



WHITE PAPER

**How to Improve Your [Everything] With
Healthier Data Governance
4 Ways to Assess and Revive Your Program**

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Introduction: why Payers need healthier data governance

Data governance for some Payers isn't going very well. Despite pervasive needs, it's difficult to make data governance programs achieve the expected traction in the first year. The learning curve can be tough for those new to the concept, and programs often underdeliver.

So it's not entirely surprising to learn that Payers – and many other healthcare organizations – are working on a second or even third attempt to build out a data governance capability. Experts and vendors offer advice and best practices in white papers, blogs, and articles, yet we lack information to assess how and why data governance went wrong in the first place.

Lacking such guidance, big ideas and enthusiasm can fade quickly. Tremendous pressure on the healthcare system renders data integrity and control more important than ever. Data governance was expected to be the Rosetta Stone for these data management problems. Priority initiatives such as member wellness, customer service, network collaboration, and delivery improvement demand a high degree of trust in the data. Such initiatives aren't just incremental improvements in capability – they are data imperatives considered essential for survival. So the clarion call sounded – let's bring business and IT together to solve those intractable issues such as data quality, authority and process once and for all.

Other factors contribute to the importance of data governance. Take technology innovation: as cloud adoption grows, data governance is critical for establishing and maintaining standards, policies and controls within environments where cloud solutions are operationalized at the department level, often without assistance from IT.

While the value of data governance is pretty clear, the hazy part is figuring out how to start – or restart. A **Data Governance Health Check** is the answer. Effective data governance is rooted in a set of specific, pragmatic steps that leverage best practice, build incremental value, and drive initiatives forward as success is demonstrated. In our view, these steps can be defined only *after* the root cause of a data governance problem has been identified.

Here's a typical scenario: your baseline data governance organization is already in place. Executive sponsors are behind the effort. Roles and responsibilities of participants have been defined. A core team of Council members has been selected – caring people with an intimate knowledge of their systems and their people. The team begins the process of nursing your organization's information to a healthier, more valuable state through a governing framework that addresses data issues from the ground up.

The problem is that this same situation has already played out – last year, perhaps, or maybe the year before. Somehow, too many meetings yielded too little action. Maybe it wasn't clear who had the

Cloud Impact on Data Governance

Forrester reports that business executives are sidestepping IT departments more often to provision their own cloud services. In these environments, the role of IT shifts from traditional service delivery to setting and monitoring standards, policies and controls. As cloud computing grows in pervasiveness, so does the importance of data governance.

authority to call the shots in your consensus-driven organization. Perhaps goals and results weren't clearly articulated to guide work streams. In short, data governance failed to deliver on the promise.

Fast forward to today: the business is frustrated, the technical teams are skeptical, and the leadership team is weary of plans and intentions that never delivered. Relaunching data governance is going to involve some careful negotiations internally, a lot of hand-holding, and resurrection of the passion within each data steward for getting the data right.

A **Data Governance Health Check** will initiate an honest evaluation, one that sets the foundation for an actionable program designed to overcome the challenges your organization has experienced. Reviving your data governance program – correctly – can improve all aspects of your business. From enabling faster, more accurate decision-making to driving greater operational efficiencies across the board, almost everything stands to benefit from well-governed data.

Assess your health with a Data Governance Health Check

In the healthcare industry, the prognosis for data governance is precarious. For example, the Provider data area seems to be a perfect place to apply data governance, as it is rife with data management issues that plague healthcare businesses (see sidebar). Over time, data and system owners have been structured to operate independently of each other. Separate systems make discerning a single version of the truth a challenge. Often, multiple systems exist that contain the same business concepts for the same Provider entity.

A **Data Governance Health Check** offers specific approaches to get your program off information life support and bring it back to productive health. The baseline for pragmatic data governance is an appraisal of the big picture – a clear understanding of where your data governance program stands, today. Use the four point evaluation below to help you assess the health of your overall program and match the treatment to your symptoms. The outcome will help you create a tailored approach to efficiently revive your program from its current state.

