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Driving impact through operational readiness:
Operational preparation for enabling technology transformation in health care

What's at stake?

In today's rapidly evolving health care landscape, one major trend has remained constant: in order to stay competitive long term, health care organizations are integrating information technology initiatives into broad organizational performance improvement strategies. To successfully support the technology adoption needs of their providers, clinical staff, and non-clinical functions during these periods of massive change, organizations should include a comprehensive operational readiness program as part of the overall transformation strategy. Operational Readiness refers to the structured, systematic analysis of the difference between current and future state operations and the impact a technology implementation or optimization will have on policies, processes, and roles, as well as tactics to mitigating those risks associated

with adoption. Without an operational readiness strategy in the current environment, health care organizations may experience more challenges in achieving strategic goals such as:

- **Improving patient care and experience:** The ability to create a safe, efficient and positive experience for patients throughout the care continuum from outpatient encounters to hospital discharge is at the core of technology-enabled transformation, which is a first step toward driving an interactive patient experience, enabling increased access to care, patient compliance, and improved health outcomes.

- **Leading talent techniques:** Effective use of technology is necessary to achieve the full benefit of organizational analytics that pertain to maintaining provider, nurse and other employee utilization and performance measures.

- **Reducing margin pressures:** Without technology to enable cost reduction and revenue improvement, organizations may lose the ability to invest in research and innovation to improve efficiency, quality, satisfaction and patient experience. In addition, maintaining compliance with state and federal regulatory requirements requires continued effective use of technological systems.

- **Converging strategic partnerships:** The efficient use of technology to provide high quality, data driven care can also enable health care organizations to market themselves as a unique partner in digital and mobile technologies, mergers and acquisitions and health plan alliances.

Technology undoubtedly supports the delivery of high-value care and creates an affordable, sustainable operating model by streamlining talent management and compensation for providers, nurses and other staff. Many organizations' key strategic goals hinge on the successful implementation, optimization, and long-term adoption of new technologies and behaviors by physicians, clinicians, revenue cycle, and other provider staff.

Through a robust operational readiness program, health care provider organizations can successfully support the adoption needs of their providers, clinical staff, and non-clinical functions in tandem with technology-enabled transformation.

Instant Insights

Solving your most pressing business challenges starts with knowing the landscape. Instant Insights offers you a digest of vital knowledge and practical steps you can take now.

Our take

Creating operational readiness for sustainable change

There are a variety of barriers to technology adoption – inadequate communication with clinicians and front-line staff, general distrust of technology, or cultural resistance to change. But, because of environmental pressures, organizations sometimes choose rapid installation or post-live optimization strategies that don't allow for the time-intensive processes needed to mitigate these barriers.

Operational ownership to drive operational readiness is critical to long-term success. Engaging the leaders already accountable for maintaining their departments' productivity through change of any type is key. Due to the focus needed to develop, activate and maintain technology solutions, the onus of operational readiness should not fall solely on the shoulders of IT resources. The effort and level of engagement for end users to be successful with an IT initiative is often under-estimated.

However, when effectively coordinated, operational readiness enables leaders who are best equipped to guide staff through changes, and builds capability in the organization to sustain future changes as upgrades, optimizations, and new regulatory requirements are introduced. Through a structured, systematic approach, health care organizations can achieve true ability to adopt new behaviors at go live so that they can stabilize and begin realizing the benefits of their IT investment as quickly as possible.

In 2010, researchers studying the U.S. Department of Veteran's Affairs "estimated that savings from preventing adverse drug events alone totaled $4.64 billion"[1]

Using the operational readiness framework in EHR implementations and optimizations

One prevalent example of an IT investment that requires high adoption for success is the implementation of an Electronic Health Record (EHR). Studies[1, 2] have consistently shown that the proficient use of EHRs can result in a variety of benefits including: improved patient care, a reduction of medication errors and duplicative tests, overall improved patient satisfaction, compliance, financial performance, and data security. The federal government required adoption of a government-certified EHR solution by 2015 to advance the use of this technology for these patient care and cost related reasons.

In one organization's push to meet the Meaningful Use deadlines, leadership failed to lay the "proper groundwork" or consult clinicians during the EHR implementation process. This perceived lack of awareness, training and overall preparedness for the transformation resulted in over 250 nurses calling for a delay in the EHR go live.[4]

The Meaningful Use incentive program resulted in many providers adopting an enterprise-wide EHR solution as quickly as possible to benefit from incentive payments and avoid penalties. Organizations are striving not only to meet escalating requirements of Meaningful Use, but also the integration with other initiatives and organizational priorities (e.g., ICD-10), while competing in a saturated market. This can create an environment that forces the hand of the health care industry to successfully leverage this technology to transform or risk losing market share and revenue. However, turning a functional system on and accomplishing the behavior change to use the system effectively, which requires achieving adoption across providers, clinicians, and other staff, are two different outcomes.

