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WHITE PAPER



Portal Governance Model

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This White paper talks about a Portal Governance model. First it justifies the need of why one would need a Portal Governance Model even if an IT Governance model existed. It then goes on to explain how an appropriate model can be setup in the organization.

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1 Executive Summary

Traditionally, managing web sites has been an uphill task for web administrators. There are as many web applications as there are functions that need to be made available through the web. Typically one single organizational unit will end up having multiple websites and so the enterprise as a whole has a multitude of web sites. Then about a decade back came along portal technology, with the promise to clean up this mess and streamline the process of building and running web sites, easing the maintenance of web site applications. While solving the typical issues faced in traditional web sites it also threw in goodies (some of the key features of the portal technology) such as role based access control, personalization, customizations and collaborations to state a few. The decision was almost unanimous, the business loved the capabilities with which the portal came and IT groups had finally found the answer to their problems. But we can agree that the decision was not so unanimous after all, the reason I say this is because, even though the business went back and started consolidating the websites into a portal, they did so at their own business unit level. And now we have a new set of issues to be resolved.

2 Introduction

With the increasing popularity of portals and the resultant increase in the chaos of maintaining many portals, it has become necessary today to devise a governance model for portals specifically. Many would argue why a portal governance model is required and why can it not be just another application within the existing IT governance framework, so I explain this in chapter 3: "Why Have a Portal Governance", the chapters following that get into the details of a portal governance framework; what issues does the governance framework resolve, how these issues are resolved and finally what activities are involved in setting up a portal governance model for an organization. But before that, let's look at some of the challenges in an Enterprise Portal Program (EPP).

2.1 Portal Challenges

- Portal projects usually involve multiple business stakeholders with diverse needs. While talking about an enterprise portal multiple stakeholders often come up with conflicting requirements, also in addition there are also issues concerning the priority of requirements. Each stakeholder believes that his own requirement is more important, and rightly so. Such a situation can be blamed on the lack of a vision for the enterprise portal, or at least on enforcing such a vision.
- User experience deteriorates as portal implementations grow and mature. The absence of policies regarding the creation of content, taxonomy, metadata, site navigation and presentation leads to inconsistent use of the elements, which in turn leads to a poorly presented site to the users. This drives users away, harming the adoption of portals and directly impacting the business objective of the organization.
- Internal competition for home page real estate and portal services. Every site owner wants the best possible services in the shortest possible time. There is no formula that can decide who wins in case of a conflict, and even if one exists it may not be legitimate enough for both parties to agree. Hence it is necessary that legitimate processes are created in a collaborative manner and these are communicated to all stakeholders.
- Portal business objectives either not well defined or not communicated. Generally the issue in this case is institutionalization of the objectives and its communication to stakeholders. If the objectives are defined but not communicated, then that leads to each business unit to care for its unit rather than to think about the organization's business objectives as a whole.
- Business objectives suffer when the portal is primarily controlled by IT. The general feeling with portals is that, in most organizations, it is treated as just another IT project and so it lands up with the IT department. While the IT departments will have portal experts able to handle the portal, what they really lack is the business knowledge and hence they are unable to leverage the portal capabilities to meet the business objectives.
- Ambiguity and delay in the decision making process. There is generally confusion about what can and cannot be done, for example a business unit may have a need for creating and publishing content. If there is more than one content management system (CMS) in the organization (which most likely will be the case) then it is not clear which one will comply with the enterprise portal platform. To add to the confusion there is no clear leadership which leads to delays.
- Organizations unexpectedly end up with silos of portal implementation. Internal competition, ambiguity, inward focus on individual units leads to what we call proliferation of portals. Each business unit implements its own portal thereby duplicating portal infrastructure, hardware infrastructure and portal content in multiple content repositories.
- Measuring ROI is almost impossible. Non alignment to overall organization business objectives, multiple implementations of portal for individual business unit goals can make it impossible to perform any kind of measurements for ROI.

