



RELATIONAL COORDINATION  
RESEARCH COLLABORATIVE

# Relational Coordination – Past, Present and Future

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8<sup>th</sup> Annual Roundtable

Relational Coordination Research Collaborative

Relational Dynamics of Multi-Level Systems Change

# Relational coordination is....

- A construct

- Giving a name to something basic that has always existed
- Communicating and relating for the purpose of task integration

- A theory of performance

- Performance outcomes of RC go beyond traditional tradeoffs
- Structures *support or undermine* RC depending on their design
- Matters most when work is interdependent, uncertain, time constrained

- A theory of change

- Provides guidance for getting from here to there
- Interventions include structural, relational, work process



# Relational coordination as a construct

## Relationships

Shared goals

Shared knowledge

Mutual respect

## Communication

Frequent

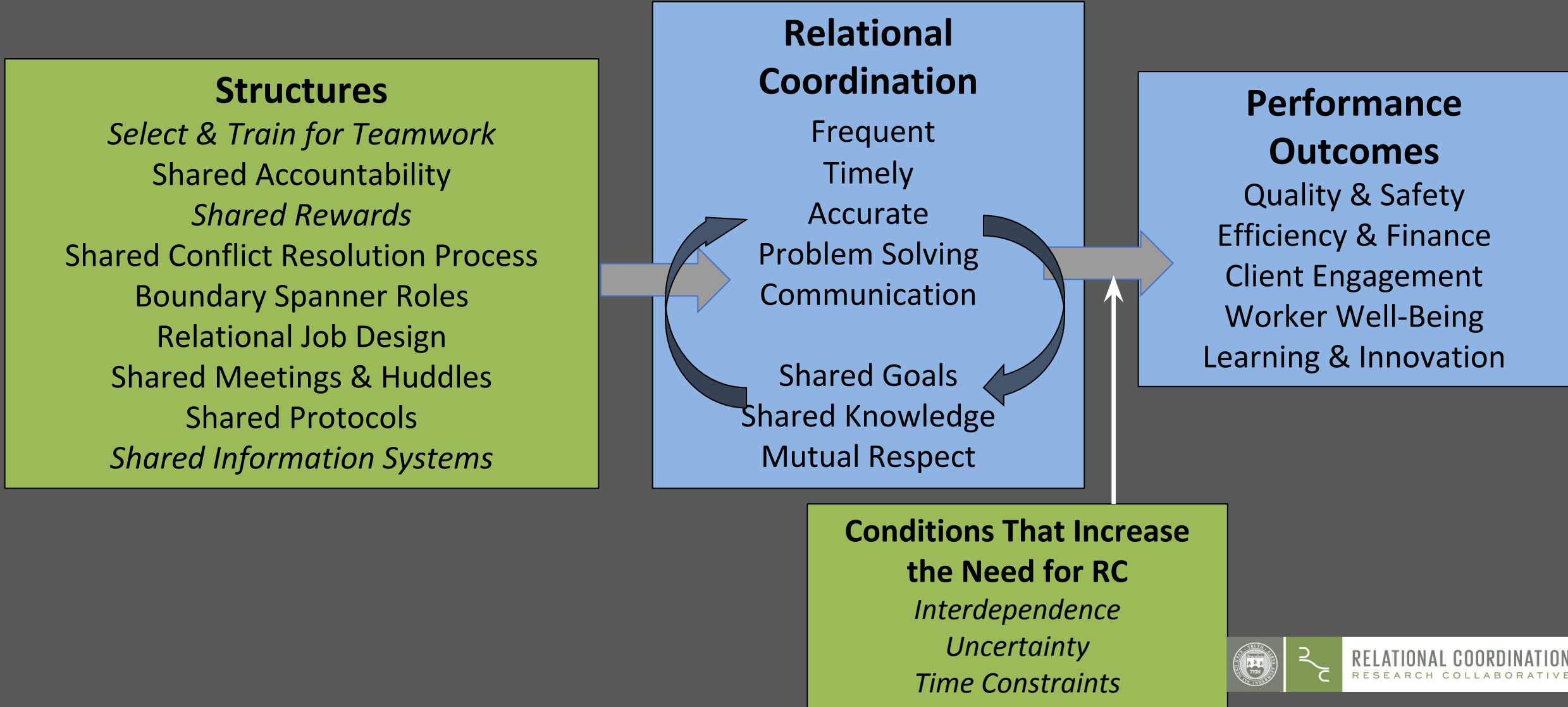
Timely

Accurate

Problem-solving

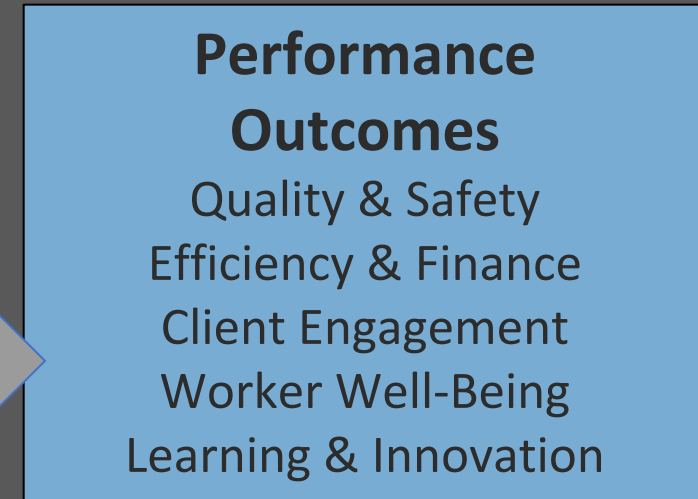
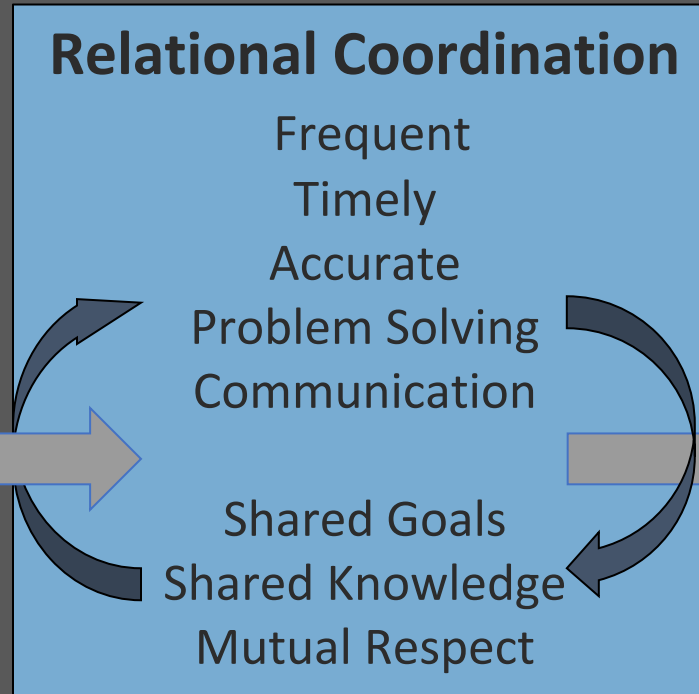
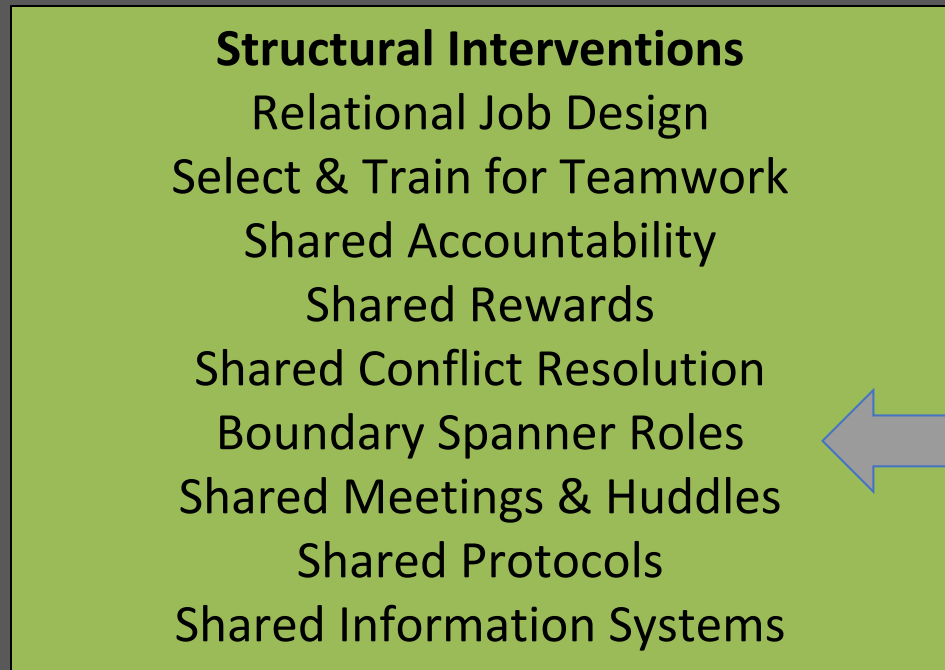


# Relational coordination as a theory of performance

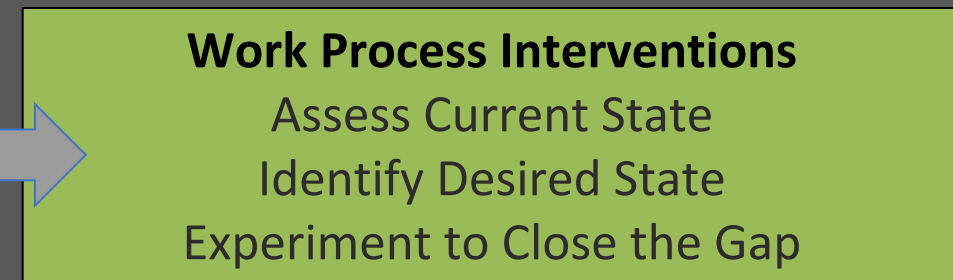
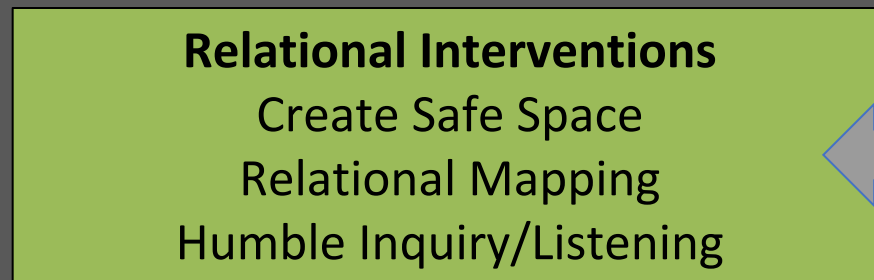


# Relational coordination as a theory of change

Middle & Top Leadership



Frontline  
Leaders,  
Colleagues &  
Clients



Core construct is called...

