



DATA GOVERNANCE IS VALUABLE: MOVING TO AN OFFENSIVE STRATEGY

Data governance defines how data should be gathered and used within an organization. That sounds boring and tedious, but data governance is critical in today's data-driven world. It is time to stop viewing data governance as a necessary evil that helps combat the equally evil and overused threats of "drowning in data," security breaches, and compliance. Instead, it is time to rethink why it's imperative for data governance to be seen as a critical catalyst of business growth.

To be sure, this is a marketing and change management challenge as much as a data challenge. Governance can barely be mentioned without brains quickly disconnecting. But, by better understanding how data governance works and how it is inextricably linked to business success, organizations can build momentum behind data governance efforts.

Data Governance Success Is Business Success

Every organization knows that data drives success. The proliferation of data scientists, with job openings [expected to grow by 36 percent](#) in the next decade, and rise of chief data officers (CDOs), a role invented in 2002 and now filled at 65 percent of large organizations, proves the perceived value of data. It's also why global spending on advanced analytics is expected to "gain strength over the next five years," [according to IDC](#).

But, when an organization then fails to achieve success, few tend to look back at data practices as the culprit. The bad decisions, misused datasets, and misunderstood insights that contributed to failure are overlooked while earnings estimates are missed, stock prices dive, and managers and leaders are reshuffled or forced to move on. Maybe they were just making good decisions based on bad data?

Yes, [data governance](#) contributes to organizational success or failure. If teams have higher quality data, more accurate data, and better visibility into which data to use, how to use it, and who knows it best, better decisions will be made. Better decisions enable success by driving value and mitigating risk. The processes and mechanisms by which data is used — data governance — is then foundational to business success, whether that comes in the form of increasing efficiency, accelerating productivity, reducing costs, boosting profitability, or achieving any other business objective.

Data governance is a key enabler for the data-driven organization. Data governance allows organizations to unleash the value of their data while enabling risk management.

- Forrester, Data Governance Solutions Landscape Report: Q4 2022

Disappointingly, barely more than one-third (36 percent) of data leaders view data governance as a key priority to improving success through business intelligence (BI) and analytics, according to [a study by TDWI](#). Think about the consequences if only one-third of CFOs saw finance and accounting practices as critical to business success!

Data governance is similar in that it guides organizations in finding, understanding, and protecting data so that the data can be used for better and consistent analysis, more easily defined goals, consistent compliance, improved data management, more standardized systems, improved data quality, and so much more.

As these use cases indicate, data is both an asset and a liability. Yet historically, data governance has existed to manage data as liability alone in a defensive posture. But that's changing. Today, wise data leaders are wielding data governance to serve both offensive and defensive purposes. This is a human challenge, which lies in shifting a groups' view of data governance as a purely defensive posture (security, control, access) to a momentum-based offensive posture (value, benefits, growth). But make no mistake: you can have it both ways.

What Is Data Governance?

Data governance defines how data should be gathered and used within an organization. It address core questions, such as:

- How does the business define data?
- Where does it live?
- How accurate must the data be for use?
- Who can use it?
- How can they use it?

To learn more, read [What is Data Governance and Why is it Important?](#)

Making Data Governance Offensive

It could be argued that many leaders already consider data governance offensive. It's a frequently avoided topic that conjures up fears of hours-long working sessions and sleep-inducing planning meetings that bring career growth to a grinding halt.

But, jokes aside, shifting from a traditionally defensive function into a blended focus that also embraces data offense... is as simple as forcing people to rethink the connection between data governance and organizational success. Defensive data governance is akin to keeping the lights on: it's not exciting but it's needed to enforce security, pass compliance audits, and mitigate the risks of running afoul of regulations. Offensive data governance, by contrast, supports competitive initiatives that can aggressively grow the business.

"Offensive data strategies focus on getting value out of data to build better products, improve your competitive position, and improve profitability," says [Bob Seiner](#), president and principal at KIK Consulting. "Defensive strategies focus more on risk mitigation, data security, and regulatory compliance."

Defensive vs. Offensive Data Governance

Defensive data strategy focuses on minimizing risk. Offensive data strategy supports business objectives. Here's how they differ:

Defense!

Puts the data governance focus on:

- Regulatory compliance mandates like data privacy and financial reporting.
- Detecting and mitigating risk of fraud and theft.
- Identifying, standardizing, and governing authoritative data sources.

Offense!