3 Why Have Portal Governance

3.1 Why Portal Governance

A governance framework specifically aimed at the portal can help. The need for portal governance arises from the desire to confront the challenges that exist in any portal program. These challenges are specific to the portal and not the general IT challenge. Some of the key reasons for defining such a framework and keeping it active are:

- Establish clear accountability and ownership of the portal,
- Ensure that the policies are enforced and issues for the portal are resolved,
- Define a process that resolves ambiguity and facilitates clear decision making,
- Prioritize portal service to meet business objectives of the EPP,
- Enforce standards and ensure a high quality of user experience on the portal,
- Collaborate and communicate with stakeholder across sections of the organization,
- Define policies and processes to help maintain the integrity of the portal,
- Define SLAs and gather metrics against the business objectives of the portal.

the issue that the portal is facing. The IT governance framework may have policy a which says IT infrastructure will be a shared services environment and BUs/LOBs will consume the service via its corresponding processes. But the overall IT governance would not be equipped to address the following challenges (sample representation of the larger set of challenges):

- Ensure portal, portlet and content proliferation does not happen,
- Ensure portal strategy is aligned to the business objectives,
- Prioritize new services and capabilities on the portal,
- Ensure an optimal user experience, remember that portal user experience is not merely site structure for a traditional web application with some branding guideline; it is much more than just that.

In short the over all IT governance framework addresses a separate set of challenges but challenges stated in the above section would need more focused attention and can be better managed through the portal governance framework.

3.2 Why Not Plain IT Governance

Though Enterprise IT governance is the overarching governance framework it does not penetrate into and provide resolution to

4 Enter Portal Governance

So we understand the challenges and we know that a portal governance framework will help counter these challenges. In this section then, we take a look at how exactly governance helps us counter these challenges and helps achieve the business objectives. But before that, we need to define what we mean by a portal governance framework.

“A framework consisting of legitimate processes, policies and guidelines institutionalized with the help of a governing body consisting of cross-sectional stakeholders entrusted with the task of meeting the portals business objectives.”

