



6 key dimensions

to assess in an **innovation management software**

– or what to ask your next software provider

If you have conquered your leadership support and have the go-ahead to find the best software for your company's innovation challenge, beware that some of the biggest challenges (sometimes mistakes) emerge in the selection process itself.

Once you move forward into picking a handful of potential system providers, it is crucial that you define which features and functionalities your company requires, based on its background innovation experience, and which of those features and functionalities will help you meet your business needs and the established goals.

Your shortlist will likely be dense, extensive, or worse yet, you may be missing critical features for your programme, such as integration with previous initiatives or the ability to scale to new languages as your programme grows.

It is easy to feel lost in this process, with many tools overwhelming you with features you may not actually come to use.

It is also easy to be drawn in by the promise of quick and easy results, but be conscious that it is unlikely your ROI will increase overnight. Innovation is a process of trial and error, so don't be misled by the idea of easy gains. As long as you focus on **content quality** and **solid engagement levels**, you will see changes across the board, from small benefits that help incentivise your people to more substantial ones, such as turning ideas into real, impactful projects. Don't believe in quick fixes. Set the wheel in motion and be ready to give the process time and celebrate the wins along the way.

All the available software options and their various, flexible and intricate features may be too much for you to manage if you are taking the first steps in launching an innovation programme. So it may be too much for users to navigate easily as well, which will undoubtedly have the opposite effect to the many benefits offered by these tools.

Always have in mind your organisation's innovation reality and maturity.
You need to be ambitious, but also to set your priorities straight.

To navigate through the murky waters of innovation management tools, it is important to first make a list of your **desired features** and organise them in alignment with the priorities of your company.

To help you make a quicker, more calculated decision, consider the following four points:

- 1. GATHER THE FACTS**
Make sure you have all the information before making a decision. Carefully analysing reliable facts will give you the certainty needed to make your choice.
- 2. NARROW DOWN YOUR OPTIONS**
Make a selection of the tools that offer the features you feel are indispensable to your initiative and disregard the rest.
- 3. SET A TIME LIMIT**
Giving yourself a deadline creates a sense of urgency and helps you focus on the decision at hand, collecting the pros and cons faster.
- 4. TRUST YOUR GUT**
Instinct is also a form of information processing and can be used as a useful tool in making good decisions. Balance the information you have with what your gut is telling you.

Your decision must be based on what is most relevant for your company's needs.

For example, a simplified platform can get you started in 24 hours, while if you're looking for higher customisation, it will take some time and additional effort on your part. It is a matter of matching relevance and urgency and deciding on the process with the people involved.

In our experience, we have learnt that there are several dimensions that are typically more important to innovation managers. To help you decide on the best fit for you and your organisation, consider these **6 key points**:

1 ■ Ease of management and customisation



The first decision you should make is whether your priority is a quick start, or a more complex system that will take longer to set up but that will adapt better to your innovation reality and structure.

*Do you need field-tested configurations for a **fast, easy start**, balancing quick onboarding and easy-to-use, intuitive features with the configuration options you consider most essential? Or are you looking for a more **flexible product** with a comprehensive set of features, that will be able to fulfil a more complex process with more elaborate innovation projects?*

