CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS OF SUGGESTIONS SYSTEMS

ANDREW E MARX
Dept of Business Management
Faculty of Economic Management Sciences
Lynnwood Road
University of Pretoria
PRETORIA, 0181
South Africa
Tel: +27 (12) 420-4635
andrew.marx@up.ac.za

Abstract

This paper aims to identify the critical success factors of suggestion systems. In doing so, it could be used as a guideline in starting up a suggestion system or to contribute to a more successful existing system. A literature study approach is followed to establish which factors contribute to the success and failure of various suggestion systems. It was found that fourteen factors seem to contribute to the success of any suggestion system. Although all the factors are not equally important, they all contribute to the success of the system. All employees have ideas regardless of whether or not the environment is conducive but the employee will only submits it if the environment is seen as supportive. That means that the organisation that wishes to have a successful suggestion system must be creative and innovative.

Practical implications are that a suggestion system can be a very powerful management tool. Employees are an excellent source of ideas but there should be a supportive culture that encourages ideas. The system must be well organised and take into account all the critical factors that might have an influence. It is important to start off well when launching a new system. It is more difficult to revive an old one. The value of the paper firstly, shows the importance of creativity and innovation within the organisation's own culture and the framework of a formal suggestion system. Secondly, it emphasizes the importance of the development of ideas. It also identifies the hurdles and difficulties that hampered the development of ideas and the transition there of into suggestions.

Keywords – Suggestions, suggestion systems, creativity and innovation, commitment, involvement and ideas generation,

Paper type – Literature study

Introduction
One of the first books ever to be written on the subject of suggestion systems Seinwerth (1948:1) wrote: "Idea power is the most tremendous human force in the world". Nothing has changed since then. It is just a matter of how this idea power is been utilised. Simply having a suggestion system in place is not necessarily enough. To a creative and innovative organisation the suggestion system will be only one of the instruments that will be used to extract that idea power from employees. A common aim of a suggestion system is to achieve greater employee involvement which eventually leads to greater tangible benefits such as cost savings, and higher sales and intangible benefits like higher levels of morale (Crail, 2006:30 & 31).

The suggestion box
A sure failure will be the traditional suggestion box that will be emptied now and again. Many managers believe that if a suggestion box is placed at a strategic point and emptied on a regular basis that the organisation has a suggestion system. Large segments of the business community hold the suggestion box in low esteem. For many managers the suggestion box is in such ill repute, that its existence is tolerated primarily as a defensive play. The box is there to prevent employees from charging that management does not care about their ideas. Employees on the other hand look upon the boxes as joke boxes or convenient rubbish bins. To be successful, the suggestion system must be a formal one, fostering an environment where ideas are recognised, incentivised, followed through and communicating that effectively (Crail, 2006:30).

A formal suggestion system
According to Darragh-Jeromos (2005:18) a stand alone suggestion system is outmoded. It should be a suggestion **system** that is integrated with the organisation culture. To comply with this the system must be formal. That means that the system consist of a formal procedure which encourages employees to think creatively about their work and work environment, and to produce ideas which will benefit the organisation for which the employee will receive recognition, in one or another way, if the ideas are useful for the organisation.

One of the reasons behind the failure of suggestion systems is an over reliance of a formal, ready made, "off the shelf" suggestion system, which take little or no account of "the organisation's context, its particular issues, the concerns of its employees or its communication infrastructure" (Sweetman, 2005:44). Every organisation has its own culture and needs and its suggestion system should be moulded around that.

In order to be considered a formal system all the following elements should be present (Marx, 1995:16):
- The system should be approved and supported by top management.
- The suggestion must indicate a problem, potential problem or opportunity to improve an existing process or situation.
- The suggestion must present a solution to the problem, potential problem, process or situation.
- The suggestion must be in writing.
- The idea proposer must be identifiable, even if the system provides facilities for anonymous suggestions.
- The suggestion must be acknowledged on receipt.

Creativity and innovation

In order to survive in the current competitive world, organisations should be creative and innovative and use any possible management tool that contributes to it.
One should remember that employees have ideas regardless of whether or not the environment is conducive but the employee will not submit it if the environment is not seen as supportive (Frese, Teng & Wijnen,1999:1139).

What is meant by a creative and innovative organisation?

It is an organisation that creates the opportunities for its employees to recognize opportunities and/or give the inspiration that enables employees to develop ideas (creativity) and then implement all the usable ideas, big and small (innovation). That sounds great, but the path to success is often obstructed by poorly planned initiatives that alienate rather than inspire (Sweetman, 2005:44).