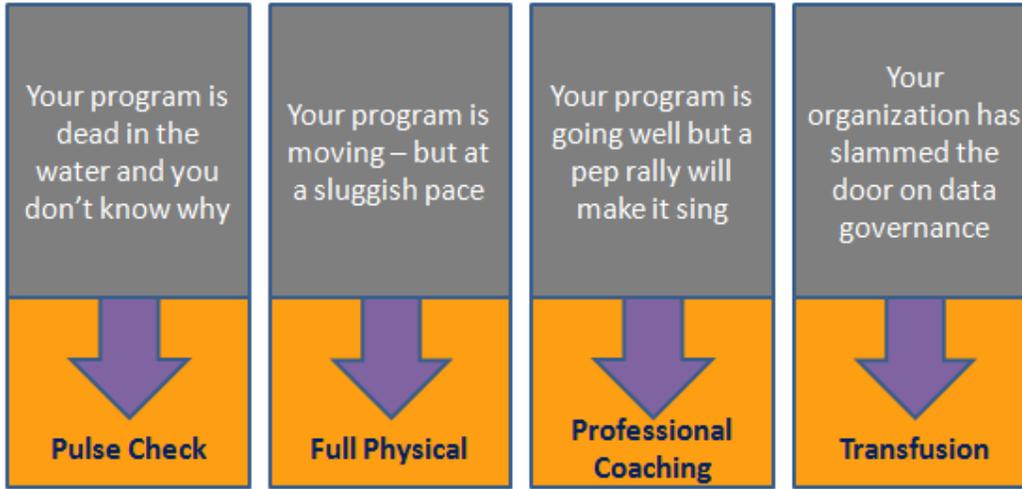
- Is the program going nowhere and no one knows why? Start with a Pulse Check.
- Is the program moving but at a sluggish pace? A Full Physical is in order.
- Is the program going well but could use some TLC or a pep rally? Engage a professional coach.
- Is your organization refusing to talk about data governance again? It may be time for a Transfusion of new blood to reinvigorate the team.

Provider and Practitioner Data Issues

Provider information typifies the complexity of data found in healthcare that drives the need for a data governance capability. Credentialing is a good example. A physician submits an application to be credentialed and added to the payer network. Provider applications enter the data stream through many channels, including the postal service, phone calls / IVR, fax, email, web portal, mobile and the service desk. Separate systems handle professional, commercial and institutional applications; the same for hospitals, ancillaries, labs, and dental. Different rules are applied as the data migrates through the functional food chain. The data governance challenge is on.

Data Governance Health Check

Which describes your data governance program?



4 Approaches to Revitalize Your Program

1: Take a Pulse Check

Your data governance program probably started with a kickoff meeting and enthusiastic participants. After the party, the fireworks faded and no one seems to remember the reason for the celebration. At this point, your team may be asking:

- Data governance... hmmm... what was that all about again?
- Why haven't we documented any issues to resolve? Are there none?
- Where do we go from here?

Checking the pulse of the program gauges the organizational response to what happened with the data governance initiative, what didn't happen, and why. The **Pulse Check** begins with interviews of some of the key players who have seen data governance action or inaction. This includes the senior leadership team, the sponsor, and a couple of data stewards. The interviewer should have a track record of successful data governance work but without any program involvement. Interviews elicit opinions about what the participants believed data governance would accomplish, and their views on why the program went on life support. You may find, for instance, that your organization's intense focus on master data management derailed the governance effort before it had a chance to get off the ground.

Data Governance *Before* Master Data Management

Don't make the mistake of implementing MDM before putting in place a governance framework. It's critical to establish data ownership, lineage, and accountability before focusing on the data quality and rationalization necessary for master reference data within an enterprise. Governance directly supports a single version of the truth.

