

Exploring the Design of an IT Governance Minimum Baseline in the Belgian Financial Services Sector

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Abstract

In many organisations, information technology (IT) has become crucial in the support, sustainability and growth of the business. This pervasive use of technology has created a critical dependency on IT that calls for a specific focus on IT governance. IT governance consists of the leadership and organisational structures and processes that enable the required alignment between business and IT. This practice-oriented research concentrates on the IT governance practices that organisations can leverage to implement IT governance in reality and is in the first place, for reasons of internal validity, focused at the Belgian financial services sector. Based on literature research, pilot case research and delphi research, this paper provides insights regarding the effectiveness and ease of implementation of IT governance practices and regarding a minimum baseline of practices that organisation at least should have. Via this research, we want to contribute to new theory building in the IT governance domain of knowledge and assist practitioners by providing more guidance on how IT governance can be effectively implemented.

Key words: IT governance, business/IT alignment, delphi research

1. INTRODUCTION

In many organisations, information technology (IT) has become crucial in the support, sustainability and growth of the business. This pervasive use of technology has created a critical dependency on IT that calls for a specific focus on IT governance. IT governance consists of the leadership and organisational structures and processes that ensure that the organisation's IT sustains and extends the organisation's strategy and objectives (ITGI, 2003; Van Grembergen, 2007). As denoted by several authors, IT governance needs to be integrated into the overall governance structure and therefore, IT governance and corporate governance can not be considered as pure distinct disciplines (ITGI, 2003; Peterson, 2003; Weill and Ross, 2004). Today, IT governance is high on the agenda of many organisations, and high-level IT governance models are being created. However, having developed a high-level IT governance model does not imply that governance is actually working in the organisation. Conceiving the IT governance model is the first step, implementing it as a sustainable solution with workable practices is the next challenging step.

This research focuses on which practices (structures, processes and relational mechanisms) an organisation can leverage to ensure that IT governance becomes a reality in the organisation. This practice-oriented research focus is relatively unexplored in academic literature. Many research projects focused on the impact of specific contingencies on e.g. centralised versus decentralised governance structures (e.g. Ahituv et al., 1989; Brown and Magill, 1994; Olson and Chervany, 1980) and on how strategic alignment impacts business performance (e.g. Croteau and Bergeron, 2001; Sabherwal and Chan, 2001; Teo and King, 1996). Less research can be found on how organisations can effectively implement IT governance in day-to-day practice. Via this research, we want to contribute to new theory building in the IT governance domain of knowledge and assist practitioners by providing more guidance on how IT governance can be implemented.

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCOPE

Having developed a high-level IT governance model does not imply that governance is actually working in the organisation. Conceiving the IT governance model is the first step, implementing it into the organisation with workable practices is the next challenging step. As proposed by work from amongst others Peterson (2003), Weill and Ross (2004), Peterson et al. (2002) and Van Grembergen (2003), IT governance can be deployed using a mixture of various structures, processes and relational mechanisms. IT governance structures include “structural (formal) devices and mechanisms for connecting and enabling horizontal, or liaison, contacts between business and IT management (decision-making) functions” (Peterson, 2003) (e.g. steering committees). IT governance processes refer to “formalisation and institutionalisation of strategic IT decision making or IT monitoring procedures” (Peterson, 2003) (e.g. IT balanced scorecard). The relational mechanisms finally are about “the active participation of, and collaborative relationship among, corporate executives, IT management, and business management (Peterson, 2003)” (e.g. training). Relational mechanisms are crucial in the IT governance framework and paramount for attaining and sustaining business-IT alignment, even when the appropriate structures and processes are in place (Keill et al., 2002; Weill and Broadbent, 1998; Henderson and Venkatraman, 1993).

Goal of this research is to provide more insight into how practitioners can leverage these practices. More specifically, the general research questions are:

1. what IT governance practices are applied in practice?
2. what is the perceived effectiveness of these IT governance practices?
3. what is the perceived ease of implementation of these IT governance practices?
4. what is a minimum set or minimum baseline of required IT governance practices?

To ensure sufficient internal validity (Cook and Campbell (1979)), the research was scoped down on multiple aspects. In the first place, it is acknowledged that the use of IT governance best practices might be different in different types of industries. Organisations in the finance industry are highly dependent upon IT which probably requires the finance industry to have a more solid and broad IT governance framework. Therefore, the focus of this research is only on one sector, more specifically the financial services sector, to control the contingencies resulting from differences in industries. The choice for the financial services sector is made because, amongst different industries, financial services, together with manufacturing and retailing, is the first industry to use information technologies and as such is already more matured in these domains, making empirical research interesting (Chiasson and Davidson, 2005). The scope was also reduced in geographic terms and regarding size of organisations. To avoid cultural differences between regions worldwide and contingencies related to the size of the organisations, it was decided to only focus on typical Belgian financial services organisations with headcounts ranging from 100 to over 1000 employees. The final scope reduction focuses on the organisational level of IT governance practices. As indicated by Van Grembergen (2003), IT governance is situated at multiple layers in the organisation: at strategic level where the board is involved, at management level within the C-suite layer and finally at the operational level with IT and business management. This implies that all these levels, business as well as IT, need to be involved in the IT governance process and they have to understand their individual roles and responsibilities within the framework. However, Peterson (2003) makes a clear distinction between IT governance and IT management. According to him, IT management is focused on the effective and efficient internal supply of IT services and products and the management of present IT operations. IT governance in turn is much broader, and concentrates on performing and transforming IT to meet present and future demands of the business (internal focus) and business customers (external focus). “This does not undermine the importance and complexity of IT management, [...] but whereas elements of IT management and the supply of (commodity) IT services and products can be commissioned to an external provider, IT governance is organisation specific, and direction and control over IT can not be delegated to the market” (Peterson, 2003). This “higher-level” focus of IT governance is confirmed in the IT governance definition of ITGI (2005), which states that “IT governance is the responsibility of executives and the board of directors”. Based on the considerations

