Data Identification and Classification

Data & Analytics

FTI Consulting understands the challenges organizations face when identifying and mapping their data landscape to understand the types and sources of data that exist across its ecosystem. This effort can become convoluted due to historical mergers and acquisitions, technology migrations, siloed business units, employee turnover and lack of reliable documentation. We work with clients to bring organization and clarity to the process through data discovery and data classification.

Increasing and ever-changing data privacy and data security regulations as well as the exponential growth in the volume of data produced can make it difficult to understand where data exists across an organization. Maintaining an evergreen map of the data and applications used by a company creates the foundation that enables Privacy, Governance and Information Security's critical functions. Scanning tools are often used to simplify the process of keeping the map updated by enriching data through scan findings. The process of standing up the data map, implementing scanning technology, and determining lineage between data sources can be an extremely manual and time-consuming process. We have developed solutions for clients that automate these processes and unlock the benefits of data identification and classification while not being burdened with hiring additional employees to manage the process.

FTI Consulting's Approach to Data Identification and Classification

Buy vs. Build - Selecting the Proper Data Identification and Classification Tool: Often clients face a challenging decision regarding which Data Identification and Classification solution is right for them. Choosing the right path can have significant financial impacts, so we work with stakeholders across various business functions to evaluate current and future business needs and align the organization on measurable requirements. These requirements can then be used to evaluate multiple vendors, as well as in-house options, during a proof of concept to inform the business case. Our team has assisted clients in standing up vendor tools in their own environments and creating test scenarios to evaluate tool performance against the defined success criteria, giving them confidence in their vendor selection. Our experts have also helped build custom applications that clients have used to meet their data discovery needs.

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Operating Model and Implementation: Before a tool is implemented, organizations must define the proper operating model. It is essential to agree on clear ownership, usage agreements, maintenance, and other key operating decisions. A Data Identification and Classification tool is useful for many different business functions, so clearly defining the roles and responsibilities across teams and verticals helps extract the most value from the tool. We often build upon the information gathered during the requirements development project phase to inform and recommend the proper operating model. The target model's success is dependent on client ownership, so we will facilitate the installation process by recommending best practices in partnership with the appropriate stakeholders. Our team has experience in assisting with implementation, advising on technical considerations as well as performing the go-forward operation of the process. We offer flexible solutions where our team can continue to manage the tool or we can transition the process to the client with the necessary on-site training and documentation to provide confidence in its ongoing success.

Bridging Vendor Gaps: Out-of-the-box tools often do not fit all client requirements. To fill the gaps, we can build custom solutions either within the chosen tool or as an independent and standalone solution. These engagements have ranged from building custom pattern-based search criteria in a vendor's tool, to creating a Python script that crawls through client databases to search for sensitive data using a different method that complemented the client's chosen Data Identification and Classification tool. We have a team of developers that can tailor solutions specific to any use case and work in partnership with the chosen vendor to seamlessly implement processes.

— WHY FTI CONSULTING?

We are a team of technologists and data science professionals that draws on years of experience in highly regulated industries to advise clients on how to best manage their data. As the regulatory landscape continues to change, we deliver solutions flexible enough to scale and adjust based on emerging data privacy laws, regulatory scrutiny, technical advancement, and digital transformation. We also understand that data can be a profit center and differentiator, if handled properly. FTI Consulting offers a full suite of capabilities including program design, strategic assessments, data classification, automation, data management and validation, and the development of tailored technical solutions. Our focus is to operationalize Data Governance within an organization to unlock the full value of its data. We take a technology-driven approach to keep Data Governance initiatives current, with a focus on solutions that can be continually managed with minimal demands on personnel.
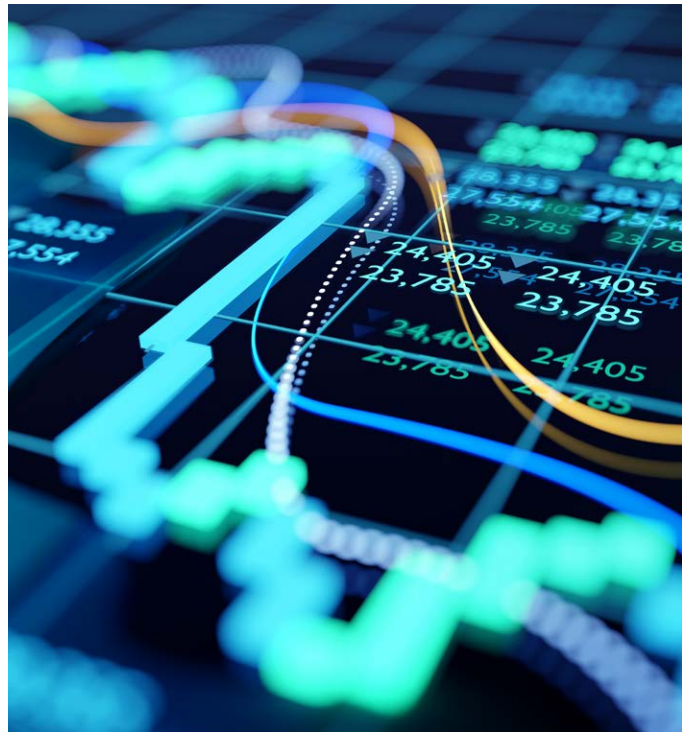
CASE STUDY

COMPLIANCE WITH PRIVACY REGULATIONS

For the client, a global telecommunications company, a steady flow of information was critical to serving its customers, from service orders to data needed by technicians in the field. To preserve billions of dollars in government contract revenue, the client needed to fulfill the new Cybersecurity Maturity Model Certification ("CMMC") requirements by identifying controlled unclassified information ("CUI") in more than 3,500 applications containing approximately 7,000 unstructured databases and protecting the information using government-approved methods. Due to business needs, the timeline for identification and protection was reduced from 18-plus months to less than 12 months and the privacy concerns needed to be mitigated while not interrupting critical business operations.

Our team used a data protection platform to scan a sample of each database, database schema, table, and field across various database technologies, in order to classify data with potentially personal, sensitive or controlled information. With this insight, the team worked to validate whether the data required protection, what protection method was appropriate (encryption, data masking, tokenization), and what level of access individuals or user bases required. Throughout the project, while the client remained highly focused on CMMC, we calibrated each decision for overall program success and holistic data governance while meeting strict timelines.

DREW SHEEHAN
Data Governance Co-Leader
Senior Managing Director
+1.703.470.4995
drew.sheehan@fticonsulting.com

BRYCE SNAPE
Data Governance Co-Leader
Managing Director
+1.703.795.3098
bryce.snape@fticonsulting.com

MICHAEL BALLOU
Managing Director
+1.617.747.1710
michael.ballou@fticonsulting.com

MAX CANTIN
Director
+1.202.715.1553
max.cantin@fticonsulting.com

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