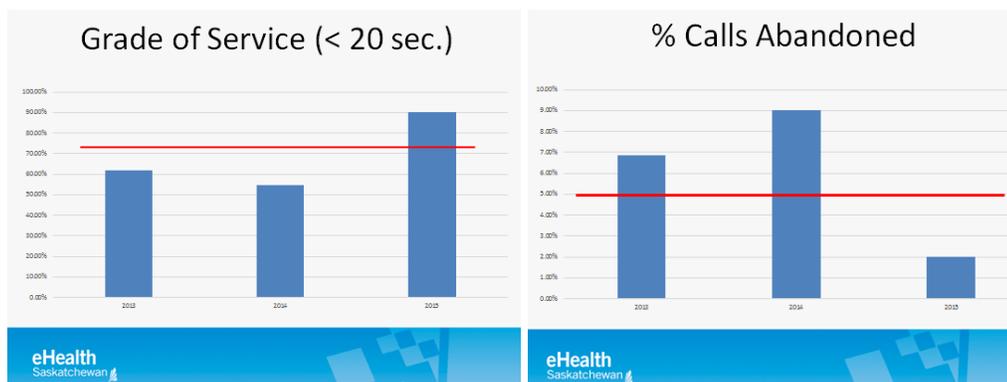




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Improved Staff Experience: Transformation of the eHealth Saskatchewan Service Desk



At the end of summer, 2014, the eHealth Saskatchewan Service Desk was in a crisis. A rapid turnover of personnel resulted in a number of vacancies and inexperienced staff, which led to the Service Desk being unable to keep up with customer demand. The eHealth Saskatchewan Service Desk provides front line I.T. support to the health care system. It typically receives 500 phone calls and 130 emails/faxes per week day, and supports critical services 24x7.

Wait times had become excessive; at one point across the health care system an accumulation of 100 hours was wasted in a single week by health care professionals waiting to talk to a Service Desk analyst, often for something as simple as requesting a password reset or reporting a malfunctioning printer. The Grade of Service – the percentage of calls answered within 20 seconds – was at an all-time low of 20% (the target is at least 80%). The Call Abandoned Rate – callers who hang up before an analyst answers, usually because they are waiting too long – peaked at 33% (the target is less than 5%). Staff morale was low, as they dealt with customer after customer who had waited often 20 minutes or more to talk to a Service Desk Analyst.

Yet by January, 2015, things had turned around dramatically. The Call Abandoned rate had zoomed past the target, and the Grade of Service had approached the target by mid-January and – for the last 2 weeks of January – exceeded it.

How was this accomplished? During this 5 month period, 15 PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) cycles were attempted. This was a sequence of trial-and-error experiments, some of

which were effective, others not. However, Lean's insistence on "try-storming" rather than "brain-storming" gradually had a measureable effect.

What kinds of things were "try-stormed"?

- The team adjusted the start times of shifts and breaks, in order to provide leveled scheduling of resources.
- One very effective idea was to move from two staggered break shifts in the morning to three, meaning 2/3 of the staff were still on the phones at any given time during breaks.
- The team also experimented with level loading, bringing staff who normally work on emails or documentations into the phone queues during the busiest parts of the day, or even as needed when a spike in demand was observed.
- Visual Daily Management was enhanced with a very clear focus on daily metrics and targets, with root cause analysis every day when targets were not met.

Suggestions from front-line staff were taken seriously and turned into PDCA's – with enough regularity that it is now a normal part of the team's culture when someone has an idea to say "Let's run that as a PDCA". This change in mindset converts the all-too-frequent "grousing sessions" found in struggling workplaces into pools of ideas to experiment on in the workplace. When people's ideas are taken seriously and tried out, then, whether the result is success or failure, people feel respected and engaged.

One factor that cannot be under-estimated is the value of regular Executive visits to the gemba (the place where work is done). Front line staff knew that Executives were aware of the dismal state of affairs, but the ongoing Executive support and encouragement when the numbers started turning around was energizing. To know that Executives were watching PDCA's and being supportive whether they succeed or fail, spurred ever more innovation by front line staff.

The work is far from done. Lean emphasizes *continuous* process improvement. The next target is to raise the "Tier 1 Resolution Rate" – the number of contacts that can be fixed by the Service Desk Analysts themselves rather than passed along to senior support specialists within eHealth or its partner organizations. The Tier 1 Resolution Rate is currently averaging about 50%; raising it to the industry standard of 80% is a daunting challenge, but it can be met by steady, continuous emphasis on understanding the root causes, continuously making small, incremental improvements, and using Visual Daily Management to track progress.

Debrief questions:

- What Lean tools, techniques or philosophies were involved in making this improvement?
- This wasn't an overnight success. Why do you think it took 5 months to achieve these results?