ABSTRACT

Projects are meant to create new products or services, or enhance and improve their performances, properties and capabilities. The project management world is replete of stories on successful projects. This could possibly be attributed to the maturing project management practices and advancements in enabling technologies. However, there are still numerous cases where projects are abandoned, scrapped, or failed to deliver the expected outcome. One dimension that may have not been thoroughly explored is the level of engagement of project stakeholders.

Researches show that employee engagement improves the bottom line of organizations. In the same token, stakeholder engagement improves the final outcome of a project. One novel approach of engaging stakeholders in a project management context is called Positive Deviance Initiative (PDI).

PDI started as an approach to address formidable problems in communities. It was used as an approach to address rampant children malnutrition in Vietnam. The main element of Positive Deviance Initiative is to engage the community in the project solving process. PDI is built on the assumption that solutions already exist within the community. The process involves determining the positive deviants in the community and discovering extraordinary behaviors and strategies.

Numerous studies show that community engagement improved the outcome of a project. Such is the case of malaria outcome improvement in Myanmar, not by introducing new technologies to address malaria but by engaging the community through PDI. In the corporate sector, PDI was used to improve health care outcomes specifically in providing immediate response to heart attack patients. These two case studies are used to illustrate how communities play pivotal role in the success of projects.

There are valuable PDI principles that are useful in project management. If project managers will leverage on the valuable contributions of positive deviants, cases of project shortfalls may be lessened.

CASE FOR POSITIVE DEVIANCE

Despite the advancement in technologies and methodologies in Project Management, every now and then we hear reports of failed projects. Most projects are carefully planned and well thought of, yet during implementation, there are always glitches along the way. Is it because project
managers are just optimistic? One indication that a project manager is overly optimistic is on assessment of people. Optimistic project managers would say that most of their people are good, meaning, they fall in the upper good side of the distribution curve. Maybe this assumption is not necessarily accurate. Health Care industry is one place where not every doctor and every hospital fall in the good side of the curve.

Studies in health care, that aims to understand the differences among hospital and doctors, show an unexpected pattern. Most people expect a shark fin curve but evidence indicates that performance of hospitals and doctors follows a bell curve. (Gawande, 2007).

The shark fin curve means that most hospitals and doctors are clustered at the very best outcome. Gawande indicated that in the case of treating cystic fibrosis, centers perform in a normally distributed behavior, where there are a handful showing poor outcomes. There are those however, who are remarkably good. (Gawande, 2007)

Assuming that the bell curve is the general behavior of most health care providers, then this situation is scary especially if you are admitted in a hospital that falls in the poor side of the curve. A study on how fast hospitals attend to heart attack patients reveals a similar bell curve pattern. What is more disturbing is that the median time is beyond the prescribed guidelines of the American Heart Association and the American College of Cardiology. (Bradley, et al., 2006)

Obviously for regulators, the immediate action is to bring back those in poor side of the curve to normalcy. Majority of the population, which is statistically estimated to be more than 90%, are considered the normal group. Given that the even the median is not within the guidelines, we can say that even the normal group have subpar performance.

To address performance issues, most improvement systems are focused on those in the poor side and center of the curve. There are two issues with this approach. Firstly, correcting the performance of delinquents i.e. group in negative curve, oftentimes doesn’t work. (Hollon, 2012). Secondly, improving the performance of the normal group is not always guaranteed to succeed. As an example, many organizations invest on leadership development programs aimed to develop the leadership skills of the average or normal population. According to a recent leadership survey, 75% respondents said that their leadership programs are not very effective. (Freidfield, 2013)

When Jerry and Monique Sternin were asked by the US NGO Save the Children to create a program that would solve the childhood malnutrition problem in Vietnam, they were in this same predicament. They could have identified those in dire need of nutrition supplements and haul
food from elsewhere to feed those children. They realized that this approach is not sustainable. The Sternins deviated from the norm to solve the formidable problem of children malnutrition. Instead of focusing on the delinquents and the normal group, they first determine if there are positive deviants and discover their uncommon but successful behaviors and strategies. As a result, they were able to solve the children malnutrition and gave impetus to a movement called Positive Deviance Initiative. (Positive Deviance Initiative, 2014).

