The Checklist Manifesto: A Practitioner's Perspective

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**The Checklist Manifesto: A Practitioner’s Perspective**


I consider this is a good book and a must read for students and practitioners of Organizational Behavior Management. Although much of the information will be familiar, especially to those involved in behavior-based safety, Dr. Gawande’s book still manages to expand our understanding of the critical elements involved in the use of checklists to improve performance. His extensive use of stories from aviation and health care bring the book alive. His inclusion of applications from finance helps build the case that checklists are valuable in other complex environments. The detailed description of the evolution of his work with the World Health Organization is simply wonderful, particularly the details surrounding their study on and results from the use of checklists in surgery.

Unfortunately, his empirical data are largely limited to studies in health care. It is too bad that he missed the whole body of literature from behavioral safety as it would have added significantly to his empirical base. In spite of this shortcoming, I found great value in the book. For example, he details some of the key steps used by Peter Pronovost, who conducted a 2001 study at Johns Hopkins and later in the widely publicized Keystone Initiative in Michigan. The steps included asking each hospital to assign a “senior hospital executive” as a project manager to participate in twice-monthly conference calls with Peter Pronovost as well as visit each unit once a month to listen to staff complaints and help address problems (p. 43). Such gems are scattered throughout the book. Others include the importance of piloting the checklist as part of the design (the chapter, “The First Try,” pp. 86–113); what makes a good checklist (p. 120); “ideally it should fit on one page” (p. 123); and the use of upper and lower case and san serif type for easy reading (p. 125).

In short, I benefited from reading this book. I wish I had read it four years ago before we began work in health care. Although many of his observations confirm recommendations we provide clients in behavior-based safety, the stories and the book itself might have helped overcome some of the resistance we experienced over the past few years. My experience mirrors his in many ways; for example, nurses were willing to use safety
checklists and coach one another, while hospital executives were reluctant to visit units, conduct safety walk arounds themselves, or even visit monthly with those involved in safety improvement efforts. This book may help us build better support for such efforts in the future.

Beyond our implementation efforts, however, my company is now beginning efforts to develop checklists for many of our own complex tasks, including project management and sales. While this is in part due to growth and increased complexity in our organization, it is also partly due to the impact of Dr. Gawande’s book. I can’t tell you how much I appreciate his contribution to my business.

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