A THREE-PART SERIES

Active Data Governance

From knowing data exists to confidently using it at scale.

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Contents

ACTIVE DATA GOVERNANCE · PART 1

From Knowing Data Exists to Using It

The Governance Gap — why most programs stop at awareness and what that costs the enterprise.

This installment explains why traditional data governance stops at visibility and documentation, why knowing data exists is not the same as governing how it is used, and why governance must operate at the moment data is used.

SERIES OVERVIEW

Active Data Governance Series — Part 1 of 3

Part 1

This installment explains why traditional data governance stops at visibility and documentation.

The Challenge

It highlights why knowing data exists is not the same as governing how it is used.

The Solution

It introduces the need for active governance, where policies and controls operate at the moment data is used.

This is Part 1 of a three-part series designed for executives and data leaders seeking a clear, non-technical briefing on the evolution of data governance. The series prepares you to understand how governance must transform from passive documentation into active execution, especially as organizations accelerate their use of analytics and AI.

THE CURRENT STATE

The Current State of Data Governance

For more than a decade, organizations have invested heavily in data governance. They have built catalogs to inventory their data assets, defined business glossaries to standardize language, documented ownership models, stewardship roles, and accountability frameworks, and have written policies, reviewed them, approved them, and socialized them.

In a majority of cases, you would be right to assume that governance should be "working", but, in many organizations today, the same conversation keeps resurfacing, "We know the data exists... but can we actually use it?"

THE ILLUSION

The Governance Maturity Illusion

Organizations often mistake documentation for true governance. The critical gap lies between having governance artifacts and achieving actual operational effectiveness and trust.

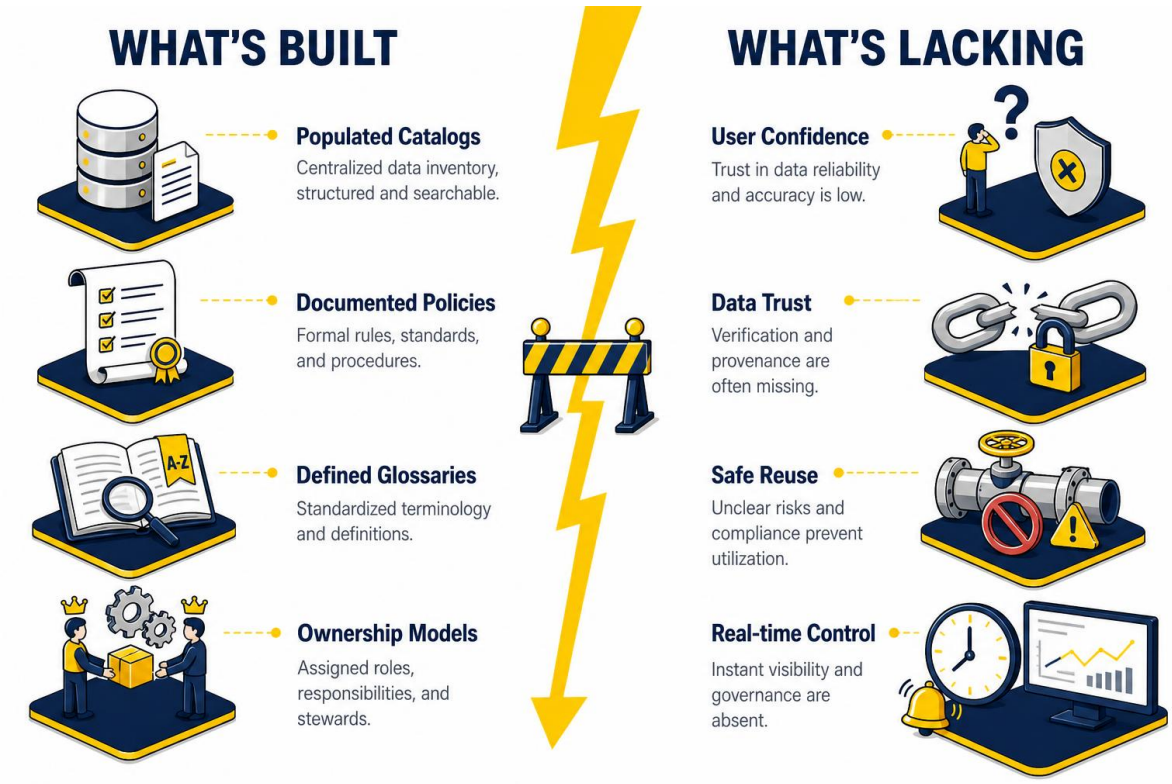


Fig 1 — What gets built vs. what's actually missing in traditional governance.

The Illusion of Maturity

Manual Verification

Analysts manually cross-check numbers "just to be sure".

Access Bottleneck

Data teams approve access requests one by one.

Trust Gap

Business users still hesitate before trusting data.

Late Issue Discovery

Issues are discovered after data has been used.

THE TURNING POINT

The Question that Exposes the Truth

> **"We know the data exists… but can we actually use it?"**

This question exposes an uncomfortable truth: data is visible, data is not usable, and governance has been optimized for compliance, not decision making.

THE UNCOMFORTABLE TRUTH

The Uncomfortable Truth About Data Usability

That question exposes an uncomfortable truth.

Most data governance programs are very good at making data visible. They are far less effective at making data usable. This can be attributable to the fact that a majority of data governance deployments were for the purposes of compliance, focused on regulations, not on the use of data for decision making.

Ask an organization how mature its data governance is, and the answer is often framed in terms of artifacts. The catalog is populated. The glossary contains hundreds, sometimes thousands, of defined terms, and critical data elements, ownership roles are clearly documented, and policies exist for access, privacy, and compliance.

On paper, governance looks complete, but step into the day-to-day reality and a very different picture emerges.

DAY-TO-DAY REALITY

The Reality of Day-to-Day Governance

Fig 2 — The reality of day-to-day governance: trust gaps, bottlenecks, late discovery.

Business users still hesitate before trusting or reusing data, analysts still cross-check numbers manually "just to be sure", data teams are still asked to approve access requests one by one, risk and compliance teams still discover issues after data has already been used.

Trust Gap
Business users hesitate before trusting data.

Manual Verification
Analysts cross-check numbers just to be sure.

Access Bottleneck
Data teams approve requests one by one.

Late Issue Discovery
Issues discovered after data has been used.

Despite documented processes and artifacts, these daily challenges hinder true data effectiveness and trust, acting as significant roadblocks in an organization's data journey.

CONTROL REPLACED BY DOCUMENTATION

When Documentation Replaces Control

When governance is measured by what has been written down rather than what is actually enforced, documentation quietly takes the place of control.

Governance exists, but confidence does not.

This is the illusion of governance maturity, mistaking the presence of documentation for the presence of control, and confusing awareness with trust.

Knowing that data exists is not the same as governing how it is used.

THE DESCRIPTIVE TRAP

The Descriptive Governance Trap

What Does This Dataset Contain?
Traditional governance answers this well through catalogs and metadata.

How Is This Field Defined?
Business glossaries provide clear definitions and standardized language.

Who Owns It?
Ownership models document accountability and stewardship.

What Policy Applies?
Policy documents outline rules for access, privacy, and compliance.

Traditional governance models are largely descriptive by design, driven by a compliance focus. They are concerned with answering questions such as what does this dataset contain, how is this field defined, who owns it, and what policy applies.

These questions matter. Without them, governance has no foundation, but they are also fundamentally incomplete.

