

## IDEAS ARE AS FRAGILE AS GLASS – EIA 2006 CONFERENCE – PALM SPRINGS, CA

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Ideas are as fragile as glass – at any step in the process of a suggestion or idea system; we can turn off the participants. This includes the idea generator, reviewer, implementer as well as champion along with management. This may make them not wanting to ever participate again!

We probably can make the biggest impact on our programs. How we handle ideas, especially the problem ones as well as how we treat the various participants will deeply affect people's perceptions. Can we bend the rules a bit or push management to take a second look at something?

We also need to be clear on what types of ideas we want people to submit. Often in traditional suggestion systems, we want larger ideas that fit very specific rules. These ideas can pay large awards to submitters – upwards of \$25,000. By primarily asking for larger ideas, we tend to turn off a large percentage of people. Newer approaches that link to Lean and Continuous Improvement focus on smaller ideas – striving for incremental changes. Traditional suggestion systems may not be able to handle the volume of ideas some Japanese automotive companies generate – possibly limiting their impact to their organization. Keep in mind this concept during the presentation.

It also relates to the purpose of our suggestion or idea system. We need to be really clear on what we are doing for our organization and why. On the next page we will review a standard definition of an idea system as well as allow space for you to write down comments on your own program.

After reviewing how we define our suggestion system, we will then look at the key steps in an idea or suggestion system and then discuss each step and review ways we can turn someone off to our program and then find ways to shift that into something positive.

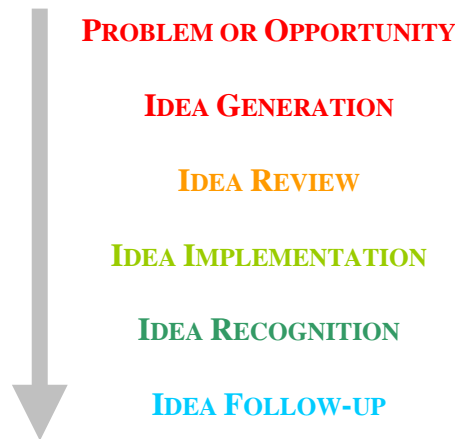
## DEFINITION OF AN IDEA OR SUGGESTION SYSTEM

- ◆ *An employee (associate) idea process openly invites ideas from individuals or groups in an organization.*
- ◆ *Each idea is treated with respect and fairly evaluated. Every effort is made to work toward its timely closure, striving to implement every idea possible.*
- ◆ *Feedback and mentoring is invested with the participants so they can clearly define their ideas and the future ideas they develop.*
- ◆ *All people involved in the process are appropriately recognized and acknowledged for their efforts.*
- ◆ *Results of the process improve all aspects of the organization and it is a rewarding experience for participants.*

*Definition of Our Idea Process  
(write your own definition here)*

There are several basic steps to an idea process – these relate to the natural way we identify and resolve a problem (these are reviewed on the next two pages). We first need to find the problem or opportunity and then define a solution and review that solution for merit. Then the idea needs to be put into use – if it isn't we weren't successful. We need to find ways of thanking people for being involved as well as verify the idea stays in use over the long-term (or is adapted as our needs change). It is simple in concept but there are hundreds of different implementations of this basic approach.

Who performs each step in creating an idea and resolving it will vary from organization to organization. Different people may wear different hats or have responsibility for different types of idea. For instance in a Kaizen type process, ideas may be directly identified, reviewed and implemented by the submitter.



We will use the following terms:

- ◆ **STAKEHOLDER** – someone that will be impacted (+/-) by what we are doing. For instance in an employee idea process – people submitting and reviewing ideas are stakeholders along with management who supports the process.
- ◆ **IDEA OR SUGGESTION** – something that identifies a problem or opportunity along with a viable solution. In contrast, a complaint only identifies the problem. In the United States a formal suggestion process is called a suggestion system and in the UK it is often called a Suggestion Scheme or Staff Suggestion Scheme.
- ◆ **LEAN** – Based on the Toyota Production System (TPS), it is an approach that focused on meeting customer needs (Takt time is a core element) while standardizing work so we can problem solve our processes. True Lean programs then use suggestion/idea/Kaizen type approaches to constantly improve standardized work. Lean tends to focus more on small incremental improvements rather than the large home-run hits of more traditional suggestion programs.

