Comparison of Enterprise IT Governance Process Assessments Performed With COBIT 5 and COBIT 4.1
By Diana Santos, CAPM, and Joao Souza Neto, Ph.D., CGEIT, CRISC

Having evaluated both at a Brazilian public sector organization, this article presents a comparison between the maturity level evaluation for the ME4 Provide IT governance process of the COBIT® 4.1 Monitor and Evaluate domain and the process capability assessment for the governance domain of COBIT® 5. This organization has an IT department of 81 people, structured in four main divisions—operations (including help desk and infrastructure), software development, service delivery and information management—with a US $2.5 million annual budget in 2010 (excluding staff payroll). The organization has been implementing IT governance and IT management best practices, such as a formal IT strategic committee and a project management office (PMO), since 2009, with an 85 percent increase in its IT budget in 2011 followed by a 75 percent cut in 2012.

Methods
The maturity level of the ME4 process was evaluated through self-assessment using the maturity model described in COBIT 4.1. Further, the capability assessment for the governance domain of COBIT 5 was performed using the self-assessment approach described in COBIT© Process Assessment Model (PAM): Using COBIT® 4.1, by evaluating process outcomes for capability level 1.

Results
Using the process maturity model provided in COBIT 4.1, the public sector organization achieved maturity level 2 (repeatable but intuitive) for ME4. Nonetheless, on the more detailed vision of COBIT 5 process capability assessment, it was found that 40 percent of the evaluate, direct and monitor (EDM) governance processes were at level 0 (incomplete process), and that processes EDM02 Ensure benefits delivery and EDM03 Ensure risk optimization are the least addressed ones, as shown in figure 1. This is important information for decision makers that was masked in the high-level COBIT 4.1 process assessment.

Thus, there is a significant difference between these assessment models. Although they were both performed as high-level assessments, measuring capability level 1 provided more detailed information since all governance processes outcomes were explicitly gauged.
It is worth noting that the average capability level of the COBIT 5 governance processes should not be considered the global governance domain capability level in order to directly compare it to the single ME4 process. This would create a distortion as PAM was not meant to assess a domain. Instead, a safer comparison would be taking a look at the highest levels achieved using PAM and note that they are all lower than the maturity level of ME4. "In general, scores will be lower with COBIT 5 process capability model…. In the COBIT 4.1 maturity model, a process could achieve a level 1 or 2 without fully achieving all the process’s objectives; in the COBIT 5 process capability level, this will result in a lower score of 0 or 1." This was expected and empirically confirmed.

As of now, there are no publicly available benchmarks for COBIT 5 assessments; however, governance processes in level 0 are a matter of concern as fragilities in IT governance processes reflect negatively in IT performance.

Discussion
The assessments made are based on facts that were reported exclusively by IT managers, which constitute a limitation of this work as the participation of business managers would be important to ascertain the delivery of the desired outcomes. Therefore, it is possible that the IT respondents skewed toward the higher end of the scale and reported on what they wanted to or what they expected to achieve soon, as opposed to what they had actually achieved. In this scenario, governance processes at the assessed organization reached an alarmingly low level. To ascertain the validity of this hypothesis, an increase in the rigor of the assessment and the inclusion of the process practices and the work products would be necessary.

The main benefit perceived in the COBIT 5 process capability assessment was the detailed analysis of the process being evaluated, assessing whether the process achieves its goals and produces the required outcomes. Using the maturity model provided in COBIT 4.1 makes it relatively easy and fast to perform a process assessment, but it will be based on a broad consensus rather than measurable and repeatable components. COBIT 5, on the other hand, provides a process capability approach, with generic process capability attributes that use the information for the work products, base practices and process outcomes as performance indicators for capability level 1. This assessment process takes more time to carry out, and may result in a higher assessment cost, but it is more precise.

Expertise in the organization’s processes under scrutiny is required for both assessment approaches, but ISO-based methodology expertise is an additional requirement for a COBIT PAM assessment. Managers were briefed on the COBIT 5: Enabling Processes publication during the questionnaire application as part of the assessment process. If the respondents are beginners on the IT governance and management subject and they are not familiar with COBIT 4.1, it would not be recommended to do such a briefing during the session, because it will demand a longer explanation time. Nevertheless, it worked just fine with skilled participants.

Conclusion
Processes are one of the seven governance and management enablers proposed in COBIT 5, and the scope of this article considered only one process from COBIT 4.1. Therefore, this type of evaluation, which is focused only on governance processes and is a limited sample, does not provide enough information to make definitive conclusions about the governance of this organization.

Nonetheless, results using the COBIT 5 PAM showed two governance processes in level 0—very useful information that the COBIT 4 model did not provide. The COBIT 4 model provides a quick scan that is not fully accurate and the COBIT 5 PAM takes more time but provides a much more precise and fact-based view of the process.

The COBIT 5 process capability assessment of the governance processes of other Brazilian federal government agencies related to the judiciary is a matter for future research.

Diana Santos, CAPM
Is chief of the information systems division at a Brazilian federal government agency related to the judiciary, and she has collaborated on IT governance and the implementation of COBIT processes. She is a member of the ISACA Brasilia (Brazil) Chapter.

Joao Souza Neto, Ph.D., CGEIT, CRISC
Has more than eight years of experience in IT governance, applying COBIT within Brazil Post. He is also responsible for the IT governance research area in the Universidade Catolica de Brasilia. He is founder and educational director of the ISACA Brasilia (Brazil) Chapter.
Endnotes

1 The COBIT® Process Assessment Model (PAM): Using COBIT® 5 is in development and expected to be available in first quarter 2013.
2 ISACA, COBIT 5, USA, 2012, p. 43-44