

White Paper



Defining a Governance Model for Portals

Tushar Sachdev

The need for governance

While implementing portals, the focus is often only on technology. The implicit assumption being that the portal is yet another IT application with the usual execution and operational dimensions. However, portals involve softer issues which, when ignored, lead to unsuccessful implementations. These issues relate to change management and the governance model for managing change.

Portals and Content Management Systems (CMS) warrant changes to operating processes. The changed processes must be defined and the organization must be built around them to manage change effectively. For instance, while introducing a tool to manage web content, it is necessary to define how authoring templates will be created and managed, the roles of business and IT, and centralization/decentralization of operations around web content management. These factors vary based on the phase of the project – envisioning, implementation or evolution.

Another example is branding. A portal implementation may involve revamping and standardizing brands for the company, group or department. Creation of a brand and managing its changes requires defined processes, and at times, dedicated teams.

Portals and CMS require involvement of the business and IT groups. It is, therefore, necessary to define the governance model during “envisioning” of the systems. Portals and CMS have failed in several instances due to the absence of appropriate governance mechanisms. Technology is often not the cause for failed implementations; it is the lack of appropriate structure and processes to manage the implementation. The “ownership” element is very critical since portals are multi-dimensional and multi-owner entities.

In this paper, we outline a holistic approach to defining and implementing an effective governance model for portals.

Defining a governance model

The governance model for portals and CMS must define the processes and roles required to implement and operate them. It must address all needs in different stages of a portal lifecycle. For instance, content creation needs to be highly centralized before the launch of a portal, but may be decentralized after the launch.

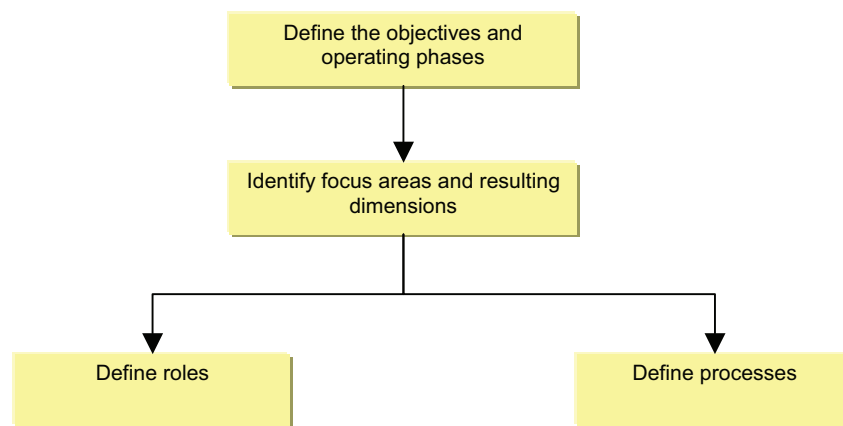


Figure 1

Defining objectives

Objectives are a function of the need for the portal. They vary based on the type of portal or CMS being implemented. They are defined by the clients of the portal and the maturity level of the organization’s IT processes. Some typical objectives are:

- Enabling quick decision-making
- Managing multiple stakeholders and multiple initiatives
- Prioritization and release strategy
- Managing technological changes and integration challenges
- Minimizing legal risk
- Aligning governance models with other interdependent initiatives
- Managing user experience
- Ensuring successful change management

It is necessary to ensure that the evolution of the governance model is aligned with progression of the portal lifecycle.

Infosys adopted a 3-phased approach to an Enterprise Portal program for a large utilities company. As shown in Figure 2, at the launch, the portal was in the “envisioning” phase with a focused group striving to understand its feasibility and impact to prepare a business case. The implementation phase was managed as a “program”. As the first few releases were rolled out, the project moved into the “evolution” phase focused on enhancements and maintenance. The governance model was designed to address different aspects in each of these phases, based on the nature of tasks.

