



Table of Contents

An Introduction to NIATx and its Improvement Model

- About NIATx 5
- Four Aims 6
- Five Principles 9
- Key Roles 11
- A Proven Change Process 11
- Special Focus: *(Title TBD)* 12

How to Use this Workbook 15

Part I: Pework for Leadership 17

Part II: Background Information for Change Leaders. 25

Part III: Change Project Process 37

Resources 55

Glossary 56

Appendix A: Instructions for Tools/
Methods 59

- Nominal Group Techniques 60
- Walk-through Case Studies 65
- Group Flow-charting Exercise 69
- Getting Ideas from Outside the Field 71

Appendix B: Promising Practices 73



The Five NIATx Principles

Before NIATx began, we turned to research on process improvement to find evidence for what we considered essential ingredients to process improvement. We found three studies that had analyzed organizational change by comparing successful and unsuccessful organizations in 13 industries. To differentiate organizations that were successful at improving from those that were not, the three studies looked at 640 organizations total. They examined 80 different factors that might possibly explain why some organizations were great at successful change efforts, while others floundered. (Gustafson and Hundt; 1995.)

Only five factors emerged as significantly important in organizational change. From all these factors, NIATx developed the Five Principles.

Principle 1. Understand and involve the customer

This factor had more predictive power in discriminating successful from unsuccessful organizations than all other factors combined. In this guide, we encourage you to begin your change effort by taking a walk in your customer's shoes. This workbook will tell you more about how to conduct what we call a "walk-through." In a walk-through, staff members experience the treatment processes just as a customer does. The goal is to see the agency from the customer's perspective. Taking this perspective of treatment services—from the first call for help, to the intake process, and through final discharge—is the most useful way to understand how the customer feels, and to discover how to make improvements that will serve the customer better.

Principle 2. Fix key problems and help the CEO sleep at night

One of the mistakes we made in process improvement when we first started was that we picked "low-hanging fruit." We chose a process that was easy to change, spent nine months changing it, and created yawns from people who looked at it and said, "It took you nine months to do that?"

Thus, the second key principle, supported by research, is to solve a problem that is important to the CEO. And that is usually a problem related to the financial health of the organization—its bottom line. The NIATx model of process improvement, as you will see, helps member organizations improve the quality of care their clients receive as well as the organization's finances, workforce development, or competitive advantage.

“NIATx asked agencies to conduct a walk-through for the Paths to Recovery grant application process. Over 800 agencies completed the walk-through process, and then focused on one of the four aims to improve on through a Change Project.”

“We have tried to inculcate a culture of serving the customer. I use a lot of business metaphors here. The underlying principle is to understand that patients need to be communicated with, engaged, and 'sold' on recovery.”

Raymond Tamasi, CEO,
Gosnold on Cape Cod,
Falmouth, MA

The Key Roles

In the NIATx model of process improvement, staff members work together to improve businesses processes that affect the four aims. An **Executive Sponsor**—typically the director or Chief Executive Officer of an organization—is responsible for authorizing the time and resources needed to complete the project successfully. The Executive Sponsor also designates a staff member as **Change Leader** to improve a process that influences one of the four aims. Together, the Executive Sponsor and the Change Leader agree on a plan for a Change Project: a process improvement initiative that targets one aim, one level of care, at one location, with one population. The Change Leader is responsible for organizing and conducting the project. Together, the Executive Sponsor and Change Leader also assemble a **Change Team**, which includes staff members and, in some cases, consumers. Each of these roles is discussed in more detail in Parts I and II of this book.

A Proven Change Process

Through experience with hundreds of addiction treatment organizations, NIATx has developed a model for conducting improvement projects divided into five phases:

- 1. Complete a walk-through (to understand customer needs):** This step arises from the NIATx principle of paying attention to customer needs. Here, you pretend to be client and experience what it's like to do business with your facility or organization.
- 2. Decide what you want to accomplish (pick an aim):** The walk-through will help you understand which areas of your business are feeling the most pain, and therefore which of the four aims should be addressed first.
- 3. Identify how you will know if a change is an improvement:** Before implementing changes, you need to know how you will evaluate “progress.” The answer lies in picking the right metric and gathering baseline data.
- 4. Select and test changes:** Now that you know what problems customers face, what aim you want to improve, and how you will evaluate the impact of a change, you're set to actually make changes. We'll guide you through ways to be creative in selecting and testing changes. As represented by another NIATx principle, the goal here is to pick small changes you can test rapidly.
- 5. Sustain the gains:** Most process improvement projects do not sustain their gain beyond six months. According to Lynne Maher of the British National Health Service, there is considerable evidence that, in general, 70 percent of improvement projects do not survive more than six months. That being the case, you can safely assume yours won't survive either, unless you do something different.

