

Auditor-General's Report: Connecting Courts—the Integrated Courts Management System

Background

The Integrated Courts Management System (ICMS) is a major Information Technology (IT) initiative of the Department of Justice (DOJ).

The objective of the program is to establish a single integrated technology platform and a set of applications for all Victorian courts and tribunals to:

- enable the courts and tribunals to deal effectively with the increasing complexity of cases
- improve justice system efficiency in case management
- improve the experience of community and legal practitioners in dealing with the justice system.

The 2005–2006 State Budget allocated \$45 million to the ICMS program, which began in July 2005 as a four-year program. The budget allocated \$32 million for capital and \$13 million for operational expenses.

The ICMS program is highly complex, and involves a number of legal jurisdictions. It is being implemented in a period of significant reform in the Victorian courts and tribunals, which adds to its complexity.

At the core of the ICMS program is a common case management system for all Victorian legal jurisdictions. The case management system is an electronic system designed to manage cases in the justice system from start to finish.

It affects the following court and tribunal jurisdictions:

- Supreme Court of Victoria
- County Court of Victoria
- Magistrates' Court (including Coroner's Court, Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal)
- Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal
- Dispute Settlement Centre Victoria
- Children's Court of Victoria.

It involves major change for these jurisdictions to improve and integrate their justice services by implementing a common technology platform and harmonising processes.

Findings from this audit

There has been a significant delay in the ICMS program and implementation costs have risen. Unsatisfactory supplier performance has been a major factor in the time and cost overruns. However, inadequacies in the planning and management of the ICMS program have also contributed to the program's difficulties.

The rationale for the investment, nevertheless, was and remains sound. ICMS promises to allow the courts to be managed and run as a coordinated system. DOJ has placed a high emphasis on stakeholder management, and is putting significant effort into engaging stakeholders, as their participation is crucial to the program's success. Encouragingly, we found a number of instances where program participants from various jurisdictions were already pooling their resources to coordinate their systems and processes.

The business case presented to government provided a sound argument based on service need and policy drivers for the investment in ICMS but there were critical gaps in the assessment of the proposed case management solution.

The program underestimated the risks involved in its approach to:

- assessment of program costs
- analysis of industry capability to meet the business requirements
- procurement strategy.

After a prolonged and complex procurement process a different case management system was pursued to the one proposed in the funding submission. The implications of the changed approach were not thoroughly reassessed.

A non-traditional approach to managing the relationship with multiple suppliers was adopted and the consequent risks of this choice were underestimated. DOJ's supplier coordination ability was less than robust and there were gaps in the risk management approach that resulted in the realisation of some key risks.

Nevertheless, DOJ has addressed significant challenges encountered by the ICMS program, mainly due to supplier issues. In spite of these challenges, DOJ has been able to maintain the program momentum.

By their very nature, transformational IT-driven programs are complex and risky. A program such as ICMS, which is being implemented in a period of significant reform in the justice system, is even more complex.

This audit found a number of effective practices adopted by the ICMS program to deal with such complexity. These practices include:

- strong articulation and communication of vision
- strong belief in the value of the outcome from all the stakeholders
- real commitment from the steering committee and program management team
- active involvement of stakeholders from the judiciary
- effective use of resources from jurisdictions within the program team
- focused effort on dealing with change management
- strong contract management procedures
- sustained effort from the steering committee and program management team to see the program through difficult periods.

Nevertheless, the audit also found some major flaws in program planning and control from which important lessons need to be learned.

Recommendations

The audit report makes a range of recommendations to help the Department of Justice strengthen and improve its management of the ICMS program, as well as position itself to successfully plan and deliver transformational technology programs in the future.

This report was tabled in the Victorian Parliament on 10 June 2009.

The full text of the report is available on the office's website: <www.audit.vic.gov.au>

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