

PMI Charleston Scholarship Essay

Importance of Project Management in Healthcare

Healthcare is an innately process-driven industry, yet only recently in this sector has the importance of project management's tools, skill sets, and operational necessity been understood. In an industry where quality is continually demanded and a significant amount of improvement needs to occur, embracing and using the methodology behind project management can ensure this continual enhancement takes place- and does so in the most efficient and cost effective way. In the clinical side of patient care, as well as the business and operational aspects of providing care, specific goals must be attained and certain objectives reached in precise timeframes. This is the underlying purpose for project management, and if the other premises of this skill set are used, more effective planning, better organization, and more efficient allocation of resources could be achieved.

Delegating the most pertinent people and key stakeholders to a specific team is critically important to achieving set objectives and ensuring buy-in of ideas and implementations, especially in dealing with busy people who already have too much to accomplish. This certainly holds true in regards to the medical and administrative professionals in healthcare. Each is tasked with critical activities which must be completed on tight schedules, and wasting their time is not only foolhardy but costly. Thus, by adopting and implementing the steps and processes purported by project management, this commodity of professional time can be used in the most effective and efficient manner while still enabling more to be successfully achieved. So, using the knowledge and guidelines offered by project management allows for more to be done with less, in regards to time, personnel, and money.

In an industry where perfection is literally the goal, a plethora of projects exist- projects for improvement and adaptation, for implementation and creation, projects for financial gain and time savings, for patient care and better access. The list goes on, and will continue to grow. It is feasible to accomplish these projects in the most efficient and effective way by fully adopting and utilizing the processes, tools, and methods of true project management. And this need is greater than ever and continues to grow, as costs become more unsustainable and continuous quality improvement is more a budding ideology than a standard practice. Therefore, the importance of project management in the healthcare industry is undeniable, and the time for fully embracing it has arrived.

Academic Development of Project Management Skills

The Operations and Project Management class was in some aspects a re-cap of my time working with MUSC's Quality and Performance Improvement Department. However, it was also a compounding aspect to that experience, 'filler' if you will, in that it was much more detailed learning and a combination of teaching and doing. Learning the formal basics of project management and project leadership is crucial as a healthcare executive. Whereas the Quality Department may not be the end goal for me, identifying, initiating, understanding, and conducting projects will inevitably be an integral component of being an administrator. Thus, knowing the basic concepts and understanding the foundational aspects of managing (and leading) a project is a necessity, and having the opportunity to fill in details of the 'Why?' and 'How?' enhances our ability to successfully accomplish a key element of our job in health care leadership.

Learning and adapting utilitarian principles of project management and specific tools for performance improvement was one of the most valuable offerings from this class. As a metaphor, I would say that every manager has a toolbox; the great ones have more tools in it, as well as a better understanding of how and when to use each one. I went through Lean Six Sigma Greenbelt training during my stint with the Performance Improvement Department, and gleaned useful tools from this and was able to put some of them in practice. However, this Project Management class- and the project therein- further showed me that other tools are necessary in addition to LSS implementations. So, gaining more tools this semester, and deriving a better understanding of when to use each, added both usable tools and knowledgeable understanding to my 'toolbox.'

Similarly, each class we are in has group projects; some are case studies, while others are operational projects for non-profit organizations. Having these continual opportunities to implement the project management knowledge that I have gained allows the projects to be more successful, but moreover, it provides me additional practice and experience in using these powerful tools and this useful information that I have gleaned. Practicing, making mistakes, having success, new ideas- all are great learning experiences from having numerous projects throughout our Masters of Health Administration program; and each time I work on a project, I learn something- usually a lot. The class itself and the intensive project it entailed were a phenomenal start to learning and implementing the formal project management disciplines. Continuing to use these tools and enhance this skill set is a sincere bonus that our academic program allows by tasking us with a wide array of projects.

Why This Field of Study and Work

I chose to pursue a career in healthcare- and therein the Masters of Health Administration degree, in order to affect a difference in an industry that affects everybody, sick and healthy alike, yet inasmuch an industry where very few people understand that. So, my reasoning is to make a change both in the industry itself by improving a broken healthcare system, as well as to make a change in how the average person in the general public view healthcare by providing a greater understanding of how they are affected- even when they are healthy. By creating this understanding, my hope is that they will seek to gain more knowledge and information, in order to play a greater role in America's healthcare system- caring about it, fixing it, shaping it, enhancing it. In so doing, we can improve this massive industry and make it better, more efficient, and less expensive by leaps and bounds. However, even then, it will boil down to the small steps, the individual projects that accomplish specific objectives and achieve key goals of improvement. So, even by endearing others to the betterment of the overall industry, much of the true improvement and beneficial change will come from strategic improvement projects. Thus, as I pursue my mission of empowering people with the desire to learn more and work to provide them the knowledge they need, I also must be ready to assist in proposing ideas and creating evolution that will achieve the greater outcomes we all need and a sustainable system that will behoove us all.

Project Management's Beneficial Role in Healthcare

As previously alluded to in this paper, unsustainable costs are one of the most dire, problematic issues facing the healthcare industry at this time. Much of this, along with other problems, stems from waste: waste of resources, time, money, personnel, and vision. If this waste was eliminated and standardized best practices were adopted, both in clinical and administrative efforts, our healthcare system would not be more than double the cost of most industrialized nations for lower quality care. There are a variety of actions that must take place to stem this waste, but many of them on the ground floor begin with correctly assigned projects that can achieve relevant goals in a timely fashion in order to improve processes, enhance productivity, increase quality, and cut costs- all of which culminate in reducing waste dramatically if done correctly. Indeed, identifying and leading these projects correctly and effectively is the key, and this is done through the widespread adoption and large scale implementation of project management knowledge. Instead of further wasting resources trying to achieve successful outcomes, we must use the project management tools and skills to plan strategically, manage resources more carefully, and accomplish lofty goals, in order to succeed.