



# Why Bother? The Value of Training Your Employees Around Innovation

*Innovation Training & Development White Paper Series*

*(Document 1 of 4)*

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# Why bother? The Value of Training Your Employees Around Innovation

## Innovation Training and Development Whitepaper Series

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### ■ Introduction

The art and science of innovation management within large organizations is growing ever more complex.

The success that many programs are achieving at coming up with new ideas is creating a new set of problems, which leaders of relatively small innovation programs are struggling to address. These issues include how to scale a culture of innovation across large organizations, how to enhance the flow of innovative ideas being executed and how to create greater financial impact.

Increasingly, innovation leaders have responded to these challenges by focusing more aggressively on educating large numbers of employees around innovation skills, and then supporting them with personal networks and connections once they graduate from the training.

This series of four whitepapers outline key steps and examples on how to establish this kind of approach within an organization, in a way that drives the most value to all stakeholders. Whitepapers within the series include:

- Whitepaper #1: Why Bother? The Value of Training Your Employees Around Innovation (This document)
- Whitepaper #2: Can Innovation Be Learnt?
- Whitepaper #3: Taking Innovation Training to the Next Level: Integration With Employee Networks
- Whitepaper #4: Innovation Networks in Action – A Case Study

Each of these whitepapers can be downloaded for free from [www.culturevateinc.com](http://www.culturevateinc.com).

We hope that the combination of theoretical and practical approaches provided within these documents is helpful to readers and welcome any comments that you might have on these important topics.

Kind Regards,  
Anthony Ferrier, Culturevate

## ■ Why Bother? The Value of Training Your Employees Around Innovation

**Many successful innovation programs are extending their offerings to include training efforts for employees around the skills of innovation. This whitepaper (the first in a series of four) examines the benefits of such an approach for companies, innovation program leaders, and the employees who participate.**

In the recent past many Fortune 500 companies are finally seeing the cultural and financial benefits from their investments in building sophisticated innovation programs. As these programs mature, innovation leaders are extending the activities that they undertake across an organization, in an effort to drive new approaches to value, and to capture and execute ideas at various stages of development.

This level of success drives the generation of more ideas, but also raises a new set of problems, including the need to review, resource and execute more ideas than ever before. Program leaders are only now starting to grapple with the problem of idea execution, including how they can get better quality ideas generated more efficiently from their activities.

**“Many companies are extending the crowdsourced innovation model into the back-end of innovation.”**

As a way to address this backlog, many companies are extending the crowdsourced ideation (front-end) model into the back-end of innovation, often for the first time. This is a relatively new concept, as up until recently the development of ideas generated through crowdsourced activities were sent over to the standard product or process development teams, and everyone would hope for the best, almost always with disappointing results.

In this series of papers we will examine an alternate approach to idea development and execution as part of a successful innovation effort. Specifically, we will assess the need for organizations to train their employees around the skills of innovation, and then ensure that those individuals are directed to apply those new skills to generate the best quality ideas and assist with execution.

Admittedly, there is no shortage of training available for executives on how to establish and build innovation programs within large companies. However, this whitepaper series will focus on why you should train your middle management and more junior level employees around how to be innovative, rather than how to manage innovation.

What are the benefits to the organization of training employees on how to be innovative?

**Improved Bottom Line** – An effective innovation training program should be focused on creating a positive financial impact to the organization. Many training programs, whether they are focused on innovation or not, make the mistake of relying on the output of people trained or attendee feedback metrics. While these “soft” metrics are good to a point, over time the focus needs to be on generating direct ROI in order to maintain ongoing leadership support. Financial impact can be tracked through a variety of approaches, including ideas executed from attendees or generated directly during the training program.

“Many training programs make the mistake of relying on the output of people trained or attendee feedback metrics.”

**Empowered Employees** – By training your employees around innovation concepts and resources you are also empowering them to add value to the organization, beyond fulfilling their existing day-to-day roles. This empowerment of employees becomes an essential element to enhancing a culture of innovation across the organization, which leads to the next point.