Oftentimes project management is characterized by its performance. We describe project management in terms of performance of the products, services or processes created. We may also talk about performance of the project team. In managing projects, the focus had always been to improve the performance of the delinquents and the normal group. In PMBOK, to manage a project team means to track team member performance, provide feedback, resolve issues, and manage team changes to optimize project performance (PMI, 2013). What if project managers change the focus from managing the project team to engaging the positive deviants to pull the project team towards excellent performance? Most likely, project performance will be much better.

WHAT IS POSITIVE DEVIANCE

To clearly understand Positive Deviance Initiative, we have to look on the theoretical works from Sociology and Positive Psychology on how Positive Deviance evolved. In Sociology, deviance is associated with negative condition, persons or acts that society disvalues, finds offensive or condemns. Generally deviance refers to some difference from a social standard. (Clinard & Meier, 2011). However there are those who are deviating from the norm in a positive way. These people exhibit behavior that focuses on the best of human condition in an extraordinary and honorable ways. They are called the positive deviants. (Spreitzer, G. & Sonenshein, 2003).

A dissertation was published in 1985 by Maria Heckert investigating various theories towards the development of positive deviance. The investigation of Heckert started with the writings of Pitirim Sorokin, a Russian-born sociologist who was critical of the negative-orientation of the society. Sorokin is recognized to be in the forefront of positive deviance, although he did not call it positive deviance then. (Heckert, 1985). Heckert classified the positive deviants based on the diverse behaviors and actions such as innovative behavior, supra-conforming behavior, altruistic behavior, innate characteristics and charismatic behavior.

In creating a program to address massive children malnutrition in Viet Nam, Jerry and Monique Sternin did not pursue the traditional approach. The common practice (standard) during those days was to bring and feed the children with the right type and amount of food. The Sternins recognized that this approach was not sustainable. Instead they turned to the works of Marian Zeitlin. In 1990, a professor at Tufts University, School of Nutrition, Zeitlin published a collection of studies from around the world about well-nourish children from poor families. Zeitlin identified this group as the positive deviants. (Positive Deviance Initiative, 2014). These positive deviant families were classified as “innovative” under Heckerts classification. The families of well-nourish children were no different from the rest of the community in Viet Nam. The only difference was that they innovated and did something different from the norm. The
Sternins discovered that those who were well-nourished were fed differently, such as adding sweet potato leaves on children’s rice, eating tiny shrimp and crabs found in rice paddies. (Positive Deviance Initiative, 2014)

In Positive Deviance Initiative, it is a belief that “in every community there are certain individuals or groups whose uncommon behaviors and strategies enable them to find better solutions to problems than their peers, while having access to the same resources and facing similar or worse challenges.” (Positive Deviance Initiative, 2014)

THE POSITIVE DEVIANCE INITIATIVE PROCESS

Jerry and Monique Sternin describe PD in four distinct steps often referred to as the 4D methodology: Define Determine, Discover and Design. (Pascale & Sternin, 2010). There are variants in implementing PDI, depending on the context and the problem being address. So to better understand how PDI operates, we will look at two case studies below. These two case studies vary in approach and context, but we can use both to find possible applications of PDI in Project Management.

CASE STUDY 1: IMPROVING MALARIA OUTCOME IN MYANMAR

Prior using this Case Study, I contacted the author, Muhammad Shafique to have a better understanding of the project. Shafique’s completed works are available from the website of Malaria Consortium. (Muhammad, Zegers de Beyl, Meek, & Smith, 2013).

The Malaria Consortium piloted a PD program in Myanmar which aims to promote the best practices found within the community. The program manager was Muhammad Shafique, Behavioral Change Specialist of Malaria Consortium. The program was piloted in 6 villages of Kyun Su Island, Myanmar, a community of rubber tappers and fishermen.

