

SHAREPOINT GOVERNANCE BEST PRACTICES BY SHAREPOINT MVP CHRISTIAN BUCKLEY

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Foreword

At the European SharePoint Conference in Copenhagen in early 2013, I shared the stage with my good friend and fellow-SharePoint MVP Dan Holme to discuss the topic of governance. We shared a couple slides which summarize, in my experience, what governance should mean for every organization. It comes down to three basic points:

- SharePoint doesn't matter – the business matters.
- Governance is not a checklist, but a strategy.
- When you understand the requirements of your business, and the constraints of the technology, you can use governance to bridge the gaps.

Most people who administrate SharePoint try to view governance through the technology lens, when the reality is that the technology is just one facet of your strategy. What makes development and execution of a strong SharePoint governance strategy difficult is that it requires careful planning up front, and continual nurturing and adjustments as you use the platform.

One of my favourite quotes comes from Stephen R. Covey's book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, in which he suggests people "Seek first to understand, then to be understood." As Covey points out, it is in our nature to interpret definitions and requirements based on our personal experiences, rather than to step back and look at problems holistically. SharePoint owners and operators tend to be technologists, and so it is not surprising that they would treat governance as a technology issue – and miss many of the needs of the business.

Many of my blog posts and feature articles come from my years of experience as a business analyst and technical project manager, where it was my role to understand and correlate the business and technical requirements, and translate for everyone. By understanding my background and thought process, hopefully this series of articles will help you to think more about your own approach to implementing a SharePoint governance strategy for your organization. Use what makes sense and is applicable to your own business, and make it your own.

But most of all, don't forget to talk with your end users – the people who own the content, and who rely on SharePoint to accomplish their work each day. You cannot implement a governance strategy without their input and buy-in. Ultimately, governance should enable them, not prevent them from being productive.

Good luck!

--Christian Buckley

Defining Governance

At a recent SharePoint Saturday event (a community-driven conference) I discussed some of the more popular definitions of SharePoint governance being shared by Microsoft and experts within the community. There is a misconception out there that governance has somehow been defined within SharePoint -- that there is an accepted model, a "best practice" that is endorsed by Microsoft and/or the SharePoint expert community.

There isn't.

SharePoint is just a tool (or, more accurately put, a platform) through which we achieve certain business outcomes, and against which we apply our governance standards. Don't get me wrong -- SharePoint is a fairly powerful platform, into which more and more critical business systems are being directed. But it's still just a tool, a platform. It executes on commands we put into it. Trying to make decisions about managing and administrating SharePoint without the perspective of your organization's governance model -- and how that model affects not only SharePoint, but the larger ecosystem of systems and processes and people -- makes about as much sense as thinking the world is at the center of the universe, with all other celestial bodies orbiting around us. SharePoint is not at the center of the universe, but is just another piece of the celestial fabric (an increasingly important part of it, yes) and the means to delivering your business solutions.

One of the best definitions of governance that I have heard came from my good friend Paul Culmsee, co-author of the book *The Heretic's Guide to Best Practices: The Reality of Managing Complex Problems in Organisations*, when he stated that governance is "a means to an end." As I responded to the questions in my session over the weekend, every company has constraints on their system: business requirements, end user requirements, compliance and auditing requirements, and various permissions and data retention requirements. On the other end, they have their systems and tools -- in this case SharePoint. Governance is your organization's way of keeping track of those constraints, tracking and managing variances created when the tools and platforms you use do not fit perfectly within those constraints. Governance for SharePoint could be defined as your strategy for delivering the business solutions your end users want, within the scope of the technology, while maintaining those business constraints.

For example, your primary SharePoint environment has recently been upgraded to the on premises version of SharePoint 2013, with strict content rules that minimize what you can do inside of the cloud (maybe your policy states that key intellectual property must be hosted onsite), and yet your team has built out an extranet using Office365 so that you can better collaborate with key external partner teams. Your governance standards require monthly auditing of permissions, to ensure that the right people have access to sites and content. Additionally, there is a desire to maintain consistent taxonomy and content types across environments so that content can be migrated from the extranet to the intranet as external projects come to an end.

Unfortunately, the out-of-the-box reporting capabilities for SharePoint on premises and SharePoint online are not consistent, which makes managing sites, content, and permissions a very manual process, forcing administrators to login to both systems, run different reports, and then spend a lot of time normalizing data and building out blended reports. Likewise, as changes are made to taxonomies and content types on the company intranet, the same edits must be made manually to the extranet, leaving a lot of room for human error. Your governance model would help you to determine the common standards between these platforms, and where additional resources (such as third-party solutions) might help automate these activities and reduce the manual workload -- while better enforcing governance policies.

