

‘One Framework to rule them all?’

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Nicky Stewart (*Skyscape Cloud Services, UK*)

* SPEAKING NOTES *

This was my exam question:

Is the EIF relevant in a Cloud dominated world?

The short answer is Yes.

Why yes?

Its all about digital. No sane person could argue the undoubted benefits that an EIF – aka digital public services - could bring. Equally, it’s a blunt instrument to imply that cloud makes EIF irrelevant. We all know that not all clouds are interoperable.

The relationship between EIF and cloud is obvious, and very interesting.

Interoperability across Europe means scale, accessibility and sharing. Cloud does all of this, and some.

So in the same way that we know that DSM, big data driven initiatives and pretty much anything else in our digital world will be underpinned by cloud, it is hard to see how EIF would not be underpinned by cloud.

For me, the real exam question is how we make EIF and cloud more relevant to each other.

I doubt that there isn’t a technology company on the planet who wouldn’t want a piece of the EIF to call their own. Most CSPs are firmly in this category, and their P&L motivations are just the same as any other company.

But there are some tensions at play.

Cloud, as I am sure all of you are aware, is an established but very dynamic market. Even over the last five years technology has come on in leaps and bounds. Where we once spoke of CPUs and VMs, we now speak of Containers, and PaaS. If some CSPs are to be believed, soon we may speak of data centres under the sea.

This dynamism is desirable and necessary. But it doesn’t easily accommodate localism, regulation, or the rigid application of standards.

I’m a relative new comer to EIF (if not to cloud), and I am sure most of you are experts.

What I do observe is that just like cloud, EIF has been around for a long time. Only we don’t really have one yet. A fully functioning EIF across the member states could be a long way off – and in the meantime, cloud will move on.

Because as EIF is integrated with DSM, like the DSM, EIF needs to understand what cloud really is if it is to really reap cloud's benefits.

And that begins with a fundamental differences in current perceptions of what cloud is.

If we assume that EIF will be underpinned by cloud, in the same way that we know Uber, Facebook and others are underpinned by cloud, we can't therefore assume that EIF is the same as Uber, Facebook and others. The only common denominator is cloud, and by default, the data in the cloud.

To draw an analogy (and to stick to my knitting)

UK government is undergoing fundamental digital transformation:

- Improving citizen experience
- Reducing transaction costs
- Speeding up policy deployment
- Building things once and sharing

Its Government as a Platform, and it goes without saying that its all predicated on cloud. IaaS, PaaS and, of course, SaaS.

GaaS won't be without its challenges, but its certainly not being delivered in a random, ungoverned way. Far from it.

The standards are very clear. They are also very appropriate.

There is a Digital Service Standard, that provides guidance for architects, developers, designers, service managers and more. It covers a multitude of topics, from how to determine whether to build or buy, use of open standards (which are mandatory, unless an exemption has been granted) through to security standards and how to make decisions about how a service is hosted.

Its pretty comprehensive. Digital public services that don't meet this standard won't make the grade.

Similar standards are being determined for local government.

And there are clear, fair and transparent routes to buy these services, such as G-Cloud, and the Digital Outcomes Framework.

Fundamentally, the Digital Service Standard is about choice. It enables technologists and buyers to make the right choices for their needs, in compliance with government's digital strategy.

Even more importantly, from Skyscape's perspective, it gives CSPs a choice. To comply with the requirements of the standard (which might require significant investment) or not, as the case may be. Supplier decides, and thrives or dives in the market according to its decision.

So what has this got to do with Uber, Facebook and all of the other platform providers?

Cloud providers don't come from the same mould – there is huge diversity in the market. Many European cloud providers are SMEs, and a million miles away from Uber or Facebook.

Many cloud providers are finding niches to actively address many of the perceived problems with cloud that have been created by Uber, Facebook and others. For example, Skyscape and many others specialise in cloud security.

So here are some asks of the EIF from an SME CSP's perspective:

- Be clear about what you expect from cloud providers – particularly in terms of interoperability (because it isn't clear now) – let cloud providers make choices
- Be clear about the extent of the market, and when market opportunities will arise – then cloud providers can decide if, when and how to make any necessary investments
- Engage with CSPs, and gain a really thorough understanding of cloud in all its guises, and what cloud can bring to the EIF party.
- Don't try and invent a cloud especially for EIF. It won't be cloud, and it will be an antiquity before you've even put your pen down.
- For the same reasons, do NOT attempt to build an EIF cloud. If you do, expect to spend billions of euros, waste man year after man year of entirely nugatory effort. It's all out there in the market today.
- Standards are preferable to blanket, one size fits all regulation.
 - But standards need to be open and appropriate, and based on the needs of the consumer, rather than what industry thinks the consumer needs – which will inevitably veer towards the proprietary
 - No problems with the creation of new standards, provided they are appropriate to the nature of the underpinning technology, and are capable of evolving in line with that technology
 - But before new standards are created, there needs to be a careful assessment and mapping of existing standards to the EIF requirements – this will speed up delivery, and keep down compliance costs for CSPs – in particular SMEs.
- If Europe must regulate, it must think carefully about what it regulates, how it regulates, and what the unintended consequences might be. Any CSP operating in Europe must already, and quite rightly, comply with data protection regulation, consumer regulation, competition law, and so on.

- Many would argue that the existing regulation is already fit for purpose, but simply isn't being properly applied – or may be in need of an overhaul to drag it kicking and screaming into the 21st century.
- Regulating the many to control the few could have highly undesirable unintended consequences
 - The giants will get around it – they always do
 - SME CSPs in Europe will drown in the red tape, and in worst case scenarios could be forced out of business – leaving the way clear for the giants
 - Regulation inhibits choice and it restricts innovation
- Think very, very carefully about how all of this stuff gets bought.
 - Competition and iteration is better than massive aggregation onto a few suppliers. UK public sector learnt that the hard way.
 - By all means stipulate the terms and conditions of any EIF engagement, but make sure they are proportionate and relevant to cloud.
 - Make sure buyers understand what they are buying – buying cloud is a million miles from buying tin – or even a managed service. Informed buyers will make the right decisions and accelerate the EIF. Some work underway under Horizon 2020 to do just this – don't underestimate the importance of these activities, and give them appropriate profile and air-time.
- Today, I don't see a clear roadmap for EIF, nor do I see a clear articulation of what Europe's cloud strategy is. There are very many component parts. There are undoubtedly folk in Brussels, and probably here today, who understand how all these component parts fit together. But I think it's fair to say that these people are probably in the minority.
- But above all, making the big picture more generally available will motivate CSPs and their investors to do the right thing for EIF. They just need to know what the right thing is.

Create the right market conditions for cloud, and EIF will become reality.