



## Leading Through Disruption – Focus on Innovation Skills

*Posted by Scott Cooper*

For most of us, the way we do our job and the skills required to do so are quickly changing. According to the World Economic Forum's [Future of Jobs Report 2018](#), "workers will see an average shift of 42% in required workplace skills in the period leading up to 2022." Among the twelve industries studied, innovation and analytical thinking topped the list of emerging competencies.

These findings reinforce the conversations we hold with our client partners on a daily basis. Across health care, innovation has taken center stage as organizations aim to transform in the face of industry disruption. At InveniasPartners, innovation has been on our minds as well. Just last week, in his blog post [Destination Innovation](#), our Vice Chairman and President, Joe Fournier, wrote about the importance of health care organizations establishing and fostering a culture where innovation thrives. Here, Joe makes an important distinction; innovation is driven by people. In order to build a "Culture of Innovation", organizations must recruit and develop leaders who are not only innovative themselves but who can inspire innovation in others.



### Looking Beyond Technical Ability

Increasingly, hiring managers think about their leadership needs through the lens of transformation. It's natural for our conversation to gravitate toward technical skills and specific health care leadership examples. While experience integrating multiple sites and departments following a system merger is valuable, the ability to integrate digital health technology is becoming more important. Expertise – or at least exposure – in the areas of data, analytics, block chain and augmented and virtual reality is becoming standard in the leadership profile for an executive search.

As we aim to recruit and develop top talent, we must also consider how disruptive factors shift the personal traits and attributes we seek in our health care leaders. Developing knowledge and subject matter expertise will continue to play a significant role in professional success. However, thriving in this environment requires more than just a new set of technical skills.

Over my career, I have interviewed thousands of health care executives. Some interviews are more enjoyable than others because some candidates are better suited for new leadership roles in an ever-evolving industry. What makes a leader truly exceptional in today's fast-paced environment? Now, more than ever, health care organizations need leaders who welcome new thinking and action. They need innovators.

### Wanted: Innovation Skills

In his article, "[To Drive Innovation, Focus on People, Not Technology](#)," Cisco executive Alex Goryachev notes "innovation is a state of mind – an attitude". I agree. Innovation is a way of thinking; it is not the result or a product launch. So, what does it take to be an innovative leader? Are there certain identifiable traits? According to the Future of Jobs Report 2018, innovative leaders can possess numerous traits or "innovation skills" that help them develop creative solutions for the complex world we live in. Among the traits they list are creativity, critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and adaptability.

As an expert in assessing leadership potential, I have developed my own thoughts about the ideal profile of an innovative leader. Pay close attention to these innovation skills during the recruitment process:

- **Curiosity and Creativity:** Ultimately, I believe the backbone of innovation is intellectual curiosity. As health care organizations look to develop new, innovative models of care, they should seek and encourage leaders to have an experimental mindset. Curiosity can in turn fuel more creative solutions. Although not all experiments will be a success,

lessons learned from failure often bring a team one step closer to ground breaking solutions.

- **Compassion and Empathy:** Although it may not be the first trait that comes to mind when you think of innovative leaders, compassion and empathy play a major role in building a culture. For many people, change can be unsettling. As health care leaders drive their organizations to innovate, team members will encounter recalibrated expectations, unfamiliar work flows, and many other unsettling changes to their jobs. To inspire others to embrace innovation, leaders must know when and how hard to push forward with new concepts. To minimize resistance, look for leaders who put the needs and interests of others first.
- **Openness and Tolerance:** Innovative leaders embrace and encourage team members with different viewpoints, backgrounds, experiences, culture, and ethnicities. [Research](#) has shown that hiring diverse workforces result in greater innovation. From my perspective, leaders who embrace diversity show that they value respectful dissent and are committed to avoiding the limitations of “groupthink”.

To thrive in today's uber-competitive atmosphere, health care organizations cannot afford to have leaders who lack an instinct for innovation. While skill and expertise can still go a long way, readiness for transformation calls for leaders with innovation skills – those prepared to be the catalyst for change.

## Industry Discussions

This week, health care leaders from across the country have traveled to Chicago to attend [Becker's Hospital Review 10th Annual Meeting](#). With over 300 hospital and health system leaders speaking, and over 4000 attendees including two former US Presidents, the conference promises to spark discussion and promote new ideas on a range of topics and issues. Health care is a people business, so I'm delighted to see an agenda with several sessions focused on leadership and talent development. However, I'm even more excited to think about the dialogue that will emerge from a session titled “A Culture of Innovation Means a Culture of Entrepreneurs”.

As we continue the conversation around transformative leadership, I encourage you to make innovation skills a key element of each leader's talent profile. To continue the discussion, drop me a line at [coopers@inveniaspartners.com](mailto:coopers@inveniaspartners.com).

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