- ◆ **EMPLOYEE INVOLVEMENT** – programs or activities that better involve an employee in the organization. This can be utilizing their ideas to better the organization, involving them on teams or work groups to solve specific problems or recognizing them for management-driven behaviors. To be successful employee involvement requires clear communication of organizational goals and a process that is fair while allowing a wide range of employees to participate.
- ◆ **IDEA GENERATOR OR SUBMITTER** - a person identifying a problem or coming up with a new idea.
- ◆ **GROUP IDEA** - a group of submitters turning in an idea. This group could actually be a quality team, though we will use the term group here to not be confused with quality improvement teams themselves.
- ◆ **IDEA REVIEWER OR EVALUATOR** – a technical expert or team that needs to review an idea for merit. For smaller ideas consider having people evaluate and implement their own ideas.
- ◆ **EMPLOYEE** - someone that works for the organization and we realize that many organizations now use the term associate.
- ◆ **TEAM** – A group of people resolving a specific problem or group of problems. They may be management assigned or self-created.
- ◆ **TANGIBLE IDEA** – an idea that has measurable savings. This may be material or labor savings.
- ◆ **INTANGIBLE IDEA** – an idea that does not have direct measurable savings such as safety or quality issues.
- ◆ **AWARD** - implies some sort of tangible award such as cash or merchandise.
- ◆ **RECOGNITION** - includes awards but normally means some sort of thank you that has no direct monetary value such as a pin, certificate or recognition luncheon.
- ◆ **ON-LINE SYSTEM** – A web-based software management system that lets people enter ideas, check status, evaluate ideas, teams collaborate on ideas and participants use the database as a research tool. Any modern idea system really needs to be on-line to fully interact with employees as well as customers and suppliers.

## IDEA SYSTEMS – KEY STEPS IN CREATING AND IMPLEMENTING AN IDEA

KEY STEP	PROBLEM OR OPPORTUNITY	IDEA GENERATION	IDEA REVIEW	IDEA IMPLEMENTATION	IDEA RECOGNITION	IDEA FOLLOW-UP
<b>DEFINITION</b>	Safety, quality, efficiency or service related. Opportunities are potential new products/services or ways of improving.	A person, group or team of people identify the problem or opportunity – writing it up and providing research into a potential solution.	A person or team reviews the idea and its potential solution for merit. This can include cost calculations and other investigations.	Taking a valid idea that has passed review and utilizing it.	How we say <b>thank you</b> to the people that participated in the idea.	Verification after the fact that the idea is still in use and viable.
<b>WHO</b>	Management must communicate key improvement needs & the direction of the organization – based on the customer. Lean Standardized Work is important to have as a baseline tool for improving a process.	Normally anyone in the organization. Could have a different focus for hourly or salary staff as well as different areas in the organization.	In traditional programs this is a technical expert such as engineering. For smaller ideas it should be the idea generator.	Maintenance or other groups responsible for updating and installing the idea. For smaller ideas it should be the idea generator along with their supervisor/team leader.	Normally calculated for that specific idea. Typically handled by the idea champion and possibly distributed by that person's supervisor or area manager.	Normally the person that reviewed the idea. We could also ask idea generators to perform this task.
<b>ISSUES TO CONSIDER</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Creating a culture where people are <b>supported &amp; asked</b> to look for improvement ideas – this needs to evolve into something <b>spontaneous</b></li> <li>◆ Start with little ideas such as 5S – never loose this focus as <b>little ideas will always be important</b></li> <li>◆ Don't turn off people to thinking only big ideas are worth investigating</li> <li>◆ Share with employees areas to focus on</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Start little and grow</li> <li>◆ Capture <u>all</u> ideas little and big – categorize them afterwards</li> <li>◆ Mentoring</li> <li>◆ Tools to problem solve as well as Standardized Work.</li> <li>◆ Management supports idea generation.</li> <li>◆ Clear goals of organization and area</li> <li>◆ Handling of duplicate ideas</li> <li>◆ Simplify eligibility</li> <li>◆ Easy to fill-in forms or on-line system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Simplify the review process – get rid of over complex forms.</li> <li>◆ Remove unneeded rules</li> <li>◆ Avoid reinventing the wheel</li> <li>◆ Enrich the idea rather than simple yes/no</li> <li>◆ Solid feedback to the generators</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Timely</li> <li>◆ Not forgetting to manage this step and assume it is completed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Normally just idea generators – include other participants</li> <li>◆ Smaller recognition for the individual idea – timely</li> <li>◆ Fairness</li> <li>◆ Larger recognition for quarterly/annual participation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Often overlooked in most programs</li> <li>◆ Assign six month or later F/U</li> <li>◆ Did we go back to the old way of doing things? Why?</li> <li>◆ Ask idea generator to see if they have further improvements to that area</li> </ul>

