

# Spotlight on

## A framework for democratising innovation in Telecommunications



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***We've been through some seismic changes in the past two years and telecoms have had to roll with those changes more than most. Would you agree?***

Telecommunications is one of the most innovative industries where change is constant. The industry drives technological change. From VoIP, IoT, AI to 5G and network infrastructure, our products and services are constantly pushed by the evolving technological landscape. Additionally, it is challenged by the needs of our customers who want reliable connectivity, speed, and large data capacity.

***Very true. There are few industries as innovative and fast-moving as telecoms. It must be a doddle.***

Not really. Innovating in such a rapid changing environment is hard. Especially for complex organisations that are traditionally not agile, and where innovation is seen as something reserved to a small pocket of the organisation.

***That's a fair comment. They are slow-moving machines alright. How do you get around that?***

By building internal capability that makes the innovation process accessible to everyone in the company, you can unlock the potential and reap the benefits of adopting a true innovation culture. Let me describe how an innovation framework that champions diversity, drives inclusion and democratises the process can unlock the power of org-wide innovation.

***Please do. I'm interested in how you even get started with that in a large organisation.***

Ideas for innovation, whether it's incremental or radical, can come from anywhere. In order to establish a culture of

innovation, the organisation must create both a platform for crowdsourcing ideas and a lean, effective process to bring those ideas to fruition. The platform must enable the people who generate the ideas to participate and experience the innovation process. I believe this is fundamental to an organisation's long-term success. Democratising the innovation process unlocks people's potential and embraces the power of diversity. This generates benefits to both the employees and the company. People engaged in this process feel more motivated and recognised, while simultaneously the organisation benefits from new value creation and business growth.

***That's all very well in theory. How do you execute that in practice?***

It starts with the idea discovery, the most important stage of the innovation process. An egalitarian and transparent front-door for crowdsourcing ideas is paramount. Anyone should be able to submit an idea and contribute through moderated discussion and voting.

***Is that really possible? Suggestion boxes are all very well but they aren't usually taken that seriously.***

Well, it's important to discard the hierarchy and encourage participation across all areas, departments and levels. It doesn't need to be complicated. Start simply. There are many crowdsourcing tools out there for this purpose.

***So you utilise tech to assist this process. Go on.***

That's right. At Liberty Global we use Sparks. It's a platform designed to support innovation across the business. It can be launched for specific campaigns. You can also set it up

with open channels. Regardless of the set up, it gives access to people in the business and across the Liberty Group. Even without a dedicated platform, there are many ways in which you can make this work. You could use a manual process to begin with. I've seen teams making this work using basic Microsoft forms combined with GitHub, Jira or even excel as a starting point.

***Hard to picture this to be honest. Can you give me an example?***

Stack Overflow (stackoverflow.com) is a great example. It is a community-based Q&A hub for programming. While it is not a crowdsourcing innovation site itself, the way in which their community engagement is managed is a great example of a democratic process where everyone who is part of the community is invited to take part. All responses and activity are visible to everyone, and people participate by voting for the responses that give the best answer.

***What happens after that?***

The same approach can be applied to the crowdsourcing of innovative ideas. Once a front-door process is established, it is essential that the same principles are carried through to the evaluation, incubation and acceleration stages of the process. It should be inclusive and experiential all the way through.

***It sounds relatively simple and certainly achievable. This should be a model all companies work with.***

Absolutely. In this way, organisations will be able to realise the value of and embrace a true innovation culture.



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