



# Developing Court Capabilities and Insights through Data Conversion

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## ACADEMIC ARTICLE



## ABSTRACT

Court systems nationally and internationally engage in upgrading case management systems or their components to improve the capturing and monitoring of case processing in more modern and standardized ways. In the fall of 2014, the Maryland Judiciary began its statewide implementation of Maryland Electronic Courts (MDEC); a single judiciary-wide integrated case management solution to include trial and appellate courts. One of 24 general jurisdiction courts in Maryland began its involvement in this statewide initiative in May 2018. Preparing for system implementation at the local court level involved participation in multiple projects including but not limited to data conversion, system development and establishing data integrations and customized reports and extracts. These projects required the identification, mobilization and, at times, supplementation of resources. Drawing upon Ostrom and Hanson's (2010) "Achieving High Performance: A Framework for Courts" and the concept of "capitals" (human, organizational, technology, and information), this paper describes the court's management of a data conversion project and the lessons learned from the experience. Through engagement, opportunities and challenges arose that shaped the responses by the court's conversion management team on this and future projects.

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## 1. BACKGROUND

Court systems nationally and internationally have initiated upgrades to their case management systems or their components to modernize their operations and processing efficiency, as well as respond to public demands for transparency and improve information access. However, the implementation of such technology in and of itself does not result in modernized operations or yield improvements to various issues courts face (Reiling, 2009). Research has found that technology systems are more likely to achieve their intended gains when organizational and attitudinal changes occur along with a commitment to generating knowledge from the systems (Reiling, 2009).

The Maryland Electronic Courts (MDEC) project, which creates “a single Judiciary-wide integrated case management system...will collect, store and process case records electronically” allowing access to the state’s appellate, circuit courts’ and District Court case records (Maryland Judiciary, 2022). With a single judiciary-wide case management system, there is an expectation for data standardization and the hope that more complete and accurate information will yield consistent reporting on court processes. Further, if the processing of court information becomes more standardized, structured and accurate, reliance on the information may increase to inform improvements in the administration of justice (Reiling, 2020).

The Circuit Court for Montgomery County began its preparation for the MDEC transition as early as 2015 well before its ultimate implementation in October 2021. Drawing upon concepts from Ostrom and Hanson’s (2010) “Achieving High Performance: A Framework for Courts” and project management principles, this article attempts to address the following questions: (1) how can courts mobilize human, organizational, technology and information assets to support and manage a data conversion initiative, and (2) what lessons are learned that can inform other courts undertaking similar technology initiatives?

### 1.1. CIRCUIT COURT FOR MONTGOMERY COUNTY

The Circuit Court for Montgomery County (hereafter referred to as the “court”) is one of the 24 general jurisdiction courts in Maryland, serving over 1 million residents<sup>1</sup> in the state’s most populous county. The court consists of 24 judges, 8 magistrates and approximately 320 Clerk of the Court and Court Administration personnel. During Fiscal Year (FY) 2019, the court processed approximately 35,000 case filings and 34,700 terminations (original and reopened)<sup>2</sup> and held over 37,100 hearings and 1,700 trials. In addition, the court processed over 10,650 business licenses, issued over 5,000 marriage licenses and performed over 2,300 marriage ceremonies.

The goal for the MDEC data conversion project was to successfully migrate case records stored in the court’s customized, legacy system for over 40 years<sup>3</sup> to the statewide system. In addition to court records, the legacy system captured the court’s case management/business process information such as attributes associated

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1 Resident population as of April 1, 2020 according to the United States Census Bureau QuickFacts website: <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/montgomerycountymaryland> [accessed 23 January 2022].

2 In FY2020, the caseload declined to 29,663 filings (15%) and 28,712 terminations (17%), largely due to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

3 Legacy system data entry began in January 1977.

with Differentiated Case Management (DCM) plans,<sup>4</sup> deadlines and time standards. Since the court's legacy system was to be deprecated following implementation, it was understood at the outset, that most, if not all, legacy data was to migrate to the new statewide system. Early in the project, the local court, state judiciary and vendor reviewed the data tables existing in both the state and legacy systems. An Intermediate File Layout (IFL) document of the state's system tables was shared with the local court to help identify corresponding data fields. Where corresponding data fields existed between the two systems, legacy data migrated. If a corresponding (matched) data field did not exist, attempts were made to migrate the data to a comment or notes field when deemed to be important information by end users. The court used SQL Server to facilitate data migration, which currently serves as a repository of all legacy data (as of the implementation date).

