

“How the champion of the health care reform project must cope with costs and schedules”

Keeping in regular contact with the customer can ensure that the goals of the project are never far out of sight.

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Obama and Health Care Reform: The Challenges and Limits of a Project Champion

Health care reform and bringing coverage to 46 million uninsured people is a big project with all the challenges that any project faces. It needs a project champion and that person must manage the support of his or her constituency.

Few people would disagree that the champion of health reform is President Obama. It is an issue that played a prominent role in his campaign for the presidency and he would clearly like to make it a hallmark of his first year in office.

Like any project however,, on the surface everyone agrees with the concept, but it is not until the details need to be fleshed out that disagreements surface.

Effective champions are flexible, they listen to their stakeholders and make the adjustments in scope necessary to deal with these disagreements.

In this respect Obama has been doing a credible job as project champion.

Confronted with pressures and lobbyists from health care professionals, voters, taxpayers, and pharmaceutical

companies, he has discovered that there are no feasible solutions that come close to making everyone happy.

In July, when Obama started to lose support of his own party he was forced to change his schedule. Originally he wanted a bill signed before the end of October.

But now the complexities of how the reformed system will affect patients, how costs will be covered, and what changes will be made to contain runaway medical costs, Obama has pushed the legislation back to the end of this year.

Watching the Bottom Line

Projects must keep the bottom line in view at all times. Unless they contribute to increased revenue or decreasing costs they will play no part in the goals of the organization.

Yet maintaining a focus on the bottom line may be too abstract, too difficult or seem like a diversion when the job is to get the

project done within budget and on time.

One way to assure bottom-line focus is to have those involved with the project maintain regular contact with the customer or end user.

What do we mean by regular contact? In some projects it might mean contacting the customer every day while in other

projects I might mean weakly contacts. But spreading these out to once-a-month or less may shift the focus back to internal issues.

What is the major advantage of this approach? It keeps the focus externally on customers and not internally on methods and procedures.