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Document Authors:	DT4EU Carlos Pinzon Robrecht Renard George O'Neill
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Commission Project Managers (CPM) (European Commission):	Georges LOBO and Victoria KALOGIROU
External Contractor Project Manager (ECPM)	Patrick WAUTERS
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Project and document background

On 23 March 2017, the European Commission (EC) adopted the revised European Interoperability Framework (EIF), containing 47 recommendations aimed at helping Member States achieve interoperability together with an Interoperability Action Plan (IAP).

The EIF conceptual model defines a number of key concepts including Interoperability Governance, Organisational Interoperability and Integrated Public Service Governance, each one with specific recommendations for their implementation, available in the action plan. These concepts are at the core of the ISA² action: EIF Implementation and Governance Models, and activities to further develop them and provide guidance on them are foreseen under Actions 2 and 6 of the [Interoperability Action Plan](#)¹:

- **Action 2:** Identify and describe governance structures and good practices for interoperability coordination
- **Action 6:** Clarify and propose ways to formalise public administrations' organisational relationships as part of the establishment of European public services. Identify and develop common process models to describe business processes. Identify best practices

In line with this action, the European Commission is currently carrying out a study to identify and describe governance structures, organisational interoperability models and good practices for interoperability coordination for public administrations. As part of the activities included in this study, the European Commission will host two workshops: one to collect data to support the development of the study, and the second to validate the findings. This document contains the outcome of the discussion sessions of the first workshop.

1.2. Objectives of the Workshop

On 14 March, the European Commission organised a workshop on Organisational Interoperability and Public Service Governance. 41 participants took part in the discussions. This report provides an overview of the discussions and findings of the workshop.

The overall objectives of the workshop were to gather information and exchange challenges and good practices in relation to the implementation of three concepts defined in the European Interoperability Framework: Interoperability Governance, Integrated Public Service Governance, and Organisational Interoperability. The concept of Interoperability Governance having been thoroughly analysed in previous phases, was not treated with the same depth as the other two concepts. The focus was instead mainly placed on the Integrated Public Service governance and Organisational Interoperability concepts.

The workshop aimed to help administrations make use of these concepts in order to support the interoperability of their public services and, ultimately, improve their integrated public service provision.

¹ The EIF is accompanied by the Interoperability Action Plan (IAP), which outlines priorities that should support the implementation of the EIF from 2016 to 2020. The IAP is comprised of five focus areas, addressing issues related to the identification of mechanisms to govern interoperability, collaboration between organisations, engagement of stakeholders, and raising awareness of the benefits of interoperability. It also covers the development, improvement and promotion of key interoperability enablers, while considering the needs and priorities of end users.

1.3. Workshop approach

The workshop was divided into a number of sessions as listed below, with 2 of these sessions incorporating a break out session:

1. The key concepts of Interoperability Governance, Integrated Public Service Governance, and Organisational Interoperability;
2. Findings from previous studies regarding Interoperability Governance;
3. Organisational Interoperability, which included a break-out session;
4. Integrated Public Service Governance, which included a break-out session; and
5. Conclusions of the workshop.

The workshop began with a presentation of three of the key concepts of the EIF: Interoperability Governance, Integrated Public Service Governance, and Organisational Interoperability. During the presentation, the roles played by each concept was described and furthermore, the relationship between concepts was explained. The EIF recommendations related to these concepts, and materialised in the Interoperability Action Plan, were explained in detail. The findings from previous studies regarding Interoperability Governance were described and shortly discussed.

For the concepts of Organisational Interoperability and Integrated Public Service Governance, a presentation based on the findings and results of previous studies was also provided. Once the presentation was concluded, breakout sessions were held. The breakout sessions consisted in splitting the plenary in three groups allowing them to have discussions on prepared questions. Each group was moderated by one of three interoperability experts – Prof. Efthimos Tambouris, Prof. Maria Wimmer, and Prof. Herbert Kubicek - and a member of the organisational team. At the end of the day, the designated rapporteur from each group reported on their break-out discussions during the plenary session.

The section below provide the main findings of the workshop regarding organisational interoperability and integrated public service governance and a detailed summary of the items discussed during these two breakout sessions.

2. OVERVIEW OF THE DISCUSSIONS

2.1. Main Workshop Findings

The workshop allowed for an interesting confrontation between theoretical academic concepts and practitioners with extensive practical experience from different regions and Member States. A general emphasis was placed by workshop participants across both concepts discussed – integrated public service governance and organisational interoperability - on the motivation and goals behind any interoperability or integrated public service project. In relation to organisational interoperability, shared goals are an important determinant of aligned business processes. Meanwhile for integrated public service governance, a common vision is required in order to motivate the integration project. The main reflections from the workshop on these two key concepts are presented below.

