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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. *Indicate the key professionals required for a leadership planning session.*
2. *Assemble the necessary information for an effective session.*
3. *Categorize quick wins, long-term goals, and strategic initiatives.*

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Education Nation:**Sterile Processing Leadership Planning Sessions**

by Sarah B. Cruz

The patient experience is a planned event in healthcare. From the moment the patient begins seeing the doctor to the day they arrive for elective surgery, the individual triggers a cadence of events that will create their patient safety story. Even in the case of an emergency when a patient arrives “unexpectedly,” the professionals have had training and practice to prepare for what may need to be done in that particular moment. Typically, the processes are pulled from learned and pre-designed processes put in place for moments like this. It is true that although we cannot prepare ourselves for every specific emergency or hypothetical situation, healthcare professionals have demonstrated that we can prepare ourselves for intense and stressful moments by having core processes to default to. Every scenario, planned or not, in which a group of professionals can come together to pull from their expertise and carry out necessary actions that create the anticipated or needed outcome, can be attributed to a planning session. There is much to be said about the influence that an effective plan has on the ability to achieve much-needed outcomes, facilitate key performance indicators (KPIs), address corrective action, and ultimately influence the patient safety story.

Cadence & Forecasting

Every day includes a process called forecasting. Much like the way this word is used to determine the weather for the week, surgical forecasting allows perioperative and Sterile Processing (SP) leaders to predict the requirements and necessities of future surgical cases.¹ This form of predictive scheduling can be implemented as soon as the surgeon’s office when the patient is scheduling surgery in a larger healthcare facility. This ability is a tool that creates a complete picture for the required series of events that must occur in order for that patient to have the surgery performed. That series of events is called a cadence. While the term cadence traditionally speaks to the

rhythm of music, it has evolved to represent the professional activities that guide us.²

Cadences and effective forecasting are what allow for the operating room (OR) and SP staff to ensure that a surgical procedure can occur. The multiprofessional group involved must be certain they have the resources available to accommodate the surgeon’s request.³ The recipe for surgery always includes, but is not limited to, the availability of OR time, OR teams (nurses, surgical technicians, anesthesiologists, etc.), surgical theater equipment (monitoring, beds, etc.), and the surgical instruments needed to actually perform the procedure. These tools are the primary requirements for any type of effective planning.

Effective Response

The term “effective” in itself can be ambiguous. Simply put, it means producing a desired result.⁴ The cadence is designed to demonstrate if processes are being done the right way to achieve effectiveness. SP department training, standard works, and best practices are tools used to adhere to the approved cadence and self-supervised transfer of the learned skills required to effectively respond to a situation.⁵ The three components serve as the primary influence that shapes the way SP professionals perceive, engage, and perform during the situation. An effective response is defined by its ability to yield the anticipated result. In conjunction with the professional skills necessary to do so, SP professionals must be able to demonstrate interpersonal skills to respond effectively. High emotional intelligence (EQ) demonstrated through active listening, raising empathy, inclusive language, and team problem solving are just a few EQ qualities that will contribute to the desired results.

These skills are heavily relied upon to assuage high-stress situations with accurate and reactive responses. An example of this is seen when an add-on (a not previously scheduled and/or impromptu surgical procedure) is scheduled. This can result in a frazzled, overexcited response if previous

standard works and best practices were not prepared for and trained by SP professionals ahead of time. However, because the process (professional cadence) was already put in place, the SP tech can effectively move through the heightened and fast-paced situation and reach the required outcome. This success is much to the expectation of the perioperative team and to the necessity of the add-on patient.

Why Plan?

It is important to acknowledge that the role of an SP Manager is to efficiently navigate the team to achieve the facility's overall vision and mission through the operations and organization of the department.⁶ This is done through a number of different ways:

- Motivating and growing team members
- Hiring and staffing quality professionals
- Conducting performance assessments
- Addressing conflict and providing resolutions

While these are critical job responsibilities, this is only a fraction of the roles and influence an SP manager must have on the department. They must incorporate these responsibilities into the daily operations and duties of a functioning department. As we all know, Sterile Processing is not an independent department. The collaboration of the multiple departments' contributors is required so that the demand and responsibilities expected of an SP department are met. By incorporating the goals of partnering departments into their own expertise on what must occur in their department in order to achieve the desired outcome, SP managers can demonstrate overall process contribution and success.

Anatomy of Planning

This is where an effective leadership planning session can make the SP manager's ability to perform significantly better and easier. While all perioperative professionals are acquainted with the ability to forecast the needs of surgery, this same principle is applied to planning for future prospects, goals, and emergencies that are key to overall department success. Simply put, planning is purposeful thinking before the action takes place.⁶ The logical thinking and rational decision-making of a planning session affords SP leadership the time to consciously choose the purpose of a process, the outcome of a goal, and how to go about achieving such things concisely and purposefully.

The length of planning sessions can be as short or as long as needed to determine the goals or outcomes associated with their purpose. Regardless of the purpose, all planning sessions consist of these key components:

1. Stakeholders

2. Key process indicators

3. Quick-wins and long-term goals of strategic plans.

Stakeholders are the individuals that may have an interest in the success or failure of a business, project, or group. They are typically linked to the planning session in question on a variety of levels determined by the amount of impact they could potentially derive based on the outcomes or reasons for the planning sessions. Primary stakeholders stand to be directly affected, while secondary stakeholders will be indirectly affected by the planning session. Key stakeholders can belong to both or neither of these aforementioned groups, however they have the ability to directly impact the efforts and outcomes of the group (positively or negatively). One of the biggest obstacles that SP leaders face is the ability to relay the information necessary to help these participants understand why they should have an interest in the session's goals. Another obstacle is that the leaders must be able to demonstrate how key stakeholders stand to benefit from their interest in the session's outcome.⁷