Malaria Consortium defines Positive Deviance as “an asset based behavior change approach which highlights and appreciates the positive behaviors of the community”. Consistent with the PDI believe, Shafique and his team believed that “In every community there are certain individuals whose uncommon positive behaviors enable them to find better solutions to problems than their neighbors who have access to the same resources”. Shafique’s task then is to identify those individuals with uncommon behaviors that enabled them to stay malaria-free. They followed the following process steps:

1. **Community Orientation**

   The first step was to explain the PD concept to the community members. It is critically important to define the “community” in a PD project. Shafique and his team invited 40 to 50 community members and the concept was introduced through games and stories.

   Prior to this process step, Shafique had a clear definition of the problem, i.e., finding asset-based approach to improve malaria outcome.
2. Situation Analysis

Having engaged and planned with the community members, Shafique and his team conducted a series of focus group discussions (FGDs) with the rubber tappers, fishermen and other community members. In these series of FGD’s, the group established the “normative behaviors” around malaria prevention and control. In these sessions, they were able to identify potential positive deviants.

In Sternin’s 4D Methodology, this step is called Determine where individuals with extraordinary behaviors exist.

3. Positive Deviance Inquiry

This is also the fourth step in 4D Methodology which is Discover, which is finding out the deviant or best practices that the positive deviants exhibit. Shafique and his team continued with in-depth interview with potential PD role models. They also allowed the community to discover uncommon behaviors and strategies.

Mon Mon San was a rubber tapper who worked in rubber farm for 15 years but never got malaria. She was identified as a positive deviant. Unlike the rest of rubber tappers, Mon Mon always wore a long sleeved shirt, long trouser and rubber boots when she worked in rubber farm. She also covered her head and face with a cloth during rubber tapping to avoid mosquito bites. She did other things that prevented her from being bitten by Malaria-carrying mosquito. Whenever got sick, she always contacted the health center for blood test.

4. Participatory Analysis of PD Findings

Now that the positive deviants had been identified, and their PD behaviors already discovered, Shafique and his team invited the key stakeholders to vet the PD findings. They selected those behaviors that were accessible to all. This step is equivalent to Design step in 4D Methodology. The team had to consider that the community must fully recognize that the solution was from within and not brought from outside.

5. Feedback Session

The final step was to share the identified PD role model behaviors with the community members. Shafique and his team came up with ingenious ways to present the findings, and to engage the community in planning for action.

Having role models to share with others the best practices, the 6 villages of Kyun Su Island became a role model in Myanmar in Malaria outcome improvement.
CASE STUDY 2: IMPROVE CARE FOR ACUTE MYOCARDIAL INFARCTION

The first Case Study pertains to an individual positive deviants (or group of positive deviants). In Positive Organizational Scholarship, the idea of positive deviance is expanded to units, organizational or business norms (Spreitzer, G. & Sonenshein, 2003). The second case study falls in that category where positive deviants are not just the individual people but the deviant group. Improving Care for Acute Myocardial Infarction, or commonly known as heart attack, is found in BioMed Central, a publisher of peer-reviewed open access journals (Bradley, et al., 2005).

The project opens with the problem of persisting poor performance in health care despite decades of efforts to improve health care quality. One particular point of interest that relates well with most project management context is the weaknesses in project implementation. The authors pointed out that when “effective innovations are discovered”, uptake is often delayed and incomplete.

One of the key principles in Positive Deviance Initiative is that “the knowledge about 'what works' is available in existing organizations that demonstrate consistently exceptional performance”. This principle has been adapted in health care, nutrition, education where PD was tried.

Some of the problems identified in this Case Study are:

1. Patients often do not receive guideline-recommended processes of care
2. Risk-adjusted outcomes vary substantially across hospitals and regions suggesting potential for improvements.
3. Despite enormous national investment in biomedical research, less than 1% of this is directed at research on improving health care delivery
4. When innovations in clinical care are discovered, the uptake of these improvements into practice is often delayed and incomplete.

In this Case Study, Positive Deviants are “those organizations that consistently demonstrate exceptionally high performance in an area of interest (e.g., survival rates, medication use, and timely emergency treatment)”.

In evaluating performance of hospital in treatment of heart attack patients, one of the metrics commonly used is the door-to-balloon time. This time measurement is used to gage how prompt hospitals will be able to do the immediate necessary intervention the moment a heart attack patient arrived in Emergency Room. A study of the door-to-balloon time indicates that the performance of hospitals follows a normal curve, an idea that fits well in PDI.

