Strategies for Success: MANAGING COMPLEXITY in Health Care
Hospitals and health systems are used to operating in highly regulated environments with intricate payment mechanisms, shifting demographics and some level of uncertainty. Now, in the midst of an epic transformation of the care delivery system, hospitals and health systems are faced with even greater complexity and uncertainty over how to remain competitive and relevant in the future.

The challenge for health care organizations is to enhance the value of the services they provide, while pulling down their cost structure by 20–30 percent. The shift toward population health management, the rise of the new consumer and the arrival of new competitors into the marketplace add to the complexity of the business.
environment, which continues to change rapidly and unpredictably.

Critical success factors for hospitals in the future include effective strategic planning, agility and innovation. The key is to design organizations that deliver value-based care and are capable of adapting to fast-paced changes within the marketplace, without creating more complexity and complications. It’s no small task.

Hospital executives, along with their boards, must focus on the future, developing partnerships and models of care to succeed in the next 10–20 years. Hospitals and health systems must be poised to develop a new system of care that is stronger and more responsive to their patients and communities than what exists today. The opportunities are many, and the time for change is now.
As the health care industry continues to transform, the need for collaboration has only increased. By breaking down traditional barriers and exchanging ideas, together — providers, patients, payers and others in the industry — have a unique opportunity to positively transform health care in the United States.

One of the benefits GE can bring to the health care industry is to use our global scale to help convene thought leaders, facilitating disruptive discussions that will drive change. For the second year, GE Healthcare hosted top health system CEOs and board members at an executive leadership retreat in New York City. There, we discussed the latest in health care reform as well as disruptive strategies for success, bringing global insights to our domestic challenge. The passion in the room and constructive dialogue was inspiring. I hope you find the takeaways from the leadership session — found in this supplement — valuable in challenging your conventions and helpful in strategizing for your future.

We need to challenge ourselves to truly think differently. We're living in two worlds…health care as defined today and health care as it will be in the future. Our industry must examine new ideas from around the world to manage these dynamics. It's a big challenge given the complexity and speed of change that's happening around the world. It's also exciting … the eagerness and willingness of industry leaders to have honest conversations will lead to creative new ways of collaboration.

As the new CEO of GE Healthcare, I look forward to more opportunities to listen to each of you and to have a constructive dialogue on how we can help.

John Flannery
President and CEO
GE Healthcare

Find out what other industry experts are thinking at www.gehealthcare.com/forwardthinking
What exactly do we mean when we say we are engaged in strategy planning? Too often, organizations believe they are acting strategically when, actually, they are operating in ways that are only supporting their current operations.

Strategy is not about celebrating the past and it’s not about celebrating the present. It’s about leadership in the future. Don’t assume that because your organization is a leader today, it will be a leader tomorrow. You have to earn that position. We all know that healthcare is evolving rapidly. If you want to position your organization as a leader in the future, you will have to adapt to change. Another word for adapting to change is innovation. If you’re not innovating in your company, you’re not doing strategy — you’re doing something else. Strategy equals leadership in the future. Leadership in the future equals adapting to change. Adapting to change equals innovation. Therefore, strategy equals innovation.

I’m often asked by senior executives whether innovation exists in every industry. They want an example of an industry that has failed to change, failed to innovate. Many suggest that academia is one area that changes slowly and does not grasp innovation, but they are wrong. If we composed a list of the Top 10 universities in the world 100 years ago, would we find any American universities on the list?

No. Not even Harvard was considered a top university then. Germany had six of the Top 10 universities in the world 100 years ago. If there were absolutely no breakthrough innovation in that industry, the list of the Top 10 today would be identical. But it’s not. The list has completely turned upside down. In fact, there is not a single German university on the list today. It is populated with American universities.

