

To be effective, a business case for criminal justice information integration (CJII) must be specific about its objectives, practical in its approaches, and realistic in assessing its prospects for success. This study examined several integration initiatives in order to ground business case development in current realities. The study revealed a complex but optimistic picture for improving integration. There is much enthusiasm for the general objectives for integration: smooth and effective information sharing and use, increased public safety, enhanced justice in society, and more efficient government operations. The problems come when actual integration initiatives generate conflict over specific impacts on budgets, organizational relationships, and established procedures. These are problems not of technology nor of conflicting visions, but of organizational and political interests and relationships. All should be reflected in a business case for CJII.

The results of this study are based primarily on 26 interviews conducted with persons who were knowledgeable about specific state and local initiatives. The interviews ranged in length from 45 minutes to 2 hours, and were semi-structured, open-ended in style. The study also draws on published materials about the integration initiatives, obtained either from the participants directly, or by searching print and electronic sources.

The study showed that achieving a high level of integration is feasible and has been achieved in some states and localities. These examples of success can serve as lighthouses for integration efforts elsewhere by illustrating problems to be solved, successful strategies, and benefits to be obtained. A number involve building the foundation blocks for more complete integration, such as formal coordination bodies, data networks, and collaborative relationships. There is growing attention to and funding for the integration agenda at the local, state, and Federal levels. As attention and resources have increased, the cost of information technology has continued to decline, bringing higher capability within the budgets available for new initiatives.

Quite a wide variety of initiatives were identified, including several that were **comprehensive** in scope, and others that were **selective** and focused on specific objectives. Along with widely varying objectives, the states and localities have a mix of histories for integration initiatives ranging over a 20+ year span. The Harris County Justice Information Management System (JIMS) has grown from a modest beginning in the late 1970s to what is now a large integrated system. By contrast, Colorado pursued a much faster statewide effort. They began with an exploratory commission in the late 1980s, leading to the Colorado Integrated Criminal Justice Information System (CICJIS) Task Force in 1995, followed by a full integration plan approved in September 1996 and a live statewide system in May 1998. The result of these various development paths is a patchwork quilt of integration initiatives. Thus an effective business case for advancing integration initiatives must be tailored to its particular corner of the quilt.

Overcoming Barriers to Achieving Integration Objectives

Success depends on overcoming the many barriers to integration found across the sites we studied.

- **Turf**—the desire to avoid the costs of change, to reduce or control risk, and to preserve autonomy in an adversarial environment. The successful solutions depended on building trust and increasing incentives, or making the resistant participants more aware of incentives and benefits, and controlling costs.
- **Complexity and variety**—Inconsistencies in scale and structure among governments and levels make compatibility and consistency in applications more expensive and complicated to design and develop. These uneven rates of development and technological sophistication result in an uneven capacity to innovate.
- **Need for a champion or powerful advocate**—The champion is needed to overcome resistance to central coordination, standardization, or the uniformity and consensus necessary to achieve most integration objectives.

Lessons About Success

Successful achievement of integration objectives is clearly possible by a number of different paths, such as a “full frontal assault” on comprehensive integration objectives and in other cases, limited strategic objectives as part of a larger strategic plan.

Several other factors played a role in success.

- A crisis or high visibility event that focused attention on the need to improve integration.
- Informal relationships that facilitate communication and provide ongoing opportunity for the interaction necessary for moving integration forward.

- A building block implementation philosophy that allows systems to be constructed from a number of inter-related “blocks” or components, guided by an overall vision or strategic plan.

Necessary Ingredients

There were a number of consistencies among the integration initiatives that suggest some necessary ingredients for success.

- **Coordination and control mechanisms**—to support communication, collaboration, and some sort of authoritative decision making among the many players in the enterprise.
- **Trust, participation, and buy-in**—successful relationships, building trust through power sharing, incentives, and shared interests.
- **Standards**—agreement and consistency in data elements, their definitions, data manipulations, operational procedures, and application design.
- **Comprehensive planning and a long-range perspective** — to achieve a wider, more systematic range of objectives.
- **Understanding of the business process** —clear and highly detailed knowledge of the specific procedures that generate or use criminal justice information in order to support and enhance the business processes.
- **Adequate financial resources**—an ongoing commitment of resources to avoid obsolescence, and meet escalating demands for capability.

Useful Ingredients

A number of other factors, or ingredients, were clearly helpful in promoting greater integration in the cases studied.

- **Peer pressure**—agencies or jurisdictions felt a competitive pressure to improve their own integration capacity when a peer agency or jurisdiction improved theirs.
- **Increased demands**—for improved integration prompted by growing sophistication about what is possible with rapidly improving information technology.
- **Reinventing government**— movement and the related emphasis on efficiency, innovation, and improved service delivery.
- **External support for networking**—has also been a valuable resource for integration, such as the Office of Justice Programs workshops.

Assessing the Benefits

A key benefit of improved integration is improved decision making. This includes better information for law enforcement officers at the points of critical decisions, better information as a tool for improved court management and case-related decisions, more complete information for both prosecution and defense attorneys, and for jails and corrections officials to make appropriate classification and assignment decisions. Parole officers desire improved information to better manage their cases. Though not measured in financial terms, there was clear consensus that justice professionals attach a high value to these benefits.

Benefits also include reduced exposure to liability for mistakes, since errors in the criminal justice enterprise can be very costly. Eliminating redundant data entry reduces the possibility of errors and can improve data quality as well. As with improved decisions, estimates of actual savings due to error reduction were not available. Benefits in terms of administrative efficiency were also reported. These include reducing or eliminating redundant data entry and paper work, delays in accessing information, reducing costs for retrieving information, and avoiding delays through better coordination.

Assessing the Costs

Available cost estimates and reports provide only a very rough guide for planning. The consensus among those who participated in the study was that integration initiatives are potentially expensive, but still clearly cost-effective overall. Some examples do give a rough indication of the range of costs involved. At the high end, North Carolina

estimated \$91 million for its integration work, and Alaska's integration initiative includes a budget estimate of \$84 million over four years. Sarasota County (Florida) recently implemented an integrated system at approximately \$5.9 million, estimated to save \$2-3 million per year. The Harris County JIMS has an operating budget of \$2.2 million per year, and is estimated to save considerably more than that in overall time and operational costs.

Implications for Business Case Development

- Need to tailor strategy to the time and place, to each jurisdiction's unique problems and opportunities, stakeholders, and interests and goals.
 - Importance of buy-in, which depends on careful attention to interests and incentives, and understanding of the players' needs and objectives.
 - Strategies for building grass roots support, including how to develop persuasive presentations and print materials, and how to elicit information about interests and needs from potential participants.
 - Importance of planning requires case materials to include tools and examples of plans and planning techniques used effectively in other initiatives, and descriptions of planning and strategy-making tools.
 - Federal role in funding has been important, so the business case materials should contain information and tools to support requests for Federal funds.
 - Organizing the pitch will require basic marketing and selling techniques, such as concepts and methods for understanding the potential market and the customer, discovering needs and preferences, and effective communication and persuasion.
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