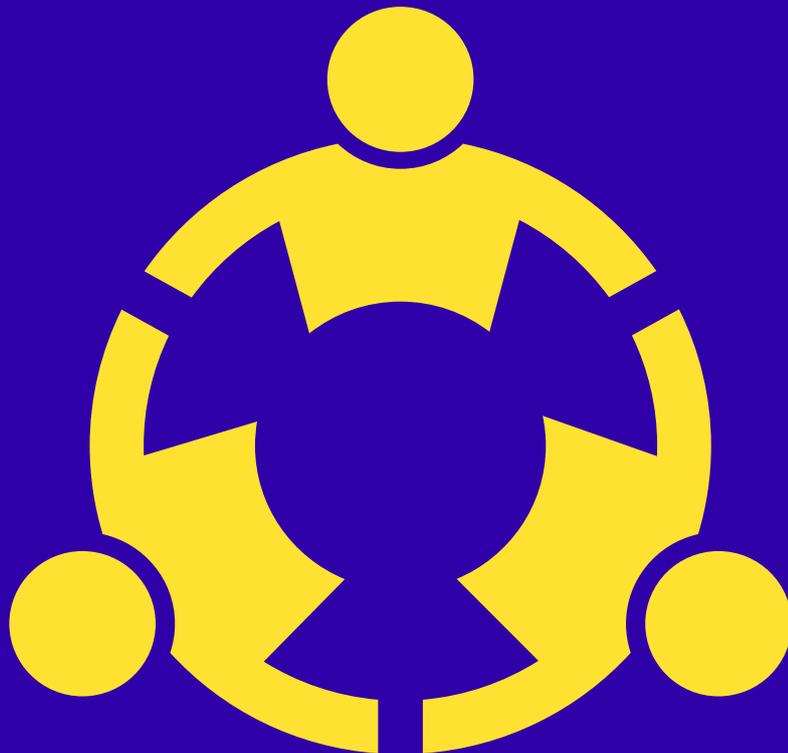# smartcrowds®
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Delivering Measurable ROI from your Innovation Efforts A Series of Practical Guides

Step Two - Creating an Innovation Active Workforce

# The Importance of an Innovation Active Workforce

If you want to empower your employees and promote a sustainable culture of innovation you need to engage and energise as many people as possible so they contribute new ideas. In short, you need to create an innovation active workforce.

Some employees naturally look for new, better, ways of getting the job done. For most, though, the drive and confidence to regularly contribute meaningful ideas needs to be nurtured and stimulated.

This guide is all about helping you do exactly that. It will give you practical advice on how to create an innovation active workforce that results in more employee engagement, empowerment and satisfaction and, ultimately, more people across the workforce solving strategic business challenges.

Three Key Areas of Focus

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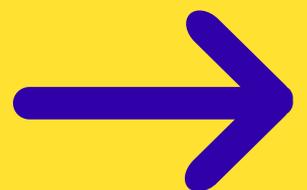
There are three main things you need to do to create an innovation active workforce:

✓ **Increase the number of focused innovation activities**

✓ **Increase the number of engaged employees**

✓ **Increase the average number of ideas per employee**

We're guessing none of these things come as a surprise to you, in fact they all fall into the 'blindingly obvious' category. But actually doing them is incredibly difficult, so the rest of this document lays out a series of practical steps you can take to ensure success in each area.

→

KEY AREA OF FOCUS

1

How to increase the number of Focused Innovation Activities

The key to this is to give local leaders, whether that's at team, department or regional level, sufficient discretion to identify their own innovation priorities, but also the confidence to take appropriate steps to identify, set and solve those challenges with the help of the wider workforce.

The following practical steps will help to create an environment that will foster these characteristics.

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1

Use your Feedback Channels to Spot Early Warnings or Opportunities

Giving your leaders easy access to things like always-on listening surveys, traditional surveys, post project reviews, customer interviews, sales call analysis, social media sentiment and feedback monitoring platforms means they can start to identify the most pressing areas where employee ideas can help.

Exposure to these channels can be a great way for them to identify areas for improvement and innovation challenges.