Data conversion involved code mapping, review of converted data and the creation of scripts and rules to translate case data from the court's (source) system to the state's (target) case management system. Once the decision was made to accept the system change, the local court was better able to respond to it. The local court assumed responsibility for and ownership of the successful management of this effort given the importance of the court record and because it was its system's data that was being migrated. Court administration values, which are rooted in achieving high performance (Ostrom and Hanson, 2010) and project management principles, guided a largely novice project team leading the local aspects of this initiative.

## 1.2. HIGH PERFORMANCE COURT FRAMEWORK

The National Center for State Courts High Performance Court Framework (hereafter referred to as the "Framework") (Ostrom and Hanson, 2010) offers courts a flexible, iterative approach to enhancing performance. Performance improvements have at their foundation the administrative values of the organization. Improvements are achieved through collegial engagement among those internal and external to the organization and leveraging data to inform decisions (Ostrom and Hanson, 2010). Research conducted in two separate Finish law instances also finds that it is critical for individuals to be committed to process improvements sought as well as have the procedures, practices and tools available to achieve and sustain them (Pekkanen, 2011). While this is not an easy feat and courts continue to be challenged by what it means to achieve higher performance (Cornell et al., 2020), the commitment to improvement is at the core of the Framework and effective court administration.

An aspect of the Framework that helps courts conceptualize their solutions to operational challenges is the focus on core capabilities or assets of the organization referred to as capitals. According to Ostrom and Hanson (2010), organizational assets demonstrate the practical application of administrative principles and may be grouped into four general categories: human, organizational, technology and information. These capabilities are interconnected and interdependent with no one capability having significance over the other (Ostrom and Hanson, 2010). For example, employee skill-development (human capital), cross-department engagement (organizational capital) and the use of data and technology enhancements (information and technology capitals) are all key characteristics of a high performing court (Ostrom

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<sup>4</sup> The court's differentiated case management plans are accessible from the following link: <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cct/departments/dcm.html> [accessed 17 January 2022].

and Hanson, 2010). Change tends to happen slowly within courts, and resistance to change is experienced in different ways, at varying degrees and throughout the implementation of change initiatives (Ostrom and Hanson, 2010). It is argued that through investments in and utilization of these capitals, effective responses to performance and operations challenges can be achieved (Cornell et al, 2020).

Human capital focuses on members of the organization regardless of their position. Whether judicial officers or frontline workers, this capital is rooted in the utilization and mobilization of the workforce to effectively support and improve operations. It considers aspects of human resource management such as performance appraisals and the hiring and firing of personnel yet extends to focus on how personnel can succeed in applying and demonstrating the court's mission and administrative values (Ostrom and Hanson, 2010). This capital includes the development of professional skills and abilities among personnel through training and education. The encouragement, engagement and growth of staff within the organization in creative and flexible ways are aspects of human capital and are often reflective of the court's culture.

Organizational capital is described as the way work is accomplished (Ostrom and colleagues, 2007). It mirrors what is valued as well as reflects behavioral expectations. While court leadership frequently defines the strategic direction of the organization, it is engagement among the workforce that translates that vision into reality through the implementation and accomplishment of projects, as well as through maintenance of daily operations.

Technology capital focuses on the identification, use and management of systems and applications that capture and allow access to data that may inform court operations and better serve patrons. Information capital includes the depth and breadth of insights, knowledge and data that court personnel espouse along with the ability to analyze, synthesize, report on and communicate insights gleaned from systems and applications (Ostrom and Hanson, 2010). These capitals require the mobilization of teams, workgroups and committees to guide technology policies and data governance. If technology and information capital are valued by the organization, they will be cultivated through the establishment of offices and departments that focus on technical project management, data quality, analysis and research. In establishing and growing information capital, courts hire and train staff in skills that help them translate and synthesize data to guide case- and operations-related management decisions.

