

Newsletter

2/2008

Business ideas from an innovation workshop

Open access to ideas

Profiles of higher education

Futures seminar addressing customer and user orientation

Forest-related expertise services have business potential

The Forest Foresight Unit organised an innovation workshop addressing the business potential of forest-related expertise services in November. The large number of business ideas created during the workshop speaks volumes about the potential of expertise service entrepreneurship in the forest sector. The Forest Foresight Unit is conducting a survey into the potential profiles of higher-level forestry, wood and paper education in eastern and south-eastern Finland. The Forest Sector Futures Seminar on 10 February 2009 will discuss the meaning of customer and user orientation in the forest sector.

Business ideas from an innovation workshop

In November, the Forest Foresight Unit organised a one-day innovation workshop, in which the participants brainstormed for new forest-related expertise services. The innovation workshop attracted 20 participants representing companies in the forest sector and related fields, research institutes and business development organisations. Hundreds of new ideas were born in the workshop and the participants chose the ten most promising ones to further refine towards a ready product or service.

The development of the business operations of forest-related expertise services was chosen as the theme of the first innovation workshop, because the utilisation of our strong forest-related expertise in private sector business operations is regarded as a future success factor for the forest sector. A more extensive service business structure would also improve the prerequisites for diversifying the economic structure of the forest sector. The large

number of ideas created in the innovation workshop showed that there is plenty of potential for expertise services aiming at the domestic and export markets alike.

The innovation workshop focused on creating, collecting, screening and refining new ideas. Business enterprises often consider this fuzzy front end of the innovation process less important than the actual product development process. In addition to getting concrete business ideas, the participants were also challenged to think about how to use creative and innovative working methods in their own organisations.

Open access to ideas

The innovation workshop worked on the principle of open innovation. Open innovation rests on the idea of an organisation acknowledging that it cannot create all the innovations it needs by itself, but searches and utilises ideas and innovations created outside. In return, the organisation offers its own, non-used innovations for others to use.

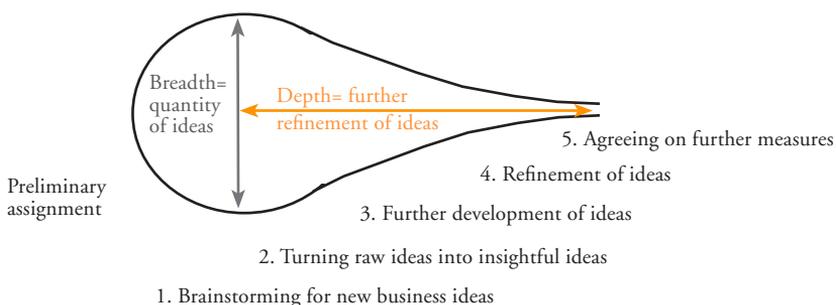


Figure 1. The innovation workshop used the BrainGrouping method and its water drop model (modified on the basis Mr Veikko Mantere's (Innotiimi Ltd.) presentation).

The workshop facilitator, Mr Veikko Mantere of Innotiimi Ltd., emphasised the four basic principles of brainstorming. First of all, quantity creates quality: in one hundred new ideas, one may be good one. The expectation to come up with one hundred new ideas first made the participants smile sceptically, but the flap-boards on the walls started to fill up with new ideas already during the first hour.

It is also important to separate the production of ideas from their evaluation. In the brainstorming stage, the words “no” and “but” were banned. The plausibility of the ideas and the restrictions posed by the operating environment were addressed only after the brainstorming stage.

As different ideas stimulate thinking, the brainstorming group should include people from very different backgrounds. It is also important to bravely grasp other people’s ideas and refine them further.

The ideas created in the innovation workshop will be posted on the website of the Forest Foresight Unit, where they will be freely available for everyone – reserved business ideas excluded. As the ideas are described very briefly, they can best be used as stimulants boosting the brainstorming process of the individual or company concerned.

Profiles of higher education

The Forest Foresight Unit is conducting a survey for the Ministry of Education into the potential profiles and division of responsibility between higher-level forestry, wood and paper education in eastern and south-eastern Finland, where the structural reform of the forest sector is the most tangible. The survey comprises two universities (Joensuu and Lappeenranta) and five universities of applied sciences (Etelä-Savo, Kymenlaakso, North Karelia, Saimaa and Savonia). These institutions are part of the national expertise structure in the forest sector and their training

provision significantly influences the success of the forest sector reform.

The Ministry of Education is hoping that the present survey provides suggestions and new openings concerning the areas of expertise, which the higher-level forest sector institutions could address with their training provision and thus create their distinct profiles. By choosing right profiles and dividing responsibility, it is possible to maintain the basic expertise needed by the forest sector and to re-target resources to future areas of expertise. The Ministry of Education notes that the alternative for choosing the profiles and dividing the responsibility are cut-downs in the student intakes to meet the needs of the current forest sector, which was also suggested in a Ministry of Education report addressing forest sector education needs, published in March 2008.

The survey will be conducted in collaboration with the educational institutions to ensure that the suggestions made are also possible to realise in practice. The suggestions of the survey will be completed by mid March in order for them to be available in the target negotiations between the Ministry of Education and the educational institutions concerned.

Futures seminar addressing customer and user orientation

The forest sector frequently emphasises the importance of customer and user orientation for the development of its operations. What is the true meaning of customer and user orientation? Moreover, who are the customers and users, and how can they be involved in product and service development processes?

These questions will be addressed in the seminar to be organised in Helsinki on Tuesday, 10 February. The discussion will be opened by Research Manager, Ms Anu Raijas, of the National Consumer Research Centre and experts of D’ART, Design Resource Centre.

Forest Foresight Unit’s Newsletter

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