

How To Encourage Innovation in the Workplace (With Examples and Tips)

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Innovation in the workplace relates to the process of developing and introducing something new. This may be a process, product, or service, and innovation, and the goal of innovation is often to improve or optimize actions, results or revenue. In this article, we discuss why innovation at work is important, tips and how to encourage workplace innovation and discuss innovation in the workplace examples.

Why is innovation in the workplace important?

Innovation in the workplace is important because it challenges employees to think differently, which can inherently promote growth. If your company continues to take the same approaches and avoids trying new things, they may miss important opportunities. Workplace innovation may be the deciding factor in what sets you apart from your competitors.

Other benefits of innovation at work may include:

- Becoming more attractive to potential new hires
- Enhancing the efficiency of internal process
- Producing better products
- Improving your workplace environment
- Increasing employee engagement and collaboration
- Maximizing productivity

Tips for encouraging innovation in the workplace

Here are some tips to help encourage innovation in the workplace:

Work in a different place

Move your meeting to somewhere other than a traditional office setting. Consider working at a nearby cafe, renting a conference room at your local library or hosting a meeting outside. When you move your team to somewhere other than the office they're used to, they may think differently and come up with new ideas.

Change your meeting style

Plan meetings that differ from the standard meetings your team is used to. For example, try hosting a stand-up meeting, meaning you encourage participants to stand during the meeting. This may make your meeting more action-oriented and your team more motivated and inspired.

Stay up to date with industry trends

Keep up to date with the latest industry changes and market research. Monitor what your competitors are doing, and track consumer demands and trends. Consider what your company could do to satisfy customer demands.

It may also be a good idea to follow the latest updates from companies you admire that aren't in your industry. See what new things they're trying, such as a new social media campaign or a new service they offer. Determine why it appeals to you, and consider ways you could implement something similar within your own company.

Promote collaboration

Encourage employees to work together to achieve innovative solutions. When possible, build teams of people from various backgrounds and departments who may not otherwise work together. See how their different points of view complement each other to foster innovation and creative thinking.

Be positive about every suggestion

Treat every idea with the same amount of respect. Record or write every idea your team suggests, but try to limit how much time you spend on each idea. This can help encourage your team to continue thinking of new ideas and using previous suggestions as inspiration.

Empower your employees

Set your team up for success by empowering them with the freedom to work in ways that work best for them. Provide them with the flexibility to work when, where and how they want. Try to give projects to them that best align with their strengths and preferences.

Start with small projects

Innovation is beneficial in the workplace, no matter how big or small it is. Making small changes can be an excellent first step, especially if you work in a slow-to-change environment. Notice the improvements these changes make, and use this as inspiration for bigger changes and projects.

Change your habits

Add variety to your workday and challenge yourself to approach things in a way other than you normally would. For example, challenge your team to brainstorm new ideas without allowing them to use tools or resources they normally would, such as access to the internet to guide their search. See what they think of on their own as a starting point, and supplement their ideas with research later.

Welcome creativity

Embrace creativity and inspiration in all forms. For example, listen to your favorite playlist or read a piece from a writer you love to draw inspiration from. If you struggle to think of new ideas, take a break from your work. Get out of the office and take a walk. Use your walk as an opportunity to find inspiration in your surroundings.

Consider how someone else may solve the project

If you're struggling to reach a solution, consider how someone you admire would approach and resolve the issue. Challenge yourself to see things from someone else's perspective. This may generate ideas or solutions you hadn't previously considered.

How to encourage innovation at work

While it's important to create an environment that always promotes innovation, you may have specific scenarios in which you want to encourage innovation. This may be to improve an existing process, create a new product or something similar. Here are some steps to follow to facilitate and encourage innovation at work:

1. Determine a problem

Identify a problem you want your company could solve or improve. This can be an internal or external issue of any size. It may relate to a process, product or an intangible thing, such as morale.

2. Establish a goal and criteria

Determine what you hope to achieve through the innovative process. This may be what you think the solution to your problem may be. For example, if establish your problem is a lack of employee engagement at work, your goal could be to create a new employee rewards program. Establish the framework for determining if an idea is worth pursuing and aligns with your goal. This may include how much your company is willing to invest financially in the solution. Also, determine if a solution needs to address multiple related issues or just your primary problem for you to consider it worthwhile and implement it.

