

THE SIX FUNDAMENTALS THAT UNDERLY FLAWLESS EXECUTION IN HEALTH CARE

By Lewis E. Frees, Ph.D.

Everything that happens in an organization or any social system owes its origins to some form of shared thought. This collective intelligence can have global reach ... or be created by two lovers sitting in a bar sharing a drink. It can consist of simple observations about the weather or a deep probe into a pool of thinking that belongs to the ages. It can be the product of new understanding or simply reinforce and further burnish already existing opinions. It can set people against each other or bring them together on new common ground.

The culture of an organization is the product of collective intelligence but so are the results on a patient experience survey, because collective intelligence is not limited by organizational boundaries. If we can shift the collective intelligence to the point at which it is inspired ... a shift that is not only more intelligent - as in smarter - but also qualitatively different – as in new understanding, we can create a palpable improvement in virtually every organizational outcome.

Recently Cisco was recognized as one of the most innovative companies in the country by Fast Company.¹ What does Cisco have to do with health care? It doesn't matter whether success is dependent on innovating ahead of the competition or reducing medical error by improving physician best practices, there are six fundamentals of collective intelligence that make the difference between continuous resistance, missteps, re-dos and breakdowns on the one hand, and the ability to nimbly recognize and leverage best practices.

Health care systems are increasingly using six sigma techniques. More recently some have implemented data mining software called Process Proxy to extract predictive information from hospital information systems to identify best practices.² The six fundamentals described in this paper seamlessly mesh with and enhance these approaches.

Let's look outside of health care for some clues to what collective intelligence looks like when it is inspired. Here is the way the people at [Cisco Systems](#) describe their organization.

"The Boards and councils have been able to innovate with tremendous speed, Fifteen minutes and one week to get a business plan that used to take six months!" ~ John Chambers, CEO

"Fiscal 2008 saw a tenfold increase in new projects. At the same time, operating expenses have been trimmed from about 38%, at the height of the tech boom, to

¹ Fast Company Innovation Issue, February 2010

² Ragupathy Veluswamy, MD, MMM, CPE, FAAP: Golden Nuggets: Clinical Quality Data Mining in Acute Care, The Physician Executive: May-June 2008.

between 35-36% today. We're shaving from 2-3% of profit off every dollar of revenue we get in." ³ ~ Ron Ricci, VP for Corporate Positioning

"Cisco operates as a distributed idea-engine where leadership emerges organically, unfettered by a central command. We want a culture where it is unacceptable not to share what people know. As a result, Cisco has become a laboratory of connectedness and productivity." ~ John Chambers CEO

Cisco has achieved an optimization point ... a transformation in the quality of collective intelligence from simply good enough to inspired. This is a game changer for any measure of success.

On any subject the quality of collective intelligence resides somewhere on a scale from failed to inspired, as illustrated in Figure 1 below: **Utilization of Collective Intelligence.**

Utilization of Collective Intelligence



Figure 1

Figure 1

8.5 is an optimization point at which speed accelerates, cost deflates and individual resourcefulness surges. Mastery of the following six fundamentals enables any institution to chart the path past "good enough" ... to flawless execution:

1. **Create pull**
2. **Shift the way people think**
3. **Create the right mix**
4. **Develop flow**
5. **Build social capital**
6. **Have the right conversations.**

³ Ellen McGirt, *Cisco Gets Radical: How CEO John Chambers Is Turning the Tech Giant Into a Socialist Enterprise*, Fast Company, December 08/January 09, pp 88 ff.

These fundamentals provide a pathway as illustrated in Figure 2 below: ***Steps in the Pathway.***

Steps on the Pathway

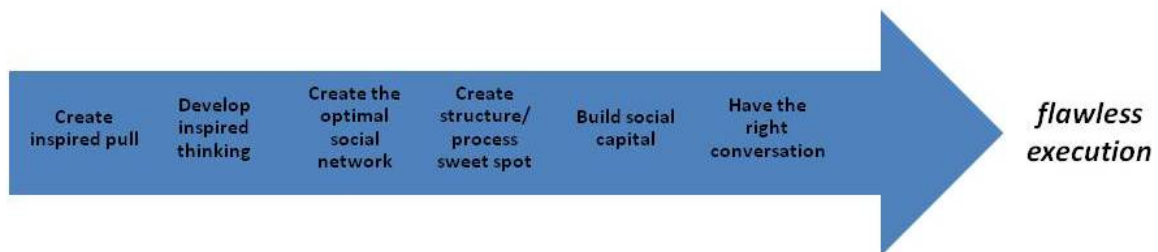


Figure 2

Fundamental 1: Create Pull by Making the Right Things Matter

Pull is the natural attraction that is created by anything that matters or is significant to us. The greater the significance, the greater the pull and the more it affects the choice about what action to take. How do leaders communicate what matters most? By sending uniform signals in the form of words, policies, incentives and the allocation of resources. There are two principles of pull that are especially important.

