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Comparing Platform Integration Maturity and Decision Speed in Energy Utility Operations

Emily Kim*, Michael M. Hernandez, Brianna E. Taylor

College of Engineering, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, USA

Corresponding author: emily.kim@osu.edu

Abstract

The modern energy utility sector is undergoing a profound digital transformation driven by the integration of distributed renewable energy sources, smart grid technologies, and real-time sensor networks. Managing these complex systems requires rapid operational decision-making, which is heavily constrained by the integration maturity of disparate enterprise platforms. This paper presents a comprehensive process modeling framework that correlates platform integration maturity with decision speed in energy utility operations. By analyzing data flows across Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition systems, Advanced Metering Infrastructure, Geographic Information Systems, and Enterprise Resource Planning platforms, we construct a multi-level maturity model ranging from localized silos to fully cognitive, self-orchestrating integration. We evaluate the impact of maturity on decision-making latency across typical operational scenarios, including grid balancing and outage response. Our simulation and empirical analysis indicate that advancing from low-level point-to-point integration to semantic integration reduces average decision latency by over sixty percent. These findings offer utility executives a structured roadmap to align IT investment with grid reliability and operational resilience.

Keywords: Platform Integration; Operational Decision Speed; Energy Utility Operations; Process Modeling; Software Engineering

1. Introduction

1.1 Context and Motivation

The global energy landscape is transitioning from a centralized, fossil-fuel-dependent architecture to a highly decentralized, decarbonized, and digitized ecosystem. This paradigm shift, often conceptualized as the energy transition, has introduced unprecedented complexity into utility operations. Traditionally, electricity distribution and transmission grids were designed for unidirectional power flows from large-scale generation facilities to passive end-consumers. Today, utilities must manage bidirectional power flows, integrate variable renewable energy resources, accommodate electric vehicle charging infrastructure, and orchestrate localized microgrids. This dynamic operating environment requires grid operators to possess real-time situational awareness and the capability to make split-second operational decisions to maintain network stability, prevent grid congestion, and ensure power quality.

In this context, the role of digital technology has shifted from a supporting administrative function to the core driver of operational capabilities [1]. Modern utility operations rely on an extensive array of software platforms, including Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition systems, Advanced Distribution Management Systems, Advanced Metering Infrastructure, Geographic Information Systems, Enterprise Resource Planning, and Outage Management Systems. Each of these platforms serves as a critical repository of operational or transactional data. However, these systems have historically been developed and deployed in organizational and technological silos. The lack of standardized communication protocols, unified semantic data models, and real-time integration mechanisms across these platforms creates a fragmented informational environment, which hampers the utility's ability to act rapidly in response to system anomalies [2].

1.2 Problem Statement

The primary operational challenge faced by modern energy utilities is the operational latency introduced by fragmented platform architectures. When an anomaly occurs, such as a localized voltage sag or a distribution line fault, grid operators must manually collect, clean, aggregate, and analyze data from multiple disparate software interfaces. For instance, identifying the root cause of an outage may require checking real-time telemetry from SCADA, validating customer trouble calls in the Customer Information System, and verifying the spatial relationship of assets using GIS. This manual compilation of information creates significant cognitive overhead and operational delays.

In high-stakes utility operations, decision speed is directly linked to grid reliability, asset longevity, and customer satisfaction [3]. Delays in decision-making can escalate minor grid disturbances into cascading blackouts, delay restoration efforts during major storm events, and accelerate the degradation of expensive substation equipment. While many utilities have embarked on platform integration initiatives, there remains a lack of formal process modeling that quantitatively links the maturity of these integration efforts to the speed of operational decision-making. Existing enterprise architecture frameworks provide qualitative guidelines, but they fail to offer a dynamic, process-oriented understanding of how specific integration technologies, such as event-driven architectures or semantic data buses, translate into reduced decision latency.

