

Premier Connection

CIOs Face Extreme Career Challenges and Opportunities

By Linda Hodges

CIOs have always faced significant challenges and scrutiny. Driven by government mandates, incentives and penalties, today's environment is even more complex and intense.

The good news is many organizations are approving significant, multiple IT investments to qualify for ARRA dollars and/or avoid serious penalties. Many organizations, eager to qualify for stimulus dollars, have rapidly approved the purchase of advanced clinical systems that have languished and/ambulatory EMRs, or are in an active selection process to meet the meaningful use requirements. Expectations are running high, and some may be unrealistic.

In addition to the capital expense for purchases, new positions to make these initiatives happen are required, along with consultants, contractors and vendor staff. All are significant undertakings to be managed simultaneously.

Some progressive organizations saw the need before mandates were in place. While these organizations are farther ahead and under less pressure, they are beginning to question whether they have the right CIO leadership.

Some CIOs don't want to tackle the magnitude of the changes and are opting to retire. Others have been severed and released for lack of confidence. Many organizations are faced with creating a CIO position for the first time and elevating the role.

The challenges tied to the changing IT environment are daunting. Very specific deadlines create a rush to the finish line that is carefully watched by boards, senior executives and physicians. There is danger in trying to accommodate deadlines by retro fitting implementation schedules, rather than planning appropriately.

Even with approval of new staff to make these initiatives happen, finding leaders with the right experience is difficult. Competition for clinical systems implementation experience, particularly with certain vendors, is at an all time high. With fierce competition and a gap in experienced leadership, some organizations have begun to create training institutes or academies to train internal clinical staff for IT leadership roles.

Achieving interoperability and in particular, figuring out how to get independent physicians on an EHR that is integrated with the acute care side, is a challenge. Few examples of doing this successfully exist.

Today's CIOs are balancing dramatically increased budgets, fully-engaged boards, and higher visibility of their roles with specific deadlines, intense pressure and high expectations. These factors converge to create some of the most extreme career challenges and opportunities for healthcare CIOs since their inception.

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