

Unlocking digital innovation in healthcare: the imperative of change management

By [Henry Adams](#)

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In the healthcare landscape, innovation reigns supreme. However, despite the joint efforts of vendors and partners to deliver exceptional service and solutions, the industry continues to grapple with resource shortages.



Source: Supplied. Henry Adams, InterSystems South Africa country manager.

In 2022, InterSystems commissioned a survey to assess the significance of innovation among healthcare players.

The survey revealed that 71% of healthcare leaders consider innovation vital for the survival of their organisations. This statistic underscores the unwavering commitment of the healthcare sector to actively pursue agile systems, tools, and treatments that ensure optimal outcomes for patients.

Furthermore, more than four out of five respondents (81%) identified "keeping pace with patient needs" as the primary driver behind their innovation initiatives. This demonstrates the profound understanding among healthcare leaders of the importance of generating novel ideas to enhance care and services. However,

numerous obstacles impede the path to innovation, with change management emerging as one of the most formidable challenges.

Addressing the challenge of change

Recognising the inherent nature of change and the imperative of innovation, leadership teams in hospitals and healthtech firms face barriers such as conservatism and concerns regarding the erosion of professional autonomy among senior staff. Overcoming these obstacles necessitates a comprehensive understanding of the positive impact that new technology implementations can have.

Organisations must adopt a holistic approach to new technology implementation, differentiating between technical changes and adaptive changes, while acknowledging the far-reaching consequences of the latter. While transitioning to a new MRI machine constitutes a technical change with a well-defined pathway, digital transformation represents an adaptive change that is more intricate and nuanced.



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Effectuating genuine change demands more than investing in software solutions; it requires a comprehensive investment in the people and culture underpinning the sector, coupled with strong leadership. Failure to recognise, understand, and address these factors renders the implementation of any change an arduous endeavour.

Significant attention must be devoted to various factors related to individuals, particularly in the development of new medical technology. Conflicting requirements between the organisation and its developers often arise.

For doctors and nurses, this often entails substantial changes to their workflow, resulting in increased time spent on system input rather than direct patient care. Acknowledging the additional burden on frontline staff at the outset of digitisation projects is pivotal to effective planning and managing of staff expectations.

Successful change programs in healthcare providers are frequently bolstered by robust senior-level leadership, including medical directors and chief executive officers. However, it is commonplace for senior-management team members to possess limited visibility into local digital projects, as their focus often revolves around operational delivery and performance indicators.

Collaborative innovation

One major challenge lies in the potential isolation of technology providers from their customers. Historically, certain IT and healthtech vendors would implement a system and then vanish, leaving customers with lingering questions and concerns. Instead, vendors should continuously engage with customers, ensuring optimal system functionality, growth, and adoption rates.



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The urgent need for change in healthcare, aimed at enhancing patient outcomes, improving clinician workflows, and optimising cost savings, necessitates effective change-management strategies. This involves stakeholders forging partnerships to achieve common goals, focusing on establishing trust-based relationships and fostering collaborative efforts to drive the necessary changes.

Although obstacles arise when implementing new technologies or solutions that can catalyse positive change in healthcare, steps can be taken to surmount these barriers. By collectively challenging entrenched attitudes and ways of working, while embracing innovation, healthcare and medtech providers can successfully embed innovative technologies that drive genuine transformation in medical settings.

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