

Enterprise Data Architecture

Identifying and preserving the most valuable resource in a Financial Services organization

A DATA STRATEGY SERIES CASE STUDY

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When business-critical information resides on desktops, and the share price sinks or soars on data-driven decisions, it's time to get serious about data architecture. It doesn't happen on its own...it takes strategic vision, cogent planning, and a strong ability to execute.

Introduction For a private education lender, the ability to leverage data is critical to the success of their business – from developing and marketing innovative products to managing their risk exposure and structuring deals. After years of rapid growth in both their borrowers' and their technology needs, the integrity of the organization's data supply chain had reached a critical stage. In partnership with Axis, the client set out to regain control of its information – securing their most important asset while enhancing their ability to use data to drive revenue growth.

1 Project Details

The goal of the 12-week engagement was to provide a strategic view of the client's future state information supply chain, and a customized set of well-defined projects needed to achieve that goal. The guiding principles behind the roadmap were the integrity and consistency of information, cost efficiency of the solution, and consensus among stakeholders. The solution needed to address fundamental issues of data ambiguity and lack of consistent usage, as well as high dependence on manual entry and assembly of information and commensurate undocumented processes.

2 Tracing the Information Supply Chain

The project began with an exhaustive cataloging of current systems, reports, and data feeds throughout the organization, including myriad VAP centers residing in Access databases and Excel "spread-marts" peppered throughout the company on individual hard drives and even in hard copy on stakeholders' bookshelves.

This enormous task was assisted by the use of Axis' groundbreaking reporting application inventory tool, which allowed the team to quickly gather and capture reports and system metadata in a format that facilitated analysis while also providing much-needed documentation to the client on their existing processes and data.



3 Involving the Users

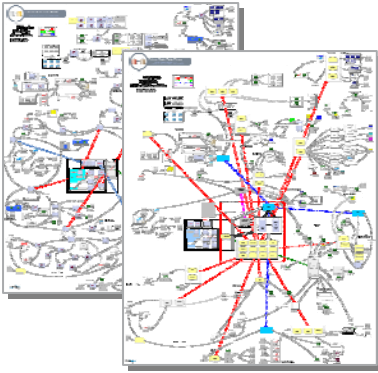
In parallel to the data and reporting effort, the Axis User Experience team went to work with information users, creating a current and future state picture of their touchpoints into the information supply chain, as well as

the type and prevalence of tasks among the users. Creating a fully-documented view of the user community - in partnership with the users themselves - the team created a never-before-seen view into the actual workings of the organization – who was doing what with the data and how that impacted stakeholders further down the chain. Represented as a voluminous set of User Personas

and Scenarios, this understanding formed the basis for creating a future state environment in which users could focus less on hunting for data and spend their time making better business decisions with the insight the data provided them.



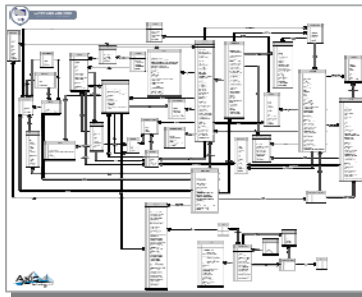
3 Defining Information Challenges



The Axis team partnered with data stewards, system owners, and key stakeholders in the organization, created a comprehensive view of the current state data flows between manual processes and reports, Access databases and production systems. Using the processes uncovered by analysis efforts as a basis for requirements, a future state data flow was developed in cooperation with stakeholders, IT, and the leadership team, representing a cost-optimized, risk-managed, and scalable information supply chain. Leveraging existing investments in technology and personnel, the data flow represents a robust and achievable vision.

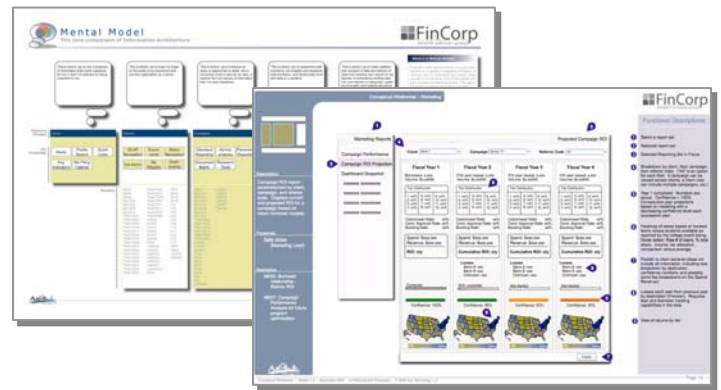
4 Creating a Vision for Users

Alongside the efforts of the data team, the Axis User Experience team built on the success of the User Personas and Scenarios to create a vision for the structure and functionality to be built on top of the equally critical data capabilities on the back-end. User tasks extracted from the Personas were grouped into a mental model based on the task categories of Monitoring, Investigating, Modeling, and Managing information. Using this model as a global framework, the team created conceptual wireframes around scenarios in creative whiteboard workshops with the users. The result was a clear vision of how the users perceived the data, and how they preferred to interact with it in support of their business functions.



Special Topic: Data Smackdown

The Axis team initiated a highly successful cross-functional effort to resolve data redundancy and ambiguity. Referred to colloquially as "Data Smackdown", this effort brought key data stakeholders together into a data governance committee to maintain data consistency and integrity in the Enterprise.



5 Setting the Path

With the vision set for user functionality as well as back-end architecture and data integrity, the team worked with client sponsors to build a project portfolio, and to prioritize components of the solution into an achievable roadmap – a plan with pragmatic costs and benefits demonstrated by the stakeholders and approved by Finance - for each project in a 24-month horizon.



In Closing

The strategy effort was a stunning success for Axis and our client partners, culminating in enthusiastic support from the Executive Operating Committee and the CEO of the company. As of the date of this case study, two foundational projects are under way to resolve key data ambiguity and management challenges in preparation for warehousing, masking, and analytics efforts in the 2007 portion of the roadmap. The strategy effort has resulted in an unprecedented level of cooperation across the enterprise, aligning ongoing IT initiatives and personnel to the strategic direction outlined in the roadmap, and bringing cross-functional stakeholder groups into consensus on a common set of goals that will support the business in its future successes.

