



## Is Your Company Actually Ready to Innovate?

12 Questions Every Company needs to Answer to get the most from their Innovation Efforts

## **More efficient processes, breakthrough products, new customers, and happier employees**

Every organization wants to be innovative and realize results like those above on a consistent basis. But even with the best intentions, few manage to reach the goals they set. They commit to innovation, formalize objectives, set milestones, but the results aren't what they wanted. Why?

Innovation is about much more than setting goals. Even the strongest efforts by management will fail if the resources, people, and ideas necessary to succeed aren't available or coordinated. If your organization is seriously looking to accelerate its innovation efforts and improve its operations, the first step is introspection. You've got to take a look inside your organization to ensure that the pieces are in place and that your workforce is ready and willing to commit to the innovation process.

Innovation is impossible without an engaged workforce. Unfortunately, upwards of 70% of US employees aren't engaged with their work (Gallup), and the numbers are often higher overseas. This is obviously detrimental to operations and even more so to innovation. Employees are a huge but largely untapped source of new ideas, and are also the ones responsible for bringing every idea to life and making sure it succeeds. If your organization wants to improve, it has to be a collective effort.

So where do you start? By making sure you can answer "yes" to the following questions. If you can't, you've got some work to do (and we can help)!

### **1) Are your organization's high-level goals and mission set and widely known by employees?**

No new undertaking is possible without first identifying what you're actually trying to accomplish. It may seem obvious, but setting at least rudimentary goals for certain departments, products, markets, etc. that match the company's mission is often overlooked in many projects and initiatives. Apart from discussing those topics in the board room, it's a great practice to share that information with the workforce as well to form a baseline of knowledge company-wide, and to get everyone engaged in the new initiatives.

## **2) Do you have a firm grasp on what innovation really is?**

From the smallest improvements on your production line to launching a new product, innovation strategy is all about seeking improvement, testing your outcomes, and leveraging them for future initiatives and can present itself on many levels. There are traditionally three levels of innovation; Incremental being based on finding more value from current operations, Semi-Radical being based on improvements or changes to your business model or the technology involved in operations, and Disruptive being based on a combination of both business model and technological improvements.

## **3) Is continuous improvement and education a priority?**

Effective and consistent innovation is a long-term commitment, one that requires constant introspection and a willingness to adjust your operations according to the goals you've set, the results you've received, and the process for future implementation. This constant, sometimes sporadic commitment requires a larger focus on synchronization of goals across departments and effective communication to ensure everyone is both aware of what's going on and what's required of them.

## **4) Is someone directly in charge of innovation?**

While many companies can't afford a designated CIO to manage their innovation efforts, there still needs to be an individual or party in charge of organizing the hopefully large influx of new ideas, changes, and reports coming in from your improvements. This manager or team needs a great understanding of company strategy, technology, ideation practices, continuous improvement, and communication to track efforts and hold everyone accountable.

## **5) Can the workplace culture be defined in a positive light?**

Cultures like Google are known for the immense freedom and trust they give their employees, but you don't need to go to an extreme to create a productive work environment. Employees just need to feel comfortable in their responsibilities, have a general understanding of what the company is doing now and what they're trying to accomplish, but most of all have the opportunity and responsibility to think outside the box, share their ideas, and collaborate to solve problems.

## **6) Is there a strong relationship between employees and management?**

A large part of a fruitful company culture is the relationship between employees, especially throughout the hierarchy. Break-downs in communication are often the main culprit in weak relationships, but other factors such as a lack of trust, inefficient role assignments, lack of respect, and even intimidation can cause cultural barriers and innovation efforts to fail quickly.

## **7) Does the workforce understand company operations outside of their responsibilities?**

Apart from transparent organizational goals, effective innovation also relies on a deeper understanding of the operation as a whole on the part of those involved, helping to bring context to how problems can be solved or improved and what's really possible. This baseline of knowledge works to better frame problems and opportunities in an employee's reality, and builds engagement by expanding knowledge sharing outside of their core responsibilities.

## **8) Are the ideas of employees valued in the organization?**

Every company says they want to hear from their employees, but the suggestion box still sits empty or is ignored by management. Making the sharing of ideas and feedback public and of utmost importance can work wonders for employee engagement, provide everyone with motivation to start thinking critically, and provide management with new ideas to boost their innovation efforts.

## **9) Are there effective channels to communicate?**

Many employees are in possession of great ideas, but have no way to get them out of their heads and into the decision makers' hands. Suggestion boxes are filled. Emails are sent. Brainstorming meetings are held. But creativity and motivation fall flat without active feedback and collaboration. Innovation and employee engagement thrive on not just one-way conversations, but active and consistent communication of targeted and actionable thoughts to others.

## **10) Do you employ a process for reviewing and implementing new ideas from employees?**

Innovative ideas are just that – ideas – and are worthless if nothing is done with them. Since a driving force behind your innovation efforts should be seeking ideas from parties within and outside your organization, action needs to be public and a priority. Nothing will kill engagement in a new initiative quicker than passive feedback to new ideas or failure to follow-through on the goals your organization initially set.

## **11) Is there a standard for recognizing employee contributions?**

For the parties involved in your innovation efforts, remember that not every employee reacts to the same form of reward for their efforts. Increases in pay, personal recognition, vacation time, extra perks, and advancements are just a few ways to incentivize employee engagement, so determining what motivates which parties is a huge step forward in an effective innovation, communication, and rewards program.

## **12) How healthy are career development and advancement opportunities?**

Even on the most collaborative and effective teams, people are always looking to improve their own lives. There's no problem with that, but if it's clear that there is no chance for an employee to grow, there's a smaller chance you'll get their full effort. Committing to innovation is a large responsibility, and the parties involved want to make sure they're getting something for it professionally too.

### ***After answering these questions, is your organization prepared to innovate? If not, where do you need to focus your efforts?***

As we said before, innovation is much more than just setting goals. Employee engagement, knowledge sharing, managerial transparency, and effective communication are all necessary pieces of the innovation puzzle, held together with the glue of a strong culture and a strategic plan that aligns goals, people, and resources.

Getting to a point where everyone knows what the company stands for, where its heading, how it's getting there, and how they can be involved takes work, but sets an organization up for more than just a few months of "innovative" action. It can make for an energizing environment where management doesn't just seek improvement, but empowers others to strive for the same and they happily oblige.

*Managing innovation doesn't have to be hard. Engage, collaborate, and improve your operations with your employees, customers, and suppliers on one platform to get the most for your innovation efforts.*

Contact Ideawake today at [support@ideawake.com](mailto:support@ideawake.com) or 262-696-9261 for a free 1-hour innovation brainstorming session and a demo of our software.