DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

Formidable Information and Technology Management Challenge Requires Institutional Approach

Why GAO Did This Study

In 2003 GAO designated the merger of 22 separate federal entities into the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) as a high risk area because of the criticality of the department's mission and the enormous transformation challenges that the department faced. Given that the effective use of information technology (IT) is a critical enabler of this merger, GAO has previously reported on a number of DHS efforts aimed at institutionalizing an effective information and technology governance structure and investing in new IT systems that are intended to better support mission operations.

Now that DHS has been operating for over a year, GAO was asked to, based largely on its prior work, describe DHS's progress in meeting its information and technology management challenge.

What GAO Recommends

To strengthen DHS's IT strategic planning, GAO recommends that the department establish IT goals, performance measures, and milestones, and analyze whether its IT staffing adequately supports those goals. In commenting on a draft of this report, DHS generally concurred with GAO's recommendations.

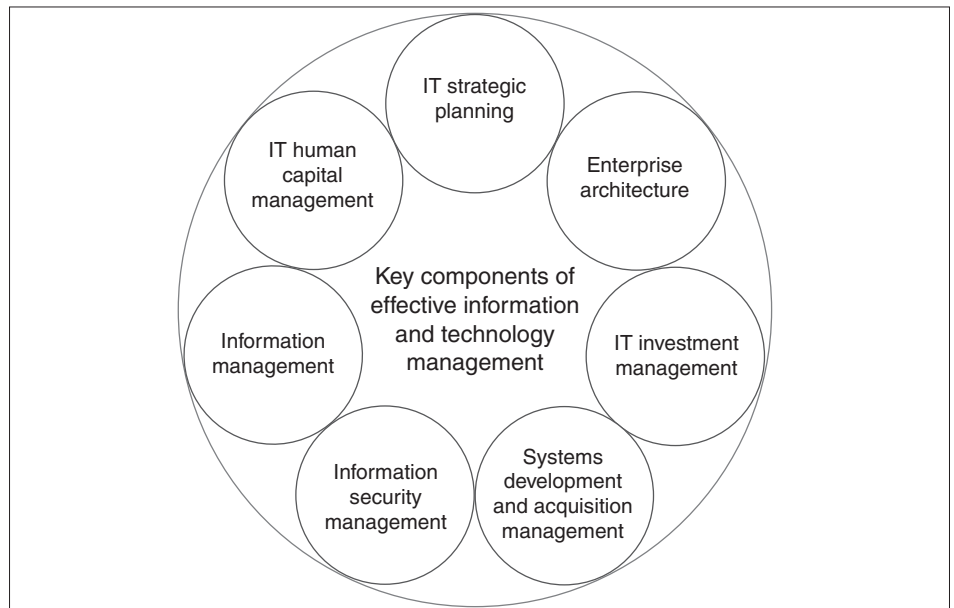www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-702. .

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Randolph C. Hite at (202) 512-3439 or hiter@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

DHS's overall IT challenge is to standardize and integrate the legacy system environments and management approaches that it inherited from its predecessor agencies, while concurrently attempting to ensure that present levels of IT support for critical homeland security operations are not only maintained but improved in the near term. To accomplish this, the department is in the process of instituting seven information and technology management disciplines that are key elements of an effective information and technology management structure (see chart).

DHS's progress in institutionalizing these key information and technology management elements has been mixed, and overall remains a work in progress. Such progress is not unexpected, given the diversity of the inherited agencies and the size and complexity of the department's mission operations. Nevertheless, because DHS has not yet fully institutionalized these governance elements, its pursuit of new and enhanced IT investments are at risk of not optimally supporting corporate mission needs and not meeting cost, schedule, capability, and benefit commitments. Accordingly, GAO has previously made recommendations relative to most of these areas to the department's chief information officer and other responsible DHS entities. Lastly, DHS has developed a draft IT strategic plan, which GAO finds lacking in explicit goals, performance measures, milestones, and knowledge of whether it has properly positioned IT staff with the right skills to accomplish these things.

Key Elements of Effective Information and Technology Management Structure

Source: GAO.

United States Government Accountability Office