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OPEN SOURCE SOFTWARE: PANACEA OR NICHE PLAYER? By: Timothy F. Masse



Open source software receives a lot of press these days and many believe this new way of developing, distributing, and supporting software products will fundamentally change the software industry.

To begin, it is important to understand what open source software is all about. Unfortunately, there is plenty of misinformation about it in the marketplace. Open source software differs from commercially developed software in that it is created by a "development community" rather than a single vendor. The development community is typically comprised of volunteers from many different organizations that develop the software on a full-time or part-time basis. Typically the source code is initially free and it can be modified by anyone that uses it to meet their specific needs.

Although the software may be initially free, many for-profit companies sell a distribution version of the open source product and provide on-going maintenance and support services for a fee - just as other commercial software vendors do for their products. For example, the Linux operating system and associated support services are available from Red Hat, a publicly traded company.

The basic argument for open source software is that some believe a large group of independent programmers can produce a more bug-free product at a lower cost than vendors that develop

commercial software products. Open source software products are subject to a peer review process whereby other programmers continually assess contributed program code before it is approved for inclusion in the open source product. The goal is to ensure that poorly written code does not make it into the product.

Vendors of commercial software products believe that a single organization or company can be more effective than relying on a group/committee to decide what new code is added to a software product. They also argue that there are hidden costs associated with using open source software and that organizations don't adequately plan to address these costs until after they begin using open source products. Microsoft has run numerous advertisements that compare total cost of ownership of Linux versus their Windows operating system.

To conclude, we won't know for some time whether open source software will live up to the hype it has received or if there will only be a small number of widely used open source software products available to the public. It is important though that the marketplace becomes more educated on open source software since Linux, the Apache web server software, and the MySQL database software are all widely used open source products that continue to gain market share.

Tim Masse is the principal in charge of our Public Sector Consulting practice. If you'd like more information on open source or would like to discuss the topic with Tim, he can be reached at (207) 775-2387, tmasse@bdmp.com.

HOW TO AVOID POT HOLES ON THE ROAD TO SYSTEM SELECTION AND IMPLEMENTATION: PART ONE By: Mary Jo MacLaughlin, MHSA, CHE

Too often in our consulting practice we have new clients come to us after a major system selection and implementation project has gone off-road and crashed. Because no one wants to "throw good money after bad" the organization's management realizes it must step back, re-group and attempt to salvage the project. Unfortunately, at this point, time and dollars are spent, users are alienated and the reputation of the project and system is damaged, perhaps even totaled.

Of course some potholes are more disastrous than others. By following a few simple guidelines there is a much greater chance the road will be smooth. Following is Part One of a road map to a successful selection project. In our next edition we'll discuss implementation.

1. Develop a clear Request for Proposal (RFP). Say what you mean and mean what you say. Develop an RFP that clearly describes your organization and its goals. A well written RFP helps the vendor to describe its qualifications to meet your needs and will set the stage for what will be expected of the vendor. It also allows your team to

objectively evaluate the responses you receive.

2. Take sufficient time and effort to properly define the requirements for the new system. One of the most important steps toward a successful implementation is to devote time up front to properly define the requirements for your new system. Involve future system users to identify all the system requirements. This also serves to begin the process of user ownership.

3. Get to know the systems and vendors before buying. Vendors should demonstrate their systems for your users so they can see exactly what you want them to see, not what the vendors want them to see. Make site visits to see the systems in action and talk to those who actually use the system. Finally, check references to confirm that you have addressed all your questions and are comfortable the system is a good fit with your organization.

4. Review and negotiate the contract with the vendor to establish accurate delivery expectations. Leave no stone

turned! In addition to reviewing the contract from a legal perspective, review the contract from a users' perspective and from an information technology perspective. It's important to include the response to the RFP as a part of the contract.

Mary Jo MacLaughlin, Consulting Manager, specializes in government, healthcare and not-for-profit in BDMP's Management and Information Technology Consulting Group. She can be reached at (207) 942-1600 or mjmacLaughlin@bdmp.com.



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MEDICAID MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEMS: TOUGH LESSONS LEARNED

By: Laurel Harris and Charles K. Leadbetter, III

Many states are looking to obtain new Medicaid Management Information Systems (MMIS) in order to comply with Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) regulations, upgrade outdated architectures and provide improved service to their constituents. This initiative impacts access to healthcare for thousands of people. In many states, annual Medicaid costs have surpassed the amount spent on education. It's a fact: implementing a faulty MMIS has a crippling effect on state finances and provider operations.

Our experience assisting states with MMIS projects reinforces our commitment to promote best practices. Lessons learned on these types of projects include:

ADVANCE PLANNING

Properly structuring your project in the planning stage greatly increases the likelihood of success and minimizes project risk. For example:

- Plan for an overlap of vendor contracts while implementing the new system by maintaining current capabilities as a contingency option.

