# Initiate Stage Guide

Summary

This guide provides a brief description of the application of a systems approach to the initiate stage of health and care design and continuous improvement.

Contents

- Introduction
- Improvement Canvas
- Stakeholder Needs
- Theory of Change
- Stage Plan
- Stage Outputs

Introduction

This guide is part of the University of Cambridge **Improving Improvement Toolkit**, which develops the approach presented in the Royal Academy of Engineering report titled "[Engineering Better Care](#) – a systems approach to health and care design and continuous improvement".
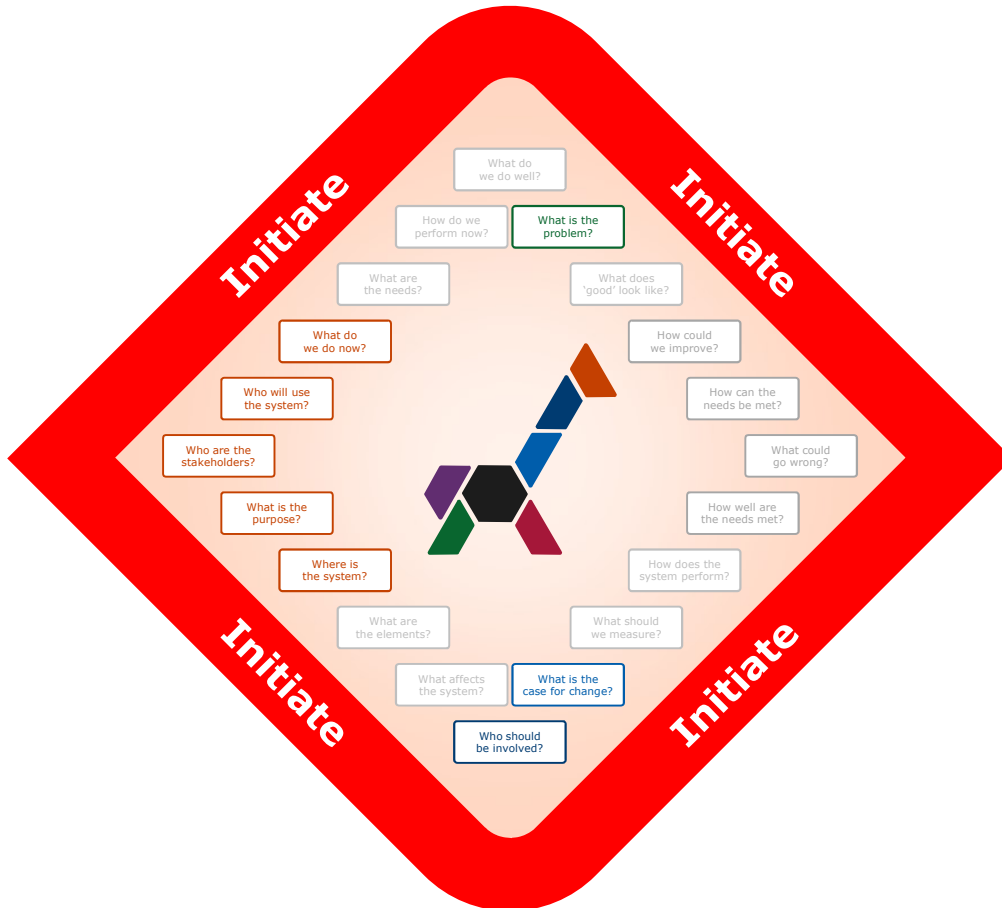

Engineers routinely use a systems approach to address challenging problems in complex projects. This allows them to work through the implications of each change or decision they make for the project as a whole. They consider the layout of the system, defining all the elements and interconnections, to ensure that the whole system performs as required.

"Systems that work do not just happen — they have to be planned, designed and built"

This particular guide assists in the definition, visualisation, planning and execution of the **Initiate Stage** of the Improvement Programme. The questions and activities highlighted here provide a minimum suggested set for the stage and may be supplemented with other familiar activities.

