
Implementation: Challenges & Methodology



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Implementation Challenges

Overview

Today, many Senior Care administrators and owners are facing the same critical challenges. In order to provide the best services and care to residents, providers are required to come up to speed with twenty-first-century documentation practices. Mandates from State and Federal agencies have issued compliance and reimbursement edicts that now shape our infrastructures. Facilities are faced with very little leeway if they wish to meet compliance standards, operate efficiently, and most importantly, provide quality care to their residents.

When narrowing the list of potential qualified software vendors, decision-makers need to go beyond the obvious software features and benefits. Whether operating a large or small enterprise, providers need to be prepared to challenge potential vendors with the value and diversity of their implementation options. Internal considerations should include a thorough analysis of current business processes, training, deployment, data conversion, and the actual Go-Live event.

In addition to the long and short-term ROI and workflow processes, providers must evaluate not only the plethora of software sources, but the many implementation options as well. The important question is no longer *why* or *when*, it is now, *how*. How will this implementation affect the facility? The staff? The budget? And time?

When evaluating challenges relative to implementation, providers have five primary areas of considerations: residents, staffing, costs, time, and the potential for redefined business processes. Although these issues stand on their own for merit and level of importance, they are interconnected and may overlap in several areas.

Resident Care

Most importantly, residents are the chief concern and the reason for existence of any facility, large or small. At no time during the implementation process should the health and welfare of residents be compromised or diminished. An acute awareness of these challenges by both the provider and the vendor should translate into minimum negative effects during every stage in the process.

A principal area of concern related to resident care is staff availability during the initiation and training phases of the new system. Providers must give careful consideration to staff scheduling so that adequate time and effort can be applied to the initial implementation efforts. The potential to affect resident care may extend into the category of maintaining regulatory requirements (i.e., MDS completion within required time-frames).

Buy-In

One of the greatest challenges whenever the need for change is imminent, is the willingness by the end-user to accept not only the concept, but the effort required to make that change. As creatures of habit, people have a tendency to put up mental blocks and may even take steps to prevent change. Staff may resist the idea of new technology (subconsciously be afraid or overwhelmed by it), resist the requirement for scheduling flexibility during training, or may feel put-off by the data input challenges during the start-up process. In addition, staff may feel threatened by the new oversight capabilities.

Hidden Costs

The very nature of the senior healthcare system places financial obstacles in the path of providing quality care on a limited budget. Providers must carefully leverage existing equipment and evaluate reusable in-house resources. Making a commitment to acquire new software is only the first step in optimizing the value of a new application. Considerations must be given to infrastructure changes at both the corporate and facility levels.

Workflow

The lack of a structured implementation methodology, specifically as it relates to training, data conversion, and staffing will significantly challenge an organization. The absence of forethought and project planning will affect the overall process, manifesting into many time sensitive tribulations. The physical steps taken to develop new habits may require a new understanding of industry-specific processes.

The definition of "workflow" as defined by The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language is: (Noun) 1. The flow of progress of work done by a company, industry, department, or person. 2. The rate at which such flow or progress takes place.

Whether addressing staffing issues like training or turnover, physical changes within a facility or enterprise (hardware, software, WAN, LAN), or procedural changes, workflow reengineering must be considered at all levels.

Enterprise Summary

- Internal training must complement the provider's organization and can only be created from the provider perspective. The vendor should offer varying levels of training options for a range of users. However, providers need to develop an internal training program assuring continuation of the initial training and implementation phase. Policies and procedures must be aligned with training guidelines outlined by the vendor.
- As new processes are defined and old processes are eliminated, workflow will have to be adjusted to compensate at corporate, regional, and facility levels. System set-up and maintenance will influence operations.
- Unless the provider chooses a superior software package designed with the flexibility of integration, chances are that the clinical and financial software will not interact with each other. The need for simultaneous implementation of both clinical and financial software is imperative, if the software is to be integrated.
- Resources may need to be allocated during the initial implementation to input existing facility data and data that cannot be converted from the old paper-driven or antiquated systems to the new technology.

Implementation Methodology

Implementation Plan

Every Senior Care provider presents unique needs as it relates to implementing an information system. Available resources, skill sets, and network and hardware requirements dictate these needs. K2HealthTech works with every customer to design an implementation plan that incorporates the unique needs of the provider.

The evaluation process begins before the contract signing. This initial evaluation is critical because it is when the expectations are established. Too many implementations ignore the reasons the system was acquired. Senior management has expectations from the purchase of the system, it must be a part of the implementation plan, and it must be used as a guide throughout the implementation.

Project Management

The acquisition and implementation of a new information system is too important and too expensive not to manage it properly. The importance of good project management to the overall success of the implementation can not be overstated. Projects that are delayed cost money and result in lost opportunities. While the direct costs are can be easily determined, the cost of missed opportunities are not so easily defined. These include continuing to miss deadlines for MDS submission, reduced quality of care due to redundant data entry, and errors caused by inadequate shift-to-shift communications.

For organizations lacking available resources to adequately manage the project, K2HealthTech can contract to provide a project manager. Our staff is experienced at implementing hundreds of systems in the Senior Care market.