2

Use Strategy to Inform Mission Critical Challenges

Strategy reviews are key to uncovering mission-critical innovation challenges. Use the reviews to identify important issues that need to be resolved for the organisation to achieve its overall objectives, and then identify those areas where innovation would really help – where there are issues but no obvious solution is readily available.

These are the things that should form the basis for the strategic innovation challenges that can be communicated across the organisation. In this way the innovation challenges will have a clear line of sight to the overall strategic objectives.

3

Identify Local 'Purpose' and 'Performance' based Challenges

An often-overlooked place for department/function heads to find inspiration in setting innovation challenges is their own business unit.

When starting from here It helps to be able to take a "systems" perspective on the function to inform challenge-setting.

The organisational balanced-scorecard, which often represents business unit purpose as KPIs with associated scoring for performance, acts as a great tool for spotting problems that can be turned into improvement and innovation.

4   Break Large Challenges into Smaller Meaningful Chunks

Where a challenge has been set at a high organisational level it can be difficult for employees, working in their own business unit, to understand how their contributions might help.

To solve this, develop more focused challenges based on how the department can contribute to the overall business challenges. In this way, strategic level challenges can be deployed throughout the organisation as a hierarchy of more local challenges.

5   Communicate Challenges Effectively

Good communication of a challenge is vital for its success. Keep it simple and short. Around half a page of A4 for the whole challenge is about right. Make sure it promotes action with no further instructions required, and write it in a way that anyone can understand - research suggests that communication of this type is most effective if written at the reading age of an average 11-year-old!

Our Challenge Template is a great starting point: You can download it here
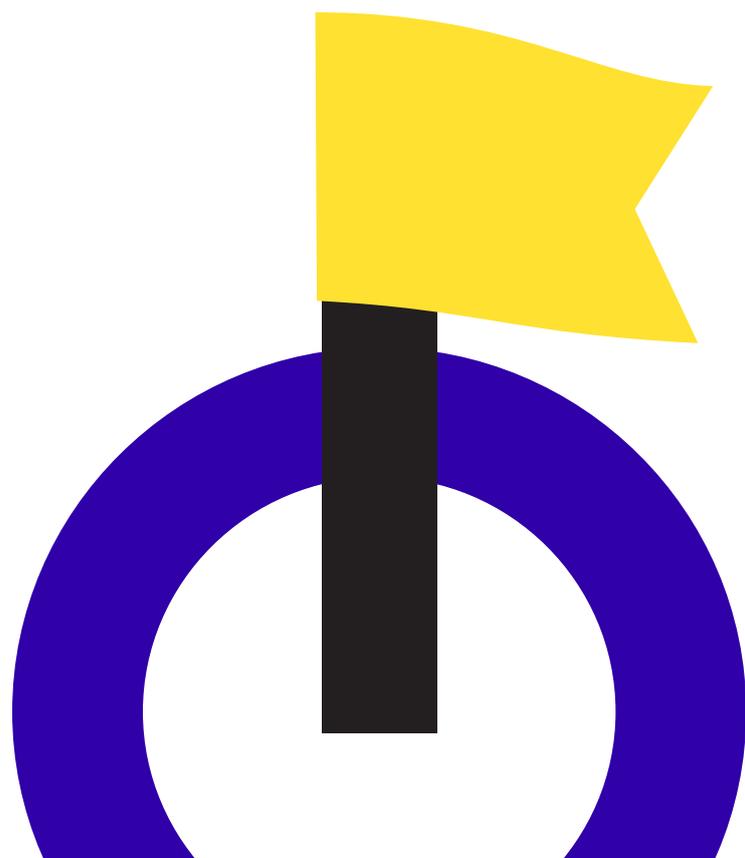
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How to increase the number of Engaged Employees

The number of employees actively contributing ideas to innovation challenges is a clear indication of how engaged your workforce is and of how much they 'believe' in the innovation programme. So let's get them as engaged as possible!

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1. Keep Multiple Challenges 'In-Play'

Try to ensure that there is no challenge 'dead-time' - those periods where there is nothing that employees can contribute to. Instead, keep up interest and momentum with a mixture of trickle down sets of connected challenges, focused departmental challenges and individual requests for help.

