Data ownership within governance: getting it right

Control your data

An Experian white paper

Table of contents

About Author

Janani joined Experian Data Quality in 2011 as a senior consultant, providing businesses with strategic consulting integrating Experian data and technology within enterprises. Her current focus is management consultancy specialising in data governance and strategy, where she oversees the development, promotion and delivery of data governance, data quality strategy and data lifecycle management consultancy.

Prior to Experian, Janani held roles as a business and technology consultant over thirteen years delivering high-value and challenging business projects, with a focus on data modelling and quality, business process improvement, enterprise architecture, business intelligence and multi-channel customer relationship management. She has experience in implementing business processes and supporting technologies for a variety of industry verticals in the UK and USA, covering high-tech, retail, telecommunications, manufacturing, travel and transportation, leisure, business services, local government, business support, education, insurance, banking and finance.

Author
Janani Dumbleton

Data Governance Specialist
Experian Data Quality

1. Introduction

A successful implementation of a data governance initiative is highly dependent on;

- ❯ the right people having the right users to gain buy-in from the business,

- ❯ the right people to develop the data strategy,

- ❯ the right people being able to identify the right representatives to deliver the objectives of the data strategy that has been set out.

Data governance is a quality control discipline that covers the acquisition, management, storage and usage of information or data within a business, with the objective of maximising the value of the organisation's data assets. In layman's terms, this means getting your data and related processes in order, so that the business can maximise value from it.

Implementing this control requires a body of people to drive the initiative, manage the tasks and make critical decisions. It is often represented as the data governance office or council. The data governance office usually consists of several management stakeholders, a data steward and a data custodian. The data steward is responsible for the content held within data elements, while the data custodian is responsible for the technical environment and controls around data.

Data ownership is often the biggest need identified during a review of Roles and Responsibilities within any data governance initiative. The data owner is often seen to be the person who is ultimately responsible for all decisions made around their specific data in the organisation, and often this responsibility is left to the data steward's role within the data governance office.

However, the term 'owner' can be misleading, as it seems to indicate not only ultimate responsibility, but also the ability to use the data for their own purpose, and both are not necessarily true of data use within a business.

Hence, data ownership can also be a barrier, as most organisations may object to the idea of one person or role being able to 'own' data, and many users may shy away from any form of ultimate responsibility towards data. This is evident, especially, when it is shared and used by all. Data ownership can also be the cause of strife and may end up with the wrong people being allocated the role due to the inability to find the right candidates.
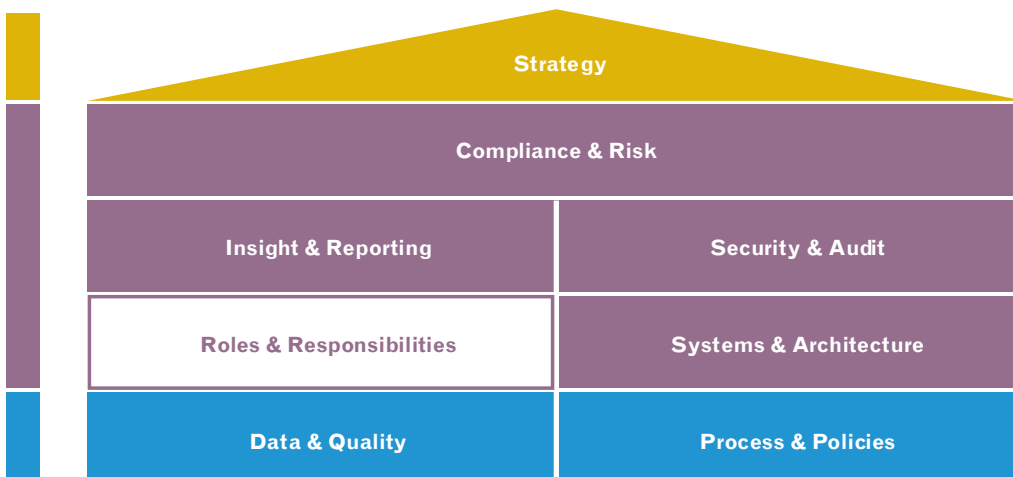
Data is a complex entity. It can organically grow through an organisation, growing in size, changing in nature. Data can then lose relevance, getting archived as business needs change. There are multiple business processes, people and technologies that interact with data, in relation to different business objectives. To identify one role or person responsible for ownership of data within an organisation without understanding the various uses of data can be a very simplistic and often the wrong approach. This can lead to delays in getting decisions around data improvement, data quality measures and data strategy.

