

Good Data Governance

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“If your organisation has not been taking data governance seriously, it had better start – and soon.¹

“Data Governance is a system of decision rights and accountabilities for information-related processes, executed according to agreed-upon models which describe who can take what actions with what information, and when, under what circumstances, using what methods.²

This is a series of advice notes prepared by UKEOF's Data Advisory Group.

UKEOF works to improve coordination of the observational evidence needed to understand and manage the changing natural environment. It is a partnership of public sector organisations with an interest in using and providing evidence from environmental observations. Contact us at office@ukeof.org.uk.

¹ David Reed. The Data Governance Forum <http://datagovernor.co.uk/styled-5/> (accessed 10 January 2014).

² The Data Governance Institute, LLC. http://datagovernance.com/adg_data_governance_definition.htm (accessed 10 January 2014).

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Why Good Data Governance is Important?

Data is the lifeblood of any business and is a valued resource and an asset. Good data governance means that all data has a designated owner (usually someone senior in the organisation) to ensure it is managed and looked after as a financial asset. Good data governance can drive efficiencies and enhance public services, whilst at the same time reducing waste and improving value for money.

Implementing Data Governance

This section provides an outline of the key components of good data governance of data and information within an organisation.

a) Identify an owner

All data must have a senior owner who looks after it, normally the Head of Department who is the corporate/business lead. They are ultimately accountable for the safe and proper management of the organisations data assets. It is important that this role is not in the IT department. The IT department has a separate business role and they are not the ones who create and manage an organisations' data (although they will have their own data). The ownership of data is always best kept closest to those who create and manage it i.e. those who care about the data. An organisation may have a number of data owners for each aspect of their business, for example finance data, Human Resources data. The number of data owners will depend on the size and diversity of the organisation.

The data owners are at the right level to set the strategic direction for the use of the data, manage risks arising from poor data quality, prioritise resolution of issues and allocate staff and funding

b) Accountability – identify who owns and looks after all assets

All data, maps, models, IT Systems and data products need an owner. Without this level of ownership, the data will be looked after at a grass roots level. This will result in inefficiencies, inconsistency and not escalating risks. Data owners must be clear on what they own and what their accountabilities and responsibilities are.

c) What should we consider as part of data governance?

Each data owner should consider the following as part of their governance.

- Understand for what IT, data and models they are responsible
- Protocols for data quality, version control and file naming
- Security protocols for system access and secure management of confidential / personal data
- Management of the backing up of systems and data
- Who else uses their data and what data is published
- Asset management tracking
- Metadata standard and creation of discovery metadata
- Data IPR and Licensing
- Understanding the common data standards used in the business
- Be aware of the international standards, for example, ISO 19115-1 and INSPIRE.
- Database software and design

The owner should review the current governance performance for their area of responsibility and put plans in place to address any issues and manage any risks.

Good Data and Information Management through Governance

In summary, we achieve good data governance through:

- Having the right seniority of ownership within an organisation;
- Understanding what they are accountable for; and
- Understanding where their risks and issues are.

This ensures that data is looked after as an asset, risks are understood and mitigated, while maximising efficiencies.

Case Study: How the Environment Agency assign governance roles

