

EMPLOYEE SUGGESTION SYSTEM ASSESSMENT MODEL: THE BEST PRACTICE SCENARIOS

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Abstract Corporations widely use 'Employee suggestion schemes' to elicit employees' creative ideas. Despite its many benefits, sustaining the suggestion system is still a challenge for the organisation. This paper uses a sustainability assessment model to assess the sustainability of suggestion scheme of three organisations in the UAE. This paper presents three case studies of organisations in the UAE, which throw light on practices that can potentially help sustain the suggestion schemes in the organisations. It discusses a framework to assess the employee suggestion schemes. It summarizes the findings and concluding remarks of the cases and implications for future research.

Keywords: Suggestion System, Creativity, Suggestion Scheme, Innovation, Sustainability

INTRODUCTION

Employee Suggestion System (ESS) is a tool widely used by the corporations to elicit employees' creative ideas. It will elicit suggestions from employees, classify them, and dispatch them to the "experts" for evaluation. After this, the suggestion might be adopted, in which case the suggestion may well be rewarded. "Experts" are dedicated committees who evaluate the suggestions and propose them for its implementations. Employee Suggestion Systems create win-win situation for employers and employees alike. However, despite the many benefits of the suggestion systems, sustaining them is still a challenge for organisations. Organisations need to assess their suggestion schemes to determine their sustainability and to examine if the right conditions exist for the suggestion schemes to flourish. After all, suggestion systems can contribute to build organisations innovative capability.

A majority of the current literature focuses on the suggestion system features, enablers and the inhibitors of suggestion schemes. While there have been some previous studies that explore sustainability in suggestion system (Rapp & Eklund, 2002; 2007), there are opportunities for additional research to extend this body of knowledge and to potentially increase the effectiveness of suggestion schemes in the organisations. There are currently limitations to the general continuous improvement and process improvement body of knowledge as well that create the need for additional research on the

sustainability of the outcomes of improvement approaches in general (Glover *et al.*, 2011). So, greater understanding of the determinants of sustainability in suggestion system could decrease this and organisations could more systematically adopt an approach to sustain the suggestion schemes outcomes.

This paper presents three case studies of organisations in the UAE, which throw light on practices that can potentially help sustain the suggestion schemes in the organisations. The following section discusses a framework to assess the employee suggestion schemes. The paper then discusses three case studies from organisations in the UAE. It summarizes the findings and concluding remarks of the cases and implications for future research.

BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Suggestion schemes also became popular in many countries and they have a considerable history that includes USA, Europe, Asia and the Middle East (Cooley *et al.*, 2001). In the UAE, the most foremost scheme is that of Dubai Aluminum (DUBAL). They report that total number of implemented and awarded ideas is 116,139 since the suggestion scheme's inception about 30 years ago. Moreover, the audited savings' potential of the ideas implemented in 2010 amounted to \$5.32 million, which raised the total savings achieved by the Suggestion Scheme over the last 30 years to more than \$31.8 million (www.dubal.ae).

Another noticeable scheme is that of global marine terminal operator DP World saved Dhs14 million in the period 2004 to 2008 by implementing the Group Suggestions and Rewards Schemes (www.dpworld.ae).

Fairbank *et al.* (2003) highlights the fact that many organisations have attempted to implement suggestion systems, but they often fall far short of achieving their potential. They reported some of the possible reasons for the failure of the suggestion which are

- Organisations often do not offer compensation or rewards of any type for participation
- Submitters do not understand the process through which their suggestions are evaluated
- There are long delays in getting the suggestions processed

Rapp & Eklund (2007) found that following aspects contributed for the sustainability of the suggestion system:

- Situations when the employees had a personal benefit from submitting suggestions
- Campaigns emphasizing different themes encouraged employees to become more active within the suggestion system
- Employees having some of their suggestions rejected were more active in submitting suggestions than employees having most suggestions rejected or accepted
- A high monetary reward was not found favorable for submitting new suggestions, compared to lower rewards
- Increased support of group suggestions contributed to a sustained and high level of activity of the suggestion system

Literature evidences a number of factors that foster the success of the suggestion schemes as summarized in the Table 1.

