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MANAGEMENT CONSULTING

*Optimizing the business of healthcare*

ROAD MAP



## Road Map

Avoiding 11 Pitfalls of System Conversions

# Avoiding 11 Pitfalls of System Conversions

There are many reasons healthcare organizations look to convert to a different system: their current system may not meet Meaningful Use standards, it's simply too slow, their system vendor may not be financially stable, or, in many cases, a merger or acquisition forces a change in software.

Regardless of the reason, conversion from one system to another can be a complicated and perilous journey. Commitment and planning are critical to a successful conversion, but even then, dangers still lurk. Here are 11 common pitfalls you might encounter during a conversion and what you can do to avoid them.

# Avoiding 11 Pitfalls of System Conversions



## Lack of Executive Sponsor/Champion

Any substantive change must start with commitment from the top of the organization. The implementation can't be successfully driven by just the staff on the project team. An executive champion is responsible for setting the tone for change and outlining the benefits the organization will experience.

The executive sponsor must not only set the direction of the project, he or she must also ensure that the project team has the resources and tools to carry it out. The executive must be front and center to demonstrate the importance of the project. Without this public, senior support, people may get the impression that the project isn't crucial and use it as an excuse for non-participation.



## Organizational Resistance to Change

It's natural for people to resist change. They get into a routine and tend to fall into the "this is the way we've always done it" syndrome. Even if you can show that the changes will lead to better efficiency and make their jobs easier, it's natural that there will be hesitation to leave a well known comfort zone.

To break through resistance, include a change management component in your project. The key steps to successful organization change management include:

- Establishing clear change goals and outlining why they are important
- Assembling and empowering a team to help lead the change
- Implementing successful change strategies like education plans and workshops

- Addressing objections by constantly listening and communicating
- Sustaining change with detailed planning, specific measurement, and developing an atmosphere of trust and cooperation

Change management is challenging but it can be successfully accomplished with committed leadership, clear goals, and a dedicated team.



## Exclusion of Outlying Staff

During a conversion, much of the knowledge of the legacy systems resides with certain key players or superusers. However, small pockets of users sometimes operate on the edges of the systems and their use is not clearly understood by the key players. For example, you might have staff who do not perform any data entry, but regularly pull reports from the legacy system. These individuals can sometimes be overlooked and this could result in your missing out on critical knowledge necessary for a complete and successful conversion.

In order to transition your systems effectively, you need to know your own system, its users, and its processes inside and out. To do that, gather input from anyone who interacts with the system. Spread the word and make sure all relevant personnel are involved.



## Insufficient Resources

Most organizations underestimate the number of staff needed to successfully complete a system conversion. They tend to assign one person for each process area and think that will be enough to handle all the requirements. Unfortunately, that's not usually the case. To make sure you have sufficient resources devoted to the project,

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include not only your superusers, but tap those staff with experience. Many times this is easier said than done since staff must still perform their “day jobs” while the transition is going on.

One way to solve this dilemma is to engage outside support to manage your legacy systems. This can be either interim management or temporary staff help. Freeing up your team to get them involved on the ground floor of the transition will pay huge dividends in the long run.



## Failure to Appropriately plan for Data Conversion

The data stored in systems tends to be incredibly large because storage is less expensive and data retention requirements for legal compliance continues to grow. Extracting, moving, manipulating, and repopulating this data into a new system is extremely time consuming. This increases the chances of data errors being transferred that could impact compliance as well as patient care and safety. Putting together an appropriate and experienced team to complete the necessary conversions is vital.

Start by surveying internal staff to find qualified candidates. If you do not have staff with the fulltime commitment available, you most likely won't want to hire new permanent headcount to complete this one time task. That's where partnering with a seasoned third party might be the best solution.



## Moving Bad Data

The old saying of “garbage in, garbage out” applies here. During the data conversion process you can be left with duplicate or obsolete entries. The result is populating your new system with bad data right from the start.

Focus on cleaning up the databases before you begin transferring data. You can limit the amount of data you move by date range, but this risks not moving some essential data. The best way to preserve data integrity is to do a merge and/or review beforehand to thoroughly clean the data before any transfer begins. This takes significant, dedicated time and will hold up a project if not given priority.