Such discovery often finds the organizational culture to be a major impediment to moving the program forward. A key component of the **Pulse Check** should be an objective assessment of the organizational readiness to commit to data governance. These and other findings, including objective measures of success and action items gathered from the interviews, become input to the Data Governance Council and the senior leadership team to consider either a re-launch or program suspension until a restart is readied.

2: Get a Full Physical

Perhaps your data governance program is humming along. Regular Council and Stewardship group meetings are taking place. There's a backlog of issues and action items that can drive data initiatives for years. But that's the core of the problem: the issue list gets longer, while the list of closed issues hasn't budged. A full checkup may be needed when data governance team members are thinking:

- Lots of great issues to tackle! When do we start?
- Data governance is AWESOME...now when do we see an ROI?
- Why didn't (fill in name) get this gnarly data issue resolved by now?

A data governance physical goes beyond assessing your vitals. It gets your program out of the ER by evaluating where you are at versus where you need to go. Here too, a dose of reality is required.

The **Full Physical** reviews progress-to-date on data governance initiatives as well as projects that have spun off the data governance program. Interviews are conducted at the "doer" level – the data owners and stewards are interviewed individually and collectively to find out what has and has not been working. A pragmatic approach looks at inputs to and outputs from the data governance efforts, including a review of the issue and action item list. The issue list is matured if necessary. Roles, responsibilities and authorities are revisited. Processes are reviewed to identify breakpoints. Stakeholders are engaged to find out what level of support they require to meet their needs. The organizational impact of the data governance effort is assessed.

Most organizations think they are at a low level of data governance maturity compared to other companies in their industry. Generally, this is not true - an industry often exhibits the same level of data governance maturity from a macro perspective. While some teams may debate the amount of proactive and reactive data governance work they engage in, the maturity of some data governance components have more in

Metrics and Measurement

Using ideas from corporate performance management, a data governance organization should use metrics and measurements to manage itself. For example, healthcare organizations have many metrics to evaluate data quality. A **Pulse Check** should include a quick scan of several of these metrics. Candidate measures might include HIPAA 5010 compliance, HEDIS, and the Provider Data Quality Index.

common with standard corporate leadership than anything specific about the data. For example:

- How should a team work virtually across the organization?
- How do you reward them?
- How does the group manage its list of issues?
- What does it do with the issues and which groups does data governance need to influence to obtain budget to implement solutions?

All these issues are about building effective teams but contribute greatly to data governance maturity.

The outcome from the **Full Physical** consists of actionable items customized to the organization. Action plans engage and hold team members accountable. The findings include recommendations to enhance the overall program wellness, remediation to address team needs (i.e., training and communications), guidance to the Data Governance Program Director on empowering the team and a report to the senior leadership team on current and desired program effectiveness. The physical will also identify areas of improvement that will drive breakthroughs and help prioritize upcoming projects to bring in much needed wins.

In short, nursing your data governance program back to health will require a thorough review of team and program dynamics, deliverables, and processes. A **Pulse Check** doesn't provide the transparency and depth of analysis required for this diagnosis. No aspect of the data governance program should be immune from the **Full Physical**.

3: Bring in a Professional Coach

Your data governance program is operating acceptably, but it's not firing on all cylinders. The team is not as effective as it could be. Is something missing?

A data governance team is no exception to the principle that every team needs a good coach. Are your team members unsure about how a data governance initiative operates, perplexed about detailed tasks, or nervous about working through issue logs? You may need a **Professional Coach** if your team members are asking questions like this:

- How do I utilize the collateral available to get this work done?
- How do I plan out what to do end to end to get this issue resolved?
- What is the first step I need to take? The next?

Data Governance Maturity

How do you judge the annual progress of data governance? The **Full Physical** should start with an assessment of the current state to create a baseline of progress. Most organizations think they are at a low level of maturity compared to other companies in their industry. Generally this is not true - an industry often exhibits the same level of data governance maturity overall, with the exception of a few outliers. Dramatic differences can exist *between* industries, however. Financial Services and Pharmaceutical companies have focused intensively on data governance for many years, and are further along than healthcare. Focus on an end goal, such as a two-year period to grow and mature. Success takes time.