- Allow for an adequate User Acceptance Testing (UAT) plan. Factor in time for development of test scenarios, execution of test scripts, prioritization of defects and retesting activities. Build stakeholder confidence in the system during UAT.

SYSTEM SELECTION

Selecting the right vendor and system solution begins with a carefully written Request for Proposal (RFP) that meets the specific

needs of the State. At this point, the interests of taxpayers, providers and other stakeholders can be protected. Below are a few items to consider during the system selection process:

- Reliance on a boilerplate RFP can be problematic. Poorly structured RFP's can lead to contested awards, ineffective projects, and significant contractual and process related problems. A good RFP will prompt quality proposals from leading vendors and ensure a transparent and competitive bidding process.

- When developing your RFP, include your technical and business requirements. Without well-written requirements it is difficult to measure whether or not a proposed or delivered system will meet the needs of the state. This may require you to update manuals and reconcile policies with actual daily practices.

- Ask potential vendors for a gap analysis in your RFP solicitation. Requesting vendors state clearly which requirements will be met "out-of-the-box" and which will require custom modifications, is an excellent way to compare function to function, and cost for cost, from one vendor to another.

STAFF CONSIDERATIONS

Underestimating the importance of experience at this critical planning stage can result in the selection of an overpriced system that will not fit the State's needs and a contract that does not protect the State's interests. Below are a couple lessons learned:

- The greatest benefit of engaging an independent consulting firm to monitor the MMIS implementation is when they are obtained early in the re-procurement process. They can help structure the project, develop a competitive and strategically sound RFP, participate in system selection, and protect the State's interests in the negotiation phase and throughout the implementation.

- Evaluating staff experience, expertise

and availability to fulfill key project roles and responsibilities is fundamental to the success of the project. State subject matter experts will need to divide their time between their operational responsibilities and project demands. Their knowledge is critical to a successful outcome.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

Developing tangible, easily understood metrics that will help determine if deliverables have been completed, or criteria to determine if the system has been adequately architected is crucial to a successful project. Here are some important lessons learned:

- Define methods and metrics for measuring success against each project objective. Work shouldn't be considered complete until it meets the State's specifications. Success measures will also help the State objectively determine when the system is ready to move into production.

- In addition to tying payment terms to deliverable completion and performance, effective payment terms should also provide an incentive for the vendor to correct problems discovered after "go-live".

- Always have a contingency plan that can be enacted at the State's discretion should it become necessary. Without such a plan, the state can be pressured to accept a system that hasn't been adequately tested to ensure stability or accuracy.

Quality assurance, IV&V, and project management services, if utilized during MMIS re-procurement projects, can provide tremendous benefits to your organization and increase the likelihood of a positive project outcome.

Laurel Harris and Charlie Leadbetter are consultants in BDMP's Management and Information Technology Consulting Group and can be reached at (207) 775-2387, or via email at lharris@bdmp.com & cleadbetter@bdmp.com.

PEOPLE NEWS



Laurel Harris, a senior consultant in our Group, has earned the top certification credential in the project management field. Laurel received the Project Management

Professional (PMP) certification from the Project Management Institute, a pioneer and advocate for the project management profession.

Laurel works primarily with public sector clients assisting them in managing the scope, timeline, resources, communication, and costs associated with substantial projects. She earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Computer Information Systems from Illinois State University and worked with State Farm Insurance as a programmer, system analyst

and project planner at their Bloomington, Illinois headquarters. Laurel can be reached directly at (207) 541-2236, or lharris@bdmp.com.



Charles K. Leadbetter, III, a manager in our group, co-presented at the International City/County Management Association Information Technology

Management Summit in Virginia Beach, VA. The conference attracted municipal government IT directors and managers from around the country looking to create and sustain successful, technology-focused local governments. Charlie's session highlighted a recent integration project for the Town of Leesburg, VA.

Charlie can be reached at (207) 541-2249, or cleadbetter@bdmp.com.



Marcey McHatten has joined our Management and Information Technology Consulting Group as a Consultant. She is based in Portland, Maine. Marcey assists

clients in addressing a broad range of management, project management, and planning issues. Her relevant experience includes project management, technical needs assessment and implementation, research and data analysis.

Prior to joining BDMP, Marcey was a business analyst and project manager with Wright Express in Portland and a researcher with the Margaret Chase Smith Center in Orono, Maine. Marcey is a native of Maine and a graduate from the University of Maine with degrees in Math and Statistics and Education. Marcey can be reached directly at (207) 541-2221, or mmchatten@bdmp.com.