Recommendations for supporting the spread of innovations at a macro level

A recent paper from Norton et al 17 describes 5 recommendations to improve spread, identified by the attendees at a conference on Scale-up and Spread in Healthcare and Public Health held in Washington on July 10, 2010. A year after, a survey was issued to the conference attendees to help to operationalize and prioritise the 5 recommendations identified. Please, refer to Norton et al 17’s paper for more details on the list of the recommendations and corresponding sub-recommendations resulting from this prioritisation exercise.

The 5 recommendations described by Norton et al 17 are briefly discussed next.

1. **Increase awareness of the need for greater attention and activity in scale-up, including research, practice and policy activity.**
   Spread should be an integrated part of any improvement project and sufficient resources should be invested in this stage. Educational activities targeting staff at all levels, from improvement staff to senior leaders, will be beneficial to increase the awareness of the need for scaling-up innovations (e.g. spread should be included as part of any quality improvement methodology course).

   The Department of Health 12 identifies that a leadership culture to support innovation is inconsistent or lacking and this is one of the barriers that slow the spread of innovation in the NHS. Training and education programmes should focus on senior managers and clinicians.

   ‘Leadership for innovation begins at the Board. An empowering Board is one that opens its eyes to the potential for innovation inside the organisation, outside the organisation and in collaboration with other organisations’

   Providing the right incentives and rewards could help to draw the attention to the need to spread innovations 11,12.

2. **Facilitate better information exchange, collaboration and use of existing knowledge.**
   The development of a web portal for innovation for NHS Scotland could be key in improving access to data and information and facilitating the sharing of knowledge and collaboration. Poor access to metrics and information has been identified as one of the 6 barriers to hinder the spread of innovation in the NHS 12.

   This web portal could host a central database of the existing improvement activities, the stage they are at, together with a brief description of the project (and results if available). Users should be able to search the database easily. This web portal should have other sections such as online forums where practitioners can share their experiences and advice could be provided, support tools and e-learning modules 12.
‘The NHS needs an intellectual marketplace of ideas, a ‘problems and solutions warehouse’ – where innovators can showcase and exchange their ideas’

Laszlo Igali, Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital

Ideally a formal change agency could be the host of this web portal to promote collaboration across the NHS in Scotland. Change agencies can play a key role in supporting spread of innovations.

3. Develop, evaluate and refine innovative scale-up and spread methods, including novel incentives and ‘pull’ strategies
The development of a taxonomy of strategies and factors influencing the effectiveness of spread activities would help practitioners to understand which strategies or methods work better in different contexts.

Funded research programmes could advance the existing knowledge on scale-up and spread methods. Translation of the research finding into practical advice and/or tools should also be considered.

4. Develop and apply new approaches for evaluation
A standardised tool for evaluating spread is recommended. In order to evaluate naturally occurring spread, in other words, diffusion, observational research will be required. Evaluating spread will help to learn more about the spread process and its effectiveness, and therefore, develop the taxonomy referred in recommendation 3.

5. Expand capacity for scale-up policy, practice and research
Apart from raising awareness of the need for spread discussed in recommendation 1, enough resources and expertise will be required to ensure the success of spread initiatives. A diverse range of initiative such as training courses, discussion on ongoing scale-up activities, recognition and awards for good spread practices should be in place to contribute to the development of expertise and interest in this area.

Change agencies should incorporate in their agenda the provision of capacity for spread.

‘The NHS must build innovation and the concept of adoption and spread into undergraduate and post-graduate curricula.’

Professor Normal Williams, Royal College of Surgeons