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DATA GOVERNANCE 101: OPERATING MODELS

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The second installment of Acamar Consulting's data governance webinar series focuses on implementing a sustainable governance framework through a structured and actionable operating model. This model helps organizations drive long-term value by aligning leadership, cross-functional teams, and workstreams under a unified strategy.

Why a Structured Operating Model Matters

As organizations collect and manage increasing volumes of data, they need a governance model that can scale across departments and evolve over time. A structured operating model provides the framework for defining roles, ensuring accountability, and driving communication across the governance lifecycle.

The model consists of three interconnected layers:

1. Executive Sponsors
2. Data Governance Organization (DGO)
3. Working Groups

Executive Sponsors: Leading the Charge

At the top, Executive Sponsors—typically senior executives or C-suite members—champion the importance of data governance. Their responsibilities include:

- Promoting data as an organizational asset
- Empowering governance structures to enforce policies
- Driving cultural change
- Making final decisions on escalated data conflicts

These sponsors provide strategic direction, allocate resources, and appoint leadership within the Data Governance Organization.

The Data Governance Organization: Operationalizing Strategy

The DGO translates executive guidance into tangible governance actions. This group includes cross-functional representatives responsible for:

- Defining and approving governance policies, rules, and standards
- Aligning IT and business goals
- Overseeing governance initiatives through working groups

At its core is the Data Governance Council, led by the Data Governance Lead, who ensures alignment between executive goals and operational implementation. Council members—typically data owners from various domains—are responsible for setting governance standards and prioritizing initiatives.

The DGO also manages internal communication, reports progress, escalates unresolved issues, and adapts priorities as needed.

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Working Groups: Executing the Vision
Working groups form the foundation of the model, executing day-to-day governance efforts. These teams:

- Address data issues and propose solutions
- Create standards, definitions, and procedures
- Implement controls to ensure data quality, consistency, and compliance

A key player in these groups is the Data Steward, a domain expert who ensures data accuracy, oversees access and use, and implements standards at the operational level. Data stewards help translate governance strategy into practical execution.

Structure in Action
Here's how the model operates in practice:

- The Executive Council appoints the Data Governance Lead and Data Management Lead (typically from IT). These non-voting advisors support governance efforts and serve as liaisons.
- The Data Governance Lead chairs the Council, escalates issues, ensures progress, and coordinates updates.
- The Council establishes working groups based on business needs, pulling in staff across departments to address challenges like data quality, ownership, or regulatory compliance.

Communication flows in both directions: executive input shapes priorities, while insights from working groups inform strategic refinements and escalate critical issues.

Delivering Real Value
A well-implemented operating model delivers:

- Improved data quality, consistency, and usability
- Clearly defined ownership and accountability
- Better alignment between business needs and IT systems
- More efficient, transparent data governance processes

Rolling out the model incrementally helps build momentum and ensures sustainable adoption. It requires cross-functional coordination, ongoing communication, and a shared commitment to treating data as a critical asset.

What's Next
Part three of the webinar series will cover how to roll out governance programs effectively and measure their maturity. It will offer best practices for evolving governance models and driving continuous improvement. In the meantime, viewers are encouraged to revisit part one and evaluate their own organization's readiness.

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Key Takeaways:

- A tiered operating model brings clarity, structure, and accountability.
- Executive sponsors are vital for driving change and providing support.
- The Data Governance Council connects strategy to execution.
- Working groups, with the help of data stewards, put plans into action.
- Iterative rollouts and clear communication are essential for long-term success.

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