

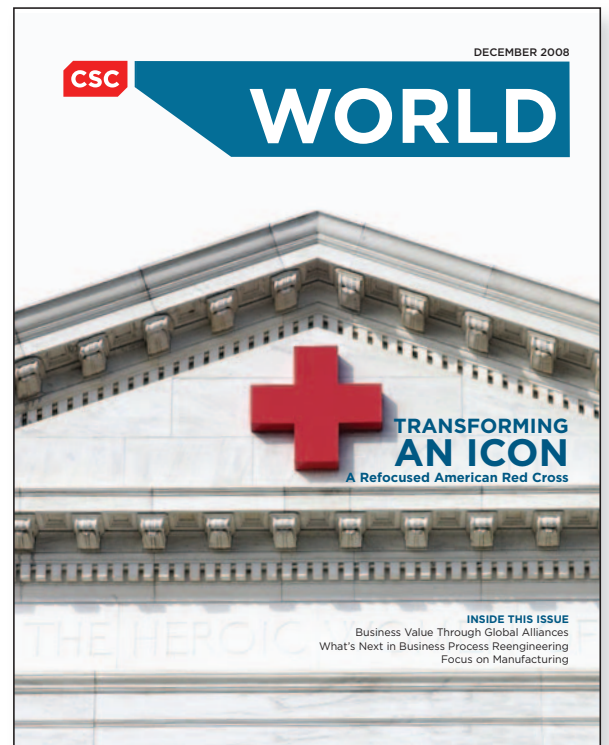
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## COLLABORATION

Ideation: A 21st Century Suggestion Box



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# IDEATION

## A 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY SUGGESTION BOX

by Martha Johnson and Howard Smith



## It's been almost a century since the first suggestion box was created as a tool to invite ideas and help employees contribute to their workplace.

How far we've come. Today, companies live and breathe by innovative ideas that can be nurtured and, ultimately, turned into profit. Whoever has the best idea-management process and culture has the upper hand in the market. Companies are scrambling to plug the best minds into their growth-oriented innovation process.

Innovation used to be defined largely by creativity and the development of new ideas. Now, the term encompasses coordinated projects that hone those creative ideas in order to boost the bottom line. At CSC's Idea Central, that's exactly what's happening — not just with employees, but with customers and partners and across the wider ecosystem of global talent.

How? The approach is called Ideation.

Ideation uses a smart software application — Imaginatik's Idea Central — to capture, organize, evaluate and rank participant suggestions. Ideation events may include as many as 200,000 people, comprised of customers, stakeholders and alliance partners.

Ideation securely organizes peer reviews so that ideas can be promoted, weeded out, directed to experts and then extended with further participant input. Weighted scorecards help evaluations, and participation scoring helps maintain employee interest levels and involvement. The tool streamlines the process of configuring and launching tailored business or engineering challenges to large communities, and easily plugs in all the essential experts.

### **Ideation: The wisdom of crowds**

Each Ideation event has its own objectives. One event may be to reduce costs, another to grow revenue, yet another to improve a service or transform an important client's relationship. Beyond these event-specific objectives, an organization can also uncover additional benefits:

- The real minds and hearts of employees are revealed, as challenges engage their minds and collaboration boosts their spirits.
- Decision makers can access more complete and creative thinking, building better odds for success.

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- A fruitful pipeline of priorities may emerge.
- Solutions have a higher probability of success, due to early developmental support.
- Experts can vet ideas openly and promptly.
- A central and accessible corporate memory bank can be created, proving a new form of knowledge management.

“We rejected an idea five years ago because we did not take the care to evaluate it. A competitor turned it into a billion dollar business opportunity.”



## “Problem types” that are good for Ideation events

While “blue sky” events are possible, many Ideation users have more prosaic objectives. There is no such thing as a standard Ideation event. They are as much about problem solving as they are about new ideas. Ideation can be structured to get insights into challenges such as:

- We don’t know which important problem(s) to focus on.
- We lack consensus about the need to solve a problem.
- We know the problem but not the best solution for it.
- We know the solution but not how to implement it.

also fosters collaboration and communication, as it issues friendly reminders to participants who are developing each other’s ideas, as well as to experts and reviewers. Communication can range from full broadcast ideas and comments; to offline, direct referrals to experts; or one-on-one reviewer check-ins.

## Common business problems where ideation has been applied

**Adapting to New Market Realities.** In a safe environment, explore the impact of large scale, damaging industry trends.

**Bureaucracy Buster.** Identify wasteful processes or procedures to streamline work and reduce overhead.

**Commercial Launch.** Accelerate product launch of solutions and services; customer and consumer adoption.

**Customer Echo.** Collect input from employees who ‘express’ the customer’s needs. The employee builds a heightened sense for the market.

For a longer list, visit [www.csc.com/ideation](http://www.csc.com/ideation).

