

Governance for All

Empowering IT and business content owners

Written by Chris McNulty, SharePoint strategic product manager, Dell



Abstract

Governance for all is more than an IT initiative or a goal written in a plan document; it's a strategy that unites IT and business content owners to achieve their SharePoint goals. At its best, governance means empowering self-governance, with tools like delegated access, effective reporting, and automated policy enforcement. This white paper explains how to create a "governance for all" strategy that will enhance SharePoint adoption and its benefits to the organization.

Introduction

Governance is not an IT initiative; it's a partnership between IT and business users

SharePoint management, migrations and customizations traditionally fall into the IT department's purview. So it's natural to think that the creation and enforcement of a governance strategy would fall to IT as well. But governance is more than just the rules and processes that govern SharePoint; it's also about what you want your SharePoint to be in your

organization and how you plan to get there and stay there. Therefore, governance cannot be an IT initiative alone; it must be a business one, with buy-in from business content owners.

About this document

Encouraging user buy-in is critical to creating an effective and long-term governance strategy. But this process is more than just collecting business requirements; it's about empowering your IT staff and your business content owners to self-govern. This white paper explores the challenges to developing an effective SharePoint governance plan that encourages SharePoint adoption, and also explains how to create a "governance for all" strategy that works.

The three key challenges in SharePoint governance and SharePoint adoption

1. The word “governance” itself is a problem

Discussions of SharePoint governance often begin with Microsoft’s definition from TechNet:

“Governance is the set of policies, roles, responsibilities, and processes that guide, direct, and control how an organization’s business divisions and IT teams cooperate to achieve business goals.”

But in practice, SharePoint governance tends to fall at one of two ends of a spectrum:

- **At one end of the spectrum is a “cheerleader” idea of governance.** The organization offers training, guidance and encouragement about how to do things, but not a lot of control. For instance, the organization might say, “We want you to use SharePoint to collaborate on all of next year’s planning documents,” but not actually even check whether all the document activity is happening inside SharePoint where it’s expected.
- **At the other end of the spectrum is the “iron-fist approach”—governance as tight control from above.** In a corporate context, “governance” brings to mind images of Boards of Directors or stringent oversight of financial statements. This vision of governance can spill over into SharePoint. For instance, some organizations lock all team sites to identical look-and-feel with identical features. Others stipulate policies such as “SharePoint must never be used for any personal content” and implement controls to ensure the policies are followed, such as scanning regularly for personal documents and removing any that are found.

It’s hard for SharePoint to be an effective tool to a business outcome at either end of the spectrum. If “governance” is simply statements of intent (“we’d like you to do this”) without some level of oversight, SharePoint can and will go out of control. You’ll have chaos, and

the organization will be wasting time and money maintaining a platform that isn’t being used effectively. On the other hand, if SharePoint is too strictly controlled (“you must do this in this way”), then people will feel oppressed and, therefore, will resist using the platform at all. Meanwhile, all the manual work required to micromanage SharePoint will cause IT costs to skyrocket, with little or no return on the money spent. Accordingly, it’s crucial to strike a balance between runaway users and users running away.

2. Governance is seen as the “bad cop”

Another common challenge for SharePoint governance is the “bad cop” scenario. Governance, like most things that touch technology, starts out in the hands of IT. But all too often, users perceive governance as the IT authorities cracking down on them. If all people hear all day is, “You’re doing this wrong in SharePoint; you’re doing that wrong in SharePoint,” they will throw up their hands, walk away, and say, “Okay, SharePoint expert, you do it.”

That’s obviously bad for SharePoint adoption, and it’s also bad for SharePoint governance, because when the users disengage from SharePoint, governance tends to remain exclusively in the hands of IT. Business users are not going to show up for “governance” or “steering” meetings, and the organization will never have a unified vision of how the technology is supposed to support its business needs and goals.

3. Technical needs tend to outweigh business needs

It’s become de rigueur to talk about governance for technical issues, such as web sites, messaging and social solutions. In addition, economic and regulatory factors, such as options pricing, Sarbanes-Oxley, and the recent global recession, have led to extensive discussion about reforming corporate management and boards of directors.

