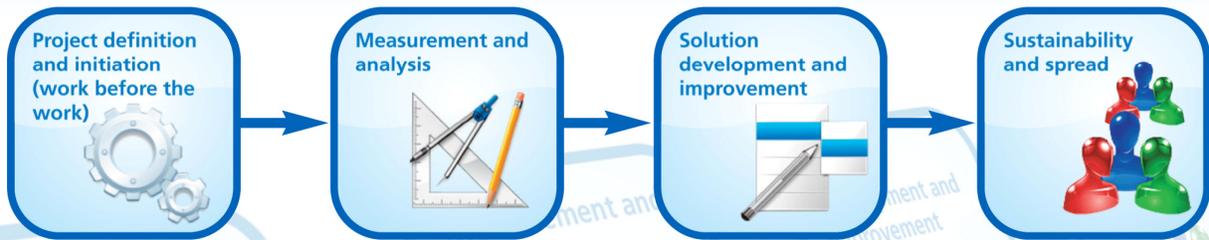**NHS**

NHS Improvement

NHS Improvement

An Overview – Tips for Successful Improvement Projects
October 2011

Project definition and initiation (work before the work)

Measurement and analysis

Solution development and improvement

Sustainability and spread

Tips for Successful Improvement Projects

Starting out on any improvement project is always an exciting time, and you are likely to be full of enthusiasm and optimism. However, things don't always go entirely to plan and it can be hard to maintain impetus and progress with enthusiasm alone. Experience and learning from the Lung Improvement Programme project teams and peer support have identified a number of factors that can help ensure the success of your project and minimise the impact of any problems you may encounter.

Why do Projects Fail?
- Project aims and objectives not clearly defined or articulated
- Little or no top level support & leadership for the project
- Lack of effective engagement with key players and patients
- Poorly planned projects
- Inadequately monitored, controlled & managed
- Failure to take account of Local and National priorities e.g. QIPP
- Poor communication
- Failure to divide the project into small manageable tasks
- Unable to collect and analyse data

What makes a Successful Project?
- Right people involved from the start of the project
- Clear aim statement
- Planning, monitoring and control
- A real understanding the current issue / problem
- Measurable improvements
- Clear links to local and national objectives
- Involve patients and carers
- Display effective communication

Right People Involved
Having the right people involved from the beginning will give your project the best chance of success. If the right people are not involved from the beginning, it is a lot harder to engage and involve them at a later date.

Involvement from the top of your organisation (Chief Executive or Executive Team) is necessary to provide strategic support to the project and support the team to access Human Resources, Finance and IT teams when required. This individual should also be identified to discuss issues and celebrate achievements.

It is advisable to give one person the role of Project Manager. This person should have ownership and lead the project ensuring decisions are made, actions taken, and measurable and timely progress is made.

Within the project team it is necessary to have a combination of individuals, some whose role will be to make decisions and others to carry out actions. Consider individuals or groups who are interested and enthusiastic about your work and those who are in a position of power. It is also worth involving people or groups who are not as interested in your project but have a key position of power or authority. Involve all grades of staff (Clinical Staff, GP's, Porters, Commissioners, Reception Staff, Managers, Pharmacists, Clinical Support Staff etc) as they will have different knowledge, opinions, ideas and concerns.

Once individuals or groups have been identified, include them within a Communication Plan.

Involving Patients and Carers

Patients' and Carers' needs are not secondary to system organisation, they are the reason the system exists. Our ability to meet their needs is a valid measure of performance but unless we ask the patients and carers we will not know how well we are doing.

The patients' experience of our service can be very different to what we intend or assume it to be and they can tell us what works, what doesn't and what could be done better. We might "know" we are doing a good job, but if it isn't meeting patients' needs, it is not good enough.
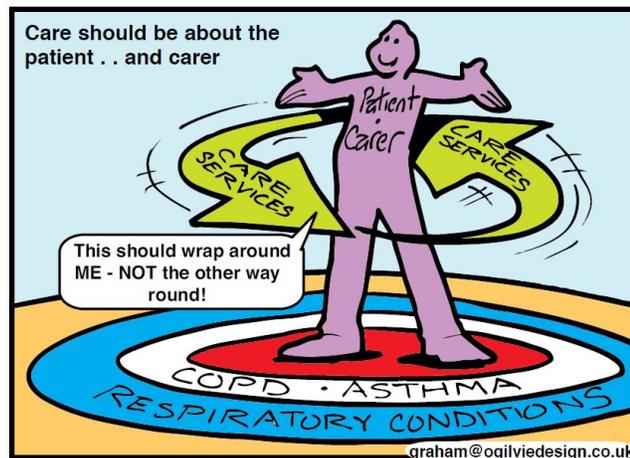
The quality of the patient's experience of care is very important and this has been emphasised by the inclusion of a patient experience domain in the NHS Outcomes Framework. The patients' experience of our service can be very different to what we intend or believe it to be; we cannot assume that clinical effectiveness is the only important measure of our service's performance. If a service isn't meeting patients' needs, it is not good enough. Patients and carers can tell us what works, what doesn't and what could be done better.

Only when we understand what people's needs are – by asking them, not second guessing – can we work in a way that meets those needs and ensures they get maximum benefit from our service. For example if you don't understand why people don't comply with treatment, you can't find ways to make it easier for them.