# relational coordination

...and defined as “communicating and relating  
for the purpose of task integration”

(Gittell, 2002)



## Relationships

Shared goals

Shared knowledge

Mutual respect

## Communication

Frequent

Timely

Accurate

Problem-solving



## Relationships

Functional goals

Specialized knowledge

Disrespect

## Communication

Infrequent

Delayed

Inaccurate

Blaming

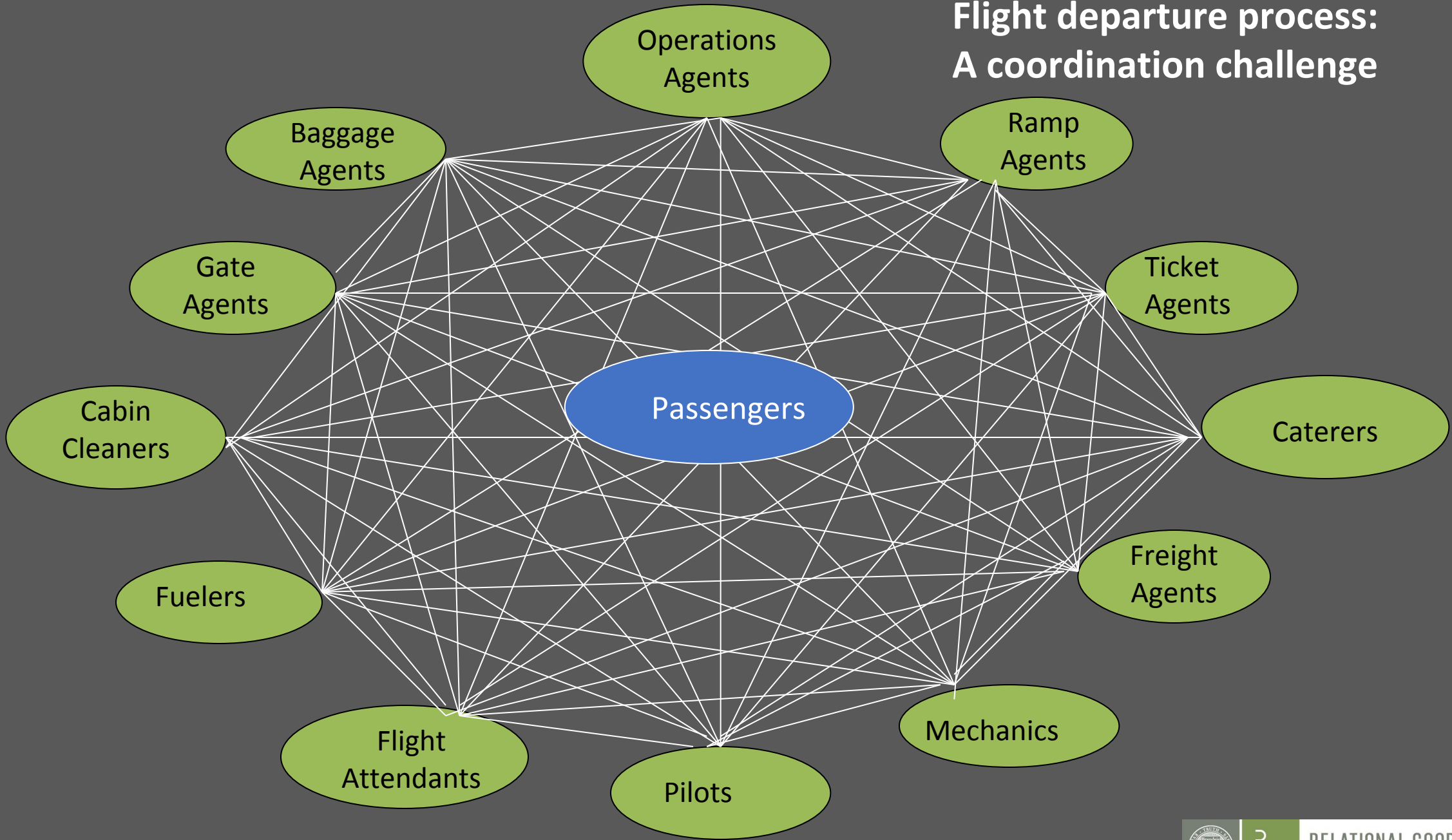




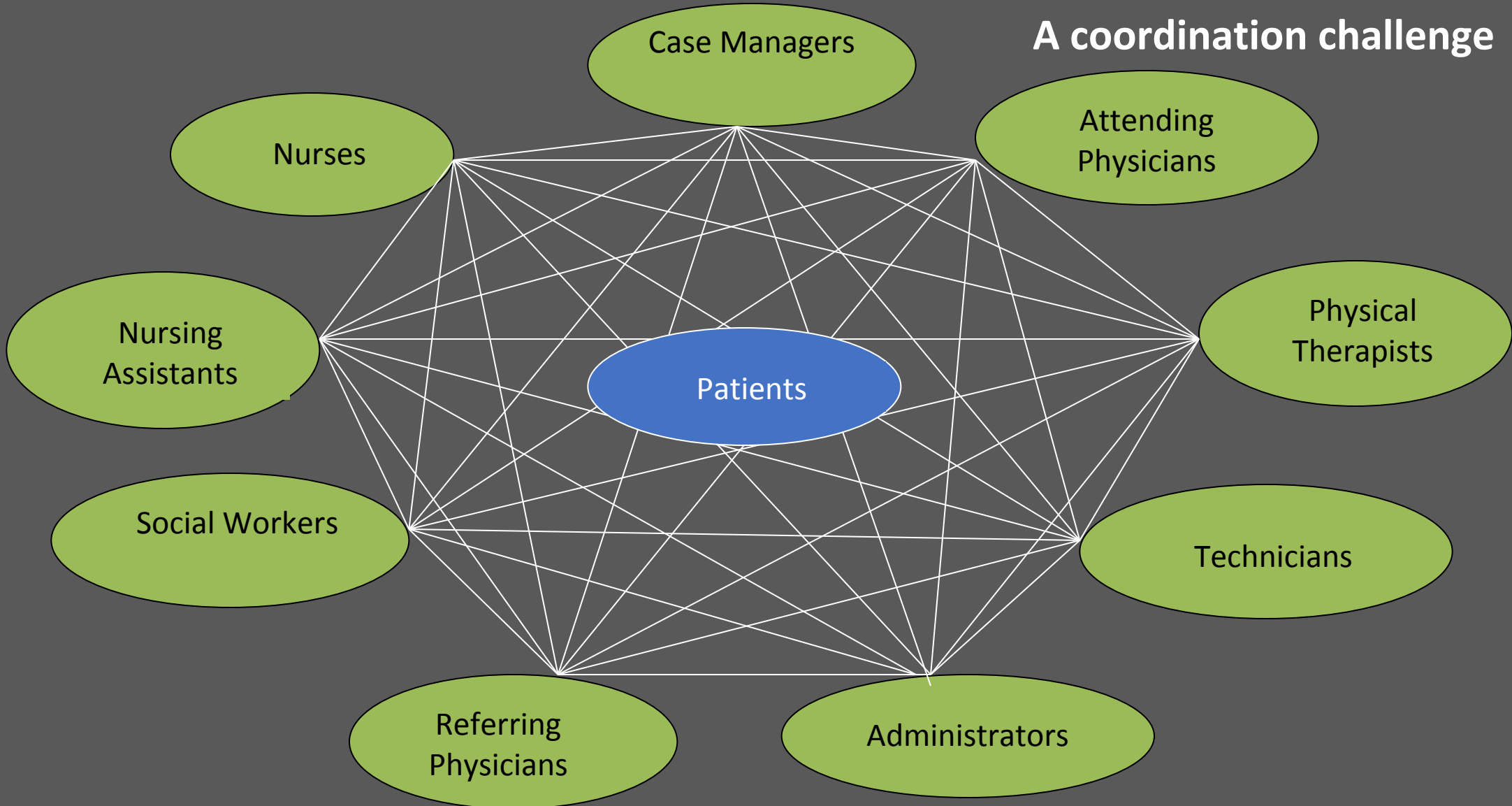
# Relational coordination construct is...

