

IDEA MANAGEMENT – GETTING AN IDEA RESOLVED

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Innovating is imperative in today's work climate. We need to do more with less yet improve and cut costs. Consider enlisting ideas from the entire workforce to innovate and improve the workplace. This may require a true shift in our organizational culture. Managers become coaches. We learn to listen and enlist input from all employees rather than putting the burden of improvement on a few key leaders, experts and consultants.

Taking someone's concept, suggestion or idea and getting a fair resolution is tough at first. So many things can get in the way. Formalized processes to manage ideas are common: suggestion systems (suggestion schemes in Europe), continuous improvement, or corrective actions. Yet, these processes often fall short due to a lack of the correct ingredients to support effective idea resolution and implementation. Also often overlooked is fully supporting creativity to generate good ideas. Let's take a look at key components of a successful idea system.

KEY ELEMENTS - IDEA GENERATION THROUGH TO RESOLUTION

Communication – Participants get clear and thoughtful feedback on their ideas.

Training & Tools - Correct tools to resolve the problem. Do not overlook communication skills and conflict resolution training.

Full Management Support – Support a culture of innovation and improvement.

Peer Support – Work together to improve our direct work area. Lean 5S fits well here.

Collaboration – Share knowledge and enlist other people's input across the organization.

Review – How do we decide to carry forward an idea and use it? Traditionally ideas used formal evaluations but there are other options.

Appropriate Recognition and Awards – Saying thank you in the right way strengthens the process. Insure the design fits your culture. Large cash awards can be counterproductive.

Idea Management System – On-line works best and promotes sharing. Keep rules to a minimum to avoid unneeded bureaucracy.

Measure - Effectiveness of all participants - link to Balanced Scorecard, Lean or other organizational goals. Typically, cash savings is a key measure but do not overlook other methods of valuing an idea.

Fair Process – We cannot play favorites or allow people to undermine the process.

Sustainability – Becomes culturally ingrained. Doesn't depend on one person to keep it alive.

Are We Committed to Generate/Resolve Ideas? – Do participants really want to be involved? Participants include anyone involved in creating, evaluating, implementing and awarding an idea. First, we need people creating useful ideas. Then that same group could find a viable solution or we need to enlist the correct people to evaluate and implement it. How do we get them committed to do this?

Will We Support People Generating a Wide Range of Ideas? – Some great and some not so great. Will we mentor people submitting weaker ideas to create stronger ones next time?

Where Are We? – Participants need to clearly understand the current playing field so they can identify valid problems and or opportunities. This works better if all rules are on the table and there are no hidden agendas (e.g., quality is a formal organizational goal but in reality it is "Ship on Friday").

Where Do We Want to Go? – Where is the overall organization going? More important, what are the goals of the area each person works in? With out a clearly communicated vision, people will head down the wrong path. With the right information, participants will search for ideas and solutions that fit current and future needs.

Results

Reduced costs, higher quality, new products, customer satisfaction, improved workplace safety, lower turnover and a motivated workforce that works to make the organization succeed.