If we had the time, we could do an analysis and figure out what breakthrough innovations American universities focused on in the last 100 years to make them leaders today. Certainly, they innovated the product. But innovation has to go beyond the product, and there are plenty of opportunities to practice breakthrough innovations in non-product areas. Today, Harvard, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Stanford, among others, are world leaders in higher education. But, as I stated earlier, that doesn’t mean they are guaranteed to be leaders in the future. Becoming a leader is what strategy is all about. In the last 12 months, Harvard, MIT and Stanford have put courses online. MIT, in particular, is doing a breakthrough innovation experiment. Anyone can take MIT engineering courses online and, if they’re willing to subject themselves to the course work and tests that are given in the classroom, they will get a certification from MIT. This has the potential to fundamentally change higher education going forward.
Thinking Inside the Box

As hospital and health system leaders, think about the products and services that you provide today: What are you doing strategically today that will make your organization a leader in the future? Think about everything you do inside your organization and list them in one of three boxes [see Figure 1]. How many of the projects that you are executing today will be in Box 1? Box 1 is all about managing the present. It’s about improving organizational performance and optimizing your system as it exists today. Next, how many of the projects that you are executing today will be in Box 2? Box 2 is about selectively forgetting the past. And, finally, how many of the projects that you are executing today will be in Box 3? Box 3 is about creating the future. Organizations too often think they’re working on strategy, when they are really just managing the present. Strategy has nothing to do with the present and it has nothing to do with Box 1. Strategy has everything to do with Boxes 2 and 3. Organizations frequently mistake cost-reduction activities and improvements in margin as strategy. Strategy is not about what the organization needs to do in the short term to improve its current business.

The challenge with Box 3 is: What is the organization doing to create the future in the year 2025? First, you have to selectively forget the past in Box 2. Let me clarify one thing. Strategy, for any organization, whether it’s Harvard, Stanford, General Electric or a large health system, is about becoming a leader in 2025 — not about what you have to do in the year 2025, but about the projects you are executing today. Another term for Box 1 is “competition for the present.” Strategy has little to do with competing for the present. Boxes 2 and 3 could be termed “competition for the future.” Strategy has a lot to do with competing for the future.

As leaders, we know that competing for the present is extraordinarily important. It’s just as important as competing for the future. Therefore, strategy is really about how organizations create their future while managing the present. This is challenging because the thinking process and the execution of Box 1 are very different from the thinking process and the execution methodology in Boxes 2 and 3. To be leaders in the future, organizations should focus on Box 1 projects, while also doing at least one significant Box 2 and Box 3 experiment — just as MIT is doing today. These experiments require a different thinking process and performance methodology. That is the central leadership challenge. While it is simple to say, it is not easy to do.

It’s challenging because, in addition to what your organization is doing today to become a leader, it also must focus on what the organization must do in the future. There are conflicts and tensions between the two. Box 1 projects are always in response to clear and linear changes within an industry. Organizations respond to these clear and linear changes with incremental improvements. Competition for future projects, Box 3 projects, are always in response to weak signals and nonlinear changes in the environment. As organizations respond to nonlinear changes in their industries, they have to create fundamental innovations, breakthrough innovations. What’s an example of a nonlinear change in industry that leads us to a nonlinear innovation? The Internet was a nonlinear change. And nonlinear change drives nonlinear innovation. Concepts like eBay, Amazon.com and Google would
not have been possible without the Internet.

Over the next 10 years, what might be some major nonlinear changes that will fundamentally reshape health care and, therefore, demand that your health system start Box 3 innovations? Certainly, technology will continue to transform health care, but it is not the only source of nonlinear changes. The health care consumer of the future could be fundamentally different from today’s consumer. We’re already seeing nontraditional competitors enter the health care marketplace to meet the changing needs of the customer.

Another area for consideration is emerging markets — India and China, in particular. They are both growing aggressively. American companies are eyeing these nations as opportunities for growth. The catch is that growth in American markets cannot be captured through Box 1 activities. American companies should not assume that the products they created for the American consumer will be successful for them in India or China. Customers in emerging markets are fundamentally different from customers in developed markets. Because of this, they will demand Box 3 innovation.

Why are they fundamentally different? Think about one statistic: The annual per capita income in India is about $1,000. It’s about $50,000 in the United States. For U.S. companies to gain market share in India, they must try to capture the middle market, with an annual per capita income of $500. Imagine that in rich countries, one person has $1,000 to spend. In a developing country, there are 1,000 people with $1 to spend. The demand structure is very different. American companies will need to engage in Box 3 innovation to reach the average Indian consumer.

