Developing a Staffing Strategy for the Existing Core IT Systems Team in an EHR Transition

When embarking on a multi-year EHR implementation, it is critical to ensure existing core IT systems continue to function well while the new EHR is being built and deployed. EHR implementations span multiple years, and core systems are needed to continue daily operations and patient care. As the organization continues to achieve strategic and operational imperatives, limited enhancements to the existing system may be required to support compliance, core measure reporting, patient safety issues and other critical business needs. A small, but cohesive team that is highly engaged is required to effectively support mission-critical existing systems. Failing to employ an effective staffing strategy for legacy IT operations systems can put a healthcare organization at risk.

**Risks to Address**

When developing a staffing strategy for a major EHR implementation, several risks need to be addressed:

- If the majority of existing IT resources are dedicated to the new initiative, the quality of the legacy operating environment can decline, negatively affecting adherence to regulatory requirements and support for key operational performance improvement initiatives.
- If staff assigned to the implementation effort are pulled to address operational issues, progress on the implementation may be negatively affected.
● Turnover among existing operational support staff may occur due to uncertainty about their future tenure in the organization.

● IT leadership team workload may significantly increase if they assume responsibility to guide the development and implementation of the new system, while remaining involved in day-to-day operations and ongoing existing operations system initiatives.

**Points to Consider**

● **Create an inclusive IT operating model.** Depict the end-state structure early (during the implementation planning phase) that aligns priorities and reinforces accountability and clear responsibilities. Ensure 100% focus to EHR program implementation and ongoing operational responsibilities by having two dedicated but interdependent deployment and support teams.

● **Words matter.** Avoid terms like legacy, leave behind or other phrases that may make the support team feel like second-class citizens. Critical core is one example of a phrase that emphasizes the key role these team members play in supporting current IT systems and ensuring ongoing, effective care delivery.

● **Communication is key.** Develop a communication plan and cross-team communication mechanisms such as employee meetings, newsletters, social events and new staff orientation that emphasizes inclusiveness of the entire IT team and the significance of the support team’s role in the organization. Communication is essential to building trust and reducing anxiety.

● **Be transparent.** Address career concerns and incent staff to continue in their roles. Consider retention strategies such as bonuses and remote or work close-to-home alternatives. Provide continued career growth paths for these team members. Continuing internal promotions, celebrating the team’s successes and providing continued management support will maintain high engagement of staff in these critical roles. Reinforce the go-forward staffing roadmap and be explicit about positions before the end of the implementation. Communicate the process to migrate to the new, consolidated team and support structure before and during the deployment, and emphasize the training plan for their new roles.

A well-developed (and articulated) staffing strategy for managing existing core IT systems during an EHR transition will result in numerous benefits. The team will be energetic and enthusiastic, loyal to the organization and more likely to stay during this critical transitional time. They are more likely to serve as an advocate for the organization and more willing to go above and beyond, exerting additional effort during a period of tremendous change.
FOR MORE INFORMATION

Please contact us to discuss developing a staffing strategy for your EHR transition.

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