Governance is a strategic activity, not a set of rules to be applied. Setting the upper limit of file size uploads is a tactical activity -- something you do to help achieve your governance strategy. Managing your policies and guidelines around content, storage, security, and performance are all real issues, and SharePoint provides some degree of control over these things -- but your governance discussion do not (well, should not) begin and end with SharePoint. SharePoint is just one part of your overall system. Technology simply enforces the governance policies and guidelines set by your company leadership. And if you ask me, enforcement of SharePoint policies and guidelines is far lower on the totem pole than ensuring your SharePoint project fits into initiatives that move the business forward (in the grand scheme of things).

I don't believe in "SharePoint governance" but in enforcing governance within SharePoint. I do believe there is a difference. While the former may help you manage what is happening in SharePoint today, the latter has more to do with fitting your SharePoint solutions into your overall corporate strategy.

The Process behind the Governance Definitions

There is a lot of talk in the SharePoint community at the moment about SharePoint governance, but what exactly does it entail? Well, at a very basic level many people would say that it is a set of guidelines, rules, responsibilities and procedures on how SharePoint should be used within an organisation.

However, if you look deeper (i.e. [Wikipedia](#)) at the word governance it actually "derives from the Greek verb κυβερνάω [kubernáo] which means *to steer* and was used for the first time in a metaphorical sense by Plato."

Therefore, SharePoint governance is not just a set of fixed rules and regulations but is more about how you guide/teach/coach your users to ensure that you maximise the investment you have put into the SharePoint technology.

So, if you are just at the beginning your SharePoint implementation or have been using SharePoint for some time and are considering putting together a SharePoint Governance policy document, where do you start? Well first of all, congratulations on even considering governance. A number of organisations we encounter still do not consider governance and SharePoint has grown in a very organic and unstructured manner and will continue to do so unless action is taken.

One of the main reasons that SharePoint has grown at such a pace is that it can be implemented very easily, and SharePoint sites can be created and deployed very quickly. This can result in "SharePoint Sprawl" where sites are created with little thought and very quickly it becomes unclear as to which sites are actually used and which are not.

A good starting point for defining your SharePoint governance plan is this handy set of resources provided by [Microsoft](#). However, the bad news is that a successful governance strategy is not something that can be packaged, purchased, and installed over a weekend. It is an on-going process that will require regular reviews to monitor the effectiveness of your plan, which may then require redefinition.

SharePoint Governance Process

Your entry point to this process will depend on the stage of your organisation with your SharePoint implementation. In an ideal world, a governance plan will be built prior to implementation. The starting point should be to define the roles, responsibilities, procedures, etc., that your plan will consist of. However, this is not always possible due to the organic nature of SharePoint deployments that we discussed earlier, so a review of your environment may be the first thing required.

This analysis of SharePoint will help you to understand how your users are interacting with SharePoint. For example, what sites are out there, are they used, who has access, what type of content are they uploading, how many content databases are there, etc. Using this information, you can then start defining your governance plan to hopefully bring the SharePoint environment back under control. A great little free tool that can help you analyse your existing SharePoint is our recently released [Migration Expert](#) or for deeper analysis you could use our [ControlPoint free trial](#).

When it comes to enforcing your SharePoint governance strategy, it is important not to be too restrictive. Users can be put off by technology very easily, so it is important to have a balance. This is why regular reviews are important to ensure your governance policies are effective. This should not simply be a review of the technology, but must include your users. For example, conduct user surveys to understand what they think of SharePoint and how they use it. The results may then lead you to changes to your initial governance policies.

SharePoint Governance Considerations

Governance within SharePoint is very similar to every other enterprise system. Some of the considerations for your policy document should be:

- **Roles and responsibilities** - Key stakeholders, e.g., who will be responsible for managing the SharePoint implementation and reviewing how effective the governance policies are? Centralised or decentralised administration? Who can create sites? Who will manage security?
- **Infrastructure** - Farm topology, what servers/services are required? How many content databases are needed? How many site collections? What site quotas level should be enforced?
- **Configuration** - Meta data/taxonomy definitions? Look and feel - how to manage master pages, site themes, navigation, etc.? AD groups, SharePoint groups or both for managing permissions?
- **Users** - How to ensure end user adoption? Training? Support?

This is a very small list but are certainly questions that should be asked when defining your governance policy. Good luck!

The Link between Good Governance and Better Collaboration

Recently, we spoke with over a 1,000 SharePoint administrators and business professionals to understand the successes and challenges businesses are facing with enterprise collaboration platforms.

The good news: collaboration platforms, such as SharePoint, are adding significant value to organizations.

The bad news: many respondents admitted their collaboration platforms are disconnected from business goals.

While the news that collaboration platforms are capable of adding value is promising, the goal of the platform is not to let it go stale, but to instead enable organizations to make quicker decisions and do less with more resources.

