An overview of the EC's Service Level Agreement Standardisation Guidelines

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Published on 24 June 2014, the guidelines provide a set of SLA standardisation guidelines for cloud service providers and professional cloud service customers, while ensuring the specific needs of the European cloud market and industry are taken into account.

The guidelines pay particular attention to the specific needs of the European cloud market and industry. Regarding security and personal data protection, it has taken into account the existing legal framework and guidance of the article 29 Working Group Party. The guiding principle is that standardising aspects of SLAs will improve the clarity and increase the understanding of SLAs for cloud services in the market, in particular by highlighting and providing information on the concepts usually covered by SLAs and related documents, in addition to information which can be obtained from certification schemes.

These guidelines will form the basis of a submission by the C-SIG SLA subgroup to the ISO/IEC JTC1 Working Group on Cloud Computing, which is currently working on an international standard for cloud SLAs, to ensure maximum impact for the European position to be taken into account at the international level. International standards, such as ISO/IEC 19086, provide a good venue to achieve this objective. Taking this into account, the C-SIG SLA Subgroup, as the European Commission expert group, set up a liaison with the ISO Cloud Computing Working Group1 to provide concrete input and present the European position at the international level. The SLA Standardisation Guidelines will serve as a basis for the further work of the C-SIG SLA and for a contribution to the ISO/IEC 19086 project.

DG CONNECT commissioned a report from Gartner on common terms of service and SLAs for cloud service contracts. The final report, Cloud service provisions - Draft suggestions for common terms of service and SLA's for cloud service contracts, was published in April 201427.

The draft suggestions relate to common terms of service and metrics for the SLA that should be part of the procurement for the different types of cloud services. It is primarily intended for cloud service customer organisations considering the procurement of cloud services. It draws on substantial feedback from the C-SIG-SLA, Gartner research and an analysis of 75 cloud service providers. The goal of the latter analysis was to identify common elements of the terms of service and SLAs as different providers may structure their cloud contracts, which include terms of service and SLAs in different ways.

The report is scoped to cover service provisions and commercial terms, not on developing the contract terms as a whole or a complete contract template, where service provisions are for contracts between cloud providers and cloud service customers. Its focus is on technical objectives, though a cloud SLA would ideally contain also business level objectives, i.e. the "why" of procuring preceding the technical SLA considerations.

Gartner's findings show that, in practice, there can be significant differences between what is included in the SLA and what is specified in the other parts of the terms of service. For example, some providers include both quantitative service level objectives (with defined targets and enforcement terms) and

qualitative service level objectives (that only specify a potential business outcome such as "API level integration with the client's service management platform") in the SLA, whereas others consider qualitative service level objectives to be part of the terms of service.

The report provides checklists and sample provisions for key SLA-related aspects of cloud service contracts between cloud service providers and cloud service customers. These key aspects are typically characterised as the terms of service and the SLA is a part of the terms of service. The checklists and sample service level objectives in this report constitute a view of the essential elements that Gartner would expect to be included in the terms of service and SLAs. To meet some cloud service customers‟ specific needs and for some service types, additional elements may be added, but in Gartner's view the common key elements are covered in this report.

The report also considers a number of key components that Gartner observes in cloud terms of service. These were used to compile the checklists to describe SLA-related aspects of the terms of service that should be included in the cloud terms of service documentation. These are grouped into the following subjects, often available as one document:

- SaaS, IaaS, PaaS specific Service Descriptions
- Common Security and Risk Approach
- Relationship and Governance
- Disaster Recovery and Business Continuity

These checklists also indicate whether the terms of service aspect is „Common‟ or „Special‟. Those provisions that are commonly seen and appropriate for the majority of cloud terms of services are marked as "Common". Those that Gartner would expect to see in certain situations, but which are not always present are marked as "Special", e.g., those that depend on the cloud service customer's "specific requirements, providers" architecture, or specific services offered.

Gartner provides samples of quantitative service level objectives that Gartner suggest should be considered when evaluating cloud service offerings. These are based on SLA provisions that are commonly found in cloud contracts as of December 2013.

According to Gartner, SLAs should focus on the service level objectives and metrics provided to the cloud service customer organisation, regardless of the configuration of the eco-system of cloud providers providing the services and the associated internal operational SLAs. The technical service level objectives and measures that underpin the SLA metrics provided to the cloud service customer are not discussed in detail, as these are more relevant to providers and are not necessarily visible to the cloud service customer. Therefore this report considers the key commercial service level objectives that will be relevant for cloud service customers when judging which service offering is most suitable to meet their needs.