Book: Design: Moving from Strategic Objectives to Patient Services

Author: Crayton Fargason Jr., MD, MM

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Most health care organizations have been under the budget knife over the past few years. In many circumstances, we've cut about as much as we can from the workforce. At the same time, major initiatives have been undertaken (i.e., Leap Frog, Six Sigma, etc.) which focus on systemic improvements.

Dr. Fargason's book is a very useful and informative book. It presents a complete methodology for organizational improvement from the "design" perspective. Once we only used the word "reengineering." However, today, the word embodies a broader definition to include other major projects like process improvement, informational technology, physician order entry, electronic medical records, etc.

The book is the fourth in a series by the Curbside Consulting Group. The firm's books are targeted to clinicians, offering practical and condensed advice on a number of important business topics.

Dr. Avedis Donabedian (noted University of Michigan professor and researcher) developed the Structure-Process-Outcome model for quality improvement. Dr. Fargason updates this model in the Quality Grid. Using Donabedian's model as the x-axis, this author adds "Design-Implementation-Monitoring & Control" to the y-axis. One has a grid in which to fill-in the necessary details for any important project.

Dr. Fargason presents two major approaches to design: rational approach and intuitive (or natural) approach. The rational approach is much more structured, including design objectives and prioritized results. Through fishbone diagrams, checklists, and matrices, the author presents supportive documents and assistance.

Intuitive or natural approach is the other method of design. It involves intellect and reasoning to facilitate systemic change. Since it is more reflective, it does not include checklists and other cues. Rather, the author presents prompts and suggestions to analyze using the intuitive method.

The book is a very quick-read, stocked with diagrams, checklists, and other resources. While written for the busy clinician, it is applicable and appropriate for even the seasoned health care executive. It would be a welcome addition to anyone's bookshelf that is charged with the responsibility of project and/or process improvement.