

## Case Study:

# Giving data a voice at Ashland Inc.

Establishing a data governance framework and clear understanding of roles, responsibilities and processes

### Business challenge

Many of today's large modern enterprises rely on successful mergers, acquisitions and divestitures as a significant part of their growth strategy, and Ashland Inc. is no exception. Their people, processes and systems are constantly moving and changing, which has made it increasingly challenging to remain innovative and agile in their quest for digital transformation.

Amplifying this challenge was little enterprise-level understanding of the importance of data and information. This is common even in the most established and mature organizations. Executives would commonly point to "bad data," but in reality the issue was a systemic lack of context and understanding of the data's business impacts.

"We had a lot of well documented business rules, but they were in a format that was consumable by the master data team, only. They were full of acronyms and 'techy' terms and lacked context around the business reason to have the rule," said Greg Hill, Global Master Data Manager at Ashland Inc.

The Ashland Master Data Management team knew they needed to establish formalized governance policies, and that leading a cultural shift was critical for the business to access, understand and take advantage of data. They had to give data a voice for Ashland's business.

### Solution

Data was not a topic widely talked about at Ashland. Information was not considered a corporate asset nor was it on the radar in terms of digital transformation efforts. Understanding the importance of digital enterprise capabilities to enable future competitive advantage, Ashland turned to Precisely to help establish a framework for data governance and build a clear understanding of roles, responsibilities and processes.

"We chose Precisely because we wanted a unique firm that had a laser focus on data governance. Their concepts and previous experience along with their customized approach allowed us to build the right fit for our organization. It felt personalized and never like a one-size-fits-all approach," said Christopher Grubaugh, Ashland's Enterprise Data Leader.

## ASHLAND®

Ashland Inc. is a global leader in providing specialty chemical solutions to customers in a wide range of consumer and industrial markets. As a global Fortune 500 company, they operate in more than 100 countries and employ 10,500 people. Organizationally, Ashland Inc. is divided into 3 distinct business units: Ashland Specialty Ingredients, Ashland Performance Materials and Valvoline.

Precisely Data360 furnished a framework of data governance, delivering dashboards and reporting features for operational transparency, and providing data quality across the enterprise.

The data governance framework provided by Precisely included the critical processes associated with developing data standards, business rules and metrics, as well as establishing governance strategies. Most importantly, this framework directly linked data and information governance efforts to associated value drivers in Ashland's business processes, systems and analytics.

During the initial project to establish their purpose-built data governance framework, Ashland was introduced to Precisely Data360.

"When we started, we were very sure that we were looking for a program and not software. But after a presentation on Precisely Data360 we quickly understood that this is just the system that would alleviate our pain point around technology. It became obvious that we needed Precisely Data360 if we were going to operationalize a sustainable, enterprise-wide data governance framework," explained Grubaugh.

Ashland leveraged Precisely Data360 to accelerate their governance pilot for the vendor domain. It was a quick ramp-up to go through the existing business rules within all domains and easily load them into Precisely Data360 with added business context. Applying that business context in Precisely Data360 enables business leaders with clarity of sight into how the new governance organization's efforts were driving value for the business across analytics, business processes and regulatory/compliance capabilities. Ashland is now able to identify their critical data elements, proactively govern via business rules and standards, and ultimately demonstrate information value creation through improved business processes and performance metrics.

"Now that we have business context of our information, we can search within definitions to quickly find anything we need. Not only that, but we can search on the field. This comes in handy for a new resource who doesn't know what the process is, therefore isn't even sure what to search for to find what they are looking for. They can simply use the search feature to reverse search and it brings them directly to the rule. Before Precisely Data360, they would have to find someone who knew or dig through spreadsheets, and at the end of the day they may not have been able to find it at all. This has been a huge increase in efficiency," said Grubaugh.

## Results and future plans

The combination of an established data governance framework and Precisely Data360 has resulted in:

- Clarity of rules and ownership
- Collaboration forums for identifying and addressing business pain points
- Communication and branding plans

Thanks to these efforts, Ashland's business now enjoys general acceptance that data governance ensures data is leveraged as a corporate asset. The Data Governance Organization is seen as a value center which identifies business opportunities, drives reduction in costs and maximizes efficiencies through the improvement of integration and technology.

The use of Precisely Data360 has allowed Ashland to move away from reliance on tribal knowledge regarding where and why certain rules exist. Having a foundation of information and a governance process to bring data issues to the forefront is paramount to the success of future digitalization plans. "We can bring discussions and opportunities from a data perspective – and get people to discuss these issues. We used to just look at each other and say, 'What do you think?' Getting data out in front of the company is huge. We've given data a voice," said Grubaugh.