What can you do that would be different? *Answer: Use what you have learned from your patients who sustain recovery.*

“

Sustaining the gain in organizational improvements is very similar to sustaining recovery in substance abuse treatment. Once the gain is accomplished, sustaining it is an ongoing process.

*Dave Gustafson,
Director, NIATx*

”

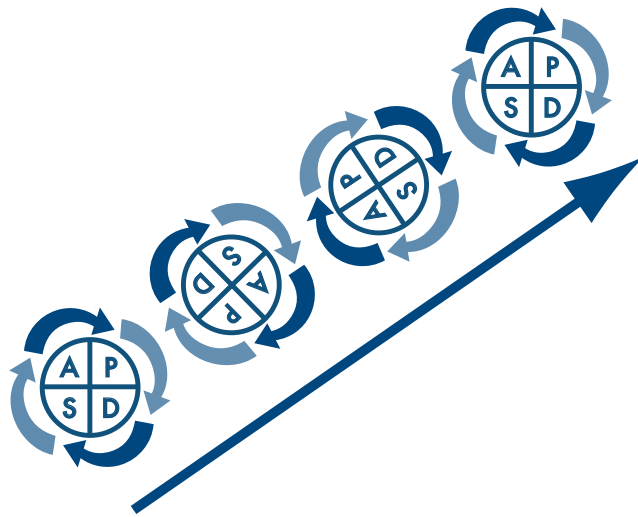
You'll find detailed instructions for conducting a project using this model in Part III.



Introduction to the Plan-Do-Study-Act Cycle

Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) is a cycle that turns a change idea into action. The value of the PDSA model is that it is simple in structure and natural in execution. It represents the natural flow of information gathering, decision making, action, and assessment involved in a wide range of actions. It uses a series of short rapid cycles, where the goal is to test a particular change on a small scale, learn what you can, and get better in the next application. The results of each change cycle are compared to pre-test measurements to ensure that the change is actually an improvement. Only when the change cycle results in an improvement in the existing process is the change fully implemented.

Figure 2: The Plan-Do-Study-Act Cycle



By testing changes this way, you:

- 1) Minimize risks and expenditures of time and money
- 2) Make changes in a way that is less disruptive to clients and staff
- 3) Reduce resistance to change by starting on a small scale
- 4) Learn from the ideas that work, as well as from those that do not

Thus, by starting with small changes to test ideas quickly and easily, and using simple measurements to monitor the effect of changes over time, the PDSA model can lead to larger improvements through successive quick cycles of change.



What follows is more detail about what's involved with each phase.

PLAN the Change

The purpose of the PLAN step is to identify the aim of the change, and predict which results will make the change a real improvement. In this stage you should consider what steps you need to take to prepare what needs to be improved. Why is this important to clients, staff, and the agency? Who needs to be involved? When do various actions need to happen? Remember to use what you learned in your walk-through exercise to guide your change plans.

DO the Plan

The purpose of the DO step is experimentation. Try the change for a short period of time (e.g., two weeks) and in a limited area (e.g., for a few patients). Test the change with one counselor, two intake workers, and twenty patients. Increase the numbers as you test the change through successful cycles. In this step, you should document any problems and unexpected observations, as well as analyze the data you are collecting on the change. Remember to change only one thing at a time, so you can track the data associated with the change and determine which change is actually making an impact.

STUDY the Results

In the STUDY step, you should complete the analysis of your data, comparing your predicted results with your actual results. In this step, you should summarize what you have learned. Ask: What worked well and what did not? Did the change result in an improvement? Why or why not?

ACT on the new knowledge

In the ACT step, use the results of the STUDY stage to decide on your next steps. Was the change beneficial to clients, staff, and/or the organization? Should the change be increased in scope or tested under different conditions? Should the change be adopted, adapted, or abandoned? What will be the next cycle?

REPEAT

Consider what barriers you faced, what you would do differently in the future, and what went well and should be repeated. Begin a new cycle, adapting the change as needed, in order to make it a real improvement. Your changes should stay true to the PDSA Cycle.

PDSA Example

To illustrate how PDSA works in practice, here is an example from one NIATx client: