

Friday Night at the *ER*[®]

Lessons

To optimize system performance, the parts must interact effectively and efficiently in service of the goals of the overall system. When we instead become focused on optimizing the parts, system performance suffers. This simulation experience compresses space (providing a view of the whole system) and it accelerates time (eliminating delays) so that individuals and teams can see the effects of their decisions on other positions and on the system as a whole.

To excel in the game, as in the real world, individuals must consistently...

- Collaborate: see that they are interdependent contributors to a system and share responsibility for system performance.
- Innovate: break out of conventional thinking boundaries to adapt the processes of the system to meet customer needs.
- Drive decisions with data: learn what customers want, measure performance and provide performance feedback throughout the system.

All three principles must be operative. Collaboration without innovation can reinforce the status quo; innovation without collaboration can be harmful to other parts; and both collaboration and innovation are meaningful only when driven by performance data.

Most people know these principles are important. Why, then, do people often behave otherwise when “in the trenches?” The game also facilitates an understanding of the underlying structures that drive behavior—the organizational procedures, accounting systems, physical elements, cultural norms that shape the way people behave. In the game play, underlying structural elements initially influence people to focus on departmental performance. In the real world, people can learn to identify underlying structural elements and redesign them to consistently reinforce desired behaviors.

We must examine the explicit and implicit structures in organizations and across organizations that impede the performance we desire. We must be willing to change the rules of the game.