The graph in Figure 3 below shows how hospitals perform in their door-to-balloon time.
The median door-to-balloon time was calculated for each hospital in the study. The mean (±SD) of these median times was 100.4±23.5 minutes, which is considerably longer than the 90-minute interval recommended in the 2004 guidelines of the American Heart Association and the American College of Cardiology. (Bradley, et al., 2006). Highlighted in red are the obvious negative outliers. The yellow-shaded members of the “hospital community” are the positive deviants.

As of 2004 to 2005, less than one half of patients received care that met the national target of door-to-balloon times within 90 minutes. But there were individual hospitals which met the 90-minute guideline even before 2005. Considering the positive deviants were present, the PDI approach can work in this context. The researchers did the following processes:

1. **Identify Positive Deviants**

   The researchers referred to the National Registry of Myocardial Infarction to gather the hospitals median door-to-balloon time. The researchers then examined the strategies employed by top performing organizations (or the positive deviants).

2. **Study Organizations in Depth**

   The researchers conducted in-depth site visits among those identified as positive deviant organizations. From these visits, they were able to collect data, and identified specific strategies and organizational characteristics making those positive deviants as top performers.

3. **Test Hypotheses Statistically in Larger Representative Samples of Organizations**

   To provide credibility on their discovery, the researchers validated the strategies and characteristics identified in a larger sample. They conducted survey to more than 350 hospitals using open-ended questions. An example of the positive deviant strategies they identified was “activation of the catheterization laboratory by emergency medicine physicians instead of cardiologists, resulting to an 8 minutes reduction.”
4. Work in Partnership with Key Stakeholders to Disseminate Best Practices.

The researchers decided to use Door-to Balloon (D2B) Alliance as their dissemination vehicle. D2B is a public campaign group supported by 38 professional associations and agencies committed to the single goal of having 75% of patients with ST-segment elevation myocardial infarctions treated with PCI to have door-to-balloon times of 90 minute or less.

The result of the dissemination of best practices resulted to significant performance improvement. Those hospitals that participated in the D2B Alliance recorded improvements in their door-to-balloon times. In 2005, only half of those hospitals met the guidelines, and by 2008 the number of hospitals that met the deadline was 75%.

PDI KEY PRINCIPLES

Compared to other improvement approaches, PDI takes a different approach in terms of engaging the community. The concept of involving the people or community early on, and letting them take ownership of the process is very strong in PDI. Monique Sternin, in an interview organized by HEC Paris Alumni Conference with Harvard Club of France and Oxford Alumni, emphasized that in PDI, the community decides. She pointed out that the goal of PDI consultants is to become irrelevant (Sternin, 2015). The role of PD facilitators then is to determine who are the positive deviants and discover their positive behaviors and strategies. The PDI process however does not end in “determine and discover,” otherwise results won’t be as expected.

In most organizations, positive deviants are present. However, the presence alone of positive deviance is not an assurance for success. It is possible that an organization is doing a PDI-kind of initiative even without knowing (Sternin M., 2015). An example of an organization with positive deviant people, yet did not fully realized the benefit of PD, is Genentech.

Genentech is a company whose clientele are mostly oncologist and pulmonary specialist who routinely perform outpatient infusion procedures. In 2003, Genentech introduced Xolair. The clientele for this product are the allergist and pediatricians. After 6 months, the sales results were below expectation, despite Xolair’s superiority. All 242 sales people except 2 performed below expectation. The 2 extraordinary women used strategies to address the allergists’ and pediatricians’ issues with infusion procedure. As a result, they sold 20 times more than the rest of the sales force. However, Genentech’s management insulated the positive deviants in the process by doing the fact-finding themselves. Next was a broadcasted message directing the reps to use the PD approach. The result was lukewarm acceptance and modest improvement (Pascale & Sternin, 2010). What Genentech did was not the complete PDI process, and not consistent with the PDI Principles.
PDI is built around these principles. (Pascale & Sternin, 2010)

1. The community must own the entire process.
2. The community discovers existing uncommon, successful behaviors and strategies.
3. The community reflects on these existing solutions and adapts them to their circumstances.
4. The community designs ways to practice and amplify successful behaviors and strategies.
5. Community members witness that “someone just like me is succeeding against all odds with the same resources that are available to me.”

