The Model for Improvement

Gary Sutton, Improvement Advisor with the Scottish Government, explains the Early Years Collaborative Model for Improvement.

The Model for Improvement, developed by Associates in Process Improvement, is a tried and tested approach to achieving successful change in processes and systems, that result in better outcomes.

The Model:
- is a simple approach that anyone can apply;
- reduces risk by starting small;
- can be used to help plan, develop and implement change and;
- has been shown to be highly effective.

It provides a framework for developing, testing and implementing changes to the way that things are done that will lead to improvement.

The Model consists of two parts that are of equal importance:
- The first part, the ‘thinking part’, consists of three fundamental questions that are essential for guiding improvement work.
- The second part, the ‘doing part’, is made up of Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) cycles that will help you make rapid change.

A planned approach to improving things will give you a better chance of being successful. The three fundamental questions for achieving improvement are a useful way of framing your work.

The three fundamental questions for achieving improvement

1. **What are we trying to accomplish?**
   
   Having a clear vision of your aims is crucial. What results would you like to get and how would you like things to be different?

2. **How will we know that a change is an improvement?**
   
   Without measurement it is impossible to know whether things have improved. Think about how you want things to be different when you have implemented your change and agree what data you need to collect to measure it.

3. **What changes can we make that can lead to an improvement?**
   
   Finally, you need to decide what changes you will try in order to achieve the results you are looking for. What evidence do you have from elsewhere about what is most likely to work? What do you and your team think is a good idea? What have other people done that you could try? Are there any Key Changes (see below) that will have a big impact on achieving the aim? This is where you can adapt ideas or be completely creative. Remember that you know your own system best, so keep your objectives in mind and use your knowledge and experience to guide you.

Practicalities of Improvement Methodology

- Improvement is nearly always a team endeavour. Try to ensure that you involve the right people in your work.
- People have a tendency to jump straight to solutions rather than really work out what the root of the problem is. If you use the three fundamental questions, it will help you to be sure that you are dealing with the issue that really needs to be addressed.
- When you plan your cycle, make sure you are clear about who is doing what, where and when. Your results are dependent on how good your plan is.
- Discuss what you think will happen when you try out your change. What is your hunch or prediction? When you have carried out the cycle, compare your expectations with what actually happened. You may learn something interesting about how things work.
- Record your PDSA as you go along: the plan, the results, what you learnt and what you are going to do next. Not only is it very motivating to see the results of what you have tried, it is also a great way of accumulating information about your systems and a good way of sharing your learning with other people.
- Use PDSAs consecutively to build up the information about your change and then use them to implement it systematically into your daily work. PDSA cycles generally do not operate in isolation – you should expect to have a series of them leading towards your goal.

PDSA cycles

PDSA stands for ‘Plan, Do, Study, Act’. Once you have decided exactly what you want to achieve, you can use PDSA cycles to test out your ideas developed from the third question, ‘What changes can we make that will lead to an improvement?’

Key Changes

A Key Change is where there is strong evidence to suggest that implementing something, and making this reliable, will have a significant impact on achieving the aim. For example, there is strong evidence to suggest that women who smoke during pregnancy are at an increased risk of having a stillbirth, so what Key Changes can be tested in an attempt to increase the likelihood that women will not smoke during pregnancy?