Views on (arguments against) outsourcing IT management in statistical organisations

Data and its management are key elements in any organisation of the data economy. Statistical organisations are typically one of the few most important players in data economy in any country, providing high quality key information on the whole population for various phenomena in society, economy, environment and other domains. Statistical organisations collect and manage vast amount of information to serve these needs. Naturally, all these data are managed in databases and by various IT systems.

In this regard, outsourcing IT functions in statistical organisations comes with the following high risks:

— **Loss of trust**: statistical organisations are constantly modernising to face the challenge of declining response rates and trust in general in institutions managing their data. The key to maintain and strengthen this trust is transparency. Statistical organisations can demonstrate this by showing how the data is managed within the organisation and how different data protection, IT security, infrastructural and access rights are in place to ensure that only the necessary processes and people get access to the data for various statistical tasks. A big part of this security is about showing that data and the systems that manage this data is not accessible to third parties. The security risk for any data breach is naturally higher with additional outside players involved in these processes. In case of outsourcing the complete or big parts of the IT function will demolish this trust and ultimately will result in loss of reputation in statistical institutions as trustful organisations and ultimately lead to failure to achieve their role in the society.

— **Threat to professional independence & insight**: Statistical organisations develop and choose statistical methods and practices on scientific considerations. IT in statistical organisations implement and use these chosen methods, therefore companies providing IT solutions for statistical organisations have no freedom to choose and decide what to implement and how to maintain or change in the IT processes and infrastructure. An outside company specialised in providing IT services, however, has the means to implement solutions into the IT without directions given from or insight given to statistical organisations, putting them on a forced path. This is against the fundamental principle of professional independence and will hurt the credibility of official statistics. This will also come with a higher cost for the statistical organisation as extra effort is needed to get insight into and understand the applied solutions and to manage corrective actions. From the content point of view of the affected statistical processes: the company providing IT solutions for

statistical organisations must understand the needs and underlying statistical considerations to be able to provide professional service for official statistics. This will come with a lot of extra resources needed from the statistical institution to make sure that there is common understanding between the parties (definitions, architectural foundations, data and metadata standards, statistical business process etc.).

— **Loss of architectural safeguards**: many statistical organisations have standard methodological/IT practices in place for storage, flow and management of data and metadata. These long standing solutions are basically knowledge put in practice: any choice made with the establishment, further development or full redesign of certain IT service components is embedded into the statistical processes. Managing IT is not a technical task in statistical organisations but an integral part of the processes. Managing IT outside of a statistical organisation is feasible when the IT function is a more traditional technical side of the operation of an organisation. In case of statistical institutions, this is not the case and it will impose a critically high risk in business continuity and managing the whole architecture of the statistical organisation as one system.

— **Threat to maintain authority over data assets.** Statistical databases and various forms of collected, cleaned, processed, etc. interim datasets represent the most important value in a statistical organisation. Authority over this cannot be handled over to third parties. This challenge will also come with hardships on how to provide and maintain the necessary access rights to the datasets to users, both internal and external to the statistical organisation.

— **Challenges of timeliness and quick responsiveness:** statistical organisations operate in environment both on national and internal level, where new data providers appear on the data market practically every day. The competitive advantage of official statistics on this market lies in the quality components. With the accelerated data ecosystem, timeliness (altogether with punctuality) is the key component: getting out information fast to show the state and development of the economy and society of „today" is essential to remain relevant. In case of outsourcing, this process will undoubtedly be slower, resulting in statistical organisations to lose their edge in the competition.

With these risks in mind, it is not recommended to consider outsourcing IT functions of statistical organisations.

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