2. Actively promote out-of-role contribution

By identifying a range of different challenges across the organisation, and actively promoting and encouraging as many people as possible to get involved, individuals get an opportunity to make a contribution beyond their usual role.

Cross functional challenges are a great way to stimulate out-of-role contribution - create a forum for your leaders to regularly agree on the next set of cross functional challenges that will break down your silos and create greater diversity.

3. Consider 'any-person' challenge setting

In an ideal world anyone can identify for themselves an issue they want to resolve with new thinking, and then look for help from others.

Online innovation platforms can make this type of activity more viable, letting you create a vibrant digital "innovation notice-board" where people post their requests for help and colleagues can get involved in areas where they think they can help.

4   Build Confidence with Innovation Training

Training in areas like opportunity spotting, creativity, idea generation, idea communication and commercialisation skills can increase people's confidence in their own ability to contribute to innovation.

Keep your training exercises short, stimulating and easy to follow - video clips that show what a good idea structure looks like or how to use idea starters to stimulate creative thinking (we talk about this in the next section), provide great training resources.

KEY AREA OF FOCUS

3

How to increase the Average Number of Ideas per Employee

The truth is you'll need lots of ideas if you want to increase the chances of finding those that can be successfully implemented. The likelihood is you'll need more ideas than you think. So you need to make it as easy as possible for people to submit relevant ideas that can make a real difference.

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1 Set Strongly Aligned Challenges

When setting challenges you need to ensure they are aligned to organisational priorities which are, in turn, cascaded to regional, departmental, and team level.

Well-designed imagery that reinforces existing organisational priorities and objectives, visibly linked to your challenge, can be a great way to share this line-of-sight. If there are no resources available, speak to your marketing department – they should be happy to help!

2 Provide Clear Idea Guidance

Beyond good challenge setting, another simple step that can have a dramatic impact on the number of ideas submitted is to provide clear guidance on what a good idea looks like.

Use a structured idea form that guides the submitter to clearly communicate the essence of the idea, making it easy for others to understand and get behind.

- What is the idea – the thing, the proposal, the change that is being suggested?

- Who is the customer – who benefits directly from the idea?

- What problem is addressed – what is the issue that the customer is facing?

- What is the benefit for the customer – how is this good news for the intended customer?

- What's new about this idea – how does it do something different to what is being done just now?

A structured form will lead to a much higher quality of ideas being submitted and fewer being rejected, minimising the risk of discouraging the submission of more ideas in the future.

Utilise Idea Starters

A great way to increase the innovation output from employees is to utilise methods that stimulate new thinking.

Idea "starting points" can be identified in any challenge so that individual employees can use their own curiosity to explore potential sources of inspiration. In its simplest form, stimulus of this kind might be data or insights that are directly related to the challenge area.

To identify starting points try looking at performance reports, customer feedback, failure analysis. In addition, communication of summarised research findings, solutions from different industries, or reports on the application of new technologies can all stimulate the creative juices leading to more new ideas.

