

# Employees develop innovative solutions encouraged by recognition & rewards

*Encouraged by recognition and rewards, employees - cutting across ages - are working towards developing a new or improved solution or product.*

LUBNA KABLY | TNN | Aug 19, 2016, 02.07 PM IST

Innovations are springing out of the inbox, leading to disruptions across sectors.

Digital idea exchange platforms, innovation contests and cross-functional brainstorming sessions are helping employees don the innovator's hat.

Encouraged by recognition and rewards, employees - cutting across ages, levels of seniority and industrial sectors - are working towards developing a new or improved solution or product.



Here's the story of some:

**PwC's Concept Cradle:** Annual innovation contests prompt employees of PwC, a network of affiliated professional services firms across 100 countries, to offer out-of-the-box solutions, which can be deployed to meet client needs.

**The Aha! Moment:** Client interactions often spark an idea. Such interactions led the consultancy team at PwC India to realise that while cloud technology enables companies to connect with their customers via mobile apps, the going isn't easy and costs can escalate.

Vijay Kannan, a senior-level consultant in his mid-forties, and his team developed the 'Digital Foundation Platform (DFP)' through which a mobile app can be updated at a faster pace. App users don't have to wait for months for a newer version.

"After the launch of their first app, corporates often run into roadblocks. A typical development cycle can take anywhere from a few weeks to a few months," says Kannan.

DFP was one of the five ideas selected at the India level in the 'Global Innovation Challenge' contest for 2015-16. Kannan got a chance to compete with innovators from other PwC-affiliated firms and found a place in the top 30 global list. DFP has been piloted with one of PwC's clients in India and the plan is to utilise PwC's world-wide network to take it to the global market.

Another recent innovation, the web-based platform Prudence developed by the forensic practice

team, has been deployed in-house. It enables clients to keep track of PwC's progress during due-diligence mandates of third parties.

**Vedanta Says Eureka:** Vedanta, the diversified group engaged in mining and exploration, recently launched 'Eureka', a web-based employee idea exchange platform to incubate in-house innovation. The company has a Rs 200-crore corpus to fund select ideas.

**Value In Waste:** With 'zero waste' in mind, Eliakim Tshiningayamwe, a technical manager from a group company in Namibia, proposed making use of stockpiles of marginal ore, a waste product.

"The target is to process marginal ore and recover zinc, which would boost profits. Eureka helps in collaboration between R&D and process teams across locations," says Tshiningayamwe. The company has introduced a quarterly chairman's award - a trophy and citation for the best innovation and an annual award.

"Sustainability is at the heart of our business. High-efficiency technology and safe practices ensure maximum recovery as well as zero waste. Eureka helps create the discourse on this," says Ajay Kumar Dixit, CEO (power) at Vedanta. Other ideas include recovery of cobalt and copper from slag and conversion of fly ash into geo-polymer cement.

Until recently, the hierarchical manufacturing and service sector in India frowned upon a bottom-up approach towards innovation. A more open culture in the tech sector enabled Infosys, Wipro, HCL and others to nurture in-house innovation. But now the engine of internal crowd-sourcing of disruptions is revving up in non-tech sectors as well.

One may not easily associate innovation with a law firm, but Nishith Desai Associates (NDA) has set up a 'disruptive practices group' which tracks futuristic trends such as drones or driverless cars. Thus it is forearmed with sound perspective and can deliver innovative solutions to its clients, besides achieving leadership in new practice areas.

"Emerging technology brings with it new legal and tax problems requiring innovative solutions. A clear assertive statement based on in-depth research from our law firm on the legality of Bitcoins stopped the RBI from barring them," says Prateek Bagaria, a 28-year-old legal associate with the firm.

The law firm helped shape the Bitcoin policy in 2013. It also enabled FII investments in Bitcoin companies in India by providing investment-structuring solutions and is now assisting this sector to develop a self-regulatory regime. NDA recently helped the government to set up an investment structure for the \$6-billion National Investment and Infrastructure Fund, considered to be a first of its kind in the world.

At Marico, an FMCG company, 'MarVal', a multi-pronged module ranging from jam sessions to niche think tanks, in one instance led to a packaging design innovation. "Periodical thematic innovation jam sessions bring ideas to the table from our employees across the globe. The

winners are selected by an Innovation Council, says Ashutosh Telang, chief HR officer. Over the last two years, the jam sessions have resulted in over 2,000 ideas.

Companies having realized the value of employee-sourced innovation are supporting these initiatives. "We treat our innovators as 'special people' regardless of the commercial success of certain ideas," says NDA founder Nishith Desai.

Shyamal Mukherjee, strategy leader at PwC India, says, "Innovation is critical means of staying in the game. It will have a significant impact on the way we do business over the next few years."