To establish a climate for innovation an innovation, process should include a system for encouraging employee suggestions that remove barriers (Prather & Turrell, 2002:13). At the car manufacturer in Oxford, where the Mini, owned by BMW, is produced, such opportunities are created. Every fortnight the production line is shut

down for 45 minutes to enable employees to get together in groups to discuss the progress of new ideas and come up with more suggestions (Anonymous, 2004:8). To be a successful and innovative organisation, the following process should be in place according to Wood (2003:22):

- An effective idea generation system
- A way to handle ideas quickly
- An effective evaluation process
- A way to ensure that ideas are implemented
- A method for recognition or rewarding those involved

According to Frese, Teng &Wijnen (1999:1139) suggestions can be developed as creative behaviour and as initiative. Creative behaviour conceptualizes suggestions as creative acts while initiative adds one particular facet to the creative process idea.

All of the above are true where an existing suggestion system is driven. What about if you want to start a suggestion system or revive a flagging program?

Conditions for a successful suggestion   system

Without ideas there will be no suggestions. The development of ideas is hampered by a number of difficulties and barriers.

1. Commitment and involvement of top management.

According to The Penguin English Dictionary commitment is "an act of committing to a change or trust; especially a consignment to an institution; an agreement or pledge to do something in the future; something pledged; loyalty to a system of thought or action" (Penguin Reference Books, 1985:163). The South African Concise Oxford Dictionary (2002:232) states that commitment is "the state or quality of being dedicated to a cause or policy". The pledge to do something in the future means to suggest that something be done in any possible way and to be dedicated to that something. This will includes careful planning and support. This also applies to management commitment to suggestion systems. In fact, management commitment is the most important cornerstone for the success of the suggestion system (Reuter, 1976:11, 1977:84 and Wood, 2003: 22). It is top management who needs to approve the program policy, as well as the funds to establish and maintain the necessary infrastructure and award system.

Top management's agreement and visible commitment to seek employee inputs act as a sign of the organisation's sincerity and eagerness to engage with employees (Sweetman, 2005: 44). Top

management must also ensure that all levels of management are familiar with and understand the concepts of the program in order for it to become a part of the management objectives. The suggestion system should truly become part of business. The suggestion system should not been seen as "just another initiative" that eventually fades away. Management needs to maintain the momentum by working with all the managers and encouraging the communication process (Sweetman, 2005:45); in fact it is a never ending engagement.

The commitment of top management should be made known so that employees realize that management are serious about it and that they really consider the suggestions and act on the usable ones. There are many ways on how top management could keep this commitment and engagement. The following are a few examples (NASS, 1983):

- Get actively involved in the strategy planning and goal setting of the suggestion system. View the suggestion system as an important tool to improve effectiveness, efficiency, productivity and eventually profitability.
- Suggestion system reports should be put on top management meeting agendas and should insist on reports from the systems coordinator or head of the departments reviewing the results and the future plans.
- Using suggestion system activities as an appraisal yardstick for measuring the progress of a department and a supervisor's effectiveness.
- Conducting periodic formal employee attitude surveys to determine the degree of the suggestion system effectiveness.
- Top management should make public their support for the initiative.
- Top management should actively participate in reward ceremonies and insist on press coverage.
- Discuss the system in special occasion speeches.
- Write articles in in-house magazines and/or company news letters.

Top management's involvement in the effort to make the suggestion system a success creates a cascade effect down to baseline employees, which will encourage them to become active in the system. Most of the other success factors that follow are very closely linked to top management involvement.

2. Supervisor's involvement

Supervisors are often the most important link in the suggestion system. The employee and the supervisor are the people with the most knowledge of the job. Therefore, with out the supervisor's support, it is hardly likely that subordinates will come up with new ideas. If there is an air of negativity, it will pervade down to the subordinates with the result that participation dwindles. The supervisor's role is an important aspect in the success of the scheme. The following indicate why (Reuter, 1976:11 & 12):

- Suggestions originating in a specific area are usually referred to the supervisor. He decides whether the suggestion will be accepted or implemented, especially when it relates to his particular area of supervision. If he suppresses all the initiatives of his subordinates, he will be unable to motivate them to participate.
- Because the supervisor is engaged in evaluating the suggestions, he is instrumental in determining the advantages or savings of the idea. The value of the saving will also determine the award value and if the suggestion is unfairly treated, it will result in a demotivated group of suggestors.
- The supervisor is the communication channel through which employees can exchange and submit ideas to management. If the supervisor blocks this channel, the suggestions cannot be taken further and management will remain unaware of these ideas.
- The supervisor that maintains a good relationship with his subordinates will be able to motivate them to submit an unending flow of suggestions.
- According to Darragh-Jeromos (2005: 19) a supervisor's role should also be to coach the employee by offering feedback and suggestions for additional documentation.
- Supervisors can influence the climate that supports or hinders innovativeness (Frese, Teng &Wijnen, 1999:1140).

Any idea, no matter how small or unrealistic, should nevertheless receive fair consideration. Investigation of each and every suggestion becomes part and parcel of the supervisor's duties and by fulfilling these duties he will, at the same time, encourage his subordinates to keep bringing forth suggestions. However, some supervisors discourage suggestions from subordinates for the following reasons. (Reuter, 1979:12):

- The fear that good suggestions may overshadow the supervisor's own performance.