- Conceptualized as a network of communication and relationships ties between key stakeholders or workgroups involved in a focal work process
- Useful in many contexts, within and across organizations
- Measured using the Relational Coordination Survey, a 7-item validated tool (Gittell et al, 2010; Gilmartin, et al, 2015; Valentine, Nembhard & Edmondson, 2015)

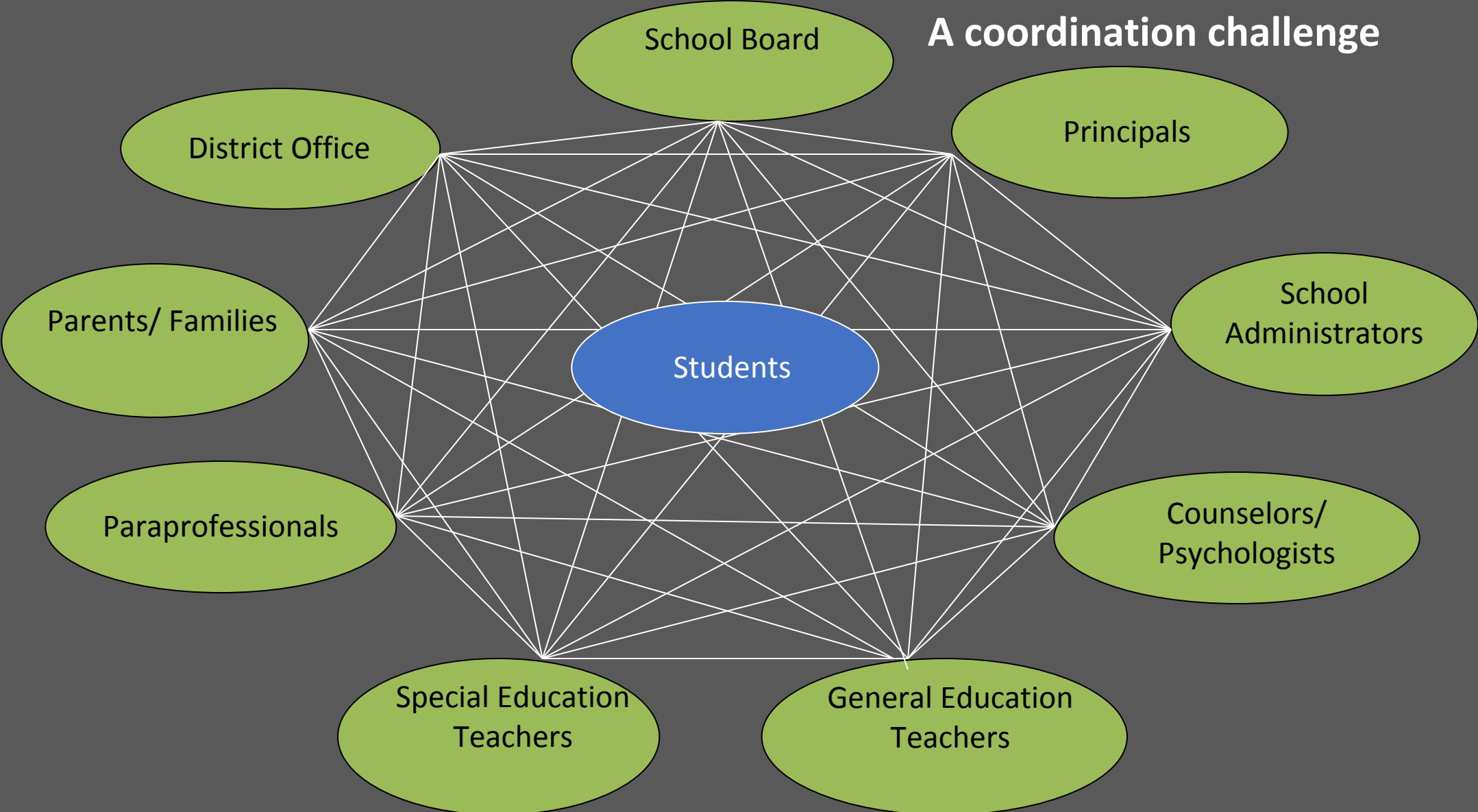
# Flight departure process: A coordination challenge



# Patient care: A coordination challenge



# K-12 education: A coordination challenge

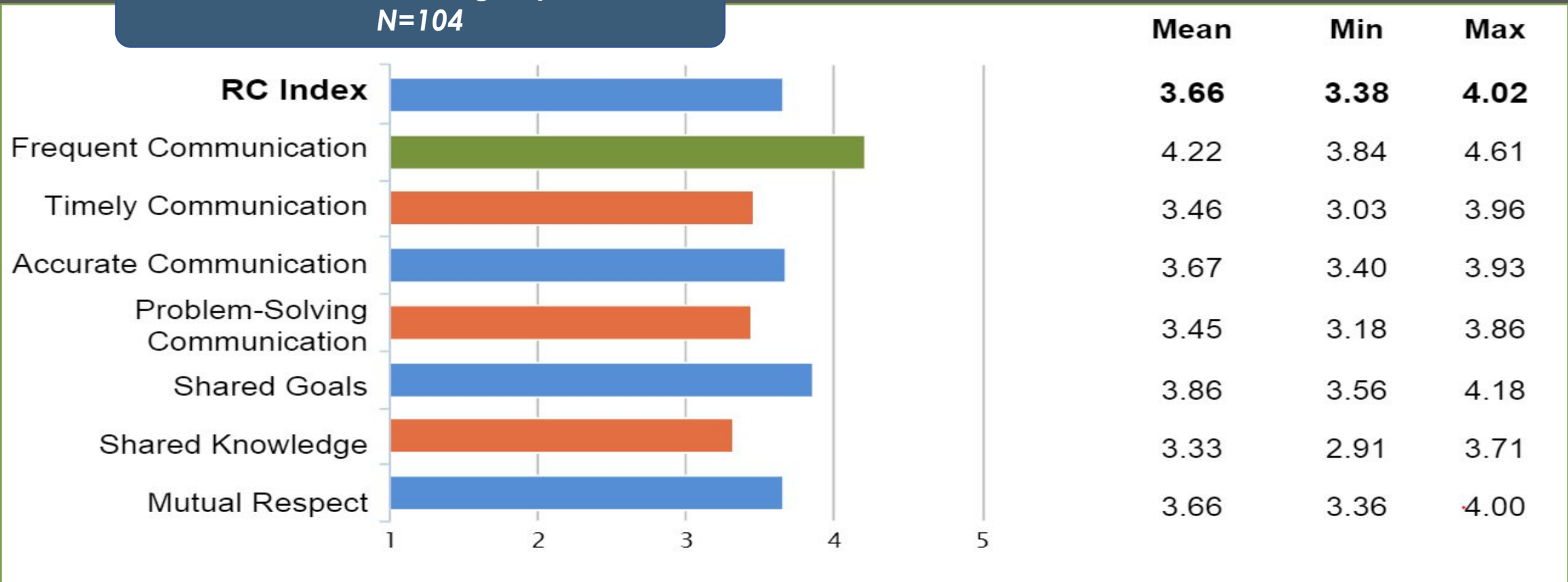


# RC survey questions

<b>1. Frequent Communication</b>	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> ?
<b>2. Timely Communication</b>	Do they communicate with you in a <b>timely</b> way about <b>post-operative care procedures for our surgical patients</b> ?
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# Sample RC findings

