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Effective Power Platform Governance – For thriving Citizen Developer Capability

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Abstract

Low-code no-code platforms are fast becoming mainstream, and Microsoft Power Platform is emerging as a leader in this area. Power Platforms enable business users without any prior coding knowledge to create applications and share them with others. Business SMEs themselves wearing the hat of Citizen Developer can dish out applications faster instead of waiting for weeks for IT. With this power, comes a responsibility to manage risks and data security for which effective governance is required on this platform.

Governance should not be too restrictive for Citizen Developers, which will prevent them from using the capability and it should not be too lenient to expose organizations to undue risks. It is important to implement a balanced strategy with required monitoring and alerts to take timely actions.

Power Platform Adoption Trends

Adoption of low-code, no-code platforms is growing in leaps and bounds. Gartner predicted that, by 2025, 70% of new applications developed by enterprises will use low-code or no-code technologies, up from less than 25% in 2020. Microsoft's Power Platform is positioned as the leader in the Gartner Report. Fast app development, the democratization of IT, and a wide range of functionality/connectors make it a platform of choice for many organizations. To top it, Microsoft has been seeding Power Platform capabilities with Dynamics 365 and Office 365 licenses.

Why Governance?

While the license seeding speeds up Power platform adoption, in some cases, this has caused the Citizen Developers to start developing power platform applications before IT departments could implement effective governance controls or organization has blocked Power Platform access via policies to avoid any data or security risks.

Power platform enables Citizen Developers without prior coding experience to build and share apps that can run on web or mobile alike. Business SMEs closer to actual day-to-day business issues can now create solutions that best fit their needs and change them as the business requirement changes, making the overall business process nimble.

Organizations wanting to reap the benefits of Citizen Developers on a low-code, no-code platform are realizing that they need to create a nurturing environment where the Citizen Developer community can flourish without compromising the organization's data and security.

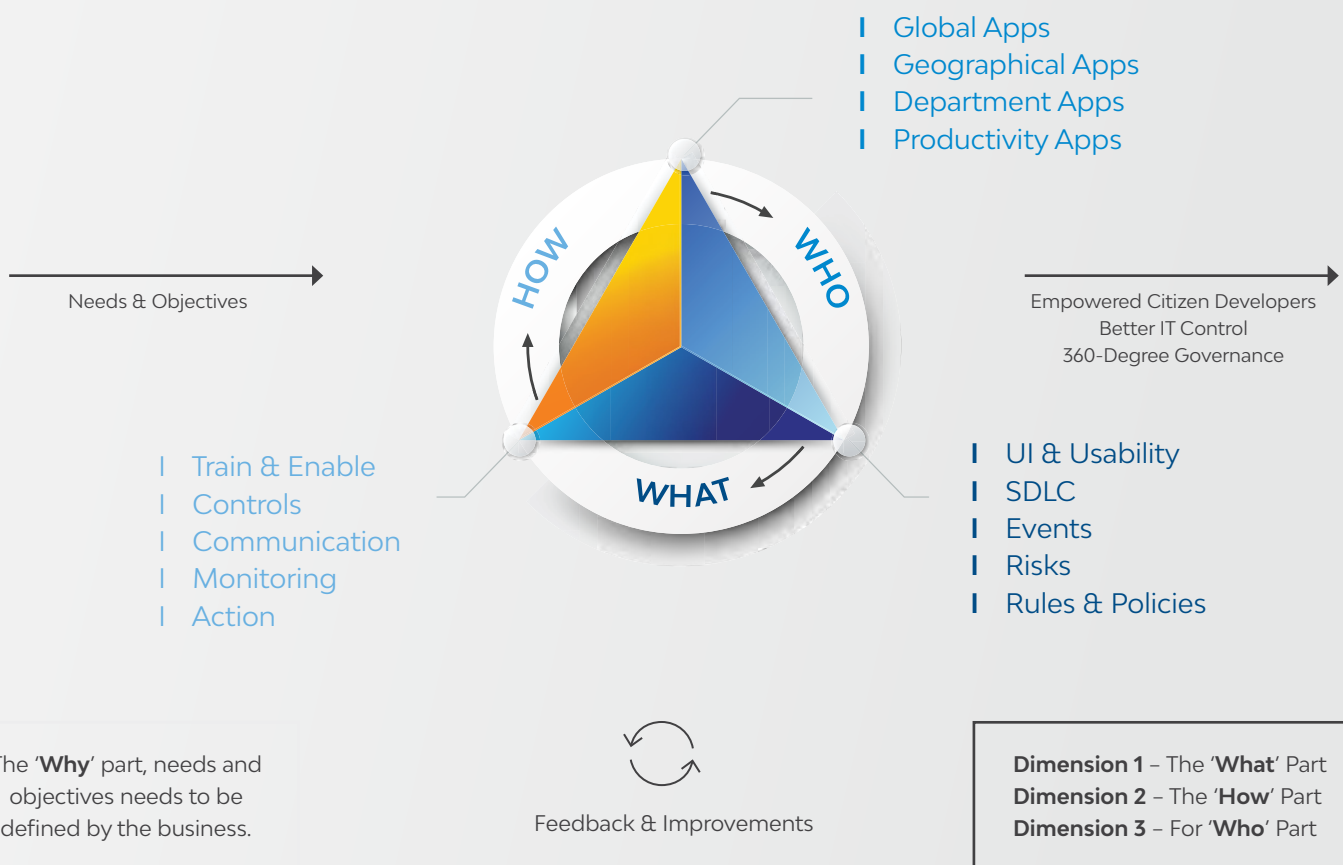Without effective Power Platform Governance, customers will find themselves in a situation where-