High performing courts encourage continuous improvement in the systems and applications used to extract, analyze, display and disseminate the court's data. However, even if financial constraints limit the purchasing of court technology, there is value in utilizing data from whatever applications exist. Existing "applications" may be spreadsheets or documents containing data manually compiled to be shared with other court departments as part of the decision-making process. Organizational flexibility in the utilization of court capabilities to improve performance and attain goals may also yield improvements. For example, when court research personnel communicate their findings on cases closing over a defined time standard to case management and clerk personnel, additional investigation including possible reasons for the over-standard terminations may be undertaken. Additional insights gained may further be shared with the bench and administrative executives who have the information and leverage to determine whether corrective action is needed. In the following sections, the local court's data conversion project is examined through the lens of those four capitals.

## **2. APPLICATION OF THE FRAMEWORK'S CAPITALS**

### **2.1. HUMAN AND ORGANIZATIONAL CAPITALS: DEVELOPING THE CONVERSION TEAM**

In May 2018, the state judiciary's data conversion team in partnership with the vendor provided the court with an overview of the case management system implementation project with particular focus on the key tasks of data conversion. The overview outlined the judiciary's expectations for the court including its responsibilities. The local court was to be heavily engaged in data conversion because of the knowledge of its own, customized case management system. In response to these outlined expectations, the court created a local team and developed its own management strategy. With large-scale projects where the organization's role is as a key stakeholder, a level of flexibility is often required as management responsibilities can be ambiguous. Accepting a level of ownership in project success required court engagement. Taking steps to understand project and task requirements, identifying and mobilizing resources as well as creating local management plans were found to be critical for engagement and ultimate project success.

A cross-functional conversion management team of Court Administration and Clerk of the Court personnel was established and included subject matter experts in technical services, data processing/programming, research, quality control/business processes, clerk operations management and courtroom processing. The team also included a contractor hired to assist in data transfer from the legacy system to SQL Server. The contractor worked closely with the court's lead legacy programmer to develop data conversion requirements as well as design and lead the development, testing and execution of the migration. Engagement with other technical consultants also occurred to help devise solutions for conversion tasks. Over half of the conversion management team members were engaged in other aspects of the MDEC implementation portfolio, including system development and data integration (i.e., developing forms, reports and data feeds).

The local conversion management team went through the normal stages of project team formation.<sup>5</sup> While team members were familiar with each other's work, the level of communication and coordination on the conversion project was unlike any previous experience. To support project team development generally, court leadership offered project management training and supported employees interested in obtaining the Project Management Professional (PMP) credential. Between October 2015 and September 2016, a total of 20 Court Administration and Clerk of the Court personnel, including the entire conversion management team, participated in a week-long project management bootcamp course, offered by an external consultant. The investment made in such an activity helped guide not only the conversion project but also other operations-related initiatives undertaken by the court.

While primarily out of necessity, having conversion management team members engaged in multiple aspects of the larger implementation effort allowed them to apply insights gained in one project area to other areas. For instance, performing the conversion data review task while also validating newly-created, customized reports provided an additional opportunity to review legacy data and assess whether migrated data displayed in the target application as expected. Similarly, through engaging in

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<sup>5</sup> Additional information on project team formation can be found in the PMBOK (Project Management Institute, 2017).

data conversion and development tasks, discussions occurred about whether migrated data should align with current business processes, which may become obsolete after system implementation or align with future business processes. While being engaged in multiple, simultaneous data system implementation projects was challenging and required effective time and task management at individual and team levels, it resulted in a high-level of knowledge accumulated and applied across multiple aspects of the larger, system implementation project. While no single team member held all the knowledge, there was both a specialized and broad understanding of data, business and technical systems resulting in the ability to coordinate more efficiently and effectively within and outside the conversion project team on issues as they arose.

Investments made in human capital demonstrate a level of flexibility given to the local conversion management team. That flexibility highlights court leadership's skill in anticipating future needs, adapting and responding by securing and allocating funds in accordance with those needs. Local courts do not always have the resources to support such human capital investments. This court has found that such investments made have had far reaching impacts not only in employee skill development and growth but also for the organization as it transitions to the new platform. The composition of team members with diverse skills and subject matter expertise enabled the team to investigate, question and offer solutions on a given data conversion issue while minimizing "groupthink." The investments also provided a sound, reliable system resulting in end user confidence in the platform.

