Institute for Healthcare Improvement

90-Day Innovation Process

IHI's 90-day innovation process is our engine for research and development. The process was designed to provide a reliable and efficient way to research innovative ideas, assess their potential for advancing quality improvement, and bring them to action. IHI created a small Innovation Team with dedicated resources to support this process, and the team begins at least five new projects every 90 days. Projects are selected by IHI's senior team, including the Senior Vice Presidents, CEO, and COO, based on IHI's strategic plan and customer needs and suggestions.

Foundation

IHI's 90-day innovation process is based in part on Proctor and Gamble's innovation method (Huston L, Sakkab N. "Connect and Develop." *Harvard Business Review*. March 2006:58-66). All projects that are part of the process share some common characteristics:

- A specific question that needs to be answered;
- A charter that clearly states a problem;
- A network of innovators, along with other traditional methods (e.g., a literature search, prototype testing), to find answers to the problem described in the charter;
- A specific time frame for investigation, in this case 90 days (in some cases, less than 90 days if the project is smaller or the potential is unclear); and
- A decision at the end of 90 days that can include a recommendation to launch a new program, integrate content into an existing program, hold on additional development, or run another innovation project if further investigation is needed.

Components of an IHI 90-Day R&D Project

For each 90-day innovation project, the Innovation Team and faculty work together on three distinct phases of work:

- **Phase I (Scan):** The initial 30 days of the project is spent scanning the literature and conducting key interviews with relevant individuals in organizations, both within and outside of health care. The project team assesses the current landscape in order to understand all the dimensions of the problem or issue. At the end of this 30-day period a complete charter is produced, including the aim of the project, a description of the current environment, a set of theories for how to solve the problem, the specifications for an effective solution, and an annotated bibliography.

- **Phase II (Focus):** The subsequent 30 days is spent testing theories at the front line and refining ideas about what actually works. Health care organizations and, in some cases, organizations outside the field are enlisted as prototype sites to help test and develop ideas. A key activity at this stage is describing the key components of the system that perform "to specification." A goal of this phase is to transition from an early *descriptive theory* about how a new idea works to a normative theory that is tested and provides a detailed understanding, as described by Carlile and Christensen (Carlile PR, Christensen CM. *Practice and Malpractice in Management* Research. January 2005). IHI believes that one way to make this transition is to create a driver diagram—a tool to conceptualize an issue and its system components. The diagram also helps to demonstrate a pathway to achieve the desired outcome. At the conclusion of this phase the charter is updated with a list of contacts, people with experience testing in the area, and outcomes of tests.

- **Phase III (Summarize and Disseminate):** The final phase of a project is spent concluding tests, summarizing lessons learned, preparing a final report, and identifying appropriate dissemination products such as IHI programs and publications. The Innovation Team also prepares the handover of information gleaned during the project to others for the development of new programs, integration into existing programs, or chartering of a subsequent innovation project.

IHI 90-Day Innovation Process

Scan	Focus	Summarize & Disseminate
Review, interview, & select an angle	Visits, tests, analysis, & concept design	Validate, write up, & handoff to projects
30 days	30 days	30 days