**INTEGRATING POSITIVE DEVIANCE IN PROJECT MANAGEMENT**

A research study of Rebovich, DeRosa, and Norman shows that in the practice of systems engineering, positive deviants exist. These positive deviants do things differently but for good reasons. (Rebovich, DeRosa, & Norman, 2009). Armed with these findings, Rebovich, DeRosa and Norman proposed that the Positive Deviance approach can be implemented in the practice of systems engineering. The proposed PD steps are:

1. Identify the few who have succeeded within the environment
2. Determine how they do what they do
3. Synthesize, package, and communicate their ideas across the enterprise
4. Set expectations that the ideas will be considered by the rest of the enterprise
5. Measure and reward changes in outcomes and communicate the results across the enterprise.

These steps can also be applied in project management setting. The approach is specifically suitable for product and process improvement projects. However PDI can be considered as foreign concept in project management. As such, introducing a foreign concept may take quite a while for an uptake. In this paper, the proposal is to use the principles of PDI in introducing the concept.

**Principle 1: Ownership of the entire process**

The definition of community in project management varies. For a project manager who is responsible for one project, the community may be the entire stakeholder group and the project management team. For program managers, the community may be the group of project managers. In organizational context, a community may be the group of project management offices.

It may not be the case the methodology of PDI used as a project management phases, although it is possible to use PDI 4D Methodology in improvement projects. The idea of community owning the entire process pertains to the engagement of the community of the PD principles in various phases of the project. PD principles will be beneficial in project planning, project execution, project monitoring and project closure.

Project Management is a system that translates the users’ requirements into a service or product that fulfills those requirements. The life of a project traverses from a problem domain to solution domain (Hull & Jackson, 2005). In finding for solutions, the tradition approach is to look back...
on what has gone wrong and posit solutions. However in many instances this approach fails. The failure could be attributed to the difficulty in transferring solutions from one environment to another (Rebovich, DeRosa, & Norman, 2009). So why is it that despite of the many noble solutions, there are still a lot of disgruntled customers. Is it because the focus of projects is to introduce the latest and the greatest technology without considering if there are existing solutions to the problem? This is the realization of Atul Gawande.

“I did not completely fathom the full breadth of the possibilities, however, until I considered the practice of medicine in most of the rest of the world – where the best hope for saving lives lies in raising performance, not in expanding genetics research.” (Gawande, 2007. P234).

The position of Gawande to prefer raising performance over expanding genetics research stemmed from the idea that for a problem to be effectively solved, the community must be involved in raising performance by implementing best practices. Gawande writes on how MRSA wound infections rates drop to zero in regional health care initiative in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The initiative started with specialist-driven improvement ideas. The initiative has initial success but it was not sustainable. Then they called Jerry Sternin to use PDI in reducing hospital infections. This is a case that if the entire community is engaged, the outcomes are more effective and sustainable (Gawande, 2007, p23-25).

**Principle 2: Discovering existing uncommon, successful behaviors and strategies**

Despite advances in technology, processes and efficiencies, complex problems still resist improvement. In part, this could be due to natural variation within the processes and practices, particularly in large enterprises. The variation may result to detrimental outcome, but others have positive gains. The traditional approach is to find what went wrong, and propose solutions to fix the problem. But since the practices are also evolving, improvement strategies must be evolutionary rather than conventional. The focus should change from bringing unproven ideas from the outside to finding and amplifying solutions that already exist inside the organization (Rebovich, DeRosa, & Norman, 2009).

In the world of software development and software improvements, a new approach called Agile is gaining widespread attention. Agile is in fact changing the software development landscape. (Dingsøyr, Nerur, Balijepally, & Moe, 2015). Agile came into being because of the frustration of the slow traditional software development process. In 2001, a group of 17 people met to find common ground recognizing the need for find alternative to the document-heavy traditional software development method. What emerged is that gathering is the Agile Software Development Manifesto. (Highsmith, 2001).

