

Knowledge Management in Project Management – Affordable Care Act



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Current and Compelling Story

- Knowledge management suggests that one of the most important skills we can cultivate to effect change is the ability to tell a springboard story
- Many of you who live beyond the boundaries of Washington DC today are hearing and reading stories about the problems with the website that supports insurance shopping and subscription through the Affordable Care Act's website
- I also teach enterprise and business architecture in our School of Digital Sciences and I live in Washington DC
- I am fresh from the Enterprise Architecture Conference with lessons learned and a story



The Story We Want to Tell

- Once upon a time, there was a country that decided to make affordable health insurance available to all of its citizens. A large community of practice was assembled to design the implementation of the act. Everyone in the community was totally committed to its success. A well defined project plan was developed to manage the implementation, including data specs and flows, business architecture, user interface, quality control and reporting.
- If I could tell you this story, and if it had a happy ending, I would be speaking to how knowledge management practices were used in every phase of project management and implementation



The Real Story

- Here's what happened when knowledge practices were not part of the project
- 1. There were no common mental models and no understanding of the larger "system" in which the ACA would work
- 2. There was no community of practice to support the project – the project was the purview of the legal and the tech folks - never included the actual people who would consume the outcomes (insurance, citizens)



The Real Story

- 3. The ACA was not aligned with the business goals and processes of the insurance community – where the exchanges were setup and aligned with the business process, they are working well
- 4. There was no project plan for implementation outside of technical specs – it was all about the law. Had we had KM and EA folks involved from the start, we would have known what we didn't know and what we needed to know from Day 1.
- 5. There were no technical requirements that could have been grounded in a Business Architecture. As a result now, we have hundreds of thousands of lines of code. We will need to start from scratch to architect.



The Real Story

- 6. The implementers didn't have a community of practice or any good working space for collaboration. Developed parts and hoped it would all fit together in the end.
- 7. The timeline for development provided no room for double-loop learning. "Do what we tell you to do" – single-loop learning was the dictate based on an incomplete understanding of the complexity of the problem.
- 8. The individuals overseeing the project have incomplete knowledge of the problem and they see little need to get more involved (e.g. hierarchical management structure and no open knowledge flows).



The Real Story

- 9. Poor organizational culture which does not support exposure of an unpopular idea.
- 10. Hubris vs. Humility – the former CIO who was responsible for awarding and defining the project was not committed to its success but rather was focused on his own success.
- 11. Lack of rich knowledge used to write the RFP and its specifications, and even less knowledge leveraged to award the technology contract. No interest in learning from the procurement process.
- 12. Lots of issues about the quality and availability of encoded data and information. These issues can be resolved fairly easily. The knowledge methods issues, though, are fundamental.



The Moral of the Story

- Start with an understanding of the project and prepare a rigorous project plan
- When we talk about integrating knowledge management and project management, I think we mean both artifacts and methods
- Having the right information is important, but in some cases it is more critical to consider the way the project team works and the culture of the project environment
- Identify the key areas of risk and dependencies and ensure that there is a rigorous review of the plan for knowledge requirements and methods



Rewriting the Story

- The story as we would tell it truthfully is a case study for Peter Senge
- At this point we are fixing fixes. You can expect to see other examples from Senge's writings play out in the near future unless they step back and understand the fundamental problems.
- In terms of the underlying knowledge management for this project, we need to start from scratch and redesign the fundamentals.



Thank you!

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