



4 Success Factors of Systemwide Improvement Efforts

How MedStar Health Continues to Improve the Healthcare Experience

In 2015, MedStar Health launched a systemwide effort to improve performance across its 10 hospitals, dozens of primary and urgent care centers, and other programs and services. Efforts are focused on increasing systemness and enhancing our value proposition for the more than a half-million patients choosing MedStar across Maryland and the Washington, D.C., region.

Over the past three years, our dedication to ongoing improvement continues to produce measurable results in quality of care and workflow efficiency, as well as consistency in patient, staff, and provider experience. The effort includes initiatives that touch every facet of the enterprise from acute and ambulatory care to revenue cycle and supply chain—and everything in between.

With numerous successes achieved to date, MedStar has observed four critical attributes that have been essential to the speed, success, and sustainability of our system transformation efforts, including:

1. Leadership and process owner accountability
2. Data availability and integrity
3. Focused goals and objectives
4. Change management

Each of these four factors are seemingly simple and straightforward in theory. However, in practice, they are often challenging to execute in systemwide initiatives across large organizations such as MedStar. In our experience, performance improvement initiatives are more likely to fail if these elements are overlooked. In contrast, the most successful improvement efforts have emphasized these attributes from start to finish. Here is a deeper look at the four success factors that are vital to systemwide improvement efforts.

Enterprise-Wide Departments Participating in Improvement Initiatives:

- Administrative Support Services
- Ambulatory Care
- Enterprise Analytics
- Information Services
- Perioperative Services
- Pharmacy
- Revenue Cycle
- Supply Chain

1. Leadership and Process Owner Accountability



Active and visible senior leadership is one of the most important factors in any change effort. In fact, improvement initiatives with significant senior leadership involvement and presence are **5.3 times more likely to be successful** than those with senior leaders who neglect to model changes they're asking their associates to make. In our experience, this has been proven to be true. All successful transformation projects have benefited from the support and engagement of senior leadership.

Projects that reached sustainability also benefited from strong operational process owners, such as leaders with accountability for maintaining and improving new processes and structures that have been established for the system. The importance of process owners is not surprising. But it can be easily overlooked, delaying sustainability of the transformation. Gallup consultants David Leonard and Claude Coltea suggest that **70 percent of change initiatives fail** when the role of front-line managers is shortchanged.

Initial progress can be made without a strong process owner if there is a strong project team. When empowered at the beginning of a project to design and implement a new process or structure, the project team can also do the work of an operational leader. In the absence of a process owner, effective project teams can—and should—fill in the gap of day-to-day work, which can reduce the urgency to hire or appoint a dedicated process owner.

However, without a dedicated operational process owner, progress may be slower and less likely to be sustainable. It may be more difficult to clear barriers during implementation and hold people accountable after process improvement efforts conclude. In our experience, active engagement of both a senior leader and a process owner is critical to long-term success of change efforts.

Leadership in Action

In 2016, the MedStar's Pharmacy department kicked off efforts to enhance the safety and quality of medication management, improve efficiency, and reduce expenses across the MedStar system. In support of this, a systemwide director of Medication Use Management was hired and tasked with accountability for management and improvement of the new process that was established.

With a single process owner in place, obstacles were easily cleared and the project was completed on time. The new process continues to establish medication use guidelines and achieve savings targets a year after the project team disengaged.

2. Data Availability and Integrity



MedStar projects that have been most successful in driving rapid, sustainable change have prioritized building a focused, high-integrity measurement system—one with a few critical metrics and strong data governance.

In our experience, effective measurement systems include:

An outcome metric linked to the goal of the project (e.g., operating room utilization)

AND

Process measures providing insight into performance drivers of the outcome metric (e.g., operating room turnaround time)

It can be challenging to define a focused measurement system with a few critical metrics. And, at large organizations like MedStar, it can be time consuming to build, given the disparate data sources used across the enterprise. However, it can be done, and it must be prioritized to achieve a return on investment in any improvement effort. There are no projects without a focused measurement system at MedStar have made it to completion and sustainability.

Aligning Focused Goals With an Effective Measurement System

In 2017, our Perioperative Service Line recognized an opportunity to standardize performance metrics across nine acute-care hospitals. Success can be attributed to greater visibility into performance metrics, as the Perioperative governing body is now able to regularly monitor data trends and make data-driven decisions that are helping to improve efficiency, patient flow, associate engagement, and quality of care.

Focusing solely on operating room utilization, the data quickly revealed opportunities to improve the rate at which operating rooms are filled by patients. With a baseline of 58 percent utilization, the data uncovered that the hospital operating rooms had higher capacity than demand.

Perioperative Services used the data to inform business decisions, such as improving block scheduling and case posting efficiency. Leadership resisted the temptation to expand focus until targets were achieved. As a result, operating room utilization increased to an average of 62 percent to date.

3. Focused Goals and Objectives



Focused goals and objectives go hand-in-hand with an effective measurement system. In fact, the most impactful projects at MedStar have goals that can be distilled to a measurable outcome. Given the multitude of pressures facing MedStar leadership, this is often a challenging endeavor. However, senior leadership and process owners must practice discipline to maintain laser focus on achieving that measurable outcome and resist the temptation to expand scope prematurely, prior to meeting original targets.

Often times, leaders undertake too many goals at once rather than emphasizing one clear focus. When this happens, the scope of a project grows too large or complex too soon and can spiral out of control. Several MedStar projects have fallen prey to *scope creep*, which significantly hampers progress.

4. Change Management



In our journey to systemness, engagement of frontline associates is critical for the success of any change endeavor. In order to develop improvement projects that address the issues effectively, efficiently, and sustainably, change management must be a priority.

Successful change management needs to include:

- Clear and frequent communication about the need for change
- Engagement of various levels of staff and leadership in discussing potential solutions
- Transparent evaluation of results and adjustments as needed
- Recognizing success and reinforcing change

Change management takes time and effort, and in the desire to move quickly, can be easily overlooked, becoming a thorn in the side of any sustainable initiative. An ongoing process, change management strategies need to be woven throughout each phase of an improvement initiative. Change management was foundational to the success of the aforementioned case studies by involving the right people early on, implementing a clear process, and continuously adjusting, as needed, throughout the duration of each effort.



While the most difficult to execute these four factors are essential to change at any scale, from systemwide transformation to local change. MedStar continues to prioritize and incorporate these attributes into planning and execution of current and future improvement initiatives. Engaging senior leadership and process owners while aligning data, goals, and change management efforts, will help MedStar build a learning organization where initiatives are not only sustained but where healthcare teams are continuously striving to find new and better ways to improve high quality care delivery and productivity.

To learn more about performance improvement initiatives at MedStar Health, email us performanceimprovement@MedStar.net.