



The Path to Empowerment

A Guide to Practical Steps for Meaningful Ideas

Creating an Engaged and Empowered Workforce:
A Series of Practical Guides

From Involvement to Empowerment

In our previous guide “More Routes to Empowerment - Practical Steps for Effective Involvement”, we shared some practical solutions for leaders looking to create a more **involved** and pro-active workforce that can drive meaningful change from the day-to-day and emerging issues and concerns of employees.

However, a more involved workforce is only one piece of the current “war-on-talent” jigsaw: according to Gallup and Accenture, whilst engaged and involved employees are 59% less likely to seek out a new job or career in the next twelve months, 31% of those people who **will** leave will do so due to **lack of empowerment**.

And so, in this final guide in the series, we move our focus from ‘better involvement’ to ‘greater empowerment’, exploring what an empowered workforce might look like and sharing practical tips that leaders can use to help foster an organisational culture that brings greater ownership, accountability and creativity.

BENEFITS OF EMPOWERMENT

Research regularly demonstrates that when employees feel empowered at work, it is associated with stronger job performance, job satisfaction, and commitment to the organisation. It’s no surprise that organisations that are best able to follow through on their empowerment promise will navigate the war-on-talent with the fewest battle scars.

In our view, empowerment flourishes when employees:

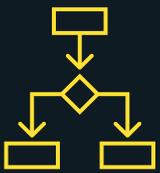
-  have the appropriate resources to effectively carry out their work;
-  are given the opportunity and authority to deliver excellent work outcomes;
-  are motivated to continuously improve using their own ideas; and
-  are comfortable with being held accountable for their actions.

While this might seem simple, tackling each of these aspects is a challenge for every business. Luckily, help is at hand! Read on for the smartcrowds guide to creating the super-empowered employee!

The Empowered Workforce

What type of environment and culture must an organisation foster to ensure that empowerment is within every employee's grasp? And what practical steps can leaders take to create the right conditions for empowerment – without the need for a wholesale re-organisation of the business.

First, let's look at some key features of an empowered, innovative workforce.



CLEAR LINE OF SIGHT

Most people have ideas on how to improve their day-job. But an empowered employee will know how their ideas will positively impact the wider business. Create a clear line of sight so that everyone focuses on what will help the organisation achieve its key goals.



CREATIVE FOCUS

Creativity is everywhere in your organisation, from leaders to front-line workers. But the wrong workplace environment and culture can stifle even the best creative minds. Instil and embrace a leadership focus on workforce creativity to ensure that everyone has an equal chance to contribute.



LOCAL OWNERSHIP

Nobody can drive process, service, and product improvements better than the people who deliver them daily. But all too often, centrally planned business improvement results in missed opportunities. Break away from the old model with an incremental local ownership and empowerment approach.



TRUSTING ENVIRONMENT

Two-way trust between leaders and employees is a cornerstone of workforce commitment, accountability, and performance. But trust will rapidly dissipate if leadership makes promises but does not follow through. Develop a framework that combines effective processes and systems to ensure that the ball never gets dropped.



OUTCOME FOCUSED

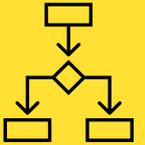
A focus on outcomes is great for everyone – from employee, team, business unit and the organisation's bottom-line. But where employee perception is that nothing ever changes, disengagement rapidly spreads. So, celebrate your outcomes with the fanfare they deserve and use the opportunity to share learnings as a bonus.

Empowerment Activities

The path to an empowered workforce is not always obvious nor easily trodden, but broken down into bitesize chunks can be easier to make sense of and follow.

In the following pages, we provide guidance on how to make your employees feel like they have gained a new set of workplace superpowers!

CREATE A CLEAR LINE OF SIGHT



A cornerstone of empowerment is a clear line-of-sight between the efforts of employees and the contribution that those efforts make to business performance.

Take a step back and view your organisation from a birds-eye point of view. Ensure that your business can elaborate and share a clear picture of how the individual working parts contribute to the whole.

