

The Innovation Toolkit - Contents

The 'Innovation Toolkit' contains practical guidelines and exercises through which an organisation can increase the quantity and quality of its innovative solutions. Feel free to reproduce the contents of the Toolkit for the use of your staff.

◆ **Brainstorming Guidelines**

If there is one creative thinking technique that is commonly used by businesses all over the world, it is brainstorming. However, due to ineffective techniques most brainstorming sessions are not as productive as they could be. The brainstorming guidelines will help you to ensure that your brainstorming session stays on track and avoids being undermined by people's egos*.

◆ **The innovation identikit**

The innovation identikit will encourage you to challenge your organisations status quo and will trigger ideas about how your organisation could be more innovative.

◆ **Applied creative thinking: Challenging your service elements**

One popular creative thinking technique, 'slice and dice'**, requires users to dissect the issue at hand into its individual attributes. The idea is to then focus on each attribute separately, challenging the accepted belief about what it involves. The hope is that through pointedly challenging the status quo, new and improved ways of doing things will emerge.

◆ **Personal Job Development**

The overall effectiveness and dynamism of an organisation can be increased by allowing individual staff members greater efficacy in their day-to-day work. If encouraged to question, challenge and reform the way that things are done on their own turf, staff will become generally more innovative and will tend to feel more empowered and satisfied within their roles. All staff, from Chief Executives to administrators, can begin to identify ways in which they can improve their services and increase their impact by answering the personal job development questions.

◆ **Identifying your innovative team**

There is little doubt that some people have a natural flare for innovation. These are the people who are full of good ideas and have the drive and determination to make them happen. As a result, when we talk about innovation, we tend to put all the emphasis on the 'ideas people'. It would, however, be a mistake to assume that these are the only people an organisation needs in order to create systematic innovation. If an organisation wants to be well positioned for innovation, it will need to involve and cultivate the skills of not just its 'ideas people' but also its leaders, planners, negotiators and frontline workers.

◆ **Idea Implementation form**

It is much easier to act on staff ideas if they are well thought out and focussed around the organisations objectives. The idea implementation form will help you to collect staff ideas that are focussed and well thought through. This will make implementing ideas seem far less daunting.

* In his book, 'Managing the people side of innovation', Jeet Chopra argues that people's ideas are subconsciously integral to their perception of self. If these ideas are criticised or dismissed they will react either by withdrawing (holding back any further ideas) or counter attacking (finding fault with other people's ideas).

** See Michael Michalko's 'Thinkertoys' (1991) for more details.

Brainstorming Guidelines

1. Clearly define the problem and specify any criteria. The more time you spend getting your challenge right, the more likely you are to reach an effective solution.
2. Make it clear that there is no criticism or judgement allowed.
3. Where possible, get participants to jot down ideas prior to the actual brainstorming session. This will increase the likelihood of the quieter people participating. It also means that people will have a longer period of incubation over which inspirational ideas may appear.
4. Conduct the session in a stimulating or unusual environment. This will get people in a more creative frame of mind and may lead to fresh associations.
5. Appoint a facilitator to keep the session flowing and on track. The facilitator should also strictly enforce guideline 2.
6. Appoint someone to record all of the ideas or use a tape recorder.
7. If the group is very homogenous, the range of ideas will be limited. In order to increase the diversity of the solutions offered, appoint a 'devils advocate' to challenge the status quo and make provocative suggestions.
8. Start the session by limbering up. For example, get participants to come up with ideas that would be completely unacceptable to the client/user. (This will get people laughing and the ideas flowing.)
9. Encourage unconventional ideas
10. Aim for quantity and variety – not quality. This way people will be more willing to say whatever comes into their head and you increase the chance of a unique connection being made.
11. Include every idea in the final list.
12. Make the session fun!

Unless the decision needs to be made on the spot, it is best to leave the evaluation of ideas until later. (See p18 of the innovation handbook for evaluation questions.)

The Innovation Identikit

Organisational aims and objectives	Comments
What are the key results your organisation is trying to achieve?	
What are the ways in which the organisation tries to meet these aims?	
Will the above aims and objectives lead to the best possible outcomes for your clients? Why / why not?	
Do you feel the organisation is meeting its aims and objectives? If not why not?	
How do the organisation's outcomes compare to the best possible outcomes? (Imagine how it would work in an ideal world.)	
Can you suggest any ways in which the organisation could better meet the client's needs?	

