

# SharePoint Roadmap Governance Themes Workbook: Site Creation Rights



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## Executive Summary

What you decide about who is permitted to create a new site in SharePoint, under what conditions, with what approval process, and through what method, has a huge bearing on the effectiveness of your use of SharePoint for collaboration. Get it right, and people will have a clear picture of what is required when creating a new site, thus setting the framework for effective use. Get it wrong, and your SharePoint implementation will result in site sprawl, unused team sites, and poor findability.

This report tackles the governance theme of Site Creation Rights in relation to using SharePoint for collaboration. It builds on Chapter 4 of the book, SharePoint Roadmap for Collaboration ([www.sharepointroadmap.com/roadmap.html](http://www.sharepointroadmap.com/roadmap.html)). The three stages of requesting and getting a new collaboration site are discussed, and the various patterns that these stages create are listed. Four specific patterns are discussed in detail, with pros, cons and potential mitigations for each pattern outlined—in line with the general decision process advocated in SharePoint Roadmap.

The report includes survey data on current practice in relation to Site Creation Rights drawn from a worldwide survey of organizations using SharePoint for collaboration today. Survey results present current practice about who has permission to request a new site, the approach taken to requesting new sites, whether approval is required for new sites, and whether the current approach is expected to remain stable for the next 12 months or undergo revision.

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## Introduction

Governance is the focus of Chapter 4 in my strategy book, SharePoint Roadmap for Collaboration ([www.sharepointroadmap.com/roadmap.html](http://www.sharepointroadmap.com/roadmap.html)). The chapter defines governance, provides an organizational structure for governing the use of SharePoint, proposes a decision process, and touches on key governance themes related to using SharePoint for collaboration. The intent of that chapter was to teach people how to govern SharePoint in their organizations, rather than giving a raft of simplistic answers about governance.

This report extends Chapter 4, providing much greater detail on the Site Creation Rights governance theme. The intent is to provide additional information and insights to assist governance teams in making effective decisions about governing SharePoint. The discussion from Chapter 4 is expanded in this report, and is complemented by new survey research data on how organizations are governing SharePoint in relation to site creation rights. This report is one of about 10 reports that will make up the SharePoint Roadmap Governance Themes workbook, due for publication during 2010 (see [www.sharepointroadmap.com/governance.html](http://www.sharepointroadmap.com/governance.html)).

Site Creation Rights is a key theme when using SharePoint for collaboration:

- It is a significant contributor to creating end-user affinity with the technology. When users can create sites that reflect business and personal projects, they feel more affinity with the technology.
- It can be a leading cause of information sprawl, confusion, information overwhelm, and poor findability. If site creation is rampant, the system will pretty quickly become highly tailored to individual tastes and unusable as a corporate information resource.

Making a clear decision about the rights of creating new SharePoint sites for collaboration is essential to keeping an appropriate level of control and oversight of SharePoint. Too much control and you will strangle the tool before it can be put to good use. Too little control and you will overwhelm the tool with so much junk that it becomes an unusable dumping ground where no one can find their way, or make profitable use of the tool.

This report should be read in conjunction with chapter 4 of SharePoint Roadmap for Collaboration (see [www.sharepointroadmap.com/roadmap.html](http://www.sharepointroadmap.com/roadmap.html)).

## Independent Research

This report is an independent publication of The Michael Sampson Company Limited, and was internally funded. No vendor requested or paid for its preparation or publication.

## Disclaimer

The information provided in this report is by necessity of a general nature, and its applicability to a specific business or organizational context is not guaranteed. Due professional care must be exercised in applying the ideas within this research report. All care has been invested in the preparation of this material, but the author accepts no responsibility for its application.

## The Issue

One of the key decisions to be made in using any collaboration technology relates to the creation of sub-places to work. In SharePoint, these sub-places are called sites—a separate place where teams can work on a particular collaborative project, with all related documents, discussion topics, ideas and other artifacts separated from the relevant items for other projects.

Site Creation rights is a key decision for the following reasons:

- It is a significant contributor to creating end-user affinity with the technology. When users can create sites that reflect business and personal projects, they feel more affinity with the technology.
- It can be a leading cause of information sprawl, confusion, information overwhelm, and poor findability. If site creation is rampant, the system will pretty quickly become highly tailored to individual tastes and unusable as a corporate information resource.

In keeping with the language in SharePoint Roadmap, then, the issue or concern is: Who is allowed to create a new collaboration team site, and under what conditions?

## The Options

The creation of a team site involves three conceptual stages: request, approval, and actioning.

- **Request** ... Triggers the creation of or request for a new site.
- **Approval** ... Granting or withholding of approval for the new site to be created.
- **Actioning** ... Provisioning of the new site.

Let's explore each stage in more detail.

### Stage 1. The Request

The request stage is the first part of the site creation process. It's where the process starts. Someone takes the initiative to request a new site for team collaboration. In looking at the governance around new site creation, there are three elements that come together in this stage:

- **The Person** ... Someone has to request the creation of a new site. The governance decision here is about who is permitted to request the new site. It could be anyone, or only particular people, for example based on a job role ("Project Manager") or organizational position ("Manager"). If there are some limitations introduced as to the person who can request a new site, then basically that signals that an extra level of pre-authorization is built into the process. Most importantly, this pre-authorization comes with a training requirement, that if only certain people can create a site, then they need to know when and why it is okay to create the new site.
- **The Rationale** ... The rationale is the reasoning behind requesting a new site. If a governance process is in place to cover the rationale, then certain pre-conditions must be met in order for the site to be created. The technology of SharePoint requires only a few items in order to create a new site—the title of the site, and the site file name—but there could be other things added as part of governing it. For example, a project number could

be required as part of requesting the creation of a new site, or a cost center code for monthly chargeback purposes. Equally, the name of the business owner or sponsor could be required. Or the proposed end date of the team project. If external people will be working on the project, then this may be asked upfront, as it may impact on the implementation approach (in-house team site vs. a hosted team site). If there are no governance add-ons then only the basic SharePoint information will have to be supplied—title and name. If there is a governance decision around rationale, then extra things will be required.

- **The Approach ...** There has to be an approach for creating the new site. It's either created directly, using the "Site Actions" menu within SharePoint, and thereby basically filling out the form that ships with SharePoint. Or it's transformed from being a create-directly process to being a request-then-process approach.

One way to cut down on inappropriate new site creation requests—assuming that this is happening at your firm—is to limit the number of people who can request the creation of a new site. In taking this step, you are basically pushing the approval stage partially into the requesting stage, in that in order to request a new site, you have to have pre-approval to do so.

If we look above the SharePoint system, there is another way for a new site to be created, and that is when the new site request is an output of another approval and actioning process. For example, every time a legal firm has a new case to work on, the case could be first set up in the case management system, and then as part of the case management system logic, an appropriate SharePoint site is requested and created. In such a situation, the trigger for a new site isn't a person with a rationale following an approach, but rather a workflow process from a wider system. Another example would be the creation of a site when a construction or consulting firm won a new project. As with the legal firm, the request and provisioning of the new site would be part of a wider process around project set up.

