



# QUALITY BY DESIGN

SECOND EDITION <sup>2</sup>

A CLINICAL MICROSYSTEMS APPROACH

MARJORIE M. GODFREY · TINA C. FOSTER · JULIE K. JOHNSON  
EUGENE C. NELSON · PAUL B. BATALDEN

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## A Clinical Microsystems Approach

Second Edition

Edited by

Marjorie M. Godfrey

Tina C. Foster

Julie K. Johnson

Eugene C. Nelson

Paul B. Batalden

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We dedicate this book to

**Our teachers** – *we are grateful to have learned from the pioneers/luminaries in the fields of improvement and learning.*

We have been fortunate to learn directly from several of these thought leaders: James Brian Quinn, the “father” of micro-meso-macrosystem thinking, Parker Palmer, Karl Weick, Don Berwick, Staffan Lindblad, Maureen Bisognano, Atul Gawande, Brenda Zimmerman, Trish Greenhalgh, Jody Hoffer Gittel, and Edgar Schein. Through their writings, we have benefited from other thought leaders such as W. Edwards Deming, Florence Nightingale, Avedis Donabedian, and Donald Schön.

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**Our families** Our loved ones who support our passion and pursuit for excellence in health care.



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# CONTENTS

---

Tables, Figures, and Exhibits   xiii

Foreword   xxi

Preface   xxv

Acknowledgments   xxix

The Editors   xxxiii

The Contributors   xxxix

Introduction   xli

1 Clinical Microsystems – Success Characteristics of High-Performing  
Microsystems   1

Julie K. Johnson, Marjorie M. Godfrey, Boel Andersson-Gäre, Susanne Kvarnström,  
Tina C. Foster

Introduction

True Structure of the System, Embedded Systems, and the Need to Transform Frontline Systems

Success Characteristics of High-Performing Sites

Case Study: International Research on Clinical Microsystems

Conclusion

Mesosystem Considerations

Summary

Review Questions

Discussion Questions

Additional Activities

References

Additional Resources

Key Words/Terms

## 2 Developing High-Performing Microsystems 37

Marjorie M. Godfrey, Tina C. Foster, Steve Harrison, Martin J. Wildman, Julie K. Johnson

Introduction

Case Study: Maintaining Fidelity in the Face of Complexity – Using Microsystem Improvement to Structure Change in Cystic Fibrosis Care

A Model of Development and a Curriculum to Catalyze Microsystem Growth

Conclusion

Mesosystem Considerations

Summary

Review Questions

Discussion Questions

Additional Activities

References

Additional Resources

Key Words/Terms

## 3 Leading Improvement of Healthcare Service Systems: Microsystems, Mesosystems, and Macrosystems 71

Paul B. Batalden, Edgar H. Schein, Don Caruso, Marjorie M. Godfrey, Tina C. Foster, Julie K. Johnson

Introduction

Case Study: Leadership

Leading Clinical Micro-, Meso-, and Macrosystems

Some Current Priorities for Leading the Improvement of Health and Health Care

Focus on Basics

Relentlessly Reduce Waste and Add Value

Enable Continual Inquiry into the “Unchanged Present” and Offer the Social Support that Fosters It

Co-creating Health Through Relationships that Align Micro-, Meso-, and Macrosystems

Conclusion

Summary

Review Questions

Discussion Questions

Additional Activities

References

Additional Resources

Key Words/Terms

#### 4 Developing Professionals and Improving Work Life 111

Marjorie M. Godfrey, Tina C. Foster, Gay L. Landstrom, Joan Clifford, Julie K. Johnson

Introduction

Case Study One: Dartmouth-Hitchcock Frontline Clinical Manager Development

Case Study Two: Exploring a Reflective Team Coaching Model as a Leadership Strategy to Cultivate Frontline Quality and Safety Improvement Capability

