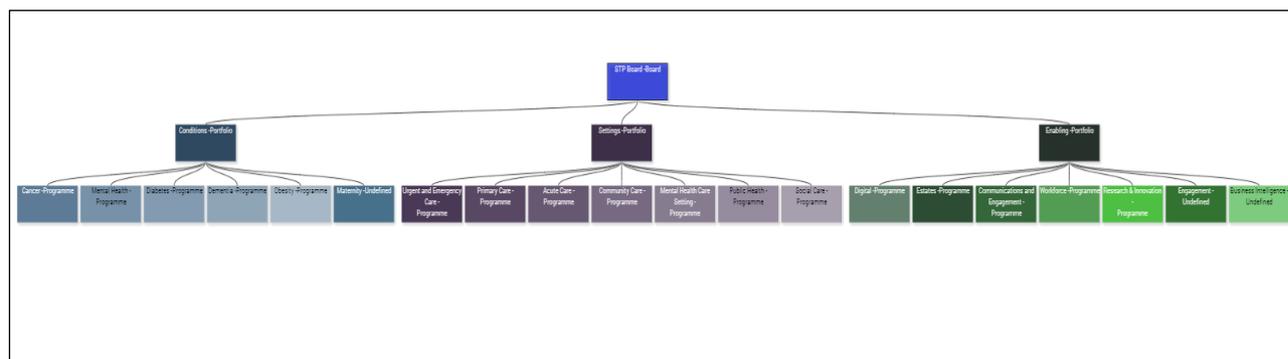# Sustainability & Transformation Partnerships (STP) Challenges

Control

How to ensure you control the delivery of your STP plan

The first blog in this series set out the top five challenges faced by the 44 Sustainability and Transformation Partnerships (STP) in England; Coherence, Clarity, Consistency, Collaboration and Control. This sixth blog in the series provides insight as to how to approach the fifth of these challenges – Control.

How do you control delivery of your plans across a diverse and dispersed range of stakeholders in your local health and care system, supported by a simple, effective and affordable governance structure where accountability and responsibility for achieving your plans are understood?

You can't take control of whole system transformation without a whole system view of investment plans, delivery plans and benefit plans, where accountability and responsibility throughout is understood.

Governance

Do you have an efficient, effective and affordable governance structure in place across your STP that ensures ultimate accountability for project delivery and benefit realisation and the decision-making process across the STP is clear?

Governance is about decision making, as well as ensuring that things are controlled well enough for you to know that you can say, with confidence, that you are doing the right things, in the right way, for the right reasons. Governance processes often become unwieldy because people try to control absolutely everything. A good starting point would be to ask yourself what is most important for you to control and why, and then determine what information you need to be able to do that. It is likely that different amounts and types of information are needed at different levels within the partnership.

So, whilst at a project level, you are likely to want to discuss how you ensure that day to day progress is being made at the right pace and delivering the right results, at a portfolio level you are more likely to need to know what is blocking you from doing what you need to and how to remove those blockages so that you can continue. At board level you may be more concerned with whether the strategy that you are following is the right one and whether the level of investment is appropriate. By keeping it simple, it should be easy to understand, as well as being effective and affordable.

Make sure that you have suitable portfolio, programme and project boards in place that are fit for purpose. This means that they have a clear mandate, scope, budget and resource and that they are clear on what they are accountable for. It is also important that membership of your various boards is appropriate in terms of roles, experience and number of attendees. I have attended programme boards with more than 25 people on them – no decisions were made, accountability and responsibility were unclear and they just became talking shops for people to air their points of view. This is a very expensive and ineffectual way to govern.

Single Point of Truth

Do you have a mechanism for providing all STP stakeholders with access to a Single Point of Truth (SPOT) of holistic, high integrity, information and knowledge of your Objectives, Results, Performance and plans for delivery, presented in a way that is easy to understand?

In a way, not having a single source of holistic, high integrity, performance information and recognising that what you have is not presented in a way that is easy to understand may be a blessing in disguise. Yes - it means you have a significant piece of work to do - but this brings you the opportunity to design your performance information so that it is fit for purpose for your partnership. The key here is to remember that sometimes less is more.

There is a large amount of statutory information that you need to report on, however, when designing your measures, focus on the most important outcomes of your processes (e.g. patient centred, improving quality and timeliness of care for all patients) as the measures typically reinforce the behaviour you want to encourage.

When you are clear about what you want to measure, you then need to think about three more things:

1. Make sure that the hierarchy of measurements makes sense. In other words, think about your audiences at the different levels in the governance structure and how the measures build from bottom to top. Ideally, the STP Board should be reviewing no more than 7-10 measures and those measures should be aggregated versions of the measures that sit beneath them.

For example, the STP Board would be interested in indicators that measure progress towards closing any projected financial gap across the STP; the Medicines Optimisation Programme Board would be interested in measuring progress in delivering its contribution to that financial gap target; and individual Projects within that Programme would be interested in measuring the success of delivery of their project outcomes that enable those cost savings to be realised.

2. Think about how your measures associated with transformation are impacting the operational measures that you need to report on - linking these together will help in two ways, it confirms that what you are doing will (by design) impact the outcomes you need to achieve and publicly report against as well as helping you to profile and then explain the changes in performance you achieve as you progress.

3. You need to think about how you can present the information in a way that is easy for everyone to understand. Special skills should not be required to understand the picture you are painting when feeding back on your performance - so keep it simple, label things well and make the approach to reporting consistent across the whole transformation portfolio so that once you have understood it for one programme or project, you can understand it for them all.

Ability to Prioritise

Do you have an objective view of your portfolio and its progress so that you can prioritise your resources on the things that are most urgent and most important to you?

Prioritising your investments in programmes and projects is almost always difficult. There are a couple of reasons for this.

People are invariably passionate about the programmes and projects that they are sponsoring. This is important as it is one of the things that really helps make sure they deliver. There is sometimes a downside…. In some organisations, it is not unknown for senior executives to sponsor what might be referred to as vanity or pet projects. Deprioritising these, due to the sponsor's emotional commitment and positional power, can be very challenging.

To explain the second reason let's assume you are clear about the financial investment you are making and the value that each project or programme is expected to return. When the value is not presented in financial terms it is often believed that you therefore cannot compare it with another project or programme delivering a different value category. We all know that comparing 'apples and pears' doesn't really work. However, it can be done if you use a method to 'normalise' the results. This technique is often used in six sigma and lean engineering and can be applied in any industry. There are also business management systems that will do this for you.

Whichever solution you opt for, make sure that the return on investment can be objectively measured so that you can rank everything within your portfolio to determine which gives you the best return and which gives you the worst. When this is understood objectively you can re-evaluate your portfolio based on value and then bring in other influencing factors (e.g. proximity and risk) into the dialogue when making decisions about what work you should start, stop or continue.

When starting this journey keep it simple. Try to relate things back to a financial results where possible. If it isn't possible – limit yourself to the same 7 -10 measures that the executives on the Board consider. If you don't have the ability to normalise your results across all value categories, at least aim to prioritise within each value category. You can do this using a simple calculation of what does it cost and how many units of value will that investment get you by the end of the project.

[VALUE SCORE CHART IMAGE HERE]

Conclusion

Taking and retaining control of delivering your STP plan across the diverse range of organisations and stakeholders in your partnership is challenging. Keep your governance clear, simple and fit for purpose. Ensure you have a Single Point of Truth of holistic, high integrity, information and knowledge of your Objectives, Results, Performance and plans for delivery, presented in a way that is easy to understand. And ensure you have an objective view of your

portfolio and its progress so that you can prioritise your resources on the things that are most urgent and most important to you.