- Supervisors do not set aside the time and effort to evaluate suggestions.
- Some supervisors feel that suggestions point out problems which they should have noticed.
- Fearing the unknown, supervisors often requires training in the evaluation of suggestions and unless they are trained, they will avoid the system at all costs.
- The recognition and awards which the employee receives can have the opposite effect on the supervisor, causing a certain amount of resentment.
- Doubts may exist in the minds of supervisors as to the real value of suggestion schemes.
- Employee involvement is one of the objectives of a suggestion scheme with the result that the supervisor may be led to believe that he is excluded from participating in the scheme.

Most of the resistance and resentment results from lack of knowledge. It is therefore important that supervisors are trained in how they and their subordinates can benefit from the suggestion system, how to evaluate ideas, how to administratively assist subordinates and how to encourage ideas, which means they must know how to develop ideas from their group.

Some organisations also recognise the supervisor's role by awarding them for adopted suggestions (Darragh-Jeromos, 2005: 19). The supervisor is seen as part of a team and should therefore share in the recognition and compensation which the group may receive (Marx, 1992:40)

3.   The suggestion system policy, procedures and rules
The suggestion system policy is a general guide that expresses limits within which action should occur (Ivancevich, 2001:19).

There should be a clearly defined policy which leaves little room for personal judgements and arguments, thereby reducing favouritism and dissatisfaction. Every aspect of the scheme should be clearly defined so that employees are left in no doubt as to what is expected of them and what they can expect from the organisation in return. What, however, is important is that policies, procedures and rules should not choke creative behaviour and initiative.

It should be remembered that the policy is the guide to decision making. Some of the aspects that should be addressed in the suggestion system policy are (Marx, 1992:80 – 84):
- The aim of the system
- The definition of a suggestion or idea

- Topics which are not eligible as suggestions
- The suggestion committee
- Employees who are eligible to submit suggestions
- Suggestion awards
- Taxation on the suggestion awards
- Procedures related to the submission of suggestions
- The right to appeal
- The cession of suggestions
- Patentable suggestions

Procedures provide for customary methods of handling suggestion system activities and are more specific than the suggestion system policy (Mathis & Jackson, 2003:529) for example; the policy may state that the suggestion Committee will be responsible for the evaluation of ideas that have corporate wide implications. Procedures establish the specific method of evaluation and approval before implementation.

On the other hand, rules are, according to Mathis and Jackson (2003:529) the specific guidelines that regulate and restrict the behaviour of the individuals. For example, employees of the Research and Development Department will not get any financial award for implemented ideas. Rules, thus, give specific direction for decision making. For the suggestion system policy, procedures and rules to be effective coordination between the suggestion system Committee/Coordinator, other managers and supervisors are vital.

4. Administration and processing

The administration of the suggestion system seems to be a major hurdle to overcome. Love (1998: 11) therefore suggests that the system should start small and grow only if necessary. Administrative delays result in the employees getting the impression that the organisation does not view their ideas as worthwhile. An early acknowledgement of receipt of the suggestion is essential. Suggestion boxes, traditional ones and electronic ones, should be "cleared" on a daily basis. The suggestion system coordinator should make sure that employees who submit an idea receive a personal response to thank them. Failure to acknowledge ideas is far more damaging than not seeking employees' views at all. (Sweetman, 2005:45).

If supervisors are well trained to encourage ideas through the normal work teams, they are the first gatekeepers of those ideas. This means that much of the initial administration of refusing and reviewing the ideas will be eliminated. (Wood, 2003:22).

Available software should be used to manage the process effectively and efficiently. The software not only replaces the traditional suggestion box, but is, according to Wood (2003:22), able to acknowledge receipt, handle duplicated ideas, link ideas to evaluators and allow everyone to search for existing ideas and build on. According to British Gas PLC (2006:43) the submission of suggestions online increased the number of suggestions because the process is more transparent and enables the employees to track their ideas from the point they suggest then right through to evaluation and implementation.

If suggestion system reports form part of top management meeting agendas certain information will be needed by the systems manager or head of departments. Part of the administrative function is to maintain a register which allows control over suggestions, and process data for report purposes. A computerised register will simplify the idea registration process and facilitate the extraction of data. The register should contain, inter alia, the following data:

- The number of eligible personnel
- The number of suggestions submitted
- The number of employees who participated
- The total number of suggestions adopted
- The total estimated savings as a result of suggestions adopted
- The total amount paid out as awards
- The total number of suggestions in process

According to Wood (2003:22) ideas fall in to four categories and each type of idea should be handled differently. The categories are as follows:

- Ideas applicable to a specific section and which the supervisor can authorise and implement immediately. The supervisor then records it for recognition and/or reward.
- Ideas of a local nature but may be applicable and should be disseminated to other section or units. The supervisor can also authorise the idea and implement it immediately BUT the management system should be alerted so that other concerned people are advised of the idea which may benefit them.
- Ideas of a local nature but need higher local approval before implementation. There could be various reasons for getting approval on that level for example capital investment to implement the idea. After the initial discussion with the supervisor, the latter should make a recommendation about the acceptability of the idea in the concerned work area and enter the idea into the program for higher level sign off. The last

category is those ideas that have corporate wide implications and that will need higher level approval before implementation. Although these ideas should be discussed with the supervisor, the latter may not be able to make any recommendations about its acceptability. It does not matter in which category the idea falls, the motto should be: "Deal with the idea quickly and effectively". Employees will be more likely to submit suggestions if they believe that the organisation treats suggestions with urgency, adequately, fairly and implements it where possible.

