

Checklist: Questions to ask before beginning any data integration project

Before embarking on a Data Integration project, you can overcome initial inertia with this easy-to-follow worksheet that breaks down a seemingly overwhelming project into manageable steps.

Data integration projects can be difficult to define and manage. Complexity can contribute to inertia. Complicating the issue is the fact that many organizations are unaware of the extent of their problem. Enterprise Architects, Integration Specialist and Developers are in a unique position to help solve the problem by breaking down the preparation into easy-to-understand steps.

Use this process to identify existing problems and anticipate integration challenges. If you do not take inventory before you start the project, you may need to remedy problems later on when you risk missed deadlines, budget overages, and disheartened stakeholders.

Follow this checklist to prepare your organization for a data integration project.

Step #1 Identify key stakeholders

- Which business units need to be involved in the project?
- Who is responsible for data integration and strategy?
- Which key players within those business units will be involved in the day-to-day management of the project?
- What resources are devoted to this effort?
- What barriers do you see in putting integration platform into production?

Step #2 Identify key systems being used by stakeholders

- What manual processes are currently being used, such as reconciling data in an Excel spreadsheet?
- Can manual processes scale?
- How does organization currently schedule, monitor and report and integration activity?
- Do SaaS or cloud-based data stores exist?
- What does your current integration environment look like and is it dynamic enough to embrace new demands?
- Do obscure legacy systems still contribute data?
- What patterns of data integration do you need to support?
- Is there a need for real-time access to data?

Step #3 Identify the data and how it is being used

- Which data sources does your organization work with?
- Is it unstructured or structured?
- Is it machine-generated or sentiment data?
- Do you have to repeatedly cleanse spreadsheets and send them to partners, managers, co-workers, and customers?
- What are you getting from the data?
- What aren't you getting from the data that you need?
- What priorities do you share with other stakeholders?

Step #4 Identify better ways to integrate your data

- Will an objective third-party consultant help avoid conflict and provide insight?
- What data needs to be integrated on a regular basis?
- Which additional integration projects might provide value to the business?
- Can you avoid one-off integrations by identifying similar projects in your organization that could benefit from this same approach?
- Do you need to integrate on-premise and cloud data sources and applications?
- What steps are you taking to share/socialize data within your organization?
- What trends are you finding that you should highlight for future projects?

Step #5 Identify data integration tools that fit into their budget

- What is your budget for initial integration efforts?
- Do you have in-house expertise to develop solutions?
- What is the value of making better, more timely decisions with data sharing?
- Is there a need to adopt a new technology that will scale once your needs change?

