THE DATA
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The Right Stuff

The increasing challenge of recruiting high quality data governance management professionals

A Data Governance Forum (DGF) Paper, 2017
Author - Mr Tony Hodgson

The DGF Papers

This paper is one of a series published under the auspices of the Data Governance Forum (DGF). As a completely independent, not-for-profit organisation, dedicated to fostering best practice in data governance, we regard it as important that our practitioner members publish their expert insights and reflections.

So our thanks go to Mr Tony Hodgson for this paper and further insights which he will be contributing to the Forum.

The views and arguments expressed in this paper are designed to raise debate and encourage discussion. Anyone wishing to add to the debate is most welcome to join our LinkedIn Group at https://www.linkedin.com/groups/8370331, or contact me directly at paul@datagovernanceforum.com.

Other DGF members wishing to suggest a paper for publication are encouraged to do so by contacting me direct. The more high quality outputs available to the data governance community, the better our practice will become.

Paul Lindsell
Co-Founder, The Data Governance Forum

To deliver good data governance and management, you need experienced, effective and empowered people.

Scoping the Challenge

Data Governance and Management is increasingly being recognised as an essential business capability. Governing, managing and protecting customer data especially is increasingly in the spotlight, as senior management recognise how essential it is to good customer relationships and profitable business results. This will increasingly be the case as business moves away from face-to-face, and becomes more of a blend of remote online channels and more high value in-person contact. Effective definition and management of key data assets is important to achievement of key business objectives. It is also essential for maintaining trust and confidence between an organisation and its customers or stakeholders.

All this is being brought into sharp focus by new Europe-wide data protection rules, which will be effective from May 2018, and are likely to be left in place post-Brexit. These new rules (rightly) introduce demanding standards and massive fines for non-compliant organisations. Most major organisations in the UK recognised the business value of good data governance and management years ago, and have been independently working on improving their data governance standards - in some cases since 2005. The new data protection rules have simply sharpened this focus even further.

However, to deliver good data governance and management, you need experienced, effective and empowered people. Recruitment of the right individuals for these key data governance and management roles is increasingly difficult as demand increases. In fact, a toxic combination is emerging, pairing the increasing scarcity of suitably skilled and experienced people, with the immaturity of understanding of Data Governance and Management within organisations and external recruiters.

It is critically important that organisations get this recruitment process right. If an incapable or inexperienced person is put in charge of such a strategically important issue as data governance, the consequences – commercial, reputational, regulatory – can be cataclysmic. With the increased legal exposures associated with substandard data governance, this is not an area that any organisation – private or public – can afford to get wrong.

How, then, can organisations approach the challenge of recruiting the best people for data governance and management, while avoiding these pitfalls. This short paper presents a number of key considerations that can help the process to be successful.

1. What will be included in the Data Governance and Management function?

At a simplistic level, the role can be considered an extension of Data Protection - providing some controls to support compliance, or potentially combined with (or assumed to be covered by) Information Security. Data governance and management overlaps with, and sometime includes, these disciplines. But the role is, in fact, much more diverse. Some define it as Data Quality definition and management. I would say that complete Data Governance and Management encapsulates all aspects of both structured and unstructured data including capture, sourcing, use, sharing, improvement, derivation, exploitation, archiving and deletion of data whatever the source or final usage. It is also an essential basis for effective business intelligence, insight and data science. It is important to consider the breadth and complexity of application, at a Group, Organisation or Data Domain level and the availability, maturity and effectiveness of related functions such as: Data Protection, Information Security, audit, legal, regulatory and risk management.

2. How mature is the Data Governance and Management capability within the organisation?

There are a number of phases in the development of Data Governance and Management capability: the initial strategy and plan based on achieving key business outcomes and value; the definition of the organisational structure, key artefacts, controls such as policy and process, data and information structure and meaning; implementation including education and business as usual; there is also potentially the re-engineering of existing capability. Data Governance is complex business change which if successful will result in a revised data culture within the organisation which becomes embedded, resulting in data being treated and used as a key asset. Skills and experience requirements differ widely during the data governance and management lifecycle.