For example, let's take a simple process of a product sale, where the data originates from the call centre.

Information Technology
The IT manager is responsible for decisions around archiving the customer data once the customer is no longer active.

Fulfilment
The fulfilment department ships the order and sends an email to the customer; the activity is captured as data against the customer record.

Marketing
The marketing department enrich the customer record with demographic data.

Call Centre
The call centre user places an order for a customer, and in the process captures their name, address, email address and communication preferences.

Management
Management see summarised information that contains the demographic information held against the customer and the purchases made by them.

In this very simple data journey, we have various activities and usage scenarios around the same set of customer data, such as:

- ❯ The call centre staff that initially capture and create the data

- ❯ The fulfilment team and management who purely consume and update data

- ❯ The marketing department who consume as well as enrich the data

- ❯ IT who manage the movement and archival of data

Most businesses will have more complex data journeys, different types of journeys, and many variations within a journey. This brings to the forefront more people across the organisation that interact with data in different ways. Trying to summarise such a complex relationship with data into a simple term such as data owner, can be quite difficult.

Before the concept of ownership is decided and owners are assigned their roles, taking a step back and mapping out the various interactions business users have with data should be the best place to start. Mapping these high level interactions and identifying the common interactions gives the business the necessary insight into how they use data. For example, in the simplified data journey described, a customer email address could be created, updated, deleted, read, archived, moved, etc. These are specific and individual interactions that all occur on the same set of data, with different parties responsible and accountable for their execution.

Once these key data interactions have been recognised, identifying the responsibilities business users have towards these interactions can be mapped out using a simple, but effective method such as the RACI matrix. RACI stands for Responsible, Accountable, Consulted and Informed, and is a way of identifying levels of responsibilities in a process, or in this case, data. So within a data process such as "creating data", the term RACI breaks down into:

> **Responsible:** The person responsible for capturing the data element.

> **Accountable:** The person accountable for the final decision around the data element, may be ultimate owner.

> **Consulted:** The person consulted before a decision or action is taken around creation of the data element.

> **Informed:** The person informed that a decision or action has been taken.

The call centre user is responsible for ensuring the customer email address is captured when taking an order. The call centre manager is accountable for the capture of this data within their business unit. The marketing manager and IT manager are consulted when decisions are made around email capture. The fulfilment manager is informed of changes to email address capture.

RACI (Responsible, Accountable, Consulted & Informed)

Call Centre User	Create	Update	Read	Delete	Acquire	Move	Archive
Customer Name	R	R	R	I	I	I	I
Email Address	R	R	R	I	I	I	I
Marketing Demographics	I	I	R	I	I	I	I

Call Centre Mgr	Create	Update	Read	Delete	Acquire	Move	Archive
Customer Name	A	A	C	C	A	C	C
Email Address	A	A	C	C	A	C	C
Marketing Demographics	I	I	C	C	I	I	I

Marketing Mgr	Create	Update	Read	Delete	Acquire	Move	Archive
Customer Name	C	C	C	C	C	C	C
Email Address	C	C	C	C	C	C	C
Marketing Demographics	A	A	C	C	A	A	A

IT Mgr	Create	Update	Read	Delete	Acquire	Move	Archive
Customer Name	I	I	A	A	C	A	A
Email Address	I	I	A	A	C	A	A
Marketing Demographics	I	I	A	A	C	A	A

Accountability Matrix

| Call Centre Mgr	Marketing Mgr	IT Mgr

Building on this method and completing a matrix for all data held by the organisation, the business will be able to view trends in responsibility and accountability. Through the process "owners" or people accounted for certain types of data and interactions are naturally recognised. Having a more scientific and granular approach in determining trends of responsibility can reduce conflict when it comes to determining the best candidates when decisions are made around data. It will also ensure that the correct people are allocated responsibilities when changing processes or technologies that use data. Eventually, this process identifies the right people to build the data strategy for the organisation.

