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The Six Vital Characteristics of a Successful Data Governance Manager

Foreword

Being a strong
communicator is
a huge asset

Since 2003 I have been helping organisations implement Data Governance. One of the interesting things that has come out of that experience is what most people think are the managerial attributes needed to implement data governance. I can tell you the opinions and the reality vary greatly. That's because while data governance gives the impression of being a technical or analytical subject, actually the most successful Data Governance programmes are led and supported by individuals with well developed soft skills.

Passion, enthusiasm and the ability to motivate others towards achievement of a goal, whether in Data Governance or any major project, will stack the odds of success in your favour. While Data Governance may seem a strange thing to be passionate about consider this:

**If you're not buying it, they're not buying it!
And that means bad news for everyone.**

Being a strong communicator is also a huge asset. You will need to convince people on a large scale, and influence them individually when proposing new approaches to governing their data. As with any change there will be resistance and having the soft skills to deal with resistance positively definitely works in your favour.

If you feel that communication skills are not your strong suit, don't worry - they can be learned through training, coaching and of course, practice either before or during the project itself. We'll be looking at this and other behaviours like patience later on.

The Birth of this Book

You may be
wondering who I am
and why I wrote the
original blog posts
in the first place

This book actually started life as a series of blog posts. As I continued to coach and train individuals and organisations in Data Governance, it became clear how useful it would be for my clients if I invested a bit of time adding detail to the original blogs and collating them as a book for easy reference.

You may be wondering about now, who I am and why I wrote the original blog posts in the first place.

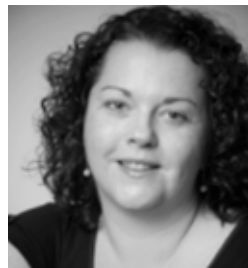
My name is Nicola Askham and I'm known as The Data Governance Coach. I am an independent data management consultant with experience coaching both regulatory and non-regulatory organisations to design and implement full Data Governance frameworks. My coaching approach is unique within the Data Governance field as it enables organisations to self-manage the process beyond initial implementation.

I regularly run workshops, including Solvency II, supporting my clients to ensure their Data Governance framework is embedded as an integral part of their business as usual policy. The benefit for them, and you, is that once the framework is in place, your organisation will be confident, competent and compliant.

Is that something you'd like to be?

I have been involved in Data Management since 2003, initially for a leading UK Bank before becoming an independent consultant in 2009.

I am a Director and Committee Member of DAMA UK and an Expert Panel member of Dataqualitypro.com and regularly write and present internationally on Data Governance best practice.



You can find out more about how I can help you become more successful in your Data Governance initiative by contacting me at NicolaAskham.com

So what is the
key factor for a
Data Governance
implementation to be
successful?

So, what is the key factor for a Data Governance implementation to be successful?

I'm often asked this question over coffee as if it is something that can be answered in a two minute sound bite. While I'd love to be that concise with an answer I'm not sure it's possible as there is no single key factor to success. This book however is my attempt to answer the broader question of: "What makes for a successful Data Governance implementation?"

While a relatively small number of people would call themselves Data Governance experts, there is

a rapidly growing body of people working in the field. This introduction to the qualities needed for those planning, or already in the process of implementing, a Data Governance framework will help to determine where training or coaching may be useful or needed.

An Assumption

Although it's usually not best practice to do so, I'm going to assume that, at least to some degree, I'm now speaking to the converted; that you already realise the importance and value of data governance. It's also likely that if you're reading this you're already professionally involved with data. This may be direct involvement, as a data professional or it may be less direct, as someone working in the business. Whatever your involvement, you realise that it's one thing to hold a lot of data; it's quite another to manage it so it can be used advantageously.

A Definition

Whilst I am assuming the above, it still will be useful at this stage to give a basic definition of Data Governance for us to work from.

Data Governance is simply a framework that allows you to proactively manage your data to meet your business needs. At a minimum it includes a policy to mandate:

- how your organisation is going to manage its data
- roles and responsibilities of those involved and
- the basic processes to ensure clarity, consistency and coordination



For a more comprehensive definition of Data Governance, please see my white paper "Getting Ahead of the Game: Proactive Data Governance".

Where's the Challenge?

