20 Questions and 6 Indicators of Team Success or Failure

The new 2014 report 'The NHS Forward View' tells us that the future of the NHS depends on greater efficiencies. Like any large organisation the NHS delivers its services through teamwork. Therefore the efficiencies will have to be made though better teamwork. It is well known that, in any organisation, some teams perform better than others, and in extreme cases some teams succeed and others fail. The NHS is no exception to this. The real challenge for NHS leaders is to know when it is happening, why it is happening, and what to do about it.

A good place to start is by asking some good diagnostic questions.

Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry advocates positive inquiry into the best of what is, in order to imagine what could be, followed by design of a desired future state that is compelling and thus creates future change towards a more desirable state, for example improved performance or a more efficient service.

The model is based on the assumption that the questions we ask will tend to focus our attention in a particular direction – in this case a positive direction. Questions are never neutral, they are always value laden and fateful, and social systems (like for example, your NHS Trust, CCG or Service) move in the direction of the questions they most persistently and passionately ask and discuss.

10 Positive Questions

Using Appreciative Inquiry principles, on the next page are 10 positive questions you might ask yourself.

You should also ask them of:

- Your top team
- Senior Doctors and Senior Managers
- Clinical Directors
- HR department
- Clinical Leads and Service Delivery Managers
- Other key players in your business.

10 Positive Questions to Ask:

1.	Which do you think is our highest performing team and why?	*e.g. great results, quality of work, clinical achievements etc.*
2.	How do you know they are high performing?	*e.g. from internal reputation, colleague's comments, feedback from patients etc.*
3.	What specifically do you measure, track or count to identify them?	*e.g. published research, audits, patient satisfaction etc.*
4.	What do they do better, how do they operate more effectively than other teams?	*e.g., understand patient needs, team working, communication etc.*
5.	What do they achieve more of, as outputs or outcomes, than other teams?	*e.g. number of procedures, clinical outcomes, reputation etc.*
6.	What is the atmosphere like in the highest performing team?	*e.g. fun, energised, quietly business-like etc.*
7.	How would you describe the culture in the highest performing team?	*e.g. positive, empowering, inclusive, stretching etc.*
8.	How would you describe relationships in the highest performing team?	*e.g. competitive, friendly, critical, demanding etc.*
9.	Do they know they are a high performing team? If so how do they know? If not, why not?	*e.g. feedback, award winning, performance reviews etc.*
10.	If you could sum it up in one sentence, what would you say to complete this sentence?	*"They are the best team we have because…"*

The point is to start by diagnosing what success looks like and feels like in your part of the NHS. Really work away at the diagnostic question "Why?" One efficiency model, Six Sigma, suggests that you need to ask 5 Whys to discover the root cause of a problem. We're suggesting the same will work for a more positive approach, asking 5 Whys, to finding the root cause of success.

Then you need to build on the results of your diagnosis. You might ask yourself and other senior doctors in your organisation what you, and they could or should be doing to create those same positive conditions that improve efficiency or performance in all the teams operating throughout your service. Just asking these questions of your key people and analysing their answers, plus asking for suggestions to apply and improve things across your organisation, will put you well ahead in the efficiency stakes.

A Failure to Analyse the Positive.

That's because in our experience, most organisations don't put much if any resource into identifying what they do exceptionally well or get right. In most businesses success is taken for granted and goes unexamined. There seems to be an unfounded fear that focusing on or examining success will lead to self-congratulation and might result in complacency.

All of the evidence from Positive Psychology and Appreciative Inquiry tells us the opposite. That analysing success in detail and then applying the lessons learnt to new situations is the fastest way to improve morale and performance, increase the quality of the product or service we deliver. Most organisations don't seem to know that. What most organisations spend most of their diagnostic resources on is investigating and analysing faults, problems, failures and complaints. They take a deconstructive approach based on a deficiency model.

They ask questions such as:

"What are the problems?" or "What's wrong?" or "What needs to be fixed?"

Sometimes they phrase the question in terms of "What are the challenges?" which still focuses on negativity, on deficiency, on what needs to be fixed or solved. Whilst this approach is important, it misses the fundamental lessons to be gained from analysing success. A simple example is to ask: "When we are being more efficient than usual, or providing better than average clinical outcomes, what exactly are we doing differently that makes us more efficient?" The answers to those questions should lead directly to better outcomes, and maybe save lives. They are that important!