of Peterson (2003) and ITGI (2005), we will discard the operational oriented level, which according to Peterson (2003) maps to IT management instead of IT governance.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Because research in the domain of IT governance implementations is in its early stages and theoretical models are scarcely available, the nature of this research is exploratory rather than hypothesis testing. Indeed, the concept of IT governance, as it is understood now, only emerged late nineties (De Haes and Van Grembergen, 2006; Weill and Ross, 2004), and there has been little research material developed on which we can build. By exploring this research domain in detail, we do however want to contribute to creating a basis for future research, by building theoretical models and generating potential hypotheses to be tested.

Exploratory research often builds on secondary research, “such as reviewing available literature and/or data, or qualitative approaches such as informal discussions with consumers, employees, management or competitors, and more formal approaches through in-depth interviews, focus groups, projective methods, case studies or pilot studies.” (Ryerson, 2007) Our research strategy therefore also triangulates between multiple different research methods: literature research, pilot case research and delphi method research. This triangulation enables us to obtain a richer insight in reality, as also advocated by Mingers (2001): “... different research methods focus on different aspects of reality and therefore a richer understanding of a research topic will be gained by combining several methods together in a single piece of research or research program”.

3.1 Literature and pilot case research

The research process started with exploring the research domain through a detailed literature research in the domain of business/IT alignment and IT governance. Papers and research reports of both academic and professional journals were collected, read, organised, analysed and summarised into one masterfile, providing the researcher a complete and workable overview of existing literature relevant to the research domain. The focus was on finding an initial list of structures, processes and relational mechanisms that organisations can leverage to implement IT governance. At this moment, the research was not yet scoped down to only the Belgian financial services sector, in order to be able to capture an as broad spectrum as possible of IT governance practices. To complement the initial list of IT governance practices, pilot cases were described. Our idea for using case study research in this phase is built on the argumentation of Benbasat et al. (1987) who states that “case study research is particularly appropriate for certain types of problems: those in which research and theory are at their early, formative stages, and sticky practice-based problems where the experiences of the actors of important and the context of action is critical”. This reasoning is very much applicable to our research, in which we want to capture knowledge from practitioners and develop theories from it. These cases consisted of one in-depth case (based on 6 interviews, KBC) and five mini-cases (based on 2-3 interviews, Vanbreda, Sidmar-Arcelor, CM, AGF Belgium, Huntsman). Both business and IT managers were interviewed. Two criteria are used to select the sample of pilot case studies: local proximity to enable the researcher to execute multiple in-depth interviews at site and diversity to enable the gathering of as rich data as possible on used structures, processes and relational mechanisms. Therefore, Belgian based organisations were selected, operating nationally and internationally in different sectors (finance, insurance, chemicals, steel).

3.2 Delphi research

After the first exploration, the delphi research methodology was used. The delphi method can be characterized “as a method for structuring a group communication process so that the process is effective in allowing a group of individuals, as a whole, to deal with a complex problem.” (Linstone and Turoff, 1975). The delphi method provides a structured process to solicit expert opinion on a particular subject and enables group interaction without needing a face-to-face meeting (Taylor-Powell, 2002). This method is particularly suited as a research methodology for this type of research

as “the delphi method technique lends itself especially well to exploratory theory building on complex, interdisciplinary issues, often involving a number of new or future trends” (Akkermans et al., 2003; Okoli and Pawlowski, 2004). An expert panel was composed of 29 consultants, senior IT and senior business professionals who are all knowledgeable about organisations operating in the Belgian financial services sector. From this group, 22 experts continued to be involved in the full research effort (25% drop off rate), having different profiles: senior business/audit management (6), senior IT management (8) and senior business/IT consultant (8).