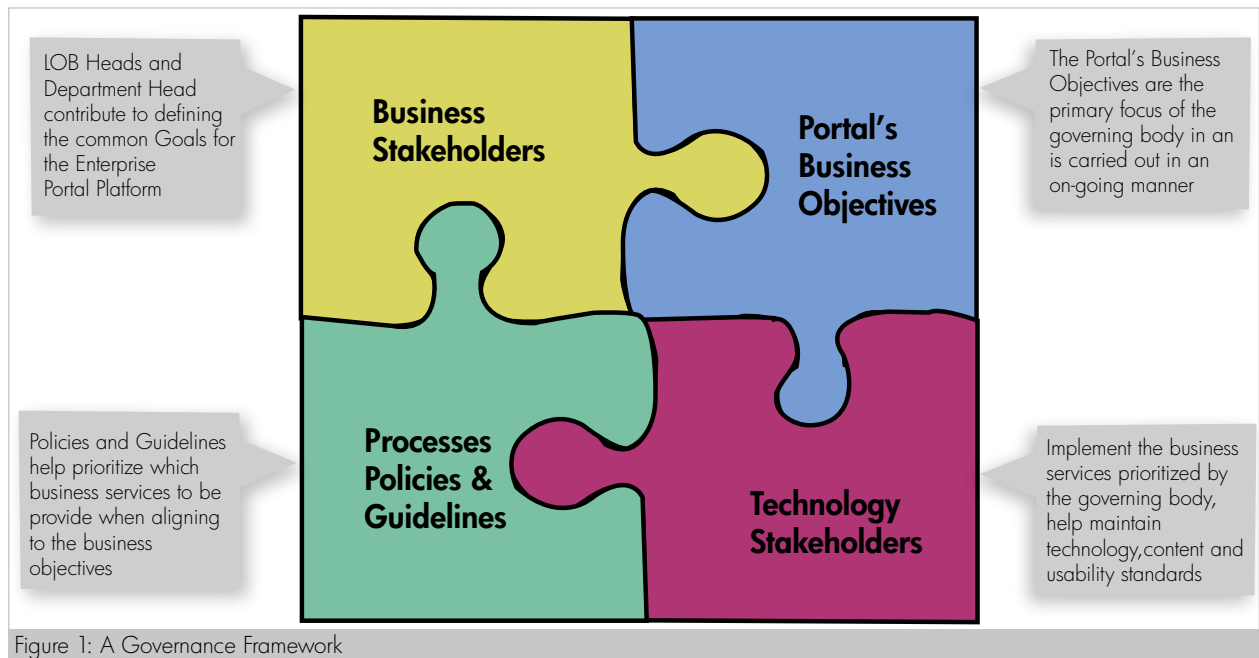


Figure 1: A Governance Framework

4.1 What is Portal Governance

A structured team with assigned roles and responsibilities governs the policies and processes, which helps the organization to guide, control and direct how it leverages technology to achieve its business objectives. For the portal governance to be effective it is necessary that policies and process in the framework are defined at both the strategic level as well as the operational level.

Strategic Level: At a strategic level the processes become the means through which the company sets business priorities and goals for the portal	Operational Level: At an operational level the processes define the means by which the organization designs, builds, implements and maintains the portal
Examples:	
Strategic Policies for ...	Operational Policies for ...
User Experience management	Managing Application On-boarding
Taxonomy and Content management	Architectural Change management
Website Branding	Managing Shared services environment
Prioritizing the business services delivered through the portal	Managing the Infrastructure and Security for the portal Platform
Release Management	Managing the standards and guideline for design, development and maintenance

4.2 How does Portal Governance Help

In section 2.1 “Portal Challenges” we pointed out some key challenges; the goal of portal governance is to address those. Let me take an example here; actually this may be a very common scene one may come across in the organization where a portal is implemented. Since portals integrate multiple disparate systems we end up dealing with multiple groups, departments or lines of business which generally leads to competition and conflicting priorities. In cases where a governance framework exists, the team would have pre-defined policies that would dictate which unit gets the priority. Again this priority would have been arrived at with the overall business objectives of the portal in mind.

If that is not sufficient the executive sponsor (a member of the governance team) who has oversight over multiple departments can address the issue and resolve any conflicts that may arise. In another example where MphasiS implemented a federated portal architecture for an investment bank in North America the User Experience (UX) management team of the consumer portal dictates what the user experience should be for the portal. Each participating portal that wants to federate its portlets to the consumer portal has to follow the policies and guidelines defined by the team. In the absence of a governance framework one could imagine how the user experience for the consumer would be.

Another issue we have with portals is that its usability quickly deteriorates even though the UX management team could handle any issue. Often there is no feedback loop in place to gather user feedback or measure the portal usage. This is generally true in the absence of a governance team because there is no common entity binding all stakeholders together. One of the goals of the governance team is to monitor and measure performance and usage of the portal within the organization. Content sprawl, portlet sprawl and multiple portal silos are other issues that portal governance can track. The governance team

uses process and tools that help track duplication. MphasiS for example uses a tool called Portlet Inventory as part of its portal development process. This tool helps manage the portlets being used in the portal: for new requirements one can check the availability of portlets and content without having to go to the portal server to search for available portlets. Plus it provides a description of what each portlet does, what is the source, what is its location on the portal and other such details.

The portal governance framework defines policies for decision making, with roles and responsibilities clearly defined. There is no room for ambiguity in the decision making process. This speeds up the decision making process; additionally the executive sponsor (who is also a champion in navigating organizational structure & boundaries) and the finance department helps speeding up investment related decisions.

5 Defining a Governance Model

A step-by-step process is followed to set up a governance model. Activities at each step coupled with drivers for each help arrive at the appropriate model for each organization and project. While drivers and activities may differ from organization to organization the broad level steps are quite the same.

- Portal vision identifies the business objectives and what gets governed,
- Focus areas identify the focus areas that could be changing from time to time,
- Identify the team that will govern the process and policies for the portal,
- Setup the processes and policies that are required for the portal.

