

Assembling the A-team for your data governance program



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Introduction

Business leaders today recognize the importance of data to their overall business success. From driving increased revenue to better managing risk, information assets are delivering substantial benefit to organizations of all sizes. Data is so fundamental, in fact, that our 2018 global data management benchmark report found that 95 percent of C-level executives believe that data is an essential part of forming their business strategy. With so much emphasis on leveraging data to make strategic decisions, it is important for business leaders to have confidence in the quality of their data. And that means there needs to be people, processes, and tools in place to ensure that data is governed effectively over its life cycle.

Our recent research found that approximately one-third of U.S. organizations are planning a data governance initiative in the next twelve months—a growing priority for many, as evidenced by a 14 percent year-over-year increase. This heightened awareness of data governance reflects the emerging belief that data is a valuable asset that needs to be under the proper care. Governance projects have also taken center stage as a result of increasing regulation around data privacy.

Data governance, however, is not something that can be done as a one-time project, and it's not something that should be done off the sides of people's desks. Achieving data-related goals requires a dedicated data governance office (DGO) that can be responsible for the management of enterprise-wide data assets.

Although a majority of organizations understand the importance of data governance to meeting strategic objectives and regulatory requirements, the path to standing up a governance program can be lined with obstacles. In fact, 95 percent of businesses say that they struggle to implement a data governance program. Those who are implementing data governance can face a variety of internal and external challenges, such as siloed data, conflicting departmental processes, and a lack of clear ownership or authority over data. These challenges are only compounded by the fact that one in three businesses struggles to form the necessary data governance team.

To help you build a successful data governance organization, we've created this guide to identify and explain the key players in data governance.

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The data governance champions

An effective data governance office has advocates who can help generate momentum and interest throughout the organization. While you can never have too many advocates, when you're first starting out, you'll want to identify an executive stakeholder who can build credibility and interest among the C-suite, as well as a business-level data steward who can lead the day-to-day governance operations. It's a simple top-down, bottom-up approach. Let's take a look at how these data champions help.

Executive stakeholder

Nearly one-quarter of businesses say that maintaining long-term momentum is a growing challenge for their data governance program. That's why securing a C-level sponsor for your data governance program is a smart idea for generating sustained business interest. Not only do these folks understand the impact of the work you're doing, but they can help to translate it into business value that is aligned to strategic goals.

Typically, organizations with an established data governance office have a chief data officer (CDO) who fills this role. In other organizations, the C-level sponsor could be the chief information officer (CIO), the chief technology officer (CTO), or perhaps a line-of-business executive, such as the chief marketing officer (CMO) or chief financial officer (CFO).

Chief data steward

While having a senior executive on your team is helpful when securing budget and authority over data, you will also want to have a tactical project manager who can lead the charge on a daily basis. Enter: the chief data steward. This individual should work to identify and champion data governance projects that make measurable business impacts and advance the mission of the data governance program. In addition, the chief data steward should be monitoring and tracking related performance metrics in order to report on the impact of the program.

It is worth noting that the chief data steward does not need to be the owner of all corporate data sets. Therefore, they should coordinate with the correct business stakeholders to ensure governance projects are completed efficiently. For example, the chief data steward might lead the effort to develop an enterprise data glossary, working in conjunction with department-level data owners to outline and document the appropriate data definitions.



The data governance council

While governance is and should be an ongoing part of the business, with its own dedicated full-time staff, a data governance council is often needed to lay the foundation for a scalable and sustainable governance program. Tackling enterprise-wide data governance projects takes teamwork and collaboration from subject matter experts across the business—it is certainly not something that can be done by one individual. Organizations that have established successful enterprise data governance offices typically rely on a cross-departmental governance council that works to identify, prioritize, and execute data-related projects. Let's take a look at the members of the council and what they bring to the table.

