The Strategy and action plan: implementation & evaluation

After the strategy document and the action plan have been reviewed and signed-off it is time to look at the implementation considerations. In this chapter we specifically look at the pre-requisites for implementing action plans, including oversight and management mechanisms that must be in place both at the strategic and project level. In this context we look at how the political and administrative leadership of the parliament can exercise control over the implementation through specialized bodies and specific project management tools for among others carrying out project evaluation exercises and consolidating lessons learned.

Concerning the specific implementation of technology we look at the available tools, including the enterprise architecture that can be used as a reference for further developing the parliamentary ICT architecture while adhering to technological choices that ensure interoperability and a lower total cost of ownership.

To conclude the chapter we look at how to evaluate the strategy through the mid-term review, in terms of preparation and execution.

The cycle of strategic planning

Strategic planning is not a one-time single document or product. Instead it is a holistic process that provides for the review, revision, and updating of plans on a continuing basis as goals, objectives, technologies, projects, and resources change. It is a means for ensuring that parliamentary strengthening initiatives remain focused on the goals of the parliament, and that they occur on an appropriate schedule and with the appropriate resources.

Fig. 1: The cycle of strategic planning: strategy plan, mid-term review and action plans

2World e-Parliament Report 2008
Looking at the strategic planning process in Figure 1, strategy plans are often developed for a three or five-year cycle and are subject to a mid-term review. The strategic goals and objectives are formulated and endorsed by political and senior administrative leadership, and form the basis for the action plans that in turn “feed” the formulation of projects and initiatives to be carried out at the departmental level. Below, the prerequisites and considerations are discussed in the context of implementing the action plans.

**Implementation prerequisites: oversight and management**

For successfully implementing the action plans, an important prerequisite is the presence of the appropriate oversight and management bodies that are able to engage the high-level political and administrative leadership of the parliament and garner support from stakeholders from the respective institutional areas. At the strategic level, if present, this oversight and management role may best be fulfilled by the committees dedicated to the institutional areas.

**Implementing the strategy**

**Managing the Action Plan for ICT**

In the sections below, we shall look at the specific mechanisms and tools that should be in place for implementing the Action Plan for ICT and the considerations that deserve particular attention.

**Committee for ICT Planning & Development**

If present, a “Committee for ICT Planning and Development” would be best placed to oversee and manage the implementation of the Action Plan for ICT. If not present, the first and foremost recommendation of the strategy document may be to install a Committee for ICT Planning and Development with the above-mentioned oversight and management mandate and role.

Throughout the implementation of the Action Plan, the Committee for ICT Planning and Development (hereafter: Committee) should seek to encourage where possible and logical coordination and collaboration between agencies and units of the parliament with regard to: exchanging experiences and best practices; sharing of services and resources in implementing and managing ICT; and better alignment and development of the entire ICT infrastructure as one integral asset ensured by compatibility and interoperability standards.

**ICT Governance mechanisms**

The Committee may introduce (if not present or fully developed) a number of ICT governance mechanisms / directives for achieving its objectives.

**Service Level Agreements**: to ensure an adequate delivery of services and level of support from the ICT Department (or Centre or Unit) to the rest of the parliamentary organization, it is recommended that Service Level Agreements (SLAs) are established (ideally mandated and formalized through the intervention of the Committee).

SLAs are “agreements” between the service-providing (i.e. ICT Department) and receiving parties (rest of parliament); they specifically indicate what kind of hardware, software, server capacity and technical support should be provided, against what cost and conditions. They also stipulate the
parameters of system environments that may be provided as a service including the level of system performance, stability, security and necessary disaster and recovery procedures. Finally SLAs also clearly indicate the type of response that is required from the ICT Department in case of service or system failures, and provide guidance on escalation procedures.