The data governance council is a critical component in a successful data governance programme, as it consists of a group of business and technical stakeholders who are responsible for decisions around the management of data. The results of the RACI matrix analysis creates the foundation for the implementation of a data governance council, ensuring that the correct representatives from the business are involved with decisions with data .

An ideal data governance implementation, would consist of a central owner of the data governance initiative through a data governance council. They would maintain a federated responsibility structure such as the implementation of a RACI matrix to ensure that decisions around data have the necessary structure for approvals and the best representatives contributing to the process.

The following diagram depicts an example of a data governance structure within an organisation. Here, the individuals who were identified as accountable for data processes through the RACI matrix, form part of the subject matter expert group that handle day to day data governance planning and operations.
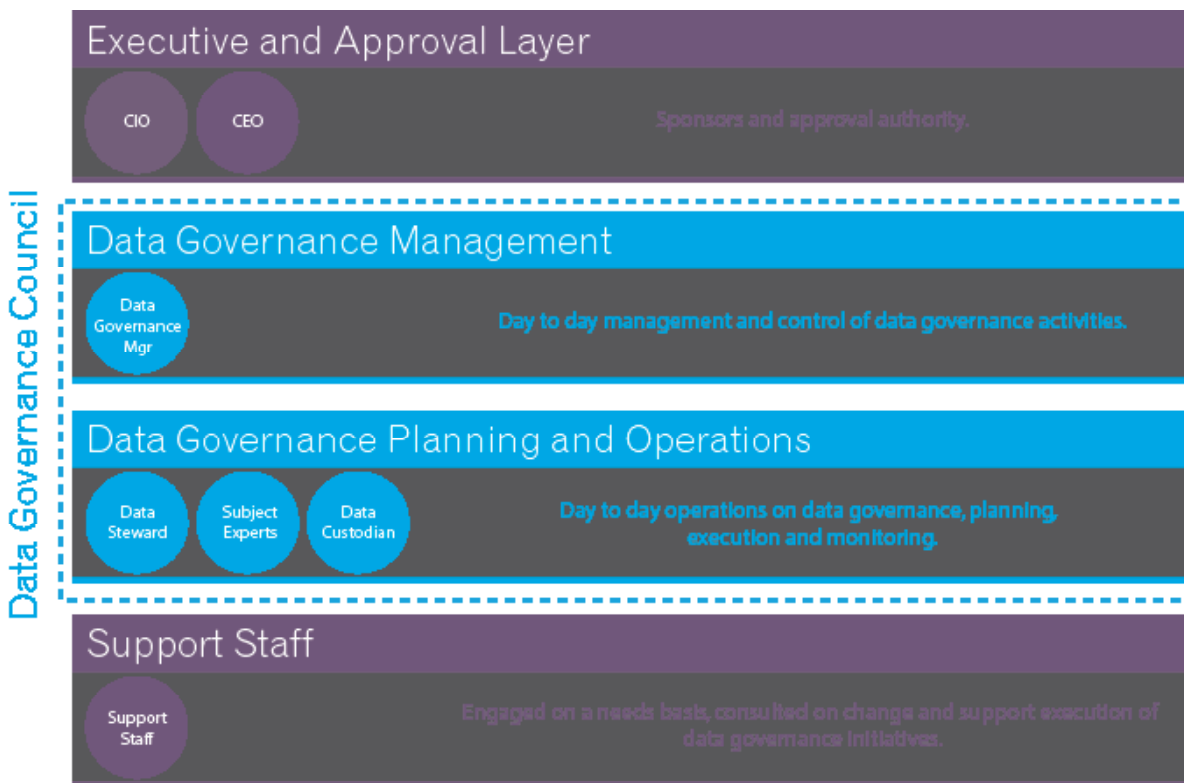
5. Summary

In summary, having the right people and roles involved in a governance initiative can demystify any confusion around who should be responsible for key data related activities such as; improving data quality, making data processes efficient, buying new data and procuring technology for a data process.

Having a clearer vision around the responsibility and accountability towards data can:

- reduce conflict around data ownership,

- gain organisation wide buy-in for data governance,

- and ensure the most appropriate people are involved in decisions around data.

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.

For more information please contact us:
T (61) 3 8699 0100 | E info@au.experian.com | W edq.com/au