



RELATIONAL COORDINATION  
RESEARCH COLLABORATIVE

# Building Relational Coordination for High Performance in the Veterans Administration

VHA Cyberseminar  
December 13, 2018

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Director, Relational Coordination Research Collaborative  
Chief Scientific Officer, RC Analytics

# Relational Coordination Research Collaborative

The RCRC is an international learning community welcoming partners from a variety of sectors who use relational coordination theory in their research and practice. Relational coordination is a mutually reinforcing process of communicating and relating for task integration. Relationships shape the communication through which coordination occurs, for better or for worse.





RELATIONAL  
COORDINATION  
ANALYTICS

[About](#)[RC Theory](#)[RC Survey](#)[Services](#)[Contact](#)

# TRANSFORMING RELATIONSHIPS FOR HIGH PERFORMANCE

Relational Coordination Analytics, Inc. (RCA) is a measurement and analytics company that provides action-oriented roadmaps for organizations seeking to improve their performance.

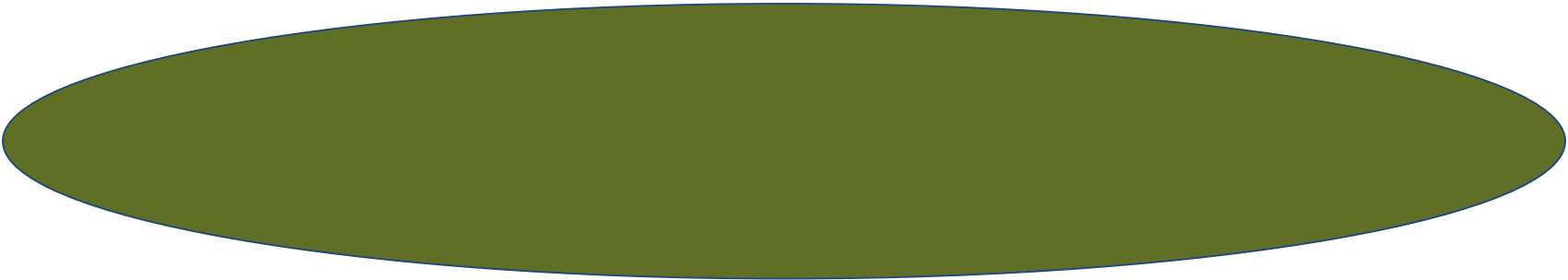
See what sets us apart

RC INDEX  
RELATIONSHIP  
PROBLEM-SOLVING  
COMMUNICATION  
SHARED GOALS  
SHARED KNOWLEDGE  
MUTUAL RESPECT

# Poll Question

What is your primary role in VA?

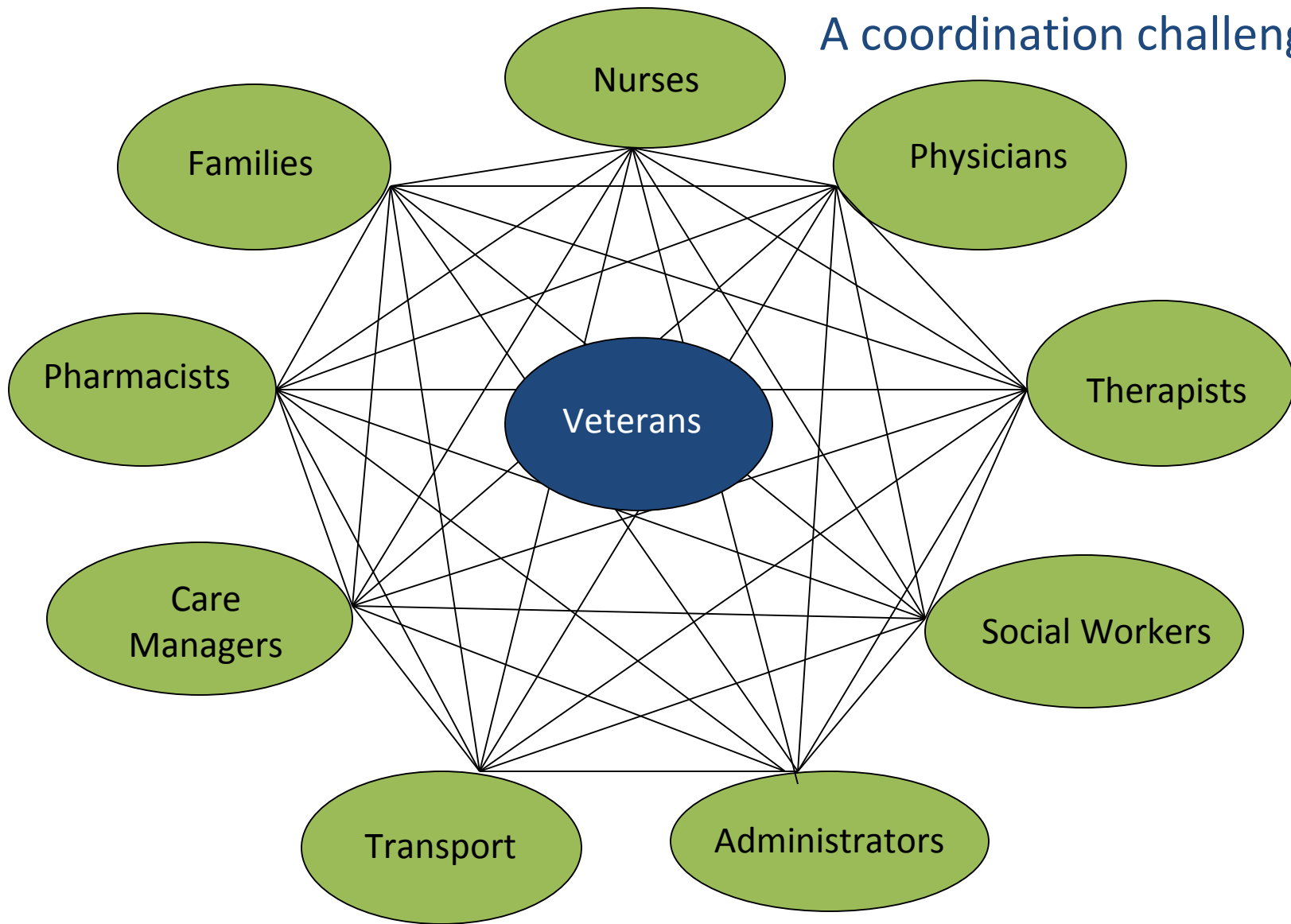
- ◆ student, trainee, or fellow
- ◆ clinician
- ◆ researcher
- ◆ administrator, manager, policy-maker
- ◆ other

- 
- ◆ VA is a **complex system** – many roles with their own knowledge and expertise
  - ◆ Veterans have **complex conditions** with needs that extend across the VA and beyond
  - ◆ Due to Veterans Choice Act, a growing demand to coordinate care with **external entities**
  - ◆ How to leverage VA **strengths and mission** to respond to these coordination challenges?