Since there is limited research on sustainability of suggestion system, the literature regarding the sustainability of continuous improvement approaches, in general, is also reviewed. Bateman (2005) explains that sustainability is also an issue with other types of improvement programs – as Dale *et al.* (1997) identify those factors that negatively impact on sustaining total quality management by studying a number of case studies on companies. They divide these negative impact factors into five categories: internal/external environment, management style, policies, organisational structure and process of change.

Aken *et al.* (2010) introduced a framework for the design and management of a Kaizen event program with four main phases –plan, implement, sustain and develop. Bateman (2005) argues that crucial to the development of

the sustainability model of process improvement was the realisation that sustainability is not a binary concept, with only two states: of sustaining and not sustaining, but rather sustainability has a number of states. They proposed a four stage sustainability model: diagnostic, workshop, follow-up and post follow-up and ten enablers for sustaining the improvement activities. Curry & Kadasah (2002) presented an evaluation tool that can be used to assess the extent of progress of TQM based on key priority elements of TQM on which company's needed to focus. Pillet & Maire (2008) proposed a model of sustainability for an improvement process. This model is founded on three axes: organic state, return on effort and facilitation. They state that to sustain an improvement process over time, it is necessary for these axes to be taken into account by managing their relative importance in space and over time and they proposed specific actions for each of the states.

Daniel *et al.* (2004) proposed a framework that describes the factors which influence the sustainability of e-marketplaces. These factors operate at three inter-related levels:

- The macroeconomic and regulatory level
- The industry level
- The individual firm level

Fadeeva (2005) stated that assessment of the networking should be done against the network's own objectives. A sustainable innovation should be proven to be of benefit to the diverse stakeholders Johnson *et al.* (2004) and what can be regarded as 'sustainable' from the point of view of an individual organisation is not necessarily sustainable from the point of view of the region and vice versa (Fadeeva, 2005). So, the expectations from the system must be set in the language of those involved and should measure things on which they can have direct impact (Wood & Contracts, 2005). Based on the literature a framework as shown in Table 2 is adopted.

The framework suggests five factors for assessing the sustainability of the suggestion system. These include: Leadership and Work Environment, System Capability, System Effectiveness, Organisational Encouragement and System Barriers. This paper adopted this framework to assess the sustainability of suggestion schemes of organisations. The findings of the three cases are discussed below.

METHODOLOGY

In order to assess the sustainability of employee suggestion schemes, the framework described in the previous section was applied to three case studies in the UAE. A case study is defined as a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular phenomenon within its real life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon being studied and the context within which it