## Stage 2. The Approval

The governance decision in the approval stage is whether the request is subject to examination by a person or process before the collaboration team site is created.

Where is it subject to a person's approval, then:

- That person has to review the application, and make a decision about whether to approve it or not. They carry the responsibility to say "yes" or "no". They are playing a totally different role to the person who actually creates the site.
- It's great to make it clear on what basis requests are approved. Don't make the reasoning opaque.
- Reasons for approving the new site request should center on alignment with business projects,
- Reasons for rejecting the new site request should be clear.
- If a new site is rejected, the requestor should be clearly notified about why the new site was rejected. If it was because there is already a site dedicated to that purpose, then they should be pointed in the direction of it. If it was because the approver felt that the new site was unnecessary, then his or her reasoning should be outlined. If there is a right of appeal, or a right to modify and re-submit the request, then that should be noted too.

It is undoubtedly true that the approval stage could be automated. For example, certain conditions can be required, and double-checked against other systems of record. If there is a positive match—depending on the specific test of course—then an automated approval could be granted.

- The system could check that all the required fields on the requisition form are filled out with valid data. E.g., the requestor is a current employee, their email address matches what is in Active Directory, they have given the new team site a title, and so on.
- If a project code is required, the system could check the project management master record to ensure that the project is current, that budget has been allocated, and that the person requesting the new site is the project manager.

What could be done never implies that it should be done—the “should” is a totally separate decision. Don’t push too far into the systematization of approval until you know that the process works, what’s important, and what’s not for your organization. Don’t go overboard in created an automated approval system until you have real experience with real people requesting real team sites for real projects, and you are able to track why the approval person approved or rejected the request. Too much automated logic too early in the process can hide valuable lessons, and may be money poorly spent. You may create the perfect system that immediately approves bad ideas.

### Stage 3. Actioning

The third and final stage is when the collaboration team site request is actioned. Basically this means the site is created, access rights are assigned, and the original requestor receives a notification that the site is ready for them to use—generally as an email from the person who has created the new site, or as an automated email alert if a workflow tool is being used to action new site requests.

There are a number of ways of actioning a new site request.

- **Created Immediately** ... If the requestor is permitted to create the site directly, without approval by another person or process, then the request and the actioning of that request are one and the same.
- **Manually Created by a Person** ... Someone receives the request for the new site, after it’s been approved if that’s required, and then creates the site using “Site Actions” in the appropriate place in SharePoint.
- **Automatically Created by a Process** ... The new site request is captured as part of a workflow process, and once the necessary approvals have been gained, the new site is provisioned. This requires that the workflow process knows what type of new site to create, eg, based on a particular template.

### *Thoughts on Automation of the Actioning Stage*

Automation of the actioning stage via a workflow process is a compelling idea, but only under particular circumstances. There are (at least) four conditions under which automation via a workflow process makes sense, but any one of these standing alone is probably insufficient justification to push ahead with workflow automation. Look for at least 2 or more of these conditions to align before pushing ahead.

### ***Volume***

If there is a high volume of new site requests being approved or received, then automation of the provisioning stage is a good idea. Where the volume is low, automation is less likely to be a good idea.

### ***Timeliness***

If the person or people responsible for provisioning the new site are not being prompt about doing so, then one option to hiring more people is to automate the provisioning process through a workflow tool.

### ***Clarity***

If you have a clear understanding on the reasons under which a new site can be created, then it a workflow process could work. You would have to be able to specify the conditions clearly in a way that the system could evaluate whether the conditions have been met or not. For example:

- That budget has been assigned to the project before the project team site is created—if that's a requirement you put in place—should be able to be objectively ascertained by querying the project management system.
- If external people are going to be involved in the project, what is your policy decision about that? The question could be a “Yes” or “No” answer, with “No” answers automatically provisioned and “Yes” answers routed to a person for approval and investigation.

### ***Judgment***

If there are no judgment calls required in setting up the new site—for example, your firm has settled on three project templates and no deviations are permitted (see “Governance Themes Workbook: Template Standardization” for more on this), or if there is a basic site created and then the site owner is delegated all of the responsibilities of designing the site in accordance with the project requirements—under either of those situations, no judgment is required by a person. They are merely clicking buttons and filling out fields in a particular order to create the site, and as such, it's a mindless and judgment free activity. In such cases, moving towards automation is a good idea.

## **The Patterns**

Now we have explored the elementary options of Site Creation Rights, let's put them together and see how the options can come together into patterns. There are 16 valid patterns for site creation rights—although the possible number of patterns is higher, the others don't make sense, for example, that anyone can create a site directly, with no pre-conditions, but Approval is required.

Table 1: Patterns of Site Creation Rights

Pattern	Person	Rationale	Approach	Approval	Actioning
1	Anyone	No Conditions	Create	Not Required	Manual (by requestor)
2	Anyone	No Conditions	<b>Request</b>	Not Required	Manual (by someone else)
3	Anyone	No Conditions	Request	<b>Required</b>	Manual (by someone else)
4	Anyone	<b>Conditions</b>	Request	<b>Not Required</b>	Manual (by someone else)
5	Anyone	Conditions	Request	<b>Required</b>	Manual (by someone else)
6	Anyone	Conditions	Request	<b>Not Required</b>	<b>Automatic</b>
7	Anyone	Conditions	Request	<b>Required</b>	Automatic
8	Anyone	<b>No Conditions</b>	Request	Required	Automatic
9	<b>Someone</b>	No Conditions	<b>Create</b>	<b>Not Required</b>	<b>Manual (by requestor)</b>
10	Someone	No Conditions	<b>Request</b>	Not Required	Manual (by someone else)
11	Someone	No Conditions	Request	<b>Required</b>	Manual (by someone else)
12	Someone	<b>Conditions</b>	Request	<b>Not Required</b>	Manual (by someone else)
13	Someone	Conditions	Request	<b>Required</b>	Manual (by someone else)
14	Someone	Conditions	Request	<b>Not Required</b>	<b>Automatic</b>
15	Someone	Conditions	Request	<b>Required</b>	Automatic
16	Someone	<b>No Conditions</b>	Request	Required	Automatic

THERE ARE 16 PATTERNS FOR SITE CREATION RIGHTS IN SHAREPOINT. NOTE THAT THE TEXT IN BOLD INDICATES A CHANGE FROM THE PATTERN IMMEDIATELY PRECEDING IT.

Obviously there are a lot of options here, once the different combinations are put together! Let's talk in depth about four of these patterns, rather than all 16.

## Pattern 1 “Wild West”

In Pattern 1, any user can create a collaboration team site immediately in SharePoint, for any purpose, without review or approval by anyone else, using the “Site Actions” menu anywhere in SharePoint. This is the “Wild West” option for Site Creation Rights, where anything goes, and everyone takes the law into their own hands!

