

Getting started with MillionBrains Tips for Challenge Managers

Quantify the challenge

Quantifying the challenge puts it in perspective for everyone AND it allows you to communicate the challenge in a much more compelling way. It becomes your pitch for potential stakeholders.

Here are some hints to get you started. Remember to keep it short:

- Who is the customer?
 - Are there several layers of customers?
 - How many customers?
- How large is the problem?
 - Magnitude (per site/number of sites/total)
 - Number of people affected
 - Side effects
- How frequent is the problem?
 - Continuous
 - Seasonal – which seasons?
 - Other frequency
- Is problem growing or declining?
 - By which %
 - By which total number
- What is the cost of the problem?
 - Direct cost
 - Indirect cost
- What are the estimated savings by solving the problem?
 - Direct savings
 - Indirect savings
- Is a potential solution worth more than the direct and indirect savings?
 - Quality of life
 - Health
 - Environment

Criteria for solutions

If you have specific criteria for solutions then you have two choices:

- Share them with everyone up front
- Save them for a later evaluation phase

Sharing them up front may impede the brainstorming process and saving them for later may bring a number of unrealistic solutions

proposals to the table. It must be a decision that is made from case to case.

Solution criteria may be – but are not limited to:

- Investment
- Operating cost
- Capacity
- Scalability
- Existing systems compatibility
- Durability
- Lifetime
- Sustainability
- Logistics
- Speed of deployment
- Ease of deployment

For an example of a well defined challenge see the MillionBrains Challenge Template

How to make open innovation work

The open innovation process is characterized by cross collaboration – not only across different departments, different educational backgrounds but also across cultures and nations. This can be very rewarding – but it can also be very frustrating. It requires an open mind, a bit of patience and respect. Here is some advice that will facilitate the process:

- Communications is key
 - Remember that not everyone has your background. The best solutions often come from a totally unexpected angle. So be sure to communicate in a way that everyone understands.
- Ask questions
 - Do not be shy about asking questions. This often starts a process that leads to unlocking new solutions and approaches. Brains gain credits for asking questions!
- Respectful feedback
 - Never shoot down an idea. Build on top of it. Always be constructive in your feedback. Say what you think is good about the proposed solution and what could be improved.

Innovation drivers

Innovation is hard work like everything else. It is not just about R&D or ideas. It is a lot about understanding the true needs, understanding the current available alternatives and being conscious about the benefits you want to bring to your customers/users – and at what cost. The right, specific solution grows out of a higher concept that again is the result of a number of proposals, approaches and ideas generated throughout the brainstorming phase.

So how do you get started? The best way is to participate. Give your point of view and help get the process started.

The innovation process is highly iterative and here are some tips to help you get started with the Brainstorm phase:

- Do not fall in love with your first solution/proposal. Be open for input and see where it will take you. Chances are that it will improve your value proposition dramatically.
- Do not defend yourself or your solution. Again be open for other points of view and think positively about input from others. They are helping you get better at getting better.
- Ask questions and dive into the challenge from different angles before proposing an approach.
 - Ask all the W questions, why? Why not? What if? When? Where? etc
- Build on the ideas of others – the more ideas the better. The solution often emerges during this process of building on each other's ideas.
- Get the iteration process going – make it fast and see where it takes you

If you get stuck here are some ideas how to get going again:

- Be inspired
 - Current solutions
 - Study current best practices to get a starting point
 - Try to evaluate current solutions according to the challenge criteria
 - Work on the parts of the challenge that is not solved by current solutions
 - Analog solutions
 - Try to look at a similar type problem in a totally different industry and study the solutions – being active at MillionBrains assist you in this

- Look at how nature solves a similar type problem (this is how Velcro was invented)
- Related challenges
 - Check MillionBrains for similar challenges and proposals to get inspiration