

The Cobit 4.0 Strategic Assessment

By Marcelo Gherman and Eduardo Poggi - August, 2006

Check-up Tool provides quick status reports on the organization's IT processes, and how they contribute to the main objectives of the business.

Based on the Cobit structure, the system's new features provide a quick assessment of the maturity level of any IT process, by means of a web-based interview which identifies the main issues contributing to the control of each process - policies, skills, expertise, automation, and others.

Using the new Business Components attributes allows mapping the results of the maturity assessment to the IT objectives, and to the business goals. The CIO can then define the level of compliance with the respective objectives, and measure the return on investments made on the controls applied.

COBIT is a method developed by the IT Governance Institute ITGI (www.itgi.org) for implementing IT governance. It was created in 1998 to define standards for guidance and control of information technology in organizations. Effective IT governance helps to ensure that information technology effectively supports business goals, optimizes IT investments and manages opportunities and threats related to IT.

Basically, Cobit is a framework that should be customized and used together with other resources for adapting best practices to their specific use in each organization. Structurally, Cobit consists in a set of 318 Control Objectives for IT, designed to allow auditing. These control objectives are guidelines describing requirements for IT governance.

The challenge in applying Cobit does not lie in the individual control objectives, which are relatively simple and well-known, but in the set of control objectives for which Cobit was developed. The real challenge is to decide on which objectives the organization will invest money and efforts, and which will be ignored for now. How sure can we be that priority areas have been covered and that efforts are not being made to cover unnecessary areas?

In order to make it easier to access and view the control objectives, they have been grouped into 34 processes (also known as high-level control objectives defined in the COBIT document), and arranged into 4 domains. A detailed description of each IT control objective is published by the ITGI. There are 1547 Control Practices, which are an extension of the control objectives.

The Cobit framework is process-oriented and focuses on the business. It is based on controls and directed towards measuring maturity. This framework is built on the following principle: in order to provide information needed for achievement of its goals, an organization has to manage and

control IT resources using a structured set of processes that deliver the required information. This way, there is a formal relationship between business goals and IT objectives, which defines IT process priorities.

Based on the Cobit structure, the system's new features initially provide a quick assessment of the maturity level of any IT process, through a web-based interview that identifies the main issues contributing to the control of each process - policies, skills, expertise, automation, and others.

Using Risk Manager, a high-level assessment process can be created for IT processes, by means of specific checklists supported by web-based interviews with the owners of each IT process. The relationships between the business goals and the IT objectives supported by the IT processes are established using the new three-layered Risk Manager feature: Business Components, Systems and Infrastructure.

As we can observe, IT processes are considered assets. They are listed in the system layer (IT objectives), and support the Business Components (business objectives).

Using the new Business Components attributes, the results of the maturity assessment can be mapped to the IT objectives, and from there to the business goals. The CIO can then define the level of compliance with the respective objectives and measure the return on investments made on the controls implemented.

After the questionnaires have been answered, we can view the maturity level of each IT process and IT objective, in order to meet the business goals. Below we present a partial view of the Cobit 4.0 maturity level result.