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Which Came First: Innovation or Collaboration?

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Which Came First: Innovation or Collaboration?

Part 1 of 2

As I was re-watching the TED videos for last month's KeePosted article, there was a recurring theme that I noticed repeated over and over - Collaboration. You may also recall Linda Fred's 2014 presidential theme of Collaboration, which encouraged us to foster collaboration as a way of expanding our reach as pharmacists and pharmacy technicians. This month I wanted to further explore this topic of collaboration in the context of promoting innovation within our pharmacy departments and outside of our departments within our healthcare organizations. As hospital mergers continue and health-systems expand into the ambulatory space, the ability to collaborate and devise innovative services with often limited resources is paramount.

I don't know about you and your personal experience in your current work environment, but it may be similar to mine. Over the last six months I have been working with my hospitals to implement formal diversion prevention programs, preparing for The Joint Commission Survey, including the new Medication Management standard focused on Antimicrobial Stewardship, not to mention tackling already on-going projects focused on compliance with sterile compounding standards USP 797 and 800. The pressure is on!

The challenge lies with the ability to adapt to these changes in a timely manner to meet these demands. We have thus far relied on expanding our roles, changing our pharmacy practice models and leveraging technology. In many organizations, the ability to hire additional staff to meet these demands is often limited. As a result, I am starting to hear more in different venues about what we can do to further accelerate the expansion of the advancing role of the pharmacy technician, and how we can further expand their involvement and leverage their knowledge and skills to meet these demands. How can we achieve this goal? One approach is Innovation through Collaboration.

In a recent survey¹ of over 1,700 CEOs, IBM reported that the need to innovate and collaborate was forefront on the minds of business leaders in both the public and the private sectors. Of the CEOs who participated in the study, collaboration was the most important trait they were seeking in employees. In the face of an increasingly complex world facilitated by the rapid adoption of technological advances, adopting innovation strategies will be key to making significant changes that organizations will need to respond to market pressures.

Innovation happens through collaboration. Jeff Dance, in his article "5 reasons why collaboration contributes to innovation," lists these top reasons:

1. Associations – Some of the best meetings are those where ideas are being discussed, bounced around from individual to individual and an excitement starts to build as consensus among all those in the room is reached. It's the connections and associations that are made between a diverse group of individuals that generate and develop ideas that lead to innovation. Have you attended a meeting or have you included pharmacy technicians in pharmacists meetings where the expansion of pharmacy services are discussed? Have you ever invited a pharmacy technician to a Pharmacy and Therapeutics (P&T) meeting or other related committee meeting and solicited their feedback on what was discussed? A seasoned pharmacy technician may provide a perspective or idea that may lead to an association not previously thought of.
2. Speed – Last month I presented an insulin pump policy to one of my hospital's P&T committees. It was small group composed of pharmacists, an ICU Nurse Manager, the Radiology Director and one of our primary endocrinologists. As I made my way through this lengthy document, issues arose of how to manage the pump when the patient had a scheduled procedure in radiology. In a short period of time, numerous ideas were discussed, perspectives were shared and solutions were offered. While the policy was not approved, the feedback that I received over the 15-min discussion saved me hours of work that it would have taken me to schedule and meet with the individual stakeholders.
3. Connections – The best way to expand your network at work is to work on a project with someone outside of your pharmacy department.
4. Energy – There is power in numbers. If there is a team of individuals from many different departments supporting an initiative, it may help it to push through an expected resistance or doubt that may be raised by a manager or other direct report. Also having the positive energy behind a new idea or process can help when the team is experiencing a delay or setback.
5. Implementation – Lastly, there is no innovation without complete implementation of a project. Staying the course and navigating the ups and downs of implementation is half the battle. With collaboration, it is a little bit more likely you will be able to survive the journey.

In the next issue of KeePosted, I will discuss the barriers to collaboration and what you can do to foster innovation through collaboration at work in Part 2 of this article.

1. IBM. Leading Through Connections. http://www-935.ibm.com/services/multimedia/anz_ceo_study_2012.pdf (accessed 2017 January).
2. Dance J. 5 Reasons why collaboration contributes to innovation. <https://www.freshconsulting.com/5-reasons-why-collaboration-contributes-to-innovation/> (accessed 2017 January).

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