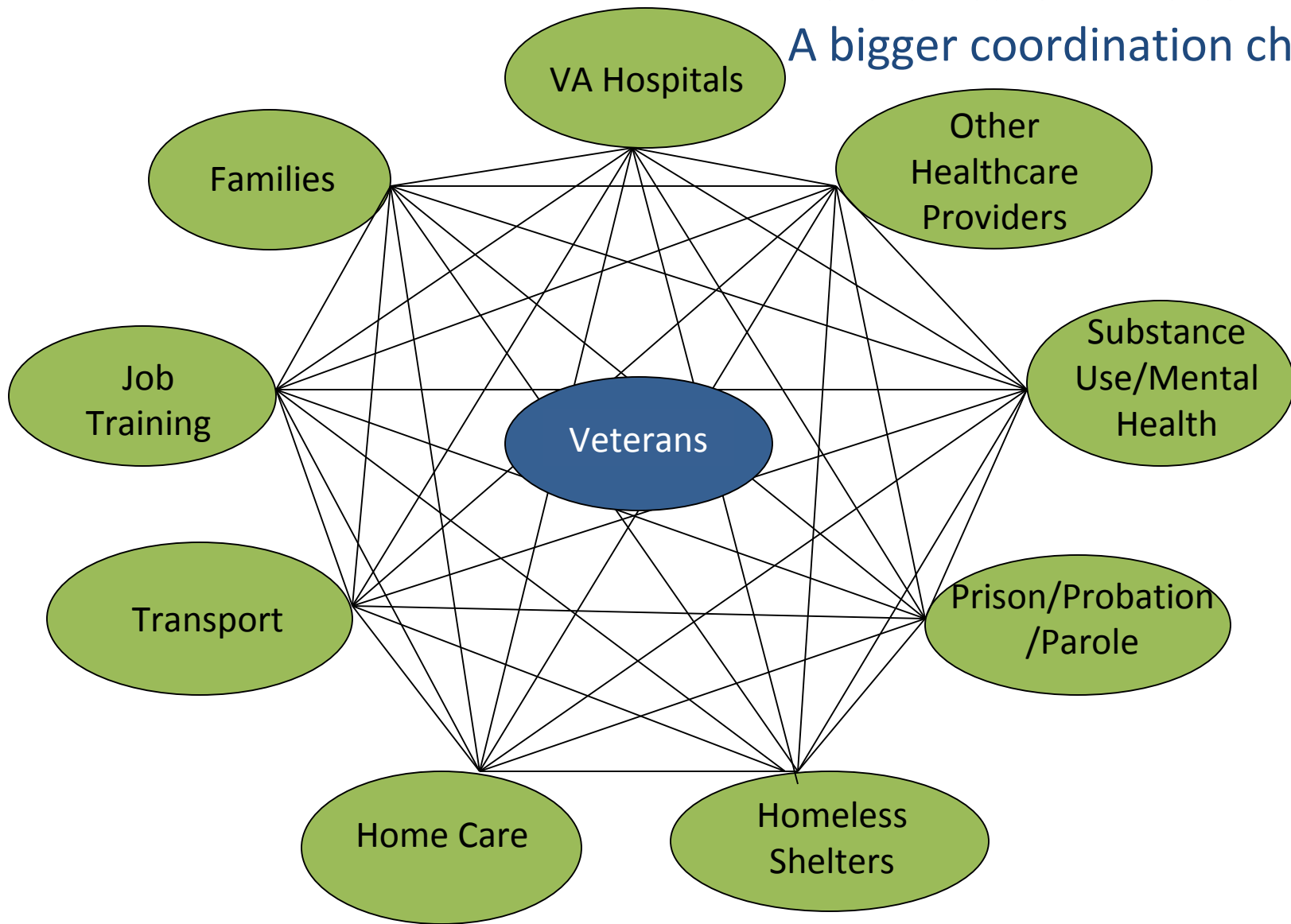


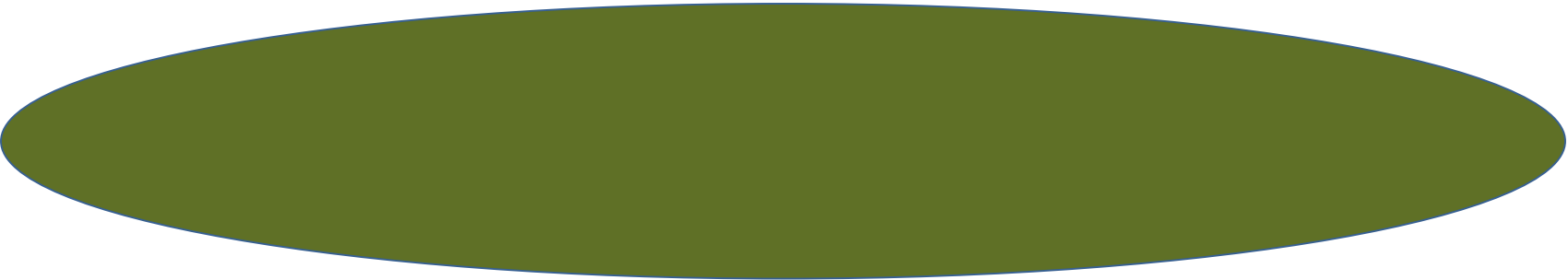


## Inpatient Veteran care: A coordination challenge



## Veteran care in the community: A bigger coordination challenge



- 
- ◆ Growing interest in relational coordination in the VA
  - ◆ Relational coordination was keynote topic at this year's State of the Art (SOTA) Conference
  - ◆ All VA employees are eligible to become partners in the RCRC in the current year
  - ◆ And there's a competitive process to get funding for your baseline RC Survey for research or improvement project





# Today's agenda

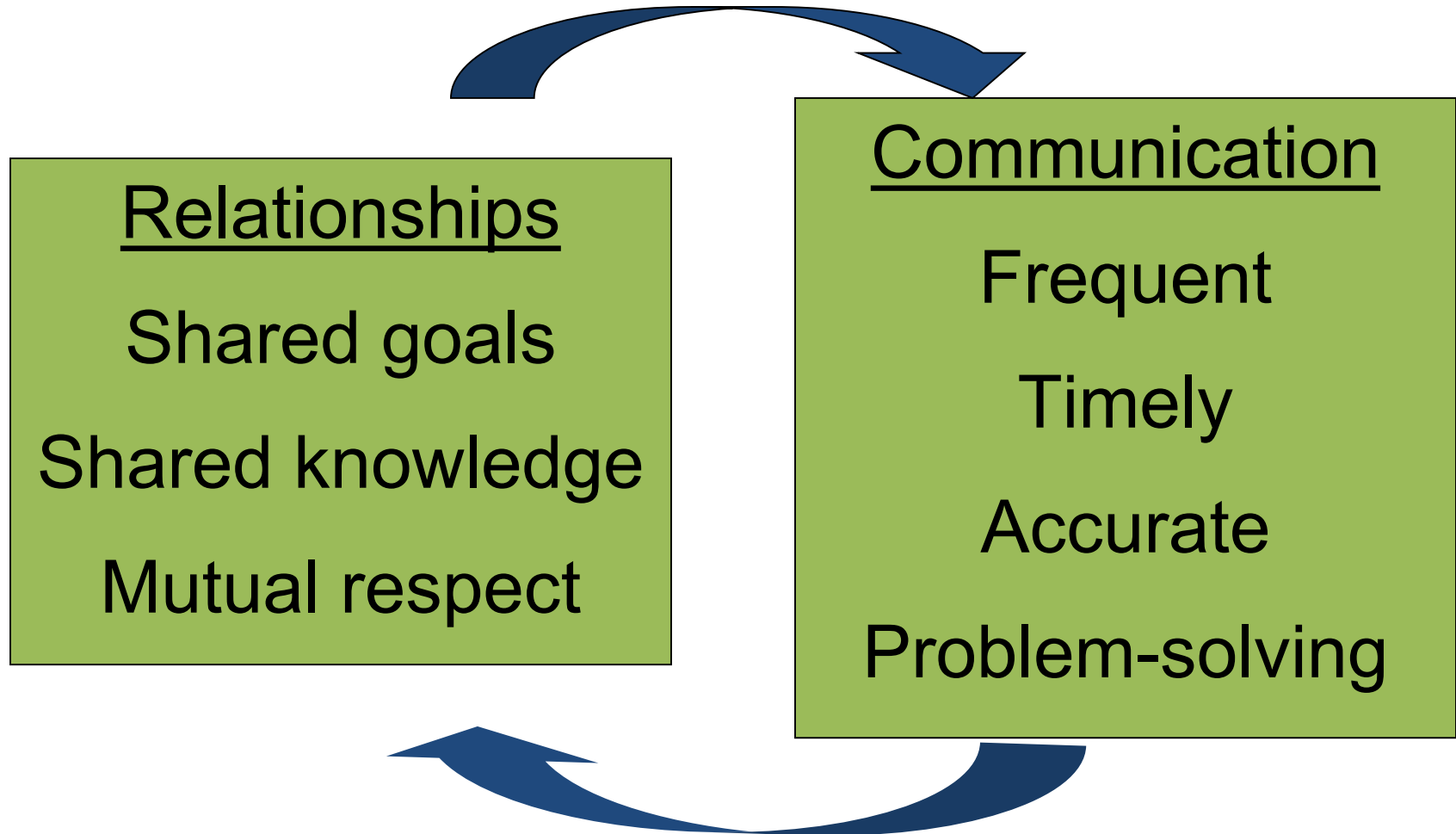
- How well does relational coordination currently work in the VA?
- How well do VA organizational practices currently *support* relational coordination?
- Four tools that can help
  - Relational Mapping
  - RC Survey (RCS)
  - Organizational Structures Assessment Tool (OSAT)
  - Relational Model of Organizational Change (RMOC)



Relationships shape the  
communication through which  
coordination occurs ...



# For better...



... or worse



Relationships

Functional goals

Exclusive knowledge

Lack of respect

Communication

Infrequent

Delayed

Inaccurate

Blame shifting



This process is called

# relational coordination

“Communicating and relating  
for the purpose of task integration”



"If you want to understand how one organization can change the competitive rules of the game for an entire industry, read this book."

—James L. Heskett, Baker Foundation Professor, Harvard Business School  
and Coauthor of *The Value-Proposition Chain*

# The Southwest Airlines WAY

Using the Power of Relationships to Achieve High Performance

JODY HOFFER GITTELL

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"A blueprint for improving healthcare quality while reducing costs—just what the doctor ordered."

—Thomas A. Kochan, Professor, MIT Sloan School of Management

# HIGH PERFORMANCE HEALTHCARE

Using the Power of Relationships to Achieve Quality, Efficiency and Resilience

JODY HOFFER GITTELL

Award-winning author of *The Southwest Airlines Way*  
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Jody Hoffer Gittell