So if Data Governance is simply a framework, the challenge is implementing the framework. And what's needed here are the soft skills I mentioned earlier. Soft skills are needed from the beginning when persuading your organisation to adopt a Data Governance framework and all the way through to completion.

The Traits that Will Win

While I will be discussing several traits later on, the first, and overarching trait you'll need to win in your initiative is **Passion**

A true passion for data and a belief in its importance will infuse itself throughout the whole project. Believing the work you are doing is making a difference will help others to believe as well. Anything less and you will struggle to sell your Data Governance framework and fight an up-hill battle during the implementation stage, even if you do sell the initial framework concept.

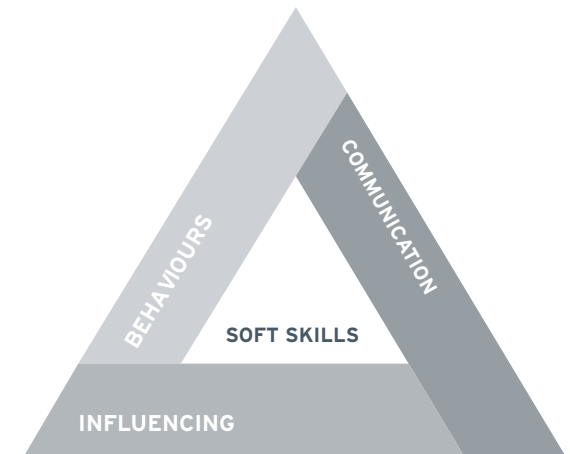
Once Passion exists there is a triad of soft skills that support the day-to-day interactions with those involved: **these are Communication, Influencing and Behaviours.**

Communication in this context focuses on presenting and selling your message to groups of people.

Influence on the other hand, refers to winning over one person at a time

Behaviours will concern itself with the characteristics needed to successfully progress your data implementation framework namely, Pragmatism, Persistence and Patience.

But first, a little passion to kick things off...



Passion

“The only way to do
good work is to love
what you do.”

Steve Jobs

To excel at Data Governance, or one could argue any successful endeavour, you need Passion. That doesn't mean you need to arrive at work every day sporting an ear-to-ear grin (although that's not such a bad idea either). You don't even have to love every single moment along the way; that's a pretty tall order for even the greatest optimist. However, before you get started, a keen interest in the area you're going to immerse yourself in will be appreciated by everyone, including yourself.

"The only way to do good work is to love what you do." Steve Jobs

Before you embark on converting those around you to Data Governance, you need to really believe in the benefits and be able to share that belief to engage others.

Remember, if you're not buying it, they're not buying it.

When providing consulting services for clients, I spend a lot of my time in meetings with potential data owners or data stewards (as I'm sure you currently do or will be soon). To understand how important passion is, consider the following scenario:

You're about to deliver a presentation about the need for Data Governance at a new organisation.

Do you assume that

- the data steward will just present one hurdle after another?
- they will say that the roles you want people to perform won't work?
- they will believe that they don't or won't own any data and it's 'probably all IT's fault' anyway?

If you're like me you've probably heard these objections numerous times before. Would it be safe then to say you're likely to give in a little to that sinking feeling of familiarity from presenting the same set of slides and saying the same things for the umpteenth time?

Of course you are, and that would be natural.

But let's look at it another way. What if you could see every presentation as an opportunity to get another Data Governance convert? Someone who can help you champion the process in the future.

Isn't that a better scenario?

Your passion can help others see how many of their data problems will be resolved through Data Governance and therefore be a benefit to them on a daily basis.

It may be your usual slides on the screen, but it's what you say to support these reference points that count. When you know the subject well, you can adapt your talk to the needs, desires and of course, objections of each audience. And on the point of objections, use the fact that you've heard them before to your advantage by proactively preparing positive benefit responses, instead of reactionary defensive responses. That way you're already one, if not two steps ahead.

In my experience, the second version of the meeting is going to end more successfully. Keeping focused on the virtues of good Data Governance and why you are implementing it will help you achieve that result.

If you work in Data Quality you need to love your data. The same is true for Data Governance, but to an even greater degree. The subtle difference with Data Governance is that you also need to get the people you are working with to develop a closer and more meaningful relationship with their data. And indeed for them to love their data, too.

