

Market Access Innovation Requires a New Leadership Approach

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Market access leaders shoulder responsibility for a critical part of the pharmaceutical industry's mission: to get valuable treatments into the hands of consumers who need them. Rapidly changing dynamics in and outside pharmaceutical organizations pose unfamiliar obstacles to market access success.

Pharmaceutical organizations need to think more broadly, measuring leaders not only against financial benchmarks but people factors as well.

Intensifying criticism over drug pricing and affordability are complicating pharmaceutical manufacturers' relationships with payers, putting pressure on leaders to design business models that bring products to market faster and more cost effectively. As [precision medicine capabilities](#) evolve

and organizations focus on developing treatments for dramatically smaller populations — amid an increasingly complex regulatory environment — market access teams must develop different ways to [communicate](#) value to payers, providers and consumers.

Addressing market challenges requires not only creative solutions but a new approach to pharmaceutical leadership. Market access teams that embrace an agile, adaptive leadership mentality will be able to clearly articulate a strategic vision and promote a change-ready culture.

Redefining the Attributes of Successful Leaders

Pharmaceutical organizations often apply a legacy mindset to attracting and developing leaders — seeking candidates with similar profiles to historically high performers. This mentality, however, assumes that the future of the industry and market access will follow a similar route to the past.

Rather than evaluating market access leaders based almost entirely on their success in previous roles, pharmaceutical organizations need to consider a candidate's ability to excel in an uncertain future environment.

Transforming the market access function depends on having leaders who can move beyond traditional linear management approaches and adapt to shifting internal and external expectations. These leaders demonstrate distinct change-ready competencies, including:

- A willingness to take calculated risks. Even in a highly regulated sector, pharmaceutical leaders must look at risk/reward equations in a new light to realize the full returns of innovative partnerships and payment models.
- An ability to accept ambiguity. In an era of ongoing disruption, some leaders reflexively strive to create a superficial sense of certainty to put their teams at ease. Effective market access leaders will frame complexity as an opportunity to detect emerging trends and encourage their people to do the same.
- An inclination to seek out other voices. To unite a team or organization around a different strategy or operating model, leaders should listen to perspectives that conflict with their own. Capturing points of view from a diverse set of peers, direct reports and experts helps leaders avoid complacency and decision making that affirms the status quo while promoting critical engagement among their people.
- A belief that change is continuous. The pressures that pharmaceutical organizations face today are not static; regulations, technology and funding models will fluctuate over time. Successful leaders understand that transformation is an ongoing exercise and embed a changeready philosophy throughout their teams.

Measuring Market Access Leader Success

Across industries, return on investment and shareholder value are core metrics for gauging leader effectiveness. While market access leaders will continue to be evaluated by their impact to the bottom line, traditional metrics offer a limited view of success.

Pharmaceutical organizations need to think more broadly, measuring leaders not only against financial benchmarks but people factors as well. Patient advocacy and patient impact are two areas in which market access leaders could be responsible for showing tangible results. While almost all employees across the pharmaceutical and medtech sectors agree that a [focus on patient needs improves business outcomes](#), less than half say their teams measure patient-focused efforts.

Going forward, leaders could be evaluated, at least partly, based on their ability to forge partnerships with patient advocacy groups — a collaboration that can inform more comprehensive and innovative market access planning. Particularly as manufacturers develop treatments for rare disease populations, patient advocacy groups can be critical to helping organizations articulate the value of emerging products to payers, providers and consumers.

Leadership Transformation Starts in the C-Suite

Creating a culture of change-ready leadership should not be the responsibility of human resources departments alone. Pharmaceutical executives across the C-suite must take responsibility for encouraging a new leadership approach.

Leadership development should be elevated as a priority on the executive team's performance scorecard to ensure those at the top are held accountable for encouraging bold, innovative thinking.

Pharmaceutical organizations will continue to confront uncertainty in the years to come. Pursuing unconventional business models, partnerships and technology investments may solve for near-term challenges, but redefining leadership behaviors is step one toward building a sustainable competitive advantage.

Key Takeaways

Positioning market access teams to thrive in a volatile environment starts with transforming pharmaceutical leadership. To do so, organizations must:

Think differently.

Acknowledge that market access success in the future will require different capabilities and metrics than what worked in the past.

Plan differently.

Make leadership transformation a shared objective for C-suite executives and encourage advisers and board members to hold them accountable.

Act differently.

Reward behaviors and attitudes that demonstrate transformative leadership, from calculated risk-taking to internal and external collaboration.



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