Teamwork Primer

Ontario
Health Quality Ontario

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TEAMWORK PRIMER

Quality improvement (QI) initiatives have the best chances of success when there is strong organizational leadership, a supportive culture of improvement and team work, and staff that are familiar with quality improvement methodology.

A well-designed QI initiative includes frontline, inter-professional teams that are empowered to: set goals for improvement, identify causes of poor system quality, conduct tests of change, and collect and analyze data to determine whether a change led to improvement.

Once the decision to conduct a QI initiative has been made, one of the first steps in the "Getting Started" phase of Health Quality Ontario's QI Framework is to assemble a team that will use quality improvement science to achieve their goals.

The Power of a Team

Sometimes it may feel like the best way to achieve quality improvement would be if one person works alone to identify change ideas and implement the changes. However, the essence of QI is to harness the knowledge, skills, experience and perspectives of a range of individuals, particularly customers and those individuals that are directly involved in or impacted by the process or service.

| Hospital physician specialist dictates note for patient record. | Transcriptionist types out written document of dictation from specialist physician. | Patient's family physician receives note from hospital specialist physician. |

The notion that "2+2 ≥ 4" is particularly true for quality improvement initiatives. It is through collaboration, interaction and the building of relationships that *sustainable* change occurs. Teams are most effective when:

- The system or process under consideration is complex
- The process involves more than one department or discipline
- Knowledge about all of the elements of the process cannot be held by only one person

- Resolving the problem will require the creativity to view it differently
- Employee commitment and buy-in are crucial to the success of the initiative

Since this list of qualities describes most QI projects, teams are recommended for all quality improvement initiatives.

Team Size

The following recommendations are helpful when considering how many team members are necessary:
- The team has to be big enough for tasks to be spread out so that no individual is overwhelmed
- The team has to be small enough that having meetings or communicating isn't too difficult

With these criteria in mind, it is recommended that QI teams have between six and ten members. Anything larger than ten can be difficult to manage and anything smaller than six may leave team members overwhelmed with work. Adjusting team size as the project evolves may be necessary, as well as creating small sub-teams for specific tasks.

Team Composition and Roles

Team composition should reflect where the process occurs and where the changes are being made. The team should include the professions and roles that "touch" the different parts of the process that is being considered for improvement. This means the team should include staff members who:
1. Provide input to the process
2. Perform one or more of the process steps
3. Receive output from the process

Effective teams may also include members representing:

1. Clinical or Process Expertise - The team's Clinical/Process Expert has first-hand knowledge and understands both the clinical implications of proposed changes and the consequences such a change might trigger in other parts of the system.

2. A Data Lead – The team's Data Lead has in-depth knowledge of data collecting, reporting and supporting systems. This individual has knowledge of available data sources, is able to extract relevant data, and can inform and support data collection processes. The Data Lead is able to help the team determine what to measure and can assist in the design of simple, effective performance measures to show whether a change is having a positive effect or not. In addition, the Data Lead contributes by displaying metrics in a way that is both meaningful and easy to interpret by staff, visitors and customers.

3. A Team Lead – The Team Lead is responsible for managing the quality improvement project or initiative on a day-to-day basis. The Lead ensures that the goals of the project are achieved by guiding, supporting, directing, scheduling, and influencing other members of the QI team; clearing the path for the team to achieve success; helping the team to plan ahead; and encouraging the best from each team member. The Lead may have subject matter expertise as well as QI knowledge and experience. As the driver of the project, the Lead makes sure that tests are implemented and works with the Data Lead on the collection of supporting data. This person should be knowledgeable about the processes and systems being improved, and be able to work effectively with other disciplines, including physicians. The Team Lead and Improvement Facilitator have different functions, so to take on both roles can be confusing and overwhelming. Thus, teams may choose to designate an individual to manage the team who is not the Improvement Facilitator.

4. The End-User or Customer – Any quality improvement initiative is designed to improve the quality of whatever product or service is being delivered to your customer. The QI team should be grounded in this perspective and in the principle of designing care, services and products to address the needs of the customer, who has insights that cannot be provided by any other member of the team. Engaging customers in the quality improvement process will increase the validity of improvement ideas and keep the team engaged.

5. An Improvement Facilitator (IF) – The Improvement Facilitator is the team's designated QI expert. This individual is someone who has knowledge and/or experience with quality improvement tools and methodologies. The IF works closely with the team to carry out the quality improvement work as determined by the plan developed during the QI Team meetings. This individual is also essential for sharing QI knowledge and experience through mentoring and staff engagement.