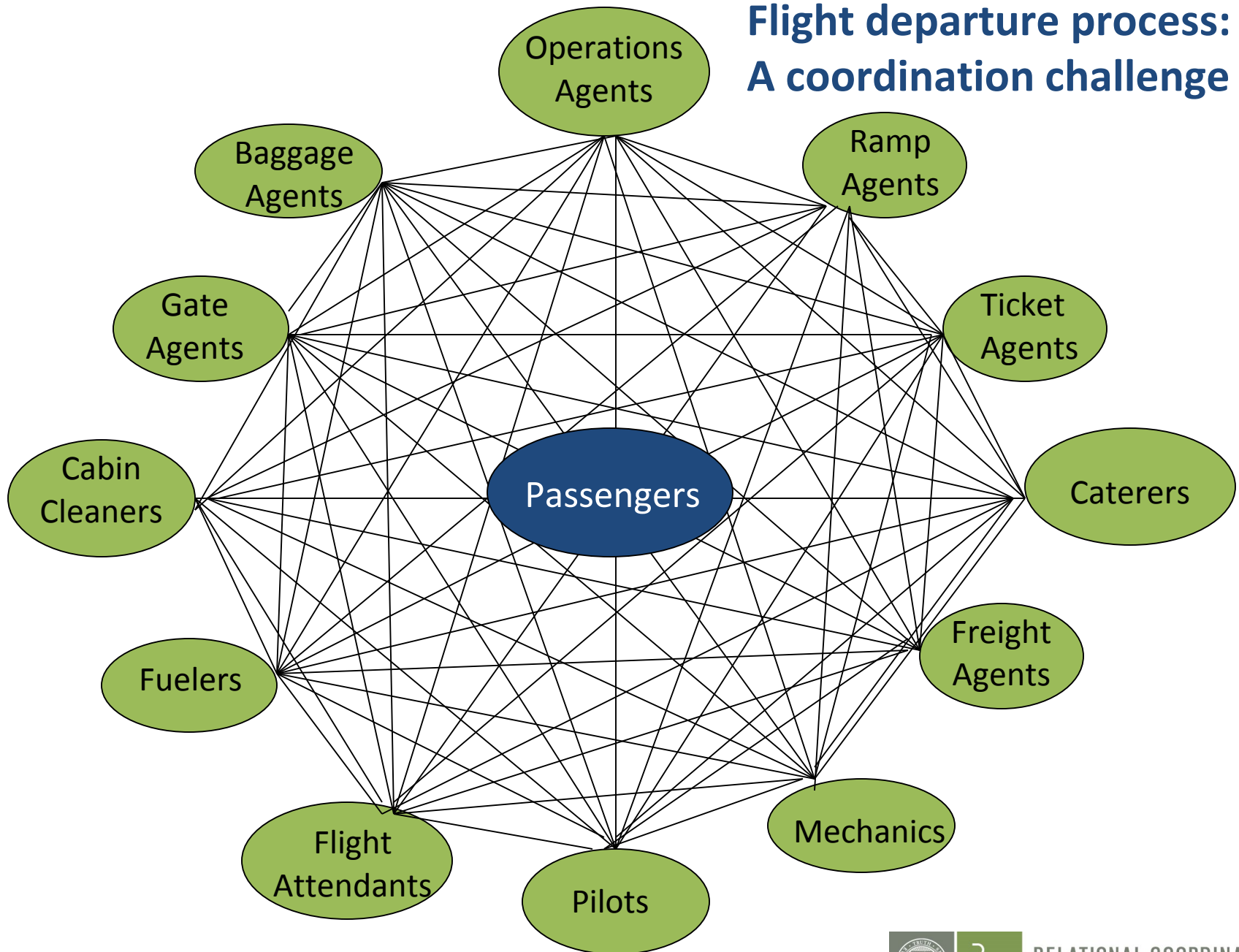
## TRANSFORMING RELATIONSHIPS FOR HIGH PERFORMANCE

The Power of Relational Coordination





## Flight departure process: A coordination challenge

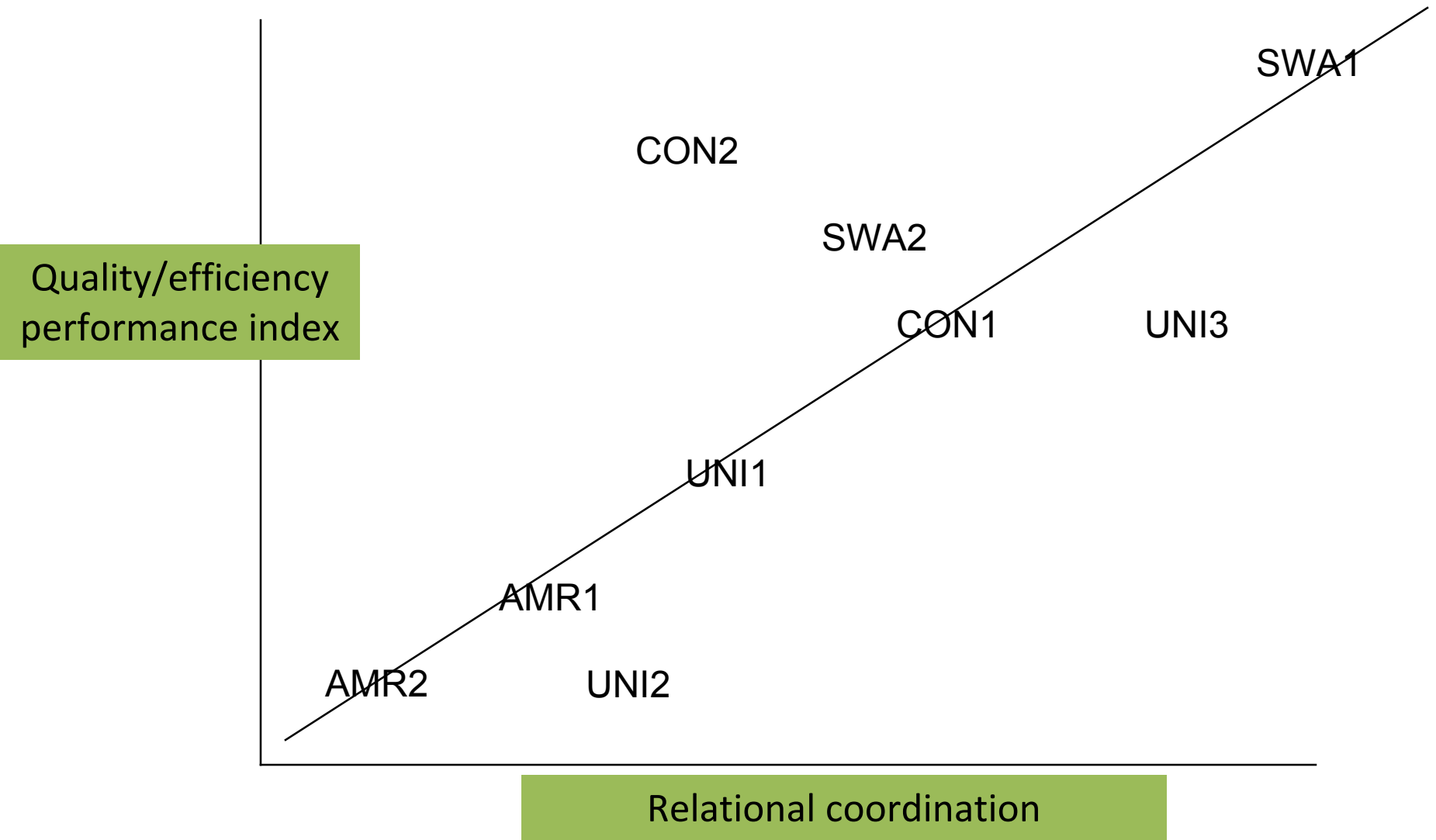


# Investigated performance effects of relational coordination

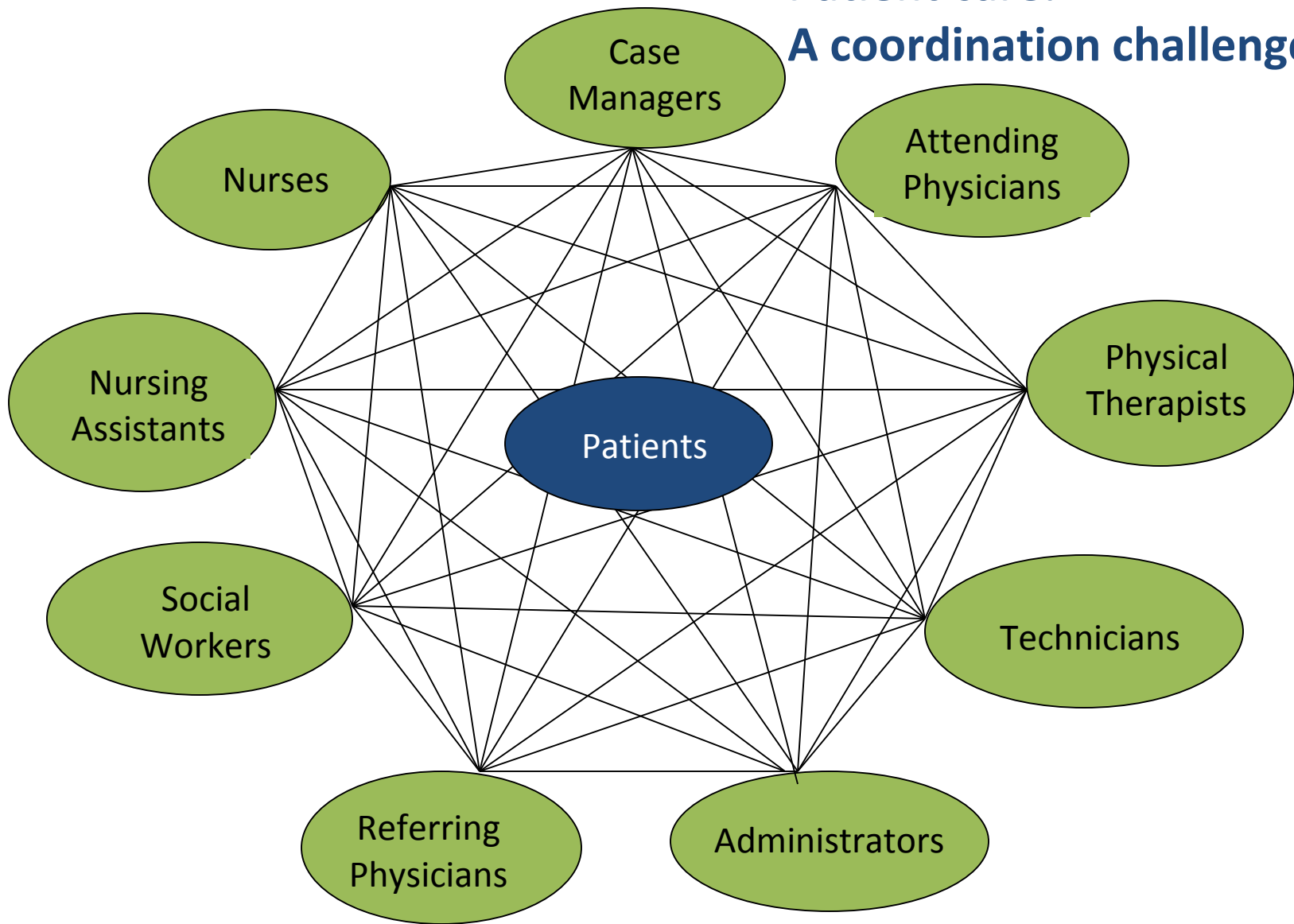
- Nine site study of flight departures over 12 months of operation at Southwest, American, Continental and United
- Measured quality and efficiency performance, adjusting for product differences
- Measured relational coordination among pilots, flight attendants, gate agents, ticket agents, baggage agents, ramp agents, freight agents, mechanics, cabin cleaners, fuelers, caterers and operations agents