Table 2: Patterns 1 of Site Creation Rights

Request	Approval	Actioning
Anyone	Not Required	Manual (by requestor)
No Conditions		
Create		

Let’s consider the pros, cons, and possible mitigations for Pattern 1.

### Pros:

- SharePoint is totally responsive to the perceived needs of individuals. If they want it, they can have it!
- SharePoint users will love the system, as they can do with it whatever they want. They will feel a deep sense of ownership and involvement in SharePoint.
- There is no bureaucracy to navigate to get a new site created in SharePoint.

### Cons:

- Prolific site sprawl will take place, as people create whatever they want, wherever they want, whenever they want.
- SharePoint users will come to loath the system over time, because they can never find what they need to find. Findability will be difficult, if not impossible.
- There will be duplication of sites for similar projects and purposes, leading to confusion about which is the authoritative version of a document, not to mention a project!
- People are likely to create a plethora of small sites, for short-term projects.
- There will be high abandonment of sites, as people set up sites almost as a knee-jerk reaction to something, and then decide that they don’t actually need the site anymore.

### Mitigations:

- Automatic site closure and deletion after 30 days of inactivity within the site, but only after automatically shifting all items from the site into the Records Management system. Such a hard-line policy offsets the Wild West nature of Pattern 1.
- Offer online training resources to provide guidance about effective usage of SharePoint, so that site creators have the opportunity to learn good practices, and can see what has worked for other people within the organization. This provides a way of sharing learning, and some mechanism for reducing the more wild behaviors.
- Automatically send new site creators an email message with links to a training site in SharePoint.

Regardless of the mitigations embraced, there are some serious issues with Pattern 1, as evidenced by the cons listed above. If these more serious problems are occurring within SharePoint, and they are untenable within your organization, then shifting to another pattern will be required.

## Pattern 4 “IT Holds the Reins”

In Pattern 4, any user can request that a collaboration team site be created, with various pre-conditions set—for example, that a formal project exists, or that a formal project has budget approval. No approval is required, however, but the request is actioned by someone other than the requestor, such as the SharePoint or IT Administrator. In this case, the organization is not giving people the ability to create sites directly, but rather holding that right firmly in hand.

Table 3: Pattern 4 of Site Creation Rights

Request	Approval	Actioning
Anyone	Not Required	Manual (by IT Administrator)
Conditions		
Request		

Let’s consider the pros, cons, and possible mitigations for Pattern 4.

Pros:

- The conditions set a clear expectation about what is required in order to get a team collaboration sites on SharePoint. There is no guesswork involved.
- Significant reduction in the number of sites created within SharePoint, thus eliminating sprawl before it can take root.
- Having a clear set of pre-conditions signals that some thought has gone into how SharePoint can be used effectively within the organization, that is, when it makes sense to use SharePoint, and also when it does not make sense to use SharePoint.

Cons:

- It may be possible for someone to read the pre-conditions and say “yes” to them all, when actually they don’t exist. Thus they pretend to have a valid reason.
- The person who actions the request (the IT Administrator) may not be sufficiently in touch with business requirements to know whether a new site is really required or not.
- The IT Administrator may become a bottleneck in the process, depending on how many sites are requested and how long it takes them to action each request.

Mitigations:

- Randomly review and audit 10% of new sites each month, to ensure that they meet the stated pre-conditions. For those that don’t, seek an explanation as to why they were created.
- If the IT Administrator is becoming a process bottleneck, consider workflow automation. This would mean that the requestor would fill out a form requesting a new site, clicking

through the pre-conditions, and on successful submission, would have the new site created automatically via a workflow process.

### Pattern 13 “Business Oversight”

Pattern 13 features significant controls over the creation of collaboration team sites in SharePoint. Only specifically trained and nominated people—in this case Business Unit Leaders—can request a collaboration team site. This greatly reduces the pool of people who are requesting sites, and because there are pre-conditions set, and approval by someone else is required (in this case, someone in Senior Management), the number of new sites requested and created will be significantly less than the more looser patterns.

Table 4: Pattern 13 of Site Creation Rights

Request	Approval	Actioning
Someone - Business Unit Leader	Required - Senior Management	Manual (by IT Administrator)
Conditions		
Request		

Let’s consider the pros, cons, and possible mitigations for Pattern 13.

Pros:

- Clear ownership by and involvement of business people in decisions around the effective use of SharePoint for team collaboration. Having business people involved in the request and approval stages signals that SharePoint has become a “business-as-usual” tool.
- The limited pool of requestors means that training around suitable circumstances for creating SharePoint team sites can be targeted to specific people. More in-depth training can be laser focused on specific people, rather than much higher-level training being delivered more broadly.

Cons:

- Approval by senior management could become a burden. They should have better things to do than approving site creation requests.
- The process could become bureaucratic and burdensome, with both pre-approval (through pre-conditions) and approval stages.
- The manual actioning of the request by the IT Administrator could be a mindless activity. The key thinking work has been done before they receive the request, so it could be just a matter of clicking a few buttons and filling out some fields. If no judgment is required on their part, they aren’t going to find a lot of satisfaction in creating new sites.

Mitigations:

- Change the approval stage from an explicit approval (“please approve this before the site is created”) to an implicit approval via notification (“the site has been created, but if you don’t like this, please contact the requestor immediately”).

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- If no judgment is required by the IT Administrator, Pattern 13 is an ideal customer for workflow automation, that is, going up to Pattern 15. As soon as the site is approved, the workflow system creates it without requiring a person to do the work.

The key to success with Pattern 13 is in choosing the right people for the “someone” request role—Project Managers perhaps—along with the right people for the approval role. Whoever is in the “someone” role has to have time to be trained on when and where it makes sense to use a new SharePoint team site, along with time to receive and filter requests for new team sites from other people.

## Pattern 15 “Workflow Enabled”

Pattern 15 is the step up from Pattern 13 through the addition of automatic workflow enablement, covering both the execution of the upfront request process, linked with the automatic actioning of the request, once approval is given by the appropriate individual. In Pattern 15, only projects that have an associated budget and senior management approval can be given a SharePoint site, using an automated workflow process.

*Table 5: Pattern 15 of Site Creation Rights*

Request	Approval	Actioning
Someone - Project Manager	Required - Senior Management	Automatic (by workflow)
Conditions - Associated budget		
Request		

Let’s consider the pros, cons, and possible mitigations for Pattern 15.

Pros:

- Same pros as for Pattern 13.
- Automatic workflow actioning of the new site request means that the process runs as streamlined as possible, with no delays by waiting for an IT Administrator to create the site.

Cons:

- The approval step is a bureaucratic addition, because pre-approval is implicit through the careful selection of the “someone” to request the new site, and the clear explanation of the condition (that budget has been approved). Since the request can only be submitted once the project’s budget has been approved, that by implication gives management (or senior management) approval for the project, and thus the creation of the SharePoint site to support the project should be a natural and standard linked outcome that doesn’t require separate approval.

