

One of the key challenges governments face in improving interoperability is the need to identify and address existing bureaucratic, political, and hierarchical structures and policies that make cross-boundary decision making about priorities, resources, and systems difficult. Regardless of this difficulty, whole scale replacement of these traditional bureaucratic and vertical governance structures with new cross-boundary, horizontal governance structures is neither a feasible nor desirable approach. Division of labor and specialization—inherent in bureaucratic and hierarchical structures—are intentional features of modern governments and exist for good reasons (Page 2005, Christensen and Lægveid 2007). In addition, the political risk as well as the financial cost of attempting to push through such drastic changes limits them to political rhetoric and idealistic calls for reform. Hierarchy and authority cannot and will not be replaced (Kettl 2002). Therefore, it must be understood and worked with when improving government interoperability.

Efforts to improve government operations and services to citizens through cross-boundary collaborative efforts have shown that traditional government structures do not disappear. Rather, “they are penetrated by both formal and informal information sharing and work relationships that cut across jurisdictions and program structures” (Pardo and Burke 2008, p.1). While the traditional structures do remain in place, a different type of governance capability is needed to help guide these new groupings of persons and forms of organization as they learn how to make decisions, share information, exchange knowledge, integrate processes, use technology, and respond to demands in new ways—to become interoperable. As such, governance capabilities for improving government interoperability must include a combination of exercising formal authority **and** negotiating and collaborating that allows a network of organizations to collectively manage traditional boundaries and constraints rather than replace them (Pardo and Burke 2008).

The CTG current practices review of IT governance in the public sector revealed a variety of IT governance coordination mechanisms currently in use (Pardo, Canestraro, Hrdinová, Cresswell, and Raup-Kounovsky 2009). A coordination mechanism is defined as “any administrative tool for achieving integration among different units within an organization” (Martinez and Jarillo 1989). CTG’s examination of existing IT governance structures in the U.S. states found a range of mechanisms that integrate and coordinate diverse stakeholder views (see Table 3). These coordination mechanisms all exhibit structural, functional, and social integration capability (Peterson, Callaghan, and Ribbers 2000). A set of state profiles as well as a state-by-state comparison (Hrdinová et al. 2009) identified that some states were found to use only one or two types of these mechanisms, while others used a variety of interrelated coordination mechanisms.

Table 3. Examples of IT Governance Coordination Mechanisms

Coordinating Mechanisms	Description
External committees, councils, and boards	Physically located outside of the control of the state level IT office; however the state level CIO or agency level CIOs have roles in these bodies – either as a chair or participant. These are generally created for a host of different reasons and all have different levels, authority, scope, and responsibilities.
Community of Practice (CoP)	Instances where people with like needs come together to solve problems relevant to the community. Some of these CoPs have formalized their own IT governance activities, and some have been recognized as part of the larger state IT governance picture. However, it is surmised that the majority of them are informally created and thus not necessarily reported.
Enterprise oriented offices, divisions, or units within the state level IT office	Have as their sole responsibility to look across the state for opportunities where individual agencies or the state as a whole can benefit from an enterprise approach to IT.
Agency liaisons	Used to elicit the needs of the state agencies and to be able to gather their feedback. The state level IT office creates agency service units with liaisons to each state agency or a cluster of agencies perceived as being part of the same domain.

One key lesson learned from our discussions with state CIOs and their staffs was that creating and implementing successful coordination mechanisms is very much an emergent process. While a number of the CIOs we interviewed told us that their initial strategies involved selecting one type of mechanism and trying to make it work for their state, they learned that political, financial, organizational, and other environmental issues often impeded the success of that approach. As described in this paper, building effective governance capability requires an initial focus on the five key aspects of governance (i.e., scope, authority, organizational structure, membership, and process) and then determining which mechanisms are most appropriate within the existing context and will achieve the desired goals. For the long term, effective IT governance capability also requires acknowledgement that conditions change, and so sustaining an effective structure requires regular examination of the fit between IT governance and the changing context.
