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(The business of)
experience innovation

Innovation is changing. By anchoring to human needs as the starting point for innovation, health outcomes and value creation become everyone's responsibility, and problems are being solved in fundamentally new ways.

What's going on

The health and life sciences industries are traditionally at the forefront of advancements and novel ways of thinking—from developing vaccines to combat the spread of smallpox in the late 1700s to the rapid development of COVID-19 vaccines today.[1] But the structure of the legacy healthcare ecosystem makes innovating the healthcare experience a struggle.

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Historically, life sciences organizations operated apart from the patient. A product would go to the distributor, be prescribed by a physician and be dispensed by a pharmacy. Leading medications often sold themselves, so there was no urgency to invest in the patient experience. Meanwhile, on the healthcare side, the financing structure for episodic care meant that some organizations didn't have to worry about the patient experience either.

In short, there was no need to deliver satisfactory experiences or build loyalty. Now, the rise of liquid expectations and the consumerization of health are forcing organizations to compete in ways they weren't originally designed for—nor ready to operate in. They are under growing pressure to deliver experiences comparable in quality and sophistication with industries—many of which are more experienced in innovation and are suffering massive expectation gaps and low patient satisfaction.[2]

The arrival of COVID-19 has turned innovation into an urgent necessity: 78% of health executives believe that the stakes for experience innovation have never been higher, and getting it "right" will require new ways of innovating with ecosystem partners and third-party organizations.[3]
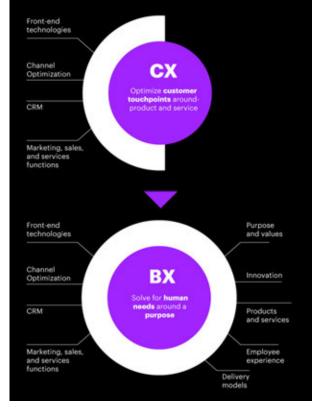
Activities that forever felt aspirational, like scalable virtual health or digital check-ins to allow for contactless appointments, have become necessary. Meanwhile, long-standing regulatory constraints have been eased, unlocking even more potential for new experiences—clinical trials powered by remote patient monitoring, for example.

These advancements have created the right environment to launch the reimagination of what innovation in healthcare looks like, and it will be powered by the business of experience (BX).

What's next

BX requires rethinking your starting point for experience innovation as anchored to human needs. It is harder to implement than traditional approaches. But when innovations converge in coherent and mutually reinforcing ways that create value in the experience, it is more transformative and harder to copy.

Customer Experience (CX) innovation focuses on patient acquisition, conversion, engagement and retention. In contrast, BX focuses on becoming indispensable to all healthcare stakeholders. It does this by being experience-led – with business model, employee experience, operating model and technology all in service of the experience.[4]

A true BX culture asks organizations to close the gap between their brand promises and the experiences they deliver by changing not just what they say, but how they behave across their organizations.

BX is not a tactic that shows up at a specific moment. Instead, it occurs at all levels of business. It's not achieved by optimizing CX touch points, such as a website or mobile app. Rather, it serves as a rallying cry for an entire organization to obsess over how to deliver value-driven experiences that people want and need.[5]

Opportunities for reimagination

1. Solving problems in new ways

While health and life sciences organizations have adopted methodologies to grow through changing times, they often neglect the innovation lens needed to form the strategies that guide them—a key cause of traditional patient and HCP experience strategies struggling to modernize.

Many organizations continue to employ a "past-forward" approach that focuses on extrapolating data rooted in the past. But to successfully reimagine EX in today's context, organizations should embrace a future-back approach: one that focuses on delivering patient and HCP value by taking an expansive view of the future to understand what could happen and then planning backward.

Future-back isn't rooted in what happened in the past; rather, it triangulates the future using signals, data and intelligent synthesis. Instead of doing the impossible by predicting the future, it accepts that we aren't fortune tellers by defining multiple potential futures that can be used to prepare our response to deliver value and ensure we're constantly being proactive.

By exposing what changes in the world to look for, actively seeking them out and recalibrating when necessary, future-back enables an innovation strategy that lives and breathes as the future unfolds.

2. Obsessing over the experience of innovation

The experience of innovating is just as important as any innovation methodology. Organizations must promote and incentivize creativity, collaboration and unconventional thinking with a focus on patient and HCP wants and needs. Having space for innovation isn't just about innovation centers and R&D hubs. Rather, it's about making organizational space to test, learn and recalibrate based on experimentation and learning.

Also important is accepting that patients and HCPs are innovating for themselves. The lines between innovation and creation and between creator and consumer have blurred, and this must be acknowledged.

