

## **Governance Considerations in Enterprise Portal Deployment**

Zach Wahl  
Project Performance Corporation  
1760 Old Meadow Road, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor  
McLean, Virginia 22102  
703-748-7000

### **Portal Governance**

Portals aggregate a broad spectrum of content, applications, and services that are owned and managed by a variety of groups. For this reason, conflicting requirements from different stakeholder groups are a given. In addition, the proliferation of multiple stakeholder groups leads to “organic” portal development. Different groups will take ownership of various sub-components of the portal and develop them to suit their own needs with little coordination or regard for how this will affect other groups. In short, without portal governance guiding processes, developing policies and procedures, and maintaining authority, portal projects risk absolute failure.

Organizations that implement a governance model that covers the areas of project objectives, portal roles, policies and procedures, and communication have a much better chance of succeeding. A successful governance model will help gather user requirements by improving communication and clarifying roles and responsibilities within the portal implementation team. In turn, these clarified roles and responsibilities will speed development and assist team members in prioritizing activities. Finally, an effective governance model ensures consistent decision-making on the part of the portal team.

### **Centralized or Decentralized Governance**

Governance models traditionally fall into the category of centralized or decentralized, although in practice most models are a hybrid of the two approaches. In a centralized approach, a small team of employees that have the skills and knowledge needed, both technical and business, are in charge of managing the portal. This centralized team is responsible for gathering the requirements from all potential portal users and building the portal to suit these stakeholder’s needs.

By keeping the process centralized, it is only necessary to train a small team on the various functionalities of the portal software. Therefore, decision-making becomes easier and more uniform, clear accountability and authority exists, and costs can be kept lower. However, there are several drawbacks to this approach as well. One major drawback in many smaller organizations is that it may be infeasible to solely dedicate resources with the necessary skills to maintain and enhance the portal. In addition, a centralized approach may slow development and add a bottleneck as the small staff cannot keep up with requests from stakeholders. Furthermore, a centralized team may not contain the breadth of knowledge necessary to truly personalize a portal for an organization of diverse stakeholders and business areas.

A decentralized approach, though inherently more complex, better suits the needs of many organizations. The decentralized approach gives business units more flexibility by putting portal capabilities such as content management and portlet development directly under their control. The decentralized approach takes advantage of the portal's natural capacity to serve multiple types of users, allowing these various stakeholder groups to build the portal to suit their own needs. With these benefits, however, come the risks that a decentralized governance model is much more difficult to manage and may result in inconsistent decision-making and development. In addition, a decentralized approach requires a cultural change in most organizations, with new portal-related responsibilities falling on the shoulders of already busy existing employees.

Another option is a hybrid of the two approaches, known as the Loose-Tight Governance model. In this scenario, a small team of dedicated resources maintain administrative responsibilities over the portal and are responsible for portal governance and the publication of policies and procedures. In addition, these dedicated resources are responsible for training stakeholder groups and "marketing" the portal to them. In the Loose-Tight scenario, this small team of dedicated resources allows a centralized portal team to set guidelines that ensure the portal is effectively developed and deployed. At the same time, it will provide stakeholder groups and end users with the capabilities and guidance necessary to personalize the portal to suit their own needs and interests, but in a manner that is deliberate and beneficial to the entire portal audience.

Regardless of the model used, any successful governance plan will encompass the areas of project objectives, portal roles, policies and procedures, and communication.

## **Project Objectives**

A key role of any portal governance body is to identify a mission statement, or the overall objectives, for the portal project. These objectives should be confirmed by all members of the portal team and communicated clearly to all portal users. In cases where an iterative (or phased) approach is being used and the project objectives will be fulfilled over time, the timeline for reaching these objectives should be communicated to end users and project stakeholders as well. Clearly defining and communicating these objectives will help to set expectations and validate current assumptions. In addition, the establishment and communication of these objectives will help the portal team members to focus their efforts and effectively prioritize development activities that lead to the attainment of the stated objectives.

## **Identifying Portal Roles and Responsibilities**

An effective governance model will define each team member's roles and responsibilities. Clearly defining roles and responsibilities allows users more time to learn who is responsible for what components in the portal and guides stakeholder requests for additional functionality.