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The fact is, SharePoint can become the mission-critical enterprise workspace. But all too often, important business needs are not clearly defined; for example, who determines business criticality? Often, the right questions aren't being asked, or they're being posed to the wrong people, or the questions aren't understood as they are phrased. IT organizations are often left to guess or infer business needs, which, of course, does not help the organization achieve effective governance. Organizations see the need to balance policy enforcement with business involvement and user self-governance, but they struggle with defining a flexible governance strategy, and they often lack the tools to implement and enforce such a strategy.

A good business outcome for SharePoint is supporting accurate enterprise decisions and processes by providing "one version of the truth" while preventing information leakage to legacy messaging or "bring your own cloud" approaches. This is but one example, but it provides framing for discussions about how to prevent site sprawl while supplying compelling "products" (applications) that outcompete the siren call of free file storage in the cloud.

A better approach: Think "steering" instead of "governance"

A better approach is to abandon the word "governance" altogether. Instead, use the word "steering," and think of governance as analogous to steering a car.

Cars do not run well by committee. We all know it wouldn't work if someone were to say, "Hey, let's partner on driving the car: you run the pedals and I'll run the steering wheel." And at the other end of the spectrum, nobody drives really well if someone's yelling at them the whole time, "Turn here, turn here, turn here, turn here." Similarly, SharePoint does not function well if there is too little coherent guidance, or if there is too much control.

The goal is self-governance

How much guidance or control is the "right" amount? Let's extend the analogy. Imagine that you are driving your car normally—no committee and no backseat driver—but that the car has no speedometer. In fact, nobody's car has a speedometer. In that scenario, traffic simply wouldn't function well. The police can pull over only so many vehicles; it's simply not reasonable to expect them to be responsible for keeping cars moving at the right speed on the roads.

The key point to understand is that most people do obey the speed limit (or close to it) on their own—if they are given the right tools. Tools like speedometers enable drivers to self-govern. And that should be the goal in SharePoint as well. We don't want the SharePoint "police" to be responsible for keeping SharePoint functioning well; we want to empower the users to own primary responsibility for SharePoint.

With the right tools, business users can take on primary responsibility for SharePoint governance

When it's done right, governance is a partnership that's designed to enable technology to support business outcomes. The goal should be to shift the organization's understanding of "governance" so that setting the purpose and direction of SharePoint is seen as a business responsibility that IT supports by giving business users the tools they need to self-govern as much as possible.

Putting speedometers into cars shifts the primary responsibility for the speed of traffic from the police to drivers themselves; similarly, giving business users the right tools shifts the primary responsibility for SharePoint governance from IT to the business. It's important that business users be able to answer important questions without having to involve IT, questions like "Are people using SharePoint? What are they doing with SharePoint? What are they looking for? What are they putting in? How healthy is the system, is it reliable?"

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Creating an effective and long-term governance strategy requires establishing your business requirements and then empowering your IT staff and your business content owners to self-govern.

Let's give users not only the SharePoint equivalent of a speedometer, but also "fuel gauges" and "engine temperature sensors," so they can monitor things like resource usage and site activity themselves.

Just as most drivers don't speed too much or run out of gas very often, most SharePoint users intend to do the right things. They're not trying to figure out how many extra versions of extraneous material they can put in SharePoint until it breaks, or how to put information in the wrong places so the wrong people can see it. But if drivers don't have a speedometer, it's likely they'll speed, and if they don't have a fuel gauge, they'll run out of gas more often. If SharePoint users don't have the right tools, they will make more mistakes that lead to a less useful collaboration environment. But if we create a climate where people can, at an individual level, see the results of what they've done, or, at a group level, see what their team is doing, it's easier to count on them to self-govern.

Assessing your organization's "steering" philosophy

You can start to get an idea of your organization's general approach to governance or "steering" by looking at how it manages other collaboration technologies, such as phones, email and instant messaging. Are phone calls actively screened and recorded? Are there policies about phone use or are employees free to use them as they see fit? Are emails monitored or restricted in any way? What policies does the organization publish about instant messaging, and how are they enforced? Answering these questions can guide your understanding of where your organization fits on the governance spectrum – whether it tends to be closer to the "cheerleader" approach or to "iron-fist" control.

