

## YOU CAN'T BUY GOVERNANCE

*SOA governance is much feted, but it's something you have to work at, says Graham Oakes.*



**Graham Oakes: governance is about a lot more than compliance**

These days it's hard to talk about architecture without someone pointing out how critical governance is. Governance is sexy. Most of the IT vendors feature 'SOA governance' strongly on their websites and in their toolsets. This word, which was barely on our radar a few years ago, is now centre stage.

Far be it from me to argue against this trend. Effective governance clearly is critical. However, it might be nice to be clear about what governance is before we rush out and buy a lorry load of it. First, here are some things that governance isn't:

- Governance is not a fancy word for management. A service management solution isn't worth more just because it's relabelled as service governance.
- Governance isn't just the concern of auditors. Controls and audit trails are important, but they're the results of good governance, not the causes.
- Governance is about a lot more than compliance. This may be the root of the trend – governance hit a lot of people's radar when regulations like Sarbanes-Oxley started to bite. But addressing governance solely for the sake of compliance is a path to high costs for relatively low returns.

I go with the following definition: "Governance is the process whereby societies or organisations make decisions, determine whom they involve and how they render account" ([www.iog.ca](http://www.iog.ca)).

Management is about actually making the decisions. Audit is about demonstrating that the decisions have been made and executed in accordance with the owners' (and regulators') wishes. Governance provides the framework of roles, accountabilities and decision-making processes that makes good management and audit possible.

So where does this leave SOA governance? For me, once you strip away the common misconceptions, it becomes even more important. Good SOA governance enables organisations to make effective, strategic decisions. It helps address issues such as:

- Who decides what our core services are, and how do they decide this?
- Who decides how we will build, deploy and manage these services?
- How do we prioritise which services to build first?
- How do we ensure that the services we've deployed execute the business rules originally approved by the process owner?

If you've ever been in the midst of an argument between a project team, some enterprise architects, and a cabal of business process managers as to who defines which service, then you'll know why answering these questions is important. It's hard work, and there's no vendor in the world who can do it for you.

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