

I.K. Hofmann GmbH – Using collective intelligence for innovation

Cases from the innosabi book.

About «Ideenhof»: A Virtual Hub for Ideas

I.K. Hofmann GmbH's «Ideenhof» is an internal idea management platform designed to foster innovation by providing a dedicated virtual space for employees to submit their ideas or highlight challenges. With innosabi Idea, I.K. Hofmann GmbH is able to streamline its idea management processes, increase transparency and create a motivating environment that improves the quality of ideas and increases employee satisfaction and engagement.

- | 442 ideas submitted by 140 employees
- | 87 ideas in the evaluation phase
- | 28 ideas in implementation & 29 ideas implemented
 - a 13% realization rate
- | +75% more ideas submitted than the previous year
- | Approximately 3 months from submission to implementation

Overcoming Challenges

Before implementing the «Ideenhof» platform, I.K. Hofmann GmbH faced significant challenges in managing ideas. The existing system lacked transparency, with unclear deadlines and responsibilities, leaving employees uncertain about the progress of their submissions. The qualification of the ideas was organised in meetings, but the roles and responsibilities of each individual were not clearly defined, which often slowed down the overall progress. The lack of a central communication point for innovation discouraged employees from submitting ideas, and even successful implementations were often not communicated back to the originators. Overall, this led to low participation and frustration among employees.

Unleashing Creativity Through a Unified Platform

The launch of «Ideenhof» revolutionised I.K. Hofmann GmbH's approach to idea management by creating a transparent, user-friendly process from submission to evaluation. The platform allows employees to submit ideas, anonymously if they wish, and have them evaluated transparently, reducing bias and encouraging more contributions. This overhaul addressed previous challenges and created a positive and structured environment for innovation.



At launch, the platform saw a high number of registrations. Participation reached 50% within 6 to 9 months and stabilised at around 60 to 70%, peaking at 90% during a C-Level led challenge. On average, users submit one to two ideas, with some power users submitting up to 100 ideas. «Ideenhof» has become the central hub for innovation, where all employees can submit ideas and stay informed about ongoing innovation activities.

Ideas are categorised into seven clearly defined fields of action, and dual-control assessment by two experts ensures fair evaluation based on defined criteria. This structured process has improved transparency and efficiency, allowing the time from submission to implementation to be monitored. Continuous feedback and point-based incentives keep employees engaged and informed about the status of their ideas, fostering a culture of active participation.

Setting the Stage: Best Practices for Innovation Success

The successful launch of the «Ideenhof» was marked by a big announcement at the annual company event, with a hologram show and management speeches, accompanied by flyers with QR codes for direct platform access.

The idea process is transparently explained on the platform, detailing each step from categorisation to evaluation. Clearly defined categories help employees understand where their ideas fit, while dual-control evaluations by two dedicated experts ensure fairness and impartiality. Automatic notifications keep submitters regularly informed of the status of their ideas, fostering a sense of involvement and appreciation. The user-friendly interface, coupled with the option to submit ideas anonymously, lowers the barrier to participation, making it easy and convenient for employees to contribute.

Active participation is incentivised through a points system, rewarding all submitted ideas regardless of their outcome. Points accumulate towards raffle tickets, with a limit of one prize per employee to ensure fairness. This gamified approach motivates continued engagement and contribution. In addition, «Ideenhof» serves as an exclusive source of information and interaction on innovation, with live demos and updates on new features. Regular updates on the latest developments and innovations are shared through the platform, keeping employees informed and involved.

Customer Insight

"You shouldn't expect employees to come up with great ideas all the time. Instead, it makes sense to ask them about specific challenges or problems and work together to find solutions. One example is our time-waster challenge: what are the biggest time-wasters in everyday working life and where is there potential for improvement? You often hear that there is no time for innovation, but this is where our 'No Pain No Gain' approach comes in - finding out our employee's real pain points and working on them. We can't expect them to come up with the big innovation that will change the business model on the side. So: problems instead of ideas. Targeted challenges can increase the quality of ideas submitted."

- Patrick Gutowski & Aram Azimi, Innovation Manager

One notable initiative is the "Mrs. Hofmann has said" challenge, where employees could anonymously submit questions to management about current concerns. This initiative not only provides management with valuable insights but also creates a direct line of communication between employees and management. Such challenges increase transparency, build trust, and ensure that employees feel heard and valued.

Learnings: Keys to Success

| **Have realistic expectations:** Prioritise specific problems to develop effective solutions, emphasising quality over quantity.

| **Challenges for Quality:** Use challenges to encourage more focused and thoughtful idea submissions.

| **Employee Involvement:** Involve employees from the outset and incorporate their needs into the innovation process, particularly to secure C-level involvement.

| **Innovation as a Mindset:** Cultivate innovation as a company-wide mindset, not just a task for the innovation management team.

| **Focus:** Focus on key topics and manage resources wisely to avoid overwhelming employees with too much information. There is no need to provide constant insight into the latest (mega-)trends.

| **Thematic Content:** Present complex topics or mega-trends like artificial intelligence in an understandable way linked to practical challenges, creating small learning moments with each interaction. This can be done for example with a dedicated tab on the platform with information all around the topic, linked to a challenge to collect the best ChatGPT prompts.

By integrating these practices, I.K. Hofmann GmbH has established a comprehensive, transparent, and motivating idea management process that encourages active participation and improves the efficiency and traceability of innovation.

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innosabi is one of the world's leading providers of software solutions for collaborative innovation and idea management. Large international corporations rely on innosabi's software and methodological knowledge to transform their innovation processes by enabling open collaboration with customers, employees, suppliers, and other relevant stakeholders. innosabi empowers organizations to leverage their entire ecosystem for innovation. In addition to new forms of digital, large-scale collaboration, innosabi is continuously developing innovative analytics and evaluation mechanics to make more information and additional data sources usable in corporate innovation. innosabi's customers today include PepsiCo, Deutsche Telekom, Lufthansa Group and Astra Zeneca. As of January 2021, innosabi is part of the Questel group.