Although not that often used, some organisations, like British Telecommunications PLC (BT), preferred to outsource the administration of their suggestion system. According to BT, who outsourced their system (which was in existence for more than 15 years) in 2002, their suggestions soar with the new initiative. This initiative provides focused expertise and improved efficiency (Centaur Communications Ltd., 2003:12). Out-sourcing must be seriously considered if an organisation does not have the necessary infrastructure to drive the suggestion system effectively.

5.   The coordinator /administrator

To ensure that the suggestion system function effectively make one person responsible for the operation (Love, 1998:5). Although a suggestion committee and functional specialists assist the suggestion system coordinator (sometimes called the administrator or the facilitator) it is he/she who bears the responsibility for the management and maintenance of the system. The ability, attitude and enthusiasm of the coordinator are prime factors in maintaining continued interest of supervisors and employees in the program.

The ability of the administrator will be determined by his/her knowledge of the suggestion system and the ability to work with people. Great care must be taken by management when selecting the persons who are made responsible for the system. In many organisations the position of suggestion system coordinator is issued to "side track" a "problem" employee or supervisor, or an employee close to retirement. That is a certain recipe for failure.

Another reason for failure of a system is that coordinators are overloaded with too much work (Reuter, 1977:86). Usually the suggestion system duties are "add on" responsibilities. This is mostly the case in medium to small organisations. The result is that suggestion system activities are not a priority in the day-to-day work execution. Where organisations could not afford a full time system

coordinator, it should rather appoint a system coordinator and "add on" other duties, than vice versa.

The National Association of Suggestion Systems (later known as the Employee Involvement Association) (1983:4) suggests that the suggestion administrator is the individual holding the links together by planning, organising, communicating, reporting, promoting and controlling. The links referred to the system design, employer, supervisor, management's attitude, organisational climate and the administrator.

It is thus essential that management ensure that the person entrusted with the responsibility of the suggestion system should be suggestion focused, not overloaded with other tasks, acceptable and enthusiastic about the system.

6. The awareness and publicity program

According to Sweetman (2005:44) communication is the key to raising awareness, generating credibility and inspiring employee participation. Employees need to see that the organisation is seeking their inputs.

An awareness program is essential at the start of any new suggestion system. Employees who are potential suggestors should be informed as to what the new system embraces, what if offers them, what it offers the organisation and when the system begins.

A publicity program is as important to the existing suggestion scheme as it is for a new one. Employees should be reminded on a continual basis of the importance and benefits of a suggestion scheme. One of the best ways of eliciting ideas is to ask the employees for them and that can be done in a number of ways.

The publicity program should emphasise the awards paid to suggestors and publicize the award ceremonies. The suggestion system should be publicised regularly and promote the fact that employees are being recognised in an appropriate way for successful suggestions (Marx, 1992:19, Love, 1998:11 & Stern, 2006:7). Employees should be made aware of the awards which are actually being made. If someone doesn't see what happens to submitted suggestions, he will lose interest in the scheme. The importance of a publicity program for an established scheme cannot be stressed sufficiently.

A publicity program may comprise certain aspects, for example, a book of rules that outline the policy, a guide for supervisors, a brochure for the employees, an induction brochure

outlining the scheme, circulars, posters, salary packet inserts, occasional speeches and newspaper and magazine articles.

The awareness program is a never ending process. The aims of an awareness program are three fold:
- To inform the employees about the objectives, policy, methods and advantages of the suggestion system.
- To develop and maintain collaboration and self confidence in the system.
- To continually stimulate employees to think creatively about their work and work environment.

All existing communication channels and structures should be used so that employees see the requirement for input and suggestions as part of business as usual (Sweetman, 2005:44). Newsletters, memo's, intranet, brochures, exhibitions, competitions, employee forums, briefing structures, staff meetings, notice boards and posters are all media and techniques that could be used in awareness programs.

7.   The correct organisational climate
According to Stern (2006:7) forced initiatives to create new ideas fail to provide a justifiable return. Organisations need to create a culture that promotes a natural flow of ideas. In an organisation which has a predominantly autocratic management style, a suggestion system is less likely to succeed, the reason being that the autocrat is insensitive to the ideas of others. The suggestion scheme is a management tool that involves the employee and is therefore a tool for participative management.   If, on the other hand, management is not in favour of participative management, the suggestion system will be worthless. Before any measure of success can be achieved with a suggestion scheme, there must be some indication of an attitude change towards participative management throughout the entire organisation.