Mitigations:

- Change the approval stage from an explicit approval (“please approve this before the site is created”) to an implicit approval via notification (“the site has been created, but if you don’t like this, please contact the requestor immediately”).

## Current Practice

So as to capture data on current practice around Site Creation Rights in SharePoint, a survey was created and administered through Survey Monkey. The survey was advertised using a variety of online channels—email distribution lists, Twitter updates, and a blog post on Michael’s blog. 51 people started the survey, and 7 of those were immediately disqualified from completing the survey because they or their firm were not using SharePoint for team collaboration today, nor had immediate plans to do so. The survey was open for data collection between November 18 and December 5, 2009.

There were a couple of points of motivation to participate in the survey:

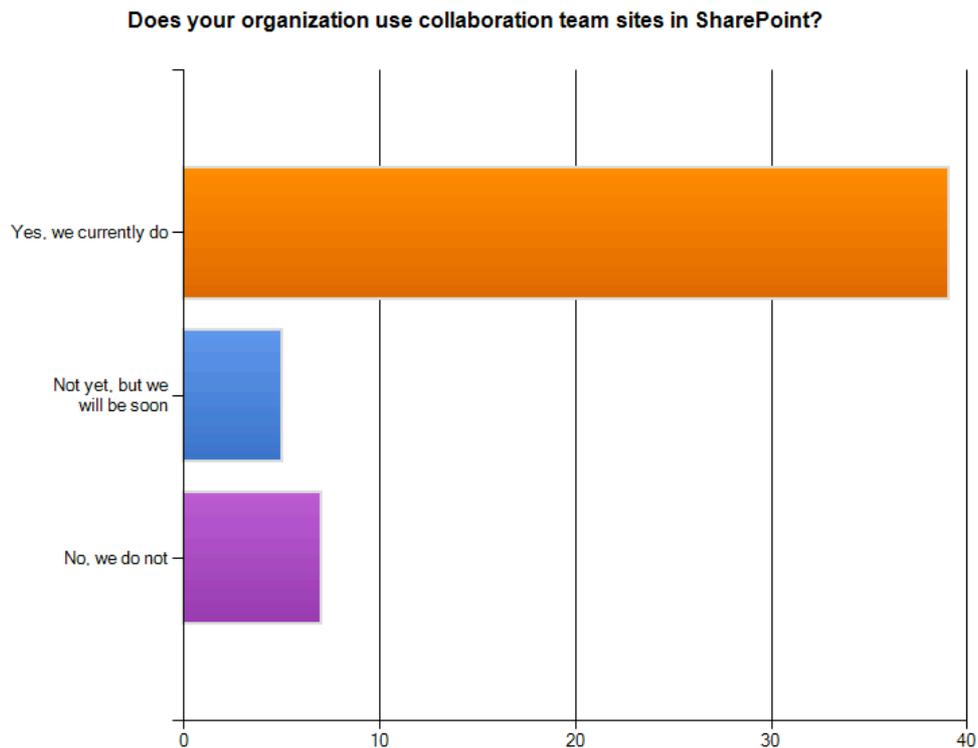
- Everyone who completed the survey and provided their name, organizational affiliation and email address was gifted a copy of this document. A total of 31 people met this requirement.
- Participants wanted to learn about this governance theme in SharePoint, and were willing to disclose what they were doing in return wider insight.

Let’s explore the results from the survey.

## Question 1. Use of Collaboration Team Sites in SharePoint

The first question asked if the respondent's organization used collaboration team sites in SharePoint. If the respondent answered "No, we do not", they were forwarded to a survey exit page and disbarred from the completing the survey. If they did use SharePoint for team collaboration, or were moving towards doing so, they were permitted to continue with the survey.

Figure 1. Current Use of Collaboration Team Sites in SharePoint



51 people started the Site Creation Rights survey.

- 7 people were not using SharePoint for collaboration team sites, and so were not permitted to complete the survey.
- 44 people either were using SharePoint for collaboration team sites, or would be soon. People in both answer bands were permitted to complete the survey.
- A total of 34 completed surveys were returned. 10 people who were qualified to complete the survey chose not to do so before getting to the final question.

## Question 2. Number of Collaboration Team Sites in Use Today

In order to gauge maturity with collaboration team sites, respondents were asked to enter the approximate number of collaboration team sites in use in their organizations today. This was a free text entry, rather than a ranged option.

51% of respondents had less than 50 team collaboration sites in their SharePoint environment, with quite a number of these at less than 10 team sites.

- 14% had between 51 and 100
- 11% had between 101 and 250.
- The remaining 23% had over 250 team collaboration sites.
- The highest number was 2500 team collaboration sites.

It's interesting to note that half of the respondents had less than 50 collaboration team sites in use at their organizations. That number is quite low, and signals one of three reasons:

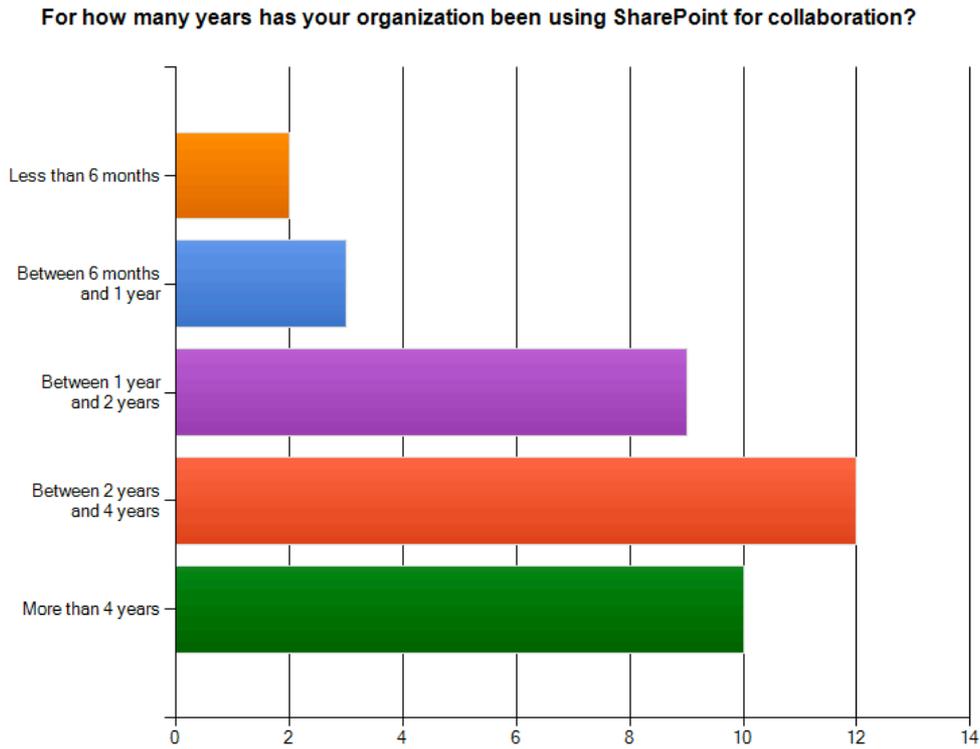
1. A degree of immaturity of use for SharePoint team sites for collaboration.
2. Respondents were from small organizations
3. Respondents really didn't know how many team sites were being used, and were guessing.

