Improvement Advisor Professional Development Program

Program Overview

Health care organizations use both internal and external advisors to provide expertise and facilitate organizational improvement. The people in these positions are often called quality coaches, quality improvement specialists, quality facilitators, black belts, etc. To achieve organizational success, these "Improvement Advisors" need a resource to develop and enhance their knowledge and skills of the art and science of improvement. **IHI's Improvement Advisor Professional Development Program** provides this resource.

Aim of the Improvement Advisor Professional Development Program: To develop health care Improvement Advisors (IAs) to be effective facilitators to accomplish the improvement strategies of their organization. The curriculum is designed for health care professionals who expect to have a major portion of their future work focus on improvement.

Program Objectives

- To further develop individuals to be more competent Improvement Advisors leading to organizational success.
- To have a successful outcome on the IA's selected improvement project(s).
- To enhance the value and results of participant organization's improvement activities by increasing their ability to have a "results focus" in improvement projects.

Program Curriculum

The curriculum is built around the theoretical framework of W. E. Deming's System of Profound Knowledge and the Associates in Process Improvement's Model for Improvement as a roadmap for structuring improvement initiatives.

Each IA accepted into the program will be asked to identify one or more specific improvement projects for which he/she is responsible for providing improvement expertise and skills. The curriculum design uses action learning to enhance learning-by-doing with the projects. The workshops and support activities focus on participants' projects. A philosophy of "all teach, all learn" permeates the curriculum. The opportunity to apply theory and methods taught in the program will come from these projects.

Thus, it is crucial that each participant identifies at least one improvement project that can be completed within the time of the Program (by graduation twelve months from program start). If the work is focused on complex, long-term improvement projects, participants should scope a portion of that project during the IA Program.

The twelve-month development process includes 13 WebEx sessions, twelve days of classroom work (in three four-day workshops), and assignments on specific technical topics. There will also be extensive use of an Extranet to share resources, and a Listserv to facilitate communication and continuous collaborative learning. Expect Listserv email to be active with substantial email volume from this program.

Key Support in your Organization for your participation in the IA Program

The Project Sponsor is the senior leader responsible and accountable to the organization for the specific project that the participant will be working on during the IA Program. The *IA Advocate* is the person that controls the IA participant's time and budget.

Project Selection

We cannot emphasize this point enough: For this program it is *essential* that you have an appropriate improvement project to focus your learning. An appropriate improvement project meets the following criteria:

1. The proposed project should connect to the strategic and business plans of your organization. It is expected that you can make a business case for this project. The financial impact should be calculated and supported by your organization's financial group. We recommend meeting with the financial group prior to the first learning session to discuss the business case.

2. The results of the project are expected to be significant for the organization and the project is important to the leadership of your organization for one or more of the following reasons:

    a. Patients are experiencing problems with safety, service or outcomes.

    b. There is a need to reduce costs while maintaining or improving quality.

    c. There is a need to go beyond customer expectations with attractive products and services.

3. If you are in an oversight or consulting organization; or if you lead collaborative learning projects or learning networks, on a Triple Aim project - your project should be one in which you work as an improvement advisor directly with a client team on an improvement project in their organization. The client's improvement project should be selected with the criteria in this project selection section considered. IA projects related to internal QIO processes generally have not resulted in IA projects that promoted learning of the principles and methods.

4. The project will have an "improvement team" working on it, as opposed to an individual person.

5. For optimum learning, it is crucial that the project is scoped so it can reasonably be completed in twelve months or less. (If your work is focused on a large, long-term, improvement project you should work with your sponsor to find another project or partition the large project to one that can be accomplished in twelve months).

6. Key measures of success that connect directly to the goals for the project, and that can be impacted in the 12-month timeframe, must be been identified for the project. It's desirable for baseline data for at least some of your project measures to be available.

7. The systems, processes, products, or organizations where the anticipated changes must be made are within the control or influence of the project sponsor. An appropriate pilot population or demonstration unit has been selected for the IA Project.

8. The project is one for which the project sponsor agrees to actively provide guidance, routinely monitor project progress and aggressively remove barriers.

9. Projects focusing on patient centeredness in healthcare or of health disparities are particularly appropriate for the IA Program. Note: Include customers, consumers, clients, family or community members and suppliers in improvement projects to enable them to better understand our needs and allow us to better understand their needs to find win-win situations that will allow all parties to prosper.

10. IHI describes the "Triple Aim" in healthcare which is the simultaneous pursuit of: population health; excellent health care, and reduced costs. We will work with you to select an appropriate family of measures for your project that would support achievement of the Triple Aim.

The following are good examples of useful projects for the IA Program:

1. Improve a health care process that produces acceptable results most of the time but occasionally results in errors or problems (e.g. testing new protocols for reducing errors and improving reliability).
2. Develop a new, process product, or service because the previous product, process, or service was plagued with problems to the point they were not worth fixing and the process needed to be discontinued all together and replaced with a new process. (E.g. develop and test new patient discharge process).
3. Identify a service that better matches and meets a patient or family need, even if patients or family have not expressly asked for it. (E.g. test a process to better obtain information on patient medications used at home).
4. Identify and improve processes, products, and services by making fundamental changes even though the output is currently not considered a problem, in order to deliver even better outcomes in the future. (E.g. redesign the clinic check-in process resulting in improved relationships with patients and improved satisfaction).
5. Improve a product, process, or service today, which will put us in a better competitive position (e.g. patient assessment on admission is as good as our fellow hospitals but you work with a team to test a variety of technology-based changes so that patient assessment is always done upon admission).

The following projects are NOT useful for the IA Program:

1. Developing a measurement system -- such things as Balanced Score Cards, surveys, etc. This work is often necessary, but not sufficient for improvement.

2. Huge ("solving world hunger") projects. Strategic issues, while worthy of work by their very nature, will require multiple improvement projects and more than twelve months.
3. Projects to institute a Quality Program or to develop or mentor quality advisors.
4. Any project where you cannot answer the question "How do you know a change is an improvement?" within the timeframe of the project.

5. A project without senior leadership support. IA projects should be important enough to leadership that some time is devoted to providing resources, removing roadblocks, checking on the status. Generally a senior leader in the organization (your project sponsor) must understand and support the project to obtain success.
6. A project designed to fix a recent problem and put process back (restore) to the level it had performed in the past.
7. A project to implement various types of inspection or reviews to prevent errors from reaching/affecting a customer.
8. Politically charged issues are not a wise choice of projects for the IA Program. They can easily get mired in conflict. For the IA Program project, the IA should be able to demonstrate skills and have a good chance to achieve success.
9. Projects aimed at improving employee compensation or rewards.