Some considerations on approaches in SP information systems implementation

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Information technology (IT) for social protection

- Targeting, eligibility, cross-checks, ...it’s all about information processing
- Source of data generated for evidence based policy making
- It is the backbone of social protection/safety net systems reforms
We are not implementing the IT based systems just to be “modern” and “computerized”. As that requires efforts and time, we must understand the value that will be gained.

To get value, specific products need to be deployed. Just a good idea does not necessarily produces value. Wrong design can reduce the gained value; sometimes make even more damage than improvements.

The process of getting there needs to be clear - approach, tasks to be done, resources/efforts and timeline for the solution(s) implementation.

What capacity (capabilities and resources) will be needed to move through the process, to implement and to use the designed solution in order to gain value?

...but, sometimes over-simplified

Buy IT!

We will implement the “integrated social protection information system”.

Value

Process

Design

Capacity

We can do it before next elections!

No problem – we have few good IT persons in the ministry.

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Out of many important aspects of the VDPC framework, we would like to emphasize only two:

1. **Design choice:** Comprehensive, business processes oriented system vs. data collection system
2. **Process choice:** Comprehensive system development vs. quick wins
A classic definition of information system

Information system is set of interconnected components that work together to collect, store, process and distribute data...

...to support analysis, decision making, coordination and control in an organization.
Simple, but to some point **misleading**

- It is emphasizing the *data collection*, and not *business processes* to be supported by the information system.

![Diagram showing data collection, operational management, middle management, and top management with descriptions of data types for each level.]

- **Data collection**: Daily operations, generating data.
- **Operational management**: Operational, daily data with high level of details.
- **Middle management**: Summary, synthetic data, but with enough details to effectively support tactical managerial control.
- **Top management**: Highly-synthetic data, oriented to future and support to strategic planning.
Data collection

- Case: Kyrgyzstan social protection system
- Case: MoLSW Disability Beneficiary Registry in Greece
- Case: Data collection in Education Information System in Serbia
The system needs to be oriented to **business processes** – data collection is automatic then

More effective and efficient operational functions

- processing of applications,
- Database reporting and cross checks,
- determination of eligibility
- processing and issuance of payments
- case management
- recertification

Improved management and oversight functions

- financial control of payments
- planning and budgeting,
- implementation management
- performance monitoring
- oversight and controls
If oriented to processes...

- generated data are “by-product” of real business processes - this information can be trusted as it has been aggregated from operational data generated by real people in real business processes. Such information is:
  - accurate,
  - timely reported,
  - useful for support of daily business processes, and
  - does not generate additional workload
Only in some exceptional cases, data collection design is acceptable, or more precisely, something that can be accepted temporarily. In such case, some principles should be respected:

- Such system should be clearly treated as temporary solution, with the plan to replace it with an information system that has primary purpose of supporting processes,
- Data collected on such way cannot be fully trusted.
- More resources should be planned for the process of data collection than on technical solutions for the information system itself – the system should be simple, in most cases based on of-the-shelf solutions, and no huge investments should be made because the system should be planned to be replaced.
So, apart from such exceptional cases, if data oriented design leads to problems, or at least low improvement of performances, ...

- why countries implement data collection systems, instead of process oriented systems?
- The answer is very often quite simple – because it’s easier (faster, cheaper), which leads us to the next issue.
Process choice: Comprehensive system development vs. quick wins

- To design and implement fully business processes oriented information system takes a lot of time and efforts.
- Sometimes both managers and engineers “do not have time for slow and systematic development” and are looking for solutions that can produce value in short term and with small investment – so called “quick wins”.
Design-wise: Compare this with data collection architecture

Registry

Domain Process Modules (Core)
- Application
- Reporting
- Eligibility
- Monitoring
- Benefit Level
- Case Management
- Payments
- Complaints

General Business Modules
- User & Rights Management
- Financial Management
- Workflow Management

Document Management
- Evidence Capture and Storage (Scan, Pictures, Data)

General System Requirements
- Archive and Storage
- Data Integrity and Security
- Spatial Distribution (Central and Remote)

Cross-checks ..
- Automated
- Semi-Automated
- Manual

... with other registries / systems for...
- Identification
- ... and verification of income and assets

Population Registry
- Tax
- Pensions / Health
- Financial Institutions
- Vehicles / Vessels
- Land and Agricultural Assets
- ...
Process-wise: Compare this:

Step 1: Identify level of ambition that is feasible.

Step 2: Assess country’s capacity to support integrated services.

Step 3: Build or strengthen systems to support integrated services.

Step 4: Identify resources to support integrated services.

Step 5: Phase in integrated services.

ICT implementation essentials and preconditions

Justification

Resources

To this:

Prepare technical specifications → Procurement → Implementation
Advantages of quick wins

- Provide evidence that sacrifices are worth it
- Reward change agents with a pat on the back
- Help fine-tune vision and strategies
- Undermine cynics and self-serving resisters
- Keep bosses on board
- Build momentum
- The sponsors get critical feedback on the rate of progress
- Breaking deadlock of indecision
- Gradual capacity building

**Smartly positioned quick wins can produce regeneration scheme reinforcing the support, investment and incentives for the information system implementation**
Disadvantages of quick wins

- Sometimes hard to start
- Targeting short-term wins during a transformation effort increase the pressures on people
- Using quick wins as short-term gimmicks ("smoke and mirrors")
- Too much leadership, not so much management
- Sometimes quick wins are really not so "quick", asking for considerable resources and efforts without strategic impact.
- Tend to be technologically oriented
- **Quick wins give illusion of all-embracing progress and strategic change, thus significantly slowing down the progress**
Does it make sense to pursue quick wins

- Quick wins could be valuable tools in pushing the strategic change forward, but cannot be the strategic change themselves.
  - If used smartly, oriented to modest, specific goals, they can add much of a value to the process of strategic change
  - If used to create the illusion of a strategic change, quick wins can actually become the obstacle to the process.
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