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A systematic approach to an organization's sustainability

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ABSTRACT

This article integrates the concepts of sustainability and quality improvement into a systematic approach to an organization's sustainability. The article: (a) presents a literature-based model that incorporates the factors that drive an organization's sustainability; (b) describes how sustainability is operationalized through a systematic approach to quality improvement; (c) discusses the advantages of a systematic approach to sustainability; and (d) shares with the reader literature and experientially-based lessons learned about the approach.

1. Introduction

Human service organizations, such as those providing services and supports to persons with disabilities, are currently experiencing significant challenges that are causing them to consider their long term health and welfare. These significant challenges involve adapting to an increased demand for services and supports within a shrinking financial base; the need to operate within highly complex networks that comprise widely varying levels and types of providers, settings, and structures; the high turnover rate among direct support staff; the shift to internally-based performance management, monitoring, and quality improvement; and the emphasis on outcomes evaluation (Reinders, 2008; Schalock & Verdugo, 2012).

Given the above challenges and the current social, political, and financial environment, human service organizations are increasingly focusing on two concepts to guide their thinking and actions: sustainability and quality improvement. Sustainability characterizes an organization's ability to adapt to change and provide a range of valued service delivery opportunities and practices that are effective and efficient. As generally understood, sustainability is a multidimensional phenomenon that focuses on maintaining sound outcomes, generating knowledge, building capacity, experiencing stable funding and staffing patterns, and providing value-based services and supports in an effective and efficient manner. These attributes are considered essential to the organization's ongoing health and welfare (Kim, 2015; Krumdieck & Page, 2012; Krumdieck, 2013; Scheier et al., 2008; Scheirer, 2005; Simmons et al., 2015).

The second concept, quality improvement, is increasingly being viewed as an effective and efficient approach to operationalize sustainability. Viewed from this perspective, quality improvement is not a discrete event, nor is it a single process. It is a continuous process that occurs most readily in organizations that have built the capacity to change, and in those organizations that take a balanced approach to its formulation and implementation. In addition, quality improvement involves integrating organization self-assessment, planning, doing, and evaluating; involving key stakeholders in the quality improvement process; incorporating multiple performance-based perspectives; implementing specific quality improvement strategies aligned with these perspectives; and using right-to-left thinking that establishes the mindset among organization personnel that change is possible by beginning the quality improvement process with the question, "What are our desired outcomes, and what needs to be in place for these outcomes to occur?" (Bourgeois, Hart, Townsend, & Gagne, 2011; Hunter, 2006; Kapucu et al., 2011; Schalock & Verdugo, 2013).

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This article integrates the two concepts of sustainability and quality improvement into a systematic approach to an organization's sustainability. To this end, we present a literature-based sustainability model that incorporates the factors that drive an organization's sustainability, and describe how sustainability is operationalized through a systematic approach to quality improvement. Additionally, we discuss the advantages of a systematic approach to sustainability, and share with the reader literature and experientially-based lessons learned about the approach. Throughout the article, sustainability is defined as adapting successfully to change and providing a range of valued service delivery opportunities and practices in an effective and efficient manner; quality improvement is defined as an integrative, sequential, participative, and continuous process that is based on best practices and whose primary purpose is to enhance an organization's effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability.

2. Sustainability model

Models are developed to aid peoples' thinking. In reference to an organization's sustainability, one needs to consider what factors drive the organization's ability to both adapt successfully to change and provide a range of sound service delivery opportunities and practices that result in valued outcomes. Fig. 1 depicts three set of literature-based factors (which we refer to as 'drivers') that accomplish this goal: *accountability drivers* (effectiveness and efficiency), *leadership drivers* (transformational leadership and strategic execution), and *organization drivers* (high performance teams and continuous quality improvement). These factors/drivers are based on the published work of Denning (2012),Johnson, Hays, Center, and Daley (2004), Kapucu et al. (2011), Kim (2015), Kotter (1996), Lick (2006), Meyers, Durlak, and Wandersman (2012), Pluye, Potvin, Denis, Pelletier, and Mannoni (2005), Selden and Sowa (2011), Schalock et al. (2014), and Tsai, Chou, and Hsu (2009). Table 1 provides a description of the components of each of the drivers.

