
Aligning Data Quality and Data Governance

Experian Pandora



The Nicola Askham Interview
Guest Expert: Nicola Askham
Data Governance/Quality Coach and Practitioner



Nicola Askham

Data Governance/Quality Coach and Practitioner

Nicola is an independent data management consultant, whose primary area of expertise is data governance. Nicola has experience in designing and implementing full data governance organisations in both regulatory and non-regulatory environments. She has worked in Data Management for ten years, initially for a leading UK Bank, before becoming a consultant at the beginning of 2009. Most recently Nicola has spent most of her time delivering data governance for Solvency II and also offers data governance coaching.

Nicola presents at Data Management Conferences, is a Director and Committee Member of DAMA UK and is on the Expert Advisory Panel of Data Quality Pro.com.



About Experian Pandora

Experian are creators of the analyst acclaimed Experian Pandora, a high-performance data management software product that is deployed on data quality, data governance and data migration projects across the globe.

Experian Pandora possesses unique technology that enables it to tackle every phase of the data quality management lifecycle with unrivalled performance and ease of use.

To discuss a trial for your next data quality, data governance or data migration project please contact us at info@au.experian.com.



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Interview

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Derek Munro : Let's start with an obvious question that a lot of people seem to wrestle with - what is the difference between data quality and data governance?

Nicola Askham : That's a good question and is one that many people get confused about. The term data quality has been better known for much longer and most people are comfortable that they understand what activities the term is used to describe, however data governance as a discipline continues to bewilder those new to the terminology.

The easiest way to think of it is that data governance is the framework that you need to put in place in order to proactively manage your data. It is the framework that defines the roles and responsibilities for undertaking various data management activities. These activities will of course include the measuring and improving the quality of your data.

They are two complementary data management disciplines and I would even go as far as to say that they enjoy a symbiotic relationship - doing one without the other would add very little value to your organisation.

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Derek Munro : If you look back at the early data quality and information quality books, there really was no mention of data governance so what caused it's prominence? Is it not just something companies have implemented but in another guise or naming convention?

Nicola Askham : That is a very fair reflection, indeed if I cast my mind back to when I started working in data governance 11 years ago, I did not know that what I was doing had a name. In fact it was two years later, after attending a conference, that I discovered that my roles and responsibilities at work were described as

"Data Governance".

I think it's fair to assume that I was not the only person attempting to implement data governance at this time, and earlier, but it certainly was not labelled as such.

As to what has caused its rise to prominence, I would guess that numerous companies have discovered that their various data quality and data cleansing initiatives are at best tactical and of limited value if they are not undertaken as part of an overarching Data Governance framework.

A rise in the number of regulations requiring the implementation of data governance have of course fuelled the focus on data governance. This is particularly true in the Financial Services sector where Basel III, CRD iv, Solvency II, Dodd-Frank and FATCA all require companies to implement a focus on data governance.

And let's not forget that whilst compliance is a significant driver, the recent years of economic turmoil have forced many organisations to question whether they were making key decisions about their business on the correct data and in my experience the more proactive companies have come to the realisation that failure to implement effective data governance impacts on both their efficiency and competitiveness.

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Derek Munro : You've obviously been involved in ramping up numerous data governance and data quality initiatives, can you share some practical tips based on successes you've had in the past?

Nicola Askham : First and foremost is to identify why you are undertaking data governance and data quality initiatives. Early on I learnt the hard way that trying to do them because it was a "good idea" or "best practice" rarely convinces people

to allocate budget or resources to such projects. It is of the utmost importance that you ensure that any such initiatives are clearly aligned to and support your organisation's strategy and help it achieve its objectives.

One of my clients had great success in raising both the profile of and enthusiasm for their data governance initiative after clearly demonstrating how it helped their company achieve every one of the major goals laid out in its five year strategy.

Secondly you need to define the roles and responsibilities you wish to implement early on in your initiative and get the most senior of those roles engaged and signed up to support you as soon as possible. The whole point of such projects is to facilitate organisational change. It is impossible to implement such a change, if you are not able to articulate what roles and responsibilities you are expecting various individuals to take on.

Thirdly, never underestimate the amount of effort and the number of challenges you will experience when implementing these initiatives. It is relatively easy to design your data governance framework or data quality reporting project on paper. It is quite another thing to successfully implement it.

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Derek Munro : In terms of data quality and data governance alignment, what does an ideal data governance and data quality roadmap look like? Are there any preferred stages or sequences that are better to follow?

Nicola Askham : I think the important thing to focus on is that there is no single roadmap that is the perfect answer for every organisation. When I start working with a client, I do of course have a best practice data governance framework in mind, but the end result is adapted so that it meets their needs and culture.

As I often say (and indeed have already mentioned a couple of times in this interview) the first and most important stage is to identify why you are doing data governance and data quality. Knowing this will help you plan your roadmap. After all how can you plan your initiative properly, if you are not clear what problem you are trying to solve, or goals you are trying to achieve? Knowing this will also help you engage your stakeholders, as you will be in a better position to articulate what you are doing and why is important to do it.

Once you are clear why you are embarking on the initiative, you need to identify what you are aiming for. Are you aiming for "Data Governance Nirvana" where every single piece of data is proactively managed and monitored, or are you thinking of something a bit more realistic and achievable?

Once you know both why you are doing data governance and data quality and also what you are aiming for, you will be in a good position to plan your roadmap by prioritising those activities that move you in the right direction.

For a company who is experiencing a particular pain with the quality of a certain dataset, an early phase could be focused on addressing that data quality issue.

For others getting the basic roles and responsibilities defined and in place may be the most important.

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Derek Munro : Finally, do you ever experience the situation where companies focus too much on the frameworks and infrastructure of data governance without actually solving any problems? If so, how should companies make their data governance initiatives truly results-oriented?

Nicola Askham : This is a great question Derek and it's certainly something I have seen more of late.

Having come to the realisation that data quality initiatives do not continue to add value in the long-term if they are not supported by data governance framework, many more organisations are focusing on this. However, as with any change programme, it is very easy to get bogged down in the detail of what you want to achieve rather than getting on with actually facilitating that change.

To be truly results oriented, I encourage all of my clients to align their data governance initiatives to their company's strategy and goals. As I explained earlier, you really do need to have a good understanding of why you are doing data governance and what value it will bring to your organisation. This will help you focus on implementing your data governance framework in a manner which has the greatest benefit for your company, particularly in terms of improved data quality.

I used to describe myself as a Data Governance Evangelist, however over the

years I have been working in this area, I have become increasingly pragmatic, as it has become very clear to me that in order to be successful that data governance frameworks have to be implemented incrementally, in manageable sized chunks and also in a manner that is sympathetic to the culture and business of your organisation.

Derek Munro : Thank you for your sharing these insights today Nicola, inspiring words as ever.

Nicola Askham : It's been a pleasure, thank you Derek.

About Experian Data Quality

Experian Data Quality has built up exceptional market coverage assisting customers with their unique data quality challenges. We provide a comprehensive toolkit for data quality projects combining our market leading software with a vast scope of reference data assets and services. Our mission is to put our customers in a position to make the right decisions from accurate and reliable data. The size and scope of data management projects varies considerably but the common factor in all ventures is unlocking operational efficiency and improving customer engagement. We see the potential of data. Whether it's in enabling ambulances to be sent to the exact location of an emergency or attributing charitable donations to the people who need it the most - data accuracy makes all the difference to service provision.

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