The following diagram provides a summarization for setting up a Governance Model

Steps	Portal Vision	Focus Areas	The Team	Process & Policies
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Identify Business Objectives ➤ Align Portal technology to Business Objectives ➤ Track Investment and to ensure value generation ➤ Identify metrics to be collected and techniques to measure performance and usage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Identify current focus areas ➤ Adhere to over business objectives ➤ Define the amount of control required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Define the governance team structure ➤ Acquire Executive Sponsorship ➤ Invite members of various groups with the organization to participate in the Team ➤ Prefer willingness over nomination of members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Identify & Define required Processes ➤ Process should be aligned to meet the overall business objectives ➤ Focused around the focus areas from time-to-time
Drivers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Scope of the Portal ➤ Size of the Organization ➤ Available Budget ➤ Technical and Organizational Maturity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Current Phase of the Portal Life Cycle ➤ Current Business unit in focus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Need for people to govern the processes ➤ Authoritative Support from Senior Management ➤ Re-presentation from a cross section of stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Govern implementation of Portals ➤ Streamline Administrative, Development, Deployment and maintenance activities ➤ Pre-define who wins and argument in case of conf

Figure 2: Define a Governance Model

5.1 Objectives and Focus Areas

Portals are often mistaken to be just another IT project, but in a reality the Enterprise Portal Program is a journey. In the journey there would be various phases and some of these would be iterative phases. To be successful with the enterprise portal program it is critical that the governance model we define is adaptive in nature. The governance process should be able to adapt to constant changes that occur in a portal program life cycle. If the organization is using the Rational Unified Process (RUP) to manage the project life cycle then the focus area of governance during the inception phase will be on:

- Scope definition for the portal based on the available budget
- Prioritization of portal requirements
- Concurrence of stakeholders on the scope and prioritization

Likewise, different phases will have different focus areas and hence the process will focus around those.

Another dimension for governance focus area is the business units or LOBs that are interacting with the portal from time to time. Based on the objectives for the portal the organization could be integrating disparate applications such as SAP, PeopleSoft, and some accounting system or the portal could be simply integrating applications within a single LOB or business unit say for example an HR portal. Irrespective of the type of portal and application being integrated there would be consideration on focus area. For example for an internal facing HR portal one focus area in addition to the phase specific focus could be related to compliance. Whereas for a public facing corporate portals the focus areas would be Branding & User Experience.

The point here is that although Compliance, Branding and User Experience management would be part of the overall objectives, there will be times in the portal life cycle where these and other

objectives will have specific focus; the governance framework should be able to take care of it.

5.2 The Governance Team

The most important aspect of the governance framework is the formation of a team with an appropriate structure. With structure we mean the right competency and the right authority. The competency is important from the point of view of understanding portal technology, tracking it for the right use within the enterprise.

Having in place the right competencies helps to make informed decisions. For example a decision on whether to use a content management solution that comes bundled with the portal product or to choose a best of breed CMS product will come from being competent and knowledgeable about various products in the space and the requirements the enterprise has. Although the example talks about technical competency it is not to mean only technical skills but it is to be true for the competency of the overall team in all aspects.

A more important aspect is the right authority. It is usually achieved by having an executive leader sponsor the portal program and be part of the governance team. The participation of the executive sponsor not only helps maneuver the various political, organizational and financial challenges within the enterprise, but because (s)he has a cross-functional view of the organization many of the stakeholders and LOBs roll up under her/his authority. For the ones that (s)he does not directly control (s)he can reach to his peers to iron out inter-departmental issues. A typical Governance team is indicated below. The table below it lists the roles and responsibilities of the team members. It is a typical model and will need to be modified to suite the organization and its dynamics, but there may not be a lot of deviation.

