TIME : STUDY

Make every minute count.

Keys to Successful Time Studies

Ten-Minute Learning Series, Vol. 2

About the Ten-Minute Learning Series

We know your time is valuable. Our Ten-Minute Learning Series is designed to help you learn more about time studies and how to make them impactful in your organization. Each article is packed with information that you can read quickly. With a small investment of time, we aim to enhance your understanding of administering and improving time studies.

If you have a topic that would be interesting for us to cover, please let us know at **resources@timestudy.com**.

About Time Study Inc.

Time Study is the first platform designed from the ground up to focus on the critical process of administering time studies in healthcare organizations. Our user-friendly software transforms time studies into an efficient, accurate, and insightful process. Health service organizations can prepare accurate financial reports in a fraction of the time while getting new insights that drive productivity and best practices. Meanwhile, practitioners can track in real-time for much greater accuracy and compliance.

Top hospitals around the country use Time Study to make the hospital work more efficiently and give staff a more rewarding experience on the job to guide them towards best practices that ultimately deliver better care to the patients.

To learn more, visit **timestudy.com**.

Keys to Successful Time Studies

Time studies collect data on how staff spends time at work, that part is simple in concept. When administered correctly, they can provide a huge return on investment by providing insights that address organizational pain points of resource allocation, contract adherence, reimbursement, and employee burnout.

The power of knowing how your team spends their time is one of the great, untapped resources that can transform an organization for the better. To do so, the time studies need to be timely, accurate, and complete, making them complex to administer.

The three phases of a successful time study include:

- Time Study Design
- Time Study Administration
- Analysis and Reporting

We're going to break each of these down to guide you and your team and ensure that your next time study gets off to a good start, runs smoothly and delivers the information you require.

Part 1 | **Designing a Time Study**

"An hour of planning can save you ten hours of doing."
– Dale Carnegie

As Dale Carnegie pointed out, taking a little time upfront can avoid a lot of trouble down the line. Whether setting up a single-time study to find insights on productivity or to create an ongoing system to fulfill the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) requirements, taking a moment to be intentional is essential. Even if you consider yourself an expert, try not to shortcut this process as there are always incremental gains to be found.

Define the Objective.
Write down what the team is expecting to measure and why. Be clear about what is required to capture the correct data, what the timeline is for doing so, and how that data should be presented to stakeholders. This can require discipline but it is vital to success and efficiency.

This is also a time to assess past time studies and try to identify areas of improvement. Try to not fall into a routine where processes are not interrogated for ways to make them better.

Identify the Participants.
Prepare a list of the members of the team that will be part of the time study. Understand your organization's complex structures to align with each individual participant profile so that the data provides a well-rounded picture of the work environment. The more diverse and well-represented your participant list is, will ensure that your results are accurate as well as have a sample size that is statistically significant.

Design the Time Study.
This is the nuts and bolts of preparation in which one designs the actual tool for capturing the information.

First, think about what you would like to measure and how areas of time can be expressed through reporting insights that inform your goal findings.

Then structure your main components:

- Work Activities – Identify the specific components of work that will be measured. Be sure to make them intuitive to understand so participants don't have to ponder which item to select. Create a balance between specificity which provides more detailed data but also adds complexity for the participant which may be unnecessary.

- Further, organize the activities into categories that align with how that participant thinks about their time spent.

- Time Increments – Is it necessary to measure by the moment, day, week, month, or quarter? This is a fundamental question, just like activities, you need to be mindful of your workplace goals to capture the most accurate and rich picture of time without overburdening the participant.

Select a Reporting Instrument.
The system you use to administer and capture time study data is one of the greatest predictors of success. Many still use manual processes including paper forms or rudimentary digital formats such as spreadsheets or surveys. These processes are subject to human error and participant recall bias, in which the participant fails to respond near-real time and therefore reports inaccurate data.

The optimal solution, both for the administrator and participant, is a software platform specifically designed for this use; where data gathering is instantaneous and less intrusive for participants to keep more accurate data, and ensure timeliness with reminders.

