

One significant challenge facing governments in developing governance capabilities for improving interoperability revolves around creating a shared understanding of what is meant generally by “IT governance.” This section lays out a set of definitions for IT governance, presents a mechanism for making design choices about governance structures, and outlines the five general components of governance.

One of the most widely cited definitions of IT governance is from Weill and Ross (2004). They see IT governance as “specifying the decisions, rights, and accountability framework to encourage desirable behavior in the use of IT (Weill and Ross 2004, p.8). Governance, in their view, should address four questions: “What decisions must be made? Who should make these decisions? How will decisions be made? What is the process for monitoring results?” (Weill and Ross 2004, p.10). In other words, IT governance is about determining who is in charge of each type of decision (“decision rights”), who has input to decisions (“input rights”), and how those people are held accountable for their decisions.

IT Governance

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Governance answers the questions:

- What decisions must be made?
- Who should make these decisions?
- How will decisions be made?
- What is the process for monitoring results?

Weill and Ross 2004

Establishing effective IT governance through the creation of a framework which makes clear the decisions rights, input rights, and accountability mechanisms is key to helping governments develop and implement ICTs effectively, including improving interoperability (NASCIO 2008a, 2008b, 2009a, 2009b, EU 2008, p. 13, UNDP 2007, p. 27). In the European Government Interoperability Framework, IT governance is characterized as implying “mastery of the technology, systems and organizations in question, ensuring that their combined activities serve the strategic goals and objectives set out by the organization, in a continuous manner, and not the other way around” (EU 2008, p. 13). The National Association of State Chief Information Officers (NASCIO), a U.S.-based association of state-level chief information officers (CIOs), defines IT governance in the public sector.

- “IT Governance is about ensuring that state government is effectively using information technology in all lines of business and leveraging capabilities across state government appropriately, to not only avoid unnecessary or redundant investments, but to enhance appropriate cross-boundary interoperability. The term ‘appropriate’ is used because in many cases state government has existing statutory constraints and bounding that can often limits as well as empowers proper governance.” (NASCIO 2008a, p. 1)

The early focus of IT governance was on cost savings and consolidation of infrastructure and other services such as procurement and purchasing. More recently many organizations, including governments, are looking to *enterprise IT governance* as a capability to support portfolio management, closer business-IT alignment, prioritization across projects and across agencies, and other goals.