- Users are creating new environments without any due diligence (risk GDPR non-compliance and cloud storage space costs).

- Users are connecting and transferring data between business and personal data sources (data security issue).

- Apps violating security policies getting created (risk unauthorized access).

- Apps getting shared widely - or with everyone in organization (risk exposing information to users who do not have access to it otherwise).

- Admins making changes in DLP policies not knowing how many and which apps will be impacted and how to reach those app owners to tell theme of the impact. (App maintenance risks).

- Business users calling in support desks for app issues which the desk does not know about leaving users wondering what to do next (sub-par user experience).

While admins get reports and dashboards on power platform usage within the organization, they serve as an information source. Without proper governance, these issues which will start off small will quickly assume exponential dimensions.

LTIMindtree's Approach to Power Platform Governance

LTIMindtree believes that today's businesses need a wholesome Power Platform governance strategy that balances between security needs Vs. Citizen Developer needs to create a nurturing environment for budding Citizen Developer community.

LTIMindtrees 3D Governance model for Power Platform
Comprehensive Framework for Power Platform Governance

Global Apps
Geographical Apps
Department Apps
Productivity Apps

Needs & Objectives

Empowered Citizen Developers
Better IT Control
360-Degree Governance

- Train & Enable
- Controls
- Communication
- Monitoring
- Action

HOW

WHO

WHAT

- UI & Usability
- SDLC
- Events
- Risks
- Rules & Policies

The '**Why**' part, needs and objectives needs to be defined by the business.

Feedback & Improvements

Dimension 1 – The '**What**' Part
Dimension 2 – The '**How**' Part
Dimension 3 – For '**Who**' Part

LTIMindtree's Power Platform Governance model, is a 3-dimensional model that concentrates on empowering Citizen Developers while enabling better control. At the onset, organizations need to define governance 'Objectives' before starting any implementation. This serves as our guiding principles to implement suitable tools, policies, and processes as per needs.

Dimension 1: The 'What'

This dimension concentrates on various aspects of governance process definition.

■ **Rules & Policies**

Define all the must have rules and policies for governance. For example, only those Citizen Developers, who have undergone training on Power Platform development, should be able to create a new app. Citizen Developers should not share the app with everyone in the organization unless they have prior authorization. Rules and Policies identify major dos and don'ts for Citizen Developers/admins.

From a multi-cloud monitoring perspective, all the parameters that need to be monitored could be documented alongside threshold settings, polling intervals. This will enable to finalize the IT monitoring (infrastructure, applications) tools landscape to be deployed – be it third party solution or cloud native tools. Third party solutions, if already deployed in IT environment, can be considered too. Based on the requirements, desired toolset could be identified and evaluated with Proof of Concept (PoC) initiated.

■ **Risks**

Identify the risks associated with policy violations and/or not taking timely actions on such violations. For example, risk of untrained Citizen Developer sharing application access with others (who otherwise do not have access) via implicit sharing. Risk of flow running in production even after flow creator has left the organization. Risks, identifies the situations we should watch out for.

■ **Events**

Define all the events that we want to track in our governance solution, such as an app getting created or flow getting shared. This is important as we want to check if all the rules are followed for app creation and for flow sharing. Events provide an opportunity to check for Rules, Policies, and Risks.

■ **SDLC**

Define the SDLC for Power Platform- detailed development, testing, and deployment processes are to be followed. Review and certification processes, the process for ongoing maintenance of new app, etc. Citizen Developers needed to be trained in this to avoid any non-compliance.

■ **UI & Usability**

Finally branding, UI look & feel, and usability-related templates/guidelines for Citizen Developers, as well as expert app developers alike to ensure adherence to organizational standards.

Dimension 2: The 'How'

This dimension concentrates on various aspects of governance process implementation.

■ **Train & Enable**

Conducting training courses for Citizen Developers in batches, either classroom or virtual or recorded sessions. Recorded training sessions are particularly useful for large workforce that is geographically spread. The successful training completion enables power platform functionality for trained users.