The use of stimulus in this way can have a significant multiplying effect on the innovation productivity of the engaged workforce.
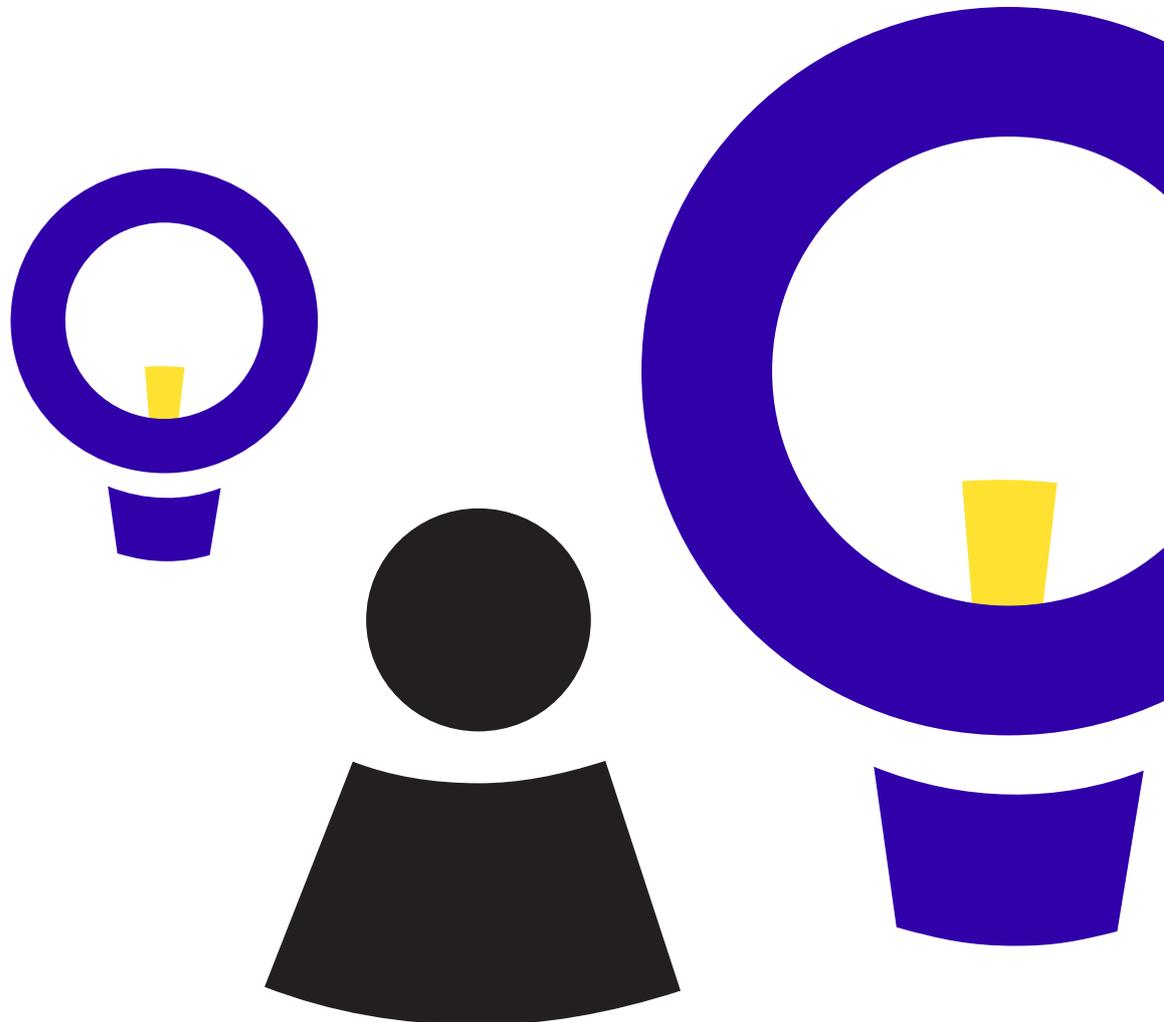
What's Next?

Now you've got the basic framework in place, check out the second guide in this series – Step Three: Building a Stronger Ideas Funnel

REQUEST AN ROII CALCULATION

Our Innovation Consultants will carry out a short review and prepare an **ROII Calculation** for you that highlights the areas where the most significant return is likely to be achieved.

FIND OUT MORE

REQUEST SMARTCROWDS IMPACT DEMO

Our **smartcrowds IMPACT demo** is delivered around the key innovation performance indicators described in this guide. In the demo you'll find out how smartcrowds helps you engage better with your workforce, empower your employees to make change happen, and turn more ideas into more outcomes, more of the time.

CONTACT US TO REQUEST A DEMO

BOOK A 'PRACTICAL STEPS TO PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT' SESSION

The leading indicators of Innovation Performance outlined in this guide are the foundation for improving the return from your innovation efforts.

The **Practical Steps to Performance Improvement** session, led by our Innovation Consultants, will assess the current innovation activities that are being employed in your organisation, and recommend a step by step process that improve the performance of a set of leading indicators that we agree with you.

FIND OUT MORE

ABOUT SMARTCROWDS

At smartcrowds, we work with organisations looking to empower their employees, at all levels, to make sustainable, positive contributions to business change and innovation. Our smartcrowds IMPACT programme has been designed to deliver repeatable return on innovation investment, through a 5-step programme that is built around the key leading indicators of innovation performance measurement.

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