Accelerating Innovation in Local Government: Employees’ Views

Joan Munro
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Seminar plan

- Introduce research
- Report findings from employee focus groups
- Compare employees’ priorities with chief executives’
- Invite your questions, comments, challenges
Overall research objectives

Aims

- Identify what chief executives can do to accelerate innovation council-wide.
- Disseminate and promote this learning to local councils.
- Further the research evidence on leadership actions that help to achieve innovation in public services.
Stage One

- Built on research, particularly NESTA’s ‘Everyday Innovation’
- Discussion with group of 8 chief executives, with Professor Fiona Patterson
- Interviewed 12 leading chief executives
- Following sector consultation, launched Local Councils’ Innovation Framework April 2012
- Tested Framework e.g.
  - 6 chief executives individually + 2 groups
  - Public Sector People Managers’ Association Conference
Local Councils’ Innovation Framework

Citizen & service user focus

- Clear political vision & priorities
- Leaders & managers driving innovation
- Strategic approach to innovation
- Cross boundary innovations
- Organisational culture that promotes innovation
- Employees motivated & skilled for innovation
- Effective delivery mechanisms for innovations
Stage Two: research objectives

- Discover employees’ views on what encourages them to contribute to innovations
- Identify any significant differences between chief executives’ & employees’ views
- Update the Local Councils’ Innovation Framework, if necessary
The Focus Groups

- 6 councils from 4 regions:
  - 3 counties; 2 London boroughs; 1 district
  - 4 Conservative; 2 Labour
- Total of 19 employee focus groups:
  - From 5 to 19 participants
- All participants ‘volunteers’
- Most frontline or support staff (some managers in 2 councils)
- Most one hour long (one council 1.5 hour)
Format for Groups

- Introduction:
  - What is innovation + examples from councils
  - What might help or hinder innovation in a council
  - What has encouraged you to contribute to an innovation: common factors

- To encourage more innovation, what are the most important things this council should:
  - Keep doing or grow?
  - Start doing?
The Results: Employees’ Priorities
Priority One

Senior managers communicate the council’s ambitions for innovation convincingly.

Senior managers:
- Explain the big challenges ahead
- Set out clear priorities & goals
- Communicate directly, personally & honestly
- Are supported by effective communication systems
‘The old senior managers used to be all gloss’

‘The new chief exec is very positive, he wants to change things’

‘Now we feel that we are in this together’

‘There is a corporate drive to encourage innovation’

‘Senior managers are open & up front’

‘The vision is vague: we need a clearer direction’

‘We need top down reminders of why we are doing what we are doing’

‘We need more feedback on progress, savings achieved’

‘Senior managers need to be honest, get rid of spin’

‘We would like to see the chief executive more’
Priority Two

Middle & frontline managers proactively encourage innovation

They:
- Agree clear targets
- Encourage & support innovation
- Give appropriate autonomy
- Recognise contributions
- Support in taking risks
- Take a no-blame approach
‘It helps when managers encourage you to think outside the box’

‘Managers are too complaisant, need to look outside more’

‘Managers shouldn’t be upset when people challenge them with fresh ideas’

‘Managers need a new attitude to risk’

‘Managers need to allow you to take risks & fail’

‘Managers need to encourage experimentation, even when things are not perfect’

‘Managers need to trust you more’

‘Agreeing targets helps you to organise & prioritise’

‘Managers here encourage you to have a go’

‘Autonomy is important’

‘Managers need to encourage you, & recognise your contribution’

‘We need more proactive managers’
Priority Three

Senior & middle managers genuinely listen to & involve employees

They:
- Understand frontline operational issues & concerns
- Encourage fresh ideas & give constructive feedback on these
- Involve frontline employees in innovation processes from the start
‘Senior managers need to involve people more, tap into their passions’

‘Senior managers need to understand frontline services’

‘Senior managers need to involve us in planning innovations from the start’

‘Senior managers should spend time at the coalface & listen to what the problems are’

‘They want us to look as if we are contributing’

‘Managers need to listen to every idea & justify why not using’

‘Lots of managers, including the chief executive are very approachable’

‘Senior managers attending team meetings provides opportunity for feedback’

‘We need more two way communication’

‘We have good systems for feeding back comments & ideas to the top’

‘You can tell them your ideas & they will listen’
Priority Four

Managers safeguard time & resources for innovation

Managers at all levels set aside enough time & resources for:

- Reflection & creative thinking
- Developing innovations
‘Awaydays are important’

‘Use our resources more flexibly’

‘Encourage more self-reflection’

‘Build in time to discuss innovation in team meetings’

‘We need more time & resources to make things happen’

‘Give staff more time to be creative’

‘People at the top need to throw their weight behind good ideas’

‘If we are overstretched we can’t innovate’

‘We need more opportunities to come up with ideas’

‘We need time & space to come together & develop their ideas’

‘Carve out the space for creativity’

‘We have the ideas, but not the time to implement them’

