The Role of Tools for Programmatic Learning

Case Study: Programmatic Implications

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This research is the result of the collaboration between:

Summary

This case study is part of the Programmatic Learning Instrument's research trajectory by the Knowledge Platform Security and the Rule of Law with a specific focus on "The role of digital tools for programmatic learning". Informed by an initial Observation Report, which collected insights from practitioners and their experiences with digital tools for programmatic learning, this case study is **the first** in a 3-part series: **(1) Case Study - Programmatic Implications**, (2) Case Study 2 - Policy Implications, and (3) Case Study 3 - A tool in practice.

The focus of the case study is to explore the role digital tools can play regarding programmatic learning, facilitating adaptive management, and enhancing decision-making processes within the security and rule of law (SRoL) sector. By synthesising insights from in-depth interviews with field practitioners and complimentary literature, this case study uncovers the adoption and utilisation of digital tools across diverse organisational contexts.

The implications of using digital tools for programmatic learning at the programme level is at the heart of this case study. It therefore includes voices and examples from practitioner at programme level. It highlights how these technologies foster greater operational transparency and accountability, addresses prevalent challenges encountered by organisations in integrating these tools, and provides actionable, evidence-based recommendations to optimise their use for improved strategic outcomes.

Programmatic Learning Instrument (PLI) Report

Case Study: Programmatic Implications

Introduction and Background

This case study provides an investigative lens into the role of digital tools within the SRoL sectors, outlining both the promising opportunities and the inherent challenges posed by these technologies. It serves as a guide to understanding the role that digital tools can play contributing to programmatic learning in security and rule of law initiatives, how they can be applied and what challenges and benefits they entail as well as how they can potentially contribute to shifting the paradigms of programmatic learning.

What are digital tools and programmatic implications?

Before delving deeper, it is crucial to define what it meant by 'digital tools' in the context of this study. Here, we refer to **digital tools** as a variety of software and platforms designed to, for example, facilitate data management, communication, and analytical tasks that support learning and decision-making in complex security and legal environments. These tools can range from data analysis software to communication platforms and integrated management systems that collectively enhance the efficacy and responsiveness of organisations operating within SRoL sectors.

Programmatic learning, as applied in this case study, refers to the process of capturing, reflecting on, and applying insights gained throughout the implementation of programmes or projects. It involves systematically gathering lessons, evaluating what works and what doesn't, and using that knowledge to improve future strategies, decision-making, and overall programme effectiveness. In this case study, the application of these tools to foster continuous learning and adaptation within organisations is specifically explored in the context of programmatic learning. This case study draws extensively on findings from the Programmatic Learning Instrument (PLI) framework of the Knowledge Platform Security & Rule of Law (KPSRL), providing insights into how tools like Propel can aid in this process.

Why this case study?

The primary motivation for this case study on programmatic implications stems from the necessity to understand and harness the potential of digital tools in optimising SRoL operations. The strategic implementation of these tools can lead to improved decision-making processes, heightened transparency, and better adaptability to on-the-ground realities, which are often volatile and unpredictable. By integrating digital tools, organisations not only streamline their operations but also pave the way for more informed policy-making and effective governance structures within the SRoL sectors.

This case study presents the potential of digital tools, reviews their impact on organisational workflows, and discusses strategic implementations to mitigate challenges typically faced in

high-risk environments. Following this introduction, the document will present a detailed analysis of current digital tool applications, identify trends and challenges, and provide actionable recommendations to enhance their use effectively.

The role of digital tools in the Security and Rule of Law (SRoL) sector

In an era marked by rapid technological advancement, digital tools have become indispensable for organisations engaged in SRoL activities. These tools are critical in managing intricate data flows, ensuring timely communication across various operational teams, and facilitating strategic decisions crucial for navigating complex security and legal environments. The effective use of digital technologies is pivotal in enhancing transparency, accountability, and the overall efficiency of operations in regions affected by legal and security challenges. While the integration of digital tools promises enhanced operational efficiency and better management of the complexities inherent in SRoL sectors, several barriers can impede their full utilisation. This section not only highlights the transformative potential of these tools but also examines the obstacles such as digital literacy deficits, infrastructural limitations, and organisational resistance to technological change. By identifying these challenges and exploring strategic solutions, this study aims to equip SRoL programmes with the knowledge to overcome barriers and fully leverage the capabilities of digital technologies.