Helpful Resources and Methods

Conclusion

Mesosystem Considerations

Review Questions

Discussion Questions

Additional Activities

References

Additional Resources

Key Words/Terms

#### 5 Transforming a Primary Care Clinic to an NCQA-Certified Patient-Centered Medical Home 145

Marjorie M. Godfrey, Tina C. Foster, Randy Messier, Julie K. Johnson

Introduction

Case Study: Transforming from a Primary Care Clinic to an NCQA-Certified Patient-Centered Medical Home

A Developmental Journey: Beginning to Assess, Understand, and Improve a Clinical Microsystem

Getting Started: Using the 5Ps to Explore Systems

Putting it all Together: Co-Designing and Planning Services

Conclusion

Mesosystem Considerations

Summary

Review Questions

Discussion Questions

Additional Activities

References

Additional Resources

Key Words/Terms

## 6 Partnership within the Clinical Microsystem's Framework: Coproducing Good Outcomes with Patients and Families 189

Maren Batalden, Julie K. Johnson, Cristin Lind, Helena Hvitfeldt, Paul B. Batalden, Tina C. Foster, Marjorie M. Godfrey

Introduction

Improvement Science and Relationship-Centered Care

A Framework for Patient-Professional Partnership

Methods for Partnering with Patients and Families

Case Study: Example from Cambridge Health Alliance

Conclusion

Mesosystem Considerations

Summary

Review Questions

Discussion Questions

Additional Activities

References

Additional Resources

Key Words/Terms

## 7 Improving Patient Safety and Reliability 217

Julie K. Johnson, Paul R. Barach, Gautham K. Suresh, Tanya Lord, Marjorie M. Godfrey, Tina C. Foster

Introduction

Safety, Medical Errors, and Patient Harm

Case Study: Noah

Learning from Errors and Adverse Events

Diagnostic Errors

Role of Risk Management and Patient Disclosure

Conclusion

Mesosystem Considerations

Summary

Review Questions

Discussion Questions

Additional Activities



References

Additional Resources

Key Words/Terms

## 8 Creating an Actionable Healthcare Information Environment to Inform Intelligent Action 251

Brant J. Oliver, Eugene C. Nelson, John N. Mecchella, AnnMarie R. Hess, Marjorie M. Godfrey, Tina C. Foster, Julie K. Johnson

Introduction

Rich Information Environments

Case Study One: Evolution of the Learning Healthcare Microsystem: From Historic Beginnings in the Dartmouth Spine Center to National Adoption by the Swedish Rheumatology Quality Register (SRQ)

Case Study Two: Using Data from Multiple Microsystems to Create a Mesosystem-Level Information Environment: The *Dallas OneCF Center* Pediatric to Adult CF Care Mesosystem Measurement Journey

Case Study Three: Cascading Data from the Macrosystem Level to Inform Performance and Improvement: Examples of Data Registry Applications from Sweden and the United States

Case Study Four: The Role of Clinical Informatics: Using Data from an Electronic Health Record (EHR) to Improve Health Maintenance Outcomes in the MaineHealth System

Creating a Rich Information Environment

Designing Information Flow to Support Systems: *Feed Forward/Feedback, Feed Up/Feed Down, and Feed In/Feed Out* Approaches

Leveraging Clinical Informatics to Optimize the Information Environment

Tips and Principles to Foster an Actionable Information Environment

Conclusion

Mesosystem Considerations

Summary

Review Questions

Discussion Questions

Additional Activities

References

Additional Resources

Key Words/Terms

## 9 Interprofessional Education and the Clinical Microsystem 299

Tina C. Foster, Paul N. Uhlig, Brant J. Oliver, Gay L. Landstrom, Julie K. Johnson, Marjorie M. Godfrey

Introduction

Case Studies – New Models for Enhancing Interprofessional Education and Practice in Microsystems

