

Improving the odds of success with your next Health IT project

There are many reasons why some health IT projects fail, but the top causes usually relate to incorrect requirements, inadequate communication and a lack of project management experience. Add in the complexity that is intrinsic to healthcare and it is no wonder that some in the healthcare industry are cautious about implementing new IT initiatives.

“the average large IT project runs 45% over budget, 7% over time, and delivers 56% less value than expected”

The challenges of implementing health IT can appear even more daunting when you consider that ‘the average large IT project runs 45% over budget, 7% over time, and delivers 56% less value than expected’.

The key to improving the odds for success in your next health IT project is to build on the capability of people who have healthcare industry knowledge, or who have worked on similar health IT projects before². You need to ensure your project team includes a business analyst and a project manager with the right skillset and business experience.

The devil is in the details

One of the major factors that cause IT project failure is unclear requirements. Not only can this lead to the development of irrelevant systems, it also introduces the problem of ‘scope creep’. Scope creep is the bane of any project, as it results in deadlines being missed and budget blowout.

With health IT projects, you also have increased technical complexity and the need to juggle the requirements from multiple stakeholders. As an organisation, you know what the overall business problem is and, usually, a rough idea of what you require. But, you need someone who can see the overall picture of what you are trying to achieve and yet, still have the ability to delve into the nuts and bolts of what is required from each of the project stakeholders.

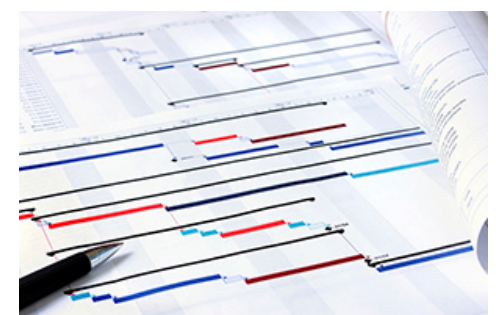


The majority of a business analyst’s role in any project is to listen, capture, collate and document the detailed business requirements. It is these requirements that become the foundation of the project moving forward. While you will know the obvious pain points you are trying to resolve, the skilled business analyst has the expertise to help you more clearly identify the fundamental business difficulty. They can highlight possible requirement gaps and ensure the right stakeholders have their voices heard. Following the in-depth analysis, the business analyst also recommends the best approach for the project, i.e. one that delivers the best fit for you and your organisation.

With experience and communication comes success

A health IT project can consist of several components and implementation phases that, in some cases, may take months or years to fully realise. These projects need a project manager with solid experience, exceptional communication skills, and the ability to manage expectations for multiple project stakeholders.

An experienced project manager knows how to drive the direction of the project, how to evaluate data from all areas, when to make the critical decisions, and generally how to keep the project on target and on budget. And all of these actions are shaped by their experience and knowledge of the business, the industry and their past project experience.



Improving the odds for success with your next Health IT project continued ...

When poor communication is attributed as a large reason for project failure¹, it becomes even more vital to have a project manager who actively and constantly shares information and knowledge during the project via concise, opportune and detailed updates and project status meetings. This includes setbacks, bottlenecks, milestones reached and scope changes. Project status transparency has all contributors on the same page every step of the way and ensures there are no hidden surprises that could derail the project.

But, above all, the main skillset the project manager brings to a project is to manage. Manage the teams working on the project, manage the expectations and requirements of the stakeholders and manage the project schedule. It takes a project manager with strong management skills to oversee the often contradictory requirements and priorities from numerous stakeholders and relic systems. And, an even greater talent to mould these into one cohesive voice and direction for the project.

There is complex, then there is Health IT

The bigger and more complex a project, the bigger the opportunity for failure. It is estimated that large IT projects are twice as likely to be late, over budget, and missing critical features compared to small IT projects¹. The chances of failure increase even more when it is a project within the healthcare industry. The automation and streamlining of health services, by their very nature, introduce complexity into any project. They can also be deemed high-risk when you take into account their possible impact on patient care.



Having a project manager and business analyst with underlying knowledge of healthcare and with similar project experience should be an essential requirement before commencing any health IT project. Having a sound industry background means both the project manager and business analyst can spend more of their time understanding your processes and what you are trying to achieve. They can then recommend the solution that best meets your need. It also means they have an innate understanding of the technical complications and risks associated with changes to processes that may affect the delivery of safe and quality patient care.

Ultimately, success comes from the right skillset and business experience

The healthcare industry continues to look to health IT solutions to improve the safety and quality of patient care they deliver, increase workflow efficiencies and provide cost savings. However, taking on a health IT project offers some big challenges in technical complexity, tight budgets and deadlines, and risks in terms of clinical processes. It makes sense then, that you should seek the best possible team to help you successfully deliver the benefits health IT promises. While there is no guaranteed formula for success, there is no substitute for what skilful business analysis and strong project management can bring to your next health IT project.

References:

1.Emily Bonnie, 2015, *Wrike Project Management blog: Complete Collection of Project Management Statistics 2015*, accessed November 2015, <http://www.geneca.com/75-business-executives-anticipate-software-projects-fail/>

2.Kyle Harden, 2015, *LinkedIn: 5 Primary Reasons Mega Projects Fail*, accessed November 2015, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/5-primary-reasons-mega-projects-fail-kyle-harden>



About Rose Harding

Rose Harding is the Marketing Communications Manager at Sysmex and has over 15 years' experience in the software industry for a diverse range of markets in New Zealand, Australia and Europe. Her previous roles have included software product management, pre-sales, training and software project implementation.