PHARMACY NEEDS A PERSONAL AND COLLECTIVE LEadership StYle THAT CEnTRES ON traNSFORMaTIoN INSTEAD OF COnTRoL.

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ommunity pharmacists around the world are being encouraged to shift the focus of their business models from product to more service-focused models. The reasoning is to shift away from a market that mostly pushes competition based on product at a price; those who can lower their operating costs, and the cost-of-goods purchased (through volume), are better able to sustain lower prices and compete more effectively against their more expensive competitors.

Community pharmacy in Australia now has highly developed versions of the low-cost, low-price business model. And so we should, if we acknowledge we are in the real world. But these models are making business very challenging for the majority of pharmacies who are either incapable of or unwilling to compete in this space. Finding a new point of relevance is urgently required.

Research from around the world demonstrates that community pharmacists have been slow to embrace professional pharmacy services. Perhaps this transition is only part of the overall management concern for community pharmacy. For instance, there is a view that many owners and operators of community pharmacies lack managerial and leadership expertise necessary to manage emerging threats including their own weaknesses, while successfully growing relevant opportunities and strengths. Emerging

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Developing management capability and competence, to ensure competitive success and the right management actions are taken both rapidly and flexibly, has become an increasingly important need globally. This demand also creates the challenge of identifying the essential human knowledge, skills and attitudes (KSAs) that are pertinent to the particular work context. However, even when the necessary KSAs are known and promoted in an engaging environment, managers often do not absorb or learn them. In particular, the researcher Argyris (1991) suggests that well-educated professionals often do not know how to learn, giving two reasons.

First, Argyris claims that learning is defined too narrowly as problem-solving, which is centred on correcting errors or deficiencies in the external environment. When a manager fails in attempts to solve a problem, the result is often an internal attitudinal shift which is defensive, largely to screen out criticism and apportion blame elsewhere.

Defensive attitudes create further learning blocks. Argyris (1977) explains this phenomenon as single-loop learning which seeks to identify and solve evident problems without seeking insight into long-term or systematic problems which may be the cause.

Second, Argyris (1991) asserts that learning is not actuated only by how people feel, but more by how people think and apply reasoning. Argyris (1977) contrasts single-loop learning with his concept of double-loop learning—a method which uses feedback from past actions and emerging circumstances to frame more penetrating questions. Using a different approach in thinking, the questions examine both the nature of future actions as well as the underlying assumptions upon which future decisions are to be made. In this way, insight into the root-cause of issues is enhanced.

It is evident that single-loop learning can block the transformative capability that double-loop learning facilitates, especially when highly skilled people are involved. Argyris refers to this as ‘skilled incompetence’. Argyris’s work highlights that individual and group reasoning behaviours, resulting in defensive routines, can thwart attempts by individuals, groups and organisations to learn necessary and transformative lessons. This idea is central to developing proper understanding of how management capability and competence is both observed and developed.

Pharmacy needs a personal and collective leadership style that centres on transformation instead of control. This is a challenge that most likely needs to start at the top with an invitation to see and accept the world ‘as it is’ and then support reflection about the many possible ways for contemporary community pharmacy to meet the environment as it arises. However, as stated by the English economist John Maynard Keynes: ‘The real difficulty lies not in developing new ideas, but escaping from old ones’.

Trust in competence

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