Practical answers and engaged stakeholders, *fast*: Lessons learnt from a 90-day cycle

Healthcare Improvement Scotland

"You could do a PhD on this, good luck getting an answer in 3 months."
(an expert interviewee)

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Introduction

90-day cycles can be useful but are known for over running or under delivering. In early 2018, Healthcare Improvement Scotland used the method to address its need for a nationwide framework for quality management. Alongside the project's outcomes, the team was keen to review the 90-day cycle process itself:

- Is it a useful way to develop a concept where there are multiple stakeholders with different perspectives?
- What conditions should be in place to maximise success from a cycle?

Method

Aim: Combine and refine both the IHI[1] and Carnegie[2] approaches to 90-day cycles to answer a complex theoretical question that enables iterative testing, stakeholder engagement, buy-in and co-design by April 2018.

We did this by:

- Undertaking 22 expert interviews (national, international and across a range of industries) using a recorded semi-structured telephone interview. These were transcribed and brought together into a formal thematic analysis.
- Carrying out an initial high level literature review, followed by a more focused second literature review addressing key issues arising from initial expert interviews and discourse.
- Adding key stakeholder "report out" sessions at the end of each phase.

Results

Managing risks and expectations
A dedicated team is essential, not a luxury. But with this resourcing comes increased expectations. A clear project charter, regular and consistent communications and open dialogue around issues and actions should be incorporated into the project plan.

Rapid testing cycles
The second phase is intended for testing at prototype sites. As our work was theoretical, we used focus groups and awareness sessions to carry out iterative tests of the developing framework. Participants appreciated being included and could see their input reflected in the subsequent version. The immediacy of testing a theory this way maintained engagement and reassured stakeholders.

Ensuring co-production
Balancing pace, time commitment and stakeholder buy-in is difficult. We added a "report out" step after each phase to a group of important stakeholders to mitigate this risk. These stakeholders reviewed the developing work, sharing their critique. The final output reflected their input and addressed their key concerns.

Can we trust the findings of a rapid cycle?
From a research perspective, it has obvious limitations being rapid and purposeful rather than exhaustive.

Our resulting framework is to be tested and validated further but it represents what is currently understood as a balanced and meaningful system for quality management across health and social care in Scotland. It draws from prevailing quality management theory and supplements this with the practical experience and expertise of a range of experts and stakeholders.

Pre-cycle

	Top tips	Outputs
	• Brainstorm to identify key preparatory reading. • Book in key meetings before the cycle begins to maximise attendance. • Ask for learning from those who have carried out 90-day cycles before.	• Draft project charter clearly indicating what is in and out of scope

Phase 1: Current academic and practical knowledge of the subject is reviewed

	Top tips	Outputs
	• Refine your question to allow for a more in-depth literature review and produce a summary report illustrating fundamental themes. • Strong project management is essential. • Get all team members involved in conducting expert interviews; it increases shared learning and engagement. • Ensure time for key individuals to review draft outputs is scheduled into diaries.	• Project charter • Literature review • Interview transcripts • Confirmed dates for Phase 2 focus groups • Draft QMS framework ready for testing

Phase 2: Topic is refined and tested

	Top tips	Outputs
	• Ensure you test ideas with a diverse group of individuals representing different roles and perspectives. • Review your stakeholder map - ensure relevant groups are consulted appropriately.	• Analysis of key themes from expert interviews • Analysis of key themes from focus group discussions • Designed and tested product/framework

Phase 3: Learning is summarised into a final report and shared

	Top tips	Outputs
	• Develop your final report with the audience in mind. You may need different outputs for different audiences. • Don't underestimate the time required for review and revisions.	• Final report • Conclusion/findings • Agreement of next steps

Conclusions

- 90-day cycles are a useful way to achieve practical answers in a contained time frame.
- When developed alongside a clear stakeholder engagement plan, they can build buy-in and enable co-design.
- The cycle should be extended to include pre and post-cycle phases to make the 90 days effective.
- A resourced project team is essential to maintain momentum and deliver within the deadlines.

References:
1. IHI's 90-Day Learning Cycle. Available from: www.ihi.org/Engage/CustomExpertise/Pages/Innovation90DayLearningCycle.aspx
2. 90-Day Cycle Handbook, October 2013. Available from: www.carnegiefoundation.org/resources/publications/90-day-cycle-handbook/

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