

Trilogue Table Editor

EP - Council

Exchange Tests Summary

November, the 8th 2016

Executive Summary

1. Trilogue Table editor started as an internal feasibility study at the European Parliament and a part of Better Law-making initiative, with a common inter-institutional goal of improving the way the EU legislates. The initiative calls for a new agreement among the EU institutions to make cooperation smoother.
2. In January and February 2016, the Secretaries-General of the GSC and the EP expressed, by exchanging letters, their support for more inter-institutional cooperation in the field of the management of Trilogue Tables, an essential tool that is used during Trilogue negotiations to reach a deal between the co-legislators.
3. The joint Trilogue Table content exchange study was carried out by the European Parliament and Council's teams in summer 2016. It has confirmed validity of the structured editing approach and an early Trilogue Table editor design.

During the analysis conducted, following the User Test methodology, it became apparent that there is an overwhelming user support to build a fit-for-purpose tool for the work on the Trilogue Tables, which overcomes the major weaknesses of the current file-based exchanges of MS Word files where, users are personally responsible for maintenance of every aspect of the table.

Users warmly welcomed the proposed Trilogue Table Editor design. Nevertheless, further functional analysis is necessary to fully map remaining users' needs.

4. With this being said, all the above represents a major shift from the current working patterns. To ensure continuous user acceptance and the success of this initiative, there is a need to carefully manage the change and adopt a sound communication strategy at all levels: project team, steering committee and business sponsor.
5. The ongoing good collaboration between EP and Council teams must be carried over to a structured governance that would continue with the involvement of all the internal stakeholders when the project is started.
6. It is recommend to follow-up on this initial study and to embrace the new structured editing technology to build a new generation of editors for legislative content. This approach is visible in other EU co-legislators IT initiatives - such as LEOS, the structural legislative text editor currently

being developed by DG DIGIT of the European Commission. It is advised to take advantage of the mutual experiences to develop a coherent inter-institutional editing platform.

7. The EU co-legislators should continue their collaboration, refining and validating the feature set with the strong involvement of users, and promoting the Better Law-making objectives throughout the design and implementation process.

Introduction

In January and February 2016, the Secretaries-General of the GSC and the EP expressed, by exchanging letters, their support for more inter-institutional cooperation in the field of the management of Trilogue Tables, an essential tool that is used during Trilogue negotiations to reach a deal between the co-legislators.

In March 2016, at a meeting of Business Representatives of the European Parliament and the Council, it was decided that both institutions will run an internal feasibility analysis on an automated exchange of content of Trilogue Tables. The decision to enter into analysis followed a prior internal study at the Parliament of a possible Trilogue Table editor design.

A more detailed list of events follows:

- **(mid 2015)**
 - EP Internal study of the Trilogue Process and identification of the major bottlenecks.
- **(late 2015 / early 2016)**
 - Functional design of Trilogue Editor Solution covering identified issues.
 - User tests of dynamic mock-ups of the functional solution.
 - Presentation of the solution to EP's and COU's users.
 - Establishing contact of operational teams of EP & COU.
- **(early 2016)**
 - Establishing of EP-COU working group on Trilogue.
 - Decision of the working group to undertake the joint analysis study.
- **(mid 2016)**
 - Preparation to the joint analysis study.
 - Joint feasibility analysis of automation of exchanges of Trilogue Tables based on dynamic system mock-ups.
- **(late 2016)**
 - Submitting of Joint Analysis Report to the EP-COU working group.
 - Establishing a Trilogue Table Steering Committee.
 - Initial discussion on Inter-Institutional Project Setup & financing options.

The document that follows describes the preparation, the study process as well as the main outcomes.

Methodology

Following the March meeting a methodology was agreed in between operational teams at the two institutions. It was based on a principle of User Tests, where staff gets an access to a mock-up of a system design with hands-on experience of Trilogue Tables editor.

Each participant was given a set of three task each, equal for each participant. Users were asked to evaluate the system design as if it were a live system, with test supervisor intervening only when boundaries of the system simulation were reached or if users would give up on the task, considering it too difficult or system design inadequate.

The scenarios tried to evaluate system design in three areas:

1. Initial document creation and exchange,
2. Sending an exchange following an update,
3. Receiving and managing update done by the other participating party.

As each scenario uses interactive system simulation, it allows users to project many use cases that otherwise would not come up. Users are encouraged to share their thoughts on the entire design, usually providing some invaluable insights.

If a particular system feature causes users to stumble, or unknowingly take a wrong decision that particular feature is evaluated in between test sessions - often resulting in an improved system simulation. This approach allows to design iteratively, concentrating first on major features requested by Business Owners and building a system design that is functional to the most users.

