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# Data Governance

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Boost the value of data  
in your business

Design a governance program  
to meet your needs

Reduce business risks  
associated with data

**Jonathan Reichental, PhD**

*Author of Smart Cities For Dummies*



# Data Governance

by Jonathan Reichental, PhD

**for**  
**dummies**<sup>®</sup>  
A Wiley Brand

## **Data Governance For Dummies®**

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# Introduction

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In the 21st century, data really matters. Some even claim it's the most important asset organizations possess today. Reviewing the evidence, I think they might be right.

Although all organizations use and manage data, far too many don't do it well. As a consequence, they are missing out on opportunities to grow their businesses, increase revenue, and leverage valuable insights. In addition, they're putting their organization at greater risk in a world of complex regulatory requirements and punishing cyberattacks.

Today, an increasing number of leaders recognize that managing data well and increasing its quality can deliver remarkable results for their organizations. They're discovering the value behind data governance.

Unfortunately, implementing data governance is no walk in the park. Research from Gartner suggests that up to 90 percent of organizations fail at their first attempt. This book can help fix that. Proven, high-quality guidance is required and that's what this book is all about.

I wrote this book to help you succeed at managing and optimizing your data in better ways than you do today. Understanding data governance will empower you to increase the value and quality of your organization's data and manage the risks and obligations associated with it.

## ***About This Book***

Despite the title, this isn't a book for dummies. It's for those smart people who recognize that managing data

well is the right thing to do. But you already knew that.

Data governance may not be the most exciting topic of our times, but in terms of importance and positive organizational impact, it's certainly hard to beat. The increasing demand for data governance is a direct result of the rise in the value and volume of data and the attendant opportunities and risks this presents.

Since you're reading this book, my assumption is that you generally get this. Ahead of many, you recognize the value of data governance and that attaining the skills and methods to implement a successful program will benefit you and your organization.

That said, I wrote this book for those with no data governance knowledge and for those with existing skills but with a desire for more insight and detail. In other words, whether you know a little or a lot on the topic, this book is designed to help you. In practical terms, like all *Dummies* books, you can read it from cover to cover, or you can just jump to a certain section.

Data governance is often a confusing and complex topic. It also has a lot of unfamiliar terminology associated with it, particularly if you don't have a technical or data background. As an educator, I like to explain things simply. In fact, I like to explain things the way I would like them explained to me. This means I've gone to great efforts to eliminate the confusion and complexity of the topic while also providing easy-to-understand explanations. You may also find some repetition in chapters, and this is deliberate. Repeating some concepts, in a variety of contexts, reinforces the core ideas.

If you decide to read the book from cover to cover, you'll notice it has five parts that are designed to take you from

concepts to planning and right through to implementation and support:

- » **Part 1, Data Everywhere:** The chapters in this part provide a detailed background of data governance and explain why it's important in a world of increasing volume, variety, and velocity of data.
- » **Part 2, Discovering Data Governance:** The chapters in this part explain how to build the business case and get approval for your data governance program. It also explains the value data governance can bring to different functions in your organization.
- » **Part 3, Developing Data Governance:** The chapters in this part detail the steps to planning, designing, and developing your data governance program.
- » **Part 4, Democratizing Data:** The chapters in this part cover how to support and maintain your data governance program once it is implemented, including monitoring it and measuring results.
- » **Part 5, The Part of Tens:** The chapters in this part provide two lists — one that identifies best practices and the other that covers the essential stakeholders involved in data governance.

## ***Foolish Assumptions***

I made the following assumptions about you, dear reader, when writing this book. You:

- » Have little patience for unnecessary jargon and deeper explanations and just want what's necessary to get the work done and be successful.