In order to enable powerful collaboration that is directly aligned with business objectives, collaboration platforms need strong governance strategies. To put it simply, governance strategies are to collaboration platforms like a floor plan is to a home – a house would fall apart without a blueprint that was vetted by experts and built by qualified craftsmen. These same truths apply for enterprise collaboration, as governance strategies are the foundation and frame that support and secure the content and users within the platform.

A governance strategy is *the link* that directly connects all of the business needs to the platform and can easily be defined as the set of policies that directs and enables the business and IT teams to jointly achieve business goals. Nearly 65 percent of those we spoke with agreed SharePoint is a strategic, enterprise-wide platform – a governance strategy not only easily taps into all of the value that is potentially available within the platform, but also ensures platform activities map to business objectives.

Some additional stats pulled from [our research](#) include:

- Only 33.8 percent said their SharePoint strategy directly connects with their business goals
- 60.5 percent stated their governance plans ranged from being neutral to not at all linked to business objectives
- 30 percent of companies connect their governance plans with an end-user adoption strategy well or extremely well

Needless to say, many organizations have a governance gap that could be seriously preventing their business from realizing the full potential of their existing collaboration platforms and employee productivity. Raw numbers aside, here are a few additional reasons why enterprise collaboration platforms need governance strategies:

- **End-user adoption** – Enterprise collaboration suites are empowering technologies, however, if no one is using it or understands how to use it, the entire investment quickly goes to waste. When governance strategies are disconnected from employee adoption, businesses

quickly lower the platform's efficiency potential and miss out on building ongoing participation.

- **ROI from the platform investment** – Why introduce an entirely new platform to only hope for the best? Governance plans continuously uncover the value within the platform and identifies not only who should manage the platform, but also guides the strategic direction of the platform's content.
- **Reducing risk** – In our research, just over 43 percent claimed they do not regularly run audits on usage, security, content or permissions, which is frightening to say the least. A governance plan that protects business IP and is aligned with the appropriate compliance regulations eliminates potentially devastating risk and losses in the future.

Governance actually enables business agility and protects the business from data leaks, risk and lost resources. Collaboration platforms create a deep pool of collective intelligence across an organization, arming end-users with the information and context to not only move faster, but smarter. For businesses, governance helps tap into true flexibility and innovation.

For more interesting statistics on our governance research, [check out this infographic](#).

Operational Fundamentals for Governance

People are always asking "Where should I start with my SharePoint governance planning?" My answer is never as satisfying as they would hope -- it depends. There is no quick and easy route. Some organizations are good at change management, others have a solid foothold in their information architecture and managing data across teams. You need to take the good things you've already done, and strengthen area where you are weak.

There are a number of areas that you should consider as you think about scaling your SharePoint platform which are independent of your governance methodology, or even the tools you use -- and will help to begin strengthening your weak spots. At the end of the day, you should focus first on the needs of your business and THEN select the processes and tools that will enable you to meet those business goals.

Here are five focus areas will help you to get your own SharePoint environment under control, allowing you to get the most value out of your investment. These are not hard and fast rules, but areas you should consider as you build out your governance strategy to match your own unique corporate footprint -- so apply as needed:

Standardize Policies and Procedures.

Are your policies and procedures consistent across your organization, or are exceptions the rule? Most organizations and their environments ebb and flow, reorganizing as the business grows, and as you try to be nimble and adaptive in response to customer needs. Don't let your governing policies be the reason you cannot change to meet the needs of the business. A business unit may have different information rights management (IRM) rules than the rest of the company, but the policies that govern how those rules are managed should be consistent across the organization.

Distribute Management.

You should explore the functions and capabilities that make sense to be centralized (possibly owned by the Farm Administrator), and those which may need to be managed at the site collection and site levels. SharePoint works best when management of its many functions are distributed to the people who know how the business should be run. The caveat here, of course, is having adequate (and standardized) policies and procedures, and clear roles and responsibilities.

Create Clear Roles and Responsibilities.

How is that for a segue? How can you measure the performance of a system -- or the performance of a person -- without first clearly defining the measurements of success? Be clear on what you expect from each role, so that people can be accountable for those roles. This is also central to good permissions management, by the way.

Build a Communication Strategy.

If you wait for the launch of a new project to articulate your communication strategy, you're already on the wrong track. Your communication strategy is part of a healthy governance strategy, outlined up front during project initiation/definition, and helps to get people involved, to keep them abreast of what is happening throughout the project (whether it be a new SharePoint implementation, a

redesign, or an upgrade), and to give them data on what has happened once the project is completed and moved into support mode.

Focus on Execution, and Iterate.

Every healthy system, once in place, includes ongoing measurement, automation, and reporting. Not every aspect of your plan will be effective -- so build into your strategy a model to review, assess, and make changes. SharePoint is not a static platform, so neither will your governance strategy be static.