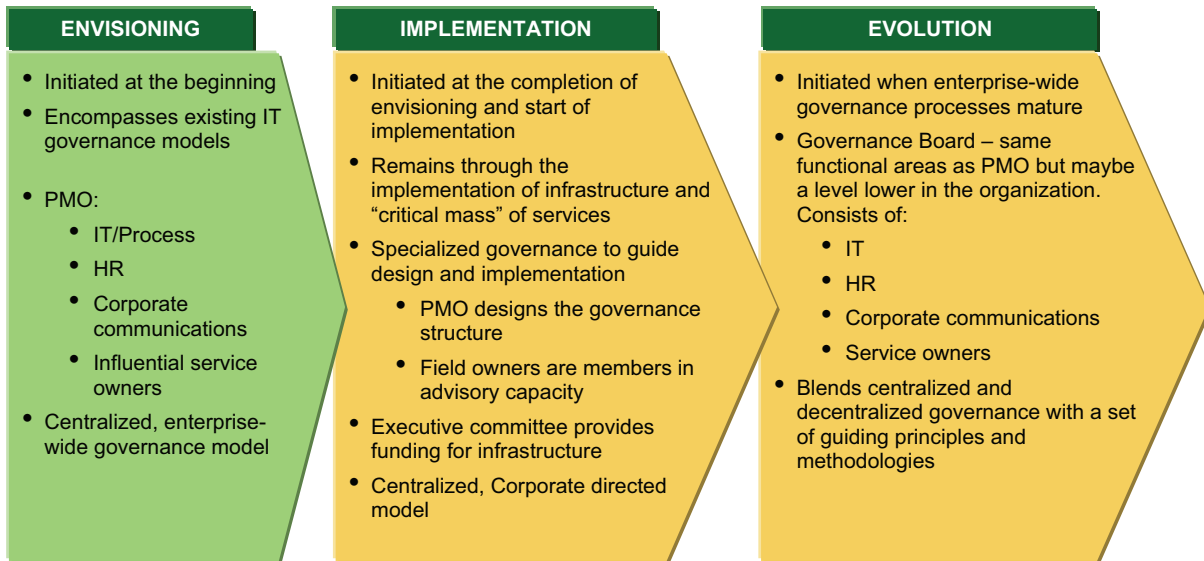


Figure 2

Identify current focus areas for governance and the resulting dimensions

The focus of the governance model varies with the phase of the lifecycle. It must be based on the overall objectives but tuned to the current phase. Focus areas represent current and near-term challenges that need to be overcome. There can be 4-5 key focus areas.

For example, while defining the governance model for the “envisioning” phase of an HR portal for a retail major, we defined the following key focus areas:

- Enablement and management of new processes
- Dependencies on other initiatives
- Technical implementation
- Compliance to legal, regulatory and policy requirements
- Business case tracking and resolution of business case conflicts

Once the focus areas are clear, the right balance of control for the different dimensions of a portal or CMS implementation can easily be arrived at.

For example, for the HR portal of the retail client, the governance model was predominantly centralized during the “envisioning” phase (see Fig. 3.1), whereas it was decentralized during the “implementation” phase (see Fig. 3.2).