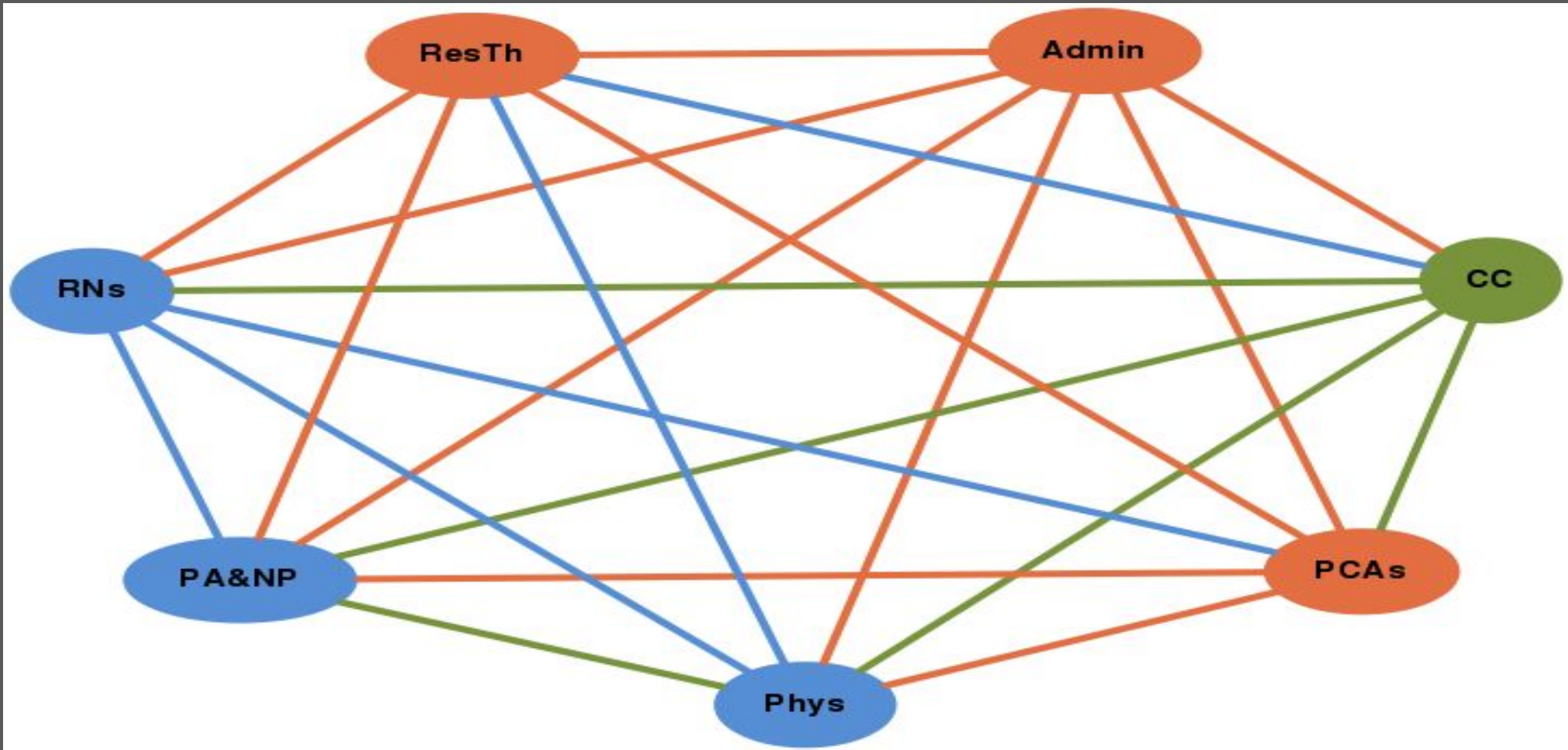
Between Workgroups  
N=104



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

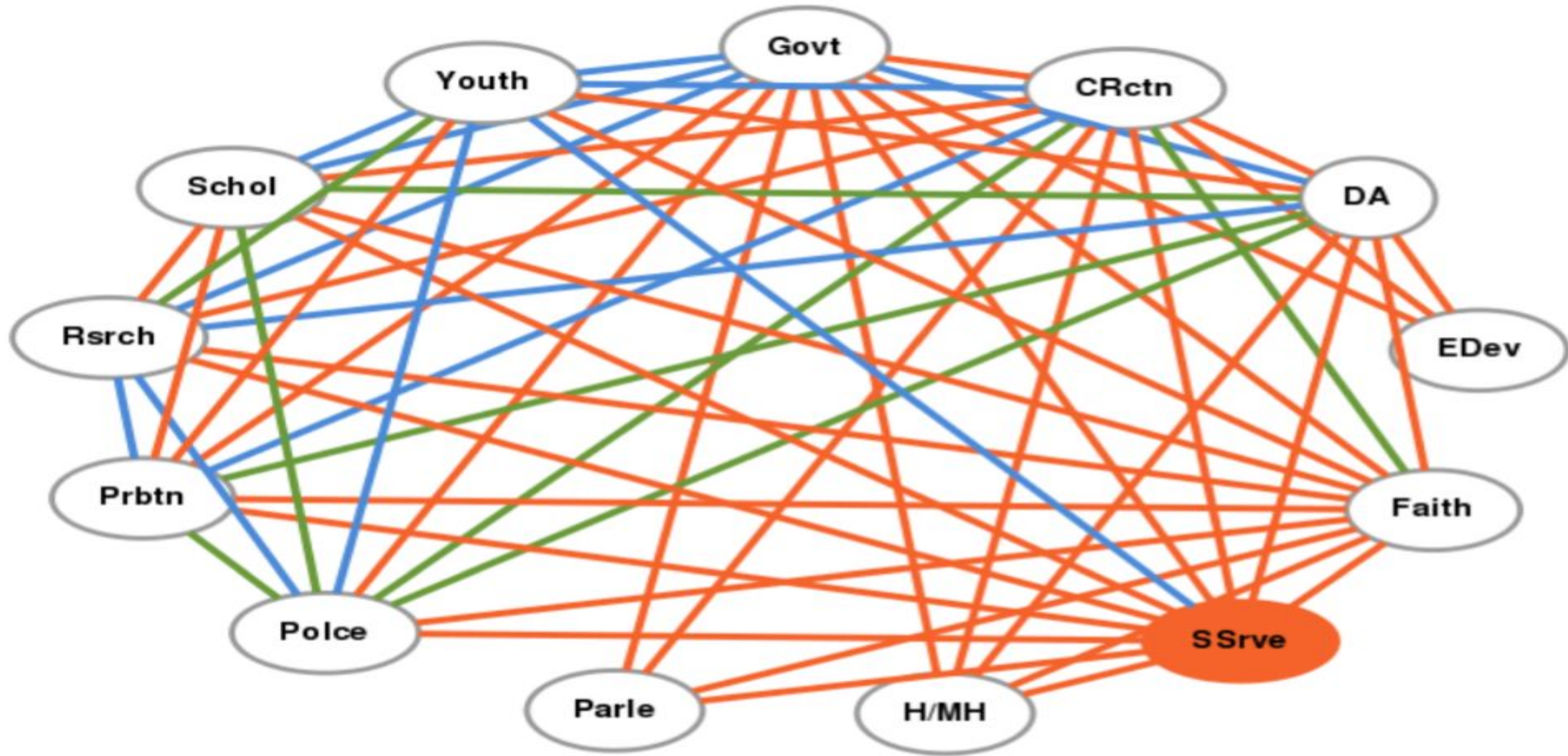


# Sample RC findings



	Within Workgroups	Between Workgroups
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# Sample RC findings





Why does RC matter and how  
can organizations support it?

# Relational coordination as a theory of performance

**Structures**

- Select & Train for Teamwork*
- Shared Accountability
- Shared Rewards*
- Shared Conflict Resolution Process
- Boundary Spanner Roles
- Relational Job Design
- 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

**Conditions That Increase the Need for RC**

- Interdependence*
- Uncertainty*
- Time Constraints*



# RC theory empirically tested in 30 industry contexts

- Accounting
- Airlines
- Autism care
- Banking
- Consulting
- Criminal justice
- Education
  - Early childhood education
  - Higher education
  - E-learning
- Early intervention
- Electronics
- Finance
- Information technology
- Healthcare
  - Chronic care
  - Elder care
  - Emergency care
  - Home care
  - Intensive care
  - Neonatal intensive care
  - Medical care
  - Mental health care
  - Obstetric care
  - Primary care
  - Psychiatric hospital care
  - Rehabilitation care
  - Surgical care
- Manufacturing
- Pharmacy
- Software

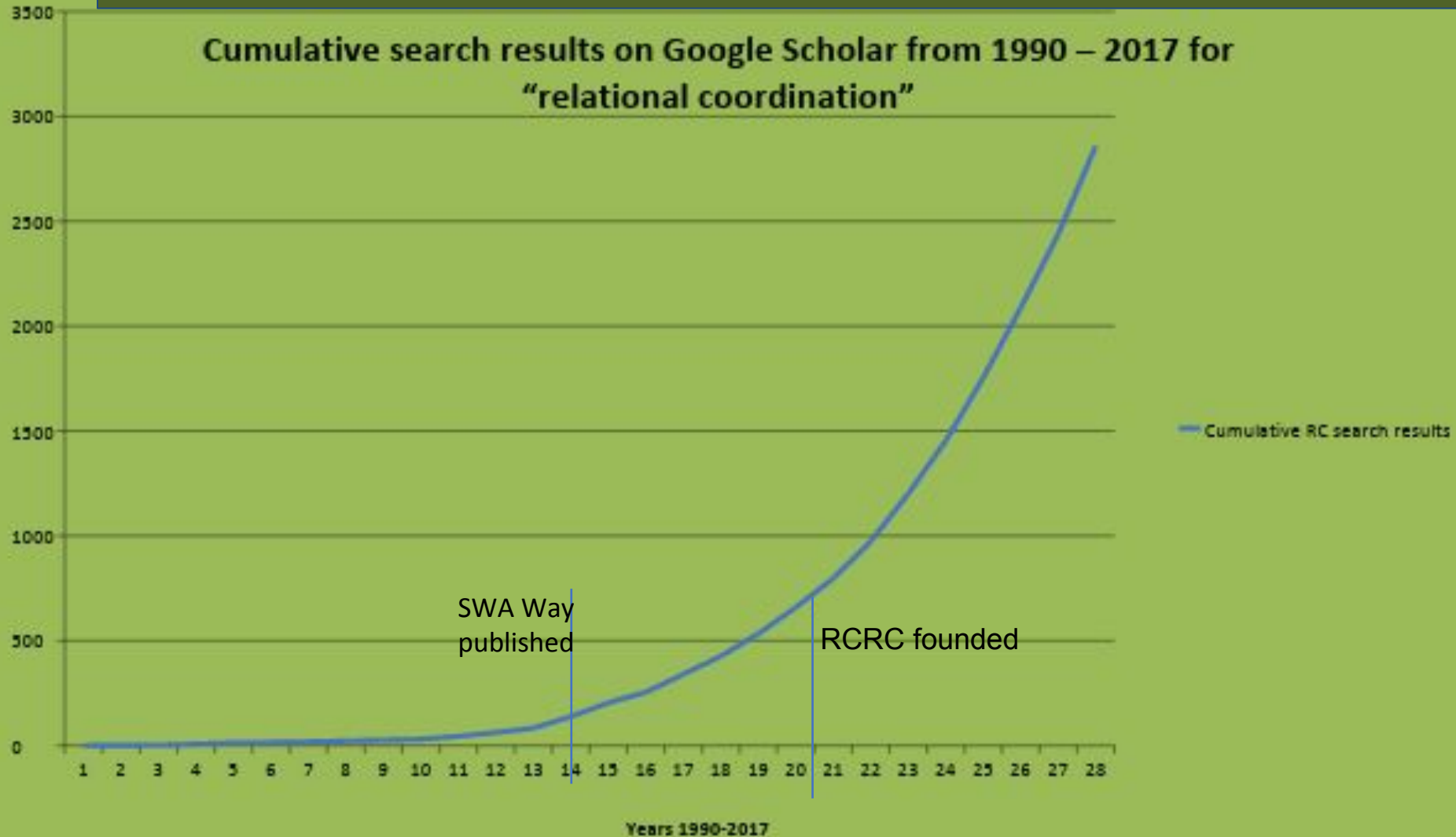


# ...and in 22 countries around the world

- Austria
- Australia
- Belgium
- Canada
- China
- Denmark
- Egypt
- England
- Ecuador
- France
- Ireland
- Israel
- Japan
- Netherlands
- Norway
- Pakistan
- Scotland
- South Korea
- Spain
- Sweden
- Switzerland
- United States



