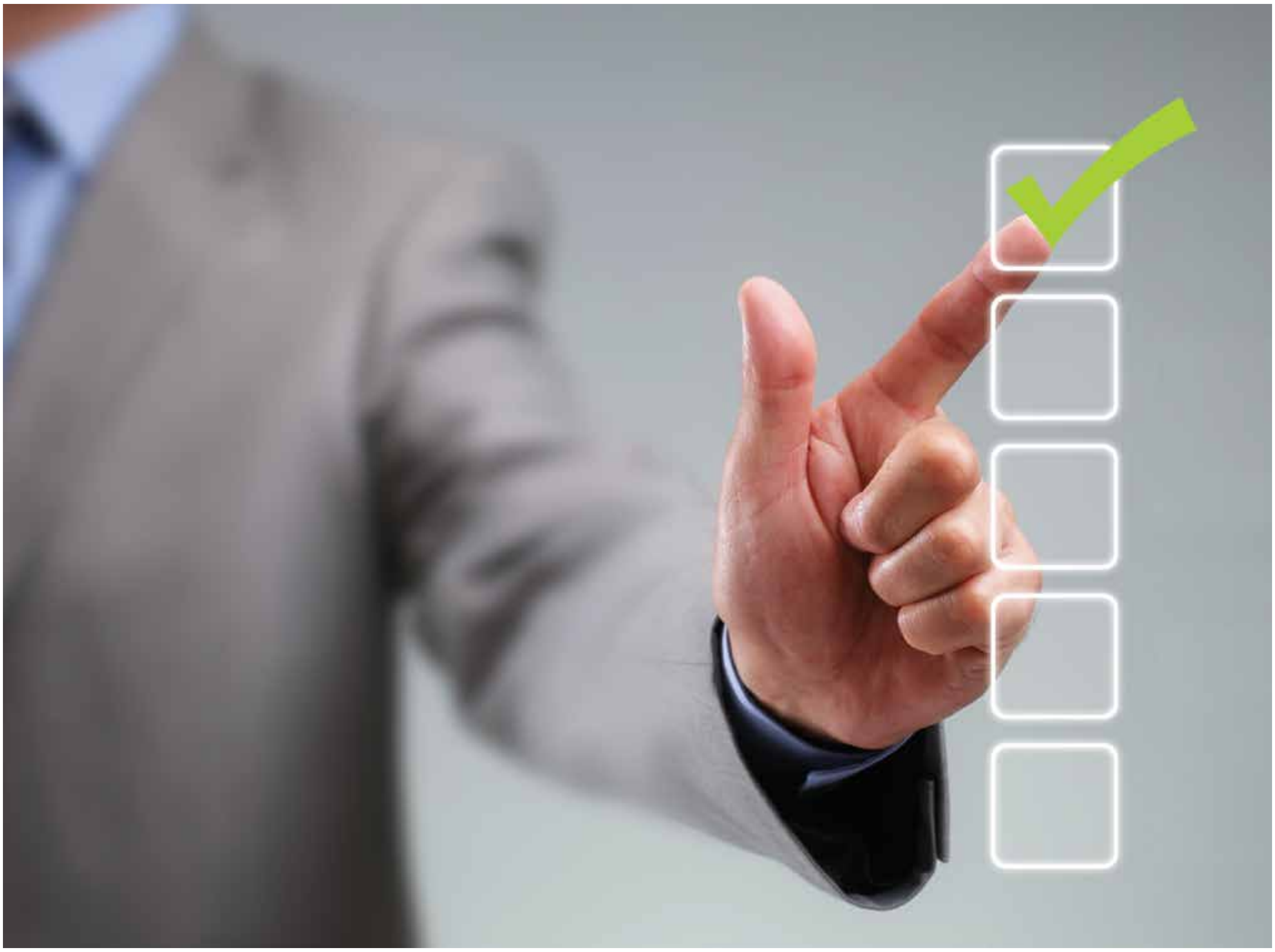

Principles for Assessing an IG Program

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Assessing an information governance program is an exercise in gathering information, interpreting it, and using it to strategize the best course for improvement. It requires thoughtful planning and decision making to determine the correct scope, participants, and methodology, and it is best done as a team effort.