CRITICAL QUESTIONS

The Critical Questions Left Unanswered

They describe what the data is, not how the data should be used, but they do not tell us whether this data should be used in a specific business context, whether it can be safely combined with other datasets, whether it is suitable for automation, AI, or external sharing, and whether the intended use aligns with regulatory intent, not just policy text.

As a result, governance becomes a static reference point, something users "search", rather than a system that actively shapes behavior.

The rules exist, but they do not operate.

This is where most governance programs quietly fail. They stop at awareness and leave users stranded when it comes time to act.

The real test of governance is not whether data is documented. It is whether a user can safely build and use a data product, in real time, against live data sources without breaking trust, policy, or compliance.

THEORY VS REALITY

The Theory Versus Reality of Data Governance

In Theory: The Ideal Journey

That is the moment governance is supposed to show up. In theory, the typical user journey should look like this:

A user has a business question or decision to support. They assemble the required data sources. Policies and controls are evaluated automatically. Access, masking, and constraints are enforced at runtime. A data product is created, shared, and reused with confidence.

Secure by default. Context aware. Governed as it runs.

In Reality: The Fragmented Process

What most organizations call governance today forces users through a fragmented, stop-start process.

A user discovers a dataset in a catalog. They submit an access request. They wait for approval. They are granted logical access, but not physical access. They move to another system to request credentials or roles. They ask a central team to build a pipeline or dataset. They wait again.

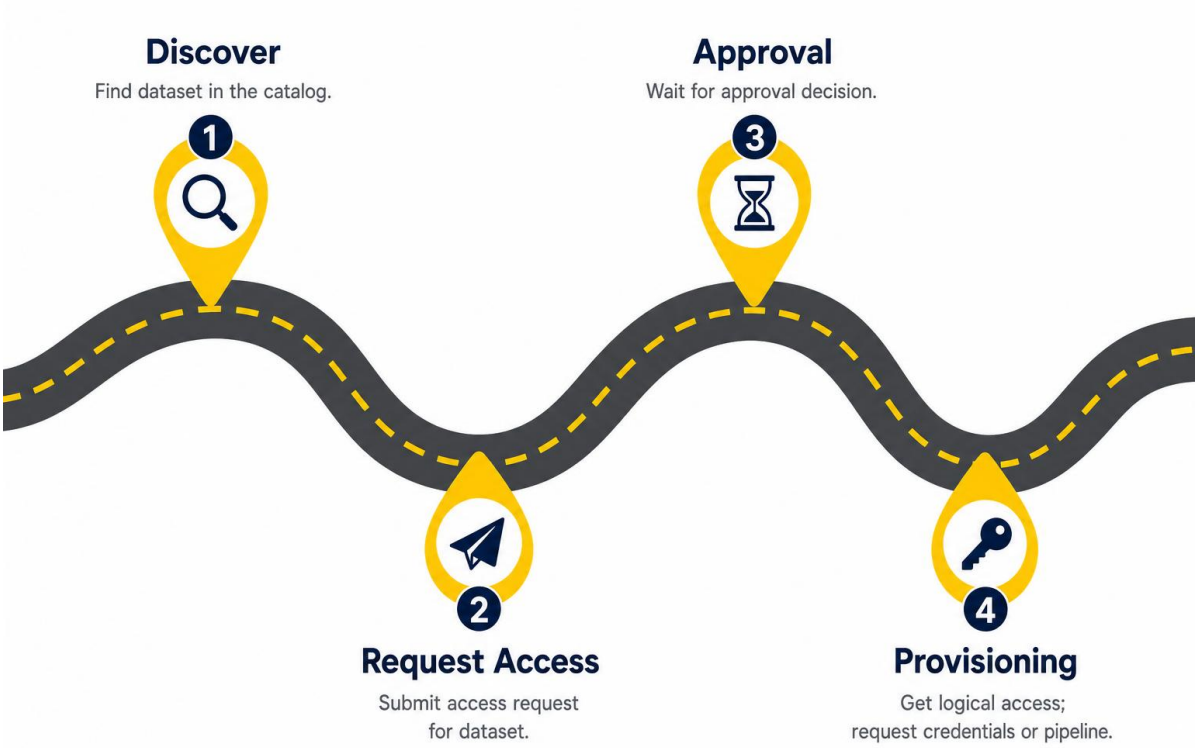


Fig 3 — The fragmented user journey: discover, request, wait, repeat.

Eventually, something is delivered.

By the time the data arrives, the original question has often changed. This is not because people are slow or incompetent. It is because governance is decoupled from execution.

GOVERNANCE THEATER

Governance Theater

This is not governance, it is governance theater.

The environment has changed faster than governance models have evolved.

The Fragmented Governance Journey

Data governance, in many organizations, creates a disjointed and frustrating experience for users. This often results in critical delays and missed opportunities.

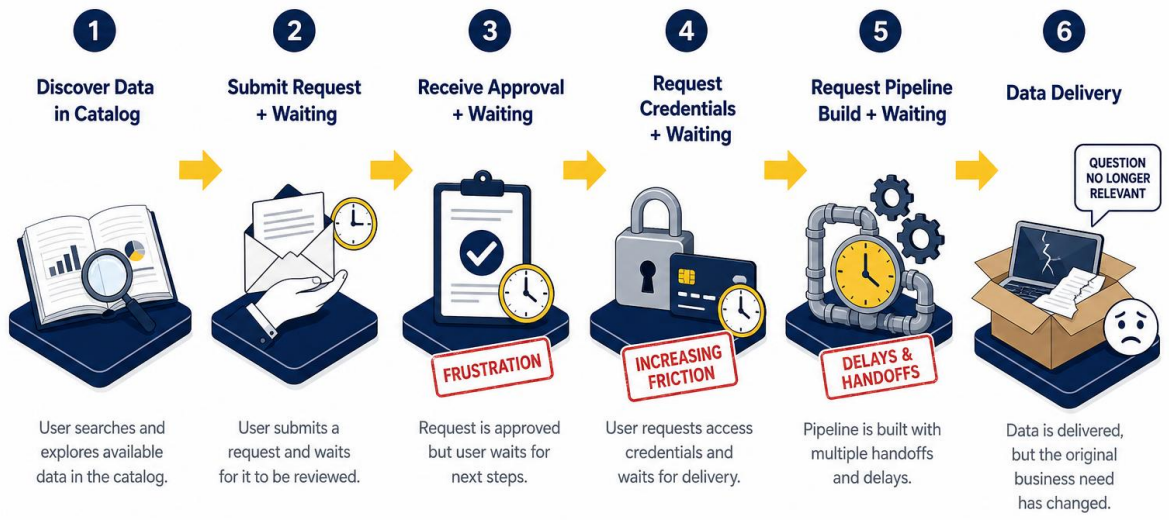


Fig 4 — Six-step access process — every wait state widens the gap between question and answer.

This stop-start process wastes valuable time and diminishes trust in the data system. The original business need often evolves before the data can even be put to use.

AI IMPERATIVE

Why AI Amplifies the Governance Gap

The rise of AI and automation has made this problem urgent. AI systems do not wait for approval workflows. They do not read policy documents. They consume data at scale, in real time, and make decisions based on what they are given.

If governance is not embedded in the data itself, if it does not operate at the moment data is accessed, combined, or used, then AI will inherit every gap, every ambiguity, and every unresolved risk in your governance model.

This is not a theoretical concern. Organizations are already discovering that their governance frameworks, built for human led analytics, break down completely when applied to automated systems.

AI does not ask permission. It uses what it can reach. If governance is not in the data, it is not in the AI.

