

Guest Editorial

Creativity, Innovation and Entrepreneurship...A New Prescription for Healthcare

We are living through what is arguably the most challenging time for the healthcare industry. Globally, healthcare appears to be on a collision course with patient needs and economic reality. No one is happy with the current system and the combination of rising costs, poor access, inequitable care and diminishing quality and safety has created anxiety and frustration for all. Decades of interventions have failed to improve the situation; if anything, things have become worse. Current approaches tend to focus on a single issue or problem—the price of drugs, rising numbers without medical aids, provider incentives to overtreat but an overarching solution has remained elusive.



Clearly, the time has come for a radical reconsideration of our approach, one based on the trajectory of well-functioning industries. The healthcare status quo is poised to be revolutionized by two forces—technology and consumerism—and the purpose of my column is to help you to get a realistic grasp on, and understand and recognize the opportunities and disruptive influences of exponentially growing technologies and converging fields within health and healthcare. More specifically, how rapidly developing technologies, such as low cost genomic sequencing, artificial intelligence, 3D printing, telemedicine, robotics, 24/7 body wearable monitors, smart pills, stem cells, synthetic biology, gene therapy, mobile phone apps and crowd sourced healthdata, are bound to affect the future of health and healthcare. So, whether you are a policymaker, payer, provider or patient, you need to get ready for a world of healthcare abundance....but only if we change our prescription!

The fundamental problem with health systems in general is that health outcomes which are not commensurate with what we spend, with our human resource capacity and capability and with current technology advancements. In short, we get out much less than we put in and this performance potential gap is inconceivable in a well-functioning market. The solution for health is, therefore, in creating value or put very simply, getting more out than we put it! As simple and obvious as this seems to be, creating value has not been the central goal, more especially, of those tasked with managing healthcare. Current approaches to health management tend to focus on maintaining the status quo or usually making unnoticeable incremental efficiency improvements (if we are lucky!)....which in effect amounts to a loss of value given what this costs us and what is available to us.

So, how does one create value in healthcare? Simple. By using the same value, creating processes and activities that Albert Einstein, Walt Disney, Steve Jobs, Richard Branson, Larry Page and a host of others used to ensure that their organizations and industries performed close to their maximal potential. They were creative, innovative and entrepreneurial and they encouraged, enhanced and enabled their teams and organizations to do the same. These are not the particular endowment of a lucky few people or organizations but are the result of skills and abilities that can be learnt by anyone. They are sorely needed in healthcare, if we are to come close to fulfilling the potential of the system as a whole and achieve an era of healthcare abundance!

Creativity is our ability to generate new and useful ideas that can be put to work in our personal or business lives. It is a specific and practical technique (it is not intelligence!) that can be learnt and critical in allowing us to rethink the way we see things as well as help us to generate the ideas and creative solutions that we need to solve the challenges that we face daily either as health policymakers, managers, care providers or patients. Amazingly, none of us are taught this and we are never assessed for this when we are being evaluated for education or job opportunities. I think this is a critical caveat in our education and training system (not unique to India) but as important as this competence is, the real value creation is still in the mind of an individual and it needs to be translated into something tangible, useful and useable...in this case to improve health and healthcare delivery.

This ability to translate a novel idea into a product, service, process or business model which is actionable and has value to the user is known as innovation. This includes making available existing products, services and processes to those who previously had no access to these. The latter is particularly relevant for healthcare in developing country contexts as the key to improving access and equity, and reducing costs will depend on leveraging existing exponential and converging technologies (like cell phone technology and genomics,) which are set to fuel the medical revolution. But, incremental

process innovations based on those of industry leaders in other sectors (e.g. on Toyota's production systems or Wal-Mart's supply chain management) are also extremely important to achieve efficiencies and should occur in parallel. These could be clinical process innovations or innovations in all the secondary or supporting activities associated with the delivery of care. Once again the ability to innovate can be learnt but is stark in its absence from programs aimed at training health sector professionals and managers. However, although all of these innovations and the ability to innovate are inherently valuable, they are meaningless if not made available to the masses.

Entrepreneurship is the process of taking innovations to the market or applying them widely within organizations, irrespective of the constraints one faces. Entrepreneurs are not born...they are individuals who have mastered the practice (by learning!) of being innovative, proactive adept at managing risk and possess the ability to get things done despite the contexts they find themselves within. We desperately need this caliber of individuals to effect change within health organizations and within the system as a whole. Instead, we are saddled with administrators and managers....a far cry from what we need to transform the system.

So, I guess what I am saying is that we have reached the tipping point in healthcare and now, more than ever, we need all players, especially leaders to adopt and propound creativity, innovation and entrepreneurial thinking and behavior as a major catalyst to effect positive change in our health and in healthcare delivery. We need people who can create value at all levels...mind, matter and market! Clearly for healthcare to change, we can start by training those responsible for delivering healthcare and those overseeing the delivery of care to be creative, innovative and entrepreneurial.

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