

Communication Before, During and After Mergers and Acquisitions

The healthcare landscape is evolving as the pressure for reducing cost, expanding coverage and improving care increases. Mergers and acquisitions are happening at a fast pace as the healthcare marketplace continues to reform in order to keep up with shareholder demands. Opportunities to respond to these demands present themselves through entering new markets, adding additional geographic coverage and taking advantage of optimizing innovative technological capabilities on existing footprints. The motivation for acquiring hospitals, clinics or providers can be organizational pressure to add specialties or geographical coverage, provide new service lines and increase revenue.

The perception mergers create for an employee may be fear, uncertainty and doubt due to changes within the new environment. In this environment they not only have to continue to work, but to flourish. Any number of factors may cause stress and dissatisfaction for staff, which most certainly affects how patients feel about the organization as a whole.

Improving communication broadly is one way to help alleviate tension and to establish a clear path for employees to get answers throughout the M&A process. In fact, companies should do everything in their power to enable and encourage even more communication across the organization. Where can a coordinated patient care team find the information they need to work quickly, easily and efficiently?

The Communication Gap

Typically, the infrastructure supporting the organization, outside of specific healthcare needs for patients, is not taken into consideration beyond a generalized concept such as 'communication amongst staff.' Enabling communication is something which should be considered paramount and can make or break a successful acquisition and merger – in fact, it's often cited as one of the most difficult tasks to accomplish and one of the most important.¹

If the end goal is to provide better service at a lower rate, improving communications should be considered a high priority by any customer-centric organization, whether preparing for M&A activity or not. The pressure to change can be great and it is not limited to internal conversations across the enterprise - improving communications with vendors, contractors, and consumers is also important.

Eliminating the frustration of how quickly and easily a healthcare employee can find the correct resource or solution at the right time will enhance both internal and external satisfaction. Highly skilled resources spending time looking for organizational assistance is obviously not cost effective. The concept of using some of the same technologies employees use in their daily lives to communicate and take care of personal business can also be applied in the workplace. How can that same level of satisfaction, delivered

and managed in a similar and familiar way, be made available in the healthcare workplace? How can these important healthcare resources connect with the right person, at the right time to find answers quickly and easily?

Part of the communication plan should be to identify group leaders in the new organization, clarify roles and responsibilities and encourage communication broadly – creating an environment that's easy to navigate, has value to all employees and removes barriers to finding information. In addition, this information should be published and readily available to everyone, so employees are enabled to quickly explore options to resolve and answer pertinent and immediate questions. Common questions employees ask may be, "What is best practice for using a new device or software?" "How do I request and hire new staff?" or simply "Where is my paycheck?".

There is technology available today which supports these endeavors. The organization should leverage existing technological investments when possible, to allow optimal communications, which reaches people efficiently, easily and eliminates daily frustrations stemming from not being able to find answers when they are most crucially required, especially during or after M&A.

¹ <http://www.renalbusiness.com/articles/2013/01/mergers-and-acquisitions-in-health-care.aspx?pg=2#content>

I Can Text or Skype with My Kids, But I Can't Reach (Insert Pertinent Name Here)?

PCs, laptops, tablets and smart phones are everywhere and what people use to get work done and communicate more freely and with greater flexibility. Just walking around any healthcare or administrative organization shows how portable technology has infiltrated our lives. Some examples of this are when you see nurses or doctors with tablets entering and accessing patient information at the bedside or using their smart phones to look up drug interactions while assisting patients. The technology is already being used – even if it's being used on personal devices. The previous example illustrates that people will take the path of least resistance and use tools to help them do their job better – even if they are doing it on their own.²

In addition, the younger generation entering the workforce has an expectation of using technology to meet their communications needs.³

The Empowerment of Unified Communications

Imagine an environment where you can layer new technology to help facilitate immediate communication and understand employee availability. The ability to see presence via instant messaging or schedule ad-hoc conference calls in order to share information quickly and easily. Not only is this technology available on PCs, but is also available for smartphones, tablets, and other portable devices AND will work with existing infrastructure.

Presence

Presence states are based on activity or calendar information. Employees can set their presence information manually or have it automatically set based on activity to control how or whether you want people to contact you. Presence statuses include Available, Busy, Away and Do Not Disturb. Presence information is available to be leveraged to decide how or when to contact others for questions, assistance, etc.

Microsoft Lync is software that enables communications across the enterprise with instant messaging, conferencing and telephony (with video capabilities), and it can work with existing platforms and infrastructure. It was specifically designed to interoperate with existing technology. If you have a need for voice mail it can be supported through Microsoft Exchange, to provide a common voice mail platform for all users in the combined company. Many healthcare systems have several disparate technologies that are used for the similar purposes across the organization – such as different PBXs and voice mail systems. This means that it's very difficult (or impossible) to forward voice mail to others outside of your location or broadcast pertinent news, for example, about M&A activity from the CEO to a large group of users. Lync and Exchange can be used to provide a common communications layer for all employees.