- Making the right things matter most by triggering people's best instincts.
- Making sure that all of the things that matter are in alignment.

What matters most has to be at the top of the hierarchy of motivation and it will only get there if every signal is both consistent and inspires the best instincts in people. If high scores on patient surveys is critical, then people will only believe it if it is everyone's responsibility for example, and is not relegated to one function within the hospital. They will also believe it if they are convinced that the primary driver behind the desire for high scores is excellent patient outcomes and that Medicare funding falls in behind it. Everything else is affected by and slides in behind whatever is at the top of the hierarchy. If the objective is to reduce medical error, physicians need a passion for leveraging the best practices identified through data mining⁴ and the process improvements developed through six sigma. Whether those best practices are implemented with enthusiasm or resisted as "cookbook medicine" is a function of where they land in relation to the other things that matter to physicians.

⁴ Veluswamy, p 48

When the things that matter most are in **alignment** and the organization pulls people to operate from their best instincts, they are more inclined to see the potential interconnections among desired outcomes ... as, for example, between clinical outcomes, length of stay, mortality rates, cost, and the results of patient experience survey ratings ... and to address them as an interconnected system.⁵

Pull energizes individual performance. When what people want is powerfully significant to them it ignites a desire to execute flawlessly. It energizes them to pay attention to detail ... and to follow through ... to step back and look for new patterns and to persist until new understanding emerges. Pull is what draws out second effort.

In order to pull a shift in *collective* intelligence the intended outcome has to be significant to everyone in the organization ... and beyond its boundaries to patients ... and the community. And they need an unambiguous message about making the right things matter most. People don't get there by push or pressure. They get there when something grabs their hearts ... the hearts of everyone.

When John Chambers talked about a "distributed idea engine," he was talking about what happens when an organization makes the right things matter to *everyone*.

Fundamental 2: The Power of Inspired Thinking

**"All meaningful and lasting change starts first in your imagination and then works its way out. Imagination is more important than knowledge." ~
Albert Einstein**

The foundational distinction between organizations that achieve the optimization point of collective intelligence and those that reside somewhere on a scale between failed and good enough is the way the people in those organizations think. People who operate at the optimization point refuse to get stuck in fears, limitations and toxic negative thinking even when it is aimed at them. They are adept at pivoting their own thinking whether it is about their own performance, other people or outcomes.

Some see hurdles and think about how hard it will be to get over them. People who think at the optimization point see what it is like to *be* over them. As a result, what others may believe to be impossible, they *know* to be possible ... and it is contagious.

At the optimization point other people are appreciated rather than being objects of critique and competition. This kind of thinking emerges from a well-honed ability to sense and appreciate the very attributes that others most value about themselves ... to see their unacknowledged qualities and potential. Inspired thinkers move this skill beyond the walls of the organization ... to patients for example. In the presence of inspired thinking, patient satisfaction improves inspired thinking is contagious.

⁵ There is now software produced by Infinity Information Systems that creates a dashboard on which to view the current metrics from a wide variety of heretofore disconnected outcomes and to track interdependences.

People who think at the optimization point always look for ways to expand the boundaries of their own ideas. They view themselves as learners rather than learned. They prize their ability to inch toward new understanding, by letting their ideas evolve in the presence of diverse thinking and dissent. Where conventional thinkers might view an unconventional array of symptoms as an unwelcome demand on precious time, people who think at the optimization point see them as opportunities to develop new understanding. This brings us to the third fundamental; creating the optimal mix of information.

Fundamental 3: Creating the Optimal Mix of People and Information to Expand the Boundaries of Understanding

A social network is the web of potential contributors to an intellectual outcome or product. At their best, they are the engine of nimble, innovative out of the box thinking. At their worst they produce cascades in which people that know and trust each other mutually reinforce misinformation. The challenge is to connect people and information in a way that leverages the diversity of experience, knowledge and dissent across boundaries and professions. In many organizations this follows from fluid connections between people both inside and outside the walls of the organization. This is what John Chambers is talking about when he refers to Cisco as "*a laboratory of connectedness and productivity.*"

The objective is to proliferate "wholes" that are indeed greater than the sum of the parts for every type of desired outcome. So if the desired outcome is higher ratings on patient surveys, the social network includes the patient ... pulling them into the conversation about what matters to them. It includes best practices from other hospital systems. For example, if a hospital is focusing on best practice for CHF patients they would want to look at Catholic Healthcare West's Marian Medical Center which assigns case workers to work with CHF patients⁶ in order to reduce readmission rates.

Chambers refers to Cisco as a "*distributed idea-engine where leadership emerges organically, unfettered by a central command.*" Inspired social networks are not just top down. They emerge anywhere they build inspired collective intelligence. The core question is: *Do we nimbly and seamlessly access the optimal mix of people and information from anywhere at any time?*

However, it doesn't stop there. In order to reach the optimization point people need to create engagement processes that flow.

