At a Chubb Board meeting, Jim Knight’s boss announced that Chubb would hold an innovation event in early fall to generate profitable growth ideas for Chubb. The catch was that they needed a technology platform in place within months to make this successful. The hopes were that a 9-year-old Lotus Notes system would suffice. It was determined very quickly that the system just was not up to the job. Jim and his team were not going to let this get in the way of a successful innovation event.

Inspired by Jim’s sense of urgency, the IT staff researched IT solutions for enabling this major innovation event for its 10,800 employees, independent agents, partners and suppliers throughout the world. After exploring many options, both internal and external, a decision was reached to contract with a Software as a Service (SaaS) vendor to host the event.

In parallel with the search for a technology platform, a disciplined innovation process and structure were created. Each phase was supported by a corresponding structure with clear accountabilities and timetable:

A major communications campaign was launched to encourage widespread participation in this first call for innovative ideas enabled by technology. The results speak for themselves: 608 ideas were submitted. Those ideas were pared to 24 through the innovation process, all of which were implemented.

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1 The Advanced Practices Council (APC) is an exclusive Society for Information Management forum for senior IT executives who value directing and applying pragmatic research, exploring emerging IT issues in depth, and learning different, global perspectives with colleagues in other industries. Madeline Weiss is the APC Director and Richard Watson is the APC Research Director.
Weiss / APC Forum: Chubb’s Innovation Jams

Buoyed by this success, Jim initiated a second innovation jam, this one for the IT community. Using the same technology platform, Jim launched a two-pronged jam to generate ideas both for gaining IT efficiencies and then for reinvesting the funds gained from greater efficiency. Again the results were impressive: 786 people participated in submitting 467 ideas for gaining efficiencies and 414 people participated in submitting 70 ideas for reinvestment. The key themes related to efficiencies covered most aspects of IT services. Reinvestment ideas ranged from knowledge management, reuse of software platforms, and additional functionality for portable devices, to new technologies such as cloud computing.

Jim attributes the success of the two innovation jams to several factors.

- The communication campaign to encourage participation in submitting ideas and building on ideas submitted by others was critical to generating the number of quality of innovative ideas.
- The technology platform was quick to set up, inexpensive to run and robust in functionality.
- The disciplined approach and dedicated structure created a manageable and repeatable process carried out by knowledgeable organization members.
- Sufficient money was set aside for implementing the ideas selected in the case of the first innovation jam and sufficient money was freed up from the efficiency ideas generated in the second innovation jam to reinvest in the areas identified.

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Phase Structure

Idea screening
Evaluation
Funding
Development and execution
Track economic benefits

Cross-functional team
Innovation support team
Venture fund management team
Strategic business unit and branch business owners
Finance

- Track economic benefits

Cross-functional team
Innovation support team
Venture fund management team
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