

Based on the comprehensive nature of Merkava, the project's value proposition (Figure 3) appears to fit the overall proposition shown in Figure 1 above. There is ample evidence in the case materials for all of the returns accumulations in these figures, though the measurement and documentation has in most cases not been done. There is, however, a major issue with respect to the assessment of public returns for a project such as Merkava that deserves some added attention. This particular project was not originally conceived or implemented primarily to produce direct benefits to citizens. It is designed primarily to improve the internal operations and efficiencies of government and only secondarily to support or deliver direct benefits to individual citizens and organizations. The question arises, therefore, about how much beyond the boundaries of the project itself should an assessment reach for evidence of public returns attributable to Merkava.

### Index:

Unshaded = Direct and documented returns

Hatched = Indirect or potential returns

Shaded = Not applicable or lack of foreseen indirect or potential returns at this time

### Figure 3. Merkava Public Value Proposition

For this case, the answer to that question has been to include attention to returns resulting from some e-government program services that are not strictly speaking based in Merkava. This was done because the back office portion of the overall service process was either already part of the Merkava architecture or planned to be. In a situation with a development approach like the five-layers model there are bound to be parallel lines of development that are part of the same vision but are technically separate. It seems that erring on the side of inclusion for such benefits is appropriate, with the necessary qualifiers, since to omit them would likely understate the overall value of any IT investment. More importantly, this broader view of returns fits with the vision of Merkava as the infrastructure for building improved services, both directly and through more general modernization and enhancement of management and controls. The challenge for assessing public returns is to trace the links between the infrastructure and all the returns it ultimately supports. For this case, much of the data for that analysis remains uncollected.

Another issue is related to the comprehensive, reform oriented nature of this project. Much of its public value rests on acknowledging and documenting returns that are difficult to measure: transparency, trust, and integrity of government; good stewardship of resources; public participation; and increased accountability. Considerable claims have been made by the designers and implementers of Merkava about returns of this sort. And the functionality of the systems themselves argue strongly for the existence of these returns. But there is at present little direct evidence to support the claims. Since many of the political returns have to do with public perceptions and attitudes, survey work with samples of citizens or more qualitative approaches like focus groups would be valuable. It would also be valuable to use the analytical capabilities of the ERP to track the shifts in expenditures and program activities to see if the expected increases in direct benefits in fact occur. The kind of data available from such inquiry would strengthen the case for continued investment and expansion of the overall initiative.

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