

# CAN INNOVATIVE THINKING OCCUR IN ESTABLISHED ORGANIZATIONS?

## TEACHING AN OLD DOG NEW TRICKS



There are many techniques to create innovative ideas and services that can help your organization grow. But it is in the implementation of these ideas that our vision of what “could be” never quite measures up to what our organizations seem to be able to accomplish. Great people, good ideas, disappointing implementation.

An organization that excels in operational excellence (minimizing risk, reductionist thinking often involving cutting back) could not be more different than one that excels in innovation (rewarding risk taking, expansive thinking often involving trial and error). In fact, your operational leadership might actually be getting in the way of your vision of the future.

The question is: “How can you maintain the advantages of operational excellence without stifling the creation and implementation of innovative ideas?”

### **SHIFTING THINKING FROM “EITHER/OR” TO “BOTH/AND”**

One of the most powerful leadership behaviors we teach executives is how to manage the polarity of these seemingly opposite concepts—operational excellence for today and innovation for tomorrow. In many organizations, these concepts are managed as competing priorities with winners and losers. The result is often that sides are chosen, turf battles rage, communications break down, and the organization spends more time competing against itself than its competitors. It is like watching a scorpion sting itself to death.

But by simply reframing the seemingly opposing concepts with a Both/And statement (How can we take advantage of BOTH our operational efficiency AND become more innovative in the way we address the needs and desires of our patients or customers, the discussion suddenly becomes open and creative because the stakeholders are no longer locked into their own particular views. The unsaid sticking points that were getting in the way of progress now have a name. We have witnessed time and again how this seemingly simple shift in thinking can energize an organization to implement tangible, measurable plans that address both their current and future needs and speed the decision-making and intent necessary to achieving them.

## **SENIOR LEADERS MUST BE PREPARED TO LEAD THROUGH DISRUPTION**

Innovation requires that organizations let go of old work and take on new. These transitions are disruptive and create more than the normal amount of breakdowns. Breakdowns happen when someone did not do something that you thought they should

do or when something “should not” be the way it is. Discussing these conflicts feels risky—and it is during these breakdowns where leadership is the hardest, and the most needed. Leaders can turn breakdowns into breakthroughs when they accept and encourage divergent points of view instead of resisting opinions that are different from their own. Resisting actually can create more resistance.

When you see a breakdown, don't immediately add to it by developing an immediate reaction as that only creates more defensiveness and the matter gets worse. Instead, start the conversation by accepting that person's concern as your own and, just for a few moments, make that concern your own. Become genuinely interested in their point of view and hold your view of the situation as only your opinion and not the truth. Try this a few times and you'll see how these otherwise tough discussions are now used to create more innovative thinking and movement towards your vision.

For more ideas on how to increase the pace, success, and sustainability of change in your organization, please call [513-821-9580](tel:513-821-9580) or email me at [michael@obriengroup.us](mailto:michael@obriengroup.us).



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