Everything you
need to know
about...

**Data
Governance
roles and
responsibilities**

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If you're just starting out on your Data Governance journey you may very well feel like you are playing the classic 80's board game 'Guess Who?' when it comes to figuring out who in your organisation should be doing what.

There are a number of different roles and responsibilities within data governance, and each play a key role when you are designing and implementing a data governance framework. It makes it is easy to get confused over which roles you really need and what you should be calling them

But never fear, The Data Governance Coach is here to explain who should be in each role and exactly what they should be doing! But first things first...

Stop and breathe

Don't start of your data governance journey feeling overwhelmed.

When implementing data governance there will be many challenges and different mountains to climb; certainly, one of them will be the naming of the different roles. What if someone tells you that the term Data Owner doesn't work within your organisation?

Well, you certainly don't need to panic if this does happen. I'm going to share what I consider a starting point, but you don't need to stick to these titles rigidly. These are just my best practices but it's also important to go with the flow of the organisation you're working with. Data governance is not one size fits all.

It's much better to use terms that suit the culture of your organisation - rather than fighting to use role titles that you've read in this blog or found with the help of google. It's what the roles do that is the important bit.

Data Owner

A Data Owner is a very important data governance role.

A Data Owner will be someone very senior in your organisation, who is accountable for the quality of a certain set of data. And I must emphasise that it really does need to be someone who is senior within the organisation because data is owned by the company.

You can expect to identify a number of Data Owners and they should all be based in the business side of things. Why a number of data owners? Well, no one person in an organisation can understand everything about all the data and manage it accordingly.

So, you're going to have to have a small number of people - maybe between 15 and 20 - who own all the data in your organisation, and they're going to be accountable for the quality of that data.

When people talk about the concept of data ownership, they really mean just this key role in the data governance framework. They're not the only roles in a data governance framework, but they are the senior people who are going to make your data governance framework work.

It's often a bit of a debate as to who owns the data. Many think it belongs to IT, but it is senior business users who are the true data owners.

The Data Owner needs to be senior so that they have the authority to approve changes to the systems and have the budget and resources to cleanse and fix data. Finding the right data owners can be hard work but if you find and engage the right people it will make a huge difference to the success of your Data Governance initiative.

Read:
['How to identify the right data owners?'](#)

Read:
['Can there be more than one Data Owner per data set?'](#)

Data Stewards

Data Owners are key, but we also need Data Stewards. Simply, while Data Owners will be able to approve things often, they won't want to get their hands dirty and will be unlikely to understand the nitty gritty details of the data.

Data Stewards act as support for the Data Owners; they are often a subject matter expert in a particular set or subset of the data and are in a good position to work through the different processes that get rolled out.

Read:
'A deeper dive into the difference between Data Owners and Data Stewards'

Having a Data Steward is key to the Data Governance implementation, as they are the people who do most of the work to make it happen.

Let's look at an example…

In a finance department, it is likely that the finance director or his deputy would be the data owner for all the finance data.

Then, in my experience, finance departments tend to be made up of a number of different specialist teams all focusing on different areas - and working with different data. This means it wouldn't be practical to have just one data steward working under the data owner.

The data owner is likely to have to appoint the head of each of those sub-teams to be a data steward for them or that subtopic.

These data stewards will be responsible for writing things like data definitions and investigating and fixing data quality issues. These are all key responsibilities that the data owner, as a head of his or her department, is unlikely to have time for.

Data Producers

A Data Producer is usually a more junior role, but this all depends on the organisation.

The Data Producer's main role is to enter the data into the system, and it is really important that these people understand that they need to capture data in accordance with the requirements of the person or people consuming the data.

This is often a missed step which can lead to bad data. In my experience, Data Producers don't often deliberately capture data incorrectly. It's just that no-one took the time to tell them what was needed and that leads nicely onto the next role that of Data Consumers...
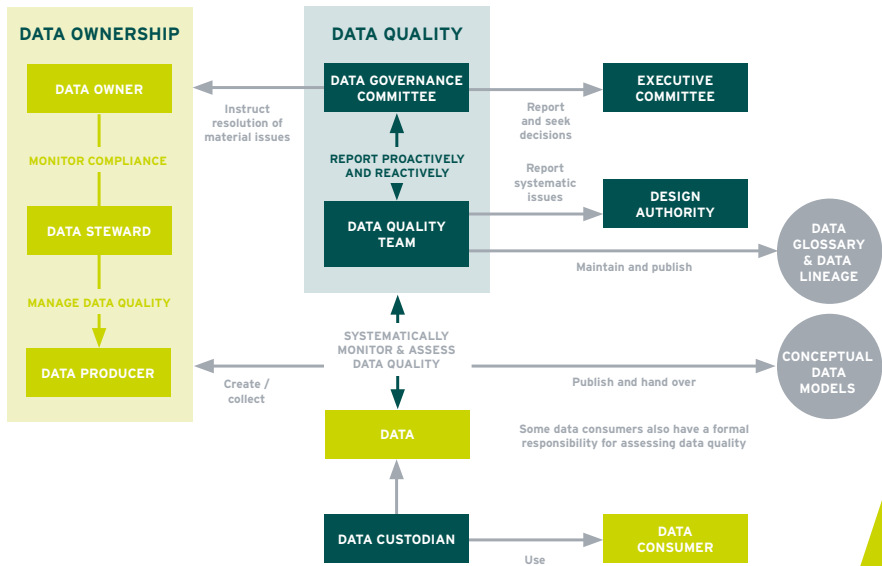
Data Consumers

I use this term to refer to anybody that is using or consuming data, and it really is these people that are responsible for defining what makes the data good enough for them to use.