Table 1: Critical Success Factors

#	Indicators	Source
1	Coworker Support	Madjar, 2008; Madjar, 2005; Shalley& Gilson, 2004; Arifet <i>et al.</i> , 2010; Binnewise, 2008.
2	Commitment and Accountability	Carrier, 1998; Gorfin, 1969; Dickinson, 1932; Milner <i>et al.</i> , 1995; Price, 2000.
3	Communication and Networking	Alves <i>et al.</i> , 2007; Aoki, 2008; Arthur <i>et al.</i> , 2010; Binnewieset <i>et al.</i> , 2007; Björklund, 2010; Klijn&Tomic, 2010; Kudisch, 2006; Madjar, 2008; Majdar, 2005; McConville, 1990; Ahmed, 2009; Recht&Wildero, 1998; Shalley& Gilson, 2004; Tatter, 1975; Khairuzzamanet <i>et al.</i> , 2007; Mongeet <i>et al.</i> , 1992; Al-Alawi <i>et al.</i> , 2007; Clark, 2009; Fairbank and Williams, 2001; Stranne, 1964.
4	Competition	Bakker <i>et al.</i> , 2006;
5	Cost Saving	Lloyd, 1996; Carrier, 1998; Kanna, 2005; Leach <i>et al.</i> , 2006;
6	Customer Satisfaction	Arifetal., 2010; Marx, 2008; Gupta <i>et al.</i> , 2005.
7	Effective System	Reuter, 1976; Lloyd, 1996; Arthur & Kim, 2005; Lloyd, 1999; Marx, 1995; McConville, 1990; Fairbank <i>et al.</i> , 2003; Mishra, 1994; Prather & Turrell, 2002; Rapp & Eklund, 2007; Tatter, 1975; Van Dijk& Van Den Ende, 2002; Arifet <i>et al.</i> , 2010; Freseet <i>et al.</i> , 1999; Hultgren, 2008; Winter, 2009; Bigliardi&Dormio, 2009; Clark, 2009; Fairbank and Williams, 2001; Lyold, 1999; Bassadur, 1992; Hultgren, 2008.
8	Employee Confidence	Bell, 1997; Islam, 2007; Lyold, 1996; Carrier, 1998; Leach <i>et al.</i> , 2006; Janassen, 2004.
9	Employee Participation	Alveset <i>et al.</i> , 2007; McConville, 1990; Lloyd, 1996; Fairbank and Williams, 2001; Cruz <i>et al.</i> , 2009; Neagoe& Klein, 2009.
10	Empowerment	Recht&Wildero, 1998; Lipponen <i>et al.</i> , 2008; Mclean, 2005; Powell, 2008; Axtell <i>et al.</i> , 2000; Jong & Hartog, 2010; Unsworth, 2005.
11	Evaluation	Egan, 2005; Rietzschel, 2008; Neagoe& Klein, 2009; Marx, 1995; McConville, 1990; Ahmed, 2009; Powell, 2008; Tatter, 1975; Van & Ende, 2002; Hultgren, 2008; Lloyd, 1996; Winter, 2009; Sarriet <i>et al.</i> , 2010; Fairbank and Williams, 2001.
12	Expertise	Bantel& Jackson, 1989; Björklund, 2010; Griffiths-hemans& Grover, 2006; Klijn&Tomic, 2010; Madjar, 2008; Madjar, 2005; Verworn, 2009; Bigliardi&Dormio, 2009.
13	Feedback	Cho & Erdem, 2006; Bakker <i>et al.</i> , 2006; Buechet <i>et al.</i> , 2010; Leach <i>et al.</i> , 2006; Mishara, 1994; Powell, 2008; Rapp and Eklund, 2007; Arifet <i>et al.</i> , 2010; Hultgren, 2008; Fairbank and Williams, 2001; Stranne, 1964; Bassadur, 1992; Van Dijk& Van den Ende, 2002; Du plessiset <i>et al.</i> , 2008
14	Implementation of Suggestion	Marx, 1995; McConville, 1990; Hultgren, 2008; Lloyd, 1996; Cho & Erdem, 2007.
15	Improvement in Process	Arthur <i>et al.</i> , 2010; Marx, 2008; Janassenet <i>et al.</i> , 2004; Leach <i>et al.</i> , 2006; Gorfin, 1969;
16	Individual Attributes and Self-Efficacy	Huang & Farh, 2009; Egan, 2005; Lipponenet <i>et al.</i> , 2008; Verworn, 2009; Freseet <i>et al.</i> , 1999; Axtell <i>et al.</i> , 2000; Aoki, 2008; Binnewieset <i>et al.</i> , 2007; Björklund, 2010; Griffiths-hemans& Grover, 2006; Klijn&Tomic, 2010; Litchfield, 2008; Malaviya&Wadhwa, 2005; Powell, 2008; Recht&Wildero, 1998; Shalley& Gilson, 2004; Janssen, 2004; Cruz <i>et al.</i> , 2009; Arthur <i>et al.</i> , 2010; Darragh-Jeromos, 2005; Muñoz-Doyague, 2008; Jong & Hartog, 2010.
17	Job Control	Anderson & Veillette, 2008; Mclean, 2005; Sadi, 2008; Anderson & Veillette, 2008; Wong& Pang, 2003; Neagoe& Klein, 2009; McConville, 1990
18	Job Factors	Amabileet <i>et al.</i> , 1996; Anderson & Veillette, 2008; Björklund, 2010; Buechet <i>et al.</i> , 2010; Griffiths-hemans& Grover, 2006; Hirst, 2009; Powell, 2008; Rego <i>et al.</i> , 2009; Shalley& Gilson, 2004; Freseet <i>et al.</i> , 1999; Axtell <i>et al.</i> , 2000; Muñoz-Doyagueet <i>et al.</i> , 2008; Unsworth, 2005; Cruz <i>et al.</i> , 2009; Jong & Hartog, 2010.
19	New Revenue	Lloyd, 1996; Carrier, 1998; Kanna, 2005; Leach <i>et al.</i> , 2006.
20	Organisational Support	Fairbank and Williams, 2001; Alveset <i>et al.</i> , 2007; Ahmed, 1998; Alwis& Hartmann, 2008 Amabileet <i>et al.</i> , 1996; Arthur & Kim, 2005; Björklund, 2010; Darragh-Jeromos, 2005; Ellonet <i>et al.</i> , 2008; Griffiths-hemans& Grover, 2006; Janssen, 2004; Klijn&Tomic, 2010; Kudisch, 2006; Neagoe& Klein, 2009; Mclean, 2005; Malaviya and Wadhwa, 2005; McConville, 1990; Powell, 2008; Prather & Turrell, 2002; Recht& Wildero, 1998; Shalley& Gilson, 2004; Al-Alawi <i>et al.</i> , 2007; Rietzschel, 2008; Zhou& George, 2001; Stranne, 1964; Van Dijk& Van den Ende, 2002; Bell, 1997; Khairuzzamanet <i>et al.</i> , 2007; Bigliardi&Dormio, 2009.
21	Organisational Impediments	Stenmark, 2000; Alwis& Hartmann, 2008, Anderson, T.A. & Veillette, 2008; Wong & Pang, 2003; Toubia, 2006; Bakker <i>et al.</i> , 2006; Amabileet <i>et al.</i> , 1996; Lyold, 1999; Fairbank <i>et al.</i> , 2003; Du Plessis <i>et al.</i> , 2008; Carrier, 1998; McConville, 1990; Mostaf& El-Masry, 2009
22	Product Quality	Price, 2000; Ahmed, 2009; Islam, 2007; Arifet <i>et al.</i> , 2010
23	Publicity	Reuter, 1976; Mishra, 1994; Tatter, 1975; Fairbank and Williams, 2001; Kudisch, 2006; Neagoe& Klein, 2009; Leach <i>et al.</i> , 2006; Marx, 1995; McConville, 1990; Prather & Turrell, 2002; Lloyd, 1996; Winter, 2009; Crail, 2006

