

# Integrating Innovation Management Into Regional Strategy

Recently the ACSELL project brought all of our partners together with stakeholders from their regions to discuss various topics related to the goal of ACSELL and learn from one another.

The first topic covered was the challenge of integrating innovation management into your region's overall strategy. To provide some insights and expertise we invited stakeholders to share their experience with the challenge and provide recommendations. Below you'll find what they shared with us.

How do you encourage and implement innovation at the political level?

**Led by Gorm Simonsen, Project Manager, Health and Hospital Innovation, North Denmark Region, Denmark**

*"We're not on the verge of a disruption in healthcare, we are in the midst of it."*

Right now, we're hopefully nearing the end of the pandemic which has been a very good example of why innovation is necessary in the healthcare industry. We've seen a lot of healthcare systems become extremely agile with adopting new solutions and because we have had this crisis on our hands, people have set other work aside and aligned to create a new way of doing healthcare so that we can live through this crisis.

How do we define innovation in Denmark? Our directors of regional development say innovation is the transformation of our core obligations, so transforming the way we deliver healthcare is innovating upon it.

One of the driving forces most politicians will know is the development of technology. One of our professors said, *"We're not on the verge of a disruption in healthcare, we are in the midst of it"*. We're looking at an exponential development of technology which means that our way of planning has to take a whole new line of sight. We can't have a 5-year plan, it's more rapid than that. With that, politicians have to make some choices on what to endorse. Things like the rapid development and adoption of technology, which brings a lot of possibilities on one hand but on the other hand we have a need for evidence, meaning some doctors will not use the technology unless they have evidence it works. Traditionally a double-blind study takes a long time to do. This means we also need to adopt new kinds of evidence. Many doctors are discussing how they can deploy new methodologies for finding and providing evidence. In the end, representatives at the political level have to use this information and make these decisions in order to let the population know what is safe and what is not. The politicians and doctors need to work together from start to finish to decide what is important and what innovations can be made to our processes.

Demographic development is another area of continuous change. In Denmark, we're seeing this right now with the need for care for the elderly population and the unfortunate lack of health care professionals to provide this care. We have schools trying to train more healthcare workers but there aren't people enrolling in them. There is a continuous and ever-increasing demand for health care workers. You can see demographic development in two ways, a focus on treating the elderly population better and a focus on new ways for training and recruiting health care employees while working to keep them in the field longer by making their work environment better and more supportive.

The rise of personalized medicine also brings about the need for innovation. How can we go from a one size fits all treatment plan for a population to a more personalized, individualized treatment plan for each citizen? The services people are getting from big tech companies who know a lot about them and their preferences are what they're starting to expect in the healthcare industry as well. Get to know me and provide me with a more personalized treatment plan from diagnoses to treatment to follow-up.

With all of this, I can say we have many good arguments as to why innovation is essential at the political level for healthcare, especially right now. Sometimes it is difficult to get innovation on the political agenda because there are of course so many other issues they are also considering. But I think that we should take into account politicians may have at least two things they consider when deciding what to address, one being the population's satisfaction with their work and the decisions they are making, which is something I believe insisting on innovation for healthcare can contribute positively to, and the other factor is the economy, they see the ramification of budget spend and where they invest. Healthcare innovation can provide both efficiency in the system saving money for the region but also growth in the healthcare industry which can help the local economy.

One of our former ministers a few years ago was asked how he viewed the importance of innovation and technology in healthcare and why it hadn't been on the political agenda and for a brief moment, he was frozen because he didn't have an answer. In Denmark, healthcare innovation is a political niche not many politicians take on. I would argue that we could frame this innovation need as low-hanging fruit for politicians and engage some of them to be the champions in this space.

How do you encourage and implement innovation at care facilities?

**Led by Louise Weikop, Head of Quality and Innovation, Elderly and Care Department, City of Aalborg, Denmark**

*"Innovation doesn't just happen by itself. You need to support it with things like frameworks, resources, encouragement, and inspiration from management."*

I'm going to address the front-line perspective from a public organization that runs care facilities. When I'm talking about care facilities I'm primarily talking about nursing homes, but I'm sure a lot of this will also apply to other types of care facilities.

So what is the innovation context at a care facility? You can argue there is not much because they have:

- Very high workloads
- Not enough time to reflect and communicate with one another
- Generally lower levels of education
- Cultural and language barriers to thinking about innovation

On the other hand, the staff at these facilities can also have:

- A high sense of meaning and purpose in their role
- A drive to do better for their patients and improve their care

Innovation doesn't just happen by itself. You need to support it with things like frameworks, resources, encouragement, and inspiration from management.

What we have done to support and encourage innovation at our facility includes:

- Putting innovation at the center of our strategy
- Requiring it as a key part of the role of every leader in our organization
- Including front line workers at the center of our innovation framework

For example, in our framework, we emphasize that the problems we need to find innovations around need to be the problems our front-line workers define. They are the ones seeing the day-to-day of our work and seeing what the challenges are for them and our patients, not the leadership sitting in their office elsewhere. We also state that we never move forward with innovation unless our front lines workers agree and are involved in implementation. They need to test the innovations, give their feedback, ideate on how to improve it, and give us their final perspectives.

We also support our innovation work financially. We set aside funds in our organization dedicated to innovation. This allows us to compensate for time spent at our facilities and to purchase new technologies we want to test, eliminating the need to find the money for these types of things on tight budgets or timelines. As you probably know when you start to implement a new innovation, technology, process, etc, it takes time to get a return on your investment while you get things up and running.

We also support our front line staff administratively. We try to make it easy for them to support and participate in innovative work. We have a small group of administrative staff that support them with things like helping them write applications, organize meetings, make product plans, collect data, write evaluations, etc. This is all work that our front line staff don't have time for and are not trained to do.

Lastly, we prioritize building the capability of innovation at our front line worker level. Having some staff who are ambassadors and have more experience with innovation, technology, and methods for implementation and development than the rest of the front line staff is very helpful.

This can be done through formal education programs or it can be something they learn as they participate in different innovation work at the organization.

Care facilities traditionally don't have the best environment for innovation to thrive, but if you put in supportive practices like the ones I've mentioned you can build a better environment to do innovative work.

And don't forget your citizens. They may be older but a lot of them still can and *want* to participate in this innovative work.

How do you translate innovation policies and strategies into implementation? How can this coordination be concretely implemented at the regional level?

**Led by Franco Scolari, CEO, Alto Adriatico Technology Park, Italy**

*"It's cold outside but the topic is really hot."*

The more rules and procedures you have the less innovative you're able to be. The Alto Adriatico Technology Park is organized into six business units: Services which is a cost unit and then five profit units which include employees, a mix of full-time and part-time, and contractors. We are a KIBS (knowledge-intensive business service). We work with a philosophy of innovation supported by our employees, shareholders, and companies that contribute to this melting pot of innovative ideas which is working for us and for our clients. We can see this success in the fact that we have been doubling our business even through COVID times. No one is coming to us to just work hard, we come here and stay here to think and promote innovation. No one is measured on how many hours they work, I measure the performance of our forty collaborators on the satisfaction of our customers. If the customers are happy then I am happy. Many of our employees are certified in innovation and digital transformation so they are knowledgeable in how to translate innovations into actionable plans.

## Reach Out

To learn more about the topics, experts, policies and more mentioned above feel free to contact the ACSELL project. We're happy to answer questions and make connections.