It shouldn't be overwhelming to determine how well an information governance (IG) program is doing. Yet, gathering the information needed to get an accurate picture of an IG program can be a time-consuming and perplexing proposition. With the right preparation and tools, it needn't be.

Purpose of Assessment

The point of any program assessment is to determine what guidance is in place, whether it is adequate for its intended purpose, and whether or not it's actually working.

Some industry sectors, such as financial services, must self-assess to demonstrate that they are doing everything necessary to have a mature governance program. Others must self-assess for particular aspects of IG. For example, healthcare providers in the United Kingdom must self-assess the privacy and protection they provide for collecting, storing, and sharing personally identifiable information (PII).

Types of Assessment

Assessments can take several forms. Peer comparison by benchmarking with other organizations in your industry can be as informal as a conversation with colleagues at a professional meeting, or it can be as structured as participating in an exercise with a consortium or a fee-based service that collects, anonymizes, and shares information practices in your industry. The problem with benchmarking is that it isn't necessarily standards-based, and a comparison between two firms may be like comparing steak and ice cream.

At the other end of the spectrum, *audits* are usually formal assessments against a stringent set of expected norms such as internal company rules or external regulations. The downside is that audits usually draw conclusions based on examining past practices, and their objective is to identify deficiencies rather than to develop strategies for improvement.

IG Assessment

Fortunately for information professionals, the Generally Accepted Recordkeeping Principles® (Principles) and the Information Governance Maturity Model (IGMM) have taken much of the ambiguity out of the assessment exercise. Used in tandem, they provide a standard for IG program components and a yardstick for measuring how well organizations are implementing them.

But they are not magic. Even with these as guidance, assessing an IG program requires analysis to determine what information to gather, from whom, and in what way; how it will be aggregated; and what to do with the results.

Preparing for the Assessment

These are some typical pre-assessment considerations:

*Identifying the assessment's scope***.** If your organization is new to IG, the assessment's desired result may be a baseline reading of maturity in all Principles: Accountability, Compliance, Transparency, Integrity, Availability, Protection, Retention, and Disposition. In contrast, those with an IG program already in place may want to assess the status for a problem or high-risk area, such as Protection.

Identifying the right participants. Assessment quality greatly depends on the people who participate in it. Adequately assessing IG will likely require the involvement of people beyond the records and information management (RIM) staff. Typically, it requires a team composed of RIM, legal, information technology (IT), compliance, risk, and audit. One or more IG team members may assume leadership for the assessment process, functioning as an administrator or facilitator.

In addition, assessment may require the opinions of people in decentralized business units who are responsible for the integrity, protection, availability, retention, and disposition of the records they keep. Whether subject matter experts or rank and file employees, these participants may not have RIM or IG backgrounds. Assessment methodologies must take this into consideration so care can be taken to ensure that those who participate understand what they're being asked to do and why.

Choosing a method. Assessment methods have tradeoffs. For example, in-person interviews allow the interviewer to ask questions and delve more deeply into actual practices, but the trade-off is the amount of time needed to schedule (and reschedule) interviews, as well as the time needed to conduct them. Where consultants are used, conducting interviews result in high costs at the front end of the project.

Surveys work well because they are easily sent electronically, but their success depends heavily on how well questions are designed and how easy they are to complete. Often, one questionnaire is used for all participants and includes questions that not all respondents are competent to answer. This results in high percentages of "Don't Know" or "Not Applicable" responses that can affect outcomes. Scoring can also be problematic, particularly with multiple choice answers like "Never," "Sometimes," "Often," and "Always," which are subject to individual interpretation.

Asking the right people the right questions will yield results that accurately represent the present level and can be used to plan for future improvement. Being respectful of everyone's time is important to getting good responses. No busy person will spend hours answering endless questions, and poor response percentages will produce a skewed picture of the current state.

Regardless of the method chosen, it is essential to explain reasons for the assessment, the subject matter covered, and the scoring mechanism so participants are comfortable and confident at the outset. Background on the Principles being measured and an understanding of the IGMM's levels will help, as will a word on the importance of IG from a senior manager.

