CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

# ACTION PLANS AND GANTT CHARTS

## Chapter Purpose

*Aim.* To create a clear action plan of next steps for planning and monitoring improvement activities and progress made.

    *Objectives.* At the completion of this unit, you will be able to

• Describe the importance of an action plan.
• Differentiate between an action plan and a Gantt chart.

• Explain the connections among the action plan, the Gantt chart, and your improvement work.
• Describe how to manage improvement activities over time.
• Write an action plan or Gantt chart, or both.

As your microsystem members begin to blend Job 1—doing the work—with Job 2—improving the way they do the work—it will be smart to look ahead to the future and to devise a plan to follow over time. A good time to make a first draft plan is when you begin making tests of change (see Figure 23.1). By this time you will have started to get a sense of pace, rhythm, and discipline; these can be reinforced by using time-planning tools. As described in this chapter, action plans keep immediate activities on track, and Gantt charts keep the big picture and major steps in the overall journey on track.

**FIGURE 23.1. IMPROVEMENT RAMP: ACTION PLANS
AND GANTT CHARTS.**
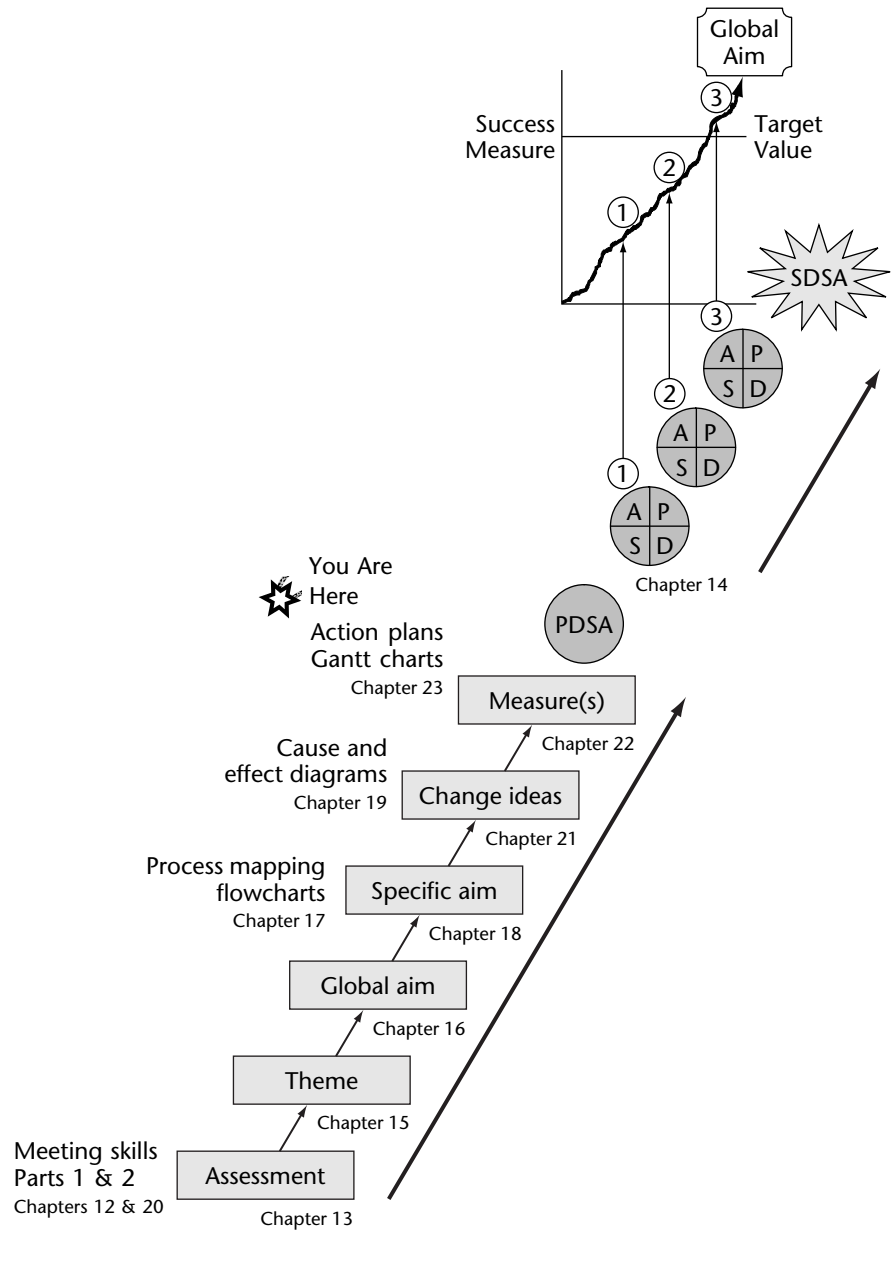
## What Is an Action Plan?

