

Avoiding Project Failure and Achieving Project Success in NHS IT System Projects in the United Kingdom

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ABSTRACT

Although project success varies from business to business depending on different internally agreed success criteria, most organisations measure project success by analysing if the project delivered the planned project objectives within the set budget, schedule (project timelines), and quality. However, for some projects especially, development projects success goes beyond just meeting time frames and budget goals. In such projects and programmes, success refers to delivering the benefits coupled with the required expectations by stakeholders, beneficiaries, and funding bodies. This paper re-examines why the National Programme for IT (NPfIT), the largest public-sector IT programme that was ever undertaken in the UK, failed and how any future NHS National IT System implementations can be completed successfully.

KEYWORDS

Corporate Social Responsibility, Critical Success Factors, Local Service Providers, National Health Service, National Programme for Information Technology, National Steering Information Group

INTRODUCTION

The UK National Health Service (NHS) suffered one of the most damaging IT project failures which has resulted in continuous and ongoing catastrophic financial implications for the NHS and the taxpayer (Chowdhury, 2019). However, irrespective of how large and complex the NHS systems are, and that they all operate independently, NHS England is accountable to the UK Government. This also means that Trusts nationally are accountable to NHS England who governs them in regard to their funding and function (Dhir et al., 2019).

The NHS organisational structure is influenced by government policies and practices. The NHS is a very complex entity with cultures driven at local level and this makes it difficult to implement anything, as all key decisions are made by the Parliament.

The entire bodies within the NHS from top level down have a social responsibility over the impacts their activities and decisions have on all areas of the environment, the staff, community and society (Schaefer, 2008). Irrespective of the political party in power, the UK government is officially committed to the sustainable development agreement signed in the UN conference in Rio-1992. Relevant legislation is clearly detailed in the Climate Change Act 2008 and the Public Services (Social

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Value) Act 2012. These legislations highlight how the government should support NHS Trusts in regard to their socio-environmental responsibility. All Trusts understand social responsibility (SR) with the aim of having a positive impact on society by delivering a good service (Dhir et al., (2019). Trusts are supporting employees, communities and environment while doing good business and this drives SR to the core of NHS mandate. The main challenges that the NHS encounters nationally is the implementation of SR due to the complex organisational structures that are varied with often restricted and controlled resources. The paper is organised as followed: Next section briefly outlines the key contributions and the research approach used in this paper. Then, a brief background of the NHS NPfIT is provided. This is followed by a discussion on the reasons for the failure of this programme. A generalised analysis is then followed to discuss project failure, followed by a tailored analysis on the NPfIT failure.

KEY CONTRIBUTIONS AND THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This piece of research utilises practice-based and academic literature relating to success and failure factors in projects, with the aim to address failure risk factors and have higher success probabilities in IT projects within organisations, especially in the healthcare context.

The four key published papers that will be extensively used to ensure the research question is answered will be:

- Shared Understanding Within Large Information Systems Projects (Lawson, 2016);
- The Critical Success Factors (CSFs) for IT Projects (Gheni et al, 2017);
- Critical Success Factors for The Implementation of Integrated Healthcare Information Systems Projects: An Organizational Fit Perspective (Hung et al., 2014); and
- Factors associated with success in the implementation of information management and technology in the NHS (Bowns et al, 1999).

The literature review starts by clearly examining the survey data available in regards to project success rates. This is then followed by explaining what could have been done to enhance NPfIT success in regards the identified eight contributing failure factors. Following an exploratory and descriptive research design, it has been attempted identify how the NHS can avoid future Information Technology project failures and achieve success. A critical review and analysis of the already existing studies from reliable and experienced authors was used to identify current IT project failures and the key critical factors required for success to be achieved (Dhir et al., 2019). Moreover, a focus has been placed on the cultural aspect of NHS to clearly outline and address the processes and activities (Baghizadeh et al., 2020).

NHS NATIONAL PROGRAMME FOR IT

On 18 February 2002, a more centralised IM&T strategy in the NHS vision was established. The Programme became known as NPfIT in the NHS. It was launched in 2002, with an initial budget of about £6.2 billion. The programme sounded extremely magnificent and arduous and ended up being the costliest IT project initiated by the government for the NHS (Bacon & Hope, 2013).

In craving for a centralised system this made the NHS NPfIT standout as the Programme had a large government funding injection and endorsement (Baghizadeh et al., 2020). The NHS would have been the shining beckon in Europe if the implementation had succeeded in view most countries like Sweden and Germany enjoined with local providers to facilitate messaging to support information communication for patients (Kuziemyky & Knight, 2013). The aim of the NPfIT was to bring the

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