8.   Recognition and awards
Employees cannot be forced into participating in the suggestion system. It is a purely voluntary activity. It is therefore unclear why some organisations are still against recognising and rewarding employees for suggesting improvements in their own jobs. Who knows the job and processes better than the employee (Darragh-Jeromos, 2005:18)?   Any employee is likely to ask: "What does it mean for me?" (Sweetman, 2005:44). Employees will only participate if they have the will to do so, in other words, the motivation, and the

45

opportunity to submit their ideas. There are a number of factors that influence both motivation and opportunity. On the motivational side, there must be awareness of the recognition and awards, which makes the publicity of the award ceremonies and occasions an important factor.

According to Klatt, Murdich & Schuster (1985: 466), the award will only contribute to the expected behaviour if the employee:

- Is aware that there will be an award and that it will be worthwhile.
- Knows exactly what to do to get the award.
- Is capable to do what is necessary to qualify for the award.
- Knows that there is a direct relationship between the award and the recognition.

Awards can be financial or non-financial. Many organisations have healthy idea programs with small or no financial awards. Some resort to awards that are imaginative and cost little but have high perceived value to the recipients. Examples of such non-financial awards are car parking spaces and lunches with managers for the submitters of adopted ideas (Beddows, 2001:15), Robbins (1997:387) confirms this when he said that it is a myth that most people are interested in absolute rewards. People are more sensitive to relative differences than to absolute differences. They compare what they get from the organisation with what others get.

According to Darragh-Jeromos (2005: 19) monetary awards should be secondary considerations. Wood (2003:22) also warns against large financial rewards due to the following disadvantages:

- It does not contribute to teamwork, and team ideas are usually better. Individuals often are reluctant to share large rewards and thus inhibit implementation.
- Large rewards can create the illusion that only large ideas are wanted. Ideas that contribute to small incremental improvements are just as important to the organisation.
- Idea evaluators and those implementing ideas may feel that they are getting an unfair share of the reward although they are involved in the whole process.

According to research conducted by the North-western University (Potentials, 2005:6), most organisations employ a combination of financial and non financial awards to motivate their employees. Their findings of the top ten motivation tactics and the percentage of companies that utilize them are reflected in table 1.

Table 1: Top ten motivation tactics' and the percentage of the respondent companies that utilize them

Position	Motivation tactic	% of Co.
1	Employee recognition	98.8
2	Special events	82.7
3	E-mail / Printed	77.8
4	communication	74.1
5	Gift certificates	64.2
6	Merchandise incentives	55.6
7	Training programs	54.3
8	Work life benefits	50.6
9	Cash rewards	23.5
10	Variable pay	18.5
	Sweepstakes	

Source: Adapted from Potentials, 2005:6

Interesting to note that, according to Crail (2006: 31) most employers feel that recognition is a more important motivator than a monetary award or gifts and that the least of the employees' concerns are saving the organisation money.

It is therefore important for management to understand their employees and tailor the recognition processes accordingly. Cognizance should, however, be taken of the organisation's culture and expectations created by past practices and the publicity program.

A properly designed recognition program will not only recognize the successful suggestors but everybody who contributed to the eventually implemented idea. That means the suggestor, team members, the supervisor; the evaluator(s) and those responsible for the successful implementation are all included. The golden rule should be: "Give credit where credit is due". Some organisations (e.g. British Gas PLC) treasures ideas so much that their top management even awards commendation awards for good ideas that can't be implemented (Centaur Communications Ltd., 2006:43). There are even organisations that offer suggestion system participants a small prize for their ideas that are not acceptable for implementation. According to Abrams, (in Dreyfack, 1999: 18) this insignificant cost to the organisation more than doubled the flow of suggestions. The least that should be done, if a suggestion is not adopted, is to thank the suggestor for taking the trouble to submit the suggestion.

9.   An effective idea generation system

Ideas cannot be bullied out of people. The organisation should develop ways or a system for employees to generate ideas out of their free will. Wood (2003:22) suggested that many different ways exist for ideas generation. It is, however, important that the method(s) used be clear, straight forward and open to all potential participants, teams and individuals. Wood also suggested the involvement of employees from all levels in the design of an idea generation system. Van Dijk & Van den Ende (2002:390) further suggested that employees should get the opportunity to find sounding boards for their ideas which will contribute to idea extraction. This was confirmed by Wood (2003:22) when he stated that the more human contact there is between the suggestion submitter and the supervisor or "idea champion" the better the chance that people will take part in the idea generation system and ideas will be more fully developed and directed. For this reason the suggestion system should made provision for teams who would like to submit group suggestions. After all, two or more heads are better than one.

Suggestion systems ask employees to participate and to contribute actively in the success of the organisation. To be able to do that, employees must be able to speak and read the language of business. That requires from the organisation to teach employees how to measure success and to show them how they can contribute to the success of the system. Teaching business literacy almost always gets employees interested in their organisation (Berman, 1998: 16).