- » Want a comprehensive guide to data governance that can be read cover to cover or used to provide the answers you seek.
- » Know that this book doesn't provide information and details about specific technology vendors.
- » Understand that data governance is focused on people and their behaviors. You won't be learning how to write a database query.
- » Recognize that data governance is not the same as data management.
- » Appreciate that data governance can appear easier to implement than in reality. The tips and best practices in the book will help.
- » Acknowledge that some repetition is deliberate in order to reinforce important concepts and to describe them in different contexts.
- » Understand that data governance is evolving, so you're best to supplement these topics by exploring current best practices and research online.
- » Understand that you cannot implement data governance alone. It requires collaboration across the enterprise. Your colleagues may need to read the book too!

## ***Icons Used in This Book***

You'll see a few icons scattered around the book. These icons highlight bits of information that are of particular importance to you.



TIP

The Tip icon shares an insight or lesson that I've learned the hard way — so you don't need to — or it's been gleaned from extensive research and suggests a good way to approach an issue.



REMEMBER

The Remember icon highlights information that's especially important to know. This is key information that you'll want to reference later.



WARNING

The Warning icon tells you to watch out! It highlights information that may save you headaches. Don't skip over these.

## ***Beyond the Book***

You can complement everything in this book with additional research online, including some excellent written and video content. You might also enjoy watching my “Learning Data Governance” video series on LinkedIn Learning. It's an hour and a half and is a light summary of some of the key areas in this book. You can also check out this book's online cheat sheet by searching for **Data Governance for Dummies Cheat Sheet** at [dummies.com](http://dummies.com).

## ***Where to Go from Here***

You don't need to read this book from cover to cover. You can, if that strategy appeals to you, but it's set up as a reference guide, so you can jump in wherever you need



to. Looking for something in particular? Take a peek at the table of contents or index, find the section you need, and then flip to the page to get your answer.

**Part 1**  
**Data Everywhere**

## **IN THIS PART ...**

Understand what data governance is and the value it can bring to your organization

Discover why data is now considered your organization's most valuable asset

Explore the many valuable roles that data plays in every business

Learn the importance of creating and implementing a data strategy

# Chapter 1

## Defining Data Governance

---

### IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Unpacking the definition of data governance
  - » Discovering the elements of a data governance program
  - » Understanding the role of data culture
  - » Determining data governance readiness
- 

Today, the topic of data governance suffers from a public relations problem. In the pages ahead, I explain how data governance is one of the most valuable programs that an organization can implement right now. The trouble is that many business leaders have an entirely different perception, assuming they even know what data governance is.

Although the momentum toward adoption is picking up pace, far too many organizations don't understand what data governance is. Many executives admit it's not showing up on their list of top priorities. They perceive data governance to be bureaucratic, complex, expensive, and largely discretionary.

Leaders soon change their views when they understand that data governance, done right, can help unleash the remarkable power of data, drive business growth, and enable successful digital transformations, all while reducing significant business risk.

What's not to like?

Solving this public relations problem begins with growing the number of people — in every role and level — who understand what data governance is and the value it brings to all organizations. That's why, in this chapter, I'm starting at the beginning, by defining governance and explaining what it means relative to the growing volume and complexity of data that confronts every business.

This book is dedicated to changing perceptions and helping more organizations succeed. When data governance is fully understood, your organization can enjoy its powerful results. Managing data well is a big deal and it must be a priority for every business leader.

In the second half of this chapter, I delve into the importance of determining whether your data culture — the level of commitment to data-driven decisions and actions — is ready for data governance.

## ***Understanding Data Governance***

The topic of data governance seems abstract to far too many people without a full appreciation of its definition, role, and value. You may have experienced puzzled looks from friends, family, and colleagues when you told them that your work involves data governance. They want to be happy for you, so they smile and congratulate you, but there's a reasonable chance they don't know what you're talking about.

I want to help fix that.

If you're going to communicate the importance of data governance to your organization so you can, for example, build a business case and get approval to design and

deploy a program, you need to explain the topic clearly. Your senior leaders will appreciate it. So will your colleagues. I start by answering the most fundamental question.

## ***What is meant by governance?***

When first presented with the phrase *data governance*, most people immediately understand the data part, but can be quickly confused by the use and context of the word “governance.”