Implementation Phases

Any successful implementation plan is divided into manageable phases. Some phases of an implementation run concurrently utilizing different resources. Technical resources may work on the network and hardware issues while training resources learn the system and develop a training plan.

We have divided the implementation process into 9 phases depending on the level of services contracted. The nine phases are:

- ◆ Customer Analysis
- ◆ Business Analysis
- ◆ Train-the-Trainer
- ◆ Deployment
- ◆ End-User Training
- ◆ Data Conversion
- ◆ Go-Live
- ◆ Post-Live Analysis

Each of these phases is discussed in detail on the following pages of this paper.

Customer Analysis

This phase of the implementation takes place immediately following contract signing of your new information system (in some cases before contract signing) and involves K2HealthTech learning everything about the customers' physical environment. This phase begins with a kick-off meeting to establish schedules and timelines. It is important that we have a complete understanding of every customer from the network infrastructure to the workflow of the facility. Our implementation team will work with the customer analyzing and documenting every aspect of the customers operation. It is during this phase of the implementation that the initial training plan is developed. This plan includes target dates and resources necessary to meet scheduled Go-Live requirements.

K2HealthTech works with the customer to tailor a training plan that meets the needs and budget of the customer. The size of an enterprise and the number of facilities determine the level of training and support to be contracted. The number of sites, individuals, and location determine the cost of each training option.

Business Analysis

Analyzing current business processes and tailoring the workflow to match those processes can be the most critical phase of the implementation. During this phase, K2HealthTech works with the customer to analyze current business processes to determine various system parameters and the appropriate settings to ensure the workflow of the business and the software are coordinated.

This phase ranges from a basic service involving the completion of the standard process questionnaire and a telephone conference to an on-site review and recommendation.

Train-the-Trainer

If the customer elects to provide the resources to perform end-user training, a Train-the-Trainer phase must be incorporated into the plan. This phase is where a key individual(s) receives intense training on the setup, maintenance, and use of the system that is selected. The Train-the-Trainer session is designed to impart the knowledge to allow the trainer to return to the facility and with the use of written documentation, train the remaining users of the system.

Deployment

This phase involves the actual installation of the software, cabling if necessary, installation of the communications, and other equipment necessary to adequately deploy the selected application across the organization. In large organizations, the coordination of the software installation is a major task requiring a number of resources. This must be accounted for in the implementation plan if the project is to be completed within the allotted time and budget.

Deployment services are offered through K2HealthTech. Organizations needing assistance with this phase of the implementation can contract with K2HealthTech to provide some or all of the deployment activities. We are experienced in deployment in all size organizations from stand-alone facilities to large regional and national chains. We work with the customer to determine a methodology that meets the overall project guidelines.

End-User Training

The training of the end-users can begin at any point of the implementation provided it does not occur too soon. Skills learned are easily forgotten when they are not used on a regular basis.

Modular Computer Based Training (CBT) delivered stand-alone on CD or to the user's computer, via Intranet or via the Internet is changing the workplace. Employees have instant access to the instruction and information they need available to them 24 hours a day. This could include training on your software, facility policies and procedures, or continuing education. No longer will you have to send staff away for training off-site.

It is also a valuable feature that customers will appreciate in an industry with high employee turnover. Training and re-training staff becomes much simpler and less expensive. If employees are properly trained, they will be able to use the system effectively.

Data Conversion

Although data analysis is performed during the Customer Analysis phase, the data conversion phase occurs just before the Go-Live phase. This is important for two reasons: 1) to eliminate duplicate data maintenance; and, 2) prevent the "garbage-in-garbage-out" scenario. It is important to run a test of the data conversion process. However, if the final conversion is performed too early in the implementation process, it will be necessary to maintain changes on two systems. Additionally, converting to a new system is the ideal time to clean any data base information. Scrubbing the data on the existing system before conversion assures a cleaner implementation.

K2HealthTech provides data conversion services from your current system to your newly selected information system.

Go-Live

Go-Live is a state of being as much as a phase. When the organization is ready to utilize features of an application in a production or "Live" manner, they enter the Go-Live phase of the implementation. Depending on the size and complexity of the implementation, certain aspects of the application may be live before another. For example, A/R and Billing may be the highest priority for an organization and therefore they begin using those features of the system in production before implementing the clinical features. If the implementation is staged with portions "Live" before others, the implementation process continues as well. This would be reflected in the plan from the very beginning.

Post-Live Analysis

An information system is acquired with a set of expectations to reduce costs or improve productivity, and all too often the benefits of the system are never realized or at least never documented. It is important that the expectations be established at the beginning of the project, used as a guide throughout the project, and assessed at the end of the project. The Post-Live Analysis is designed for just that purpose. Are we getting our ROI and are there ways to further improve our use of the information system to get more benefit from it?

During the Post-Live Analysis, additional recommendations as to the level of usage of the system are made based on the current comfort level of the end-users.



Conclusion

The implementation of an information system and the methodology employed during the implementation process can have as great an effect on the overall success and ultimately on the return on the investment expected from that system as the features offered by the system. It is never too early in the selection process to consider a strategy for implementation. The implementation team must carefully plan and manage the process keeping in mind throughout the expected outcomes and desired benefits to be realized. By using K2HealthTech for these implementation services, you help ensure the success of your project.

With K2HealthTech, now you don't have to go it alone.