Synexis CONSULTING

Navigating the Landscape of System Reviews:
What's Necessary and What's Not?

John Hrusovsky, Managing Director, Synexis Consulting

Complex system implementation projects often come with a barrage of reviews, assessments and audits. For many organizations, this can be overwhelming. What do these reviews accomplish? Are they all necessary? And how can organizations ensure they are focusing on the right reviews to reduce risk and drive success?

At their core, all these reviews are designed to minimize risk, improve project outcomes and ensure system integrity. However, they serve distinct purposes, and understanding their differences is critical to ensuring time and resources aren't wasted.

Breaking Down the Key Types of Reviews

Independent Verification and Validation (IV&V)

IV&V is an independent process designed to provide third-party validation that a system meets its intended requirements and specifications. It ensures that the system is functioning as expected before full deployment, reducing the risk that its capabilities won't meet the needs of the business.

The critical element of IV&V is independence: To provide a valid assessment, the reviewing organization must be technically, managerially and financially independent of the project client. By ensuring reviewers have this three-pronged independence, organizations are more likely to learn of high-risk errors earlier and reduce the need for rework as they develop or implement a system.

External Quality Assurance (EQA) Reviews

EQA reviews focus on enhancing the overall effectiveness of system implementations. These reviews:

- Assess the quality and value delivered by the implementation,

- Identify potential risks and issues that could impact success, and

- Provide early intervention strategies to mitigate challenges before they escalate.

Well-designed EQA reviews serve as a sort of peer-benchmark, comparing your implementation against those of similar organizations. As a result, effective EQA reviews can be conducted only by third-party organizations with extensive experience in your industry.

Risk Assessments

Risk assessments are typically one-time project reviews that focus on identifying and mitigating risks before implementation. This has value, but because risk is not static, a single review is often insufficient for managing project complexities.

The best risk assessments are collaborative, asking your teams to participate both in identifying the risk(s) and reviewing the assessment to adjust risk management plans within the project.

Technical System Assurance Reviews

These reviews focus on the technical integrity of a system, ensuring that it has been configured, developed and tested according to defined system standards. Key components of a technical system assurance review focus on security, performance, compliance and documentation. They are essential for organizations that rely on complex ERP ecosystems, ensuring the technology is not only functional but also optimized for long-term performance and minimal downtime.

However, because their primary purpose is to assess system readiness, rather than to judge overall implementation effectiveness, they do not guarantee project success.

Technical system assurance reviews can reduce operational disruptions by identifying potential system failures before they occur and by ensuring the system meets business and compliance requirements. They also help with change management, by identifying potentially painful gaps in integration between legacy systems and new software solutions. Lastly, they eliminate so-called "scream tests" by making sure the system can handle its heaviest intended use through system stress testing and load management.

Implementation Partner Reviews

Conducted by a third-party consultant such as Synexis, these reviews evaluate the effectiveness of the prime implementation partner for the project, by assessing the partner's execution capabilities and methodologies. They help organizations hold vendors accountable for delivering solutions that align with project goals, budgets and timelines. They are not a replacement for IV&V or EQA reviews, as their focus is on the implementation partner rather than the overall system deployment.

Implementation partner reviews are designed to improve vendor performance by identifying gaps early in the implementation process. They reduce risk, overruns and delays by ensuring that vendor strategies and approaches are aligned with best practices.

Many organizations assume that implementation partners will self-regulate their processes. Unfortunately, that isn't always the case. To avoid problems during or after the implementation, implementation partners should be subject to review by an independent third party.

Internal and External Audit or Compliance Reviews

Typically performed by an organization's audit or compliance teams, these reviews evaluate process risks, regulatory alignment and adherence to internal controls. Unlike technical or quality assurance reviews, these assessments focus on governance, risk mitigation and compliance. When strategically aligned with EQA reviews, they can provide valuable insights into compliance gaps and process risks.

Internal and external audit reviews can:

- Ensure compliance with industry standards and regulations, data privacy laws and security protocols.

- Identify potential financial and operational risks before they become critical.

- Improve organizational governance by strengthening internal controls and accountability.

- Build stakeholder confidence by demonstrating a proactive approach to risk management.

These reviews play a critical role in higher education, healthcare and government organizations, where compliance failures can lead to legal repercussions, reputational damage and financial penalties.

Which Reviews Are Necessary?
A Strategic Approach

While every review serves a purpose, organizations should prioritize those that add the most value based on project complexity, risk profile and organizational goals.

High Impact	Questionable Results
Choose IV&V or EQA — not both. These reviews serve similar functions, but organizations should ensure the selected review covers both qualitative (process, governance) and quantitative (system performance, testing) aspects.	Avoid one-time risk assessments. Risk is dynamic — ongoing monitoring is critical for identifying and addressing emerging challenges.
Leverage technical system assurance reviews — but don't rely on them alone. These reviews assess system readiness but should be supplemented with broader project governance strategies.	Don't treat implementation partner reviews as a standalone risk mitigation strategy. While they help monitor vendor performance, they do not replace independent oversight.
Align internal/external audit reviews with EQA reviews. Conducting early and late-stage audits in conjunction with EQA reviews ensures compliance and process risks are addressed proactively.	

The Bottom Line: How to Approach Reviews Wisely

Before launching a system implementation project, organizations should:

- Identify a trusted EQA or IV&V partner to serve as an independent advisor.
- Develop a strategic review plan that aligns with the size, scale and complexity of the project.
- Prioritize ongoing risk management over one-time assessments to ensure sustained project success.

By focusing on the right mix of reviews, organizations can maximize project value, minimize risk and ensure a smooth path to implementation success.

System reviews, though, are only as good as the individuals conducting them. With 30 years of experience consulting organizations, Synexis Consulting has the technical, process and industry knowledge to help you implement and optimize your ERP system. Contact us to find out more.

To find out more about Synexis Consulting or to request an informational interview, please visit us at synexisconsulting.com**.**