What does existing research reveal about the adoption and impact of digital tools in enhancing SRoL initiatives?

The intersection of digital tools and security and rule of law (SRoL) initiatives is growing, yet remains in many ways nascent with significant gaps and opportunities for deeper exploration. Smith and Johnson (2021) highlight the transformative potential of real-time data analytics in sharpening decision-making capabilities within SRoL frameworks, which can lead to more responsive and effective governance structures. Conversely, Lee et al. (2019) bring attention to the prevalent resistance towards technological adoption, often stemming from infrastructural deficits and ingrained cultural barriers that inhibit seamless integration. Moreover, studies like those conducted by Fernandez (2020) argue that while digital tools offer promising advancements in operational efficiency, they also necessitate rigorous scrutiny to ensure they enhance rather than complicate accountability and transparency. The literature consistently points to an urgent need for more empirical studies that not only highlight the benefits but also critically assess the real-world impact of these technologies on the transparency and accountability of SRoL organisations.

What methods are most effective in evaluating the impact of digital tools on SRoL programmatic outcomes?

To address the complex dynamics of digital tool integration within SRoL sectors, this case study adopts a qualitative research methodology, centering around semi-structured interviews with a diverse group of SRoL professionals. These interviews are designed to extract rich, in-depth data on the participants' direct experiences, the challenges they face, and the successes they've encountered with digital tools for programmatic learnings, applied in international development

and humanitarian settings, specifically related to SRoL. By focusing on qualitative insights, this approach aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the operational realities and strategic implications of digital tools in high-stakes environments. The selected methodology allows for an adaptive and responsive exploration of emerging themes, facilitating a robust analysis that can inform actionable strategies to enhance the efficacy and impact of digital tools in SRoL initiatives.

Key Results

Which digital tools are commonly used in the Security and Rule of Law (SRoL) sectors, and how do they specifically enhance operational practices?

Building upon the insights garnered from the *PLI - Observation Report*, this section delves deeper into the specific digital tools that are transforming SRoL operations. The aim here is not just to identify these tools but to critically assess how they enhance operational practices and address the unique challenges faced by SRoL organisations. Through this analysis, we offer a nuanced understanding of the digital landscape within the SRoL sectors, informed by direct testimonies from field practitioner. The integration of digital tools within SRoL operations has become increasingly pivotal for enhancing efficiency, transparency, and responsiveness.

Our analysis identifies several key tools that have been adopted across the sector:

1. **SharePoint and Microsoft Teams:** These tools are primarily used for document management and team collaboration. SharePoint enables secure storage and access to essential documents, ensuring that all team members, from local to global levels, have access to updated resources. Microsoft Teams is essential for real-time communication and project management. The integration of these platforms allows for the centralised sharing of resources across geographically dispersed teams

"*SharePoint allows our teams in different countries to access critical programmatic documents, ensuring that we are all on the same page and can collaborate effectively.*" This quote by a practitioner illustrates the central role these tools play in supporting coordination and transparency.

2. **WhatsApp:** In regions where traditional communication infrastructure is lacking, WhatsApp is crucial for real-time communication and crisis management. Its accessibility and ease of use make it an indispensable tool for instant communication between field teams and headquarters. WhatsApp's flexibility has proven vital in environments where quick decision-making is required.

"*We use WhatsApp because it allows us to respond quickly during unexpected situations in the field, like during a crisis where traditional forms of communication might not be available.*"

3. **Propel and similar platforms:** Propel is a platform designed to support programmatic learning and adaptive management. Unlike more generic tools, Propel enables organisations to track field data, adapt strategies based on real-time feedback, and

enhance their decision-making processes. The ability to document and analyse operational data is vital for managing complex SRoL projects, where feedback loops and learning must be constant and adaptive.

"*Using Propel has allowed us to dynamically adjust our strategies based on real-time feedback from field operations.*"

What are the emerging trends and persistent challenges in the use of digital tools within the SRoL sectors?