6. A Project Sponsor – A successful improvement team needs a sponsor, someone with executive decision-making authority who can liaise with other areas of the organization, serve as a link to senior management and the strategic aims of the organization, provide resources, and overcome barriers on behalf of the team. The Project Sponsor is not a day-to-day participant in team meetings and the testing of change ideas but should review the team's progress on a regular basis. The Project Sponsor is ultimately accountable for achieving the team's aims and the spread and sustainability of the initiative.

ELEMENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL TEAM

A key role of the Improvement Facilitator in a QI initiative is to build, manage and support the team so that it can be effective and successful. An

understanding of how teams develop, how to support the key elements of success, how to motivate teams, how to manage conflict, and how to best utilize and highlight the various types of personalities that will inevitably be on any team will help the IF maximize the skills of each team member and facilitate success.

Whether the team meets regularly in person or holds virtual meetings more often, careful thought and planning at the beginning of a QI initiative can set up your team for success. Elements for success include:

- Trust
- Team norms
- Shared vision
- Clear roles and responsibilities
- Effective communication
- Structured team meetings

Trust
For any team to function, members must have the following levels of trust in one another:

- Contractual trust **–** doing what you say you will do, managing expectations, establishing clear boundaries, delegating appropriately, honouring agreements, and being consistent in one's words and actions.
- Communication trust **–** honesty and disclosure. You have to be willing to share difficult truths, admit mistakes, and give honest feedback.
- Competence trust **–** respecting your teammates' abilities and skills, as well as your own, and helping others learn new skills.[1]

To build and maintain trust among team members, particularly virtual members, periodic face-to-face meetings are advisable. Coming together as a team helps to build relationships and trust because of the important differences between verbal and non-verbal communication. To maximize the benefits of a team meeting, create a structure so that team members know what to expect, understand each other's roles and can easily see opportunities to contribute and participate.

Team Norms
Team norms are helpful for building trust and keeping meetings on track by fostering a shared understanding of how teams will interact, communicate and conduct themselves.

How to Create Team Norms

1. Make sure every team member is present
2. Brainstorm all the issues that can create tension in the team
3. Agree to the top ten
4. List the opposite of the problem/issue creating tension—for example, if the issue is unproductive meetings, then the opposite would be productive meetings

Write out the norms, using a framework such as this: "If we are to (state the positive outcome desired), then we (state the expected behaviours).

How to Use Team Norms

- Post them somewhere prominent
- For the first month or so, review them weekly (then monthly) at the end of each team meeting to see how effectively the norms are being applied, whether they are still relevant or if others need to be included
- Remember that norms are not a rule book. They are simply how you expect people to perform. Don't try to legislate every potential conflict—keep to the more important issues
- If new members join the team, review the norms as a team and explain why each one is important, how it is applied for best effect, and revise them as needed

Intervening When Team Norms Are Not Being Used

There will be times when teams disagree on issues with a great deal of emotional attachment. In these situations, team members can be prone to reacting, rather than relying on their team norms. When team norms are not being followed, try the following techniques to keep the team focused and build the practice of using team norms:

- Time out. Stop the discussion and give everyone a chance to take a moment
- "I'm noticing that we are not following … (state the norm), so let's remember this as we move forward"
- "Let's all remember to follow … (state the norm)"
- "Joe, I just wanted to remind you about our norm … (state the norm)"

Shared Vision

A group of people cannot be expected to accomplish something if they do not understand the ultimate goal. A team's vision for their overall QI initiative can contain several branches of projects that will collectively serve to accomplish the team's overall goals. These sub-projects can be articulated through project specific 'aim statements.' HQO has developed a tool to assist in the creation of aim statements. Please see the 'Getting Started' phase of the QI Framework.

| Improve patient outcomes post surgery. (Vision) |
| Reduce hospital acquired infections post surgery. (Branch of the vision) |
| Provide antibiotics to 99% of applicable patients within 60 minutes prior to surgery by the end of March 2014. |

The vision should be clearly articulated in the Project/Improvement Charter. This clearly articulated vision will help everyone understand what the problem is, the project scope and objectives, why it is important to customers and the organization, key measures related to the problem or process, and the targeted beginning and ending dates of the project. HQO has developed a tool to assist in the creation of project/improvement charters. This tool can be found on HQO's website. When team members agree on the team's goals, they are accountable for the completion of those goals and to one another.

CLEAR ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Every team member needs to understand his or her role, the roles of their teammates, and who they may look to for resources and support. Without this knowledge, the team will not be able to fully realize its potential. It is important to take time to clearly state the vision of the project, the expected outcomes, and each team member's responsibilities. Clearly defining and documenting the responsibilities of each team member promotes the accountability of members to each other and to the group.