# Relational coordination drives flight departure performance



## Patient care: A coordination challenge

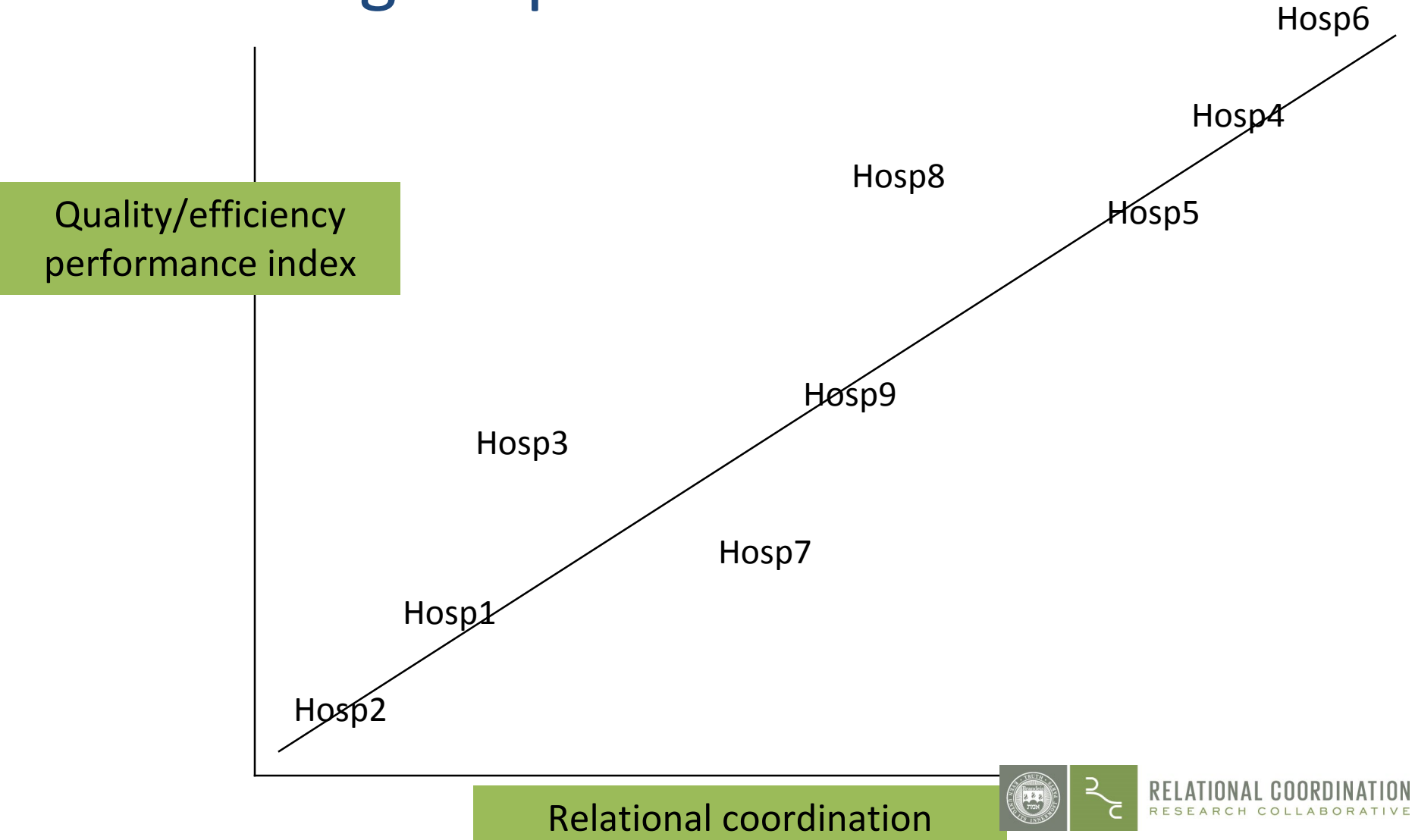


# Same study conducted in hospital setting

- Nine hospital study of 893 surgical patients
- Measured quality and efficiency performance -- and job satisfaction, adjusting for patient differences
- Measured relational coordination among doctors, nurses, physical therapists, social workers and case managers



# Relational coordination drives surgical performance





Research has continued...



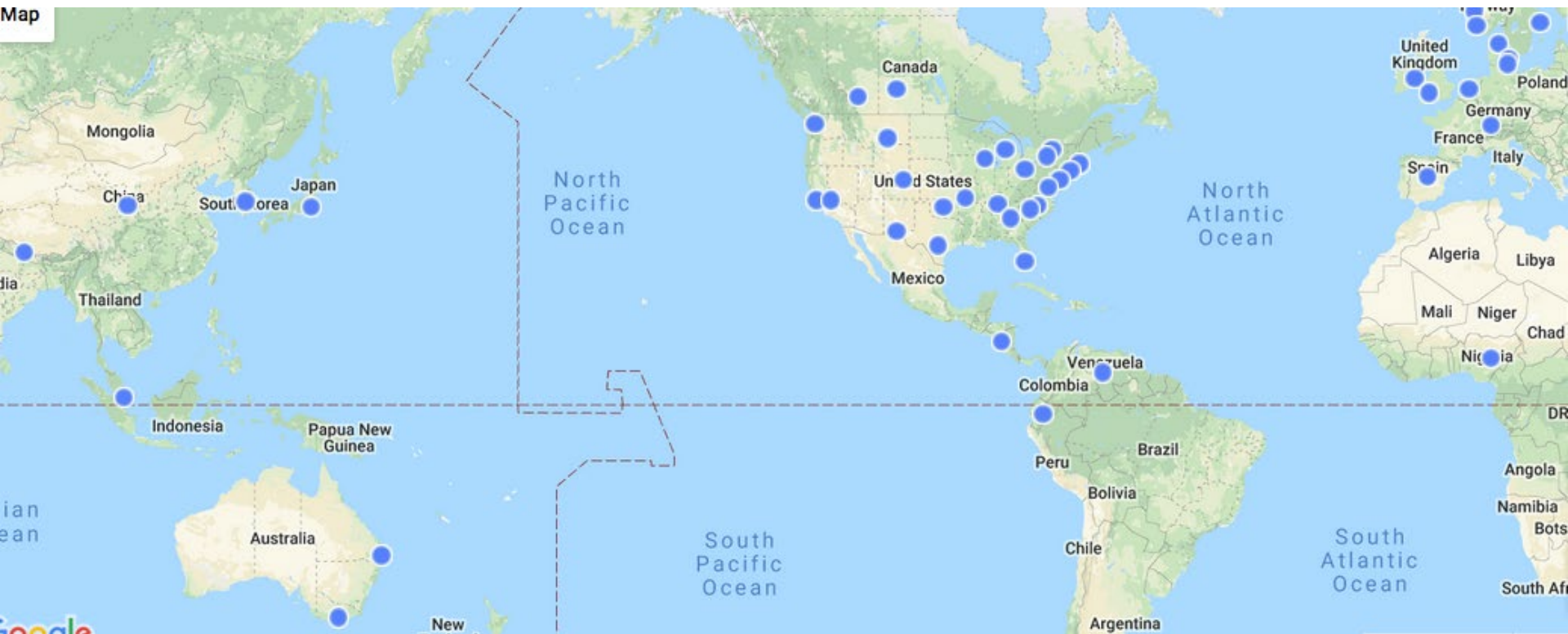
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# across multiple sectors...

- Airlines
- Banking
- Retail sector
- Manufacturing
- Construction
- Accounting
- Consulting
- Early child education
- Higher education
- Youth services
- Surgical care
- Medical care
- Emergency care
- Intensive care
- Obstetric care
- Primary care
- Chronic care
- Home care
- Long term care
- Pharmacy sector