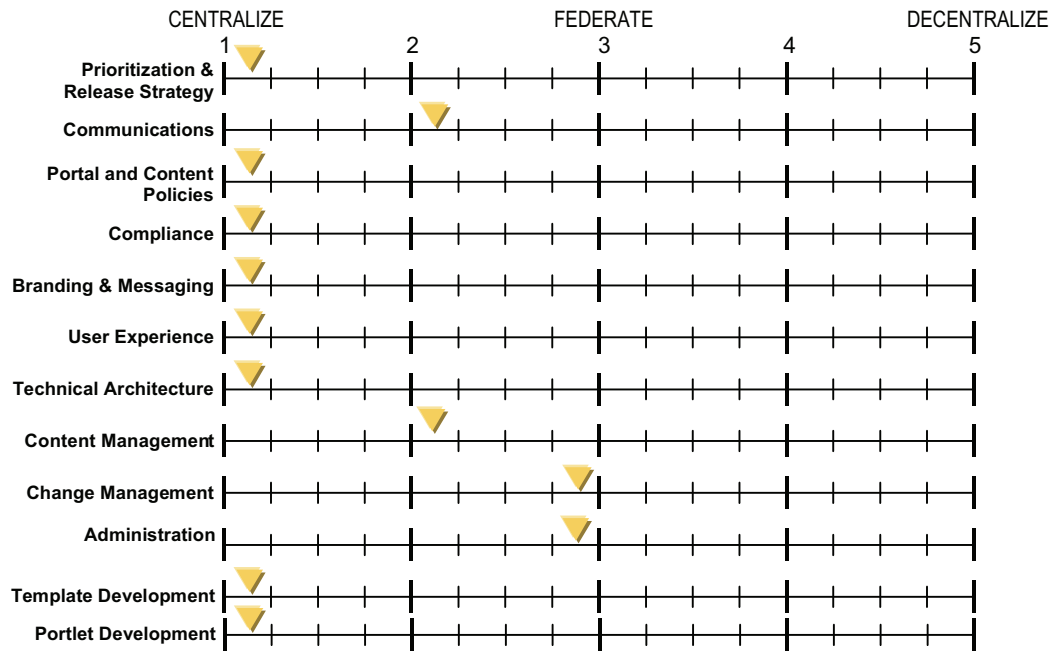


Figure 3.1

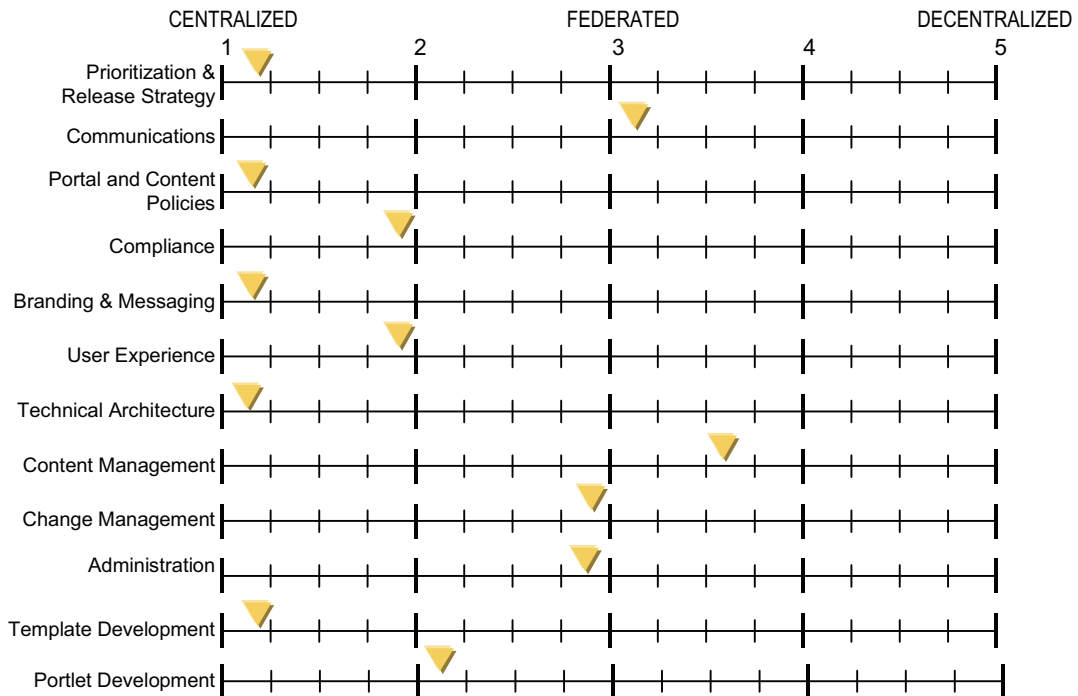


Figure 3.2

Defining roles

The structure of the governance model must be defined keeping in mind all dimensions and the level of control. Although the structure varies with the phase of the project, it must be defined in advance after considering the inter-relationship between the overall portal governing body and the existing stakeholders. The next step is defining the responsibilities of each of the portal governance body elements as well as the role structure within each of these elements. Finally, roles and responsibilities of individual members must be defined.

