Good Practices in Social Security

Good practice in operation since: 2017

Shared software and collaborative work

A case of the Social Insurance Bank

Social Insurance Bank
Uruguay
Summary

Over the past few years, the Social Insurance Bank (Banco de Previsión Social – BPS) has been promoting and exploring the possibility of using public software rather than creating a new system or issuing a call for tenders to acquire one, with the aim of making optimum use of government resources and to avoid “reinventing the wheel”. The term “public software” is used to describe any piece of software that has been developed using government resources and that should therefore be available for the different government organizations to share.

This good practice is complemented by collaborative software development techniques, i.e. ones that coordinate the efforts of different stakeholders and use collaborative work to achieve better results for all involved. This not only leads to a significant reduction in costs but also feeds into a network of knowledge and makes public sector staff more professional.

The issue or challenge

What was the issue or challenge addressed by your good practice? Please provide a short description.

This good practice covers three main areas:

- **Time and cost investment**: This is undoubtedly the most obvious advantage of using public software. Whilst time and money must inevitably be invested, there is less investment in either compared with building a solution of similar scope from scratch or undertaking a procurement process.

- **Robustness of solutions**: This is a very important aspect which frequently goes unnoticed or does not receive the emphasis it deserves. In general, according to our good practice, we propose adopting solutions that have already been working in a productive capacity in another organization for a certain amount of time already. Therefore, we can hope that the most critical errors have already been corrected and that the solution is tried and tested. In addition, when another organization adopts the solution, it becomes even more robust, since resources can be invested in correcting known errors or developing the solution further for the benefit of all the organizations that use it.

- **Staff training**: This aspect has a great deal of potential, but the results can only be fully appreciated on a longer-term basis than the project itself may allow. The fact that the staff from one organization are in touch with and work alongside the staff from another one is enriching for both sides. Sharing knowledge and training people in what is done elsewhere and how it is done are good ways of staying motivated and up to date.

Generally, for all of this to work, it is advisable for the practice to comply with certain standards and build in enough flexibility for others to be able to adopt the solution. This may mean that the initial development process takes longer, which is undoubtedly one of the biggest risks facing those who consider this type of good practice.

Addressing the challenge

What were the main objectives of the plan or strategy to resolve the issue or challenge? List and briefly describe the main elements of the plan or strategy, focusing especially on their innovative feature(s) and expected or intended effects.
The main objectives were:

- To reuse an existing public software solution in order to solve an existing problem, avoiding the need to procure one or develop one internally;
- To take advantage of features developed by third parties that meet the needs in hand or improve existing functionality;
- To further the software development team’s adoption of good practices relating to collaborative public software development;
- To add value to the public software portfolio with the purpose of strengthening the application and adding new functionalities to it;
- To think up, design and develop flexible solutions that are easy for the other interested parties to adopt;
- To promote the use of public software and collaborative development practices within the organization.

Targets to be achieved

*What were the quantitative and/or qualitative targets or key performance indicators that were set for the plan or strategy? Please describe briefly.*

The aim of this type of good practice is to come up with a quality solution to a problem that someone else has already faced while, at the same time, reducing the time and cost involved in doing so.

Qualitative targets:

- To introduce quality software that has been used in a similar productive environment to that of BPS so that the solution is stable and robust;
- To encourage human resource development by establishing inter-organizational links and networks that improve knowledge and performance.

Quantitative targets:

- To introduce the solution in less time than it would take to develop it from scratch;
- To introduce the solution at a lower cost than if a system of similar scope and functionality were developed or procured.

Evaluating the results

*Has there been an evaluation of the good practice? Please provide data on the impact and outcomes of the good practice by comparing targets vs actual performance, before-and-after indicators, and/or other types of statistics or measurements.*

In the case of the electronic diary system (*Sistema de Agenda Electrónica* – SAE), initial development took around ten months, with two staff members assigned exclusively to the project. It took BPS four months to introduce it, including investigating the solution, adapting it to the BPS environment and making it operational. This is 40 per cent of the initial development time.
This lead time has been reduced each time a new organization has adopted the system. For instance, the State Insurance Bank (Banco de Seguros del Estado) took two months to introduce the SAE and the National Telecommunications Administration (Administración Nacional de Telecomunicaciones) took only one month.

The success of this good practice led many other organizations to express an interest in introducing the solution, until the Agency for Electronic Governance (Agencia de Gobierno Electrónico – AGESIC) took the initiative to continue improving it and subsequently offer it to the central government in its entirety.

**Lessons learned**

*Based on the organization’s experience, name up to three factors which you consider as indispensable to replicate this good practice. Name up to three risks that arose/could arise in implementing this good practice. Please explain these factors and/or risks briefly.*

- The solution should be developed collaboratively and separately from the organization, complying with standards and designing flexible solutions that can be adapted to other organizational environments.
- Support and buy-in are required from the departments supervising and raising awareness among the staff involved:
  - To achieve this, firm support and buy-in are needed from supervisors so that the quality of the software and its “reuse” by other organizations are not affected.
  - It is also crucial for the staff involved in the project to be motivated and to believe in the benefits of the good practice. Only then will all decisions be made in a way that is fully conducive to collaborative work.
- Management of the solution: an inter-organizational group should be established to oversee the use of collaborative development to add new functionalities to the solution and ensure that it is transferrable.

**Risks:**

- Not recognizing which projects are suitable for this practice and trying to use it for others where the costs are more significant than the benefits;
- Adopting this good practice for purposes specific to the organization’s work, meaning that other organizations will not be able to “reuse” the solution developed;
- The fact that solutions may move away from the core function, meaning the focus for maintenance and collaborative “reuse” is lost.