data virtuality

PGGM on the road to a modern data infrastructure that serves its users

PGGM

PGGM is one of the top 10 pension funds in the world and manages the pensions of various pension funds, affiliated employers and their employees. Its services cover pension management, asset management, and management advice. On December 31, 2021, PGGM managed €291 billion of pension assets and administered pensions for 4.4 million participants. The organization has 1,500 employees.

Good data plays an essential role in the decision-making process at PGGM. Many teams rely on the data

a) for informing the participants and the pension funds b) to improve the services and make the right choices in asset management
c) for implementing the strategic objectives

In order to meet the rapidly growing demand for analyses and reports, PGGM decided to design a new, modern infrastructure within the applicable compliance guidelines that would make data available efficiently, quickly, and securely to the users, while at the same time ensuring good data governance.

> We as IT and business together had to start looking at our architecture in a different way. Not as a goal, but as a means to better support our organization.
>
> Marco van der Winden, Manager Corporate Data Management

Faster access and adequate access management

Objectives

- Create more value from data in line with the strategic ambitions to further improve services to pension funds and participants
- To structurally improve time-consuming or inefficient processes and reduce costs
- Improve control over the use and origin of (sensitive) data

Marco van der Winden, Manager Corporate Data Management at PGGM: "There is a large amount and diversity of data within our organization. For example, personal and other kinds of data of the participants, asset management data, and various data from policy advice and critical business processes. Our goal is to create more value from that data for our sta- kehold-ers. By anonymizing or pseudonymizing the data, we can perform valuable analyses. We can identify trends and developments based on location, age, and other factors. In this way, we can further improve our services to pension funds and their affiliated participants. This fits very well with PGGM's strategic ambitions. These are all potential benefits which we are currently leaving too much unexploited and there are a number of reasons for this.

First, until recently, we saw working with data primarily as a technical matter: data as an outcome of our systems. We knew very well that our data was spread throughout the organization and that the same data was available in several places. Our existing data architecture no longer met our requirements and wishes. We decided that business and IT needed to be bridged through our data management in line with our strategic ambitions and compliance guidelines.

Second, there were different understandings of how to work with data, if at all. Departments were used to solving data problems themselves. In this, employees were very inventive. They had often built their own process with embedded checks and corrections. These processes were time-consuming and costly, especially since data problems were not tackled at the source.

The same problem was solved in various ways at several places in the organization. That is, of course, very inefficient. What is also remarkable is that some issues were not seen as data problems at all, whi
le the cause really was in the data.

We therefore wanted to realize the possibilities of data-driven work in concrete terms. To do this, we brought PGGM employees together to discuss how we could best implement the data requirements on both sides. Data quality, ownership, and clear definitions were important subjects. Taking good care of data lies in the responsibility of the people rather than the technology.“

Arjan Surstedt, Enterprise Data Architect at PGGM: „In addition, we wanted to ensure clear and unambiguous data governance. Before, if you wanted to perform an analysis, you had to know who managed certain data in order to find the information. Moreover, we were not always sure whether the quality of the data was good and whether users were authorized to use certain data. Due to the lack of clarity, it took too long for data to be released. It could take weeks or even months before requests from employees to use data were approved. This hindered our organization from using valuable data to improve processes or better advise our customers.“

Solution

- A modern data architecture in which data is integrated virtually (and physically where necessary)
- A user-friendly data office where employees can easily find, retrieve, and interpret data
- Structured recording of definitions, origin, and authorization of data

Data architecture with a human face

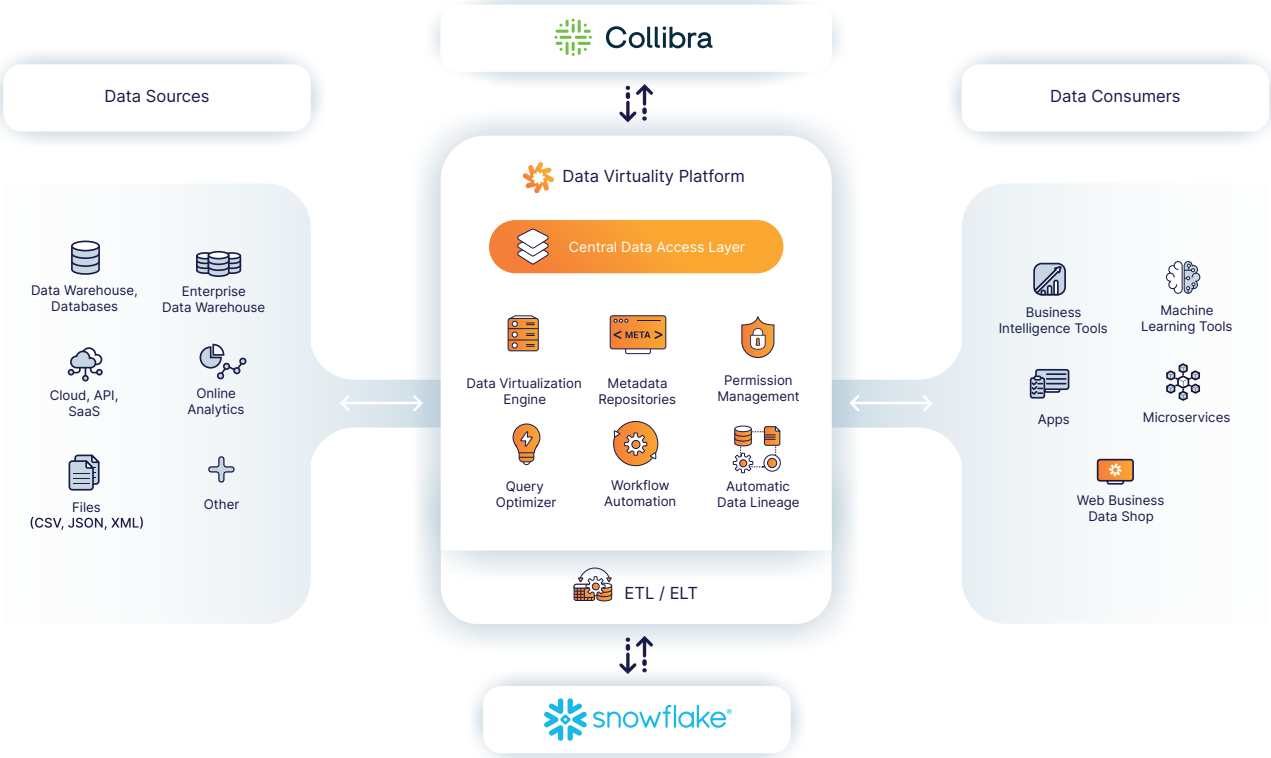
PGGM knew what kind of solution it was looking for: a data architecture that should serve its users. The technology must support employees efficiently in their daily work and ensure that they can make good use of the sheer volume of data that is available throughout the organization. User-friendliness, speed, and good access management are central to this. PGGM realized that a Data Delivery Infrastructure (DDI) consisting of three solutions that work closely together is needed: Data Virtuality, Collibra, Snowflake, and Axians.