A sound governance model revolves around the following four Primary portal roles:

- **Executive Sponsor/Portal Champion** – Address cultural, process, business change; remove barriers; align portal with strategic objectives and initiatives; leverage enterprise-wide resources; act as chief evangelist.
- **Portal Project Manager** – Overall project responsibility including portal design, development, and project management. Guides and manages activities at all phases of development.
- **Portal Core Team** – Consisting of technical and management staff, assists the Portal Project Manager in his/her duties. Also responsible for enforcing policies and procedures, reviewing and approving all new development, and all change requests to portal components.
- **Portal Steering Committee** – Consisting of a mix of technical and business staff. Review and advise the Portal Core Team on their work. Areas of responsibility include portal policies and procedures, major development initiatives, and other enterprise-wide issues. Ensure the portal meets the organization's objectives and all users' needs.

All other portal roles (e.g. Content Managers, Portal Administrators, Security Administrators, Portlet Developers, Network Administrators, Software/Hardware Engineers, Graphic Designers, and Alpha/Beta Testers) fall under the guidance of the aforementioned four primary roles listed above.

With the stated objective for most portals of serving functionality and content to organization stakeholders, involving these stakeholders in all stages of portal development is imperative. By mixing technology resources with business owners, the Portal Steering Committee will create a forum for business owners to guide current and future portal development activities. This will provide faster and more targeted results to these stakeholders and, in turn, generate greater support for the portal project. In addition, the Portal Steering Committee will serve as a link for communication between the Portal Core Team and the end users. It will also provide a forum for the Core Team to communicate timelines for deliverables and expected functionality, thereby setting the expectations of the stakeholders. Moreover, the Steering Committee will serve as an opportunity to educate the participating end users on the potential benefits of the portal, helping to spawn discussion for future development activities and encouraging support from additional stakeholder groups.

### **Policies and Procedures**

Clear policies and procedures must be in place in order to simplify the administrative burden of the portal. For each portal component in the portal (e.g. Collaboration Server, Communities, Portlets, etc.) there should be clear information concerning responsible party, means of requesting a modification or addition, process by which a decision will be reached and documented, process for taking action, who is authorized to take action, and process for testing. Options for communicating this information include the development of process flow diagrams or the development of a standard operating procedure (SOP) for each.

Componentizing policies and procedures holds several benefits. Such a document serves as a road map, identifying all key portal components and creating firm rules for their development and maintenance. Moreover, this document helps in a move to a decentralized portal model where the Portal Core Team defines the development rules, but end users identify and request the new functionality and individual business teams actually build the functionality.

In addition to the componentized policies and procedures mentioned above, a successful governance model should define policies for training and global security settings within the portal. For training, the team should be responsible for designating, for instance, the amount of training required before someone is allowed to develop portlets for the production system. For global settings, the team should define who is allowed to play what roles in the portal. For instance, who has the ability to register portlets or create a new community?

### **Communication**

The wealth of portal project data must be made available to all users, potential users, and other stakeholders. For example, all of the information mentioned in this white paper (e.g. Roles and Responsibilities List, SOPs, Policies and Procedures, etc.) should be accessible via the portal during any stage of development. A developer's community could be created that houses the policies and procedures documents, SOPs, contact lists, bug reports, and new requests. Similarly, a Portal Development community could be created for all users, with portlets that allow them to learn how to better use the portal with lessons learned and online tutorials, report bugs, request new functionality, or view existing reports and requests. Furthermore, this community could be used by the portal team to discuss existing and planned development initiatives and discuss timelines for the addition of planned functionality. Moreover, a portlet could be constructed allowing users to request a meeting with a member of the portal team for more information.

Aside from the active user feedback mentioned above in the form of bug reports or new functionality requests, general user surveys asking what users did and did not find valuable have been used by a wide array of portal customers. However, passive feedback, such as that garnered by PT Tracker is much more valuable. This tool will allow for the generation of detailed metrics on the use of the portal by each user. The Portal team will be able to use these metrics to learn what portal users are utilizing and what they aren't, and therefore will be able to respond to these metrics to better serve the portal community.