- How do I engage all the team members I need to accomplish this task?
- How can I leverage the Data Governance Council in our efforts?

Stewards and other team members may have data governance added to an already long list of duties. The **Professional Coach**, on the other hand, lives and breathes data governance on a daily basis. In fact, your coach is likely to be the only resource on the team 100% dedicated to data governance. The coach guides the team through the processes, issues log, and project plan, directing attention when and where needed. The **Professional Coach** helps the Data Governance Council mature the collateral that sets up the Stewardship Groups for success, educates the team on how to leverage the templates and processes, and walks the team through usage of the same. The **Professional Coach** is the gyroscope that guides the detailed implementation activities.

Bear in mind that the Stewardship Group acts as coaches for their teams. The leads need to know how to inform, engage, and empower the data stewards and owners on their team. A good data governance **Professional Coach** knows how to impart the knowledge needed by the leads to be effective. This means the coach will need to train-the-trainers.

Coaching a data governance team is about more than providing structure, daily guidance and education. The **Professional Coach** imparts a program focus that taps the energies of the Council and the Stewardship Groups. The team needs to be engaged in a way that stretches and challenges but does not frustrate. The **Professional Coach** can provide the impetus required to bring your data governance program to a whole new level.

Data Governance Tools and Utilities

Dedicated and committed resources should not be constrained with inadequate tools to conduct the roles of Data Stewardship. Ensure the participants have the technology for effectiveness and efficiency. Consider incorporating the following into the data governance processes:

- Data quality tools
- Data profiling tools
- Master data management tools
- Metadata management tools
- Data modeling tools
- Business process tools
- Workflow tools
- Communication tools such as SharePoint or an internal website. At a minimum the sites have an enterprise glossary of terms, a data or process intake site, communication forums (e.g., publish citations from business areas and data governance council members; establish a Wiki-style knowledge center; create a Frequently Asked Questions section)

4: Get a Transfusion

Sometimes – despite the best intentions of a team – a data governance effort flatlines. Once your program is on life support, regaining strength is tough. The team is weakened, and spirits are down. Once this happens, finding participants becomes a political hot potato – everyone wants results *now*, but no one wants to step up. It's time for a new team, or at least some new blood.

A **Transfusion** of new talent may be required when morale has dropped and you're hearing things like:

- Why has attendance declined at the Data Governance Council meetings?
- Why haven't we resolved any issues?
- Why aren't our implementations driven to completion?
- Should we give up this data governance effort?

Data governance teams in need of a **Transfusion** are in a dire situation. An infusion of new talent is needed to build out a data governance model customized to the people and culture of the organization. The current team may lack the ability to sustain a data governance program. Additional help – internal or external – is required to drive the tactical data governance efforts. This help can extend from the macro – such as writing the plan or creating a roadmap – to the micro, including identifying and gathering stewards, meeting content, and issue capture, moving the team through planning phase and into implementation.

Building out a data governance capability that delivers iterative and cumulative results needs to be sustained long term for maximum benefit. The new team should be given a fairly long commitment – think *years* instead of months. Give the **Transfusion** time to work its magic.

Staying Fresh with Data Governance

As a multi-year effort, data governance is a marathon rather than a sprint. Participants should be rotated. In a healthcare company, it is common to start with data governance focused on Provider then move to other data areas such as Member. These are two large and complex data areas. Other areas also require support, such as managing code lists (a form of master data management) that are used throughout an organization. Team members whose focus is Providers should be swapped out for team members whose focus is Members when the bulk of the data governance effort changes. If the program is running those data areas at different times, it does not make sense to keep both types of team members engaged in data governance on an ongoing basis. It may make sense to keep a balanced team during data governance startup – but staying fresh requires continuous team adjustment. Other techniques for staying current and progressive should be incorporated:

- Attend or present at data governance webinars and conferences
- Participate in blogs on the topic
- Recognize achievements of individuals or the team, such as improved data quality metrics
- Communication tools such as SharePoint or an internal website. At a minimum the sites have an enterprise glossary of terms, a data or process intake site, communication forums (e.g., publish citations from business areas and data governance council members; establish a Wiki-style knowledge center; create a Frequently Asked Questions section)

Your next step

Data governance is essential to transforming Payer data into real business value. It can improve nearly everything in an organization, because today mostly everything is linked to data. But a data governance program must be *specific* and *actionable* to yield iterative results in the near term, and great results that are sustainable over the long haul. Like any organization, the dynamics of a data governance program will evolve over time.

Start with a data governance assessment of your program's health. It will reveal whether you need a minor adjustment or a major overhaul. The stakes in the intensely competitive arena of healthcare are too high to ignore either outcome.

About the Authors

Gregory Lampshire is a Partner and Founder of Ajilitee. Previously, Gregory successfully led and grew HP's Biotechnology and Pharmaceutical Practices. Prior to HP, Gregory served as the Biotechnology and Pharmaceutical Practice Leader for Knightsbridge, a leading business intelligence consultancy that HP acquired in 2006. Before joining Knightsbridge, Gregory worked at PriceWaterhouseCoopers and Siemens, where he led the Business Intelligence and Customer Relationship Management national practices. Gregory is known for process and technology expertise to solve complex business problems, leading to higher revenues and profit margins for the companies he works for and advises. He also has demonstrated thought leadership in business strategy, strategic marketing, customer management and management analytics. Gregory has presented on predictive analytics at industry conferences and has helped employers and clients earn prestigious industry awards.

Tina McCoppin is a Partner and Founder of Ajilitee. Tina has served as Engagement & Project Manager for Fortune 1000 companies throughout her tenure at leading IT services companies including HP, Knightsbridge, Forte, Seer, Pansophic and Accenture. With 25+ years of information technology integration experience, Tina has managed multiple delivery teams with 100+ members, coordinating and managing the efforts of client staff and consultants in locations both onshore and offshore. Tina's business intelligence and data integration expertise includes: global "single customer view;" customer call center tracking; householding; campaign tracking and feedback; insurance cross-sell and up-sell data warehouse; data governance and stewardship framework. Tina also has led strategic analyses at multiple clients to define an enterprise master plan and multi-year roadmap for the implementation of cross-lines of business KPIs and requirements.

Jim Van de Water is a Manager at Ajilitee. Jim has 13+ years of IT services accomplishments and a demonstrated expertise in business intelligence, data warehousing, application development, and project leadership. Previously, Jim served as Senior Principal and Customer Program Manager at HP within the Business Intelligence Solutions Practice, where in 2009 he was nominated as one of Practice's "Most Valuable People." Prior to that, Jim served as a Senior Principal at Knightsbridge Solutions, a leading business intelligence consultancy that HP acquired in 2006, where he managed offshore and onshore business intelligence and data warehousing projects.

About Ajilitee

Ajilitee is a consulting and services firm that specializes in business intelligence, information management, agile analytics, and cloud enablement. Our award-winning information experts create agile IT environments for enhanced business performance using cloud-based methods, technologies and architectures for faster time-to-benefit with less risk and cost. For companies with strategic information needs, we advise, build, and run programs that quickly and cost-efficiently drive immediate and measurable outcomes. Ajilitee is a division of LaunchPoint, a provider of enterprise-class information-centric services and solutions. Learn more about us at www.ajilitee.com.

Resources

Computerworld: "IT increasingly bypassed on cloud adoption," by Patrick Thibodeau, June 1, 2011.

Main Contact

1701 Golf Road
Tower One, Suite 1100
Rolling Meadows, IL 60008
Phone: 224.265.4570
Fax: 224.265.0401
www.ajilitee.com

Sales Contact

Michael Pooley
Business Development Manager
Office: 402.932.1490
Mobile: 480.280.1222
Email: mpooley@ajilitee.com