

BOOK REVIEW

Accelerating Health Care Transformation with Lean and Innovation: The Virginia Mason Experience

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Accelerating Health Care Transformation with Lean and Innovation: The Virginia Mason Experience

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Accelerating Health Care Transformation with Lean and Innovation: The Virginia Mason Experience, authored by Plsek, provides an in-depth look at Virginia Mason Medical Center's integration of the Toyota Production System methodology teamed with innovation to improve and energize health care delivery in the pursuit of the "perfect" patient experience. This book lightly introduces the basic components of the Toyota Production System-lean

thinking for those who are unfamiliar with concept followed by many examples throughout the book where lean thinking and innovation are "married" in order to change health care delivery. The main premise of this book is to help readers understand what is necessary to radically improve health care through use of lean thinking and innovation which can seem oxymoronic at the core. However, the book is inspiring to the point that it draws the reader to want to be close to and part of the change that Virginia Mason Medical Center has worked to achieve through its continued efforts.

Each exemplar provides a lucid and inspiring look at the effort, work, and culture of the Virginia Mason Medical Center. A summary of key points given at the end of each chapter provides an excellent starting point for leadership discussions to make further improvement in health care. This book is a must read for anyone

who works (or plans to work) in health care and its transformation including administrators, managers, clinicians, students, and teachers.

Plsek begins with a short discussion about the integration of innovation and lean thinking across all levels of the organization. This is an important point that can easily get the short shrift by the reader. Integrity means that regardless of the section or department, the organization—the “wholeness” is thinking and acting in a similar way. Based on Plsek’s writing and accompanying exemplars, the thinking surrounding innovation coupled with creativity and lean is pervasive and supported within and throughout the whole organization. The culture at Virginia Mason Medical Center has experienced an unprecedented powerful culture shift that many health care organizations will aspire to own for themselves.

The nine chapters provide different perspectives that must be considered to shift an organization from its existing culture to that of an innovative, lean, integrated wholeness. The first chapter introduces the main premise of the book that lean principles and innovation can coalesce together and highlights a model of thinking that shows how people have purposeful ways of thinking that can hinder and derail innovation and lean efforts. In effect, those wanting to spearhead integral change throughout an organization will need to help all employees understand how mental valleys, rules of thinking, and assumptions must be overcome. In addition, the first chapter introduces and explains the Seven Levels of Change as adapted from Rolf Smith, *The Seven Levels of Change: Different Thinking for Different Results*, 3rd edition. Next, brief highlights of the remaining chapters are introduced.

Chapters 2-9 provide a “process view” toward integration of innovation, leadership knowledge, and organizational measures to establish culture and infrastructure that promote innovation among frontline workers, patients and their families. Details follow.

Chapter 2 opens with the realization that Virginia Mason Medical Center reached a nadir in its business and lost money for the first

time ever. This prompted leaders to be more “deliberate” in their business practices requiring a change in strategic planning, culture, and ways of thinking. Through the strategic planning committee, a new model was proposed with simultaneous dedication to become more innovative in enduring ways. Four pillars function to solidify the most important considerations of Virginia Mason Medical Center toward the pursuit of the perfect patient experience. Whereas organizational models routinely put administration at the highest level, a new customer emerges as the focal point. As a result of deliberate thinking about the patients, innovation, and lean principles, a *Strategic Innovation Plan* was developed.

Chapter 3 showcases real examples of innovation, creativity and lean principles merging together for outstanding results. This chapter is very important for integrating innovation into practice. The reader is taken back to the mental valleys and the levels of change as discussed in chapter 1 with the call to challenge the assumptions and mental valleys, but how? This chapter provides exemplars to show how organizations can bust through traditional ways of thinking and acting to accelerate progress toward the sixth and seventh level change.

Chapter 4 dives to the learning piece, that is, how to develop innovative thinking in organizations so that everyone can contribute to innovative thinking. In order “think” outside of the customary mental valleys, Virginia Mason Medical Center focuses on developing the fourth pillar of their innovative strategic plan using theory, practice application and innovation competences.

Chapter 5 asserts that innovation, creativity and lean principles are best thought of as a continuous process that deserves evaluation. Therefore, in this chapter Virginia Mason Medical Center *evaluates* the progress towards developing a culture of innovative thinking. A model showing seven dimensions of culture that support innovation is defined, explained, and supported with relevant literature. The following quote from Plsek (2014) helps put the dimensions in context:

If you want innovative ideas from any collection of individuals, set aside the resource of time, nurture productive relationships among a diverse group of thinkers, recognize them in ways that they find intrinsically motivating, use good tools to stimulate group activity, agree on an ambitious target, bring in new information, and be willing to take risks (p. 91).