Administering the Assessment

Administering the assessment usually requires one key person to perform the tasks associated with inviting participants, preparing them for the assessment, ensuring that they receive the assessment tool, and following up with them to make sure it is completed.

This may not sound difficult, but prep, tracking, and vigilant follow-up until all assessments are completed can be a time drain, particularly when assessments involve many business units in a large organization. Anything that simplifies these chores will boost administrator productivity and get assessment results delivered faster.

Aggregating the assessment scores, interpreting them, and making recommendations for future action to management, usually in a written report and/or presentation, can consume days, if not weeks. Where there is pressure to produce results quickly – such as after an IG breach or failure – there may not be time to undertake a thorough assessment. Yet, such documentation is important as a record of an IG program's status at a given point in time and will be useful for future assessments that may be done to gauge progress toward a desired level of maturity.

Assessment with Next Level

Fortunately, a tool is available that can systematize and speed the assessment process. Based on the Principles and the IGMM, Next Level is a software product from ARMA International that can help in assessing IG programs by automating much of the workflow associated with information-gathering, result aggregation, and recommendations for further action.

It provides ease of use for administrators overseeing the assessment, as well as for those participating in it. Designed in the cloud, Next Level requires no software on the user's computer and can be accessed via a desktop, laptop, iPad, or Android tablet.

Next Level has three main parts: Organization, Assessments, and Results.

Organization

The organization section is used to record the organization's name, industry sector, number of employees, and annual revenues. The administrator, prompted by wizards, can enter information regarding the business units he wants to assess, including the names and e-mail addresses of key employees or stakeholders within the unit who will be participating in the assessment. This is important because in very large, decentralized organizations, it is possible to have multiple business units in various locations with varying degrees of maturity. Organizing in this fashion also precludes the need to enter all employees' names or an entire organization structure.

Assessment – Administrators

In this section, administrators can easily develop the assessment plan and process by entering an assessment name, start date, due date, and purpose in the fields provided.

The administrator can customize which Principles to include in the assessment and who will be assigned to complete them. For example, an assessment of Integrity and Protection could be assigned to IT personnel; an assessment of Transparency, Compliance, and Accountability could be targeted to unit compliance officers, and so on.

Note that the need to identify the right participants is still an important aspect of gathering quality responses for assessment purposes, but once this is decided, participants are easily associated with their assessment sections by

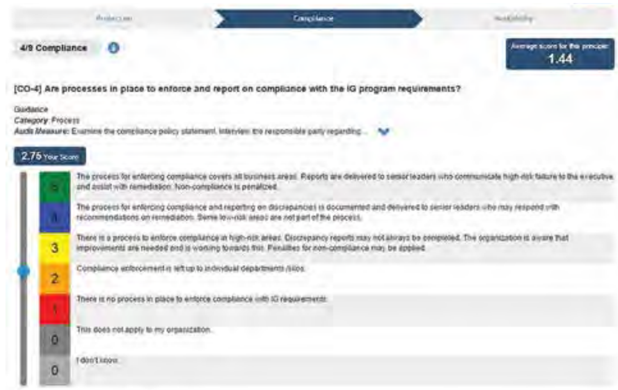

Figure 1: Next Level Score Selection Screen

dragging and dropping their e-mail addresses from the Organization section.

Within the software, assessment questions are geared to the Principles. In total, there are 60 questions for the eight Principles. The survey will take each participant about 15 to 20 minutes per Principle to complete.

Customizing participants to specific Principles also avoids the pitfall of asking people to assess areas they're not familiar with, eliminating many "Don't Know" or "Not Applicable" responses that can cloud results.

One of the strengths of Next Level is e-mail functionality, which serves as workflow. When the administrator selects the e-mail address of a participant, an invitation e-mail is generated that contains that individual's link to the survey. The e-mail's standard verbiage can be customized, and the individual's survey link is the identifier that Next Level uses to track when that person completes the survey.