In the experience industry, we have long evangelized about the virtues of co-creating with people to achieve the best possible products and services, and it's certainly proven to be a solid system.

Now, organizations should also start thinking of co-creation as an output and start designing tools and platforms to enable people to create for themselves. To start thinking of people as co-creators, organizations will need to reframe their own roles in the relationship—from sole fixer with all the answers to collaborative enabler.[6]

3. Experiment Rx

While the desired end goal for health and life sciences organizations is an improved patient outcome, the path to achieving that goal may at times involve some missteps.
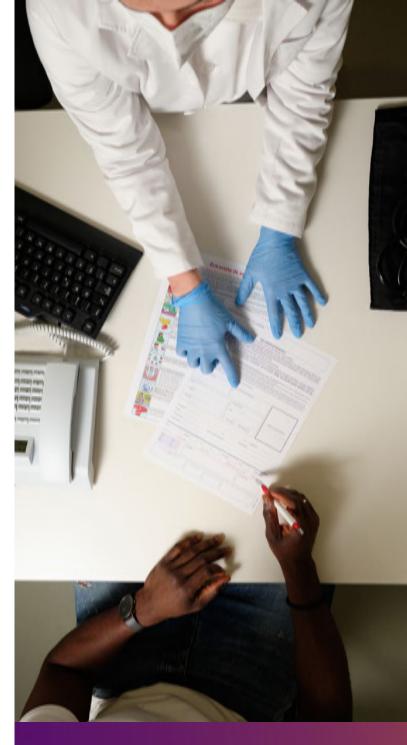
Missteps in this industry are especially tricky because of the real-life ramifications of "failed" experiments. It's also difficult in countries where healthcare is government-funded as people may view failed experiments as a waste of public funds. Yet, innovation requires experimentation.

For every innovation that works, there may be three or four that do not. That's how we explore, how we grow and how we sustainably embed innovation into the DNA of health and life sciences organizations.

Once the parameters for innovation are established within an organization, we can think about the process for experience innovation as an onion with three main layers. Each layer—feature, service, business—provides a platform for the next:

- *Feature innovation* is about incrementally improving user experiences with an existing product. Experience features are everyday activities like Netflix auto play or Apple Watch's evolving ECG functionality and sophistication.[7] Features leverage existing technological capabilities and business models to refresh current products and services.

- *Service innovation* arises when a set of features creates new services and products, like a mobile banking app allowing users to deposit checks with a photo, or ride-sharing services integrating with electronic medical record systems to provide more-seamless patient transportation.

- *Business innovation* develops if a service creates radical, disruptive change to the user experience, like when Talkspace originally launched its telehealth on-demand, online offering.[8] At this level, embedding experience innovation as an entire business can change or create a whole new ecosystem.

What healthcare leaders can do next

1. Create space to run experiments at scale

The C-suite should not look at BX as an incremental effort. Nor should it view BX as just about ideas, because you need stamina, courage, alignment and tools to see it through. Instead, organizations should focus on developing competencies and capabilities so that innovating experiences can become an everyday habit shared by the entire company.

As a first step to creating the necessary organizational space to do this, companies should appoint a BX council consisting of a multidisciplinary set of stakeholders. This will ensure proper representation from across the organization and allow everyone to feel like a contributor to innovating experiences.

2. Craft a BX manifesto

Ask the BX Council to develop a BX culture manifesto that establishes the few yet powerful principles for how employees will act to realize the goals of the ambition.

Once the manifesto is crafted, switch to action mode. Rather than spend months

diagnosing and talking about how to change culture, get to work equipping teams with practical tools to experiment with new ways of working.

Such experiments make the value of change tangible, creating enviable impact within weeks and real and valuable new norms across the organization in a matter of months.

Consider how Microsoft Chief Executive Satya Nadella describes innovation: as a set of dials to be gently tweaked rather than something that is either on or off.[9] Innovation requires a company-wide learn-by-doing mentality, where the focus is on rapid experiments and sharing those learnings broadly.

3. Build a BX platform

Start with building a bridge between your organizational intent, your BX manifesto and what the patient or HCP eventually experiences. Think of it as aligning your mental model with the end user—whether it is a patient, HCP or both—through the lens of experience.

To enable more-rapid, do-it-yourself innovation, shift your mindset from consumers and employees to co-creators. Consider your products and services as

unfinished (e.g., patient mobile app where the patient can submit what questions they have and what information would be helpful for them to see). Ask what elements of your experience could be co-created as an output and if it could increase value and outcomes.

Create a platform and let consumers and employees use de-identifiable data to enable them to play and create with your products and services and also with others. The data should fuse novel data sources with empathetic, qualitative information from a diverse patient population.

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