Finally, it's also passion for what you do that allows you to keep going on what can be, and let's be honest here, a sometimes arduous journey. I don't want to put anyone off at this early stage, but implementing a Data Governance programme is all-consuming, albeit satisfying, work. Hence the need for Persistence that we'll be discussing later

Passion

So if you have
Passion for Data
Governance, it's
time to spread the
word...

Checkpoint

Answer the following questions:

Why are you doing this role?

What do you understand as the value of Data Governance to your organisation?

What is it that makes you enthusiastic about the role?

If you are not clear on the answers to the first two questions, go and find out more. If the answer to the third question is “nothing”, you may wish to consider what could make you more enthusiastic and what personal, soft skills you bring to the table to help others become enthusiastic with you.

Communication

Once you've discovered your Passion, the first task for the budding Data Governance Manager or Data Governance enthusiast is to spread the word. After all, nothing much is going to change if you keep this approach to yourself!

**“What I do best is share my enthusiasm.”
Bill Gates**

In order to be an effective communicator you will need explain to everyone, at every level in your organisation, just what Data Governance means for them. You also need to communicate this in a variety of different ways, from presentations, one-on-one coaching sessions, written web content, emails and reports.

Especially early on in the process your main focus will be giving presentations on why your organisation needs to implement Data Governance. These are great opportunities to make an impression as often it will be your audience's first introduction to Data Governance and will guide how they feel about the process from now onwards.

The Sales Pitch

It's safe to say that as a Data Governance practitioner you have something to sell. In this case it's not a product, but a cultural change and new way of working. I'm not naturally comfortable with the idea of selling, in fact the thought of cold-calling fills me with dread. However, when it comes to selling people on the idea of Data Governance, I'm eager to spread the word, as I know the many benefits it will have for them.

Of course, there are varying techniques to communicating (to sell) an idea. But let's keep this simple by looking at the classic five-step method of answering Why, What, How, What if and What now.

When you're clear on the answers to each you're ready to communicate these answers to others.

Why?

“Why does your organisation need a Data Governance Framework?”

“Why should your organisation adopt the approach your selling?”

The best way to answer is to link each question to your organisation’s existing strategy and objectives. Work out how better quality data will support these. Then illustrate the alternatives: how things are now and how things could be. With large organisations this will involve showing what is already happening, for example the ad hoc solutions to data quality issues or the reactive workaround projects set up every time a new regulation is introduced and the costs these incur. You can then show how Data Governance would help, saving time and money by ensuring a proactive approach to data quality.

Have you ever found that a small change to the way data is handled has an originally unforeseen impact on things like key management reports? If you haven’t seen it first hand, I have. Trust me, the time, frustration and yes, sometimes panic, that ensues when reports don’t look ‘normal’ is a situation to avoid whenever possible.

Focus on your audience at all times. Think in advance what is in it for them and continue to communicate these benefits. To do this you need to find out about specific problems and how poor data contributes to those problems. Ask plenty of questions as you go along so that you are always abreast of concerns, objections and suggestions that can make the implementation process even easier. And of course the more questions you ask the more clearly you will also be able to identify the benefits your organisation.

One of Stephen Covey’s 7 Habits is to seek first to understand, then to be understood. If you understand the people, organisation and the data specific issues, then you will be in a position to help solve them.

A final piece of advice on the ‘Why’ component is to use real examples to illustrate your points. Making up examples opens you up to non-productive comments like: “Those things don’t happen around here.” which distracts from, rather than bolsters, your key message.

Communication

What?

What are you selling?

Data Governance of course!

Explain what Data Governance is as simply as possible. The K.I.S.S acronym (Keep It Simple & Sweet) is a good one to remember. For the majority of your audience, this may be the first time they have even heard of Data Governance. Make sure they understand the basics, in a positive (sweet) way before you introduce the details.

Let's face it, terms like Data Governance and framework and implementation give the impression that the process is very complicated. Most people are visual learners. Use this to your advantage by drawing pictures and diagrams to get your message across. You'll be surprised at how effective these are, especially in the initial stages. A word of warning though, do not use formal

documents to communicate your message. There are good reasons for having detailed data models, process maps, policies and operating models. However these have a time and place and it isn't at a presentation. You need to extract the material out of these formal documents and turn it into a compelling message for your audience.