The organisation should also use every opportunity to preach its attitude towards creativity and innovation. Management must also convince employees that all ideas, even the smallest ones, are important for the organisation and will be seriously considered. Small suggestions that constitute continuous improvement must be encouraged. It's therefore necessary for management to give recognition to successful ideas and publish it widely. Supervisors play an important role in creating a culture of participation in the organisation.   It will thus be a worthwhile investment for management to train supervisors how to encourage ideas and develop them from their subordinates.

10. An effective evaluation system

Objectivity, open-mindedness and fairness are the principles of sound suggestion evaluation. The initial view should be the

48

assumption that all suggestions are beneficial until the evaluation proves otherwise.

According to Wood (2003:22), the second biggest reason for suggestion system failure is ineffective evaluation of ideas. He mentioned the following reasons for failure:

- Because evaluators are not always recognized for their role in the process they cannot see the benefit of their participation.
- The behaviour of the managers of the evaluators does not portray the appropriate caring behaviour.
- Evaluators don't receive the appropriate training.
- Evaluators are afraid of failure because they belief that failures are never forgotten.

Every suggestor thinks his/hers idea is brilliant. Therefore, the burden of proof should be put on the suggestor. A well designed evaluation system will thus, makes provision for a self screening process, in other words, self evaluation which examines the idea's merit. This is done by means of answering the following questions. Does the idea:

- Increase revenue?
- Decrease costs?
- Decrease cycle time?
- Improve safety?
- Increase customer satisfaction?
- Enhance market share?
- Improve a process?

If the answer to any one of these questions is "no", it is most probably not worth the time and effort to submit the idea (Darragh-Jeromos, 2005:18 & 19). The following guidelines could contribute to a regulated evaluation of suggestions:

- Start the evaluation with a discussion with the suggestor
- Make sure the idea is the suggestor's own idea
- Evaluators must maintain their objectivity and remain neutral
- Evaluators should take care to eliminate personal bias
- The evaluation should not be affected by the negative attitude of any other employee or supervisor until such time as the evaluation is finalised.

11. Implementation of ideas

In the implementation of the submitted idea is the proof of the pudding. No idea is worth anything unless it is implemented. Not only is the implementation of the idea a huge morale booster for the suggested (and other employees) but it is a conformation of

management's commitment. The faster the implementation of the ideas, the more visible will the results be for the employees of the submitted ideas.

The major concern is not the implementation of the big ideas (they usually are implemented) but the small ones, those which seems to be trivial. The cost savings or the gain increase of a number of small ideas could easily take to the same amount as a single big idea. According to a manager of one of the motor manufacturers in Germany competitors will in less than 48 hours after a major breakthrough idea try to copy it while they probably never heard about the small incremental ones that result in improvements (Wood, 2003:22). Thus, remember to encourage small suggestions that constitute continuous improvement. No matter how small the idea, if it contributes to cost saving, increased revenue or add to productivity improvement in any way it must be implemented. The progress of submitted ideas should be monitored by the software in use and that includes implementation. The implementation of ideas should also be part of the supervisor's performance appraisal.

12. The development of an infrastructure

Management should provide a budget which is sufficient to fund the system. This should make provision for funds for the award system, stationery and other operating expenses (including the salary of an administrator and additional overheads that should be added to the duties of an existing post), the appointment of a suggestion committee and the printing of publicity material.

Suggestion scheme success is largely dependent on the efficiency of its infrastructure and is proportional to the funds spent, e.g. R10 for every R1 spent (Marx, 1992:13).

13. A suitable name

One could ask: "What is in a name?" Crail (2006:30) refers to it as "branding". It is essential to choose a name for the suggestion system that people, ideas and innovation could be associated with. It should be "smooth on the tongue", not to long and easy to handle in publicity. Alexander (1982:379) places a high priority on the correct name for a system. According to him it should be the first step in planning a suggestion system, because any further development and research could then be associated and identified with the name.

The following should be borne in mind when choosing a name for the scheme:

- It should not be linked to previous programs or systems, especially any which were unsuccessful.
- It should describe the aim of the scheme.
- It should be short and to the point.
- It should be easy to remember.
- It should be unique.
- It should offer the opportunity for publicity and advertising.
- In addition, extreme care should be taken with the name, when using acronyms, such as PIP for Productivity Improvement Program and TIM for Telecom Idea Management.

