



FIVE-MINUTE CEO BRIEF

Is Your Executive Team Carrying the Whole?

A practical lens for recognizing when enterprise integration remains overly concentrated in the CEO - and one move to test in the next executive meeting.

Your greatest leverage may not be carrying more of the hospital yourself. It may be developing the executive team into the living leadership system capable of perceiving and carrying more of the whole with you.

The distinction

A CEO may be carrying too much work. That is a capacity problem. A CEO may also be carrying too much integration: reconciling competing functional realities, translating across boundaries, containing tension, restoring coherence, and deciding what the team could have learned to decide together. That is a leadership-system problem.

The Executive Human System™ is the senior team's collective capacity to carry mission and strategy through the human systems of the hospital into stakeholder results and future capacity.

Shawn L. Zimmerman, PhD | Effective Together

Five signs integration remains too concentrated

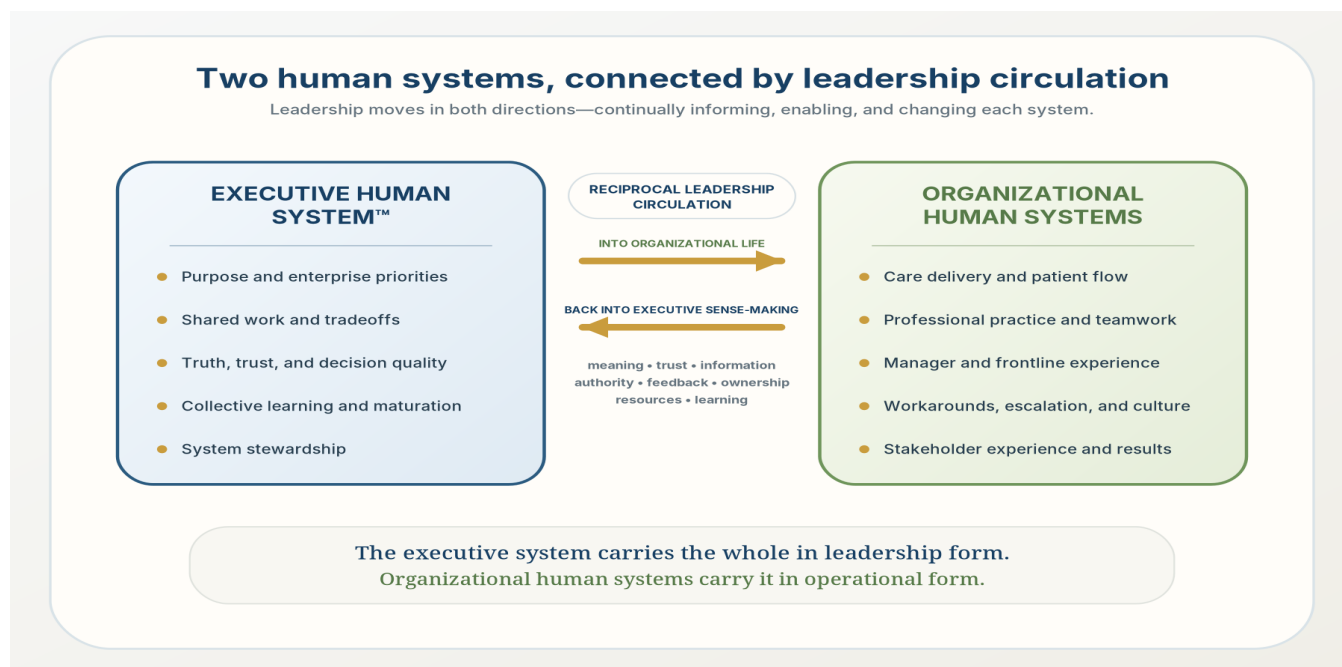
1. Tradeoffs return privately after the meeting	The room appears aligned, but the real negotiation and integration occur later with the CEO.
2. Strong functional realities do not become shared enterprise judgment	Executives accurately represent their areas, while the CEO remains the point where the parts are made coherent.
3. Escalation substitutes for peer work	Tensions move upward before peers clarify authority, dependencies, tradeoffs, and system consequences.
4. The same problem returns under a different label	The team addresses events but not the assumptions, relationships, work design, delays, and incentives reproducing them.
5. Success depends on the CEO being indispensable	Meaning, urgency, cross-boundary connection, and decision coherence weaken when the CEO is not directly present.

The useful question is not: “How do I become better at carrying everything?” It is: “What is this executive team not yet able to carry together that I continue to carry for it?”

These signs do not mean the executives are failing. They suggest that the leadership system may have become the next unit of development.

Two human systems carry strategy

The executive system carries the whole in leadership form. Organizational human systems carry it in operational form. Leadership circulation connects them.



Leadership circulation includes: meaning, trust, information, authority, feedback, ownership, resources, and learning.

A strategy can be well communicated while authority remains unclear, feedback moves too slowly, local intelligence is filtered, or people experience accountability without agency.

A 60-second diagnostic for the next meeting

- When competing realities emerge, where does the room look?
- Does complexity remain with the team, return to the CEO, move into operations, or disappear until crisis?
- Which channel is weakest today: trust, information, authority, ownership, feedback, meaning, resources, or learning?

Where complexity travels tells you more about the current Executive Human System™ than a general description of how well the team communicates.

Try this in the next executive meeting

Choose one consequential issue that no function can resolve alone. Before proposing the solution, ask:

What is this issue asking the executive team to become capable of carrying together?

- What truth or weak signal has not yet entered the room?
- What part is technical or complicated, and what part must be learned through action?
- Who currently owns action, and who owns integration?
- What bounded experiment could create useful feedback within 30 days?
- When will the team return to review both the result and its way of leading?

Three ways the work can begin

Confidential CEO diagnostic	Examine one live issue, the CEO integration burden, the current team pattern, and the next leverage point.
Executive-team diagnostic	Combine interviews, observation, stakeholder listening, and system mapping into a concise developmental map.
90-day live-heat cycle	Use one consequential challenge to diagnose, experiment, review, and embed a changed operating practice.

Selected foundations: Hackman and Wageman on real-team conditions; Edmondson on psychological safety; Hawkins on systemic team coaching; Plsek and Greenhalgh on healthcare complexity; Petrie and Torbert on vertical development and Action Inquiry; Argyris and Schön on double-loop learning; Nundy, Cooper, and Mate on the Quintuple Aim.

Read the field case, research foundation, and full source map at ExecutiveHumanSystem.com.