Practical tips for a real-life PDSA

PLAN

Although this step can include a wide range of activities, here are a few critical components:

1. Define the nature and scope of the project. Make sure you are crystal clear about what you are trying to accomplish.
2. Identify the people, time and resources required.
3. Analyze the process or problem you are trying to improve. You must have good insight into the system you are trying to make better to know what changes will lead to an improvement. For process improvement, this step usually includes a process mapping exercise.
4. Decide what metrics you will use to determine the impact of the change. Estimate how long you will need to track these metrics to see results.
5. Collect baseline data on the metrics you will be using to make it easier to evaluate the impact of the change.

DO

1. Make sure that everyone understands the changes that will be made during the PDSA cycle. This may require training in the new process or system.
2. Keep the team engaged in the new way of doing things with regular communication.
3. Let the new process or system run for a while before you jump to conclusions about whether or not it is working.
4. Keep monitoring your metrics and don’t prematurely analyze them.

STUDY

1. Once you have collected enough data to assess the impact of the change on the selected metrics, you should be able to determine if there has been any significant improvement.
2. The most important aspect of this part of the cycle is seeing what new insights come to light about the process or system during the test. With this information, you will have a better understanding of how the initial changes might lead to improvement in the next PDSA cycle.

ACT

1. Often this step gets short-changed because people are anxious to get started on the next project. If you have made a change that is clearly an improvement, figure out how to “hardwire” it into the process or system in the future. This might require modification of training for new employees or rewriting policies and procedures.
2. Once you have completed the first PDSA cycle, consider starting another on the same process until you have optimized your practice performance. Many people think that a single PDSA cycle is enough, but engaging in continuous small tests of changes to processes and systems is the most advantageous path to excellence.