3. Operationalizing the model

The sustainability model presented in Fig. 1 is operationalized through a systematic approach to quality improvement (QI). QI is *an integrative, sequential, participative, and continuous process that is based on best practices and whose primary purpose is to enhance an organization's effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability from a multiple, performance-based perspective.* The systematic QI approach used to operationalize the sustainability model encompasses the quality improvement loop shown in Fig. 2. The four components of the loop are patterned after the four elements or steps of the continuous quality cycle (Demming, 2000; Richards, 2013; Ries, 2011; Six Sigma Cycle, 2013; Sokovic, Pavietic, & Kern Pipan, 2010), and reflect the following approaches to promote both change and valued outcomes: (a) *system dynamics models* that focus on the presence of feedback loops that have a critical impact on an organization's performance (Duryan, Nikolik, van Merode, & Curfs, 2012; Morecroft, 2007; Senge, 1990); (b) *structured inquiry methods* that involve mapping the strategic context, discovering the drivers of change, and building the road map (Albrecht, 2014; Sutherland & Katz, 2005); *problem structuring methods* that focus on a shared understanding of the problems in the organization or system and fostering commitment and involvement of stakeholders (Duryan, Nikolik, van Merode, & Curfs, 2014; Rosenhead & Mingers, 2001); and *quality improvement strategies* that focus on sequential action steps involving assessment, planning, doing, and evaluating (Demming, 2000; Schalock et al., 2014).

As depicted in Fig. 2, quality improvement is composed of four QI process steps: assessment, planning, doing, and evaluating. In this section, we describe these steps and discuss how they relate to the model presented in Fig. 1.

Fig. 1. Sustainability model.

3.1. Assess

The multidimensionality of an organization's sustainability and the four QI steps identified in Fig. 2 require a broader approach to assessment than has historically been the case with externally-based evaluation (Bergsmann, Schultes, Winter, Schober, & Spiel, 2015; Schalock et al., 2014). As discussed here, assessment involves incorporating multiple performance-based perspectives, best practice indicators, collaborative assessment, and a standardized self-assessment instrument.

3.1.1. Multiple performance-Based perspectives

QI based on multiple perspectives allows for a balanced approach to quality improvement and sustainability (Niven, 2008; Tsai et al., 2009; Wu, Lin, & Chang, 2011). The four perspectives incorporated into the assessment process are those of the customer, and those of the organization's growth, financial analyses, and internal processes.

- Customer perspective encompasses personal goals, assessed support needs, individualized supports, and personal outcomes.
- Growth perspective encompasses program options, high performance teams, direct support staff involvement, networks, and partnerships.
- Financial analyses perspective encompasses a standardized approach to calculating unit costs, cost accounting, cost allocation, social capital, fixed and variable costs, overhead rate, and resource allocation formula.
- Internal processes perspective encompasses horizontal and vertical alignment of program components, mapping system (s), research and evaluation capacity, data sets, data collection systems, and quality improvement activities.

3.1.2. Best practice indicators

Best practice indicators are objective measures of organization processes and performance. Such indicators: (a) are based on current evidence that is obtained from credible sources that use reliable and valid methods; (b) are based on a clearly articulated, empirically supported theory or rationale; and (c) can be used for multiple purposes including the evidence in evidence-based practices, the items of an organization self-assessment tool, and

Table 1
Sustainability drivers and their components.

Driver	Component Description
Accountability	-Effectiveness: the degree to which an organization's intended results are achieved from the perspective of the customer and the organization's growth Efficiency: the degree to which the organization produces its planned results from the perspective of its financial analyses and internal processes
Leadership	-Transformational: communicating a shared vision, mentoring and directing, coaching and instructing, inspiring and empowering, and collaborating and partnering -Strategic execution: demonstrating highly visible and maintained support of the change/ transformation, communicating progress to all stakeholders, and considering the adoption of the change/transformation as a top organization priority
Organization	-High performance teams: horizontally structured work groups who focus on teamwork, synergy, raising the performance bar, "us" accountability, and promoting a learning culture. Such teams are characterized by being involved, informed, organized, accountable, and empowered. -Quality improvement: an integrative, sequential, participative, and continuous process that is based on best practices and whose primary purpose is to enhance an organization's effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability from a multiple, performance-based perspective

Fig. 2. Quality improvement loop.

as a basis for quality improvement (International Research Consortium on Evidence- Based Practices, 2013; Schalock et al., 2014).