Aims data governance at:

- Gaining insight about customer needs.
- Integrating customer and market data for planning future business goals.
- Supporting the sales and marketing pipelines.
- Operational efficiency and process improvement.

To learn more, read [Building a Data Governance Strategy in 7 Steps](#).

Of course, data governance will always have some focus on risk, security, and compliance. But that's simply table stakes in today's world. And it fails to take into account the true value data governance efforts can bring to the rest of the business.

Rethinking the Power of Governance

Do you remember, before the iMacs and iPhones, when design teams were driven by committees of engineers and accountants? Now, the design teams are in the driver's seat. That's the type of fundamental change needed to move data governance from a defensive to offensive posture. But moving data governance to the offensive requires a few tactics to challenge conventional thinking and force stakeholders across the organization to rethink the power, role, and purview of data governance.

For example, forward-thinking organizations are starting to merge domains and categories to include everything from the mechanisms of data fabrics and meshes and clouds to the responsibilities of DataOps. This emergent category, termed Data Intelligence and Governance (DI&G), combines data *visibility* with data *control*. This wider perspective enlightens data users by consolidating the offensive information around what data is available and where the data comes from, while also enabling defensive guardrails to be placed easily around the data for control and governance.

In this sense, the focus of governance changes from locking the data away to enforcing accountability while guiding people toward trusted data and the appropriate, compliant behaviors for using it.

What Data Governance Is NOT

Many people have preconceived notions (and bad experiences) informing their ideas about what governance is or should be. Kick off your initiative by putting those bad memories to rest.

Data governance is NOT:

- A data jail
- A punishment mechanism
- A reason to fear data
- A thing we do just for compliance audits

Data governance is:

- A business enabler
- A way to increase productivity
- A path to trusted data (and better business relationships)
- A painkiller for analysts, data engineers, and all data users

The Critical Role of Metadata

To take advantage of data to its fullest potential, organizations need to know details about the data. That comes through [metadata, which helps describe, classify, and provide context on data](#) so the related data can be easily found, cataloged, and put to work. This context helps teams answer the five W's of data: who, what, when, where, and why. Metadata-driven technology can then serve at the center of data offense and data defense. But, metadata also needs to be easily accessible, constantly updated, and instantly sharable to drive value.

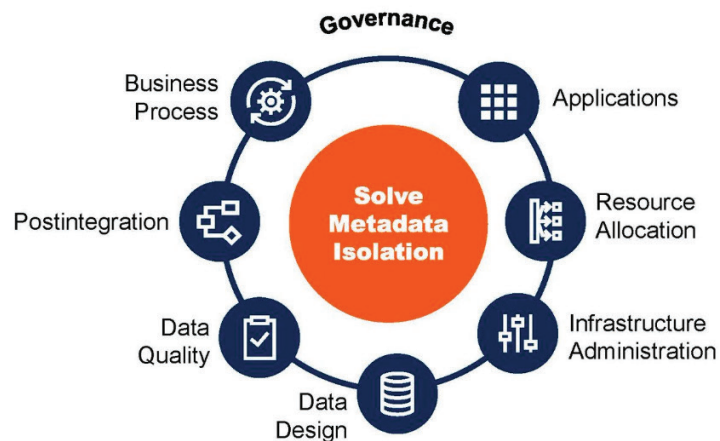
Want to Know How Data Is Used? Study the Metadata!

“Business doesn’t know what it wants or needs!”

- False! Business tells us every day through usage metadata!

Study your metadata!

- Metadata sharing solves isolation.
- Metadata analysis shows demand.
- Metadata is the roadmap.



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Gartner

An organization that is pioneering in its approach to offensive data governance is [Crocs](#), a world leader in innovative casual footwear. Improving its speed-to-insight is a critical part of the governance team’s job at Crocs, which relies on a [data catalog](#) to capture, manage, and elevate metadata to achieve broader business benefits such as:

- **Aligning data definitions** with consistent terminology and a central resource for assessing and understanding KPIs across the business units to ensure quality control, global alignment, and comprehension.

- **Growing adoption of Microsoft Power BI** by enabling users to better understand the context and origin of the data they analyze.
- **Accelerating change management** from three months to less than a week through data lineage insights that allow teams to trace data to its original source and owner.
- **Supporting cloud migration** to the Snowflake cloud data warehouse by identifying and cataloging data that can be deleted due to lack of use.

