

How is Your Project Going?



Healthcare Performance Group, Inc.

Ever hear that question? How do you answer it?

If you are like many health systems today, it is a very difficult question to answer...because there are so many projects, initiatives and tasks being juggled that it is hard to get a handle on status, much less feel in control. One task seems to pile on another and many HIT organizations are feeling completely overwhelmed, frustrated and exhausted with no visible way out of the situation...constantly relying on “heroic” efforts from their dedicated staffs to get them through one close call after another...until one day things (or dedicated staff) break down.

What to do?

The best place to start is to look at the root cause, which invariably involves ineffective planning and organizational alignment...

“If you don’t know where you are going, any road will take you there.”

We consistently hear the need for a stronger planning and project management culture from our customers but regularly hear that...

“We just don’t have the time to plan and follow a structured project management process.”

Therein lays the trap that leads to project delays, cost overruns, frustrated end users and exhausted staff. Effective planning and project management creates speed; it does not slow down the projects; but it is a discipline that is hard to start. To start the discipline, the commitment to quality and project management must come from the executive leadership of the health system. Below is a checklist of steps that every project should follow with some suggested contents and benefits derived from the steps:

- **Project Charter** – The most important step in the project is to identify: “Why you are doing it?” What are the expected and measureable benefits to the health system? How will success be measured? Who is accountable for the project? The answering of these questions creates strong organizational alignment and sets the stage for effective communication within HIT and across the organization. It also requires the engagement of the executive leadership team and establishes accountability for expected outcomes.
- **Project Scope** – Once you understand the *Why*, you determine *What* you are going to do. The scope frames the work required to accomplish the results established in the charter. It creates organizational alignment and enables the project team to have a guideline to restrict

the focus of the work to those critical items that must be done to accomplish the results within the resource constraints of the project. Most importantly it gives the project team executive level support to exclude work that is not in the critical path.

“Knowing what not to do is the key to effective project control.”

- **Project Plan** – The project plan includes step by step instructions to complete the work. This is the roadmap to “drive” to your destination...without it you are just racing around and using up gas☹. The most effective use of the project plan is to manage the entrance and exit requirements of each phase of the project; if you establish the requirements before you are in the throes of execution and you adhere to them, then it will protect the success of the project from the push of meeting time schedules for their own sake. If the prerequisite work is not done to leave a stage, then it is important to have the discipline to finish the stage rather than rationalize past the requirements for appearance purposes. Skipped steps have a way of coming back to unravel your work.
- **Manage the Execution** – This is the hands-on phase of the project that is most visible; it is where the real work gets done and where most of the resources come together. The key is communication across the project team so that everyone knows the *Why*, the *What* and the *When* of the project. Knowledge of these key items creates confidence and a real sense of purpose from all involved.
- **Measure the Project Outcome** – Upon completion of the project, go back to the project charter and transparently report on the project results. This should be a structured step with the executive team to close out the project. There is an old saying that applies here... “Tell them what you are going to do...Do it...Tell them what you did”. This transparent assessment creates open discussion and trust and will go a long way toward giving you the control and recognition you deserve for the hard work in any project.

“If you find yourself starting and ending your process at the Manage the Execution step too often, you may have found the root cause.”



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