INTEGRATED SERVICES

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In the public sector context, integrated services refers to the result of bringing together – and fitting together – government services so that citizens can access them in a single seamless experience based on their wants and needs. The subject of integrated services is increasingly discussed under the heading of integrated service delivery (ISD). The concept and practice of ISD have evolved from the earlier notions of one-stop shopping and single window service delivery; both of these terms are still in frequent use.

Initiatives to integrate government services are being taken in countries around the world – from Canada to Kazakhstan. Citizen satisfaction surveys in several countries have shown that citizens want citizen-centred service. They want to access government services quickly, conveniently and seamlessly regardless of the level of government responsible for delivering the services. They also want to receive their services through the delivery channel of their choice, e.g., via the telephone, in-person service or online. Citizens are pressing public organizations to provide services at a level equal to, or better than, what the private sector provides.

Governments' use of ISD dates back a long way (e.g., Government Agents Offices in Canada's province of British Columbia originated in the 1880s). Most ISD arrangements, however, date from the late 1980s. The striking variety of arrangements that have emerged range in complexity all the way from one government department collaborating with another department to provide a single service, to several departments in one government joining up with departments in another government and with private and third sector organizations to deliver several services.

In terms of their purposes, ISD initiatives can be classified into:

- Information gateways that provide access to government information and referral services (e.g. on consumer protection) through such channels as telephone call centres, government service centres and Internet sites.
- One-stop service department stores (e.g., Australia's Centrelink) by which citizens can conveniently access both related and unrelated government services, usually through each of the main delivery channels.
- Seamless service boutiques that provide easy access through one or more channels to a related cluster of services (e.g., advice to business) or services for a particular client group (e.g., youth).

ISD arrangements can also be classified in terms of their structure:

- *Owner-delivered* refers to service delivery by a department or a government.
- Owner-delivered in a co-located environment involves delivery by departments or governments that share space at a particular location.
- Shared delivery through integration refers to delivery by a partnership that integrates the services of more than one department or government.
- A service utility is an organization that delivers services *on behalf of* government organizations but delivers no services, or very few services, of its own.
- An ISD department takes the form of a department or agency focused on improving service delivery, with a division concerned with promoting ISD.

ISD initiatives based on the department store model are especially popular in Australia and Canada where they have been adopted not only by the federal government (Centrelink and Service Canada) but also by virtually every state/provincial government (e.g., Smart Service Queensland and Access Nova Scotia).

Most ISD initiatives involve a partnership of some kind and these partnerships can involve coordination and/or collaboration across departmental, jurisdictional and sector boundaries. Experience has shown that, in general, inter-departmental ISD is easier to achieve than the inter-jurisdictional and inter-sector varieties. It is now widely envisaged that in the future, government services will be delivered increasingly through the collaboration of governments with business and not-for-profit organizations.

Many governments have integrated their services by "bundling" them on their website according to "life events" such as having a baby or getting married (e.g., Denmark's citizens' portal). A few governments (e.g., the United Kingdom with its Tell Us Once project) are enabling citizens to engage in one-time data provision whereby they only have to tell government once about such changes in such life circumstances as births, deaths or a change of address, and that information is then shared among the relevant departments. Governments are also making considerable use of Web 2.0 technologies such as Facebook, Twitter and wikis to integrate services by connecting governments with their partners and with citizens.

Integrated *channel* delivery is a vital component of ISD in that it involves joining up channels to improve service. Citizens often use more than one delivery channel (e.g., telephone and Internet) for a single transaction with government. Thus, it is important to coordinate service delivery across delivery channels. It is also important to rationalize the use of delivery channels by providing services through the most cost-efficient one. The Internet channel is the information backbone for use of the in-person and telephone channels, and it has become the preferred channel for many citizens. Since use of the Internet channel is much more cost-efficient than other channels, governments want citizens to migrate to that channel and to such other self-service channels as kiosks and interactive voice response. At the same time, there is considerable pressure to maintain the traditional telephone and in-person channels so that citizens can use the channel of their choice to access the services they need, regardless of their social, demographic, geographical, or technological circumstances.

There is a broad range of political, legal, structural, managerial, operational, and cultural barriers to service integration. However, governments have been vigorous and innovative in overcoming many of these barriers and thereby fostering integrated, citizen-centred, inter-jurisdictional, and multi-channel service.

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