



IT leadership teams could be moved around organization charts like pieces on a chess board. Here's what you can do to be prepared.

## **Fads Will Fade**

By Betsy S. Hersher

*Part two of a two-part series*

Clinically integrated systems, strong EMRs and CPOE require strong financial support from hospital boards while IT executives communicate the need for installing and supporting those systems. In theory, everyone should be happy -- users, vendors, clinicians, CIOs and their management teams. However, at a time when all involved should be enjoying the fruits of years of struggle, lingering issues -- as reported in last month's column -- have made this a challenging and disruptive time:

- Senior and board-level executives assume that the clinical systems financial commitment will be protected by a clinical CIO not reporting thru the current CIO
- Some CIOs are being pushed back into the "keeper of technology" role through a reporting channel separated from the clinical initiatives

## **Fads or trends?**

CIOs must be able to judge the validity of a possible trend and remain viable during what might be a short level "fad." This phenomenon is hitting at a time of flux and if not identified quickly could cause damage in individual career growth. Information technology leadership teams could suffer as they are moved around organization charts like pieces on a chess board. At the same time, the good news regarding some of these fads is that they may be short-lived.

Here are the challenges you'll face as the latest ideas fade in and out:

- 1) Staying individually viable.
- 2) Continuing to push for the right IT leadership to support health care entities of all varieties.
- 3) Keeping pace with the national initiative to establish a data network that would connect physicians' offices, health care organizations, and other point-of-care entities to facilitate the free and secure flow of patient information in real time. A key step in this process is the creation of regional health information organizations and the continued modernization of network infrastructure and technology.



## **How to respond**

As outlined above, these are treacherous times for some, no doubt about it. Nonetheless, there's no reason to panic. In fact, you should view the current environment as a great opportunity. If you are prepared for change and have alternate routes laid out, you might be in a great position to "roll with the chaos."

Start with the following priorities:

- Pay attention to power shifts
- Do your job, on time and on budget
- Communicate with your customers at all levels
- Become a "jack of all trades" -- and master of all projects you undertake
- Document everything you do
- Stay on top of your executive support and coaching
- Know how to manage changing corporate cultures
- Hone your team and collaboration skills

## **Surviving the short term**

The most problematic situation you could face would be if the board or a consulting firm were to assess your organization's management team and recommend the firing of the entire C suite, generally excluding the CIO on the first wave. You'd find yourself in the middle of a sudden corporate culture change. You wouldn't be able to predict the new management team's next move. And indecision could open the door for outsourcing arrangements and a variety of interim management suggestions relating to information systems.

My suggestion for handling this situation: If you have consistently followed the recommendation in the previous section, you have an opportunity to quietly slide under the radar screen. However, you still need to be prepared for stressful encounters at all levels of the organization. A CIO has a 50/50 chance of losing his/her job.

If you are a senior executive within the information systems organization, you may have no option other than taking a chance with the new CIO, clearly an uncomfortable circumstance. But, you should note, Hersher Associates' research indicates this trend will be short-lived.

Sudden management changes may be aberrations in the long run. Reporting structure changes may be reviewed after a short period of time and may be found to be ineffectual. And if that's the case, look for the cards to be re-shuffled again.

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