24	Resources	Alveset <i>et al.</i> , 2007; Amabile <i>et al.</i> , 1996; Griffiths-hemans& Grover, 2006; Klijn&Tomic, 2010; Mclean, 2005; McConville, 1990; Shalley& Gilson, 2004; Van Dijk& Van den Ende, 2002; Lloyd, 1996; Bigliardi&Dormio, 2009; Clark, 2009.
25	Rewards	Lloyd, 1996;Klijn&Tomic, 2010; Arthur & Kim, 2005; Arthur <i>et al.</i> , 2010; Bartol& Srivastava, 2002; Darragh-Jeromos, 2005; Neagoe& Klein, 2009; Leach <i>et al.</i> , 2006; Lloyd, 1999;Marx, 1995; McConville, 1990; Du Plessis <i>et al.</i> , 2008; Ahmed, 2009; Mishra, 1994; Rapp and Eklund, 2007; Rice, 2009; Shalley& Gilson, 2004; Tatter, 1975; Teglborg-Lefevre,2010; Van &Ende ,2002; Arifet <i>et al.</i> , 2010; Bell, 1997; Frese <i>et al.</i> , 1999; Winter 2009; Al-Alawi <i>et al.</i> , 2007; Baird & Wang, 2010; Bartol& Srivastava, 2002; Clark, 2009; Crail, 2007; Rietzschel, 2008; Suh& Shin, 2008 ; Lyold, 1999.
26	Sense of Security	Carrier, 1998; Gorfin, 1969; Dickinson, 1932; Milner <i>et al.</i> , 1995; Price, 2000.
27	Supervisor Support	Mclean, 2005; Marx, 1995; Shalley& Gilson, 2004; Tatter 1975; Frese <i>et al.</i> , 1999; Lloyd, 1996; Ohlyet <i>et al.</i> , 2006; Arifet <i>et al.</i> , 2010; Hardin, 1964.
28	Support for Innovation	Lipponenet <i>et al.</i> , 2008; Hultgren, 2008; Scott & Bruce, 1994.
29	Teamwork	Rapp &Eklund, 2007;Amabile <i>et al.</i> , 1996; Aoki, 2008; Carreir, 1998; Darragh-Jeromos, 2005; Mclean, 2005; McConville, 1990; Shalley& Gilson, 2004; Baird& Wang, 2010; Egan, 2005; Pissarra&Jesuino, 2005; Fairbank &Williams, 200, Paulus &Yang, 2000.
30	Top Management Support	Huang &Farh, 2009; Amabile <i>et al.</i> , 2004; Carreir, 1998; Egan, 2005 Jong &Hartog, 2007;Marx, 1995;McConville 1990;Du Plessis 2008; Ahmed 2009;Mishara, 1994;Powell, 2008;Prather &Turrell, Rice, 2009;Zhang, 2010;Khairuzzamanet <i>et al.</i> , 2007;Bell, 1997;Unsworth, 2005; Hayward 2010;Bassadur, 2004
31	Training	Paulus, 2008; Tatter, 1975; Baird & Wang, 2010; Stranne, 1964; Birdi, 2005
32	Employee Satisfaction	Bell, 1997; Islam, 2007; Lyold, 1996; Carrier 1998; Leach <i>et al.</i> , 2006;Janassen,2004