SharePoint has quickly become a critical business platform within most organizations, and yet many struggle with making SharePoint scale to meet their growing end user needs. I often tell audiences that the top issues surrounding SharePoint have nothing to do with features or with the limitations of the platform, but have more to do with planning and execution.

Let's all agree: the word "governance" is too broad and confusing. Some organizations may have very clearly defined guidelines and processes in place, driven by government and industry regulations and standards. Others may not be required to have well-defined standards, but on their own these companies have determined that SharePoint is more manageable and scalable with a clearly defined governance strategy in place.

At the end of the day, there is no set of "best practices" for governance that can be applied across every organization. However, there is a lot you can learn from others, and leverage from our own internal operational and project management methodologies.

How to Jumpstart SharePoint Governance

One of the most common questions surrounding metadata and taxonomy management is ‘How do you begin?’ As with most user-driven technologies, SharePoint is often “unleashed” without proper planning or governance structures, and most administrators find themselves needing to *retroactively* apply standards across their environment. Companies tend to hoard information and may find themselves overwhelmed by the disorganization – and how to even begin the process to get things under control.

Without proper management, search becomes ineffective, content become silos hidden behind team sites (or even within team sites), and user satisfaction plummets.

Unfortunately, there is no “easy” button to fix this problem – and it’s not a problem unique to SharePoint. Even the most proactive organizations struggle from time to time with managing their system governance. If you’re reading this, you more than likely are looking for help in strengthening this aspect of your current SharePoint system, or are planning for a future deployment. In either case, there are some things you can implement to jumpstart your efforts as you look to put in place a more formal governance model:

Create an internal SharePoint user group

- Even if your plan is to release a tightly-controlled portal with strict guidelines around content types, workflow, and usage, you still need to involve the users and get their perspective. The power of SharePoint is its ability to inspire collaboration, even within a meticulously choreographed user experience. You need to tap into the community as a way to refine your model, adapt your systems to the ebb and flow of the business, and, quite simply, to learn from your users. I’d suggest creating both a task force with accountability for compiling and approving your taxonomy and the governance model itself, and then to send an open-invite to all employees to participate in a broader user group. As part of your process, have the task force present their results to the user group before finalizing their plans. By allowing users to participate in and define the process, the users will have a vested interest in the success of the system.

Clearly define roles and responsibilities

- Governance Task Force chair and members. Farm Administrators. Site Administrators. Project Owners. Approvers. Reviewers. Identifying core permissions and groups within SharePoint is one aspect, but modelling your governance model on your internal project methodology makes sense. If you don’t have a defined methodology, once again – keep it simple. Err on the side of ad hoc flexibility over rigid structure, as it is easier to add structure as needed than to remove it. At Microsoft, I was a fan of the OARP model: Owner, Approver, Reviewer, Participant. It was simple and clear (when it was used). At the very least, you should understand and assign similar roles within your organization so that it is evident where accountability resides.

Outline your taxonomy, communicate it, and iterate

- Once again, this is the most difficult aspect of governance for most organizations: putting pen to paper and outlining your taxonomy. Funny thing is, many companies already have their high-level taxonomy outlined – on their websites. Product lines, business units, and site maps. It's a good place to start. Sit down with your governance task force with a fixed amount of time (an hour) and create a high-level draft. Then publish the draft out to the end-user community for feedback. The point here is to create something, get feedback, and *iterate*. Follow this process several times, keeping the time short so that you have minimal impact on day-to-day business. By taking it in small steps, it also allows you to step back and reflect after each iteration. You'll be amazed at quickly things will then come together – and, with everyone participating, your taxonomy will more closely reflect the way your users work, and the way your business is actually run. *But remember:* this is just a start. Your governance task force should perform a regular review (monthly/quarterly) of your taxonomy and metadata, sharing proposed changes with the community and incorporating feedback. In SharePoint, this means regularly reviewing the enterprise Term Stores, the various Managed Terms and Managed Keywords, and promoting keywords as needed, ensuring that your model stays relevant.

Clearly, there is a lot of work to do within these steps as well as outside, but by taking action now, you will be well-positioned for success – with both the data required to put your SharePoint taxonomy in place, and with the necessary team (and cultural) support to successfully implement your governance model.

My advice: keep it simple, let your processes grow and develop organically, and keep your users – and especially your internal SharePoint community – in the loop on what you're thinking and doing. These things will go a long way in ensuring your SharePoint deployment is successful (i.e. people are using it!)

More Ideas to Jump Start Your Governance

In the previous article, I identified one of the most common questions surrounding the process of implementing a governance model in the enterprise: How do you begin?

Because SharePoint tends to be a user-driven technology, many companies find themselves in a position of having to *retroactively* apply metadata rules, refine (or, if they haven't done so already, define) their taxonomy, and roll out some kind of governance model in an effort to take back control of a quickly expanding (like a wildfire!) SharePoint environment. In the article, I recommended some basic but critical first steps to implementing a governance model:

Create an internal SharePoint user group.