> *[Data Governance] is also an essential basis for effective business intelligence, insight and data science.*

3. How complex is the stakeholder community and the underlying tensions within the organisation?

What are the business outcomes, timescales and scope of initiatives and how do these impact the demands on the data? The greater the rate, complexity and importance of change the greater the need for Data Governance and Management - but also the greater the demands on the function and resource. Specific knowledge and experience of data governance and management is required but also the ability to influence line of business colleagues and peer departments effectively. Colleagues will be highly motivated if they clearly understand how high data governance standards will benefit the organisation, their department, and their own leadership achievements. Demonstrating those benefits requires well-developed consultative skills.

> *Permanent staff are flexible and build corporate memory, but they need management, peer alignment and career progression.*

4. What type and source of resource is required?

There are a number of alternatives sources when seeking the good people: Consultants can be mobilised quickly, should have the correct skill and experience level and can be focused on specific deliverables to defined timescales. They are ideal for initial strategy, definition and implementation but are expensive and senior experienced resource is usually stretched across a number of clients.

Contractors, can be mobilised quickly, if available, but experienced skilled individuals are scarce. It is difficult to find the correct skills and experience, but often worth the effort as contractors can be more flexibly deployed. They can be applied to all phases but should be an interim solution for business-as-usual while permanent resources are secured. They may need some management depending on seniority, background and capability. They can be **very** cost-effective in the short to medium term.

Permanent resource takes longer to mobilise - potentially 6 months plus. Permanent staff are flexible and build corporate memory, but they need management, peer alignment and career progression. They are the most cost-effective for ongoing business-as-usual but recruiting for early phases will require senior, more expensive resource that may become dissatisfied over time with ongoing management and career opportunity.

5. Can a clear definition of the role be defined?

Key considerations include the seniority and perceived importance of the role, alignment with stakeholders and peers, clarity of reporting lines, clear definition of the key Data Governance and Management outcomes expected. Precise understanding and definition of the accountability, deliverables, performance indicators, key skills and experience are essential to allow appropriate briefing of internal and external recruitment bodies. The market is still immature in understanding what Data Governance and Management is, what skills and experience are required at each stage of the lifecycle. There are no consistent established job titles or roles that can be used as a benchmark. If the specific needs of the role cannot be defined, then how can the right candidate be identified and interviewed? This market immaturity also makes it difficult to effectively identify the appropriate remuneration level. Remuneration rate comparisons will require clarity of role, experience and skills.

> *We are looking for a hybrid individual who has developed from either a business or technical background but has managed to bridge the gap.*

6. What skills and experience should be included?

It is important that data governance and management roles are not considered to be purely technical. Whilst clear understanding of the technical data issues is essential, business skills and understanding are equally important. The role of data governance and management is to allow effective communication between the technologists who manage and maintain the data and the business owners and users who maximise its business value. We are looking for a hybrid individual who has developed from either a business or technical background but has managed to bridge the gap. We are therefore likely to be looking for someone with broad business knowledge, who has change-management experience, possibly a consultant. They may have worked on technical data projects either as a data specialist or as a business SME, probably delivering a new business application or information exploitation capability, such as a data warehouse and business intelligence solution, possibly even a combined structured and unstructured data project. Data Protection specialists or data quality managers are other potential qualifications, but such folk will need a breadth of business and technical knowledge beyond these specific areas.

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Summary

We don't want to give the impression that senior data governance recruitment is impossible. It is not. But neither is it easy. And because the role is both important and new, attracting and recruiting the right people is challenging.

For the recruitment process to be successful, experienced people with a real track record in data governance must be involved in the process – at least as advisors. Only they can filter out the main-chancers from the capable professionals. Remember – this world is expanding fast, especially as new Europe wide data protection rules come into force with strict requirements and massive potential fines for non-compliance. Even trusted headhunters should be encouraged to involve the support an expert consultant with real experience in the field. So many people are now putting themselves forward for these roles that it is a tricky job to sort the sheep from the goats.

In short, the key to successful recruitment of data governance and management resources is to: understand the scope of data governance to be implemented; the organisations data governance maturity; the complexity of the organisation; and the current data governance and management implementation. The skills and experience required must be clearly defined before commencing the process; and all sources of resource be considered since the optimum solutions is likely to be a blend of consultants, interim contractors and permanent staff which morphs over time as needs change.

About the Author

Tony Hodgson is an independent Enterprise Information Management and Governance consultant at Enigmacon Solutions. He has almost 40 years experience working as an embedded professional in large corporations. For the last 15 years, his focus has been on Information and Data Governance and Enterprise Information Management.