Category

Data & AI

Data Quality & Master Data Management Basics Playbook

A lightweight approach to diagnosing and fixing data quality problems at the source, starting with one master entity and a golden record, no enterprise platform required.

- Practitioner
- Intermediate
- Template Included

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Overview

Most data quality complaints are actually master data problems in disguise. Profile one entity against six quality dimensions, build a golden record, and fix issues at the source, not downstream.

What's the actual difference between a data quality problem and a master data problem?

A data quality problem is a flaw within a single field or record — a typo, a missing value, an invalid format. A master data problem is a mismatch between multiple records that should represent the same real-world entity across different systems. In practice most persistent "bad data" complaints are master data problems wearing a data quality complaint's clothing.

Do we need to buy a dedicated MDM platform to get started?

No. A spreadsheet or lightweight database with clearly documented match/merge and survivorship rules solves most of the problem for a single entity at mid-size scale. A dedicated platform becomes worth the investment once you're managing several entities with complex, high-volume, real-time matching needs.

How do we choose which entity to start with — customer or product?

Start with whichever one is currently causing the most visible business pain — support complaints, pricing errors, failed marketing sends. Profiling both is unnecessary at the start; pick the one with the loudest recent incident and prove the approach there first.

How often should the data quality score be reviewed?

Monthly is the right cadence for an active entity with a named owner — frequent enough to catch regressions before they cause a customer-facing incident, infrequent enough not to become review-theater with nothing new to report.

How does this playbook relate to the Data Governance & Stewardship Playbook?

They're companions. Governance assigns the Owner, Steward, and Custodian roles and the authority to resolve disputes; this playbook gives those roles the specific diagnostic method (the six dimensions) and the specific fix (golden record, survivorship rules) to apply to the master data domains governance has prioritized.

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