

Systemation Helps Client Achieve 100% Adherence to Project Budget, Schedule, and Scope

A Fortune 100 healthcare services company recently suffered a customer exodus and precipitous stock plunge, which led to a clear mandate to develop “experienced in-house project management and more standardized governance.”

In response to this mandate, the organization partnered with Systemation to co-design and implement a training initiative to boost internal project management competency. Systemation is engaging over 200 project managers with a custom composite of standards based on Project Management Institute’s (PMI®) *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge* (PMBOK® Guide) and processes specific to the Fortune 100 company. All made very personal via Systemation’s hallmark case study and simulation activities.

This healthcare giant believes performance on current mission-critical projects depends largely on the intentional alignment of this flexible curriculum with a four-level career path and its associated financial rewards and advancement opportunities. In the following interview, the project sponsor describes the overall undertaking and offers project management advice to others facing tense competition.

You say you need 100% adherence to schedule, budget and scope. That’s a tall order. What challenges do you face in pursuing this goal?

We are actively dealing with three historical issues. First, project management practices differed widely by division and even by individual project team. Since current projects require working across division lines, we’ve taken

an aggressive approach to create and enforce company-wide project management standards.

Also in the past, we appointed project managers based on their subject matter expertise, not their project management acumen. We now have a more scientific way to match the right project managers to mission-critical projects.



Executive mandate to develop experienced in-house project managers and standardized project governance

\$18.6 billion healthcare company

Projects habitually expanded beyond initial scope

Solution – Systemation

Built consistency among team members

Created metrics and provide methods for tracking

Lastly, projects previously passed from team to team without clear definition of who owned responsibility for project outcomes. We now have required protocols for assigning and tracking accountability.

How are you training everyone to ensure uniform project management practices?

We showed generic PMBOK® Guide processes to subject matter experts from each division to find out what needed customization. While we wanted to maintain as much as possible of the industry standard, we needed to incorporate several things specific to our environment. For example, we adjusted project-level financial analysis methods and tools to reflect our unique budgetary process and ways of calculating technology costs.

Systemation helped us with this customization. We had developed our own project management curriculum. Systemation seamlessly joined our material with major elements from their Practitioner and Advanced Certificate programs. They are facilitating the training using their hallmark case study and simulation activities. Training is mandatory and tightly integrated with our four-level career path. Advancement at our company is tied to actual project results and performance on post-workshop assessments.

What project management protocols, methodology and tools have you standardized?

Basically everything. We recently restructured our central IT operations and created common processes for application development activities including testing, change management and operational turnover. We incorporated these processes into

project planning methodology and made both the processes and methodology mandatory. We also established an “engagement model,” which governs how various functions interact at our company. This model, for example, specifies involvement of the test organization at the beginning of each project. Every project must adhere to this model.

What makes your training approach unique?

We see three unique aspects:

1. With Systemation’s assistance, we’ve tightly aligned our curriculum with the specific challenges our project managers will face at each career level. You might call this “just-in-time” training.
2. PMI® standards are unlikely to change much in the short term. In contrast, we expect continuous changes in our company-specific content. Systemation has structured our workshops so we can alter pieces easily without gutting the training design. This flexibility lets us respond quickly and cost-effectively to changes in our environment.
3. We’re actively molding the culture and organization to support project management excellence. This involves special training for project sponsors and the people who supervise project managers to make sure they understand and champion best practices. Systemation has been assisting us with this education effort.


How are you matching people to projects?

We have a detailed, four-level career path for project managers—from Level 1, Developing Professional, to Level 4, Expert. We’ve assessed 280 people involved formally or informally in project management to determine their current level of expertise and developmental needs. We’ve also cataloged all our projects in a central repository using this same 1 to 4 scale. If a new Level 3 project needs a project manager, we know who’s qualified and available.

How easily can you shift project managers from one division to another?

Using uniform project management processes and tools across the company means project managers can migrate from one division to another without missing a beat. This creates a more flexible pool of project management resources.

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What advice would you offer an organization that wants to boost its project management capabilities?

1. Focus on both the performance of the project manager and the performance of the organization. Optimal project performance requires common technology, common principles and broad senior-level buy-in to the importance of uniform project management practices.
2. Combine education with incentives to reinforce specific behaviors. You get results when your people see clearly how they can further their compensation and career growth by aligning with your corporate goals.
3. Foster a project management “community” where project managers get together to share experiences. This informal network imparts company-specific learning that is hard to glean in a classroom.

Have you encountered any barriers to implementing company-wide project management practices?

Not really. We have very strong senior sponsorship for this work, which makes a big difference. Our CIO initiated this endeavor. Additionally, the combination of the career path and comprehensive training has created a lot of excitement among project managers. They now see our company taking project management seriously—viewing

project management as a profession independent of subject matter expertise.

We do have some senior project managers who question what they have to gain from training. Of the skeptics, those who have participated in workshops so far have become strong advocates. One person with a reputation like “Mikey” in the old cereal commercial exclaimed, “This is the best program I’ve ever attended.”

How will you know you’ve succeeded? What metrics are you tracking?

At this point, we’re pursuing two goals. As mentioned earlier, we want 100% adherence to schedule, budget and scope for each of our mission-critical projects. That measure is black and white—either we hit the mark or we don’t. We’ll start seeing this success early next year.

Our second goal? The number of project managers at each level of development must be greater than the number needed at any given time. This way, if we add a new Level 2 project, we have someone ready to staff it—no delays and no unnecessary learning curve.

Systemation is more than a project management training company. It’s a provider of project management improvement programs known for its ability to make learning stick. Systemation’s programs are not only PMBOK®-compliant and competency-based, they are

founded on a fully developed, proprietary methodology — PM KnowHow™. Systemation delivers its programs with an approach to teaching that focuses on actual practice rather than mere lecturing. This leaves participants more in command of standard terminology, better versed in critical skills and better prepared to cope with the people issues that can undermine project management success. Because every company has specialized needs, Systemation offers customization services as well as integrated coaching and assessment. Over the past 30 years, this powerful, flexible approach has made Systemation a key contributor to project management maturity for a long list of Fortune 500 companies and governmental organizations.

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