

Designing an Effective SharePoint Governance Plan



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Introduction

Microsoft SharePoint's powerful capabilities and user-friendliness have made it an indispensable tool for organizations world-wide. But like any tool, it can only be truly effective if it is well-maintained; this is where governance comes in. Every successful SharePoint implementation must include a robust governance plan that is followed, enforced, and updated regularly. But what exactly is a SharePoint Governance Plan?

A SharePoint Governance Plan is a set of policies, roles, responsibilities, and processes established to determine how SharePoint is used in an organization. Proper governance eliminates the potential for the design and architecture of a SharePoint system becoming inconsistent over time, leading to poor user experience and increased cost of ownership.

Additionally, a Governance Plan is essential in preventing violation of regulatory compliance guidelines such as HIPAA or Sarbanes-Oxley, wasting resources on non-essential data, loss/theft of data due to insecure server infrastructure, guiding backup and recovery of the environment in case of a disaster, and more.

What should a Governance Plan try to solve?

There are five key challenges a SharePoint Governance Plan should address for your organization:

01 **Manage Growth**

What content belongs on the site and what is the most appropriate place? Is the content ready to be published? Has ownership been taken and is someone responsible for the content additions? Is there a policy and procedure for this content and was that process followed?

02 **Align use to business objectives**

Is the problem being solved something you should actually be solving? Are you adding value to your company by solving it?

03 **Clearly Define the Information Architecture**

What problems should SharePoint be used to solve and which should it not? What alternatives should be considered instead?

04 **Avoid Roadblocks**

While controls are needed, are they being implemented in a way that is too restrictive or discourages participation?

05 **Continuous Improvement**

Realistically, there will never be a perfectly clean SharePoint system. However to ensure ongoing improvement, periodic cleanups and audits should be accepted policies. The goal should be to make the system as effective as it can be, given the time and resources available.

What solutions should a Governance Plan include?

As you plan for your SharePoint implementation, be sure to establish a governance plan that will foresee as many future eventualities and potential challenges as possible. Such scenarios include the onboarding and leaving of SharePoint users, backup and recovery of the environment in case of a disaster, etc.

01 **Roles and Responsibilities**

There should be a resource for every need and participation by everyone in contact with SharePoint. Those roles and responsibilities must be set and communicated. If there are voids, conflicts, or overlaps, they must be addressed by management. How will ownership of the site be smoothly transitioned when those responsible are unavailable for an extended amount of time or leave the company? How will provisioning of new employees be addressed?

02 **Policies and Procedures**

There should be easy-to-reference materials to guide participants in determining what is and is not appropriate content for SharePoint. An example of inappropriate content would be

personally identifiable data for employees such as social security numbers. If any policies or procedures are missing, they must be created; if vague or inaccurate, they must be corrected.

03 **Contingency Plans**

As with any enterprise solution, make sure your organization establishes a process for backup and recovery of the environment in case of a disaster.

04 **Ownership**

There should be an owner for every artifact, and ownership should be adjusted as the organization evolves. Owners must be active participants in the process. How much ownership will be delegated to each user to avoid accidental or purposeful tampering of data?

05 **Top Down and Bottom Up**

There must be executive support and budgeting for the process and business objectives must translate to SharePoint uses. Every participant and user from the most casual visitor to content authors, developers, and administrators has something to contribute.

06 **Proper Design Concepts**

Style sheets, templates, reusable components, design definition documents, style established naming conventions, metadata definitions, best practices, etc. are valuable tools and methods to support a proper implementation.

07 **Steering Committee**

Representatives for departments covering all stakeholders should participate in periodic meetings to oversee compliance with the governance plan. The steering committee should be as diverse as possible to represent the needs and wants of all users of the system. HR personnel have very different requirements of SharePoint compared to accounting staff.

As a group, they represent the needs of SharePoint stakeholders, balance resources across departments, set standards, and have the authority to act. A typical steering committee meeting would include activities such as reviewing new change requests, addressing issues, approving projects or tasks and setting their priorities. Such meetings may also include vendors and other outside organizations to support committee activities.

What SharePoint elements and activities should be managed?

01 SharePoint Elements

A Governance Plan should manage activities to create, modify and archive SharePoint Elements such as site collections, sites, lists, libraries, pages, web parts, metadata, content types, taxonomy and workflows.

02 SharePoint Supporting Activities

A Governance Plan should also manage supporting SharePoint activities such as administering SharePoint or AD user groups, enabling user permissions and access to content, auditing and planning for infrastructure capacity, performing and verifying backup procedures, etc.

What else should be taken into consideration?

01 Training

Even with SharePoint's built-in, intuitive help system, as with many existing advanced software tools and platforms on the market, some users in the organization may still require additional assistance in its use. They may require additional training for using SharePoint and complying with your organization's governance policies. There will likely be multiple training and assistance programs required to serve administrators, power users and other employees.

02 Pacing of features

With the many features SharePoint has to offer, it can be overwhelming to first-time users and even more difficult for administrators and power users to govern. It is recommended to enable only as much functionality as can be effectively governed. As your organization and

its needs grow, you may enable more of its features and evolve the governance plan to cover incorporate the new features.

03 **Keep it fresh**

Maintaining the governance plan, alongside SharePoint, will be a marathon, not a sprint. It is perfectly acceptable if the first draft of the plan is not fully followed and some elements are missing. Most organization's largest fear and the thing to avoid is for the governance plan to be written and eventually be abandoned, sitting in a corner collecting dust.

No matter how perfectly the content may seem written now, revisions will always be required in the future, especially to conform to newer versions of SharePoint, should your organization migrate to them. Older governance documents may not address the new social sharing features of SharePoint 2013, for instance, and would not have been able to predict them.

04 **Plan well for customization**

With SharePoint's extensive options for customization, it is very possible that an untrained user can put the environment's stability and security at risk. An effective customization policy should be in effect to maintain consistency across all pages and sites and prevent any design flaws to impair usability or inadvertently create breaches in data security.

05 **Will it be fully enforced by everyone?**

A proper governance plan is designed to be read by all SharePoint users of the organization. This would range from top-level business owners to IT support staff. Consideration must be given that all levels of staff follow all tenets of the plan. Some may choose to follow some guidelines and not others. Higher-level staff may feel they are "above" certain rules set forth in the document.

06 **Does it match your organizations other policies?**

When drafting your governance plan, make sure it is aligned to your corporate culture and other policies. If your company has lenient guidelines on IT policies, for instance, do not make the governance policies too strict and rigid to cause any clashes. If your IT policy mandates no uploading of any personal files on corporate systems, make sure SharePoint governance matches this.

Conclusion

A SharePoint Governance Plan is critical to maintaining an effective SharePoint environment and fostering healthy growth and adoption. Such a plan must not only be ready for ongoing user challenges, but future-proof to meet upcoming ones as well.

A proper governance plan manages growth without restraining it. Planning and supervision keeps your system in order and policies and procedures properly guide your staff members. Users, managers and administrators must all work together to ensure the best implementation possible for the organization.

Silicus and Business-Critical SharePoint

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