Stakeholder communication improvements in a IT system delivery project

Project type: IT
Location: UK
RICS/APM stakeholder principles: Communicate; Consult early, and often; Remember, they're only human; Plan it!; Relationships are key; Compromise; Understand what success is
Stakeholder terms: Stakeholder terms: stakeholder expectations, communication

Abstract
The NHS's National Program for IT (NPfIT) was the UK's largest IT project before its cancellation in 2010. Despite the ultimate cancellation of the program, there were many examples of exceptional stakeholder engagement before the project's closure.

Background
The NPfIT was a Department of Health (DOH) initiative to centralise electronic patient care records from across the UK to connect 30,000 general practitioners to 300 hospitals, providing secure and audited access to these records by authorised health professionals. As the programme progressed from successful procurement through to delivery, a series of technical, political, social, economic and health issues materialised. The number of stakeholders increased in both size and scope due to these issues and communication and engagement with these parties became an enormous task for the connecting for health (CfH) team.

The issues
To manage this workload, comprehensive stakeholder management tools, processes and FTE resources were put in place but it never was going to be enough. There were too many issues and the issues were too deep to enable quick resolution. However, despite the ultimate cancellation of the programme, there were some outstanding examples of proactive stakeholder engagement.

The challenges
The challenges are summarised under 'The issues'.

The solution
To help resolve some of the diverse range of issues facing the NPfIT program an array of stakeholder techniques were implemented. These included workshops with stakeholder groups over the handling of sensitive data, respected clinical representatives to act as a medium between the CfH/DoH/NHS groups involved to ensure clarity and co-operation between all parties and also within the CfH team regarding the success or failure of the project and the effect it would therefore have on the jobs of the employees.

The benefits
This clear, sensible and pro-active management style is the simplest way to deal with any

potential issues. Furthermore, whether in a workshop environment, or through a formal review, the NPfIT programme was constantly seeking opportunities for people to express what their view of success meant to allow continual assessment of the issues arising within the project and allowed it to effectively address some of the wide range of issues arising from the program.

The learning points
Despite the ultimate closure of the NPfIT program, many of the techniques used in stakeholder engagement were hugely successful and transferrable to other projects. However, this study also highlights the possibility that despite best efforts and a well implemented stake holder engagement program, the project may still become unviable in light of arisen issues.

This case study was written by the APM Stakeholder Engagement Focus Group.

- *For more information on the group or stakeholder engagement, click here.*