As with any presentation, give yourself time to prepare and don't try to include too much content. Be ready to be interrupted with questions that may challenge your carefully timed presentation and indeed shake your confidence. In this respect it's best to be clear on your objective (to help people understand Data Governance and to win their support) and know the facts, figures and scenarios that most strongly support that objective. In my experience a light, informal, less rehearsed presentation does the job.

How?

How does it work?

How will a Data Governance framework work and help your organisation?

This is where the detail comes in. Knowing about your organisation and their current problems will go a long way at this stage. Don't run through an exhaustive checklist of actions performed in a hypothetical world. How will it work in the very real world of the firm you're working for?

The How is where most objections will arise. It's where people begin to think, "What am I going to need to DO?" In the early stages of the process your job is to reassure them that the framework will clearly define all processes, roles and responsibilities and that all of these will be discussed when appropriate.

What if?

This the carrot or stick part of your sales pitch. I always prefer pulling people towards a vision of a better future, but occasionally you may have to resort to pushing them a little. This is where you show them the problems they will encounter if they continue on their present path, again using relevant and real-life examples. Following this it is a good time to discuss what improvements could be made and what these would mean for the business. Show them the ghost of Christmas future and you'll help them change their ungoverned ways!



...you can read more about this in my seasonal blog here...

What now?

Of course you need to finish off by explaining where you all go from here and what specific actions they need to take now. The action might be to meet with their teams, set up a one-to-one meeting with you, complete a questionnaire...it varies. However, all your efforts to convince them that Data Governance is a good idea will be lost if you don't get a commitment to take action as a result.

Checkpoint:

I'm sure you'd agree that effective communication is too big a topic to cover in detail here. If you feel you'd like to develop your skills in this area consider attending a Communications Skills Course or reading a book devoted to the topic. My personal favourites are...



"The Jelly Effect, How to Make Your Communications Stick" by Andy Bounds



"The Charisma Formula: 7 Secrets to Communicating with Eloquence and Influence" by Yvonne Gurney

Influence

The Oxford English Dictionary defines influence as “the capacity to have an effect on the character, development, or behaviour of someone or something”. Now I don’t know about you, but seeing the definition in black and white makes it perfectly clear to me why without the ability to influence others you are not going to accomplish much in Data Governance.

Think about it - even if you are implementing Data Governance to meet regulatory requirements (i.e. you have a big stick which you can use to force the issue) you want, even need, people to sign up willingly and understand the benefits they will achieve as a result. Therefore the ability to influence others is a key soft skill.

People will often leave presentations or meetings with great intentions. Changing their behaviour is another matter. Your job at this stage becomes capitalising on this goodwill to move them from agreement to action.

To influence people you need to build a relationship with them, find out what matters to them and what the biggest problems are that they are currently facing. Just delivering your message eloquently is not going to automatically move Data Governance activities to the top of their agenda. Illustrating how it will help them with their major business problems just might.

As I have said before, understanding the business you are working with is crucial. Making sure that you know exactly how implementing Data Governance is going to help solve the problems of the individuals you’re speaking to is even more so.

When I first started doing Data Governance I was very focussed on doing it for the “greater good.” I admit that to my detriment I didn’t think enough about the impact on the individuals or departments I was working with. I learnt the hard way and hope that you take the wisdom from my mistakes. Now I know that being pragmatic and focussing on the impact on the individual is a key success factor.

With one client, I initially started explaining why we were implementing Data Governance over regulatory data, but the individual who had been happy to meet me initially became bored and disinterested during the meeting. As soon as I noticed this and questioned him, it was clear that his department did not produce any data in the immediate scope of my work. However, as expected, his department did have data quality related issues that could be vastly improved with the introduction of Data Governance. By the end of the meeting he understood how the bigger picture would eventually benefit him and we were able to agree how he could champion the implementation in his department when the time was right.

Motivational responses

There are a multitude of ways in which we positively influence others. From presenting a clear vision to leading by example, and different individuals and audiences respond to different prompts.

Three ways people respond to different motivators include:

Character

This is to say they are moved by the personality (more often a positive one) of the speaker. As any successful performer will attest to, the first job is getting the crowd to like you. That makes everything else a lot easier. Did you know young comedians are often encouraged to use a simple, positive joke as soon as they get onstage? If you get people laughing (or at least smiling) early on, it makes everything else a lot easier.