THE SHIFT

The Shift from Descriptive to Active Governance

This is why governance must evolve. The next generation of governance is not about creating better documentation. It is about embedding governance into the data itself, so that policies operate at the moment data is used.

This is the shift from descriptive governance to active governance.

This is where active governance flips the model entirely.

Descriptive Governance

Documents what data is. Defines policies in text. Relies on users to interpret and comply. Operates outside the data flow. Reactive and retrospective.

Active Governance

Controls how data is used. Executes policies in real time. Enforces rules automatically at runtime. Embedded in the data flow. Proactive and continuous.

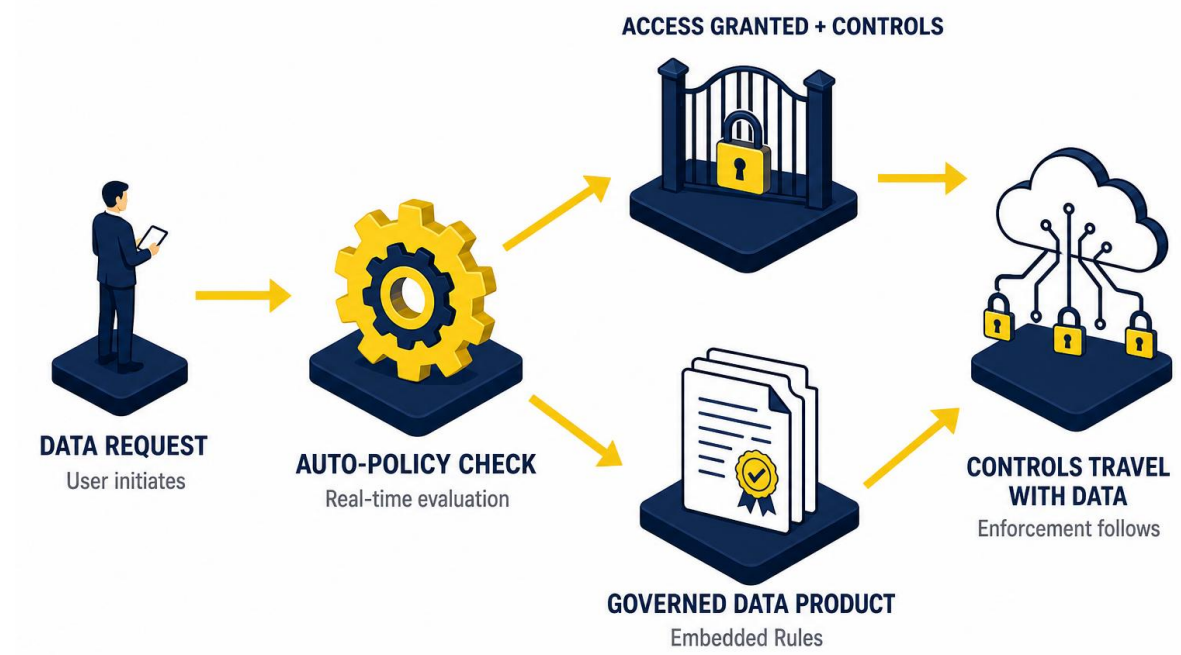
WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

What Active Governance Looks Like

Active governance means that when a user accesses data, policies are evaluated in real time. When datasets are combined, compatibility and compliance are checked automatically. When a data product is created, governance constraints are applied at runtime, not after the fact. When data is shared, controls travel with the data, not in a separate document.

This is governance that operates, not governance that observes.

It does not replace catalogs, glossaries, or ownership models. It builds on them. But it goes further. It takes the intent captured in those artifacts and makes it executable.



WHY NOW

Fig 5 — Active governance flips the model: policy checks and controls travel with the data.

Why This Matters Now

Organizations are under pressure to move faster. Business users expect self service access to data. Analytics teams are being asked to deliver insights in days, not months. AI initiatives are being launched at scale.

At the same time, regulatory expectations are rising. Regulators are no longer satisfied with governance on paper. They expect organizations to demonstrate that governance is operating, that controls are enforced, and that data is being used in ways that align with policy and regulatory intent.

The gap between these two forces, speed and control, is widening. Traditional governance cannot close it. Active governance can.

The Widening Gap

The chasm between business demands for speed and regulatory requirements for control is growing. Traditional governance struggles to keep pace, while active governance provides a vital bridge.

RUNTIME

Governance Must Operate at Runtime

The fundamental insight is governance must operate at the moment data is used.

Not before. Not after. At runtime.

Fig 6 — Governance before, at, and after data use — runtime is where it matters.

This is not about adding more rules. It is about making rules executable. It is not about slowing down data access. It is about making safe access faster. It is not about replacing governance teams. It is about giving them tools that scale.

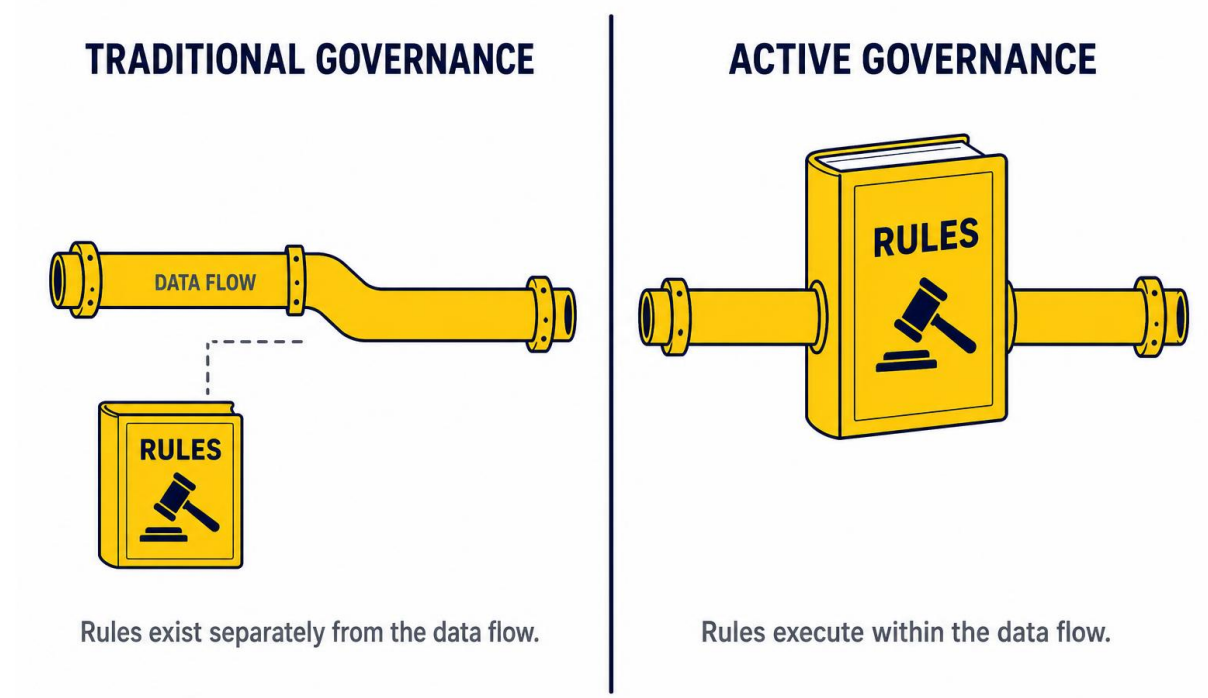


Fig 7 — Traditional: rules sit beside the data flow. Active: rules execute within it.

Active governance is the only model that can sustain trust, compliance, and velocity at the same time.