■ **Controls**

Applications to request/approve access, environment creation, app submission, review checklists, self-assessments of app risks, etc. Controls implement rules and policies. A separate App Catalog can serve as an organizational app store where admins can implement an app publishing workflow, which certifies the app before it Is visible to other users. It is also recommended to provide options for other users to read app info and request access. Access requests needs to be reviewed by admins before granting. This reduces app duplication and acts as quality gate all apps need to pass through. Any apps in environments which are not listed on catalog need to be deleted periodically.

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◼ Communication Plan

Citizen Developers, Platform Admins, Power Platform CoE, IT, and various other departments - there are multiple parties involved, communication is key. This should define all the key communications (automated as well as manual) (information, warning, non-compliance). There should be consistent communication on multiple channels e.g., via email, policy bots, community portals, announcements, weekly sessions or virtual events, etc.

◼ Monitoring

The Power platform admin center provides dashboards. Additionally, environment scanning of Power Platform can be conducted to detect any dubious actions and raise flags. These controls watch out of risks and events.

◼ Actions

Manual or automated actions, if a new environment is created without authorization – then delete the environment with communication to the creator or scheduled actions to review DLP policies for any new connectors added by Microsoft and reclassify correctly.

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Dimension 3: The 'Who'

As the number of apps and users grows, providing support for every app and everyone becomes tedious. This dimension concentrates on app categorization based on parameters such as business criticality, number of users, and complexity, etc.

- **Apps for personal productivity**
- **Apps for a team**
- **Apps for business unit**
- **Apps for a country**
- **Apps for a business function**
- **Apps for a region**
- **Global/enterprise apps**

We can then decide what sort of IT support will be provided for each category. For example for personal productivity apps, IT will play no role (apart from being an enabler and advisory) in the development or support of it. Users will themselves create, use, and maintain these apps. While for business-critical apps, IT can own the development and support. There could be other categories between these extremes with variations in these approaches. Customers need to decide on these categories and level of involvement from IT/CoE in the development and support of it.

Power Platform CoE - An Enabler for Effective Governance

As you can see, there are complexities involved in this process which demands expertise of Power Platform. Power Platform governance needs periodic reviews and update of controls and actions implemented to keep pace with changes introduced by Microsoft. It is recommended that organizations setup a Centre of Excellence (CoE) to manage this on an ongoing basis.

Power Platform Governance Best Practices

Governance Controls

- Set-up a Power Platform CoE to aid with governance.
- Define clear rules for apps to be compliant and a clear communication to owners about why their app is non-compliant and what can be done to achieve compliance.
- Establish a strict environment management strategy.

Rollout

- Start with a smaller controlled group to roll out Power Platform capability – slowly expand to add more users.
- Define different app categories. Define end-to-end process for each category.
- Automated release management.

Security

- Enable cross-tenant isolation. If connection to specific tenants is needed allow that via the AllowList.
- Discourage sharing an app with everyone. Restrict sharing the app to minimum level, share to an AD group instead of individual list of users.
- Restrict environment creation by Citizen Developers – enable this only for Admins. Develop a Request-Approval process for new environment creation.

Monitor

- Monitor new changes and connectors being announced and evaluate any possible impact.
- App usage and categorization. Some apps might need to be recategorized depending on usage trends.

Adoption

- Define app templates for most common requirements.
- Organize sessions like 'Power Platform Hour' every week/month where Citizen Developers/SMEs can connect with pro-developers to discuss about issues and get help, or simply to encourage power community.

LTIMindtree Experience in Power Platform Governance

Power Platform Governance has many moving parts. Most discussions around power platform governance seems to circle around 'CoE Starter Kit' released by Microsoft. While it is a good starting point, it is not an end-to-end governance. Businesses need to be ready with the tools and processes to guide Citizen Developers through this process.

LTIMindtree's 3D Power Platform Governance Model takes a balanced view. IT concentrates on:

- **Citizen Developer enablement.**

- **Creation of multiple channels of communication, so help is always within reach.**

- **Provision of insightful reports for senior management.**

- **Implementation of automated monitoring, actions, app catalog, and admin flows to keep an eye on what is going on and act quickly if necessary.**

With ready tools, templates, and processes, LTIMindtree helps its clients and end-customers implement governance strategy that suits them best, creating a nurturing environment for thriving Citizen Developer capability.

About the Author

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As LTIMindtree's Dynamics 365 + Power Platform practice CoE head, Nilesh helps the clients and end customers realize their Power Platform investments. Nilesh has over two decades of experience in CRM technologies and Power Platform. He had led, designed, and delivered global transformational engagements for large enterprises. His expertise lies in evangelizing the Power Platform, nurturing citizen development culture, and setting up guardrails and processes as a catalyst to create solutions that make business impact.

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