2.1.1. Organisational Interoperability

A repeated emphasis during the discussions on organisational interoperability was on “**why**” the **integrated public service project is being implemented**. Without a common vision on this, it will not be possible to align processes and activities. This is particularly important when trying to align across

completely different organisations or administrations – where there can be cultural differences and a lack of trust which are challenging to overcome.

Workshop participants considered that there were also considerable challenges associated with building a common understanding of a project *within* an administration as well – and building a vision and goals across different levels. Organisational interoperability was described as providing **a bridge between legal and technical layers**. Here, part of the challenge is also to use the right tools in order to build an understanding across management/legal and technical levels. One interesting initiative discussed in this regard was the use of a “digitisation mediator” in Flanders – to help align different levels of government.

There are a **range of business modelling techniques** that can facilitate communication and provide a common language on a particular process. However they tend to be extremely technical, and in order to expand the conversation to non-technical audiences, other simpler models should be considered as well – **the tool should be selected for the audience**. It should be remembered also that the common language enabled by business process models is a tool, it is not itself the solution.

One final recommendation coming out of the discussions on organisational interoperability was also that discussions should **focus on capabilities and not on specifications** – this can help to build a more open conversation and overcome differences.

2.1.2. Integrated Public Service Governance

For integrated public service governance, as with organisational interoperability, workshop participants talked about the importance of common targets and goals to facilitate integration projects. With such common goals in place, participants discussed the use of service level agreements to formalise relationships. The example was provided of the [Electronic Exchange of Social Security Information](#) (EESSI) system, for which negotiations over these agreements started with legal terms of collaboration – and then moved to the operational level with the service level agreements.

Workshop participants also discussed the barriers and the facilitators of integrated public service governance. It was considered that clear leadership or hierarchy was a major enabling factor. When an integration project is being conducted by a network of peers (e.g. between Member States) on the other hand, it becomes difficult to know who to look towards. Another enabling factor is a high level of regulation, as this provides a common framework. The importance of the reuse of certain common tools and building blocks was another point of discussion. It was recommended that this be facilitated through registries providing a clear list of what tools are available.

Finally, the question of skills was addressed. Absence of skills can also lead to an absence of interest and a desire to remain in a comfort area. In such situations extra effort is needed to convince people to take an interest in integration projects. This should be facilitated by the use of layman’s terms.

2.2. Detailed Summary of Break-out Sessions

2.2.1. Organisational Interoperability

2.2.1.1. Key decisions to achieve Organisational Interoperability

An important facilitator of organisational interoperability is keeping track of stakeholders, identifying and involving them, and understanding their relationships and respective responsibilities. One segment of the stakeholders is the end users, who should be the main point of focus. The aim is to make the service available to them and not just to the government.

Successful Organisational Interoperability needs a political direction with the mind-set of achieving better services and creating a clear view on the process of delegating tasks. To achieve this, there must be a willingness for trusted cooperation between the political sponsor and the departments that deliver the services and share information. Interoperability is only a tool for designing better services.

To reach the goal of better services and to create a clear view on the process of delegating tasks, it is also necessary to establish a clear hierarchy, as well as a strong coordination between the political direction and the participating department. The coordination aspects require both formal and informal agreements to be successful; to guarantee an independent implementation of those agreements, any coordinating tasks should not be handled at the political level. In certain circumstances, it can be preferable to first reach an agreement at an informal level and then allow access to commonly developed frameworks to a broader audience of interested parties in addition to the collaborating departments.

Organisational Interoperability can also be understood as a bridge between the legal and the technical levels of EIF.

Example:

- The Flemish digital agency ([Informatie Vlaanderen](#)) is currently working on formalising the role of a Digitisation Mediator between different levels of government. This role began as an informal one, through discussions with interested parties on what is needed, how, etc. As this role has proven to be useful, the agency is now looking to make it official through political support so the roles and responsibilities can be further built on. The digitisation mediator would be responsible for data standards, providing common tools for all, etc.

By building this role up via informal discussions and agreements, the agency has been able to foster interest and ownership amongst the different relevant parties, without making them feel obliged. This has facilitated the development and success of this role.

2.2.2. Factors to take into account when implementing Organisational Interoperability and how they differ across service domains²

The approach towards Organisational Interoperability differs between domains and can depend on a variety of factors such as the volume of cases handled and the number of actors involved.

Participants found that differentiation across domains can actually be positive as it ensures that the service maintains its autonomy. They are thus able to work effectively and efficiently in response to

² A service domain is a set of public services related to a specific sector such as health, transportation etc. A service domain has its own functions and processes and often abides to domain-specific, regulations.

their unique characteristics. Some domains, for example, are highly regulated while others are much less or not at all – this will lead to differences in the way organisations interact.