CONCLUSION

Conclusion

Knowing that data exists is not governance. Documenting policies is not governance. Governance is what happens when data is used.

If your governance model cannot answer the question, "Can I safely use this data for this purpose, right now?", then it is not governing. It is documenting.

The organizations that will succeed in the next decade are not the ones with the most complete catalogs. They are the ones where governance operates in real time, embedded in the data itself, enforcing policy at the moment it matters.

Active governance is not about more rules. It is about rules that run.

Cameron Price.

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DATA TILES

Cameron Price is a senior data industry practitioner with deep experience in data strategy, enterprise data programs, executive leadership, and advisory, as well as the development of data-focused software products. He champions business data access and enablement, with a primary focus on business-built data products, a philosophy reflected in his work and in the creation of Latttice. This article is the first in a three-part series on Active Data Governance.

REFERENCES

References & Further Reading

This article draws on research, regulatory guidance, and industry commentary from the following sources:

Gartner

Research on data governance maturity, analytics leadership, AI governance frameworks, and the evolution from descriptive to active governance models.

BARC

Research on data governance effectiveness, analytics trust barriers, and the gap between governance documentation and operational confidence.

McKinsey & Company
Research on data foundations for AI, execution gaps in governance programs, and the failure pattern where governance frameworks exist but break down at the moment of data consumption.

Deloitte
Publications on governance frameworks, operational enforcement challenges, and the velocity gap between data consumption and traditional governance processes.

Monte Carlo
State of Data Reliability research documenting ongoing data incidents despite documented governance controls.

Collibra
Thought leadership on active data governance, governance in motion, and the shift from governance as a reference layer to governance as an execution layer.

IDC
Research on decentralized data environments, domain-owned data architectures, and governance challenges in distributed systems.

Forrester
Analysis of governance automation, policy enforcement at runtime, and the future of governance as an execution layer rather than documentation.

Basel Committee on Banking Supervision
Regulatory guidance including BCBS 239 on risk data aggregation and reporting, emphasizing the need for automated, continuous governance.

European Central Bank
Supervisory findings on data governance weaknesses in financial institutions, particularly regarding data used in risk reporting, stress testing, and AI driven decision systems.

Federal Reserve
Guidance on model risk management, AI governance, and the requirement for continuous control operation in automated decision systems.

Institute of International Finance
Research on regulatory data management challenges and the need for continuous, automated governance in financial services.

Mike Ferguson
Industry commentary on governance execution challenges and the gap between governance theory and practice.

ACTIVE DATA GOVERNANCE · PART 2

What Active Data Governance Actually Means

The shift from documentation to execution.

Governance that sits on the shelf has never protected anyone. This second installment examines the shift from passive documentation to governance that operates at the precise moment data is used. And why that shift is now essential for enterprises.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Gap Between Awareness and Action

In Part 1 of this series, we explored a critical gap in modern data governance: most programs stop at awareness. They help organizations find, describe, and document data, but fall short of enabling confident use at the moment it matters. Governance exists in these organizations, but it does not actively support decision-making when and where decisions are actually being made.

Part 2 builds directly on that foundation by addressing what comes next. Active Data Governance is not about doing more governance. It is about changing fundamentally how governance

operates, shifting it from documentation to execution, from static rules to real-time decisioning, and from oversight to embedded control.

This article explores what Active Data Governance actually means in practice, why traditional approaches cannot support modern data and AI environments, and how governance must evolve to become a true enabler of confident, scalable data use across the enterprise.

PART 2 BEGINS

What Active Data Governance Actually Means

In Part 1, we surfaced an uncomfortable reality: most data governance programs stop at awareness. They help organizations find data, describe it, and document responsibility. Yet they consistently fall short of enabling confident, real-world use. The catalogs are well maintained. The glossaries are populated. The lineage diagrams are drawn. And yet, when a business user needs to act on data with confidence, governance is nowhere to be found at that decisive moment.

The missing link is not more policy, nor is it more metadata, and it is certainly not another layer of documentation. What is missing is governance that operates when data is actually used. Not before, not after, but during. As Gartner has increasingly emphasized in its research on data governance and AI readiness, governance must evolve beyond static documentation toward models that actively support data usage, particularly in environments driven by analytics and AI.

This is where Active Data Governance begins, not as a product category, not as a framework version, but as a fundamental reimagining of where governance lives in the data lifecycle.

DEFINING THE CONCEPT

"Active" is an easy word to misuse, and in the data industry, overloaded terminology has a long history of diluting important ideas. So let us be precise. Active Data Governance is not simply faster documentation, nor is it the introduction of real-time dashboards that report on governance activity. It is not a new interface layered on top of existing tools, and it is not governance performed more frequently or with greater urgency.

It represents a fundamental shift in where governance lives and how it behaves. Traditional governance exists around data, operating as a layer of documentation, oversight, and retrospective control that sits adjacent to the actual act of using data. Active governance, by contrast, exists within data usage itself, becoming part of the interaction between people, systems, and data at the moment that interaction occurs.

This distinction is subtle, but it is critical. One model describes what should happen. The other ensures it does.

1. Traditional Governance

Operates around data. Documentation, oversight, and retrospective control applied after the fact.

2. Active Governance

Operates within data usage. Embedded control applied at the precise moment of interaction.

3. The Critical Difference

One model describes what should happen. The other ensures it does, automatically, contextually, and at scale.

CORE SHIFT

From Passive Oversight to Real-Time Decisioning

Passive governance answers questions after the fact. It focuses on what data was accessed, who accessed it, and whether that access violated a policy. This retrospective posture made sense in an era when data moved slowly and business decisions were made in quarterly cycles. That era has passed.

Active governance asks a fundamentally different question: should this data be used, right now, in this specific context? That single reframing changes everything. It shifts governance from observation to decision-making. It brings governance into the flow of work, rather than leaving it as a function that reviews logs and issues findings weeks after the fact. Governance becomes a participant in the data interaction, not an auditor of it.

As BARC research highlights in its work on data products and federated governance, trust cannot be assumed through documentation alone. It must be continuously established through operational control. Control that is present, responsive, and embedded in the moment data moves from storage into action.

OPERATIONAL REALITY

Governing Data-in-Use, Not Just Data-at-Rest

Most governance controls today are applied when data is created, classified, or stored. These controls remain important, they establish the baseline of what data is and how it should be treated. But in modern data environments, where data flows across clouds, crosses domain boundaries, feeds machine learning pipelines, and powers real-time decisions, static classification at the point of creation is no longer sufficient.

Active Data Governance extends governance into the moment of execution. It ensures that controls travel with data as it moves, transforms, and is consumed across the enterprise. In doing so, governance ceases to be a checkpoint and becomes part of execution itself, not slowing data down, but ensuring it arrives at its destination in a state that is trusted, compliant, and fit for purpose.

This shift reflects broader industry thinking around "governance as code," where policies are enforced dynamically rather than interpreted manually. An approach that Forrester has identified as essential for scaling analytics safely across complex, distributed data environments.

DESIGN PRINCIPLE

Context Is the New Control Plane

Active Data Governance is driven by context rather than static rules. And context, in a modern data environment, is rich with information that governance can use to make intelligent, precise decisions at the moment of use. That context includes who is requesting the data, why they are requesting it, how the data will be used, what other data it will be combined with, and where the resulting output will ultimately be consumed.

