

Quality Improvement Basics: Communication Techniques

Slide 1 Objectives

After completing this module, participants will be able to

- Identify three communication techniques to help QI teams clearly and accurately exchange information among their team and other involved parties.
- Explain the SBAR framework.

Slide 2 Communication Techniques

There are some common communication techniques that you can employ in your QI teamwork. We'll explore some popular methods here, learn about the purpose of each, and discuss how you might use them in your QI project work.

- Situation–Background– Assessment– Recommendation (SBAR)
- Elevator Speech
- Check-Back

Slide 3 SBAR

Communication is critical to the effectiveness of a team. One technique to help ensure effective communication is SBAR. SBAR stands for Situation Background Assessment Recommendation. SBAR is a structured method to communicate the status of your team's work, provide the needed context, and move on to "next steps." SBAR is an easy-to-remember tool that is useful for framing any conversation, especially for one requiring someone's immediate attention and action. You can use this tool within your team or to inform and request action from partners outside your team. The goal of SBAR is to use a structure to help you provide concise, clear, and direct information that requires attention or action.

If you were completing an SBAR, you would answer the following:

- Situation - What is going on? (Briefly and concisely describe the current situation and why you are reaching out today.)
- Background - What is background or context? (How did we arrive at the current situation, and what led to it?)
- Assessment - What do I think the problem or situation at hand is? (Now that you have provided context, assess what you think is happening.)
- Recommendation - What would I recommend? (This is the 'take action' component and will help you to move your work forward.)

For example:

Imagine you or a team member communicating this information to your director or manager.

- S: Our local health department is being asked to help sponsor a local fun run with the funds going to the cancer center at the hospital.
- B: This is a new event this year. The hospital has been a good partner with us. This event will encourage fitness and family activity. Uncertain how many people will attend. They have alerted and invited media to cover. Sponsorship is \$500.

- A: We do not have this in our budget. We haven't financially sponsored this type of event in the past. However, the hospital is a strong partner, and we want to encourage this event.
- R: Our team recommends that we help sponsor, offering in-kind support, providing educational materials and resources

The SBAR approach goes over very well with decision-makers, who appreciate receiving clear, concise, relevant information and recommendations from their team members.

Slide 4 Elevator Speech

Because our healthcare team members are so busy, and we want them to be involved in or supportive of our QI project, it can be helpful for each QI team member to be able to share an “elevator speech” that concisely sums up a key point or two about the project and how they can help.

The elevator speech should be something that each QI team member can recite from heart (each team member's version doesn't have to be exactly the same) ...but this shorthand method of communicating should help solidify and confirm that your team has a shared mental model of your project and what if any, participation, or action you are requesting from the listener.

Your summary may be a bit shorter or longer, and an elevator speech does not necessarily need a request at the end.

Public narrative is composed of three elements: a story of self, a story of us, and a story of now. A story of self communicates who I am – my values, experience, and why I do what I do. A story of us communicates who we are – our shared values, experience, and why we do what we do. And a story of now transforms the present into a moment of challenge, hope, and choice.”

Here's a quick example:

I'm part of a team here that is working to reduce readmissions for our patients with heart failure. It is personal for me - I know many of these patients personally and see the impact of readmissions on their lives. We've worked with our whole team to identify some things we can do better and set a goal to make changes over the next three months. We are all so committed. Can I tell you more?

Slide 5 Check-Back

A check-back is a closed-loop communication strategy used to verify and validate information exchanged.

This strategy involves the sender initiating a message, the receiver accepting the message and confirming what was communicated, and the sender verifying that the message was received.

Here is an example of the use of a check-back:

Facilitator: By our next meeting next week, Elena will interview 3-5 people impacted by our process change, asking how the change is working - what is working well and are they running into any barriers?

Elena: Yes, I'll do that before our next meeting, and make sure I get people on different shifts and on different days.

Facilitator: Sounds good.

An example of check-back communication is the “teach-back” method when a healthcare professional explains to a patient how to follow medical instructions and has the patient repeat their understanding in their own words.

The check-back method of communicating is a great way to ensure that the sender and receiver are on the same page and that no assumptions are made about whether what was intended to be communicated was indeed received and understood.

Slide 6 In Summary

As a re cap some of the most common communication techniques you can use in quality improvement to effectively communicate information is the check-back method, the elevator speech and the SBAR. The SBAR stands for Situation-Background-Assessment and Recommendation and is a structured method to communicate the status of your team’s work, provide the needed context, and move on to “next steps. Thank you for taking time to learn about Common Communication techniques.