The exploration of digital tools within Security and Rule of Law (SRoL) sectors has illuminated a landscape marked by both innovative practices and significant hurdles. This section delves deeper into specific cases that exemplify these trends and challenges, providing a more granular view of how digital tools are applied in real-world contexts and the implications of their adoption. Our findings reveal several trends and challenges based on the interviews conducted:

1. **Incremental adoption:** There is a growing recognition across SRoL organisations that digital tools can substantially enhance data management and stakeholder communication. However, this adoption tends to be incremental to mitigate disruptions to established workflows. As one of the interviewees notes, the integration of platforms like SharePoint for document management and Mighty Network for stakeholder engagement exemplifies this trend. Organisations gradually adopt these tools to ensure they complement existing practices without causing upheaval.

Case example: The use of a digital platform to for collaboration and knowledge exchange across country teams

In a regional advocacy programme connecting local initiatives to global policymaking, an online platform, referred to as "Grow," was introduced to support knowledge exchange across country teams. Managed by the programme's regional officer, "Grow" provides a space for sharing best practices and lessons learned. It hosts regular "Grow Together" sessions, where teams discuss successes and challenges, fostering collective learning that informs programme adjustments and improvements.

One interviewee mentioned that policymakers occasionally participated in "Grow Together" sessions hosted on the Mighty Network platform. These sessions provided opportunities for country teams to share their successes and challenges, with inputs fed back into broader policy frameworks. While their presence was not consistent across all sessions, their involvement ensured that programme-level insights were integrated into the higher-level policy sphere, facilitating adaptive management and aligning strategies with on-the-ground realities.

The platform has strengthened collaboration and communication between regions. By encouraging open reflection, "Grow" helps teams refine their strategies based on shared experiences. This has made the programme more responsive and effective, with insights from one region benefiting others, ultimately helping to accelerate progress towards its advocacy objectives.

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2. **Challenges in digital literacy and infrastructure:** Despite the potential benefits, the full utilisation of digital tools is often hindered by digital literacy gaps among staff and infrastructure limitations in underdeveloped regions. These barriers prevent some organisations from leveraging digital tools effectively. One of the practitioners interviewed highlighted that even though tools like Miro and Mural are employed for strategic planning, the complexity and interconnected nature of programmes often revert the process to more traditional methods due to these gaps.

3. **Organisational culture and resistance to change:** A persistent challenge is the resistance to organisational change. Traditional practices are deeply embedded in SRoL organisations, leading to scepticism about the value of new technologies. Without a deliberate cultural shift, the adoption of digital tools may remain superficial.
   As one interviewee notes: *"Organisations say, 'we are used to doing things this way,' and they resist the change that digital tools bring.*" This reflects a common issue across the sector, where organisational culture often inhibits technological progress.

Case example: Challenges and lessons for implementing digital tools to support existing processes

A practitioner working in justice and rule of law shared their experience using digital tools to enhance programme management and impact assessment. They use tools such as Kobo Collect for real-time field data collection, Power BI for data visualisation, and Google Forms for gathering community feedback. These tools have significantly improved operational efficiency and enabled data-driven decision-making. For example, insights from field surveys have led to adjustments in programmes, such as improved access to legal aid services based on community needs.

Despite these benefits, challenges persist. The practitioner noted technical skills gaps and language barriers, as many tools are available only in English, limiting accessibility for team members. Additionally, there is a misconception that these tools are only for M&E staff, restricting wider adoption. To overcome these issues, the practitioner sees a need for more accessible, user-friendly tools and better integration of qualitative data analysis to improve programme evaluation and responsiveness.

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4. **Need for strategic reflection:** A key insight from the interviews is the recognition of the need for strategic reflection on the use of digital tools. One practitioner noted, *"Reflection on what tools are needed and reporting on their use should be considered an approach in itself, not just a supplementary activity."* This call for reflection suggests that organisations should not only adopt tools but also engage in continuous evaluation of how these tools support transparency, accountability, and learning.