At this point, the administrator can also schedule three follow-up e-mails to be sent automatically between the start date and the due date to nudge participants who need prompting. An Assessment History feature will show when each survey is complete for each participant.

The administrator can also set up an automatic thank you e-mail to be sent when the user has completed the assessment. It shows how the user scored each Principle assigned to him or her and provides a link the participant can use to see a list of his or her scores and comments.

Assessment History is maintained in an archive. This feature enables the administrator to view all surveys that have been conducted, who has participated, and whether they are in progress or completed. The administrator may also cancel or delete a specific assessment.

Assessment – End Users

The end user experience is simple, intuitive, and information-rich. Clicking on the link in the invitation e-mail brings the user to an initial screen showing which Principles will be assessed and how to score them. Each Principle includes links to ARMA's website for a more in-depth

Figure 2: Next Level Heat Map

explanation, and users can opt to watch a three-minute video explaining the Principle.

Users can also click on the scoring system to see definitions of the terms "in development," "essential," "proactive," and "transformational," which are the 1 to 5 scoring levels respectively. Providing users these definitions may not supplant the need for a pre-survey conference or training session, but they can serve as memory aids.

As shown in Figure 1 on page 20, users move a slider button up or down along a vertical axis to select their assessment score for a specific question. Moving the slider causes numbers from 1 to 5 to be displayed. Users can score in fractions – for example, 3.25, 3.50, and 3.75, to indicate that a Principle is approaching a higher level. The finer scale is useful for showing progress toward objectives for improvement. The software computes and displays an average score for users' selections as they work their way through the questions.

Scoring also provides a free text box where users can make additional comments or substantiate their answers, something that is not always possible with surveys. If users have to leave the assessment, they will be returned to exactly where they left off when they next access it.

Once users complete all questions, they have access to a summary of their answers and comments via the survey link. These can be printed if desired.

Results

Next Level offers five system-generated reports that summarize results and offer insight into the process:

The Heat Map shown in Figure 2 shows the aggregated score by Principle and by business function. The heat map colors match the colors for the scoring chart levels (i.e., 1 is red, 2 is gold, 3 is yellow, 4 is blue, 5 is green). Each square of the heat map contains the aggregated score of all participants. Click on a square and the software displays suggestions for advancing to the next level, as well as a list of resources (e.g., relevant books and online courses) that can help with the work to be done.

The Executive Report is a pre-formatted Word document that shows the assessment name and date, the number of participants, and the heat map. The report gives an explanation of each Principle assessed, including what it is and what it should deliver, along with its score and what the level means. Included are suggestions for advancing to the next level.

The Low Score Report shows aspects of any Principle that scored less than a Level 3 (essential). This provides immediate focus on where gaps were uncovered so the team can identify where further work is needed.

The Pie Chart shows the percentages of assessment participants who selected a score, the percentage that selected "Not Applicable," and the percentage that chose "Don't Know." Pie chart results show whether the right participants were part of the assessment and whether they should be involved in future assessments or be replaced by more knowledgeable participants.

The Raw Data Report shows the administrator how each participant scored each question and what comments he or she made.

Pricing

Next Level, released in February of 2014, is licensed for a specific number of administrators on an annual subscription basis. A single administrator license is $4,995. A five-administrator license, typically used by members of the IG team, is $5,995. The license entitles the subscriber to automatic updates. End users do not require licenses to complete assessments.

Data collected during the assessment is stored in the cloud, and users will note that no private or confidential information is collected. Also, administrators can erase all data associated with the tool if they so desire. Any data entered belongs to the subscriber and will be returned should the subscriber wish not to renew.

Future enhancements to the product could include average scores by Principle by industry sector, which would function as a standards-based set of benchmarks facilitating comparison of your organization to others like it in your industry.

Assessment Tools: Worth Consideration

Assessing an IG program can be time-consuming and costly, and for these reasons, organizations may not want to assess IG maturity at regular intervals. Fortunately, the emergence of tools like Next Level can shorten the time needed to execute assessments by automating much of the workflow involved in administration and aggregation, leading to faster results with less effort. Such tools are worth consideration for any organization hoping to build or improve an IG program. **END**

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