Using the delphi method, these financial services sector experts needed to complete questionnaires in three rounds. Similar to the delphi research work of Keill et al.(2002), the delphi research started with a preceded initial list of structures, processes and relational mechanisms. This list was operationalised based on literature research and the pilot case research as discussed previous section. In the first delphi round, the respondents were only asked to provide their feedback on the initial list of practices, giving them the opportunity to make recommendations to add, change, delete some of the practices. The focus of this first round was on validating the initial list of practices specifically for the financial services sector, so no other input or feedback was requested at this stage. In the second round, the respondents were asked to rate on a scale of 5, for each of the reviewed IT governance practices, the "perceived effectiveness (0 = not effective, 5 = very effective) and the "perceived ease of implementation" (0 = not easy, 5 = very easy). The respondents were also asked to, taken the previous attributes (effectiveness - ease of implementation) and their personal experience into account, to provide the top 10 most important IT governance practices, which are in their opinion crucial elements or a minimum baseline of an optimal IT governance mix (the most important practice score 1, the second most important score 2, ... the 10th most important score 10). In the third and final round, the respondents were asked to re-evaluate their own scores out of round 2, taken the group averages into account. Goal of this round was primarily to come to a greater consensus in the group. At the end of this round, the degree of consensus between the experts was measured leveraging Kendall's W coefficient (Schmidt, 1997; Siegel, 1988), specifically for the question on the minimum baseline. Schmidt (1997) offers an interpretation of Kendall's W, indicating that the reached level of consensus in this research of 0,53 can be considered moderate providing a fair degree of confidence in the results. This result, together with the fact that the top 10 list only slightly differed between round two and three, founded the decision not to start a fourth round.

4. RESULTS AND INTERPRETATIONS

4.1.1 Literature and pilot case research

From the pilot case studies and the literature research, different drivers for adopting IT governance were identified. An important one was certainly the need to comply with Sarbanes-Oxley requirements, which impacts heavily on the control environment in IT. Other important drivers for IT governance were the push to achieve economies of scales after mergers and acquisitions and budget pressure, resulting in a smaller budget for new projects. Challenge of course is then to optimally assign the remaining budget to projects and activities that are delivering value to the business. Finally, some pilot case companies mentioned that the IT governance project was more an effort of formalizing and structuring existing mechanisms already applied. Based on the findings of the literature research and the pilot case research, an initial list of IT governance practices was composed, as shown below. For each of these practices, as short definition was developed based on the literature and pilot cases.

Name	Cross-references from literature	Cross-references from case research					
		KBC	AGF	VanBreda	Huntsman	Sidmar	CM
Integration of governance/alignment tasks in roles&responsibilities	Duffy, 2002; ITGI, 2003; Weill&Ross, 2004; De Haes&Van Grembergen, 2006	x		x	x		x
IT steering committee(s)	ITGI, 2003; Luftman&Brier, 1999; Weill&Ross, 2004; De Haes&Van Grembergen, 2006	x	x	x	x	x	x
IT strategy committee	ITGI, 2003; Nolan&McFarlan, 2005; De Haes&Van Grembergen, 2006	x					
CIO on Executive Committee	ITGI, 2003; Weill&Ross, 2004; De Haes&Van Grembergen, 2006; Luftman, 2007						
CIO reporting to CEO	ITGI, 2003; Weill&Ross, 2004; Luftman, 2007	x	x		x		x
Architecture Committee	ITGI, 2003; De Haes&Van Grembergen, 2006						
Strategic information systems planning	Earl, 1993; Gottschalck, 1999; De Haes&Van Grembergen, 2006		x	x		x	x
Balanced scorecard	De Haes&Van Grembergen, 2006; Van Grembergen&De Haes, 2003	x		x	x		x
Portfolio management (incl. Information economics)	De Haes&Van Grembergen, 2006	x	x	x	x	x	x
Charge back arrangements (ABC)	Weill&Ross, 2004; ; De Haes&Van Grembergen, 2006	x					
Service Level Agreements	Weill&Ross, 2004; Van Grembergen et al., 2003; De Haes&Van Grembergen, 2006	x		x			x
COBIT	ITGI, 2006; De Haes&Van Grembergen, 2006		x				
Job-rotation	Luftman, 2000; Reich&Benbasat, 2000; De Haes&Van Grembergen, 2006	x			x	x	
Co-location	Luftman, 2000; De Haes&Van Grembergen, 2006	x					x
Cross-training	Luftman, 2000; De Haes&Van Grembergen, 2006		x	x			x
Knowledge management (on IT governance)	Weill&Ross, 2004; Luftman, 2000; De Haes&Van Grembergen, 2006	x			x		
Business/IT account managers	Luftman, 2000; De Haes&Van Grembergen, 2006		x	x			x
Senior management giving the good example	De Haes&Van Grembergen, 2006	x					
Informal meetings between business and IT senior management	De Haes&Van Grembergen, 2006					x	
IT leadership	Monnoyer&Willmott, 2005; Smith, 2006						

Figure 1: Initial list of IT governance practices

4.2 Delphi research

The delphi research was executed in three survey rounds. The first survey round focused on validating the predefined list of IT governance practices specifically for the financial services sector. Survey round 2 and 3 captured the perceptions of the respondents regarding effectiveness and ease of implementation of the IT governance practices and regarding a set of practices that could compose a minimum IT governance baseline. The results of these surveys rounds are discussed below.

