

WHY IS YOUR I.T. INVESTMENT NOT THE PANACEA YOU EXPECTED?

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The answer to that question is actually very easy. The Panacea should and can be reality. Given that you were well aware of your information system's capabilities from the start, a system you purchased because you knew it addressed the predefined goals of your organization, then the reality is that you, simply, need to make it happen!

Sounds sensible. So then, if this is the case, why are we moving from one solution to another without clearly exhausting the capabilities of the applications for which we worked so hard to find funding, allocate implementation resources, and provide support on the back end? Once again, the answer is clear. Implementations are difficult as they require multiple components of concern, needing careful attention at all stages and levels of the implementation. The reality of implementations is that organizations oftentimes need to do more with less.

However, once an implementation is complete and the system is clearly part of the infrastructure, why is the C-suite often up nights questioning, "What went wrong? Where is the Panacea?"

GIVEN THE ECONOMIC TIMES OF TODAY, MANY ORGANIZATIONS, AS ARE MANY AMERICANS, ARE SIMPLY DEALING WITH WHAT THEY HAVE.

Many of us are trying to just keep that old refrigerator, the not-so-nice-looking car, and the tired old suit in disrepair to get the most out of them. The good news here, with regard to Information Technology, is that the issue is not so much that it is in disrepair as much as that we have not fully realized all of the capabilities and optimized cost-effectively to gain additional value.

Optimizations can take place at various stages of implementation. The most frequently seen stage that comes to mind is subsequent to Go-LIVE, when, by all

indications, your organization should be well on its way to realizing the Panacea effect. However, the truth is that not only is that desired effect not realized, but you are only seeing the capital downfall as reward for your investment. Clearly, this is the time that you must jump in with both feet to continue the process.

SO HOW IS THIS TYPE OF OPTIMIZATION DONE?

Start with the end in mind! Let's take an example of a clinical implementation. When planning for this implementation, clearly you identified your goals and with that, how this would equate to a Return on Investment (ROI). What, in essence, is the value of this project to the organization?

So now you must go back and revisit that ROI:

- **Was the system built, with dictionaries, customizations, etc., to accomplish that goal?**
- **Were workflows taken into account when designing and building, and if so, what are you seeing in regards to how the system is being used in the field?**
- **Are the clinicians using workarounds?**
- **Are the terminals used or are the wall-type desks, which were constructed to house a keyboard and monitor, simply being used as a writing surface to enter notes on paper as recently reported in one of the IS Blogs?**
- **And if the workarounds are being done, what is the root cause?**

The process must continue to explore and identify what is driving the workaround. Is it a training issue, a change-management situation? Does design dominate as the main concern or is it a build situation? Were the goals of the organization understood and committed

to from the top down, and was there complete buy-in? Perhaps policy development and enforcement were lacking, which is often the case when a project team does not possess in-depth knowledge of the system's full capabilities or optimization of application issues.

The importance of taking a "root-cause" approach should not be minimized. We can all take a guess at what may be the cause, but until all stones are turned, we will not be able to fully address the issue/problem, which leads us to remediation and ultimately accomplishing the goals of the organization. Taking this approach may produce several areas that need further exploration. However, without exhausting all areas and striving for the best, your system and associated processes are not poised to support the investment. Thorough analysis of documents, revisiting design processes, clearly understanding the messaging throughout the implementation, probing into the system capabilities and the needs of the organization, testing the stakeholder buy-in and commitment to the program, plus in-depth review of the system build and training documents, are all part of the optimization strategy.

ROOT CAUSE DISCOVERY IS JUST ONE PIECE OF THE PIE.

Once we've revealed the cause, the next step is to systematically tackle each and every area of concern disclosed through the process. Prioritize the gaps and focus on the numbers looking back at the ROI identified at the beginning of the project. It is important to make some quick wins, which will speak loudly to ROI as well as to gain momentum for the continued optimization. If you reach out to the areas that are hurting the most and brainstorm on these issues with your root-cause assessment in hand, all successes realized through the optimization process will speak loudly in a previously deflated area.

Define optimization processes and communicate that you are staying the course, deploying the necessary revisions and document all actions that are being taken. Continue to train and retrain where necessary, holding people accountable. This is extremely important and needs to be supported by leadership. Targets for optimization must be clearly articulated with the goal

of meeting the needs of the organization and fully optimizing your investment.

We are all well aware that we are facing challenging economic times and there is always going to be a new and improved system out there that offers solutions heralded as the ultimate panacea. However, if we cannot fully optimize our current systems, how will we be able to do that with the next system? Optimization will provide the functionality and ROI to sustain during this current economic environment and eventually provide the insight and potential revenue to move to another system when the time is right to make that investment.

As alluded to earlier, there are other implementation phases that also respond positively to an optimization plan. One of those areas is during the implementation when the project is producing frustrations, elongation of the timeline, and threatening unfavorable results. The approach noted above should be taken immediately to resolve the issues, thus avoiding long implementation costs or implementations that fail in the end. In addition, you may need to put the optimization plan in effect when implementations are derailed or when the organization ceases to see the value and halts the implementation leaving nothing but lost capital expenditures as the outcome.

REMAIN FOCUSED ON YOUR GOALS.

Whatever the reason or whenever in the process an optimization is necessary, it is important to manage the communication and return to your original goals. Optimization will produce favorable results, ROI, clinical distinction, financial results and competitive edge, and will act as a foundation for implementation strategies going forward. Therefore, if we return to our original statement, yes the answer is easy. However, achieving success is a journey, not a destination, and, therefore, fortitude and conviction of the ultimate goal is necessary.

"The first requisite of success is the ability to apply your physical and mental energies to one problem without growing weary."

Thomas Edison

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