- Gather a group of those who run SharePoint, who are interested in learning about SharePoint, and those who know your business. Meet weekly, monthly – whatever makes sense as you start to put together your plans. Bounce ideas off one another, share responsibilities, but most important of all – incorporate the various perspectives into your plan so that your governance model better matches the culture of your group and company.

Clearly define roles and responsibilities.

- Outline the necessary functions to deploy and govern. Figure out what you need at the enterprise, organizational, and site level. Put a process in place (like OARP) to help the decision-making process.

Outline your taxonomy, communicate it, and iterate.

- The point here is to get started. Don't wait for perfection – outline what you know, roll it out, and let your users refine it as they go. It's an iterative process that needs ongoing management, so just do your best and let the process work.

Sounds easy, right? It's all common sense, right? And yet many companies struggle with these concepts. Following on the theme of common sense, I'd like to provide some additional guidance and best practices around jumpstarting your SharePoint governance.

My intent here is not to prescribe a process or outline specific steps, but to give you some ideas, get you thinking, and hopefully add good things to what may already be in motion. Consider the following:

Have a plan.

- That's right – a plan! Listen to the experts, comb through the relevant articles, consider those best practices, and develop a plan based on your organizational and project needs. Help your management team and end users to understand the full scope of the project – that it's not just about a technical implementation, but that it is also a business process change.

Understand any regulatory or compliance concerns.

- Are there any rules or procedures having to do with legal or financial guidelines that may dictate how you setup and/or manage your SharePoint environment? Do you need to maintain audit trails? Reporting? Workflows? Metrics? These items would fall into the scoping and sizing of your project during the planning phase.

Be aware of how your metadata, content types, and social media components are to be managed.

- What is the actual process involved with managing these things? Who owns it? What is the change process? Are you going to try and maintain SLAs? This might be overkill for small businesses, but is critical for larger businesses. A major impact to end user adoption is a long turn-around time for system changes. Some of these activities are simplified within SharePoint through Managed Metadata Service and Enterprise Term Stores, which allow you to create top-level taxonomy for your entire organization, with sites consuming this taxonomy as a service. Then each site can create its own taxonomy – which other sites may or may not consume as a service. But just remember, SharePoint does not decrease the need for governance. If anything, the ability for end users to apply their own metadata will create more work for site and site collection admins, if metadata is to be managed properly. (Microsoft refers to top-down as a ‘taxonomy,’ and a bottom-up or user-defined tagging as a ‘folksonomy’) SharePoint has made strong advances in managing taxonomy and metadata for the enterprise, but it still requires upfront and ongoing work to ensure you have the latest, greatest data.

Create a governance site.

- Make your policies visible. When people ask questions, point them to an ever-expanding FAQ list (Use SharePoint! Don’t create yet another document). Update the site regularly. Make it functional, not just a one-time dumping ground for rarely used process documentation. And be sure to constantly refresh your governance site. This should not be a static site, but a working platform from which you manage your process, take suggestions, and change as needed.

Enlist your users and content authors.

- This goes beyond my advice for creating a user group, and relates to all end users. Give them a voice in the process. Get regular feedback from your business units and content authors. To capture this data, use search metrics, community sites, and polls. Once again, capturing data at regular intervals should be part of your initial project planning, as this will also provide a mechanism for reporting back to management on the progress – and success – of your SharePoint deployment.

Migrate your content, leverage your metadata.

- Depending on where you are with your SharePoint environment – just rolling it out, or in the process of revamping/cleaning up your existing system – you may have different tasks in front of you. There are a number of approaches to upgrade or migration, either manually or using third-party tools such as our own [Content Matrix](#). Whatever the approach, be sure to follow your newly-defined taxonomy. You’ve taken all that time to outline your taxonomy and complex metadata structure, it’s only fitting that you actually use it. Update as you go, propagate your changes, and keep the feedback loop with your end users running.

Learn and evolve

- Nothing is set in stone. SharePoint evolves – and so will the taxonomy. You'll rarely get it right on the first try, but you'll lose time and productivity the longer you sit idle, so the key is to take action and iterate, iterate, iterate.

Hopefully this guidance is useful, and helps you to take action. My advice on how to move forward remains the same: keep your governance model simple, let your processes grow and develop organically, and keep your end users in the loop. If they understand the governance model, they'll use it. If you are transparent about the process, and can quickly respond to user requests and changing business needs because you've kept it simple, they'll trust it. And if they're using the application and trusting the change process, your management team is more likely to view your overall SharePoint efforts as a success.

Four Ways to Build Confidence in Your SharePoint Governance Strategy

In a series of surveys last year of more than 1,000 SharePoint administrators and business professionals, much was learned about how people "perceived" their organizations to be handling their SharePoint governance strategy. The data showed a large gap between those perceptions and what governance actually looked like inside businesses.

