



# Innovation champions

**The success of innovation initiatives in an organisation is often difficult to measure and quantify.**

It is, however, imperative to evaluate the impact of such efforts in order to assess its value to the organisation and to positively influence future decision-making. In 2008 Eskom's Innovation Circuit with the assistance of external service providers embarked on an organisation-wide innovation awareness creation and training exercise. This initiative was important due to the size of the organisation. It was envisaged that programme participants would act as innovation facilitators or "innovation champions", fulfilling a critical representative role in the wider Eskom environment.

These innovation champions would assist the Innovation Circuit in enabling or facilitating innovation in the organisation. Candidates could nominate themselves for the training and

more than 200 people subsequently attended the short course.

**The approach:** The main objective of the two-day course was to introduce innovation with a focus on defining and demystifying concepts such as innovation itself, teamwork, creativity techniques and introducing the role of Eskom's Innovation Circuit. A pre and post assessment survey was designed based on the above outcomes, to evaluate the impact of the training. Candidates completed the questionnaire before the course started and again at a general workshop arranged after the event.

The main objective of the assessment was to evaluate the impact of the programme and ascertain the areas where most value was added. The measuring tool assessed competency in four areas namely attitude, knowledge, skill and impact.

**The results:** The overall results indicated most impact in the areas of knowledge and skills with a 22.3% and 20.5% improvement

respectively. The figure (above right) displays the average rating per category. Figure 1 gives an overview of the results. Looking at each category in isolation, the following conclusions were derived.

**Attitude:** This category comprised only one question: "Do you want to become more effective as a change agent for innovation in your sphere of influence?" Before the course the average score for attitude was 91.6% compared to a 94.7% score afterwards. Although it experienced the smallest impact of all the areas assessed, the result is indicative of a very positive attitude amongst the innovation champions and a sincere willingness to get involved in innovation right from the start. The high number of positive responses before the start of the course and the fact that the method of selection for attendance of this programme was by means of self-nomination, underlines this assumption.

**Knowledge:** As demonstrated in Figure 1, this area experienced the most impact.



Figure 1

There was a marked improvement in the understanding of the innovation barriers as well as an understanding of innovation as a holistic process. Pre-assessment results were 58.6% (positive with regards to knowledge of innovation) compared to 80.9% afterwards, an improvement of approximately 22.3%.

**Skill:** Figure 1 illustrates that the skills area experienced the second biggest impact. Averages increased from 64.7% to 85.2%, an approximate improvement of 20.5%. Most impact was around familiarity with techniques to generate and develop new ideas and the planning and management of group activities.

**Impact:** This category comprised one statement to which respondents had to reply based on a scale from 1-5, which represented their agreement or disagreement with the statement: "I can confidently support innovation as a business concept in Eskom". Although pre-assessment responses were relatively positive (78.7%) and again reflective of the positive attitude at the outset, a marked improvement

was evident as the positive response factor increased by 14% to 92.4%. The result can be interpreted as an indication of growing confidence with regards to the concept of innovation.

One of the main outcomes of this initiative was the buy-in and excitement created, the participants' willingness to get involved and their passion for innovation. The course created a platform for collaboration and participants realised their contributions were important ingredients in the process going forward. They wanted to stay involved and keep in touch.

This initiative contributed significantly in laying the foundation for collaborative teamwork and a culture of innovation, key components for successful implementation of future innovation projects.

**Conclusion**

The assessment demonstrated that the innovation awareness creation intervention was very successful. It made a significant

difference in the participants' understanding of innovation in general while also equipping innovation champions with the necessary knowledge and skill to encourage, identify, nurture and implement innovation in their own environments.

It is now crucial to track and assess the impact these innovation champions would have on the business. Although the assessment clearly indicates that the training was successful, the long-term ability of the champions to facilitate innovation in their environments still needs to be monitored and if necessary, re-ignited and refreshed by further initiatives.

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