As summarized in Table 2, these best practice indicators can be aggregated into the four performance-based perspectives defined above. The indicators listed in Table 2 were identified based on a thorough literature review of the areas of performance management and evaluation, and program planning and evaluation. This literature review drew heavily on the work of Bourgeois et al. (2011), Cousins and Chouinard (2012), Hunter (2006), Lencioni (2012), Lick (2006), Pawson (2006), Pluye et al. (2005), Scheirer (2005), Scheier, Hartling, and Hagerman (2008), and Selden and Sowa (2011).

3.1.3. Collaborative assessment

A collaborative approach to self-assessment is consistent with approaches such as participatory evaluation (Cousins & Chouinard, 2012), utilization-focused evaluation (Patton, 2008), and empowerment evaluation (Fetterman, Kaftarian, & Wandersman, 2015). Collaborative assessment involves obtaining assessment-related input from organization participants, such as administrators, managers, and knowledgeable support personnel. The advantages of collaborative assessment are that it increases: (a) knowledge and understanding that comes from systematic inquiry; (b) the capacity for self-critique, self-determination, and systematic inquiry at the level of the individual and the organization; (c) organization learning based on the concepts of shared values related to quality of life, personal outcomes, individualized

Table 2
Best practice indicators.

Customer Perspective
1.Aligns services/supports to identified support needs
2.Reports the number of clients living or working in more independent, productive, and community-integrated environments
3.Measures personal outcomes
4.Reports and analyzes aggregated personal outcomes
5.Uses technology to enhance personal outcomes
Growth Perspective
6.Articulates the organization's mission and intended results
7.Enters into partnerships
8.Develops program options
9.Utilizes and evaluates high performance teams
10.Monitors job satisfaction and develops job enrichment programs
Financial Perspective
11.Compares unit costs across different locations and service delivery platforms
12.Reports percentage of budget allocated to client-referenced supports
13.Monitors the relationship between social capital and agency-based fiscal capital
14.Uses fixed and variable cost data to establish a baseline cost rate
15.Analyzes overhead rate to increase efficiency
Internal Processes Perspective
16.Horizontally aligns input, throughput, and output components
17.Vertically aligns an organization's input, throughput, and output components to the corresponding individual-level input, throughput, and output components
18.Demonstrates relationship between units of service/support provided and the clienteles' assessed support needs
19.Uses data related to personal and organization outcomes for multiple purposes
20.Uses evidence-based indicators for continuous quality improvement

supports, outcomes evaluation, and best practices; and (d) assessment information being incorporated into subsequent quality improvement efforts (Fitzpatrick, 2012; Hansen, Aiken, & Wallace, 2013; Luskin & Ho, 2013; O'sullivan, 2012; Rodriguez-Campos, 2012).

3.1.4. Standardized assessment instrument

As an example of a standardized assessment instrument, the *Organization Effectiveness and Efficiency Scale* (*OEES*; International Research Consortium on Evidence- Based Practices, 2013) was developed and standardized across four language groups to allow organizations to assess their status on the 20 best practice indicators listed in Table 2. Assessment information from the Scale provides an organization profile that summarizes their status on the four performance-based perspectives. Full details regarding the Scale's development, standardization, multiple language versions, and on-line administration and scoring are available at: http://www.oeesonline.org. Details about its use related to QI and organizational sustainability can be found in Kelly and Lynch (2013), Lee (2013), Schalock et al. (2014) and in two OEES Supplement (2014a, 2014b).

The *OEES* is administered by an individual (internal or external to the organization) who is competent in assessment strategies and the collaborative approach to evaluation, and who is familiar with performance evaluation. At least two respondents are interviewed. These individuals are generally managerial level or above in the organization, familiar with the organization's policies, practices, and information systems, and knowledgeable about how to assess and interpret information.

