Data Stewardship

Idea In Short

Data Stewardship is the management and oversight of an organization's data assets to help provide business users with high-quality data that is easily accessible in a consistent manner.

Data Stewardship represents the allocation of specific roles and responsibilities within and organisation to ensure the quality and fitness for purpose of the organization's data assets, including the metadata for those data assets.

Data Stewards are individuals with responsibility for Data Stewardship. Some organizations employ Data Stewards with formal titles and designations, while in others, some individuals assume this role in addition to their regular roles. Either way, the role is indispensable for Data Governance; Data Stewards are the Data Ambassadors that connect the data producers and consumers, with the ultimate goal of enabling data consumers [users] with trusted data. While Data Governance establishes the high-level policies for Data Management, Data Steward implement and enforce those processes, policies and guidelines to organization's entire data assets achieve corporate policy and/or regulatory compliance obligations and deliver organizational objectives that depend on data.

Data Management - 3Ps

According to David Plotkin, the 3Ps of effective data management are:

- **Policies:** are established at the enterprise level and refer to the overall strategy of what needs to be done. Policies cover all aspects of an organisation
- **Process:** Policies are then crystallised into processes aimed at identifying higher level objectives that can be set and worked towards
- **Procedures:** The organizational objectives are met through creation and implementation of procedures, which represent the specific aspects of data

management at the operational level

Data Stewardship is concerned only with the Procedures aspect of the 3Ps of Data Management. They are not responsible for identifying and writing the higher level policies, but for interpreting and implementing it on a day-to-day level. At this level, the Stewards will have close technical familiarity with the systems that are being used and be able to pass recommendations up to a Data Governance Board or executive committee who will tie the specifics into the broader picture.

Objective

The overarching objective of a Data Steward is the quality and security of the data assets, datasets, data records and data elements. This includes:

- Documenting metainformation for data, such as data definitions and meta data
- Specifying rules, policies and processes for Data Governance
- Oversee implementation, data architecture and modeling
- Identifying data owners and custodians, prescribing their responsibilities
- Support project teams with their data requirements
- Oversee data management rules documentation

Types of Data Stewards

There are 4 types (or dimensions of responsibility) of Data Stewards typically found among organizations:

1. **Data Object Data Steward:** responsible for managing reference data and attributes of one business data entity
2. **Business Data Steward:** responsible for managing critical data, both reference and transactional, created or used by one business function
3. **Process Data Steward:** responsible for managing data across one business process
4. **System Data Steward:** responsible for managing data for at least one IT system

Responsibilities

Data Stewards ensure that each assigned data asset:

- Has clear and unambiguous definition
- Does not conflict with other data elements in the metadata registry
- Is under active use
- Remove unused data elements
- Is used consistently in among data processing systems
- Has adequate documentation on appropriate usage and notes
- Is fit for purpose [Utility]i.e., Data Fitness
- Documents the origin and sources of authority on each metadata element
- Is protected against unauthorised access or change
- Propose improvements to business process that create and / or consume data

Importance

Without trusted data, organizations end up with data silos across multiple databases, platforms, and even individual spreadsheets. When users don't trust their organizational data, they won't use it to make business decisions or to drive operations. Worst, incorrect data can set the organization in the wrong strategic direction with disastrous business results. Data Stewards prevent these scenarios from occuring.

By establishing consistent data definitions, maintaining business and technical rules, and monitoring and auditing the reliability of the data, they ensure high levels of data quality, integrity, availability, trustworthiness, and privacy protection.

With visibility into underlying business context and Data Lineage - the lifecycle of data from where it originates, what happens to it, what is done to it [transformations], and where it moves over time, Data Stewards can trace the root cause of issues and remediate any data errors.

Because Data Stewardship is so important, Data Stewards occupy positions of trust. As champions for information governance within their organizations, they evangelize various data initiatives, deliver education, training, and mentorship to the workforce.

Summary

Data Stewardship focuses on making organizational data accessible, consistent, usable, and secure. Data Stewardship is required for data implementation and data management to succeed. A Data Steward is responsible for carrying out data usage and security policies as determined through enterprise data governance initiatives, acting as a liaison between the IT department and the business side of an organization.