Introduction

The following steps, described in more detail below, describe possible elements of a systems-based approach for planning the **Initiate Stage** of an improvement process — leading to a description of the current system (now), a common understanding of the problem, a consensus view of what the future system might look like (better) and a clearly articulated case for changing the system.
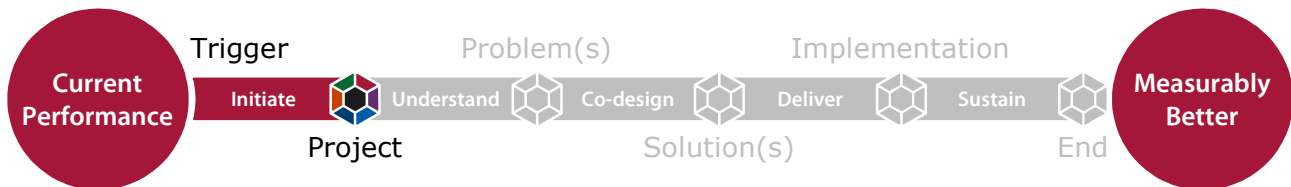
(1)   **Improvement Canvas** – Describe the context and nature of the challenge and current ideas for improvement and measurement.

Agree the scope of the proposed improvement or decision-making process and identify the team required to deliver it.

(2)   **Stakeholder Needs** – List the desired outcomes of the improvement process and the resources and permissions required to deliver them.

(3)   **Theory of Change** – Develop a comprehensive description and illustration of how and why a desired change is expected to happen.

(4)   **Stage Plan** – Define the outputs or outcomes required for the each of the strands of the improvement or decision-making process.

Select the activities and tools required to deliver these outputs and the critical dependencies between them.
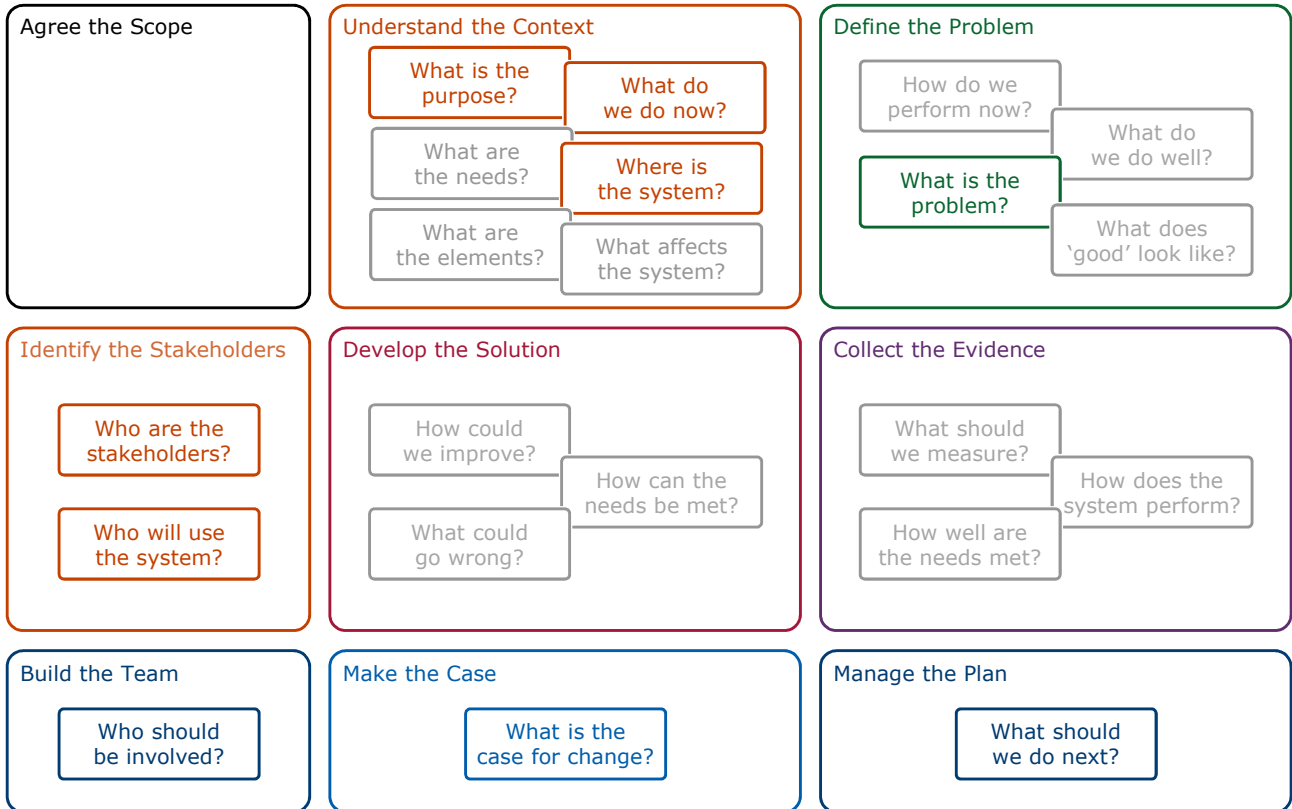
There is particular value is completing a preliminary Improvement Canvas and draft Stage Plan early in the stage to facilitate the building of an appropriate team for this and/or subsequent stages. Individual outputs for this stage can be recorded at the end of the guide and may then provide the basis for a stage-gate review.

