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Bullet proofing

NHS England and NHS Improvement

Bullet proofing

What is it?

A straightforward brainstorming technique that can help you to identify and plan for obstacles.

When aiming to improve services, some of the changes that are made will have a knock-on effect in other parts of the organisation or system. Bullet proofing is a way of thinking through some of the potential issues that may arise when trying to make improvements, or to specifically consider potential consequences for different parts of the system that are involved.

Bullet proofing enables you to identify and plan for potential obstacles by asking questions such as:

- What could possibly go wrong?
- What are some of the difficulties that could occur?
- What is the worst imaginable thing that could occur?
- What negative effect could this project or change have on another team's work?

When to use it

If you are planning a change or improvement project, you need to plan and prepare for the things that could go wrong and also consider the potential impact of the changes on different parts of the system.

This tool can be useful at the start of a project, but also when you are selecting and developing improvement ideas. Using the tool will save time later on when changes are implemented and will make them more likely to succeed.

How to use it

1. Use bullet proofing to help shape the project then use it when key decisions need to be made – ie deciding on the next step, selecting between different improvement ideas or thinking about implementation.

2. Consider who should be involved. The tool can be used by individuals, eg the project lead, but is usually more effective if used with a wider group that is drawn from across the system that is being improved.

3. Start by **brainstorming**. Think about:

- What might happen?
- What could go wrong?
- What difficulties could occur?

Identify areas in your plan of action that could potentially cause problems then insert them into a table showing how likely the event is to occur and how serious it would be if it did.

Figure 1: Table identifying likelihood and seriousness of potential problems

		How likely is it to occur?	
		Unlikely	**Highly likely**
If it did occur?	**Major problem**		**Most serious**
	Minor problem	**Least serious**	

4. Analyse your table. If there are significant numbers of major problems that are highly likely to happen, you may need to consider a different approach. Looking at the table will help you to prioritise and change your focus appropriately.

What next?

Your next steps will depend on the potential problems you have identified. If you are involved in a big project, you may wish to incorporate your strategies for tackling likely and serious problems into a project plan so that you can monitor progress. You should consider using other creativity tools to help you come up with ways to overcome some of the problems identified.