Here’s an example from GE Healthcare that shows the power of Box 3 innovation in emerging markets. An electrocardiogram machine is an extraordinarily powerful machine that saves lives and costs about $10,000. When you walk into a U.S. hospital, you are likely to see the ECG, along with a $1 million X-ray machine, a $2 million computerized tomography scanner and a $3 million magnetic reso-
inance imaging machine. Do you find all of this in an Indian hospital? The $10,000 ECG machine can be found in hospitals in major urban centers. There are rich folks in poor countries, just as there are poor folks in rich countries. But, what about the individuals in rural India? To them, the $10,000 ECG machine is useless and the most obvious reason is affordability. If you have an ECG machine of this sort, a scan may cost $200. For the 19 percent of Indians who live in rural areas and make $2 a day, they would have to work 100 days to pay for one scan. Most people will say, ‘Forget it. I’ll live with chest pain.’ So there’s a significant affordability problem. There’s another problem as well. In rural India, there are no hospitals. The ECG weighs 300 pounds. To reach the patient, the machine would have to be taken to the patient. It won’t fit in a backpack. If you transported it by bus from village to village and found people willing to pay $200 for a scan, there’s yet another problem. In rural India, electricity is either unavailable or unreliable.

So, suppose you find a rural area where everybody is willing to pay the $200 fee and you manage to take this machine on a bus and there is access to reliable electricity. You will encounter yet another problem. The ECG is a very sophisticated machine and it requires a doctor to operate it. In rural India, there are no trained doctors. As a result, 19 percent of Indians are nonconsumers of this equipment. In fact, today the world has a population of 7 billion people. Of that, about 2 billion have access to regular health care. The remaining 5 billion cannot afford it and they are, therefore, nonconsumers. If you want to turn nonconsumers into consumers, you can’t give nonconsumers the same products that are used by the current consumers. You have to engage in Box 3 innovation.

GE has developed an alternative to the $10,000 ECG. It’s a $500 machine and the cost of a scan is 10 cents. Someone who earns $2 a day can afford to have an ECG. The $500 ECG weighs less than a can of Coca-Cola. It can be carried around easily and it operates on battery power. A single battery charge can produce 150 ECG scans. And this extraordinarily simple machine is easy to use. Through its development, GE has opened an entirely new market to nonconsumers. Box 3 innovation is about creating the market.

Another example of Box 3 innovation in an emerging market is Aravind Eye Care System in India. Aravind conducts cataract surgery for $200. In the United States, the cost of cataract surgery averages $4,000. And just because the cost of the procedure is significantly lower does not mean the quality is inferior. The quality is on par with that of the United States. When you read about these cases, it seems so simple. When Box 2 and 3 projects are so simple to understand, why is it so hard for companies to execute?

An Olympian Analogy

A look at the Olympic high jump helps to illustrate the challenge [see Figure 2]. There have been four distinct ‘business models’ in the high jump. Each innovation enabled athletes to achieve breakout performance. Early on, the scissors-style jump dominated the sport. It was very much like hurdles. Because all high jumpers were using the scissors approach, the sport was about who could be best at the scissors style.
Because the future is uncertain, executives cannot predict it. They can only prepare to address its challenges and capture its opportunities. So, what should organizations do? There are many examples of the scissors jump within health care, and that’s not a bad thing. Scissors can have many years of useful life left in them. The challenge is to not invest too much to enhance the scissors, to make them more efficient. Organizations cannot allocate 100 percent of their resources to perfect the scissors. That only should be done if there is 100 percent certainty that the world will never change. And as we know, the world will change. In health care, nonconsumers will become consumers. New technology will arrive, along with a new set of competitors. And regulations will change. Therefore, in addition to perfecting the scissors within your organization, you need to practice at least one Box 3 innovation. — Vijay Govindarajan is the Coxe Distinguished Professor at the Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth, Hanover, N.H.

Questions for board discussion

1. How can hospitals and health systems ensure that they are not bogged down with Box 1 projects?

2. What projects is the organization doing today that fall into Boxes 2 and 3?

3. What are some potential nonlinear changes that may impact health care over the next 10 years? What can the organization do to prepare?

high jumpers were operating in Box 1. If they were business people, they would have been competing on cost, market share and margins.

