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Good Practices in Social Security

Good practice in operation since: 2010

Organization of own programming team within the ZUS

Social Insurance Institution
Poland

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Summary

*A programming team organized within the Social Security Institution (*Zaklad Ubezpieczen Spolecznych – *ZUS) independently provides a part of the IT systems functionalities.*

By employing highly specialized software design and development professionals, the organization ensures the quality of the new products. Expertise in programming combined with knowledge of the institution's operating rules and knowledge of the operational processes in force means that the products fit in well with the organization's expectations.

The programming team is managed from the headquarters of the institution, which allows the use of uniform manufacturing tools, unified programming solutions as well as to manage the team in an efficient and effective way.

Existence of the programming team inside the institution allows for prompt response to the need for functional changes in IT systems, resulting, inter alia, from rapidly changing legal regulations, without the necessity to procure purchases with external suppliers.

The issue or challenge

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

The ZUS operates supported by its IT tools. The external environment which undergoes constant changes (legal changes and improvement of service processes) requires a large number of alterations and new functionalities of computer systems. Keeping up with these needs is limited by the possibilities of contracting software from external suppliers under the public procurement procedure, due to legal regulations, short implementation times and budget constraints. It was a good solution to organize ZUS' own programming team. The main challenge was to recruit highly qualified staff and gain internal users' confidence in the products provided by the team as well as to organize cooperation with external suppliers. The long-term retention of a stable team in the organization is also a challenge.

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 goal was to recruit an efficient programming team which would respond to the urgent needs of the institution and to act in favour of integration of software used by the institution but coming from different suppliers. The basic elements of the action plan were the employees of the institution who are familiar with its processes and organizational culture and who understand the challenges. The internal development of computer systems by the institution allowed a good fit of functionality to needs. Another key element of the plan was to free the ZUS from the public procurement process since the task is performed inside the institution. Such a solution allows for a significant acceleration of software development. The innovative solution consisted of

organizing a team dispersed geographically, with the cooperation facilitated by groupware programming tools.

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 objective of the good practice is to guarantee computer-based support for the efficient operation of the institution, despite the inflow of tasks and the uncertainty in outsourcing the supplies or in modifying computer systems provided by external suppliers. The internal programming team provides or modifies each year many new or existing systems with different levels of complexity (of which some are even for more than 40,000 internal users and for more than 2 million external clients) and carries out activities towards systems integration. The quantity of delivered products is a result of needs identified by business units vis-à-vis the production capabilities of the programming team. The level of products supplied, which has enabled business units to perform their tasks in an efficient way, can be considered as a performance indicator.

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.

The evaluation of the good practice consists of evaluating the programming projects implemented by the team.

During its operation, the programming team has created a number of programming products that contributed to significant savings due to the forgone need to procure services from external suppliers.

Over the past three years, approximately 20 programming products of the team have been developed and further modified as compared to 46 orders executed at the same time by external contractors. They included products important to the ZUS such as the DKP Risk Base (a tool for creating and analysing the risk of contribution payers' fraud), TWZA (dues enforcement and execution), SWIMM (handling international claims for social insurance benefits), e-POD (a system of circulation of electronic documents), FPP (supporting contribution payers' inspection) and others. In the case of some of them (e.g., TWZA), the ZUS has been taken over the project from an external contractor which was not able to deliver the agreed outputs within the expected scope and time.

The programming team is also unrivalled in terms of task execution time, because less time is needed both for the process of commissioning the task to the contractor and for work performance. The products were also well-suited to user needs. The products of our own programming team are considered as an example of correct identification of user needs and of flexible implementation, based on the “agile” methodology of performance. Users of computer systems provided by the programming team have very highly evaluated them, and the awareness

of the possibility of placing an order with an internal software provider gives the assurance of order execution.

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.

Factors indispensable to replicate the practice:

- It is worth building an internal programming team based on the staff (at least in part) of the institution. It ensures good alignment with the objectives of the institution, and no time is wasted to familiarize the staff with operational processes and the specificities of the organization.
- One should create opportunities for attractive jobs in a friendly environment, full of interesting challenges and adequately rewarded.
- One should have the means to retain a team whose qualifications – and therefore the market value – are constantly increasing. The team values the opportunity to work in the institution and has great satisfaction with solved problems, but the pay pressure of the commercial environment is high. One should have the means to counteract the processes of team decomposition.

Threats:

- A very attractive labour market outside the institution.
- Excessive order portfolio, which extends the delivery time of the final products.
- The absence of prospects to significantly enlarge the team.