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Book Review: Going Digital to Advance Data Governance for Growth and Well-being

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2022).
Going Digital to Advance Data Governance for Growth and Well-being.
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ABSTRACT

This review critically examines *Going Digital to Advance Data Governance for Growth and Well-being*, published by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The report provides a comprehensive policy-oriented analysis of data governance as a central component of digital transformation in contemporary economies. It conceptualises data as a strategic asset that supports innovation, productivity, and evidence-based decision-making while also highlighting associated risks related to privacy, security, and market concentration. This review critically evaluates the report's structure, key contributions, and practical relevance, with particular attention to its conceptual clarity, analytical depth, and policy applicability. Overall, the report represents a valuable resource for policymakers, researchers, and practitioners seeking to understand and navigate the complexities of data governance in the digital age.

Keywords: data governance; digital transformation; digital economy; public policy; innovation; data-driven decision-making.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid proliferation of digital technologies has fundamentally reshaped the production, circulation, and utilisation of data across contemporary economies and societies. In this context, the OECD report *Going Digital to Advance Data Governance for Growth and Well-being* offers a comprehensive and policy-oriented examination of data governance as a central issue in the digital era. Developed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), a

globally recognised institution for evidence-based policy analysis, the report reflects a multidisciplinary and international perspective on digital transformation. It highlights the growing significance of data as a critical resource influencing economic performance, innovation processes, and public policy outcomes.

Positioned within the OECD’s broader “Going Digital” initiative, the report conceptualises data not merely as a technical input but as a strategic asset underpinning economic growth and societal well-being. It emphasises the need for structured governance mechanisms to manage the opportunities and risks associated with data use, particularly in relation to access, sharing, and control. By situating data governance within a global and interdisciplinary framework, the report draws attention to the increasing complexity of data ecosystems and the necessity of coordinated approaches across institutional and national boundaries.

Building on this foundation, the report advances an integrated perspective that brings together economic, policy, and governance dimensions of data. It frames data governance as a cross-cutting policy issue requiring coordinated and multi-level responses across sectors and jurisdictions. This positioning contributes to ongoing academic and policy discussions by reinforcing the view of data as a strategic resource in digitally driven economies. As such, the report provides a coherent analytical lens for understanding the role of governance frameworks in supporting innovation, public value creation, and sustainable digital transformation.

OVERVIEW AND STRUCTURE

The report is organised into four main sections that guide the reader from conceptual foundations to practical policy implications. It begins by defining key concepts such as “data” and “data governance,” establishing a common analytical basis for understanding the role of data in digital economies. The subsequent section examines data as a strategic asset, highlighting its contribution to innovation, productivity, and evidence-based decision-making. This is followed by a discussion of the distinctive characteristics of data, including issues related to access, sharing, and control, which shape the complexity of governance frameworks. Together, these sections provide a structured foundation for analysing how data function within contemporary digital systems.

Building on this structure, the report concludes with policy considerations aimed at maximising the benefits of data while mitigating associated risks. This progression from conceptual clarification to policy application strengthens the analytical coherence of the report by linking theoretical insights with practical governance approaches. Importantly, the report adopts a multidisciplinary perspective by integrating economic, technological, and regulatory dimensions. This integrated approach enhances its analytical relevance and increases its applicability across diverse institutional and regulatory contexts, making it particularly useful for both policymakers and researchers engaged in digital transformation and data governance.

KEY CONTRIBUTIONS

A major contribution of the report lies in its conceptualisation of data as a strategic asset that reshapes both economic activities and societal outcomes. Rather than treating data merely as a technical input, the OECD positions it as a central driver of innovation, productivity, and evidence-based decision-making across sectors. This perspective is particularly significant in demonstrating how data infrastructures support responses to global challenges, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, through real-time analysis and improved public service delivery. In addition, the report highlights the critical role of cross-border data flows in enabling digital trade and international collaboration, reinforcing the global nature of data-driven economies.

Another important contribution is the framing of data governance as a cross-cutting policy issue that extends beyond single regulatory domains. By emphasising coordination across areas such as trade, competition, and public governance, the report advances a more integrated understanding of how data ecosystems function within complex institutional environments. This perspective not only enhances the conceptual clarity of data governance but also strengthens its practical relevance for policymakers and researchers seeking to address the multifaceted challenges of digital transformation.

CRITICAL EVALUATION

Despite its comprehensive scope, the report exhibits several analytical limitations that merit closer scrutiny. First, the analysis remains predominantly policy-oriented and normative, with restricted empirical depth, particularly in relation to the measurement of data's economic value. Although the report recognises data as a significant asset, it simultaneously acknowledges the difficulty of quantifying its value, leaving key claims insufficiently substantiated. This constraint is partly inherent to its policy-driven orientation, which prioritises broad applicability over detailed empirical validation. As a result, several arguments remain conceptually strong but lack the empirical grounding necessary to support more rigorous academic analysis.

Second, the treatment of market dynamics remains underdeveloped and lacks sufficient critical depth. While the report acknowledges the rise of data-driven firms and platform-based economies, it does not adequately examine their long-term implications for market concentration, competitive advantage, and structural inequality. Issues such as data monopolisation, network effects, and barriers to entry are only briefly addressed, limiting the report's engagement with core debates in digital competition policy. This analytical gap reduces its ability to critically assess how data governance frameworks interact with evolving market structures in increasingly concentrated digital ecosystems.

Third, although ethical considerations such as bias, fairness, and data protection are acknowledged, their treatment remains largely descriptive and insufficiently developed. In particular, the report offers limited engagement with contemporary challenges related to algorithmic decision-making, accountability, and responsible AI governance. This weakens its capacity to provide actionable insights in areas that are increasingly central to digital policy discourse. Overall, while the report offers broad coverage across multiple dimensions of data governance, this breadth comes at the

expense of deeper theoretical and empirical engagement, revealing a clear trade-off between scope and analytical depth.

RELEVANCE AND IMPLICATIONS

The report holds significant relevance for a wide range of stakeholders, including policymakers, academics, and industry practitioners. For policymakers, it offers a useful policy-oriented framework for designing data governance policies that balance openness with control, thereby maximising societal benefits while mitigating risks. For organisations, the report underscores the strategic importance of data as a resource that can enhance competitiveness and innovation capabilities. From an academic perspective, it provides a solid conceptual foundation for further research into data-driven economies and governance mechanisms. Importantly, the report highlights that effective data governance is essential for addressing broader societal challenges, such as public health crises, environmental sustainability, and digital inequality, thereby reinforcing its multidisciplinary and policy-relevant nature.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, *Going Digital to Advance Data Governance for Growth and Well-being* provides a structured and policy-oriented framework for analysing data governance as a central component of digital transformation. Its multidisciplinary perspective enables a comprehensive examination of how data function as both an economic resource and a regulatory concern within contemporary digital ecosystems. By conceptualising data governance as a cross-cutting policy issue, the report advances a more integrated understanding of how data systems operate across institutional and sectoral boundaries. This positioning strengthens its analytical relevance and highlights the importance of coordinated governance mechanisms in managing increasingly complex and interconnected data environments.

At the same time, the report remains largely normative and would benefit from deeper empirical and critical engagement, particularly in areas such as market concentration, data ethics, and the measurement of data value, which may limit its applicability in more empirically driven academic research contexts. These limitations, however, do not diminish its overall contribution but rather indicate important directions for future research and policy development. As such, it establishes a strong conceptual and policy foundation for advancing research and governance strategies in data-driven economies.

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