

The Importance of Organizational Awareness in Healthcare Today

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Today's challenging health care industry now more than ever requires self-reflective leaders mindful of how their behaviors, social interactions, and relationship building skills impact colleagues and staff. These skills which are often referred to as Emotional Intelligence, or EI, serve to distinguish the most highly successful leaders from others.

There is however another foundational element contributing to strong leadership success that builds off self-reflective leadership skills, highly reflective organizational awareness skills. The better you are as a leader in exercising both self-reflective skills and keen organizational awareness skills the better your organization will perform.



But what goes into successful organizational awareness? What do the best leaders know and do when it comes to organizational awareness? Simply stated, impactful leaders exercising keen organizational awareness take the time to assess the organization through an unfiltered lens. This requires a deep sense of objectivity and realism to focus on the reality of the organization.

Ron Heifetz and Marty Linsky conducted research on the importance of organizational awareness and concluded that leaders would be well served to “get on the balcony” and see the organization from a distinctly different vantage point: One that allows the leader to see the bigger picture and more deeply understand the organization's recent performance, its evolving norms and values, and overall ability to satisfy the organization's Mission and Vision.

Strong leaders have come to realize that organizations (like people) deal with truth better than uncertainty. They help the organization see the unvarnished truth when it comes to organizational performance and competitive positioning in the market. Insightful organizational awareness also serves as the basis upon which critical decisions are made and actions are taken. It's important to get it right. This requires thoughtful, objective analysis of the organization.

Insightful learning often comes from asking deep, penetrating questions. Exploring the reality of the situation and discovering the ground truth is necessary. Here are several questions for leaders to consider as they strive to understand their organization more deeply:

1. Have the written and often stated organizational mission, vision, and value statements truly served to refocus and inspire the organization to address what's important or are they simply “words on the wall”?

2. How is the culture within the organization described today? Does the organizational culture enable it to readily adapt to the realities of the healthcare industry today?
3. What is the single most important challenge the organization is facing today? What is in the way of successfully addressing it?
4. What seems currently impossible to do within the organization today that if it were possible would change everything?
5. From a big picture point of view, “the view from the balcony,” where is the organization currently succeeding and where is it currently struggling? Why?
6. How would your organizations compete against itself? What does the answer to this question reveal about the organizational culture as well as its strategic planning and operational/leadership effectiveness?
7. What should the organization be doing differently right now to gain market share and improve payor mix?
8. Is talent acquisition and talent retention an organizational strength? Why or why not?
9. “The future belongs to the prepared.” Has the organization’s approach to leadership development effectively expanded the leadership capacity within the organization and is there a pipeline of talented leaders ready to assume more authority and responsibility?
10. How have you as a Leader contributed to the challenges the organization is now facing and what must you do differently now to bring about the changes needed?

The most critical decisions leaders make in organizations are the ones with long term impact over the course of years and even decades. As a leader you owe it to the organization to take the time to assess the organization’s performance and preparedness for the future through an unfiltered lens. By asking yourself tough questions and carefully reflecting on the answers you’ll come to understand the “ground truth” in terms of organizational performance in relation to the stated mission, vision, and values. You’ll also improve your decision-making skills as your decisions will be based on key, new-found organizational realities.

It’s critical that you draw clear conclusions from this reflective process. What did you learn? What more needs to be understood? What are you missing? Who else should you include in this critical “organizational awareness” exercise?

The final step in the process is determining what needs to be communicated throughout the organization because of these new-found insights and “ground truth realities”. There are great challenges in all of this but also tremendous opportunities to reposition the organization for improved performance and a brighter future. That’s what impactful leaders do. And it all starts with heightened self-reflective and organizational awareness

leadership skills and insights. Remember “it’s not in the knowing but in the doing”.