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Applying the Project Management Process in Healthcare Informatics

Introduction

The project management process can be applied in many settings. Every business from the National Air and Space Association to medication manufacturing uses some form of project management, and the healthcare industry is no exception. In healthcare facilities, using the project management process should be the norm when implementing software, upgrading systems, or performing ongoing system changes. These are all projects. All the phases of the project management process lend themselves well to successfully completing healthcare informatics projects. Leaders without a clear understanding of the process won’t be as successful as those who understand and follow the process while completing projects. This chapter will focus on using the project management process in healthcare informatics.

System Selection Projects

Often, new computer applications begin as a solution to quality assurance or healthcare risk challenges. These challenges could include the need to reduce medication errors by implementing bar code scanning and an electronic medication administration record. Perhaps the project begins with the challenge of creating a plan to get physicians involved in Physician Computer Order Entry. Lengthy accounts receivable days or less than optimal collections could lead to the challenge of selection for a new patient financial system.

All system selections should start with a plan detailing the activities and time frames, as well as the deliverables expected. Often, the stakeholders of a certain group, such as the physicians or the financial department, start by putting together a high-level needs assessment for the application. This needs assessment describes “why” a new system is needed, but usually does not include “how” to select the system. Once the needs assessment is approved, the project
manager can begin to create the project plan for the selection project. The project charter/scope document should include both the anticipated high-level activities and the anticipated costs required to complete the plan. Often, this part of the project begins with a project plan that includes an end date, which is often timed in relation to the budget process; for example, complete the selection by the fiscal year end. The high-level tasks for this plan include the following:

- Application scope definition
- Stakeholder/department identification
- Requirements identification
- RFI analysis
- Software demonstrations
- Reference checks
- Site visits
- Cost benefit analysis.

Using the high-level tasks, have a team of stakeholders identify the time frames and subtasks to help determine the completed project plan. This way, the stakeholders will be a part of all the steps of the decision-making processes (Figure 7.1).

One excellent source to help the project manager plan a system selection is Gartner (www.gartner.com). Gartner offers the combined brainpower of more than 1,200 research analysts and consultants who advise executives in 75

![Figure 7.1. Sample system selection work plan.](image-url)