Working environment			
Please indicate (by ticking) whether you agree or disagree with these statements. Can you suggest any ideas for improvement?	Agree	Disagree	Ideas for improvement
I feel that I am working in a progressive and innovative organisation			
I feel that I am encouraged to put forward any ideas that I have relating to the way the organisation operates			
If I have a good idea, there are ways for me to make it heard e.g. a manager who collects ideas, an idea box etc.			
I feel that I am given room within my job to be creative and to take the initiative			

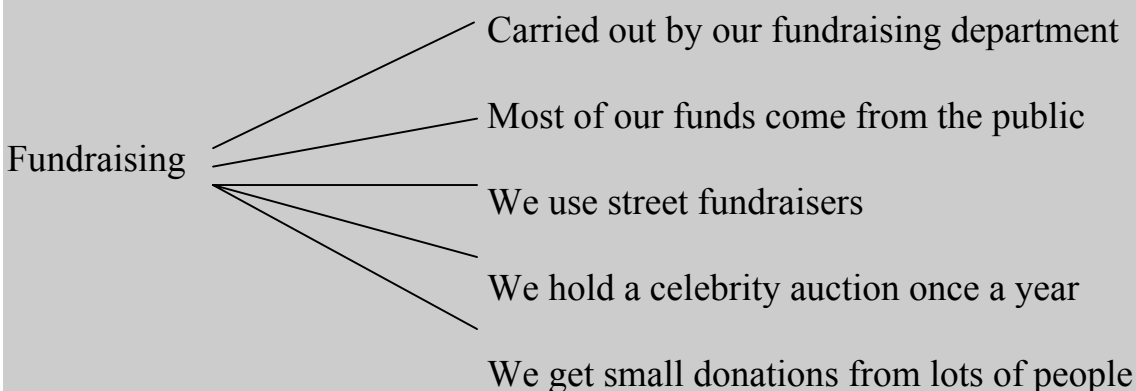
Applied creative thinking: Challenging your service elements

Consider the main service/product you provide. Create a diagram showing the main elements of this service/product. (See below example)

Now consider whether any of these elements could be improved, and how. Ask yourself:

- ◆ Why is it done this way?
- ◆ Is this the best way of doing it?
- ◆ Are there any alternatives?
- ◆ What could I do that would be a complete departure from what is currently being done?

Example: Peter is Head of Fundraising for a homelessness charity. He has decided to concentrate on the main service provided by his department, which is raising funds. Peter decides that it could be broken down as follows:



Looking at the elements one by one, Peter wonders whether it might be more effective to involve someone other than his fundraising team in the raising of funds. What would happen, for example, if they involved service users in the fundraising process? It might be challenging to get them on board, but it would have 3 advantages 1) It would give them a greater ownership of the services provided by the greater organisation, 2) It would provide them with new skills and meaningful activity, 3) It would make the cause more salient for the donors and give them a chance to engage with the people they are helping. Peter hasn't even reached the second element and already he has a great idea to work with!