## IDEA SYSTEMS – KEY STEPS IN CREATING AND IMPLEMENTING AN IDEA (CONTINUED)

<b>SUPPORT ROLES TO AN IDEA SYSTEM</b>		
	<b>IDEA CHAMPION</b>	<b>IDEA DOCUMENTATION AND MANAGEMENT SYSTEM</b>
<b>DEFINITION</b>	Person that manages the idea system.	Captures ideas, tracks status (who is reviewing/implementing the idea) as well as benefits from the idea and recognition given to participants.
<b>WHO</b>	Ideally a person with the ability to push ideas that need support through the system. They need the vision to keep the process alive and change it as needed.	Typically a fully on-line software system – idea entry, review and research.
<b>TASKS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Get management support</li> <li>◆ Create something that becomes <u>cultural</u> rather than a flavor of the month.</li> <li>◆ Design and redesign of the process – we need to fully integrate into concepts such as Lean so we properly support our organization</li> <li>◆ Creating tools that let idea generators and reviewers identify and solve problems. Lean Standardized Work along with observation and brainstorming techniques let people understand their work area and find ways of improving it.</li> <li>◆ Without ongoing training and mentoring – people’s ideas will never improve</li> <li>◆ Insuring the award/recognition process fits everyone’s needs – this will shift as the organization grows/changes</li> <li>◆ Selecting and insuring distribution of reports</li> <li>◆ Communicating to management effectively the status of the program and its needs</li> <li>◆ Connecting with management’s needs and aligning the program to it</li> <li>◆ Rules – limiting the bureaucracy of the program</li> <li>◆ Find ways of getting our technical experts and management to frequent the on-line idea site so we may start pulling ideas through the system rather than pushing them</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ For any modern idea system, we need the ability to share information throughout our organization</li> <li>◆ This system needs to be able to handle large levels of ideas efficiently – if we are going for global best practice, this will be 2-50 ideas/employee in each year</li> <li>◆ Traditionally an accounting system – how can we use it to share knowledge and ideas?</li> <li>◆ Provides statistics and reports on how we are doing</li> <li>◆ Can be used to identify areas that are not supporting idea generation – may be managers or supervisors that need training or support</li> <li>◆ Tracks successes and failures – remember many large ideas fail at first due to people not being able to see a solution</li> </ul>

### TABLE 1: PROBLEM OR OPPORTUNITY

List situations or steps in your process that can cause a participant to be turned off:

Issue	What is done that turns off the participant?	What can you do to change that?

## TABLE 2: IDEA GENERATOR

List situations or steps in your process that can cause a participant to be turned off:

Issue	What is done that turns off the participant?	What can you do to change that?

**TABLE 3: IDEA REVIEWER**

List situations or steps in your process that can cause a participant to be turned off:

Issue	What is done that turns off the participant?	What can you do to change that?

**TABLE 4: RECOGNITION**

List situations or steps in your process that can cause a participant to be turned off (**Include issues with large awards**):

Issue	What is done that turns off the participant?	What can you do to change that?

**TABLE 5: FOLLOW-UP IDEA**

This may not be part of your process – so review its benefits first:

List situations or steps in your process that can cause a participant to be turned off:

Issue	What is done that turns off the participant?	What can you do to change that?

**TABLE 6: IDEA CHAMPION**

How important is it to have the 'right' person in this job?

List situations or steps in your process that can cause the Idea Champion to loose interest in the process:

Issue	What is done that turns off the participant?	What can you do to change that?