14. Exercising patience

Lastly but not least, an essential requirements is patience on the part of management. Suggestion system systems seldom become a roaring success overnight. It takes time to gain recognition and acceptability among the employees and only then will the benefits begin accruing to both the organisation and the employees. Once the system begins to gain credibility, the suggestion input levels begin to rise. Management should realize that a suggestion system is not a panacea for all the ills of the organisation.
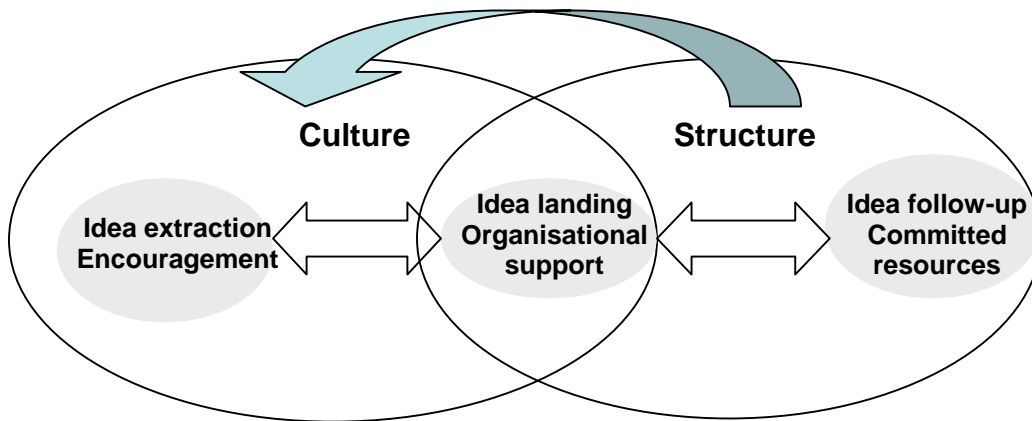
Taking into account the pioneering role played by the evaluators, particularly with a new system, the time taken to reach a point where an effective evaluation of the system can be made could be anything up to three years. Management should exercise patience and not expect tangible and meaningful results within a period of one year.

The creativity transformation model

The infrastructure of a suggestion system consists of much more than providing a budget with enough funds available to make provision for stationary, the award system, the appointment of a suggestion committee and publicity. All these aspects are necessary but that will not create and sustain the participative culture that will ensure the success of the suggestion system. What is necessary is a formula or model that will see to it that the creativity of employees that forms the source of new ideas which in turn will create the starting point for innovations (Twiss, 1992 and Voorendonk, 1998 in Van Dijk and Van den Ende, 2002:387). Van Dijk and Van den Ende (2002:389) develop a model that enables suggestion systems to transfer employee creativity into practical ideas. This will contributes to the optimisation of the design of a suggestion system that will envelop most of the crucial success factors discuss in this paper.

Figure 1 explains the phases in the transfer of creativity to practical ideas.

Figure 1:The phases in the transfer of creativity to practicable ideas

Source: Van Dijk & Van den Ende, 2002: 389

According to Van Dijk and Van den Ende (2002:389-391) the organisational culture and organisational structure form the coordinating determinants for the transfer from employee creativity to implementable ideas. The suggestion system consists of three phases namely:

- The idea extraction phase – In this phase employees are encouraged doing something with their ideas. This will only happen where the organisation culture allows the individual to express their creativity. There are many ways and means to encourage employees to come forward with their ideas.
- The idea landing phase – This phase refers to the organisational support that the employees would experience. The landing of ideas will be determined by the extent to which possibilities and support exist within the organisational culture be of such a nature that it creates the opportunity for the employees to submit ideas but there must be a organizational structure in place to allow and support the submission of ideas.

- The idea follow-up phase – This phase is mainly an organisational structural phase in which resource are committed to facilitate the absorption. It is in this phase where the ideas are evaluated excepted or rejected, employees are rewarded for useful ideas, the ideas processed and implemented.

Van Dijk and Van den Ende (2002:394) stated it explicitly, that it was their aim to develop a generic model that is broadly applicable. The model creates a number of conditions that envelop the design of a suggestion system but, when implemented, leaves enough room to adapt the system to the specific characteristics of the organisation.

The problem still remains: How to find the real breakthrough ideas. According to Prather & Turrell (2002:16) the solution lies in a four step process, used by groups or teams, namely: (1) Problem identification, (2) Idea generation, (3) Idea selection, and (4) Action planning. By using this process the participants will be able to build on the ideas of other team members.

Conclusion

A suggestion system can be a very powerful management tool. Henry Ford said of his employees:"With every pair of hands you get a brain free" (Stern, 2006:7). Employees are a good source of ideas but there should be a culture that encourages ideas. The suggestion system must be well organised and takes into account all the critical factors. It is so important to start off well when launching a system. It is much easier to start a new suggestion system than to revive an old one.

When appointing a new staff member you not only hire a pair of hands, but also an additional brain – use it extensively, tap the ideas that are in there. Remember what Seinwerth said in 1948 is still applicable today: "Idea power is the most tremendous human force in the world".

References

Alexander, W. 1982. Suggestions are alive and well at US Steel. ***Annual Industrial Conference Proceedings***, pp 337 – 383.

Anonymous. 2004. Interesting stuff. ***Human Resources***, April 2004 London, p8. [Online] Available from: http://0proquest.umi.com.innopac.up.ac.za:80/pqdweb?did=620704991&sid=6&Fmt

Beddows, A. 2001. Productivity through Innovation. ***Management Services***, Vol. 45, Issue 2, Institute of Management Services, pp. 14 & 15.

