EXAMPLE CASE STUDY
INNOVATION AND SUSTAINABILITY

CASE BACKGROUND

A company concerned with sustainability wants to find out more about how innovation is perceived in their region. They are looking to increase their local involvement and want to figure out what is happening in the field of innovation, so that they are able to react and offer what is needed.

For this exploratory research, they set up an inquiry and ask 15 local companies to distribute it amongst their employees. The inquiry is sent out to the email addresses of the employees of these local companies. Follow-up emails and reminders are also sent. The employees fill in the inquiry online when they have time for it. The company is hoping that in this way they will gain more knowledge about the efforts that are being undertaken, as well as gather stories about concrete examples of local innovation. The results of the inquiry will be shared with the local companies in an interactive online report, so that they can learn from it as well. The link to the inquiry is https://secure.sprockler.com/collector/5beaf. In total, 192 respondents responded to the online link and filled in the inquiry.

INQUIRY

As usual, an inquiry starts with a story question. After the story question, a number of interpreting questions are asked to learn more about the story and to get a more detailed insights. Next, a few context questions are asked to learn more about perceptions regarding innovation and sustainability in general. The inquiry ends with some questions about the storytellers themselves.

1. **Could you share a story about a time your organisation tried to incorporate an innovative idea into their way of working? What was the idea and what happened?**

2. **If your story were to be published in your company's news bulletin, what would be the headline above it?**

3. The idea described in my story was …

Very unsuccessful   Very successful

4. In what stage of implementation is this idea now?

- ⚬ The idea was discarded
- ⚬ It is in the planning stage
- ⚬ It is being started
- ⚬ It is running
- ⚬ It has ended
- ⚬ Other, namely …

5. How difficult was it/will it be to implement this idea?

No obstacles at all   Too many obstacles   ☐ N/A

6. How did this idea tackle the issue it intended to address?

It was disruptive   It was insufficient

7. How sustainable do you think this idea (if implemented) is?

Not at all   Very much

**8. How does this idea make you feel? Select no more than 3 options.**

- ☐ Happy
- ☐ Hopeful
- ☐ Inspired
- ☐ Indifferent
- ☐ Connected
- ☐ Disappointed
- ☐ Frustrated
- ☐ Angry
- ☐ Powerless
- ☐ Alone
- ☐ Other, namely …

Apart from questions about the story, a few more questions were asked to gain insight in the context of the storyteller.

9. In my organisation, innovative ideas are mainly stimulated by:

- ☐ Senior management
- ☐ Middle management
- ☐ Consumers
- ☐ Grounds staff
- ☐ Sustainability experts
- ☐ Designers
- ☐ Other, namely …

10. People in my organization who care about innovation are from…

Top level   Middle level

Lower level
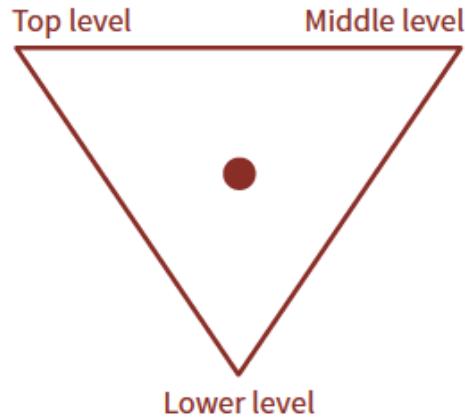
11. I think that the capacity to deal with innovative ideas in my organisation …

Requires more attention   Is already very developed

Finally, some questions about the respondent himself/herself.

12. Gender

O Male
O Female

O Other, namely …
O Prefer not to say

13. Age

O <12 years
O 12 – 18 years
O 18 – 29 years
O 30 – 44 years

O 45 – 59 years
O >60 years
O Prefer not to say

14. In which sector does your company work?

O Sector A
O Sector B
O Sector C

O Sector D
O Sector E
O Other, namely …

15. For which company do you work?

O Company 1
O Company 2
O Company 3
O Company 4
O Company 5
O Company 6
O Company 7
O Company 8

