

INNOVATORS' GROUP VIDEOCONFERENCE SUMMARY OF LESSONS LEARNED

The first videoconference with the Innovators' Group was held on January 8, 2009. In a lively discussion concerning the purpose of the project and potential ways to achieve a collaborative, evidence-based decision making system in criminal justice, the Innovators made five suggestions as to how stakeholders and practitioners in our field might do their business differently:

- The Yellow Brick Road Leads Nowhere: the Innovators emphasized repeatedly that it was pointless to develop processes and tools for decision-making, no matter how research-based they were, unless everyone was clear about a destination. They were surprised to learn that criminal justice was capable of doing risk-reduction. They had never heard of the concept and felt that it should become the standard for measuring performance and outcomes. This standard should be transparent, public and simple. The example they gave of how this could be done was the Institute of Healthcare Improvement's 100,000 Lives Campaign, which set a target of zero for life-threatening medical errors in hospitals.
- No Pain, No Gain: the Innovators pointed out that the most potent incentive for organizational change was the possibility of embarrassment. Stakeholders and leaders can do what they want, so long as others do not know what they do. The power of numbers and measures lies in their ability to make the system transparent and to make the consequences of stakeholder actions open to public scrutiny. But this will never occur until government admits the possibility of failure. Change is a process of learning from trial and error, and in this process things will go wrong. So long as criminal justice is risk adverse and beholden to a standard of infallibility, its practices and outcomes will be kept a closely guarded secret.
- A House Divided Shall Not Stand: the Innovators' recommended that the project investigate the notion of a value-chain alliance. Organizations add value to a productive chain that results in an outcome desired by a client. Collaborative value chains enable each element to specialize in what it does best. The most effective and innovative value chains are based not on authority and power, but on influence and trust. The criminal justice system must develop a single metric to assess the product to be achieved by the value chain, one that will "stick" in the heads of the public.
- Keep It Simple, Stupid: the human factor in the change process demands that we grant normal human beings the opportunity to implement and practice risk-reduction. It is the only way we can have a hope of helping them avoid error and doing harm. The example used here were checklists such as those used by airline pilots
- Knowing Right from Wrong: dealing with crime, from a social perspective, is as much moral as it is pragmatic. The public sees crime as an affront to the common weal that requires some form of punishment and individual accountability in response. The interests of risk reduction must be merged with the morality of punishment in order for evidence-based decision making to be successful.