Creating Clear Roles and Responsibilities
1. Provide an overview of the project
2. Communicate the deliverables
3. Share the roles and responsibilities
4. Discuss the reporting structure and accountabilities
5. Facilitate discussion to ensure that all team members understand what's expected
6. Document in the Improvement Charter

Effective Communication
Effective communication is essential to success, regardless of the size of the team. It can be difficult to keep everyone updated and focused on the same goals while they are performing their own tasks and attending their own meetings. The larger the team, the more important a good communications strategy becomes. HQO has developed a communications plan template that can be used for both the internal QI team as well as external stakeholders. This tool can be found on HQO's website.

Effective communication can have an impact on every aspect of a team and can be a determinant of its success or failure. An environment that fosters respect, creativity, positive interpersonal relationships, and teamwork depends largely upon both the quality of information shared and the efficacy of communication between team members.

Some tips for communicating effectively include:

- Establish communication ground rules and expectations (which can be added to the team norms).Determine how the team will communicate and share information with each other in between team meetings (e.g., e-mail, teleconference, portal). Determine the expected response times for e-mail or voice-mail
- Review tips for virtual meetings with the team. Examples include muting your phone when not speaking
- Create and share work plans and any meeting agendas with team members

STRUCTURED TEAM MEETINGS
Some tips on facilitating successful team meetings:

Preparation
- Be organized
- Start and end on time
- Come prepared
- Create and distribute the agenda in advance
- Publish the agenda and the purpose of the meeting
- Include topic outcomes in agendas—e.g., decision, discussion, information

Norms
- Document ideas
- Keep everyone on track
- Value all input and opinions
- Keep in mind that there are no stupid questions
- Build consensus
- Try meeting in the place where the process you are trying to improve takes place
- Invite a patient or client to attend

Attitudes
- Stay positive
- Show appreciation for others and celebrate successes, no matter how small

Communication
- Communicate within the team and the organization as a whole
- Don't book meetings back to back - allow travel and thinking time
- Don't always schedule for one hour, try 45 minutes (people will be grateful)
- Send minutes in a timely fashion

STAGES OF TEAM DEVELOPMENT

In 1965, Bruce Tuckman developed a simple, four-stage model of team development that has become the accepted method of thinking about how teams develop. In his article "Developmental Sequence in Small Groups," Tuckman outlined four stages of team development: Forming, Storming, Norming, and Performing.[2] In a successful team, members recognize the stage they are in and adeptly manage the transitions between the different stages.

The *Forming stage* involves the introduction of team members, either at the formation of the team or when new members are introduced thereafter. Members are likely to be influenced by the expectations and desires they bring with them and will be keen to understand how the group will operate. In particular, they will want to know how the leadership operates.

As team members grow more confident, they are likely to enter the *Storming phase*. Team members will have different opinions about how the team should operate. For those who are anxious about conflict, the storming phase can be difficult. The best teams will strive to understand the sources of conflict, actively listen to each other, and agree upon a way forward. Other teams may disintegrate when individuals focus on promoting their own opinions rather than recognizing the value of the thoughts and opinions of others.
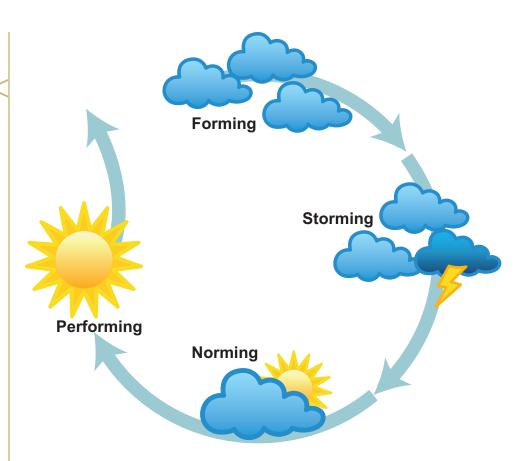
As a team emerges with an agreed upon method of operating, it enters the *Norming phase*. During this phase, team members are able to reconcile their own opinions with the greater needs of the team. Co-operation and collaboration replace the conflict and mistrust of the previous phase.