# RC increasing in the scholarly discourse



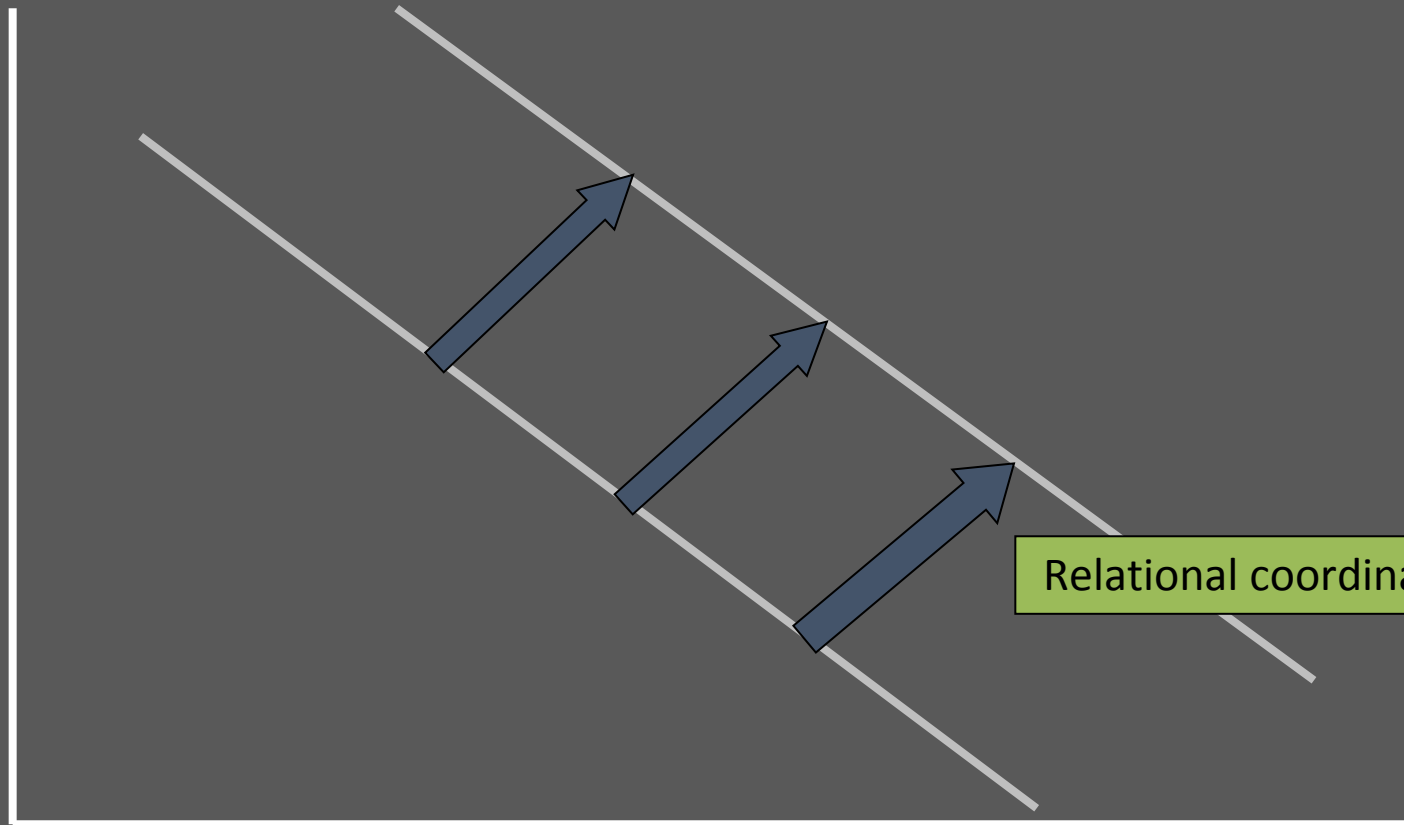
# Proposition 1

Relational coordination positively affects performance outcomes for multiple stakeholders by relaxing tradeoffs and *shifting out* performance frontiers

Womack, Jones & Roos, 1990; Gittell, 1995; Schmenner & Swink, 1998; Lapre & Scudder, 2004; Pagell et al, 2015

RC shifts out performance frontiers,  
moving from “either/or” to “both/and” ...

Quality &  
Safety  
Outcomes



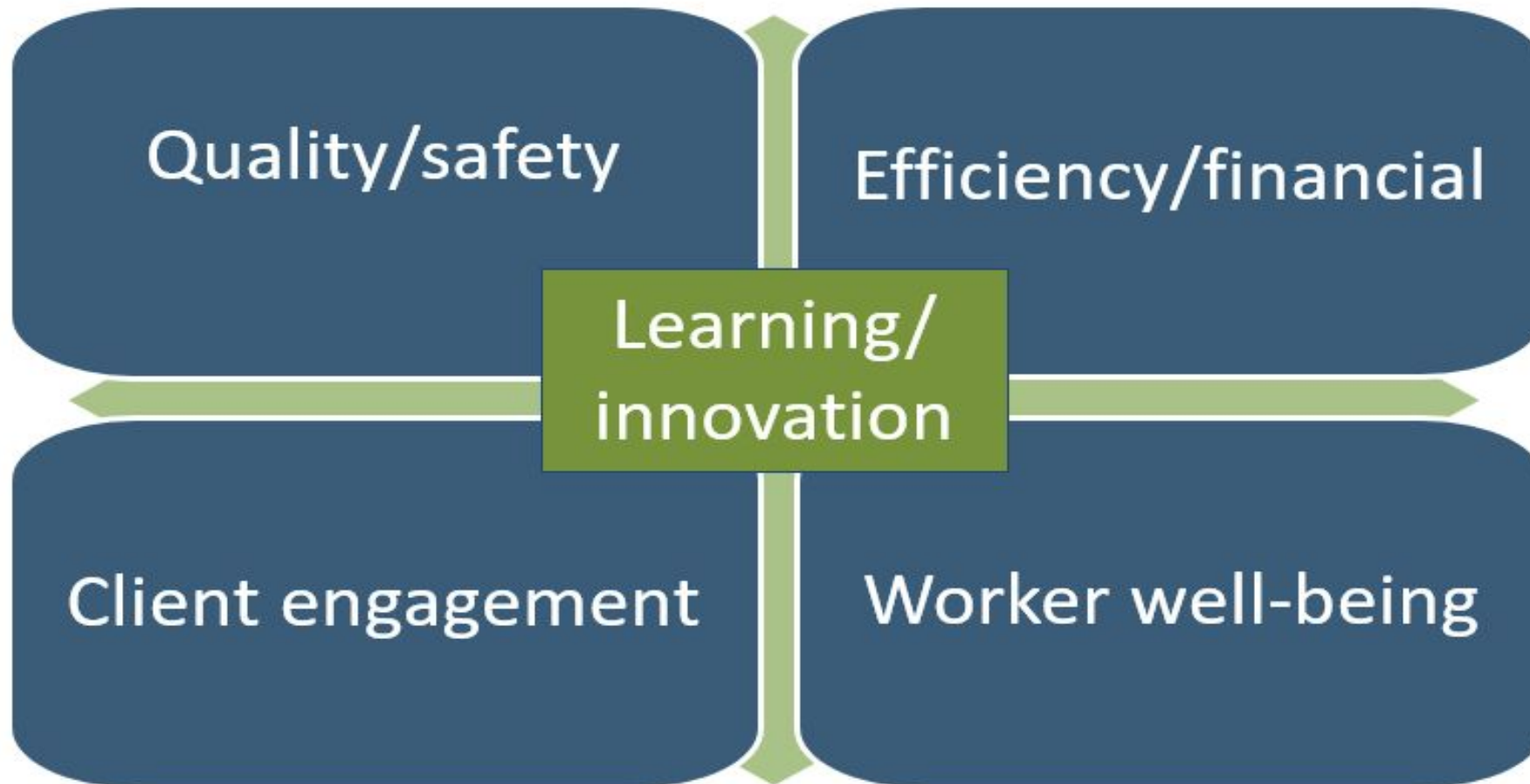
Relational coordination

Efficiency & Financial Outcomes



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...enabling performance outcomes to be achieved  
for multiple stakeholders





# Evidence regarding performance outcomes

<b>Outcomes of relational coordination</b>	<b>Total findings</b>	<b>Findings that support RCT</b>	<b>% Findings that support RCT</b>
Efficiency and financial outcomes	18	15	83%
Quality and safety outcomes	58	47	81%
Client engagement	10	10	100%
Worker outcomes	28	27	96%
Learning and innovation	10	10	100%
<b>Total findings</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>88%</b>



# Proposition 2

Relational coordination *matters most* for performance when work is reciprocally interdependent, uncertain and time constrained

Thompson, 1968; Argote, 1982; Adler, 1995

# Proposition 3

Organizational structures *strengthen* RC when they are connect across multiple stakeholders to reduce subgoal optimization and increase systems thinking – and they *weaken* RC when they are not

March & Simon, 1958; Cutcher-Gershenfeld, 1991; MacDuffie, 1995, Dunlop & Weil, 1996, Ichniowski et al. 1997, Batt, 1999, Gittell, Seidner & Wimbush, 2010

