



WHITE PAPER



Can Innovation Be Learnt?

Innovation Training & Development White Paper Series

(Document 2 of 4)

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Can Innovation be Learnt?	2
Author Biographies.....	6

Can Innovation Be Learnt?

Innovation Training and Development Whitepaper Series

■ 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
- Whitepaper #2: Can Innovation Be Learnt? (This document)
- 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.

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 and Wendy Castleman, Intuit

■ Can Innovation Be Learnt?

The first whitepaper in this series focused on the benefits generated from training employees in innovation skills. A natural extension of that approach is to now focus on what innovation training really means to an organization. In other words, what actually is innovation training, and more importantly, can innovation be learnt?

Before we get into the question of whether innovation can be learnt, my approach is an enthusiastic “Yes”. Pretty much any employee can learn the main skills needed to identify, build and execute innovative ideas, even within large, mature and conservative organizations. It is a common fallacy that people think innovation is an innate ability for employees. In fact, there are many tools and approaches to help individuals utilize their in-built skills of observation and connection to create and execute innovative ideas. After all, ideas alone are worthless. It is turning those concepts into implemented products, services or process improvements that defines innovation.

“Ideas alone are worthless.”

Like our earlier whitepaper, the focus here is on how middle management and more junior level employees can learn about how to be innovative, rather than a senior leader directing an organization towards innovation.

So on that note, let’s examine at least some areas of innovation that can be taught:

Knowing how to identify and sort ideas – With no shortage of approaches, tools and methodologies around generating and sorting innovative ideas (ideation) you could run an entire program just focused on these skills. Increasing your employee’s understanding of these skills will help improve their existing roles, as well as empower them to look for areas of improvement or innovation on a broader scale. Probably the most common approach of ideation is brainstorming, which is a great way to generate quick ideas (though others don’t necessarily agree). Other ideation techniques that can be easily taught include customer

observation approaches, design thinking, pairwise comparison, idea prototyping, observation techniques, etc. There are plenty of templates and tools to support these efforts available, but the point is that these techniques can be taught without too much trouble and can quickly add value to the organization.

“Employees should be encouraged to learn more about their company’s innovation program.”

Available channels, tools and resources – When running an innovation training effort it is important to encourage participants to better understand the resources, tools and channels that are available to support their innovative idea development efforts. In addition, employees should be encouraged to learn more about the innovation program within your organization, and to better understand the value that such a program generates to the organization and themselves. This heightened level of awareness around the program, with an emphasis on how participants can involve themselves, will help build a base for additional cultural change, and support other innovative activities that your program may be running.

Business plan elements – Within a large organization, an unformed or incomplete idea isn’t going to generate any value or progress. After all, what is the value of an idea without execution? Innovation campaigns or challenges can source some ideas, but pretty soon after that event a business plan needs to clearly articulate the value of the idea and a path towards implementation. This needs to happen within a format that is both acceptable and thorough enough for the organization to make a proper go/no-go assessment.

Every organization or business unit will have their own business planning templates and approaches, but there are definitely some central and consistent components, including a SWOT analysis, competitive positioning, idea articulation, financial forecasting and analysis, benefits outline, risk profile assessment, resource requirements, etc. Employees can be trained on how to come up with at least the basic elements of a decent business plan. An even more valuable approach is to train employees on the approaches, templates and tools specific to the organization.

“By improving employee’s abilities to come up with well structured and presented ideas, resources can be redirected to idea development and execution.”

By improving the ability of employees to come up with well structured and presented ideas, that align with your organization’s best practices, the effort and time previously dedicated to reviewing ideas can be redirected to idea development and execution.

Stakeholder buy-in – As we all know, getting an idea to successfully move forward within an organization often involves identifying, assessing and reaching out to the appropriate stakeholders, and developing approaches to encourage their support of the idea going forward. Employees can be trained in approaches and tools to identify their stakeholders and, very importantly, develop approaches to identify and address their questions. The next step is to give them the skills to coerce those stakeholders to support the idea going forward. Associated with this, your program can make available materials, tools and templates that support employees as they go through this process. Once again, not a big deal to teach, as long as you have the correct tools and approach in place.

Development planning - Learning how to create a more detailed implementation plan, beyond the initial business plan, can be an important element for employees to learn. While a business plan might include a high level approach to move an idea forward, having a more detailed execution plan, and specific steps and instructions to guide development efforts, is often the next step after the business plan has been reviewed and accepted. While elements of a business plan tend to be generic, development plans tend to be more specific to a particular idea, company and/or business unit.

“Educating employees around both when and how to use a development plan should be incorporated into training efforts.”

It is worth noting that there is often a point in the maturity cycle of an idea where a development plan becomes useful. There may be a specific process outlined for this approach, based on which group is expected to develop the idea, or even on an expected threshold of planned development resources. Educating employees around both when and how to use a development plan should be incorporated into training efforts. It is worth noting that development plans are often utilized more actively in product development areas, as they tend to have better established approaches to developing new thinking than other areas of the business.

Inter-personal relationships – Any training effort really should aim to build interpersonal relationships across silos and business units within the organization. It is well established that diversity of perspective encourages the development and implementation of innovation, but what is often missing with training programs is truly encouraging participants to understand what roles and functions other people within the organization perform. These new relationships, and increased understanding of the organization, will further position the program to drive value to the organization.

All of these elements can be taught to employees and are important in encouraging employees to support your innovation program. The next whitepaper will focus on how to support and encourage participants to drive value to the organization after they completed your training efforts.

■ Author Biographies



Anthony Ferrier, CEO of Culturevate

Anthony is the CEO of Culturevate (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.

Phone: +1 (917) 822 2115, Email: Anthony@culturevateinc.com

Twitter: [@AnthonyFerrier](https://twitter.com/AnthonyFerrier), Blog: www.culturevateinc.com



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