Finally, the team reaches the final phase, *Performing*. The emphasis is now on achieving team goals rather than working on team processes. Relationships are settled, and team members are likely to be loyal to each other. The team is able to manage more complex tasks and cope with greater change. The Performing stage can either lead to:

- A return to the *Forming* stage as group membership changes
- A new "*Dorming*" stage as the group gets complacent
- "Adjourning," as the group reaches its goal and completes its work

Forming

Storming

Performing

Norming

Facilitating Teams through the Stages of Team Development
Forming a team with the right people, creating norms, communicating and understanding the stages of team development are all essential to setting up a team for success. Once a QI team is formed, the Improvement Facilitator will work to keep team members engaged, on task and collaborative. With an understanding of the stages of team development, let's now explore the implications of each stage of the Tuckman model for Improvement Facilitators

Five Steps to Motivating Teams
As a project unfolds, there will be a number of challenges that may slow down the team, robbing the project of much-needed momentum. A stalled project can damage the team and its ability to continue. The following techniques will help the Improvement Facilitator and Team Lead keep the team moving forward.

1. Assign Fun Work
Recognize that what's fun for one individual isn't fun for everyone. Fun work means having to meet reasonable expectations that are challenging but not overwhelming or unachievable. Challenging work makes people be creative and stretch their skills in ways they may not have tried before. Staff may be working on the edge of their comfort zone or even outside it—the key is that they have the confidence to achieve what they set out to do.

2. Keep Skills Sharp. Grow Your People.

Most employees, especially technical workers, need to feel competent doing their jobs. Many (but not all) want to stay current and be marketable so they can continue to be successful in their careers and be attractive job candidates. This is a win-win scenario for an organization because valued employees have current skills, and current skills make employees value their jobs. Consider your team members' life stages when offering educational opportunities. Older employees may not be interested in learning the latest health care delivery technology but may be more interested in learning about other skills that will carry over into their "post-work" life.

3. Give Recognition – Always.

People need to feel good about themselves and their work. They want to demonstrate their skills and know that their skills are contributing to the team and the organization's success. Tell your QI teammates how they, personally, are doing a good job so that they feel valued for their contributions. Being flexible to support team members' needs is another way of showing that you recognize their contributions and are willing to work with team members to support them.

4. Communicate Freely

Actively solicit ideas and make people feel important. Keep everyone "in the know." Sharing information freely and soliciting opinions make individuals understand that they are an important part of the team. Operate with honesty and integrity. Ensure that your actions and the actions of the management team are congruent with your messages. Pay attention to words, tone, and body language. People value fairness, honesty, integrity and sincerity. They need clear, consistent and achievable performance goals. When you "walk your talk," team members value the recognition you give and trust what you communicate to them.

5. Conflict within a Team

Conflict affects the ability of a team to succeed. It can be between individuals or within the entire team. Conflict can arise because of:

- Scarce or limited resources
- Human needs
- Conflicting values and beliefs
- Structures external to the team
- Different and seemingly incompatible interests

When forming your team, it can be helpful to have a group representing a range of disciplines and professions, thus ensuring a range of conflict styles. Knowledge of conflict and interpersonal communication styles can be helpful at any stage of team development, but particularly during *Storming*.

An improvement facilitator or QI leader can adapt their approach to conflict depending on: the conflict style that is being displayed, the needs of the QI initiative, or the outcome that the group would like to see achieved.

CONFLICT STYLES

Below is a list of the different styles for managing conflict. This list is drawn from Kestner and Ray's *The Conflict Resolution Training Program*.[3]

Conflict Styles

Avoiding - Is hoping the problem will go away and not addressing the conflict. There is no attention paid to one's own needs or those of others. Avoiding can mean letting an issue go or simply withdrawing from a threatening situation. This conflict style is effective when time, place and/or personal health make it inadvisable to pursue discussion.

Accommodating - Is meeting the concerns and needs of the other person and not addressing your own needs, which requires giving in or yielding to the other person's views. This style is effective when you want to work cooperatively with the other person without trying to assert your own concerns.

Compromising - Is looking for a mutually acceptable solution that somewhat satisfies both parties. You give up something and they give up something in order to come up with a solution you both can agree upon. Compromising may work when you and the other person both want the same thing and you know you both can't have it.

Competing - Is when individuals use their own power or control of resources to assert their own needs. Competing can mean trying to win or get your own way and is used when there is no consideration for the other person's interests. This style may be appropriate when an important principle or need is at stake.

Collaborating - Is working toward solutions that satisfy the needs and concerns of both parties. It means taking the time to look at all the issues and interests that are behind the differing positions. This approach combines the search for new alternatives with the creation of solutions that end in "win-win" situations.

1   Reina & Reina, (2007). "Building Sustainable Trust," *OD Practitioner,* 9:1, 36-41

2   Tuckman, B. (1965). "Developmental Sequence in Small Groups." *Psychological Bulletin.* Vol. 63, No. 6 p.384-399

3   Kestner, P. B. & Ray, L. (2002). *The Conflict Resolution Training Program*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, p. 35-36

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