4.2.1 Delphi round 1 – validating the initial list of IT governance practices

As mentioned in previous section, the delphi research started from a predefined initial list of practices which was derived from literature and pilot case research in many sectors. In the first survey round, the respondents were asked to validate this general list of practices to make it more oriented towards financial services sector. A lot of qualitative feedback was captured from the respondents, including suggestions for new practices, improvements for definitions etc. All incoming data was structured and analysed by the researchers, resulting in a new and extended list of practices, as visualised in Figure 2.

	Index	IT Governance Practice	Definition
IT governance structures	S1	IT strategy committee at level of board of directors	Committee at level of board of directors to ensure IT is regular agenda item and reporting issue for the board of directors
	S2	IT expertise at level of board of directors	Members of the board of directors have expertise and experience regarding the value and risk of IT
	S3	(IT) audit committee at level of board of directors	Independent committee at level of board of directors overruling (IT) assurance activities
	S4	CIO on executive committee	CIO is a full member of the executive committee
	S5	CIO (Chief Information Officer) reporting to CEO (Chief Executive Officer) and/or COO (Chief Operational Officer)	CIO has a direct reporting line to the CEO and/or COO
	S6	IT steering committee (IT investment evaluation / prioritisation at executive / senior management level)	Steering committee at executive or senior management level responsible for determining business priorities in IT investments
	S7	IT governance function / officer	Function in the organisation responsible for promoting, driving and managing IT governance processes
	S8	Security / compliance / risk officer	Function responsible for security, compliance and/or risk, which possibly impacts IT
	S9	IT project steering committee	Steering committee composed of business and IT people focusing on prioritising and managing IT projects
	S10	IT security steering committee	Steering committee composed of business and IT people focusing on IT related risks and security issues
	S11	Architecture steering committee	Committee composed of business and IT people providing architecture guidelines and advise on their applications
	S12	Integration of governance/alignment tasks in roles&responsibilities	Documented roles&responsibilities include governance/alignment tasks for business and IT people (cf. Weill)
IT governance processes	P1	Strategic information systems planning	Formal process to define and update the IT strategy
	P2	IT performance measurement (e.g. IT balanced scorecard)	IT performance measurement in domains of corporate contribution, user orientation, operational excellence and future orientation
	P3	Portfolio management (incl. business cases, information economics, ROI, payback)	Prioritisation process for IT investments and projects in which business and IT is involved (incl. business cases)
	P4	Charge back arrangements - total cost of ownership (e.g. activity based costing)	Methodology to charge back IT costs to business units, to enable an understanding of the total cost of ownership
	P5	Service level agreements	Formal agreements between business and IT about IT development projects or IT operations
	P6	IT governance framework COBIT	Process based IT governance and control framework
	P7	IT governance assurance and self-assessment	Regular self-assessments or independent assurance activities on the governance and control over IT
	P8	Project governance / management methodologies	Processes and methodologies to govern and manage IT projects
	P9	IT budget control and reporting	Processes to control and report upon budgets of IT investments and projects
	P10	Benefits management and reporting	Processes to monitor the planned business benefits during and after implementation of the IT investments / projects.
	P11	COSO / ERM	Framework for internal control
IT governance relational mechanisms	R1	Job-rotation	IT staff working in the business units and business people working in IT
	R2	Co-location	Physically locating business and IT people close to each other
	R3	Cross-training	Training business people about IT and/or training IT people about business
	R4	Knowledge management (on IT governance)	Systems (intranet, ...) to share and distribute knowledge about IT governance framework, responsibilities, tasks, etc.
	R5	Business/IT account management	Bridging the gap between business and IT by means of account managers who act as in-between
	R6	Executive / senior management giving the good example	Senior business and IT management acting as "partners"
	R7	Informal meetings between business and IT executive/senior management	Informal meetings, with no agenda, where business and IT senior management talk about general activities, directions, etc. (eg. during informal lunches)
	R8	IT leadership	Ability of CIO or similar role to articulate a vision for IT's role in the company and ensure that this vision is clearly understood by managers throughout the organisation
	R9	Corporate internal communication addressing IT on a regular basis	Internal corporate communication regularly addresses general IT issues.
R10	IT governance awareness campaigns	Campaigns to explain to business and IT people the need for IT governance	

Figure 2: Validated list of IT governance practices

Specific structures that were added are “(IT) audit committee at the level of the board of directors”, “IT expertise at the level of board of directors”, “IT governance function/officer”, “security/risk/compliance officer”, “IT project steering committee” and “IT security steering committee”. IT governance processes that were added are “IT governance assurance – self assessment”, “project governance / management methodologies”, IT budget control and reporting”, “benefits management and reporting” and “COSO/ERM”. Finally, (...) some relational mechanisms were added, more specifically “corporate internal communication addressing IT on a regular basis” and “IT governance awareness campaigns”. Based on the feedback received from the respondents, short definitions were developed for each of these new practices. The updated list of practices was used as basis to start up survey round 2 & 3.