SLAs are key in establishing greater trust among parties and encouraging greater cooperation and collaboration in the parliament in terms of the acquisition of ICT services and sharing of resources. SLAs may as such reduce the incentive within departments to create their own independent (and often isolated and disconnected ICT operations)

ICT Procurement Standards and Policies: well considered ICT Procurement Policies and Standards could achieve conformity within the parliamentary (read: departmental) procurement practices in areas such as Intellectual Property (IP) in Software, Liability Coverage; Service Levels from contractors and suppliers (SLAs); Tendering procedures and documentation etc. These procurement policies and standards can be instrumental to make sure that the parliament on the one hands receives the best quality of products and services on the market place and on the other they may prevent an “uncontrolled growth” of the technical infrastructure that is hampered by incompatibility and poor choice of technology standards. Regarding the latter, procurement policies and standards should “tie in” at the technical level with the parliament's enterprise architecture (more under the section below: Consideration for implementing technology) that provides clear inputs for setting technological standards for ICT infrastructural components.

Outsourcing ICT services: In planning and executing ICT projects an issue that will undoubtedly rise is whether to invest in the development of certain in-house skills or instead to outsource these skills. The solution may depend on the cost of investing in these skills versus their market price in combination with the maturity of the country’s or region’s ICT sector in being able to provide high quality and reliable services.

The guideline may be as follows: given that a parliament can contract an external supply of high quality an reliable ICT services at reasonable price, then outsourcing should be considered, albeit in combination with the parliament's in-house ability to manage and oversee the level and quality of the provided services. This implies a certain threshold in the ICT managerial competencies in the parliament i.e. the parliament have the competencies to independently carry out ICT project design and management tasks, and defining user and system requirements. Thus ideally these two areas of competencies are not outsourced. The more technical competencies such as “programming”, “system development”, “installation” and “configuration” may be outsourced to external contractors depending on the market price and cost-effectiveness.

ICT Project management

Concerning oversight and management of projects the Committee for ICT Planning and Development could install (if not present or fully developed) and enforce ICT project management mechanisms and practices.

Project Implementation Board: For managing and coordinating ICT projects an “ICT Project Implementation Board” (PIB) is instrumental. Besides being responsible for monitoring individual ICT projects, the PIB can also re-evaluate priorities, resolve issues and (re)allocate resources across projects. In addition a PIB would also serve to engage and coordinate all stakeholders involved in the implementation of ICT projects; report to the Committee for ICT Planning and Development and escalate project / programme issues affecting the overall progress of ICT projects.
**Project management:** It is recommended that the parliament invests in developing sound ICT project management competencies through the adoption of *project management methodologies* that provide tools for planning, cost analysis & budgeting, analysing risks and carrying out project evaluations & lessons learned. The ICT project manager as such should be able to coordinate the formulation of user and system requirements, plan respective work products within the scope of the project and calculate the required time and resources.

**Considerations for implementing technology**

Concerning the implementation of technology below are three areas highlighted that may be incorporated (if not present or fully developed) during the implementation of ICT projects as they could be instrumental for a well planned growth of the technological infrastructure and delivery of high quality systems.

**Enterprise Architecture:** Enterprise architecture is a methodology for ensuring that technology directly supports the work of the parliament, that the most relevant data and documents are collected and managed efficiently, and that the specific components of technical infrastructure, such as the PCs, operating systems, and networks are interoperable. Enterprise architecture is especially important when technical support comes from a variety of sources, such as outside donors and the parliament itself. The enterprise architecture ties in with the ICT procurement policies and standards, as it provides technical guidance and rules for adding infrastructural components into the existing architecture. The enterprise architecture would at the highest level be overseen by the Committee on ICT, aided by a dedicated technical working-group that would also take into account considerations for scalability of the infrastructure and the sharing of resources and infrastructure, to achieve a more streamlined architecture. The Committee as such would not have to deal with the technical details but rather promote the coherence of standards to ensure technical compatibility and interoperability at the parliamentary level (among others through the earlier mentioned procurement standards)

**Document standards:** Open document standards are important to institutions for helping to control costs (by not being locked into the proprietary standards of specific vendors), creating more capable document management systems, and developing more flexible systems for document and information exchange. However, the use of open standards (such as the EXtensible Markup Language or XML) requires extensive training and knowledge of the most appropriate tools. Because of the additional time that open standards can sometimes require for implementation, it also needs political support. Nevertheless, open standards are important for the future development of ICT in parliaments.