Governance is not a word that most of us use on a regular basis. Sure, you create data. You use data. You store data. These concepts make sense. But governing data? That’s not something that comes up too often. It sounds abstract, a little exotic, and frankly, complicated.

Fortunately, it’s not nearly as complex as it appears. Understanding what it means right now, in the context of data, will put you at ease as you immerse yourself in the world of data governance.

*Governance* is the manner in which an entity chooses to oversee the control and direction of an area of interest. It typically takes the form of how decisions are made, regulated, and enforced. When entities grow and increase in complexity, formal governance becomes important. Left ungoverned, the possibility of devolving into chaos is all too probable. I’m reminded of what used to happen when the teacher briefly left the classroom in my elementary school. Anarchy!

Governance is a relatively straight-forward concept, but in so many contexts, it’s extremely important and impactful.



**REMEMBER** To some degree, everything in life is governed. It's just a question of its degree of formality. Parents may have a loose set of rules that govern how they raise their children, whereas our national government has a more rigorous governance system to enable, support, and enforce our democracy and its laws.

The formality and structure that governance takes depends on context and intent. For example, given their goals as organizations, governance in a public agency such as a city will differ greatly from that of a private enterprise. Each of these entities has different purposes and responsibilities.



**REMEMBER** Governance is the system that formalizes control, processes, and accountabilities, so that specific results such as meeting goals or sustaining standards can be attained.

The many domains that have adopted the term *governance* apply it relative to intent. Project governance, for example, is focused on a process for how project decisions are made and how communications are managed between stakeholders. Another area, land governance, concerns itself with issues relative to land ownership and the rules under which decisions are made around land use and control.

This book is concerned with exploring techniques and approaches for deriving as much value from your data as possible while also managing any associated risks. The priority of data value and risk management has escalated in recent years, as data continues to grow rapidly and

flow with velocity into the organization from a large number of sources. Today, the average data volume in an organization is growing at over 30 percent a year, and many are growing at an even faster rate.

These factors create urgency for many organizations to build a formal system for data control and oversight, and that includes structured processes and accountabilities.

Organizations want to reap the benefits of data abundance while managing its growing risks. In other words, organizations are now demanding data governance.

## ***What is data governance?***

To be effective at their jobs, staff want to find the data they need quickly, and they want it to be high-quality data. This means the data needs to be accurate and current. Leaders want data to provide the basis for rich insights that enable timely and informed data-driven decision-making. The legal department requires data to be handled by everyone in a manner consistent with laws and regulations. Product designers want data to inform creative decisions that align with marketplace demands and customer trends. Security professionals are tasked with ensuring that the data is appropriately protected.

Undoubtedly, a wide range of stakeholders want to harness the remarkable power of data.

To achieve these and other increasingly common business demands, you need some form of data control and accountability in your enterprise. Quality results require the diligent management of your organization's data.





**REMEMBER** Data governance is all about managing data well.

Today, when data is managed well, it can drive innovation and growth and can be an enterprise's most abundant and important lever for success.

Well managed data can be transformational, and it can support the desirable qualities of a data-driven culture. This is when decisions at all levels of the organization are made using data in an informed and structured manner such that they deliver better outcomes internally and to customers. Research confirms that most business leaders today want their organizations to be data-driven, but, according to a survey by NewVantage Partners, only around 32 percent are achieving that goal.

Successful data governance also means that data risks can be minimized, and data compliance and regulatory requirements can be met with ease. This can bring important comfort to business leaders who, in some jurisdictions, can now be personally liable for issues arising from poor data management.



**REMEMBER** Every organization manages data at some level.

All businesses generate, process, use, and store data as a result of their daily operations. But there's a huge difference between businesses that casually manage data and those that consider data to be a valuable asset and treat it accordingly. This difference is characterized by the degree in which there are formalities in managing data.

Broadly, the discipline in which an organization acts in recognition of the value of its *information assets* (a fancy

term for data with specific value to an organization, such as a customer or product record) is called *enterprise information management* (EIM). Governing and managing data well is a central enabler of EIM, which also includes using technologies and processes to elevate data to be a shared enterprise asset.

