

DATA GOVERNANCE HELPS UNITED UTILITIES DRIVE BUSINESS ADVANTAGE



About United Utilities

United Utilities is the United Kingdom's largest water company. Founded in 1995, United Utilities manages the regulated water and wastewater network in North West England, serving a population of close to seven million.

The Situation: Market Reform Shines a Spotlight on Data

In the United Kingdom, water and sewage services are managed by a small number of regional water and sewage companies, along with a few 'water only' companies. Essentially, each privately owned company operates a monopoly within its region. Historically, the market has been regulated to ensure price controls that would keep customer bills comparable across the country. Any increase in prices was required to correspond with a measurable improvement in the services provided to customers, as well as fund improvements in operational efficiency.

In recent years, the UK government began to review this regulatory model and concluded that further service and efficiency improvements could only be achieved by gradually opening up these regional monopolies to direct competition. The market opened up retail activity for commercial customers in April 2017.

Regulations, standards and policies remain an essential component of the market reform. Success of this market reform relies on the quality of the market data upon which trading is based. Although service delivery is the same to all customers, as with many industries, each company uses different concepts and terminology to describe the arrangements and services they provide. A common data model is required to describe what services are provided, and how they are provided to commercial customers.

For companies to effectively compete in this new market environment, they need to convert existing commercial customer and service data from their own data model into the new market model. More important, companies have to ensure their market data is maintained to a high standard.

Presented with an opportunity to earn close to one-third of their revenue from this new market, United Utilities became interested in data governance as a way to gain business advantage.

The Approach: Ensuring Data Governance Meets the Needs of All Business Users

United Utilities' goal with its data governance platform was to allow its business users to continuously ask and answer five key questions related to data:

- Are we talking about the same thing?
- Where does this number come from and can I trust it?
- If something changes, can I identify the impact on my business?
- Am I compliant with regulations and legislation?
- What information is currently available?

United Utilities believes the value of a data governance effort is largely dependent on how much time and effort an organization dedicates to answering these questions.

United Utilities' goal was to create a cost-effective data governance program that could evolve over time. The company chose Collibra because it offers a powerful platform that enables United Utilities to track both the quality and movement of its data. The Collibra data governance solution also integrated easily with other data management tools that United Utilities employed.

Equally important, the Collibra platform is a business solution -- one that is accessible to all users, not just those with technical proficiency. Researching a business term needs to be as simple as using Google or Wikipedia. In United Utilities' view, the ideal answer to a user's query should be no more than three clicks away. Collibra is accessible to approximately 5,000 United Utilities employees. It is set as the default reference tool for all MS Office applications and provides immediate access to glossaries, data models and reference data for all employees.

The Solution: Clean Data No More Than Three Clicks Away

To prepare for the opening of the commercial retail market, United Utilities established a plan to clean its data that included creating a data governance framework using Collibra to manage and govern data effectively.

United Utilities dedicated teams and resources to the effort, including a central governance team that oversees the administration, maintenance and development of the Collibra data governance platform. This team is responsible for implementing and coordinating data governance initiatives, policies and standards across the organization.

Our goal is to ensure that the answers are no more than three clicks away. Collibra is the best platform we've found to do this.

Paul Williams
Information Strategy Manager,
United Utilities

In addition, United Utilities has a dedicated knowledge management team that governs the processes that use data from the central data store to undertake analysis and generate management dashboards. This team works in conjunction with the central data team to ensure these processes comply with governance policies and standards.

The first steps in implementing data governance involved defining the various concepts, data items, transactions, services and reports used within the new market. This mapping was key to identifying critical data sets and prioritizing data preparation. Owners and stewards were identified and data quality rules developed to transition United Utilities' data to the required market format. After that, consistency rules were established to ensure all of the data were aligned.

The gradual improvement in data quality was tracked using a data quality dashboard. By the final market upload in September 2016, only 32 of United Utilities' 470,000 data records failed to load successfully into the market system. Collibra documentation and mapping capabilities allowed United Utilities to quickly identify and correct the 32 data records.

Given the impact to date, United Utilities plans to expand its data teams and create knowledge management teams in other part of the business as more and more data, analysis and reporting is brought under governance.

While United Utilities began its foray into data governance using Collibra to comply with the regulatory necessity of market reform, the success of the initiative has led the company to view governance as a strategic business function that will be extended into other areas of the company as dictated by regulatory and business requirements. Data governance is the foundation for all of the company's data improvement activities. In fact, United Utilities has discovered that the demand for data governance is proving far greater than initially anticipated, and the company expects with time, it will evolve into every area of its business.

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