

Book #1 Review: The Nun and the Bureaucrat – How they found an unlikely cure for America’s sick hospitals (2006). Savary & Crawford-Mason.

This book applies systems thinking to complex organizations such as hospitals – and stresses how to focus on the organization as a whole and transforming it as a whole, looking at the Structure, Process and Outcomes, rather than paying attention only to its various parts or departments.

Understanding the problems faced:

- Sick Hospitals are not about bad people but *a broken system that needs new management practices*
- The first step toward healing hospitals is to begin to *recognize, describe and discuss the problems*
- The biggest challenge they faced was the *complexity* of hospitals; problems are not medical, but managerial and require a systems thinking approach to recognize that we need better processes to address our problems/complexity.
- The most surprising challenge faced: *The patient was overlooked*. Making the patient the focus of everyone in the system makes it easier to see the system (Structure/Process/Outcome).
- The most pervasive challenge faced: *Waste. A problem for all* – it is hidden and ranges from misuse of time, talents of staff, poor inventory supply systems, poorly/under optimized processes.
- The most disabling challenge faced: *Removing Blame*. Blame says the outcome is due to the individual rather than a result of the systems – no bad people in systems thinking, just bad processes that need to be improved.

Solutions – What they did:

- Learning to apply systems thinking and continual process improvement. Teaching people a new mindset to continually recognize problems and to design improvements must be consciously learned – most people are habitual and unconscious non-systems or single event thinkers.
- When groups work together to achieve a single purpose (in a process) everyone is involved.
- Focus on the Customer/Patient- Satisfying or delighting customers, internal and external, needs to be the main focus for the people in the system or organization.
- Walk around with new eyes – seeing the workplace from a different perspective (patient); question tradition and habits, see new problems, see new possibilities.
- Develop a culture that is cooperative and shares data freely; make decisions on data.
- Become systems thinkers; empower your frontline staff to identify problems and propose solutions.
- Leadership lessons learned; leaders become continual learners, involve everyone in the transformation and insure everyone has the proper tools and training.

The Path of Improvement – How did they do it?

- Setting performance goals high – going for a “theoretical” limit goal; a goal that can be attained only in theory (100% perfection/reaching zero errors).
- Finding the root cause of problems; encouraging staff to uncover problems, then use the “5 Whys” to find causes and make effective improvements and solve problems.
- Using protocols and checklists; utilize technology to set up fail-safe ways to help people avoid mistakes.
- Empower frontline workers; real time problem solving by people at the point of care trained in systems methods.

- Remove barriers between Doctors and Hospitals; collect and present data to doctors to help them help their patients (and themselves).
- Self – Assessment with the Baldrige Criteria; can help organize and improve communication, productivity and effectiveness and achieve strategic goals.
- A radical shift from single event thinking to systems thinking and seeing previously hidden connections, interactions and possibilities.

How can you use/leverage this information in your informatics programs – Practical application:

1. Consider a systems approach for your organization, leveraging informatics as a key driver of data and standardization.
2. Empower your frontline staff to uncover problems and help craft the solutions immediately.
3. Utilize techniques, like the “5 Whys” to assist your organization to get to the root cause of problems.