One day, someone changed the rules of the game by inventing a jump called the western roll. High jumpers launched and landed on the same foot and kept their backs to the bar. The western roll dominated the sport for 25 years until someone again changed the rules by introducing the eastern roll, or the straddle. With the straddle, high jumpers launched and landed on opposite feet and faced the bar. Finally, during the 1968 Olympics, former gymnast Dick Fosbury broke the Olympic record by three inches, creating a third discontinuous change. The Fosbury flop involved a straight approach, jumping with both feet and twisting the body 180 degrees, like a gymnast, and looking away from the bar. These nonlinear shifts are examples of Box 3 thinking. Each transformed the high jump. In each case, the inventive high jumpers were not just managing the present, they were also creating the future.
Hospitals and health systems are complex businesses and growing increasingly more complex. To understand how organizations can manage complexity, we must first look at what is happening in the workplace today.

Labor productivity is declining across the globe — in the United States, the European Union and in Japan, for example. Labor productivity is defined as the value that people create at work. A study of labor productivity in Europe has found a significant shift in the last 55 years. Productivity used to grow in the 15 largest European economies by 5 percent per annum in the ’50s, ’60s and early 70s. From 1973 until 1983, productivity grew at 3 percent per annum. From 1983 to 1994, it grew at 2 percent per annum. Since 1995, it’s grown at only 1 percent per annum. Why is this important? It’s vital because productivity growth protects the standard of living. When productivity grows at 3 percent per annum, we double the standard of living every generation. Every generation is twice as better off as the previous one. When productivity grows at 1 percent per annum, it takes three generations to double the standard of living. Because it is an average, many people will not be as well off as their parents.

So, why is productivity improvement declining? I have worked with more than 500 companies around the world and, despite all the technological advances, including computers, information technology, telecommunications and the Internet, productivity is a challenge. In fact, we have a productivity crisis. It is very modern and very surprising in the sense that there are more innovations in the workforce today, so we should expect productivity to improve much faster than in the past. One of the reasons for the decline is that the workforce is disengaged. People are miserable and even actively disengaged in their work.

In Europe, depending on the country and sectors, only 11–23 percent of the workforce feels engaged. In the United States, less than 43 percent of the workforce is happy. That’s down from 61 percent of U.S. workers who were happy at work in 1983 and 55 percent in 2005. There has been a constant decline in satisfaction at work, despite all of the leadership development programs and other initiatives to help managers engage and motivate their teams. And people aren’t just disengaged. Some are actively disengaged, acting against the best interest of their respective companies. Data from Gallup Inc. have found that 20 percent of workers are actively disengaged in the United States. The numbers are similar across the globe. Twenty
percent of German workers are actively disengaged, compared with 21 percent in Australia, 24 percent in France and Great Britain, and 23 percent in Japan. When we look at some high-risk industries, the numbers are even greater. Forty-five percent of employees at nuclear power plants are actively disengaged. And 33 percent of employees who work for airplane manufacturers are actively disengaged.

What is happening? Why are people so frustrated and dissatisfied at work? In the beginning, I felt there was a clear cause and effect. Because people are disengaged, they are less productive; or vice versa, because people are less productive, companies apply more pressure, which leads them to become less engaged. We have studied this extensively and have found the root cause. The root cause is basically the way organizations have tried to adapt to the new business environment. Organizations have continued to conduct their business according to what we all learned in business school. How to organize depends on strategy. What are the organization’s key success factors? From the critical success factors, organizations then designed the business structure, processes and systems. So, strategy determined organization.

And, whenever there is a specific requirement, organizations create specific structures, processes and systems to handle the requirement. That was fine when the world was simple — when companies could choose whether they had to compete on cost or on quality. But then problems started to arise in the late ’80s when most companies lost the ability to choose between cost and quality. They had to do both. When you want to buy a new car, you go to a car dealer and say, ‘Show me your cars.’ But, suppose the car dealer says, ‘You know, I must tell you that we have a cost strategy. Our cars are quite cheap, but not very reliable. If I were you, I’d buy two of them to always have a backup.’ That doesn’t work. Consumers demand both cost and quality.