Table 2: Sustainability Assessment Model

FACTORS FOR SUGGESTION SYSTEM SUSTAINABILITY ASSEMENT				
Leadership and Organisational Environment	System Capability	Organisational Encouragement	System Effectiveness	System Barriers
FACTOR INDICATORS				
Top Management Support What evidence is available to demonstrate the top management support?	Support for Suggestion Implementation Demonstrate the actualization of the suggestion in your organisation.	Teamwork How would you describe the team work in relation to suggestion systems?	Profitability Does your suggestion system generate new revenue or saves cost?	Job Control Describe the job environment in your organisation?
Supervisory support What evidence is available to demonstrate the supervisor support to suggestion system?	System Features Describe the suggestion system features.	Training Explain the training programs that you offer to your employees in relation to suggestion systems.	Employee Productivity Describe how the employee productivity is improved as a result of the suggestion system?	Competition Do your employees sense the suggestion system as a competition to test their ability in any way?
Coworker support How do you describe the work relationships among the employees in relation to suggestion systems?	Awareness How does your organisation create awareness of the suggestion system?	Expertise How do you describe the employee expertise in your organisation?	Product quality Does the suggestion system impact the quality of the product? Give evidence.	
Organisational support What evidence is available to demonstrate the Organisational support to the suggestion system?	Feedback Explain the feedback process in your organisation.	Employee Participation What evidence is available to demonstrate the Employee Participation in the suggestion system?	Process improvements Does the suggestion system trigger improvements in the processes? Give Examples.	

