



HAVE A CONTINGENCY PLAN?

HOW TO REDUCE IT RISK IN LABORATORY INFORMATICS PROJECTS

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IT project failures are unfortunately quite common – a recent survey by cloud portfolio management provider Innotas¹ revealed that over 50 percent of businesses surveyed had experienced an IT project failure within the previous 12 months. A successful laboratory informatics project can be especially difficult to achieve, given the complex processes and technologies used in the laboratory environment. The success of a laboratory informatics project can be defined in terms of the delivered solution being on time and within budget, meeting all requirements, and ultimately resulting in a high level of system satisfaction, adoption, and utilization by the laboratory and supporting staff.

One of the biggest impediments to successful informatics projects are staffing issues. In managing typical laboratory informatics projects with hundreds of clients over several decades, we have encountered several common scenarios where staffing augmentation is necessary to eliminate bottlenecks and optimize project success. Unlike other companies that offer only professional services, Astrix offers a Scientific Staffing Division that is uniquely positioned to handle any staffing challenges that arise during a laboratory informatics project.

Let's examine some of the ways in which our Staffing Division can help close the critical gaps that often lead to project failure.

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SCENARIO #1: Scope Changes and Unforeseen Technical Issues

Laboratory informatics project managers must identify and bring together all stakeholders in order to gather the information necessary to determine the project scope (i.e., objectives, goals, tasks, budget, resources, timeline). No matter how well the scope is defined and how tightly change control is handled, the reality is that many projects grow organically as new functional gaps are identified, internal goals and priorities are changed, etc. An increase in project scope essentially means that there is more work to do than initially anticipated. Traditionally the choice has been to either increase the timeline to accommodate the added scope, or to deliver something to the users that does not meet expectations.

But there is another choice.

Let's say your project encounters unforeseen technical issues. Maybe you are trying to migrate a laboratory informatics platform to the cloud, and certain use cases cannot be handled due to integration limitations. There may be another way to fulfill the requirements than originally anticipated, but getting to this scope and design will require detailed workshops with key members of the user community. The extra work involved in this issue threatens to throw the project behind schedule unless the team either works longer hours or is augmented by outside staff. Maybe you need a cloud architect to weigh in on the design. Perhaps an expert on the APIs involved or the platforms in use. Astrix can support you in this situation by engaging our scientific staffing recruiting engine to bring in the extra people you need to augment the project team (in a matter of days to weeks) and keep the project running on time.

¹Research Report: The Project and Portfolio Management Landscape." Innotas, 2015. Available at: <https://www.innotas.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/The-Project-and-Portfolio-Management-Landscape-2015-Survey-Report.pdf>

SCENARIO #2: Highly Specialized Candidates

Another situation that can arise in a laboratory informatics project is the need to augment the project team staff with someone that has highly specialized technical skills and/or scientific knowledge. Laboratory informatics projects are typically very complex, reaching into many different aspects of the business, especially those that require integration across a global enterprise. Finding a highly specialized candidate is virtually impossible for a traditional staffing company, as they typically lack recruiters that have the desired technical skills and/or scientific and laboratory domain knowledge.

In order to find highly specialized candidates, Astrix has developed a unique set of technology tools called the Astrix HAYSTACK™ that assist our recruiters in sourcing the most talented people. These tools allow us to scour the electronic world of blogs, job boards, social media sites in order to find the exact person required by your organization.

Astrix is also uniquely positioned to evaluate highly specialized candidates. Our staffing team is comprised of highly qualified, full-time recruiters with scientific backgrounds in the areas they cover. In addition, our professional services division offers a vast amount of laboratory informatics experience and technical knowledge spanning hundreds of different informatics platforms. In this kind of situation, we put candidates through a two-tiered vetting process which involves both the standard prescreening done by our scientific staffing recruiters, along with a secondary screening that is done by our professional services personnel. Due to the breadth of our resources, Astrix has the ability to find and vet highly specialized employees in ways that no other staffing company can match.

SCENARIO #3: Backfilling Laboratory Positions

A third scenario, which in our experience is very common, involves the client's internal project team struggling to find the necessary time to devote to the project. The people assigned to the project team on the client side are usually the most skilled people on staff (e.g., lab manager), and they typically have demanding day jobs. For these people, finding the necessary time to devote an informatics project can be challenging to say the least.

One of the ways that Astrix can provide support to companies experiencing these kinds of challenges involves utilizing our staffing division to find skilled laboratory technicians that can augment the client's laboratory staff for the duration of the project. This can take some of the pressure off laboratory workflows, allowing a mid-level employee to move up and take over some of the lab manager's responsibilities. This will accomplish two things – the lab manager's workload will be reduced, allowing them to participate more fully in the informatics project; additionally, this change provides a great staff development opportunity for the mid-level employee.

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CONCLUSION:

Laboratory informatics projects are extremely complex and require a considerable time and resource commitment to implement properly. Given the high rate of failure of informatics projects, it is essential to mitigate your risks by working with a trusted, neutral informatics vendor with a proven track record of success in this domain. But that is not all you need to consider in selecting a strategic partner. With rapidly changing business environments and regulatory constraints, you simply cannot afford to operate without a contingency plan. Part of that effort involves selecting the right partner who can support you throughout the project lifecycle – especially as issues arise. In fact, selecting the right long-term partner represents a crucial step towards developing a robust risk management strategy. With 32 full-time recruiters on staff in regional offices across North America, Astrix is uniquely qualified to offer staffing and professional services in parallel and thus provide comprehensive support for all aspects of your laboratory informatics project.

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ABOUT ASTRIX TECHNOLOGY GROUP

Scientific resources and technology solutions delivered on demand

Astrix Technology Group is an informatics consulting, professional services and staffing company dedicated to servicing the scientific community for over 20 years. We shape our clients' future, combining deep scientific insight with the understanding of how technology and people will impact the scientific industries. Our focus on issues related to value engineered solutions, on demand resource and domain requirements, flexible and scalable operating and business models helps our clients find future value and growth in scientific domains. Whether focused on strategies for Laboratories, IT or Staffing, Astrix has the people, skills and experience to effectively shape client value. We offer highly objective points of view on Enterprise Informatics, Laboratory Operations, Healthcare IT and Scientific Staffing with an emphasis on business and technology, leveraging our deep industry experience.