

Measuring coordination without measuring activity

An exploratory method for examining what happens at institutional boundaries

Independent, non-governmental research initiative.

Abstract

Coordination is often described through visible activity: meetings, committees, strategies, agreements and systems. Those activities may be necessary, but they do not by themselves demonstrate that coordination has improved the citizen's journey. If we want to measure coordination, we should measure what happens at the join.

The meeting problem

Coordination activity is easy to count because institutions generate records of it. The danger is that activity becomes a proxy for outcome. A process may contain extensive coordination machinery while still requiring the citizen to bridge the boundary between organisations.

Five exploratory dimensions

The proposed framework examines R - Repetition; H - citizen-managed Hand-offs; A - responsibility Ambiguity; I - Information discontinuity; and M - citizen Mediation. These dimensions are not yet intended to be added into a single score.

Count first, weight later

A useful early method is to record the number and character of boundary events before deciding whether they should be weighted. Time, effort and consequence can be recorded alongside R, H, A, I and M. The purpose of an index is not to produce a number. It is to reveal something useful.

Citizen Coordination Load

Citizen Coordination Load is the additional time, effort and responsibility imposed upon a person principally because they must compensate for boundaries between institutions during an administrative journey.

Participation and mediation

Citizen participation is not the same as citizen mediation. Choices, consent, declarations and genuinely new information may properly require citizen action. Mediation is the work caused principally by institutional separation: carrying information, translating requirements, identifying the next organisation or restoring movement after a failed hand-off.

The Messenger Test

Remove the citizen as messenger. Does the administrative message still arrive and does the process continue? If not, the system may be relying on citizen mediation as part of its coordination architecture.

Administrative Orphan Points

A proposed related concept is the Administrative Orphan Point: a point in an administrative journey at which responsibility for progressing a matter is not operationally held by any institution during a transition between organisations, leaving the citizen principally responsible for restoring movement. A case can have a formal owner without having an operational owner. The diagnostic question is: Who owns the next move?

Good coordination

Good coordination does not require institutional boundaries to disappear. It means the transfer is clear, the receiving organisation knows what it is receiving, information follows lawfully where appropriate, the citizen knows who currently owns the matter, and a failed hand-off can be detected without depending entirely on the citizen.

Conclusion

The purpose of coordination is not to demonstrate that institutions are talking to one another. It is to reduce the consequences of their separateness where that separateness serves no useful purpose.

The ultimate test of coordination is not whether institutions can demonstrate that they have been talking to one another. It is whether the citizen still has to do the talking for them.

Irish Office for Administrative Simplification

Independent, non-governmental research initiative.

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