
The Definitive Guide to Idea & Innovation Management Platforms

**SUGGESTION
BOX**

**COLLABORATION
PLATFORM**

**INNOVATION
SOFTWARE**

**IDEA
MANAGEMENT**

CONTENTS

Introduction.....	3
A Changing Workforce.....	6
What is an Idea Management Platform.....	8
The Complex Dynamic of HR and ROI.....	11
Getting Buy-in for Idea Management.....	14
Conclusion.....	15

INTRODUCTION

A simple Google search for 'HR Software' lands you in the region of 76.5 million results:

- » Various "Buy Now!" or "Free Trial!" offers
- » Reviews
- » Recommendations
- » Social shares
- » White papers
- » eBooks
- » Conferences
- » YouTube videos...

...and of course, much more.



It can be overwhelming. Exacerbating the problem is the fact that human resources is a diverse discipline, ranging from benefits processing to talent acquisition. Therefore, the software that targets this department is just as rich in variety.

Here are just a few examples of the technology categories and companies in this space:

CATEGORY	SUMMARY	EXAMPLES
Recruiting Software	Sites where companies post job openings.	Recruiterbox, Indeed, Monster
Applicant Tracking	Share job postings socially and manage candidates in a central system.	Jobvibe, Resumator
Employee Recognition	These let you give co-workers praise for good deeds, performance, etc.	Officevibe, Wooboard, Keas, Kudos
Learning Management Systems	These help companies provide professional development online.	Axonify, LearnUpon, Udemy
Employee Reporting	See what people are working on without micromanaging them.	15Five, IDoneThis
Video Interviewing	Interview candidates remotely.	Take the Interview, Hirevue, JobScore, Bullhorn
Comp and Benefits	Manage compensation, payroll, and benefits.	ADP, Paychex, Zenefits

And of course to confuse matters even more there are some programs out there purport to do everything.

Given the variety, we think it makes sense to focus this guide on one specific area of the space not listed above: idea management platforms, which are a sub-set of employee engagement software. They help employees get more involved and help improve things like employee morale and retention.

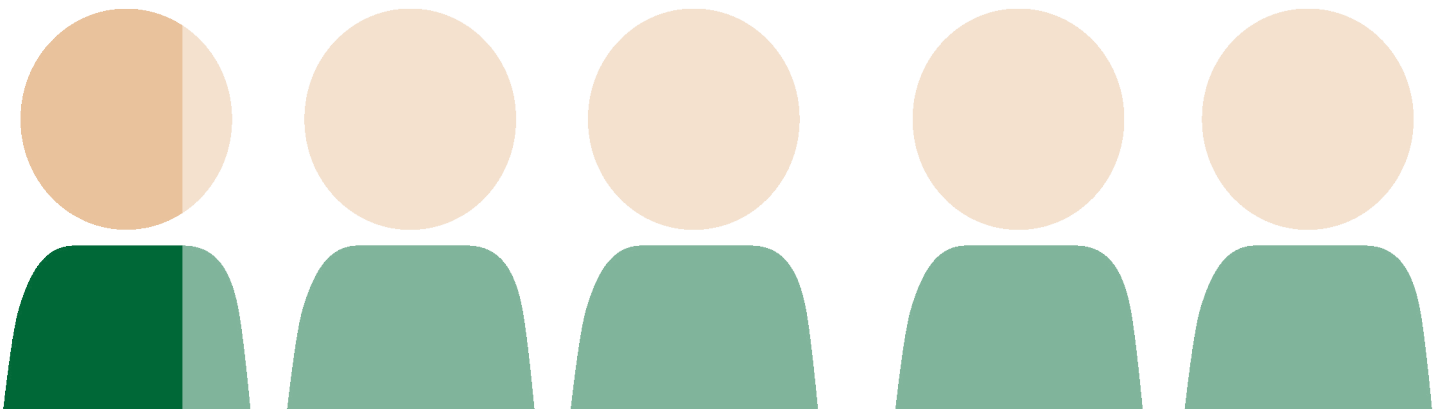
These tools are online interfaces where employees share ideas to improve their organizations. feedback from stakeholders and other colleagues, idea management helps turn those ideas into actions.