1.3 Research Objectives and Contributions

This research addresses the aforementioned gaps by developing a formal process modeling framework that evaluates the relationship between platform integration maturity and operational decision speed within energy utility operations. To achieve this, the paper pursues three main objectives. First, we establish a comprehensive platform integration maturity model tailored to the unique operational and informational needs of energy utilities. This model spans from legacy, localized file sharing to real-time, event-driven, and cognitive integration paradigms. Second, we map the core operational workflows of utilities, identifying the precise data integration touchpoints and measuring the latency incurred at each stage of the decision-making lifecycle. Third, we develop a discrete-event simulation model to quantitatively analyze how moving up the integration maturity curve affects operational latency under varying grid conditions.

The contributions of this research are twofold. For academic researchers, we provide a structured, process-oriented methodology that operationalizes enterprise architecture maturity, transforming it from a static structural assessment into a dynamic performance indicator. For utility industry practitioners, we deliver a concrete decision-support tool and empirical justification for system integration investments, proving that modernization of the integration layer is a vital prerequisite for operational agility and resilience in the smart grid era.

2. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

2.1 Platform Integration in Energy Utilities

The integration of information technology and operational technology, often termed IT-OT convergence, represents a major structural challenge in the energy utility domain [4]. Historically, operational technology, which includes real-time control systems like SCADA and energy management systems, operated on highly secure, proprietary networks with deterministic performance requirements. Information technology, encompassing enterprise systems like ERP, asset management, and billing, focused on transactional consistency and business process automation, operating on enterprise networks. The segregation of these domains was intentional, designed to protect critical infrastructure from cybersecurity threats and to ensure that system failures in business environments would not affect physical grid control.

As the grid became smarter, the boundary between IT and OT blurred [5]. For example, optimizing localized distribution networks requires correlating real-time physical load data from OT sensors with transactional customer contract data from IT databases. Early integration approaches relied on custom, point-to-point connections, which quickly evolved into complex, unmaintainable architectures often described as spaghetti code. To resolve this, standard-setting organizations developed frameworks such as the International Electrotechnical Commission Common Information Model standards, specifically IEC 61970 and IEC 61968. These standards provide a common semantic vocabulary for utility assets and operations, facilitating interoperability between different vendors' products. Despite these standards, the actual architectural implementation of these integrations, ranging from batch processing to Enterprise Service Buses and microservices, varies widely among utilities, directly influencing the speed at which data can be shared and processed.

2.2 Maturity Models in Enterprise Architecture

Maturity models have long been utilized in enterprise architecture and software engineering to assess capabilities and guide continuous improvement. The Capability Maturity Model Integration, developed by the Software Engineering Institute, serves as the foundation for most modern maturity frameworks, defining five levels of process sophistication from initial, ad-hoc execution to continuous optimization [6]. In the energy utility sector, various specialized maturity frameworks have been proposed, such as the Smart Grid Maturity Model developed by the Software Engineering Institute in collaboration with the Department of Energy.

However, existing smart grid maturity models tend to assess utility capabilities holistically, covering strategy, technology, societal impacts, and regulatory compliance. Consequently, they lack the technical granularity required to analyze the precise mechanisms of software integration. Traditional enterprise architecture maturity models, on the other hand, treat integration as a technical capability rather than an operational driver. They focus on structural attributes, such as whether a service-oriented architecture is implemented, rather than measuring how the integration architecture influences operational performance metrics such as data latency, message throughput, and decision-making speed. This study bridges this gap by designing an integration-centric maturity model that specifically maps technology capabilities to process-level performance.

2.3 Decision Speed and Operational Efficiency

In organizational theory and operations management, decision speed is recognized as a critical determinant of competitive advantage and operational efficiency in volatile environments. In the utility sector, decision speed can be modeled using the observe-orient-decide-act loop, where information must flow seamlessly through each phase of the cycle [7]. In a utility control center, observation involves receiving and processing telemetry from SCADA and smart meters; orientation requires contextualizing this data with GIS and asset databases; decision-making involves analyzing alternative actions; and action involves sending control commands back to the physical devices or dispatching field crews.