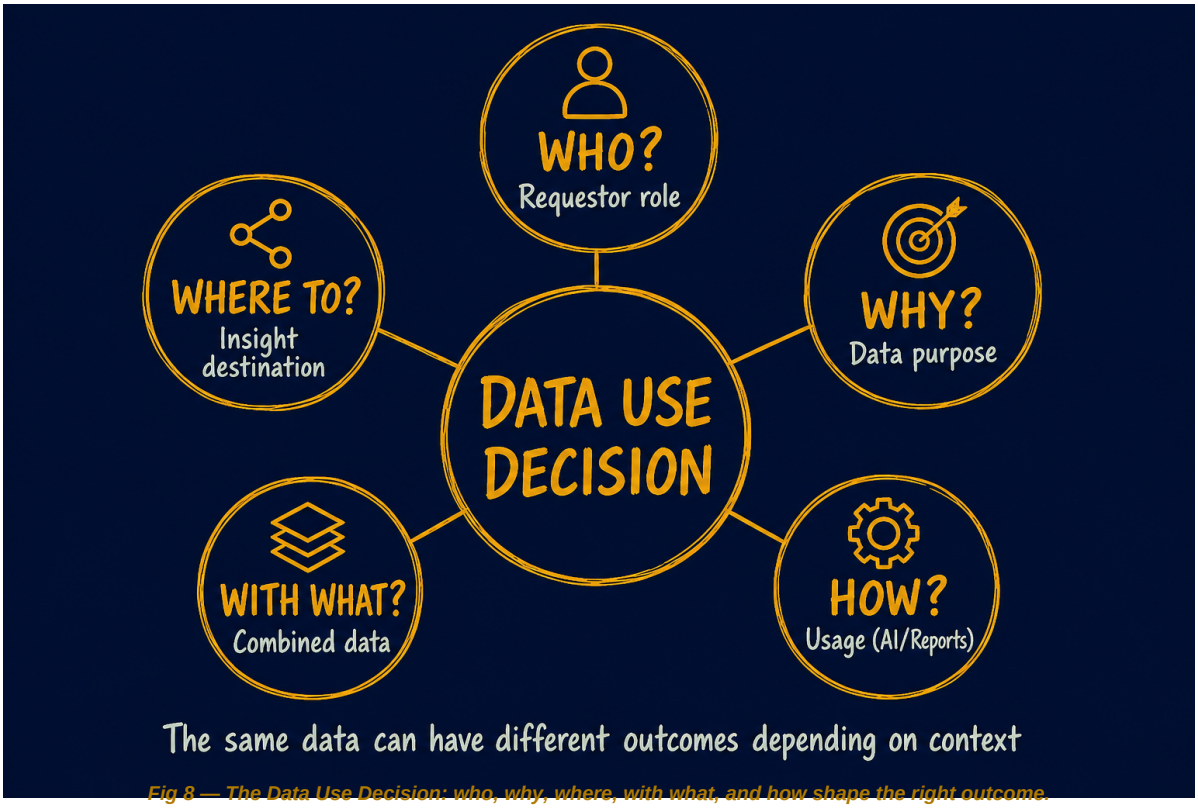


Fig 8 — The Data Use Decision: who, why, where, with what, and how shape the right outcome.

As a result, two individuals accessing the same dataset may receive different outcomes — and this variability is not a flaw but an intentional design principle. Governance adapts dynamically to intent. Sanjeev Mohan has consistently highlighted that as organizations move toward domain-oriented data ownership and data products, governance must become context-aware and embedded within usage patterns, rather than applied uniformly across all scenarios regardless of risk or purpose.

AI IMPERATIVE

Why AI Makes Passive Governance Obsolete

AI systems fundamentally change how data is consumed, and in doing so, they expose every weakness in governance models that were designed for a human-paced world. AI systems do not interpret policy documents, nor do they understand intent unless it has been explicitly encoded into their operating environment. They do not pause to request approval before consuming a dataset. They operate at scale, at speed, and without the judgment that a human practitioner might apply when something feels wrong.

Without Active Data Governance, AI systems inherit hidden risk. Sensitive data can be used inappropriately without any single moment of visible violation. Bias and compliance issues may only surface after they have already caused impact, in a customer interaction, a regulatory review,

or a failed audit. Accountability becomes increasingly difficult to trace when governance was never embedded in the system to begin with.

Active governance provides the guardrails that AI cannot infer on its own. McKinsey's research into scaling AI consistently points to data readiness, including governance and trust, as one of the primary barriers to enterprise success. Without operational governance, AI initiatives struggle not because of limitations in model capability, but because of fundamental uncertainty in the data that feeds them.

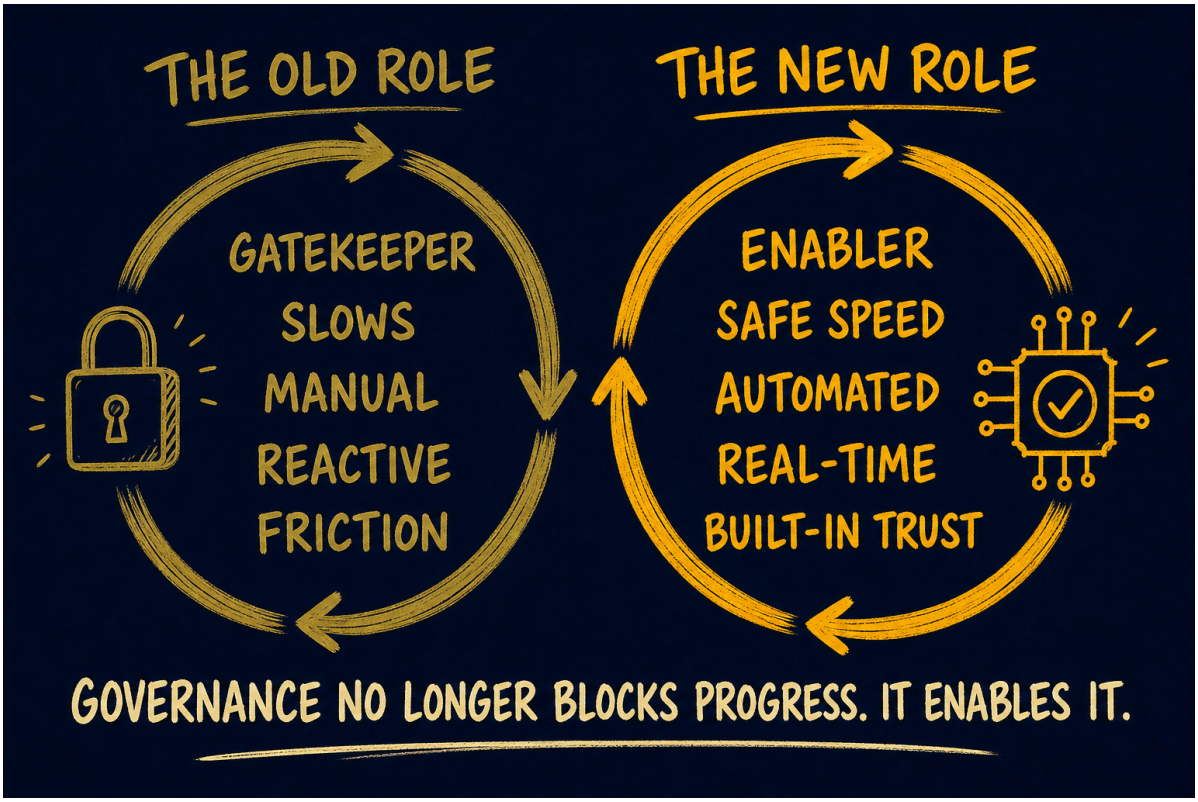
ROLE TRANSFORMATION

The Shift in the Role of Governance

In traditional models, governance is often perceived as the function that slows things down. Business users learn to work around it. Data teams are burdened by its manual demands. Executives tolerate it as a compliance necessity rather than a strategic asset. This perception is not entirely unfair, when governance operates as a gatekeeper layered on top of work, friction is the inevitable outcome.

