Which Came First: Innovation or Collaboration?
Part 2 of 2

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A key component of driving collaboration is understanding the importance of creating a win-win environment with your collaborators. In order to truly innovate in healthcare, collaborators need to keep in mind today’s business models are more dependent than ever on complex, cross-company collaboration for business innovation. The future will be won by those who leverage the collective power of many. If you find your pharmacy department is “stuck” with regards to developing true innovations, maybe it’s time to rethink the internal and external departmental relationships so that collaboration and innovation are not an “either-or” proposition, but rather, are intimately linked.

Why is collaboration so difficult? Consumer Packaged Goods (CPG) professionals cite a few key barriers:

- Not having enough time to invite feedback from others
- The practical difficulty of having too many ideas to manage
- Greater risk of conflict amongst stakeholders
- A fear of losing control of the project’s direction

How can you foster collaboration and innovation in your own departments? Collaboration is the intersection of three kinds of efforts: cooperation, coordination, and co-creation. Of the three, the most important element is co-creation because when workers have the opportunity to co-create what they do; cooperation and coordination are likely to follow. The simple reality is that without co-creation, collaboration is not possible.

Enable Relationships

In order to foster co-creation, pharmacy team members must feel connected to be comfortable to share ideas, voice opinions and challenge the status quo. This is a healthy part of collaboration. As a manager or engaged pharmacy staff member, you can aid in the relationship building process. Ideas include:

- If you don’t have regular staff meetings then start— bi-weekly, weekly, monthly — that allow each team member to have a voice. Ask questions and send an outline before each meeting that goes over expectations. Allow time for each individual to share and discuss recent on-goings in and outside of the pharmacy.
Remember the team building activities you did in school? Why not take them to the next level in the pharmacy. Create quarterly events that take employees out of the office — think walks, bowling, museum tours, dinner cruises, plain dinners — the options are endless.

- Solidify your on-boarding process by making proper introductions a priority. Introduce new employees and team members.
- Make inter-team introductions when you see a lack of communication. Encourage meetings among “Peas in a pod” various departments and make introductions based on innovative potential.

**Mix it Up**

Outlined by CMS Wire's Hutch Carpenter in “Three Types of Collaboration that Drive Innovation,” there are three forms collaboration can take that lead to successful collaborative efforts: Peas in a Pod, Partners in Crime and Challengers.

**Peas in a Pod** collaboration refers to the natural human inclination to form groups that are based on similarities, relative proximity and prior relationships. In your pharmacy department, this may be pharmacy technicians vs. clinical pharmacy specialists or the “old-timers” vs. the “newbies”. When individuals are comfortable with those with whom they will be collaborating, innovation becomes a natural by-product. While efficient, these groups may become ineffective over time based upon a lack of diversity, which can become problematic over time and by growing stale.

**Partners in Crime** collaboration groups are based upon taking individuals out of their comfort zones by placing them with new groups. These groups are generally formed with purpose — not by convenience — and allow collaboration around specific goals and ideas. An example of a partners in crime collaboration in the pharmacy is a performance improvement team brought together to improve medication delivery times. This team may involve pharmacists and nurses who have never worked together in this capacity.

**Challengers** collaborations are groups formed with various opinions and backgrounds. These groups have individuals who are likely to disagree with ideas. Challengers voice opinions openly in a manner that encourages discussion and critical thinking rather than in a negative manner and should lead the group to fully think through innovative ideas, leading to processes without loopholes and intrinsic downfalls. Challenger collaboration is necessary for long-term success and excellence in collaboration. The above three types of collaboration are really a menu of types of collaboration. It may be helpful to identify the type of the collaboration you need for a certain project as a way to identify the best individuals to bring together.

**Engineering Serendipity**

The essential element of innovation is serendipity, which is the capacity to make unusual connections. These connections are the incubators for innovative ideas. Serendipity is something that is more likely to happen when people from various disciplines exchange ideas than from isolated activity inside departmental silos. The healthcare industry is one steeped in tradition built on history of multiple and overlapping hierarchies. The defining attribute of the top-down hierarchy is the chain of command, which means, there are often members of the organization who tend to be heavily invested in the status quo and many that have the positional authority to kill good ideas and keep bad ideas alive. Serendipity doesn’t stand a chance against this type of culture because new ideas tend to threaten the status quo. Flatten the hierarchy by creating peer-to-peer networks, which are the hallmark of entrepreneurial companies such as Google, Amazon and Zappos. The leaders of these companies understand that if you want your organization to be highly competent at innovation and collaboration, you design your organization for serendipity and co-creation.

References:

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