Message

In other words, what you are saying. This is obviously helped if your audience likes you to begin with, but it is still possible to sell a message even if they don't yet know you. For the sort of audience you will be presenting to, it is likely they will be looking for a positive message that will reinforce the benefits and their required interest in Data Governance.

Cause

For a lot of audiences this may appear to be the same as the message but in reality the cause is bigger; it's the mission or overriding goal. Once your audience begins to realise the advantage of what you are saying for their business, they have moved from the message and onto the cause. Some people will continue to have problems making that leap and for this reason it's always good practice to ensure your examples are relevant to the individuals you are presenting to.

Changing the habits of an organisation means spending time influencing numerous individuals before real improvement is evident. Whether it's encouraging managers into formalising policies and procedures concerning data management or following up with employees at all levels to ensure they are actually working in line with those policies, it won't happen straight away. It will however, progress steadily if you adopt the right behaviours to see your implementation through.

Checkpoint:

A Stakeholder Map is a very useful tool. It will help to

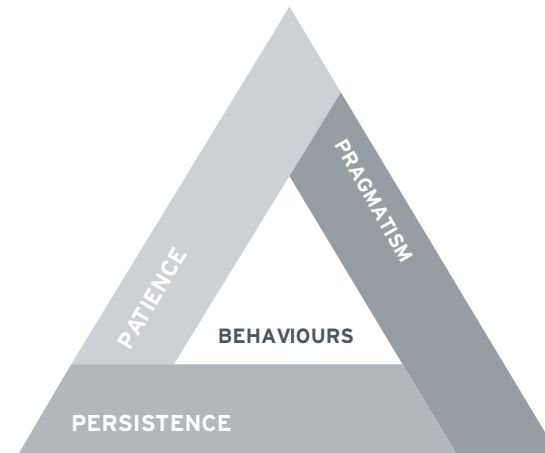
- identify your key stakeholders
- find where they currently are in terms of your initiative
- plan where you want them to be and
- move them forward through specific actions



If you'd like to find out more visit [The MindTools website](#).

Behaviours

These are the characteristics that, if you can embody, will oil the wheels of any successful Data Governance project. Good Communication and the ability to Influence are the obvious, visible soft skills. The Behaviours in the next section, on the other hand, are more the attitudes necessary for continual success in this game.