In active models, governance becomes the system that enables safe speed. It no longer acts as a gatekeeper that must be consulted before action. Instead, it becomes an enabler, not by loosening control, but by applying it precisely, automatically, and consistently so that legitimate data use flows freely while risk is managed in real time.

Deloitte and Accenture have both emphasized in their work on modern data operating models that trust must be embedded directly into workflows, rather than layered on top as an afterthought that every user must navigate before they can act.



OUTCOMES OVER RULES

Fig 9 — From gatekeeper to enabler — governance no longer blocks progress, it enables it.

From Rules to Outcomes

Active Data Governance shifts the focus from rule enforcement to outcome assurance. This is more than a semantic distinction, it represents a different organizing principle for how governance programs are designed, measured, and valued within the enterprise. A governance program measured purely by rule compliance asks whether the organization has followed its own policies. A governance program measured by outcome assurance asks whether the organization is achieving the results that governance was designed to produce.

The question is no longer simply whether rules have been followed. Instead, organizations must consider whether governance is enabling the right decisions to be made with confidence. They must ask whether it is protecting the business without slowing it down, and whether it is supporting innovation without introducing unmanaged risk that will surface later as liability.

Rules still matter, they remain the mechanism through which intent is encoded and enforced. But they are no longer the end goal. They become a means to achieving confident, scalable outcomes: business users who can act, AI systems that can operate, and enterprises that can grow without accumulating hidden governance debt.

REFRAMING THE CONCEPT

A New Mental Model

A Decision System

Active governance continuously evaluates whether data should be used in a given context, making intelligent, policy-driven decisions at the moment of interaction rather than relying on human review after the fact.

An Execution Layer

Governance becomes embedded in the operational fabric of data use, not a separate system to be consulted, but an integrated layer that travels with data and enforces intent wherever data goes.

A Trust Engine

By assuring the quality, compliance, and appropriateness of data at every point of use, active governance builds a reusable foundation of trust that does not need to be re-established with each new data request or initiative.

BUSINESS IMPACT

What This Enables

When governance becomes active, the impact is immediate, tangible, and felt across every layer of the data-driven enterprise. This is not a theoretical benefit, it is a practical transformation in how organizations relate to their data and what they are able to do with it.

Confident Business Users

Uncertainty is removed at the point of decision. Business users act on data knowing it has been validated, governed, and cleared for their specific context and purpose.

Liberated Data Teams

Data teams are no longer burdened with constant manual approvals. They can focus on enabling scalable data use rather than managing an endless queue of governance requests.

Continuous Risk Management

Risk is managed in real time rather than retrospectively, reducing exposure while maintaining the speed that modern business demands.

Scalable AI

AI becomes usable at enterprise scale because governance is embedded into its operation — not bolted on afterward when problems have already materialized.

Reusable Trust

Trust becomes reusable rather than something re-established with every interaction. For the first time, governance delivers fully on its promise to the enterprise.

COMING IN PART 3

Setting Up the Final Step

Active Data Governance is not an abstract ideal reserved for organizations with unlimited budgets and greenfield data platforms. It is achievable without replacing entire technology stacks, centralizing all data into a single repository, or rebuilding data infrastructure from scratch. Many organizations are closer than they realize.

However, realizing Active Data Governance does require genuine commitment in three dimensions: a shift in thinking about what governance is and what it is for; a shift in operating model that embeds governance into the daily flow of data work; and a shift in where governance is applied, moving it from the edges of the data lifecycle into its operational center.

In Part 3, we move from concept to practice. We will explore how organizations enable Active Data Governance in real environments, and how they make the critical transition from simply knowing data exists to confidently using it, every day, at scale, and with the kind of trust that AI-driven enterprise genuinely requires.

CONCLUSION

The Only Place Governance Can Succeed

Active Data Governance is not about doing more governance. It is not about more policies, more catalogs, more stewards, or more review cycles. The answer to the governance gap has never been volume, it has always been precision. The enterprise needs governance that is present, contextual, enforceable, and embedded at the moment that matters.

It is about making governance work where it matters most: at the moment data is used. Every query, every combination, every AI inference, every business decision that rests on a dataset, these are the moments when governance either earns its value or reveals its absence. And in an AI-driven world, where data moves faster than any human review cycle can track, that moment of use is the only place governance can truly succeed.

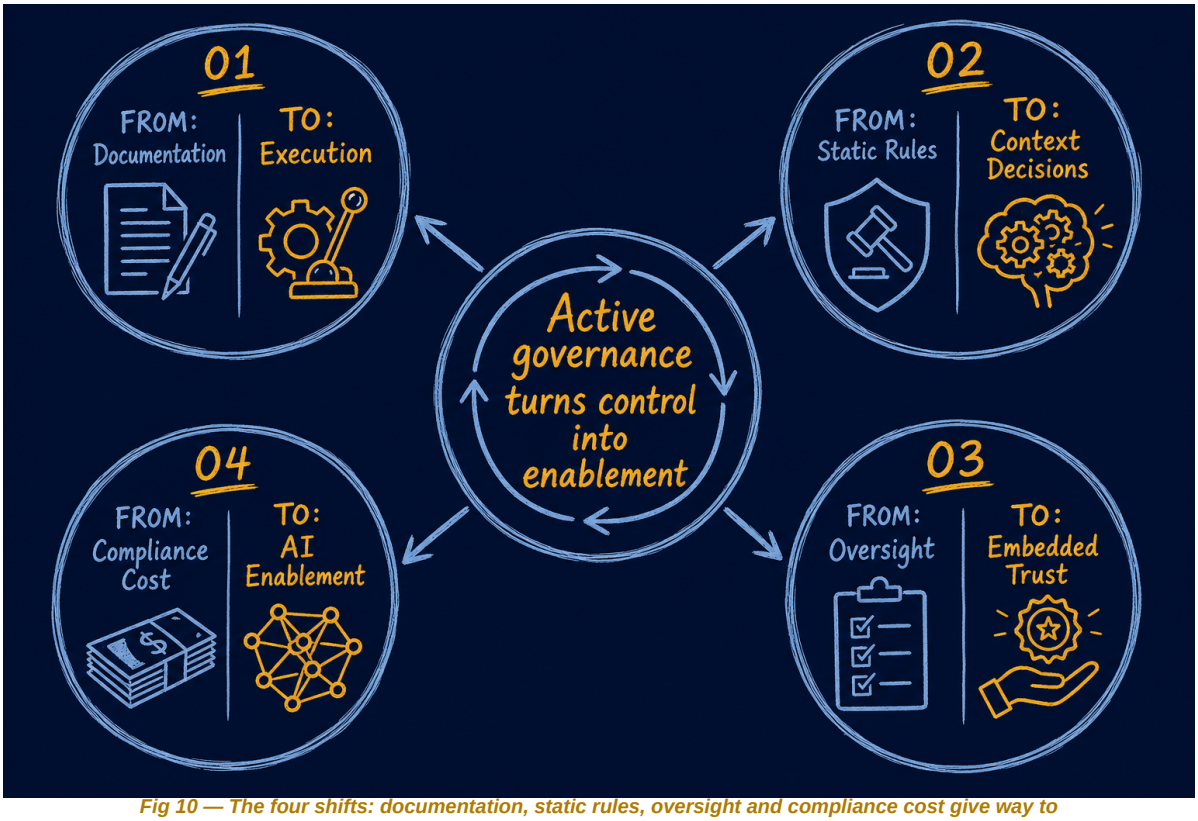


Fig 10 — The four shifts: documentation, static rules, oversight and compliance cost give way to execution, context decisions, embedded trust and AI enablement.