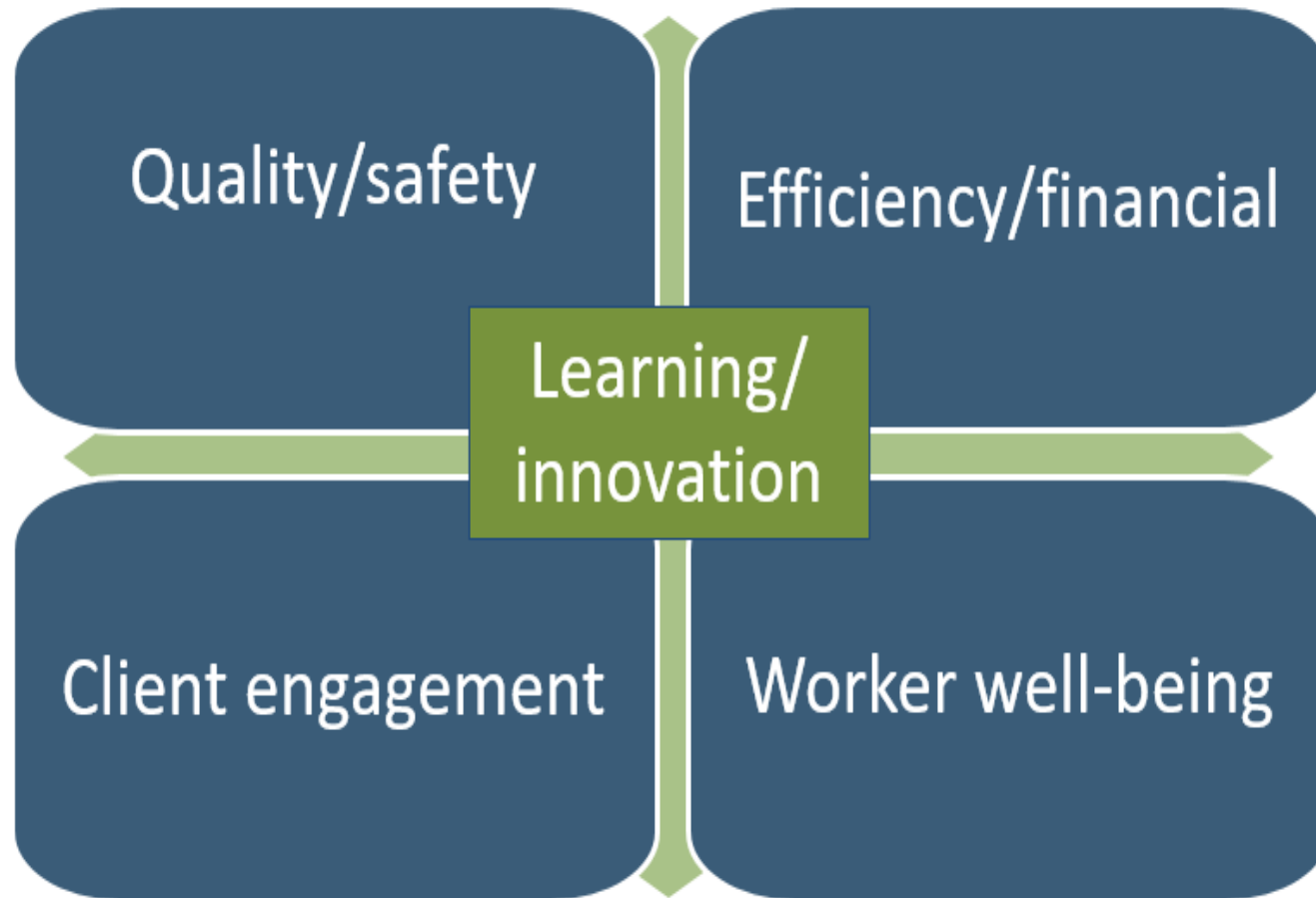
# ...around the world



# ...from inpatient, to outpatient, to the community

- Billings Clinic (Montana)
- Dartmouth Hitchcock (NH)
- Concord Hospital (NH)
- St. Josephs (NY)
- Partners Health (MA)
- Windsor Health (Canada)
- Gold Coast Health System (Australia)
- Beth Israel (MA)
- Maine Medical (ME)
- Stanford Medical (CA)
- Kaiser Permanente (OR/WA)
- Blue Shield (CA)
- American Dental Partners (USA)
- National Health Service (UK)
- Municipalities (Denmark, Sweden, Netherlands)
- Primary Care Progress (USA)
- Integrated Delivery Networks (NH)
- Local Health Integration Networks (Ontario)
- Community safety (MA)
- Family services (Denmark)
- New immigrants (Sweden)
- Community obstetrics (Netherlands)

# Performance outcomes of RC



# Why does RC improve performance?

Relationships of shared goals,  
shared knowledge and mutual respect  
create a culture that supports  
process improvement





# Why does RC improve performance?

Relationships of shared goals,  
shared knowledge and mutual respect  
help care providers to see how they  
connect *around and with* the patients



# Why does RC improve performance?

Positive relationships evoke  
positive emotions –  
activating more advanced part of the brain



# Recent findings

RC significantly improves engagement, satisfaction and reduces burnout for nurses in 5 rural hospitals

Havens, Gittell & Vasey (2018) “Impact of Relational Coordination on Nurse Outcomes: Achieving the Quadruple Aim,” *Journal of Nursing Administration*

# Recent findings

RC significantly improves engagement, satisfaction and reduces burnout for surgeons, nurses, technicians and secretaries in 11 surgical units – while increasing patient satisfaction

Gittell, Logan, Cronenwett, Foster, Freeman, Godfrey & Vidal (2018) “Impact of Relational Coordination on Staff and Patient Outcomes in Outpatient Surgical Clinics,” *Health Care Management Review*

# RC matters most under conditions of complexity

- ◆ Task interdependence
- ◆ Uncertainty
- ◆ Time constraints

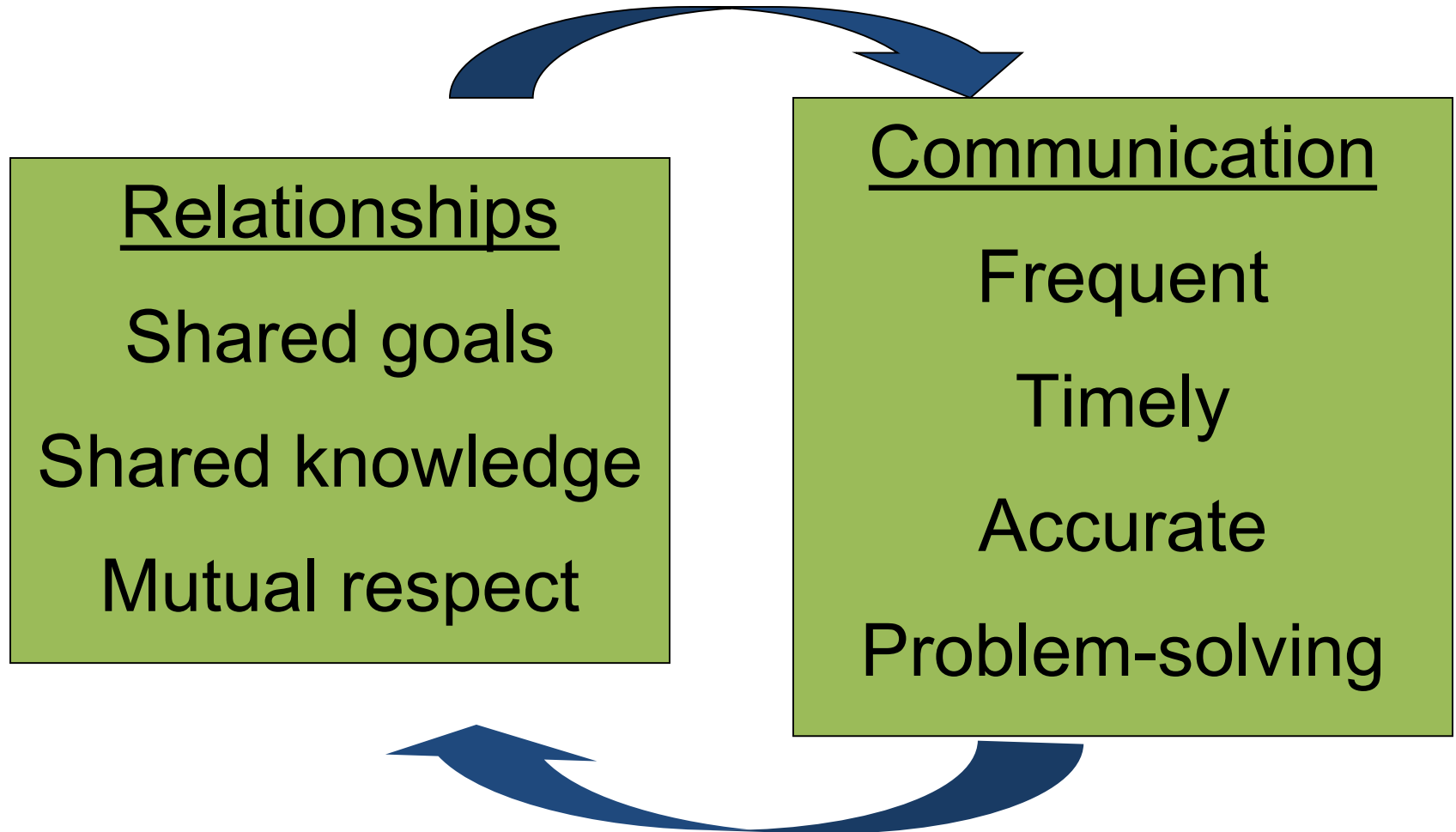


How well does relational  
coordination currently  
work at the VA?





# Like this?



... or this?



## Relationships

Functional goals

Exclusive knowledge

Lack of respect

## Communication

Infrequent

Delayed

Inaccurate

Blame shifting



# How well does RC work, in your experience?

- ◆ In your own department? 1=weak, 5=strong
- ◆ With other departments? 1=weak, 5=strong
- ◆ With non-VA entities? 1=weak, 5=strong



How well does the VA  
currently *support*  
relational coordination?



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# Like this?