Berman, K. 1998. The building blocks of business literacy. ***Training & Development***, Vol. 52 Issue 9 p.16.

Centaur Communications, Ltd. 2003. BT suggestions soar with new incentive. ***Employee Benefits**, October 6, 2003* London, p12.[Online] Available from: http://0roquest.umi.com.innopac.up.ac.za:80/pqdweb?did=420615181&sid=6&Fmt

Centaur Communications, Ltd . 2006. Suggestion schemes: Flaming good ideas. ***Employee Benefits**, February 10, 2006* London, p43. [Online] Available from:http://0proquest.umi.com.innopac.up.ac.za:80/pqdweb?did=985812451&sid=6&Fmt

Concise Oxford Dictionary. 2002. ***South African Concise Oxford Dictionary***, Oxford University Press, Southern Africa, 1368p.

Crail, M. 2006. Fresh ideas from the floor. ***Personnel Today,*** June 20, 2006, p30.

Darragh-Jeromos, P. 2005. A suggestion system that works for you. ***Super Vision,*** Vol. 66, Issue 7, p18.

Dreyfack, R. 1999. Money saving ideas for the profit minded supervisor. ***Super Vision***, Vol. 60, Issue 8, p.18.

Frese, M., Teng, E. & Wijnen, C.J.D. 1999. Helping to improve suggestion systems: Predictors of making suggestions in companies. ***Journal of Organizational Behaviour,*** Vol. 20, Issue 97, p.1139. [Online] Available from:http://0proquest.umi.com.innopac.up.ac.za:80/pqdweb?did=48248835&sid=6&Fmt

Ivancevich, J.M. 2001. ***Human Resource Management***. Eight Edition, Mc Graw-Hill Co., Inc., New York, NY, 622p.

Klatt, L.A, Murdick, R.G & Schuster, F.E. 1985. ***Human Resource Management**..* Charles, E. Merrill Publishing Co., Columbus, Ohio, 723 p.

Love, T. 1998. Managing your small business. **Nation's Business**, Vol. 86, Issue 5, p.11.

McManus, K. 2003. Quality requires a strong foundation. **Industrial Engineer**, *Vol.* 35, Issue 9, p.22.

Marx, A.E. 1992. **A Practical guide on Implementing Suggestion Systems**. Juta&Co, Ltd., Kenwyn, South Africa, 118p.

Marx, A.E. 1995. Management Commitment for suggestion systems. **Work Study**, Vol. 44, No 3, MCB University Press, West Yorkshire, England, pp 16 – 18.

Mathis, R.L & Jackson, J.H. 2003. **Human Resource Management**. Tenth Ed., Thomson South Western Ohio, 650p.National Association of Suggestion Systems (NASS). 1983. Management: Participation … Support … Involvement. **NASSPAK**. Second Quarter, Chicago, pp1-6.

North-Western University. 2005. Number Game, **Potentials**, Vol. 38, Issue 10, p6.

Penguin Reference Books. 1985. **The penguin English Dictionary**, Merriam-Webster. Inc. and Longman Group Ltd., Middlesex, England, 993 p.

Prather, C.W., & Turrell, M.C. 2002. Involve everyone in the innovation process. **Research Technology Management**, Vol. 45, 5, p.13.

Rapp, C. & Eklund, J. 2002. Sustainable development of improvement activities – the long-term operation of a suggestion scheme in a Swedish company. **Total Quality Management**, Vol. 13, Issue 7, pp.945-969.

Reuter, V.G. 1976. A new look at Suggestion Systems. **Journal of Suggestion Management**, Vol.27, pp 6-15.

Reuter, V.G. 1977. Suggestion Systems: Utilization, Evaluation and Implementation. **California Management Review**, Vol. 19, No 3, pp 78 – 89.

Robbins, S.P. 1997. **Management Today**. Prentice Hall, Inc., New Jersey, 584p.

Seinwerth, HW. 1948. **Getting Results from Suggestion Plans**. First Ed., New York: Mc Grow-Hill Book Co., Inc., 223p.

Stern, S. 2006. Interesting Stuff. **Human Resources**, March 2006, London, p.7. [Online] Available from: http://0proquest.umi.com.innopac.up.ac.za:80/pqdweb?did=1009986941&sid=5&Fm

Sweetman, P. 2005. How to … seek suggestions from staff. **People Management**, Vol. 11, Issue 13, Personnel Publications Ltd., pp 44 – 45.

Van Dijk, C. & Van den Ende, J. 2002. Suggestion system: transferring employee creativity into practicable ideas. ***R&D Management***, Vol. 32, No 5, pp 387 – 395.

Wood, A. 2003. Managing employees' ideas: From where do ideas come? ***The Journal for Quality and Participation***, Vol. 26, Issue 2, p22.