“Active Data Governance does not slow the enterprise down. It is what finally allows the enterprise to move fast, and trust the ground beneath its feet.”

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REFERENCES & FURTHER READING

Sources That Informed This Article

The arguments and analysis in this article draw on a body of industry research and practitioner thinking that has shaped the evolution of data governance over recent years. The following sources represent the most relevant and substantive contributions to this conversation.

Gartner

Research on Data Governance, AI Readiness, and Data Products — foundational analysis of how governance programs must evolve to support modern enterprise data strategies.

BARC (Business Application Research Center)

Data Products and Federated Governance Research — practical insights into trust, operational control, and domain-oriented data management.

Forrester Research

Governance Automation and Analytics Adoption — analysis of how dynamic policy enforcement enables safe scaling of analytics across distributed environments.

Mike Ferguson – Intelligent Business Strategies

Metadata-Driven Governance and Operational Analytics — practitioner perspective on how governance becomes part of how decisions are made, not just how data is described.

Sanjeev Mohan

Data Products, Domain Ownership, and AI Governance — thinking on context-aware governance and the shift toward embedded, usage-pattern-based control.

McKinsey & Company

The Data-Driven Enterprise and Scaling AI and Data Foundations — research identifying data readiness and governance as primary barriers to enterprise AI success.

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Modern Data Operating Models and Trust; Industrializing AI and Data Governance — complementary perspectives on embedding trust directly into data workflows.

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Governance Evolution in Cloud and AI Environments — practical analysis of how governance frameworks must adapt for cloud-native and AI-integrated data architectures.

ACTIVE DATA GOVERNANCE · PART 3

Enabling Active Data Governance

From concept to practice — and from knowing data exists to confidently using it at scale.

Making Governance Operational

Part 3 of the Series — Active Data Governance: From Knowing Data Exists to Using It.

From Knowing to Using: Making Governance Operational. In this installment, we move beyond theory and into operational practice, exploring the principles, structural changes, and design decisions that transform governance from a compliance function into a live operational capability.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Gap Between Knowing and Using

Most organizations have already invested heavily in data governance. They have catalogs, policies, classifications, ownership models, and compliance frameworks in place. They know where their data is, who owns it, and how it should be used. And yet, when it comes to actually using that data to make decisions, hesitation remains. Access is delayed, confidence is inconsistent, and governance is often perceived as a barrier rather than an enabler.

This is the gap that Active Data Governance addresses. It is not about redefining governance, but about making it operational. Traditional governance has focused on documentation and oversight, creating awareness without ensuring usability. Active Data Governance shifts this model by embedding governance directly into the moment data is used, where value and risk exist simultaneously. This allows organizations to move from static control to dynamic, context-aware enforcement, without slowing down decision-making.

Research from Gartner, McKinsey and Company, and Forrester consistently highlights that organizations struggle not because they lack governance frameworks, but because those frameworks are not integrated into operational workflows. The result is a persistent disconnect between knowing data exists and trusting it enough to use it.

This article outlines the practical principles required to close that gap. It argues that governance must move from being a project to becoming an operating capability, from being centrally interpreted to automatically executed, and from being applied to technical artifacts to being aligned with business-facing data products. When implemented correctly, governance becomes invisible until it matters, scalable across both human and machine consumption, and capable of enabling rather than restricting decision-making.

SETTING THE SCENE

From Awareness to Action

In the first two parts of this series, we reframed the governance challenge in a way that reflects what many organizations are already experiencing. In Part 1, we explored how governance has historically stopped at awareness, creating visibility without confidence. Organizations know their data exists, but they do not trust it enough to act on it. In Part 2, we introduced Active Data Governance as the shift from documentation to execution, moving governance into the flow of how data is actually used.

The critical question now is not theoretical. It is operational.

How do organizations make this real in environments that are already complex, distributed, and under pressure to deliver faster outcomes?

The answer is not another layer of process or another centralized program. It is a change in how governance is designed and applied, embedding governance into the natural lifecycle of data usage, ensuring that it operates at the exact point where decisions are made, rather than before or after that moment.

PRINCIPLE ONE

Stop Treating Governance as a Project

One of the most common failure points in governance initiatives is the assumption that governance can be "delivered" as a project. This approach typically results in large-scale transformation efforts that focus on building frameworks, defining policies, and implementing tools over extended periods of time. While these efforts often produce comprehensive documentation, they rarely change how data is actually used within the organization.

Evidence from Gartner suggests that a significant proportion of governance programs fail to achieve adoption beyond initial implementation phases. This is not due to a lack of capability, but due to a lack of integration into daily workflows. Governance becomes something that exists alongside operations, rather than within them.

Active Data Governance reframes this entirely. It is not a destination that can be reached and completed. It is an operating capability that evolves continuously. It prioritizes relevance over completeness, ensuring that governance is always aligned with how data is being used, rather than how it was originally designed to be controlled.

PRINCIPLE TWO

Governance Must Exist at the Point of Use

The most important shift in Active Data Governance is where governance is applied. Traditional models place governance either upstream, within data engineering pipelines, or downstream, within audit and compliance processes. In both cases, governance is removed from the moment where data is actually used to make decisions. This separation is increasingly problematic in modern data environments.

According to McKinsey and Company, organizations that enable real-time, data-driven decision-making are significantly more likely to outperform their peers. However, these same organizations identify governance as a key constraint on speed, particularly when access and approval processes introduce delays.

Governance must therefore operate at the point of use. It must be present when queries are executed, when datasets are combined, when insights are shared, and when data is consumed by AI systems or automated processes.

This is the moment where risk and value intersect, and where governance has the greatest impact. When governance is not present in this moment, it becomes advisory rather than operational. It may inform decisions, but it does not shape them. The distinction between these two states is the difference between governance that is tolerated and governance that is trusted.

DEFINITION VS. EXECUTION

Separating Definition from Execution

Governance intent is set by humans. Enforcement is handled by systems. This separation eliminates variability and removes the bottleneck of manual interpretation at scale.

A core principle of making governance operational is the separation of definition from execution. Organizations still require policies, classifications, glossaries, and ownership models. These elements provide the structure and intent of governance. However, the enforcement of these elements should not rely on manual interpretation at the point of use.

Research from Deloitte and Forrester highlights that manual governance processes introduce inconsistency and delay, particularly in large, distributed environments. When humans are responsible for both defining and enforcing governance, the result is variability in how rules are applied and increased risk of non-compliance.

Active Data Governance addresses this by allowing humans to define governance intent while systems handle execution, ensuring consistency and scale.

PRINCIPLE THREE

Data Products as the Unit of Governance

Another critical shift is the move away from governing technical artifacts toward governing data products. Tables, files, and schemas were never designed to carry business meaning. They represent how data is stored, not how it is used. Applying governance at this level creates a persistent disconnect between the rules that exist and the outcomes that matter to the business.

The concept of data as a product, introduced by Zhamak Dehghani, provides a more appropriate unit for governance. Data products are defined by their purpose, their consumers, and their expected usage. They have clear ownership and accountability, making them a natural focal point for governance. Studies from BARC (Business Application Research Center) and Thoughtworks indicate that organizations adopting data product approaches see improved trust and reuse of data, because governance is aligned with how the business actually interacts with data, rather than how data is structured technically.

