



Digital case management tools for social workers : friend or foe?

Tdh and digital case management tools

- Leading Swiss child relief agency
- Member of the CPWG's Case Management Taskforce
- CM “component” in a majority of our delegations / protection projects
- Emergency to development contexts
- Various “digital tools” for CM have been used for dozens of years: CPIMS, Excel, Access...
- Since 2006: development of digital CM tools in several countries
- 2011-2013: attempt to develop a standardized CM tool within Tdh
- Since 2013: multiplication of national/regional co-initiatives
- 2016: benchmarking exercise led by HQ

Perception of digital CM tools (i)

- From a danger...to the “magic solution answering all CM issues”
- A large diversity of needs/expectations within all our contexts and all our types of users (limited common trends)
- A belief - in a field perspective - that a tool embedding hundreds of features is needed (and possible!)
- Discrepancies between :
 - context oriented tool vs. harmonized tool within the organization / country / whole protection sector
 - a tool mainly dedicated to management / IM / coordination issues vs. in support of day to day work of SW
 - full digital / mobile system vs. keeping (some) paper tools
 - a tool designed to be open to other stakeholders (services provider, link with other sectorial databases...) vs. only dedicated to Tdh staff
 - embedding or not features allowing child participation
 - with “automatic” settings for risk calculation vs. keeping perception

Perception of digital CM tools (ii)

- A need to have some complementary “specific modules” such as:
 - Child migration mapping
 - Foster families
 - ...
- A focus on digital tool whereas harmonization of CM approaches and capacity building of frontline SW are most of time limited
- A strong focus on data protection and data sharing protocol issues (NGO responsibilities) whereas the final users (*usager*) perspective aren't really taken into consideration

What about “developed countries” ? (i)

Some feedback from French context

- Despite implementation of dozens of tools dedicated to SW, strong and dedicated legislation, existence of regulatory bodies...
- There is still not consensus about digitalization of SW and the debate is still vigorous

Ex : April 2016 – call for boycott and demonstration of social workers following deployment of a new software (GASPER) in Seine Maritime

- Advantages of digitalization of SW seem to have been proven:
 - increase of efficiency
 - capacity to provide a global picture
 - better coordination and collaborative team work
 - allows a greater hindsight etc.

What about “developed countries” ? (ii)

Some feedback from French context

- Observed issues
 - No respect of professional secrecy
 - Absence of consent of final users
 - Non respect of “right to be forgotten”
- Observed/perceived risks
 - Dehumanization of social services
 - Lack of time dedicated to people in need (increase of reporting time)
 - Mechanization and automatization of social work
 - Violation of privacy
 - “fichage” / policing of final users
 - Lack of update of original data (frozen data)
 - driving of social work through “financial and outputs management”
 - Effort concentration on “quantifiable” work,
 - Temptation to use data for personal predicative forecast
- Within some services, it should be noted that allowing access to the final user of data appears to be a good “safeguard”

Some questions which need to be addressed (i)

- Is digitalization of social work processes (which are based on relationship and listening) feasible?
- Is social work really standardizable?
- How could the risk of over-simplification be overcome ?
 - Each “final user” and its story is singular vs. need for categorization
 - Observation of subjective topics vs. “arbitrary and fixed boxes without any nuance”
 - Difficulty of modelization : “social work can’t be modeled” [and request] ambiguity, incertitude, complexity, unpredictability [which can’t be informatized]”
- How could biases in the relationship with children created by digital tools be overcome?
- Is digitalization a “wrong solution” for insufficiently trained or unskilled social workers? For non-formalized/non-mastered/non-appliated social approaches/protocols?

Some questions which need to be addressed (ii)

- Is digitalization encouraging a too quantitative and statistic approach of social work? A too administrative approach of social work?
- Is digitalization just a “false proof” of efficiency and seriousness (of a highly complex work) for organization in need of donors/public accountability?
- How such digital tools could be used by organizations having not strict data policies implemented and followed?
- How such digital tools could be used within countries where there are limited “safeguards” : absence of legislation or with limited implementation, absence or powerless regulatory body (such as CNIL) or ethics committee, absence or powerless organization representing final users or social workers or etc.
- How to take into consideration the place of the final user in the tool? How, in our context, can they access their data?

Some ideas how to move forward (i)

- To systematically evaluate and ensure that right conditions are met before introducing any ICT tool (e.g. readiness tool developed by Tdh)
 - Needs and relevance of project/activities
 - Operating context: national/local child protection system, CM procedures/processes, ICT infrastructure, do no harm...
 - SW capacities and attitudes: CM understanding, CM practices, SW skills, ICT literacy, volume of cases by SW...
 - Organizational support and resources: management and technical support, material, modalities of design/adaptation of the tools, existing capacity building, existing of roll out plan of the tool...

Some ideas how to move forward (ii)

- To avoid that SW suffer from the tool / are too much passive into ICT development / feel “dominated by the technology”
- SW need to keep the control of their digital tools (instead of IM specialist or manager)
- To focus digital tool developments on SW needs (reminders, support to follow up, family approach...) rather than IM ones (dashboards, reporting...)
- To integrate more ethics reflections into the development (ethics committee, electronic record charter, use research findings etc.)
- To perceive ICT tool as not something replacing “existing” practices but as complementary tool (in a global ranger of tool)
- To never perceive the use of digital tool as an end in itself but keep monitoring CM outcomes and impact!

Thanks for your attention!