Data owners and stewards

Businesses today create a lot of data, and each department likely maintains a set of data that is integral to their processes. For instance, your marketing department might maintain a database containing the history of customer and prospect interactions, or your finance team might maintain a database of current and past invoices, and so on. Each of these departments is likely to have an appointed data owner, or at the very least a *de facto* data owner, who is responsible for maintaining the integrity of the information their department relies on.

These are the people you will need to participate in your data governance council. Because they understand the context in which data is used within their department, they can speak to the nuances that could have an impact on how that field is defined at an enterprise level. By bringing together these expert data owners from all areas of the business, your council can take on governance projects with the business' interests in mind.

A man and a woman are jogging along a paved path that runs alongside a large body of water. The man is in the foreground, wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt and black shorts. The woman is slightly behind him, wearing a grey long-sleeved shirt and pink shorts. They are both looking forward and appear to be in motion. The background shows a calm body of water and a hazy, distant shoreline with some buildings and trees under a bright sky.

The quality of your information goes hand-in-hand with data governance.

Business stakeholders

Of course, not all departments will have a designated data owner. However, that does not mean they should be left out of the governance process. If a department does not have a data owner or steward, a representative from that department should be nominated to participate in the council on a regular basis. It is important that this individual has a working knowledge of how their department uses data so that they can appropriately represent their perspective and requirements.

The governance council should also work with individuals that might experience the downstream effects of changes to business rules or policies. As an example, it is a good idea to include compliance in your meetings to proactively identify any data fields that might be protected by regulation—and, therefore, barred from being changed in any way.

Data quality analysts

Because the quality of your information goes hand-in-hand with your data governance program, many organizations implement a data quality program as a subset of their overarching governance strategy. A data quality analyst is typically responsible for performing routine data quality checks and analyzing those results, participating in root cause analysis, and maintaining business rules and data quality dashboards.

The results of much of their work can be used to track the effectiveness of changes made by the governance council, measure performance against KPIs, and identify new areas of focus. For example, as the council works to define business rules, processes, data definitions, and more, the data quality analyst can ensure that these initiatives are operationalized to drive impact downstream. That's why it's important to have a data quality analyst on the governance council to provide their perspective and recommendations on proposed projects.

The data governance office

While the data governance council is recommending policies and processes to ensure information assets are managed consistently, having enterprise-wide adoption of these outcomes is critical for the program's success. That's where the data governance office comes in (for many organizations, this might also be the enterprise data management office). As a centralized department, this team is in the ideal position to make universal changes to data-specific policies and procedures and disseminate those to the entire organization. The data governance office also may have the budget and resources available to ensure that the recommendations of the council are developed at scale and invested in for long-term viability.

Everyone else!

Let's not forget that data is everyone's responsibility. No matter their role or department, every employee who accesses, manipulates, or creates data is responsible for maintaining its integrity. And that means data governance needs to be something that all employees can get behind. Organizations that have successful data governance programs frequently have a strong culture around governance, which employees are able to embrace in the daily work. Whether they're a business analyst, a salesperson, or a customer service agent, all employees should be trained on the data governance policies and have access to documentation that they can reference when handling data.

Conclusion

At the end of the day, good data governance is about people. Once you have the right people in the right roles, it's about creating processes and policies to help people interact with and use data in a responsible way. It's also about creating data that business users believe is trustworthy. That's why building a strong team of data governance professionals is so important. It's not easy work, however. It's a challenging endeavor often encumbered by obstacles, corporate bureaucracy, and miles of red tape. But anyone who has implemented a governance team at their organization will tell you it's well worth the effort.

The first step in building a data governance program is generating business support. Here's how to make your program relevant and interesting to them.

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About Experian

Experian enables organizations to unlock the power of data. We focus on the quality of our clients' information so they can explore the meaningful ways they can use it. Whether optimizing data for better customer experiences or preparing data for improved business intelligence, we empower our clients to manage their data with confidence.

We have the data, expertise, and proven technology to help our customers quickly turn information into insight. We're investing in new, innovative solutions to power opportunities for our people, clients, and communities. To learn more, visit www.edq.com.



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