Of the respondents, 67% viewed SharePoint governance as critical to the success of the platform, but only a mere 26% of respondents believed they have a well-defined strategy.

After conversations with customers and partners discussing the state of SharePoint within their organizations, the governance gap is clear and people are looking for reassurance that their planning is moving in the right direction. The most common questions include:

- Where should I begin?
- What are the best practices?
- What does Microsoft recommend?
- How do I manage change?
- Who should be involved?

Many similarities between the need for governance planning and building out project management offices (PMOs) have become evident over the past 20 years of working in the space. One of the primary roles of a good PMO is to build an environment of trust and communication with your customer organizations to help with internal, platform and customer experience improvements. There are some people that your company will trust more than others, especially when something goes wrong, and these people are needed to quickly step in to assess things, formulate a plan and then tell you not to worry. These PMOs are trusted and your business has confidence in them.

With this in mind, your business also needs to build this level of trust and confidence into a SharePoint governance strategy. How? While there is no easy button, here are four principles that helped grow confidence in building PMOs and which can be applied to a governance strategy:

1. Make the Process Visible

When trying to build confidence within any organization, keeping processes open and visible to all levels is key to success. Using public whiteboards to outline a team's process, priorities and status of requests can improve project management. Once confidence is gained through this public process, a transition can be made to online tools including SharePoint, where data can be found by simply logging into the PMO site. This helps continue to raise the visibility of a team, and the great work being accomplished.

The same applies to a governance strategy. Make the work you do to organize and define policies and procedures a matter of public discourse. One of the more successful governance initiatives I led started with a town hall-type event, with Q&A from anyone interested and passionate enough to raise their hand. And our regular governance body meetings were open door, with end users and executives alike joining one or two meetings when something they had a vested interest in was being discussed.

2. Provide Timely Updates

Nothing is more frustrating than to never hear back from a project manager when you know the status has changed. If a project is urgent and work is at a standstill, sometimes updating a SharePoint task list at the end of the day is insufficient. You can never err on the side of too much communication. With governance planning, you must include a solid communication strategy and use common sense to increase or decrease the level of communication based on the immediacy of the workload in front of you and the maturity of your governance plan over time.

3. Constantly Optimize

Governance is never a static activity, so don't roll out a plan, document it within a binder and then put that binder on a shelf to gather dust and be forgotten. Project activities, reporting and communication strategies constantly evolve because of changing business requirements and the evolving needs of your customers. Constantly look for ways to improve your governance strategy.

I always considered it a huge win to refine a governance activity, thereby reducing the amount of time the organization had to spend thinking about governance. Of course, optimizing may also mean you uncover something you had not earlier considered, which could add time and effort. It's an ebb and flow. But for the most part, if you plan properly up front, the process aspect of the work is sure to decrease.

4. Ask For, and Take Action On, Feedback

The underlying message within this list is to talk to your customers, whether they're internal end users, or external paying customers. Make a point of regularly asking each person involved whether the governance body is missing anything. Some people have no problem speaking up in a crowd — the hard part of working with people is recognizing when people are not so forthcoming with feedback. Instead, look for different opportunities to reach out and connect so that you can get a more complete view of what people think.

The answers to the most common questions I outlined above are never what people want to hear. Talking to people is hard work. They have opinions. They ask for things. They expect you to deliver. There is no shrink-wrapped set of answers for implementing governance. Unfortunately, it's hard work, and it takes time. But there are definitely benefits to doing that hard work — chief amongst them is having happy end users.

To answer the question of how to build confidence into a governance strategy, starting as soon as possible is a big factor. Develop best practices by learning from the success of others, but adapt their solutions to fit your own culture. For example, Microsoft provides plenty of content around optimal settings and system limitations, which is a good place to start, but configure your systems based on a solid understanding of your own business requirements. Adapt those policies (content limits, permissions settings, and information rights management policies) with a consistent and transparent change management process, so that employees and customers understand why changes are being made, and where their requests fit into the priorities of the larger organization or project. And do your best to allow anyone who wants to be involved to participate, in some way. There is generally a self-vetting process in a very short amount of time, and the right people for ongoing governance board participation will surface themselves.

When people are heard, it builds confidence in your strategy.

SharePoint Governance and Administration: On Premises, Cloud or Hybrid

Many organizations are making hard decisions about whether to move from their existing SharePoint environment to the latest version of the platform. Unfortunately, the decisions don't stop there -- this latest release from Microsoft is causing many organizations to seriously consider their near-term and long-term strategies for the cloud, as well. While there is definitely a lot of hype around "the cloud," the reality for the SharePoint platform is that this decision is in front of us all: do we remain on premises or move to the cloud? And is now even the time to move to SharePoint 2013 at all, or do we augment what we have today? There are many options available, from architectures to hosting options, and from social collaboration solutions to workflow tools. As Tony Byrne from analyst group Real Story Group puts it, we can "extend SharePoint, supplement it, or complement it." All of these possibilities give CIOs and their SharePoint administrator's options and flexibility in how they design their platforms, allowing them to focus on the needs of their business.