A typical structure for portal governance is shown in Figure 4. The portal steering committee is responsible for the overall direction and resolution of major issues. It has fairly senior members who provide overall sponsorship and own the execution. They appoint a program manager for running the program. The program manager and his core team are responsible for defining the portal project, its roadmap, the execution plan, finances, and quality commitments. The development and business teams own and execute portions of the program. Members from these core teams often interact with members of an extended team responsible for execution of individual modules. Members of the extended team are temporary and change with the releases.

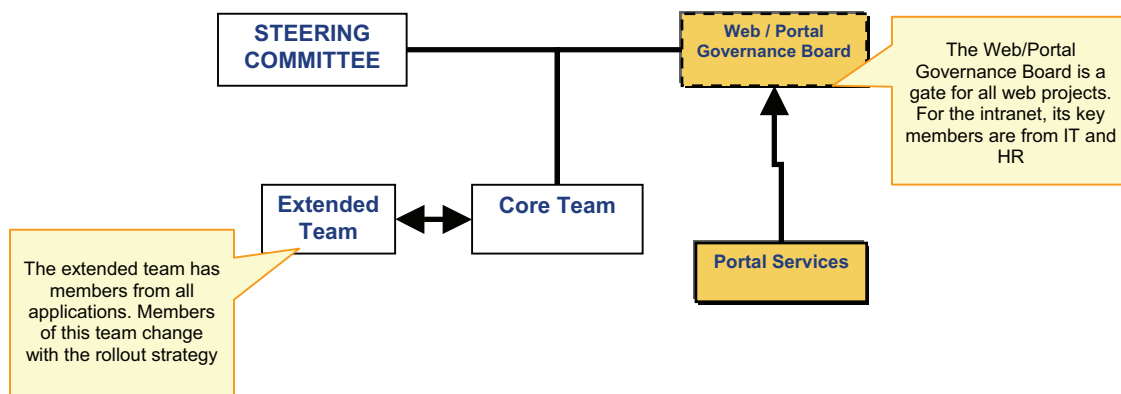


Figure 4

Once the portal reaches a mature state (“critical-mass” of services deployed), the responsibility of enhancing and maintaining it is handed over to a services team that is a part of the maintenance organization (operational). Subsequently, the ownership of the portal moves from the steering committee to a Web or Portal Governance board.

The steering committee or the leadership team comprises key service owners who can take all portal-related decisions with respect to their unit. They are responsible for the success of the program. Typical composition of a steering committee:

- Vertical Service Owners/Sponsors/Champions
 - Owner business unit — varies based on the type of portal. For example, Marketing typically owns a customer facing portal
 - Business vertical representation — Distribution, Manufacturing, Benefits, Retail, etc
- Horizontal (cross-enterprise) Service Owners/Sponsors/Champions
 - IT Services
 - Infrastructure
- Program Manager
- Program Owner
- Executive Sponsor

As new services are enabled on the portal, new service owners are introduced, thereby constantly changing the composition of the committee. The composition of the core and extended teams of an HR self-service portal of a retail major is given in Figure 5.