For data to be valuable, organizations need metadata to describe, understand, and catalog it. For metadata to be valuable, it has to be accessible. As data governance grows in importance, organizations need a platform that leverages metadata, makes data accessible, and is intuitive for users across the organization.

Types of Metadata

Metadata helps users find the data they need, see an inventory of available data, and evaluate the data's fitness for intended uses.

Metadata includes things like:

- Descriptive information such as title, purpose, creation date, and creator
- Structural information such as how data is formatted, with information on tables, pages, types, and relationships
- Administrative information such as access permissions, locations, file size, and ownership information
- Reference information such as information on quality, sources, processes used, schemas, and formulas

To learn more, read [Top 5 Best Practices for Metadata Management](#).

Rallying Support for a Data Governance Offensive

Putting data governance on the offensive is a marketing and change management challenge as much as a data challenge, as mentioned above. Communication is key, but so is a well thought-out and articulated plan.

The place to begin is where all organizational projects begin: with the business justification. By tying data governance from the start to business results, stakeholders can be focused on the expected outcome of success rather than the governance mechanism required to get there.

[Greg Swygart, VP, enterprise data office, Fifth Third Bank](#), says, “We realized that centralized, traditional data governance had somewhat of a bad brand.” To shift perception, his team rebranded key data governance terms.

 Why Words Matter

Traditional Data Governance	Data Management
Centralized Governance	Federated Data Management
Subject Matter Experts	Data Management Mavens
Governance Controls	Data Handling Best Practices
Data Stewards	Data Stewardship Meetings
Catalog	Curation
Assign	Recognize

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Making small changes to the words you use in governance initiatives can have a big impact on how people respond. [Source](#).

Under Swygart’s leadership, “data governance” became “data management” while “subject matter experts” became “data management mavens.” People are no longer *assigned* governance tasks — they’re *recognized* for critical data management work. These small changes can shift the conversation in a big way and encourage people to embrace the change.

Financial justifications for data governance should also connect tightly with key organizational goals. For example, an objective to accelerate time-to-market can be supported with data analyst productivity increases that deliver more accurate insights to decision makers in less time. Or, a goal of improving business agility can be achieved by improving the accuracy and timeliness of business KPI dashboards across the organization.

Every organization is different, too, so understanding the best approach depends on what works best. A human-centered approach focuses on building a data culture. A technology-forward approach puts the technological foundation in place first to make data governance an integral part of the data infrastructure. With this foundation set up, leaders can then turn to driving a human approach and emphasizing data culture.

Taking the Human Angle

[Data culture](#) is a people-first organizational attitude that promotes data-driven decision making. Evidence and reason are valued above all else. Organizations with a data culture, combined with an offensive data governance strategy, win out against slower-moving consensus cultures and myopic hierarchical cultures. According to Forrester Research, organizations with an insights-driven culture are nearly three-times more likely to have double-digit growth.

So how do you integrate data governance into a data culture? Look to success stories, examples, and connecting real people to real data-driven results. Offense-focused governance replaces rules and limitations with guidelines and solutions, so that people quickly begin to shift their own perspectives, too.

“The term governance smacks of edicts handed down from above and dusty documents that no one reads,” says [Sebastian Kaus, Data Governance Lead at Vattenfall](#). “But a thriving data culture must be grown from the bottom up. And that starts with listening to people.”

Companies with a strong data culture — one where people feel confident in their ability to find, use, and trust data — are more likely to meet or exceed their revenue targets. Here are some tips in crafting a people-first approach to offensive data governance:

- **Executive buy-in is critical.** There needs to be a clear understanding of how data drives revenue, even with the executives.
- **Technology exists to support people.** Technology won't create a data culture.
- **Invest in training.** Remember that not everyone is a data scientist.
- **Start small.** Focus on a single area of the business and then broadcast that success to create momentum.
- **Create "data evangelists."** Let them spread the word to other data scientists and analysts throughout the organization.
- **Build a community.** Find, engage with, and celebrate those who are super passionate about data and data culture.

To learn more about building a data culture, read [Accelerating Your Data Culture Journey: Customer Best Practices in Data Governance](#).

Putting Technology Forward

Using technology to reign in processes, provide easy access to information, and guide the business to the best data helps create a foundation for an offensive data governance strategy. But it's important to shift the role of technology from command and control to enablement, access, and speed. Data governance can then facilitate processes that help drive sales, gather competitive intelligence, launch new products, and more

Before governance can take the offensive, however, a technology-forward data governance foundation must be implemented. This requires solutions which can locate and track data and usage, capture and pull value from the accompanying metadata, and empower teams to find the information they need. Here are some tips for deploying a technology-forward approach to offensive data governance:

- **Identify and prioritize existing data** by creating an inventory of data, classifying it, and organizing it.
- **Choose a metadata storage solution** to collect metadata from across platforms and that provides easy, centralized visibility.