Case Study One: Using “Educational Microsystems” to Develop a “Clinician-Leader-Improver” Curriculum	
Case Study Two: The Social Field Model of Collaborative Care	
Case Study Three: The Clinical Nurse Leader Role – Two Stories of Clinical Microsystem Transformation	
Conclusion: A New Future Waiting	
Mesosystem Considerations	
Summary	
Review Questions	
Discussion Questions	
Additional Activities	
References	
Additional Resources	
Key Words/Terms	
<b>10 The New Frontier of System Improvement – Mesosystems</b>	<b>333</b>
Marjorie M. Godfrey, Tom Downes, Steve Harrison, Julie K. Johnson, Tina C. Foster	
Introduction	
Two Case Studies	
Case Example One: Acute Care Flow of Frail Older Patients	
A Mesosystem Improvement Journey	
Case Example Two: Improving the Cystic Fibrosis Lung Transplant Mesosystem	
Discussion	
Guiding Principles from the Two Case Examples	
Conclusion	
References	
Key Words/Terms	
<b>Afterword</b>	<b>367</b>
<b>Appendix: Accelerating Improvement in Clinical Mesosystems</b>	<b>375</b>
<b>Glossary</b>	<b>477</b>
<b>Name Index</b>	<b>495</b>
<b>Subject Index</b>	<b>501</b>

---

## TABLES, FIGURES, AND EXHIBITS

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---

### Tables

- 1.1 Scope of Primary Success Characteristics and Illustrative Underlying Principles 15
- 1.2 Specific Examples of the Primary Success Characteristics 17
- 1.3 Illustrative Best Practices Used by High-Performing Clinical Microsystems 20
- 1.4 National and International Research and Improvement Programs 23
- 3.1 Hypertension Improvement Matrix 76
- 3.2 Best Practice Improvement Toolkit for Hypertension 77
- 3.3 Summary of Changes 82
- 3.4 Improvement Training Methods 83
- 3.5 Behaviors, Actions, and Approaches that Leaders Use to “Build Knowledge” 89
- 3.6 Attributes, Concrete Steps, and Behaviors Associated with Leaders in High-Performing Clinical Microsystems 91
- 3.7 How Leaders Review and Reflect 93
- 3.8 Needs Identified by Mesosystem Leaders 94

3.9	Helpful Knowledge and Skills for Clinical Mesosystem Leaders	95
3.10	Six Commonly Recognized Needs	95
3.11	Positive Work-Life Context Statements	97
3.12	Supportive Information Infrastructure Questions	97
3.13	Factors that Influence Our Thinking	98
3.14	Time Estimates to do the Work	98
4.1	Changes Over Time	122
4.2	Self-Evaluation with Coaching Interdisciplinary Professional	124
4.3	Four Levels of Relationships	128
4.4	Examples of Skills Addressed in a Personal Skills Assessment	134
4.5	Five themes Managers Should Include in Their Leadership and Development	136
5.1	PCMH Success Elements and Their Links to the 5Ps	151
5.2	Know the Ps for Clinical Microsystems Across the Health Continuum	158
5.3	Practice Core and Supporting Processes Assessment	166
5.4	Assessing Your Practice Discoveries and Actions: the Ps	174
5.5	Assessing Your Practice Discoveries and Actions: Common Oversights and Wastes	177
5.6	Challenges on Medical Services by Microsystem Domain	180
6.1	A Framework for Patient–Professional Partnership	193
6.2	The 5Ps Clinical Microsystem Framework Augmented with a Coproduction Lens	202
6.3	Change Concepts for Coproduction	207
7.1	Classification of Patient Safety Events	223
7.2	Conditions That Contribute to Errors and Adverse Events as seen through the Who Framework	224
7.3	Linkage Between Microsystem Characteristics and Patient Safety	239
8.1	Dallas OneCF Center Population Measures	259
8.2	Dallas OneCF Center Outcome Measures	259
8.3	Dallas OneCF Center Process Measures	260

8.4	Percentage of Health Maintenance Activities Completed (February 2016)	268
8.5	Percentage of Health Maintenance Activities Completed (Improvement Phase)	270
8.6	Tips for Developing and Sustaining an Actionable Rich Information Environment	286
8.7	Fundamental and Intermediate Improvement Measurement Skills Education in Dartmouth Microsystem Academy Programs	289
9.1	Key Constraints Creating Barriers to Quality and Safety Integration	304
9.2	Summary of School of Nursing Quality Improvement Task Forces and Pdsa Cycles	310
9.3	Summary of Patient and Team Self-Perception	321
10.1	Quality Improvement Assessment (Qia) Categories	352
10.2	Relational Coordination Survey Dimensions	352
10.3	CF Ltt Llc Relational Coordination Interventions – Examples	355
10.4	Comparison of Two Case Studies	357
A.1.1	The Twenty Sites Examined in the Clinical Microsystem Study	35
A.4.1	Staff Satisfaction Survey	130
A.4.2	Staff Personal Skills Assessment	132

