

INSIGHTS

Connecting the Dots: Innovation in Healthcare

Disruption is a litmus test. One industry particularly ripe for disruption, and the opportunities disruption creates, is healthcare. From the rising cost of care and consumerism, to lower reimbursements, to the rise of new technologies, to the volatility of regulatory reforms, healthcare is in need of top-down and bottom-up innovation.

With all of this opportunity to innovate, however, how do healthcare leaders connect the dots between leadership, people, processes, technology, and culture in order to seize the opportunities disruption creates? How can leaders realize the value of an innovation initiative, from ideation through to executing for results?

Recently, I spoke on a panel tackling innovation in healthcare at the [2018 Health: Further](#) conference. The panel dedicated the conversation to connecting the dots in order to drive innovation across healthcare organizations. Each of the panelists approached innovation from different organizational contexts, from rapidly growing startups to global healthcare organizations. In the conversation, we uncovered a series of innovation “Do’s” and “Don’ts”.

SCOPE OF INNOVATION

DO	DON'T
Consider your organization’s culture, maturity, and growth trajectory. Determine whether the innovation needs to be operational, strategic, or disruptive. Ask whether the innovation initiative is evolutionary (incremental, iterative) or revolutionary (expansive, paradigm shifting). Consider the context of the innovation initiative. What are the people, process, technology, and cultural requirements in order to achieve success in the short and long-term?	Act as though one innovation methodology or scope of effort will work for your organization out of the box. One size does not fit all. In innovation, we do not often see “best practices” across all organizations and contexts, only “leading practices”.

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ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE READINESS

DO	DON'T
Consider the impact of proposed innovation on your organization's culture. Change is hard, but if your organization and team understand the criticality and opportunity pertaining to the change, they will be far more prepared to sign up and get to work making change happen. Work to communicate what the innovation entails for the organization and each individual (uncover what's in it for them and share). In addition, alignment has a short half-life. Prepare to constantly align and realign on the value of change.	Ignore the power of communication. Instead, communicate, communicate, communicate. Do so in ways that fit your organization's culture and current level of maturity. Consider the individual as well. Some change efforts require face-to-face communication and iterative conversation in order to ensure the change effort sticks.

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

DO	DON'T
Inject an innovation mindset. Whether it is evolutionary or revolutionary, your organization must be prepared to innovate as a core capability. Set performance goals that include innovation. Work with key teams to integrate out-of-the-box ideation. It will be important for individuals to be both accountable and incented to drive innovation efforts forward.	Ignore the added time, energy, and talent required for innovation initiatives to gain momentum. There will be additional responsibilities and work effort required within your organization. Don't let your organization succumb to group think and stifle the impact and effect of the selected innovation efforts.

THE ROLE OF CONFLICT

DO	DON'T
Encourage conflict and courteous disagreement, within the boundaries defined by your organization's culture and team dynamics. Transparency and openness to new ideas (even if they seem counterintuitive) are critical for successful innovation. Playing the devil's advocate, on both sides of an issue, is critical for ideation, synthesis, and successful execution.	Ignore conflict, foster environments where group think reigns supreme, or allow conflict to create cultural toxicity. Personal attacks, disguised as "meaningful dissent", are still personal attacks. Foster a culture that allows ideation in an environment of safety.

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THE ROLE OF DIVERSITY

DO	DON'T
Foster innovation via multiple represented viewpoints and contexts. Diversity is key to any innovation effort in order to encourage the most dynamic conversations and ultimate success. Create diverse, cross-functional ideation efforts. Build a dynamic environment to generate the best ideas rapidly, and align the team going forward to ensure successful execution.	Attempt to generate innovation by creating or rewriting a vision based on only one or at most a handful of perspectives. This is a recipe for ineffective decision making and lack of commitment. Instead, leaders should seek to drive alignment throughout the course of an innovation effort, confirming commitment every step of the way.

INNOVATION LEADERSHIP

DO	DON'T
Know your own leadership and communication style. Understand your strengths and weaknesses to determine the best means by which to drive an innovation initiative. Lead by example throughout the course of the innovation process, from ideation through to execution. Make time to connect and see the innovation effort (and results) in real time.	Don't go forward alone. Find mentors and peers to coach you through the innovation effort. Innovation is hard, and there is no silver bullet. Trust your team and be aware of how they strengthen you.

We are all learning how to face the future and the disruption it entails. It is through dialog that we learn how to accelerate in the face of change and innovate. Together leaders can drive innovation by connecting the dots within their teams and organizations and redefine how value is created and maintained across the healthcare continuum.



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