Useful toolkit resources: printable PDFs for all of the **Stage Guides** are included in the **Stage guide PDFs** part of the **Resources** section.

Improvement Canvas

Use the **Improvement Canvas Poster** to investigate the team's current knowledge about the system and agree the scope of the change required.

Agree the Scope	Understand the Context	Define the Problem
	What is the purpose? / What do we do now? / What are the needs? / Where is the system? / What are the elements? / What affects the system?	How do we perform now? / What do we do well? / What is the problem? / What does 'good' look like?

Identify the Stakeholders	Develop the Solution	Collect the Evidence
Who are the stakeholders? / Who will use the system?	How could we improve? / How can the needs be met? / What could go wrong?	What should we measure? / How does the system perform? / How well are the needs met?

Build the Team	Make the Case	Manage the Plan
Who should be involved?	What is the case for change?	What should we do next?

A clear articulation of the scope helps to define the boundary between what is in and what is out of the system of interest. It also reflects the prioritised needs of the stakeholders that should drive any improvement. The scope will also be influenced by the context of the system, primary focus of the challenge, core themes of possible solutions and level of detail required to describe the system and its stakeholders.

At the beginning of each stage of the improvement programme it is important to reaffirm the content of the canvas and scope of the challenge. This helps to define the gap between what is known at the start of the stage, the needs to be met by the end of the stage, and the plan to move between them.

The questions of particular interest to the **Initiate Stage** of the Improvement Programme are highlighted in colour above.

Improvement Canvas

Use the **Improvement Canvas Worksheet** to describe the team's current knowledge about the system and agree the scope of the change required.

Agree the Scope	Understand the Context	Define the Problem
Identify the Stakeholders	**Develop the Solution**	**Collect the Evidence**
Build the Team	**Make the Case**	**Manage the Plan**

The canvas may be completed in any order, with input from the stakeholder influence and stakeholder needs worksheets informing the stakeholder and team boxes, from the system boundaries and rich picture understanding the context, and from the design themes and persona descriptions defining the problem.

All entries are important in capturing the team's current knowledge about the challenge, and in determining a sensible starting point and scope of interest for improvement. Ideas of solutions inspire a deeper understanding of the problem, and evident may provide context or evaluation of existing solutions.

The case for support provides a rational for stakeholders to support the proposed change, while the plan and team describe the necessary resource and steps required to deliver the change.

Stakeholder Needs

Use the **Stakeholder Needs** worksheet to list the system stakeholders' needs and reasons for those needs.

As a …	… I need …	… so that …

Stakeholders are defined by their role, needs and reasons for those needs. It is useful to capture this information in the form " As a … … I need … … so that … " where these statements provide insights into needs and the rationale for them.

Stakeholders may have multiple and diverse needs and associated rationales, which provides the basis, with their interest and influence, for early conversations to prioritise these needs. Such needs may also vary with time and, therefore, in importance to other stakeholders over time.

Use the worksheet to remind the team of the stakeholders related to the improvement process, to highlight the range and diversity of potential stakeholders, and to accentuate the importance of understanding stakeholders needs.

Theory of Change

Use the **Theory of Change** worksheet to remind the team of the factors that define and describe the activities required to deliver a successful programme.