Consistent with the collaborative approach to assessment, the interviewer uses a conversation format to obtain from the respondents a consensus score for each of the 20 indicators. A template is provided to the Interviewer to facilitate this process. The essential components of this template include evidence criteria that are sequenced according to the plan-do-evaluate quality improvement cycle/loop, examples of relevant evidence, and the three scoring criteria (2 = 3 evidence criteria met; 1 = 1 or 2 evidence criteria met; 0 = no evidence criteria met).

Indicator scores from the *OEES* are aggregated into profiles that reflect the perspective of the customer, and the organization's growth, financial analyses, and internal processes. These profiles are depicted graphically in a Radar Chart such as that shown in Fig. 3. Three evidence-based indices are also computed and depicted graphically, as shown in the Dash Board presented in the bottom section of Fig. 3: An *Effectiveness Index* (the total of the Customer and Growth Perspectives), An *Efficiency Index* (total of the Financial Analyses and Internal Processes Perspectives), and a *Sustainability Index* (total of the two indices). These profiles and indices are computed in real time and are available to the interviewer and respondents immediately following the on-line assessment. This profile information along with item raw scores can be used for multiple purposes, including the QI-related planning activities described next.

3.2. Plan

Planning is a disciplined, detailed, forward-focused effort that builds on the assessment results just described within the parameters of what is important to the organization's sustainability (Shogren, Luckasson, & Schalock, 2015). QI-related planning decisions and actions are developed and implemented by a Quality Improvement Team, which is a critical organization process driver. Such a team is: (a) characterized by their being involved, informed, organized, empowered, and accountable; (b) a horizontally structured work group that exhibits a sense of ownership and task completion; and (c) composed of stakeholders who are knowledgeable about the organization's policies, practices, and information systems and who are involved in implementing

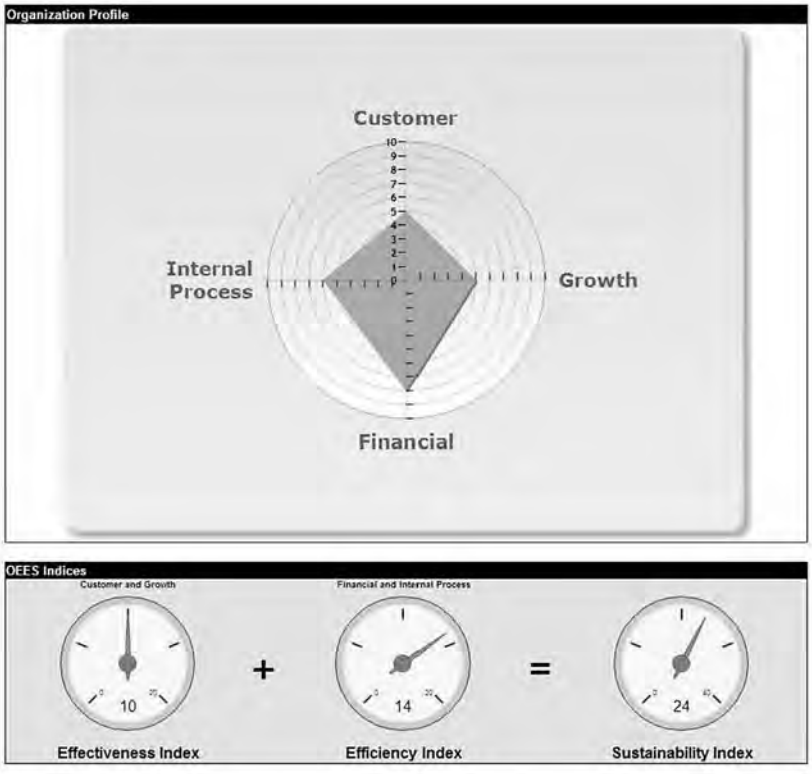

Fig. 3. Organization profile.

organization practices (Schalock & Verdugo, 2012; Schalock et al., 2014).