Communication Explain how communications and networking impacts suggestion system in your organisation.	Rewarding Explain the reward scheme for suggestion system in your organisation.		Customer Satisfaction Does the suggestion system impacts the customer satisfaction? Give Examples.	
Support for Innovation What mechanism exists in your organisation to protect your employees in case of disputes due to suggestion system?	Evaluation Explain the evaluation procedure for suggestion system in your organisation.			
	Resources Explain the resource availability suggestion system in your organisation.			

is being studied are not clearly evident (Yin, 2003). This method of study is especially useful for trying to test/validate theoretical models by using them in real world/ situations, and testing whether scientific theories and models actually work in real life. The semi-structured interview method was used to collect the data. The purpose of doing the interview is to get a wider picture and more detailed information about the practices existing in the organisations. For the purpose of this study the three using suggestions schemes relatively for 5 years to 30 years were used. We will represent these s as A, B, and C. The interviews took place in each employee's office. Although there were no time constraints, it took between 45 minutes and one hour to complete the interviews. Each participant was apprised of the relevance of the study and the assessment framework was also provided with printouts of Table 2. This was done in order for the respondents to put their thoughts in the context of the model.

The questions were not asked in a specific order, flexibility was given to people, to talk without much restriction of rigid question order or check lists. This flexibility gave the chance for people to explain in detail, the system they have in their companies. In addition, they were asked to show the evidences to support their practices for each of the factors.

THE RESULTS

The model as shown Table 1 was used to assess the sustainability of the suggestion schemes of three organisations in the UAE. These are referred here as Organisation A, B and C. Organisation A is one of the aluminum smelters based in the UAE. It was started in the year 1979. It manufactures more than one million tons of finished product, made-to-order for more than 300 customers in at least 45 countries worldwide. It has employee suggestion system in place for last 30 years. Organisation B facilitates the customs transactions electronically round the clock from all over the world. It has about 1000 employees. Organisation C is the

infrastructure organisation. Its main function is to design, build and manage the municipal infrastructure, facilities and services. It provides services to residents with respect to constructions such as roads, buildings, and communications, electricity, water, sewerage etc. It has about 250 employees. The summary of the assessment are as below:

Factor 1: Leadership and Work Environment

Top Management Support

The top management support was analyzed in three different cases. The practices noted across three organisations are tabulated as follows:

As we can note, coinciding with most of the practices of Organisation A, Organisations B and C demonstrated that its leadership and top management support their suggestion systems in a variety of ways. From above descriptions, it can be noted that in all three organisations, the top leaderships commitment and involvement is attributed to their direct involvement in the suggestion system. The support is further shown by establishing the clear vision and mission for the scheme. The pioneer organisation further sets itself ahead of B and C to provide strategic directives to the needy departments after analyzing the monthly reports. Organisation B demonstrated a unique practice of setting of an "Audit system" for their suggestion system. Thus, the support takes many different forms and as such the assessment of this indicator should look for evidences of following practices to demonstrate the top managements support:

- Direct involvement of the top management in programs for awarding the best suggestions
- Participation of the top management in the events relating to suggestion scheme.
- Review the suggestion system performance monthly

Table 3: Practices for Top Management Support

#	Existing Evidences	Organisation A	Organisation B	Organisation C
1	Directly involving in programs for awarding the best suggestions	✓	✓	✓
2	Directly participating in the events relating to suggestion scheme.	✓	✓	✓
3	Review Suggestion system performance report monthly	✓	✓	✓
4	Give direction to departments that fall below the expected outcomes	✓		
5	Vision and mission for their suggestion system	✓	✓	✓
6	Establishing an “audit system” for suggestion system		✓	
7	Host and sponsor events relating to the creativity	✓	✓	✓
8	Directly involving in making the suggestions related to their work area and thus by setting examples to their subordinates.		✓	
9	They sponsor and participate in the conferences and events to show their support for their suggestion schemes		✓	✓
10	Supports and empowers middle management	✓	✓	

- Establish vision and mission for their system
- Hosting events and sponsoring events relating to creativity

Further, following evidences demonstrate the progression of the top management’s support to the suggestion system in established suggestion systems.

