How to Start a Staff Suggestion Scheme

A free eBook introducing basic ideas on how organisations can initiate a Staff Suggestion Scheme

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Overview

It is crucial to the success and growth of any business to proactively encourage employees to generate ideas for innovation and improvement. A continuous supply of new ideas, if properly managed, will lead to increased productivity, reduced costs, waste reduction, improved customer service and satisfaction, and improved employee morale, all contributing to a more competitive business.

How will it work?
Senior management commitment and involvement is vital. Planning is crucial. It is important to have effective business planning in place. The business plan for the suggestion scheme should link closely with the overall strategy and business plan for the organisation. The programme must be managed and driven in the same way as any other business improvement initiative. With effective planning, measuring, reviewing and reporting of outcomes the programme will generate momentum and become an integral part of business improvement.

Why it will fail.
A suggestion scheme will not run itself. Management at all levels must actively support the programme. The main reason for programmes failing is due to lack of proper planning and reviewing to ensure that the momentum is maintained. If ideas, when submitted are not reviewed and actioned quickly this has a detrimental effect on future participation and also on the benefits to business.

To overcome these initial issues, contact ideasUK for more information, we have a wide range of experience in launching programmes in organisations like yours!
Steps to developing a programme

First step – Scoping Study

At the outset a scoping study should be undertaken to ensure management agreement, ownership and support for the programme. Identify the reporting structure within the organisation and who will drive from the centre.

When undertaking a scoping study it is essential to identify any other quality initiatives being used within the organisation and identifying how the suggestion scheme will fit with these. Integrating all change or quality improvement programmes enables employees to better understand the overall process and ensures that the suggestion scheme is integrated within such programmes. It should not be something that stands alone.

Comparative studies and benchmarking information can be useful to highlight what can be achieved by the implementation of a successful programme.

Some factors that can contribute to a successful programme:

- Visible commitment from the top of the organisation
- Business planning; setting aims, objectives, targets and measures
- Sound administrative procedures should be in place before the scheme is launched
- Equitable awards structure/recognition programme. The reward and recognition structure should be established and communicated widely throughout the organisation
- Continuous promotion and publicity. Prepare a marketing plan
- Effective evaluation and implementation of ideas
Leadership/Management Support

The active commitment and involvement of senior management will impact greatly on the benefits realised by the suggestion scheme. Evidence shows that organisations where senior management is actively involved can achieve 50% to 90% participation rates with up to 75% of these ideas being implemented. (This information is available to members on the ideasUK website.)

Strong and active management commitment and support will result in a strong and active suggestion/recognition programme.

What are some of the ways leaders/managers demonstrate support?

- By setting goals and targets for the suggestion scheme and ensuring these are communicated within the organisation
- By active involvement in recognition events
- By encouraging a culture, which fosters creativity and innovation, inspiring change and recognising and rewarding people for their efforts.

A number of ways to gain support for the programme:

- Gather benchmarking information – show how successful other organisations are, this is one of the most important aspect of ideasUK, we can help you benchmark with our members worldwide
- Highlight benefits gained from implementing employee ideas – financial and non financial
- Use the ideasUK Toolbox (Which is free to members) in planning and reviewing procedures. Scheme credibility is enhanced by the effective use of business plans with targets, measures etc. This also allows for early identification of potential problems within the programme which need to be addressed to ensure continuing success
- Report regularly to management on all outcomes of the programme
- Working towards and gaining ideasUK Accreditation for your programme
Detailed Planning is essential

Establish aims, objectives, targets, measurements for the suggestion scheme.

The overall objective of the programme should be to help optimise business results and encourage a proactive workforce.

Some examples:

- To promote creativity and innovation across the organisation to assist with the delivery of organisation’s innovation strategy
- To encourage all employees to submit suggestions relating to revised business practices and delivery of key performance results
- To deliver on key performance indicators
- To generate ideas that contribute to improved delivery and efficiency

Strategic Planning

It is imperative that a clear planning process is undertaken. Stakeholders are identified and it is established what their requirements and expectations are.

A Business Plan is essential.
This should identify aims and objectives of the suggestion programme with specific targets, measures and expected outcomes. Identify responsibilities and the resources needed to achieve the expected outcomes.