From a methodology perspective, respondents were not asked how many employees worked at their firms, nor how many people at their firms used SharePoint for collaboration—thus counteracting reason #2 above with data is impossible. As part of the demographics collection in future surveys, this would be a good data point to add!

### Question 3. Years Using SharePoint for Collaboration

Question 3 was also designed to get a feel for the maturity of the respondents and their use of SharePoint for collaboration. This question was aimed at quantifying the length of time that the respondent's organization had been using SharePoint for collaboration.

Figure 2. Years Using Collaboration Team Sites in SharePoint



Most respondents have been using SharePoint for collaboration for more than 2 years.

- 28% have been using SharePoint for more than 4 years.
- 33% have been using SharePoint for between 2 years and 4 years
- 25% have been using SharePoint for between 1 and 2 years.
- The remainder have been using SharePoint for less than 1 year.

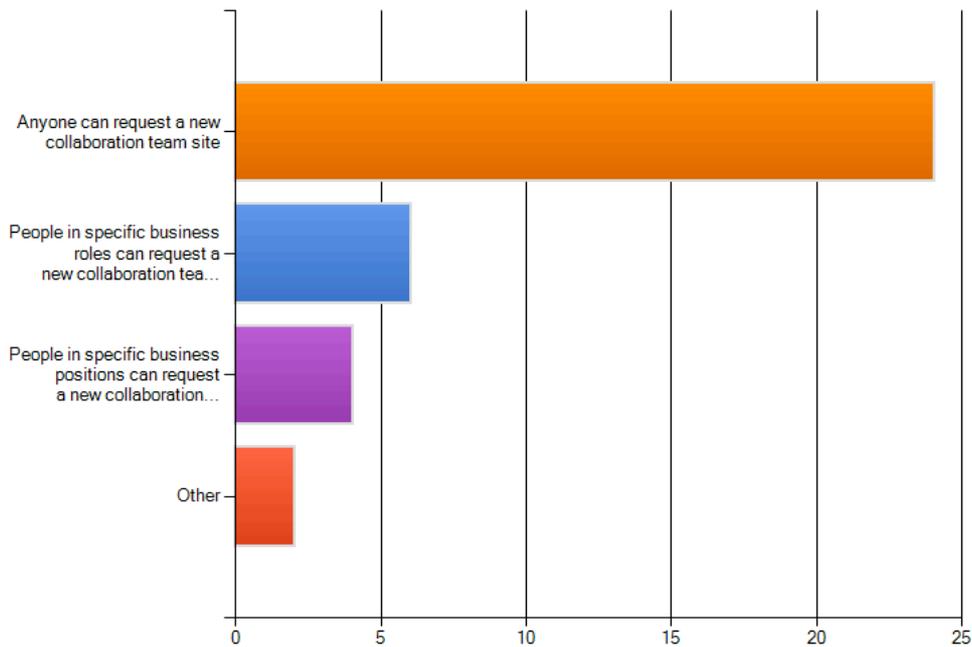
There appears to be good maturity in usage from this question, with 60% of respondents coming from firms that have used SharePoint for collaboration for more than 2 years.

## Question 4. Permission to Request New Sites

Question 4 started into the data collection proper, asking for the current governance decision about requesting new collaboration team sites. For the majority of respondents (67%), anyone at their organization can request the creation of a new collaboration team site.

Figure 3. Who Has Permission to Request a New Site?

**The creation of a team site involves three conceptual stages: request, approval, and actioning. Thinking just about the requesting stage, who is allowed to request a new collaboration team site on SharePoint?**



The second most common approach is that someone in a specific business role could request a new collaboration team site, eg, a project manager (17%).

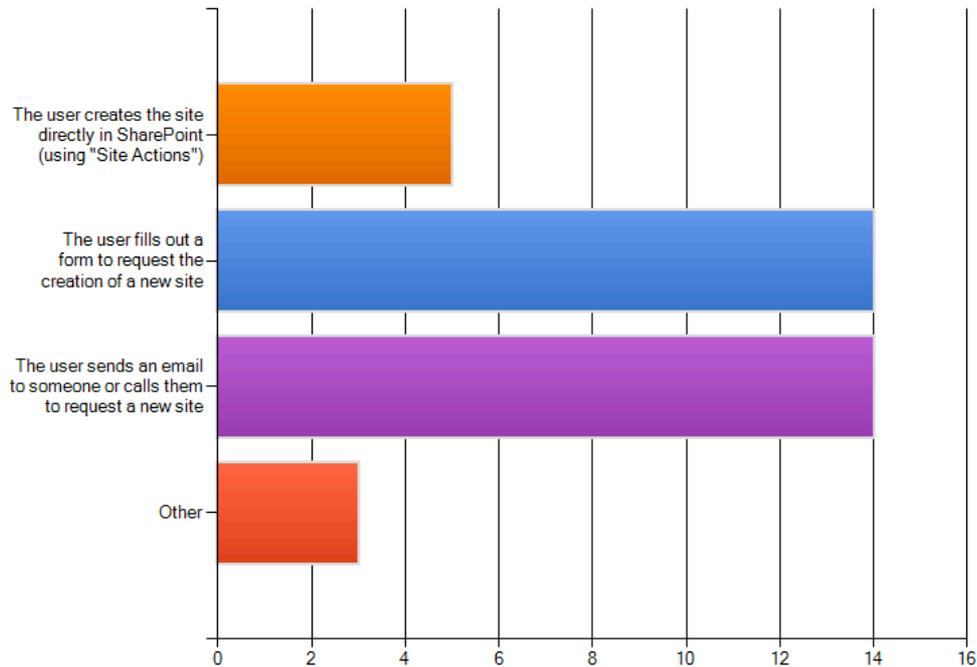
The least common approach was that someone in a specific business position could request a new collaboration team site, eg, a business unit leader (11%).

## Question 5. Approach to Requesting New Sites

For most respondents, people requesting a new site cannot create it directly and immediately in SharePoint using "Site Actions".

Figure 4. People Can Request New Sites, Not Create Them Directly

**The creation of a team site involves three conceptual stages: request, approval, and actioning. Thinking just about the requesting stage, how is the new site requested in your organization?**



For over 80% of respondents, either the user fills out a form to request the creation of a new site, or the user sends an email or calls someone to request the creation of a new site. Respondents were equally split on the approach taken.

For 14% of respondents, the user can create the site directly in SharePoint (using "Site Actions").