The first task of the team is to determine what is important to the organization and what is important for the organization. Areas considered *important 'to' the organization* typically relate to the organization's founding philosophy, ongoing commitment to quality services and supports, and deep culture. *What is important 'for' the organization* is based on raw and profile scores from the self-assessment, such as those depicted in Fig. 3.

After determining what is important to and for the organization, the next planning decision involves selecting QI strategies that address the organization's most important QI needs and hence the organization's sustainability. Four criteria are used typically by the QI Team to select specific QI strategies. These are that the selected strategy: (a) addresses the perceived need and is therefore *important*; (b) is 'do able' within the organization and thus *sensitive* to the organization's culture, competence, and resources; (c) will result in observable and meaningful change and/or short-term wins for the organization and is therefore *relevant;* and (d) is *balanced* across the performance-based perspectives wherein improvement is needed. Specific processes, procedures, and tools related to planning and implementing perspective-related QI strategies are available (with published references) on-line (OEES Supplement, 2014b).

3.3. Do

Doing is a shared process involving actions implemented and coordinated through the QI Team. Doing involves implementing and monitoring the QI strategies that were selected by the team during the planning step. To facilitate full implementation of the strategy, it is important that a user-friendly format be used that conveys a clear vision, simple communication, and constructive engagement. Although organizations tend to have their own QI format, commonly used formats include action steps related to identifying the most important QI needs, selecting the performance-based perspective(s), implementing the specific QI strategy, and monitoring and evaluating the results of the strategy (Schalock & Verdugo, 2013).

3.4. Evaluate

In reference to QI, the term 'evaluation' can refer to checking or studying (Demming, 2000), analyzing (Six Sigma Cycle, 2013), deciding (Richards, 2013), learning (Ries, 2011), or assessing/refining (Sokovic et al., 2010). In reference to the systematic approach to QI presented in this article, evaluation occurs at either the micro or macro level. At the micro level, evaluation focuses on the QI objective and whether the intended result has occurred. Micro level evaluation results are used to determine the influence of specific QI strategies and to modify the strategy if necessary (Farrington, Clare, Holland, Barrett, & Oborn, 2015).

At the macro level, evaluation focuses on either the *best practice indicators* assessed on the *OEES* or perspective-*based performance-based organization outcomes.* Focusing on *best practice indicators* requires a reassessment on the *OEES*. Data from the reassessment can be used in at least three ways. First, Time 1 vs. Time 2 profile analyses can be done to benchmark changes over time in each of the four performance-based perspectives. Second, Dash Board graphs showing Effectiveness, Efficiency, and Sustainability Indices can be used for reporting, benchmarking, and accountability. Third, perspective-based raw scores can be used as evidence in evidence-based practices and/or as a basis for subsequent QI activities.

Focusing on *performance-based organization outcomes* involves systematically measuring performance indicators related to the perspective of the customer, and the organization's growth, financial analyses, and internal processes. Exemplary outcomes referenced to these perspectives are presented in Table 3. Organization outcomes are essential to maintaining an organization's sustainability, and providing information that can be used for data-based decision making, managing for results, reporting and accountability, benchmarking, and establishing evidence-based practices.

4. Advantages of a systematic approach to sustainability

In review, we have presented a sustainability model that incorporates the factors that drive an organization's sustainability, and have discussed how sustainability is operationalized through a systematic approach to quality improvement. In this section, we discuss what we consider to be the most important advantages to this approach. These advantages relate to building sustainability capacity, developing quality improvement guidelines, using a balanced approach to performance management and evaluation, and adapting successfully to – and aligning with – the transformation era.

4.1. Sustainability capacity building

The proposed approach to assessing and enhancing an organization's sustainability is an internal and collaborative process that incorporates self-assessment and self-directed quality improvement activities. Thus, the organization and its personnel are not only empowered to bring about change, but also to use the

Table 3
Multidimensional perspectives on organization outcomes.

