



Procession plc, 1a Stone's Courtyard, Chesham, Bucks HP5 1DE, England
Telephone +44(0)1494 781444 www.procession.com

A brief on using a new approach to build a “Dynamic Benefits System” for UK Government Department of Work & Pensions

Background

This brief follows a meeting at DWP Warrington on the 23rd June 2010, when the concept of a “Dynamic Benefits System” was raised. This brief is designed to address some of the challenges that all UK Government Departments (including DWP) face, and to stimulate discussion in the context of the Procession’s unique capabilities.

UK Government systems have evolved over the years based upon transaction processing and database storage and represent a significant investment in money, labour and knowledge. The traditional design of systems often results in information being stored in isolated silos, and consequently a very simple procedure (such as sending information across the organisation for further action) becomes complex and challenging. This was highlighted at the Warrington meeting.

Understandably, in the modern world there is an increasing need for complex decisions to be made accurately and quickly; the business process and applicable rules, therefore, have to be embedded in the business system rather than in the operators’ heads or dusty manuals. The more often an operator has to refer to another system or even a written manual, or to another colleague, or to his memory, the more likely are the opportunities for delay and error.

There is a growing awareness of, and dissatisfaction with the shortcomings of such legacy systems and the IT industry has applied the tag of “Business Process Management” (“BPM”) to its various remedies. As the next logical move in modern system development, BPM focuses on the “business process” where people interact with these existing legacy systems.

In an attempt to modernise systems, changing or even replacing a legacy system is inherently risky, would be prohibitively expensive and ill-advised in almost all circumstances. These legacy systems contain vast amount of highly valuable, often confidential and largely irreplaceable data, and as such are germane to the functionality of Government Departments.

So, how does a Government IT Executive retain the best of his legacy system, representing *£ms* of investment, and yet introduce a unified, cross-platform, flexible, process-driven architecture?

Procession represents a new generation of software as Business Technology with its own unique design philosophy that is “process driven” in its approach, is a self-contained application supporting people operating the process, and delivers a comprehensively more effective use of legacy systems.

Additionally, Procession’s unique approach supports high levels of process automation, with the attendant cost savings, and has the inherent capability of being easily modified to support continuous improvement in operating efficiency.

People and Process drive all activity

The IT industry has generally failed to embrace the fact that People are the source of all information. As such any new dynamic system development should focus where improvements in both service delivery and efficiency can be meaningful and measurable.

Procession’s approach is to use its unified toolset to build a ProcessHub™ that orchestrates a powerful “people driven business process” at the very core of an organisation. From this ProcessHub™ all business activity is managed and the rules of operation ensure that the right information is in the right place at the right time, with full transparency and full accountability.

Customer Centric Systems

This approach to system design is to ensure that, regardless of which legacy systems are used, the operator can logically go through as many processes as are necessary to allocate benefit to each “customer”

In the case of DWP’s systems, a “one-to-many” design philosophy is essential to ensure that the “one” applicant is allocated “many” benefits according to his eligibility. In technical parlance, this is in effect a sophisticated “configurator”, driven by an assortment of inter-dependent rules. The “business process system” should take an operator (currently a DWP civil servant but ultimately could be the “customer”) along the path of clear decision making to deal accurately with the specific circumstances of each benefit claimant “customer”.

Procession has built both complex product and pricing configurators for Rank Xerox. Further, Procession has built for UK Sport a comprehensive process to “means test” all athletes, within their end to end management of the UK’s top athletes.

Procession can build great flexibility into such configurators as demonstrated by their Living Process®.

Agility in the Software

Any new system should be able to implement quickly changes to both the process and the “rules”, without undermining the essential structure of the system. This is

an absolute pre-requisite; changes to the benefits rules occur all the time, and the “customer” must always receive no more, but no less, than his entitlement

We believe that any deployed software should support “System Thinking” as articulated by Dr W Edwards Deming ⁽¹⁾ which is an approach that “*optimises how business processes operate from end to end, working together with the solution supplier, for the benefit of the customer (the DWP) and ultimately for the benefit of their customers (the claimants).*”⁽²⁾”

Above all, such agility will make a dynamic system a future proof investment. Systems thus designed do not have a limited shelf life; they are continually updated.

Procession’s software has run UK Sport for 10 years, has undergone constant updating and change, and maintains a high level of automation with low running costs. Such agility fully supports Dr Deming’s approach to empower people.

Legacy Systems

Existing legacy systems often provide the ultimate challenge to the development of new applications; existing complexities can often deter the addition of new capabilities.

This is where a deep understanding of the legacy issues is required with a collaborative approach involving all stakeholders. The plan indicated above is to use the power and information found in existing legacy systems but to implement Procession’s “ProcessHub™” approach to harness and maximise that power.

Procession has a LegacyConnect™ capability within its tool set whose design allows the collection of information from legacy systems with minimal requirement imposed upon the legacy.

Recommended steps

For all new system development projects a working prototype should be built to capture all of the steps and rules that apply to the benefits system. This is a business analyst’s job and, to be most cost effective, is best undertaken internally to allow freedom of access to the right people. This also allows the end users / operators to be involved in the system design.

This methodology requires a complete articulation of all of the DWP benefits and inter-relationships amongst them. Once this is achieved then building a prototype could easily take place using Procession.

For Procession, this is the relatively easy part and such a prototype becomes the first pass of the deployable solution. Procession is iterative in development and users/customers can see tangible progress as each agreed milestone is reached.

Dealing with the issue of legacy systems would require the involvement and expertise of those who manage them; their contribution to the building of such a dynamic transition would be important and valuable.

Thus resourced, Procession's Business Technology will facilitate a very comprehensive solution to handling and incorporating existing legacy systems in a novel and safe way.

Platforms

The new system could be in the UK Government's "G Cloud" if so desired. Procession is based on the Oracle database, and as such is as scalable as Oracle. With DWP's large system, Procession would likely need to adopt a grid approach. However Procession technology is not resource demanding and would result in a very efficient use of infrastructure requirements.

Procession supports a wide choice in browsers, operating systems and application servers including open source.

Summary

These views are based upon deep knowledge of Procession's attributes and capabilities that challenge established ways of managing the complexities of different software technologies. We believe that to create a new and dynamic benefits system for DWP is achievable at a fraction of the time and cost of the historic legacy systems, and will result in a very much more efficient and transparent system. Procession has pioneered a new way with "people and process" at its core, and it is both proven and highly suited for deployment in Government Departments.

At the very least Procession's Business Technology could be deployed to build a prototype system to understand clearly the entire benefits system, and which could prove beneficial in its own right to facilitate better decision making on future benefits.

Notes:

(¹) Dr W Edwards Deming was one of the greatest management thinkers of the 20th century. The Japanese credit him with providing the management approach that has enabled the dramatic and unprecedented success of their industry since the Second World War.

(²) This quote is from the Deming Forum booklet "Managing Transformation actually means Transforming Management" <http://www.deming.org.uk/>