

Getting Started with the EIC

Summary

The [Enterprise Interoperability Center](#) (EIC) originates from the ATHENA Integrated Project (Framework Program 6), a 26 million Euro project sponsored by the European Commission as part of an action plan to modernize the European economy by addressing the challenges of B2B integration. Founded in April of 2006, the EIC defines and applies integration methodology and tools, particularly the significant work produced by ATHENA, and leverages existing industry standards to define common public business processes for achieving interoperability of networked organizations across multiple industries. The objective is to provide an increased level of interoperability by eliminating choice and clearly defining all aspects of the business process. SAP is a member of the board of directors of the EIC and is a founding member of the organization.

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Author Bio

Mark Schenecker has more than two decades of professional experience developing, designing and implementing solutions for inter-company business processes. In his role at SAP, Mark drives B2B Standards development. Mark participates in numerous standards development organizations to define and promote emerging standards across multiple industries and is a board member of the EIC, OAGi and RosettaNet. A frequent speaker on technology and supply chain business processes, Mark is the author of several patents and industry standards. Mark has written numerous articles on technology, software development and business process management and is also the author of a book on e-Commerce, published in 1999 as well as a contributor to the *Supply Chain Management Handbook*.

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Formation of the EIC

In 2004 the European Commission revised the eEurope Action Plan for modernizing the European economy and building a knowledge-based economy in the European Union. The vision for the Action Plan is, “By 2010, enterprises will be able to seamlessly interoperate with others”. A key part of achieving the plan was the establishment of the [Advanced Technologies for interoperability of Heterogeneous Enterprise Networks and their Applications](#) (ATHENA), a 3-year research project sponsored by the European Commission.

ATHENA is one of the most ambitious information systems projects sponsored by the European Commission. The European Commission, SAP and 25 other organizations have spent tens of millions of Euros on ATHENA. The ATHENA project incorporates technical and business process resources from 26 organizations, primarily from the European Union. The scope of the ATHENA research agenda is to address all aspects of interoperability – from technology components to applications and services, from design methodology to testing and from training to evaluation of the societal impact of technology.

SAP research is currently working on ATHENA programs around collaborative enterprise modelling tools, ontology structures and semantic definitions, data transformation, service composition and many other interoperability topics. It is expected that some of the experience and knowledge realized in the public research and development at ATHENA will enhance SAP products and architecture in the future.

A key requirement of the ATHENA project was to establish the Enterprise Interoperability Center (EIC). The primary goal of the EIC is the practical application of the ATHENA tools and methodologies to address the challenges of interoperability in the marketplace. The EIC is the means by which the European Commission hopes to see the application of the output of the ATHENA project so that the results benefit organizations of all sizes and types both within and outside of the European Union.

Overview of the EIC

The EIC was launched on April 27th of 2006 in Brussels as a not-for-profit organization. As expected, the initial founding members are all from the ATHENA research project. However, the EIC is not restricted to ATHENA members or European organizations – rather, the EIC is an open, neutral, and independent

organization for addressing the business process challenges of interoperability for companies of all sizes and markets.

The scope of the EIC is to define and apply the ATHENA interoperability methodologies and tools to define common public business processes for achieving interoperability of networked organizations across multiple industries. The EIC does not receive funding from the European Commission or any other government entity, instead it is funded by contributions from end-users, research institutions, universities and solution providers. This funding mechanism ensures that EIC deliverables are quickly adopted by those with a vested interest in their development and deployment.

The EIC is currently attempting to address two of the most severe obstacles to interoperability. First, companies have cited the existence of too many industry standards as a critical impediment to implementation. Second, industry standards have successfully defined methods for exchanging electronic business messages but have not addressed the need for a concise business process definition.

There are hundreds of vertical industry standards organizations that are defining thousands of business messages. In fact, there are so many vertical standards organizations that today these organizations create more of an impedance factor to interoperability than a solution. The EIC appears to be quite unique in the standards organization landscape in defining a common business process that employs select vertical industry standards messages. The EIC has many similarities to WS-I, an organization that profiles specifications at the message handling layer. Interoperability Profiles will have the affect of reducing the number of vertical industry standards organizations by having the broader community select the best-in-class.

EIC Objectives

The EIC does not attempt to define industry standards such as business messages formats. Instead, the EIC intends to profile existing standards to support an end-to-end business process in a specific industry or across multiple industries. The results will be published in what is called an Interoperability Profile. An Interoperability Profile specifies the exact industry standard message structures (OAGi, RosettaNet, CIDX, etc.) in a defined message exchange pattern to support a specific business process. The result should be a concise definition of a business process including the sequence of messages, the exchange pattern and the exact messages to be applied. The objective is to provide an increased level of interoperability by eliminating choice and clearly defining all aspects of the business process.

The EIC has 5 key objectives for addressing the challenges of interoperability at the business process level.

- Concisely define the business and technical aspects of the common public processes while preserving the independence and confidentiality of internal, private processes
- Leverage existing industry standards, technology, applications, research and standards
- Profile the existing architectures, methodologies, guidelines, best practices, semantics, message standards and interfaces necessary for a precise definition of a specific business process
- Validate the Interoperability Profile by building prototype implementations of real-world business scenarios defined by user requirements
- Facilitate the delivery of tools, conformance testing, analysis, training and other services to encourage broad adoption in the community

EIC Governance

Just like most not-for-profit organizations, the EIC is governed by a board of directors made up of a variety of organizations. It is important to note that the European Commission is not a part of the governance model. Interoperability Profiles are defined by a community of users, typically within a specific industry, in a working group called a Business Forum.