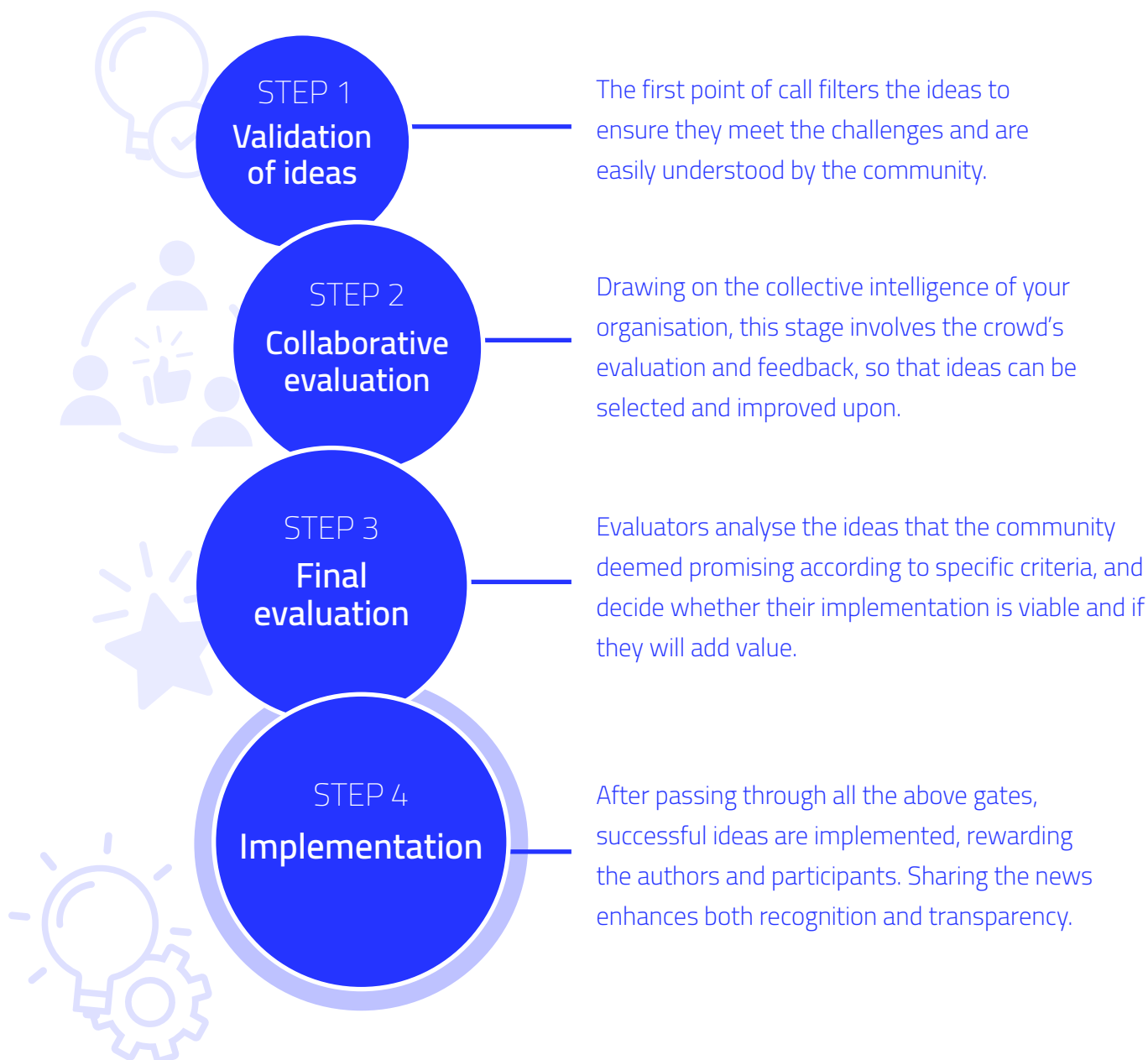
Once you have deliberated over ease of use versus versatility and adaptability, you should assess the type of customisable requirements for your system. Specifically:

How it integrates with your previous initiatives, ensuring the continuation of the programme and that any previous knowledge or data is not lost.

How it adapts to your brand to make it yours. It is important to create a brand around your innovation activities, aligned with your existing corporate brand. In this way, employees can relate to the initiative and build it up as their own.

How effective the workflow is. Customising your workflow to align with your innovation needs will shorten the time between ideation and implementation. Opt either for a simple process to collect, evaluate and select ideas, or for a more complex path involving different development stages and gates that better align with your programme requirements.