Chapters 6 provides a glimpse of several prominent organizations and their infrastructures designed to facilitate innovation and then gives the reader two fundamental questions to be answered that will help direct the type of infrastructure needed to support innovation. Virginia Mason describes the minimalist approach used to enhance the dimensions of culture (Chapter 5) and separates their infrastructure from others. This is an excellent chapter for those wanting to create an infrastructure for innovation where all employees have the mindset that they are contributors to the process.

Chapter 7 moves from infrastructure to employee and highlights the specific employee cases where innovation, on a daily basis, improves the work environment. The concepts that Virginia Mason uses to describe certain structured ways to apply innovation and lean thinking are engaging. For example, the reader will come to understand what the *Everyday Lean Idea* (ELI) structure looks like followed by exemplars. The terms “Moonshining” and “Moonshine Playbook” quite naturally bring a certain lighthearted appeal to creative thinking. These terms lighten the thought process and open the door for some fun. There is one particular case that highlights the mental valleys juxtaposed with alternatives or “Escapes” that inspire people to be more creative in their thinking. Of particular importance in this chapter is the attention to informatics and how they are using a SmARTE™ program to save time, effort, in communicating test and other information to patients.

Chapter 8 brings home the very importance of the people at the top of the strategic plan—that of the patient/family and how they must be able to play a role in the innovation process

as supported by the works of von Hippel, Prehlad and Ramaswamy. One of the cases used in this chapter “The Shame of Waiting” is to eliminate the “waste” that occurs when the patient (and family) have to wait for services in a waiting room. Most of us have had this type of unfortunate experience—waiting for up to an hour or even longer sometimes. Virginia Mason has changed the entry point process for care in that their new primary care clinic opened *without* a waiting room (change level six/seven). Experience-based design approach is introduced, defined, and applied in the Virginia Mason setting.

Chapter 9 looks forward to the future and how Virginia Mason will continue to grow and incorporate the lean principles with innovation using the approaches outlined in the book. One of the most insightful points in the chapter demonstrates that Virginia Mason is a leader and committed to providing the best services by the following:

..leaders also believe that operations and the patient experience should drive technology choices, not the other way around (p. 175).

While the statement may seem to be unadorned, it does suggest that Virginia Mason understands and fundamentally knows the secret that many organizations and technology providers fail to grasp.

This book is strongly recommended for those who are wanting to deliver “World-Class” health care not through technology alone, but through a thunderous and monumental shift in culture where lean and innovation are married and interwoven throughout their organization. Two suggestions are given help drive the ideas forward for people who want to have further knowledge. First, some readers will want to delve into the assessment piece (Chapter 5), add more to their knowledge and have the opportunity to apply the measurements to a problem. This desire can be facilitated through an inclusion of a workable case in an appendix. Second, the author will do a tremendous service to those seeking to

replicate their strategy by developing online materials that coalesce with the readings that can be adapted by organization to fit unique needs. This book is inspiring for those seeking to (a) improve the health care experience, (b) improve satisfaction among patients and employees and (c) draw the best employees and patients to their organization. The principles introduced, defined, and discussed can be applied to any type of organization large or small. Plsek's writing and the work that Virginia Mason is doing and plans to do creates an environment where the best and the brightest will seek to work and where patients will make the choice to drive further- in order to receive the best care.

SUMMARY

In brief, the book is engaging to read and may superficially seem to be a quick read. However, this book is packed with useful information, resources, and ideas that need time for contemplation and reflection. The forward, written by Donald Berwick, MD, sets the tone for the entire book. This book will draw readers in, stir their emotions, and move thinking forward to solve organizational problems in enduring ways. The road is not simple or easy and in fact, never is for changing culture. It would not be surprising to find readers of this book looking at the career opportunities that exist at Virginia Mason Medical Center.

Falan is Associate Professor of Nursing at Western Michigan University, Co-Director of the Center for Health Information Technology Advancement, and the Health Informatics and Information Management curriculum. Prior to joining WMU, Dr. Falan received her PhD in Nursing from University of Michigan (Ann Arbor, Michigan) in 2007, MSN degree from University of Michigan in 2004, and BSN degree from Western Michigan University in 2000. Dr. Falan has worked in acute care and home care nursing with a focus on implementation of clinical information systems. Dr. Falan is a contributing member of the Technology Informatics Guiding Educational Reform (TIGER) initiative and member of NANDA-I Informatics Committee. Her work on the Usability and Clinical Applications Design Collaborative Team identified key recommendations for Health Information Technology vendors to develop better clinical applications for health care practitioners. Dr. Falan has presented her research work in both national and international conferences. Her most recent research focuses on similarity, concept analysis, nursing terminologies standardization, informatics competencies, and health care management. Dr. Falan's research has appeared in the Journal of Nursing Measurement, Communications of the ICISA: an International Journal, International Journal of Nursing Terminologies and Classifications, the International Journal of Nursing Knowledge, the International Journal of Electronic Healthcare, and the International Journal of Healthcare Information Systems and Informatics.