

Comment

## Book review: managing the myths of health care by Henry Mintzberg

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### Abstract

Internationally acclaimed management guru Professor Henry Mintzberg's latest book gives valuable insights into the world of healthcare management. A must read for all those in healthcare!

## 1 Introduction

World-renowned guru Henry Mintzberg is a leading authority on management and has written extensively on this subject. He currently holds the post of Cleghorn Professor of Management Studies at McGill University. Mintzberg's writings have garnered him multiple awards in his career including the McGill Lifetime Achievement Award.

In his latest book "Managing the Myths of Health Care", Mintzberg argues that healthcare is being poorly managed, with serious consequences to patients. He dissects the faults of current healthcare management with surgical precision, and spares no punches on pointing out the many managerial issues that burden our healthcare systems.

"Health care is not failing but succeeding, expensively, and we don't want to pay for it."

Mintzberg highlights that many healthcare organisations face an epidemic of "remote-control management". A style that is detached from the operations, yet determined to control them. This method of management typically reorganizes relentlessly, measures like mad, promotes a heroic form of leadership and favours competition where the need is for cooperation.

The author calls for a reorganisation and a new re-think about systems and strategies, sectors and scale, measurement and management, leadership and organization, competition and collaboration, in order for healthcare to improve.

## 2 Synopsis

Mintzberg divides his book into 3 parts. The first addresses the 9 myths of healthcare.

Myth 1: We believe that we have a system of health care when we actually have a set of disconnected parts of disease cures.

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Myth 2: The system of healthcare is failing. Mintzberg argues that the treatment of disease is on the contrary, succeeding, often spectacularly. The problem is it does so expensively.

Myth 3: Healthcare institutions can be fixed with more heroic leadership. The author's view is that healthcare does not need superior leaders, domineering managers, or haughty professionals. Rather these organisations need communities with managers leading from the ground up, in a collective effort.

Myth 4: The health-care system can be fixed with more administrative engineering. Mintzberg's view is that healthcare management and change must come from the ground up, not top down, let alone from so-called experts who have never practised health care.

Myth 5: The health-care system can be fixed with more categorizing and commodifying to facilitate more calculating. Although Mintzberg comes from a business world, he rejects the notion that health care organizations can be fixed by such a system of categorizing and calculating.

Myth 6: The health-care system can be fixed with increased competition. In the United States, he says, where that belief is the strongest, such competition has done more harm than good in health care. We need more co-operation, not competition, especially among the professionals themselves.

Myth 7: Health-care organizations can be fixed by managing them more like businesses. Mintzberg again rejects this notion, simply because healthcare is more than just a business with metrics; it is a calling that requires experience in the human touch.

Myths 8 and 9: Over all, health care is rightly left to the private sector, for the sake of efficiency and choice. At the same time, health care is rightly controlled by the public sector, for the sake of equality and economy. In fact, Mintzberg argues that both private and public sectors have a role to play, as does, crucially, what he calls the plural sector, often known as the third sector or not-for-profits.

Part two of his book deals with the organisation of the healthcare system. And in Part three, Mintzberg helps us think about systems and strategies, sectors and scales, measurement and management, leadership and organization, competition and collaboration.

The Mayo clinic is cited by Mintzberg as having a strong system that espouses good ideas. Where everyone is valued, and works together as a community from the ground up. The hospital in turn runs as a plural sector, focused on patient-centered benefits and outcomes.

### 3 Applicability

This book does a great job at capturing the essence of healthcare systems in the developed world. Most notably in the United States and Canada; but also to some extent, Europe. In these systems, the book does a good job at pointing out errors in the current management system and does offer well-thought-out alternative courses of action. This book would best be appreciated in these countries where healthcare systems are at the extremes – be it either all private or all public. And with each type, comes with it the difficulties.

Readers who are already in healthcare management roles, or contemplating a career in healthcare management would find this book to be very enlightening. This book poignantly zeroes in on the many issues that plague healthcare management, and also provides a plethora of potential suggestions. Mintzberg does not profess to encourage the reader to one method of management, but rather encourages the reader to broaden his or her mind to the many options out there. It is an important must-read for all incumbent or aspiring healthcare managers!

**Author contributions** Author Brian WCA Tian prepared the manuscript. All authors edited. All authors reviewed and approved the manuscript.

### Declarations

**Competing interests** The authors declare no competing interests.

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