- Setting up robust policies and procedures for the smooth functioning of the suggestion scheme
- Giving strategic directives to improve the performance
- Setting up examples by involving themselves in making suggestions

Supervisor Support

The supervisors support is core to the suggestion system as demonstrated in all three organisations. Table 4 depicts the various evidences prevalent in the organisations:

Consistently, in all three organisations supervisors provide their support to motivate their subordinates to make suggestions, and refine the ideas if necessary. It is thus necessary that the assessment of supervisors support to suggestion scheme should at least evidence that:

- The supervisor is responsible for reviewing employee ideas and providing suggestors with input and assistance in refining the ideas

Table 4: Possible Practices -Supervisor Support

#	Existing Evidences	Organisation A	Organisation B	Organisation C
1	Supervisor is responsible for reviewing employee ideas and providing suggestions with input and assistance in refining the ideas.	✓		
2	Supervisor is recognized for his contributions.	✓		
3	Supervisor has been given full support and taken into confidence	✓		
4	Supervisors are empowered to fix the award for the suggestion received	✓		
5	Supervisors are given targets	✓	✓	
6	Supervisor encourages their team members to discuss any of their work related issue prior to forming into a suggestion into the system.	✓	✓	✓
7	Supervisors provide their guidance if required to formulate the solution as well.	✓	✓	✓
8	Supervisors too receive monthly and quarterly suggestion reports.		✓	✓

Table 5: Possible Practices-Organisational Support

#	Existing Evidences	Organisation A	Organisation B	Organisation C
1	Employee suggestions are centrally stored	✓		
2	Organisations supports if an implemented suggestion needs to be replicated in other departments.	✓		
4	Employees can test their suggestion before submitting into the system.	✓	✓	✓
5	Provides support where required to review the suggestion etc.	✓	✓	✓
6	Employees can also avail the support of the central suggestion scheme team should they need any help	✓		
7	Employees are free to communicate with cross departments for any support.	✓	✓	✓
8	Decentralized system giving the authority in their departments to review the suggestions first	✓	✓	
9	Clear suggestion guidelines and awareness to formulate suggestions	✓	✓	✓
10	Organising Creativity simulation workshops.	✓		✓
11	Hosts events to honor the winning suggestion.	✓	✓	✓
12	Employees can collaborate and discuss their ideas and produce their suggestions.	✓	✓	✓
13	Employees are given suggestion target and are recognized on their performance review		✓	
14	Supportive organisation culture	✓	✓	✓

- The supervisor encourages their team members to discuss any of their work related issue prior to forming into a suggestion into the system
- The supervisors provide their guidance if required to formulate the solution as well

The advancement of this support is demonstrated in Organisation A, as it further sets targets and recognises their supervisor as well when awarding the employee. Thus, it can be said that the development of the supervisors support can be further noted with additional evidences such as:

- The supervisor responsible for suggestion schemes by setting up targets
- The supervisor is empowered
- The supervisor and their line manager till the top too are recognised
- The supervisors review monthly or quarterly reports of the suggestion system performance

Overall, the supervisors support is demonstrated as central to the sustainability of suggestion system in all three organisations.

Organisational Support

The support of the organisation for the success of the suggestion system is also crucial as demonstrated in all

three organisations. All three organisations consistently demonstrate similar evidences for organisational support.

The common practices noted among all three organisations, to demonstrate the support of the organisation to the suggestion scheme include:

- Employee suggestions are centrally stored
- Clear suggestion guidelines and awareness to formulate suggestions
- Organising Creativity simulation workshops.
- Hosts events to honor the winning suggestion.
- Employees can collaborate and discuss their ideas and produce their suggestions.
- Supportive organisation culture
- Employees can test their suggestion before submitting into the system

The unique evidences such as below are noted in established suggestion system such as that of Organisation A.