In the Security and Rule of Law (SRoL) sector, digital tools are increasingly used to manage complex programming in fragile and conflict-affected settings. Tools like Kobo Collect and Power

BI have been adopted to gather real-time data, visualise trends, and inform programme adjustments. For example, in contexts such as Burundi, these tools have allowed practitioners to adapt their approaches based on evolving security and justice needs. However, the sector's reliance on informal communication methods, like WhatsApp for rapid decision-making in high-stakes environments, reflects the challenges of fully embedding structured digital platforms in SRoL programming.

This reliance on informal tools often stems from the unique demands of the SRoL sector, such as the need for rapid responses and collaboration among diverse stakeholders, including local communities, government agencies, and international donors. Additionally, tools like Mighty Network have faced resistance due to entrenched habits of using familiar platforms like email or WhatsApp, which are perceived as more accessible in these settings. Another challenge lies in integrating qualitative insights, crucial for understanding complex social dynamics in justice and governance, with quantitative data, which many existing tools struggle to do effectively.

These trends and challenges highlight the importance of tailoring digital tools to the specific needs of the SRoL sector, where adaptive decision-making, trust-building among stakeholders, and the ability to synthesise diverse data sources are critical. Digital tools must balance accessibility with functionality to support programme goals in environments that demand both flexibility and rigour.

Recommendations

What are the actionable steps for improving the use of digital tools in the SRoL sector for programmatic learning?

Informed by the interviews with field practitioners and the analysis, this section offers tailored recommendations aimed at optimising the use of digital tools within Security and Rule of Law (SRoL) programmes. These suggestions focus on enhancing programme execution, refining tools for better integration, and evolving policy frameworks to support the effective deployment of digital technologies.

1. **Invest in digital literacy and infrastructure:** Organisations should focus on upgrading infrastructure to support the seamless integration of digital tools, particularly in rural or underdeveloped areas. Equally important is the investment in comprehensive training programmes designed to boost digital literacy among all staff members. For instance, participants highlighted the initial success and subsequent limitations of tools like Miro and Mural in visualising programme strategies, pointing towards the need for continuous learning to keep up with evolving tool capabilities.

2. **Foster organisational culture that embraces innovation:** The cultural resistance to new technologies is a significant barrier, as noted by some of the participants of the study. Leadership must actively promote and support the adoption of innovative tools by demonstrating their value in enhancing program transparency and operational efficiency. Encouraging a culture of experimentation and learning can facilitate smoother adoption and integration of new technologies.

3. **Enhance strategic use of digital tools:** As digital tools evolve, so should the strategies that surround their use. Organisations should periodically review and assess the tools in use, ensuring they align with current programmatic needs and strategic objectives. Examples such as the use of Kobo Collect and Power BI in programme management illustrate the benefits of strategic tool utilisation to enhance data-driven decision-making and operational efficiency: *"We need to reflect on what tools are needed, have a more open discussion around tools, and report on them.".* A critical takeaway from the interviews is the need for organisations to embed strategic reflection on digital tool use into their broader planning processes. Reflection on the purpose, functionality, and impact of tools should not be a supplementary activity but a core component of strategic planning. One practitioner aptly highlighted, *"Reflection on what tools are needed and reporting on their use should be considered an approach in itself, not just a supplementary activity.".* To illustrate, a best practice example comes from a programme where teams used SharePoint to centralise documentation and facilitate collaboration across multiple countries. The programme included regular reviews of the platform's effectiveness in supporting communication and coordination, which directly informed adjustments to workflows and enhanced its utility over time. This reflective approach ensured that the tool was not only functional but aligned with the evolving needs of the team, fostering both transparency and efficiency

4. **Improve tool integration:** Tools like Propel and other specialised platforms should be designed to integrate seamlessly with commonly used software such as Microsoft Office. This integration can significantly reduce the learning curve and resistance among staff, making these tools more accessible and practical for everyday use. The integration of SharePoint has been particularly noted for supporting cross-regional communication and learning, enhancing programmatic coherence and collaborative capabilities.

5. **Address context-specific challenges:** Digital tools in the SRoL sector must account for the unique challenges of volatile environments. Tools should be designed with features that support adaptability, such as real-time data capture and analysis for rapidly changing conditions.

6. **Bridge informal and formal learning practices:** While informal tools like WhatsApp are widely used for quick communication, structured platforms can provide the analytical depth needed for programmatic learning. Combining these tools strategically can ensure both immediacy and rigour in decision-making processes.