Agile Manifesto says (Agile Alliance, 2001)

“We are uncovering better ways of developing software by doing it and helping others do it.”
Agile Manifesto is pretty much aligned with the PDI Mantra: (Pascale & Sternin, 2010):

“You are more likely to act your way into a new way of thinking than to think your way into a new way of acting”

Agile has resulted into faster software development cycles. Not only Agile has improved the technical side of software development, there are reported studies that Agile improve interactions between members of the project team. In a case of a software development company with project teams in two different countries and cultures (Japan and China), Agile Scrum resulted in better understanding amongst team members, motivation has increased and turnover decreased from 20% to 0%, and quality level has improved. (Ozawa & Zhang, 2013). Agile is an example that the project management community benefits from an existing uncommon successful behavior and strategy.

Principle 3: Reflect on existing solutions and adapt to current circumstances

Probably the easiest way to introduce the concept of PD in project management is by using the existing solutions. One of the existing methodologies in project management is benchmarking and best practices.

Although for the purest PD advocates, benchmarking is totally different from PD. Jerry Sternin became familiar with the question “Is Positive Deviance just benchmarking and best practices in disguise?” Sternin argued that PD is not benchmarking or best practices. He pointed out that PD has a higher chance of success because PD doesn’t have the inherent problem encountered in benchmarking such as the "not invented here" mentality. (Sternin J., 2003)

Benchmarking and Positive Deviance Initiative have similarities. Both methods attempt to identify a best practice and replicate it throughout the organization (Saco, 2005). Some researchers argue that, since benchmarking against leading companies improve the performance of average organizations, benchmarking projects can achieve improved performance of projects (Ajelabi, 2010). However the concept of benchmarking in Project Management is still somewhat vague. One of the challenges in benchmarking is that oftentimes benchmarking activities result to highlighting of performance difference without giving reasons for the difference (Ajelabi, 2010). Although by design, benchmarking is supposed to understand the reason for differences. As an example, the benchmarking process developed by the US Department of Energy identified the need to identify performance and practice use gap, and reason for the deficiencies. (DOE OECM, 2005).

The intent of benchmarking is to find the best practices in the industry. In project management, benchmarking is typically done to find the best practices. One example of investigating the best practice is on Rural Transit Projects (Hallowell, Molenaar, & Tran, 2013). Hallowell, Molennar and Tran pointed out that the biggest challenge identified in Rural Transit Project is the performance and project execution issues due to small contractors. The researchers identified the following best practices in dealing with small contractors.
• Delivering sample within a specific time frame
• Following standard practice
• Not paying the contractor for sub-standard work
• Using consultants to supplement staff during critical times; and
• Providing onsite education and assistance for the contractor.
• The agency should store and review all quality reports performed by small contractors to ensure that the work meets the specifications.

It appears that these identified best practices are solutions to address the negatively deviant and the normal group of small contractors. These best practices are enforceable by the agency, which means that these are solutions that are not from within the community of small contractors.

Finding the best available solution is what Positive Deviance Initiative offers. Unlike benchmarking, PDI relies on the available best solution. This approach outright eliminates the rejection of a solution due to Not-Invented-Here mentality, such is the case of seasoned engineers rejecting the COTS products. (Blanchette, 2005). At times, challenging the current paradigm, which is what PDI is all about, brings about a breakthrough and exceptional result. Take for instance, the case of the Swiss structural engineer Robert Maillart. He challenged the accepted design methods of the time. The result revolutionized the use of reinforced concrete and resulted to an elegant Salginatobel Bridge in Switzerland (Knowles, 2015).

In PDI, once the best practices and strategies of the positive deviants are identified, the PDI process continues with the DESIGN of the appropriate intervention that would enable the target population practice those successful behaviors. Such was the case for the Vietnam Malnutrition project. The PD behavior (the addition of a small handful of shrimps/crabs and greens, in combination with increased frequency of feeding) was accessed and practiced by the community (the mothers practiced cooking new recipes, and they brought their children in their neighbors house to be fed with nutritious meals) (Sternin J., 2003).

