

# Vision of the Future: Strategically Managing an HIM Department

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*by Harold Dahlstrand and Beth Hjort, RHIA*

Do you know where your HIM department is headed? HIM departments are affected by many external forces, yet a considered vision and anticipation of the unexpected can help to make the uncontrollable more manageable.

If you're an HIM leader, ask yourself these questions: What is the mission of your department? Do you know how this department should be built, organized, and grow over time? Who are the customers? How would your department react if faced with a major catastrophe? How does HIM fit into the big picture within your healthcare organization? Do you see any change in focus or emerging missions?

This article will provide advice on how to approach these and other questions and better lead your department through strategic planning.

## Planning Is Everything

The answers to the questions above tell your institution that as HIM professionals, you are part of the team, care about the well-being of the organization, and want to deliver quality services that are in sync with overall organizational direction. The best way to uncover the answers is through strategic planning, the core process in a successfully managed HIM department.

Strategic planning meetings play a crucial role in an organization's success. To many people, strategic planning is needed only for big businesses, but it applies equally to any organization and any size business or department. Strategic planning helps match strengths to available opportunities, regardless of how big or small an organization or department is.

It's likely that your healthcare organization already does an excellent job of strategic planning. If your department doesn't have a strategic plan, however, it would be wise to work with key people to develop one.

First, make sure you have access to the organization's current strategic plan. It will serve as a blueprint and ensure that your department's direction is consistent with and supports the overall mission and strategy of the organization.

## Assembling a Team

To plan effectively, you need the right mix of staff members on the strategic planning committee. Members must have a clear understanding of departmental functions, strengths, and weaknesses and be able to realistically assess the current circumstances. They must be comfortable seeking the input and perspective of others who aren't on the committee. And they must be able to develop a clear vision, mission, goals, and objectives. Be sure to gather people who are diverse in their thinking, expertise, and experience. And don't be afraid of candor--many healthcare facilities suffer because they don't take advantage of existing talent.

Recognize that the strategic planning process is scalable to your department and organization. You may find that involvement of all departmental staff is the best choice as you consider current morale, extent of buy-in sought, department size, and a time line for developing a final plan. Breaking into smaller groups with more narrowly focused planning agendas may be effective. The collective recommendations of these groups can be sifted and collated for formation of a manageable departmental plan.

When conducting strategic planning sessions, it is important to create an environment of open sharing and safety, regardless of rank. If you don't feel that you have this type of climate or you don't feel comfortable leading a planning session, you might consider bringing in an outside facilitator. Too often when organizations have strategic planning meetings, the participants only nod their heads in agreement with the boss—even when their input is requested. It is best to prep each participant with the

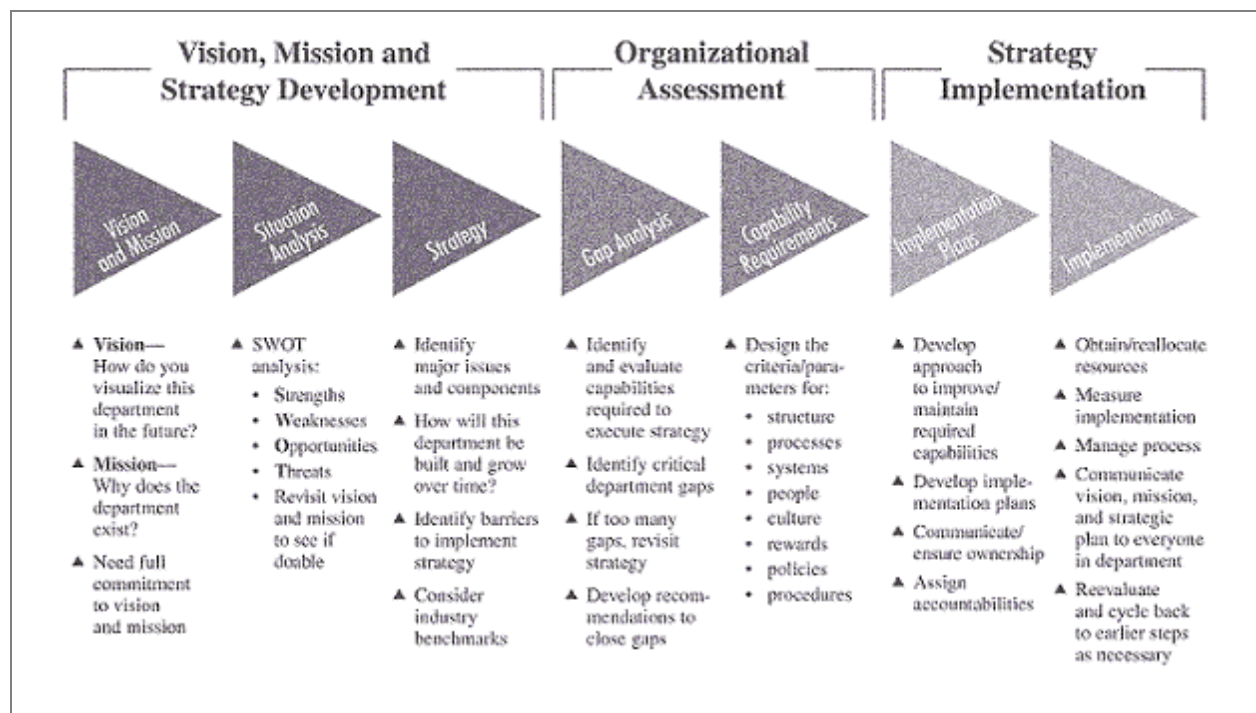
type of questions that need to be addressed and the necessity of honest observations. By doing this, everyone will understand the purpose of strategic planning sessions and feel included in the discussions.

## Laying the Best Plans

After you have assembled a planning team, it's time to start thinking of possibilities for your department's plan. What are your creative opportunities? Most likely you will not need new techniques. Familiar quality improvement techniques can be appropriately applied and are just as valuable and effective in the strategic planning process (see "[The Way to Strategic Planning](#)" below).

After the meetings, validate the new strategic plan with senior management for agreement and clearly communicate it to all departmental staff. Both management and staff should understand departmental direction, be able to articulate the mission and strategy of the department, and know how each job fits into its overall success. Even the most clearly expressed visions and carefully worded mission statements fail if staff members have no ownership or commitment.

A wise manager in a well-managed HIM department will recognize that a very valuable side benefit to the strategic planning process is strengthening staff cohesiveness as they work together in a common direction. Strategic planning is step number one in an ongoing process--the action that follows with everyone behind it is what will make the difference.



**Harold Dahlstrand** ([hdahlstrand@msn.com](mailto:hdahlstrand@msn.com)) is president of the Dahlstrand Group, a management consulting firm ([www.dahlstrandgroup.com](http://www.dahlstrandgroup.com)). **Beth Hjort** ([beth.hjort@ahima.org](mailto:beth.hjort@ahima.org)) is an HIM practice manager at AHIMA.

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