

A community of caring

By Dennis Sandow, Scientist-practitioner

Cascade Medical Center is a rural health care organization located in Cascade, Idaho. Cascade Medical Center's mission is "To provide access to quality health care services in a caring, professional environment." To achieve this mission, CEO Tom Reinhardt posts this message on the [organizations' website](#):

Welcome! Here at Cascade Medical Center, we understand that healthcare is evolving. Advances in medicine and strides in technology are constantly bringing greater access to better medicine closer to home. And while medical excellence is our top priority, the very best health care is delivered with kindness, compassion, and love. That is where our amazing care team really excels - caring for our patients and their families. Whether you live in our community, or are traveling to it or through it - our goal is to provide you with the best care in our region.

In 2014, [Arie de Geus spoke](#) at a global meeting of the Society for Organizational Learning encouraging young attendees to read Piaget's work on accommodation and to change the internal structures of business and governmental institutions to be in harmony with our contemporary values. Much of the time our learning is guided by deductive theory and Piaget refers to this as assimilation. At other times, we learn in the absence of theory. This is the case in inductive discovery science. Piaget called this learning through accommodation.

Tom Reinhardt, George Greenfield and Dennis Sandow met to discuss using social action research to understand how the staff at Cascade Medical Center worked well together. This is the first step toward bringing the organization's internal structures in harmony with our preferences for living and working well together. Instead of taking a pathogenic approach and seeing the organizations problems, social action research studies how people do what they do when they create value and wellbeing. Instead of using numbers, social action research listens to one person after another explain how they work well together. Each open-ended interview is transcribed and validated by having those listened to correct any mistakes made by the listener. Then all of the interviews are read and coherences, or regularities across interviews, are discovered. Finally, the social network of Cascade Medical Center is mapped. All of this data is compiled and presented to the staff and Board of Trustees so they can conserve and build on the culture of wellbeing and high performance.

What we learned from the staff was that their preferences for working well together included these coherent themes. Representative comments from two staff interviews are below each theme. There were several similar comments for each theme.

Family

We are one family and we take care of each other.

Everybody is so interconnected and we live in a small community and when patients come in they become family too.

Communication

*Communication is key and allows us to keep above average worker satisfaction.
I think that for the most part our working well together stems from communication.*

Openness and transparency

*Communication is open. You can go talk to anyone you want when you need to.
In the office there's an openness to ask questions, without judgement. For new people that's nice.*

Community and care

*In this community, everyone cares for everyone in the community.
Our patients come in from our community and everybody knows people who live in our community and that helps us with improving our care.*

Help and support

*There's also an amazing amount of selflessness here. If you need help staff will work late or work in the evening to help you.
We're flexible in helping people out. I appreciate helping people out on many levels, not just health.*

People are not numbers

*I've worked at other health care places that make you feel like a number. They make you feel like they don't want to know who you are.
They are humble and kind and it blows me away. I've never worked with nicer people. They are selfless. You are not a number.*

Trust

*People feel trusted and they want to reciprocate at all levels.
I feel supported by the structure, the trust and the comradery – all of the pieces are there.*

Cohesion

*We have expectations on what work is all about so the interpersonal relationships need to be cohesive.
Our CNO creates cohesiveness and is so helpful and supportive of the people that work for her so we take care for her.*

Freedom

*Our Director lets us work things out instead of micro-managing us.
There's not the barriers of the large corporations and we've given our employees the freedom to fix problems.*

Amazing

*They noticed how I felt and their compassion was just amazing.
It's an amazing place to work.*

Wellbeing at work

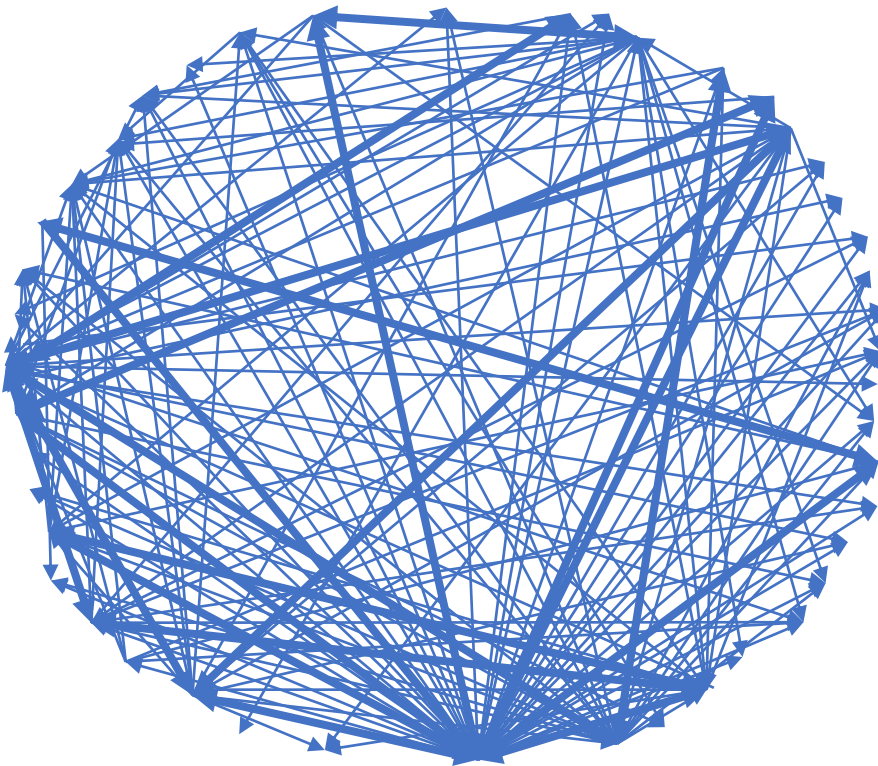
Across the board the staff are willing to contribute to each other's success. The staff are happy, positive and caring.