Despite the apparent weaknesses of benchmarking, it has provided value to project management. We can consider benchmarking as an existing solution to discover best practices. Reflecting on this existing solution, we can present PDI as enhancement of benchmarking.

**Principle 4: Design ways to practice and amplify successful behaviors and strategies**

Almost all industry sectors have published list of best practices. These best practices are proven and ready for use by project managers. Despite the volumes of researches unearthing these best practices, project managers seldom find solutions in these best practices list. One of the possible reasons is the reluctance of the project management due to benchmark data accuracy. (Marshall, 2006). In the project management world, the priority of the project manager is to find satisfactory solutions to project requirements rather than to find the best solution. This can be explained by the nature of project management where there is not room for trial-and-error exploration. (Froese & Staub-French, 2003).
One way to practice and amplify successful behaviors and strategies is called Community of Practice (CoP). CoP could be a venue where positive deviants can share their strategies and best practices. CoP goes beyond the traditional repository of knowledge and ideas. It is a venue where the community can access and practice the solutions and ideas that already exist within and works (Wu & Xue, 2013).

In Case Study 2: Improve Care for Acute Myocardial Infarction, the Door-to Balloon (D2B) Alliance was the venue where the best practices are shared, accessed and practiced by the community i.e. member hospitals.

**Principle 5: Witness “someone just like me is succeeding against all odds with the same resources that are available to me”**

Heckerts described the various types of positive deviants. There are those among us who are geniuses, innovative, charismatic, supra-conforming or altruistic. However one doesn’t need to have these traits to do something different that produce extra-ordinary results. Mon Mon, the rubber tapper is Myanmar is one of those ordinary girls who did something different. She was spared from rampant malaria occurrences in her community because she demonstrated positive deviant behavior and strategies.

There is a long list of seemingly ordinary folks who did extraordinary things and delivered extraordinary results. As project managers, it is important to keep watch of the positive deviants in your community. But project managers can be positive deviants themselves. Here are the suggestions of Atul Gawande for becoming a positive deviant. (Gawande, 2007)

1. **Ask an unscripted question.**
   
   “Ours is a job of talking to strangers. Why not learn something about them”?

2. **Don’t complain**
   
   “Resist it (the complaining). It’s boring, it doesn’t solve anything, and it will get you down. You don’t have to be sunny about everything. Just be prepared with something else to discuss..."

3. **Count something**
   
   "Regardless of what one ultimately does in medicine — or outside medicine, for that matter — one should be a scientist in the world. In simplest terms, this means one should count something. ... If you count something you find interesting, you will learn something interesting."
4. Write something

"It makes no difference whether you write five paragraphs for a blog, a paper for a professional journal, or a poem for a reading group. Just write."

5. Change

“Make yourself an early adopter. ... I’m not saying you should embrace every new trend that comes along. But be willing to recognize the inadequacies in what you do and to seek out solutions”

CONCLUSION

Positive Deviance Initiative is relatively new but is already creating ripple effects not only in nutrition and health care, but in government and corporate world. Of all valuable PDI concepts, one that could potential change how project managers behave is the approach of engaging the community of stakeholders and project team.

If project managers adopt the principles of Positive Deviance, probably the chance of project success is higher. If the community is actively engaged, the role of project managers will shift from controllers to facilitators i.e., facilitating the positive deviants to demonstrate successful behaviors and strategies so that the community can access and practice these best practices. With Positive Deviance, project managers will be pre-occupied not in finding the solution to meet the user’s requirement but discovering already-existing and working solutions, as Atul Gawande writes that improving performance has bigger impact in improving health care than new genetic researches.

The success stories of Malaria Outcome Improvement in Myanmar and Door-to-Balloon Time Reduction in US Hospitals demonstrated that principles of Positive Deviance increase community engagement and assure a successful and sustainable project.

Project management is a community with behavior that follows the bell shaped curve. There are those who are already positive deviants, those who do extraordinary strategies and demonstrate uncommon successful behaviors. Those in the normal group can be positive deviants too by taking the simple five steps to become positive deviants.
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