Institute for Healthcare Improvement

Simple Data Collection Planning

IHI Tool

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Simple Data Collection Planing

Simple data collection planning is a process to ensure that the data you collect for performance improvement are useful and reliable, without being unnecessarily costly and time-consuming to obtain.

Simple data collection planning has a variety of benefits:

- It helps to ensure that the data gathered contain real information, useful to the improvement effort.

- It prevents errors that commonly occur in the data collection process.

- It saves time and money that otherwise might be spent on repeated or failed attempts to collect useful data.

Directions

1. Begin your data collection planning by answering these key questions:

   - What question do we need to answer — that is, why are we collecting these data?

   - What data analysis tools do we envision using to display the data after we have it? (Note: The run chart is the recommended tool for displaying data showing the performance of a process over time.)

   - What type of data do we need in order to construct this tool and answer the question?

   - Where in the process can we get this data?

   - Who in the process can give us this data?

   - How can we collect this data from these people with minimum effort and chance of error?

   - What additional data do we need to capture for future analysis, reference, and traceability?

2. Keep in mind the following points when planning for data collection:

   - **Seek usefulness, not perfection!** Remember, data for improvement are different from data for research. Confusing the two can slow down improvement work. We need data that are "good enough" to permit us to take the next step in improving a process. These data are for learning, not judgment.

   - Data recording must be easy. Try to build it in to the process under study.

   - Use sampling as part of the plan to collect the data.

   - Design the form with the collector's needs in mind.

   - Minimize the possibility of errors.

   - Provide clear, unambiguous directions.

   - Use existing data whenever possible.

3. Develop your plan by answering the following questions:

   - Who will collect the data?

   - What data will be collected?

   - When will the data be collected?

   - Where will the data be collected?

   - How will the data be collected? (Note: It is helpful to put operational definitions of the data to be collected somewhere on the data collection form — for example, noting that "Surgery Start Time" is defined as when the first incision is made.)

4. When you have developed a method to collect the data, test it with a few people who will actually be collecting the data and incorporate their ideas for improving the data collection plan.

5. Be aware of the cost of collecting the data relative to the benefit gained from having the data.

6. Teach all of the data collectors how to collect the data correctly.

7. Record what went wrong during the data collection so that learning can take place.

8. Audit the data as it comes in for accuracy and completeness. Correct errors early.