One respondent in the "Other" category indicated that the process had not been determined yet.

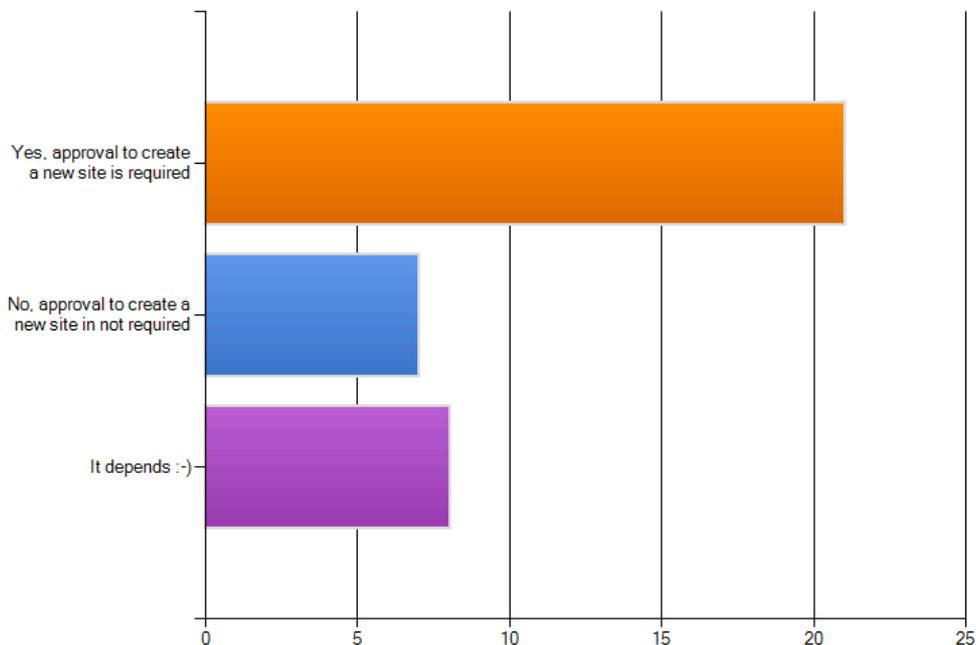
In combination with the majority approach of allowing anyone to request a new site, the majority do not allow the site to be created immediately using the "Site Actions" command. This basically means that the majority of organizations are taking a post-request actioning or approval stance to site creation rights. This allows someone else to keep an eye on what's going on within SharePoint, and helps to prevent the spontaneous combustion of sites all over the place.

## Question 6. Approval of New Sites

For the majority of respondents, approval to create a new collaboration team site in SharePoint is required. That is, someone else other than the requestor has to approve—say “yes” or “no”—to the new site request. This is much more than just requiring someone else to action the provisioning of the new site; this represents the authority to allow or deny the site request.

Figure 5. New Site Requests Have to be Approved

**The creation of a team site involves three conceptual stages: request, approval, and actioning. Thinking just about the approval stage, does the creation of a new site require an approval before being actioned?**



The split on approval is basically 60-20-20.

- 60% of respondents indicated that approval to create a new site is required.
- 20% of respondents indicated that no approval is required.
- 20% of respondents indicated that the required for approval is not clear-cut, that it is dependent on something.

After reviewing the notes left on the “It depends” category, it would appear that approval is required in 80% of cases; the answers to “It depends” option can be combined with the “Yes, approval is required” option. These two options can be combined because the textual notes basically say that approval is required.

- One respondent indicated that it depends on the nature of what the team would use the site for. The respondent was from a hospital in the US, and patient-sensitive information was not placed in SharePoint.

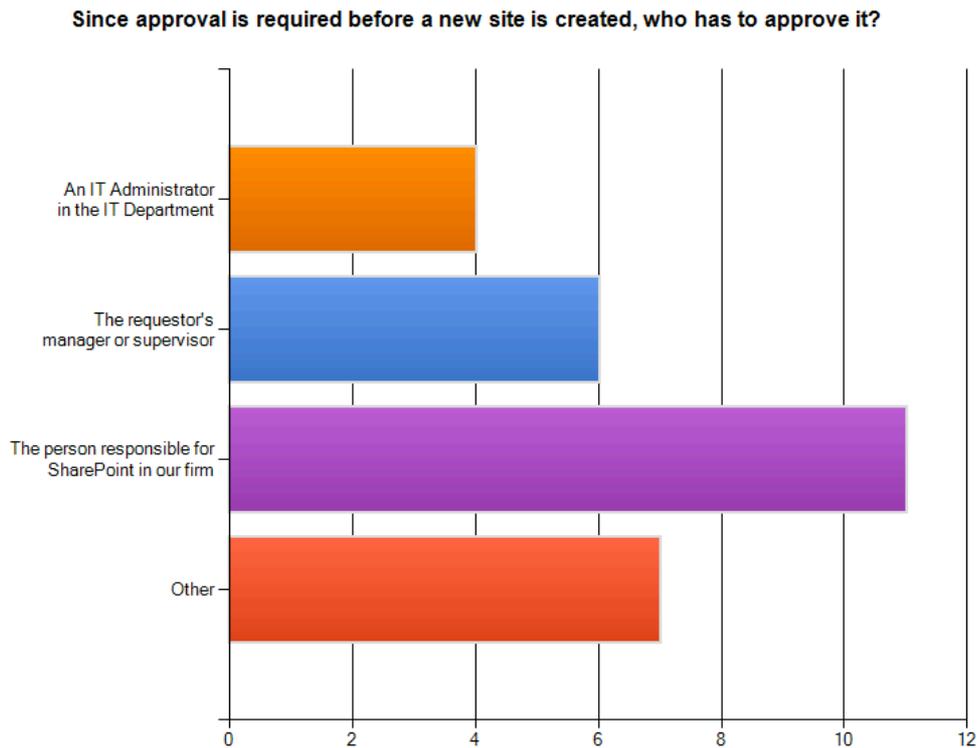
- Other reasons given by this respondent for not approving the use of a SharePoint team was basically lack of technical fit. For example, they felt that complex spreadsheets should not be place in SharePoint. Equally, in cases of application development, they would push users in the direction of an alternative technology, such as ASP.NET.
- Another respondent indicated that there are certain answers on the request form that raise “red flags” about the suitability of SharePoint. When this happens, there is discussion between the SharePoint technical team and the IT Knowledge Management team.

In these cases, there is basically an approval step dependent on various decision criteria. There is some indication of a correlation between those that chose “It depends” and the length of time their organization has been using SharePoint for team collaboration sites. Five out of the eight respondents who selected “It depends” come from organizations that have been using SharePoint for more than 2 years, and three out of the five have been using SharePoint for more than 4 years. We need more data to conclude as to a strong correlation, but it would make sense that the process of approval and would become more nuanced over time based on experience with a wide range of approval requests.