A real understanding the current issue /Problem
Before starting a project, understand your current system. Map the process, collect and analyse the data, ask patients and staff what they think of the current system. This process may uncover different issues which require further action and will ensure you are working on the real problem, not just a symptom of the problem.

Clear Aims Statement

Why do you need an aim statement?
- If you don't know where you are going, you are likely to end up somewhere else…
- How do you know what to measure if you don't know what we are trying to achieve?
- Ensures the team are working towards the same goal.
- Outlines the project scope

A good aim statement should include:
- What you are trying to achieve?
- For whom?
- How much?
- By when?
- Compared to what?
- And why?

Planning, Monitoring and Control
A Project Plan is fundamental to the establishment of the project. It sets the contract for improvement and establishes the mandate, priorities and resource availability. In other words, it spells out clearly what is to be done and how, so that everyone is aware of their commitments and how they impact on the project's success. You may be tempted to ignore this element as "bureaucratic" or "administration" but it is an essential tool for ensuring there is clarity about the project and what will need to be delivered when and by whom. It doesn't need to be an enormous document, but it does need to clearly spell out the key areas.

The Plan is developed in the preparation phase of the project and enables decisions to be made with regard to modifying or cancelling the initiative in situations where the required support for the project is not evident. The plan is used throughout the project for monitoring and control

A Project Plan should include:
- Project Background
- Aims and Objectives
- Scope of project
- Expected deliverables
- Risk assessments
- Statement of key sponsor commitments
- Identification of the project sponsor or champion
- Data and Measures
- Decision making strategy/medium (i.e. the operation of a steering group etc)
- Statement of team resources; what constitutes full or part-time team membership etc. What backfill will be available?
- Envisaged sustainability and spread of the project

Measurable Improvement

How do we know whether what we are doing is making things better, worse or just the same? Many people dislike the idea of "data" and "measurement" but they are essential if we are to demonstrate that change has occurred or needs to occur. In line with the National Quality Innovation Productivity and Prevention agenda, it is essential that all system changes are measured and recorded. Whether the change was a success or didn't demonstrate the anticipated outcomes, we still need to demonstrate its effect and learn from it.

All improvements are changes, but not all changes are improvements.

Do not start your improvement project without first establishing what data you will use, how you will find it, what it will tell you and how you will know whether your project has been an improvement. To work out what data you need, it is essential first to understand what outcomes you are aiming to achieve as this will help determine what your measures are. You should consider which measures will best demonstrate whether the changes you introduce have made things better or worse. Defining your aim in terms of the size of the improvement and the timescales you are aiming for will help you to determine appropriate measures. Capture all this in a data collection plan.

Don't forget "better" is not measureable. "More", "faster", "safer" or "cheaper" can all be measured but only if you know how many, how fast, how dangerous or how expensive things were to begin with.

A Data Collection Plan should include:
- A Specific Question – What do you want to know?
- What data do you require to answer this question?
- Where will you get this data from?
- Who will collect the data?
- How often will the data be collected?
- Do you foresee any problems collecting this data?
- How are you going to analyse the data?
- Who will be responsible?
- When is the raw data and analysed data required?

Clear links to Local and National Objectives
A project is more likely to be successful, supported and sustainable if it is linked to both Local and National Objectives. Consider linking your work to the national QIPP workstream to improve quality, innovation, productivity and prevention. How will your project make a difference to reducing costs, enhancing productivity, enhancing quality or increasing safety?

Good Communication within Project Team and with Stakeholders

You cannot over communicate when you are working on improvement projects. Even when you think you have communicated with everyone enough, communicate some more. Effective Communication from the beginning of a project will ensure the team are working to the agreed aims and objectives. Good communication will allow stakeholders and team to discuss expectations, deliverables, timescales, progress, risks, challenges and achievements. It is also important to keep the wider group of stakeholders, who may not be directly involved or affected, well informed about your project.

Documented communication will support teams who are improving services in a changing environment with a high staff turnover. Make sure you act on and communicate quick wins, because if you can find and share some small quick improvements you will maintain impetus for the project and keep people interested. We all like to be part of a project that is delivering something!

A Communication Plan should be constructed in such a way that it actively addresses the interests and concerns of the key stakeholders.

A Communication Plan will help to:
- Ensure that communications are timely and relevant
- Ensure that actions detailed under the Communication Plan are actually carried out and that the project members receive feedback regarding any concerns or actions that will require addressing.

A Communication Plan should include:
- **Who** do you need to communication to?
- **What** do they need to know/what do you want to tell them?
- **How** are you going to communicate? Email, Face to Face, Newsletter etc
- **When** are you going to communicate? How often?
- **Who** is responsible for the communication?

While these factors won't guarantee that your improvement project will succeed, they will help ensure you give it the best possible chance. If you don't get these things right your project is unlikely to succeed or be sustainable. Keep in mind the goal you are aiming for, learn from experience and be prepared to be adaptable – your first idea may not be the best or the right solution, but learning from this is key to sustaining change and improvement. And lastly – be enthusiastic, because while personal enthusiasm alone is not enough to deliver lasting change, it can and will inspire others to do the best they can.