### ***Data governance versus data management***

Within the EIM space there are many terms that sound like they might mean the same thing. There is often confusion about the difference between data governance and data management. Data governance is focused on roles and responsibilities, policies, definitions, metrics, and the lifecycle of data. Data management is the technical implementation of data governance. For example, databases, data warehouses and lakes, application programming interfaces (APIs), analytics software, encryption, data crunching, and architectural design and implementation are all data management features and functions.

### ***Data governance versus information governance***

Similarly, in EIM, you may want clarity on the difference between data governance and information governance. Data governance generally focuses on data, independent of its meaning. For example, you may want to govern the security of patient data and staff data from a policy and process perspective, despite their differences. The interest here is on the data, not as much on the business context. Information governance is entirely concerned with the meaning of the data and its relationship in terms of outcomes and value to the organization, customers, and other stakeholders.

You might experience obvious overlap between the two terms. For sure, as a data governance practitioner, to

some extent you'll be operating in both the data and information governance worlds each day. This shouldn't present an issue as long as the strategy for data governance is well understood. My view is that understanding the context of data, a concept known as *data intelligence*, and the desired business outcomes, complement data governance efforts in a valuable manner.

### ***The value of data governance***

If an organization considers data to be a priority — and an increasing number of businesses believe just that (in fact, according to Anmut, a data consultancy, 91 percent of business leaders say that data is a critical part of their organization's success) — and it puts in place processes and policies to leverage the data's value and reduce data risks, that organization is demonstrating a strong commitment to data controls and accountabilities. In other words, that organization values data governance.



**REMEMBER** Fundamentally, data governance is driven by a desire to increase the value of data and reduce the risks associated with it. It forces a leap from an ad hoc approach to data to one that is strategic in nature.

Some of the main advantages achieved by good data governance include:

- » Improved data quality
- » Expanded data value
- » Increased data compliance
- » Improved data-driven decision-making

- » Enhanced business performance
- » Greater sharing and use of data across the enterprise and externally
- » Increased data availability and accessibility
- » Improved data search
- » Reduced risks from data-related issues
- » Reduced data management costs
- » Established rules for handling data



**TIP** Any one of these alone is desirable, but a well-executed and maintained data governance program will deliver many of these and more.

In the absence of formalized data governance, organizations will continue to struggle in achieving these advantages and may, in fact, suffer negative consequences. For example, poor quality data that is not current, inaccurate, and incomplete can lead to operating inefficiencies and poor decision-making.



**WARNING** Data governance does not emerge by chance. It's a choice and requires organizational commitment and investment.

### ***Creating a data governance program***

The basic steps for creating a data governance program consist of the following (these steps also form the basic outline of this book):

1. Defining the vision, goals, and benefits

2. Analyzing the current state of data governance and management
3. Developing a proposal based on the first two steps, including a draft plan
4. Achieving leadership approval
5. Designing and developing the program
6. Implementing the program
7. Monitoring and measuring performance
8. Maintaining the program