These are not easy decisions. I talk with customers regularly who are trying to decide how to move forward, and my advice is purposely broad: make your decisions based on the needs of the business, not based on industry buzz. That is not to say that there are not compelling reasons to move to 2013, but is more of a testament of a strong 2010 platform -- and the need for organizations to really understand what it means to move into the cloud, and to appropriately set expectations for what SharePoint can and cannot do within each version.

The following outlines some of the advantages and disadvantages of each, hopefully helping you to better understand which option may work best for your own business needs:

Remain on premises using SharePoint 2010

There is nothing wrong with making the most of your existing SharePoint investments. Let's face it -- SP2010 is a stable platform, and may be delivering solid value to your business. While you should definitely weigh the costs of managing the infrastructure, maintaining the necessary support and development expertise in house to keep things running, and any other 3rd party or educational costs, the numbers may lean in the direction of keeping things where they are -- at least for the time being.

As your end users begin asking for features and capabilities not available out of the box -- such as social collaboration, or deeper line of business application integrations -- make sure you adequately identify the costs of enhance the existing toolset, either through custom development or through the partner ecosystem. For example, solutions from partners like [Beezy](#), [Sitrion](#) (formerly [NewsGator](#)), [Neudesic](#), and [Attini](#) provide fully integrated social tools that work natively with SharePoint. Or you can subscribe to Yammer, which provides some light integrations into the platform, allowing you to push content one-way from SharePoint to Yammer, as well as to embed your [Yammer](#) feed into team sites.

I do recognize that there are still some customers on older versions of SharePoint, such as 2007 or 2003 (I haven't run across many SPS2001 installations for a while). In these cases, I'd

say that there is even less of a reason to stick with your current system, and to consider jumping ahead to 2013.

Move to Office 365

While there may not yet be complete parity between on-premises and Office365 versions of SharePoint, you can bet there soon will be. When you bundle the power of SharePoint with the #1 enterprise email platform in the world and the most economically-priced communication tools out there, how can you not see the value of moving to the cloud? But the real story here is not as much about the capability of the solutions as their delivery method: is your business goal to develop and maintain SharePoint hardware and software expertise, or to run your business? Do you want to constantly test and deploy patches, updates, and new features -- or let the system handle these remotely? That is the power of cloud.

Of course, for some organizations, the lack of parity between platforms is key. Many companies extended SharePoint to meet their unique business requirements, using it as their central collaboration hub. The costs of re-architecting these platforms in the cloud (possibly using Windows Azure) may be expensive, or not yet possible due to limitations of Azure or the SharePoint APIs. Before you run head-first into talks with Office365, take the time to understand what workloads, customizations, and features are essential to your business so that you can accurately map them to Office365's available features.

Move to on-premises SharePoint 2013

Microsoft recognizes that a percentage of organizations will never be able to move SharePoint activities to the cloud -- whether because of compliance and regulatory issues, or out of perceived (or real) data security issues. In these cases, there will continue to be an on-premises version of SharePoint available.

As with organizations who plan to stay with their 2010 environments, there are advantages (customization and integration flexibility) and disadvantages (slower update/new feature release cadence from Microsoft). As you review your SharePoint strategy, make sure to discuss your requirements and concerns with your Microsoft rep, as they do listen to feedback from customers on which features and capabilities within SharePoint Online (office365) should be prioritized for release to the SharePoint 2013 on-premises version.

Maintain a hybrid environment, with both SharePoint on-premises and Office 365

Hybrid will likely be a popular solution for the next few years as the online platform matures, and as organizations slowly migrate their on-premises assets toward the cloud model. Some advice for organizations considering this model: be sure that you thoroughly understand the governance and administrative overhead of managing two platforms. For example, Office365 provides some great tools and reporting for management of your SharePoint Online environments, but the granularity of this data -- and your ability to dig into log files -- is very different than what is available on premises. As part of your platform requirements and planning, be sure to map out your reporting and governance requirements in detail, and thoroughly understand the gaps between platforms.

As many of you know, Metalogix has established itself as a leader in the SharePoint partner ecosystem with our market leading product, [ControlPoint for SharePoint Administration](#), giving administrators a powerful and flexible tools for permissions management, reporting, information architecture management and re-design, auditing and compliance, and for

distributed management that gives farm admins down to power users more control over their environments. ControlPoint leads the category, and provides powerful functionality to help organizations quickly clean up and maintain control over their SharePoint environments -- which, by the way, is an essential prerequisite to moving to a new version so that you know exactly the state of SharePoint, from permissions and content storage down to your team-level governance policies.