4.2.2 Delphi round 2 & 3 – evaluating IT governance practices

As mentioned in previous sections, goal of the delphi survey rounds 2 & 3 was to capture input from the respondents regarding perceived effectiveness, perceived ease of implementation and a minimum baseline of IT governance practices. As visualised in Figure 3 and Figure 4, the research demonstrated that, according to the expert group, some of the addressed practices are more effective or easy to

implement compared to others. The five practices being perceived as to most effective for the Belgian financial services sector are “IT steering committees”, “CIO reporting to the CEO/COO”, “CIO on executive committee”, “IT budget control and reporting” and “portfolio management”. The importance of portfolio management is also put forward in McKinsey’s “Annual European Banking IT Cost Benchmark Study”, which concludes that top-performing banks have more mature portfolio management processes compared to other banks. (McKinsey, 2006) Most of these practices were also identified as being relatively easy to implement. Other practices were perceived as fairly effective but not easy to implement. Good examples in this high-effectiveness/low ease of implementation domain are “benefits management and reporting” and “charge back arrangements”.

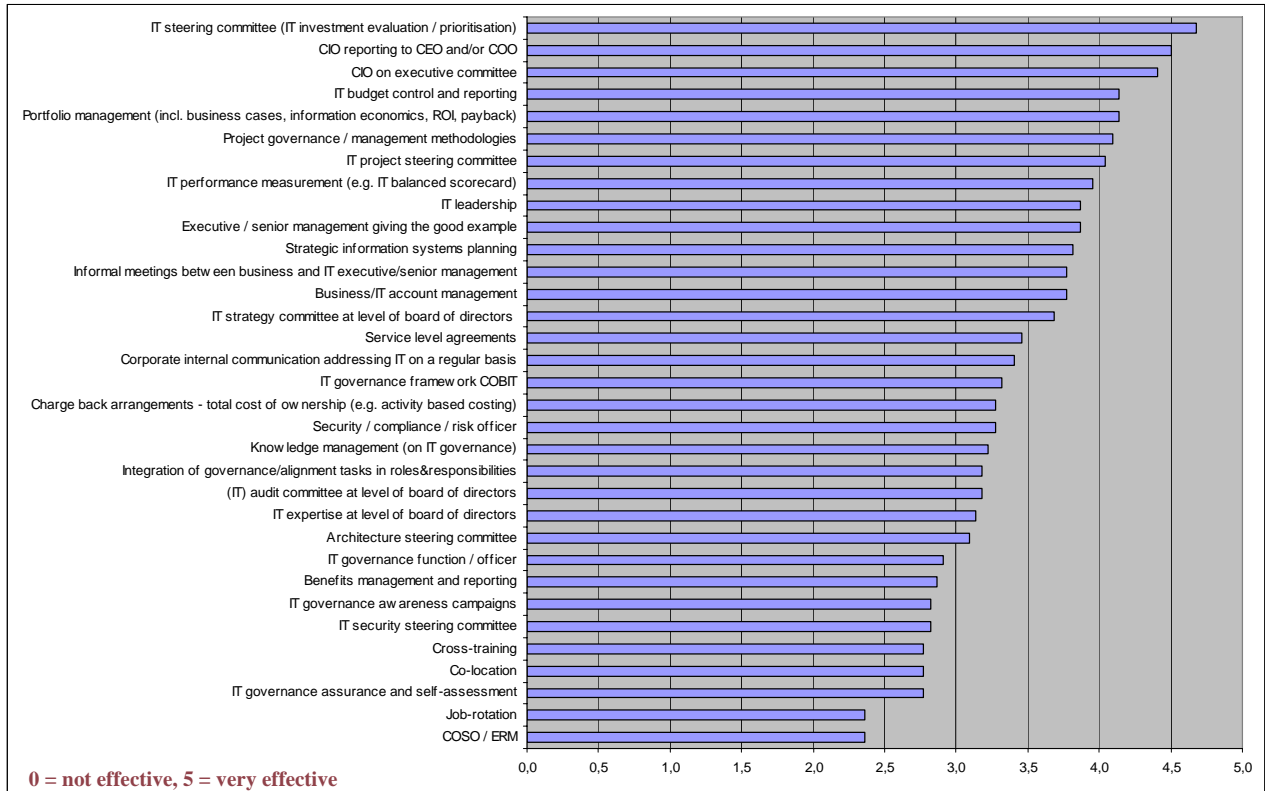


Figure 3: Perceived effectiveness of IT governance practices

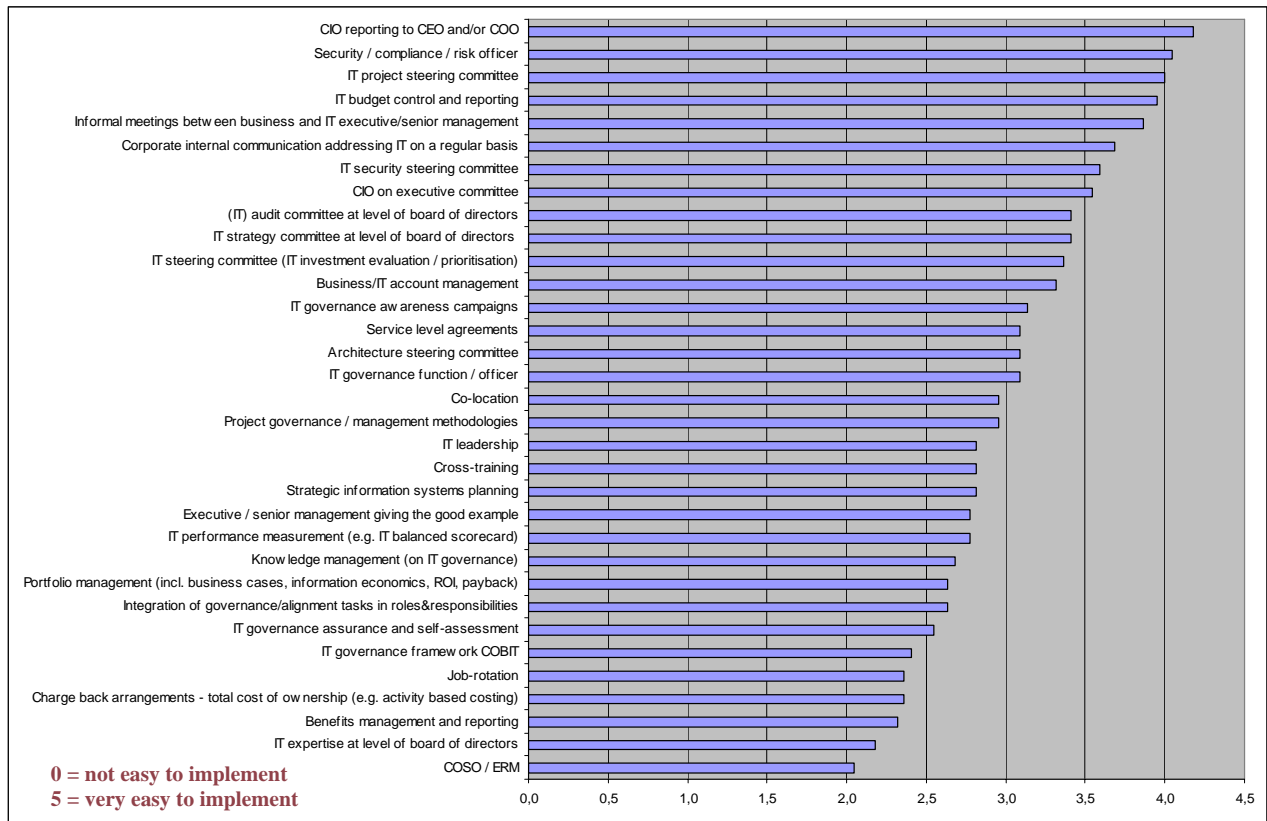


Figure 4: Perceived ease of implementation of IT governance practices

An interesting case is the “IT governance framework COBIT”. This framework is receiving a lot of attention in literature and in the field, but did not come out very high in this research. However, there are indications that COBIT is a very solid framework to work with. COBIT, as a framework, is situated at a higher level of granularity compared to other more detailed structures and processes in this research. Good examples are the “IT steering committee”, the “portfolio management process” and “project management/governance methodologies”, which are all practices that are integral part of COBIT’s “Planning and Organisation” processes (ITGI, 2005). The good news for COBIT is that many of these detailed practices, individually, received very positive scores in this research in terms of effectiveness.