Outcomes Evaluation Focus	Performance-Based Perspective	Exemplary Organization Outcomes
Effectiveness	Customer	-Enhanced personal outcomes -Services and supports aligned to personal goals and assessed support needs -System of supports implemented and functional
	Growth	-Increased program options (e.g. community-based living, employment, education, participation) -Increased staff involvement (e.g. ISPs and QIPs) -Increased networks/partners
Efficiency	Financial Analyses	-Reduced overhead rate -Reduced cost per unit of service/support -Increased percent of budget allocated to customer-referenced services/supports -Resources allocated on basis of major cost drivers
	Internal Processes	-Program logic models used to align processes and functions -Web-based information systems implemented that generate performance-based information -Protocols developed for using data for multiple purposes

obtained information to enhance organization learning through evidence-based feedback, knowledge transfer, and benchmarking the transformational process.

In reference to self-assessment, building sustainability capacity requires that organizations develop the knowledge and skills involved in conducting collaborative self-evaluations that are methodologically sound, relevant to organization information needs, and usable for multiple purposes. It does this by stating and defining operationally what to assess in regard to best practice and sustainability indicators, explaining how the assessment can be done reliably, and providing real-time summaries of quality improvement needs (International Research Consortium on Evidence- Based Practices, 2013; O'sullivan, 2012; Rodriguez-Campos, 2012). In reference to QI activities, specific QI strategies are based on the same best practice indicators assessed, aggregated into performance-based quality improvement perspectives, and implemented by the QI team (Cousins, Goh, Elliott, Aubrey, & Gilbert, 2014; Johnson et al., 2004; Levine, Russ-Eft, Burling, Stephens, & Downey, 2013; Millesen & Bies, 2007; Schalock & Verdugo, 2012).

4.2. Quality improvement guidelines

The QI loop depicted in Fig. 2 incorporates best practices related to quality improvement and promoting change and valued outcomes. This 4-step model provides a framework for implementing a number of guidelines for each of the QI process steps. These guidelines, which are presented in Table 4, are based on our own work, plus that of Kapucu et al. (2011), Levine et al. (2013), Scheirer (2005), Schuh and Leviton (2006), and Selden and Sowa (2011).

4.3. Balanced approach to performance management and evaluation

A balanced approach to performance-based evaluation that incorporates the perspective of the customer and the organization's growth, financial analyses, and internal processes allows one to view organizational sustainability from a holistic perspective as well as provide information that can be used for multiple purposes such as fulfilling accountability requirements and performance management needs (Fuller, 1997; Zaffron & Logan, 2009). Furthermore, a balanced approach allows managers and other key stakeholders to appreciate the multi-dimensionality of an organization's performance, understand how different perspectives on effectiveness and efficiency relate to an organization's sustainability, and identify quality improvement strategies to achieve the strategic objectives for each perspective.

4.4. Transformation era characteristics

The proposed systematic approach to an organization's sustainability also allows organizations to adapt successfully to the significant transformational changes occurring within human service organizations. Chief among these are first, the person is central. Accompanying this change is the shift from general services to individualized supports, and the alignment of person-centered values with service delivery practices. These person-centered values relate to quality of life, self-determination, inclusion, empowerment, and equity; the service delivery practices relate to the assessment of personal goals and person-referenced support needs, the provision of an individualized system of supports, and the evaluation of personal outcomes. Second, organizations are becoming more streamlined with a corresponding movement from vertical to horizontal structure that is accompanied by the increasing use of collaborative approaches to organization evaluation, leadership and management strategies, and high performance teams. Third, data systems are becoming evidence based and organized around the four performance-based perspectives (see Table 1) that provide a balanced approach to assessment, reporting, benchmarking, accountability, and quality improvement. Fourth, quality improvement is a continuous process that integrates participative assessment with specific quality improvement strategies (Schalock & Verdugo, 2013).

5. Lessons learned

Based on the literature reviewed in developing the sustainability model presented in Fig. 1 and our experiences in operationalizing it through the systematic approach to quality improvement described in Section 3, we have learned at least six valuable lessons. First, the role of leadership is both transformative and essential. In addition to the transformational leadership roles and functions listed in Table 1, it is essential that leaders throughout the organization understand the critical importance of an organization's sustainability, and the need for a systematic approach to quality improvement. Through a systematic approach to assessment, planning, doing, and evaluation, leaders are in a stronger position to demonstrate 'strategic execution skills' that

Table 4
Quality improvement implementation guidelines.

