several people in the business to ensure your ideas are as clear to them as it is to you.

This vision will form part of a 'roadshow' pack that will form the basis of your campaign to get your information quality initiative off the ground.

A roadmap towards the future vision

It's not enough to have a vision. If you can't show people that you can get them to that vision, you will not get the backing you will certainly need. A roadmap, including milestones with deliverables, is required to engender confidence in your ability to accomplish your improvement goals.

It is here that you must make it crystal clear that this is an improvement methodology, not a 'quick fix' solution. It takes time to get everything under control and will need a continuing effort to ensure the quality remains for the long term. However, good planning will reap rewards in short order. Prioritise the milestones so that the biggest problems get relief first. Include easy wins along with big problems so you can prove return on investment quickly.

To enhance your roadmap, a clearly defined methodology will go a long way to creating confidence in your abilities. There are several methodologies available. I generally recommend the process provided in Larry English's book, known as TIQM¹.

Add the roadmap and methodology to your 'roadshow' pack and get ready to hit the road! Now it's time to meet with the business in order to build your business case and, more importantly, to find a sponsor that will provide the type of support needed to get your improvements funded and successfully adopted.

Securing the Right Sponsorship

You may be able to get funding for your initiative without a sponsor. However, you will struggle to get everything implemented and to build a long-term information quality environment without the right sponsorship. So, who would be the right sponsor?

Your sponsor must be a senior manager. Improvement processes will require changes to business processes and systems. It will also require both financial, system and human resources. In fact, most initiatives will have an impact on job roles and may even require

¹ Larry English, *Information Quality Applied Best Practices for Improving Business Information, Processes, and Systems*, Indianapolis, NJ USA: Wiley Publishing, Inc., p. 27

changes to entire departments. A senior manager is the only one that can enable these to happen and you need to find one that is in PAIN.

To find that senior manager, you will need input from the business to find out where problems occur. This is where the roadshow comes in.

Take your show on the road

Find venues for your presentation. Getting in front of people is the best way of getting your message across, and finding your sponsor. Go back to the people you spoke with when you were looking for the information quality problems. Schedule meetings with their departments where you will present your roadshow. Provide a clear agenda of your presentation so people know what to expect. Take the time to ensure the right people are able to attend.

When you are presenting, pain is once again the key. It seems to act as a lens allowing people to 'see' the solution and the eventual relief of their distress. Speak of the areas in need of improvement and what will be possible once those improvements are underway. It's important to talk about the costs of poor quality information and how improving quality will reverse those costs and relieve their pain!

When you discuss problems, find out whether there has been a specific senior manager that is feeling pain from all of this. This could be lost sales, customer churn, low profits, and even embarrassment when things have gone publicly wrong. Also, take this opportunity to get people to bring your evidence of the costs of poor quality. You will already be on your way to building your business case.

And, finally

If you can't find a senior manager in pain (or you can't highlight the costs of poor quality to cause him/her pain), then it might not be the right time to proceed. Without pain, you won't get the right level of support. You could try running a small pilot project without additional funds and calculate ROI and then get this in front of someone to see if they might bite. However, the overwhelming opinion is that pain is needed. You may need to bide your time and be ready when something happens that is related to information quality. Be prepared, it will almost certainly happen!

How Kynetika can help

Kynetika offer a variety of information management consultancy services using seasoned experts with best practice methods. Some of the areas covered are described below, and, to help you get started, we are running a special New Year's promotion that can give your project a jump start.

Establishing the Data Governance Function

Our consultants can assist you in identifying and enlisting the correct business and IT individuals to take on the roles of Data Governance Managers. We will then work with them to develop the principles and processes required to make Data Governance work.

Information Quality

We have specialized Information Quality Consultants who will ensure the improvement of data and information quality from both a business and IT perspective. This will include data profiling to help the business and IT understand the data in detail and will highlight challenges in need of attention. It will also include experts in improving quality from both a business process and technology perspective using proven methodologies.

Master Data Management

Key non-transactional reference data needs tight controls and agreed data definitions that transcend the entire organization so that master data can be shared across the enterprise and used with confidence by everyone. Our experts will assist in defining that key data and establishing the correct controls to ensure the quality of this essential information.

Justifying Costs

As with all business initiatives, it is critical that the costs associated with establishing Data Governance, Information Quality and Master Data Management be justified and backed up with predictions of ROI. Our consultants have proven methods and practices to find the costs of poor data governance, including the costs of scrap and re-work, opportunity costs and wastage, that will provide overwhelming justification for any of these business initiatives. We can also help you write that all-important business case and then, once the initiatives have been established, we can show you how to measure that ROI to highlight the success of your endeavors.



* * * Special Kynetika Promotion * * *
HALF PRICE Information Issues Workshop

If your organization has issues with its information and want to find ways of making improvements, this half-day workshop will get you started.

Based on Kynetika's best practice service offerings, we'll help you get the right people together to investigate what's going wrong and will provide you with valuable insight into the costs of poor quality that may be costing you a fortune!

The workshop will start before we get there when we discuss who should participate in the workshop and then we'll provide an information issues questionnaire to send to the invitees so we are able to 'hit the ground running' on the workshop day.

The workshop itself will allow your participants the ability to air their concerns and provide you with evidence of the costs of poor quality. We'll identify key data elements in need of attention and we'll undertake an information management maturity assessment which will provide an estimate of the costs your business is experiencing due to poor information quality.

After the event, Kynetika will provide you with a report of the proceedings along with our recommendations for the next steps.

And don't forget, Kynetika are experts in global data so, if your footprint is multi-national, we are ready to help you overcome the challenges that global data brings.

During this promotional period, Kynetika are offering this workshop for half price – that's just £500 (plus travelling expenses for countries outside the UK) for the first 15 companies that respond.

Contact us at

Kynetika Ltd
1 Lyric Square
London W6 0NB
UK

+44 (0) 20 7147 9980

+44 (0) 7973 220 813

kathy.hunter@kynetika.com