## Figures

1.1	Chain of Effect in Improving Healthcare Quality	4
1.2	Network of Care	5
1.3	Anatomy of a Clinical Microsystem	7
1.4	Research Design for Study of 20 Clinical Microsystems	11
1.5	Success Characteristics of High-Performing Clinical Microsystems	13
1.6	A Model of Knowledge Creation Through Interactive Research	25
2.1	Success Characteristics of High-Performing Clinical Microsystems	38
2.2	Map of Area Around Sheffield Uk	40

2.3	Team Coaching Model	41
2.4	The Improvement Ramp	42
2.5	I Dropped My Quarter	44
2.6	Lampost Figure – SPC Chart of Adherence Data	45
2.7	Beginning the Improvement Journey: the Star Indicates the Theme of Improvement	47
2.8	The CF Clinic Flowchart	48
2.9	Cause and Effect for Patient Waiting in CF Clinic	49
2.10	CF Clinic Redesign Process Flowchart	49
2.11	SPC Chart of Waiting Times in the CF Clinic	51
2.12	Overview of CF Improvement Activities	52
2.13	Adapted COM-B Behavior Change Model	54
2.14	A Model for a Microsystems Developmental Journey	57
2.15	Mixed Up Improvement Ramp	60
3.1	A View of the Multilayered Health System	72
3.2	Example of Local Areas of Autonomy Compared to Service Lines: Cardiovascular Care	75
3.3	Final Hypertension Work Flow – Primary Care	79
3.4	Final Hypertension Work Flow – Specialty Care	80
3.5	Team-Based Care Model of Service Line Resources	81
3.6	Team-Based Care Model: Horizontal Alignment Across Microsystems	82
3.7	Hypertension Improvement Over Time	85
3.8	Microsystem Preventative, Acute, Chronic, and Palliative Subpopulations	85
3.9	The Healthcare System as an Inverted Pyramid	87
4.1	Participant Confidence with Conflict Management and Relationships	118
4.2	Coaches-In-Training Confidence in Coaching Skills	119
4.3	Clinical Microsystem Staff Short Survey	129
5.1	The Original Improvement Formula	147
5.2	The Updated Improvement Formula	147
5.3	Two System Levels of Action to Plan Focused and Disciplined Improvement Strategy to Meet Pcmh Standards	153

5.4	Medical Home Activity Survey	154
5.5	Medical Home Gantt Chart	155
5.6	Patient Viewpoint Survey	163
5.7	RC Map	169
5.8	High-Level View of a Primary Care Clinical Microsystem	171
5.9	CF Lung Transplant Mesosystem 5Ps	181
6.1	The Phases of Project Execution/System Development Life Cycle	195
6.2	Coproduction Continuum: Health Professionals and Patients	200
6.3	Patient–Professional Partnership along the Improvement Ramp	204
7.1	Haddon Matrix Analyzing an Auto Accident	226
7.2	Safety Matrix for Analyzing Patient Safety Event	227
8.1	Dartmouth Spine Center Dashboard	254
8.2	SRQ Dashboard for a Rheumatoid Arthritis Patient	255
8.3	Longitudinal Outcomes for Rheumatoid Arthritis Patients in Sweden	256
8.4	Dallas Onecf Center Modified Scorecard	258
8.5	Dummy Dashboard Structure	261
8.6	Dallas Onecf Center Populated Dummy Dashboard	262
8.7	Dallas Onecf Center Initial Dashboard	263
8.8	Dallas Onecf Center Spc Dashboard	264
8.9	Cascading Measures	265
8.10	Colorectal Screening Stratified Bar Chart	269
8.11	Depression Screening Run Chart	271
8.12	Clinical Value Compass	273
8.13	Balanced Scorecard	274
8.14	Basic Improvement Measurement Process	275
8.15	Linking Short- and Long-Term Measures	278
8.16	Cascading Measures Across System Levels	279
8.17	Information Flow Systems (“Feed Systems”)	280
8.18	Stratified Bar Chart	282
8.19	Stratified Time Plot	283