## **2.2. INFORMATION AND TECHNOLOGY CAPITALS: CONVERSION DATA REVIEW**

The conversion data review task consisted of identifying, validating and logging conversion issues over multiple review cycles. The conversion management team's initial data review approach involved two members as managers and four as data review leads. Programmers on the conversion management team focused primarily on script development and issue resolution support. The managers were responsible for task and technical oversight as well as ensuring local progress on conversion rules and scripts. The managers communicated with court leadership as well as department/office supervisors on task progress. The leads were paired with teams of data reviewers and worked directly with them on the task. This approach continued with only slight variations through the first five of nine review cycles.

The data review task involved between 24 (Cycle 1) and 59 (Cycle 5) local court data reviewers. These reviewers engaged in conversion tasks at various points during the project but were not members of the conversion management team. Review of cases took approximately 4-6 hours to complete depending on the size of the case and familiarity with both source and target case management systems. Cases were recommended to be reviewed weekly. The conversion management team implemented a two-step verification process of vetting and logging issues. The management team vetted each identified issue and, if verified, logged the issue on the judiciary's issue tracker application (Office 365 SharePoint). They were also primarily responsible for verifying the "fixes" implemented by the vendor or the state judiciary (if an issue focused on configuration, for example) and marking them as resolved.

Prior to each cycle of data review, the conversion management team drafted a strategic approach to data review, which was shared with court leadership. The plan outlined the team's decisions related to case allocation, potential risks to task completion and

mitigation strategies as well as the overall data review approach. Prior to starting each data review cycle, conversion management team meetings were held to review and discuss the experiences of the previous review cycle and make modifications to the upcoming data review approach. A data review kick-off meeting was also organized and held. Meetings among the management team occurred weekly, if not multiple times per week, to discuss data review cycle progress, questions raised from data reviewers' checklists and issue identification/resolution. Once a cycle completed, a debriefing was held to identify what worked well and what should be modified before the next review cycle. For instance, the management team discussed the number of reviewers, the number of cases per reviewer, whether reviewers should be assigned to the same cases or different cases and if previous cycles' pass/fail determinations should be included on the subsequent cycle's checklists. Conversion management team members also utilized Basecamp<sup>6</sup> as their primary project communication tool.

One of the judiciary's templates for the data review task was a spreadsheet (known as the data review checklist) that listed the data elements requiring review in each case. The conversion management team reviewed and customized the checklist template to ease navigation between the source and target case management systems and to include data elements associated with new development. The management team approached the customization and improvement of the data review checklist with a quality cycle mindset. Ostrom and colleagues (2011: 141) discuss how "problem solving evolves in the form of a quality cycle." This continuous improvement approach to the data review checklist extended beyond data element and instruction updates. For instance, the management team discussed and investigated how best to reconstruct the checklist tool so that it better serves the data reviewers utilizing it and the leads reviewing it.

For the first two data review cycles, the management team manually organized case/reviewer allocation and then manually built out each reviewer's data review checklist. While a feasible approach for the first data review cycle (Cycle 1), it became cumbersome for subsequent cycles as the number of reviewers engaged in the task increased from 24 in Cycle 1 to 59 by Cycle 5; a 146% increase between Cycles 1 and 5. The manual, linked spreadsheet approach was not sustainable as the process was time consuming and the links tenuous.

Starting with Cycle 3 of data review, the conversion management team took a new technical approach to the creation of the data review checklists to improve efficiency and expand the information available to data reviewers. With assistance from a technical consultant, an automated system was implemented to read in all previous cycles' checklists and join that information with a compiled list of reviewer names and their case assignments for the upcoming review cycle. Once this information was read into the program, checklists were automatically populated into spreadsheets incorporating information on previous cycles' pass/fail determinations, any failure comments provided by the assigned reviewer along with team lead comments and a conversion issue number (if one was logged on the state judiciary's issue tracker). The data reviewer's name associated with each review cycle was also added to assist the current reviewer assigned to the case.