# Summary of findings about structures

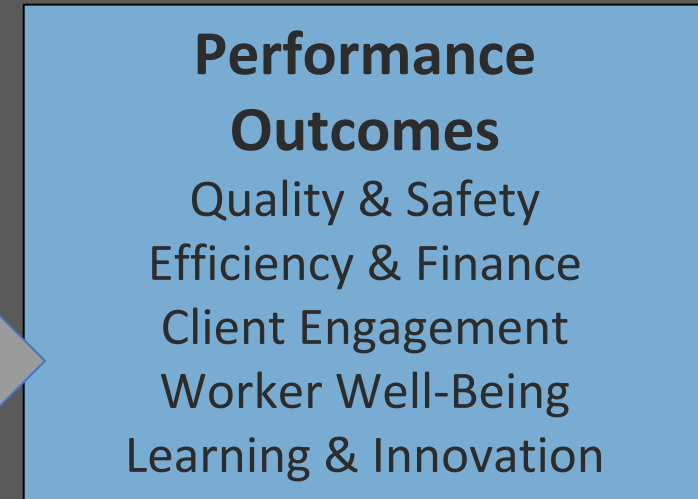
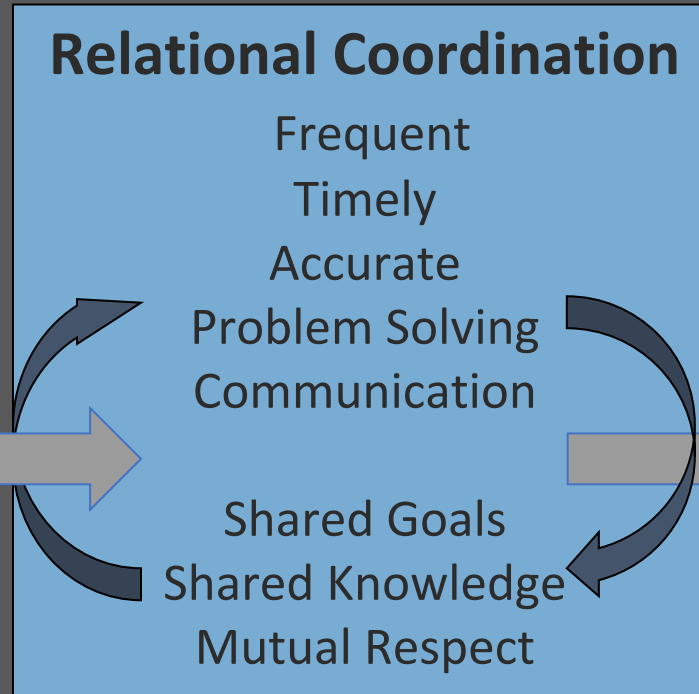
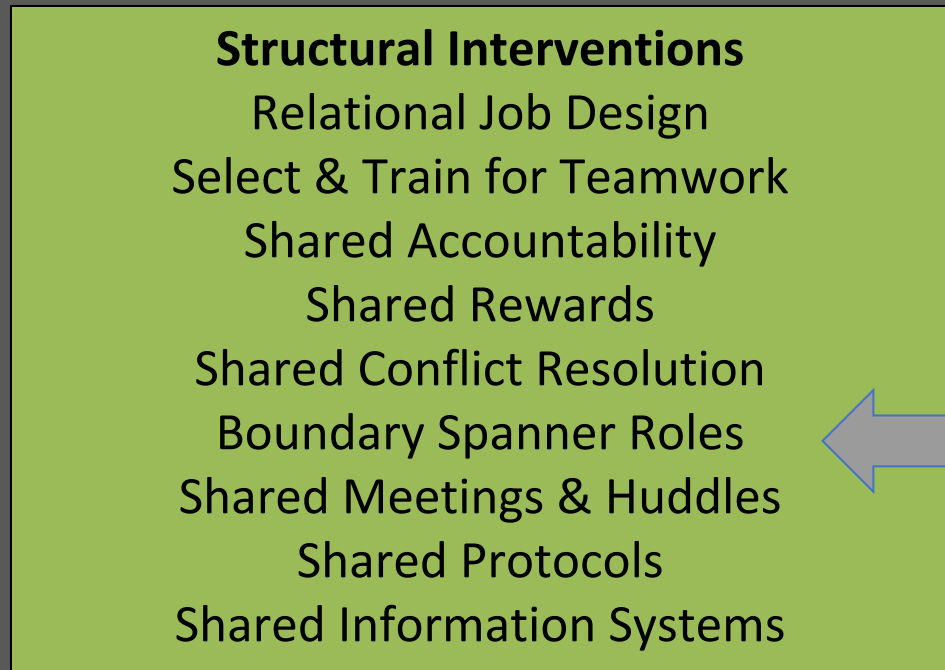
<b>Structures that support relational coordination</b>	<b>Total findings</b>	<b>Findings that support RCT</b>	<b>% Findings that support RCT</b>
Relational job design	5	5	100%
Select and train for relational competence	5	5	100%
Shared accountability and rewards	7	7	100%
Shared conflict resolution	2	2	100%
Relational leadership roles	4	4	100%
Boundary spanners	9	6	67%
Shared meetings	7	7	100%
Shared protocols and routines	12	11	92%
Shared information systems	6	4	67%
Formal contracts	2	2	100%
Relational interventions	2	2	100%
<b>Total findings</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>90%</b>



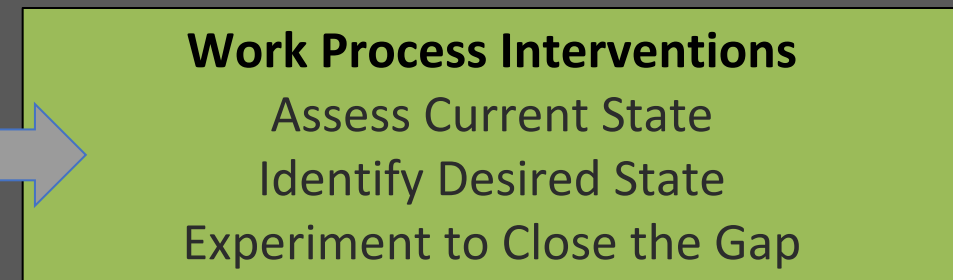
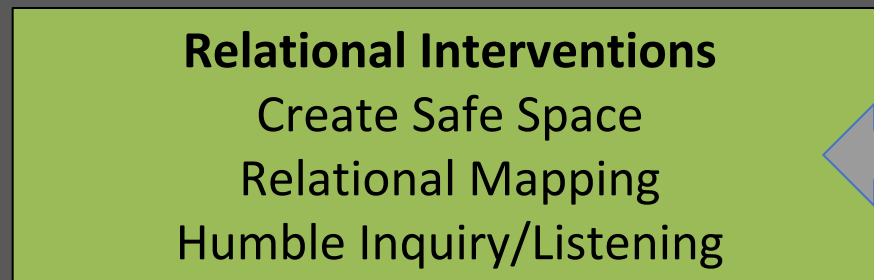
How do we get from here  
to there?

# Relational coordination as a theory of change

Middle & Top Leadership



Frontline  
Leaders,  
Colleagues &  
Clients



# RC becoming a multi-level theory of change



# Six stages of RC change

- Stage 1: Explore context, 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 reassess





# Stage 1: Explore context, introduce RC

Shared goals  
Shared knowledge  
Mutual respect

Frequent  
Timely  
Accurate  
Problem-solving  
communication



## 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 current state of coordination

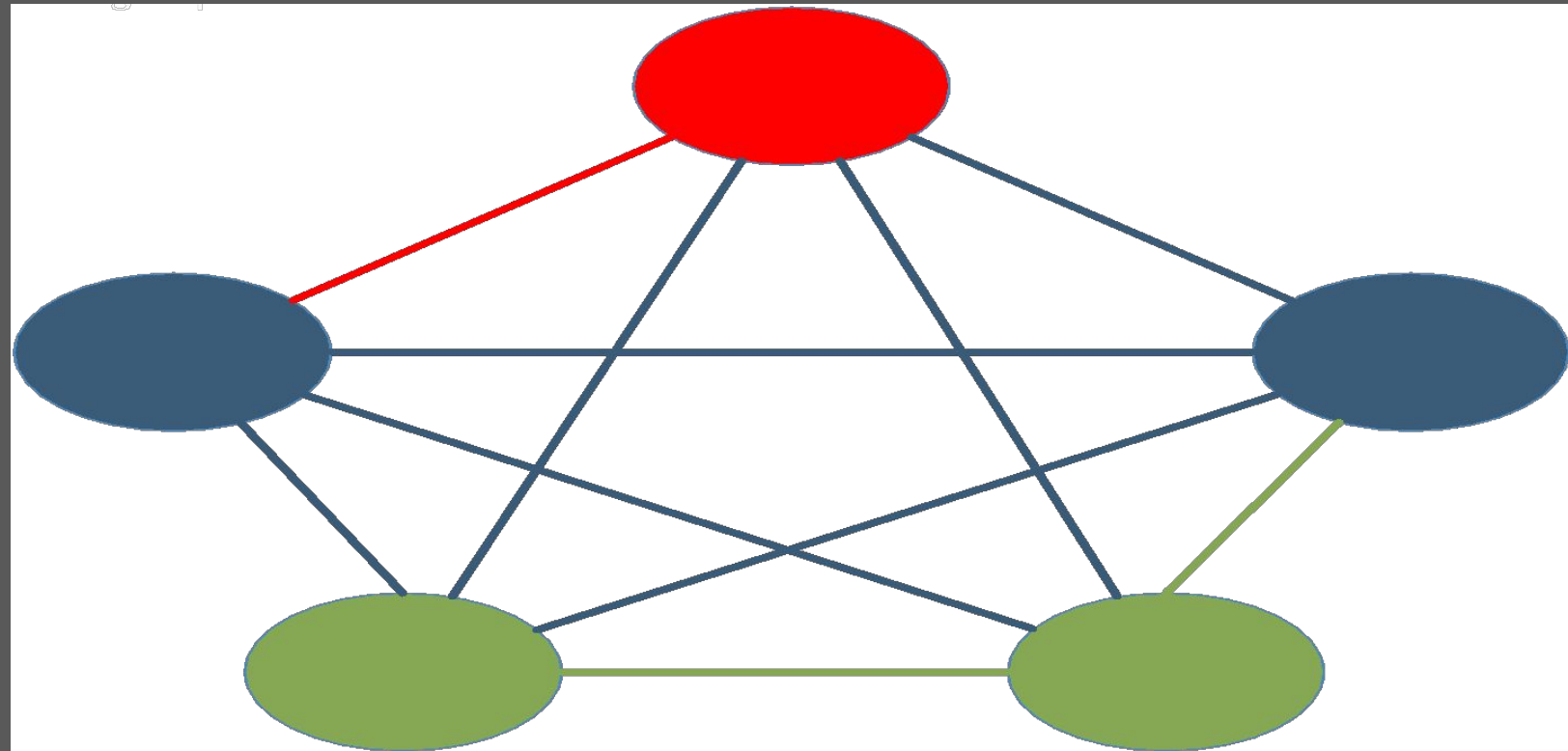


## Stage 2: Create change team

- ◆ Identify a work process that needs better coordination – say “improving health outcomes in our region”
- ◆ Which stakeholders are involved?
- ◆ Draw a circle for each stakeholder and lines connecting between them
  - WEAK RC = RED
  - MODERATE RC = BLUE
  - STRONG RC = GREEN
- ◆ Color of the circle says how we are coordinating *within each stakeholder*, color of the line says how we are coordinating *between stakeholders*