Case example: Enhancing peacebuilding through strategic digital tool integration

A peacebuilding specialist, working across the peace nexus and conflict sensitivity, shared insights on the strategic use of digital tools in her work. Supporting country teams from headquarters, this practitioner utilises a project management system, referred to here as "One Manager," to streamline proposal development, document handling, and legacy workflows. This system centralises key documentation, making it accessible to global teams, which enhances

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collaboration and ensures coherence across various offices. By integrating such tools into daily operations, the practitioner ensures that global teams can work more effectively and remain aligned on programme goals.

Additionally, this practitioner facilitates communities of practice through platforms like Microsoft Teams and Viva Engage. These tools are essential for both synchronous and asynchronous communication, enabling seamless file sharing and ongoing discussions among team members. The practitioner values these platforms for creating an engaging and collaborative space where learning is shared, and real-time problem-solving can occur, all of which are crucial for supporting dynamic and responsive peacebuilding efforts across multiple regions.

7. **Create feedback loops for continuous improvement:** Establish mechanisms that enable continuous feedback from all tool users within the organisation. This feedback should directly inform the ongoing development and adjustment of tools to better meet the users' needs, thus ensuring their relevance and effectiveness. Implementing structured feedback loops can help organisations adapt more swiftly to both internal and external changes, enhancing overall program adaptability and responsiveness to evolving challenges.

Conclusion

Digital tools are not merely supplementary assets but pivotal elements that can redefine operational landscapes within the Security and Rule of Law (SRoL) sectors. They offer capabilities to enhance decision-making, boost transparency, and facilitate rapid adaptation to evolving ground situations. However, to unlock their full potential, organisations must navigate several foundational challenges that could impede their effective adoption.

Focusing on programmatic learning:

Digital tools dramatically enrich programmatic learning by facilitating real-time data collection and analysis, which is crucial in refining programme methodologies and outcomes. By investing in digital literacy and infrastructure, SRoL organisations ensure that their teams are prepared to use these tools and able to interpret the data effectively, leading to more informed decisions that directly influence programme success.

Overcoming organisational resistance:

Organisational resistance, often fueled by a reliance on traditional methods, can be mitigated by demonstrating the clear benefits of digital tools through tangible examples and case studies. These illustrations should showcase how specific digital solutions have directly contributed to the learning and adaptation phases of programs, thereby improving results and stakeholder satisfaction.

Strategic reflection and continuous evaluation:

Strategic reflection on the selection, utilisation, and continuous evaluation of digital tools is crucial. Organisations should not adopt technology for its own sake but rather implement tools

that align with strategic objectives and enhance operational efficacy. Regular reviews of tool effectiveness, informed by direct feedback from users at all levels, will ensure that digital strategies remain aligned with organisational goals and are responsive to the dynamic SRoL landscape.

Case example: Integrating tools as core elements of programmes

In one example from a practitioner working in transitional justice and rule of law, a project coordinator emphasised the importance of digital tools in shaping programme strategies. Rather than treating these tools as mere supplementary aids, the practitioner advocated for their integration as core elements of a programme's overall approach. They argued that when digital tools are considered strategically, they can significantly improve the effectiveness of project implementation and its long-term impact. This perspective urges organisations to reconsider how they incorporate technology, ensuring that tools are not only functional but central to achieving programme objectives.

The practitioner also highlighted the need for more open discussions within organisations about the potential of digital tools. They stressed that reflecting on which tools are required, how they can be applied, and reporting on their impact should become integral to project cycles. This shift, they suggested, would ensure that tools are recognised as a fundamental part of the broader strategy, promoting more deliberate and impactful integration in future programmes.

In summary, the path to effective digital tool integration within SRoL sectors is complex yet undeniably rewarding and, considering the advancements of digital technology such as proven by the reverent developments in AI technology, arguable inevitable. By prioritising an environment that embraces digital fluency and innovation, SRoL organisations ensure to meet the current technological benchmarks as well as advance programmatic learning and outcomes. This strategic approach ensures that SRoL entities not only respond effectively to immediate challenges but also shape future governance with enhanced accountability, efficiency, and adaptability.