

Graham English

Are you ensuring the Catalytic component for QIPP functions effectively? Latest thinking and actions.

Innovation



Chinese Drum

Innovation is the vital catalyst to the NHS System Reform agenda with its dual emphasis on Quality and the need to address costs at a time of financial pressure (QIPP). Recent studies have concluded that Innovative practice depends on organisational and cultural imperatives, which place real value on innovation. Are we ready for the implications of this approach?

This paper considers

the role of Innovation in delivery of QIPP,

the conditions necessary to achieve Innovation (and hence QIPP), and

the practical actions that arise from this way of thinking about Innovation.



Is Innovation – the Catalytic component in QIPP - operating effectively?

Timing

We're soon to hit the tough stuff when it comes to the understanding the full impact of the new financial climate, but there's still time to influence the responses to a new financial climate as the worst is still to come, so this is a good time to reflect on what it is that makes this agenda something other than the management of 'death by a thousand cuts', or worse still the dreaded 'salami slicing'.

But what of the attempt to connect the need for cost reduction to a much more ambitious, reforming agenda? Word has it our DH leaders are working hard on appropriate macro and system changes and in due course we may well see the (bitter?) fruits of their labours (vertical/horizontal integration is a mere aperitif). That is their remit, but it is all too easy to imagine the process generating yet more (centrally) imposed change – of a sort which easily leads to disengagement, of clinical staff, of frightened middle managers (don't senior leaders ever get frit?). This is most likely not the intent, but this sometimes-weary traveller understands the pressures which take our leaders there. It's hardly the best environment in which to secure much wanted and needed change, but an age old conundrum.

The Next Stage Review offered so much potential, albeit in a different financial climate. The test of the worth of such thinking comes when the tough times arrive, so I was heartened that we had in QIPP a way of joining the Quality and Productivity agendas. And lest anyone has forgotten (and from my perspective quite a few have), there was an important joining component to that agenda, the glue if you like – Innovation.

I distinguish between 'death by a thousand cuts', and 'salami slicing' as follows; the first requires lots of small-scale cuts, penny-pinching and similar measures at a micro level, in the hope that lots of pennies will make many pounds, the second requires no more than a calculator to establish the share of pain to borne by each and every service or cost centre. Am I alone in thinking the second is often used as a threat of irrational action as a means to secure action on the former? Of course there are good reasons to keep an eye on the pennies, and of course we are talking about some pretty substantial sums being extracted by such means.

Why Innovation?

Let's take a moment to consider two questions about Innovation – what is it, what makes it happen?

Well it's probably reasonably well understood that Innovation doesn't have to mean only that which is radical and entirely new – incremental change is still change after all. New applications for existing technologies, processes and understandings is at the core of a great deal of worthwhile innovation, but the most interesting component of the responses to the

questions is that such apparently small -scale change depends on a set of conditions , circumstances and drivers which are common to those required for radical change.

The first conclusion drawn in recent studies¹ is that you get innovation if you place value in it. Of course that carries the connotation that if you aren't getting innovation then you have yet fully to value it – an interesting challenge.

Alongside this maxim comes a set of conclusions about the implications for leaders; that they have to

- gear their leadership to innovation
- set a culture which supports innovation
- recognise the potential for innovation across the whole organisation, especially from the front-line and users, not just from designated 'innovators'

What does this mean in practical terms?

Well on the leadership front it means motivating people to innovation, being open to new ideas, and recruiting for mind-sets which embrace innovation (confidence, courage, motivation, curiosity, openness to ideas, an open style of communication, flexibility, encouragement of risk-taking, and being optimistic about the future), and it means modelling those behaviours assiduously, especially the most difficult one, risk-taking.

Confidence

Courage

Motivation

Curiosity

Openness to ideas

Open communication style

Flexibility

Risk-taking

Optimism

Collaboration

External and Customer Focus

It also means setting aside time and it means a transformational style based in inspiring, motivating and collaborating for change. Also strongly recommended is the use of diagnostics and measurement of innovation, as means to ensuring the practice is both valued and directed.

Significantly, it also means adopting an external focus – actively engaging with the user and their needs – not just 'understanding their perspective', but being driven by a deep and on-going relationship with their needs and wants.

None of which sounds like it is outside the range of NHS mindsets, does it? Well perhaps not those which the NHS has formally espoused in recent years. But if as the reports suggest the public sector is less innovative than other industry sectors (based on their analysis of the underlying causes of innovation), then that might make us reflect on how our NHS leaders' actions are actually perceived and the extent to which we have yet achieved real depth in the 'modern mindset'.

¹ NESTA - Everyday Innovation - December 2009, Prof Fiona Patterson, Dr Maura Kerrin, Geraldine Gatto-Roissard and Phillipa Coan And Also The Innovation Imperative - March 2009, Michael Harris And David Albury.

Another irony is that these are the forms of cultural leadership that are most likely to underlie other forms of reforming practice, for example the development of new, embracing and involving relationships with local people in the decisions which affect their lives, as patient or member of the public – this is the work of Fontis², which many of you will be aware is a deep interest of mine. Well, perhaps that's no coincidence at all.

And isn't it just so ironic that it is often these types of leadership behaviour that come under most pressure when the need to pursue harsh and very real imperatives comes on?

What is to be done?

This is work that cries out for concerted approaches. This means thinking through carefully, and expressing widely, the basis of an organisational approach. And demonstrating real commitment to it. Real leadership.

A practical starting point is to analyse the state of readiness for Innovation in any one organisation, or sets of organisations (the problems faced are often cross-boundary in their nature in any event). Tailoring the available tools to local and to NHS circumstances is a first step, informed by the 'state of readiness'.

And yes I am offering to support organisations to do that – whether it is by undertaking the initial analysis, in supporting cultural and organisational change, or in supporting individuals who either want to make these changes, or who are challenged by them.

More important however is that we finally move away from a stock response of penny-pinching and salami-slicing, which I know so many leaders aspire to do, and do in a way which embraces the potentials of the Innovation route to reveal true gains of combining the Quality and Productivity agendas.

So this paper is about Banging the Drum for a form of leadership which generates potential AND delivers positive and needed outcomes in a harsh environment.

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NB Yes I know I haven't mentioned the other P (Prevention), in need of Innovation at least as much as the other areas. That's for another time....

² Fontis exists to transform the relationship between the public and public services, in entirely practical ways, and is a social enterprise which values its independence from traditional forms of public service. See more at www.fontis.org.uk