OUR TOP TIPS

1. **Identify a Line-of-Sight (LoS) shortcut:** your organisation's Balanced Scorecard or 5-Year Plan can be a great way to understand how KPI performance at each level drives overall performance, so **USE** it as a shortcut for developing a LoS guide.
2. **Use understandable KPI language:** Not everyone will immediately understand the myriad and complexity of KPI metrics across the business, so **TRANSLATE** them into easier to consume, non-metric based measures of success. (*see below)
3. **Present your LoS visually:** **ENGAGE** your marketing team to develop a graphical (and preferably navigable) guide that represents the LoS up and down the levels of your organisation in a way that everyone can understand in seconds.
4. **Share on your popular platforms:** identify the most common everyday touchpoints for your workforce – your Intranet, email, and MS-Teams system - and **LINK** to your visual LoS guide on each resource to reinforce business priorities.
5. **Communicate it regularly:** launching an innovation challenge? Recently completed an improvement project? Be sure to share the details of your initiative and **ILLUSTRATE** how it relates to LoS and impacts on business performance.

* See some examples of how to [‘express your KPIs as LoS’](#) here.

EMBRACE EMPLOYEE CREATIVITY



Employee creativity can help organisations obtain a competitive advantage and an innovative edge. But it needs to be harnessed through leadership actions that demonstrate that leaders value their creative input.

Whilst necessity is often the mother of invention, creating an environment with the right balance of creative free will and pressure for new ideas will encourage your workforce to contribute their best innovation efforts.

OUR TOP TIPS

- 1. Adopt a balanced expectation of innovation:** too much innovation free will affects focus, but too much pressure inhibits creative thinking. **COMBINE** a range of ideation approaches from continuous improvement suggestion boxes to time-bound challenges and idea hackathons that enable your workforce to dip in and out of creative initiatives in a manner that works best for them.
- 2. Ensure the provision of always-on channels:** some employees can produce ideas with what seems like superhuman regularity, so make sure you cater for them. **PROVISION** a range of always available idea boxes (paper or electronic) from business units across the organisation into which employees can drop ideas whenever they like to support your continuous improvement drive.
- 3. Create a bank of exciting challenges:** The best new ideas often emerge when business goals are clear. **WORK** with your leadership team to identify a stream of time-bound strategic innovation priorities that you can work on over time. Not priorities that you KNOW how to solve, but ones that you DON'T know how to solve – this is where your workforce can best help you gain that elusive edge.
- 4. Tolerate the employee dark side! :** some of the best ideas often come from individuals with personal characteristics that make them question the status quo and defy existing norms. **COMMUNICATE** clearly that this type of creative input is not just acceptable but desirable – within the bounds of good corporate behaviour and with the help of a moderation facility, of course!
- 5. Allow for the need for anonymity:** not everyone can easily share their creative side with colleagues – for some, it's an uncomfortable experience that inhibits involvement. **ENSURE** that your ideation channels allow for anonymous input, even if that means you might never know who submitted the idea.



All too often, workforce empowerment through the opportunity for staff to participate in improvement & innovation activities is limited. And the chance to get involved is also often limited by a centralised approach to business change.

Be prepared to break away from the centralised model – your local business units and teams know how best to make the biggest difference, so enable them to safely improve and innovate in line with your organisational priorities.

OUR TOP TIPS

- 1. Identify your local empowerment bottlenecks:** poor line-of-sight, unclear ‘tramlines’ for innovation activity to occur, lack of trust in local leaders to own local initiatives, and limited innovation capability of employees are common barriers to workforce empowerment. **IDENTIFY** and prioritise your key bottlenecks and set out a plan to tackle them one by one.
- 2. Take an incremental approach:** Building innovation capability across an organisation is often best achieved through sharing of real-life learnings. **CHOOSE** a strategic innovation priority and select a group that embraces change to solve the challenge. They’ll require some investment in innovation training, but your newly skilled team will act as your innovation experts on your next - and next again - challenges, upskilling colleagues as they go.
- 3. Adopt a consistent process:** With an incremental approach to innovation, a copy-and-paste approach will make it easier to up-skill new teams who take on the next set of projects. **HONE** your process from the first few initiatives and set that out as a consistent (though evolving) standard for those that follow.
- 4. Break down your local silos:** Whilst local teams are often best at solving local challenges, diversity of thought brings multiple alternatives and true out-of-the-box thinking. **ENABLE** local silos to be broken down by sharing your challenges and providing opportunities for anyone with a curious mind to get involved.
- 5. Track team empowerment efforts closely.** As capability and opportunity for empowerment grows across the business, high performing teams will quickly emerge. Regularly **MONITOR** key metrics from each unit, such as the number of initiatives launched and the trend of involvement effort, and lean on identified teams to share their learnings and help bring other areas up the curve.