## Delegating the Conversion Completely to IT

Data conversion problem can arise when the task is left strictly in the hands of the IT department. Although IT may control the data and will play a central role in moving it over to the new system, they shouldn't be responsible for deciding which data to move. If that happens, the danger is too much or too little data moved over.

This is another case where you must involve the people who use the system on a day-to-day basis to help make data transfer decisions. Using a household moving analogy, you can hire someone to move all your belongings to your new home, but since they have no idea what is good or bad, they will end up taking everything unless you direct them otherwise.

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## Underestimating the Process to Convert Future Scheduling

Conversion of future schedules is another area full of pitfalls to be avoided. Many organizations try to digitally move this data from the legacy system to the new system, but doing so involves extensive setup work and developing scheduling criteria in the new system. The systems may not be compatible when it comes to schedule formatting so you could end up having to make significant corrections once the data is transferred.

In most cases, it is generally more effective to simply load all future schedules manually as part of the system build and setup and as a training opportunity for the end user. Again this process is time consuming and error prone and not planning for adequate time will delay the project. Neglecting the necessary quality control will also lead to unhappy customers and a drop in the quality of care.



## Not Converting All Key Data

Another conversion pitfall can arise if relevant documentation doesn't get brought into the new system. Physicians will need access to historical clinical content for treatment of patients. Failure to move this critical data will result in a continued dependency on your legacy system. Certain data has legal requirements that it must be moved into the new system.

To avoid this problem, make sure all data fields are reviewed and understood prior to transfer and that you have included all areas of the organization in the process.



## Poor Testing

A common pitfall in many engagements is having the same staff on the build team also act as testers. This may sound logical, but may not be the best practice. Many times builders will recycle the same patient test data over and over again. This randomly selected data may have no clinical and/or business reasoning behind it.

It's much more effective to write test scripts based on real-world scenarios that can be validated before end-user testing takes place. Have a clear way to communicate those results back to the project team and ultimately the vendor. Include multiple rounds of testing aimed at different objectives.



## Waiting Too Long to Plan for Archival

Another often overlooked component of the transition plan is planning for archival of historical records. Waiting too long to make the decision can cost you by having to pay full service maintenance fees on your legacy system even though it is only being partially used. While you're waiting to archive, you'll also be paying people to keep up the legacy system and can be hit with potential hardware and software costs, as well.

The best way to address archiving is to make an end plan at the beginning. Determine how long you're going to need the data and how best to store it. Options include setting up a data warehouse or repository using a commercial relational database and reporting tools. Third party vendors are also available to handle archival.

# Case Study: Ensuring a Smooth Conversion with Employee Engagement

Even with an effective change management program, it is often difficult for staff to leave a system they have maintained in the hands of strangers. They may be on board to accept and learn a new system and different processes, but they often continue to respond to users secretly, refuse to share knowledge and processes with the new support team, and resent any changes of process.

A large healthcare organization wanted to avoid this dilemma during their recent migration to Epic. They understood that to successfully migrate, staff needed to be fully engaged in implementing the new system. They knew they needed to build trust between staff and the new support team, ensuring processes and SOPs were fully documented prior to engaging the backfill support team. They set a clear communication process, ensuring all staff was busy with the new project as quickly as possible following the transition.

Ultimately, they successfully converted to Epic by working with Hayes Management Consulting in the following areas:

- Brought the project manager on site first to manage their system while staff completed documentation.
- Planned the process prior to introducing all new staff.
- Established a clear system of communication and escalation including standing meetings and reports.
- Documented the handling of all user requests making them available to client for review.
- Outlined a clear timeline, scheduled immediately prior to staff leaving for Epic training.

Through planning and communication, client was able to avoid staff resistance and ensure a smooth conversion.

## Summary

Any time you change from one system to another, there will be challenges to overcome. Being aware of potential challenges ahead of time and planning on ways to overcome them will ensure the best chance of a successful transition. This means developing a firm plan that includes scope projections and resource requirements. With proper preparation, you can take on the conversion, confident of avoiding these common pitfalls.

## Hayes Management Consulting

Hayes Management Consulting is a leading, national healthcare consulting firm that partners with healthcare organizations to streamline operations, improve revenue and enhance technology to drive success in an evolving healthcare landscape. To learn how Hayes Management Consulting can help you with your clinical optimization, call 617-559-0404 or [requestconsultant@hayesmanagement.com](mailto:requestconsultant@hayesmanagement.com).

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