An *action plan* is a list of tasks specific to the next steps that need to be completed to achieve your stated improvement goals. The action plan is a simple, helpful organizing tool to keep improvement activities on track over time. It is often created at the end of the weekly improvement meeting to ensure that all the steps that need to be completed before the next meeting are achieved and to document additional action steps and timelines. The action plan changes weekly and is updated as tasks are completed.

## What Is a Gantt Chart?

A *Gantt chart* is a horizontal bar chart developed by Henry L. Gantt (1910), an American engineer and social scientist. Gantt charts are useful tools that are frequently used to manage overall improvement work. A Gantt chart provides a graphical illustration of the improvement activity schedule; it helps you to plan, coordinate, and track specific tasks. It allows you to show how long an improvement initiative is expected to take, to determine the resources needed, and to lay out the order in which tasks will be carried out.

A Gantt chart may be used to plan the entire improvement initiative. These charts may be simple displays drawn by hand on graph paper or complex diagrams made with computer programs such as Microsoft Project or Excel.

When improvement activities are under way, Gantt charts help you to monitor whether the activities are on schedule. If they are not on schedule, these charts allow you to pinpoint the remedial action necessary to put them back on schedule.

## Why Use Action Plans and Gantt Charts?

Action plans and Gantt charts help busy clinical teams stay on track with intended improvement activities. They also serve to record who is to do what, and when, and to track progress over time. Action plans and Gantt charts

• Help you lay out the tasks that need to be completed.
• Provide a basis for scheduling when tasks will be carried out.
• Specify the resources needed to complete the tasks.
• Clarify the critical path for an improvement activity.

## How Do You Write an Action Plan?

At the end of each weekly improvement meeting, an action plan should be completed to maintain the momentum and rhythm of improvement. To create an action plan, first, list the tasks that need to be carried out to achieve the goal. Second, list who will complete each task by a certain date. It is helpful to list the actual completion dates and the actual names of the individuals responsible for completing each task.

## How Do You Create a Gantt Chart?

A Gantt chart tracks the progress of the improvement journey over time. List the steps or tasks in the overall improvement process on the left-hand side of the chart and then create horizontal bars on the right to show when each phase of the improvement process is scheduled to occur (see Figure 23.2). When improvements are begun, it helps to strategize about the improvement activities over the upcoming months. This will help you and your team maintain the pace of improvement.

