

Organisational barriers to international cooperation (1st draft)

Introduction

The High-Level Group for the Modernisation of Official Statistics has asked the Modernisation Committee on Organisational Framework and Evaluation to create a Task Team to work on the problems of organisational barriers to international cooperation.

The goal of this Task Team is to produce a list of most important barriers to international cooperation and present some examples of the best practices from the countries to overcome the barriers.

First output of this group is expected to be presented at the Workshop on the Modernisation of Official Statistics (Geneva, 22-23 November).

The process

During the brainstorming session the Task Team identified the list of possible barriers to international cooperation:

1. Legal
2. Stakeholder engagement
3. Selection of people involved in the international collaboration
4. Mandate (vision)
5. Lack of coordination inside statistical offices
6. Lack of coordination between organisations
7. Internal versus external barriers
8. Internal communication
9. Human and financial resources
10. Burden on lead organisation
11. External communication
12. Work being done on the corner of the desk

You can see more detailed description of each barrier here:

<http://www1.unece.org/stat/platform/display/MCOOFE/Old+table+-+List+of+all+barriers+to+international+cooperation+-+results+of+the+vote>

After initial review of the list of barriers, it was decided that it is too many barriers to deal with at the moment, and it was suggested to shorten the list to 4-5 barriers.

The revised list of barriers, combined all barriers listed above into 5 groups:

1. Lack of coordination inside statistical offices (also includes: internal communication, burden on lead organisation, internal vs external barriers)
2. Human and financial resources (also includes: Selection of people involved in the international collaboration, Work being done 'on the corner of the desk')
3. Stakeholder engagement (also includes: Mandate (vision))

4. Lack of coordination between organisations (also includes: External communication)
5. Legal

It was decided that at the moment the group will not work on the legal barriers, but instead will focus on the other 4 barriers.

Barriers selected for work

For each barrier it was suggested to identify challenges that should be looked into and to propose possible solutions.

1. Lack of coordination inside statistical offices

N	Challenges	Description	Solutions/Good practices
1	How to coordinate?	Need for an organisational model (formal or ad-hoc) to coordinate many different international activities. Mechanisms for sharing/collaborating are not horizontal within organizations.	Having an International collaboration/co-operation division as a permanent organizational unit. Assigning the responsibility for international collaboration to a key senior official (ex. Assistant Chief Statistician).
2	Inefficient internal communication	Inside organisations many activities are not known.	Having a centralized structure and one person responsible to gather summary information on activities on a regular basis that is presented to senior management and posted on a website for a wider audience. Maintaining a list of contact persons. For efficient internal communication - especially in large offices - it is essential to know who does what (portfolio responsibilities, attending international expert groups etc.) and keep the list of contact persons up-to-date. Propose to the senior management to install an office-wide structure by appointing international coordinators in each statistical division/department. They are responsible for keeping an overview on who does what in their division/department. Having regular monthly meeting with all coordinators in order to share information and status, prepare briefing notes, etc.

2. Human and financial resources

N	Channelges	Description	Solutions/Good practices
1	Clear guidelines within organisations on support for international collaboration	In order to secure funding, allocate staff time and prioritize international collaboration activities against internal activities; it is important that guidelines are clear and supported by senior management.	Development of an international strategy with a description of tasks, roles and responsibilities to be adopted by the senior management. Adequate internal communication of the international strategy.
2	Reconciling the international agenda with national activities	Given the already high workload and budgetary pressures, the relative importance and priority of international activities compared to national activities must be clear within the organization.	Documentation of the vision and strategy for international collaboration and how it fits into the broader organizational vision and strategy.
3	Role and financing of 'animators' to stimulate the commitment of the group	People involved in international projects usually have other positions within their institution. To ensure the necessary continuity and to coordinate and stimulate the activities, is necessary to have coordination roles that are financed by the project	The animators will: i) stimulate participation by group members, requesting contributions and by linking together the right people ii) organize the meetings (virtual and F2F), iii) monitor compliance with the deadlines, iv) coordinate the activities of the group with other groups People who cover this role will have to be devoted at least 20% of their time to the "animation" of an international group.
4	Face to face meetings versus virtual calls	Virtual calls and the use of WebEx have been found to be very effective means of conducting international business, and save costs. It is however useful from time to time to have face-to-face meetings to further advance work plans, and the justification for face-to-face meetings are becoming increasingly challenged.	
5	Budget pressures within organizations	When budgets are being reduced for statistical programs or operations, it can be difficult to justify time or resources spent on international activities.	Investigating with external stakeholders/funding organizations options for funding to support international activities.
6	The same people are involved in multiple activities	This can create i) workload issues with those participating, ii) perception of favoritism to those not asked to participate, iii) vulnerabilities given that the knowledge/experience is growing in a small number of people	Offering opportunities widely within an organization in order to broaden the knowledge base, and support learning and development opportunities for employees.

