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## **Managing a Successful Project**

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# Healthcare Administration

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## Managing a Successful Project

*By Paul Goldberg, MPH, PMP*

*Paul Goldberg & Associates, LLC*

So, you thought the project could be completed by the end of the quarter? After all, how hard could it be to coordinate work across just two other departments? But, four weeks into it, the manager leading the project wants to give up, other managers are frustrated, everyone has different opinions on what needs to be done, and valuable resources are being used; all with no apparent progress. What went wrong?

Most health care organizations are structured by functional area with varying degrees of matrix responsibility. This environment of competing priorities and resources makes managing projects a challenging proposition.

Some common traps that doom a project from the start include:

- Limited senior management support
- Lack of clear objectives and poorly defined deliverables
- Led by a manager with little project management experience
- Participation on the project is a “favor” rather than a clear job responsibility
- Project management tools designed by intuition rather than proven success

To avoid these traps, a well managed project should include strong sponsorship, a charter and scope, a dedicated project manager, and good product management tools.

A **strong management sponsor** is needed to supply project resources and champion the project among key management stakeholders. This is who the project manager can turn to if there are problems needing management resolution.

A **project charter document** is needed to authorize the project, its objectives, and the project manager. And, a **scope document** is critical to clearly state what is to be accomplished and includes such information as: project boundaries, assumptions, constraints, requirements, deliverables, milestones, cost estimates, and risks. These documents don't need to be dissertations, but they do need enough specificity to provide a common understanding about the project among all stakeholders.

A single dedicated **project manager** accountable for project success must be assigned. Being a good functional line manager, does not necessarily translate to being a good project manager; project management is by influ-

ence and negotiation, rather than direct authority. And often times, functional managers are too busy with their daily responsibilities to manage complex projects. In these cases, organizations have a number of options:

- Provide line managers project management training and temporarily reassign other responsibilities
- Seek support from the organization's project management office (PMO) that houses a pool of project managers
- Hire an external resource with project management expertise in health care

**Good product management tools** to manage project activities are essential. Too often, however, project managers design their own tools based on intuition and don't use ones already proven to be successful. This can have a significant impact on project outcomes. Good tools include not only work plans and issues logs, but also those related to communications, schedules, costs, risks, quality and performance.

Sometimes a project managed by a functional manager with neither the training nor tools is successful with good intuition, sheer will,

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and an Excel spreadsheet.

However, when projects are large, complex and critical to organizational objectives, the use of a proper project management structure and approach truly enhances the opportunity for success.

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