

Ingenix Consulting Consultants Leverage Technology for Successful Project Management

Technology can emancipate the Flowcast Project Manager, but only if used correctly. Ingenix Consulting¹ healthcare IT consultants have incorporated tools into their project management techniques that enable them to make better decisions and improve efficiencies.

Some of the key areas where projects can suffer mismanagement are communication, organization, and resource allocation. Ingenix Consulting healthcare IT consultants use Microsoft Project and SharePoint to manage all aspects of our business: software implementations, technical service projects, GE Healthcare upgrades and implementations, and Allscripts TouchWorks implementations and roll outs. Due to the varied nature of Ingenix Consulting projects, our consultants have learned to identify where technology is helpful and where it's a hindrance.

Not a Project Plan

Ginger Irwin, a certified project manager in Ingenix Consulting software division, speaks to both the advantages and the pitfalls of using tools like MS Project: "MS Project documents are often referred to as the Project Plan which can cause confusion for companies. MS Project was designed to be a schedule and for that, it's a highly functional tool. However, it should not be used as a task list." Ginger mentions that a true project plan is really the compilation of a number of documents which include the Project Charter, Scope Document, Work Breakdown Structure (WBS), Communications Plan, Change Management and Risk Management plans, as well as the schedule which can be created using MS Project.

Utilizing Resources Effectively

Understanding when and how to use tech tools can significantly improve the outcome of your initiative.

Barbara Mings, Ingenix Consulting Senior Consultant, attests "The success of project management is in proper distribution of the details."

She finds that MS Project is great for outlining the broad strokes of a large project like a Flowcast interface or TES install. While providing a solid overall roadmap, she notices that project team members don't relate well to seeing detailed tasks in a Project Plan. Instead, she employs a variety of tools to communicate with team members. Translating MS project tasks into HTML documents is one way to distribute information across software platforms. Barbara likes MS Word for scope documents, agendas, and status reports, while favoring Excel spreadsheets for detailed documents such as task lists. She mentions that team members want to concentrate on the areas they're responsible for and spreadsheets allow them to focus on specific details critical to project success.

Ginger mentions that MS Project is an essential tool for identifying a project's critical path, the shortest route from beginning to end of a given project. When tasks are set up appropriately, a PM can easily view the critical path and manage the resources which will most directly affect the achievement of the project goals. For instance, during a Flowcast upgrade a project manager can see that testing is a task that is part of the critical path. If dates are slipping and other tasks are not getting completed on time, then a PM can see that by adding resources to the testing task (and moving them off of tasks that are not in the critical path) the testing timeframe is shortened by hours or days. This ability to identify critical tasks and effectively allocate resources is intelligent use of the tool.

A caution with MS Project is the temptation to use it as a task list of everything that must be done and include several layers of detail. When projects are set up with too much detail, a PM is less able within MS Project to see the big picture. The PM can get caught up in the smaller details of an individual's tasks like the installation of a server or the ordering of new hardware.

¹ Global Works Systems, Inc., a division of Ingenix Consulting

The PM's focus is better given to evaluating the impact of events within the schedule and making decisions based on the information provided, rather than updating an overly complicated plan with task updates.

When there is a need for additional levels of detail within a plan, the notes function within MS Project can be used to add levels of detail to given tasks. The information is therefore gathered and available to all who require it without creating the confusion of layers of tasks.

Streamlining Communication and Organization

The Microsoft SharePoint Portal offers PMs the ability to centrally store and organize project communications and related files in a web-based application. Similar to customizing your Yahoo page, SharePoint provides the flexibility to completely customize the project portal to the needs of the specific initiative. Offering folders, project pages, task lists, project contacts, and contact information, SharePoint becomes a central location or meeting place for all project-related material. Management or members of a project team can easily access status reports, agendas, meeting notes, and MS Project plans in a familiar folder structure. By creating this central location, Ingenix Consulting PM Pam Lawrence states that the project documents become "something that live beyond the individual" allowing coverage when team members are unavailable or out of the office, creating transparency for the project.

A successful project can be well organized using technology that is readily available. PMs can create winning scenarios by managing their project resources at a high level and creating a central location where information can be shared and stored. Using today's tools for today's jobs improves efficiency and provides the data to make the best decisions for the project.

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Ingenix Consulting is a premier, data-driven health and human services consulting organization. We have over 1,000 consultants with experience working with hospitals, physician practices, health plans, employers, government agencies, and pharmaceutical companies. This scale and exclusive health and human services focus set us apart.

