Quality and Service Improvement Tools

Staff Perceptions

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Staff Perceptions

What is it and how can it help me?

This tool describes a number of ways in you can learn about staff perceptions to help inform service improvement. The methods covered in this guide include snap shots, questionnaires, focus groups, and 'informal conversations'.

When does it work best?

Understanding how staff view the organisation can aid the service improvement work both through identifying issues that need to be addressed and monitoring staff's views on the implementation of change. Change that is initiated and supported by staff is generally more successful.

How to use it

There are many different methods to collect staff views. Which one you choose will depend on the resources available to you:

- what stage you are in your project
- the type of information you want to get and
- how formal or informal you want the process to be

All the methods described here can be used at organisation, department or team level.

1.Snap shot
A good way to identify areas for improvement is to ask all staff in your team or department to write down their five top moans about the service they work in. You can then use an affinity diagram to theme the suggestions.

This method, requires very little resource and enables you to identify areas for improvement very quickly.

However it may not identify underlying causes to the 'moans'.

2. Questionnaires
A questionnaire is a straightforward way of getting information from lots of people. They are easy to administer, you can also use them to measure levels of satisfaction with a process or service and are useful for measuring baseline information and to evaluate change over time.

Responses can be anonymous which will allow staff who do not feel confident enough to share their views in an open forum to do so.

Questionnaires may not identify underlying issues or concerns. Developing a questionnaire that asks the right questions to get the information you need can take time, as can analysing the results.

Guide Notes

- Be clear about what you are trying to accomplish, what you want the information for and how you will use the results
- Structure questions carefully: consider the balance between multiple choice (yes/no or Likert scale) and free text questions. Multiple choice questions are quicker for the user to complete and for you to analyse. Free text questions often provide more valuable data, if completed
- Keep it short: it should take no more than 10 minutes to complete
- Always pilot the questionnaire: using small tests of change PDSA is a useful way to refine and improve questions
- Make sure respondents know why you are undertaking the questionnaire and what the results will be used for

3. Informal Conversations
Some staff may be more open in an informal setting. Having a conversation will allow you to ask questions that will help you to really understand the point that is being made.

Having conversations with several individuals or small groups may give feedback that is representative of the whole team.

Make sure it is not always the same staff whose opinion you seek for improvement ideas, include everyone, particularly those who are hard to engage. Getting their views may take time but will give you useful insights.

4. Focus Groups
A focus group involves encouraging an invited group of participants to share their thoughts, feelings, attitudes and ideas on certain subject, it will help you get a deeper understanding of the issues in a particular areas. They can also be very helpful in getting buy-in to a project.

Focus groups are relatively easy to set up and manage. They don't involve all staff so views may not be representative.

Guide Notes

- Clarify the purpose and the key issues you want to explore
- Groups should comprise 6-12 people. If the group gets too large consider splitting it into two sub-groups
- The focus group should last between one and two hours. Make sure the members are clear about how much time they need to allow for the session
- Have a good facilitator who will not seek to lead but has strategies to help the group if they get stuck
- Agree ground rules for the group eg respect for others views and confidentiality before you start
- Explain what will happen to the information generated at the beginning of the session
- Use prepared questions and themes relating to the topic for discussion
- Feedback outcomes / progress to the group

Examples

When East Sussex Hospital Trust decided to improve their Theatre service they decided to base their recommendations explicitly on the views of staff and patients - as well as research evidence.

There was a sense that the service was performing well; waiting list targets were being met and there was a stable flexible work force. Nervertheless, staff saw scope for improvement. Previous initiatives had not included a process to hear views of staff and patients.

One of the methods used to collect views from staff was focus groups. The team had initial fears about the effectiveness of this approach; would people make the effort to attend? Would they be constructive or destructive? The team decided that multi-disciplinary sessions were crucial; they choose to arrange them in time that was set aside for the bi-monthly clinical governance half day - when theatres were closed for routine work. This would allow staff to attend during normal working hours.

The teams fears were unfounded. Over 50 people attended spread over five sessions. They came from theatres, surgery, urology, nursing, anaesthetics, pathology, radiology, sterile supplies and the ward. They were very positive about the event. Staff from outside the Directorate who had previous facilitation experience facilitated the sessions. The independence added to the success of the events.

Notes from the workshop listed issues to be addressed. They included better communication, about clarity on the management of theatre lists, the need for distinction between emergency and non-emergency lists and better preparation of patients for surgery.

The recommendations from the focus groups were combined with the findings from the other methods used to collect patient and staff views (patient focus group, questionnaires and interviews) and then grouped on the basis of practicality with a list of quick wins as well as other issues that required more detailed attention and/or resources. Recommendations were turned into actions that were circulated to attendees, this showed all those involved how their contribution was being used: it gave them 'ownership'.

Good progress is being made to implement recommendations.

What next?

Getting staff perspectives not only generates ideas for improvements that can be made but it can also begin to engage staff in the work you are doing. For more information about engaging staff see clinical engagement.

To develop your understanding of your service further you should get the patient perspective to compliment the perspectives gained from staff.

Other useful tools and techniques on this website

Depending on the views of your staff you may find the following tools useful next steps:

- An overview of creativity to help you generate ways to overcome any issues raised
- Working with resistance
- Human barriers to change
- The discomfort zone

Additional resources

Websites:

- Focus groups visit
- Questionnaires visit

Background

The NHS Modernisation Agency's Research into Practice team promoted the spread and sustainability of service improvement through its programme of research, evaluation and development. They helped to build a body of knowledge that has practical application for staff working directly on improvement activities. One of the key factors that they identified that influenced how change is spread and sustained was the early engagement of all staff who will be affected by the change, getting staffs perception is a good way to initiate staff engagement and generate ideas for improvement.

Acknowledgements / sources

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