- 9.1 Perceived Knowledge Outcomes and Student Experience Outcomes from a School of Nursing Course in which Students Used the Microsystems Assessment Tool (Mat) 307
- 9.2 Knowledge Outcomes from a School of Nursing Course Embedded within an Online Learning Environment 308
- 9.3 School of Nursing Curriculum Thread for Quality and Safety Integration Across Programs 309
- 9.4 Short-Term Process and Outcomes Performance Results 312
- 9.5 Statistical Process Control (SPC) Chart of Pass Rate Performance Outcomes (P Chart) 313
- 9.6 Before and After the Development of a Social Field 316
- 9.7 Differences Between Traditional and Social Field Approach to Care Transformation 318
- 9.8 Growth of Reliability and Resilience in Care Teams 319
- 9.9 Observable Differences Between Traditional and Collaborative Care 320
- 9.10 Examples of Care Outcome Improvements – Social Field Model of Collaborative Care 322
- 9.11 University Hospitalist Teaching Service Preparing To Implement Collaborative Care 323
- 10.1 Flowchart of Ken Bladyka’s Journey Through Multiple Mesosystems of Care in Two Macrosystems 337
- 10.2 The “Big Room” Translated From Toyota Obeya 340
- 10.3 A Display Board in the “Big Room.” 341
- 10.4 GSM Bed Occupancy From January 1, 2012 342
- 10.5 Current Design – Assess to Discharge and Flipped Test 343
- 10.6 Pilot Ward Mean Spell Length of Stay for all Discharges from January 2013 345
- 10.7 Mean Delay from Referral to Assessment for All Ar – by Week 346
- 10.8 CF Lung Transplant Learning and Leadership Timeline of Activities 349
- 10.9 30,000-Foot View – the Eight Phases of CF Lung Transplant and Transition Mesosystem 351



## **Exhibits**

- 4.1 Kotter's Eight-Step Process for Leading Change 114
- 4.2 eCoach-the-Coach Program 116
- 5.1 The Improvement Formula (Batalden and Davidoff, 2007) 147
- 5.2 Moving from Satisfaction to Patient and Family Experience of Care 164
- 5.3 Analysis and Improvement of Processes 167
- 5.4 Relational Coordination 168
- 5.5 Redesigning the Microsystem to Improve Quality of Care for Hospitalized Patients 172



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## FOREWORD

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Paul B. Batalden, MD; Eugene C. Nelson, DSc, MPH

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### Introduction

The meeting was about making real change in U.S. healthcare services. Professor Diane Meier, Director of the Center to Advance Palliative care and expert on palliative medicine, presented the story of the development of palliative care. As she reflected on the progress made in the quality of health care, she identified at least seven contributing levers for change:

1. The “business” case
2. The “quality” case
3. Social marketing to create specific audience awareness
4. Clinician training
5. Payment
6. Regulation, accreditation, certification
7. Policy change

*Quality by Design*, second edition, helps with each of these levers. It offers insights that can help you build the “quality” case, and it offers the basic information that can form necessary clinician education and training. It indirectly contributes to each of the other levers by bringing the basic unit where professionals and individual patients, families and communities meet (the clinical microsystem) into sharp focus.

---

## Context and Importance of Clinical Microsystems

This book describes how the real work of healthcare services gets done and how that work can be improved. It begins with the recognition that healthcare service today is not “soloist” work. Clinical microsystems are groups of professionals and patients who regularly use information and technology to help them work together to realize shared aims. Effective clinical microsystems are based on trust and communication that builds a positive patient-professional relationship. Together, the microsystem groups can work to help patients flourish and minimize the burden of illness. Microsystems form the basic building blocks for modern healthcare service.