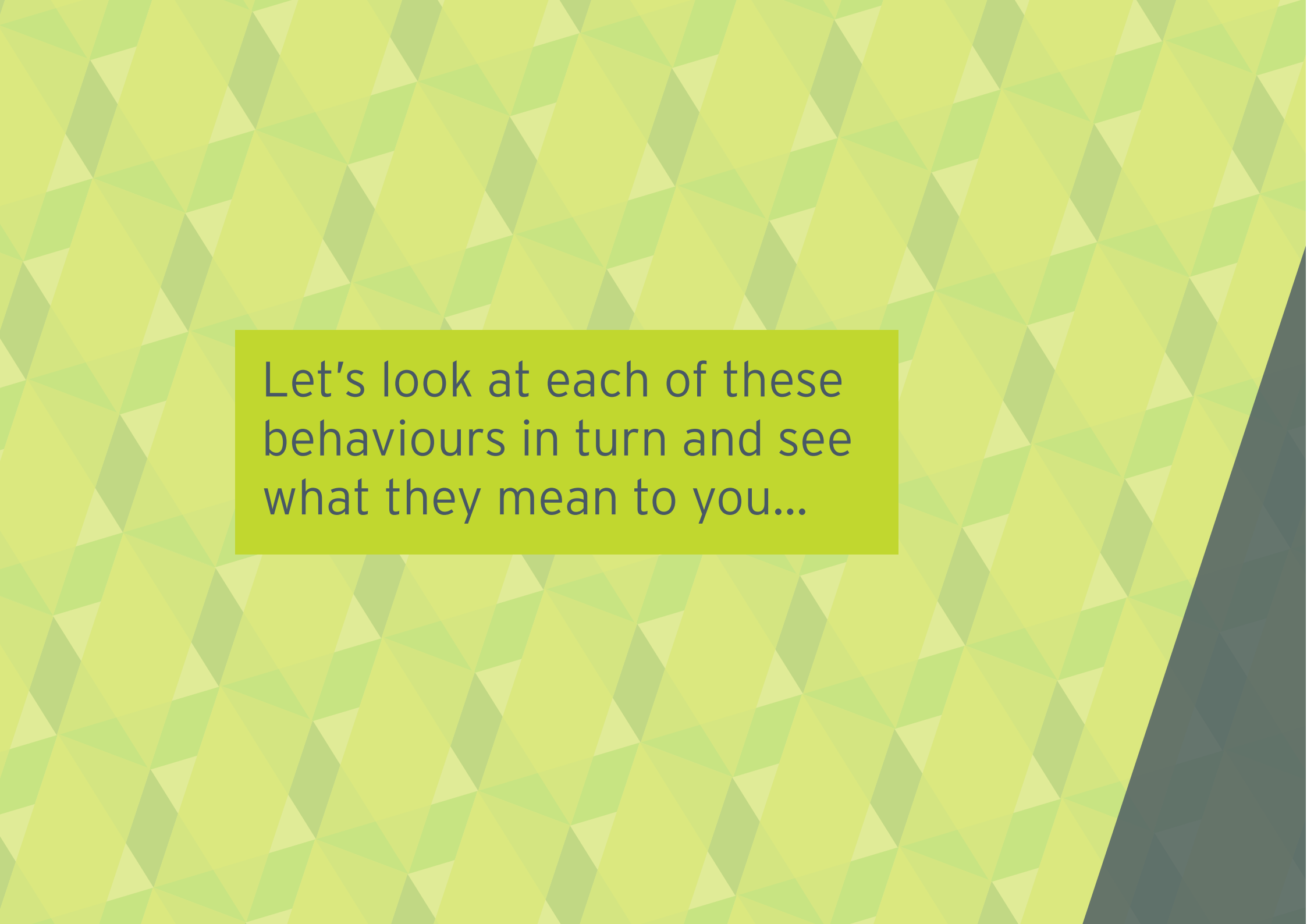


The first of these Behaviours is Pragmatism, or being practical; remembering where you're doing this and for whom. Focus and prioritise sections of the implementation and find ways to make them work in the real world in order to gain momentum.

The next Behaviour is Patience. Be prepared for the need to repeat your key messages numerous times. When you find that repetition being needed with the same people the natural reaction of course would be to get exasperated. The good news is Patience is a skill that can be learned (and ironically in situations like this it needs to be done quickly!)

I guarantee you'll also be told "no" more than once, along the way. In order to take these knocks and soldier on you will need...

...Perseverance. Implementing Data Governance can be simple but it is not necessarily easy - and it will take time. If at first you don't succeed, you're just getting started!



Let's look at each of these behaviours in turn and see what they mean to you...

Pragmatism

Change does not happen in a vacuum. What I mean is your Data Governance implementation will be taking place within an organisation that has its own history, issues and work culture.

These practical, and sometimes frustratingly impractical realities need to be taken into consideration.

I have to confess, when I started in Data Governance, I was something of an evangelist. I believed passionately in what I was trying to achieve (and still do). I wanted it done properly. I wanted it done **now**.

With my unchecked enthusiasm, combined with my lack of experience at that time in implementing organisational change, I failed to see that I was unintentionally making a hard task even harder. The results being the scope and costs of the initiative increased and, not surprisingly I isolated the very people I was hoping to help. My biggest supporters were in IT which was to be expected. Working closely with data every day it was, perhaps, easier for them to see the benefits of Data Governance. As I'm sure you've experienced, the business side of an organisation can often overrule IT and not surprisingly they did just that in this case, too. I remember being told in no uncertain terms that Data Governance activities would take more time and resources than the business was willing (or able) to invest.

Although I still want to do it all and do it properly, I am also mindful of the importance of simply getting started. If you are able to identify a small area of the business on which to focus your attention, and then show some progress, this will help to gain momentum and you will get buy-in from other areas. Before long you will have people asking you to go above and beyond the initial scope of your current phase. People will realise that

the principles involved in properly managing data apply throughout their business.

I am reminded of a client who asked me to focus on implementing Data Governance over customer data only. During a Customer Data Owner Forum an issue concerning a piece of product data was raised. When challenged about the appropriateness of a governance approach in this instance, the answer was simple: **"Just because it is not customer data, doesn't mean it shouldn't be governed in the same way."** The nicest thing about this response is that it wasn't me saying it, but one of the internal Data Owners. They had seen the benefit in their area of the business and could, from a place of strength, support the selling of the benefit in other areas.

