

Systems Analysis in Health Care: Framework and Example

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Summary

Objectives: Due to the high complexity of structures and processes in health care, thorough systems analyses in health care run the risk of becoming very complex and difficult to handle. Therefore, we aimed to support systematic systems analysis in health care by developing a comprehensive framework that presents and describes potential areas of analysis.

Methods: A framework for systems analysis in health care was developed and applied in a health care setting. To provide a clear structure, the framework describes the potential views and levels of systems analysis in a health care environment.

Results: The framework comprises five views (roles and responsibilities, information processing and tools, communication, business processes, teams structure and cooperation) and five levels of analysis (overall organization, organizational unit, staff member, role, task). The framework was successfully applied in an analysis of the structures and processes of the Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry of the University Medical Center Heidelberg.

Conclusions: The proposed comprehensive framework aims to structure the views and levels of systems analysis in the complex health care environment. Our first experiences support the usefulness of such a framework.

Keywords

Systems analysis, communication, coordination, patient care team, delivery of health care, process assessment

Methods Inf Med 2002; 41: 134–40

1. Introduction: Systems Analysis in Health Care

1.1 Background and Motivation

The complexity of information processing in health care institutions is tremendous due to the high complexity of their structures and processes. Nearly everyone working in a hospital has an enormous demand for information, which must be fulfilled to guarantee excellent and efficient patient care [1, 2]. To achieve high-quality patient care, different professional groups, such as physicians, nurses, and administrative staff, must communicate and cooperate closely [3, 4]. The stakeholders' issue is quite complex [5]. Patient care aims must be discussed, decided upon and revised in treatment teams, which are made up of different members for each patient. Processes are highly variable and flexible, standard 'reference' patient care processes are difficult to define. Patients receive individual treatment – not only in emergency cases that demand immediate care. Decisions must be made quickly and are often based on incomplete information. Therefore, systematic information management is of tremendous importance in order to plan, monitor and direct information processing in such a way that the information needs of the various user groups are fulfilled in any situation and location [6].

The quality of information management can only be assessed by rigorous systems analysis. The general aim of such an analysis is to analyze the current state and weaknesses of organizational structures and processes in a defined area. A thorough

systems analysis in a health care institution is the precondition for all activities aiming at improving structures and processes in health care, such as business process reengineering, quality management, or the introduction of new information processing tools [3]. The more precise the analysis, the better the structures and processes of the institution can be redesigned, improved or supported [7, 8].

Due to the high complexity and interconnectivity of workflow, information management, communication and cooperation, thorough health care systems analyses run the risk of becoming very complex and difficult to handle. If relevant parts are overlooked, insufficient systems analyses may even lead to project failures [9, 10]. For example, an insufficient analysis of communication may lead to the failure of a new electronic record system [11].

In our opinion, a description of the possible views and levels of a systems analysis in health care could help clearly define the areas requiring analysis without overlooking relevant parts.

Approaches used in more structured environments do not seem useful in assessing the complexity surrounding health care. For example, available frameworks for computer-based enterprise information systems – such as ARIS (Architecture of Integrated Information Systems) [12], or the Zachmann framework [13], concentrate on the computer-supported part of an information system, often omitting, for example, an explicit analysis of the specific complexity surrounding health care, such as paper-based information processing, communication and cooperation within the health professional team. Thus, they are not

Received February 22, 2001

Accepted November 5, 2001

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