These people should be using the Data Governance Framework to communicate what they need from the data and defining how they know whether the data is good enough to use (also known as data quality rules).

Example Roles in Practice

DATA OWNERSHIP

DATA OWNER

MONITOR COMPLIANCE

DATA STEWARD

MANAGE DATA QUALITY

DATA PRODUCER

DATA QUALITY

DATA GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

REPORT PROACTIVELY AND REACTIVELY

DATA QUALITY TEAM

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

DESIGN AUTHORITY

DATA GLOSSARY & DATA LINEAGE

CONCEPTUAL DATA MODELS

Instruct resolution of material issues

Report and seek decisions

Report systematic issues

Maintain and publish

SYSTEMATICALLY MONITOR & ASSESS DATA QUALITY

Create / collect

Publish and hand over

DATA

Some data consumers also have a formal responsibility for assessing data quality

DATA CUSTODIAN

DATA CONSUMER

Use

BUSINESS ROLE

CENTRALISED ROLE

Data Custodians

This role is related to those working in IT, and their main responsibility is maintaining the data on IT systems in accordance with business requirements.

I must stress that IT do not own the data, just because it resides on systems they support and maintain.

This is an important role as before a company has Data Governance in place, it's common that the business has not been trained in articulating their data requirements and therefore it is often down to IT to interpret or make decisions in order to help the business.

However, once you have a Data Governance framework in place, the business usually gets much better at articulating data requirements and IT's job gets easier.

Another difference between this role and others is that a data custodian is not necessarily a named person. It is a title that's used loosely as a collective term for all of the IT department who are supporting your infrastructure.

That said, it's not impossible to have named custodians. I've worked with a number of clients where they have named their Data Custodians. These have usually been smaller organisations, where there is only one subject matter expert for each system and that person has been named as the Data Custodian.

Another frequent question is whether IT is ever a Data Owner? Now this is an interesting questions as generally, I would say, no. They might own meta data, or performance data around the systems, but nothing more than that. However, occasionally, I have come across circumstances where IT might own some data.

One such example is maybe your Data Security or Information Security Team who may be monitoring telephone calls or internet activity. This often isn't being done for any direct business purpose, but rather to protect the business as a whole. If this data isn't being collected to meet the requirements of a business Data Owner, then it could easily be argued that IT own that data.

IT do not own the data, just because it resides on systems they support and maintain.

Data Governance Manager (and team)

Data Governance frameworks do not last very long when no one is responsible for them. So... bring in the Data Governance Manager!

This person should be responsible for evolving and embedding the framework within the organisation. This is the only new role you will need to fill when implementing Data Governance for the first time. Everyone else already exists - you just need to formalise their responsibilities regarding data.

Depending on the size of your organisation (and the investment they are willing to make in Data Governance) you may be lucky enough to have a Data Governance Team headed up by the Data Governance Manager.

And once again, it doesn't matter what you call this person, but there really needs to be someone responsible for the initial implementation and after that checking that the cogs are still turning, things are still running smoothly, policies are being reviewed regularly and processes are being updated when they need to be.

Chief Data Officer

I strongly believe that you need executive sponsorship for your data governance initiative - it is the only way to make the initiative truly effective. However, I don't believe that there must be a 'Chief Data Officer', so don't panic if your organisation doesn't have one.

If your organisation has a Chief Data Officer then the Data Governance Manager should be reporting to them and they should be the executive sponsor of your Data Governance initiative. But don't panic if you don't already have a CDO, find an executive who understands the value of data and get them to be your sponsor.

I have helped more organisations to successfully implement Data Governance that don't have CDOs than those that do!

Finally...

...at the appropriate time you will want to start gathering groups of these people together. You can find out more about Data Governance Committees, Forums and Working Groups by going to

Read:

[Here you can find out more about Data Governance Committees, Forums and Working Groups.](#)

If you are just starting out, why not download my free 'Data Governance checklist' and get on the right track to developing a framework that suits your organisation's needs and ambitions -

Download:

[My free Data Governance checklist](#)

Book a call to find out more

Book a discovery call to find out the different ways I can help you implement Data Governance successfully.

Book a discovery call

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My name is Nicola Askham and I'm known as The Data Governance Coach.

I help organisations understand and manage their data better. For almost two decades I've helped organisations reduce costs and inefficiencies and remain competitive. I have developed The Six Principles of Successful Data Governance through my many years of experience implementing data governances in organisations. I'll give you an achievable and explainable plan of action you can share with your senior stakeholders, clarity on why your organisation is doing data governance and validate your approach.

I simplify data governance through clear language and stories which show people how it applies to them and their organisation. I promote best practice in everything I do and am regularly asked to speak about data governance, including at international conferences.

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