Where it is necessary to overcome differences between domains, it is recommended to focus on capabilities instead of specifications.

2.2.3. Main struggles in relation to the concept of Organisational Interoperability

A number of obstacles to Organisation Interoperability were discussed in the break-out sessions. When considering common European projects and services, there are considerable challenges in aligning processes across Member States. These need to be overcome through mutual negotiations at European level, as is being done for the single digital gateway³. Cultural differences and lack of trust between organisations provide one barrier to interoperability. Meanwhile other barriers include power struggles between organisations and other more mundane issues such as time management and agendas. In order to overcome differences and establish trust, open approaches should be encouraged.

When considering the mind-set and skill-set of people in these the organisations, it becomes apparent that “siloed” thinking can provide another impediment. Some projects struggle to get started due to a lack of interest from stakeholders. It helps to have at least one strongly involved stakeholder to keep the drive in the project. Identifying such a stakeholder in practice can be difficult however.

2.2.4. Instruments used to formalise organisational relationships

Organizations use business process and architecture methods (concepts, notation languages), such as BPMN⁴, SIPOC⁵, EIRA⁶, etc. to formalise their implementations. To use the diagrams and models proposed by those methods, an administration must have specific resources (skills) and a certain digital maturity. These methods can be too complex for non-technical people. Consequently, the use of simpler, or less IT related diagrams and models should be recommended, as well as their adaptation to the targeted audience.

Some projects use Service Level Agreements (SLA) to formalise their relationships. This can start with legal terms of collaboration (as was done for the EESSI⁷). Organisations find it is easier to implement SLAs within administrations but harder between regions or between different political levels and

³ https://ec.europa.eu/growth/single-market/single-digital-gateway_en

⁴ BPMN (Business Process Model and Notation) is a graphical representation for specifying business processes in a business process model. More information at <https://www.omg.org/spec/BPMN/>

⁵ SIPOC (Suppliers, Inputs, Process, Outputs, and Customers) is a tool that summarizes the inputs and outputs of one or more processes in table form. The term SIPOC originates from the 1980s and is part of the total quality movement

⁶ EIRA (European Interoperability Reference Architecture) is an architecture content meta-model defining the most salient architectural building blocks (ABBs) needed to build interoperable e-Government systems. More information at <https://joinup.ec.europa.eu/collection/european-interoperability-reference-architecture-eira>

⁷ EESSI (Electronic Exchange of Social Security Information) is an IT system that helps social security institutions across the EU exchange information more rapidly and securely, as required by the EU rules on social security coordination. More information at <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=869>

hierarchy. Service level agreements can be defined as either bilateral or multilateral agreements. When possible, multilateral agreements are preferable.

The use of user guides and specific case studies by digitalisation projects can provide clarity and examples, and help people to better understand organisational interoperability.

Examples:

- In the [Ministry of Justice in the Netherlands](#), when developing common agreements, they identify priorities that are translated into immediate actions and create focus groups to develop business processes based on existing SLAs.
- The implementation of certain pieces of legislation can also help formalise organisational relationships. For instance, in Spain the introduction of legislation that prohibited different services to photocopy citizens' documents, pushed the different administrations to collaborate more to get the required data from each other. Although it took some time for the administrations to adapt to the new procedures and learn the benefits of an enhanced collaboration, this effort to facilitate administrative procedures for citizens translated into an improvement in service efficiency and organisational interoperability.

2.3. Integrated Public Service Governance

2.3.1. Relationship between Interoperability Governance and Integrated Public Service Governance

Participants understood interoperability governance as being a part of integrated public service governance. It is needed across the different service domains in order to provide integrated public services and enable their governance. However, definitions in practice may vary from one organisation (or Member State) to another and not be entirely aligned with the EIF.

2.3.2. Issues and decisions related to Integrated Public Service Governance

There were differing views from workshop participants on the extent to which the issues and decisions faced through integrated public service governance differ across domain. On the one hand, it was noted that there can be very different privacy requirements for different types of services. This can lead to differences in the levels of integration with other services that is possible. On the other hand, it was noted that most digital solutions can be used across different domains – there is a level of reusability for all digital solutions.

Digitalisation itself was also identified as a driver of increased collaboration across different departments. Other drivers of integrated public services can include political dictates and will from above, or a particular strong business need.

During the discussion on integrated public service governance, two approaches towards the implementation of a governance framework were described. In the first approach, the implementation projects (or initiatives) are created, then an organisation is identified to govern it. In the second approach, the projects are created inside a framework that already has a governing body. This body then ensures the project is built in an interoperable manner from the outset.

