

Case Study: Is the Matrix the Problem or the Solution?

A number of problems existed at Horizon Hospital, a large psychiatric facility. Turnover among nursing personnel was much higher than is typical for psychiatric hospital, and relationships between the nursing services and members of the professional staff organization (PSO) were unusually poor. Psychiatrists and clinical psychologists often complained that their patients received inadequate attention from nurses and that their orders were not fully and promptly followed.

The hospital president asked the vice president for nursing to recommend a course of action to resolve the problems. The vice president for nursing developed a plan to restructure the nursing units, using a matrix design (as attached figure). His plan included a new structure, reporting relationship, authority and responsibility relationships, and a timetable for implementing the matrix design.

The president was impressed with the plan and believed it might improve the situation. However, when she showed the plan to the chief of professional staff and several members of the PSO, she was told in no uncertain terms that they would oppose it and would do nothing to implement the change.

Puzzled by their reaction, the president called the vice president into her office to discuss the next step.

Questions:

1. Why do you think the PSO members reacted as they did?
2. Is there anything inherently wrong with the matrix design? Is it inappropriate for psychiatric hospitals?
3. What should the president and vice president for nursing do now?

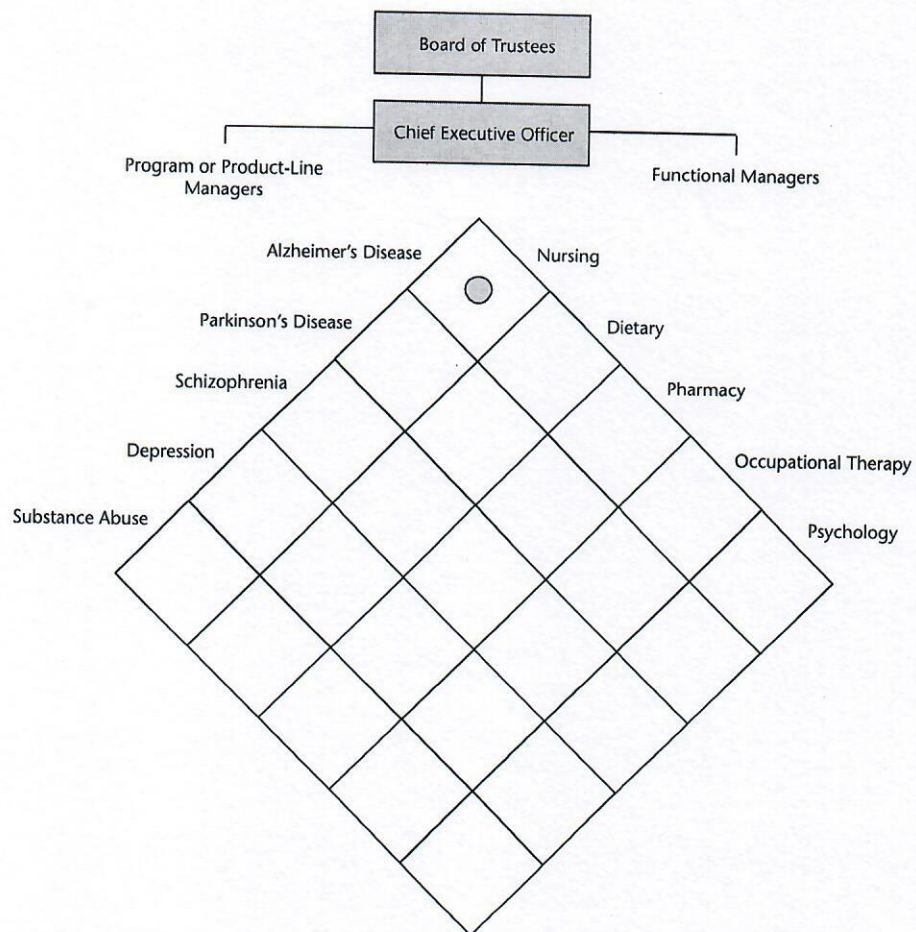


Figure 12.3. A matrix design: a psychiatric center. (From Leatt, Peggy, Ross Baker, and John R. Kimberly, "Organization Design." In *Health Care Management: Organization Design and Behavior*, 5th ed., edited by Stephen M. Shortell and Arnold D. Kaluzny, 332. Clifton Park, NY: Thomson Delmar Learning, 2006. Reprinted with permission of Delmar Learning, a division of Thomson Learning (www.thomsonrights.com). From *Managing Health Services Organizations and Systems* (6th ed., Longest & Darr). Health Professions Press, Inc. All rights reserved. Permission for figure/table access granted for course use only. Permission required for all other uses (see caption above).