In addition, the EIC has an Association Board that reports to the Board of Directors. The Association Board provides a direct link to other standards development organizations (SDOs), particularly those organizations whose specifications are being employed in an Interoperability Profile. In the future, it is expected that many of the vertical industry standards groups will join the EIC Association Board.

Business Forums

The EIC is designed to be highly stakeholder-driven through the employment of Business Forums. The association includes various management roles (e.g. Business Forum Chairs, Steering Committees, EIC staff, Program Coordinators and a Board of Directors) that collectively make the organization function effectively and efficiently, while simultaneously ensuring the Associations integrity is preserved.

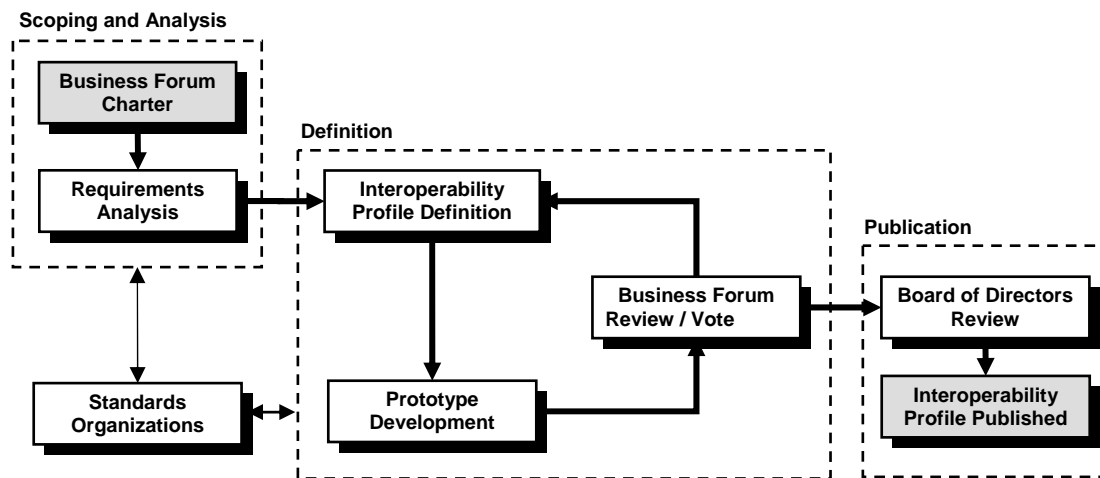
The Business Forums are the working groups that define interoperability business requirements and ultimately define Interoperability Profiles – collectively referred to as the EIC deliverables or work products. Each Business Forum has a charter that is approved by the Board of Directors.

The EIC Business Forums seek to streamline common public business processes. Interoperability Profiles achieve this by employing both profile composition and constraints. The Interoperability Profile concisely defines the composition of the steps of a specific business process. In addition, the Interoperability Profile constrains an implementation such that it specifies exactly which of the hundreds of vertical industry standards will be employed.

The precise definition of the composition of the business process means that companies can engage with their trading partners using a single message exchange pattern rather than many variations of the same pattern. Constraining profiles make specifications more precise by reducing the number of implementation options. Trading partners only have to support one or two message formats rather than be faced with having to implement potentially hundreds of overlapping message specifications. The clarification provided by a Profile removes complexity which results in a significant reduction in the time and expense of integration.

The Standards Definition Process

The EIC operations process consists of four major phase gates: scoping, analysis, definition and publication.



Scoping

Before a Business Forum is initiated and activities commence, a preparatory scoping phase takes place. The scoping phase results in a concise definition of the requirements and the expected output of new forum. The scoping phase requirements and output are published as part of the Forum charter. Organizations should carefully evaluate the charter to determine if the business forum is applicable to their interoperability challenges.

Analysis

Analysis consists of steps that are designed to ensure that business requirements are systematically captured and documented. A mechanism has been built into this part of the methodology to engage other standards bodies as required.

Definition

The definition phase is the part of the methodology that defines the Interoperability Profile and also includes prototyping and testing of the Profile. The Interoperability Profile is complete only through a formal vote of the Business Forum.

Publication

The final publication stage culminates in ratification of the Interoperability Profile and promotion to the EIC community and beyond. Interoperability Profiles are copyrighted by the EIC but made available to the public without fee or license.

SAP Engagement in the EIC

As a deliverable from ATHENA, SAP was charged with the responsibility for the creation of the EIC. In this role, SAP was instrumental in establishing the EIC and is a Foundational Sponsor and member of the board of directors. Foundational Sponsors are organizations that demonstrate the highest level of commitment to the association by substantially underwriting the mission of the EIC. SAP is also instrumental in sustaining the organizational infrastructure of the EIC with personnel that provide technical work, marketing outreach programs and program coordination.

SAP intends to participate in Business Forums depending on the industry and the business process objectives of the Forum as they align to SAP products and solutions. For example, a Business Forum that is working on discrete manufacturing would be very important to the continued development of our Distributed Manufacturing solutions. In this discrete manufacturing forum, SAP Industry Business Unit (IBU) subject matter experts would participate, both taking away valuable input as well as contributing to the process. The resultant Interoperability Profiles from this Business Forum would provide unique opportunities to improve SAP applications as well as advance into additional markets. As SAP transitions to its Enterprise Service Architecture, these Interoperability Profiles will gain even more importance and utility.

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