At [Vocoli](#), our goal is to foster increased employee engagement, collaboration, and the concept of an “employee voice.” By working directly hands on with our customers, we design the best possible system to achieve these three goals. This guide will demystify the space and help you determine if you need a program of this nature, then, subsequently, what you need.

LET'S DIVE IN!

A CHANGING WORKFORCE

In the last several years, one of the most-discussed trends in human resources was [Gallup's 2013 State of the American Workplace report](#), which found that only 13 percent of all workers (worldwide) are engaged at work. This is a staggeringly low number.



For many that have had the dreaded jobs where tasks are boring or responsibilities are unclear, it seems perfectly logical that the number would be so low. Contrary to many prevailing thoughts in senior leadership, the central issue is often not compensation, but rather, [poor management or the lack of opportunity for growth](#).

Regardless of the reason, this is an alarming trend for organizations. Research shows that disengaged employees get less done. This costs companies a ton of money in lost productivity each year. Additionally, disengaged employees are more likely to quit, and it's much more expensive to replace even an average performing employee making an average salary than it is to retain him or her.

To this end, the notion of “employee engagement” has been top of mind for business

leaders in recent years. Employee engagement was once thought to be somewhat of an organic thing driven by the subject matter of the work. It's just a lot more fun selling candy than copiers, right? And some people are just happy to clock in, clock out, collect their pensions, and get on with their lives, right?

Wrong.

Most people want more out of work than a paycheck. This is especially true for one of the largest growing segments of the workforce - millennials.

Studies show that millennials have especially idealistic mindsets about their careers. They desire a sense of purpose through their work. Influenced by participation awards, required group schoolwork, 9/11, the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, the 2008 economic crash, and Occupy movement, millennials are a collaborative crowd with a strong sense of community and the greater good.

They want to feel a sense of belonging with their co-workers. In addition, millennials grew up being told they were special people with unique ideas. Social media reinforced this concept by giving them platforms to express themselves with. This is why sharing is their default. So when it comes to work, it's stifling if millennials don't have a way to share their ideas and engage with the company, even if they are "only" entry-level or middle-management. Upper management can likely sense their restlessness and may not fully understand where it's coming from, leading them to be frustrated as well.

|| All in all, the miscommunication is a recipe for disaster, but this is
|| also why better communication is key to better engagement.

WHAT IS AN IDEA MANAGEMENT PLATFORM AND WHAT DOES THE IDEAL ONE OFFER?

We believe the right approach to idea management is to offer somewhat of a “digital suggestion box” for collecting ideas from workers and to provide a workflow for implementing them.

The screenshot shows the Vocoli web application interface for submitting a new idea. The page is titled "Contribute a New Idea" and includes a navigation sidebar on the left with icons for HOME, IDEAS, COLLABORATE, and CAMPAIGNS. The main content area is titled "BASIC INFORMATION (STEP 1 of 4)" and contains several input fields: "IDEA NAME (required)", "ORGANIZATIONAL PILLAR (required)", "DEPARTMENT (required)", "CURRENT METHOD OR PROBLEM (between 15 and 1500 characters)", and "PROPOSED SOLUTION (between 15 and 1500 characters)". At the bottom right of the form, there are two buttons: "SAVE AS DRAFT" and "NEXT". Below the form, there are three colored tabs: "BENEFITS AND OUTCOMES" (purple), "ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS" (yellow), and "ATTACHMENTS" (orange).

YOUR IDEA MANAGEMENT PLATFORM SHOULD DO THE FOLLOWING:

- **Gives employees a space to share ideas.** These ideas can be simple things like organizing a company picnic or complex initiatives like a new marketing campaign. Once submitted, the idea gets posted to an internal feed where it's available for commentary.
- **Encourages employees to provide backup and support for their ideas.** Some tools are like a firehose for knee-jerk suggestions, but platforms should empower employees with the right process for communicating ideas. They should require employees to do their research, and put those details down when they submit ideas.
- **Prompts employees to invite stakeholders to engage with employees.** Employee freedom is great, but the ability to act without checks can lead to miscommunication. Executive sponsors with access to the “bird’s eye view” of the company are important. The right interface makes stakeholder interaction simple by allowing employees to invite leadership to collaborate on ideas.
- **Gives employees a chance to be a part of solutions.** We just discussed some ways the right tools empower employees to make suggestions of their own and get leadership approval. The right solution can also do the opposite, which is to allow employees to provide commentary on executive ideas or “requests for solutions” in which they are asking for others’ opinions.
- **The right platform works for YOUR company - not the other way around.** Every organization is different. Every culture is different. What works at Zappos may not work at the Department of Veterans Affairs. But everyone has an opportunity (to some degree) to listen to their team. The right solution is flexible and enables you to do this in a way that fits the dynamics of the organizational culture.

Other specific features ultimately are based on your organization's structure. Who reports where, what metrics are typically used, what systems are already in place, and your budget considerations.

THESE ARE THE CORE ELEMENTS YOU'LL LIKELY WANT TO CONSIDER:

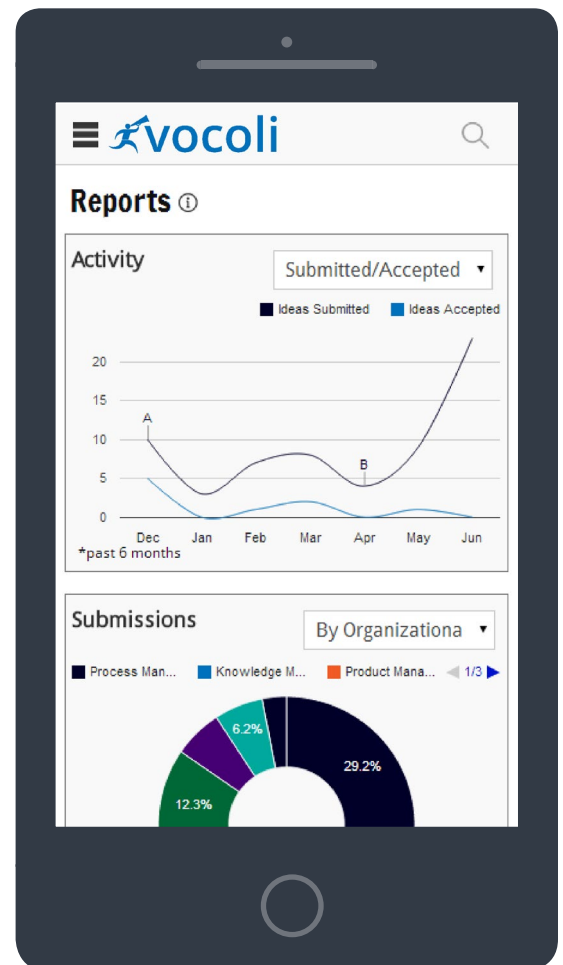
- Ease of adoption - Which stakeholders will you need to “sell” this solution to?
- Cost structure (including cost-per-user)
- Ease of use
- Integration with your existing technologies
- Access and availability
- Case studies or consumer reviews
- The value-add this will provide
- Easy to set up
- Clear ROI documentation

Of these, we'd argue that ease of adoption, cost structure, simplicity, and ROI are the biggest areas to focus on.

You never want to go with something that promises a four-month rollout – and ultimately becomes a 20-month rollout. Almost every decision in an

organization comes down to cost and ROI, but you need to also consider how much your current process is costing you. Simplicity is often ignored in these types of decisions, but it is crucially important. Remember, if this is an engagement platform, it's something a good chunk of your organization will be using. If it's too complicated for an average user to understand, it's not going to catch on, and will likely fizzle out in a year or two.

