

Fragmentation

Recently I attended a healthcare summit offered by a hospital system on whose board I serve. One of the speakers was a physician in charge of identifying and publicizing innovative medical programs across the country. These programs had to meet three criteria: care had to be coordinated between various health providers & institutions; there had to demonstrate improved health outcomes; and they had to cost less than comparable programs. When he was asked what the biggest challenge was in delivering on these three criteria, he said that “the enemy is the fragmentation of services.”

It occurred to me that the challenge of fragmentation is what makes many organizations ineffective. I once asked someone to define the culture of his organization and he said, “That’s easy. It’s a mosaic of fiefdoms.” As I discovered, he was correct. It was a marvelous description of the organization. The company was a series of discrete castles – each with their drawbridges in various positions of being open or closed. Department heads appeared to devote much more energy to maintaining their individual fiefdoms than serving the company as a whole.

Anyone who has gone to a hospital has experienced the frustration of repeating all of their personal information (and having their insurance cards re-copied) as they moved from department to department. The owner of a large health

insurance provider donated a kidney to his son and had a full battery of tests. But when he went across the street in the same hospital system for a minor procedure, they wanted him to completely retake the same battery of tests because the systems of the two elements of the institution didn't talk to one another. Fortunately, he had downloaded all of his files on his i-phone and simply emailed the results to the hospital.

We see examples of this kind of fragmentation all the time in government and in business. Different elements of a company – sales vs production, research vs marketing -- each having a definition of success that is incompatible with the other. These differences create inefficiency and stalemate. Ultimately, they wear away at a company's potential for success. Throughout 2011 and into early 2012 our federal government has been paralyzed because people of different political persuasions seem unwilling to push for a common rather than a partisan outcome.

Clearly, the enemy is fragmentation.

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