**Usability testing:** the aim of usability testing is to observe people using systems to discover how they experience using them and find areas of improvement. Usability testing generally involves measuring how well test subjects (i.e. staff that is asked to try out new systems) respond in four areas: efficiency, accuracy, recall, and emotional response. The tests should be carried out during each system implementation and the results of the first test can be treated as a baseline or control measurement; all subsequent tests can then be compared to the baseline to indicate improvement.

- **Performance** -- How much time, and how many steps, are required for people to complete basic tasks using the system? (For example: search and retrieve a law, create a draft bill)
- **Accuracy** -- How many mistakes did people make? (And were they fatal or recoverable with the right information?)
- **Recall** -- How much does the person remember afterwards or after periods of non-use?
- **Emotional response** -- How does the person feel about the tasks completed? Is the person confident, stressed? Would the user recommend this system to a colleague?

Setting up a usability test involves carefully creating scenarios, or realistic situation, wherein the person performs a list of tasks using the system being tested while observers watch and take notes.
Several other test instruments such as scripted instructions, paper prototypes, and pre- and post-test questionnaires are also used to gather feedback on the product being tested.

**Standards and Policies:** If any communication policies exist within the different units, these must be evaluated and factored into the development of the overall strategy. Similarly, if any standards have been set for information production, dissemination and management, these must also be reviewed and taken into consideration. Ultimately as more information is exchanged electronically and ICTs are more widely adopted for information management, it would be recommended that document and file standards and templates be established for use across all the different structures and departments of parliament. This will also require close collaboration with the ICT Department and any committees established to coordinate the integration of ICTs into parliamentary processes.

**Evaluation: strategy mid-term review**

After two to three years of implementing the action plans it is recommended to have a checkpoint to assess whether all is still going into the right direction; this checkpoint in strategic planning is known as the “mid-term review”, and as a consequence the strategy plan may (or not) be revised. In this section will be explained how a mid-term review should be prepared and carried out (i.e. through which steps) and how its results feed back into a revised strategy - and action plans.

The scope and steps of the mid-term review are similar to the initial four strategic planning steps, however instead of carrying out all the four steps all over again, the mid-term review is more an exercise of checking where we are and whether all the assumptions are still correct. With an assessment of the progress of the action plans in one hand, and the original strategy document in the other, the aim of the mid-term review is to answer a set of critical questions (Box 12). In the following sections we look at preparing the mid-term review and the steps to be taken to answer the “review questions”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What has been achieved?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What strategic goals and objectives have / have not been attained through execution of the action plan?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are better services provided through process improvement?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have new methods and mechanisms been adopted for research, information dissemination, communication?</td>
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<tr>
<th>What are the lessons learned?</th>
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<td>What were the good practices?</td>
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<td>Which implementation practices could be improved?</td>
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<tr>
<th>Are the original assumptions still valid?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Has anything changed in the external environment that would impact the vision and the attainment of the strategic goals and objectives?</td>
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<td>Has anything changed in the internal environment that would impact the vision and the attainment of the strategic goals and objectives?</td>
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<td>Does this impact the vision still the same?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Does this impact the strategic goals and objectives still valid?</td>
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Box 9: mid-term review questions

Preparation mid-term review

Gathering existing documentation

Ideally during the two-three year run up to the mid term review the parliament has committed itself to the execution of the action plans carried out within a framework for oversight and management incorporating the relevant control mechanisms and project management methodologies, that consistently produced documentation along the way, including progress reports and project evaluation & lessons learned.

In preparation of the mid-term review this type of relevant documentation would have to be gathered to make an assessment of the progress of the action plans. Not having this type of documentation neatly and orderly in place can make the preparations rather time consuming, as first this documentation would have to be “produced” which would not be very appropriate as project achievements and lessons learned need to be documented “fresh” from the project.