Four keys to an effective "governance for all" strategy

Creating an effective and long-term governance strategy requires

establishing your business requirements and then empowering your IT staff and your business content owners to self-govern. There are four key ways to develop and implement this type of "governance for all" strategy:

- **Delegate self-governance**—Empower your business content owners with easy-to-use tools so they can manage the site collections and sites that they own.
- **Pull meaningful reports**—Give IT and business content owners access to reports that are intuitive, easy to use, and aligned with business scenarios, so they can quickly understand what's happening in SharePoint and make faster and more effective decisions.
- **Take action within reports**—Enable users to take action directly from the reports, instead of having to use separate tools or processes. For example, if a permissions report shows that a sensitive document can be viewed by anyone, you should be able to restrict permissions on that document right from the report. This will reduce the time and complexity of managing SharePoint.
- **Enforce policies within reports**—Let users initiate and enforce policy changes directly from reports, instead of switching to another system or asking someone else to step in later. For instance, from the permissions report just described, you should also be able to change a policy so that no one but you can grant wide access rights to that document again.

Example 1: Empowering site owners

Let's talk through "governance for all" with a couple of real-world examples. First, let's suppose you are a manager in the finance area of Acme Company. You want to make sure that your financial people around the world have access to the documents that they need, but you also need to keep confidential documents secure. How do you proceed?

Without a "governance for all" strategy

You're not technical. To you, SharePoint is a magic box: it shows up in your Web browser and you upload documents to it. You think it's secure, but how do you

know? Just who has access to your site, anyway? Historically, you don't have either the permissions or the know-how to go in and inspect the security settings yourself. (Technically, SharePoint can generate audit logs that might be available to you, but realistically, people are not going to look through the raw text of thousands of access logs to see who is accessing their document library.)

Instead, you have to rely on IT to get the information you need. You know that every so often, you should go to them and say, "Can you show me the permissions on my site; I want to make sure they're appropriate because we have some sensitive docs there." But that's a cumbersome process for both you and IT, so you're likely to skip it more often than you should, which puts the security and effectiveness of your site at risk. In particular, site owners are far more likely to take the trouble to ask IT to add permissions when someone joins a particular team or project than to remember to ask IT to remove permissions when someone leaves the team or the organization. Without a periodic attestation exercise that you will actually follow, you're likely to end up with accumulated access permissions granted to users who should no longer be authorized to access the content.

With a "governance for all" strategy

With an effective "governance for all" strategy in place, however, you—the keeper of that content—have the tools you need to manage your site yourself. In particular, you can do all of the key tasks listed above:

- **Pull meaningful reports**—You can easily get usage reports yourself, without the time and bother of seeking assistance from IT. For instance, you can pull a report showing who's been using your doc library in the last 30 days. As the business content owner, you know who ought to have that access. Suppose you recognize most of the names in the report, but someone you don't know has been looking at certain documents. You wonder, "How does Adam in advertising have access to the quarterly

financials from Europe?"

- **Take action within reports**—If you have the right tools, you can easily dig further to find out exactly who has permission to access that document. You see that everyone in the company has permissions to it. Why? The tool should enable you to answer that question. Perhaps you find that someone made a change on that document, sharing it out with everyone. Since you're the business owner of the finance area content, you're the right person to know whether that change makes sense. Moreover, it's your responsibility to keep confidential documents safe from prying eyes. You should be able, directly from the report you're viewing, to change the permissions for that document back so only the right people can access it. That enables real individual accountability.
- **Enforce policies within reports**—Moreover, you should be able to change a policy so that no one but you can grant wide access rights to that document again—and you should be able to do that right from the report, without help from IT.
- **Delegate self-governance**—If you can do all that in a manner that can be self-taught or learned in five minutes, you've got the tools to a self-governing process. That's critical, because as we saw, you as the business content owner—not IT staff—are the right person to assess usage of your site. When Adam in advertising accesses the quarterly financials from Europe, from IT's perspective, nothing is wrong; Adam's behavior is allowed, given the permissions on that document library. Determining who should and should not have access is a business role, and therefore the business content owner should have easy access to reports that are straightforward to understand and that enable quick action.

Of course, it's important to remember that self-governance must be limited to the sites and content that a given user actually owns. It's not helpful if Mike in Manufacturing starts "governing" the Finance site. No one appreciates nosy-neighbor, busybody governance from the department down the hall any more than they welcome it from centralized control.