10 Negative Questions

If you would prefer to adopt a more familiar, problem focused approach, and would like to diagnose the situation in terms of problems to be solved, on the next page are 10 negative questions you might ask yourself, your top team, and your senior (or junior) doctors.

10 Negative Questions to Ask:

1.	Which is your poorest performing team, and why?	*e.g. poor results, low quality work, lack of achievement etc.*
2.	How do you know they are poorly performing?	*e.g. from rumours, internal reputation, colleague's comments, feedback from patients etc.*
3.	What specifically do you measure, track or count to identify them?	*e.g. clinical outcomes, staff turnover, SUIs, complaints etc.*
4.	What should they do better, how could they operate more effectively?	*e.g. listen to patient's concerns, team working, communication etc.*
5.	What would they be doing if they wanted to achieve more?	*e.g. team working, more procedures, better clinical outcomes, etc.*
6.	What is the atmosphere like in the poorest performing team?	*e.g. lacking energy, disengaged, tense, frantic, etc.*
7.	How would you describe the culture in your poorest performing team?	*e.g. negative, depowering, clique-based, frustrating etc.*
8.	How would you describe relationships in your worst performing team?	*e.g. competitive, unfriendly, critical, demanding etc.*
9.	Do they know they are a poorly performing team? If so, how do they know? If not, why not?	*e.g. feedback, lack of rewards, poor performance reviews etc.*
10.	If you could sum it up in one sentence, what would you say?	*"They are the worst team we have because…"*

Again, your purpose is to diagnose what may be going wrong in your teams or service so that you can put it right - fix it. Now the Six Sigma model comes into its own with the 5 Whys of root cause analysis. This method is designed and intended to tell you what's going wrong. The problem is that stopping being inefficient is not the same thing as starting to be more efficient. For example, if throwing things away is wasteful, stopping throwing them away is no less wasteful unless and until you start to re-use or re-cycle them.

So an essential stage in this approach is to ask yourself and the other senior clinicians and managers in your organisation what you, or they could or should do to improve things, and create more positive conditions that will actively increase efficiency and productivity in all of the teams throughout your service. Then you can analyse what works using Appreciative Inquiry and take positive steps to build on your success. Your purpose is to create more positive conditions in all the teams so that they stop failing and start to succeed throughout your service.

6 Indicators of Team Success or Failure.

As a senior leader, there are a number of organisational level indicators you could measure to identify if things are going well or if you have a problem. Because they are negative indicators, they are usually reducing if things are going well, or increasing if things are going wrong. You should be able to ask HR for this information.

For example do you have:

	Good (Decreasing)	Bad (Increasing)
1. Staff Turnover		
2. Serious Errors		
3. Customer Complaints		
4. Internal Disputes and Grievances		

Two other sources of diagnostic information you could use are

5. Staff surveys

6. Exit interviews

All of these indicators should be continuously monitored for you by your HR Department or Clinical Governance Team. For example, what does your last staff survey tell you? If you don't already survey your staff, we can help you to organise a survey. We can discuss what questions you would like to ask, and more importantly, what you want to do with the answers.

What does the analysis of recent exit interviews tell you? If you don't usually interview staff when they are leaving (exiting) the service, you could identify one or two recent leavers and ask someone from HR to phone them. We can help you to identify the key questions you want to ask, or we could conduct the exit interviews on your behalf.

What do you do next?

Well that depends on what you want to achieve. If you found this guide useful, and the various analytical questions gave you some helpful insights or food for thought, you might want to consider our Clinical Leadership Skills Development Programme and see if a free Organisational Diagnostics Session would be helpful for you in analyzing your service.

If you have identified some problems you could decide that you want to take things further. You might choose to talk confidentially to someone with the experience and expertise to help you to improve team performance in your business. If so, please get in touch now on 0800 840 4122. We are experts in our field, have a successful 14 year track record of working in the NHS (and 28 years in the private sector) and can show you brilliant testimonials from our clients.

We look forward to hearing from you and we'll be happy to help you in any way we can.

Together we can fix it!

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