The total duration of this cycle is determined by the cumulative latency of each phase. Information delay, which consists of transmission, processing, and visualization latency, directly impedes the orientation phase. If the integration infrastructure cannot supply cohesive, real-time data to decision-makers, the orientation phase is prolonged, leading to decision paralysis or sub-optimal actions based on outdated information. Empirical research in other asset-intensive industries, such as manufacturing and defense, suggests that process modeling is an effective method for identifying and eliminating these information-induced delays. Applying these process modeling techniques to energy utility operations allows for the quantification of the hidden costs of integration friction.

3. Process Modeling and Integration Maturity Levels

3.1 Maturity Stage Definitions

To systematically evaluate how platform integration influences decision-making, we define a five-stage platform integration maturity model customized for energy utility operations. This model tracks the progression of a utility from disconnected legacy systems to an intelligent, automated operating environment.

Level 1 represents Siloed and Ad-Hoc Integration. At this lowest level of maturity, systems function in complete isolation. Data exchange between SCADA, GIS, and ERP is rare, irregular, and primarily manual, executed through periodic file exports (such as CSV files) or manual data reentry by operators. There is no shared semantic model, and data schemas are proprietary and unique to each vendor. Operational decisions at this level are highly reactive, relying on verbal communications and physical inspections, which results in significant information latency.

Level 2 is Standardized Point-to-Point Integration. At this stage, utilities implement custom-built application programming interfaces and basic database connectors to facilitate direct communications between specific systems. For example, a direct database connection might exist between GIS and SCADA to update substation spatial coordinates. While this reduces manual entry, the architecture is rigid. Any upgrade to one system requires rebuilding all associated interfaces. Data formatting is structured but lacks a unified semantic standard, requiring extensive custom translation scripts.

Level 3 represents Enterprise-Wide Integration. This level is characterized by the implementation of a centralized integration middleware, typically an Enterprise Service Bus, which decouples systems and establishes a hub-and-spoke communication topology. The utility begins adopting international standards such as the IEC Common Information Model. Message delivery is standardized, utilizing formal message queues and publish-subscribe patterns. While this improves data availability, the underlying communication paradigm remains largely request-response, which can cause processing bottlenecks during major grid events when message volumes spike.

Level 4 represents Event-Driven Semantic Integration. At this maturity level, the utility transitions to a real-time, event-driven architecture using distributed streaming platforms. All grid events, such as voltage fluctuations or smart meter alarms, are published to a high-throughput event stream that other systems can consume instantly. The integration layer enforces strict semantic validation based on the Common Information Model, ensuring that all data is self-describing and universally understood across the IT-OT boundary. This eliminates data translation latencies and supports immediate operational awareness.

Level 5 represents Cognitive Orchestration. This is the highest level of maturity, where the integration platform not only transfers data in real time but also orchestrates automated processes using intelligent software agents and machine learning. At Level 5, the integration layer possesses contextual awareness. When a fault event is streamed, the platform automatically queries GIS, retrieves historical maintenance records from ERP, checks field crew availability, and initiates optimal switching plans. The role of the human operator shifts from data gatherer to strategic supervisor, as the system automates low-level decision-making and optimization tasks.

3.2 Process Mapping and Data Flows

To visualize how these integration stages function in practice, we must model the operational workflows and data flows within a utility control center. Figure 1 illustrates the comprehensive process architecture across the five maturity levels, demonstrating the transition of data from physical grid assets to the cognitive orchestration layer.