Enabling the concept of federation is important if the company has contractors or vendors who interact with the environment on a consistent basis. With federation, other user's presence is exposed from outside the organization. If these resources also use Lync as their unified communication client, the conversation is encrypted and secure. For example, Skype is a public communications tool that is a free client to utilize that supports presence, IM and voice communications. Federation facilitates presence and communications with people outside the organization. If vendors or other resources that support your organization utilize a public messaging client, communications can be enabled to speed up transactions.

Federation

Federation allows users in the organization the ability to communicate with users outside your internal network in a secure way. A federated identity is the means of linking a person's electronic identity and attributes, stored across multiple distinct identity management systems.

² <http://www.beckershospitalreview.com/healthcare-information-technology/the-impact-of-mobile-devices-a-byod-on-healthcare-today-and-tomorrow.html>

³ <http://www.networkworld.com/news/2012/061912-byod-20somethings-260305.html>

Example 1

Let's say a patient needed an open MRI. The new organization provides easy access to the scheduling solution. The facility for this procedure less than a mile away. The referring physician's office is aware the newly merged organization has this skill set, but doesn't really know the most efficient and appropriate way to get the MRI scheduled. Without the right tools, the physician's office staff might spend a few minutes looking for the name of the facility and then provide that information to the patient – never knowing what happened next.

A better way would be to enable staff to search for an open MRI facility, obtain all pertinent details including location, directions, and most importantly to patients, a specific name and title including contact information for someone who can personally help the patient if the need arises. A bonus for the physician's office and patient would be immediate contact through presence and an IM conversation to confirm details and thus facilitate a smooth transfer for the patient. The technology supports search capabilities to quickly find information and resources that can help, which also speeds up the transaction and ensures the patient is taken care of throughout the process.

Connecting the Dots...

Setting up the right communication structure can be easier than you think given proper planning. Clients can leverage off the shelf software or a cloud-based solution to enable collaboration in the enterprise quickly, even if your organization does not have unified communications deployed today as the technology can integrate with existing infrastructure.

Microsoft Lync offers a simplified and quick-to-implement solution which helps solve some of the M&A concerns around communications. Microsoft Lync keeps the flow of business continuing throughout the M&A process. The same solutions used to improve communications during the M&A activity can also position companies to start on their own UC journey. In fact, your company might already own the Microsoft UC software necessary to implement a solution.

Example 2

You are making decisions about a learning management system for the new company and are interested in getting feedback from nurse managers whose staff will actually interact and use the new system. The previous organizations used a different system so feedback would be very helpful. This decision process normally could be quite cumbersome. Conversations might begin at a fairly high level but must trickle down into the organization to get to the people whose opinions may be most useful.

A better way would be to post a survey tool on a company intranet site or a separate portal location with details on options, discussion boards, and perhaps even feedback to final decision makers. Unified communications can be enabled to allow direct IM access without having to search for people and utilize presence to begin chat/IM sessions, to create an immediate and dynamic conversation about the material, or even to schedule a conversation later.

To support communications between companies throughout the M&A process, here are some examples of approaches:

- If any of the companies already owns Microsoft UC, there are options to quickly implement the software:
 - Setting up federation between two companies who already own Microsoft Lync or Office Communications Server 2007
 - Allowing federation with external public internet connectivity (PIC) for Skype or other public IM access
 - Create AD personas for the new required users and provide them a Lync client
- If none of the companies own Microsoft UC licenses, these are the options to set up an environment for facilitating communications:
 - Microsoft Lync to provide a minimal on-premise environment for instant messaging and presence for both organizations
 - Office 365 Lync to provide a hosted environment for instant messaging and presence for one or both organizations

How Fast Can We Enable Communications Across the "New" Company?

This is one of many questions asked during every merger and acquisition. Most IT organizations don't look forward to the integration work involved considering the various communications solutions including PBXs, conferencing, voice mail, etc. This is true whether you are going to replace or integrate systems long term. Often during the process, a key decision maker examines the entire communications concept across an enterprise, considering unified communications (UC) as a strategy. Implementing Microsoft UC specifically for the M&A process is a quick and painless way to test UC as a strategy with just a few key people involved in the M&A process or across an entire organization.

Closing

Whether you are at the planning stages or are actively considering UC in your organization or are in the middle of a merger or acquisition, we can help establish a straightforward, simplified deployment (on premise or hosted) of Microsoft Lync in your environment to help people communicate better. Immediately the organization can start addressing instant messaging and presence. IM and presence is a low risk deployment with a high rate of return and a fast implementation cycle - often completed within weeks instead of months.

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