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Sustainability planning in eHealth projects

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Many eHealth pilots fail to survive

- Numerous eHealth pilots worldwide struggle and many fail to survive beyond the pilot phase.
- Despite the large number of eHealth projects today and the positive outcomes of evaluation studies, the actual take-up of eHealth services is lower than expected [1].
Three types of difficulties with the uptake of eHealth have emerged:

- **Slow diffusion**: eHealth technology is not available to, or desired by, everyone (potential users do not have the resources (access), or the need, to use the technology)

- **Low acceptance**: eHealth technology is not satisfying (early adopters do not have their needs satisfied)

- **Low adherence**, also referred to as non-usage attrition: eHealth technology is not used persistently (e.g., online therapy is not finished) [2]
Current frameworks for eHealth development suffer from:

- a lack of fitting infrastructures;
- the inability to find funding;
- complications with scalability and
- uncertainties regarding effectiveness and sustainability. [3]
What is sustainability planning?

- In the context of eHealth projects, the word *sustainability* can be defined as *a system which has passed the pilot phase and is now fully operating.* [4]

- Moreover, a sustainable eHealth service will no longer be financed by external funds (e.g. project funding).

- However, being financially sustainable is not the only important issue for a project. Besides, a project should attain institutional sustainability, political sustainability and technological sustainability. [5]
Example of a sustainability planning process in eMedic

- Stakeholder analysis
- Research and Analysis
- Business Model
- Risk Migration
- Stakeholder Testing and Modifications
- Adoption and Implementation.
Based on the experiences of the eMedic project

- sustainability planning is teamwork and work division should support it;
- a preliminary but precise stakeholder analysis should be performed already when planning eHealth pilots;
- financial sustainability planning of eHealth pilots takes time in international network projects and critical paths can be avoided only by making project timetables anticipatory enough;
- indicators and information which are the basis for proceeding with a pilot or a part of it to implementation have to be defined and described clearly in an early phase;
- the sustainability process needs to be monitored and evaluated throughout the pilot phase.
Discussion

➢ Sustainability does not necessarily mean that the project is a success since a project can be sustainable without attaining its major goals. However, if a project is not sustainable, it is likely to be a failure. [6]

➢ A sustainability plan is always a hypothesis and contextual. Social, economic and political changes affect the issue of sustainability and the research results might change the path of the sustainability plan. A project worth sustaining in the project design phase may not be worth sustaining by the end of the project. [7]
References


Thank you for your attention!

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eMedic

Developing New Practices for Teleconsultation and Diabetes