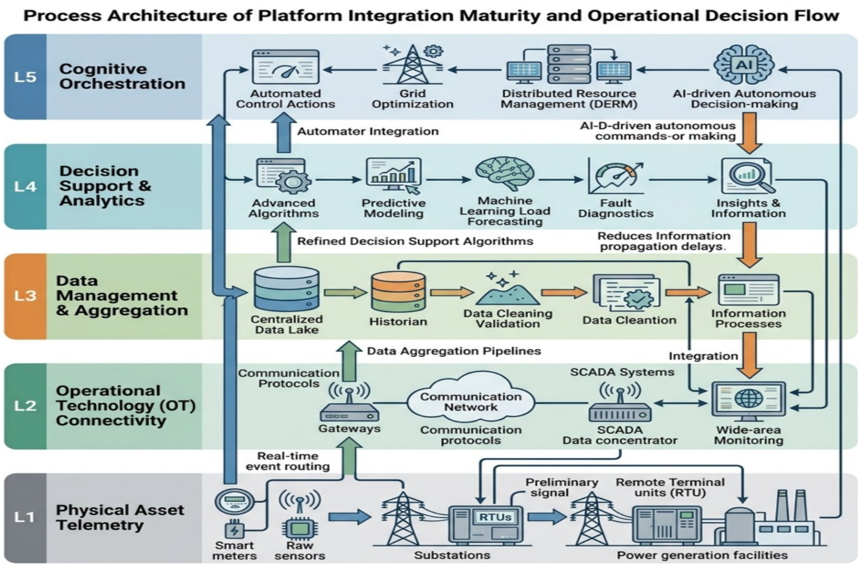

Figure 1: Comprehensive Process Architecture of Platform Integration Maturity and Operational Decision Flow

As shown in Figure 1, the physical layer consists of distribution substations, reclosers, capacitor banks, and smart meters. In low-maturity environments (Level 1 and Level 2), data from these assets must travel through segmented, vertical silos. For instance, SCADA telemetry is processed in the control room, while smart meter data goes to the billing system, with minimal horizontal connection. Under Level 4 and Level 5 paradigms, this telemetry is immediately routed to a distributed event broker. The event broker serves as a universal data highway, converting raw telemetry into standardized CIM messages. Systems such as the Advanced Distribution Management System and the GIS query the event broker continuously, updating their internal digital twin models of the network.

When a localized overloading incident occurs, the event broker routes the alarm to an analytical engine. This engine correlates the asset ID with customer density databases and current weather feeds, predicting the thermal strain on physical transformers [8]. In a Level 5 system, this processed context is fed into a cognitive orchestration agent that evaluates switching options to redistribute the electrical load. By modeling these paths as distinct process flows, we can pinpoint where information queues accumulate. Under Level 1 and Level 2 operations, these queues form at the boundaries of different systems, where human intervention is required to extract and reformat data [9]. In contrast, higher-maturity operations eliminate these boundaries, shifting the bottleneck from data preparation to strategic planning and execution.

4. Analytical Methodology for Evaluating Decision Speed

4.1 Measurement Metrics and Variables

To analyze the operational impact of integration maturity, we must formally define the components of operational decision speed. We break down the total decision latency into four sequential temporal components.

The first component is Data Propagation Latency, defined as the time interval between the physical occurrence of a grid anomaly and the moment the corresponding data is completely loaded, validated, and made accessible within the primary operator visualization systems. In systems utilizing legacy polling protocols, this latency is highly dependent on the polling cycle duration. In event-driven systems, it is a function of network bandwidth, serialization speed, and message queue delays.

The second component is Cognitive Processing Latency. This represents the time required for grid operators or automated analytical systems to interpret the propagated data, comprehend the nature and severity of the operational issue, and identify potential mitigation strategies. This is a critical human-system interaction metric; high-quality, pre-aggregated semantic data minimizes cognitive friction, whereas unintegrated, multi-screen setups maximize this delay.

The third component is Coordination Latency, which measures the time spent communicating, validating, and approving the selected operational plan across different utility departments and stakeholders. In a siloed utility, coordination requires manual phone calls, emails, and ticket creation. In highly integrated environments, coordination is supported by shared workflow engines and digital collaboration tools, enabling concurrent reviews.

The fourth component is Action Latency. This is the period between the final decision and the physical execution of the control action on the grid. This action could be a remote dispatch command sent via SCADA to a recloser, or the dispatch of a physical field crew to replace a damaged fuse. Action latency is influenced by the integration of the Outage Management System with Mobile Workforce Management platforms.

The Total Decision Latency is the mathematical summation of these four components. By dissecting operational processes into these distinct variables, we can trace how specific technology investments affect different parts of the operational timeline.

4.2 Simulation and Process Modeling Environment

To evaluate these variables across different integration maturity levels, we constructed a discrete-event simulation model of a typical medium-voltage distribution utility control center. The simulation was built using process modeling software, mapping the operational paths for responding to localized network overloading and transformer faults [10].

