ASIware
Software and a Partner

Why a single software solution?

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White Paper for "Is a single software solution really in your best interest?"

Problem
Social services organizations looking for one software solution to meet their needs across multiple programs.

Intended Audience
Chief Executive Officers, Presidents, Chief Financial Officers, Program Directors, Director of Operations, Clinical Directors, Consultants.

Problem Examination
The single system mindset.
While I understand the desire to have one login that provides a single view to all of your important data, this approach may be detrimental to the overall well-being of your organization. As technology and software evolve, finding that single system that provides for the smooth operation of all programs in your organization is comparable to finding the needle in the haystack. As I talk to more business leaders and front line staff of larger multi-program organizations I hear the same problems over and over.

The conversation goes something like this:

- Me: Do you have a present software solution?
- Them: We use xyz software.
- Me: That's good. Is it meeting your needs?
- Them: Yes, well sort of.
- Them: We picked xyz software because it did such a good job with our therapy and counseling programs.
- Me: How is xyz software doing for your home based services, foster care and residential programs?
- Them: Fine, however there are many features that it does not have because it was really built for therapy and counseling, features that could really help us overcome some of our problems.
- Me: Will your organization consider looking at solutions that address your problems in these other programs.
- Them: We have spent too much money and time at this point to take on anything else.

These conversations happen quite often with organizations I meet. Organizations continue to pour resources into these hopeless situations. There comes a time when you have to retreat and rearm your selves for the future. Do not settle for less for the sake of single system implementations. Do what is best for your entire organization.

I used to be the type of leader that looked for a silver bullet solution but not anymore. We are a software company and just went through this painful experience. We wanted a system that would help us with service/support, CRM and software development management. Our main priorities were service/support and CRM with software development management as a secondary priority. We picked a solution that provided the best tools and features for our two main priorities and one we thought we could manipulate for our secondary priority. After some time we realized that the solution we picked did an excellent job for our main priorities but was creating problems for our secondary priority. Our director of operations came to me one day after reading an article on LinkedIn about another solution that was built for software development by software developers. After carefully considering everything it became very obvious that the benefits of switching development management to this new solution far outweighed the pain of logging into a second system, so we switched. A very good decision for my team.

Steps you can take to make the right decision.

If you, as the decision maker, want to make the right decision you must understand the problems and needs of all the programs within your organization. Members from all programs must be part of the process for writing the project plan. All of the input you receive must be carefully considered. These are the people that are running your programs, for you. They have problems and pains that create emotions both good and bad. Why would you make your one of your programs use software that only solves part of their problems? Your return in investment will be diminished when you do this.

Below are the steps that can help you make the right decisions in regards to single system or multi system selection.

1. Solicit members that are a complete representation of your organization.
2. Be sure to include direct service staff. This will make a huge difference in staff buy in and uncovering hidden requirements.
3. Identify the main problem you are trying to solve. What is keeping you up at night or causing you to sit up in bed suddenly at 3:00 am. This is very important and is a high level description of the problems your organization faces.
4. Identify the sub problems.
    a. If you are a single program organization then your sub problems may be categorized by the different departments within your organization. For example tracking requirements on your staff may be in the human resources department while tracking invoicing may be in the financial department.
    b. If you are a multi program agency then the sub problems must be categorized by programs and departments.
5. Analyze the problems exhaustively. Assign weights to the problems that can be used for grading solutions. Use a weight scale that works for you.
6. Document your findings in a clear manner that can be used for grading possible solutions.
7. Research solutions that seem to be capable of providing the resolution to your problems and grade them.
8. Don't be single minded in your thought process and selection process. For example if your foster care department identified problems in case management, licensing, invoicing and foster parent payments do not try to make a solution fit this by coming up with ways of manipulating it. Pick the solutions that was built to do these things and does them very well with no manipulation. At the same time do not take a system that does these foster care things really well and manipulate it to fit your therapy and counseling programs. They were not built to do those things. Again, pick the solutions that was built to do these things and does them very well with no manipulation.

Summary

It's your decision. Be pragmatic in your approach and decision. While a single system theoretical seems to be the best decision, a silver bullet approach may not be in your best interest. Use sensibility and reality in your decision. Solve your problems in a more complete manner.