A North America-based health services organization (NAHSO), with 10,000 employees, developed a business case to modernize its human resource information system (HRIS). Upon approval, a task force was put in place to source and select the new technology. In an effort to prioritize the limited budget, NAHSO leaders decided to manage the vendor selection themselves. They had talented employees and were already leaning toward a reputable technology vendor, so what could go wrong?

Two Years Later … NAHSO came to grips with its failed implementation and decided to start over — this time with an outside consulting partner. Here’s what went wrong:

- The business case that was developed highlighted the anticipated financial spend but did little to articulate the business priorities and issues that the new HRIS needed to address. Without these strategic guideposts, a financial snowball slowly rolled downhill, picking up speed and size along the way.

- Without clear objectives, the requirements definition was very generic, with “a little bit of everything” as opposed to the clear, specific, and unique requirements of this organization.

- The project sponsor was new to the organization and struggled with getting the necessary buy-in from users. Furthermore, the project manager was overwhelmed with his full-time day job in the organization and struggled to keep up with the vendor selection process and demanding schedules.

- Without the necessary time spent up front on strategy and objectives, the decision criteria became predominately focused on cost. In addition, the lack of organization-specific business requirements resulted in no specific use-case scenarios that would highlight how each vendor would best support the NAHSO’s business needs.

- No one on the team had recently been through a vendor-selection process, and most were largely unfamiliar with new developments in the vendor landscape. The team was unable to decipher the smoke, mirrors, and claims that can unfortunately be used in software sales.

- When the implementation became troubled, the process further stalled due to a lack of clear business drivers and success measures. This made change management and communications practically impossible. Few successes were apparent, and mounting issues convinced management to pull the plug and start over.

Surprisingly, this is not an unusual outcome when organizations try to “go it alone.” At Mercer, we use our proven methodology and tools to make sure you make the best technology selection possible.