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Automating project management

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The NHS-recommended PRINCE 2 project management method aims to facilitate the organisation, management and control of projects. *Health Estate Journal* examines the benefits of automating the process for healthcare project stakeholders including estates and facilities personnel, clinicians and managers.

First developed by the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency (CCTA) in 1989 as a UK Government standard for IT project management, PRINCE (Projects in Controlled Environments) has since been widely adopted by both the public and private sectors. The method is being recommended to healthcare organisations by the NHS as a flexible way to organise, manage, control and deliver clinical, IT and building projects within all-important deadlines and budgets. PRINCE 2 was officially launched in 1996, and is universally accepted as the best practice method for project management.

According to the Association of Project Managers, at the end of 2004 approximately 100,000 people had taken the PRINCE 2 exam, of which 90,000 are based in the UK. This is a combined total of practitioner and foundation levels. Furthermore, 20,000 people take PRINCE 2 exams every year, which

averages around 700 people per week. The Association of Project Managers has 13,500 members and 240 corporate members with more than 40 associated training organisations. In the UK, 25% of GDP is spent on projects, which equated to £261 billion in 2002. The UK Government is estimated to spend \$22 billion in 2005, making it the biggest spender on IT in Europe. Most NHS Authorities need to spend approximately 4% of turnover on IT and the number of IT staff within the NHS is expected to rise to 30,000 people.

Process automation

One supplier that believes in automated PRINCE 2 compliance as a way of managing multiple projects is web-based solutions specialist Project Progress. The company has launched an online product for complete PRINCE 2 automation, and one of the sectors targeted is healthcare. "Our product provides multiple users with a prescriptive environment for ensuring projects are properly managed and executed," says Adam Smith, CEO of Project Progress. "The public sector is under continuous pressure to become more accountable, increase stakeholder value and rationalise costs," he adds.

The product 'Projectprogress' provides a prescriptive environment for PRINCE 2 compliance, imposing elements of control that prevent deviation and provide complete visibility up and down the value chain. By providing a holistic view of multiple projects to multiple users and organisations, the product enables companies to direct their internal

resources appropriately, eliminating wasted time, resources and money.

This automated platform has proved to be beneficial to the in-house projects team at Barts and The London NHS Trust, who is using online PRINCE 2 management for its capital and facilities directorate, which is responsible for managing numerous ongoing capital and building projects.

The in-house projects team manage the capital and facilities directorate, which is responsible for managing capital and building projects ranging from £20,000 up to £2 million. The directorate manages up to 100 ongoing projects at any one time. As one of Britain's top teaching hospitals, Barts and The London NHS Trust is currently undergoing a £1.2 billion investment programme, the biggest hospital redevelopment in Britain. Barts and The London is one of the oldest hospitals in Europe and the biggest PFI in the UK.

Glenn Woodhead is project team leader, capital and facilities directorate for Barts and The London NHS Trust. He said: "We took our project management team through PRINCE 2 training, however, we knew manual enforcement and adoption of the method would be a labour intensive process, as well as a management challenge. The same words and terms can mean different things to different people, and even just getting everyone to understand common definitions was a major exercise."

Glenn Woodhead is also chairman of the P21 London Network, and stressed the importance of communication both within Trusts and between organisations in the



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Barts and The London: one of Britain's top teaching hospitals.

context of ProCure21. He stated that facilities managers in particular need to engage with project stakeholders including clinical staff, and that the ability of all staff to input into the project in real time has been a major benefit of automation. Crucial also to the PFI project is the fact that automation allowed project stakeholders to understand and manage how time is being utilised, as well as keeping track of the financial progress in relation to budgets.

Another consideration pertinent to facilities managers is the issue of logistics and space management. In terms of hospital design, a number of organisations simply lack the space within their facilities to store huge volumes of project manuals and notes, and even the process of locating and moving written information can be counter-productive. Automation of all project data allows instant access to all information on a number of projects that can be accessed, worked on and amended in real time by any stakeholder.

Holistic view

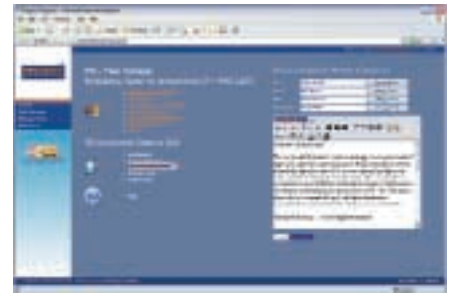
Although Glenn Woodhead's project team had policies in place for managing large buildings as well as smaller projects, they lacked a holistic view of what stage each project was at, and with major refurbishments of existing buildings, no two jobs were exactly the same. In addition to greater management insight, the team also wanted a means of

enforcing compliance and a full audit trail on its projects.

"Since we've been automating our project management, we've not only seen a vast productivity improvement in our own ability to manage project managers, but we've also got complete uniformity across the entire group, with the same consistency of model, process and style, including the project initiation document. Most importantly, we've now got full visibility and a full audit trail, and the team is now operating as one," adds Glenn Woodhead.

Effectively managing a multiplicity of such projects is simply impossible to do manually. The sheer size, scope, complexity and geographic distribution of project sites makes it unfeasible to ever gain a big picture view, let alone avoid the traditional project management pitfalls. Compounding this problem is the need for greater accountability, corporate governance, audit trails and compliance, especially in the public sector and financial arena. Risk not only needs to be properly managed, but it also needs to be continually assessed as projects move forward.

One of the UK's largest privately owned construction contractors, Fitzpatrick, also employed online automated PRINCE 2 delivery using the Project Progress platform. Fitzpatrick is the main contractor for the refurbishment of John Harrison House, a nine storey 1960s building, which is being converted into



'Projectprogress' covers the organisation, management and control of projects.

the new offices for the executive of Barts and The London NHS Trust in a contract worth in excess of £2 million.

Mark Thomas, healthcare director for Fitzpatrick, comments: "In projects such as John Harrison House, where there are many stakeholders involved, automation provides the opportunity for people on the periphery of the project to provide input without being dragged into half day off site meetings, as well as track the project's progress at each stage of development. From our perspective, it also provides us with a completely auditable electronic process. This not only gives us peace of mind in terms of compliance and good corporate governance, but on a practical level, it also means that we don't have to archive paper copies of historical files, which in some cases we have to retain for up to 12 years."

Construction industry

Adam Smith adds: "The construction industry is a natural fit for automation due to the large scale nature of projects and the number of people involved in multiple locations and from numerous organisations.

"In this instance, because both Fitzpatrick and the in-house projects team at Barts and The London NHS Trust are both using the same method, they are able to harness complete visibility up and down the value chain, tracking the progress of the John Harrison House project at a very granular level."

With the unprecedented rise in hospital construction seen in recent years continuing unabated, the potential for automated project management appears enormous. For a project of any size to succeed, public and private sectors, managers and clinicians, and different departments within healthcare organisations will all need the means to communicate effectively and input their ideas in a traceable way. IT is beginning to make its presence felt throughout the NHS as never before, and Trusts who find ways to utilise the wealth of technology that is becoming available today will be the ones who can pass the benefits on to their patients in the months and years ahead.