Another interesting finding to pinpoint is that many IT governance definitions stress the prime responsibility of the board of directors in IT governance (e.g. ITGI, 2003), while these results reveal that the mechanisms to achieve this (“IT expertise at level of board of directors” and “IT strategy committee”) are rated relatively low in terms of perceived effectiveness. This can possibly be explained by the fact that making the board of directors more IT literate is not easy to achieve, which is confirmed by the second to last score in term of ease of implementation of “IT expertise at the level of the board of directors”. The results of this research in any way raise questions on how financial services organisations realise this board involvement in practice.

If averages are calculated for effectiveness and ease of implementation for all the structures, the processes and the relational mechanisms (see Figure 5), it appears that structures and processes are in general perceived as being equally effective. However, it appears that IT governance structures are perceived as being easier to implement compared to IT governance processes, although in many cases they are closely related. A good example here is the “IT steering committee”, which is a crucial element to build up a “portfolio management” process, but the “IT steering committee” is perceived as much easier to implement compared to the whole “portfolio management” process. This finding is also supported by the personal experiences of the researchers in running an IT Governance Business Game amongst groups of business and IT professionals. The participants in this game are confronted

with a fictitious organisation with low business/IT alignment and the assignment is to define IT governance practices for the organisation to improve that situation. Mostly, the participants are very fast in defining structures such as steering committees, but it appears to be a much bigger challenge to define supporting IT governance processes such as portfolio management.

Figure 5 also shows that relational mechanisms are perceived as being easier to implement compared to IT governance processes, probably because some relational mechanisms can have a very informal character (e.g. “Informal meetings between business and IT executive/senior management”).