Pragmatism can simply mean managing your implementation in bite-sized chunks in order for it to actually be realised and seen. Of course you'll still be thinking big but not everyone will be interested in or required to understand your master plan!

I'm going to give the last word on Pragmatism to my good friend, Information Management Expert Daniel Flören, **"We're taking over the world one attribute at a time."**

Checkpoint:

Take a few minutes to consider your current focus in your Data Governance Initiative.

Are you being too rigid in its implementation?

Can you think of alternative approaches to achieve the same end goal?

The second behaviour to master is Persistence.

Let's be realistic, there will be trials and tribulations, setbacks and days when it seems that you've taken two steps back for every one forward. It's at these times your determination to make things happen needs to kick in.

Persistence

A while back I was involved in a musical stage production of Half a Sixpence. For those of you who know the show, I was playing the part of Helen Walsingham and sang a song called 'Be Determined'. It is a suffragette rallying, march-type of song, which she sings to the defeatist leading man. While rehearsing for this show I found myself humming the song a lot at work, often when faced with challenging situations. Then I realised that it wasn't just because I was learning the song, but because the lyrics were particularly relevant to what I was trying to achieve at work.

I have helped many organisations to implement Data Governance programmes, with widely differing cultures. Some have been more challenging than others, but one thing is true, even in the most open-minded, change-ready organisation you need to be tenacious. For every step of the way, there will be hurdles to overcome. It's up to you to find a way over, under or around them. Sometimes the challenges will be as simple as finding your way into diaries or getting people to return your calls. At others it will be dealing with the dissenter who does not want to sign up to one of the key roles in your Data Governance model.

If you want your Data Governance initiative to be successful, giving up is not an option, it's that simple. If Plan A doesn't have the expected results, make sure you have plans B and C ready to go.

Data Governance is not for the faint hearted, but if you're determined you will be successful.

Decide you'll play the Data Governance game to win.

**"Be determined is the clue.
If you'll only see it through.
Make my day, decide to you'll
play the game to win."**

A great message for numerous life situations!

**The third key behaviour
is Patience.**

It can take a lot longer than expected to get buy-in from different parts of the organisation; to convince them firstly of the need for Data Governance and then to embed new processes and mindsets into business as usual activities.

Patience

I freely admit that I am not a naturally patient person. I can hardly bear to stand still to wait for the drinks machine to dispense hot water. So waiting months for agreement and then even longer for real action can be trying to say the least.

It took the Titanic 24 hours to turn just 90 degrees. While Data Governance isn't a luxury liner, it is a big thing to get moving. There is a great deal to do in order to gain momentum. You'll think you don't have the time to be meditating and thinking calm thoughts. You'll think you need to get people to take action. You'll think you need to be out there doing whatever it takes to help them take that action and, and, and...

...and at this point it's time to take a deep breath and remind yourself that you need to be patient.

While I said that patience is not my greatest virtue, I soon realised its importance in this field. I said it before but I will say it again; even if you know it well, for many people this may be their first experience of Data Governance. And you will need to say things again and again. When you are teaching people new things you need to build a foundation of base principles. In training development we call it 'chunking' - small steps that build on a solid foundation and then on each other.

Chunking is also well supported by flexibility. Namely flexibility in how you adapt your message for different audiences. Sometimes you may even find yourself adapting, and therefore repeating, your message to the same audience if you get the indication they do not quite understand. Continually viewing the message, benefits and even the challenges from their business perspective will help you do this with style. After all, Data Governance may be your top priority but they may not even consider it on the agenda.

Most (if not everyone) in your organisation uses and/or produces data. The problem is unlike IT they generally they don't think about it. I heard an excellent analogy from Data Management Expert Peter Aiken. He said that the majority of people think of data in the same way that they think about air... in that they don't. They just assume that the air is good enough for them to breathe until they discover that it isn't! So getting them to start thinking about it will require great patience.

"I am extraordinarily patient, provided I get my own way in the end."

Margaret Thatcher

**I wish you all the best in your
Data Governance initiative.**

If you are interested in the various ways we can work together to make it a sure success, please contact me at **Nicola@NicolaAskham.com** and for any further information please visit my web site **NicolaAskham.com**

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