O Company 9
O Company 10
O Company 11
O Company 12
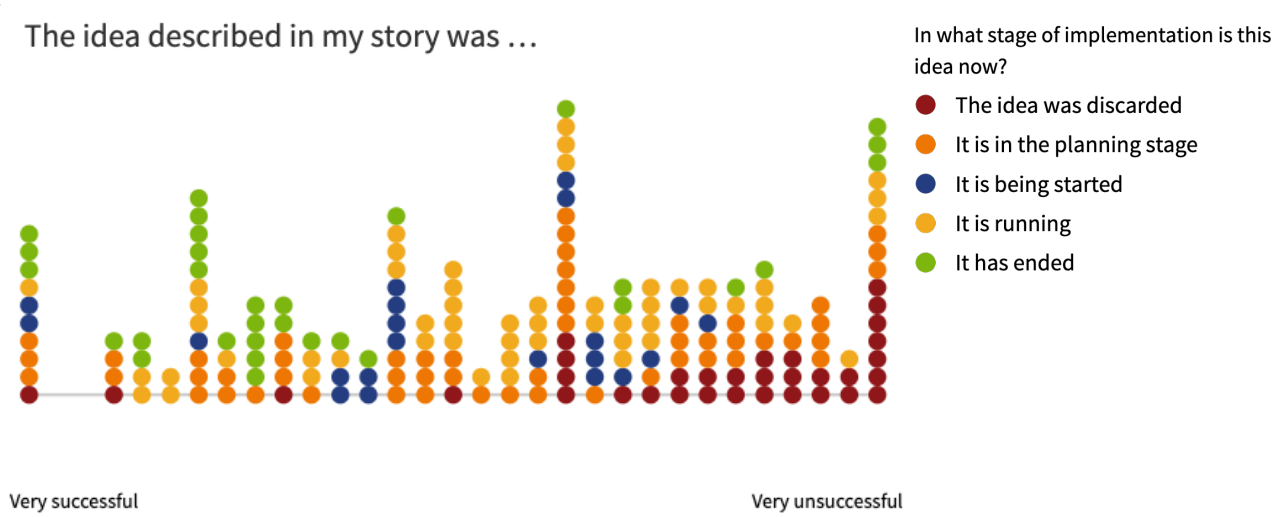O Company 13
O Company 14
O Company 15

16. Do you consent with your story being shared with your company and other companies to learn from?
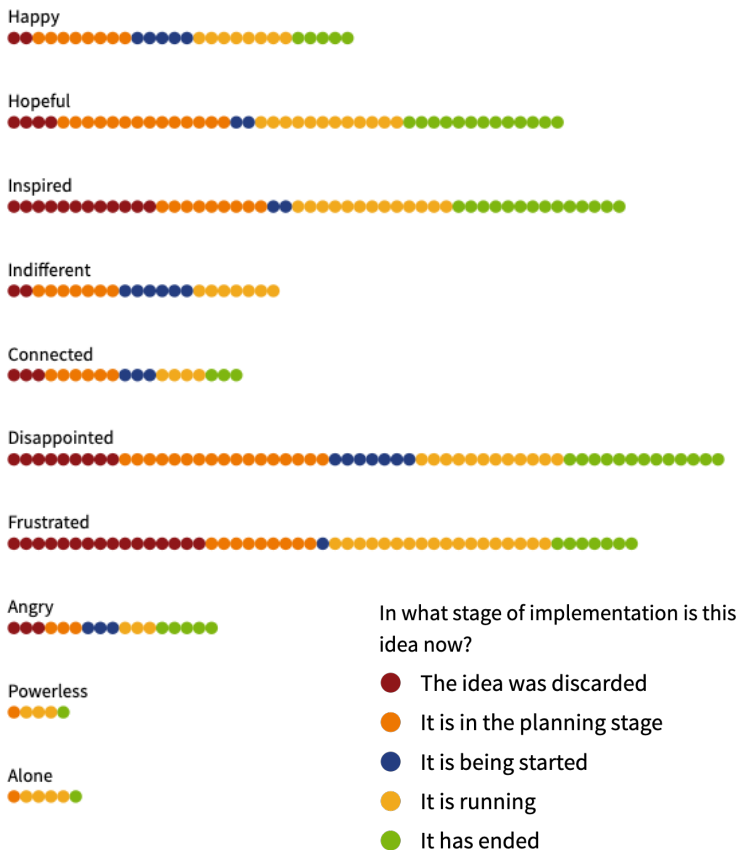
○ Yes

○ No

INTERPRETATION

When the deadline they set for the responses passes, those in the company responsible for the Sprockler exploration come together to read all the stories and analyse the results. They create an online interactive report of the results, which can be visited here: https://visualizer.sprockler.com/open/examplecaseinnovation. In this report, the answers to the question for which company do you work are not visible to guarantee the privacy of the respondents. By filtering using this question, the company also creates a copy of the report for each of the participating companies with only the results of this company. In all the reports, only the stories are shown by storytellers who consented to sharing their story in question 16. If companies are interested, the company organises a meeting in each company to discuss the results of the exploration and potential next steps with management teams and sustainability departments.

