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The insights below are adapted from a November 2016 webinar featuring Utah Department of Health’s State HIT Coordinator and the Director of the Center for Health Data and Information, Wu Xu, Ph.D.

On the importance of informaticians
If we want systems to talk to each other, then we need people to talk to each other. Informaticians can help people work together to integrate information and resources.

On centralized versus distributed IT
Consider a hybrid model. Centralized IT is best for enterprise infrastructure like hosting, servers, and security. Distributed IT is best for application management, and other services that require high familiarity with workflows.

On working with centralized IT
Manage the relationship like any other vendor. Ensure you have a detailed understanding of roles and responsibilities and monitor their performance to ensure crucial elements, like security, are well executed.

On informatics as protection
It's not if you will have a breach, it's when and how bad that breach will be. Investing in informatics can protect against expensive data breaches and guarantee you have security plans in place for when an issue occurs.

On interoperability as a viable alternative to integration
Fully integrated internal systems mean that all data are housed together. Given public health's siloed programs and structure, this may not be feasible. That's OK. In an interoperable system data stay in their original system but the information is shared. This has made a huge difference for us. For example, Vital Records shares data with our Medicaid program, which helps identify potential cases of fraud.

On the role of leaders
Leaders can encourage agency-wide planning and coordination, such as enterprise-level IT portfolio management. They can also support their informatics staff and make sure they know how valuable their contributions are to the agency.

On informatics throughout the agency
We have informaticians at every level. I’m part of the executive team that develops strategy. Managers and senior informaticians support work in the bureaus and divisions. Informatics practitioners support major systems within the programs.