When the first edition of this book was written, we had the deep belief that healthcare service professionals actually have two jobs: to do their work and to improve their work. The addition of practical improvement “know-how” ensures that the healthcare professionals of today and tomorrow will be ready to lead the changes needed. We believe that this second edition has benefitted significantly from the reflections and experiences of hundreds of people and can help practitioners learn and master the basics of improvement as they put them to use for the benefit of the patients they serve.

---

## The Clinical Microsystem: A Perspective and an Approach to Improvement

Clinical microsystems do not need to be “installed” or “implemented” – they already exist. However, their performance and functional effectiveness vary substantially. The first edition of this book suggested several ways that clinical microsystems might be recognized and improved. Since that book, many have engaged in the job of improving these small systems, and much has been written and spoken about their efforts. New insights, new frames, and new data have emerged. This version brings together these new insights and combines them with the introductions found in the first edition. This book provides today’s healthcare leaders, practicing clinicians, and clinical learners with what they need to get started on the road to measurably improve healthcare services in a way that can be sustained and further improved upon.

The first part of the book offers a panoramic and refreshed view of quality improvement and includes useful theoretical frameworks, important principles, practical tools, and powerful techniques, often in the context of real-world cases. It covers fundamentals such as patient-centered care, patient safety, and quality measurement, and introduces emerging issues such as the co-production of health

and healthcare services, integration of care across different levels of the system, and building rich information environments enabled by information technology.

The second part of the book provides specific guidance and a “path-forward” curriculum. Of particular note is the advancement of clinical microsystems to mesosystems of care since people usually receive care in more than one microsystem during episodes of care. Leaders at all levels of the healthcare system can use it to successfully integrate quality improvement into the daily work of clinical professionals and support staff who serve all kinds of patients with all kinds of health-related needs.

---

## Editors and Authors

This second edition of *Quality by Design* was directed by three editors who are known for leading, teaching, and writing about quality improvement in the frontlines of care. Marjorie M. Godfrey (PhD, MS, BSN, FAAN) and Tina C. Foster (MD, MPH, MS) began working in the 1990s as quality improvement leaders and teachers at Dartmouth, which continues to be their professional home. Julie K. Johnson (MSPH, PhD) received her doctorate degree from Dartmouth and enjoys a distinguished career in quality and safety working as a professor and researcher. She is currently based at the Feinberg School of Medicine in Chicago, Illinois. We have had the privilege of working very closely with the editors and believe they have produced a wonderful book.

They have enlisted the aid of a diverse group of authors with wide-ranging, real-world experience and strong credentials in healthcare service improvement and innovation. The authors have brought their firsthand knowledge and worldwide experience about healthcare service and its improvement into each of the book’s chapters.

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## Conclusion

Today, we recognize the need to build quality improvement “know-how” into the education of tomorrow’s healthcare professionals – the doctors and nurses and allied health professionals of the future. We also recognize the need to build this same quality improvement “know-how” into the work of busy clinicians. This work and the knowledge of clinical microsystems make it possible for everyday medical practices and clinical units to be improved from “the inside out.” Those are the improvements likely to last. Go for it.



---

## PREFACE

---

Marjorie M. Godfrey, PhD, MS, BSN, FAAN; Tina C. Foster, MD, MPH, MS; Julie K. Johnson, MSPH, PhD

This second edition of *Quality by Design* is about both clinical microsystems – the place where patients, families, and care teams meet – *and* other systems in health care, primarily mesosystems, which comprise multiple microsystems that (ideally) work together for a common aim. It is about what leaders at all levels need to know and do to create the conditions for excellent care at the front line. Is the care correct? Timely? Caring? Desired? Efficient? Is the care coproduced with patients and families in a way all parties can support? These questions are answered millions of times a day as real patients and families interact with real teams in real clinical microsystems and mesosystems. The experience by people in these interactions can range from “perfect” to “dreadful” (and everything in between).

