

HEALTH CARE SYSTEMS SUSTAINABILITY: THE ROLE OF HEALTH CARE MANAGEMENT EDUCATION AND CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

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INTRODUCTION

It comes as no surprise that healthcare leaders today face unprecedented challenges. Some are immediate. Others are long-term. Many are interrelated. All are complex.

None of them are small, as they include financial sustainability, mission, quality and patient safety, rapidly advancing technology, changing consumer expectations, new market entrants, healthcare inequities, and more regulation. And one challenge tops that list: workforce shortages. Although many individuals continue to be drawn to healthcare, the numbers are insufficient to meet increasing demand.

But there is one more challenge which even tops this issue. And that is the continuing and growing need for capable and competent leaders and leadership in the world's most complex industry sector – healthcare.

Aiming for excellence in health care are words that adorn our organisation's mission statements and list of values. But is there something that can make the difference in outcomes for health at the patient level, at a system level, and at a population level? And if there is, can we identify what makes the difference, amplify it and exploit it to the world? My thesis is the one thing that will make the difference is the level of competence and capability of the leaders and leadership. What does this look like? What should we be doing to grow it and develop it?

Firstly, we must have a map to guide us, or a scaffold around which to build the core capabilities that are required for one to be a leader or for an organisation to have effective and strong leadership.

LEADERSHIP AS CAPABILITIES, NOT COMPETENCIES.

My personal preference is to use the term leadership capability over competency. The term competency is most appropriately used in training, to refer to the skills and knowledge that individuals require to do their job in a predictable environment. For many, it refers to a bare minimum required to do the job.

The term capability, on the other hand, includes competence, but much more. The goal of developing capabilities is to raise your level of ability much beyond the bare minimum.

In leadership development I also prefer the term capabilities because leadership development in itself is a lifelong journey. Over your lifecycle of leadership, you will use different capabilities to lead in one situation as opposed to another.

Leadership has no meaning without change. If the world were static, management would have it tightly organized, planned, and humming along in a highly ordered way. Leaders seek the opportunity to change, for change means improvement and growth. Leaders provide

direction and purpose to change. In our turbulent, complex world, transformative change, may be the only way health care can continue.

THE JOURNEY HISTORY OF COMPETENCY FRAMEWORKS

Competency frameworks in all types of professions and industries have existed for some decades now. In 1978 the WHO published a paper entitled Competency-Based Curriculum Development in Medical Education. In 2002, the first competency-based curriculums were published by the three Royal Medical Colleges in the UK.

In the late 1990s the healthcare industry worldwide was awakened to the fact that it did not always live up to its traditional ethic "above all else, and first do no harm." Patients and populations for that matter, were being put at risk. Fundamental changes were needed and what became very evident was that we needed to make certain that leaders had the skills and tools to make and conduct the changes. Over the years, leaders in the quality space (Pronovost, Baldrige et al), have emphasised the need for leadership competencies.

In the mid 2000's Dickson from Royal Roads University in British Columbia led the way with the LEADS - in a caring environment. The Canadian LEADS framework has been on an evolving journey over the past 20 years and has remained elegant and translatable.

In 2013 the Australian Government Health Workforce Australia developed a nationally recognised leadership framework based on LEADS Canada and around the same time, the IHF contributed to the agenda by trying to fill a global gap in the leadership quest through launching a directory.

The Australasian College of Health Service Management has an industry led Master Health Services Management Competency Framework which is brought to life as the platform for the wide variety of college programs that in turn longitudinally support leaders as they learn.

The Framework underpins the credentialing program for Certified Health Managers that supports lifelong learning. The Fellowship Program and early career programs developed and delivered by the College all contribute to,

and continue, the acquisition of competencies that in turn underpin the growth of capabilities to lead.

But competency models are only as useful as the leadership-development efforts they support. When they are incorporated into development programs based on sound adult learning principles, competency models can be powerful facilitators of individual change, but by themselves do little to help people develop.

And of course, the effectiveness of even the most skilled quality professionals will be bounded by the level of collaboration they experience from the other leaders and clinicians they work with. Attention to leadership as a team game and the need for a continuous learning focus will continue to be essential in supporting quality improvement gains in healthcare organisations.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PAYS OFF

The Centre for Creative Leadership points out four reasons why organisations need to invest in developing leaders.

1. NAVIGATING CHANGE AND INNOVATION

The healthcare industry is constantly evolving due to new technologies, treatments, and regulations. Effective leaders can anticipate trends and prepare organisations for what lies ahead. Continuous learning and growth organisations demonstrate commitment by nurturing talent through leadership development.

2. POSITIVE WORK ENVIRONMENT AND CULTURE

Strong leadership fosters a healthy workplace culture leading to higher employee engagement, better patient care, and improved outcomes. Effective leaders inspire and motivate teams, leading to higher employee engagement and improved productivity.

3. DECISION-MAKING AND ADAPTABILITY

Leadership development ensures that future leaders align with the company's goals and vision by investing in their growth.

4. FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE AND STRATEGY EXECUTION

Leadership development drives sustained success by improving bottom-line performance attracting talent and enhancing an organisation's ability to navigate change, thus reducing costs, opening new revenue opportunities, and contributing to increased profitability.

THE PROBLEMS WITH TRADITIONAL EXECUTIVE EDUCATION

Moldeoveanu and Narayandas state that “the leadership development industry is in a state of upheaval with the number of players offering courses to impart the hard and soft skills required of corporate managers soaring. And yet organisations that collectively spend billions of dollars annually to train current and future executives are growing frustrated with the results” [6].

Their studies indicate that more than 50% of senior leaders believe that their talent development efforts don't adequately build critical skills and organisational capabilities and that traditional programs no longer adequately prepare executives for the challenges they face today or tomorrow.

Most executive education programs, designed as extensions of, or substitutes for MBA programs, focus on discipline-based skill sets, such as strategy development or financial analysis, and seriously underplay important relational, communication, and affective skills. Traditional executive education is simply too episodic, exclusive, and expensive to achieve that goal.

There are a growing number of online courses, social and interactive platforms, and learning tools from both traditional institutions and startups that can make learning flexible and accessible, thus enabling employees to pick up skills in the context in which they must be used. A fundamental belief must be that leadership is a learnable skill and a personal responsibility.

CONCLUSION

Leadership programs underscore that investments benefit individual participants and help transform their organisations. The organisational benefits are the result of greater leadership abilities and expanded access to knowledge and resources resulting from leaders expanded professional networks.

Connected, resilient, and skilled leaders are essential to transformational changes as we collectively look to advance health equity, strengthen the workforce, and embrace the information and digital challenges ahead of us.

Investing in leadership development provides a structured and comprehensive approach to developing leadership skills and competencies.

A leadership development program can give enhanced leadership skills, improve self-awareness, and give a deeper understanding of strengths and weakness. They help you acquire new knowledge and understand best practices that will enable you to lead effectively in a dynamic and uncertain environment.

Eric Hooper said, “In times of change, learners inherit the earth while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists.”

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