N	Channelges	Description	Solutions/Good practices
7	Clear financial and senior management support for international work	Without clear senior management support and financial commitments, the value and importance of international activities may be questioned.	see #1

3. Stakeholder engagement

N	Challenges	Description	Solutions/Good practices
1	Lack of strategic support and buy in	Many international projects quickly fail within organisations due to lack of strategic awareness and support that comes from poor communication, not involving senior management early enough in the project, and whitewashing reality. For example over selling the benefits without given a clear picture of the long term vision and gains. See #2	The international Collaboration Projects should put in place a governance structure that enforces strategic/Senior Management involvement. Clear and strong messaging from top senior management. Ensure there is regular dialogue between senior managers from each participating organisation.
2	Long term vision and benefits versus short term gains	Many projects either fail or never reach full potential within an NSO due to over selling benefits that can only be seen in the medium to long term when international collaboration is involved.	Clearly present the facts from day 1 and demonstrate linkages with own organisation strategy.
3	Changing organisational culture	It is at times difficult to show the value of international collaboration to stakeholders at various levels within the organization. Different perspectives on the benefits/advantages of international collaboration in the different parts of the organisation (i.e. between methodology, IT, subject matter, operational areas) and within levels of management (i.e. top senior management vs. middle management vs working level). Employees and managers need to understand more fully 'what's in it for them'.	Clear and strong messaging from top senior management.
4	More clear rules for collaboration	Rules for collaboration are not always clear or documented.	Having a clear documented framework

N	Challenges	Description	Solutions/Good practices
			like in the EU. HLG Statement of Intent.
5	Lack of a clear international strategy document. Adoption and Communication of the international strategy	All managers should be committed to implement the agreed and adopted international strategy of the NSI. After adoption clear communication will ensure awareness of the strategy.	Having a international strategy document and ensure implementation.

4. Lack of coordination between organisations

N	Challenges	Description	Solutions/Good practices
1	Multiple groups (organisations) working on similar issues	Work being done within organizations in support of their mandate might be quite applicable and useful to other organizations. Information sharing mechanisms that could highlight work plans across organizations are lacking. Often similar organisations work on the same strategic projects (i.e. big data, globalisation, exchange of microdata) and sometimes in a certain competition with each other. Double work is therefore unavoidable but also a waste of human and financial capacity.	The planning exercise initiated by the HLG in 2015, gathering the high level investments National Statistical Organizations are making over the next few years, along with the business capabilities they are addressing is a great start. Agree on coordination mechanisms between (international) organisations will contribute to a better division of tasks, making use of each other expertise and knowledge. Focus on collaboration instead of competition.
2	It will be good to compare work of the national and international groups	There is not one source that compiles the plans and priorities across organizations.	A central webpage that provides links to the planning documentation already available on the internet. A second step would be to have resources review, analyze and summarize this planning documentation.
3	Technology constraints	Making sure that all organisations can use basic collaboration tools, like WebEx for example.	Collaboration via Webex
4	Different time zones	Problem of different time zones for collaboration.	Careful scheduling of calls, taking into account very different time zones.

Next steps: We are looking for the input from other Modernisation Committees members, to help us with the following:

- to identify missing challenges for each of the barriers
- provide comments on the current description of barriers
- share examples of best practices on how to overcome some of these challenges or propose solutions not mentioned above.