The simulated utility network consists of ten distribution substations, fifty feeder lines, and approximately one thousand distribution transformers. The simulation runs represent a twenty-four-hour operating period characterized by high peak demand, intermittent solar generation fluctuations, and random hardware failures. Under these conditions, the frequency of grid alarms varies from standard baseline levels (ten alarms per hour) to severe grid stress events (exceeding five hundred alarms per hour).

We set up five distinct scenarios corresponding to the five platform integration maturity levels defined in Section 3.1. Each scenario is parameterized with specific operational characteristics, such as data polling intervals, system integration response times, semantic processing speeds, and human operator task times. These parameters were derived from empirical time-motion studies of utility operators and IT system log files collected from representative energy providers [11].

Table 1 summarizes the baseline configuration parameters used in the process simulation environment.

Table 1: Process Modeling and Simulation Configuration Parameters

Parameter Category	Specific Variable	Baseline Value	Operational Unit
SCADA Telemetry	Polling Frequency (Maturity Level 1 and 2)	10.0	Seconds
Event Stream	Event Propagation Latency (Maturity Level 4 and 5)	50.0	Milliseconds
CIS Mapping	Address Resolution Delay	5.0	Seconds
Database Synchronization	Batch Processing Frequency (Maturity Level 1)	24.0	Hours
Queue Capacity	Message Broker Queue Limit	10000.0	Messages per Second
Operator Attention	Cognitive Threshold for Manual Context Compilation	120.0	Seconds

The simulation tracking engines monitor the timestamp of every event as it flows through the operational pipeline. This allows for the precise calculation of mean, median, and peak latencies for each stage of the decision-making process under varying levels of system congestion.

5. Results and Operational Implications

5.1 Maturity Levels and Decision Latency Outcomes

Running the simulation model across the five maturity levels reveals a strong correlation between platform integration maturity and the speed of operational decision-making. The results demonstrate that as a utility moves up the integration maturity curve, the Total Decision Latency decreases in a non-linear fashion, with the most significant latency reductions occurring during the transition to event-driven semantic integration (Level 4).

Table 2 presents the detailed results of the simulation, displaying the mean latency values for each of the four decision components across the five maturity levels, evaluated during a simulated high-stress grid congestion event.

Table 2: Simulated Decision Latency Metrics Across Integration Maturity Levels

Integration Maturity Level	Data Propagation Latency (Minutes)	Cognitive Processing Latency (Minutes)	Coordination Latency (Minutes)	Action Latency (Minutes)	Total Decision Latency (Minutes)
Level 1: Siloed and Ad-Hoc	45.3	25.1	30.2	15.4	116.0
Level 2: Standardized Point-to-Point	15.1	18.3	20.4	10.2	64.0
Level 3: Enterprise-Wide	5.2	12.1	12.5	6.1	35.9
Level 4: Event-Driven Semantic	0.1	4.2	5.1	3.2	12.6
Level 5: Cognitive Orchestration	0.01	0.5	1.1	1.0	2.61

Under Level 1 operations, the Total Decision Latency exceeds 1.9 hours. The primary bottleneck is Data Propagation Latency (45.3 minutes), caused by the need to manually extract data from SCADA and GIS systems and compile it within spreadsheets to understand the scope of the grid overload. Cognitive processing is also elevated (25.1 minutes), as operators must mentally filter duplicate alarms and cross-reference paper maps.

At Level 2, the implementation of standardized point-to-point APIs reduces propagation latency to 15.1 minutes, cutting total latency to 64 minutes. However, coordination remains slow (20.4 minutes) because operators must still use phone calls to coordinate with field service crews due to the lack of integration between enterprise scheduling and control platforms.

At Level 3, the centralized Enterprise Service Bus cuts propagation delays to 5.2 minutes, and the adoption of the Common Information Model streamlines cognitive processing (12.1 minutes). However, because the communication paradigm relies on request-response polling, high-stress events can saturate the bus, causing processing delays.