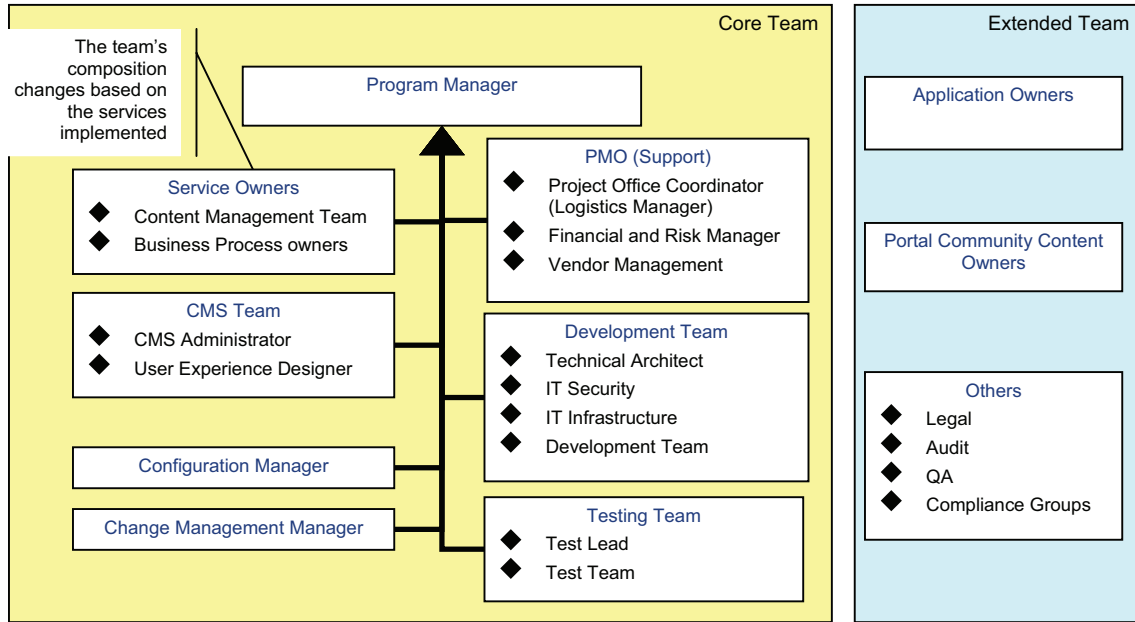


Figure 5

The roles and responsibilities of each of the members of the core and extended teams must be defined. Defining the time commitment for each member in each phase is a good metric for evaluation.

Here's a sample role definition:

Position	Responsibilities	Skills Required
Program Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Act as “engagement manager” to provide a one-point contact to different stakeholders and ensure smooth development and deployment of the site Manage vendor engagement, licensing services Own common site framework Manage the portfolio of site services and develop a roadmap to evolve the services Identification of opportunities to build services as a part of the in-flight site project Own the quality of experience feedback mechanism to determine opportunities for improvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding of the enterprise business processes and organization Understanding of site components and architecture Understanding of best practices for quality management Strong communication and soft skills People/Team management skills

It is also important to define the various forums and meetings that the teams must attend and the frequency of such meetings. An example is given below:

Meeting	Purpose	Frequency
PMO	To discuss overall project roadmap and progress, risk assessment and finances	Weekly
Core team meeting	To track project status, issue resolution, risk assessment at plan level	Weekly

Defining the processes

The next step is defining the processes based on the dimensions defined. Processes must be defined before the beginning of a phase and should have buy-in from all stakeholders involved in the process. Identification and definition of processes are based on the activities undertaken in the concerned phase. A list of processes for portal programs in the “implementation” phase is shown below:

Process	Brief Description
Prioritization and Release strategy	Defines overall process for introducing/prioritizing new services into the portal. Includes the necessary gates through which the proposal passes – business, financial and technical
Site Brand Management and User Experience	Defines process for introducing changes to the portal branding in terms of logos, style, colors, etc. It also defines the process of measuring the quality of experience of the site
Communication	Defines the process of creation and approval of communication plan and ongoing communication related to the program
Site Policies and Compliance	Defines process creation and modification of portal policies, and compliance checks and communication with respect to it
Site Taxonomy	Defines processes for modifying the site map
Content Management	Defines processes with respect to creation, modification and archival of pages, templates, resources and branches

The responsibility of all individual stakeholders in each part of the process must be defined. Process detailing is a complex exercise and buy-in from stakeholders is important. A swim-lane process diagram, as shown in Figure 6, is useful to depict process flows along with the stakeholders involved.

