

Health Care Reform Meant IT Project Management Reform



Through Freed’s direction and support, the client was able to revive and maintain the health of a key mandate project. This was accomplished through such critical actions as replacing the project manager and business analyst, and optimizing in-flight and planned project activities using project management life cycle standards, as established by the client’s new PMO.

Introduction

We’ve all heard it: The only thing constant is change. And nothing yells “change” more loudly lately than health care reform. For a Freed Associates client, a top health plan provider, health care reform also meant IT project management reform, given the client’s regular habit of missing project completion dates.

For providers, health care reform and several affiliated “mandated” changes have removed the flexibility of missing compliance dates. Not only could fines be imposed, but business could be affected, since any competitors that successfully met mandates would now have the opportunity to steal away business. Our client realized that “noncompliance is not an option” and partnered with Freed to assist.

Goal

The primary goal for our client was to make sure mandated projects were given the highest priority for success; however, the mandated project portfolio was already full of mandated projects, some of which were on a trajectory to fail. Our client needed a way to rescue these in-flight projects and meet all of the mandates.

Strategy

Freed and the client staff strategized to create a team within the new mandate's project management office, called the Rapid Transformation Team (RTT). The RTT would recruit well-trained and experienced project managers to serve as a "special forces team" to drop in on an at-risk project, quickly assess the situation, apply any needed corrective action and ultimately help ensure project success.

Tactics

One of the client's projects in particular needed immediate RTT attention. This \$4M project had started late, was already on its third project manager, and well into implementation phase without an approved budget. Additionally, there was dissension between the project's team members, and the first compliance date was less than four months away.

To respond to this at-risk project, Freed provided a highly qualified consultant to serve as a senior manager with the RTT, and replace the project's current manager. The Freed consultant then took the following sequential actions:

Assumed project management responsibilities:

- * Took over project management for a troubled project that needed to be handled with care. The Freed consultant made sure that relations with the outgoing project manager were handled appropriately and professionally for the sake of the project and organization.

Rebuilt team relationships:

- * The Freed consultant, serving as the new project manager, set up individual, in-person meetings with each of the project's key stakeholders at their geographic location. During these meetings, key concerns and solutions were discussed openly, directly and honestly.
- * All stakeholder interactions reflected the Freed consultant's desire to remain calm and approachable, and handle project concerns with firm actions, not emotional reactions.

Assessed the current state to potentially apply corrective actions:

- * The client was establishing a new quality standard (also in partnership with Freed) and an audit process. The Freed consultant adapted to the client's new quality standard and audit process, then Freed and the client created an assessment scorecard, based on both tangible and intangible project management metrics, to determine which items required correction.

The assessment scorecard classified each finding in a specific category, included the finding's description, its root

cause and corrective action (if any) needed with an assigned owner and due date. Individual category scores, as well as the overall score, indicated the level of intervention and prioritization required.

Applied corrective actions:

* Reestablished efficient communication by enforcing the existing standard for clear meeting agendas and meeting notes out within 24 hours, using a standard template. Reduced redundant team meetings and added efficient small group meetings, including recurring one-on-one meetings with key business drivers. Kept the documentation of risks, actions, issues and decisions up-to-date and accurate. Created detailed process flow diagrams to simplify communication of complex processes.

* Aligned appropriate levels of skill for key roles. For example, Freed and the client identified a need to support or replace the project's business analyst (BA), who lacked experience in business requirement traceability (from definition to testing and validation). Although the BA was willing, proactive and a hard worker, the Freed consultant needed to temporarily serve as the lead for user acceptance testing (UAT). Ultimately, Freed tapped another senior business analyst to assume the UAT lead role and other BA responsibilities.

* Revamped the business case and budget for final approval. Each of the client's projects began with seed funding based on 10 percent of the estimated cost, with final budgets approved during the planning phase. This project was already in the implementation phase and the seed funding was rapidly running out. The Freed consultant analyzed the current budget, pushed back on artificially inflated costs, and removed duplicate items from improper chargebacks costs and multiple solutions. The consultant kept only the most probable costs.

Maintained project health:

* Once the Freed consultant helped restore project health, the next goal was to adhere to the project's new standards. Freed helped ensure that all additional quality assurance assessments successfully passed with minimal or no findings, and that all department action items were completed on time or early. The Freed consultant did not allow seemingly lower-priority items to bundle up into a big list that could have eventually impacted effective time management. Additionally, Freed identified other efficiencies regarding use of the project management tool, Planview, and the budget tracking tool created by the client.

Returned project management to the client:

* Over a six-week timeline, the Freed consultant successfully transitioned project management responsibilities back to the client. During the first two weeks, the Freed consultant shared information about the project; during the next two weeks, the incoming project manager shadowed the Freed consultant; during the final two weeks, the client's new project manager assumed full responsibility, with the Freed consultant shadowing.

Results and Conclusion

Through Freed's direction and support, the client was able to revive and maintain the health of a key mandate project. This was accomplished through such critical actions as replacing the project manager and business analyst, and optimizing in-flight and planned project activities using project management life cycle standards, as established by the client's new project management office (PMO).

Overall, Freed's engagement resulted in:

Greater efficiencies:

- * Freed created business case financial components, using Planview reports for more accurate forecasts and a direct tie to the timekeeping system.
- * Created an employer group transition tracking tool to more efficiently manage and monitor monthly mandated moves.

Cost savings:

- * Scrutinized IT costs to challenge and identify necessary scope, reducing the estimated project cost from \$4M+ to under \$2M, which avoided the unnecessary commitment of \$2M that could then be allocated to other projects.

Improved teamwork and efficiency:

- * Helped repair damaged inter-team relationships, based on the team's experience with the prior project manager (in fact, the team was later nominated for a recognition award).
- * Assumed the overall project manager role, instituting project management best practices, and performed interim user acceptance testing lead role until a new business analyst was put into place.
- * Simplified the project schedule by reducing unnecessary detail and successfully maintained high quality project quality assurance scores.
- * Coached other business work stream leaders and project managers on project management life cycle best practices.
- * Collaborated on creating a reusable project assessment tool to be used in rescuing other at-risk projects.

Improved communications:

- * Reduced unnecessary meetings and reorganized meetings with efficient agendas and more timely post-meeting reports.
- * Established weekly one-on-one meetings with business drivers to provide a forum for clear, concise, and candid communication regarding all aspects of the project and project team.