Fundamental 4: Creating pathways that flow in engagement processes

The engagement process consists of the settings, events, venues, methods, activities and organizational design that support human interaction. Unlike most work processes, the engagement process is not linear. In fact, as the development of collective intelligence evolves, it often seems to have a life of its own as the optimal mix of contributions for every interaction becomes apparent. Medical complications produced by seemingly unrelated symptoms that evolve and appear during treatment fall into this category.

⁶ Williams, Jeni, [Community Benefit Strategies for a Changing Economy](#), HFMA Newsletter, 2/12/09, p2ff

Because most intellectual processes constantly shift and evolve in the presence of new information they leverage diverse contributions as the guidance system. An inspired engagement pathway operates in *flow*, connecting the right people together at exactly the right time no matter whether they reside within or outside the organization.

How do people know that people are out of flow? Everything seems hard. There is high stress and struggle rather than intensity that is fulfilling. Glitches, rework and other non value-added activity keep occurring; all of which increase costs, take more time and degrade the final outcome.

When intellectual processes operate in flow they are simple and lean. Every contribution adds value. Contributors seamlessly mesh intuitive and intellectual acuity.

Fundamental 5: Building a Bank Account of Social Capital

Social capital refers to the residual value of trust, respect, rapport and appreciation in a relationship. It is called social capital because in every interaction people either withdraw from or invest in this bank account, which then affects the next interchange.

When the value of social capital is applied to the issues of patient experience, the stakes become obvious. And hospitals are attempting to respond to this challenge. They know that the contact between the health care professional and the patient are critical. In fact 84% of respondents to the 2009 Health Leaders Media patient experience survey say that they see employee training in customer satisfaction to be one of their highest priorities as a vehicle to raise survey ratings⁷ and that is a good start. Social capital is built through appreciation, rapport and trust. The skill of building rapport of course can be developed through good training. Appreciation is more than a skill. It also is an attitude and it can be transformative when hospital employees appreciate ... not just empathize which is important ... but appreciate those instincts in the other person that those people most prize about themselves. Customer relations training therefore taps into only some of the elements that build social capital. Trust, for example, is built through reliability, competence and sincerity. Both reliability and competence in a hospital relate directly to clinical outcomes,

Social capital creates a generative environment that encourages people to move out of intellectual comfort zones to see ways to continuously improve and refine execution. The broader and more diverse the thinking, the greater the bank account of social capital required.

The optimization point for social capital creates a measurable shift in three variables: speed, cost and the quality of the outcome. Speed increases, cost goes down and the quality of the outcome improves. In the presence of high social capital, social interchange is fluid and open. It is unencumbered by competition, mistrust and lack of respect. High social capital enables fast decisions that deliver. Social deficit, in contrast, fosters the type of caution that feeds analysis paralysis. Every interaction, every procedure, every initiative, every

⁷ 2009 Health Leaders Media Patient experience survey

communication either with a patient or colleagues, and every strategic or tactical initiative is impacted positively by social capital or negatively by social deficit.

In an environment of high social capital people operate out of their best rather than worst instincts. In health care this means that the patient and the health care professional are interdependent as a matter of course. Each appreciates the knowledge of the other. They don't have to waste creative energy finding excuses and placing blame or engaging in self promotion. Social capital provides the glue that holds together divergent perspectives in order to drive new common understanding. But it takes an inspired conversation to bring the entire bandwidth of potential ideas, wisdom and experience into play.

Fundamental 6: Conversations that Move People to the Optimization Point

Optimal conversations trigger the best thoughts and instincts of everyone in the interchange. They access and peel open ideas and insights that would easily be missed during conversations that are simply good enough. Organizations that reach the optimization point approach conversations from pull instead of push. The goal is to tease out ideas in a mutual process of discovery *rather* than pushing ideas in an attempt to convince.

Conversations at the optimization point are naturally collaborative because they focus on exploring and understanding. People are comfortable with the wobble of ferment that occurs when a set of ideas has not yet popped into a new understanding. When viewed from this vantage point, conversations between patients and health care professionals are a partnership in understanding. And the more the patient can experience the conversation as a partnership the greater the likelihood that all of the information needed for an accurate diagnosis will be accessed

Inspired conversations are kick-started by high social capital. They then reinforce and deepen the very rapport on which they thrive. In addition, they require inspired social networks ... just the right people who can nail contributions as the ideas evolve.

The Pathway

Einstein famously observed that we can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking that created them in the first place. Mastery of the six fundamentals enables people to think differently... to create a culture in which everyone reaches for flawless execution no matter what the desired outcome...no matter where they reside in the organization ... not because people push them but because they are inspired. Superb execution works from the inside out and it is within the reach of every organization.

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book he is currently authoring: [Inspired Collective Intelligence: The Six Fundamentals of Flawless Execution](#).

Among the services offered, include intellectual value stream mapping, social network mapping, pull analysis, 360° feedback surveys, and collaborative software application to support the implementation of the five competencies needed to create an inspired organization.