

Chapter 17: The way we did things

This chapter identifies 10 challenges posed by the stakeholder evaluator for delivering a complex intervention involving cultural change into the complex environment of the NHS.

Key points

Introducing a complex intervention like Year of Care (YOC) into a complex environment is bound to be challenging. Here are ten of those which had to be grappled with:

- Genuine change versus influence through policy.
- Local ownership of the model versus effectiveness.
- Team approach versus central leadership.
- Conceptual approach versus constancy.
- Spread of message versus integrity.
- Solution focus versus problem focus.
- Ability to reshape versus clarity of aims.
- Experiential approach versus preparedness.
- Formal evaluation versus more novel approach.
- Adequate funding at outset versus incremental options.

Cultural change is a key priority for the NHS to improve relationships between people with diabetes and clinicians, and bring about greater personalisation, choice and control and improved integration of services across the health (and social) care system.¹²² All are essential to improve productivity and quality. Achieving this depends on changing the culture of established interactions between clinicians and people with diabetes and between healthcare staff based in different organisations.¹²³

There is a strong evidence base that shifting attitudes and work patterns across such a 'complex adaptive system' can only be achieved through integration and collaboration between stakeholders to align goals through relationships.¹²⁴

Partners in the YOC project were aware that to deliver the complex intervention of care planning designed to change relationships, the Electronic Health Record (EHR) and the care processes through commissioning, a different approach to delivery would need to be adopted from the traditional, and perhaps more structured project management approaches or from a linear sequence of activities. The project applied both project management and change management principles combining these with iterative learning to deliver a structured programme to impact on attitudes and relationships. The focus of this was to improve the care system by changing the patterns of relationships and attitudes of those working in it and those accessing care within it.¹²⁵

The third and final wave of stakeholder research (late 2010), generated insight into the way the project had worked. The research focus was '*Introducing a complex intervention into a complex environment*'. The report¹²⁶ highlighted 10 challenges, or dilemmas, as a way of conceptualising central underlying themes with which YOC had to grapple, and the non-linear approaches that led to the successful outcomes of the project. It is extremely

122 Department of Health. (2010). *Equity and Excellence: Liberating the NHS*

123 Schein EH. (2004). *Organizational Culture and Leadership*. USA: John Wiley & Sons

124 Bate P, Mendel P, Robert G. (2008). *Organizing for Quality*. The Nuffield Trust

125 Griffin D and Stacey R. (2005). *Complexity and the Experience of Leading Organizations*

126 Duquemin, A. (2011). *Year of Care: Reflections on introducing a Complex Intervention into a Complex Environment*

helpful learning that should inform implementation and evaluation of such complex interventions within the complex healthcare environment in future.

Ten challenges

The 10 challenges identified reflect dilemmas experienced as the project applied the three qualities that best characterise YOC: decentralised leadership; conceptual, ethos-driven approach; and iterative development. These were the very qualities that supported the effectiveness of the programme, yet each brought with them very real threats of project derailment or failure. While aspects of these qualities can be tidily packaged in terms well-rehearsed in change management literature (eg empowerment, bottom-up, spread) the reality of their application is challenging and often confusing. As a larger report¹²⁷ reflecting YOC stakeholder views describes these were the very qualities that supported the effectiveness of the programme, yet each brought with them very real threats of project derailment or failure.

Decentralised control

1. Genuine change versus influence through policy

“...it has been a fascinating learning process and probably has made me see that actually, writing policy documents doesn't make a blind bit of difference... unless you actually put someone there, or something in, to actually make it happen at a local level, it just won't. And it doesn't necessarily have to be us that makes it happen, but we have to work out a way of working with stakeholders, to make it happen. And if you do that, you lose a certain amount of control and so that's the give and take.”

Stakeholder interview, 2010

Leadership for the development of the YOC concept was left in the hands of the pilot sites. The central team initiated development by presenting pilot sites with five questions to explore and address, then facilitated opportunities for learning with other sites. The associated challenge is that those who initiated the project were no longer in control of the way it developed.

2. Local ownership of the model versus effectiveness

“So there is this continual paradox that when it's done according to the method... we have worked together to work out how to do it, so that it's successful and so that it's motivating and so that it works. And we can say that when it's done that way, it is motivating and then it works. But when it's not done that way, it doesn't motivate and it doesn't work and it sort of atrophies and therefore the challenge is to keep it on course without of course, controlling it because the thing that's motivating, is that it's about real people working in a really flexible way.”

Stakeholder interview, 2010

A complex model works in situ when it is owned and adapted for its setting. YOC was perceived as an ethos rather than a process incorporating a focus on attitudes as well as facts and structures. The challenge, however, is how to contain the extent to which it changes and departs from its central ethos, leading to loss of impact.

3. Team approach versus central leadership

“I sort of did wonder sometimes initially if the central team was holding that power and perhaps not always sharing everything. But as time's gone on, there has been that mutually working together and that sharing, so I think it's just building that rapport really... you just build that rapport all the time.”

Stakeholder interview, 2010

127 Duquemin, A. (2011). *Year of Care: Reflections on Introducing a Complex Intervention into a Complex Environment*

While development of the YOC concept was always a team effort, governance of the project moved increasingly towards a shared approach as the project progressed. Intentions, at central level, to share governance are nevertheless balanced against the unavoidable final responsibility and inevitable power that rests with the central team.