Organizations with EHRs already implemented are also at risk of not realizing the full potential of the systems due to poor adoption across users, even during an upgrade or optimization project that drives improvement of efficiencies in the system. In addition, many are looking to optimize or replace their current systems in the coming years to mitigate decommissioned systems, improve provider satisfaction, and achieve strategic benefits above and beyond what is needed for regulatory compliance.[5]

If the risk of poor adoption isn't adequately and proactively mitigated, organizations can experience significant clinical and financial consequences, such as long-term productivity loss, inaccurate charging for services provided, increased AR days, or decreased Medicaid/Medicare reimbursement.

Defining readiness

Many leaders are already familiar with other types of readiness, which do not comprise components of operational readiness.

- **Technology readiness** is fundamental to technology transformation projects – from collecting the technical requirements needed to support operations, to building and testing the new system, to determining that the infrastructure, hardware and other technologies will work in tandem with the new system, to upgrades and optimizations. All of these aspects are on the critical path to successful adoption.

- **Change readiness** is the wide-scale preparation and transition of leaders and end users through the phases of change that occur during the implementation of new technology. It brings the organization a step closer to adoption by helping employees in the organization prepare for change at the macro level. Dimensions of change include: leadership alignment, communications and delivery of training.

- **Patient readiness** is the effective engagement and preparation of patient populations to be comfortable interacting with health care technologies so that they can more effectively communicate with providers, collect and share information through technologies such as the required use of a patient portal, and additional use of technologies such as wearables and other digital health applications

The path forward

Preparing for operational readiness

In our experience, health care technology initiatives tend to lack a robust operational readiness program that goes beyond the technology and change readiness strategies typical of a Health Information Technology (HIT) project, resulting in the inability to effectively address issues such as improved care, reducing margin pressure, or accomplishing leading business practice. Health care systems can drive adoption of new system processes, policies and the behaviors of providers, clinicians, and revenue cycle staff through a structured framework focused on engaging leadership to drive and sustain change and establishing a dedicated operational readiness team.

With this investment, front line managers, clinicians and staff can be better prepared for the upcoming transformation and may be able to successfully integrate the new technology into their daily activities on Day One of go live. They are able to field the questions of patients and their families during this time period, providing reassurance to the populations they serve and ultimately influencing patient satisfaction during the transition. In addition, the organization now has the capability to manage continuous needs for technology-driven operational change in the organization as the EHR system undergoes upgrades, optimizations, and integration with other technologies.
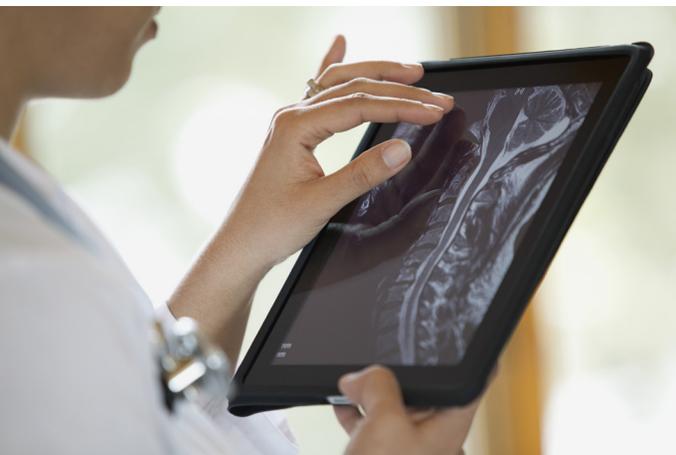
Enabling EHR transformation through operational readiness

The EHR transformation is a prime example of a large-scale HIT project with widespread disruption to people, process, policy and technology and one that significantly benefits from a structured operational readiness program. Operational readiness brings the organization to the highest level of adoption by focusing on the service line, department and employee stakeholders in addition to the technology. Recognizing that each facility, department, and unit will experience change differently during the implementation, operational readiness teams focus on defining the specific job role, process, and policy changes that the system will introduce to each employee segment. In essence, by adapting adoption and achieving this layer of granularity, staff may be able to understand the change in how they complete the work, and not just the global changes taking place. For adoption during an implementation or optimization to be sustainable, it should be personal. Each individual within the organization should be prepared for and committed to the new future state for a transformation to be successful.

Furthermore, executing this level of readiness planning and socializing these changes in advance paves the way toward successful end user training, as it gives users a chance to be comfortable with changes before they have to learn a new tool that they will use in their day-to-day work. The understanding of new processes and responsibilities helps to build credibility for the system, building trust that it provides the patient safety, quality and financial performance that the organization looks to achieve. More importantly, clinician trust in the system design, build and implementation also allows them to focus their efforts on the patient rather than being overwhelmed by the stress of change.

