

Why more people should aspire to be intrapreneurs

Every era is defined by innovations that transform our lives. Ground-breaking leaps forward are lauded, only to have their crown snatched away by a better, smarter version in the following years. Since the turn of the millennium, unfathomable levels of investment have poured into companies pushing boundaries in every field.

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But whilst the 'typical' innovator conjures up disruptive Silicon Valley types - breaking down barriers and sidelining traditional industries - not all entrepreneurs need to adopt such a guise. Instead, it's time to put the intrapreneur in the spotlight.

Many of us neglect to consider the potential for innovation that exists where we are, in our companies or roles. We view innovators as other-worldly inventors, always launching a new concept that most of us couldn't even dream of. But the truth is, we can all be innovators. We might not have the next Spotify up our sleeve, but we can still have an impact from the inside out. The startup scene is saturated and the economy has taken a hit; meaning now is the time to look inwards for inspiration.

Intrapreneurship stems from the notion that within a business there is just as much space for entrepreneurial spirit as in the world outside. Now more than ever, we need to start hustling internally to keep our businesses afloat and our products relevant. We're a nation obsessed with newness, but if we stopped looking through the lens of tech start-ups and

instead saw the potential in our own organisations, or in our own sector-specific expertise, we'd realise the power in innovating internally rather than assuming it's only a disruptors game.

I've seen first hand just how far intrapreneurship can take an organisation.

I launched Virti in 2018. After completing medical school in 2009 and qualifying as a doctor, I felt unprepared for the realities of real healthcare environments. I hadn't had enough hands-on learning and felt thrown in at the very deepest of ends. This lived experience sparked an idea for how I could make things better for young doctors like me. Virti uses XR technology to immerse students in clinical situations so they can learn by 'doing'. Trials have shown that this kind of experiential learning is far more effective than traditional reading or lectures, thanks to enhanced opportunities for repetition, practice and preparation.

We've been able to make huge strides in the medical sector, and this is largely down to the intrapreneurial spirit of the team. We innovated fast when COVID hit, training NHS staff to use ventilators and helping orientate them in new wards. We've also been working with medical students to reduce anxiety, burnout and stress, with teaching using our simulations proving 70% more effective than reading or lectures. Our intrapreneurs have also levelled up our tech, with 'XR' and AI opening up new frontiers in terms of what and who we can teach.

By innovating in the medical sector - a sector I know all too well - we've been able to expand our customer base and enter into new markets. We've trained tube workers to spot suicide risks, helped oil trainees practice working on rigs and supported corporates in upskilling their staff.. Intrapreneurship often gives way to more traditional entrepreneurship, providing a strong foundation for growth and diversification.

In this sense, intrapreneurs are the opposite of disruptors: they work hard internally to make something great, rather than always looking to pastures new. Good intrapreneurship keeps the ship strong and steady, opening up new opportunities by maximising assets and leveraging expertise.

To become an intrapreneur as an employee, you must find your voice and realise that you are capable of bringing something to the table, even if it's out of your comfort zone. From making hiring processes more inclusive by introducing AI, to boosting your new business pipeline by strengthening internal processes, there are lots of impactful ways to flex your intrapreneurial muscles. You have little to lose if an idea doesn't fly, but everything to gain if it does.

Entrepreneurs bring companies into being; intrapreneurs enable companies to flourish long into the future. Ensuring your organisation is the best it can be is essential as we face the fallout of COVID, so if you've spotted something that could make it more robust, it's important you go for it and make your voice heard.

Innovation isn't all about industry disruptors. Now more than ever, it's about finding solutions that can help us weather this current storm. Intrapreneurs have never been more crucial for our businesses' long-term success, so now's the time to see what you can do.

Dr Alex Young is CEO and founder of Virti: a Bristol-based tech firm using XR and AI to set a new gold standard for immersive learning. A trauma and orthopaedic surgeon by training, Alex built and sold his first company whilst still at medical school. He has won multiple awards with Virti including 'Best Startup' at the Mayor of London's Medtech Business Awards. Virti is also part of the NHS' prestigious Innovation Accelerator Programme and has been met with huge successes in the US.

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