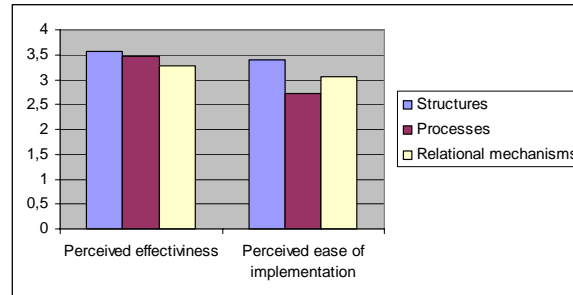


Figure 5: Average perceived effectiveness and ease of implementation for IT governance structures, processes and relational mechanisms

The delphi research also brought up a list of IT governance practices, specifically for the Belgian financial services sector, that can be regarded as a minimum baseline, or a necessary set of practices for implementing IT governance. The respondents were asked to build up this minimum baseline in terms of a top-10 of practices, taking the attributes of perceived effectiveness and ease of implementation into account, together with their professional experience of their day-to-day practice. Figure 6 shows the final top-10 resulting from this ranking exercises, including the number of times a specific practice is mentioned (total times mentioned) and the total ranking score (if a practice was ranked “1”, it received 10 points).

		total times mentioned	total ranking score	Total rank
S6	IT steering committee (IT investment evaluation / prioritisation at executive / senior management level)	21	178	1
S4	CIO on executive committee	20	153	2
P3	Portfolio management (incl. business cases, information economics, ROI, payback)	20	142	3
P9	IT budget control and reporting	17	112	4
S1	IT strategy committee at level of board of directors	17	97	5
R8	IT leadership	16	79	6
P1	Strategic information systems planning	13	64	7
S9	IT project steering committee	13	55	8
S5	CIO (Chief Information Officer) reporting to CEO (Chief Executive Officer) and/or COO (Chief Operational Officer)	11	47	9
P8	Project governance / management methodologies	14	45	10

Figure 6: Minimum baseline of IT governance practices

It was surprising that only one relational mechanism was reported in this minimum baseline (“IT leadership”), while many authors in literature stress that the relational mechanisms are crucial enablers for IT governance (Keill et al., 2002; Weill and Broadbent, 1998; Henderson and Venkatraman, 1993). A possible explanation is that, just as in literature, less detailed knowledge and expertise is available on relational mechanisms which often have a more intangible and informal character. On the other hand, it should be noted that many other relational mechanism, such as “business/IT account management”, “senior management giving the good example” and “informal meeting between business and IT executive/senior management”, did attain relatively positive scores in terms of effectiveness and ease of implementation. The importance of “IT leadership” and “CIO on executive committee” (ranked second in the above list) is confirmed by Monnoyer and Willmott (2005): “The IT leader must be part of the executive team to get results and to build the necessary relationships and credibility within the company. CIOs who are perceived to be operating managers—not leaders—rarely sit on the management committee and often report to executives other than the CEO. The

solution isn't to clear space at the table for an operating manager; instead companies should search for an IT leader who adds value to the management team.”

Figure 7 brings it all together, plotting the previous results on two axes. The vertical axe addresses the “perceived effectiveness” while the horizontal axe measures the “perceived ease of implementation”. Starting from these quadrants, we are of course interested in the practices that are situated at the top right level, or at least above the horizontal axe. The practices in the grey circle are the ones identified as being a minimum baseline for IT governance. They all have “high effectiveness” and are “easy to implement” which demonstrates the consistency in answers of the experts. These minimum baseline practices are to be regarded as a minimal (necessary) set of IT governance practices for each Belgian financial services organisation. They should be supplemented with other practices as required by the specific environment to build up a more broad IT governance framework as required by the specific organisational environment. To create such a broader IT governance framework, the practices in the upper right quadrant (outside the circle) are first in scope to be regarded as additional elements, as they are “highly effective” and “easy to implement”. Some examples are an “IT governance function/officer”, “service level agreements” and “co-location”. The practices at the top left are highly effective but do require more implementation time. Interesting to see is that the “IT governance framework COBIT” sits in this space, but as already mentioned earlier, COBIT is a framework situated at a higher level of granularity compared to the other practices, which evidently explains that is it harder to implement. IT governance practices that are situated at the bottom left of this graphical layout are of course the least interesting IT governance practices. In this quadrant, “COSO/ERM” and “job rotation” is located. The value of these practices, in the context of IT governance, can of course be challenged.