## Organizational Structures

Relational Job Design  
Select for Teamwork  
Train for Teamwork  
Shared Accountability  
Shared Rewards  
Shared Conflict Resolution  
Boundary Spanner Roles  
Shared Meetings & Huddles  
Shared Protocols  
Shared Information Systems

## Relational Coordination

Frequent  
Timely  
Accurate  
Problem Solving  
Communication

Shared Goals  
Shared Knowledge  
Mutual Respect

## Performance Outcomes

Quality & Safety  
Efficiency & Finance  
Client Engagement  
Worker Well-Being  
Learning & Innovation



# Or this?

## Organizational Structures

- Siloed Job Design
- Select Individual Players
- Train Individual Players
- Siloed Accountability
- Siloed Rewards
- Siloed Conflict Resolution
- No Boundary Spanner Roles
- Siloed Meetings & Huddles
- Siloed Protocols
- Siloed Information Systems

## Relational Coordination

- Infrequent
- Delayed
- Inaccurate
- Blaming
- Communication
- Functional Goals
- Exclusive Knowledge
- Lack of Respect

## Performance Outcomes

- Low Quality/Errors
- Inefficiency
- Financial Losses
- Client Disengagement
- Worker Burnout
- Failure to Learn



# Bottom line

These structures can strengthen or weaken relational coordination – and performance - depending on their design



# Where to start?





# Stage 1: Choose sites, introduce RC

- Choose pilot sites
- Identify desired performance outcomes
- Who are the key stakeholders involved?
- What are their coordination challenges?
- Introduce RC framework to those stakeholders



# Stage 2: Create Change Team

- Create a Change Team that represents key stakeholders
- Motivate these stakeholders from distinct perspectives/power to contribute time and effort to change process
- Facilitate sensitive discussions with a "safe space" to disagree respectfully
- Engage in relational mapping to visualize the work to be done



# Relational mapping of current state

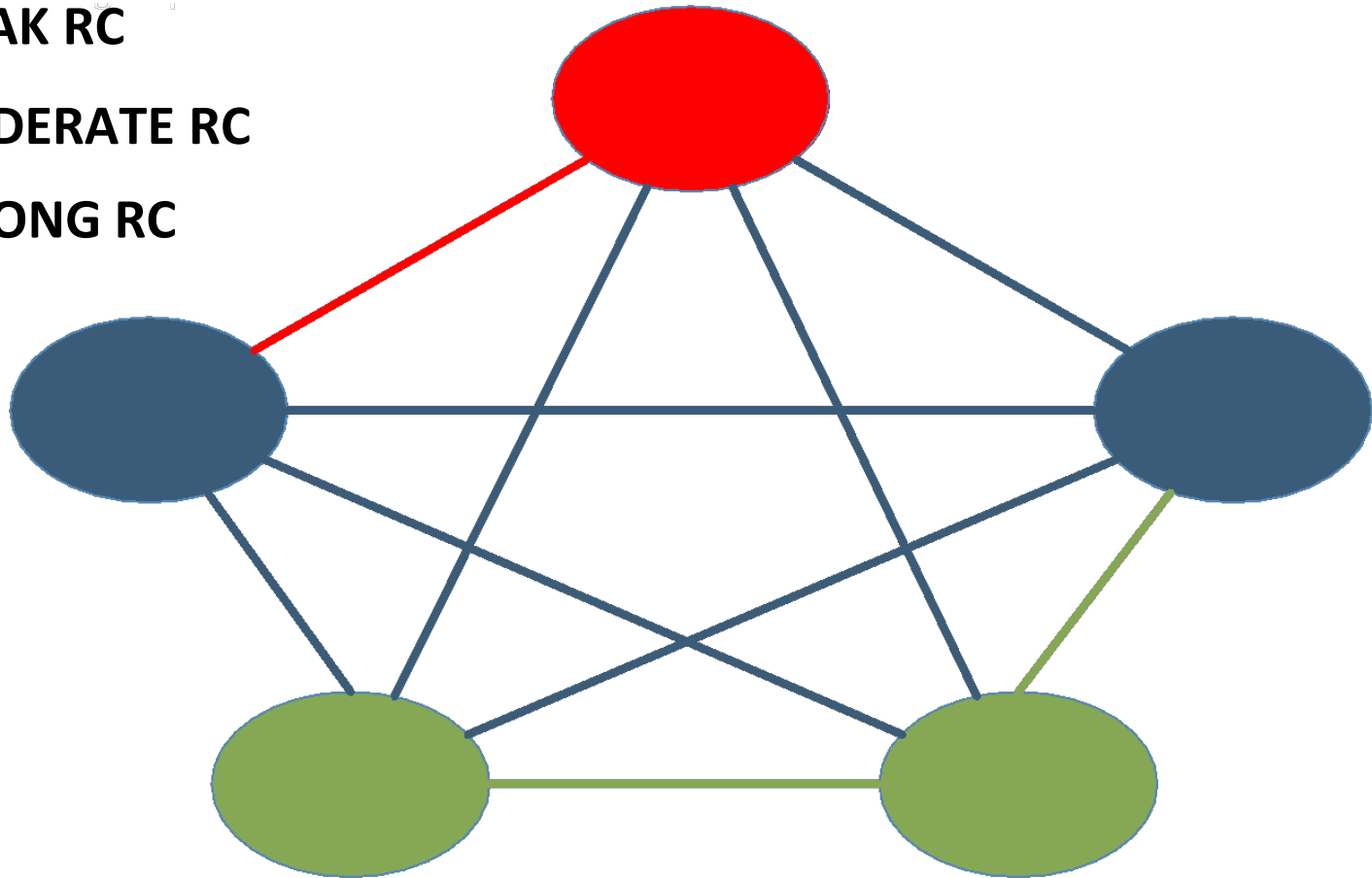
- ◆ Identify a work process that needs better coordination – “caring for our Veterans”
- ◆ Which workgroups are involved?
- ◆ Draw a circle for each workgroup and lines connecting between them
  - **WEAK RC = ORANGE**
  - **MODERATE RC = BLUE**
  - **STRONG RC = GREEN**
  - Color of the circle says how we are doing within each workgroup, color of the line says how we are doing between the workgroups

# Relational mapping of current

 **WEAK RC**

 **MODERATE RC**

 **STRONG RC**



**RC = Shared Goals, Shared Knowledge, Mutual Respect,  
Supported by Frequent, Timely, Accurate, Problem-Solving Communication**







# Stage 2: Create Change Team

- Where does relational coordination currently work well? Where does it work poorly?
- What are the underlying causes?
- How does this impact our performance outcomes?
- Where are our biggest opportunities for change?



# Stage 3: Measure RC

- Use the RC survey to assess the current state of coordination accurately and inclusively
- Survey takes about 20 minutes to complete and results remain anonymous
- Results will be shared as a basis for designing interventions in an inclusive process





# Stage 3: Measure RC

1. Frequent Communication	How <b>frequently</b> do people in each of these groups communicate with you about <b>post-operative care procedures for our surgical patients</b> ?
2. Timely Communication	Do they communicate with you in a <b>timely</b> way about <b>post-operative care procedures for our surgical patients</b> ?
3. Accurate Communication	Do they communicate with you <b>accurately</b> about <b>post-operative care procedures for our surgical patients</b> ??
4. Problem-Solving Communication	When there is a problem with <b>post-operative care procedures for our surgical patients</b> ?, do people in each of these groups blame others or work with you to <b>solve</b> the problem?
5. Shared Goals	Do people in each of these groups <b>share your goals</b> for <b>post-operative care procedures for our surgical patients</b> ??
6. Shared Knowledge	Do people in each of these groups <b>know</b> about the work you do with <b>post-operative care procedures for our surgical patients</b> ??
7. Mutual Respect	Do people in each of these groups <b>respect</b> the work you do with <b>post-operative care procedures for our surgical patients</b> ?

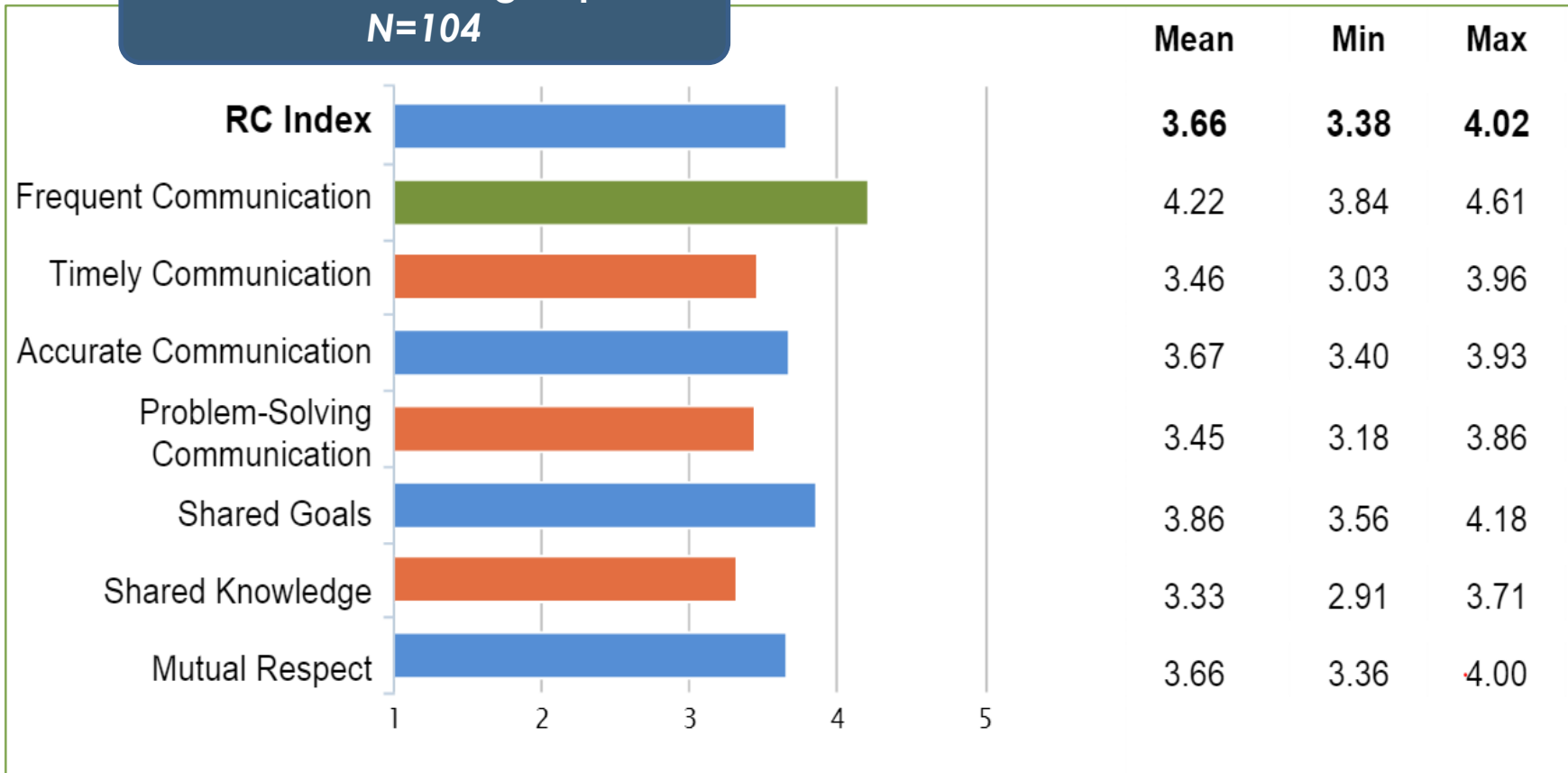
# Stage 4: Reflect on RC findings

- With facilitation, Change Team shares RC measures with key stakeholders
- “Looking into the mirror”
- “Putting the elephant on the table”
- A starting point for new conversations
- A starting point for reflection and change



# Stage 4: Reflect on RC Findings

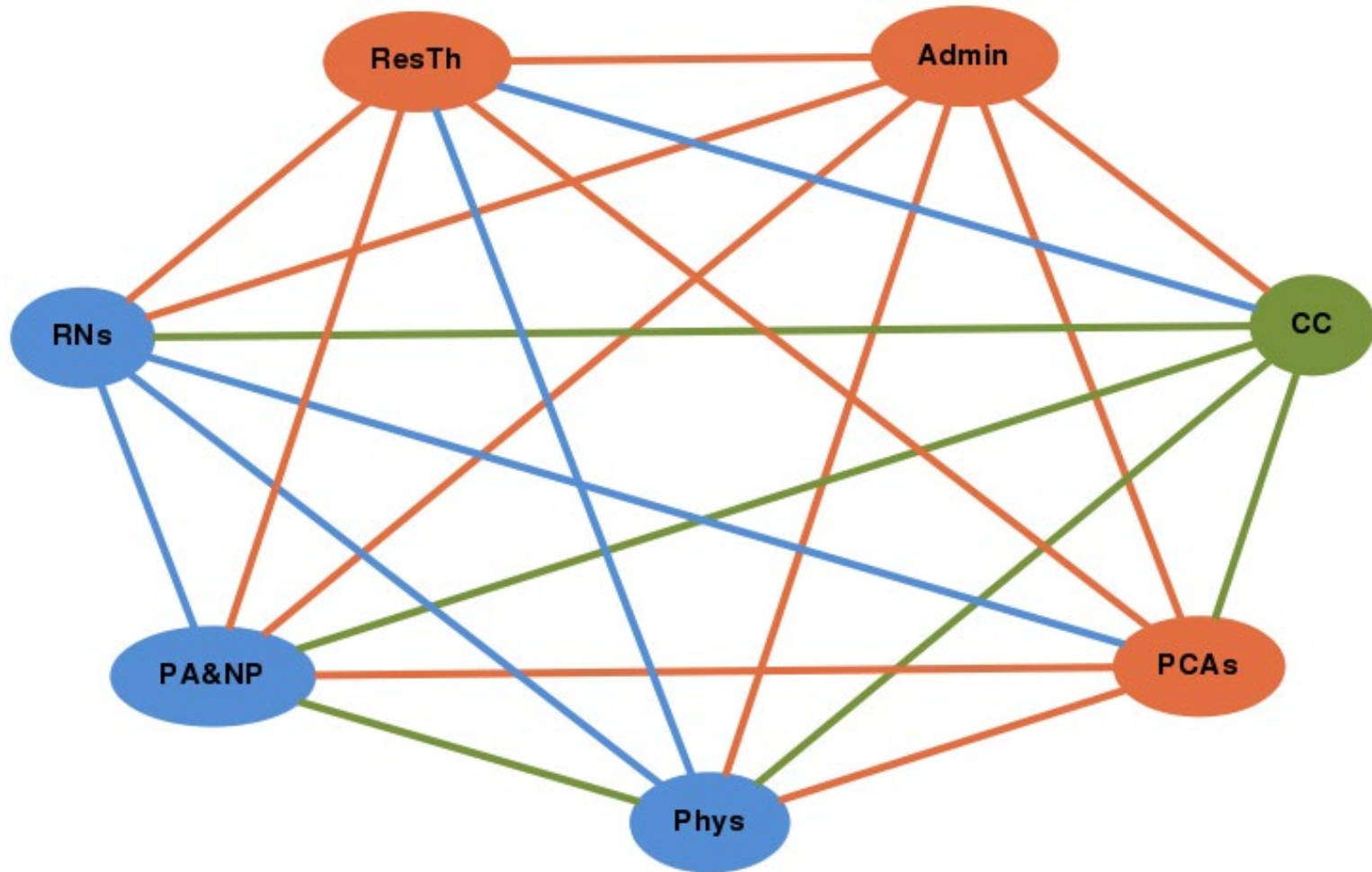
Between Workgroups  
N=104



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	Within Workgroups	Between Workgroups
Weak	<4.1	<3.5
Moderate	4.1-4.6	3.5-4.0
Strong	>4.6	>4.0

# Stage 4: Reflect on RC findings



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	Within Workgroups	Between Workgroups
Weak	<4.1	<3.5
Moderate	4.1-4.6	3.5-4.0
Strong	>4.6	>4.0

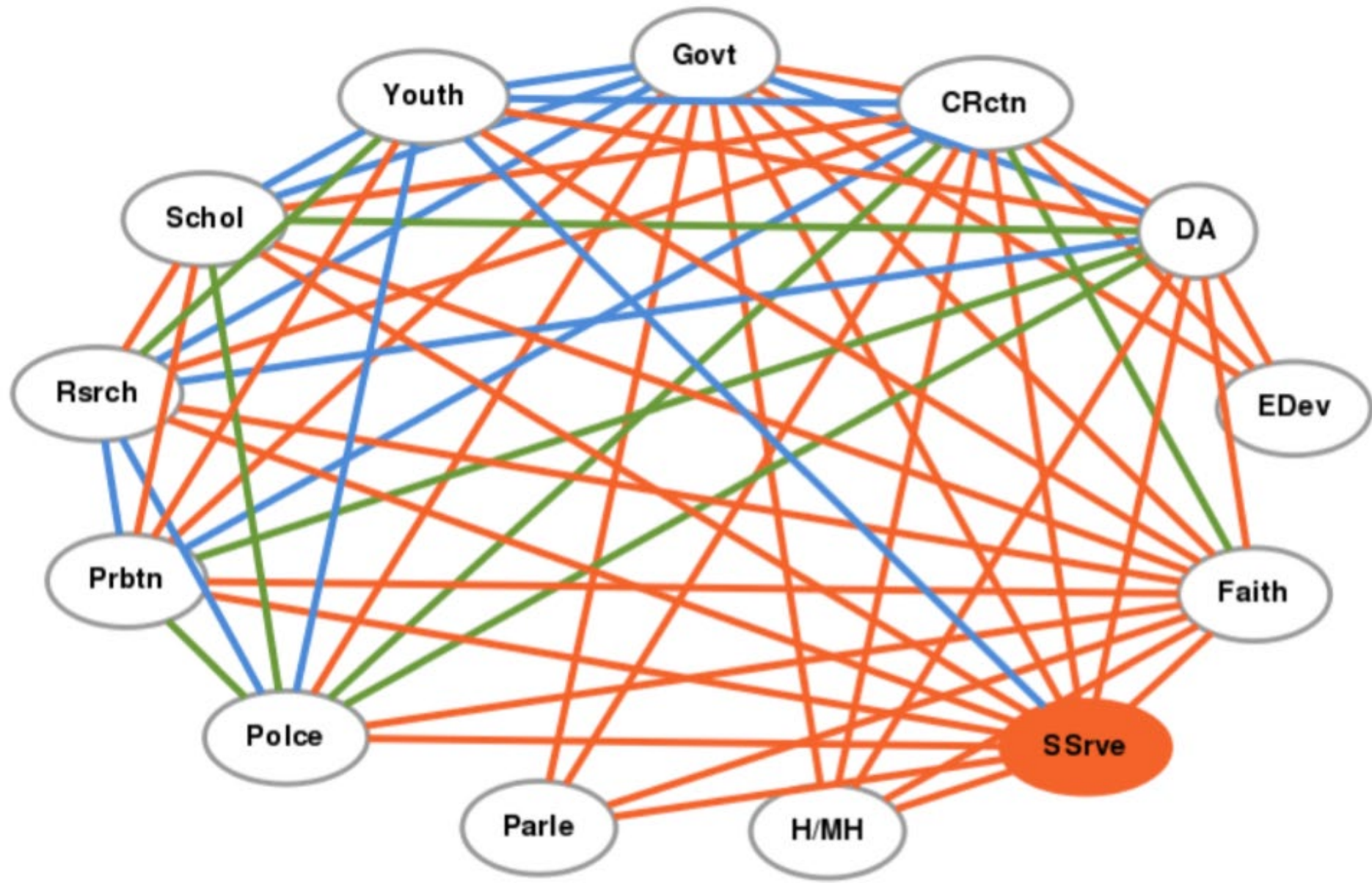
# Stage 4: Reflect on RC findings

Ratings of								
R a t i n g s  b y		Admin	CC	PCAs	Phys	PA&NP	RNs	ResTh
	Administrative Support	1.79	1.79	1.79	1.79	1.79	1.79	1.79
	Care Coordination	4.43	4.86	4.29	4.52	4.71	4.67	3.86
	Personal Care Assistants (PCAs)	2.62	2.40	4.02	2.29	2.29	3.50	2.40
	Physicians	3.58	4.26	3.47	4.25	4.19	3.84	3.50
	Physicians' Assistants and Nurse Practitioners (PAs & NPs)	3.75	4.29	3.39	4.30	4.55	3.96	3.20
	Registered Nurses	3.37	4.08	3.70	3.55	3.98	4.22	3.49
	Respiratory Therapy	2.57	2.57	2.57	3.14	3.14	3.43	4.00

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	Within Workgroups	Between Workgroups
Weak	<4.1	<3.5
Moderate	4.1-4.6	3.5-4.0
Strong	>4.6	>4.0

