

Stewardship of open government data - concepts and corresponding roles in practice

Isabell von Falkenhausen^{1,*}, Jana Plomin¹, Merle Heider¹ and Jens Klessmann¹

¹Fraunhofer Institute for Open Communications Systems FOKUS, Kaiserin-Augusta-Allee 31, 10589 Berlin

Abstract

As the governance of open government data evolves the concept of data stewardship (DS) for open government data (OGD) is gaining traction both in grey and academic literature. At the same time, roles have emerged that may be described as open data stewards through combining tasks of internal data management, the facilitation of open data publication and external engagement and thus catering to several stakeholders. This paper aims to shed light on the concept of DS in OGD through the public domain and on the existence of formalized roles that enact such DS. We provide insights on DS by bringing together findings from literature on the OGD sector, the research data community and the private sector. Furthermore we conduct a content analysis on role descriptions from open data providing government organisations' websites in English and German speaking countries. Our results indicate that organisations in OGD employ roles that ensure DS on several levels and that stretch beyond typical roles found in research, using different role titles. While the priorities of roles predominantly entail responsibilities within the organization also external-facing tasks arise, indicating a stewardship for multiple stakeholders.

Keywords

data stewardship, data governance, open data

1. Introduction

The data steward role is mentioned in literature but often not defined [1]. In practice certain roles have emerged that uniquely unify internal data management with the facilitation of open data publication and external engagement and which might be labeled as stewards for open data. The Open Data Coordinator as described by the Competence Center for Open Data in Germany serves as an examples for this [2]. "Stewardship" means taking on a task, overseeing something or taking care of something [3]. Data stewardship (DS) therefore involves overseeing and caring for data, with its definition varying depending on the context and specific goals. Stewardship in public administration requires that government information is managed as a valuable resource, that its protection from damage and misuse is ensured and that transparency is promoted by making it "fit for use" [4]. Data is seen as a strategic asset [5] with benefits for the public [6, 7] and a focus on high data quality, security and standardized metadata [5] in compliance with laws and regulations [8]. Other sources demand a more comprehensive

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*Corresponding author.

✉ isabell.von.falkenhausen@fokus.fraunhofer.de (I. v. Falkenhausen); jana.plomin@fokus.fraunhofer.de (J. Plomin)

🆔 0009000173429794 (I. v. Falkenhausen); 0000000301277493 (J. Plomin); 0009000105671722 (M. Heider);

0009-0004-0820-3141 (J. Klessmann)



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understanding of DS that considers all stakeholders' interests [9]. The aim of this ongoing research is to gain a first understanding of roles of DS in the government sector with a focus on open data. For this we employ a content analysis on role descriptions from open data providing government organisations' websites through which we generate clusters of responsibilities present among the roles descriptions.

2. First results

A web search revealed seven role descriptions from Germany, the USA, Canada and Austria with the titles Open Data Coordinator, Open Data Commissioner, Data Steward, Data Expert and Open Data Champion. Clusters of responsibilities derived through the content analysis include amongst others identification and evaluation of datasets, data publication, ensuring data quality, coordination within the organisation, compliance and exchange with user communities.

3. Conclusions

A limitation of this study is that it does not consider the different contexts of the roles. Recommendations for further research include conducting more in-depth qualitative studies on roles enacting stewardship for OGD.

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