Through the automation process, management team resources were spared at least a day or two of work manually creating spreadsheets and verifying the information. Also, adjustments were easily made to the checklists such as adding notes from previous cycles into subsequent review cycle checklists. When the management team

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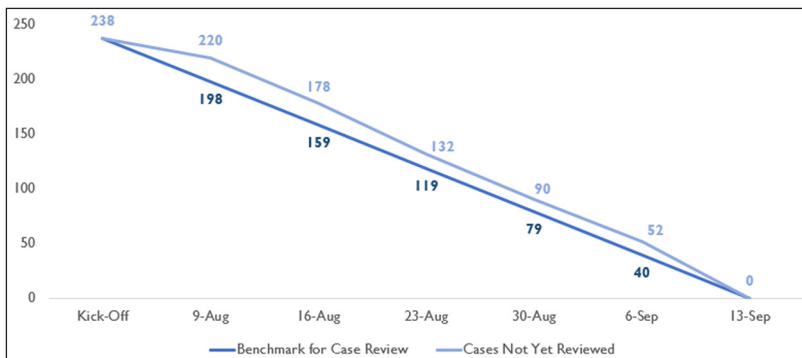
<sup>6</sup> Basecamp is a project management and internal communication tool: <https://basecamp.com/welcome-back> [accessed 17 January 2022].

decided to reduce the number of docket entries to review, the docket entry range for each case was programmatically added to provide reviewers with information on the relevant pleadings/docket entries for their assigned cases. Another benefit of this automated process was that a report was generated listing all potential errors found during checklist creation. While most of these warnings highlighted differences in text formatting (e.g., an upper-case “Pass” versus a lower-case “pass”), there were instances where the report identified an error with the input data (e.g., a mis-typed case number; the same case being allocated twice to two different reviewers). With a built-in quality report, the conversion management team was able to identify and reconcile any identified data discrepancies before checklists were shared with reviewers. Flexibility in the technologies available and technical skills leveraged offered a level of information access that helped better manage project tasks.

### 2.3 LEVERAGING THE FRAMEWORK’S CAPITALS: DEMONSTRATING PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Performance management focuses on utilizing data and performance results to guide and inform decisions. Over time, local court leadership has made investments in personnel, training and technical resources to support the court’s ability to effectively maintain, measure and communicate case information. An in-house data processing department extracted court record and case management system information on-demand to meet internal and external requests. A quality control department established in 2001 and a research team created in 2006 became part of the court’s organizational structure and data-oriented culture. Value in the use of technology, data and measurement has been demonstrated for over two decades by court leadership. The conversion management team shared the vision espoused by leadership and was committed to it.

Two monitoring streams were established by the conversion management team: 1) data review cycle progress to track task completion and weekly issue status and 2) conversion issue logging across review cycles to monitor the status and resolution of all created issues. The primary metrics for data review cycle progress included: total cases allocated per reviewer and total/percent of cases reviewed each week. The court also borrowed tools from agile and scrum project management methodologies to monitor each cycle’s data review progress. A burn-down chart<sup>7</sup> (*Figure One*) was created every review cycle to monitor (weekly) progress toward task completion.



**Figure One** Data Review Cycle Management: Burn Down Chart – Example.

<sup>7</sup> The following link provides a general overview of the difference between burn-up and burn-down charts: <https://www.modernanalyst.com/Careers/InterviewQuestions/tabid/128/ID/3433/What-is-a-Burn-Up-Chart-and-how-does-it-differ-from-a-Burn-Down-Chart.aspx> [accessed 17 January 2022].



Results were shared with leadership, department supervisors and data reviewers. The burn-down chart displayed the number of cases remaining for review with the trend line approaching zero at the cycle’s deadline. An estimated trend line was also displayed on the chart reflecting the number of cases to complete per week assuming each reviewer had an equal chance of completing their weekly case review. The estimated trend line provided the team a baseline by which to assess task progress.

Higher-level metrics for court leadership were compiled to monitor weekly conversion issue status (**Table One**) during each review cycle:

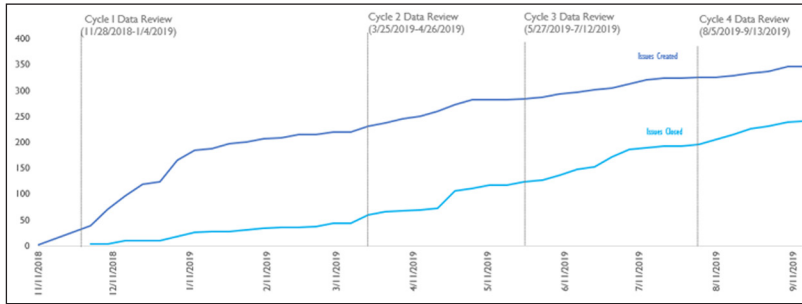
- Count and percent of conversion issues by status.
- Count and percent of issues by priority status.
- Count and percent of active issues by priority status.