### FIGURE 23.2. EXAMPLE OF A GANTT CHART.
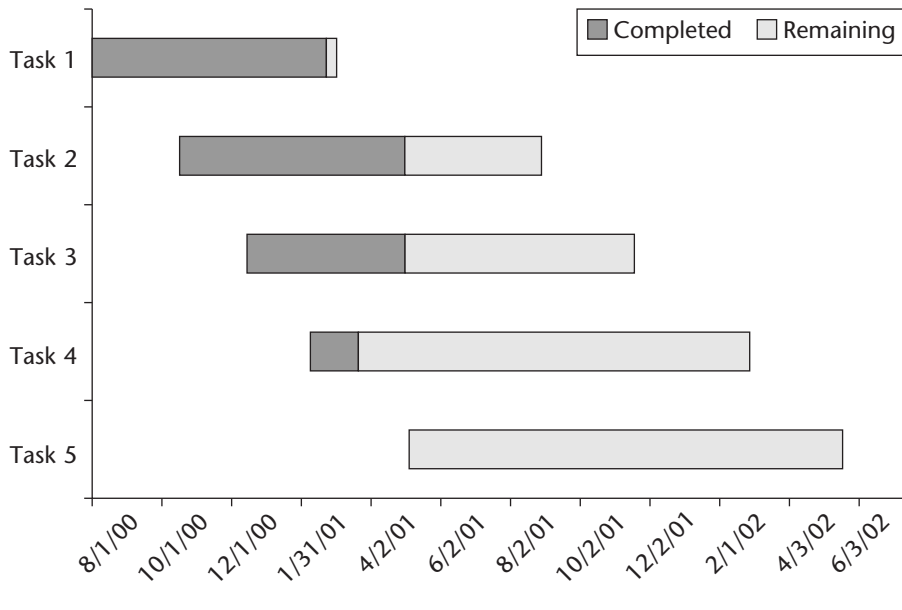
# What Are the Next Steps?

Once you have created your action plan, it is smart to track the completion of the listed tasks between weekly meetings. Follow up with individuals who have been assigned to each task to determine their progress and to offer assistance as needed.

Sometimes, due to competing interests and limited time, a task may not be completed by the next scheduled meeting. Adjustments to the agenda and timeline may need to be made if the deadline is not met.

The Gantt chart can be reviewed to monitor progress over time; it can be modified based on actual experience. To keep everyone's energy high, it is helpful to periodically review what has been accomplished.

# Case Studies

### Intermediate Cardiac Care Unit (ICCU)

Each weekly meeting of the ICCU lead improvement team produces action plans to follow up between meetings. An example of an action plan detailing next steps follows:

• Stay with PDSA 7.
• Give the attending physician's beeper to the nurse practitioner to decrease interruptions during rounds.
• Post a sign on the conference room door to decrease interruptions during rounds.
• Adjust "scripts" for each role during morning rounds to accurately reflect what the roles are reporting and to keep everyone on track; repost the scripts on the wall for all to see during rounds.
• Use the charge nurse beeper to alert each RN when it is time for that RN to come to the conference room to report on her or his patients.

The ICCU team members created a Gantt chart to provide a road map for their long-term improvement activities and to help them to stay on track (Figure 23.3).

### Plastic Surgery Section

Since 2003, the Plastic Surgery Section lead improvement team has continued to meet weekly and improve processes and roles. The weekly meetings have changed

**FIGURE 23.3. GANTT CHART FOR THE ICCU'S OVERALL SEVEN-MONTH IMPROVEMENT STRATEGY.**

| Action Item | Responsible | Month | | | | Jan. '06 | | | | Feb. '06 | | | | March '06 | | | | April '06 | | | | May '06 | | | | June '06 | | | | July '06 | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Week | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Organize and conduct weekly meetings | Jean/Ed | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Create PDSA for A.M. rounds in conference room | Lead Improvement Team | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Interdisciplinary morning walking rounds | Jean & Ed | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Optimization of roles with standardization of function | Jean & Shelly | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| New care model design | Jean & Pilot Group | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

over time. Team members now use laptop computers to research data during the meeting, and they have an LCD projector to display findings for all to see during the meeting. They continue to work through their list of changes and to engage new members of the Plastic Surgery Section to learn about improvement and apply the concepts in daily practice. Both leaders and microsystem members realize improvement is a continuous journey. Not only are there weekly improvement meetings but the section also holds monthly all-staff meetings to ensure that everyone is aware of improvements and to provide opportunities to discuss progress and new initiatives. Annual retreats are part of the microsystem culture; they are held to review progress and to set goals for the coming year.

The improvement activity has moved beyond just the section's outpatient practice. Active discussions and applications of improvement knowledge and tools are occurring with the operating room staff and other specialty groups who share patient populations with the Plastic Surgery Section. Improvement science is the foundation for all their activities. They have developed the habit of comingling, doing their work (Job 1) along with improving their work (Job 2).

## Review Questions

1. What is the difference between an action plan and a Gantt chart?
2. What are the benefits of action plans and Gantt charts?
3. How might a Gantt chart boost morale?

## Between Sessions Work

1. Write a Gantt chart specific to your long-term improvement plan.
2. Each week, write an action plan to promote between-meeting completion of tasks.

## Reference

Gantt, H. L. (1910). *Work, wages, and profits: Their influence on the cost of living.* New York: Engineering Magazine.