

An overly ICT and customer-centric focused project can hide the true complexity of government efforts to improve programs and services (Guijarro 2007, p. 92).

Government attempts to address these problems can be both risky and expensive. **Risky**, since government agencies tend to resist efforts to change the way they operate and because failures of such change efforts can jeopardize existing government operations and services. These changes in government are also **expensive**; not only in financial terms, but also in terms of opportunity cost. Changing the way government and government organizations operate—and inter-operate—requires developing and implementing new policy and management practices, all of which must be negotiated with and coordinated across multiple organizations. Consequently, deciding how to become more interoperable is among one of the most complex decisions that governments are expected to make. More importantly, the consequences of such decisions will have a direct impact on the public (Dawes et al 2005, p. 12). The combination of this high risk and cost is why governments are finding it so difficult to launch sustainable and ultimately successful, efforts to improve government interoperability, even when they know it is the right thing to do.

A number of tools, techniques, and models are available to help organizations determine the likelihood of success when planning risky and expensive initiatives. Over time, research efforts and practice-based experiences have provided the foundation for these resources. However, improving interoperability is a relatively new area, in general, for most types of organizations, and more so for governments. Some of the existing tools and techniques can be used in this context as they relate generally to good ICT project management, others have more relevance to building the policy, management, and technology capabilities needed for government interoperability. Two tools in particular, developed by the Center for Technology in Government provide a foundation for this discussion. Core ideas from both provide a foundation for the government interoperability improvement framework presented below.

Making Smart IT Choices: Understanding Value and Risk in Government IT Investments. This toolkit guides government agencies and their partners through the process of up front business case development. This toolkit has been applied in the context of government interoperability initiatives and can be used to guide the selection, control, and evaluation of such initiatives. The tools, techniques, and models presented in **Smart IT** are designed to provide government leaders and other appropriate decision makers with the necessary knowledge and resources to then select from among investment options and control and evaluate selected initiatives. The core principles of **Smart IT** provide the business case foundation for a set of capability dimensions for improving government interoperability.

Why Assess Information Sharing Capability? A network form of government's ability to share information among its organizational partners is at the core of interoperability. This toolkit provides a comprehensive and systematic process for determining the policy, management, and technology capabilities required to share information across a network of organizations. The ability of governments to generate comprehensive information about both existing and missing capabilities among the network of organizations involved in trying to achieve a specific goal is another critical step in the process of making smart investment choices and improving government interoperability (Cresswell et al 2007).

As further foundation for development of the framework, the next section provides a discussion of existing interoperability maturity models before introducing the framework itself.
