

Five Vital Steps for Large-Scale Health Care Project Success



Rome wasn't built in a day; neither are large-scale health care projects. That's because large-scale projects typically require sequential step development and extensive input from multiple internal constituents – a process that can take months or even years, depending on your project size.

Rome wasn't built in a day; neither are large-scale health care projects. That's because large-scale projects typically require sequential step development and extensive input from multiple internal constituents – a process that can take months or even years, depending on your project size.

By knowing and applying the five most vital success steps for large-scale projects, you'll be better able to gain cooperation from all key players, resolve inevitable barriers and achieve your project goals on-time and on-budget.

Success Step 1: Gain Ongoing Leadership Sponsorship and Support

Studies have repeatedly shown that the single most important factor in the success of a large-scale effort is senior leadership sponsorship and support. To avoid having a project falter or fail, senior leaders must engage their organizations around the rationale and desired results of the project. This should be done at the project outset and throughout its execution.

To understand why senior leadership is so vital, consider your work environment. Likely everyone is barraged daily

with high-priority, do-this-now requests. Thus, it can become challenging for employees to know what tasks merit their primary focus. The role of senior leaders is to ensure your large-scale project remains a primary focus.

Ensure your senior leadership owns and is accountable for your initiative. Spell out how and when there will be key opportunities for leaders to step in and lend their voice toward your effort. Early engagement allows senior leaders to add their imprint and help ensure success throughout the project.

Success Step 2: Align Your Initiative with Recognition/Compensation

Just as what gets measured gets done, what gets done gets recognized and compensated. Ensure that your large-scale project factors into performance evaluations and incentive/compensation decisions for all levels (including senior leaders).

With large projects, it can become easy for team members to let project deliverables slide and miss deadlines unless they are held accountable for their performance. Additionally, you may have project team members insufficiently collaborative due to their inexperience with project partners and/or the project itself. Rather than allowing personnel performance issues like these to impair your project, implement and maintain basic project management standards.

Establish that leaders will be assessed based on their performance, relative to the initiative. Communicate these standards to team members and discuss the alignment of goals and incentives. Then, measure results and hold leaders and employees accountable for that performance. Align incentive/compensation decisions to the program's success metrics. Provide clear and consistent ongoing feedback, so that there are no recognition/compensation surprises down the road.

Success Step 3: Ensure Correct Project Scope and Flexibility

Your project plan, in writing, should contain all of the background information, plans, and analyses necessary for your project to succeed. The most successful large-scale projects are led by those who have applied appropriate due diligence and planning prior to kick-off, and have in place change control processes giving decision-makers timely, accurate, and fact-based data to make good decisions.

Problems arise on large projects when the project plan is missing key information, has been informed by people unfamiliar with your project, or lacks buy-in and approval from key stakeholders. Even large-scale projects can sometimes lack crucial data, such as a formal feasibility study or cost-benefit analysis. Additionally, informal or haphazard changes to the project plan, without a consistent analysis of their effect on the project, almost always cause delays and resource issues.

To ensure your project stays in-scope, be sure that those who are developing and approving the plan are also responsible for executing it. Capture all project plan details in writing, especially plan changes, as well as the

source(s) of specific project component requests. Use weekly project team meetings not to simply recap tasks but instead to address project issues. Take advantage of your team's collective knowledge and wisdom to resolve these issues right away.

Success Step 4: Plan Your Communication Strategy

Communication is the lifeblood of large-scale projects in health care, especially considering the number of departments typically affected. However, depending on the project type, personnel from disparate departments may not have worked together before. Thus, they may initially be wary with each other until you have a team identity/focus and procedures for decision-making and conflict resolution.

At a minimum, plan to meet and communicate with your project team each week. It should be an opportunity for attendees to determine if any tasks are behind schedule and/or require additional resources. Following these meetings, the project manager should communicate progress to the organization's leadership as well as other relevant project personnel (e.g. stakeholders, partners, suppliers, etc.).

Larger organizations often have an individual or team assigned to handle project communications. If your organization has these resources, leverage them at the outset of your project. Large projects, like the inner workings of an organization, rely on frequent, clear and consistent communication for success.

Success Step 5: Ensure Proper Schedule Management

Schedule management is critical on large-scale projects. It is a given with a large-scale project that there will be problems that must be addressed. Unforeseen obstacles can prevent the timely completion of tasks. Key project personnel can depart or be re-assigned. Friction among team members can bog a project down in conflict resolution. Whatever the issue, the project manager cannot be so inflexible that it becomes difficult to make required course corrections.

Up-front, create an intelligent schedule/work plan and ensure that there are sufficient resources assigned to each task, using a management tool/process to identify resources stretched too thinly. Assign a start and completion date to every task within the project. When issues impacting the schedule arise, as they inevitably will, your immediate reaction should be, "What can we do to quickly resolve this?"

Know the Success Steps

Due to the scope and scale of a typical large-scale project and typical internal resource limitations, many organizations turn to experienced, objective external resources to manage their large-scale projects. Whether you rely on internal or external expertise to guide your project, by knowing up-front the success steps required, your organization will more likely complete it successfully.