



**THE WHARTON  
HEALTHCARE QUARTERLY**

**SPRING 2015  
VOLUME 4, NUMBER 2**

## PROPULSION: TURNING STRATEGY INTO ACTION QUICKLY – PART 4

This is the final piece in a series of four articles about working toward being a “superconducting organization,” in which desired results come faster — and they last. In this article, we detail *Propulsion*, one of the levers that can help build this kind of organization.

### Propulsion in Healthcare

Many leaders’ offices have ‘that’ binder on the shelf. It has a typewritten label, a neatly organized tab system, and an inch of dust on top. It’s their last strategic plan.

The task of turning strategy into action quickly is difficult across today’s business environment, but is perhaps most challenging in healthcare. For example, in light of the [January 2015 HHS announcement](#) of an accelerated timeline to adoption of value-based payment strategies, it’s tough to imagine that tactics drafted in a strategic plan today will be relevant five years from now.



Plus, there are cultural factors. A recent [Forbes article](#) quoted a Mayo Clinic study where design experts were paired with physicians to execute a healthcare improvement project. One designer observed, “Physicians were deeply guided by tradition, and because they bore the responsibility for the patient’s life and well-being, they were, as a group, risk-averse... This conservative culture affected doctors’ willingness to try not only new drugs and treatments but also new administrative procedures and educational methods.” Even as lawmakers, payors, patients, and their families are calling for a paradigm shift in delivering and funding care, providers often call either for establishing an evidence base, which comes with a lag time, or for the comfort and familiarity with the way they’ve been doing things for decades.

There are, however, ways to build agility into healthcare strategy. In fact, we observed “Propulsion” — the ability to put strategy into action quickly — time and again in national organizations focused on interprofessional collaboration, a feature of healthcare delivery that we studied recently in partnership with a healthcare foundation. We saw that developing ways to partner closely across roles allowed healthcare systems to achieve goals that ranged from increasing patient-centeredness to reducing length of stay.

### Creating Engagement through Real Work

As with any sustainable change, Propulsion starts with leaders setting a strong direction for organizational leadership and competitive strength in their particular environment. However, the leader’s job does not end with being clear about the strategic direction. People need to know how they can play a part in making change happen, and leaders can help by embedding change strategies into real work that’s already on a given team’s plate.

For example, the medical director and nurse leader for surgical services at a specialty hospital focused on women’s health saw together the need to shift their unit from a culture of blame to one of problem-solving through interprofessional collaboration. Instead of enrolling their team in programs that preached the values of teamwork or respect, they took a sharp look at the actual work of the staff. What exactly did they need to adjust in order to improve patient outcomes and satisfaction?

They found ample opportunity in time management issues in the OR — surgeries weren’t starting or ending on time, which had

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implications for patient safety and employee and patient satisfaction. They implemented training to introduce clinical (physicians, nurses) and non-clinical (pre- and post-op, housekeeping) team members to each other's roles and responsibilities. Training centered both on process improvement and on best practices in communications and collaboration, like closed-loop communication, constructive conflict resolution, resource management, and the empowerment of every member of the care team to speak up for safety (and be heard). Having this new knowledge about ways of working together, and opportunities for application, allowed the teams to deliver on the objective of shared problem-solving within their existing work processes.

Through turning strategy to action quickly, the surgical services team has seen remarkable improvement in metrics that were meaningful to the hospital, the team, and most importantly, the patient. Over four years the team at this hospital has cut turnover time by 20%, seen an increase of over 100% in first-case on-time starts, and have eliminated 700 hours of delays.

### **Supporting Behavior Change**

We've seen that implementing a successful strategy isn't a one-time "fix." New behaviors, like new collaborative processes within teams, require new infrastructure and resources to support and sustain the changes. Without the right elements supporting change, strategy can stall — but sometimes those elements are difficult to anticipate. This is where creativity also comes into play in implementation.

The interprofessional Palliative Care Team at a children's hospital within a prestigious Midwestern hospital system is composed of a physician, two nurse practitioners, a nurse, a social worker, and a chaplain. The stakes are high for the team — they form a consult service to families with very sick children, and provide a summary of the child's situation and recommended steps to the child's physicians. They have goals they hold sacred, to "carry their story," and "serve the family and meet their needs." In order to deliver on this work, the team elected to rely on a non-traditional resource for clinical teams — group therapy. This venue provides a safe space to air conflicts and, as such, deepens the team members' trust in one another, a key ingredient to the success of their work with families. It also allows the team to flex and try new things, knowing they have reflective time to weigh in on the changes together and come to shared agreements.

With these elements — setting direction and engaging teams in real work, and supporting behavior change with the right infrastructure and resources — organizations can put strategy into action quickly, and sustain on-course delivery and adjustment of their strategy over time.

In this series, we have described distinct approaches that can help organizations move toward being superconducting, where results come faster and they last. Our first installment outlined the Superconducting Organization ([Part 1](#)). These approaches include mobilizing the energies of your workforce (Leading Leaders, [Part 2](#)), engaging resistance to pick up speed (Superfluidity, [Part 3](#)) and this piece on Propulsion, turning strategy into action quickly.

For more information on this topic or related materials, contact CFAR at [info@cfar.com](mailto:info@cfar.com) or 215.320.3200 or visit our website at <http://www.cfar.com>.