



## Planning and Running an Innovation Workshop

Leveraging targeted brainstorming and collaboration to solve the organization's biggest problems with its most powerful asset.

**Whether internal or external, every organization tries to leverage workshops with varying results. But with poor engagement, loose objectives, and few actionable returns, the events don't always seem worth the investment. An innovation workshop can be the one that provides a real return.**

The goal of an internal innovation workshop is to open up specific challenges or opportunities facing the organization to targeted groups of employees. With a focus on knowledge-sharing, transparency, and collaboration, employees get a deeper understanding of the organization's goals, and are pushed to formulate new ideas and approaches to play a larger role in achieving company-wide objectives.

### **Examples of Innovation Workshop Topics –**

- Boosting Sales for a Product Line or Customer Market
- Reducing Costs for a Department, Business Segment, or Process
- Improving Customer Satisfaction, Communication, or Retention

An innovation workshop is easy to run and works to boost engagement for employees in the improvement process within the organization. Flexibility in choosing topics, objectives, and participants allows you to run anything from a small, departmental workshop to a large, cross-company collaboration session.

When you're ready to get started, follow this planning process to organize your workshop, formalize your goals and objectives, plan your activities and content, and ensure both your participants and the organization can make the most of your workshop.

**Happy innovating!**

**Set specific goals for your workshop and participants.** - 1-2 Hours

- Determine what you want covered, delivered, and taken away by those involved after the workshop concludes. Choose a specific topic or challenge you're looking to solve (problems in a department, potential customer segments, communication improvements, etc.) and the context for a solution that participants need to find.

**Determine the scope of your challenge and the workshop.** - 1-2 Hours

- Once you have your topic and specific challenge, decide how deep of a dive you'll take. Examine the information or education participants will need, the problems you're solving, and a deeper breakdown of the types of solutions or ideas you're looking for.

**Forecast the number and type of participants.** - 1 Hour

- Identify who your participants are and how many you're inviting/will be attending. Determine the best approach to inform them about your workshop, and what they respond to in terms of messaging, collaboration, topics, and incentives to motivate them to participate.

**Select required staff for presentations and support.** – 1 Hour

- Identify the speakers and support staff that will be present during your workshop. Not only will they be active in running and deliver presentations and specific knowledge to participants, but also providing credibility to the innovation workshop and support to those working on their ideas, answering their questions and collaborating with teams.

**Allot time for your workshop and follow-up.** - 1 Hour

- Once you've identified your participants and staff, carve out a potential date and time slot for the innovation workshop that works for them. Take into consideration subsequent events that will take place once the workshop is over as well (this will be covered more in-depth below).

**Create an objective and knowledge database.** - 2-4 Hours

- Gather and organize general guidelines and specific information for the topics, problems, or opportunities you're covering, aligning the scope of information shared with the solution sought. Take into consideration what participants will already know and what new knowledge they'll need to create an actionable idea or solution to your challenge.

**Build your presentation and itinerary.** - 6-8 Hours

- Create the backbone of the innovation workshop. Outline your workshop schedule, and create an engaging presentation to lead it, including all educational and contextual information that will be delivered to participants and available for them after the workshop.

**Provide engaging and informative literature and handouts.** - 2-4 Hours

- Along with the presentation, actionable literature will be handed out to participants. It should include outlines for activities, additional information and FAQs, and "homework" or follow-up instructions for after the innovation workshop (covered more below).

**Organize an ice-breaker activity.** – 2-4 Hours

- Serving as an introductory activity to get everyone thinking, the ice-breaker can be either educational or energizing. It should relate to the topic and challenge that will be discussed during the innovation workshop and lead participants to the primary breakout activity. It most often consists of a brainstorming session for problem or solution identification.

**Organize your primary breakout activity.** 4-6 Hours

- Determine what type of group activity will be best suited for solving the challenge that the innovation workshop is based around, and how it can run at the event. Focus on leveraging ideas from your brainstorming sessions to lead groups to further analyze high-potential solutions and build actionable case-studies for presentation.

**Set incentives or rewards for participants.** 1-2 Hours

- Make the innovation workshop more than just an educational session. Tie in a competition or challenge that can lead to a reward or follow-on opportunity for high-performing individuals and teams. Instead of monetary or physical prizes, offer the chance to earn resources or time for their ideas and projects they create during the workshop.

**Promote and communicate with participants.** - 4-6 Hours

- Plan a marketing campaign for the parties involved, communicating objectives with them and achieving buy-in for their participation. Reference the messaging and individual goals that you identified earlier when examining your participants to ensure your messaging speaks directly to them.

**Establish a follow-up plan and schedule.** - 2-4 Hours

- Continue the energy from the event by setting post-workshop opportunities. Provide steps that your participants and groups can take to continue working on their ideas, if even just for those who produced at a high-level during the workshop.

**Order snacks and food.** - 1 Hour

- Everyone needs nourishment, so don't skimp on ensuring everyone can be comfortable and productive with some energy-boosting food and drinks.