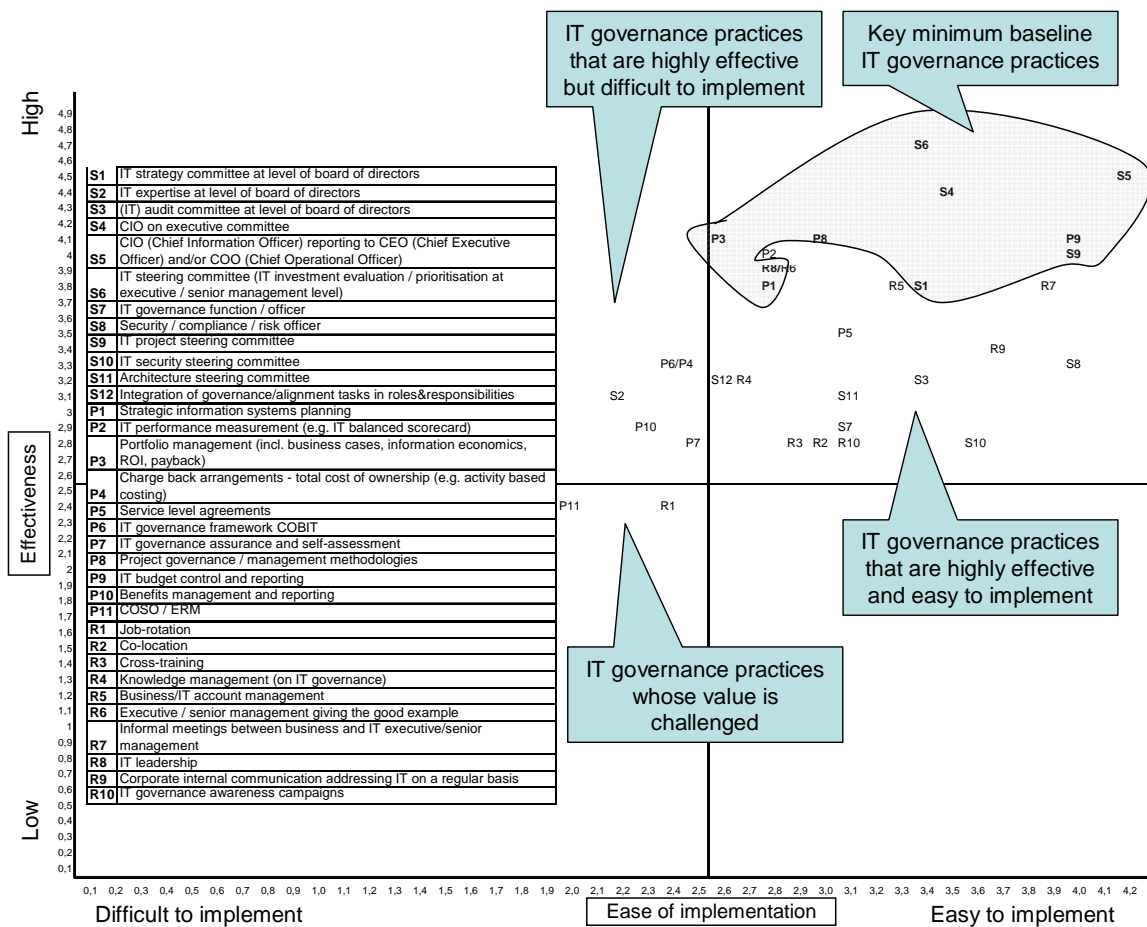


Figure 7: Effectiveness, ease of implementation and minimum baseline of IT governance practices

5. CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

At the beginning of this paper, four specific research questions were proposed. These conclusions are organised according to these research questions.

Regarding the first research question, this practice-oriented research reveals that Belgian financial services organisations are using (according to the pilot cases and literature) a wide range of IT governance structures, processes and relational mechanisms. The case research also identified important drivers to initiate IT governance initiatives, such as the need to comply with Sarbanes-Oxley requirements, the push to achieve economies of scales after mergers and acquisitions and budget pressure, resulting in a smaller budget for new projects. The case research resulted in an initial list of potential IT governance practices, which was reviewed and supplemented by industry experts (delphi research) to come up with a more complete and validated list of 33 IT governance practices at the level of strategic and executive/senior business and IT management. It should be noted that this list can not be exhaustive and the practices at operational level are discarded in this research.

In relation to research questions 2 and 3, the research demonstrates that some of the addressed practices are regarded as being more effective and/or easier to implement as others. Examples of practices that are perceived to be very effective are steering committees and having the CIO reporting to the CEO or being a member of the full executive committee. Other practices are perceived as fairly effective but not easy to implement. A good example of that is the IT governance framework COBIT. Finally, some practices are perceived as being not very effective nor easy to implement in the context of IT governance, such as COSO/ERM and job-rotation. These practices are likely less useful in the creation of a powerful IT governance framework for an organisation.

Regarding research question 4, this paper also brought up a list of IT governance practices, specifically for the Belgian financial services sector, that can be regarded as a minimum baseline for IT governance. This suggests that, in implementing IT governance within a financial services organisation, these minimum baseline mechanisms may play an important role (necessary conditions). culture, etc. of the organisation, to create a broader set of IT governance practices.

As a recommendation to practitioners, this paper suggests that the defined minimum baseline of practices can be regarded as the minimal starting point to implement IT governance. Each financial services organisation should at least have these IT governance practices in place, regardless of other contingencies. Of course, they should be supplemented with other practices, as required by the specific environment, culture, size etc., to build up a broader and more complete IT governance framework. To select these extra practices, it is best to focus on those practices that are perceived as highly effective and relatively easy to implement, for which guidance is provided in this paper.

While this research for validity reasons is focused on the Belgian financial services sector only, it can be expected that many conclusions might apply to other sectors as well. Further research, focusing on other sectors could support that assumption. Such research in other sectors could also address the impact of other contingencies. It might for example be that organisations operating in the United States have very different views on what an optimal IT governance framework is compared to organisations operating in Europe.

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