Training: Critical to continuing success of Health IT projects

Healthcare is an industry undergoing rapid change as governments and private providers push for organisations to work faster, smarter and cheaper than they have before. Each day there seem to be more and more stories about the latest advances in technology or scientific breakthroughs that are shaping the future of the healthcare industry. But, for an organisation to truly take advantage of these technology advances and bring all the benefits they offer in terms of efficiency and quality improvements, they need to invest in staff training. Which is why I cannot understand how training is often the first expense targeted when cost cuts need to be made, or why an organisation would risk project failure by not ensuring staff were adequately trained (and continue to be trained) in the new technology they were implementing.

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So, before you pick up that red pen to cross out the training figure in your next project estimate, stop and compare the tiny cost of training compared to the higher cost to your organisation in terms of quality control, diminished skills and productivity, and high staff turnover.

Quality control issues

A lack of knowledge and training leads to poor staff performance, and poor staff performance can often lead to a lack of quality control. Of all industries, a lack of quality control in healthcare can be disastrous to all involved. Patients expect their healthcare providers to be staffed by qualified, fully trained and experienced staff. They rely on staff to make the right decisions and give the right advice, often during an extremely stressful period of their lives. Failure to train staff to undertake their role to the best of their ability endangers your patients and damages your organisation.

Standardising your training, whether it be for new employees or a refresher course, also ensures a consistent approach to processes and ultimately the successful use of the technology.

Diminished skillset and productivity

Many organisations look to reduce the ongoing cost of training by having existing staff train new employees in the use of IT systems. But, not only can existing staff pass on their own bad habits, they can also only train staff on processes in which they are proficient – not the full capability of the technology solution, which could be changing with each new update. This type of training diminishes the organisational knowledge of the technology solution as each new staff member learns less and less.

A 2012 study on ERP projects hypothesised how 'knowledge leakage' damages an organisation through the reduction of skills in an organisation over a period of time. The study noted that this loss of skill 'occurs in every organisation, every time. It does not discriminate based on operating system or platform, and it can kill organisational performance.'[1] The point was also made that complex skills taught, but not reinforced, are particularly susceptible. While this study may have related to ERP projects, its premise could be applied to any industry, including healthcare.
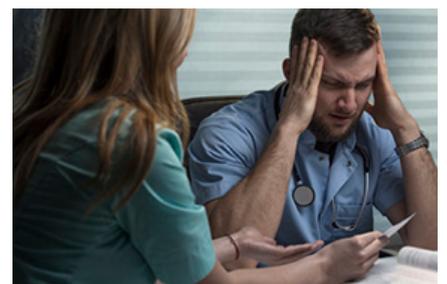
Training: Critical to continuing success of Health IT projects continued ...

High staff turnover

A skilled and experienced workforce is an asset to any organisation, even more so in a healthcare provider. So, why wouldn't you take the time and money to invest in one of your most precious assets? An organisation that invests in its own people will not have issues recruiting and retaining staff; and a lower staff turnover means reduced labour overheads and less productivity downtime.

Employees view training differently to employers. While an employer views training as a cost of implementing a chosen technology solution, employees view training as an indication of their value to an organisation. They see how an organisation is willing to commit money, time and resources to ensuring their employees are equipped with the skills to do their job. This leads to increased job satisfaction and overall happier employees.

How much would it cost to initiate a training refresher course in your organisation right now? Now compare that to how much it cost to recruit your last employee.
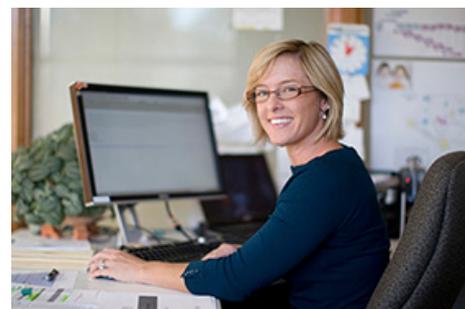
Safeguard your success

As an organisation, you have already taken the first step by choosing to introduce new technology and processes that will bring about operational efficiencies and improvements in the quality of patient care you deliver. Now is the time to take the next step and safeguard the continued success of your health IT project by investing in your staff and making sure they have the skill-set and confidence to operate it.

References:

1. Anderson, Cushing. July 2012, *"Knowledge Leakage: The Destructive Impact of Failing to Train on ERP Projects."*, accessed March 2016, http://media.cms.bmc.com/documents/2361301.pdf

About Rose Harding

Rose Harding is the Marketing Communications Manager at Sysmex and has over 15 years' experience in the software industry for a diverse range of markets in New Zealand, Australia and Europe. Her previous roles have included software product management, pre-sales, training and software project implementation.