As you begin to think about your SharePoint 2013 migration and which aspects to move into the cloud, remember that Metalogix offers flexibility in how you manage these environments. Of course, ControlPoint works with SharePoint 2007, 2010, or 2013, but we were also the first vendor to provide governance and administration for the Office365 platform. What's more, our award-winning platform allows you to manage your SharePoint assets across a hybrid environment within a single interface, reducing the risks and overhead of managing two platform architectures.

You should migrate to the latest version when it makes sense for your business to do so -- not because a vendor tells you it's time to move. The reality is that security or regulatory issues may require you to keep certain assets on-premises, while other assets and workloads can easily fit into the cloud model -- and Metalogix can support this hybrid model, giving you a single console view into both on-premises and cloud SharePoint environments, simplifying the complexity of governance and management across an otherwise complex architecture.

Using ControlPoint to Get a Handle on SharePoint Governance

"Governance is most definitely something that should be a task on your corporate checklist, something that is done up front to provide guidance and direction for shaping your company infrastructure, especially your IT systems. At the core of governance are one or more company objectives -- the things that drive your business forward, and which help employees strive to improve. Example might be "Reducing the number of defects in our processes to zero" or "Improving employee innovation." Your corporate governance should take these objectives in mind, with all systems and initiatives taking into consideration how they can best move these objectives forward."

From AIIM.org, [Governance: Overused, Misunderstood, Flavor of the Month?](#)

Ask ten people to define governance, and you'll receive ten different answers. Many of us have participated in governance initiatives inside and outside of IT, but what all of these plans must fundamentally include are:

1. Strategic components that correlate systems (like SharePoint) to corporate goals (like reducing the cost of IT, or maybe improving the speed at which innovation moves from idea to action), and
2. Tactical components that allow you to measure, guide, and when necessary, control, as a way of implementing the strategic components (like site guidelines, and content database limitations).

One of the most common questions we hear from the community: Is [ControlPoint](#) a governance tool? The answer is both no and yes. With the above definition, where governance is concerned with defining the rules and guidelines for how SharePoint is managed, the answer is no. Governance is more of a process or a method for managing your systems. It is much bigger than a single system or tool, and you are thorough in your planning and consistent in your execution, it should help move your company toward your corporate goals.

But as for setting up and enforcing the rules and guidelines defined by your governance strategy, then yes, ControlPoint is the best tool on the market for centrally managing a single or multiple SharePoint environments.

For example, one of the more common scenarios I use in demonstrations is when someone leaves the company. There is usually a process for locking down their access rights through Active Directory, but it may not be so straight-forward within SharePoint. SharePoint does not provide a method for tracking all sites and content within an environment related to a single user, much less across multiple environments. As a result, you may have sites and content floating out there with dubious ownership.

ControlPoint allows administrators to setup and subscribe to many out-of-the-box and custom reports, all of which are dynamic and actionable -- which means that they both provide data about what is happening in your systems, while also allowing the admin to make the necessary changes in real-time from the report. An 'Inactive User' report could be set up, published daily or weekly, to flag all SharePoint end users who no longer appear in Active Directory, allowing the admin to remove a user across multiple sites, site collections, or even farms -- all from one ControlPoint report, security

trimmed based on their accountability. The admin can then reassign the content and permissions, as needed. You can even publish this report, and other critical reports, to SharePoint lists, and then build out dashboards and scorecards to help provide your team with a powerful management solution.

This is just one scenario. Through dynamic reports and quickly "pivoting" views into different aspects of your SharePoint environment, ControlPoint allows you to quickly take command of your environment, and make your governance strategy actionable. ControlPoint allows for real-time policy enforcement for Site and Item creation/deletion. Whether navigating through your environment to find broken policies, or setting up policies and procedures that help guide end users through compliant use of SharePoint, ControlPoint is the right tool.

About the Author

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About Metalogix

Metalogix provides content infrastructure software to improve the use and performance of enterprise content. For over a decade, Metalogix has transformed the way commercial and government organizations manage terabytes of content to improve knowledge sharing and collaboration.

Today, more than 14,000 customers rely on the company's products to upgrade, migrate, organize, store, archive and replicate content on Microsoft SharePoint, Exchange and Cloud platforms. Metalogix has moved more than 50,000 terabytes of content.

Metalogix is recognized as the fastest growing software company in the Washington D.C. area by the Washington Business Journal and was named to the 2012 Inc. 500 list of fastest growing companies.

Metalogix is a Microsoft Gold Partner, a managed partner in Microsoft's High Potential ISV Group and GSA provider. Metalogix is a privately held company backed by Insight Venture Partners and Bessemer Venture Partners.