VA Product Effectiveness Quality Assessment
Document Review and Communication

The Challenge

Just as private sector businesses must measure how well their activities and investments contribute to achieving mission results, so too must federal executive agencies, including the Department of Veteran's Affairs. To that end, the VA Office of Quality, Safety and Value's Product Effectiveness Division (PE) performs independent assessments and analyses on various programs and products to ensure they are effective, efficient, and provide value to the customer. PE assessments provide VHA programs with evidence-based information for decision support, validation, and justification of investments.

AllagashGroup performs quality assurance on all documents produced by PE and is also tasked with developing technical content to use in internal communications and educational materials. PE plays the role of the internal consultant that performs arm's length projected return-on-investment (ROI) analyses of proposed projects, and in so doing offers an enhanced business case for internal clients (provided that the intended benefits are realized). Having a clearly defined methodology to calculate ROI and provide hard numbers could help PE better convey the business case for the project and the enhanced value PE provides for their internal customers.

The Solution

AllagashGroup is recommending two solutions that, when applied in combination, will help to solve PE's dual problems of enhancing their clients' business cases through ROI analyses, and enhancing their own business case by demonstrating their value to their customers. Our evaluators and performance measurement team starts by beginning with the end in mind. We do this by asking basic questions about the ultimate goals of any project or program. We then employ a proven methodology that entails the use of logic models to show the relationship between inputs, activities, outputs and short-, intermediate-, and long-term outcomes that relate to the ultimate goals previously expressed. The final step in our approach is the construction of a model for monetizing the projected outcomes by using a methodology we have named Expected Value—Return on Investment. Monetary ROI measures can happen in two parts of the logic model: at the Activity and Output level through more efficient operations so that tasks can be accomplished with better quality in less time and with a lower expenditure of resources, and at all three Outcome levels through more effective operations that produce better outcomes.

An example in the VA is improving hospital bed management through an electronic Bed Management System (BMS). For the BMS project we begin with the end in mind and ask what the problem is that the system is intended to solve. Bed capacity is a crucial but limited hospital resource. Therefore, professional bed management aims at an optimal allocation of beds involving short waiting periods for the patients, a low rate of

canceled admissions, and a high occupancy rate. AllagashGroup is recommending the use of these three objective measures that point to improved bed management. Currently there are many survey questions asking users of the BMS for their opinions on details of the BMS functionality and report generation capabilities. The answers to these questions are only important insofar as customer satisfaction drives improvement in the three objective measures.

Applying the logic model approach to the BMS problem, we establish the three objective measures as outcome goals. Since we have determined that the BMS system has the necessary functionality, the question moves to the effectiveness of training and subsequent the use of the BMS to improve patient flow and bed availability. To gauge the effectiveness of training we turn to the logic model as applied to training programs employing an established and logical progression that assesses training participants' reaction to the training, how well the training achieved its intended purpose, to what degree participants apply what they learned, and to what degree the training led to measurable improvement in the outcome goals. These measures have monetary implications that can help answer the ROI question.

Results

This project is ongoing and AllagashGroup's recommendations are still being considered so results are not yet known. However, our intent is for our client to receive better work products that engage the reader and immediately explain the magnitude of the problem and the proposed solution's role in alleviating that problem. The problem and the proposed solution are explained in lay terms and positioned within a hierarchy of VA needs so that the reader understands the size of the problem both in terms of the number of people affected and the dollar cost of not engaging in a solution. The probability of success of the proposed solution is expressed so that the reader can understand that an investment of X dollars has the potential of saving Y dollars.

By introducing the logic model as the overarching visual for understanding the project, the reader sees the connection between better processes and better outcomes. PE's customers are pleased that they are better able to justify worthy investments to funders, and to avoid investments that do not convincingly pass a positive return on investment test based on the logical flow that connects the cost of an intervention, the probability of success, and the expected value of that success.