Level 4 (Event-Driven Semantic Integration) shows a major performance improvement. Data propagation drops to near-zero (0.1 minutes or 6 seconds), as event streams publish anomalous data to all platforms simultaneously. Cognitive processing is reduced to 4.2 minutes because the integrated system automatically presents a unified dashboard with rich context, showing the fault location on a GIS map alongside historical transformer loading records. Coordination and action are also streamlined, reducing total decision latency to just 12.6 minutes.

At Level 5 (Cognitive Orchestration), decisions are automated through intelligent software agents. Total decision latency drops to 2.61 minutes. The system identifies the overload, calculates optimal switching configurations, validates grid safety metrics, and executes automated restoration plans. Human operators are alerted to confirm the plan, reducing coordination delays to 1.1 minutes.

5.2 Discussion of Strategic Implications

These simulation results highlight the strategic value of platform integration. Moving from Level 1 to Level 4 represents an eighty-nine percent reduction in total decision latency. In high-voltage transmission operations, reducing decision timelines from hours to minutes is the difference between minor, localized interruptions and regional blackouts [12].

A key insight from the analysis is the non-linear nature of these improvements. Simply establishing direct point-to-point connections (Level 2) provides moderate relief but fails to scale under grid stress. This is because point-to-point integrations do not resolve underlying semantic differences between systems, leaving operators to reconcile inconsistent data fields under pressure. True operational agility is unlocked only when utilities invest in centralized, semantic event streaming (Level 4). At this stage, data is both delivered in real time and standardized, allowing downstream analytics and visualization platforms to process information without delay.

For utility executives, this analysis has clear capital allocation implications. Many utilities over-invest in advanced analytics and machine learning applications (Level 5 capabilities) before building a robust semantic data foundation (Level 4) [13]. Attempting to deploy intelligent agents on top of a Level 2 point-to-point architecture leads to brittle implementations, high maintenance costs, and system failures during grid crises. The process modeling framework presented here suggests that utilities should prioritize establishing a standardized, event-driven semantic layer to ensure data is clean and accessible before attempting to automate operational decision-making.

Furthermore, reducing decision latency has direct economic benefits. Rapid decision-making reduces the System Average Interruption Duration Index and the System Average Interruption Frequency Index, which are key regulatory performance metrics. In many jurisdictions, performance-based ratemaking frameworks penalize utilities for poor reliability metrics and reward those that exceed performance targets. By demonstrating a direct, quantitative link between IT-OT integration investments and reduced outage durations, this research provides utility regulatory affairs teams with the empirical evidence needed to secure approval for digital transformation capital expenditures.

6. Conclusion and Future Directions

6.1 Summary of Key Findings

This research has developed a comprehensive process modeling framework that evaluates the relationship between platform integration maturity and operational decision speed within energy utilities. By defining a five-level integration maturity model and simulating typical grid disturbance scenarios, we analyzed how various integration architectures affect decision-making latency. Our results show that advancing from siloed legacy systems to an event-driven, semantic framework reduces total decision latency from nearly two hours to under thirteen minutes, representing an eighty-nine percent improvement.

The analysis confirms that the primary bottlenecks in traditional utility control rooms are manual data aggregation and cognitive overload caused by fragmented systems. Transitioning to event-driven architectures with strict semantic validation based on international standards resolves these bottlenecks, providing operators with immediate situational awareness. While cognitive orchestration offers further latency reductions, achieving event-driven semantic integration is the critical step for utilities seeking to build an agile, resilient grid operation.

6.2 Limitations and Future Work

While this study provides valuable insights, certain limitations should be addressed in future research. First, our process and simulation model assumed a standard distribution grid topology. In practice, utilities operate under highly diverse infrastructure conditions, including varied ratios of overhead lines to underground cabling, and varying levels of smart sensor penetration. Future research should apply this methodology to a wider range of grid environments to validate the generalizability of the simulation findings.

Second, the simulation model did not fully incorporate the potential impact of cybersecurity protocols on data propagation latency. In highly secure utility environments, real-time data crossing the IT-OT boundary must pass through strict firewalls, data diodes, and intrusion detection systems. These security measures can introduce additional transmission delays. Future process modeling should evaluate how cybersecurity architectures can be optimized alongside event-driven integration platforms to maintain both high data speed and robust defense against cyber threats.

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