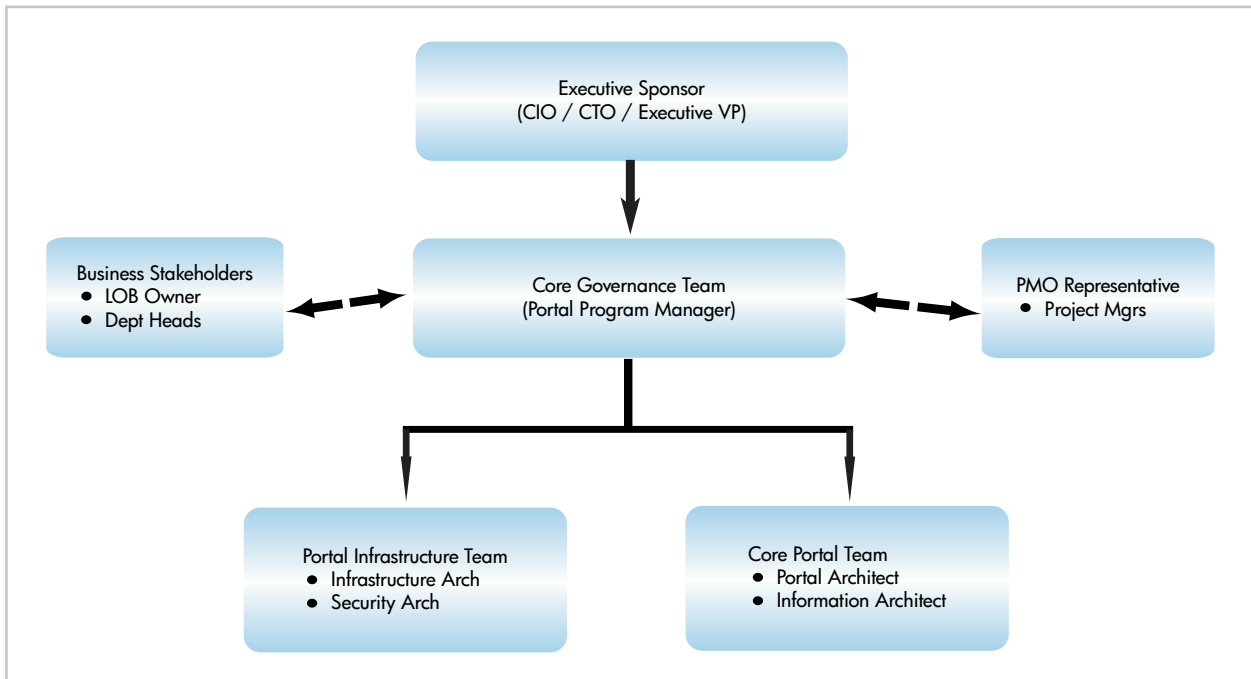


Figure 3: Typical Governance Team

Role	Responsibility
Executive Sponsor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide executive level sponsorship for the portal, • Strategically position the portal as a critical mechanism for achieving business value, • Helping to communicate the value of the portal to the management levels of the organization.
Core Governance Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shoulders the ultimate responsibility for meet the goals of the portal, • The chairman along with business and technical stakeholders is responsible to drive the portal initiative, • Ensure on an on-going basis that the program is in alignment to the business objectives, • From time-to-time ensure that the right stakeholders and part of the governance team, • Markets the enterprise portal to different lobbs and increases its use in the organization.
Business Stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides business requirements that helps set the objective for the enterprise portal, • Helps define the vision of the enterprise portal, • A set of business representatives are rotated periodically to ensure organization wide membership.
PMO Representative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projects identified as a result of business functions prioritization are executed by project managers, • In this role the project manager executes projects in lines with policies and procedures governed by the governance core team.

Core Portal Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide technical implementation and support in executing the portal vision, • Manage content and taxonomy standards and guidelines, • Manage the use experience and branding for the enterprise portal.
Portal Infrastructure Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage the architecture standards and guidelines, • Define and manager guidelines for use of hardware and security infrastructure.

5.3 Processes and Policies

Having identified the focus areas and the governance team, it is time to identify the processes and policies. Processes in a way are similar to a “How To...” document; they define the process of doing a particular task, for example “How to get access to the portal” or “How to upload content to the portal”. They are cookbooks.

