CDC Unified Process

Project Management

Newsletter

Supporting A Common Project Delivery Framework Volume 1 | Issue 9 | December 2007

Effective Project Management for Public Health IT Initiatives

A project, as defined by the Project Management Institute's (PMI) Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK), is a temporary endeavor undertaken to create a unique product, service, or result. Project Management is defined as the application of knowledge, skills, tools, and techniques to project activities to meet the project requirements.

Regardless of project size, or type, effective application of best practice project management techniques is often what distinguishes an easy, successful project from one that is painful, and unsatisfactory. Being able to apply this in the area of public health IT is challenging because project managers not only need to concern themselves with project management activities but also with a plethora of Federal and organizational policies, mandates, and procedures that sometimes dictate how a project needs to be managed. Additional challenges stem from a continued sense of urgency to meet public heath demands, public scrutiny that often makes even small projects highly visible, ever increasing and changing Federal and organization mandates and policies, resource and budget constraints and limitations, shifting and changing resources and stakeholder, etc.

Public health IT managers are also often the first to apply new technologies to the area of public health. At the same time they may struggle with loosely defined requirements resulting from the increasing demand for timely delivery of public health IT solutions. These and other challenges result in increased project risk. Public health IT project managers are then faced with the challenges of working through these and other concerns while battling the difficulties of communicating effectively across agencies and offices, and through multiple layers of government.

With all this in mind, the goal of any public health IT manager should be to manage public health IT initiatives more effectively to not be bogged down by these and other challenges.

Tom Brinks, PMP presenting at the October 2007 meeting of the CDC Project Management Community of Practice (PMCoP) outlined ten recommendations for effective project management for public health IT initiatives. These recommendations included:

1. **Understanding the business vision of the client**
   If the IT project doesn't align with strategic goals the project is at risk. An IT project manager must be more than just a technologist. They must educate themselves about and understand the client and stakeholder's business as well as any requirements driving the need for the project. It's also important for project managers to articulate technology solutions in terms of business requirements so that non-technical stakeholder can understand the benefit of the project and work being performed. In addition, communicating the business impacts to developers is just as important.
2. **Influencing the project team and stakeholders**
   The ability to persuade others is not necessarily dependant upon the level of authority given to the manager. Authority does not limit the ability to understand and influence others, and situations. Proactive leadership allows project managers to adapt and quickly react to rapidly changing situations and requirements.
3. **Managing the triple constraints of the project**
   Analyze quality based on scope, time, and cost impact to the project. When managing competing requirements, evaluate how a change in one constraint affects one or both of the remaining two constraints. This evaluation will help the project team understand the costs and benefits of change. Educate stakeholders on the triple constraints cost, schedule, scope and how changes to one variable affects the others, as well as the overall quality of the product.
4. **Planning for the unknown**
   Manage risk in a way that limits the project impact of unknown events. As quickly, and as early, as possible identify risks and begin to

mitigate them and develop contingency plans to handle risk if it becomes an issue. The sooner this is done the less impact the risk may have on the project.

5. **Managing change to scope and requirements**
   Expect that customer requirements will change. Communicate to stakeholders the importance of a formal process for managing and controlling change. Have formal procedures in place for dealing with change requests. Document how change will be managed within a change management plan.
6. **Planning the project work and work the plan**
   Identify and understand external dependencies. Respond quickly to missed dates, deliverables, and milestones. Collaborate with stakeholders to develop a WBS and schedule. This makes it easier to obtain buy-in and support for the schedule. Create a project management plan that outlines how project activities will be managed. Whenever possible, record actual results against planned results followed by any appropriate schedule adjustments.
7. **Releasing the product through iterations rather that all at once**
   Consider delivering the product in several shorter functional iterations that each address key issues. This approach brings benefits to the client more quickly rather than forcing them to wait for the entire product to be completed. It provides something sooner rather than everything later and allows the project to be more flexible, respond quicker to requirement changes, and reduces technology risk.
8. **Communicating effectively**
   Manage customer expectation by documenting goals and objectives and communicate them effectively. Meetings where decisions are made and action items identified should require meeting minutes that validate and document what was decided and who is responsible.
9. **Encouraging teamwork**
   A group of people does not make a "team". Teams are built. Assign ownership of deliverables, recognize accomplishments, and celebrate success.
10. **Using good project management tools and techniques**
    Follow the best practice project management approach(s) as outlined by the CDC Unified Process.

Upcoming Project Management Community of Practice Meetings and Topics

- **Friday, December 7**
  The Inadvertent Project Manager

2008 PMCoP Meetings

- **Friday, January 25**
  CDC IR Governance and HHS EPLC
- **Friday, February 29**
  Project Server
- **Friday, March 28**
  Mid Tier Data Center and DSS
- **Friday, April 25**
  Program Management Professionals Certification
- **Friday, May 16**
  Security Issues that a Project Manager at CDC Need to Address
- **Friday, June 27**
  PGO Processes
- **Thursday, July 24**
  Project Management Career Framework
- **Friday, August 22**
  General Management vs. Project Management
- **Friday, September 26**
  Records Management, PIA, and Classified Information
- **Friday, October 24**
  Facilitation – A Key to Project Success
- **Friday, December 5**
  Influence – A Critical Skill for Successful Project Managers

Portions of the content of this newsletter was paraphrased from a presentation by Tom Brinks, PMP during the October 2007 meeting of the CDC Project Management Community of Practice (PMCoP). For more information regarding effective project management, Tom's presentation, the CDC PMCoP, or the CDC Unified Process (UP) please visit the CDC UP website located at http://www.cdc.gov/cdcup/. ▮

Contact the CDC Unified Process Team

The *CDC Unified Process Project Management Newsletter* is authored by Daniel Vitek MBA, PMP and published by the National Center for Public Health Informatics.

For questions about the CDC UP, comments regarding this newsletter, suggestions for future newsletter topics, or to subscribe to the CDC UP Project Management Newsletter please contact the CDC UP Team at cdcup@cdc.gov

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