SharePoint Governance Overview

In this chapter, we will introduce the conceptual framework used throughout the book and define the terminology used to describe and govern SharePoint solutions. By the end of this chapter, you will understand the purpose and process of governance and, hopefully, where you fit in.

What Will You Learn in This Chapter?

- Why you need governance and how it should be structured
- How the services provided by the portal are identified
- How to define the roles and responsibilities associated with controlling a SharePoint solution
- How the segments of IT, information, and application management relate to one another
- The purpose and general structure of a governance plan
- The common issues experienced in a SharePoint environment when governance breaks down

The Purpose of Governance

Why establish governance over any human activity? Why not just let everyone do their own thing? Isn’t freedom supposed to be a good thing? For an answer, take a look at any country in the world where the government has failed and a new one has not replaced it right away. It is not a pretty picture.

Of course, failing to assign storage quotas on your corporate intranet isn’t likely to result in hordes of crazed co-workers fighting to the death over the last of the copier toner. More likely, the system will just crash or be left in an unusable state. Developing policies and standards and assigning responsibilities to the appropriate departments creates a system that can support business needs without becoming an impediment. Or maybe users shouting angry slogans while waving burning torches are a normal part of your corporate culture?

The most important consideration in developing your governance strategy is determining the needs of the users and adapting the governance plan to meet those needs as effectively and unobtrusively as possible. This requires an understanding of the users’ business processes, preferences, and working culture. SharePoint is a widely varied product with many features that can be productive, useful, confusing, or annoying depending on the needs of the system’s users and how those features are leveraged.
The two most common mistakes when establishing governance are to implement too much governance or too little.

There is no such thing as a SharePoint installation with no governance. Anarchy is not a default; it is a choice. Even if an organization has intentionally avoided putting any restrictions on users, that is a governance choice. SharePoint sites where users have absolutely free reign are all too common. The result is most often a site clogged with massive amounts of data, but very little useful information. Users can’t find anything except the most recent content they added themselves. Older data or content contributed by others may as well be on a floppy disk in someone’s desk for all the good it will do them. Eventually, the site becomes slow and unreliable and falls into disuse.

Too much governance, on the other hand, robs users of the opportunity to innovate and use their creativity to find new ways to do business. If you have an inherently collaborative corporate culture, unnecessarily restricting access to SharePoint’s collaborative features such as team sites, document workspaces, wikis, and social networking may cause that collaboration to shut down. Alternately, team members may abandon the portal to collaborate effectively. Overly aggressive security restrictions can also prevent users from finding valuable information they need to make important business decisions. Too much governance, like too little, is likely to result in a system that users don’t choose to use.

No one wants to live in total anarchy or a police state. That’s why effective governance must take a “Goldilocks” approach. Not too little, not too much. Not chaos, not prison. You want users to be comfortable using SharePoint. It should be as natural a part of their work day as opening their e-mail. Otherwise, they will seek easier ways to perform their tasks outside of the portal. After all, Goldilocks didn’t stay in the bed that was too hard or too soft, but in the one that was just right.

**Services**

The first concept we will introduce is that of a service. In this context, a service is a set of features that the portal provides to the community of end users. In SharePoint, these services might include discrete subsystems like Excel Services or PerformancePoint Services, but they also include more general services like authentication and secure (SSL) site access. A service is the basic unit of functionality to consider when planning the governance of your portal.

A service has a lifecycle that starts with installation and configuration of the service, also known as provisioning the service. Once the service is provisioned, it must be monitored and evaluated to see how well it is meeting user needs. When improvements are needed, the service may need to be reconfigured or upgraded to meet new or refined requirements. At some point, it may be decided to remove a service because it is no longer needed. When a service is decommissioned, it is often necessary to migrate its associated data to another service or system.

As shown in Figure 2-1, governing the lifecycle of a service is a continuous process that doesn’t end as long as the service is in production. This ensures that the service continues to meet the requirements of the organization in a sustainable way. This cycle of continuous monitoring and re-evaluation will be a recurring theme as you examine all of the processes used to govern a SharePoint portal.

![Figure 2-1. The lifecycle of a service](image-url)