

# Implementing Effective Governance for Business Intelligence

Metric Insights recently partnered with Donna Burbank for a webinar on implementing effective governance for business intelligence. Burbank is the managing director at Global Data Strategy, Ltd., an international information management consulting company that specializes in the alignment of business drivers with data-centric technology.

Donna is a recognized industry expert in information management with over 20 years of experience in data strategy, information management, data modeling, metadata management, and enterprise architecture. Her background is multifaceted across consulting product development, product management, brand strategy, marketing, and business leadership. She is a thought-leader in the fields of data governance and metadata management. As an active contributor to the data management community, she is a long time DAMA International member, Past President and Advisor to the DAMA Rocky Mountain chapter, and was awarded the Excellence in Data Management Award from DAMA International.

She has worked with dozens of Fortune 500 companies worldwide in the Americas, Europe, Asia, and Africa and speaks regularly at industry conferences. She has co-authored several books and is a regular contributor to industry publications. She can be reached at [donna.burbank@globaldatastrategy.com](mailto:donna.burbank@globaldatastrategy.com)

Donna is based in Boulder, Colorado, USA. In this paper, Donna shares her views and opinions on what it takes to implement effective governance.



In today's increasingly digital economy, data is a strategic differentiator with over 70% of organizations listing data as one of their most important strategic assets<sup>1</sup>. More and more organizations across all industries are striving to become "data-driven", using data to inform decision-making. A key tool for the data-driven organization is the business intelligence (BI) dashboard, used by approximately 80% of organizations in the market<sup>1</sup>. Similar to a dashboard in a car that provides the driver with easily consumable visual indicators such as a speedometer, fuel gauge, etc. a BI dashboard provides information to help drive the organization, such as sales metrics, customer satisfaction ratings, and more. Imagine, however, if your vehicle's dashboard indicators were incorrect and that, for example, you stopped to fill up your empty gas tank only to find that it was already full. By the same token, incorrect metrics on an executive dashboard can lead to incorrect business decisions with potentially disastrous results. Imagine a BI dashboard indicating that sales were increasing in a region when they were actually falling! This is where BI governance comes into play – to establish processes, tools, and roles across the organization to ensure the accuracy of and confidence in the measures shown on critical business dashboards.

According to the Data Management Body of Knowledge (DAMA DMBOK<sup>2</sup>), data governance is defined as "The exercise of authority, control and shared decision-making (planning, monitoring and enforcement) over the management of data assets." To ensure that the numbers driving

**“Approx. 80% of organizations use BI Dashboards to drive strategic decision-making.”**

organizational decisions are correct, authority and control are needed to validate the calculations of these numbers and ensure that trusted data sets are used to source the data (data lineage). Due in large part to the importance of trusted metrics on BI dashboards, nearly 80% of organizations have a data governance program in place or have plans in place to begin one<sup>1</sup>. While rules, authority and control are critical to effective data governance, the other aspect of the DAMA definition lists "shared decision-making" as an equally important part of data governance, which often requires a more

collaborative approach.

Take for example a definition of a common metric such as "total sales by region". While on the surface, the definition may seem obvious, various departments might calculate this metric differently. In one department, total sales might include wholesale sales, while another might exclude wholesale revenue from the calculation. The definition of "region" might differ as well – with one department using geographic regions and another using internally-defined sales regions. The list goes on. A published Glossary of definitions for common BI calculations is critical to aligning team members so that everyone has the same understanding of how key metrics are defined and calculating. While publishing common definitions is important, arriving at commonly-agreed definitions can often be challenging, as different team members can often be passionately opposed in their opinions. Effective data governance requires a combination of people, process and technology – centered around a common organizational vision and goals, as shown in Figure 1.

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<sup>1</sup> based on research from a 2020 DATAVERSITY survey on "Trends in Data Management" by Donna Burbank and Michelle Knight

<sup>2</sup> Data Management Body of Knowledge, 2017, Technics Publications



Figure 1 Effective Data Governance requires both Human-centric and Technology-centric components

*Effective data governance requires a combination of people, process and technology – centered around a common organizational vision and goals*

The process of arriving at consensus for a given definition can take many forms, depending in large part on both the organizational style and culture as well as the type of data being managed. A key distinguishing factor in the management of definitions and calculations is whether to take a strongly governed and vetted approach, or a more loose, collaborative approach. A strongly governed approach is often driven by a data governance lead or committee, where a formal process of review and publication is needed to finalize any published metric. This type of approach is effective for the following types of information, and also works well in a structured organizational environment:

- **Enterprise reporting:** where key metrics are reported enterprise-wide and/or to the public, for example financial reports, annual reports, etc.
- **Master and Reference data:** where key data areas are used across the organization and must be standardized into a canonical, trusted format.

A more collaborative approach works well in organizations that have a more federated approach to management, and works well for the following types of data:

- **Exploratory and Self-Service reporting:** where teams collaborate and share ideas, often with many iterations back-and-forth before a common definition is agreed upon in an organic way.

A helpful way of thinking of these two disparate approaches is the Encyclopedia vs. Wikipedia approach. In the Encyclopedia approach, data is closely curated and vetted by a subject of approved individuals before publication to a wider audience. The Wikipedia approach uses crowdsourcing to leverage the collective knowledge the organization through opening editing and rapid iteration to achieve a common definition. Both approaches have their place if applied to the right type of data in the right organizational setting.

In getting started with data governance, it is important to define an actionable roadmap that provides some “quick wins” that align with business value so that stakeholders can easily see the benefit of governance efforts. For example, rather than “boiling the ocean” and defining all organizational metrics in a Glossary, it can be more effective to start by focusing on key metrics supporting an important business initiative, such as a product launch, a marketing campaign, or a regulatory

compliance initiative. By aligning with business goals, key stakeholders can not only see immediate value, but also better understand their role in governing BI reports, i.e., the role of a data steward. Having defined data stewardship for key metrics helps establish long-term viability and quality, as business stakeholders take ownership and accountability for the accuracy of figures displayed on dashboards.

Successful businesses rely on quality data to drive their strategic decision making, and quality data requires strong data governance. Success of any data governance initiative requires strong buy in and action from business stakeholders. To this end, it is important to understand the unique culture of your organization and align data governance efforts accordingly. For example, is a more collaborative approach to decision-making appropriate, or is a more hierarchical, “top-down” approach more effective? Whichever approach is taken, it is important to align rollout of data governance to strategic business initiatives so that all stakeholders can immediately see value from the decisions and standards created for business intelligence reporting. Once business and data are aligned through effective data governance, organizations can truly benefit from data-driven decision making and the strategic benefits that a data-driven approach can provide.

## More about Metric Insights:

A lack of BI governance in organizations leads to cluttered BI platforms, low usage, and lack of trust by end-users. Metric Insights' Enterprise BI Portal enables BI governance, providing analysts a way of documenting, categorizing, and certifying their key BI reports and dashboards and publishing them in a centralized portal for users.

For more information regarding <https://www.metricinsights.com/> you can contact [info@metricinsights.com](mailto:info@metricinsights.com) or check out some of the resources below:

“Implementing Effective Governance for Business Intelligence” webinar with Donna Burbank:

[Webinar](#)

Whitepapers/Datasheets:

[Enterprise BI Portal Overview](#)

[Data Governance vs BI Governance](#)

[The 3 Pillars of Effective BI Governance](#)

[The Practical Guide to BI Governance](#)

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