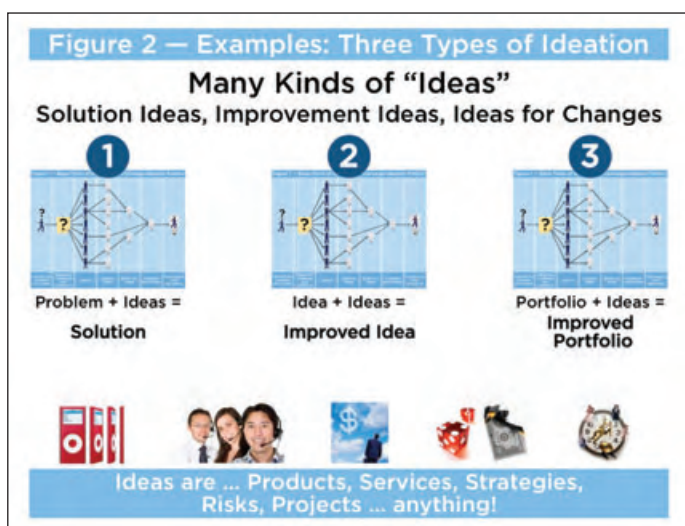
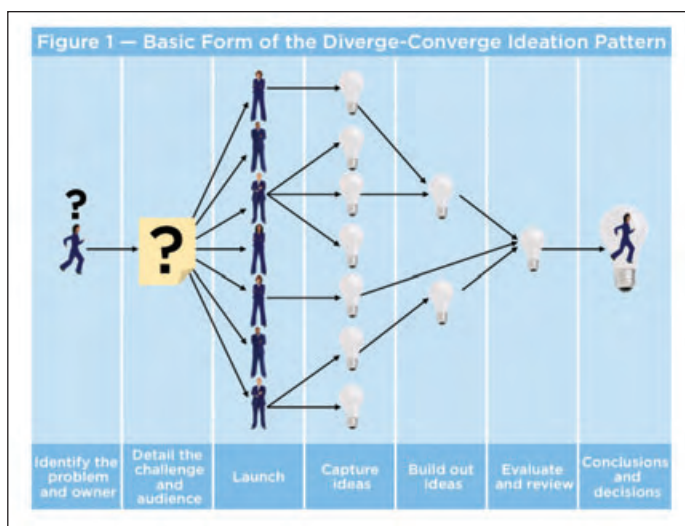
Much of this is based on the “wisdom of crowds” notion: If many people jump into a thought process, more and better ideas are offered, and the diversity of options and full spectrum of possibilities are more certain. Taking this one step further, Ideation is structured to be a time-bounded, managed event, rather than an ongoing, online, open-ended rant.

Ideation events are large-scale, collaborative, problem-solving campaigns. They challenge an entire community, which responds through a flexible and threaded discussion. Typical events last from three days to three months, during which time each participant has a specific role: contributor of ideas, reviewer, expert, sponsor or challenger (one who poses provocative questions). The event’s orchestration relies on good design and a clear time frame — people understand the questions and feel subtle pressure to contribute now, rather than waiting or even disappearing.

### Clarity and communication

The Ideation event is typically structured into six phases: collection of raw ideas, idea development, evaluation, recommendations, final decisions and conclusions. This clarity of project planning

Rarely are events simply open-ended “blue sky” thinking. Most events start with a specific idea and seek to improve it. Ideation allows an idea to have a full life — be stated, commented on, upgraded, reviewed, categorized, coupled with or split from other ideas, or discarded. Furthermore, events can be chained together, so that the sub-ideas are fleshed out and then linked with others to drive a larger program of change or development. For example, one event may prioritize problems across the organization. The next event may take the highest ranked of those problems and start to develop solutions. (See Figures 1 and 2 for illustrations of various kinds of Ideation.)



Finally, an event is also an archive record of the collaboration, which helps guard ideas — and idea originators — so they’re available when needed. Lessons learned are not lost. For example, rerunning an event across different business units or client accounts, at different times of the year or on different subjects, allows a richer bank of knowledge.

#### Ideation in action

CSC has been aware of Ideation for some time, but in the past year we’ve more deliberately moved through the early adopter phase and are now deploying the tool more broadly. Two early CSC events in Europe yielded significant cash savings of \$30 million. More recently, an event was designed to improve the end-to-end cash flow in our North American Public Sector. In another,

## Events can be created to support a host of opportunities

- Market exploration and growth
- Customer and partner collaboration
- Service innovation
- Solutions and portfolio development
- New initiative launch and awareness
- Best practices identification and adoption
- Culture and organizational change

participants at a major internal conference were asked to identify the “elephants in the room” preventing progress. CSC is also applying Ideation in enterprise risk management (ERM) and to shape our Green agenda and solution offerings. Results from Ideation depend on how smart an organization is in setting challenges and deciding which emerging ideas to target.

**“We outlined a single campaign that produced value estimated at \$30 million.”**

Other companies have used Idea Central to significant ends: Pfizer uses it to connect 25,000 people organizationwide on a range of collaborative tasks, such as drug formulation and delivery. Xerox uses it to support their Lean and Six Sigma programs, in addition to helping drive collaborative leadership forums. Boeing uses it to engage staff for collaborative problem solving, to generate ideas for growth initiatives and to help improve existing processes.

But the exciting story at CSC is how Ideation is becoming a household word, a new attitude about how transparency can help problem solving. It’s fostering a new sense of empowerment as employees are invited to contribute their ideas and comment on solutions. Leaders have a new way to share broadly and deeply their commitment to communicating with employees and resolving significant issues.

And this new approach does not stop at our doors — organizing Ideation events with our customers is the next step. Challenges can help us better understand client issues; reviews and expert comments can help clients recognize and reach better solutions. ●



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*With the broadest range of capabilities, CSC offers clients the solutions they need to manage complexity, focus on core businesses, collaborate with partners and clients, and improve operations.*

*CSC makes a special point of understanding its clients and provides experts with real-world experience to work with them. CSC is vendor-independent, delivering solutions that best meet each client's unique requirements.*

*For more than 49 years, clients in industries and governments worldwide have trusted CSC with their business process and information systems outsourcing, systems integration and consulting needs.*

*The company trades on the New York Stock Exchange under the symbol "CSC."*

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