

PDSA Cycles

Contacts

Making improvements in services requires changing things. Change can seem threatening or overwhelming for busy people doing demanding work. The PDSA method is a way to break down change into manageable chunks, and test each small part to make sure that things are improving and no effort is wasted.

What is it?

PDSA stands for Plan, Do, Study, Act. It's a model for testing ideas that you think may create an improvement. It can be used to test ideas for improvement quickly and easily based on existing ideas, research, feedback, theory, review, audit, etc or practical ideas that have been proven to work elsewhere. It uses simple measurements to monitor the effect of changes over time. It encourages starting with small changes, which can build into larger improvements in the service through successive quick cycles of change.

The PDSA Cycle

It is:

A common sense of approach to change and improvement

Quick and simple

Do' able

It is not:

Complicated

Difficult

Gimmicky

Why is it useful?

It works! The PDSA cycle has been used for decades as an effective tool for improvement and it's still going strong! The method is well established and validated and is particularly suited to small, dynamic organisations like general practice. It's an extremely practical, common sense based approach that is easy to understand.

How do I do it? - The step-by-step guide to the PDSA cycle:

Step 1 PLAN

Identify what change you think will create improvement and then plan the test of the change. What is your objective in introducing the change? It is important to establish the scope of the change to be introduced, and how you are going to collect information about the differences that occur, how will you know whether the change made has 'worked' or not?

The change should bring about differences which are measurable in isolation. A major change could be broken down into smaller more manageable 'chunks'. Once the actual change to be introduced has been agreed, the following questions should be asked:

What are we trying to do during this cycle?
What exactly will you do?
Who will be involved?
Where will it take place?
When will it take place?
What do you predict will happen?
What data/information will you need to collect?
Step 2 DO

Put the plan into practice - test change by collecting the data. This stage involves carrying out the plans agreed in step 1. It is important that the Do stage is kept short as possible. There may be changes that should only be measured over long periods. Record any unexpected events, problems and other observations. Start analysing the data.

Step 3 STUDY

Review and reflect. Complete the analysis of the data. Has there been an improvement? Did your expectations match the reality of what happened? What could have been done differently?

Step 4 ACT

Make further changes or amendments after you have decided what worked and what didn't and collect data again. Carry out an 'amended' version of what happened during the Do stage and measure any differences.

Handy Hints

Keep it simple

Keep it small and manageable to start - massive projects can be broken down into a number of small, quick PDSA cycles.

Cycles should happen quickly - think in terms of a day or two not a month!

There is no wrong answer, if you find something that works - use it!