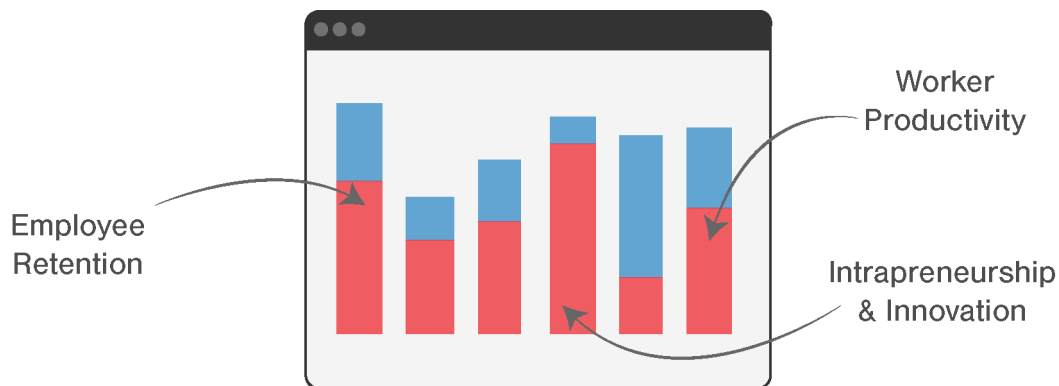
And then...of course...we come to ROI.



THE COMPLEX DYNAMIC OF HR AND ROI

In immediate post-WW2 working America, human resources (HR) was akin to personnel or admin. Despite massive changes in the legal structure of America and how we work day-to-day, there are many who still view HR through that lens, and proving the ROI of HR-related functions *has been a challenging task for years.*

Numerous works have been written on the ROI of HR – see [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#) for some examples – but, beyond getting into where HR could be headed (that’s another discussion altogether!), we need to take a look specifically at the potential ROI of employee engagement.



WE BELIEVE THE ROI FOR EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT RESIDES IN THREE AREAS:

- Employee Retention
- Intrapreneurship & Innovation
- Worker Productivity

EMPLOYEE RETENTION

In general, the common math on losing an employee is that it **costs the organization 6-to-9 months of that employee's salary**. This has always been a hard thing to directly measure because some people leave organizations with a low salary and low amounts of responsibility. But they might be the only person who actively knew cost codes, printer codes, and other office necessities. While those responsibilities can be figured out by others, that's still a huge cost to day-to-day productivity – and a cost to remaining employees learning new tasks and determining who to ask for specific things.

There are significant **hidden costs** of losing an employee: lost knowledge, overworked staff, recruiting (using third parties / flying candidates in), training (most studies indicate a new employee won't reach the productivity of the departed employee **until the 10th month**), and much more. If you don't focus on retention, these costs can come back to bite you; for a middle-management employee who departs, the average cost to fill is \$12K. That's not a lot for a Fortune 100 company, but for a mid-size company it can be – and for a Fortune 100 company extrapolated across 30-40 different managers in different divisions, it starts to add up.

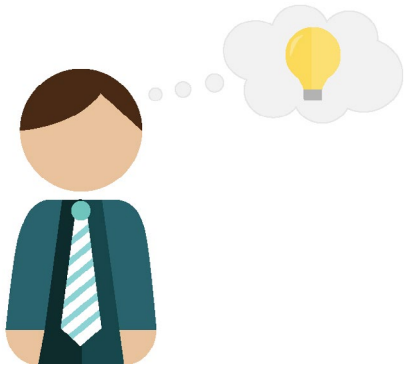


INTRAPRENEURSHIP & INNOVATION

The idea of intrapreneurship is that employees work on projects outside of their primary job roles with the goal, these projects will turn into **fresh and innovative ideas for the organization**. One offshoot you'll often hear is "20 percent time," meaning employees can use 1/5th of their time for special projects that relate back to the business.

The most famous contemporary example is Google. Gmail and AdSense, two of their most

notable products, **came from 20 percent time.**



Managers can be fearful because they're concerned it will lead to slacking off. There is a conventional argument there. Not everyone has the focus and discipline to treat intrapreneurship as an opportunity to excel, as opposed to an opportunity to surf the Internet.

Intrapreneurship **can be used to foster internal successes** that directly impact the bottom-line. As the number of examples continues to grow, this question of ROI is still a concern among senior management.

