

## Part II: Synthesis of Concepts from the Complexity Sciences

# Positive Deviance

Curt Lindberg discussed the process of positive deviance, a tool to help communities to find their top performers, learn the traits that make them successful, and then transmit those traits to the rest of the community to improve both individual and overall performance.



Grass-roots initiatives tend to be more effective than top-down initiatives. People trust people they know and other physicians that they work with. We need to find local people to exemplify and promote these qualities of competency. The key is finding people who are “similar to us” – to the people we are targeting.

Often the Positive Deviance process identifies ideas and techniques that experts would never dream of. In Brazil, uneducated parents were invited into the schools to help teach the students – this helped address the challenge of retention.

How would regulatory bodies encourage this kind of process? It seems difficult to mandate the use of Positive Deviance, but we should find ways to encourage this kind of grass-roots innovation. This is a very time- and people-intensive process. The topic must be something that people are passionate about, because it requires a lot of their time.

The Positive Deviance process also requires that leaders and experts change their roles. They are used to knowing all of the answers, and they can feel very challenged by having their “subordinates” coming up with ideas and innovations.

The regulatory body could provide a lot of data to the healthcare system. Some medical schools and residency programs are already very thirsty for data on their own performance, and they proactively make changes to improve quality.

The danger with improvement programs is that improvements that work in one setting are expected to be used everywhere. How can we foster experimentation and innovation through a regulatory body? People can get focused on individual techniques and not the outcomes that those techniques are intended to achieve. This is one of the flaws of the “best practices” approach.

Positive Deviance is very good at making the practices accessible to everyone that make the positive deviants successful. Everyone wants to learn from their peers.