Policies on the other hand are decisions that are made, in this case about the portal, examples being “Oracle Weblogic Portal is the choice of portal to be used”, “Content creation will at a minimum have the author, approver, publisher workflow”. The next important thing to note is that the processes/policies are always interlocked with the earlier two steps, one is that process/policies should be in alignment to the current focus area at that respective time, two is that the members of the team have specific roles and responsibilities in the defined processes. To be successful with the defined processes and policies there needs to be a consensus

among stakeholders in defining/creating these. For example in the federated portal example that I have discussed earlier, a policy for site look and feel (common WSRP styles should be used) could be challenged by some stakeholders. Without consensus the legitimacy of the policy or process can be questioned. If the consumer portal in my example has to be successful then it needs tenants (in this case LOBs) on it, and the LOBs will not follow policies if they have not had a consensus on them. LOBs/departments not coming to a consensus will automatically lead the department/LOB to setup their own portal leading to the failure of the governance model. Processes and policies should be defined during each phase of the portal’s lifecycle and there surely would be a time when these need to be modified. The governance model should also have processes for changing and updating the portal policies. A few processes and policies that MphasiS defined for the federated portal are stated below.

Items	Description	Process/Policy
Portal components deployment should be automated	A policy restricting the use of UI console for deployment	Policy
How to create pages and associate portlets with pages using XMLAccess	A procedure document describing how perform automated deployment	Process
Security between WebSphere Producer to WebSphere Consumer should use LTPA Token, all other products should use WS-Security UserNameToken	Security policy between the producer and the consumer portal in a federated environment	Policy
How to created a Wizard style Portlet using the JSP Portlet Framework	A how to document for creating a specific type of portlet application	Process

5.4 Communication and Feedback

As with any other process, communication and feedback of the governance framework activities is important. It is important to unambiguously communicate to all portal users, potential users, stakeholders, sr. management about the activities, decisions, policies and process with respect to the portal. Various forms of communication can be employed including weekly, fortnightly, monthly meetings, use of newer collaboration techniques and not limited to just blogs, wikis, forums. Send out newsletters and leverage knowledge centers in the organization knowledge management systems.

Actively seek feedback from various stakeholders of the portal including the users. While stakeholder can provide feedback and suggestions about the governance model itself, users of the portal can provide feedback on the user experience and benefits of the portal and also request for new services via the portal.

6 Best Practices for Portal Governance

- Form the governance team as early as possible
- Ensure clear leadership for the team
 - In the proposed model the portal program manager is the leader
- Always have a senior executive sponsor the portal program
 - The sponsor's role is to provide executive support to meet the goals of the program
- Ensure that the governance model is inclusive
- Have business and department heads join as members of the core team
 - This will ensure business stakeholder buy-in to the portal program
- Ensure participation from the project management office
 - Will help ensure that the implementation teams are aligned to the overall requirements
- Recruit a portal architect and an information architect to form the core portal team
 - They will provide the necessary support for following the guidelines and policies as defined the core governance team
- Recruit an infrastructure and security architect to form a portal infrastructure team
- Ensure participation by choice then by force; incentivize members to join
- Rotate members to gain organization-wide participation
- Use collaboration tools such as wikis, blogs, forums for discussion and education
- Set up a knowledge center to maintain and store process docs, sop, contact list, bug report, and issues list
 - At MphasiS we use virtual team rooms on a SharePoint site as the knowledge center
- Make portal health check a part of governance
 - Check usage metrics to judge the use and adoption of portal on an ongoing basis
 - Check usage trends immediately after a release of a major upgrade to the portal site
 - Analyze the results to spot any unusual drop in the usage of the portal

7 Summary

This white paper is trying to bring out the challenges involved in delivering an enterprise portal. This paper prescribes a mechanism to counter the challenges of a successful portal implementation, stressing the fact that these challenges are unique to a portal program because of the nature of the technology and involvement of various stakeholders. The prescribed mechanism is to define and use a portal governance framework which defines a structured mechanism to counter the challenges of the portal program. The governance framework itself is a structured team with roles and responsibilities to define and use processes to govern the conception, elaboration, implementation and on-going management on the portal program. There is an importance to the team members and more so to an executive sponsor to help the team navigate the rough path of organizational structure and hierarchies for a smooth implementation path of the portal program.

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About MphasiS

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