



Strengthening Project Management in the Public Sector

Federal Cabinet-Level Agency Healthcare Efficiency Initiative

The complexity and breadth of services of this Federal agency has led to considerable variability in terms of the effectiveness of project execution. This variability created many business and technology systems to be less than optimally implemented, resulting in operational inefficiencies.

The Healthcare Efficiency (HCE) initiative has been put in place to improve processes and procedures where the existing practices have failed and to move toward a more standard project execution framework. This initiative requires evaluation of current systems, identification of areas for improvement, and implementation of changes. Through this initiative, the Agency intends to reduce operational costs and create a more streamlined deployment of targeted program areas, to enhance the programs' efficiency across the enterprise.

Additional goals of the HCE initiative are to provide more accurate and less burdensome delivery of benefit services, better meet the reporting needs of the Agency and Congress, and reduce potential fraud, waste, and abuse. This initiative requires coordination and collaboration across multiple stakeholder groups; geographically and functionally dispersed delivery teams; and the management of five projects.

The Federal cabinet level Agency turned to Advanta Healthcare Partners (Advanta) to supply project management discipline and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of current Office of Information Technology (OIT) projects. Critical to our success with this project were our years of project management experience and familiarity with the

Project Management Institute’s methodologies, e.g., Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK) and tools.

Working jointly with the government, our efforts resulted in delivering completed projects that were not only within Agency budget constraints, but added significant value to field offices and Agency end users.

The Client’s Challenges

The primary challenges facing the initiative’s team:

- Project managers did not execute projects according to Agile and Agency standards.
- Project risks were not identified in a timely manner, negatively affecting the implementation of mitigation strategies.
- The program office was having extreme difficulty managing the triple constraint: scope, cost, and time, and the way in which these constraints impacted quality. As shown in the figure below, focusing on one aspect over the others – in this case, time – can have unintended consequences on the other two.



Figure 1 – Project Management’s Triple Constraint with time

The Advanta Solution

To address the current challenges within the Agency, Advanta identified new ways to improve performance, avoid delays, reduce costs, and meet the requirements and expectations of project sponsors and stakeholders. After identifying the issues, Advanta was able to come up with a three-pronged approach to address them.

While challenges are expected during the execution phase of a project, Advanta’s ability to create awareness of certain topics quickly resulted in an advantage later during the

project execution journey. Our approach was:

- **Project Management Discipline, Timelines, and Scheduling: Managing Deployment Milestones**

OIT management of milestones such as release package review (8 days), user testing (15 total days with no errors), and release board review was not as effective as needed. Executing schedule tasks concurrently instead of consecutively along with effective communication with executive leadership allowed us to achieve the schedule for a majority of the milestones.

- **Risk Identification and Communication: Keeping Stakeholders Informed**

Without roles and responsibilities elaborately defined, major milestones, which were not accurately accounted for in terms of task duration, and some minor tasks, were inadvertently left out until just weeks prior to their due dates. Weekly risk meetings and improved status reports prevented adding additional length to our schedule and resulted in the application being delivered to the field in a timely manner.

- **Get Everyone Involved: Leadership and Sponsors**

Some projects lacked the identification of a *single point of accountability*. Project progress was delayed due to high-priority issues not being resolved quickly and expeditiously. Advanta was able to assign detailed responsibilities for all team members; however, most importantly, responsibilities were assigned to leadership at the project, program, and sponsor level. Roles were outlined via the project management plan making for a more cohesive team approach to the project.

The Results

By implementing our proven approach and establishing a strong communications plan, the HCE project was able to meet its strategic Agency goals. Improved reporting, risk tracking, and creation of small sub-teams or “pods” addressed critical issues. All played a key role in making the project successful. The Advanta team leveraged PMBOK methodology effectively to limit scope creep and deliver the project in the required timeframe without sacrificing quality. With Advanta’s experienced large-scale project management support, efficient management of project time and scope provided a solid base for performance improvement.

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