Scope	Challenge

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Impact

Assumptions	Preconditions

Successful improvement depends on a wide range of stakeholders and system users who, at any point in time, will have different levels of interest in and power to influence such improvement. They will bring a range of perspectives to any programme and through their action or inaction can enable, actively encourage or frustrate progress.

A theory of change identifies the scope and challenge of the improvement, records the assumptions made to arrive at this description, presents the preconditions required to initiate and deliver the improvement. This is supported by a case that identifies key costs, activities and benefits.

Use the worksheet to focus on the development of a viable theory of change that can be presented to key sponsors and enablers of the improvement process, building on the content of the Improvement Canvas.

Stage Plan

Use the **Stage Plan** worksheet to select the most important elements of the improvement process that are required to deliver the desired outputs.
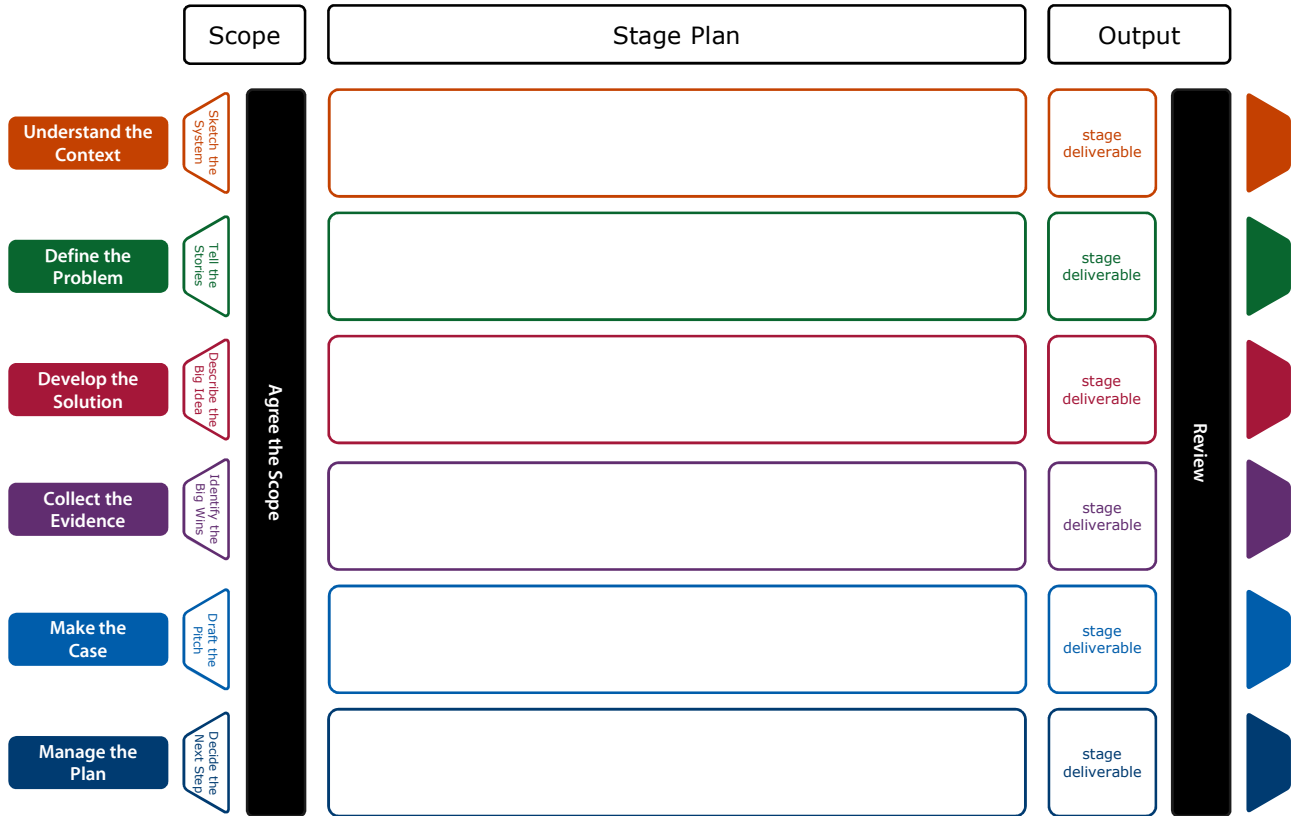
This model underpins the stage gates of an Improvement Programme, where progress is driven by clear objectives for each of the key elements at each stage of the programme.