How did organizations respond to this new requirement? They invented the matrix organization to help compete on both cost and quality. Things were more complicated under the matrix, but that was nothing compared to the nightmare of the last 10 years when organizations faced even more requirements, such as global consistency, local responsiveness, innovation and efficiency, speed and reliability. This is business complexity: more and more requirements that often are contradictory. Innovation means doing something we’ve never done before and efficiency means doing something the same way for the 10th time. Speed and reliability are also contradictory. Reliability means taking control at the expense of speed. That’s basically the new business environment. And any time there was a new requirement, we applied the same approach. We created new processes, systems, matrices and so on. We responded by creating complicatedness. In trying to confront complexity, organizations created complicatedness.

The Overcomplicated Organization

In complicated organizations, managers spend about 40 percent of their time writing reports, because they have to report on a lot of things, such as matrices, scorecards, etc. And they spend 30 percent of their time in meetings because they have to coordinate with so many other functions. That doesn’t leave much time to work with their teams. Therefore, the teams do not receive the right guidance, guidelines or recognition.
There's a disconnect in these organizations. So, not only do organizations have a productivity crisis, they have a workforce crisis. Employees are overworked. And when they don't feel good, they become disengaged. In complicated organizations, employees spend most of their time wasting time — yet working harder and longer — because they increasingly work on non-value-adding activities. There is more and more work on work, and less and less work. It's no surprise then that productivity is crawling in most economies.

So what do companies do? Very often, they bring in psychologists who conduct surveys and interviews, and announce a psychological problem. And they react by creating a bunch of soft initiatives — people initiatives such as bonding sessions and team-building events to make people feel better. But, it's rarely a psychological problem. In fact, what would be a psychological problem is if people remained engaged in the labyrinth organization. To disengage is a rational strategy in the complicated organization. The real issue is the way organizations are structured around a legacy of the hard approach to management.

Think about health care. Health care is a complex business with a complicated structure. What drives complicatedness in health care? Technology innovation is growing at a fast pace. The rise of consumerism. Workforce needs. Employees used to not matter years ago, but they matter today.

To understand complicatedness, let's look at an example outside of health care. The engineering department of an automobile manufacturer has a five-dimensional matrix. If you open any cell of the matrix, you will find another 20-D matrix. So it's a 25-D matrix; they have created a unit in charge of coordinating the engineers on cost, another unit coordinating the engineers on the weight of the cars and other units focused on aerodynamics, noise, safety and fuel consumption. It's impossible to execute in this kind of complicated organization. When an organization wants to get something done, they create a dedicated structure. By creating that structure, it knows who's supposed to be accountable. But this elusive accountability gets in the way of execution.

Let me explain. Three years ago, there was a new requirement that emerged within automobile manufacturing, beyond cost, safety and gas consumption and so on. It was the length of the warranty period. Kia, the South Korean manufacturer, offers a seven-year warranty. As a result, cars must be easy to repair. If a front light does not work, you shouldn't have to remove the engine to access the lights. The car would have to stay a week in the repair shop, instead of two hours, and the warranty budget would explode. So, what was the solution using the hard approach? If repairability is the new requirement, the solution is to create a new function: Mr. Repairability. And Mr. Repairability creates a new matrix and structure for the repairability process with a repairability scorecard, repairability metrics and eventually repairability incentives on top of 25 other key performance indicators. Incentives are important, right? What's the purpose of the measures if you do not have incentives?

So what does Mr. Repairability do? What percentage of the engineer's salary is based on meeting key performance indicators? Twenty percent at most, divided by 26 KPIs. Based on that calculation, re-
pairability makes a difference of 0.8 percent. What difference did it make in their actions and their choices to simplify the repairability process? Zero. And the result is that the cars are still difficult to repair and they were not able to extend the warranty period. This is an example of trying to deal with complexity with complicatedness.