ISSUE STATUS	COUNT	PERCENTAGE
Active	13	3.2%
Waiting for Push	0	0.0%
Waiting to Close	0	0.0%
Ready for Review	1	0.2%
Closed	390	96.1%
Resolved	0	0.0%
Reopened	0	0.0%
On Hold	2	0.5%
Total	406	100.0%
PRIORITY STATUS	COUNT	PERCENTAGE
Low	39	9.6%
Medium	245	60.3%
High	82	20.2%
Showstopper	40	9.9%
Total	406	100.0%
PRIORITY STATUS (AMONG ACTIVE)	COUNT	PERCENTAGE
Low	0	0.0%
Medium	7	53.8%
High	4	30.8%
Showstopper	2	15.4%
Total	13	100.0%

**Table One** Data Review Cycle Management: Weekly Conversion Issue Monitoring – Example.  
Note: Data reflective of issue status as of September 27, 2020.

The conversion management team also used a burn-up chart to track issues created and closed over time. While the number of identified conversion issues were expected to increase throughout the conversion project, the gap between identified issues and those closed was expected to narrow as the project approached completion. As shown in **Figure Two**, most issues were identified during earlier review cycles, and

the gap between issue creation and resolution did in fact narrow. **Table Two** reflects the number of issues created and closed for each cycle period. Even when formal data review was completed, issues continued to be created for the current review cycle up until the subsequent review cycle. Since issue closure took more time than issue identification, generating a lag between the two, the issue clearance rate (the number of issues resolved over the number created) exceeded 100% during certain cycles. As the rate of issue creation slowed, closure increased. That said, some issues lingered due to their complexity requiring additional details and investigation to arrive at viable solutions.



**Figure Two** Conversion Issue Monitoring: Burn Up, Data Review Cycles 1–4.

PERFORMANCE METRICS	CYCLE 1	CYCLE 2	CYCLE 3	CYCLE 4	TOTAL
Issues Created	220	62	42	22	346
Issues Closed	44	73	76	48	241
Clearance Rates	20.0%	117.7%	180.9%	218.2%	69.7%

**Table Two** Conversion Issue Monitoring: Issues Created, Closed and Cleared, by Cycle.<sup>8</sup>

Note: The ‘cycle’ period in the table reflects issue counts up until the beginning of the next data review cycle.

By having various metrics compiled and available, the local court was able to engage in meaningful discussions with court management as well as state judiciary and vendor partners about the data review progress and issue resolution status.

### 3. LESSONS LEARNED

The court’s engagement in and commitment to the success of this initiative provided the following lessons:

- *Project management is a characteristic of successful court projects.* Courts do not always approach projects through an organized and coordinated framework aligned with project management principles. While there may be several reasons to explain why such a principled approach is unnecessary, we found it indispensable. Owning a management role in the project signaled to the vendor and the other project participants that the local court was actively engaged in and fully committed to project progress and success. Tasks and benchmarks set at a project level to be completed at a local level were opportunities to engage not merely accept. If such principles were not incorporated in the management approach, there likely would have been more uncertainty with our ability as a court to succeed in the conversion effort. Furthermore, the management responsibility and resource lift by the state judiciary would have also been heavier.

<sup>8</sup> At the time of system implementation (October 2021), a total of 449 issues were created over five additional cycles. Two conversion issues were active at the time of implementation.