Key process indicators are what keep people interested. KPIs are used to measure the outcomes of processes. It is important that they are quantifiable so as to reflect the overall effectiveness of the process. This can be achieved through data collection, ongoing metric logging, and/or other dashboard tools. More often than not, KPIs are created in an attempt to guide a department or group of professionals towards an organization's defined outcomes. They are a key factor in "how well" a department is performing or not.⁸

To be strategic is to be designed and planned to serve a purpose. When a planning session incorporates a strategy into their design, it provides the foundation for initiatives that work towards a more focused and specific outcome intended by the organization. In these planning sessions, the initiatives that are created will speak specifically to the KPIs and stakeholders of the organization. SP initiatives are reinforced or implemented through their quality assurance (QA) programs and maintained by their quality management systems (QMS). The clearer the initiative is, the more the QA and QMS can be assessed, updated, and/or bolstered to help support the goals in place. Goals can be categorized into quick-wins or long-term initiatives. Quick-wins are just that: initiatives that create immediate successful outcomes that contribute to the major purpose defined by the planning session. These are used to boost morale, garner momentum, and demonstrate the ability of the team to uncertain stakeholders. Long-term initiatives are outcomes that will take

a length of time to implement, monitor, and maintain before consistency and sustained success are demonstrated.

From Overwhelmed to Under Control

Let us outline a planning session based on the key points listed above. This is a simulated session between SP professionals discussing the issue only after it has been brought to leadership's attention.

The concern: Missing instruments are causing room delays.

Identify the stakeholders on every level and what their needs are.

- Primary stakeholders: OR staff that is impacted: nurses, surgical techs, etc.
- Secondary stakeholders: the patient, unbeknownst to them, is affected by this delay.
- Key stakeholders: OR leadership voicing the concern to SP leadership and surgeons that may be pressuring them to do so.

Determine what KPIs are in place or need to be created in order to demonstrate change, growth, consistency, or acknowledgment of change in this matter.

- Tracking system or paper documents that indicate missing instruments from setlists, missing instruments from case carts, current inventory (par level) of instrumentation.
- Frequency of instruments requested: day/time/surgeon requesting said items.
- Current staffing models and levels, department assignment schedule, training and standard works in place regarding prioritizing inventory.

Strategic Goal: To increase the availability of instruments that are contributing to surgical case room delay.

- Initiative: Determine the reason why instruments are not available for surgical cases.
- Plan:
 - Determine trends in request times, surgical case order, and surgeon preference (long-term)
 - Utilize tracking system data to determine if loaners or temporary sets need to be requested to supplement inventory (quick-win)
 - Analyze costs to create/supplement existing sets to accommodate requests (long-term)
 - Assess staffing structure to determine possible correlations between instrument availability and department productivity (long-term)
 - Evaluate instrument turnover process and streamline awareness and alertness to expedite reprocessing efficiency (quick-win)

° Implement standard works for clear communication and phone protocol to better relay when priority sets are needed same day (quick-win)

After all the discussion among SP professionals, the intended improvements and processes would need to be discussed by the OR leadership. They may be able to contribute their insight to many of the outlined

solutions or even lend suggestions or knowledge of their own. This action also helps the key stakeholders understand their involvement in the solution and how they stand to benefit from the success of this initiative.

Effective planning is an essential tool in any leader's skill repertoire. Utilizing leadership planning sessions provides methodical and purposeful ways for SP

leaders to forecast and incorporate cadence into their everyday department practices. Poorly executed processes lack the ability to yield any of the desired results of those involved. While the lack of successful outcomes really demonstrates the ineffectiveness of the planning process, it may cast a poor light on the SP leader's abilities. The inability to consistently achieve process expectations and meet the needs of stakeholders (upper-level leadership) have been indicators of "poor management" or ineffective leadership. Entire SP leadership teams have been relieved of their duties upon citing multiple instances of end results not having been fulfilled. By incorporating a purposeful and well-structured SP leadership planning session, stakeholders of every level stand to benefit through the clearly outlined and methodical approach of utilizing KPIs that contribute to the strategic goals, initiatives, and plans. This is the power and impact an SP leadership session will have on patient safety. **HPN**

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CONTINUING EDUCATION TEST • OCTOBER 2023

Education Nation: Sterile Processing Leadership Planning Sessions

Circle the one correct answer:

1. "Producing a desired result" is the definition of:
 - A. Efficiency
 - B. Effectiveness
 - C. Purpose
 - D. Strategy
2. Forecasting is a form of planning utilized by SP and OR professionals.
 - A. True
 - B. False
3. Components to an SP leadership planning session include:
 - A. Stakeholders
 - B. Key process indicators
 - C. Quick-wins and long-term goals of strategic plans
 - D. All of the above
 - E. None of the above
4. SP initiatives are reinforced or implemented through their:
 - A. Quality Assurance Programs
 - B. Quality Management Systems
 - C. Both a & b
 - D. None of the above
5. There are three types of stakeholders to consider in a planning session.
 - A. True
 - B. False
6. Which is a factor as to how a Sterile Processing professional interprets and carries out an SOP?
 - A. Job skills
 - B. Workplace tenure
 - C. Learned habits
 - D. All of the above
 - E. None of the above
7. Ineffective planning can reflect poorly on SP leadership's ability to problem solve.
 - A. True
 - B. False
8. To be strategic is to be designed to serve a purpose.
 - A. True
 - B. False
9. SP leadership planning sessions should include the input of professions that directly contribute to or are impacted by the outcome of the strategic plan.
 - A. True
 - B. False
10. Demonstrate if processes are being done the right way to achieve effectiveness.
 - B. Determine if data is useful.
 - C. Are specific to the perioperative team.
 - D. All of the above
 - E. None of the above

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