**Reserve a comfortable and productive location.** - 0 Hours

- Find a location that allows for your presentation and break-out activities to be held effectively, taking into consideration seating, audio, work stations, and travel arrangements if necessary

Planning your innovation workshop can take anywhere from a day to a few weeks. It all depends on your goals, the people you're working with, and the topics to be covered during the presentation and workshop. Still, it's a worthy (and necessary) investment to kick off your innovation and improvement initiatives.

When everything is set and you're ready to move forward, it's time to focus on the workshop itself.

As we mentioned, your presentation will direct the workshop, so it's likely you'll put the itinerary/schedule together first. While your schedule is flexible, the content of your workshop must hit key topics like the challenges you're solving and the ideas you're looking for.

## **Here's a sample schedule of an innovation workshop that you can use.**

### **Introduction – 10-20 Minutes**

- Give a brief explanation of the topic, the challenges you're looking to solve, and the objectives of both the workshop and the subsequent activities.

### **Warm-Up Activity - 20 Minutes**

- A big part of what makes innovation workshops different is the opportunity to open up your thinking and find new solutions to specific problems. Leverage divergent thinking exercises to get people to shift their perspectives and get their creative juices flowing is a great way to introduce your workshop.
  - Examples –
    - Ask a question that pushes participants to approach problems and opportunities in a new way. How would Amazon solve this problem?
    - Create a list of all the potential problems, solutions, and opportunities for your challenge that you can think of in a limited time-frame.
    - Describe an ideal customer for a product or service, and what you can do to keep them satisfied with new technologies, services, or features.

### **Continue Presentation – 10-20 Minutes**

- Transition from your warm-up activity to introduce the main challenge of your workshop. If necessary, hold an individual exercise for brainstorming the ideas that they can work on in the team breakout.

### **Launch Individual Exercise - 20 Minutes**

- Separate from your divergent thinking activity, this exercise will relate to the topics of your workshop. Solo and small group brainstorming sessions are often the easiest way to get participants to come up with new problems, ideas, or solutions that will be leveraged later in the workshop. You can approach these sessions by directly generating ideas, or transition by pushing for looser concepts that can be used in the team breakouts to generate more concrete ideas.
  - Examples –
    - Problems or time-wasters they experience during the day
    - Underserved habits or preferences of current or potential customers
    - New technologies or strategies that could benefit the organization

### **Continue Presentation – 10-20 Minutes**

- Review your individual or group breakout sessions. Transition from the work done in the previous activity, and leverage it to jump-start the primary activity of the workshop.

### **Team Breakout 1 - 30 Minutes**

- Launch the primary activity of your workshop. This activity needs to bring people together and solve the outlined challenge and goals of your workshop, and run in a manner that can produce at least a preliminary, actionable idea or solution. Direct your group to choose an idea or solution to your challenge, and walk it through an activity or two for further development.
  - Examples –
    - Perform a SWOT Analysis or Business Model Canvas for a new Idea
    - Build a Case-Study and implementation strategy for a new Idea
    - Create a marketing strategy and campaign for a new Idea

### **Continue Presentation – 5-10 Minutes**

- Recap the first half of the primary activity, outline objectives that should have been met and should be met before the next session ends.

### **Break - 40 Minutes**

- Release participants for lunch or a snack.

### **Continue Presentation – 5-10 Minutes**

- Bring the participants back to your activity, recap the objectives from the first half, and again outline the remaining objectives that they should be striving to meet.

### **Team Breakout 2 - 30 Minutes**

- Continue the primary activity with a focus on hitting objectives.

### **Continue Presentation – 10-20 Minutes**

- Review the progress teams made during the breakout activity, and outline the remainder of the workshop. Depending on the type of your event, you can prompt teams/individuals to present the solutions or ideas they've come up with if necessary or desired.

### **Pitches - 30 Minutes**

- Teams present the ideas, potential projects, or case-studies they came up with during the breakout activity in an effort to solve the challenge outlined in the workshop.

### **Follow-up Assignment - 10 Minutes**

- To avoid the workshop being merely a temporary bump in motivation, take the information shared and progress made in the workshop outside. Let participants know the next steps they can take with their ideas and projects, and assign them “homework” to keep that motivation alive.

### **Time for Questions – 10-20 Minutes**

- Offer a chance for further clarification with a basic Q&A session.

### **Conclusion – 5-10 Minutes**

- Wrap up the workshop with some inspirational words and again sharing the challenge(s) the organization is looking to solve and how your participants can make a difference.



Making the most of your innovation workshop(s) means taking the time to identify your objectives, and bringing the excitement and ideas that were sparked during your sessions out of the meeting area. It shouldn't be a "one-time" event.

Without clear goals and a strategic approach, you won't get the most you can out of your employees' efforts. And even with a successful workshop that generates strong ideas and productive collaboration, a lack of follow-up makes the progress all for not.

Leverage the progress your employees made to make real change in your organization. Provide the infrastructure, support, and direction that employees need to take further action on their ideas, and give them the opportunity to really makes changes. With proper allocation of time, resources, and communication, the potential improvements to employee engagement, creativity, and your bottom-line can be a game-changer.

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