Transforming IT—
The CIO as Clinical Transformation Champion

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The healthcare industry has discovered information technology is a strategic asset. It has moved from a tactical function within individual provider, payer, and supplier organizations to a driver of clinical care redesign, regional information sharing and collaboration, pay for performance, and research.

Most health systems, today, have strategic initiatives revolving around electronic medical records, computerized practitioner order entry, clinical decision support, and other clinical information systems. These advanced technologies offer clinicians an opportunity to change the way they work to include new information-based modalities and reduce their dependence on paper.

In fact, now more than ever before, the industry has the opportunity to drive significant clinical transformation within the health system (see Table 1).

Successful transformation efforts are more than technology implementations—they are organizational change initiatives led by the most senior executives in the health system. In fact, for many health systems, these transformations are the most comprehensive, complex efforts ever undertaken. The potential for positive change is significant, yet the risks are also high.

Much has been written about the role of executive sponsors, the participation of physician and nursing leadership, and the change management needed within clinical operations. But there also is significant change that must occur within the information technology function. The IT staff must play a role in facilitating transformation and the role of the chief information officer must be expanded so he becomes a clinical transformation champion.

Most health systems must take specific steps to prepare for clinical transformation, and that requires certain actions by the CIO to ensure the IT organization is prepared to deliver value and champion clinical

**Definition of Transformation:** The transformation of health care services from manual processes to technology-enabled or automated processes. For success, health care professionals in every category, from physicians and nurses to pharmacists and IS staff, must change the way they think about and do their work. Change will occur in the way information is collected, managed and stored. Each individual must seek new ways to improve patient care, operational work methods, and their own personal productivity while confronting the challenges of learning new processes and technologies.

**Table 1.**
transformation. Those steps include the clinical readiness assessment; vision development; and transformation roadmap design.

**Clinical Readiness Assessment**

Before launching a major clinical system rollout, the CIO should work with operational and clinical leaders to evaluate the organization’s readiness for systemic transformation and care delivery redesign. Key questions include:

- What other redesign projects have been completed?
- What lessons were learned?
- Are top executive, physician, nursing, and other clinical leaders ready to commit to redesigning care delivery?
- Do champions exist?
- Has the case been built for change?
- Does a culture exist for information sharing and collaboration?
- Do competing organizational initiatives exist that may dilute the effectiveness of change initiatives?
- Does the medical and clinical staff have the needed skills, tools, and resources to accomplish the redesign process?
- What role has IT played—or not played—in these efforts? Is the IT function viewed as a change agent or a barrier to change?

This detailed analysis will set the stage for casting IT as a change agent. Through the clinical readiness assessment, information can be obtained regarding the needs, wants, and values of IT customers. Best practices from the industry can be researched and shared with the organization’s leadership. Commitment can be obtained, and a thorough understanding of change management requirements within the organization and within IT can be established.

**Vision Development**

The leadership team, in conjunction with key members of the medical staff and board, should create a comprehensive integrated understanding of what is meant by clinical transformation and identify strategic objectives with clearly defined desired outcomes for the health system. The vision then can feed a high-level roadmap for the resource, funding, revenue, and operational expectations required for achieving desired objectives and outcomes.

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The CIO also should work internally within IT to ask the following questions:

- What value will IT bring to accomplishing this vision?
- What unique skills or capabilities does IT bring to the table today?
- What skills and capabilities does IT need to have in the future?
- How can the department increase the contribution of IT to accomplishing these clinical objectives?

**Transformation Roadmap Design**

The readiness assessment provides a “current state” assessment, while the vision provides a “future state” goal. The next major step for the organization is to create a transformation roadmap that closes the gap between the two.

Specifically the roadmap defines the critical path, resources, funding, revenue, and operational expectations required for achieving desired objectives and outcomes. A cogent plan with the proper political support and champions is essential to create the foundation for success.

During this important planning phase, IT must align its strategy, organization, internal work processes, and behaviors with the overall transformation plan. Specifically, IT should:

- Develop a business case for change within IT.
- Create a value-based IT strategic plan that is consistent with the strategic plan of the enterprise.
- Augment IT steering committee functions with overall transformation governance and leadership teams.
- Coordinate risk management practices within the enterprise and within IT.
- Shift more to process owners and business/clinical sponsors.
- Become more consultative and learn to facilitate process redesign and change management into work practices.
- Develop strong customer service and relationship management processes within IT.
- Expand the IT program management offices to become enterprise transformation management offices.
- Develop metrics derived from overall business objectives.
- Create a communication plan and conduct regular meetings to ensure exposure to industry lessons learned; program management tools; the role of vendor, IT, business, and clinical teams; and transformation accomplishments.
• Source appropriate internal and external expertise.

Systemic change requires new insight and methods at all levels. Transformation provides a unique opportunity for IT and the CIO to champion the most profound changes that most organizations will go through. During the planning phase, IT should focus internally while simultaneously leading the enterprise.

About the Author
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