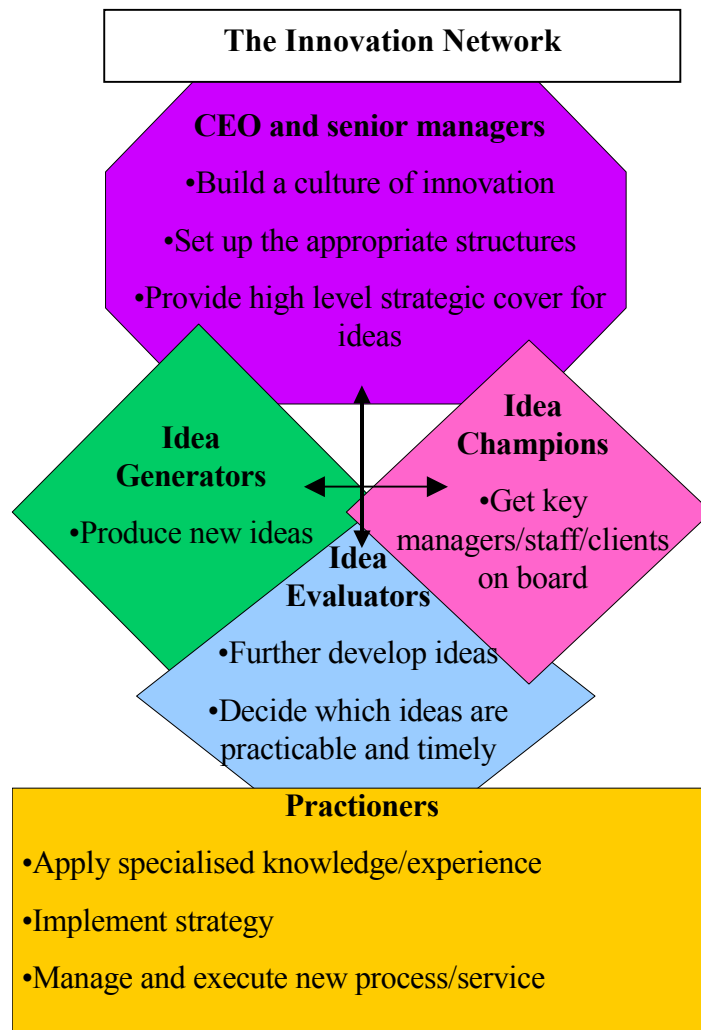
Personal job development

Step One: Think about all of the work you do and jot down answers to the following questions.	Answers
What excites me in my work?	
What angers me in my work?	
Is there anything that stops me from being as effective as I could be?	
What do I wish would happen in my job?	
What do I wish I had more time to do?	
What changes would I like to introduce?	
What would I like to get other people to do?	
What takes too long or is too complicated?	
What would I like to organise better?	

Step Two: Look at your answers. Now list up to 3 actions that could be taken to address some of these issues.	Will the effort involved be worth the difference it will make?	Do I need anyone to help me with this? Who?
1		
2		
3		

Identifying your innovative team

“There is a strong image of the lone genius – the inspired creative force working alone. But the reality is that teams are generally more effective at generating and refining ideas.” (Paul Slone, in ‘The leaders guide to entrepreneurial skills’)



Case Study: Shelter’s innovation network
 Shelter is a good example of an organisation that makes good use of a range of staff when innovating. As CEO of Shelter, Adam Sampson tries to cultivate an entrepreneurial and risk taking culture. He does this by ensuring that the organisation is very clear about its vision, principles and strategy and by encouraging staff to come up with ideas around these clearly defined parameters. His message to his staff is “if you can show us that this idea is relevant to our mission and values then we will back it”. Adam also ensures that the appropriate structures are in place to facilitate innovation.

These include:

- A part of the intranet devoted to new ideas (idea generation from all staff)
- A new solutions group that meets regularly to review ideas (further idea generation, idea evaluators, idea champions)
- Three members of staff assigned to mid-wide and nurse new ideas (idea champions, change agents and idea practitioners)

The innovation network is the network of roles utilised in order to get innovation off the ground. Of course, these roles are not distinct - there will usually be a degree of overlap. For example, a CEO who is very excited about an idea may want a part in every role. In the same way, a person who generated an idea may also function as the ‘idea champion’ and even the ‘idea practioner’.

Now, think about the people who work within your organisation and answer the following questions.

- Who are the leaders?
- Who are the ‘ideas’ people?
- Who are the analysts and evaluators?
- Who are the people that make things happen?
- Who is meticulously organised?
- Who is particularly persuasive?
- Who has a knack for getting people to co-operate?
- Who has expertise in a particular area?

Anyone you mentioned in response to the above questions has the potential to play a key role at some stage of the innovation process. (If the same name kept coming up again and again, then you’re probably looking at a born innovator!)

Idea implementation form

Staff name and department (optional): _____

We would like you to help us develop new ideas. So that we can more easily visualise how your idea might work, we ask that you consider how it might work in practice and suggest appropriate partners, training and 'action steps'. Please complete one idea implementation form per submitted idea.

We are seeking ideas regarding:

We would like all ideas to meet the following criteria:

- A.
- B.
- C.
- D.

Idea: _____

Potential partners? _____

Expertise needed? _____

Suggested steps for taking idea forward:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____