

## **B.4. Defining a Successful Implementation**

The most challenging part of an information system strategy is successfully implementing the plan. But what do we really mean by implementation and how does one know if it is successful?

When we refer to implementation, we mean far more than merely plugging in the computer and peripherals and the communication hardware, and turning on the screen — implementation also involves the process of introducing an information system throughout the institution and ensuring that its full potential benefits are achieved. A successful implementation is one that promotes and supports the institution's ability to execute its plans and meet its goals. Organizations are discovering that successful information systems implementation in the health services institution requires a firm understanding of the organization's overall strategic plan. A health services information system has the purpose of improving the overall performance of the institution. The system being implemented must be recognized as a strategic tool and corporate asset that represents an investment in the organization's viability.

In the case of Latin America and the Caribbean, in particular, one must also consider the many different levels of technology available or currently in use in the region. All too often there exists the tendency to rush to the latest and most advanced technology, irrespective of the user's ability to absorb it, that is, to install, maintain, and make the best use of it. Different needs and capabilities co-exist in the same country, same political subdivision, and even inside the boundaries of the same organization.

A technology that is appropriate to an advanced, sophisticated user such as a large teaching institution in an urban area may not be appropriate for an emerging health services organization in a rural setting. The social and economic context must always be considered along with issues related to availability of resources and personnel, health information infrastructure, sustainability and continuity of the decisions, and appropriate flow of financial resources.

### ***B.4.1. Processes and Roles***

To respond to the customer needs, the institution must be able to execute key processes efficiently and effectively and provide adequate information support to critical roles. A process is essentially a set of activities, with a distinct beginning and end that results in the delivery of a product or service to customers. In general, health services institutions manage between twelve and fourteen critical processes:

- Planning services
- Coordinating services
- Delivering care
- Scheduling patients and resources

- Managing material
- Collecting revenue
- Developing staff
- Assessing patient care, planning, and outcomes
- Health services
- Reviewing care
- Documenting care managing costs
- Managing facilities
- Managing information
- Managerial decision making.

The identification of critical processes lays the foundation for defining key roles. Roles are defined as a set of job characteristics that describe how (tasks, events, responsibilities, and priorities), what (goals, objectives, and targets), and the enablers (skills, accountabilities, incentives, and ownership).

### ***B.4.2. The Information Strategic Plan***

One must emphasize that IS&T is a supportive tool available to the institution, not an end in itself. For IS&T to be successful, its functions and capabilities must properly address the goals of the institution. When a health services institution decides to proceed with a computerization process, an information systems plan in keeping with the institution's strategies becomes an essential element in guaranteeing that the technologies incorporated fully correspond to the institution's requirements and structure. Accordingly, IS&T plans should usually follow on the heels of similar organizational planning at the institutional level.

Whether the computerization process is being implemented through the acquisition of a standard market solution or by the development of custom-designed applications, the Information Strategic Plan is an unavoidable requirement.

The project plan should make it possible to understand the overall organization's mission and the position of IS&T within that mission; gain an understanding of the institution's policies and strategies; determine the management information that the each management level will require for operation and control; and determine the extent and level of satisfaction provided by the currently operating computer system.

A strategic plan entails the accomplishment of the following steps:

- Involve users in the determination of requirements, functions, design, and selection of solutions for application implementation.
- Incorporate all relevant applications into the plan, along with implementation timetables, resource requirements, critical assumptions, and dependencies (see Implementation Phases below).

- Provide tangible solutions to problems detected during the execution of the project.
- Develop appropriate mechanisms for measurement of implementation results and eventual adjustments to the IS&T plan.

The resulting Information Systems Plan should allow the Institution to understand its current position and in what direction it should head, with regard to information systems. Furthermore, it must contain an overall information strategy, with critical inputs that include users' needs, assessments, physical and technological infrastructure, organizational culture, human resources, and education as to the potential of IS&T to support the organization goals.

Part of the strategy may address regional networks, partners, the Internet, and other external influences that will need to be considered, such as government and crediting agencies (Figure 6).

**Figure 6. Aligning IT Strategy to the Health Services Institution Strategy**

