

“Our people often do not even call it innovation, but they do things in new ways because they want to improve.”

The story I want to share

Some years ago, we initiated a knowledge-sharing award within Helvetas. We transformed it when we felt that the culture of knowledge sharing had really developed, narrowing the focus to innovation. We adjusted the criteria and now call it an innovation award.

The prize is for the staff, by the staff, judged by the staff.

It provides us with momentum once a year by drawing attention to what is happening in the different country programmes. We receive 20–25 nominations every year, which are compiled so that everybody knows what is happening in the organisation and we can learn from each

other. The award instils motivation and pride, and promotes innovation.

I believe that the most powerful thing is that we are not trying to steer innovation; it is happening in different contexts, and is the result of our sharing culture. People can microblog on our intranet wall, we have TED-style talks, ‘share weeks’ for collective strategic dialogues amongst country directors and Swiss-based staff, and ‘share days’ for global discussions around emerging topics. We try to ensure that everything we do is made visible, and try to live a working-out-loud culture.



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How our sharing culture led us to be organically innovative.

Lessons learnt

- 1) Promoting innovation is a complex challenge that **requires a multifaceted approach**; no single tool or activity will get the job done. So it's definitely worth undertaking small experiments to see if they gain traction.
- 2) Patience, patience, patience. As with anything involving human interaction at scale, **do not expect things to change overnight**: you need to build up some success stories, have senior management support, identify and cultivate champions, continue to quietly (and sometimes not quietly) support ongoing, innovation-friendly initiatives and be prepared to wait for the organisational change you are looking for.

TED Talks

We recently started to host TED-style talks: colleagues from different departments share their personal stories and shed light on development topics, which provides inspiration and food for thought. All TED-style talks are recorded and hosted on our intranet.