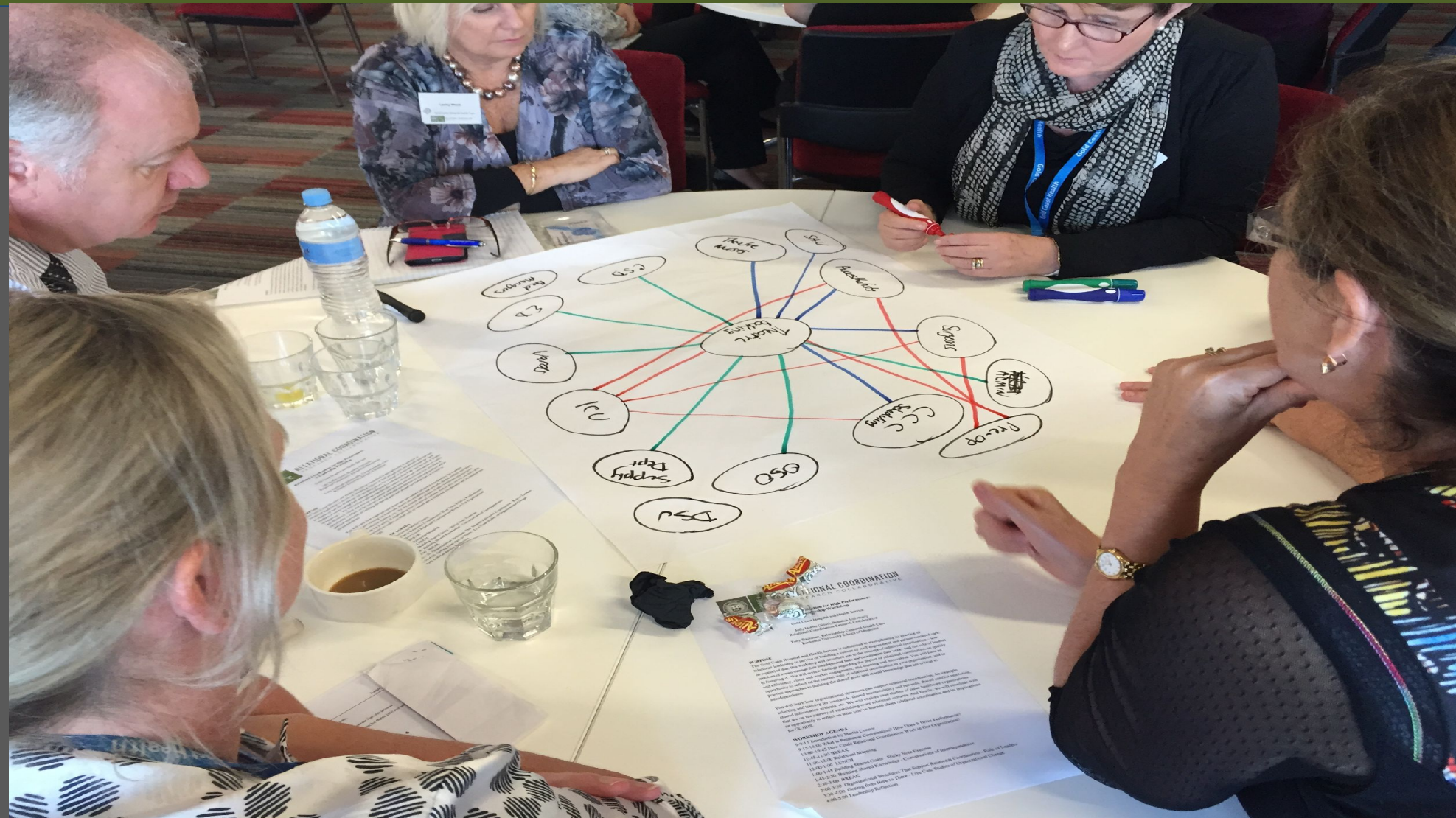
# Stage 2: Create change team

-  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





# Stage 2: Create change team



## Stage 3: Measure RC

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



# Stage 3: Measure RC

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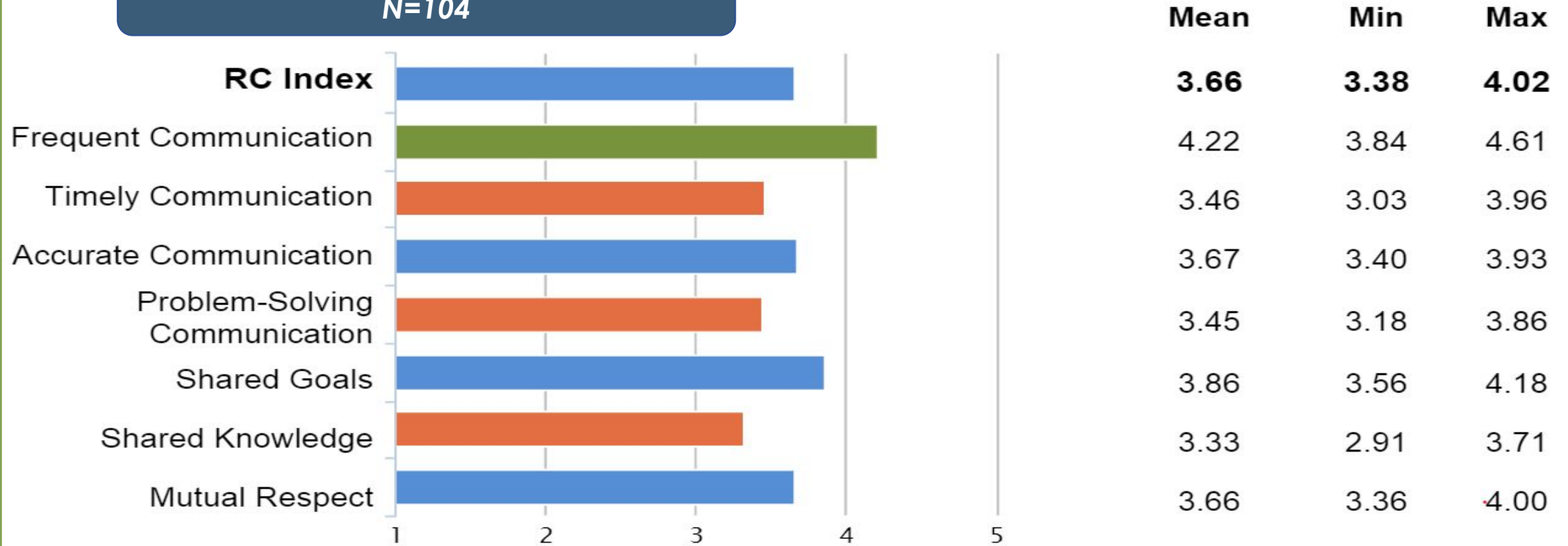
# Stage 4: Reflect on RC findings

- 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



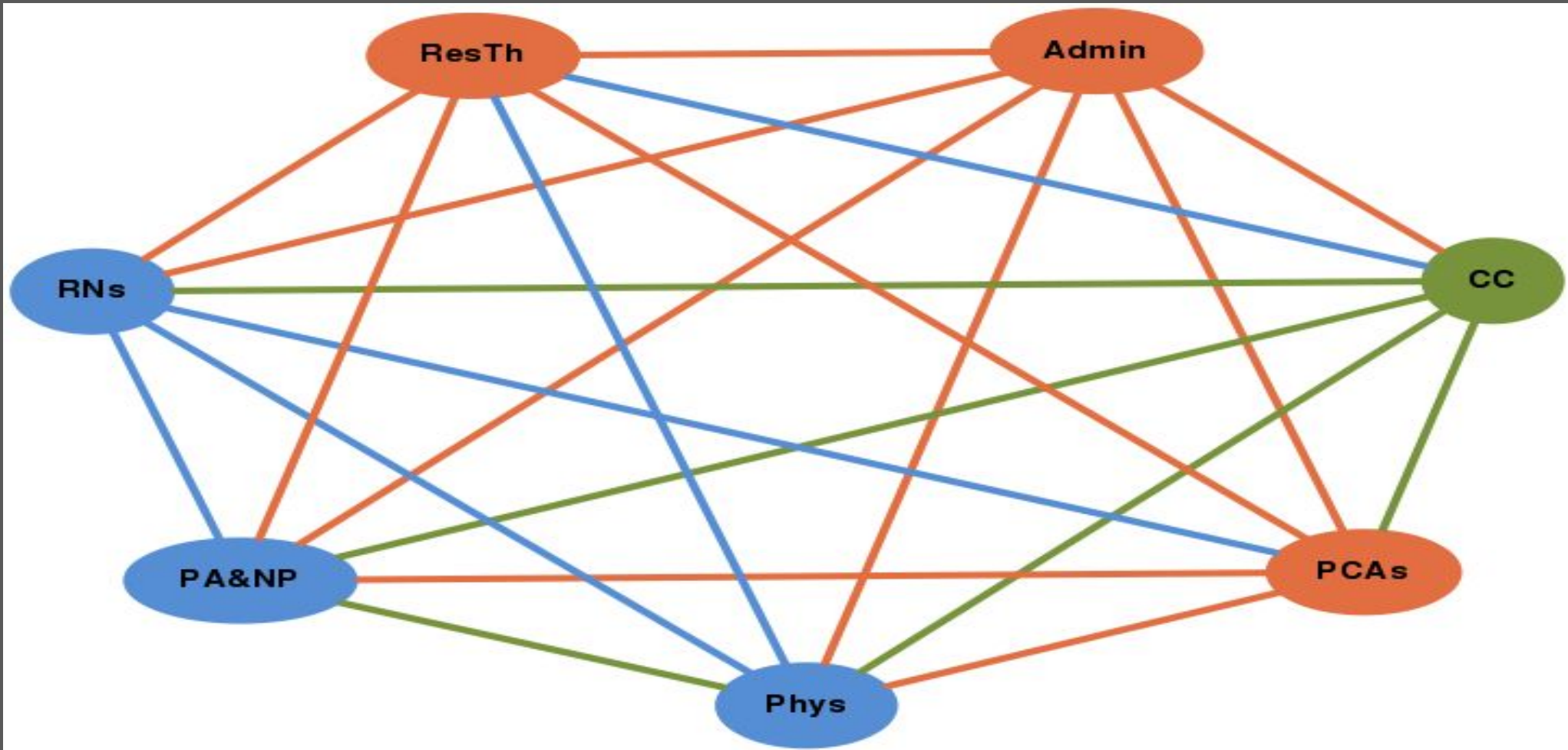
# Stage 4: Reflect on RC findings

Between Workgroups  
N=104



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# Stage 4: Reflect on RC findings



