

When Everything is a Priority, Nothing is a Priority

Supercharge Your Performance Improvement by Transforming to a Project Economy

Background

In 2022, Carilion Clinic's Chief Quality Officer sought to accelerate improvement efforts at this seven-hospital Virginia health system. Auditing Quality's project portfolio showed it was 84% operational and outcomes were not keeping pace with national benchmarks. Building upon a framework of nationally-recognized safety structures, maturation of quality improvement structures was in order as change was happening too slowly. Initiatives would start but then stall out. Clinical and operational staff were working at capacity, and recruiting challenges limited resourcing options.

Consulting a newly-hired leader with extensive project and organizational change management experience, a plan to address these challenges was developed. Three key tactics were quickly set in motion:

1. Establishing tools and standards to optimize improvement results
2. Adopting a 'project economy' mindset while separating operational work and resources from project work and resources
3. Developing leadership competencies for effectively managing people through change

Deploying a more contemporary project management framework and integrating change management best practices has brought scalability and enhanced capacity to quality improvement efforts. Transformation demanded discipline and a strategic approach, including training for leaders system-wide to understand their critical role accelerating and sustaining change. Quality is successfully translating this framework into improved patient outcomes.

Interventions

- Voice-of-the-Customer (Lean Six Sigma) sensing sessions were conducted with quality and administration leaders at six hospitals, and with process improvement and project managers, to understand current state and identify root causes. Themes emerged which were compared to best practices from literature reviews (HBR's "The Project Economy Has Arrived," Vizient blog posts, and Prosci's ADKAR® model and benchmark reports).
- Board advocacy was leveraged to create a burning platform for Quality to accelerate overall mortality improvement efforts.
- Job descriptions were updated and new ones created to clarify operational roles apart from project roles. Departmental realignment ensured reporting structures supported project and functional responsibilities.
- 32 hospital and clinical leaders plus 17 staff in project-focused roles attended full day workshops to gain knowledge and tools for successfully leading/managing their change initiatives. Pre-work assignments plus hands-on exercises and peer discussions during class provided attendees with concrete practice and actionable next steps to apply immediately after training. Post-class resources (subscription to Prosci's portal, materials from class, and emails from the trainer) have reinforced and augmented knowledge gained. Digital badges

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for email signatures and 'Lunch and Learns' provide continued awareness of training achievement and forums to network and spread best practices.

Outcomes and Impact

- Executive sponsors are clearly and repeatedly setting expectations why the change must occur and maintaining focus on project goals, preventing dilution of goals to achieve specified project objectives.
- Operational vs. project roles are defined and the distinction continues to be socialized, with operational ownership confirmed before a Quality project can begin.
- Projects are initiated with clearer and more controlled scope and agreed-upon SMART goals. Planning for sustainment is part of each project's planning phase.

Year 1 measured structural outcomes:

- ✓ 42% increase in project team capacity and 48% increase in project completion rates. Quality's portfolio is now 100% strategically aligned.
- ✓ 100% of trainees reported their understanding of change management and their role in change increased, with 'usefulness of tools and knowledge shared' scoring 4.79 out of 5 for leaders and 4.75 for project staff. 6 months post training, tools and knowledge scored 4.19 out of 5 for role relevance with 62% reporting regular use (n=21).

Year 1 related quality outcomes:

- ✓ Sepsis mortality index has decreased from 1.5 (well above Vizient's Academic Medical Centers benchmark) to 0.91 (below benchmark) as of June 2023.

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