## Question 7. Who Approves the New Site?

If a respondent indicated that approval was or could be required in Question 6, they were then asked who had to approve the new site request. The largest grouping of respondents said that it was the person responsible for SharePoint in their organization.

Figure 6. SharePoint People Approve New Site Requests



For 40% of respondents, the person responsible for SharePoint in their firm has to approve the creation of a new site.

- The next most common approach is to seek approval from the requestor's manager or supervisor. This is the case for 22% of respondents.
- The third most common approach is to seek approval from an IT administrator in the IT department (14%).
- 25% of respondents chose "Other", with explanations ranging from naming a particular department, pushing the approval to the appropriate Site Collection administrator, requiring multiple approvers, and seeking Executive approval.

The high percentage of involvement from the SharePoint person or the IT department indicates that SharePoint still has "special knowledge" requirements; there is still a high degree of hands-on intervention required to make SharePoint work. It goes to the person responsible for SharePoint

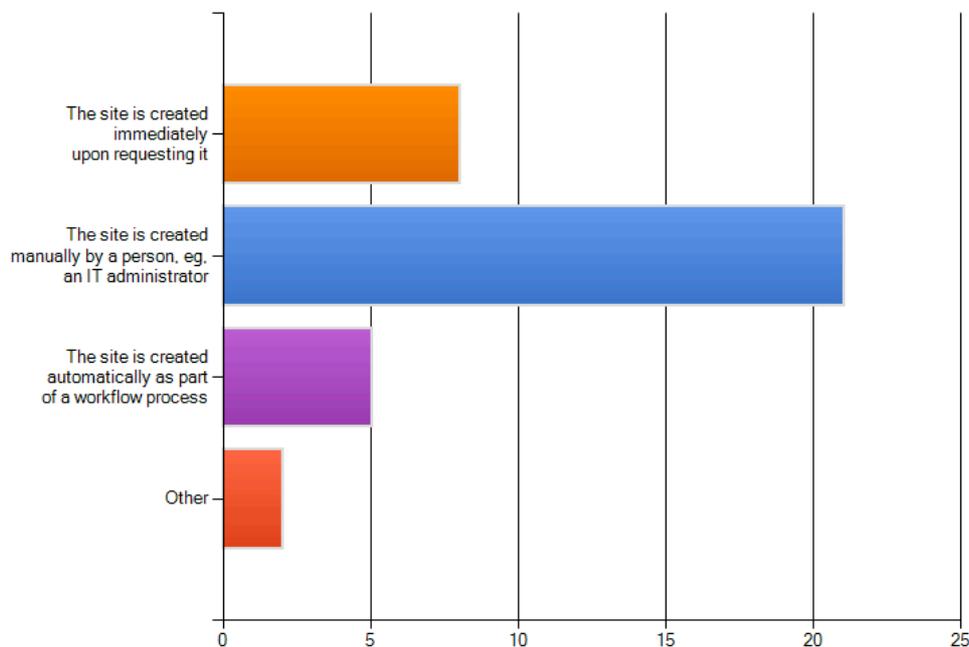
too frequently, rather than being devolved wider in the business. If SharePoint is a business tool, then approvals should come from people in the business—not the person responsible for SharePoint, and definitely not from someone in the IT department.

## Question 8. Creating the New Site

Once the new site has been requested and approved (if required), it is most frequently actioned manually by a person such as an IT administrator. This is true in about 60% of cases. The second most common approach where the requestor cannot create the site directly is to have the site request actioned as part of a workflow process. 22% of respondents can create the site immediately upon requesting the new site.

Figure 7. New Sites are Created Manually

**The creation of a team site involves three conceptual stages: request, approval, and actioning. Thinking just about the actioning stage, how is the creation of the new collaboration team site actioned?**



The small number of respondents using a workflow process to create the new site is somewhat surprising. However, 4 out of the 5 respondents selecting this option all come from organizations with many hundreds of collaboration team sites. Therefore we can conclude that the main driver for automating the provisioning of the new site as part of a workflow process is the number of requests being received during a particular period of time. For organizations with a small number of new site requests, the workflow automation cost is not required. For organizations with a large number of requests, the workflow automation cost can be justified.

## Question 9. Rationale for the Current Approach

Respondents were asked why they took the approach they did to site creation rights in SharePoint. 23 people provided a free-text answer.

Common themes across the 23 answers were:

- Lack of maturity, or that they were still in the early stages of using team collaboration sites and therefore had not converged on a particular way of doing things yet.
- Where approval was required for creating team collaboration sites, this was often linked with a consultancy or engagement phase where business needs and requirements were discussed with the requesting individual and associated people.
- Approval is used as a way of enforcing a particular way of using SharePoint, to drive consistency in usage and approach across the organization. For example, if the organization had a large number of users, approval was used to ensure that only required sites were actually created.

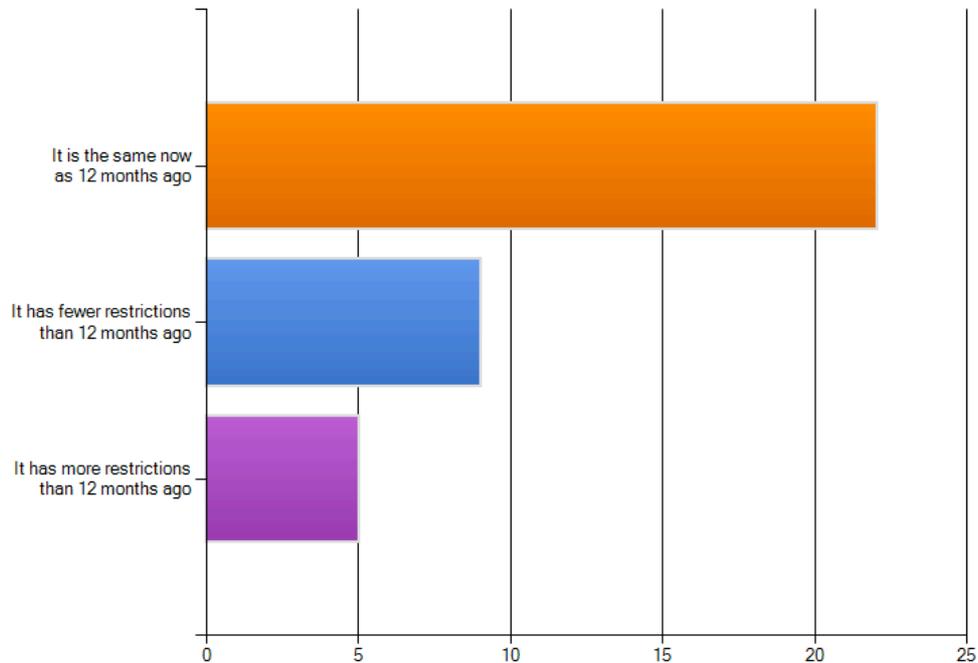
Generally speaking, respondents were able to articulate a reason for the current approach to site creation rights, indicating that appropriate thought had been put into the governance process for this theme. This harkens back to the apparent maturity in the use of SharePoint by the organizations at which the respondents work—as measured by the number of collaboration team sites in existence and the number of years that the respondents have been working with SharePoint.