By governing data products, organizations can ensure that governance is directly tied to outcomes rather than infrastructure, making it both more meaningful to business users and more enforceable in practice.

EXPERIENCE

Making Governance Invisible Until It Matters

One of the defining characteristics of effective governance is that it does not unnecessarily interrupt workflows. Traditional governance often introduces friction through approval processes, access requests, and manual checks. This creates resistance among users and limits adoption

across the organization.

According to Forrester, user experience is a critical factor in governance success. When governance is perceived as restrictive, users are more likely to bypass it, increasing risk rather than reducing it.

Active Data Governance takes a different approach. It is designed to be invisible during valid usage, allowing users to access and use data without interruption. When restrictions are necessary, governance provides clear, contextual explanations, ensuring that users understand why certain actions are limited and what alternatives exist.

This approach shifts governance from being perceived as a mechanism of control to being experienced as a foundation of confidence. Users trust that the data they are working with is governed appropriately, without needing to engage directly with governance processes to validate that trust.

HUMANS + MACHINES

Designing for Humans and Machines

The modern data landscape includes not only human users but also machines. BI tools, APIs, automation workflows, and AI systems all interact with data continuously. This introduces new challenges for governance, particularly in ensuring consistency and scalability across forms of consumption that operate at speed and volume far beyond what manual processes can manage.

Research from MIT Technology Review and IDC highlights that the rapid adoption of AI is outpacing governance capabilities, creating significant risks in areas such as data privacy, bias, and regulatory compliance. Active Data Governance addresses this by encoding governance intent in a way that can be enforced by machines, ensuring that governance is applied consistently across all forms of data consumption, whether human or automated.

Human Intent

Business and governance leaders define policies, classifications, and ownership rules that reflect organizational priorities and regulatory requirements.

Machine Execution

Systems enforce governance at scale, in real time, across every data interaction — BI queries, API calls, AI pipelines, and automated workflows.

Continuous Oversight

Human oversight remains essential for defining, monitoring, and refining governance rules as business context, regulation, and data usage evolve.

WHERE TO BEGIN

Starting Where It Matters Most

Implementing Active Data Governance does not require a complete overhaul of existing systems. Organizations that attempt full-scale transformation simultaneously often find themselves paralysed by complexity before demonstrating any meaningful value. Instead, a targeted approach focused on the highest-impact areas enables momentum and builds internal confidence.

Cross-Domain Data Usage

Where ownership and context intersect across teams and platforms, creating ambiguity about accountability and appropriate use.

Regulated and Sensitive Data

Where risk is highest and the consequences of inconsistent governance are most immediately felt by the organization and its stakeholders.

AI and Automation Use Cases

Where scale amplifies consequences, making consistent, machine-enforced governance a prerequisite for responsible deployment.

High-Value Decision Workflows

Where delays in access are most visible and where the cost of governance friction is most directly felt by business leadership.

By focusing initial efforts on these areas, organizations can demonstrate immediate and measurable value, building the internal momentum required for broader adoption without requiring enterprise-wide transformation as a precondition for progress.

OPERATIONAL IMPACT

What Changes When Governance Becomes Operational

When governance is embedded into the flow of data usage, the impact is significant and felt across multiple dimensions of the organization. Business users gain the confidence to make decisions without waiting for approval from data teams or compliance functions. Data teams are no longer required to act as enforcement layers, allowing them to focus on enabling capabilities rather than managing access requests and resolving ambiguity.

Risk becomes continuous rather than episodic, with governance applied in real time rather than through periodic audits that assess what happened after the fact. Trust becomes reusable, embedded into every interaction with data rather than being re-established for each new use case. Most importantly, data begins to move at the speed of the organization, rather than at the speed of its governance processes.

Active Data Governance represents a fundamental shift in how governance is understood and applied. It is not about increasing control, but about applying control more effectively, moving

governance from static rules to dynamic intent, from oversight to enablement, and from awareness to action.

THE REAL SHIFT

From Awareness to Action

Active Data Governance represents a fundamental shift in how governance is understood and applied within an organization. It is not about increasing control, but about applying control more effectively and at the right moment. It moves governance from static rules to dynamic intent, from oversight to enablement, and from awareness to action.

This shift allows organizations to move beyond simply knowing that data exists, toward trusting that data enough to use it confidently and consistently across every team, tool, and decision-making context. The organizations that make this shift will not just be better governed. They will be more competitive, more responsive, and more capable of delivering on the promise of data as a strategic asset.

CLOSING THE LOOP

Restoring the Connection

Data governance was never intended to be a reporting function. Its purpose has always been to make data usable, safe, and valuable across the organization. Over time, it became focused on documentation and compliance, losing its connection to operational outcomes and the business decisions it was designed to support.

Active Data Governance restores that connection. It embeds governance directly into how data works, ensuring that it supports rather than constrains decision-making at every level of the organization. When governance becomes operational, it is no longer something organizations struggle to implement, justify, or sustain. It becomes something they rely on to drive outcomes, enable growth, and manage risk with confidence.

The journey from knowing to using is not a technical problem. It is a governance design problem. And the organizations that solve it will define what data-driven leadership looks like for the next decade.

INFOGRAPHIC SERIES SUMMARY

Five Principles of Active Data Governance

Active Data Governance is not a single technology, framework, or governance program. It is a shift in how organizations think about trust, access, accountability, and decision-making at scale. These five principles summarize the operational foundations required to move governance from static

oversight into a live capability embedded directly into the flow of data usage.

The organizations that succeed with governance will not necessarily be those with the most policies, the largest governance teams, or the most complex frameworks. They will be the organizations that make governance operational — embedded directly into how data is accessed, trusted, shared, and used every day. Because ultimately, governance only creates value when it enables better decisions, faster, with confidence.

Cameron Price

DATA TILES

Cameron Price is a senior data practitioner and the creator of Latttice. In this Part 3 — the final installment of the Active Data Governance series — he turns the conversation from theory to practice, setting out how organizations move governance from documentation to live execution at the point of decision.

Governance That Works Where You Work

The organizations that will lead the next decade of data-driven enterprise are not those with the most comprehensive governance frameworks. They are those that have made governance

operational, invisible when it should be, and unmistakable when it matters.

Active Data Governance. From knowing to using.

FURTHER READING

References (discoverable)

This article is grounded in Cameron Price's practitioner-led experience across enterprise data environments and the development of Latttice. The following organizations and authors are referenced to validate and support the direction outlined, reflecting broader industry alignment on governance challenges, data strategy, and AI risk trends.

Gartner
Data governance and analytics maturity research.

McKinsey and Company
Data-driven enterprise and decision intelligence studies.

Forrester
Governance adoption and data strategy insights.

Deloitte
Data governance operating models.

BARC
Business Application Research Center — Data product and analytics research.

Thoughtworks
Technology Radar and data mesh evolution.

MIT Technology Review
AI governance and risk trends.

IDC
AI adoption and governance gap analysis.

Zhamak Dehghani
Data Mesh and data product thinking.

Continue the Conversation

If this series has raised questions about your governance maturity, the applicability of these principles to your operating environment, or the practical steps to begin — Data Tiles welcomes the conversation.

Talk to John Goode, Head of Global Sales

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Learn more about **Latttice** — the Data Product Workbench that makes Active Data Governance operational.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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DATA TILES

Cameron writes on the gap between AI ambition and AI reality — and on what it takes for boards, practitioners and platforms to finally meet in the middle.