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Example 2: Empowering end users

In addition to giving business content owners the tools they need to manage and report on their sites, an effective governance strategy will make it easy for end users to do the right things (much as we give drivers speedometers enables them to better govern their own driving). For example, suppose you're an employee of Acme Company, and you're using Outlook to send an email to some colleagues. You have several documents you want to share with them. Historically, you have to go outside Outlook, upload the files to SharePoint, determine the right links to the documents, and then return to Outlook to finish your message. That's cumbersome at best. At worst, you get sidetracked during your foray into SharePoint and you never get back to the original task, or you simply attach the files to your email instead of using SharePoint at all.

With governance for all, however, you'd have a tool that would enable you to upload the files and add the links to your email—all without ever leaving Outlook. In fact, the tool might even remind you of the option of using SharePoint whenever you try to attach a file. With such a tool, doing the right thing—using SharePoint instead of email attachments—is easy. Your recipients will always see the latest version of your documents, and SharePoint adoption will increase without any heavy-handed coercion from management.

Caveats

Don't move too fast

Shifting responsibility for SharePoint administration to business content owners should be a goal of any governance strategy, but how fast an organization gets to that goal depends on its culture and the comfort level of the users. Some site owners will leap at the prospect of being able to create reports and manage site security. But organizations that have never delegated those types of powers and abilities before may need to move more slowly; people can absorb only so much change

at once. For instance, a department manager who is just starting to adapt to keeping documents in SharePoint instead of email and users who are just getting used to having a check-in/check-out process might not be able to handle anything more for several months.

Often a good place to start is to simply give content owners access to reports on their sites. A content owner learning his way through SharePoint will likely start having questions like, "Who is contributing to the site?," "Is anyone looking at what I publish?," and "Why did I get that size quota warning?" They'll be eager to see reports that provide the answers they seek. And if the reports also enable easy follow-up actions, they're likely to take that next step fairly quickly as well—all driven by their own needs and not by any dictates from IT or management.

Once content owners are used to those basics, you can add additional tools and encourage them to take on additional responsibilities like managing permissions. Just be careful not to ask for too much too quickly, or you may lose their buy-in.

Delineate responsibilities clearly

As you do shift responsibility for SharePoint governance from IT to business content owners, remember that it's critical that everyone be on the same page. Communication is vital to avoiding what I call the "pop fly problem." I coach a Little League baseball team, and one thing we try to teach all the players is that if you're going to try to catch the ball, call for it. We tell them to call out, "I got it!" so the ball doesn't end up landing between two players who each think the other will make the catch.

Similarly, in SharePoint you don't want IT to assume they've successfully transferred security management to a business content owner, thinking, "Yeah, they're running all their own permissions; we don't need to do anything anymore,"

while business users are thinking, "This belongs to IT; we don't need to do anything." The communication needs to be clear and explicit: If responsibility is being shifted from IT to someone else, everyone needs to agree about exactly what is going to happen, and when.

This lack of clarity about responsibilities often comes up with user profile management. SharePoint now allows non-IT people to be put in charge of user profiles, and the classic example of this is HR. You can easily give HR the ability to change certain user properties, such as an employee's name or office location, without giving them the keys to kingdom. If HR is willing to do that and commits to it (says, in effect, "I got it!"), that's great. But if IT simply grants HR the right to make those changes without the transfer of responsibility being clear to everyone, there will be problems. Change requests will continue to come to IT, but IT may look at them and say, "This must be a duplicate. We know that we gave this responsibility to HR." HR may see the request, but not know that they're responsible for it. The end result is that the user profile never gets updated, business processes may be disrupted, and everyone looks incompetent.

There are different approaches that can be used to minimize these problems. If you give departments control over access to their sites, you can include the new process for requesting access in employee training or an announcement: "Going forward, talk to your department manager if you need access to a department document." You can also "burn the bridges," for example by removing the ability to put in a document access request ticket to IT. You remove all ways of making the request except the one you want, thereby funneling everyone towards the behavior you want.

Governance for all increases SharePoint adoption and SharePoint usefulness

Governance for all does take some planning and some effort, but the rewards are significant. The organization will see its investment in SharePoint rewarded with increased user adoption. Moreover, the resulting SharePoint environment will be more scalable, since the work of maintaining it is distributed out to the users and site owners, and the sites will be more useful because users will find it easy to do the right things, such as put documents in SharePoint, and in the right place inside SharePoint.