Quality improvement step/ phase	Implementation guidelines
Assess	-Evaluate the status of best practice indicators -Interviewer and respondents are familiar with key concepts including the collaborative assessment process -Respondents are honest in their evaluation and base evaluation on 'what is' rather than 'what someone might want to see' -Stakeholders view the evaluation process as a collaborative effort that increases knowledge and encourages self-critique and systematic inquiry
Plan	-Distinguish between what needs to stay in place as is, and what needs to change -Be sensitive to the organization's context and conduct a contextual analysis that includes factors that inhibit change and those that facilitate change -Employ a balanced approach to planning based on multiple perspective scores/profiles -Emphasize capacity building
Do	-Distinguish between a goal and an objective -Align quality improvement needs with strategies, objectives, monitoring, and evaluation -Operationalize outcome categories and associate with available performance indicators -Distinguish between monitoring and evaluation. Monitoring involves determining the implementation status of the specific QI strategy; evaluation focuses on the QI objective and whether the intended result has occurred
Evaluate	-Make evaluation understandable and a collaborative process -Distinguish between micro and macro level evaluation -Clarify the intended uses of information -Use a logic model to frame customer-referenced evaluation questions(i.e. input = customer-referenced factors; throughput = support strategies; output=personal outcomes

involve supporting the QI process, communicating progress on both processes and outcomes, and ensuring that implementing those strategies that enhance the organization's sustainability are a top priority.

Second, sustainability involves values, resources, and transformation. It also requires the exchange of explicit and tacit knowledge (Farrington et al., 2015), team continuity and team effectiveness (Buntinx, 2008), and service marketing (Hartline & Ferrell, 1996; Zeithaml, Bitner, & Gremler, 2006). Less tangible requirements involve creativity and social entrepreneurship.

Third, quality improvement needs to be a transparent, collaborative process that is sensitive to the organization's receptivity, furthers the organization's unique competitive position, provides a mix of values to stakeholders, and be easily understood and taught via consultation and learning teams but within the constraints of organization resources. In addition, concrete and objective data are absolutely necessary to make sustainability measureable. Although one should manage on the basis of vision and not numbers, numbers generally focus peoples' attention.

Fourth, although collaborative assessment is an essential part of an organization's sustainability, it presents at least two significant challenges. First, valid self-assessment requires that organization personnel are honest in their assessment of the status of performance indicators and formulate their evaluation on the basis of 'what is' rather than 'what someone might want to see'. Typically, this is not a part of the mind-set of organization personnel. Second, self-assessment instruments such as the *OEES* need to be integrated with other performance evaluation and management systems that are frequently mandated or highly recommended by specific jurisdictions. Examples are CARF standards in the U.S. and Canada, and the EFQM Business Excellence Model used widely in Europe (Heras-Saizarbitoria, Casadesus, & Marimon, 2011; Vallejo et al., 2006). The *OEES* was not developed to replace these systems, but to provide a best practices framework for operationalizing sustainability and engaging in QI activities.

Fifth, an emphasis on sustainability does not come without costs. Specifically, it requires that an organization: (a) recognize the necessity for self-assessment, buy-in, and capacity building; (b) create a structure for implementation (e.g. quality improvement teams and user-friendly QI formats/templates); (c) ensure on-going support strategies (e.g. technical assistance, and supportive feedback); and (d) encourage learning and sharing (Meyers et al., 2012).

Sixth, a focus on sustainability also involves change in an organization's culture. That change recognizes that an organization's identity incorporates sustainability drivers, and its status reflects how well it provides a range of valued and sound service delivery opportunities and practices that result in valued personal and organizational outcomes. As part of the organization's culture, a systematic approach to organizational sustainability that includes participative quality improvement activities is a positive experience, and one that organization personnel feel good about. Positive feelings should flow not just from the participation and constructive engagement central to the process, but also from the pride that comes from being a learning organization and a knowledge producer.

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Further reading

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