In this report some of the main findings of the overall results are shared. This image below shows the responses to whether the idea described in the story was successful or not. This question is combined with the question about in which stage of implementation the idea is, yielding the different colours on the dots. Each dot represents the story of one respondent. Clicking on a dot in the online interactive website shows you the stories of that respondent, if they consented to sharing their story. This image shows that the respondents who shared ideas that were discarded (the dark red dots) are considered as very unsuccessful by the respondents who shared them, which seems to be a logical connection. This image also shows that there are several projects that have ended (the green dots) that were considered very successful. Reading the stories behind those dots can give insights into what type of initiatives and which factors played a role in the success of those ideas. Similarly, reading the stories of unsuccessful ideas can provide information about what is difficult in implementing ideas about sustainability for these companies.

The idea described in my story was …

In what stage of implementation is this idea now?
● The idea was discarded
● It is in the planning stage
● It is being started
● It is running
● It has ended

Very successful   Very unsuccessful

How does this idea make you feel? Select no more than 3 options.

Happy

Hopeful

Inspired

Indifferent

Connected

Disappointed

Frustrated

Angry

In what stage of implementation is this idea now?

- ● The idea was discarded
- ● It is in the planning stage
- ● It is being started
- ● It is running
- ● It has ended

Powerless

Alone

A large group of those who stated that their idea was discarded, stated that they felt disappointed and/or frustrated. However, several respondents who said their idea was discarded also felt inspired. Similarly, a large part of the respondents whose ideas are running or have ended, feel both disappointed and frustrated, as well as inspired and hopeful. This seeming contradiction of implementation and frustration or discard and inspiration could point to opportunities for growth for the companies and reading those stories could help the companies get a clearer image of what goes right and what does not.

If we combine the question on obstacles, capacity to deal with innovative ideas and the classifier question on the sectors of the company, we get an image that looks like this. We can see here that the two questions on obstacles and capacity have a correlation, they almost present a line in this plot. We see that sector B and sector C see their organisations as very developed in terms of innovation capacity and do not see a lot of obstacles. On the other side of the spectrum, sectors A and E do see a lot of obstacles and state that their organisations require further attention in terms of innovation capacity. This provides information about where certain sectors stand with regards to innovation and also shows that according to the respondents the company's capacity to deal with innovation in general and the existence of obstacles are somehow linked.

Obstacles for this initiative (y-axis) & Capacity to deal with innovative ideas organisation in gene...

Sector
- ● Sector A
- ● Sector B
- ● Sector C
- ● Sector D
- ● Sector E

No obstacles at all

Requires more attention
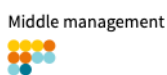
Is already developed

Too many obstacles

The question about which people in the organization care about innovation yields the following picture. This picture shows that, according to these respondents, the lower level and the top level are viewed as caring more about innovation. This could point to issues with the middle level's capacities for innovation. Maybe the top level and lower level have the space to talk and act upon innovation but there are some structural things in the way for the middle level. More research into the middle level approach to innovation could provide more information. For each specific company this could provide valuable insights. It is possible that this issue plays out stronger in certain sectors or companies. There is also a significant group who claims that everybody cares about innovation who put their dot in the middle, which is relevant for the exploring company because it shows that a lot of people care about the topic.

People in my organization who care about innovation are from…

For the question regarding who stimulates innovative ideas in your organization, we found that the respondents perceived sustainability experts and consumers to be the most stimulating for innovation. On the other hand, middle management and ground staff were not often selected as those who stimulate innovation. Middle management being seen as one of those stimulating innovation underlines the earlier result which showed that middle management was perceived by these participant to care least for innovation.

In my organisation, innovative ideas are mainly stimulated by:

These visuals provide some information for the exploring company and also for the participating companies. In terms of having a better view on innovation in the region and being able to respond to that, the company has now learned that there is quite some space for improvement in the region. They learned, for example, that there are good examples that have not succeeded but did bring hope and that there are examples that succeeded but caused negative feelings. They also learned that top and lower management are perceived to care more about innovation and that middle management struggles in this region. This might be interesting for the organization as to achieve a certain impact, they could set up a new project specifically targeting those in middle management. Additionally, it became apparent that in certain sectors ideas were met with fewer obstacles and the capacity to deal with innovative ideas was deemed higher than in other sectors, which could be a very valuable result for these sectors and for the company to base their work on.

Of course, we need to be careful drawing conclusions as the people who responded to an inquiry about innovation might be the people who already think about innovation.