

Successful Data Governance Starts with Your People

Lessons learned from enterprise design and implementation

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Today's Environment

Most enterprises can trace a path from humble beginnings to the larger, more complex organizations they are today. As they've grown, they have collected and managed data in myriad ways according to the business need, the technology available, and the audience using the data.

While each step of data collection and management made sense at the time, the long-term result is often a disjointed information system that doesn't lend itself to analysis. This makes it extremely difficult to understand the fluid ways in which customers and business units operate. With market forces demanding responsive and rapid product development, many enterprises find themselves at a disadvantage—unable to understand trends in customer behavior and business value. It's not that they don't have the data. It's that the data is not accessible or reliable enough to drive strategy decisions.

Data governance is the answer. It allows organizations to simplify and streamline standards, enabling rigorous reporting and analysis across the enterprise.

At the heart of data governance is this: Data must be verifiably reliable and valued as a business-driving asset by everyone in the organization. You can't achieve one (reliable information) without the other (cooperation and collaboration).

Where to begin on a mission to adopt a data governance model? Start with your people.

Point B's Perspective

Point B leads data governance design and implementation projects for a wide variety of enterprises. We also provide change management expertise across virtually every business domain. What we've learned can help organizations open pathways to clarity and avoid pitfalls that cripple information flow and slow business. A few foundational tips can help your organization get data governance off to the right start:

- **Clarify your objectives.** Initially, data governance can seem vast and vague. Get specific about what you want to achieve.
- **Start narrow, with an initiative that will prove results and gain buy-in.** Attach your first data governance efforts to an initiative that will showcase its value. Look for an initiative that will help demonstrate how data governance works and why it matters. Employees become champions as they participate and see the personal benefits and business results. Making data governance integral to specific projects also helps preempt the notion that it's a separate initiative or an added layer to daily work.
- **Communicate with employees at every phase of data governance design and implementation.** Your executive sponsors and project owners need to understand their roles, goals and responsibilities—including the need to collaborate across business or department lines where the enterprise needs data to flow freely. Give leaders

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permission to cross those lines. Have substantive give-and-take discussions. And make decisions that work for the good of the enterprise, even if it means letting go of successful practices that fulfill their initial purpose at the operational level. Incorporate key messages into routine communications, including team meetings, one-to-one supervision and emails. Build awareness and understanding that data standardization is central to the company's business health and ability to deliver on its mission. Use external examples and internal wins to confront the idea that data governance is about "bean counting." Show how evidence-based decisions fuel efficiency and efficacy in the marketplace. Let employees see how data governance benefits them:

- Reduces redundant data entry
- Reduces time needed to produce reports
- Improves ability to analyze information
- Creates confidence in decisions based on quality data
- Shares vision and visibility across the enterprise, creating more opportunities for employees and the company

- **Right-size data governance for your organization.** The objective is to construct standards and processes that reveal precise outcomes and allow for cumulative analysis with related information from across the organization.

Avoid adding unnecessary structure, process or overhead; more is not necessarily better. A lean, well-crafted process makes collection and reporting easier. Define your overall data governance structure by giving people clear roles, responsibilities and accountability. Provide additional resources where needed.

Finally, be honest about the growing pains involved. Data governance challenges people to unravel existing processes and systems to construct something new. The process is scary for some, exhilarating for others.

Either way, there's no getting around the need to do things differently. Use the data governance design process to counter fears. Apply its principles as your organization tackles projects already in your pipeline. Make expectations clear to employees; stick to the agreed-upon rules so everyone benefits. When change is equally supported at all levels of your organization, you're in a much better position to move forward together.

The Bottom Line

Data governance is the best way to take control of information and leverage its value. Without it, enterprises risk losing track of their operations, customers, opportunities and market shifts. It takes a disciplined approach to redesign information technology and related processes. The place to start is with your people. With a data governance mindset that people share and support across your organization, there's no telling what you'll learn and how far you can go.