

# SEEKING WOOD, FINDING TREES

DATA GOVERNANCE IS MORE THAN THE MANAGEMENT OF DATA AND FRAMEWORKS, IT ALSO INCLUDES ACCOUNTABILITY AND COMPLIANCE.

BY TAM SIN OXFORD | PHOTO: SUPPLIED

According to The Data Governance Institute, data governance can be defined as the 'exercise of decision-making and authority for data-related matters' and it includes a 'system of rights and accountabilities for information-related processes'. In short, it's everything the organisation needs to consider when it comes to its data assets.

This tricky topic encompasses a broad swathe of duties, responsibilities, legalities and compliance commitments, and it's joined by confusion around role responsibility, employee awareness and shifting compliance landscapes. Staying on top of data governance is a hefty task and nobody seems to know exactly who's responsible for it. Does it lie with the CIO, traditionally the holder of the IT kitchen sink, or is it the realm of the CEO? Or someone else?

## NO SIMPLE ANSWER

For Riaan van Boom, MD, MWR Infosecurity South Africa, the data governance chalice should be grasped by those at the very top. "In our experience, the responsibility of data governance from a security perspective should lie with the CEO and the board of an organisation. They're responsible for the appropriate dissemination of what comprises good data governance throughout the business," he says.

It's a fair point, and one that Rynier van der Walk, CEO, Ansys Limited, agrees with. "Responsibility should lie with the board of

directors through the Audit and Risk committee under management by the group IT manager."

Meanwhile, Tania Morgan Weyer, MD, Promeal, tips the responsibility hat towards the CIO. As does Naven Naidoo, CEO, Planet Fitness. However, others are not convinced that either the CIO or the CEO should be the one in charge.

"King III recommended that this should be the CFO's responsibility," says Max Makgoale, CEO, Vuma Telematix. "That said, the rest of the C-Suite should carry equal responsibility as data is generated, stored and controlled by all divisions today. This responsibility is not clearly defined in most businesses and as data is becoming a tradable commodity as well as a competitive advantage or risk, more thought has to be given to its governance."

Simon Carpenter, CIO, SAP Africa, concurs: "We've long said that 'time is money'. Today it's more compelling to say 'data is money'. So pressing and important is the issue of data management, that some organisations, in addition to a CIO, are appointing a chief data officer (CDO) to ensure not just compliance, but also to ensure data can be monetised and used more effectively."

To achieve such a lofty goal, the business has to look at data governance holistically, making the role of data governor one that's held by everyone in the organisation. It should be defined and upheld by the board and the C-Suite and then clearly filtered down to every single one of the company's employees.

## COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY

"I don't believe that data governance is any single person's responsibility at all – it is an organisation-wide philosophy," says Neil Robinson, CEO, Relate Bracelets. "There should also be a focus on the development of a data governance council, which is made up of shareholders, directors and remuneration committees and makes sure the organisation's data governance strategy is carried out properly and checked regularly."

A council that puts data governance at its heart is a viable alternative to simply dumping it onto one person's lap and running away. It allows for representation across all essential departments and areas of the business and is far more likely to



Simon Carpenter,  
SAP Africa

develop policy that is relevant to each department or business unit.

CEO of the South African Institute for Business Accountants, Nicolaas van Wyk, points out: "It's challenging to define data and the set roles of each committee or individual; data governance is a team effort. It's discussed, analysed, and applied to the different categories for it to put the company to an advantage, and be positively functional. More data doesn't necessarily mean it's better and more useful to the company."

## DIFFERENCE OF OPINION

The roles are clearly blurred – not everyone is convinced as to which role belongs to whom, or why – so there's a need to ensure every person in the organisation knows what data governance means and how it affects them. Through judicious use of a data governance council, clear policy and company-wide awareness, the business can engage with employees around the issues that surround data governance.

"It has to become an inbred culture from person A to person B, not just the CEO or CIO," says Robinson. "Everyone in the company has to know what data governance is and understand what it means in terms of transparency, security and compliance."

This is, it seems, one area where most agree. The creation of processes, procedures, role responsibilities and supporting systems are vital in eliminating role confusion or lack of employee awareness.

"Data management is a collaborative engagement that needs to be taken seriously

by all parties," says Jacques du Toit, CEO of Vox. "A strong security ethos needs to be instilled across the organisation, coupled with a clear understanding of the processes, and the steps required to uphold them. It's vital that all staff members understand why it's important to drive these processes and behaviours."

It seems that perhaps the laying of responsibility for data governance is as complex as the topic itself. What is clear, however, is that it has to be embedded into the company culture, it must have clearly defined parameters and a leader or a team must be given ultimate responsibility over its development and implementation. ■

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