In reading and using this book, we hope you will make discoveries about microsystems *and* mesosystems. We sincerely hope you will use the tools and processes and apply the lessons in your actual care settings; discuss the concepts with colleagues, patients, and families; and learn from your experiments.

---

### What is a Clinical Microsystem?

A clinical microsystem is many things serving many purposes to many people.

*A locus of professional formation:* The place where people learn how to become competent healthcare professionals who work together and continue to develop

over time. At the heart of the development of the caring and competent healthcare professional is the integration of the learning of “the head, the hands, and the heart” with the ability to take action to values.

*A living system laboratory:* A place to test changes in care design and delivery and to observe and work with complexity. Clinical micro- and mesosystems are living, complex adaptive systems that have simple rules, autonomous but interdependent agents, patterns of ordered relationships, and processes. Micro- and mesosystems offer opportunities to understand the work of small delivery systems in their natural context. While some problems they face are simple, many are complicated and complex.

*A source of workforce motivation or alienation:* The place where pride in work flourishes or flounders. Clinical microsystems are the locus of most workforce dissatisfiers and many genuine motivators for pride and joy in work. The hygiene factors in work, identified long ago by Herzberg (1987), such as work policy, administration, supervision, interpersonal relations, and working conditions, are often mandated by the macrosystem, yet are largely made manifest in the microsystems. So too are the motivating factors, such as the work itself, responsibility, recognition, and sense of achievement.

*A building block of health care:* The place that connects with other microsystems to form a continuum of care (mesosystem). In primary, secondary, and tertiary care settings, these small systems connect the core competencies of health professionals to the needs of patients, families, and communities. In isolation or in concert with other microsystems, the clinical microsystem makes it easy or difficult to do the right thing. Microsystems exist – not because we have installed them – but because they are where real healthcare work gets done. The idea that patients and providers are members of the same system is not new. In the 1930s, the famed physiological biochemist L. J. Henderson noted that patients and their caregivers were best thought of as members of the same system (Henderson, 1935).

*The home of clinical policy in use:* The place where policies are enacted and used in actual care. Much has been made of formal guidance for caregivers from the aphorisms of Hippocrates to today’s guidelines, protocols, pathways, and evidence syntheses. Often, however, this formal guidance is the guidance we espouse but do not practice. Clinical microsystems have policies in use about access, about the use of information and telecommunication technologies to offer care, about the daily use of science and evidence, about staffing and the continuing development of people, and more. Sometimes a policy-in-use is written, sometimes not. Debates often rage about the espoused policies, whereas the policies in use often remain misunderstood and unexamined.

*A maker of healthcare value and safety:* The place where costs are incurred and reliability and safety succeed or fail. Clinical microsystems, like other systems, can make



it easy to do the right thing. Microsystems that work as high-reliability organizations, similar to those described by Weick and colleagues, are “mindful” of their interdependent interactions (Weick, 2002; Weick and Sutcliffe, 2001).

*The facilitator of patient satisfaction:* The place where patients and families coproduce care with staff and experience that care as meeting or not meeting their needs. Clinical microsystems are the locus of control for many, if not most, of the variables that account for patient satisfaction with health care. Ensuring that patients get access when they want and need it should be a goal of the scheduling processes of the microsystem. Making needed information readily available should be a priority of the microsystem. A culture that reflects genuine respect for the patient and careful listening to what patients have to say results in social learning for the microsystem. The patterns of staff behavior that the patients perceive and interpret as meeting their unique needs (or not) are generated at the level of the microsystem (Schein, 1999).

Microsystems and mesosystems are critically important to patients, families, healthcare professionals, and the communities they serve. However, they are often not recognized in daily practice and improvement, and we felt it was therefore imperative to write a second edition of this book, updating it with new considerations about mesosystems and ways of working together. In doing so, we hope that the reality and the power of systems thinking in general – and clinical microsystem thinking in particular – can be unleashed and popularized, so that outcomes and value can be improved continuously (from the inside out and from the bottom up) and health professionals at all organizational levels will have a better chance of having their everyday work in sync with their core values and their strong desire to do the right thing well.

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