New analyses & evidence

Project implementation practices: progress reports and evaluations are useful, however they may not always be enough to “connect all the dots” in answering the question “whether the overall project implementation practices were satisfactory”. One way of assessing this is simply by asking all the senior staff involved in the implementation of an action plan (i.e. departments heads, senior staff, project managers and focal points) for their opinion of the project planning process, clearness of project objectives, products to be delivered, tasks etc. For gathering this information in a very structured and consistent manner the questionnaire for “projects lessons learned” (see Template 11) may be circulated among the managerial stakeholders. Once completed by all the stakeholders using a spreadsheet statistics can be made indicating areas that were carried out well or less well.

SWOT analysis: In addition to the gathered project documentation – and based on it – a new Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis would have to be carried out similarly as explained in Step 1. The Opportunities and Threats (OT) part would be rather straightforward as it concerns an external analysis.

The Strengths and Weaknesses (SW) part however would be slightly more complex as through the implementation of the action plan parliamentary services, processes and systems may have been altered. Thus prior to making the SW analysis an overview and assessment should be made of the changes i.e. new services, processes and systems within the institutional areas. This should take into account the quality of the new services and processes.

Quality of services and processes: assessing this requires more of a “qualitative measurement” at the “clients level” i.e. MPs and their staff, Committee members and staff, users of the parliamentary information systems, Citizens etc would have to indicate what their perception is of the quality of information services i.e. questions such as:
Have services been improved? Are the departments and offices delivering products now operating more efficient? Have systems become more user friendly? Are they always available and provide updated and complete information? Has the parliament become more transparent, open, and engages more with the public?

Using questionnaires and internal interviews opinions can be gathered from the relevant stakeholders. Gathering views and opinions from citizens, may however become quite extensive and perhaps it may be too much for the parliament to deal with independently. Possibly in close collaboration with local (or regional) universities and research institutes qualitative research can be carried out focusing parliament-constituencies relations. The timing of this research is crucial for the results to have relevance during the mid-term review.

**Strategy mid-term review management workshop**

Similarly to step 2 for the strategy mid-term review a management workshop would have to be organized. This workshop - perhaps one-two days – would ideally see the participation of the political and administrative leadership of the parliament, as well as the managerial stakeholders who have been involved in the implementation of the action plans for different institutional areas.

The workshop would serve to:
- assess the progress and achievements;
- highlight good implementation practises and lessons learned;
- check whether all the original assumptions are still valid, including vision statement and strategic goals and objectives.

To cover the first two items presentations would have to be made based on the existing and new information and analyses that have been carried out in preparation of the mid-term review workshop. The findings need to be discussed, achievements (or lack of) need to be clarified. In “checking the assumptions” an overview of the internal and external analysis (SWOT) should be presented to the workshop participants, and particularly the leadership should be invited to elaborate on whether they see the ambitions and the role of the parliament and the current vision changing. For example given the “new demands from society, driven by technological innovations and greater access to information” is the current vision still valid and appropriate?

Should the vision statement need to be changed to better reflect the new ambitions and the role of the parliament, then most likely this will impact the underlying strategic goals and objectives. As such the leadership and the managerial stakeholders should clearly express their view on how the current strategic goals and objectives would need to be adjusted to remain in the scope of the new vision statement.

In line with the strategic planning steps, should the strategic goals and objectives be changed, the gaps and challenges need to be formulated, upon which new recommendations and actions (i.e. action plan) need to be defined for the next two-three years.

At the end of the workshop, a review by the stakeholders of its outcomes should take place followed by the sign-off.
### Additional resources

**Generic**

- **Project Management:**
  - [http://www.ogc.gov.uk/methods_prince_2_background.asp](http://www.ogc.gov.uk/methods_prince_2_background.asp)

- **Project management lessons learned:**
  - [http://pmtips.net/lessons-learned-template/](http://pmtips.net/lessons-learned-template/)
  - [http://www.usask.ca/its/services/itproject_services/guidelines/basic.php](http://www.usask.ca/its/services/itproject_services/guidelines/basic.php)

**ICT related**

- **Enterprise Architecture:**

- **Documents standards:**

- **Usability testing:**
  - [http://www.webcredible.co.uk/user-friendly-resources/web-usability/usability-testing.shtml](http://www.webcredible.co.uk/user-friendly-resources/web-usability/usability-testing.shtml)