To put it another way, governance for all helps technology further the organization's goals. Suppose one of your desired business outcomes is that there be one version of the truth, so that everyone is making decisions based on accurate and up-to-date information. That's great. But what does it mean? Well, for one thing, it that means all the documents that people are working on, for every project, should be kept in SharePoint. How do you make that happen?

Remember that most people want to do the right thing, especially if they understand the underlying business reason. So most people aren't going say, "I want to figure out other places to put my documents, so that some people make the wrong decisions due to missing or outdated information." No one enters the world thinking that. But figuring out where to put things in SharePoint is hard. IT may actually know where all the documents belong. A Project Management Office may know where all the documents belong. But it's not a scalable process to tell everyone, "Hey, any time you want to post things to SharePoint, email it to Chris and he'll put in the right place."

A better approach is to count on users to put stuff in the right place and give them the right guidance—for instance, a tool that publishes a preferred list of where

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Through a secure, web-based interface, Site Administrator gives your content owners the tools and reports they need without compromising your security policies.

to put information, in context. That is, at the moment you need it, it pops up and says, “These are the six places you might want to put this content.” This kind of steering helps users get things to the right place easily, and they’ll be happy with the resulting organized site since they’ll be able to find what they need faster and collaborate more effectively.

Finding the right tools

Dell is here to help organizations understand how to create and enforce an effective governance strategy for IT and business users. We offer governance solutions for both IT and the business content owners that enable governance for all, as well as solutions that encourage and empower all users to adopt SharePoint.

Governance for all: Site Administrator for SharePoint

Through a secure, web-based interface, Site Administrator gives your content owners the tools and reports they need without compromising your security policies. In fact, Site Administrator addresses all four key elements identified above to developing and implementing a “governance for all” strategy:

- **Delegate self-governance**—Site Administrator empowers business content owners with easy-to-use tools so they can manage the site collections and sites that they own.
- **Pull meaningful reports**—Site Administrator gives IT and business content owners access to reports that are intuitive, easy to use, and aligned with business scenarios, so they can quickly understand what’s happening in SharePoint and make faster and more effective decisions. For instance, the Activity dashboard (Figure 2) allows you to quickly assess how much content is used for reference and for active collaboration, and to drill down for more detail on recent changes, active users or stalled content.
- **Take action within reports**—Site Administrator enables you to take action directly from its reports instead of requiring you to use separate tools or processes, which reduces the time and complexity of managing SharePoint. For example, Site Administrator’s Security dashboard (Figure 3) allows you to uncover potential issues, such as broken permission inheritance or content open to the Everyone group, and to immediately act upon your findings by propagating permissions from the parent site or cleaning up the Everyone permissions.

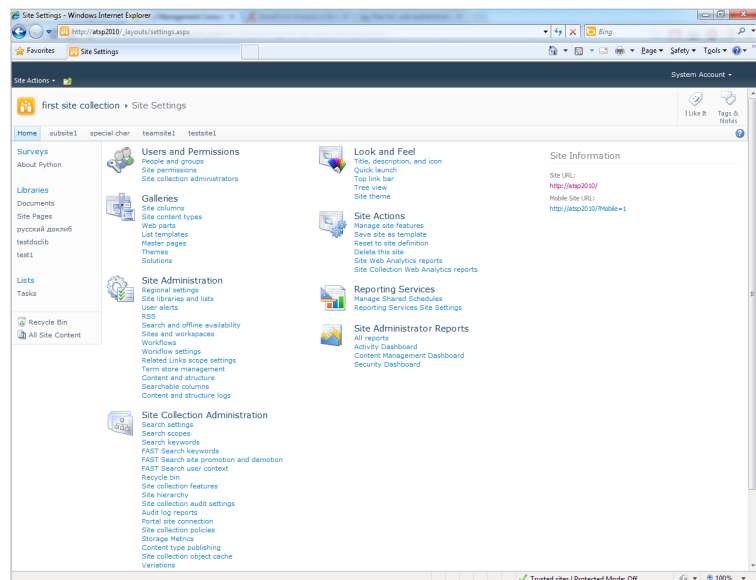


Figure 1. Site Administrator puts dashboard links in the context of site settings to make them available to content owners.