Both operational teams at the EP and the Council remained in contact in preparation to the User Test sessions and during major discoveries to align possible design solutions.

EP User Test sessions

At the European Parliament a total of **16 Test Sessions** took place, with a wide variety of committee staff, representing both Assistants and Administrators. Following the methodology the users were not guided during the tests, but were encouraged to use all the information contained in the designs of screens and emails that were part of the simulation.

The design have been updated several times in the process attempting to resolve the biggest hurdles users were encountering. The Council operation team was informed of the major design weaknesses found, and updates to the design.

A series of improvements were introduced to the steps needed to prepare a new exchange, the email confirmations of the system as well as the EP internal content sharing among all the parties involved inside the Trilogue Table edition cycle.

EP User Tests results

Following the initial design updates and subsequent tests it has been confirmed that **in-editor Trilogue Table exchange is acceptable by the users.**

One of the Business Requirements - **a notion of Formal / Informal versions** did not cause confusion and in some cases clarified the purpose of a version/exchange. These two flags seemed to be **intuitively understood by the users**.

Users found that **quick access popup-style tooltips** helped with understanding the new design elements, bringing a much needed textual clarification. No user manual was necessary during the User Tests sessions, especially the final design was found to be self-explanatory.

Version Compare screen has been developed from scratch during User Tests - following user feedback. It allows to compare any two versions of a Trilogue Table, including incoming ones that have not yet been accepted. Various presentation options have been included.

Internal EP Sharing, though not of interest to all users, **solved majority of use cases** for users that seemed to be interested in communicating exclusively with the new tool. The later versions of the design clearly introduced a notion of a document owner that has a full access control that was relatively easy to understand for uninitiated users. The team used existing design patterns of online, multiuser text editors to solve the ownership visibility and access control.

Sending and Receiving an exchange has been redesigned and nested inside an Exchange Wizard. It now uses progressive disclosure pattern, unveiling to user options related to smaller steps - avoiding options overload at the start. Especially preparing a new Exchange required to master few new concepts, now each comes with its own purpose description and all are grouped in three discreet steps: a) select or create new version, b) select transmittable parts, c) confirm & send.

EP Subjects for further study

The Analysis confirmed most of the initial expectations and allowed to polish the current designs. Additionally it pointed to some other areas that have not yet been considered in details, and may be focal points for some opinionated users.

Change Authorship Attribution - there are no clear solution designs, at the moment, on how to pinpoint, present and maintain the presentation of the initial author of any proposed change. This may be important for files where team driving the negotiations would strictly keep track whose position (and wording) has been accepted for each row or groups of rows.

This presents a further opportunity to develop a feature set that could not be available in MS Word, additionally highlighting benefits of the structured editing approach.

Comments (joint) - while there is a provision for comments in the current design, and the analysis did not go to the level of editing details, majority of users had various questions, comments and observations regarding how comments should behave. This was to be expected, as at the moment comments can serve several purposes - depending on the Trilogue Team and its internal setup. Regardless of how comments are used - they are central to communication in between Trilogue Table users. This point should be considered by all institutional parties participating in the project.

Presentation Persistence (joint) - structured Trilogue Table Editor comes with a promise of content independent presentation. In many use cases that opens up a door to a new way of treating information contained in the document that previously was not easily accessible. However, it leaves one possible problem in the open that should be tackled - same file presentation, for technical and Trilogue meetings, for all participants. The system, while maintaining flexibility, must ensure that meeting-presentation configuration is passed to the other parties during the exchange.

Council User Test sessions

At the General Secretariat of the Council of the European Union (GSC) a total of **12 Test Sessions** took place, with staff working in Policy units and dealing with various policy matters.

Individual user testing sessions were conducted and testing sessions lasted between 40 minutes and 2 hours. During the tests, next to the user, 3 GSC staff were present: 1 staff from the IT and 2 staff from the business side. Before the interview actually took place, the users were briefed about:

- how the session would be carried out; and
- What the prototype meant in general terms, and its Home and Settings pages in particular. (The two other pages were not included in this general explanation given that the purpose was precisely to test those and capture first-time feedback from the users.).

After the introductory phase, the users were asked to perform 3 tasks corresponding to the scenarios described above.

It is important to recall however that these tasks focused on the exchange functionality only, nevertheless users were invited to explore, challenge and give preliminary feedback on everything they saw on the screen, including all other functionalities available in the prototype.

Council User Tests results

General comments

Although test exercises encoded in the prototype included exchanges between the EP and the GSC only, users emphasised the fact that it is of paramount importance to have **the possibility of sending 4CT to the EP and COM at the same time**. This is without prejudice to the fact that for technical issues, bilateral contacts are made between the Institutions.