TABLE 7: IDEA DOCUMENTATION

List situations or steps in your process that can cause a participant to be turned off (**Include issues such as limited access to your data**):

Issue	What is done that turns off the participant?	What can you do to change that?

**Now we will discuss results from each table.**

**If you have questions, please feel free to contact me at the conference  
or via telephone/email.**

**Thank you!**

## **IDEA SYSTEMS – RESULTS FROM EIA WORKSHOP**

On the following page are the results from the EIA workshop at Palm Springs (September 2006). Due to time constraints, we were not able to fully discuss all steps fully. We also went through each step as a group rather than breaking into tables.

- ◆ Discussed each item generally
- ◆ Wrote down issues that could be focused on to create a more positive environment – avoiding breaking the glass. These were written on post-it notes and placed on the related flipchart paper for that step.
- ◆ Each person was allowed several votes to pick the entries that best related to them.

In the following section, each item was written under the step that related to it along with the number of votes. If no votes, then vote information was not included. I also attempted to clarify what that item meant as a short description may not be remembered.

## IDEA SYSTEMS – RESULTS FROM EIA WORKSHOP

PROBLEM OR OPPORTUNITY	IDEA GENERATION	IDEA REVIEW	IDEA IMPLEMENTATION	IDEA RECOGNITION	IDEA FOLLOW-UP
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Remove as many rules as possible (2 votes)</li> <li>◆ Knowing goals of organization and the work area we work in (2 votes)</li> <li>◆ Knowing what the customer wants (1 vote)</li> <li>◆ Resource team to ask questions. These are contact people with additional training to help submitters generate good ideas.</li> <li>◆ Weekly local meetings – discuss ideas, goals or issues.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Continuous improvement workshops (2 votes)                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Involve all people</li> <li>○ Observe and communicate</li> <li>○ Discuss</li> </ul> </li> <li>◆ Support many ways of accepting ideas (2 votes)</li> <li>◆ Coach on team or work area – extra skills and knowledge of program (1 vote)</li> <li>◆ Supervisor training (1 vote)</li> <li>◆ Rotate experts -people trained to support idea generation (1 vote)</li> <li>◆ Team or work area discussions</li> <li>◆ Standardized work – Lean – this creates a baseline to measure improvement efforts against.</li> <li>◆ Rules – simplify eligibility and other rules so we don't turn off people generating ideas.</li> <li>◆ Measure which areas generate ideas – link this to training and support.                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Avoid general training for everybody and try to focus based on needs.</li> <li>○ Areas with problems or limited activity would get extra training.</li> <li>○ Areas with high activity would get more advanced training to create better ideas.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Help our evaluators (1 vote)</li> <li>◆ Reminder of open ideas – somebody cares (letting evaluators know this is important) (1 vote)</li> <li>◆ Simplify review to make an adoption decision – red/yellow/green light (1 vote)</li> <li>◆ Clear guidelines (1 vote)</li> <li>◆ Evaluation team meetings – make them fun (e.g., bring doughnuts)</li> <li>◆ Wall of shame – list evaluators that are late with the ideas they are late on in public areas.</li> <li>◆ Set flexible turn-around time on ideas based on the size/complexity of the idea (e.g., little ideas should be handled faster than large ideas requiring capital expenditure).</li> <li>◆ Late ideas - notify the idea generator (submitter)</li> <li>◆ Clear idea status</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Feedback on status of an idea being implemented</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Manager present awards – coaching to insure they present them in a positive way (2 votes)</li> <li>◆ Publicize! (2 votes)</li> <li>◆ Skunk award – believe this is passed to different areas based on performance. Could be set up for areas lagging or with a different mascot for areas doing well (1 vote)</li> <li>◆ Celebrate</li> <li>◆ Include evaluators/reviewers in recognition</li> <li>◆ Best practice list</li> <li>◆ Large awards – clear reason as to why it was paid</li> <li>◆ Large award/recognition by idea or for overall participation for a certain time period.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Ask submitters to enter new ideas – possibly based on the idea we are following-up on.</li> <li>◆ How happy are participants with the results of the idea/suggestion?</li> <li>◆ Is it still in use?</li> </ul>