Using a Data Placemat to Evaluate a Redesigned Curriculum in the UNM Medical School

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Using a Data Placemat to Evaluate a Redesigned Curriculum in the UNM Medical School

Just what is a Data Placemat?

Data placemats concentrate important metrics in a short document for community/stakeholder learning and planning. This participatory evaluation technique promotes a shared understanding of complex data & ideas.

DOMAINS
The seven ‘domains’ represent strategies developed by the Curriculum Redesign Teams. Some examples are: ‘High quality active learning,’ ‘Prescribed assessment strategies,’ ‘Helpful core [coaching] faculty,’ and ‘Effective WISE Weeks.’

MEASUREMENT
We selected two to five measures for each domain. They include quantitative measures such as the proportion of class time devoted to active learning and the percentages of students seeking assistance; and qualitative measures such as lead faculty ratings of the quality of integration between courses. Other data include student evaluations, faculty reports, and faculty focus group findings.

Engaging Stakeholders in Three Steps

1st CURRICULUM COMMITTEE MEETING
I presented outcome data to the approximately 40 members of the Curriculum Committee (CC), showing that in the first year of the renewed curriculum, students performed similarly to previous cohorts in terms of grades and student progress. Could we improve the implementation of our renewal strategies? I divided the Committee into seven small groups; and each was assigned one domain. I asked the groups to use the measures to analyze the domains’ Strengths, Weaknesses, (future) Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT analysis) and record them. Then they rated the domain (1 low to 5 high) in terms of its priority level for more CC discussion. Of the seven domains, three were rated 4 or higher.

2nd CURRICULUM COMMITTEE MEETING
For each of the top priority domains, I shared the measures for the domain as well as the small group’s SWOT narrative analysis, ending with what the group had considered ‘future opportunities.’ As a whole group, the Committee brainstormed ideas for improvement. I used the meeting minutes, video recording, and chat recording to compile a thorough list of all ideas and forwarded it to the CC Chairs. From it, they created 2-5 policy action proposals for each domain for consideration by the Committee. The nine proposals varied in their level of ‘demand;’ and the Co-Chairs were uncomfortable with some of their assumptions.

3rd CURRICULUM COMMITTEE MEETING
The CC began to consider nine proposed ‘policy actions’ in the three categories. While the Co-Chairs had intended votes on each proposal, they also recognized some policy action proposals might need further discussion and development. Indeed, the Committee spent most of its allotted time discussing and developing the third proposal. Remaining proposals will be considered in future CC meetings.

Reflections and Lessons Learned

As opposed to a ‘standard’ data placemat process in which the final goal is collaborative data interpretation, here the CC went further to create policy actions to improve implementation. Both the stakes in the process and the level of specificity required in its outcomes were higher than in many data placement scenarios. As in most cases, the process required adaptability on the part of the evaluator and other facilitators.

As is often the case, much of the work was behind the scenes. While some measures existed from the onset, many had to be created from scratch, especially using feedback from faculty through a focus group and analysis of data by key experts. As the evaluator I needed to compile the list of ideas after the 2nd CC meeting, and the CC Chairs had to create ‘voteable’ policy action proposals.

In my view, CC members were able to participate meaningfully in the evaluation process and take action in ways that may not otherwise have occurred so early in the Curriculum Renewal. Once the data placemat process is complete, I will be interested in participants’ satisfaction with it and the selected policy actions.