# Stage 4: Reflect on RC findings





## Stage 4: Reflect on RC findings

[illegible]

# Stage 5: Design interventions

- With facilitation, Change Team creates a plan of action for improving relational coordination and the desired performance outcomes
- Change Team assesses current structures – designs interventions as needed





# Organizational structures assessment

- ◆ Create a matrix with the roles or entities from your relational map across the top
- ◆ Add organizational structures in the left column
- ◆ For each structure, ask “How well does this structure currently support RC for this role?”
  - ◆ **WEAK SUPPORT FOR RC = ORANGE**
  - ◆ **MODERATE SUPPORT FOR RC = BLUE**
  - ◆ **STRONG SUPPORT FOR RC = GREEN**



# Organizational structures assessment

	OR Nurses	PACU Nurses	Surgeons	Anesthesiologists	Service Line Cr	OR Scrub Tech
Relational Job Design	Moderate Support	Moderate Support	Weak Support	Weak Support	Strong Support	Strong Support
Hired for Teamwork	Strong Support	Strong Support	Weak Support	Weak Support	Moderate Support	Moderate Support
Trained for Teamwork	Strong Support	Strong Support	Moderate Support	Moderate Support	Strong Support	Strong Support
Shared Accountability for Outcomes	Moderate Support	Weak Support	Moderate Support	Moderate Support	Moderate Support	Weak Support
Shared Rewards for Outcomes	Weak Support	Weak Support	Weak Support	Weak Support	Weak Support	Weak Support
Shared Conflict Resolution Process	Strong Support	Strong Support	Moderate Support	Moderate Support	Strong Support	Strong Support
Boundary Spanner Roles	Strong Support	Weak Support	Weak Support	Weak Support	Moderate Support	Weak Support
Shared Meetings/Huddles	Strong Support	Strong Support	Weak Support	Weak Support	Strong Support	Strong Support
Shared Protocols	Strong Support	Strong Support	Moderate Support	Moderate Support	Strong Support	Strong Support
Shared Info Systems	Strong Support	Strong Support	Strong Support	Strong Support	Strong Support	Strong Support

 **WEAK SUPPORT**
 **MODERATE SUPPORT**
 **STRONG SUPPORT**



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# Design interventions

Middle & Top Leadership

## Structural Interventions

- Select & Train for Teamwork
- Shared Accountability
- Shared Rewards
- Shared Conflict Resolution
- Relational Job Design
- Diversity Management
- Boundary Spanner Roles
- Shared Meetings & Huddles
- Shared Protocols
- Shared Information Systems

## Relational Coordination

- Frequent
- Timely
- Accurate
- Problem Solving
- Communication
- Shared Goals
- Shared Knowledge
- Mutual Respect

## Performance Outcomes

- Quality & Safety
- Efficiency & Finance
- Client Engagement
- Worker Well-Being
- Learning & Innovation

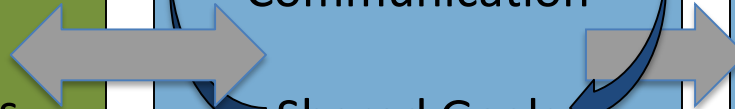
Frontline  
Leaders, Co-  
Workers &  
Patients

## Relational Interventions

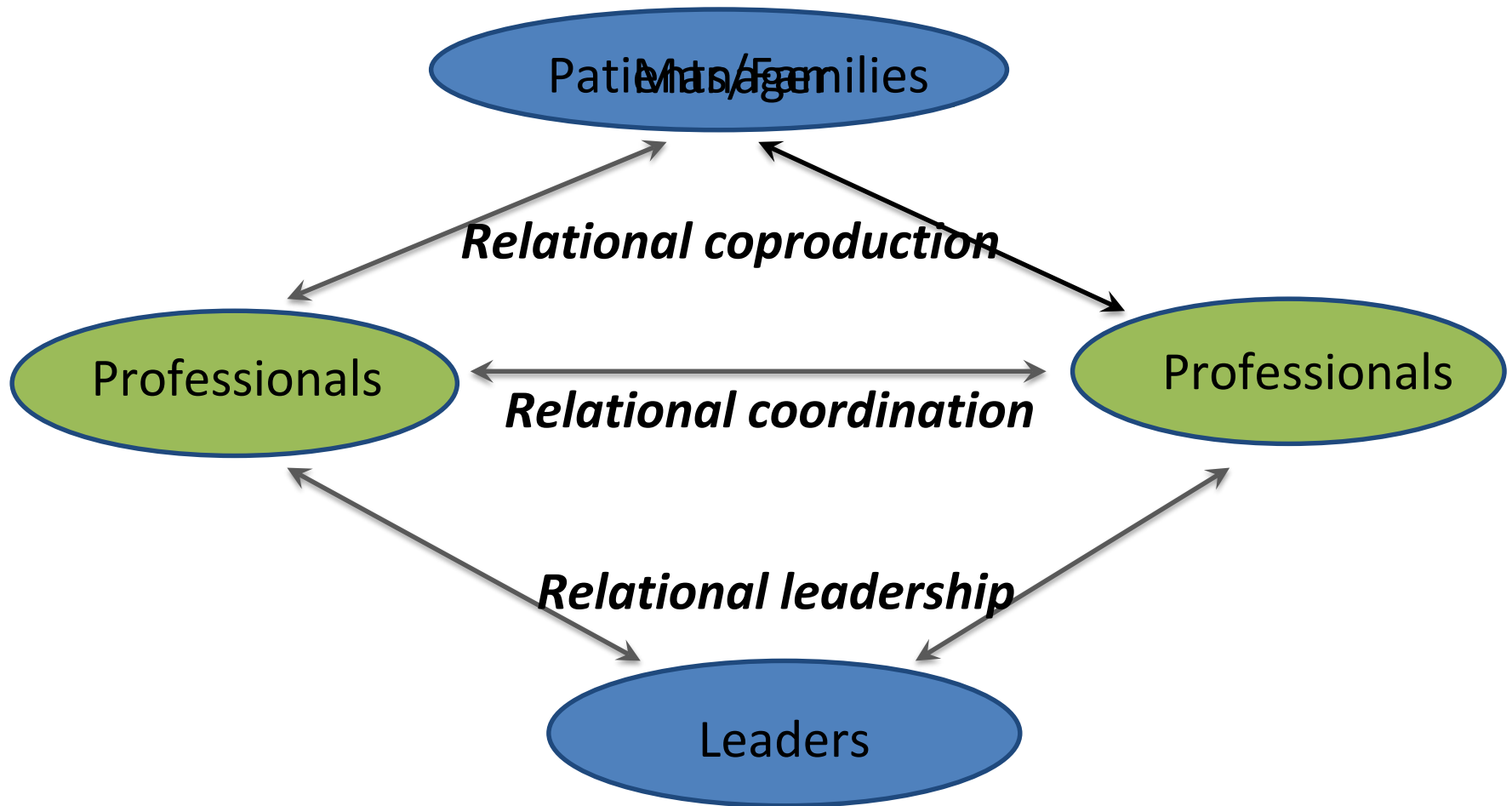
- Create Safe Space
- Relational Assessment
- Humble Inquiry/Coaching

## Work Process Interventions

- Assess Current State
- Identify Desired State
- Experiment to Close the Gap



# Stage 5: Design interventions



# Stage 6: Implement and assess

- Change Team implements the interventions they have designed
- Change Team assesses progress with periodic assessments of RC and desired performance outcomes



# Six stages of change

- Stage 1: Choose sites, introduce RC
- Stage 2: Create Change Team
- Stage 3: Measure RC
- Stage 4: Reflect on RC findings
- Stage 5: Design interventions
- Stage 6: Implement and assess



# Discussion

- ◆ How relevant is this work for the VA?
- ◆ How ready is the VA to do this work?

# Relational Coordination in VA HSR&D

(not exhaustive list)

AK

Iowa City VA Health Care System

*-Veteran Dual Use of Health Systems*

*-Relational Coordination in informatics*  
*-Healthy Connection: Veterans' Patient Engagement and User Satisfaction through Use of VA's My HealtheVet Patient Portal*

Denver/Seattle Center of Innovation -

*-Veteran-Centered and Value Driven Care -*  
*Impact of Relational Coordination on Care Coordination*  
*-The Experience of Providing Hospice Care Concurrent with Cancer Treatment in the VA*

Cleveland VA Medical Center -

*-Impact of Interdisciplinary Rounds in the Spinal Cord Injury Unit on Relational Coordination for Patients with Pressure Injury: A Pilot study*

RCRC Student Partner at Rutgers -

*-Studying Role of RC in Improving Health Outcomes, Patient Experience of Care and Reducing Per Capita Healthcare Spending in Patient Aligned Care Teams*

Patient Care Services - UT Health Science Center San Antonio -

*-Relationship Quality and Patient-Assessed Quality of Care in VA Primary Care Clinics: Development and Validation of the Work Relationships Scale*  
*-Alignment of Patient and Primary Care Practice Member Perspectives of Chronic Illness Care: A Cross-Sectional Analysis*  
*-Implementation of the Epilepsy Center of Excellence to Improve Access to and Quality Of Care - Protocol for a Mixed Methods Study*  
*-Relationships Within Inpatient Physician House Staff Teams and their Association with Hospitalized Patient Outcomes*

Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center -

*-Characterizing Staff Interactions in a Sample of High Performing Nursing Homes*



# Discussion

- ◆ All VA employees are eligible to become partners in the RCRC through October – visit RCRC website ([rcrc.brandeis.edu](http://rcrc.brandeis.edu)) to sign up
- ◆ Competitive process to get funding for your baseline RC Survey for research or improvement project - contact Heather Gilmartin - [Heather.Gilmartin@va.gov](mailto:Heather.Gilmartin@va.gov)