A Communications and Marketing Plan is also essential.
The suggestion programme should assist with the delivery of the aims, objectives and innovation strategy of the organisation and reflect the present and future needs and expectations of all stakeholders.
People

The involvement of all of the people in the organisation is vital to the success of the programme. How this will be achieved should be included within the Business and Marketing Plans.

A suggestion programme enables all employees to have a voice and to be involved. Consider how the programme will be used as a driver to ensure the involvement of all employees within the organisation in continuous improvement activities.

Training and development requirements need to be considered.

For example:

- Do suggestors, evaluators or other stakeholders, such as line managers or co-ordinators, need to be trained or do they require coaching or mentoring?
- Do they all have the necessary skills to enable them to undertake their individual responsibilities?

Recognition events and activities. Consider how success will be celebrated within your organisation. Ensure that all involved in the programme are recognised for their participation – not only the winners.

Be sure to seek feedback from all stakeholders by staff surveys, questionnaires, interviews and focus groups.

Roll out and continually maintain the momentum of the programme through a proactive marketing plan.

Include information in induction training or literature for new employees.

Encourage networking across the organisation to increase awareness and understanding.

Network with other organisations through ideasUK.
Resource Planning

It is necessary to have a sufficient budget to ensure the efficient and effective running of the programme. Budget allocation will be dependent on what will be paid centrally from the programme. The budget planning and review should consider all actions and plans as set out in the Business and Marketing Plans.

There are some points to consider when planning:

- Who will pay awards and fund recognition activities?
- Who will pay for staffing the programme?
- Will managers/administrators require training?
- Attendance at ideasUK conference and networking events
- Set targets and monitor these in line with business and marketing plan
- Report to management on outcomes
- Consider if the programme can be linked with other initiatives. This can result in a more effective use of resources within the organisation
Processes

In developing a programme and drafting a Business Plan consider what processes are necessary to deliver the expected outcomes. All key processes must be clearly mapped out and all stakeholders advised from the outset.

- How will suggestions/ideas be submitted/recorded and tracked?
- How will these be actioned and within what timescale?
- Who will evaluate the ideas and what is the process for this? Have these people been involved in the planning process?
- How and when will participants be recognised?
- How will you spread best practice across the organisation?
- Who will be responsible for the implementation of adoptable ideas and within what timescales?

*Important* – from the outset prepare to provide regular reports to management on all aspects of the suggestion programme.

Whether it’s a new or a rejuvenated programme maintaining the momentum is essential.

- Seek regular feedback from all customers
- Benchmark with other organisations to ensure best practice. This can be done through the annual ideasUK member’s survey.
- Regularly review key processes considering what is necessary to deliver on the aims and objectives of the programme
- Following reviews identify areas for improvement and set targets to ensure improvement is achieved and maintained
- Performance levels should be monitored quarterly. This will identify areas for improvement and allow you to implement changes to address the situation
Customers

To ensure the continued success of the programme customers needs must be met. Customers must be satisfied that the programme is delivering an efficient and effective service whatever their position within the organisation.

The schemes performance should be regularly monitored:

- Regularly seek customer feedback on the service provided
- Take account of comments and instigate improvements as a result of feedback
- It can be useful to set targets for satisfaction levels
- Monitor changes introduced as a result of customer feedback
- Report to management on the outcome of customer satisfaction surveys and follow up activities
- Benchmark your activity and performance with other organisations
Assessing the outcomes of the programme

Return on Investment – always record all tangible savings and intangible benefits resulting from implemented ideas. Compare the savings achieved with the running costs of the programme and awards paid and this will give the return on investment of the programme.

All well run programmes will deliver substantial savings and benefits to the organisation.

- Participation rate.
- Implementation rate.
- Turnaround time.
- Business and Marketing Plans.
- Gaining outside recognition for the programme.
- Maintaining the Momentum.
Want to learn more?

These steps are just the tip of the iceberg to ensuring a suggestion scheme is successful within your organisation.

We have 25 years experience in developing and maintaining ideas schemes within business and would be more than happy to help you to develop a scheme within your organisation.

Just call us on 0844 330 4905 or email us to see how we can help your business.

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