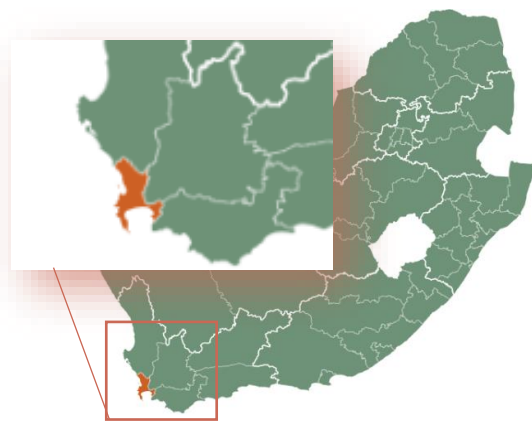


INNOVATION SPOTLIGHT: CAPE TOWN METRO

Reflections on Quality: Transforming a District Health System (DHS) meeting into a space of learning

How redesigning a routine meeting created sessions where frontline staff and managers learn together — without additional funding.



PROVINCE	HEALTH DISTRICT	PROGRAMME	PERIOD
Western Cape	Cape Town Metro	Quality management	2023 – present

AT A GLANCE

When quality meetings had lapsed, one Cape Town substructure re-launched them as quarterly Reflections on Quality (RoQ) sessions built for reflection, peer learning and wider participation. Junior staff now engage with managers as colleagues — and learning is spreading across the district, at no extra cost.

1. Innovation overview

Reflections on Quality (RoQ, pronounced “rock”) sessions launched as quarterly quality-management learning initiatives in the Northern and Tygerberg sub-districts (called sub-structure) of Cape Town Metro Health District in 2023. When routine quality meetings had lapsed, the team redesigned them as spaces for reflection and capacity development rather than simply reinstating them. The new name, RoQ, signals “standing on a rock” to look back, forward and sideways across the sub-structure and beyond. Sessions have no chair, facilitation rotates, and nurses, clerks and general assistants take part alongside managers.

2. Why it matters

Learning is critical to develop and strengthen the DHS, supporting it to deliver quality health care and take action to address the social determinants of health. Yet, meetings within the DHS are often one-way information-sharing, rigid and often unproductive. Without additional funding, meetings can be repurposed for learning. Well redesigned, they move a team from correcting actions against set goals (single-loop) to questioning the goals themselves (double-loop) to improving how the system learns (triple-loop). The approach described here changed how people related across hierarchy and opened new avenues for problem-solving.

3. Implementation steps



The RoQ team worked through five broad stages.

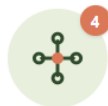
1. Scanning for opportunities — rather than create something new, the team chose to rebuild one that had lapsed — the quality-management meeting — because it aimed to improve service quality and brought leadership together.



2. Developing the ground — before changing the format, they invested in relationships and built a shared case for the sessions, drawing on provincial strategy and global evidence. Managers indicated they were keen to take part.



3. Planning the sessions — the word “meeting” was dropped from the title to break with old habits, staff were asked what would make the sessions worthwhile for their work. Each manager brought a “plus one” to each session including nurses, clerks, general assistants and other frontline staff.



4. Running the sessions — rather than having a single chair, facilitation was shared, and a timekeeper kept things moving. Positive rounds, energizers, group breakouts, affinity mapping and even decorations drew people in and encouraged participation.



5. Focus on quality, not compliance — learning was tied back into everyday quality-improvement work, keeping the emphasis on support for change rather than completing compliance checklists.

The ROQ created spaces where staff could speak openly about challenges, fostered a sense of solidarity between facilities, enabled cross-hierarchy perspective sharing and allowed for learning across facilities at multiple levels.

4. Key considerations

At the core of ROQ’s success was a shift from a compliance-based approach to quality improvement to a culture of learning and collaborative improvement. The following considerations were a part of that successful change.



Change takes time: intentionality, consistency and patience matter more than any single technique.



Extend the planning cycle: look beyond a 1-year cycle to enable and monitor systems-level change.



Think through who attends: the plus-one approach helped spread a culture of learning and added new perspectives to each session.



Create structure, but adapt: standard agendas and timekeeping help teams avoid reverting to old habits. Targeted adaptation can help achieve goals.



Create links and follow-up: linking processes and procedures across the system can drive change.



Build data sense-making skills: when all stakeholders understand the data, they can better diagnose problems, monitor progress and plan.



Vulnerability fosters trust: speak honestly about challenges and failures. Focus on building relationships with diverse parties within and outside sessions.



Design creative structures: enable more people to engage through work in pairs, small groups, and creative sense-making activities.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Motshweneng OS, Elloker S, Gilson L. [Learning in the district health system: how can meetings become spaces of reflection?](#) S Afr Med J 2024;114(6):e2094. Part of the SALAD Special Series on the District Health System.



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