Conceptual, ethos-drive approach

4. Conceptual approach versus constancy

“... but I think it needs a hook and that’s why we have to keep hooking it onto Year of Care at the moment. And we do need to keep reinforcing it, because it is, you know, it is quite a big difficult step... So it is a huge cultural change.”

Stakeholder interview, 2010

The effectiveness of the YOC approach relies on integrity of interpretation; mis-application of the approach risks bringing disrepute to the programme as it threatens its effectiveness. As a conceptual programme YOC faces challenges in conveying and maintaining the essence of its message. The programme, throughout its three years, developed ‘hooks’ that captured and conveyed the essence of the concept. Hooks included diagrammatic models (such as the House model), real-life examples (verbal and recorded), systematic procedures (sending out results) and the YOC care planning training programme.

5. Spread of message versus integrity

“... anybody can still call themselves Year of Care and use the logo and everything, so there’s still some vulnerability there... one of the ways of doing it would be to have key people who give, key front people, who give the same messages out all of the time, where they are, so that the message is not diluted. You can’t help it getting diluted once it gets past them, but if you have key front people having a consistent message and then working closely with other organisations, the chances of it getting diluted lots are less.”

Stakeholder interview, 2010

As with any programme that believes it has a message of value, YOC aimed to spread its approach to new sites and practices. The challenge, particularly for a programme that has a strong conceptual element, is how to avoid the effect of ‘Chinese whispers’ as the message travels further from its source. YOC has addressed the challenge of integrity by ensuring that people in key positions new to YOC hear the message directly from someone in the central team. This, however, mitigates against fast and far spread.

Iterative development

6. Solution focus versus problem focus

“... it wasn’t that I particularly was sold on the idea of whether care planning could or couldn’t do this... I think it was just that sense of that there was actually quite a lot of congruence between the areas that we were struggling with and then this coming along as a new idea that we could see would fit, if we could make it happen.”

Stakeholder interview, 2010

YOC began as a concept that sites were invited to develop, through exploring five open questions. At that initial stage, with no concrete programme to offer, what was it that persuaded sites to participate? The first sites to engage with YOC were attracted, not by a description of a solution, but by the promise of an intervention that addressed needs with which they identified. When sites began to promote the programme to individual practices they first described YOC as a totally new approach, but on reflection, recognised the importance of working to find resonance between needs each practice acknowledged and the way YOC worked. The challenge comes when working with new, under-explored areas, as was the case with commissioning, where problems or gaps are not well defined and therefore not acknowledged. In the absence of identified problems how does one find resonance?

7. Ability to reshape versus clarity of aims

“... one of the challenges for this project is that it’s not tangible and everybody brought to it their own perspectives of what they thought could or should be happening. And although there was some work undertaken in the initial phases about defining it tightly, they’re still quite broad.”

Stakeholder interview, 2010

The collaborative, experiential and conceptual aspects of YOC all contributed to its characteristic of being an empirically based approach that sites could apply and shape, with development and refinement continuing throughout the project. The flexibility also allowed re-framing of the concept to demonstrate its alignment with changing policy priorities. The challenge, however, comes with evaluation and external expectations. Without clear and explicit messages about what is expected from the project and how success will be demonstrated external stakeholders adopt unrealistic and simplistic expectations that risk disappointment and discredit to the project when it fails to meet them.

8. Experiential approach versus preparedness

“... a lot of the practices have said, well when we started we didn’t know what we were supposed to be doing, and they’d had some training but the training wasn’t really very integrated and didn’t in itself, the trainer wasn’t fully understanding what Year of Care was asking people to do. So I think a lot of people were trying to implement something they were very unclear about what it was...”

Stakeholder interview, 2010

As an empirically based developmental project it was not possible to develop resources for YOC in advance. Training and tools used for introducing the approach to the first practices that adopted YOC were new and experimental. Those introducing the programme felt under prepared. Possibly implementation started too early; possibly the first phase of introducing a new concept will always feel too early. The challenge is that the first sites to receive YOC were often the most enthused yet received the least developed introduction to the programme.

9. Formal evaluation versus more novel approach

“I probably would have had a gap in the middle [of the evaluation] to actually give a couple of years to really embed this, although the risk of doing that is that when you go back in two years time, nobody is doing anything... [wait] two years and then go back for evaluation... So we could have done that, or just set up a separate programme to have reviewed it two years later.”

Stakeholder interview, 2010

As a funded project YOC was subject to the usual expectations of formal evaluation with standard requirements for data collection and analysis to coincide with the end of the project. As an iterative and conceptual programme the standard evaluation model did not fit well with the real experience of those implementing YOC, resulting in frustration and disappointment in the sites and practices. The challenge is to find alternative and more flexible approaches to evaluation.

10. Adequate funding at outset versus incremental options

“Because we’ve got some external funding from our SHA, we’ve got a separate arm of the project that’s...”

Stakeholder interview, 2010

Starting as it did, with an iterative approach to development; it would have been difficult for YOC to predict the expenditure required at the outset. Despite its initially restricted funding it was able to develop two components (the training programme and commissioning models) that proved central to the programme’s success, once it was able to access two sets of external funding. On the other hand, a third component of the programme that would ideally have been devised while the programme was in progress (IT programmes) were delayed due to inability to fund their development. Is it more realistic, rather than demanding estimates of required funding at the outset, instead to provide limited funding at the start, and then enable reasonable access to additional funding as needs emerge?