The workflow in more complex systems will generally include different development stages and gates, which will successfully separate the wheat from the chaff as ideas travel along the funnel. A typical automated workflow might look something like this:



What types of evaluation methods are offered. Evaluation methods have generally been developed to be intuitive and easy to use, but each type can be more fitting to a specific purpose. For this reason, a range of options is beneficial to help engage your teams to analyse, comment on and help develop ideas throughout the workflow. You should be able to customise the type of evaluation according to your target and challenge – for example, predictive markets work well with a large community, while measuring multiple dimensions may be more fitting for a specific type of challenge. A collaborative innovation solution will also go beyond simply sourcing ideas from your people, and different evaluation methods are effective in engaging the crowd to participate in the selection process.

Types of evaluation methods include:



LIKES

A simple method that allows a quick selection of ideas by simply clicking on a 'like' button.



STAR RATINGS

The star rating, usually from 1-5, is best suited to assess the different dimensions of an idea to measure its potential, such as benefits for the company and ease of implementation.



PREDICTIVE MARKETS

Predictive markets are suited to initiatives with larger crowds. Rather than simply selecting the most popular ideas, it narrows down those with the highest quality by using the market mechanism of investment to effectively prioritise those that will add the most value to your organisation.

With all the above features and customisations, it is of course vital that the **software's back-office is intuitive**, offering ease of management and configuration to make your job easier. In this way, instead of micro-administering the programme and the software, you can focus your valuable time on strategically driving innovation within your organisation.

2 ■ Gamification and social features



To encourage people to take part, the solution should ideally be uncomplicated and appealing for the end user. User experience is a top priority in this type of tools, and complex functionalities will only be off-putting.

Your employees already have busy days and are overwhelmed with information as it is. With shorter attention spans and less willingness to contribute to lateral activities in the workplace, particularly if they are boring or unappealing, the trick is to make the innovation process fun and engaging. And **the way to make it fun? Through gamification.**

Gamification is the application of game elements and principles in non-game concepts and has proven to be a powerful way to close this engagement gap. Through this concept, companies are able to encourage their workforce to participate and be rewarded for their efforts. By building campaigns, comprising small to large groups, you can harvest the best ideas generated from the crowd, who in turn will gain from their activity.

Essentially, the more ideas and the more activities users take part in, the more they gain. It is crucial to nurture this environment of creativity and innovation by **recognising and rewarding participation**, whether it is through special announcements or tangible and intangible prizes. Announcing implementation results is also a good technique to maintain motivation and ensure the innovation culture is embedded within your organisation's walls.

This approach also reflects a **fully transparent process** as users will have a clear understanding of the overall workflow. They will see which ideas perform better and why, and receive first-hand updates of the state-of-play of activities, ideas and implementations. Bring your communications department on board to create a plan around the initiative.

Social features are also important in achieving this transparency, while simultaneously promoting sharing and collaboration among the workforce. There are several social tools besides gamification that help to encourage different profiles to engage in all aspects of the platform, such as team formations, sharing options, notifications, reminders, feedback, chat options and forums, and activity digests.

3 ■ Support beyond technology



Of course, technology plays a big role in the success of a programme based on an innovation software, but there is much more to it. If you feel there are areas in which you have less support, your provider should be able to offer a **package with additional services** tailored to your specific needs. The application of the technology will only reach its full potential if you have a range of services to support your programme globally.

To understand which services would add most value to your programme, you must look to understand the needs required by the size and scope of your programme, along with the expertise and size of the team available. To optimise the solution in enterprise-grade programmes, an expert team should be on hand to help you deploy and manage your programme effectively.

Services should cater to your needs and programme goals, whether it is technical support, such as configuring the initiative, managing the platform or training your teams, or consulting services, which can support you throughout and provide valuable assistance in the process and crowd management.

From ignition through to implementation and celebration, a combination of these services, such as hands-off implementation and content and platform management services, will free you from operational, time-consuming tasks and allow you to focus on what's important: finding those all-important ideas to transform your business.