I love working here.

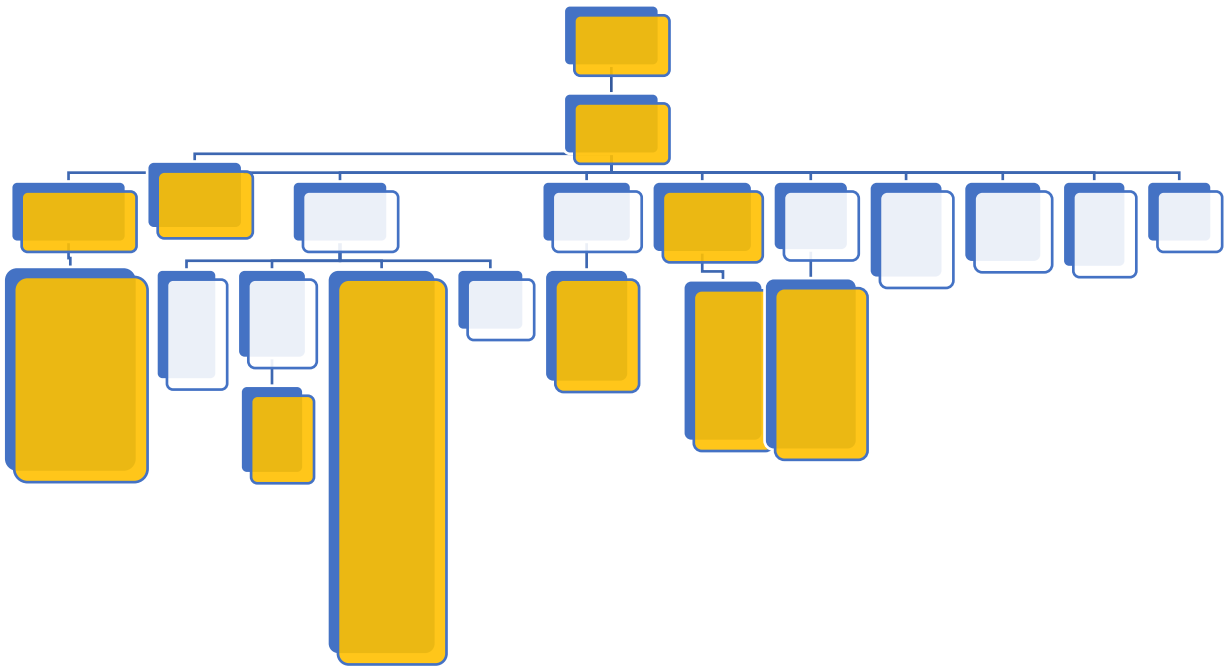
Social network mapping

To understand social systems, we make two distinctions regarding systems in general – organization and structure (H.R Maturana, 1975). In 1990, Dennis used social network mapping to study cohesive social support networks (Yan, 1991), increase supply chain productivity (Jewell-Larsen & Sandow, 1999), and improve the quality of Hewlett-Packard inkjet cartridges (Sandow & Allen, 2005).

In this case we studied the social network of Cascade Medical Centers workplace culture. A survey was sent to everyone who was interviewed asking, “With whom do you collaborate to create exemplary patient care?” The network is mapped with directional arrows. If Dennis identified George as a collaborator, a line with an arrow is drawn from Dennis -> George. If George, then identified Dennis as a collaborator an arrow was drawn from George <-> Dennis.



We found a network of social collaboration, the most cohesive social structure. When we compared it to the traditional organizational chart, we discovered that the structure was a social capital network connecting silos or functional departments (shaded in yellow).



Adaptation and accommodation during organizational transformation

Arie de Geus (De Geus, 1997), Dennis Sandow (Sandow & Allen, 2005), Alain de Vulpian and Irene Dupoux-Couturier (de Vulpian & Dupoux-Couturier, 2019) all reach a similar conclusion – it is time for us to allow biology, not just the physical science of logic, to guide our transformation. The world’s economy has shifted from Industrial Era to a Knowledge Era. Management practices that produced value during the Industrial Era have not proven to create value in the Knowledge Era. Worse yet, those trying to manage knowledge-creating organizations using Industrial Era practices, are contributing to the social and psychological malaise creating ill health and low productivity and performance. This is not a single instance concern. Government, philanthropy and business institutions continue to use the physical sciences to guide their decision making and these institutions are failing. De Vulpian and Dupoux-Couturier describe the collapse or fulfillment we face amidst this organizational transformation.

At Cascade Medical Center we chose fulfillment. What is the best we can be? How do we do what we do when we do our best work? How do we work well together? We did not use deductive theory to guide our learning, but accommodation, or discovery research, to answer these questions. This is joyful work opening new scientific views of social systems, love, support and caring. Is the work complete at Cascade Medical Center? No, what we learned is just the beginning! But we did learn that high performance and social wellbeing are synonymous and social action research helps us bring the structure and organization into balance by recognizing and conserving how we live and work well together.

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