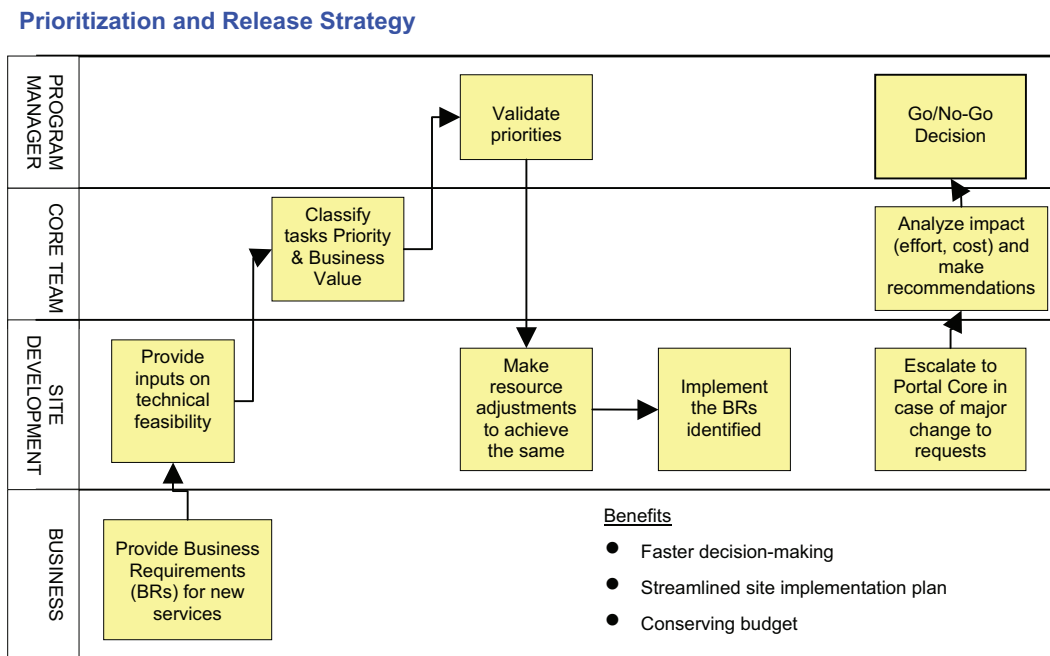


Figure 6

Implementing the governance model

Implementation of the governance model can be challenging if all stakeholders are not involved in the definition process. The structure and processes of the model must be in sync with the IT governance practices in the organization. The model must be defined and refined at the beginning of each phase as well as at regular intervals, at least half-yearly. Communication of the governance model and its processes must be unambiguous. Finally top management support is an absolute must as governance is a highly political subject and lots of ownership issues are associated with the same

Some of the inputs, tools and techniques that facilitate governance implementation are:

- Workshops to kick start the process and involve all stakeholders
- Collaboration technologies like wikis for collaborative process definitions
- Training capsules for new processes
- Industry best practices awareness

The change management team of the program has a significant role to play in the implementation of the governance model. Implementation of the model requires a lot of team management capabilities and must be carried out by people within the organization. Consultants can only facilitate workshops.

Conclusion

Defining the governance model is an extremely critical step in a portal implementation journey. It involves a step-by-step process of defining the structure of the portal governing body as well as the processes for operating the portal.

A governance model cannot be prescriptive since it is influenced by many factors: existing organization practices, type of the portal being implemented, phase of the portal lifecycle, etc. Involving stakeholders at the right time, aligning the model with existing IT practices, and top management support can ensure smooth implementation of a governance model.

About the Author

[Tushar Sachdev](#) is a Principal Architect with Infosys. His current interests include Enterprise Information Management and Enterprise Portals



For more information, contact askus@infosys.com

About Infosys

Many of the world's most successful organizations rely on Infosys to deliver measurable business value. Infosys provides business consulting, technology, engineering and outsourcing services to help clients in over 30 countries build tomorrow's enterprise.

For more information about Infosys (NASDAQ:INFY), visit www.infosys.com.