Building a better working world

"Full **customer ecosystems** will probably **remain** the area more dominated by **traditional pharmaceutical companies**, potentially in partnership with major technology firms."

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What are you and your team currently doing to develop client facing systems and portals?

At the moment, my team is working on a chat bot program, which will use artificial intelligence (AI) in order to be more responsive in our communication with patients and to build out a full ecosystem in support of patients.

How are you engaging with technology partners, both current and potential?

As a firm, Novartis maintains long-standing partnerships with some of the large technology players, for example with Microsoft, Salesforce and IBM Watson. Within these relationships, I often look to understand where they are in their own developmental journey, and work to find the right fit for our collaboration with them within the larger digital ecosystem I am working on. As a global company, these large technology firms play an important role, as they can meet the scale an organization such as Novartis requires.

From the perspective of how I deal with smaller partners, start-ups if you like, these relationships tend to be more based around individual, and in some cases, localized, solutions. In my role within Immunology, Hepatology & Dermatology, I have started looking at some potential smaller partners, but have yet to create any formal partnerships.

When evaluating these new platforms and systems, what metrics do you use to determine their success or impact?

While, as a firm, Novartis looks at market growth and market share across all of our franchises and brands, I do not make direct links between these systems and those business metrics. I can't, and in most cases shouldn't, as it isn't in the nature of these platforms to directly impact those metrics.

My aim is to try to improve how to segment patient communities because this enables my team and I to optimize how we communicate and to improve patient engagement. I am also looking at what will allow us to use health data in new ways. I of course want us to be fully compliant with national and international regulations but am also open to exploring new ways of working with health data, for the benefit of the patients themselves and to enable real-world evidence, which can be used to help other patients and can support pharmaceutical research.

In the future, I think this can also impact public sector payers, as it may be able to demonstrate that the health benefits we can provide as a firm go beyond our drugs themselves and, may provide an indirect health benefit to other patients, lowering overall health costs.

In creating patient-facing digital ecosystems, in your opinion, what are the disadvantages and advantages for nontraditional pharmaceutical firms?

Their advantage is that they can change quickly and can launch products within a much shorter time. Given that they tend to be smaller institutions, they also have faster decision-making processes, are more closely connected to technological innovation and are able to stay closer to customer feedback and react faster. This allows them to continually update themselves and their platforms, keeping them nimble and agile. In the area of regulatory compliance needs however, the new companies have a steep learning curve, though some are learning to do it quite well.

In which market areas do you think disruptors might have an advantage against traditional health care companies?

Disruptors may have the advantage in the creation of individual application-based solutions that, while owned and operated by these smaller firms, can connect to larger ecosystems as well.

Full customer ecosystems will probably remain the area more dominated by traditional pharmaceutical companies, potentially in partnership with major technology firms. However, these might develop to become plug-and-play systems, whereby large parts are owned by pharmaceutical companies but are open and accessible to the app-based solutions run by smaller players, making them a key structural trait of these health ecosystems.

When trying to acquire the skills necessary to develop and operate these new systems, do you think Novartis is looking to follow an organic or acquisition-based model for growth?

There will be areas where the firm wants to own products and platforms as Novartis, and these will require the buildup of in-house capabilities. While this is speculation, our CEO has increasingly focused on areas of data science, and this could be one of those areas that Novartis seeks to increasingly develop internally and build up competence.

Then there will be certain areas where the firm might not be able or want to own the whole thing ourselves and, in these instances, I think we will look to strategic partnerships. Lastly, there will be other areas where the company doesn't want to be involved at all and just wants to be able to connect to those systems, and in this realm, I envision that third-party providers will create solutions outside of the system.

Regardless of how the firm chooses to partner and develop within these areas, our internal IT infrastructure and digital capabilities are evolving quite rapidly. While there are certain levels of innovation and creativity that aren't suited to being housed within the firm, I believe that the company is working to make sure that we have the right capabilities in-house to make the best assessments and decisions on how to view a platform's suitability or a partner's strategic fit with our priorities.

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