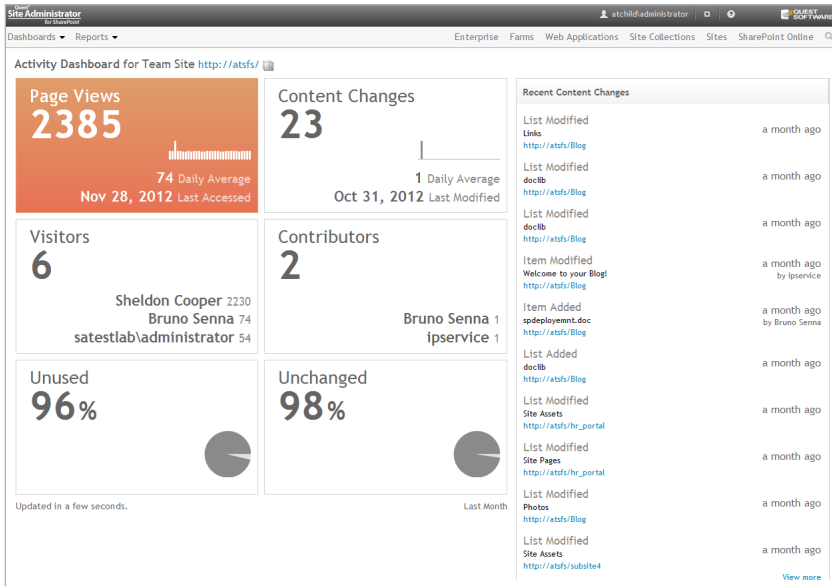


Figure 2. Site Administrator reports, like this report on site activity, are easy to access and easy to understand.

- Enforce policies within reports**—Site Administrator enables you to launch policy changes right from a report to ensure that the changes you make to your environment are enforced. For example, Site Administrator's Content Management dashboard gives you a quick view into how efficiently the available storage is used—and it also enables you to propagate and enforce settings that will prevent excessive versions taking too much of your allotted space.

SharePoint adoption: AttachThis
 In addition to empowering business content owners to make decisions and take action on the content they own in SharePoint, you'll want to consider how to get *all* your users involved in SharePoint—including content creators and collaborators as well as site owners. SharePoint adoption can be a tricky endeavor, requiring balance between

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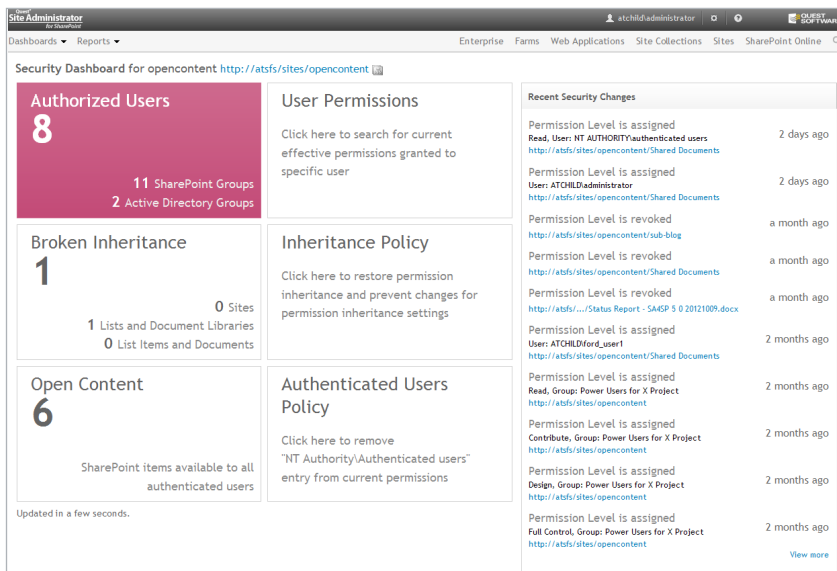


Figure 3. Site Administrator enables you to see—and quickly fix—potential issues such as broken permission inheritance or content open to the Everyone group.



governance and usability. This is where AttachThis comes into play.

AttachThis redirects content in Outlook to SharePoint, replacing it with links back to SharePoint. Critically, it allows the enterprise to identify preferred channels for posting content while understanding that ultimately, it's up to each individual to take responsibility for where they put their content. To return to our driving metaphor, on occasion, users may need to go "off-road"—that is, put content in nonstandard locations. But it is helpful to have an "information superhighway" department (that is, IT) at least paint the lines and arrows so users know when they're about drive onto somebody's front lawn.

