

Building sustainable Data Governance Programs

If you've tried to sustain a New Year's resolution for more exercise or less drinking for more than the first few weeks, you know how hard it is to change to and maintain good habits over time. This same issue happens to organisations in relation to Data Governance programs. A lot of organisations find it very hard to sustain effective Data Governance over long periods of time, despite the benefits they can deliver.

The best ways to kill Data Governance programs quickly include:

- Spending all your time in writing policies, with no business value delivered
- Promising to quickly and "once and for all" resolve data quality
- Committing to delivering a perfect end-to-end cross-organisation data flow diagram in a short time frame

However, the best way to kill Data Governance programs slowly include:

- Not demonstrating continuing business value delivery
- Overly formalising the policies and procedures so as to become rigid and inflexible to change
- Using top-down authoritative structures, where only a restricted group of people are allowed to be involved
- Not managing the data culture of the organisation through training, leadership and recognition of success

With these poor examples in front of us, what are the key tips to building sustainably successful data governance programs? In truth, there is no single answer as each organisation that undertakes Data Governance has different circumstances. The following key recommendations work well for most organisations.

Key Sustainability Tip 1: Communicate Success

It is imperative for a sustainable Data Governance program that both the executive team and the other members of the organisation understand that the Data Governance function is achieving success.

There are three sub-parts to this: Firstly, you must actually succeed. Secondly, you must be able to quantify the level of success and thirdly, you must communicate this success in a way that people listen to and understand. The art of delivering successful Data Governance programs has been addressed elsewhere in previous blogs by myself and others in the community. The second part requires KPIs or other quantitative measures to be set before the commencement of each Data Governance project, and then measured afterwards. The third part requires a well thought out communications strategy, as different audiences in your organisation will need to receive the message in different channels, and at different levels of detail. Of these three steps, the communications step is the one most often forgotten or done poorly.

Key Sustainability Tip 2: Form a Broad Community

Everyone in your organisation has some role that involves data. They could be producers of data (e.g. call centre operatives recording customer orders), or consumers of data (e.g. plant managers who need to understand machine reliability and servicing requirements), or custodians of data (e.g. the Chief Financial Officer), but everyone has at least some role that integrates with the data that your organisation maintains. Every one of these people needs to be involved in your Data Governance program in some way. Data Governance programs become more sustainable when they are embedded in the lives of everyone in the organisation.

To aid in this outcome, the recommendation is to enable anyone with an interest to be a data steward. Rather than appoint a single steward by decree, ask people who are interested in data to register for Data Steward training and enable them to be successful. Sometimes, appointing a person to an unloved data subject area may be necessary, but by engaging your community and enabling them, you will build a more sustainable Data Governance function.

Similarly, don't just report results or provide data culture education to the senior executives. Aim to enable your entire organisation to mature its use of, and understanding of, the value of data.

Key Sustainability Tip 3: Focus on Value

Assess each opportunity or project based on the value that it will deliver to the organisation. Sometimes, this will mean flexing the processes and procedures and guidelines that direct Data Governance activities, but if it is to the overall benefit of the organisation, that's ok. Try to avoid process changes that will limit future flexibility or compromise long term success, but if it is a manageable exception and delivers strong business value, it's worth doing.

Key Sustainability Tip 4: Small Incremental Successes

This is becoming the default for most organisations, but there are still some programs out there that try to build the best governance framework before they start to deliver actual value. Focusing at least initially on small incremental successes on key strategic initiatives is far more likely to build a sustainable data governance program for your organisation.

Using these tips, and others that may be required in your specific organisation, you can build a sustainable Data Governance function that delivers value both in the short term and continues to deliver successes in the long term.

If your business needs help to build a sustainable Data Governance program, please contact a Fujitsu Data & AI specialist now.

Contact

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