



THE PROCESS IMPROVEMENT INITIATIVE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH HOSPITALS AND CLINICS IN PERIOD 2011-2014

Dana Romero (Glen Schmidt)

Department of Operations & Information Systems

Due to increasing financial pressures, which have been further magnified by the recently-enacted Affordable Care Act, health care organizations have been on a lookout for a long-term solution to their questionable prospects in regards to their financial sustainability. In recent years, the University of Utah Health Care exemplified an active engagement necessary to obtain this desired solution. In addition to its continual focus on excellent quality in terms of patient outcomes, the UUHC sought after improved patient satisfaction, cost knowledge, and process improvement implementation; all of which taken together possessed the potential to generate both, revenue increase and cost reduction, and could thus become a pathway to financial sustainability.

Over the past five years, the UUHC educated hundreds of employees in process improvement principles with hopes to build a culture of continuous improvement. A past participant survey, included in this study, indicated that the training programs were likely successful as, after the program completion, 68% of the respondents consequently engaged in one or more additional improvement projects and 62% of respondents indicated that their teams implemented additional improvements to their processes.

Although the organization faced a plethora of challenges, such as its large size or time constraints especially apparent in regards to physicians' availability, the UUHC also featured important strengths, including exceptional employees who were eager for personal self-improvement and learning. The aforementioned human resource strength was demonstrated by 94% of the survey respondents agreeing that they were motivated to participate in the improvement initiative because it provided an opportunity to learn something new. Likewise, a striking 96% of respondents affirmed that their participation in the process improvement initiative was motivated by a desire to improve care outcomes, and 91% percent of respondents indicated that they were motivated by the desire to improve the perceived patient experience. Employees also demonstrated an appreciable level of participation, as 77% of respondents indicated that their teams were highly engaged in the project.

Although the financial results of the individual projects turned out to be largely unknown to the project team leaders, 56% of all the respondents were confident that their projects conducted as a part of one of the training programs were successful. Lastly, 61% of respondents believed that a culture of continuous improvement is spreading though the organization at an increasing rate. This culture change should continue to improve the University of Utah Health Care's operations and should lead the organization toward a long-term financial sustainability.