## Question 10. Difference from 12 Months Ago

There has been stability in the approach to site creation rights over the past 12 months for the majority of respondents. 61% indicated that their current approach to governing the creation of SharePoint team sites has been in place for over 12 months.

Figure 8. The Site Creation Rights Approach is Stable from 12 Months Ago

How does your current approach to site creation rights differ from your HISTORICAL approach 12 months ago?



25% of respondents indicated that there were fewer restrictions today than 12 months ago. The policy has been loosened during the past 12 months. The remainder (14%) indicated that there are more restrictions today than 12 months ago. The policy has been tightened during the past 12 months.

For those respondents indicating that there were fewer restrictions today than 12 months ago, examples included:

- An easier to use online request form.
- Removal of an approval step due to it taking too long to gain approval. For example, whereas the requestor's manager previously had to approve the creation of the new site, now they are merely notified of the creation of the new site.
- Shifting from a request via the IT Service Desk to Self Service site creation.

For those respondents indicating that there are more restrictions today than 12 months ago, examples included:

- Putting restrictions in place with the transition from WSS 2.0 to SharePoint 2007.
- Introducing an approval step into the process, along with a request queue so requestors can track the progress of their site request.

- Developing an automated workflow process for requesting, approving and provisioning new sites.

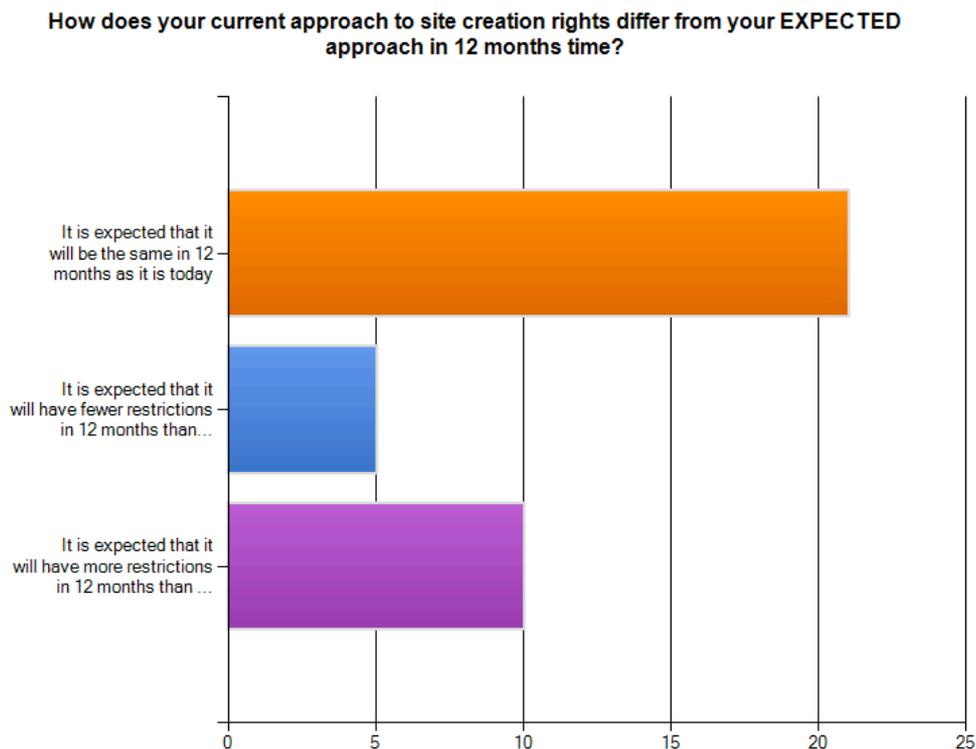
### Question 11. Anticipated Difference in 12 Months Time

The majority of respondents expect that their current approach to site creation rights will remain steady for the next 12 months. Almost 60% foresee no changes during that time. Almost 30% of respondents expect that there will be more restrictions introduced over the next 12 months, and the remainder expects fewer restrictions in 12 months time.

For those respondents expecting more restrictions in 12 months, examples included:

- Requiring more information about the site and its owner
- A reduction in the number of people who can create sites—that is, shifting from an “anyone can” to “someone can” model.
- A simplified request and provisioning process
- The introduction of an ownership model.
- Working on metadata standards and developing taxonomies.

Figure 9. The Site Creation Rights Approach is Expected to be Stable for 12 Months



## Conclusion

The right to create or request a SharePoint site is a key theme—if not the key theme—when using SharePoint for collaboration. A balance is essential to ensure that the policy isn't so tight that people feel that they can't do anything with SharePoint on the one hand, and so loose on the other that SharePoint quickly spirals out of control. When people say that the "SharePoint horse has bolted", this is basically where it happens. If you can prevent the horse from bolting, you'll save yourself a lot of trouble and hassle downstream.

In terms of recommendations, based on the discussion and survey data points in this document:

- Don't go overboard too early in the process by defining a rigorous and difficult-to-navigate approach to site creation rights. Allow some room for experimentation. For example, allow anyone to request a new site, but don't permit them to create it themselves directly. If you have hundreds or thousands of employees, limit the number of people who can create a new site to specifically trained people within each business unit. This puts in place some level of control and oversight, which allowing people to test out the applicability of SharePoint to their work.
- Part of the signal to enforce governance is the presence or threat of chaos. If too many people are creating sites that have overlapping boundaries, that's chaos. If you are receiving complaints about the length of time required to get approval for a new site, that's chaos. If people are giving up on SharePoint and using online collaboration tools because getting a new site is "too bureaucratic", that's chaos. Look for signals of chaos within your organization, and figure out what adjustments you need to make to remove it.
- If you have a highly rigorous and automated process, hopefully that signals that you've been doing this for a while, and through hands-on experience with successful sites and unsuccessful sites, have decided how and where limitations will be put in place. But don't start here! Real experience in the way things get done at your place of work is important to determining how to approach the issue of site creation rights.
- If you have an approval step in the process, and if the approver is approving all sites, or over 90% of site requests, then rethink your need to have an approver. Perhaps you can achieve the same outcome by merely notifying the approver that a new site has been created ("implicit approval"), and that if they see any problems with the new site, then they should get in contact with the new site owner.

## About The Michael Sampson Company Limited

The Michael Sampson Company is a Collaboration Strategy firm focused on improving the performance of distributed teams. We advise end-user organizations on collaboration strategies. Part of our mandate is to prepare vendor-independent research reports for our organizational clients. All of our research is internally funded, which means that no vendor has requested the authoring of our reports, nor underwritten the research. The analysis is impartial, and not influenced by vendor agendas. These reports have been prepared to assist organizations in making wise decisions about improving the performance of distributed teams.

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