Let’s look at a hospital within the National Health Services in Great Britain. It’s a matrix organization; it’s not simple at all. It’s quite complicated. What is the new requirement for hospitals? The new requirement is that you must get out of the hospital in better shape than when you came in. One risk in the hospital is infection, so avoiding infection is a new requirement. To oversee the new requirement, we have Mr. Infection. He is the director in charge of infection who will produce an annual report on the state of health care-associated infections in the organization. Mr. Infection creates a scorecard and processes and develops key performance indicators, as well as incentives. This happens in all organizations, especially in hospitals, because they are exposed to great business complexity. To address complexity, Mr. Infection develops a complicated structure. Basically, when you have a requirement, the organization creates a function in charge of the requirement and then every requirement must relate with each other. Our research has shown that business complexity has increased sixfold over the last 60 years and organizational complicatedness has increased 35-fold over the same period. This is the threshold of maximum stupidity. No wonder productivity is so disappointing. No wonder people are so disengaged and frustrated at work.

**Addressing Complexity**

So, what is the answer? How can organizations deal with complexity? The way to address complexity is through smart simplicity. It’s simplifying, but not in a naive way. It’s not about the structure of the organization, or the skeleton. It’s about the nervous system of the organization, working together and not in silos, being engaged. Dealing with complexity requires intelligence, cooperation and engagement. For leadership, simplification means making sure that management adds value. And do you know how management adds value? We need managers to make people do what they would not do spontaneously on their own. If people are doing what we spontaneously want them to do on their own, then we would not need managers. So ask yourself when you are creating a new management position, what is it that we want to make people do that they are not already doing? And then, as leaders, we need to make sure the manager has the skills, power, autonomy and decision-making ability for the role.

We can’t underplay the importance of cooperation. Whenever people cooperate, they need fewer resources. When we don’t cooperate, we need more time, more equipment, more systems and more teams. For example, when the supply chain and manufacturers don’t cooperate, we need more stock, more inventory and more working capital. Who will pay for that? Customers? Shareholders? No. They will refuse. So who is left? The employee who will have to overcompensate with his or her individual efforts for the lack of cooperation, creating stress and burnout, and causing mistakes and accidents. No wonder workers are disengaged.
The hard approach is unable to foster cooperation. It can only create new boxes, new bones in the skeleton. The soft approach is also ineffective. The soft approach believes that to make people cooperate, they have to like each other. The more people like each other, the more they will cooperate. That is totally wrong, and is even counterproductive. The more we like each other, the more we avoid real cooperation that would strain our relationship by imposing tough trade-offs. These approaches are obsolete.

**Six Simple Rules of Smart Simplicity**

To deal with complexity, to enhance the nervous system — we have created the smart simplicity approach that is based on six simple rules:

1. **Understand what people do.** What is their real work? It's important to gain an understanding beyond the job description, beyond the surface, to understand the real content.

2. **Reinforce integrators.** Integrators are managers whom you reinforce so they have power and incentives to help others cooperate. How can you reinforce your managers as integrators? By removing layers. When you have too many layers, people are too far from the action and, therefore, they need KPIs, matrices and other poor proxies to understand what's going on within the organization. Another way to reinforce the integrator is to remove rules — the fewer the rules, the greater the discretionary power of the managers.

3. **Increase the quantity of power.** This will help to empower everyone to use their judgment, their intelligence and give them the power to take risks.

4. **Extend the shadow of the future.** Create feedback loops that expose people to the consequences of their actions.

5. **Increase reciprocity.** Remove the buffers to make employees self-sufficient. This will enhance cooperation by removing layers that don't add value.

6. **Reward those who cooperate.** The CEO of the LEGO Group, Jørgen Vig Knudstorp, has a great way of doing this. He says, 'Blame is not for failure. It is for failing to help or ask for help.' This changes everything. It becomes in everyone's best interest to become transparent with their real weaknesses and their real forecasts, because they know they will not be blamed if they fail, but rather if they fail to help or ask for help.

Following these simple steps has significant implications on organizational design. The organization stops drawing boxes and dotted lines. Instead, the organization looks at the interplay. It also has significant implications on financial policy and human resource management.

When they follow these steps, organizations will be able to manage the new complexity in business without getting complicated. Organizations will create value and lower costs. It's simultaneously improving performance and satisfaction with work, because the organization has removed the common root cause that hinders both — complicatedness.

This is your battle as leaders. The battle is not against your competitors. It is within your organizations, and only you can do it.

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