BUILD EMPLOYEE TRUST



Actions always speak louder than words. Leaders will lose the goodwill generated from a new organisational empowerment programme if they fail to follow through with actionable plans for change.

Give your leaders the tools to deliver on your promise. With the right combination of role-specific innovation training and enabling technology, every leader can be empowered to act on employee input & feedback in a timely and efficient manner.

OUR TOP TIPS

- 1. Clearly state your promise:** when we're asked to get involved in anything new, we all want to know what we should expect back in return. **AGREE** a set of core innovation promise principles that every leader must adopt – for example, “We'll provide a transparent response to every contribution within three days” - and be prepared to tailor the promise locally, appropriate to each team or situation.
- 2. Provide cross-role capability training:** Two-way trust in innovation is contingent on workforce capability across several roles. Initiative 'sponsors' who identify a need. Domain 'experts' who evaluate ideas. Idea 'teams' that explore idea viability. And the idea 'contributors' themselves. **DELIVER** appropriate training for each role to build the essential skills & capability that are necessary to deliver on the promise.
- 3. Let technology help:** don't drop the ball when your workforce gets increasingly busy with locally owned innovation and improvement initiatives. Instead, **INVEST** in (or use existing) technology to help you keep on top of employee contributions using notifications and reminders of feedback that they will be expecting.
- 4. Employ regular feedback loops:** Demonstrate that you care that your actions increase employees' sense of empowerment. **CONSULT** regularly with the workforce using surveys (Pulse surveys are best!) to spot positive and negative trends in sentiment and make sure that you act on the findings.
- 5. Recognise your top talent:** with suitable reporting mechanisms, you'll quickly spot who takes responsibility and contributes the most effectively. So, **BUILD** on the trust you have been earning by recognising your intrapreneurs and working with them to identify training and opportunities that will move them up through the roles of innovation accountability.

FOCUS ON OUTCOMES



Research regularly shows that workforce empowerment breaks down when nothing ever seems to change for the better, despite the best efforts of those involved.

By focusing on both positive and negative outcomes, the trust between leaders and employees will be cemented in stone - leading to improved job performance, job satisfaction, and commitment to the organisation.

OUR TOP TIPS

- 1. If you are going to fail, then do it fast and cheap! :** All new ideas carry risk, but a mindset that accepts and embraces managed risk, from leadership down, will be more likely to achieve excellent outcomes. **ADOPT** a process that uses agile one-week sprints during an idea's exploration stage to ease concerns and keep everyone focused on reaching Go/No Go decisions as quickly and cheaply as possible.
- 2. Embrace an ethos of learning:** most innovation projects are intrinsically learning exercises - no one knows at the outset what the result will be or what twists and turns it will take to get there. So, **SHARE** every innovation outcome, both negative and positive, as your innovation project progresses - your next project will be easier when your learnings help you cut down on repeat mistakes.
- 3. Shout loud about your successes:** every success from an employee's creative thinking is a multiple win/win. Great for the individual's self-esteem, great for efficiency of the team, great for broader workforce morale, and great for the bottom line. **CELEBRATE** every innovation success using case studies which showcase the positives and the learnings for everyone's benefit.
- 4. Make your outcomes easily searchable:** whether positive or negative, all outcomes from an innovation project contribute to the bank of organisational knowledge. **WORK** with your IT team or platform supplier to ensure that every learning is captured and is easily searched by those working on the next project.
- 5. Feature innovation within employee reviews:** traditional annual employee performance reviews focus on day-to-day job & role outcomes, so set out your stall on your creativity expectations in the same way. **ADD** innovation outcomes as a core competency to keep people focused on how their input added value.

What's Next?

Find out how smartcrowds can help you empower your workforce.



Book a **smartcrowds**
EMPOWERMENT &
IMPROVEMENT demo

REQUEST AN ROI CALCULATION

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

FIND OUT
MORE

REQUEST A 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,

CONTACT US TO
REQUEST A DEMO

Interested in a deeper dive into high-impact innovation?
[Browse](#) our Practical Guides “Delivering Measurable ROI from
your Innovation Efforts”

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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