Part 2 | **Administering the Time Study**

Now it's time to get started! With the proper attention to detail in the prior phase, this will be a seamless process.

Alert Participants and Set Expectations.
Send communications to participants responsible for reporting their time, and to those support staff members accountable for those participants' time. Let them know when the study will take place and instructions on reporting, supervising, and viewing the data. Emphasize the importance of being timely in their submissions as that correlates to accuracy and completeness.

Optimize for Minimal Disruption.
We want to keep the staff on task as much as possible, so designing a lightweight process is crucial. Make the form simple, clear, and intuitive. Use electronic forms as much as possible as it will ensure accuracy with consistent activities and alerts to the submitter of any mistakes, i.e. too many hours in a day due to a typo.

Send Reminders.
When a staff member is participating in a time study, send them reminders by email, text, or other ways to keep it top-of-mind. For those support staff who are accountable for the submission of their participants' time, send out a list of delinquent users who have outstanding time studies. Again, having a technology solution to send automated reminders if a participant has not done so is effortless for the administrator and unobtrusive for the participant.

Gather Timely Attestations.
Have a system for the participant to "sign off" on their time study to ensure its accuracy and remind them that they are responsible for any errors. The attestation is a great reminder of the expectations for the participant to complete the time study near-real time or in real-time and therefore reduce recall bias and capture accurate data.

Have an Audit Trail.
Beyond the attestation, any additional information will make the time study more defensible which is most relevant when time studies are auditable, e.g. for reimbursement or grant compliance. For example, having timestamps in software that show when reports are created, edited, and submitted, as well as by whom, is a great way to show one's work.

Part 3 | **Analysis and Reporting**

Now the time study is complete. For the administrator, this is typically when the work begins. Take all of the data, pull it together, and put it into a format that will fulfill its ultimate purpose of creating insights and reports for your stakeholders.

Aggregating the Data.
Structure all the disparate data and capture it into a central database as the first step.

This can be an arduous task especially when performed manually into a spreadsheet. It is time-consuming to enter the data and it is also error-prone, so requires additional steps to check the work.

Newer software captures the data and puts it into the proper format in a fraction of the time which increases productivity and eliminates a menial task.

Conducting the Analysis.
All analysis must begin with a look at your compliance rate. The greater the participation, the greater the likelihood of accuracy, precision, and overall quality of data. Then, revisit the time study's objective and then start assembling the data to illuminate the issue or goal at hand.

If it is an efficiency study, then looking at the percentage of time a user spends in certain activities out of their total working day can reveal inefficiencies, or if conducted after strategy implementation can relieve pain points.

Cost reporting analysis can be the detailed view of time spent by practitioners and further adjusted by operational factors such as salary, reasonable compensation equivalents (RCE), number of organ transplants, and much more. Analyzing the outcomes of calculating this complex, adjusted data can improve financial cost reporting accuracy and provide better support to align with your business goals.

Delivering the Results.
Now it is time to ship the data out to the recipients. In some cases, the reporting structure is dictated by the recipient, in the case of a reimbursement report, for example. For a productivity study, the findings could be the data backed up with an expert's analysis that put the results into context. Either way, your data was flexibly structured using the previous principles to meet any desired format for stakeholder requirements.

For complex reports, preparing the submission is a time sink for staff. Having a system in place to produce reports automatically can cut preparation from hours and days to minutes or hours depending on their complexity.

Takeaways

Given the powerful insights that time studies can reveal about productivity and efficiency, time studies have a large role to play in an organization's overall health. The success factors for a time study are:

1. **Collect the right data accurately in a timely manner**
2. **Minimize distraction and disruption to participants**
3. **A high participation rate with timely data gathering**
4. **Have the system in a format that can be analyzed and reported with ease**

Software platforms that automate many of these processes can make them more valuable but also more efficient. This will encourage more use and help enterprises providing healthcare services to tap into their greatest resource–people.

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