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# Stage 4: Reflect on RC findings

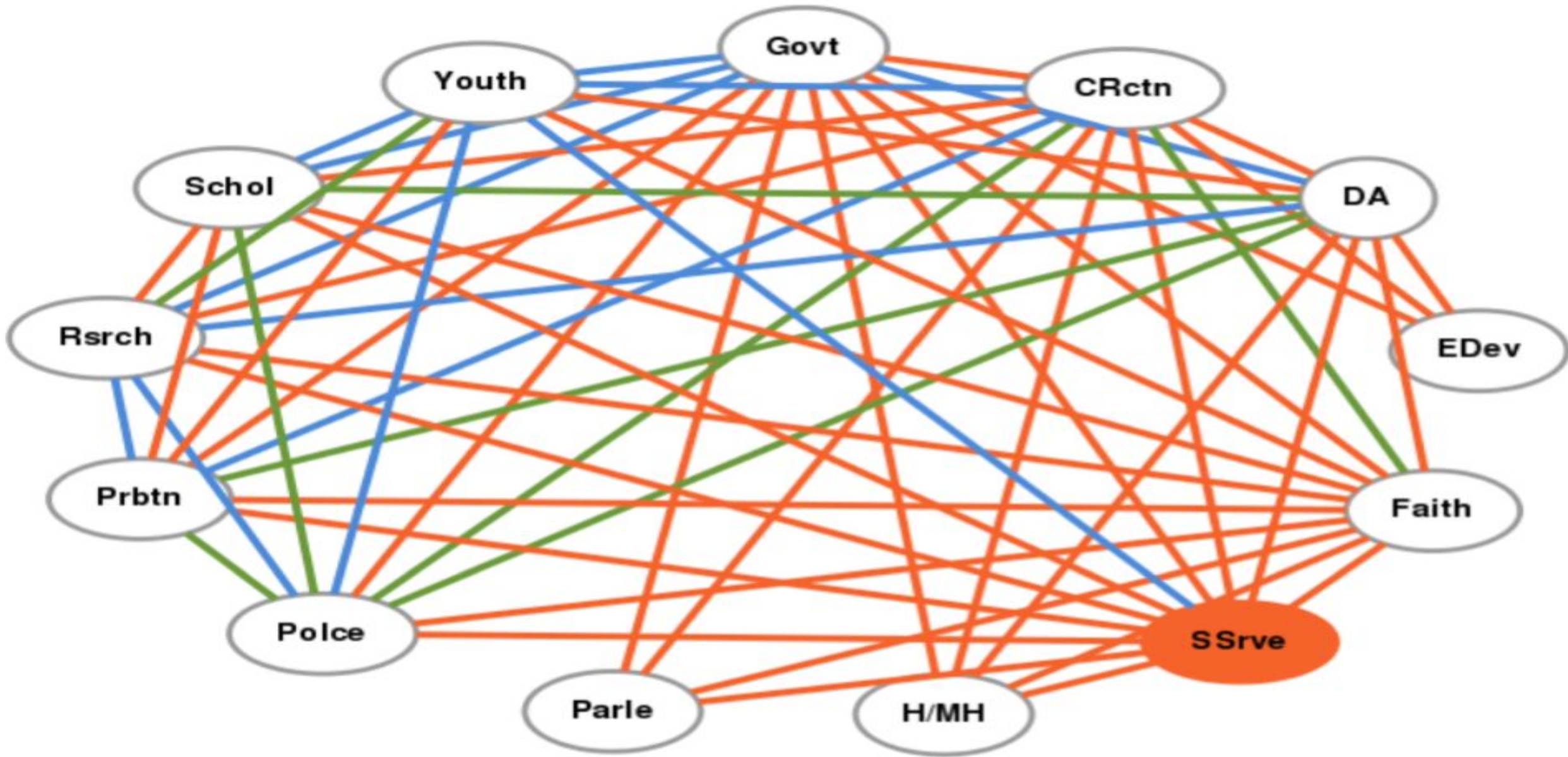
		Ratings of						
		Admin	CC	PCAs	Phys	PA&NP	RNs	ResTh
<b>R a t i n g s  b y</b>	Administrative Support	1.79	1.79	1.79	1.79	1.79	1.79	1.79
	Care Coordination	4.43	4.86	4.29	4.52	4.71	4.67	3.86
	Personal Care Assistants (PCAs)	2.62	2.40	4.02	2.29	2.29	3.50	2.40
	Physicians	3.58	4.26	3.47	4.25	4.19	3.84	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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Strong	>4.6	>4.0



# Stage 4: Reflect on RC findings







## Stage 3: Reflect on RC findings

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



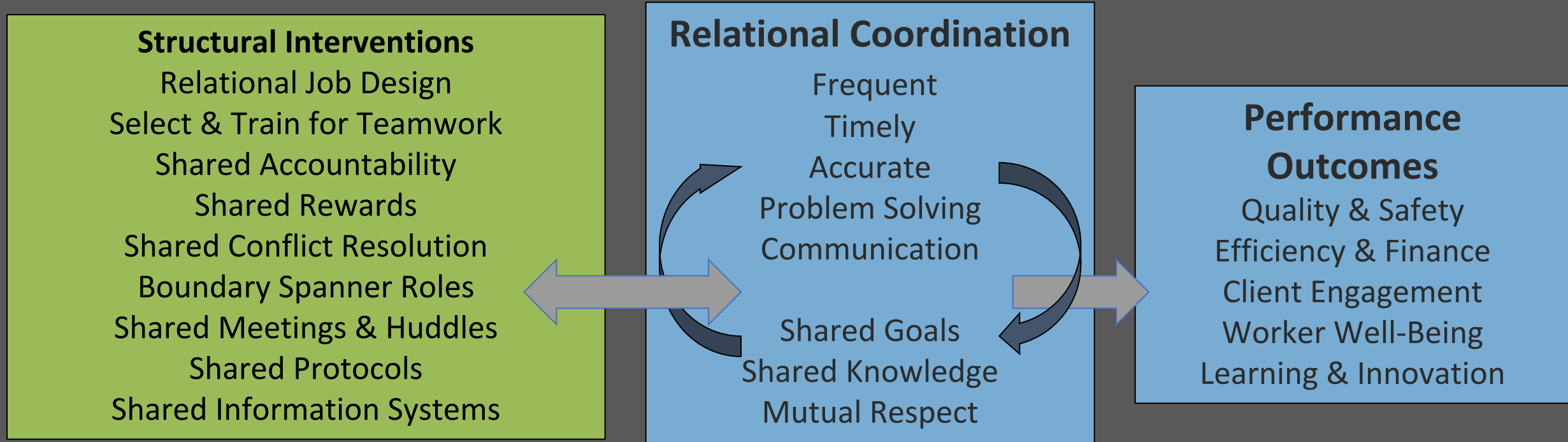
# Stage 5: Design interventions

- Change team creates a plan of action for improving relational coordination and desired outcomes
- Change team designs interventions in partnership with key stakeholders

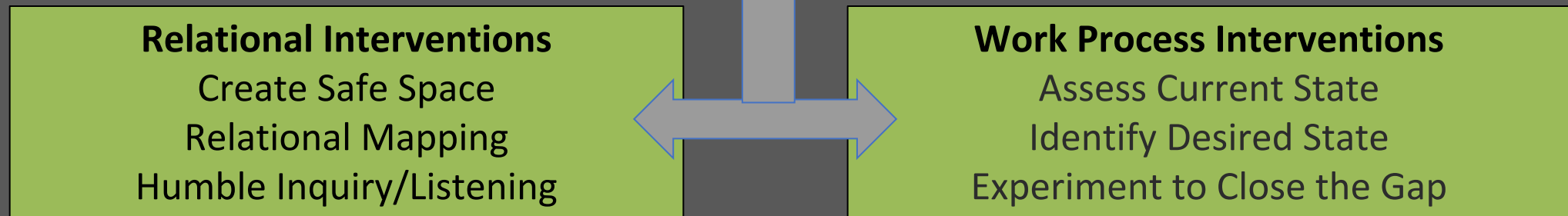


# Stage 5: Design interventions

Middle & Top Leadership



Frontline  
Leaders,  
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Clients



# Organizational structures assessment

- ◆ Create a matrix with the roles from your relational map across the top
- ◆ Add org structures along the left column
- ◆ For each one, ask “How well does this org structure currently support RC in our organization?”
  - ◆ WEAK SUPPORT FOR RC = RED
  - ◆ 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	Strong Support	Moderate Support	Weak Support	Weak Support	Strong Support	Strong Support
Selecting for Teamwork	Strong Support	Strong Support	Weak Support	Weak Support	Moderate Support	Moderate Support
Training 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 Role	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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# Organizational structures assessment

- Which organizational structures are currently *most supportive* of relational coordination?
- Which are currently *least supportive* of relational coordination?
- Where are the biggest potential gains from redesigning them to better support relational coordination?

# Stage 6: Implement and reassess

- Change team implements interventions they have designed
- Change team reassesses relational coordination and desired outcomes
- Change team expands to include new stakeholders as needed

Where to start? And how to keep change efforts aligned and linked across levels?