Specifically, AttachThis is an Outlook add-in that promotes SharePoint adoption by encouraging users to place their email attachments into SharePoint as they send their email—all without changing the way they work. Site Administrator usage reports can also help with SharePoint adoptions by enabling users to see how their behavior compares to the norm. For example, if users can see that they're mostly working on sites that fall outside the mainstream, they may be motivated to adjust their behavior themselves—with

fewer delays and less resistance than having it adjusted for them.

Conclusion—the SharePoint republic

Self-governance isn't easy or automatic. We've been working on that balance, in some sense, far longer than the twelve years since the debut of SharePoint 2001. It goes back before microeconomics began considering market efficiency and questions about why individuals sometimes act against best interests. In a sense, it goes back to the days of ancient Athens and Pericles. Balancing individual actions and centralized control remains a challenge for every republic. Including the SharePoint republic.

Ultimately, governance depends on a view of human nature as reflected in society. Are people good or bad? Strong or weak? Focused or forgetful and accident-prone? These are profound questions, beyond the ability of this writer, or even the whole SharePoint community, to answer.

Some experts in SharePoint governance tell you that all actions and policies should be controlled—that no actions should ever be allowed outside the scope of centralized monitoring and automated policies. But I'll offer a

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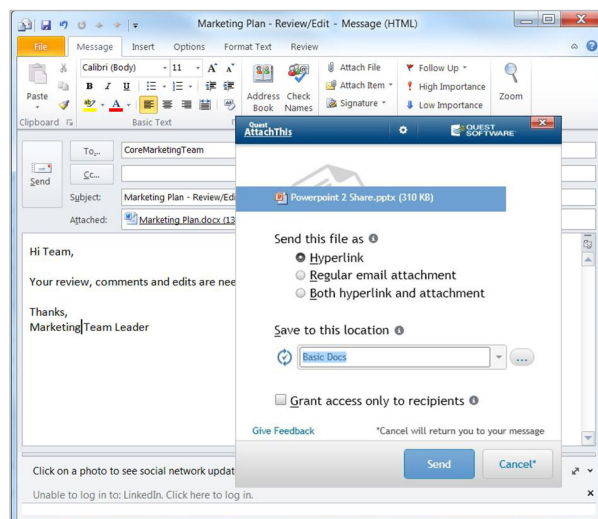


Figure 4. AttachThis automatically prompts users to place attachments into SharePoint as they send their email.

different viewpoint. I believe that human nature is essentially good but prone to weakness. Users enter the SharePoint republic with the best of intentions, but sometime lose their way or forget what they've been taught. That's OK. Because they will, time and again, return to their best intentions, either directly or with some steering.

I've said before that it's important to understand organizational culture, but it's also important to consider the broader context of our society. Most citizens of our SharePoint republics are accustomed to market-oriented economies that provide for individual rights balanced with centralized governments. For many of them—most of us—it's the world we grew up in: schoolyards and school committees have always had to balance the needs of the team and the player. So why should we be surprised when, frankly, Stalinist, top-down, dictatorial governance meets such resistance?

Instead, we need to balance the legitimate need for centralized administration with the rights of the individual information worker for self-determination, and self-governance. As history has shown, it's the surest way to assure vibrant, sometimes messy, but fruitful and long-lasting republics. Including your SharePoint republic.

About the author

Chris McNulty is a strategic product manager and evangelist for SharePoint solutions at Dell. Chris is a Microsoft Certified Technology Specialist (MCTS), Microsoft Certified Systems Engineer (MCSE), and a member of the Microsoft Solutions Advocate and MVTSP programs. A frequent speaker at events around the U.S., Chris is the author of SharePoint 2010 Consultant's Handbook — Managed Metadata Service and writes at www.sharepointforall.com and the KnowPoint blog at <http://www.chrismcnulty.net/blog>.

Prior to joining Dell, Chris led the SharePoint consulting practice at KMA, a New England-based Microsoft Gold Partner. He holds an MBA from the Carroll School of Management at Boston College in Investment Management and has over twenty years' experience in financial services technology with John Hancock, State Street, GMO and Santander. He lives with his wife, Hayley, and his children, Devin, Nathaniel and Rachel, in Milton, Massachusetts.

We need to balance legitimate need for centralized administration with the rights of the individual worker for self-determination and self-governance.



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