The desired outputs or outcomes should be identified, based on the content of the Improvement Canvas for each stage of the Improvement Programme and the particular objectives of that stage.

The stage plan should identify the questions and activities that are required to achieve the specific understand stage deliverables. They are more likely to focus on understanding the context of the challenge and on defining the problem. Later stages will see a shift in focus to developing the solution and collecting the evidence. All stages should reflect the need to make the case and manage the plan.

Stage Plan

The **Questions Map** poster can be used to identify the key questions that would help to deliver the outputs required.
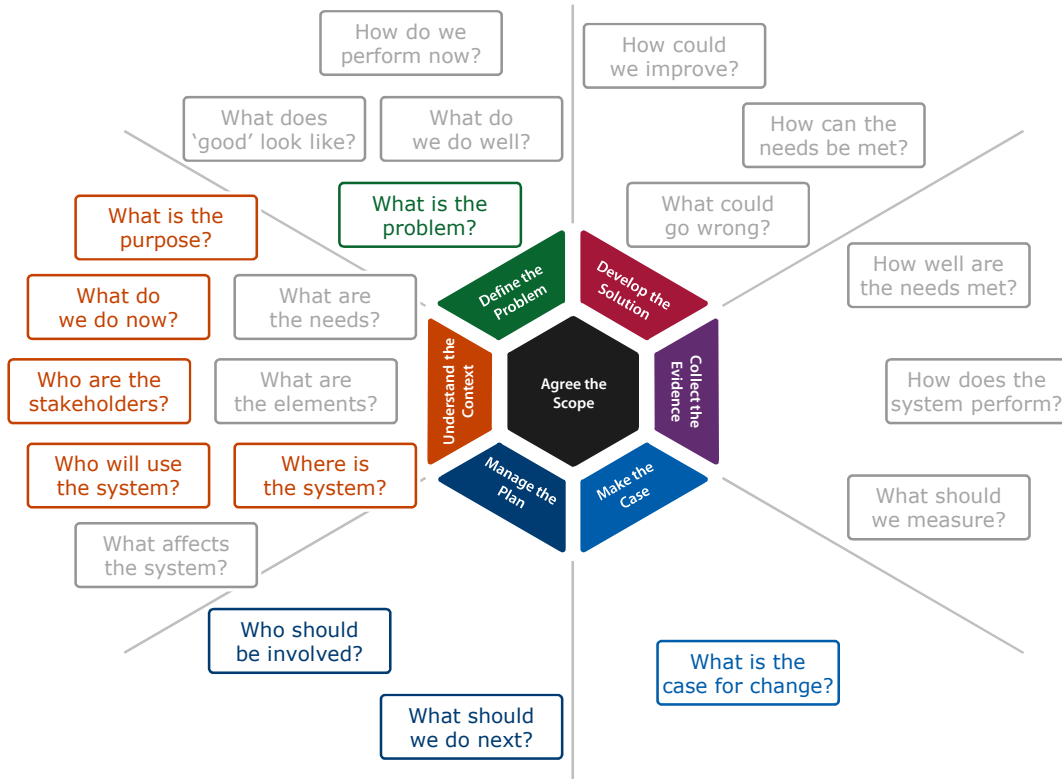
The **Stage Activities** poster can also be used to identify the improvement activities that would help deliver the outputs required.
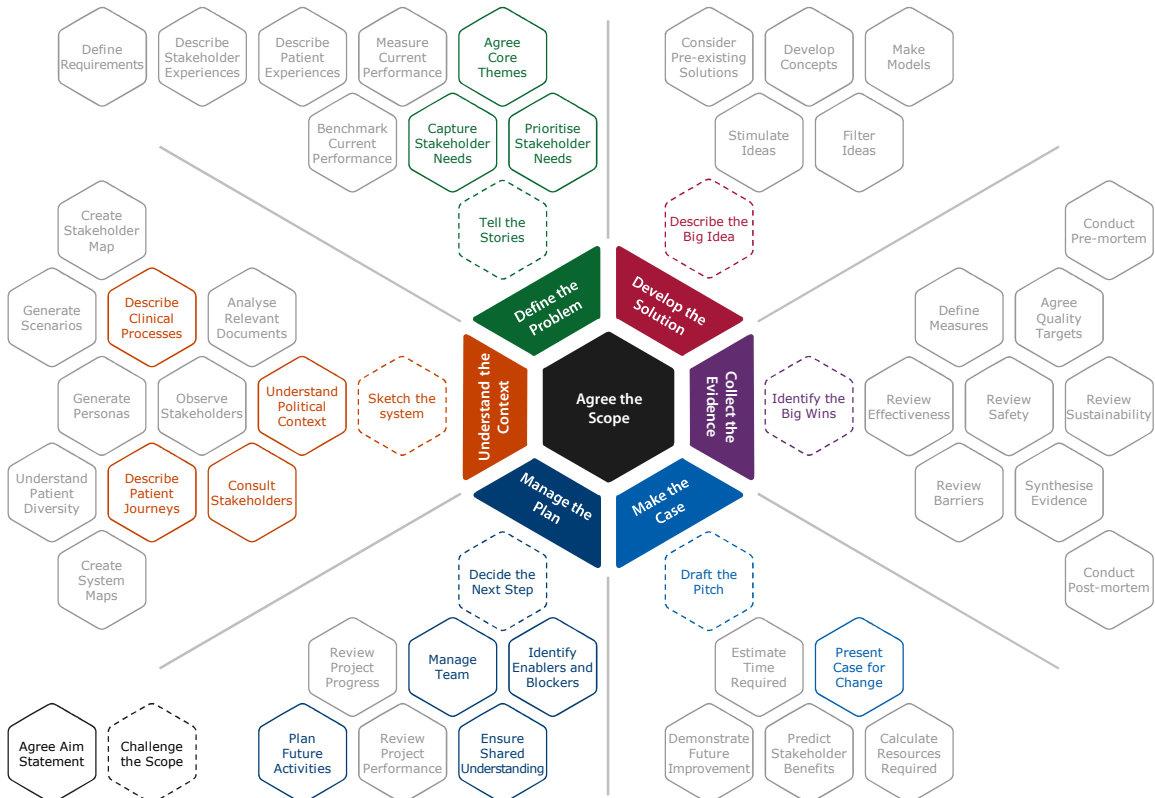
Stage Plan
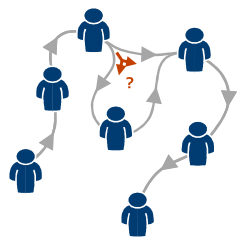
A sample of possible **Activities** which may be added to the initiate stage plan.