2.3.3. Case studies for Integrated Public Service Governance.

During this section of the break-out session, participants were asked to reflect on particular integrated public services that they were familiar with and how decisions were made across the different layers of the EIF in relation to them. Participants were asked to not only consider successful examples, but also those that experienced set-backs or failure. Participants also reflected on overall governance structures in their countries:

- **Single digital gateway:** This ongoing project has several configurations of working groups, some agreeing on standards and semantics, and other groups agreeing on processes. Organisational decisions on who does what and when are laid out clearly through work programmes. Examples of the types of decisions made by the working groups also includes the categories of data to collect and requirements to identify where the necessary information is located. In the future, a committee will be appointed to make decisions on the legal level.
- **EESI:** The system has a technical commission in which decisions related to the different layers of the EIF (technical, semantic, etc.) are discussed. The discussion on these different layers are then brought together. The technical commission also decides on the standards to be implemented and used.
- **Use of building blocks:** The use of particular digital building blocks as part of a digital public service is not made mandatory by most countries (Denmark provides one exception), and their use is not monitored at national level. It was suggested that the maturity of the building blocks provided at national level is one aspect that could be monitored in order to measure the administration's capacity to support the delivery of integrated public services.
- **Finland:** The Member State participant noticed that the maturity level of interoperability was fundamental for implementing projects. Maturity and demand are more important than the number of related ministries for example, to make an interoperability project work.
- **Greece:** The country has one overarching ministry for digital planning, to which all other ministries should respond, and most ministries have a small part that also deals with eGovernance. This role for the individual ministries is maintained as they are experts in their domain, and can collaborate with the central ministry of digital planning.
- **Germany:** It was observed that having too many related ministries (1 federal ministry and 16 Lander ministries) is counterproductive for decision making and implementation. This aspect worsens when two areas have to agree on something, as a total of 34 ministers have to agree.

2.3.4. Main struggles on implementing Integrated Public Service Governance

Several aspects, such as the level of openness of a service and the heterogeneous structure of records, impact the integration of public services. Those aspects, may lead to additional requirements and constraints. To cope with those difficulties, willingness for cooperation between departments is key. Establishing mechanisms to foster connections and relationships between members of the participant departments, as well as the continuous monitoring of the integration activities, could help.

Likewise, integration between services of various sectors (e.g. transport and environment) or belonging to different hierarchical levels, may prove difficult. The way to cope with this challenge is to have common targets and goals. If there is an existing relationship and communication channel, this connection should be taken advantage of to realise the first steps. Following this, exchanges can move higher (hierarchical levels) and broader (inter-department) to facilitate the integration process.

Moreover, paying too much attention to standardisation in the integrated public service governance process, may lead to projects not progressing properly as not all the participating departments are able to comply with all the required standards from the beginning of the process. To avoid those issues, the development should be driven by principles, which provide a general framework and allow a dialog between participants.

Another obstacle is linked to having strong leadership, either formal (through clear hierarchy, e.g. the Prime Minister) or informal (people with a “leader” character), who can push for integration. Identifying a leader is sometimes difficult when there is no hierarchy, such as when several Member States work together.

The lack of generalised service catalogues or registries to keep an overview of existing services, tools, etc. is another common issue. Currently, there is no clear view on what exists. It would also be useful to have a clear view of guidelines and best practices too. The Commission could play a role in helping to find and disseminate these.

A final problem commented on for integrated public service projects was that some solutions work well for one specific domain, but not for others. For example, base registries seem to work well for companies, while it appears that they are not so useful for municipalities. This is something to be taken into account when looking for solutions.

3. CONCLUSIONS

Through in-depth discussions with experts and stakeholders with direct experience working on integrated digital public service projects, the workshop was able to both provide input on both theoretical and practical aspects of achieving organisational interoperability and good integrated public service governance. On the theoretical side, participants pointed towards the close connection between these concepts and strong political leadership and vision. Meanwhile, on the practical side, concrete examples were provided in which these concepts were put into action – for example through the “digitisation mediator” in Flanders, and the mandatory use of digital building blocks described in Finland.

Some initial indications of potential case studies were provided for the study during the course of the day. However, these will need to be developed in considerably greater detail than was possible during the workshop. Future work during the study will focus on further describing and analysing such examples – elaborating much further in order to understand fully the challenges the identified practices are intended to overcome, their level of success, and the extent to which they could be replicated in other Member States and other scenarios.

The next steps towards implementing this will be a [survey](#) to gather further information on good practices related to integrated public service governance and organisational interoperability. The survey will be open between 29 March and 10 May 2019. In Autumn 2019, another workshop will be organised in order to discuss the findings of the project, once the case studies mentioned above have been fully developed.