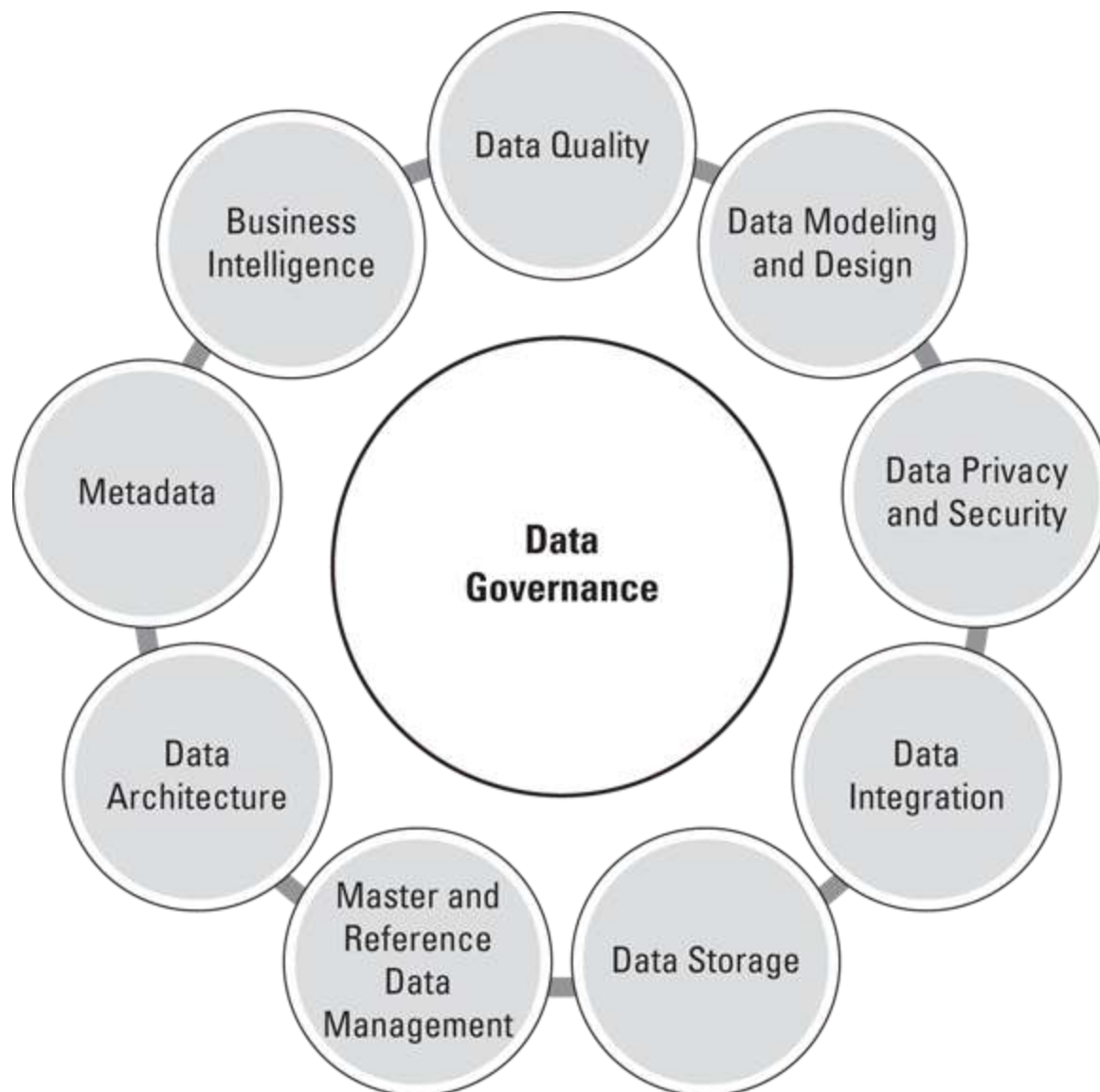
Depending on the level of sophistication and the nature of the business, the design and implementation of a data governance program can vary greatly. Unfortunately, there's no one-size-fits-all approach. One business may implement data governance with an emphasis on realizing greater revenue growth, while another may be more concerned with the regulatory requirements of their industry. Each organization will approach data governance in a manner that best reflects their desired outcomes.

As a discipline that has matured over a number of years, data governance is achieved through a set of common elements. [Figure 1-1](#) illustrates many of the most common areas. You can think of these as a good representation of data governance scope. Right now, several of the terms in the illustration may not be familiar to you. Don't worry, because this book explores each one of these and suggests approaches that may work for you.

In summary, data governance is about managing data well and helping to deliver its optimum value to your organization. It includes ensuring your data is available, usable, and secure. It's the actions that team members

take, the policies and processes they must follow, and the use of technologies that support them throughout the data lifecycle in their organization.

It's safe to say that for a growing number of organizations, data governance is becoming a very big deal.



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**FIGURE 1-1:** The most common elements of a data governance program.