Users pointed out that **tests did not specify the exact legislative stage** in which the given test scenario was conducted (i.e. First Reading, Second Reading, Conciliation), which however has obvious consequences procedural-wise, for example in terms of deadlines or marking changes made to the compromise text.

Furthermore, it has been generally expressed that: (1) **any future tool to be introduced should not offer less** than what is available with current systems, such as MS Word and MS Outlook (e.g. basic text editing functionalities such as 'copy/paste', 'replace all' and 'find text'); (2) **tracking changes** and the ownership of those made to 4CT of a given legislative file **should be easily available**; and (3) it was essential for users to **identify and classify**, in a simple manner, **articles/paragraphs that were still subject to "political" negotiations**

Regarding the Exchange functions

Generally speaking, **this function was deemed straightforward by most of the users**; though the position of its button (e.g. whether it should be shifted around with the "Council share" button) could be subject to ergonomic considerations. Alternatively the tool may provide one unique button for both the 'Share' and the 'Exchange' functionalities, where only the recipients will vary

The need to **distinguish between *formal* and *informal* versions when exchanging a table has received mixed feelings** from the interviewees; This is due to the fact that working practices vary within the GSC:

- Some services found these options very useful.
- Other services send only "official" /"formal" versions outside the GSC, therefore they would not be using any "informal" versions.
- Again others, did not want to *overflow* delegates with frequent "informal" versions containing only minor technical modifications.

The second step when preparing for a new exchange ("Choose elements to transmit"), **pre-selecting all options by default** was found useful, and **choosing additions** such as *Negotiation markers should, however be left unchecked*. This was to avoid making mistakes and sending information externally that should have been kept within the GSC.

As for the **page confirming the sending** after the 'Prepare a new exchange' wizard, users asked to **add the following information: (1) the recipients of the exchange; and the (2) exact date and time when the exchange took place**. Moreover, users **didn't find relevant the exchange history** that is displayed on the screen before the sending.

A list of functionalities already present in the prototype, or desired by the testers can be found in the following summary table

Category	Functionality	Present/ Desired
General	"Back" button at every page in the exchange wizard in order to let the user rectify in case of mistakes	D
	Offline version	D
	Availability on mobile devices also	D
Exchanging/ sharing documents	Share document (internal)	P
	Exchange documents (external)	P
	Managing recipients/groups (including COREPER, presidency, ...)	D
	Exchange history	P
	Cancel an exchange/share	D
Display option	Column ordering	P
	Hide/show column(s)	P
	Column header displays the version number, last date of update as well as document references, where applicable	D
	Add/remove recitals	D
	Show amendments' numbers	D
	Harmonised way of marking changes	D

Comments	Commenting recitals, articles	P
	Private (internal) and public (external) comments	D
Filtering options	Negotiation markers on recitals	P
	Tagging/labelling	P
	Tag with reference to a specific recital	D
	Tags to allow cross-linking different sections of texts	D
	Grouping/filtering by tag(s) available within a single column	D
Text comparison	Ability to select columns to compare	P
	Ability to select recital(s) and even line number(s) for comparison	D
	Differing display options	P
	Track changes with merging capabilities (MS-Word like)	D
	Identification of legislative lifecycle's steps	D
Notification	Confirmation of an exchange or a share	P
	Notification of a new version	P
	Email notifications to include not only basic information about the table that has been sent, but also data such as the recipients and the date of sending.	D
	Direct link to the document in notification	D
	Notification templates	D
Printing	Print document	P
	Export to MS Word	D
	Printing filtered version (on tags, negotiation markers, ...)	D
Text editing	Basic editing	P
	Consolidating, tracking and presenting changes made to text	D
	Assigning ownership (up to recital level)	D
	To collect and consolidate input from third parties (ex: Member States)	D

Council points subjects for further study

- **Full functionalities** of the Trilogue Table editor : this implies the clear need to further establish users' needs in terms of what an editor should provide to the users.
- **Information management requirements** including:
 - **Rules and procedures** with impact on the future tool including the possibility of collaborating drafting and ability to collect and consolidate comments from Member States.
 - **Access control rules** to manage distribution lists for shares and exchanges at different stages during the lifecycle of the Trilogue Tables.
 - **Taxonomies** to agree upon a number of taxonomies. Some of these taxonomies will be internal to institutions and others may prove value at the inter-institutional level. This being said, there is a clear need to align terminology used by the different departments at GSC when dealing with Trilogue Tables. The same applies to terms that might need to be shared with Council members and members of other Institutions.