WORKER PRODUCTIVITY

Workers who feel connected to their co-workers, their manager and their overall organization – and who feel like projects aren't beneath their current skill set – are more likely to work harder and deliver better service to customers/clients/end users. Some of that is just basic psychology. Some has been discussed **in more business-like contexts.**



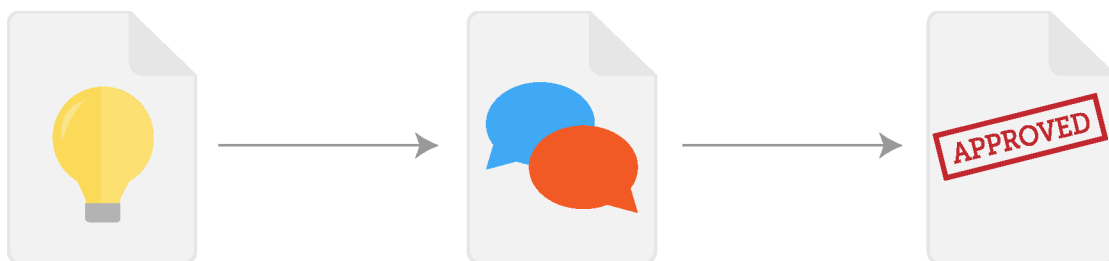
GETTING BUY-IN FOR IDEA MANAGEMENT

The first step to getting buy-in is to understand the process for adoption of idea management within your organization. This varies based on where you work.

SOME OF THE KEY FACTORS TO CONSIDER ARE:

- Who are the stakeholders that need to be included in the decision making process?
- Do these stakeholders tend to think in terms of only bottom-line, or are they flexible in their view of ROI?
- Who will be using the program/software/tool?
- Who will be the project lead on implementing it?
- Who will be doing the bulk of the training once implemented?
- Who are the final sign-offs on adoption of purchase?
- How does finance make decisions within your organization?

This seems like a daunting list of questions, but it's manageable. They all go back to the same aspect, which is: the process of an idea becoming a reality.









If you're unclear how that works at your company, talk to your direct manager. That person might have a better idea of the path of various competing projects, and if they don't, they should know where to direct you.

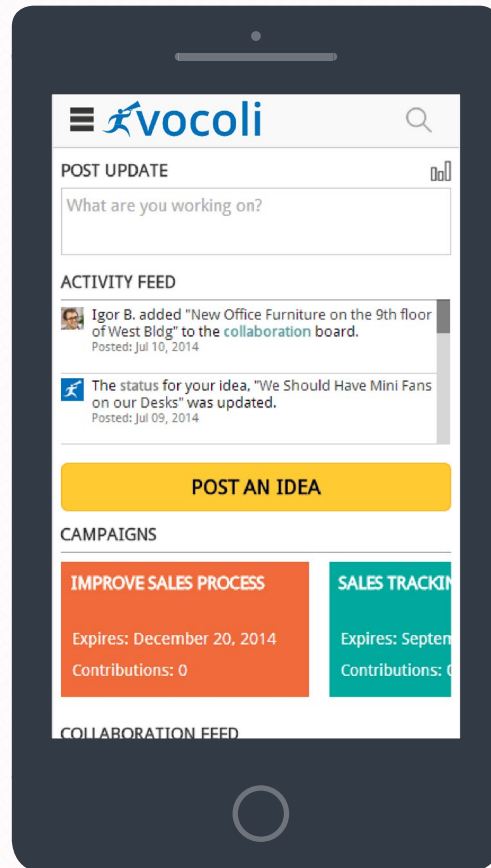
CONCLUSION

The most important word in all of this is likely context; the specific context of your organization and its needs will determine how you approach a lot of these issues.

For example, some organizations choose to spend much more on recruiting-related programs and software (get the best people in), whereas others tend to spend more on engagement-related programs (keep the best people there). Because margins can be tight anywhere, it's all a tricky balancing act. But if you know the why, the what, the who (stakeholders) and the how (process), you already ahead of the curve.

vocoli

-  Idea Sharing
-  Collaboration
-  Challenges
-  Reporting
-  Recognition
-  And more!



Vocoli can help you engage your employees, listen to their ideas, give feedback, and ultimately build better organizations.

Contact us today to learn more and get a free demo.

To request a demo: email sales@vocoli.com today!

For more information visit www.vocoli.com or call us at 888.919.5300