

Health and care as if people mattered

“Never depend upon institutions or government to solve any problem. All social movements are founded by, guided by, motivated and seen through by the passion of individuals.”

Margaret Mead, US cultural anthropologist

Our care and health care systems are under intense strain due to the Covid pandemic, seasonal viruses, changing demographics and rapidly rising citizen demand for medical interventions and immediate advice. Entrepreneurial verve, innovation and quality consumer management could aid this situation.

“Our need will be the real creator” was the phrase used by Plato in *The Republic* that has evolved over the millennia into ‘necessity is the mother of invention’. Long before even Plato, the need to create and innovate was paramount in most societies as we collectivised, cared and civilised.

Innovators and entrepreneurs have always been the people who resolved shortfalls, met demand and adapted to consumer demand and needs. They often maintain, sustain and advance care and treatment. A good example is the heart stent, which came about through somebody being inventive and playing around with a bit of pipe to make the key human organ work better.

Understanding the complexities of human nature and interaction is crucial to success. Margaret Mead, the great cultural anthropologist, is often cited as holding up a 15,000-year-old healed broken femur in a lecture to highlight the importance of community in healing. It took the care and support of others to allow somebody to heal and mend rather than allowing them to be discarded, neglected and die.

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Helping people and animals, and renewing and sustaining the environment through difficulty is where civilisation starts – and it seems to be the emerging maxim for a successful society.

Innovation, principled leadership and responsiveness take courage – they usually require determination and vision too. The Economist reports that Chinese officials fearful of being accused of corruption or ideological deviance by their rivals normally just sit on their hands. Failure is dangerous for a bureaucrat who takes the initiative and so is success.

Inertia rules in many large organisations and innovation and responsiveness should be fostered and developed. Challenging complacency, deficiencies in accountability, increasing citizen engagement and openness and not conforming to systems and procedures that are failing is innovative and should be fostered in any living and focused organisation. It is also good governance and progressive and interactive management.

It is always good to reflect and have a human, principled and systemic approach to solving problems – both complex and simple. A passionate focus on getting things done and delivered to the customers/user's satisfaction

is paramount. It is very easy to hide in the crowd and be complacent. It takes determination and vision to move things forward. One also needs to be aware of ensuring all buildings and sites are user-friendly, well signposted and digestible by consumers, whether they be young, old, less abled, patients, students or visitors. Some of the monolithic glass box building complexes feel alien, non-welcoming and inhuman. We need to design for people and their needs.

As always, we can learn from the past. The Black Death in England from 1348-50 is estimated to have killed 30-40% of the population and it was eventually brought under control through the innovation of the effective use of quarantines. It stimulated innovation and technological change as a result of a shortage of labour. In the flax and woollen industries, it led to early medieval mechanisation and technological innovation. Wages rose and skills were in short supply. Sounds familiar, even today.

Understanding consumer need and being able to adapt to meet that demand is critical to the success of any society. Being able to plan and train people to meet essential needs and demands is vital for the success of an organisation or country. Being able to think differently and offer different products and services to meet demand/needs is crucial to success.

Innovate, innovate, innovate.