Barnes & Conti Blog

Blogging Ideas into Action

Developing a Culture of Innovation

Equoranda has always known that creating a culture for innovation is an extremely important process for company growth. What is even more important and exciting to us is when we have the pleasure of watching our customers realize the importance of developing their own culture of innovation. It's like watching a flock of birds form a structured V in the sky!

Equoranda recently worked with a company that is a worldwide leader in animal health. Developing a culture of innovation became important to them when they realized their long-standing operational excellence programs were coming to an end. They allowed themselves to take a step back and see that it was difficult for their company to improve their processes and products consistently. They knew that they needed to make shifts; to do things differently in addition to or instead of doing them better.

After briefly interviewing some of the employees about innovation, we realized that many of them had come to think that innovation belonged to R&D and that R&D thought they "managed" innovation. Additionally, almost none of them appeared to have a clear definition for innovation, despite the fact that their performance evaluations included "being innovative."

What was clear was that the VP of HR thought that becoming an "innovation-driven" company was a key to their future — so she gave Equoranda the challenge of helping them develop a culture of innovation, and we gladly took it on.

Our approach to developing a culture of innovation was based on two building blocks:

- Deploying *Managing Innovation* and

- Creating an internal "Innovators Club"

The deployment of *Managing Innovation* has several characteristics: It is

- **Broad**: *Managing Innovation* is targeted to train all managers over two years, worldwide.
- **Cross-functional:** Each training session welcomes participants from different functions (Production, Finance, IT, R&D…).
- **Two-tiered:** There is one module for managers and one module for leaders. The core is the same, but we have built a specific focus for leaders on creating innovation initiatives linked to the company's strategy.

The internal "Innovators Club" is an extension of the training and has several principles:

- It is led by a *Managing Innovation* internal trainer.

- All participants of the *Managing Innovation* training become members of the Club.

As members of the Club, they are able to contribute, comment and foster the development of an innovation culture, in which they can:

- Participate in innovation projects that arise after the training.
- Test and provide feedback tools/ideas/processes to support innovation within the company (for example, a test is currently taking place for a tool to support "a marketplace" for innovative ideas).
- Participate in a new "Innovation Zone" which is being tested in the company to promote asynchronous innovation (when people cannot meet at the same time to work on an innovation project).

After six months, here are some tangible customer results:

- Several innovation initiatives have produced solid results (reduced time for onboarding technicians, increased capacity of a labeling machine) that helped in promoting the training.
- They have developed a common language around innovation: there is clarity regarding the definition of innovation.
- Each *Managing Innovation* session has had leaders spontaneously attend and participate.
- A number of participants have mentioned how the message conveyed during the training is "vital" as it allows them to tap into their creativity and to develop more autonomy in suggesting ideas and changing things in their day-to-day initiatives.
- Finally, some leaders, when feeling stuck on some issues, have invited participants from the Innovators Club, participants who do not belong to their function or area of business, to take part in their meeting in order to generate more ideas, and come up with early prototypes.

After these successful first steps, here is what Equoranda will do next:

- Continue deploying *Managing Innovation* worldwide and train more internal trainers (so far, most of the trainings have occurred in Europe).
- Work with the client to come up with ways to keep up the momentum, moving from a successful "pilot phase" to a more "mature phase."
- As suggested by the Innovation Journey, create methods for optimizing what has been done so far.

Stepping back and looking at what we learned from this specific innovation journey, we are struck by how meaningful it is for the employees. The relationship between innovation and growth was obvious from the beginning, but the relationship between innovation and intrinsic motivation for employees provides an even greater purpose, which we will share with our other clients.

Contributed by,

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