- *Measurement of project tasks provides an opportunity to review and revisit how we got here, what seemed to work, and where we can improve.* While information capital may be one of the court's most valuable assets (Ostrom and Hanson, 2010), its value is only realized in its use. A strategy for data review was created each cycle and was refined as time passed by the local conversion management team who incorporated the lessons learned from the previous cycles. Regular monitoring of progress occurred and was shared with those engaged in the tasks, supervisors and leadership. The approach allowed for continuous engagement and improvements in how the work was getting done. It also offered opportunities for the court to engage in meaningful dialogue with the state judiciary and vendor regarding conversion project progress.
- *Engagement in project tasks does not translate to an understanding of the implications of such tasks on post-implementation processing.* Engagement of personnel in intermittent project tasks such as data reviews, did not necessarily result in staff's understanding of the larger implementation effort and/or of how the project work impacted their work post-system implementation. For example, data review is not the same as exercising the source data in the target system to ensure it functions as intended. Accordingly, it is critical for data reviewers to have working knowledge of the target application during the conversion process and to observe how the converted information appears in the target application. The migration of source information to a target system may result in certain data elements not appearing as expected or not having similar functionality. Such data incompatibility increases frustration as users begin to utilize the system post-implementation. Opportunities to put the converted data into practice throughout the conversion cycles (in a more iterative fashion) may have provided court personnel with a better understanding of the implications of conversion rules and future system functionality.
- *Developing cross-functional teams enhances project management and outcomes.* Creating a conversion management team with members of differing areas of expertise and engagement across multiple areas of the project portfolio resulted in a more comprehensive understanding of project tasks and the resources needed to be successful. It also afforded the conversion team insights into how different project areas were managed, creating opportunities to draw upon or leverage different project communication and/or management streams to successfully achieve project goals. A key aspect to an effective cross-functional team is having team leaders who create an environment allowing for the open exchange of ideas among team members.
- *Consideration of partner agencies who utilize case management system data.* If some of the court's case management data is provided to partner agencies, it is important to discuss their data requirements with the new system as part of the project schedule. While efforts were made to include partner agencies and communicate the potential impacts of conversion when inquires arose, our identification and discussion of agencies' data requirements occurred too close to system implementation. The court would have been better served if regular meetings were scheduled earlier in the conversion process to discuss data conversion decisions related to partner agencies' data needs and strategize on how best to support their current data streams with the new system.

- *Application of project skills to future initiatives.* This initiative created opportunities for the court to identify and consider its role in future local and state judiciary initiatives. Data review and testing skills that staff acquired throughout this larger implementation initiative may be utilized to support future system development testing. Further, it is anticipated that skillsets grown in relation to programming and applications development will be leveraged on future local and state projects as courts strive for continued data flexibility and access.
- *Commitment by team members to shared goals offers a definition of success.* The data conversion effort afforded the local court opportunities to strengthen its intra-courthouse partnerships (across clerk and court administration offices/ departments as well as judicial administrative assistants who support judges' chambers) as well as its partnerships with the state judiciary. Much like other organizations, courthouse personnel can be siloed within their functional areas with limited opportunities to engage cross-functionally. While local-state engagement on initiatives is not uncommon, this effort provided a unique opportunity to assist in the building or re-establishing of statewide partnerships as we collectively transition to a more standardized and collaborative statewide judicial system.

## 4. CONCLUSION

With flexibility in the application of human, organizational, technology and information assets and the bringing of daily decision-making close to the operational level, a local court in partnership with state judiciary and vendor partners successfully implemented a statewide case management system. The approach to mobilizing court assets described herein is not meant to be prescriptive but rather descriptive. Once the court accepted the inevitable integration to a statewide case management system, local leadership identified the resources and outlined a general management strategy that allowed for autonomy, creativity and ownership by the conversion management team. The collective commitment to effective system implementation supported by documented management strategies and the tools to carry out the tasks and track the progress ultimately contributed to the overall success of the project. While these factors are not novel as they are identified by Pekkanen (2011) as keys to reducing processing delays and backlogs, it doesn't mean their application is easy. The mistakes made throughout this multi-year data conversion project led to exploring ways to redefine the conversion management team's approach and engage more productively with project partners. The lessons learned and the skills gained will undoubtedly inform future work at local and state levels as the court becomes even more invested in statewide systems and processes.

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## COMPETING INTERESTS

Danielle Fox and Hisashi Yamagata are full-time researchers at Montgomery County Circuit Court and were directly involved in the data conversion project. While efforts were made to be objective in the reporting of project activities and experiences, their employment with the court, may have influenced the content described herein. This manuscript was not supported by any funding agency and no other conflicts of interest are declared.

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