4. Scalability and readiness to evolve



Finding the right solution for your innovation needs right now is vital, but bear in mind that it must also be able to accompany your programme's evolution in the future and enable it **to scale and grow**. The ideal innovation management tool must support and promote transformation, upgrading as necessary to maximise your results.

Many companies work with multiple languages and different communities, meaning that an innovation software should be capable of scaling and evolving without requiring more resources or additional licence costs. If this is the case for your programme, ask your potential provider if the platform can offer multiple languages and several groups simultaneously, as well as how many languages it can offer – and if you can activate them as you expand.

This ability to evolve according to your company's shifting needs is reflected in relevant, timely new upgrades that will both accompany and stimulate your programme to achieve bigger and better things depending on its ever-changing demands.

5. Security and access



Security and privacy are obviously major concerns these days. As innovation management solutions are cloud-based, they should have every security standard in place to ensure all information and data is kept safe – offering a **trusted hosting provider**.

Questions to ask include encryption and authentication options (such as Single Sign On – SSO and Security Assertion Markup Language – SAML), penetration tests, third-party verification and external data centres.

Another issue that is unavoidable is ensuring it is compliant with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), brought in in May 2018. The chosen provider must comply with all legal obligations regarding the collection of personal data, and how it is used and stored, ensuring there are no breaches of privacy.

6 ■ Results measurement



Whatever promises a solution provider makes, the proof is in the pudding. Idea management software will enable your organisation to collect, evaluate and implement ideas, leveraging the expertise of your employees, customers and partners, but what really matters is seeing results.

A powerful tool that will help measure tangible and intangible results is Analytics and Data, allowing you to scrutinise the end-to-end process, download reports and track engagement and success, spotting any trends in activity from the ideation stage through to implementation.

Comprehensive reporting should not be underestimated – a good innovation management solution should provide **detailed reports** on KPIs, such as number of participants, number of ideas shared and implemented, evaluation data, winning ideas and so on. By tracking both idea pipelines and engagement levels, it is easier to gain an overview of the success of the process and its results, and make improvements if necessary.

The dashboard should also be ready to offer thorough information, according to your needs, such as country, department, as well as a **ROI and qualitative impact analysis**, allowing you to track the performance of each KPI against some type of benchmark.

When it comes to results, the solutions that can show proven outcomes of successful initiatives – with hard numbers and positive achievements, particularly within your sector –, used by trusted firms and global leaders, should also carry weight when making your decision.

To sum up, if you have decided that an innovation management solution will arm you with the right tools to build and scale your organisation's innovation initiative, you should choose the optimum fit for your organisation, taking into consideration:



1. *How easy it is to manage and customise*

Decide whether you want a quick start, with the platform designed around best practices and straightforward configurations, or if you need a more customisable tool that can keep up with your goals and innovation maturity.



2. *If it encourages participation through gamification and other social features*

These tools will motivate your workforce to take part, using gamification and recognition methods to nurture a healthy competitive spirit and boost engagement.



3. *If it offers well-rounded support beyond technology*

Technology is only as good as its technical support and consulting services, as well as the overall ease of use of the platform itself.



4. *If it is scalable and ready to evolve*

The chosen software should be able to meet your current needs, but also be able to scale as your initiative grows. It should also be able to cater for multiple languages and different communities without involving extra costs, efforts or resources.



5. *If it is security-compliant*

It should follow the strictest security and privacy standards, ensuring data is kept safe and information is handled correctly. It must also be GDPR-compliant.



6. *If it measures (and delivers) results*

Measuring results will reflect if the programme is successful. A dashboard that provides the main KPIs on engagement, ideation and evaluation is a must-have.

Finally, an innovation management tool can make all the promises in the world, but it doesn't mean much unless you try it out first. Starting with a **pilot project** will test whether your community adapts to the system and if the benefits are worthwhile, mitigating risks before committing. If you are confident with the performance or results of your pilot, you can then roll out the software to your entire organisation and expand your innovation initiative reach and potential.

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