- **Prepare and transform the metadata** to ensure consistent formatting and terminology, and use templates to ease the transformation.
- **Build a data governance model** that encourages innovation and takes a proactive approach to achieving data governance goals.
- **Establish a process to democratize data** with policies that are embedded into people's normal activities, workflows, and tools.
- **Identify potential risks** based on relevant laws, compliance requirements, and security threats.
- **Constantly adapt the data governance framework** to respond to issues and challenges as they emerge.

To learn more about building a technology-forward data governance foundation, read [Building a Data Governance Strategy in 7 Steps](#).

Data Governance Supports Data Quality

By following these steps, data leaders can build data quality processes into their governance framework. This requires a metadata storage solution, also called a data catalog or data intelligence platform. This platform can effectively capture the wisdom of crowds to support organizational data literacy. It can also propagate data quality warnings to downstream users affected by upstream changes.

Data quality is too vast a challenge to tackle in a silo. Thus, data management use cases are converging — driven by platforms that support data quality, lineage, security, and governance workflows and connect to a broad range of data source connections. These platforms automate learning systems with AI and ML to describe data and support smarter human collaboration.

In this way, data quality and data governance are closely linked. Data governance helps users to correctly (and compliantly) leverage quality data to deliver value to their organizations. Data quality is a critical aspect of governance, as it supports superior analysis, consistent regulatory compliance, and overall improved data management.

The Best Offense is a Data Catalog

Data governance is traditionally defensive. But emphasizing risk mitigation and compliance *alone* can relegate governance to a back-office support role. Business leaders may dismiss a strictly defensive governance posture as a necessary evil that adds friction to organizational momentum and blocks progress. At its worst, defensive governance relies on IT and ever-expansive policies to solve governance challenges with roadblocks over accelerators. When data policies are developed in silos, those policies neglect the potential business impact and the business looks for workarounds.

Let's be clear: Many governance functions dismissed as pure defense actually support a smarter offense. Take access controls as an example. This is a critical pillar of data security and governance because it controls who can access what information. Setting correct access enables the right people to get the most out of the data compliantly. Getting this right the first time prevents people from accessing data they shouldn't, such as PII (and protects businesses from hefty regulatory fines). It also delivers the right amount of information to people according to their role. A business leader doesn't *need* to know the code, sensitive, private data, or SQL queries behind a dataset. And why would they? Concealing certain elements of that data with access controls isn't just a compliance mandate — it's an efficiency booster.

This example illustrates a key theme: Data governance has expanded to support a wide range of use cases, including collaboration, metadata management, data quality, data sharing — the list goes on. That means that modern data leaders don't have to choose between offense and defense — they can do both.

Blending data governance to also embrace offensive tactics can deliver quality, curated data to the business. A blended strategy puts community building and business experts at the forefront so they can demonstrate how to use data as a competitive asset. These data evangelists focus on improving the organization's effectiveness, optimizing operations, and driving business outcomes — all by using data intelligently.

An offensive-and-defensive data governance strategy requires a platform for data consumers to find, understand, and use data appropriately. A [data catalog](#) is that broker between the data consumer and the data producers, ensuring the right data is easily accessible and quickly understood. Popular

data catalog examples include Amazon, LinkedIn, Yelp, and Google, where consumer-driven data — reviews, content, clicks, etc. — create crowdsourced tribal knowledge that those sites then make easily accessible to raise the collective IQ of their audiences.

Imagine if finding data for a critical work project was as easy as searching for it on Amazon. Results would appear, star ratings and reviews could be evaluated, questions could be asked, and it would be much easier to find the best data for the task at hand. That's an enterprise data catalog.

However, for a catalog to be successful, it must connect to everything and be used by everyone — it needs a data culture. Data cultures help organizations make better decisions, faster, which helps teams “[enjoy increased revenue, improved customer service, best-in-class operating efficiencies, and improved profitability](#).” A data culture also helps organizations attract and retain the best employees, increase employee satisfaction, and increase buy-in on company plans.

To get started, visit alation.com to learn more about building a data culture and putting data governance on the offensive.