Create System Maps
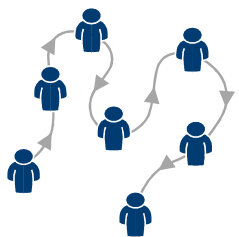
Create a common view of the system, its elements, architecture and interfaces to other systems

Describe Clinical Processes
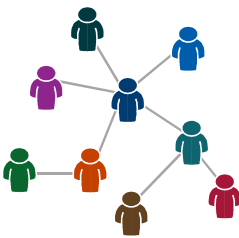
Describe the clinical processes, key decisions and expected outcomes associated with the system

Describe Patient Journeys

Describe the patient journeys through the system associated with particular clinical processes

Create Stakeholder Map

Create a common view of the range of stakeholders, their interests, and the links between them

Capture Stakeholder Needs

As a *stakeholder* **I need ...**
... **so that ...**

As a *stakeholder* **I need ...**
... **so that ...**

As a *stakeholder* **I need ...**
... **so that ...**

Identify the full range of possible stakeholder needs relevant to the system

Prioritise Stakeholder Needs

As a *stakeholder* **I need ...**
... **so that ...**

As a *stakeholder* **I need ...**
... **so that ...**

As a *stakeholder* **I need ...**
... **so that ...**

Understand the relative priority of stakeholder needs relevant to the system

Present Case for Change

Present a comprehensive case for change, balancing stakeholder benefits against costs of delivery

Identify Enablers and Blockers

Identify stakeholders who are able to facilitate or block delivery of an improved system

Plan Future Activities

Plan the future activities in a clear and robust programme to deliver an improved system

Stage Plan

A sample of possible **Tools** which may be added to the initiate stage plan.