3. Involve your employees

Engage employees from all departments in determining your solution, and be sure they know the value they bring to the process. Create a specific environment conducive to innovative, creative thinking. Separate this process from the typical day-to-day work of your employees.

4. Brainstorm ideas

Set up a brainstorming session for employees to discuss their experiences and share potential solutions related to the issue. During this process, record basic information about every idea. At this stage, every idea is a possible solution, so it's important to treat every idea with positivity and respect.

Consider hosting your brainstorming session in a special environment. Your employees may think of more innovative solutions if they're in an environment different from what they're used to. Take advantage of any community meeting space within your own office space, but consider rearranging furniture to make a change. If possible, consider renting a different space for your meeting to make the process more exciting.

5. Research ideas

After brainstorming potential ideas, complete general research about some of the strongest ideas. This may include market research, competitor analysis or similar processes. This general research can help provide a better context of what the most viable solution may be.

6. Review and select ideas

Meet with other key stakeholders to review the ideas and research. Compare these ideas with the criteria and goals you established. Select the idea you believe to be the best solution.

7. Develop a plan to implement the idea

Determine the steps you need to take to implement the idea. Include the employees who suggested the idea in this process. They likely have the best vision for what they want the solution to be, and it may improve employee engagement and satisfaction to make them feel like an even bigger part of the solution.

Innovation in the workplace examples

Here are some examples of innovation in the workplace:

Example 1: Improving an internal process

You manage a large accounting firm that operates on billable hours. However, you believe your employees spend too much time tracking each client's hours. You believe the problem may be that you use an outdated system. You set the goal to find a new way for employees to track their hours that is efficient and cost-effective.

Your office building has conference rooms tenants can rent, so you reserve a room to host your brainstorming session in rather than one of your normal conference rooms. You invite employees from every department at your firm, including accounting, administrative, IT and more. During this session, you divide employees into small groups with a mixture of employee types.

In their small groups, you ask employees to discuss their experience with billable hours. For example, an accountant may discuss their process for tracking their hours for a client. A client services representative responsible for billing the clients may discuss how long it takes for them to process and bill the hours. This allows employees to understand how the billable hours process affects their daily job responsibilities.

Based on their small group discussions, ask the groups to brainstorm potential solutions to present to the rest of the group. One group proposes using software that allows employees to set a timer to record their hours and prepares invoices automatically for each client. A member of your IT team is familiar with the software and says they believe it could work for the company. Following the brainstorming session, you further research this software and determine it will be more efficient and cost-effective than your current method with spreadsheets. Implementing the

software reduces tedious tasks for both the accountants and client services representatives, allowing them to focus on other things. It's possible you may not have reached this solution without bringing different employees together to discuss their experience and find an innovative solution.

Example 2: Updating product information to improve external use

You own a small digital marketing agency that has a proprietary email marketing tool called eContactMe. Using this tool allows your clients to better sort any emails they receive to identify the most potentially profitable leads and the priority in which to respond to email requests. However, most of your clients do not use the tool because they think the name eContactMe is confusing. You set a goal for your team to decide on a new name for the tool that more easily communicates what it does.

Your team all works remotely, so you cannot physically meet together. However, you instruct all employees to stop their work to focus on this brainstorming session. Everyone meets on a video conferencing platform, and, as a treat, you send every employee a food delivery gift card to order some snacks for the session.

You begin the brainstorming session with a brief presentation about eContactMe, how many clients currently use it and why you believe the name is a problem. Set a timer for 15 minutes and let employees share any suggestions they have. Write down every suggestion.

After 15 minutes ends, give everyone a few minutes to pick their three favorite names from the list. Ask each employee to share their favorites and why. After this discussion, ask everyone to pick their favorite name. Use this list of names as your short list to choose from for a new name. Based on the brainstorming session, you choose the name Inbox Sorting Assistant. You determine the name accurately reflects what the tool does, and it easily tells your clients how it helps them. You develop a plan for your web development team to update the tool information, and you educate your sales team about the change so they can talk to clients about Inbox Sorting Assistant.