Smart first steps to get started

- Define a governance structure to identify natural operational owners of readiness and provide oversight of the program

- Designate an operational readiness team to lead the project's readiness activities across the organization

- Partner with IT to create a tactical approach and methodology for systematically identifying and documenting the process, policy and job role changes

- Liaise with operational leadership to develop action plans that they can use to implement, communicate and sustain change

- Prepare end users for the future-state through tailored readiness activities such as workflow impact assessment, policy changes, soft go-lives and user interactions with the system

Implementation vs Adoption? "Implementation" refers to the installation and activation of a functional system or set of systems at a single moment in time, or go live event – a critical milestone in any technology project. "Adoption" is the true long-term goal for organizations, and refers to the operational ownership, as well as the continuous process of engaging users of that system prior, during and after go live to ensure that they will effectively and efficiently use the system to its maximum potential.

Case Studies

	Case Study #1	Case Study #2
Issue	One large health care system purchased an EHR solution with a plan to go live "big bang" style – implementing multiple applications at once across the hospital, central billing office and clinics. The go live consisted of replacing over one hundred legacy systems with a single EHR solution which required the engagement and training of over 17,000 employees. While broad communications on system benefits were regularly shared with the organization, survey results indicated those messages did not resonate with individuals.	Another institution faced similar issues in its effort to replace multiple, highly customized legacy systems with a single, fully integrated, patient centric EHR solution. One of the major challenges was a deep rooted cultural resistance to the new technology that would ultimately enhance safe, effective, and efficient care and support the education and research objectives.
Solution	The Operational Readiness team engaged with an internal consulting group and more than 50 directors across clinical revenue cycle departments to educate them on changes to their functional areas. Through this partnership, the team established an operational readiness program that accomplished the following: • Identified and resolved 400+ change impacts to policies, processes and job roles • Engaged leaders and end users through go live readiness activities such as User Acceptance Testing and Workflow Dress Rehearsals • Provided operational context to Super Users and At the Elbow resources, leading to more robust support during go live • Enhanced, targeted communications to specific stakeholder groups informing them of high impact, high visibility changes to how work gets done in their role or department	To support the entire organization through this period of massive change, a cross-functional team with application technology experience as well as change management, training, and communication expertise partnered with operational leadership in the roll out of the operational readiness program. Through this multi-pronged approach, the team: • Involved all major clinical and administrative areas in the overall project governance and decision making • Convened a 500-member strong formal change network on a monthly basis • Identified more than 1,000 operational process, policy, training and role changes which drove planning for and identifying impactful change management activities • Established multi-modal end-user engagement activities inclusive of both recorded and live system demos, tip sheets, and practice sessions focusing on high risk changes • Encouraged providers and other clinicians to involve patients in their own care by providing information about the Patient Portal to schedule appointments, view results and communicate with their clinical team
Impact	Leadership teams remained highly visible – rounding in the hospital and clinics multiple times each day. Their calm demeanor and constant dedication to the project resonated with their teams. Clinical staff were prepared with contingency plans and thus demonstrated very little anxiety – a testament to the operational readiness activities delivered. Clinical tasks with a direct impact on patient experience all showed immediate adoption, such as Computerized Physician Order Entry (CPOE) (99%), Bar Code Medication Administration (90%), and Medication Reconciliation (86%). Patient time to admission from the Emergency Department was minimally impacted. It was clear clinicians were able to navigate transitions smoothly using the new technology	Despite the scope and magnitude of change, the go live was one of the smoothest the organization had ever experienced. By week one, impressive clinical statistics attributed to the adoption of new organizational behaviors and user efficiency were published. The 93% CPOE rate and 95% Bar Code Medication Administration compliance were both higher than the vendor's recorded averages. Additionally, the Activation team was able to ramp down floor support and close the command center earlier than planned reducing expenses. The implementation also enhanced the overall patient experience. The integrated patient record, the patient portal and Health Information Exchanges not only satisfied Meaningful Use Stage 2 requirements, but also provided the system and the community it serves the opportunity to leverage information across the health care spectrum - improving the speed, quality and accuracy of care. The organization anticipates the increase in quality and quantity of shared patient data will have a lasting effect on the patient-provider relationships in a positive way.

The bottom line

An innovative approach to adoption

Whether you are pre-EHR implementation or in a post-live optimization phase and focused on the next steps of creating a patient-centered, high-value organization with leading analytics and revenue improvement practices, operational readiness for your technology-enabled transformation initiatives can help you to stay on strategy through timely and effective preparation of leadership, management, and staff for their future state operations.

Fostering operational ownership through alliances with leadership and IT and structured tactics to manage people risk are critical to the success of strategic, technology-enhanced initiatives to improve patient care, reduce costs, support convergence, drive innovation and advance progress on population and global health initiatives. Health care organizations that tackle the operational readiness needs of their providers, clinical staff, and non-clinical functions can minimize disruptions throughout these transformations, but more importantly support the use of new technology in the most efficient and effective ways into the future.

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