



What's Paul Plsek up to these days?

Updated August 1, 2007

Friends and colleagues often greet me with “So, what are you up to these days?” Embarrassingly, I often fumble through a less than coherent listing of my various projects; typically biased by whatever I had been doing most recently. Now, I'll not be put on the spot again! I'll just say, “Go to my website and download the latest “What's Paul Plsek Up To These Days?” briefing. I'll update this periodically.

Coaching for innovation and improvement in healthcare

I have recently launched a new service to provide one-on-one, telephone- and web-based coaching for leaders actively engaged in innovation and improvement efforts.

The tailored service is a combination of personal development through guided self-reflection, and expert advice on innovation and improvement. It is what a good mentor does, combined with my subject matter expertise from over 30 years experience in the field. It is aimed at already successful improvement leaders and change agents who aspire to become exceptional. It makes what I have been doing for my long-term clients for many years accessible to everyone. [Click here](#) to download a brochure on the new service that I debuted at the recent BMJ/IHI International Forum in Barcelona.

Innovation and creativity in healthcare

In 1997, I wrote *Creativity, Innovation and Quality* and began working with clients to spread “DirectedCreativity: Creative thinking for serious people.” 2007 continues as another great year for this work.

- ❑ Working with colleagues in the NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement:
 - ✓ We have compiled a guide to innovative thinking in health care entitled *Thinking Differently*. A prototype of the 200+ page Guide—which contains a variety of tools and methods for innovation, along with three extended case studies—was used in a workshop the recent BMJ/IHI International Forum in Barcelona. The final version will be available for distribution soon.
 - ✓ I have drafted guides on *How to Assess an Innovation* and on *How to Build an Organizational Culture for Innovation*.

- ❑ In North America:
 - ✓ I continue to serve as the Mark Hutcheson Chair of Innovation at the Virginia Mason Medical Center in Seattle, where we now have trained innovation facilitators and several innovative projects underway.
 - ✓ I am serving on the editorial board for the new *AHRQ Innovation Exchange* website. I have produced material on the innovation process and helped develop a methodology for assessing the innovativeness of ideas submitted to the site. More details will be announced by AHRQ soon.

Complexity thinking in healthcare

This is another important thread of my work that has resulted in the publication of *Edgework* in 1998 (co-authored with Brenda Zimmerman, PhD and Curt Lindberg); my contribution to the IOM Committee's landmark report *Crossing the Quality Chasm* in 2001; a series of four articles on complexity thinking in health care in the *British Medical Journal* in 2001 (co-edited with Dr. Trisha Greenhalgh); a paper in *Pediatrics* applying the concept of simple rules to the management of hyperbilirubinemia in newborns (co-authored with Dr. Heather Palmer et. al.; *Pediatrics* (December 2003; 112(6):1388-1273.); and a paper on design science (co-authored with Jo Bibby and Elaine Whitby) in the prestigious *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* (March 2007; 43(1):153-170.)

- ❑ Other writings in progress include:
 - ✓ A paper applying complexity thinking to the issue of the spread of innovation.
 - ✓ A paper on the application of simple rules to the issue of access to secondary care in the UK (co-authored with Drs. Hugh Rogers and Lynne Maher of the NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement).
- ❑ I have conducted major workshops recently on complexity thinking for senior leaders in Kaiser Permanente, the Institute of Medicine, Community Health Plan of Washington, the National Health Service (UK), Aker University Hospital (Oslo), and the Norwegian Directorate for Health and Social Care.

Pattern Mapping: A key to large system transformation

We now know that complex systems comprise structures, processes and patterns (SPP). Improvement and change often focuses only on the structures and processes, leaving the patterns untouched. In my 2002 mini-plenary at the IHI Forum, I first shared my explorations of the 1920's writings of Mary Parker Follett describing the importance of five patterns in organizations – relationships, power, decision making, conflict and learning – and introduced the concept of *pattern mapping* as an potentially powerful new tool for putting difficult topics and strained relationships on the table in order to see a way forward through a complex mess.

- ❑ In the first half of 2007, pattern mapping has been applied to several projects involving cross-boundary working among various health and social care organizations, local government, private sector, and charitable organizations in the southwest of the UK.
- ❑ I have recently shared the pattern mapping approach with groups in Kaiser Permanente and in the NHS Scotland.

The first half of 2007 has been a good start on several new developments for me at the edges of the field of health care improvement. I hope to continue to push the boundaries even further. Thanks so much to all my colleagues and friends who have joined me.

Paul Plsek
Atlanta, Georgia, USA
paulplsek@DirectedCreativity.com
770-587-2492