Data office

Arjan Surstedt: „Data must be easy to find, fully described, and immediately available after approval. And the data should be replicated as little as possible and retrieved directly from the original source as much as possible. This has been achieved with this solution. Collibra is the counter where users search for data and request access to use certain data.

With Data Virtuality, that data is then retrieved from the various data sources and/or from the analytical storage as historical data. We have over 60 data owners in our organization who will be able to easily grant permission or reject requests from users in the future. Every request is registered in Collibra. If you receive authorization to use data, the prepared data is ready immediately.

You can then work with it in PowerBI or any other BI tool to create analyses, reports or dashboards. To ensure that our users can interpret data easily and correctly, data stewards are working to properly describe the data that is integrated via Data Virtuality in Collibra. In this way, we are making it very user-friendly for our organization to work with data."



Ultimate success is determined by the users

Marco van der Winden: „The first test results with the new data architecture are positive and they confirm the expectations we had beforehand. We significantly reduced time-to-market from weeks or even months to several hours or even minutes while ensuring data governance: who has access to what, why do they have access, and is the data used securely. Further, unambiguity is important. If, for example, different departments process the coverage ratio of a pension fund in a report, you naturally want to avoid differences between the reports if the reporting date is exactly the same. Such a difference can usually be explained, but that takes time and does little for confidence in the figures.

Arjan Surstedt: „Currently we are working on two use cases in the new data architecture environment. The first use case we have chosen specifically to show that data governance is improved. In the second use case, we will show users of the Asset Management department how much benefit they get from having data from the entire organization at their disposal more easily. After that, we will pick up new use cases piece by piece, focusing mainly on demonstrating the added value of the data delivery infrastructure for the users. That the solution works technically has already been demonstrated, but the ultimate success is determined by our employees. Do they see the added value of the platform and does it help them in their daily work?"

Data Virtuality - data integration software provider who offers data virtualization and data replication in a single tool so data from different data sources can be flexibly integrated and accessed. This creates a virtual data hub that delivers uniform data services to PGGM employees, without them having to know the technical details, such as location and format. The flexibility to use the data integration best suited for the specific use case made the data architecture more agile, allowing information to be delivered quickly and making adjustments easily.

Collibra - a data governance platform that records what data exists in the organization, what the definition of that data is, how and where that data is stored, who owns the data, and who has access to the data. Collibra is the counter where users can request permission to use data and where they retrieve that data. Data is then retrieved via Data Virtuality.

Snowflake - a cloud database for storing data that cannot be accessed virtually.

Axians - a Dutch consultant in the area of business analytics and partner of Data Virtuality, Collibra, and Snowflake.

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> Arjan Surstedt, Enterprise Data Architect

Knowledge secured in the organization

Arjan Surstedt: „We are very satisfied with the collaboration with Axians, Data Virtuality, Collibra, and Snowflake. The most important thing for us is that our own people were trained to work with the technology during implementation, so all the knowledge remains secured within PGGM.“

Marco van der Winden: „The technical part was realized quickly and the various components are well connected. Acceptance by the business obviously takes more time, but that is mainly down to our own organization. At the end of the day, we can definitely speak of a positive end result.“

PGGM

Advantages for PGGM

- Data is available much faster, so that its potential can be better utilized
- Data can be made available to employees in the organization in a secure, fast and user-friendly manner
- Reliability of data increases because data is virtually accessible and better defined

Message: info@datavirtuality.com
Visit: datavirtuality.com
Request Demo: demo@datavirtuality.com

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