



Editorial

The value of establishing a culture of innovation in your healthcare organization

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Innovation can be seen in all industries. In healthcare organizations it is both an action and a reaction to care and chaos. It is important that all members of a healthcare organization (HCO) begin the process of creating a culture of innovation.

Innovation has been defined in several ways. In a survey of 26 innovation leaders conducted by Nick Skillicorn, themes related to new ideas, creativity vs innovation (thinking vs implementing), new value, products and processes, and ways to improve any given industry or practice (What is innovation? 26 experts share their innovation definition, 2023).

Caregivers, whether nurses, occupational, physical and respiratory therapists, pharmacy, social and emergency management workers, to name a few, all try to make the care and setting better for their patients and their patients' families. Before reading the rest of this editorial, write down one idea you have to improve either your patient's care delivery, a process, or product of the work environment. Many of you may say you are not creative or innovative, but if you think about your work environment you can reflect on the workarounds you have implemented or supported.

The key to success for creating innovative solutions is a culture that values innovation. These creative and innovative solutions can be supported, delayed, or ignored. While the outcome for the patient is to improve care, the question remains: what is innovation and why is it important to establish a culture of innovation?

As a result of the crises of COVID 19, a speed of innovation occurred unlike no other in recent decades. This urgency was critical to save lives and stop the spread of a life-threatening pandemic. Major corporations, in a crowdsourcing way, called on competitors to come together for the greater good, such as in vaccination development, personal protection equipment production through 3-D printing, alternative work environments with advanced technologies, and quickfire turnarounds for academic research funding (Chesbrough, 2020; Liu et al., 2022). This approach demonstrated that an innovation culture could be implemented, sustained, and iterated for subsequent innovations in normal times.

Several technologies considered disruptive emerged as a way of dealing with the pandemic: Artificial Intelligence (AI),

Industry 4.0, Internet of Things (IoT), Internet of Medical Things (IoMT), Big Data (BD), Virtual Reality (VR), Drone technology and Autonomous Robots, 5G, and Blockchain (Abdel-Basset et al., 2021, pp. 2–3; Karatas et al., 2022).

There are many theories of innovation that are outside the scope of this editorial (with the exception of work by Edgar Schein, one of the early and most influential innovation theorists). In 1994, he updated his original 1970s work along with his co-author Van Maanen and reiterated his definition: "... new ideas, behavior patterns, beliefs, values, and assumptions covering any aspect of the organization's functioning. Innovation should consider both 'content innovation' – new products, services, and ideas pertaining to the mission of the organization, and 'role innovation' – new ways of doing things, new definitions of roles, and new approaches to performing in roles (Schein, 1994, p. 2)".

Prepare your innovation journey by understanding the complexity and adaptation of the organization with a focus on the characteristics, behaviors, and emerging actions over time and between members of the organization (Dooley, 1996; Holland, 2006; Rogers et al., 2005).

Ishak (2017) describes the key drivers for creating a culture of innovation through a multilevel process: ranging from identifying the philosophy to hiring the best.

Others guide us to include communication, such as through loop learning, and stakeholder support, as it relates to the ultimate goal (Palmieri and Giglio, 2014). Pisano (2019) describes the difference between: a culture of innovation that has no tolerance for incompetence but one for failure; being highly disciplined but free to try new ideas; to support the feelings of members in a safe way and be honest and direct. Further they highlight the importance of ensuring collaboration and individual accountability as well as strong leadership with opportunity to continually learn. Evaluating and elevating leaders who are creative, enthusiastic, and adopt futurist thinking can ensure the process will begin and can be maintained (Barr et al., 2021; McCausland and McCausland, 2022).

Often members of an organization are concerned about their legacy and are afraid to try new things, fearing an increased and untimely risk of failure. However, if the paradigm

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shifts to innovation as a legacy, healthcare organizations may be more inclined to promote and sustain the culture of innovation.

As described in Schein's Model, a culture of innovation is rooted in artifacts, values, and assumptions. It is the way the organization identifies itself and the individual members who make up that identity.

- Start with establishing the artifacts, assumptions, and values of the organization.
- Complete an HCO culture checklist – start with knowing your organizations mission and what they excel at and where the failures have occurred.
- Determine if the HCO follows the 5 key steps that innovative healthcare cultures do: “... (1) They know innovation resembles another word: investment; (2) Their innovation process works like a flywheel; (3) Leadership knows when to relinquish control; (4) Innovation isn't seen as a short-term fix; (5) Innovation makes work easier” (Becker's Hospital Review, 2023).
- Determine the way learning is communicated to understand your audience.
- Commit to innovation with incentives and appreciation, and create a culture of working together, not hierarchically. Change from authoritative to democratic styles.
- Create a relationship between innovation and evidence-based practice – one to try new work, the other to determine efficacy and scientific background.
- Determine the team dynamics and alignment with mission and values, but avoid an all or nothing approach to creating a culture of innovation. A team is made up of members with ideas and plans for the greater good of the HCO. Although Aristotle said “The whole is greater than the sum of its parts,” success is derived from member self-evaluation to determine cohesion and alignment with the HCO goals.
- Add the creation of a culture of organizational diversity, equity, and inclusion. If this theory is embedded in the dynamics of organizational culture theory, the action can potentiate a synergistic opportunity for success. (Todic et al., 2022). Look retrospectively and prospectively for a greater understanding and empathy for both members and administrative leaders.
- Measure and sustain the culture of innovation through self-determined metrics and outcomes, such as new patents, products, processes, or places, recruitment and retention improvement, and better and revised mission statements. Additionally, Dobni (2008, p. 539) describes metrics using “... seven factors identified as innovation propensity, organizational constituency, organizational learning, creativity and empowerment, market orientation, value orientation, and implementation context”. Other methods for measurement include performance, competence, behavior, functionality, responsibility, appreciation, and risk taking. These variables are studied as being innovative or supporting innovation (Hogan and Coote, 2014).

Please take a look at your idea and reflect on how this could fit into a culture of innovation using the principles outlined in this editorial. You are an innovator.

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