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EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES
(EUROSTAT)**

**ORGANIZATION FOR ECONOMIC COOPERATION AND
DEVELOPMENT (OECD) STATISTICS DIRECTORATE**

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on the Management of Statistical
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Topic (i): IT governance in statistical offices

INFORMATION SYSTEM GOVERNANCE AT INSEE*

Supporting Paper

Submitted by INSEE, France¹

Summary

I. BACKGROUND

1. The year 2004 saw the completion by INSEE (the French National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies) of an ambitious modernization plan, entitled "INSEE 2004". The plan involved first of all the introduction, at the beginning of 2004, of an entirely new method of

* For technical reasons, this document has been submitted after the deadline.

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population censusing, based on annual surveys and aimed over five years at conducting an exhaustive census of communes with less than 10,000 inhabitants and at surveying a sample of 40% of the inhabitants of communes with more than 10,000 inhabitants. In order to release the necessary resources for the annual inquiries it was necessary to undertake a fundamental review of some of the statistical operations conventionally managed by INSEE and in particular those relating to the maintenance of the business register and the production of the consumer prices index. The success of the supporting IT projects was vital. In the end, the plan was carried out effectively, with the applications being made available in good time and meeting the required quality standard.

2. In 2004, the Ministry of Economy, Finance and Industry, on which INSEE depends, called for a benchmarking exercise to compare the Institute with its counterparts in several other countries. The report is now available. It indicates satisfactory performance, particularly in terms of costs, quality and volume of products.

3. INSEE began conceptual discussions in early 2005 with a view to the formulation of the 2006-2010 strategic plan. This plan will include a blueprint for the direction of the information system, covering the same period 2006-2010 and following on from its predecessor, which concerned the period 2000-2004. The matching of the timetables reflects, among other things, the desire to align IT policy with the Institute's strategic priorities.

4. The context in which these conceptual discussions are taking place is far from simple. The main structural difficulty lies in the fact that the IT specialists of INSEE are spread out in five computing centres situated in five different cities. This does not facilitate the division of labour, either with regard to new projects or concerning maintenance. It will also not help to deal under the best conditions with the question of replacing the many staff members who are due to retire in the next few years.

5. The budget cuts made in the past three years have, moreover, led to a severe reduction of the information system budget. This reduction meant taking difficult decisions in 2004 to stop two wide-ranging projects on human resources and client relations management. It was felt preferable to cancel these projects, which would not affect the Institute's core mission, in order to ensure the completion of statistical projects given higher priority.

6. These decisions and discussions are proceeding in a context that is also characterized by a marked deficiency of the budget and accounting information system. This deficiency is not unique to INSEE but common to French administrations as a whole. Significant progress should be observed in the years ahead after the recent fundamental reform of the country's budget allocation and monitoring process.

II. BODIES OF GOVERNANCE

7. INSEE has been using information technology since the 1960s. Because of the scope of its field of competence, the range of its applications is extensive. It permanently manages around 40 projects of varying scales and runs about 200 applications, likewise on various scales, all covering very different needs: conduct of surveys, statistical processing of administrative

data, keeping of administrative and statistical registers, handling of geographical data, national accounts, information dissemination and data storage, budget, accounting and human resources management, etc.

8. The great majority of the IT personnel of INSEE are attached to a single central directorate. This is also responsible for purchases of computer equipment, including servers as well as workstations and software, and is in charge of installing and administering essential telecommunications infrastructure (INSEE is housed in about 30 establishments, located both in metropolitan France and in the overseas departments).
9. IT personnel and most of the servers are spread out between five computing centres, located in Aix-en-Provence, Lille, Nantes, Orléans and Paris. This distribution, which is not easy to modify, dates back to the 1970s. It is a large constraint that has permanently to be taken into account in both primary and secondary decision-making.
10. INSEE has developed its information-system governance procedures regularly over the years, adjusting them in the light of the difficulties or problems identified, mostly through audits conducted by the General Inspectorate.
11. Since the 1970s INSEE has periodically drawn up a blueprint for the direction of its information system. This involves setting a target for several years, usually four or five, relating to various topics considered particularly important at the time of establishment of the blueprint. It may, for example, include objectives for technical architecture, accepted development environments, staffing needs for IT personnel with the various qualifications required and training of those staff, subcontracting policy, etc. The blueprint is a frame of reference for current decisions on the period ahead to be evaluated.
12. With information technology evolving so rapidly, it has proven necessary to update the blueprint in mid-term to incorporate major new objectives deemed important for the future.
13. Solutions to questions relating to the allocation of available resources for the various new projects, the maintenance of existing applications and the current performance of services are clearly essential. These matters are addressed at six-monthly intervals. Decisions are taken by the INSEE Steering Committee.
14. New projects and existing applications are managed with reference to a standard methodological framework, a method for conducting projects.
15. Each new project is examined twice, first when needs are identified and then during the preliminary study, by a special body, the "Investment Committee", which is made up of representatives of the various INSEE directorates having diverse areas of competence and experience. This Committee issues views, which may be favourable, favourable with reservations or unfavourable, on the appropriateness of the project under consideration. These views are generally followed. They may be endorsed, if necessary, by the INSEE Steering Committee.