**Engaged Employees** – Having employees who are engaged with the organization is quite different (though not mutually exclusive) from those who are happy with the organization, as outlined *in a recent report from Gallup*. The difference comes down to productivity and how much value an employee wants to, or feels that they can, give to the organization.

Employee training on innovation concepts should include education around organizational priorities at a corporate, business unit and group level. Opening up the discussion and decision

making process around these priorities encourages employees to feel engaged with the business and leadership. Further, those employees will feel that they are in a position to contribute to ideas that help drive value to the organization, either through ideation, business planning or idea execution.

“Opening up the discussion and decision making process around business priorities encourages employees to feel engaged with the business.”

As an additional point, and something regularly used by HR teams, enhancing engagement levels increases employee retention rates, leading to decreased recruitment and retraining costs.

**Improved Employee Skills and More Effective Networks** – It is really important that innovation training encourages participants to build networks and understand the value of diverse perspectives. Innovation rarely happens through the sole actions of an individual. It is generally based on the ability of individuals to leverage connections with people who have a variety of skills, background and perspectives (*Steve Johnson talks a lot about this*). Any innovation training should actively encourage the building of connections amongst employees and support a workplace that leverages employee diversity to drive additional value.

“It is important that companies don’t view innovation training as a single point activity, with little or no follow-up.”

A really important point here is that many companies view innovation training as a single point activity, with little or no follow-up support. The thinking here is that those employees will find a way to utilize their new skills. Unfortunately this is often not the case, and unless those newly trained individuals are given some sort of ongoing support they will forget or be discouraged from using their new skills.

In addition, these skills need to be useful not just in the context of coming up with new ideas, but also making the employee better at their existing role and pushing them towards more senior roles. Many companies are now making innovation training and the continued demonstration of innovative competency a requirement for career advancement.

**Connections with Leadership** – When an innovation training program is actively supported by an organization’s leadership, participants will feel a great level of connectedness to those leaders, which ties into the above points around engagement and empowerment.

“Innovation training should aim to accelerate and support other innovation activities across your organization.”

**Supports other Innovation Channels** – Your innovation training should aim to accelerate and support other innovation activities across your organization, especially those channels that create an actively managed pipeline of ideas to be assessed, developed and launched. This connection is especially important in more mature organizations, where without the support of channels to help nurture innovative ideas (in part generated through training efforts) there will only be frustration and disengagement by staff as they see all of these ideas killed off through inaction or death by a thousand cuts.

This whitepaper has focused on the benefits that innovation training efforts should aim to generate for an organization. In the second whitepaper in this series we will examine what areas should innovation training look to focus on for your company’s employees.

## ■ Author Biographies



### **Anthony Ferrier, CEO of Culturevate**

Anthony is the CEO of Culturevate ([www.culturevateinc.com](http://www.culturevateinc.com)), which empowers employees to execute ideas and inspire a culture of innovation. He is a widely read author, speaker and advisor to industry leaders with 20-plus years experience in the innovation and business-to-business sectors. Prior to Culturevate, Anthony was a Vice President of Innovation Strategy at Spigit, advising companies as diverse as Pfizer, U.S. Postal Service, Johnson

and Johnson, ADP and Fidelity on building effective innovation programs. Prior to that he led the innovation program at The Bank of New York Mellon and managed strategic planning for Pershing. He has also worked at Deloitte & Touche, Deloitte Consulting and Zurich Insurance in strategy and marketing roles. Anthony has a Masters of Commerce (University of Sydney) and Bachelor of Economics (University of Newcastle) and has lived in New York City for far too many years. Being a geek at heart, he loves the challenge of working with new clients and better understanding their innovation challenges and opportunities.

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**Culturevate** partners with clients to help enhance and build effective Innovation Programs that drive value to the organization. Culturevate empowers companies to execute ideas and inspire a culture of innovation with:

- 1. Education** – Train employees around innovation skills, generating the best quality ideas
- 2. Technology** – Engage employees with a dynamic portal / intranet site for your innovation program, with rotating materials and tools
- 3. Employee Networks** – Build effective networks to scale your Innovation Program's reach and impact

Learn more at [www.culturevateinc.com](http://www.culturevateinc.com)