‘We need an innovation fund’
Priority Five

Managers build cross council links for innovation

Managers at all levels work together to:
- Identify the key internal linkages that need to be developed to achieve more innovations
- Take practical steps to build these
‘We need a more “One Council”’

‘We need to promote relationships between services to make innovations happen’

‘Senior managers need to make “One Council” a reality’

‘Build more peer groups, make connections across the council’

‘The council needs to address silo working’

‘We need more cross silo working around issues’

‘We need more cross-council communication’

‘We need to understand what other departments do, so that we can hook onto them’

‘The council should get innovators together, create an innovation space’

‘Directors need to stop just defending their departments’

‘Remove barriers between services’

‘We need more cross-council communication’
MANAGERS SAFEGUARD TIME & RESOURCES FOR INNOVATION

MIDDLE & FRONTLINE MANAGERS PROACTIVELY ENCOURAGE INNOVATION

MANAGERS BUILD CROSS COUNCIL LINKS FOR INNOVATION

SENIOR & MIDDLE MANAGERS GENUINELY LISTEN TO & INVOLVE EMPLOYEES

SENIOR MANAGERS COMMUNICATE THE COUNCIL’S AMBITIONS FOR INNOVATION CONVINCINGLY

Summary of employees’ priorities
Other important issues

- Recruiting more innovative employees
- Training & development
- Networking to learn from other councils’ successes & failures
- Speeding up decision making & implementation of innovations
Important to some people

**Issues:**
- Bureaucracy
- Politicians
- Technology

**Positives:**
- Listening to service users
- Learning from the private sector or abroad
- Shared services
Little or no mention

Potential issues:
- Turf wars
- Blame culture
- Job insecurity
- Concerns about role changes

Potential opportunities:
- Involving service users or residents
- Focusing on most costly areas of service
- Working with other organisations
- Commissioning
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employees</th>
<th>Chief Executives</th>
<th>Differences</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Senior managers communicate</td>
<td>Most emphasised</td>
<td>Employees much bigger emphasis on:</td>
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<tr>
<td>the council’s ambitions for</td>
<td>the importance of:</td>
<td>• Senior managers being honest</td>
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<tr>
<td>innovation convincingly</td>
<td>• Clear political vision &amp; priorities</td>
<td>• Direct personal communication</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Communicated effectively</td>
<td>• Effective communication channels from top to bottom</td>
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## Comparison with chief executives’ priorities

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<tr>
<td>Middle &amp; frontline managers</td>
<td>• Managers need to be bold &amp; take considered risks, if necessary</td>
<td>• Both chief executives &amp; employees agree on what managers need to do to encourage more innovation</td>
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<td>proactively encourage innovation</td>
<td>• Middle managers need to proactively encourage innovation</td>
<td>• Employees feel that not enough managers are doing it</td>
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<td>• Importance of ‘freeing up’ people</td>
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<td>Senior &amp; middle managers genuinely listen to &amp; involve employees</td>
<td>• All concerned about employee morale</td>
<td>• Many employees felt there is too much token involvement at the end of innovation processes</td>
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<td>• Some highlighted the importance of listening to employees &amp; ‘feedback loops’</td>
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<td>• Most encourage staff to suggest ideas &amp; many have ‘suggestions schemes’</td>
<td>• Many employees frustrated that they have suggested ideas that were rejected or ignored with little feedback</td>
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| Managers safeguard time & resources for innovation | • Many recognise the importance of having time for creative thinking  
• Few have identified the key priority areas for innovation & safeguard time & resources to develop innovation there | Employees frustrated by little time & resources to develop & implement ideas for innovations |
Comparison with chief executives’ priorities

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<td>Managers build cross council links for innovation</td>
<td>All promoting a ‘One Council’ approach</td>
<td>Employees want managers to take action to make the ‘One Council’ concept a reality</td>
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Implications for senior managers in councils

Encourage more innovation by:

- Communicating ambitions for innovation convincingly & directly
- Ensuring managers proactively encourage innovation
- Listening to & involving frontline employees in developing innovations from the start
- Setting aside sufficient time & resources for innovations
- Building better connections across services
….within a strategic approach to innovation

- Take a comprehensive & deliberate approach to fostering innovation across the council

- Agree the priority areas for major radical long term innovations:
  - With partner organizations, focus greatest efforts in these areas
  - Actively seek ideas to adapt from elsewhere
  - Ensure truly understand service users’ & residents’ aspirations & concerns
  - Involve them in developing innovations

- Develop greater innovation expertise
Research Project: what next

- Write up & promote research findings for different audiences
- Continue to promote the Local Councils’ Innovation Framework
- Undertaken research with politicians?
More details

The Local Councils’ Innovation Framework and other materials are available on:
http://creativity.city.ac.uk/accelerating_local_govt_innov.html

This presentation will be posted on the LGA Knowledge Hub Creative Councils Group & comments invited:
https://knowledgehub.local.gov.uk/group/khub

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