Rich Picture

A means to understand a
system using diagrams to create
a preliminary mental model

Storyboarding

A means to clearly articulate a
view of a better system based on an
understanding of the current system

Theory of Change

A comprehensive description and
illustration of how and why a desired
change is expected to happen

Public Involvement

A means to elicit an understanding of
the needs for a system, taking account
of the full range of stakeholders

Facilitated Discussion

A means to elicit perceptions about a
particular topic or area of interest in a
non-threatening environment

One-to-one Interviews

A means to elicit information about
a particular topic or area of interest in
a one-to-one conversation

Project Canvas

A dynamic summary of a
programme of improvement to
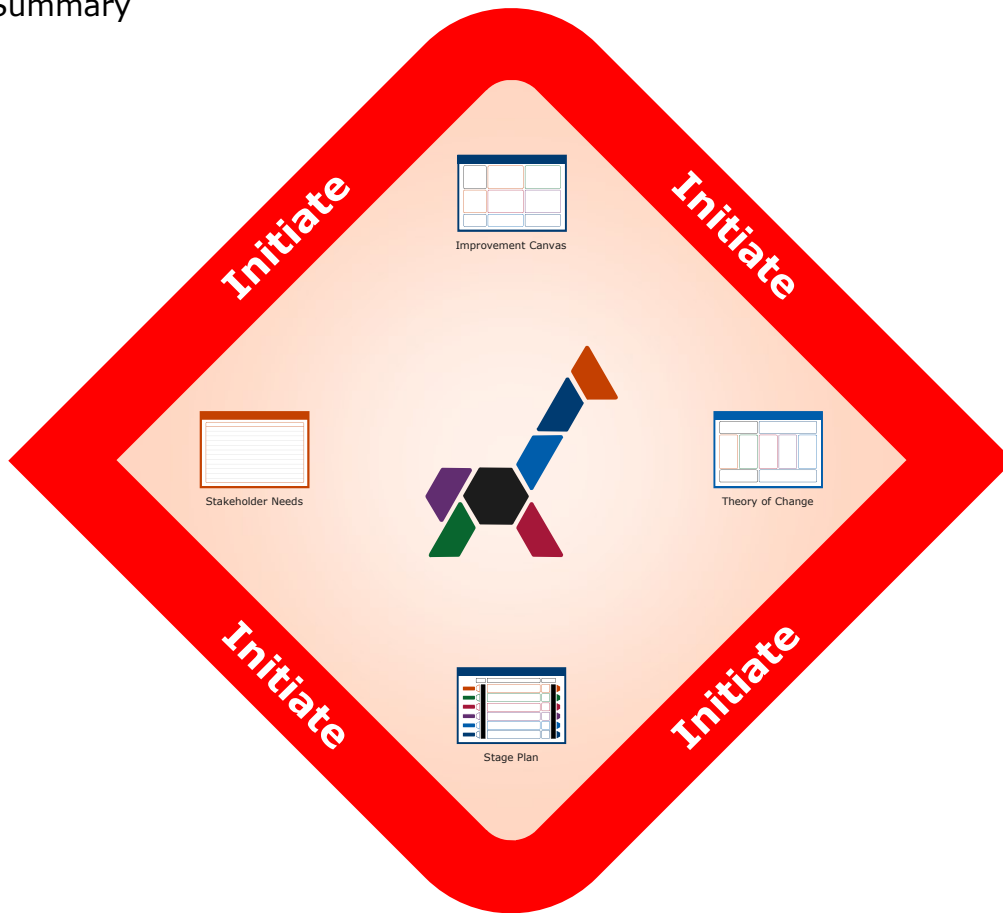encourage team consensus

Stakeholder Analysis

An analysis of the potential for
stakeholders to drive or block the
outcome of a proposed change

Gantt Chart

A bar chart to illustrate
the schedule required to deliver a
programme of improvement

Stage Outputs

Activity Summary

	Initiate Output	Narrative / Authors / Date
✓	Agreed Scope	
✓	Stakeholder Needs	
✓	Stakeholder Influence	
✓	Project Team	
✓	Design Themes	
✓	Case for Change	
✓	Improvement Plan	
✓	Permission to Proceed	
✓	Other	
✓	Other	