

What do we mean by administrative duplication?

A working definition for examining repeated administrative effort

Independent, non-governmental research initiative.

Summary

Administrative duplication is not simply two organisations doing something similar. Repetition can be justified by independent checking, appeal, separation of powers, specialist expertise, privacy, due process or resilience. The useful question is whether the repetition creates additional public value proportionate to the burden it imposes.

Working definition

Administrative duplication is the unnecessary repetition of information, verification, procedure or administrative effort within or between institutions where that repetition produces little or no corresponding public value.

Four familiar forms

Information duplication occurs when substantially the same information is requested again. Verification duplication occurs when the same fact or document is independently checked more than once. Procedural duplication occurs when similar procedural steps recur without a distinct purpose. Institutional duplication occurs where separate structures perform substantially overlapping administrative functions.

The overlooked form: citizen-mediated duplication

Administrative effort may also be duplicated because the citizen becomes the interface between institutions: obtaining a document from one body, reformatting or explaining it, and supplying it to another. The administrative burden has not disappeared. It has changed hands.

Institutional efficiency and system efficiency

An individual organisation can reduce its own workload by asking the citizen to obtain evidence elsewhere. That may improve institutional efficiency while increasing the total work required by the system. Moving work is not the same as removing work.

The value test

Four questions help distinguish justified repetition from potential duplication: What is repeated? Why is it repeated? What additional public value does the second action create? Who bears the cost?

The journey test

The citizen's journey should record repeated information and proof, time spent identifying the responsible organisation, contacts with other bodies, documents obtained and transported, repeated explanations, translation between formats and returns to an earlier stage.

Digitalisation is not necessarily simplification

A paper process can become a digital process without becoming a simpler process. If the same information is repeatedly requested through several portals, the method has changed but the duplication remains.

Conclusion

The aim is not to eliminate repetition. It is to make repetition explain itself. Where a repeated administrative action adds distinct public value, the case for retaining it may be strong. Where it does not, simplification becomes a reasonable question.

Irish Office for Administrative Simplification

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This paper is intended to clarify problems and develop questions for further research rather than prescribe institutional arrangements.