- Organisations supports if an implemented suggestion needs to be replicated in other departments
- Employees can also avail the support of the central suggestion scheme team should they need any help

Table 6: Possible Practices –Communication and Networking

#	Existing Evidences	Organisation A	Organisation B	Organisation C
1	Sharing information regarding the suggestion scheme on in-house monthly newsletter	✓	✓	✓
2	Encouraging staff to participate at national and international level conferences	✓	✓	✓
3	Flexible organisational structure and non-rigid rules	✓	✓	✓
4	Active website detailing about the status of the suggestion scheme regularly.	✓	✓	✓
5	Employees are encouraged to submit their ideas at local and international competitions.	✓	✓	✓
6	Open Door Policy and opens communication channels with them and increases the transparency of administrative decisions.	✓	✓	✓
	Meetings and opportunities to meet with colleagues	✓	✓	✓

Communication and Networking

This indicator too has shown substantial importance in the sustainability of a suggestion system. All three organisations demonstrate that they have emphasized on giving importance to facilitating the communication and networking to foster creativity in their organisations. Interestingly, the facts and figures of their suggestion schemes are openly communicated through dedicated websites and newsletters. The opportunities to share their ideas internally and externally too are evident. The opportunity to participate in events relating to creativity is also shown.

Support for Innovation

Although there are few evidences across three organisations demonstrating the mechanisms to demonstrate the support for the innovation, it is noted that, it is an important indicator for assessing the sustainability of a suggestion system. Disputes among employees are quiet common and as such if not dealt with, can undermine the suggestion systems. All three organisations take care of this in some or the other form as demonstrated in Table 7.

Therefore to assess this indicator, the common evidences to look for are:

- Provision to dissolve any disputes among employees
- Provision to discuss the idea with immediate line manger prior to submission
- Demonstration of open and supportive culture

Employees are protected and supported by the HR department to forward their creativity fearlessly.

Coworker Support

The final indicator of leadership and organisation environment factor is the coworker support. Organisation A demonstrated good evidence for the presence of this indicator specially providing an option to upload a suggestion for their colleague. Organisations B and C demonstrate that support of the coworker to guide to nurture the idea. They collaborate and make joint suggestions as well. It was noted that coworker support is crucial for sustainability of suggestion system, especially as Organisation A demonstrated that joint suggestions often are of high value. The practices illustrated for coworker support across three organisations are tabulated

Table 7: Existing Evidence for Support for Innovation

#	Existing Evidences	Organisation A	Organisation B	Organisation C
1	Provision to dissolve any disputes among employees	✓	✓	✓
2	Provision to discuss the idea with immediate line manger prior to submission	✓	✓	✓
3	Demonstrate of open and supportive culture		✓	✓
4	Employees are protected and supported by the HR department to forward their creativity fearlessly.	✓	✓	✓

Table 8: Existing Evidences for Coworkers Support

#	Existing Evidences	Organisation A	Organisation B	Organisation C
1	Provision to collaborate with co-workers	✓	✓	✓
2	Option to upload colleagues suggestion	✓		

as shown in Table 8.

The practices to assess the existence of coworker support can be thus:

- Employees collaborate to make suggestions
- Employees submit suggestions for their colleagues

Notably, these are minimum evidences. The development of this support is not very elaborative.

Factor 2: System Capability

Support for Suggestion Implementation

All three organisations clearly demonstrate the number of suggestions implemented annually. These success stories are crucial for the sustainability of the suggestion system as they are the main motivating factors. The evidence to demonstrate the implementation of the suggestion is the actual number. This indication is consistent across all organisations and moreover, organisations make this figure public on their websites or through new channels. Moreover their awards are tied to the implemented suggestions only, giving due importance to the employees creative ideas. Consistently, all three organisations provide their evidence to this indicator as shown in Table 9.

The assessment of this indicator thus should look for evidences such as:

- Awarding only implemented suggestions
- Centrally storing the suggestions for everyone's information
- Evidence is available on implemented suggestions.
- Monitoring the system performance with regard to suggestion Implementation

Interestingly, Organisation A demonstrated that departments are allowed to replicate a solution in other departments, if it is beneficial to them. This indeed makes obvious the seriousness of the organisation to actualize the suggestions received and as such an advance of this indicator may look for evidences such as:

- Provision to replicate an implement solution elsewhere in the organisation
- Distribution of suggestion system implementation report among all stakeholders

Feedback

The feedback to the employee is seen as vital for the sustainability of the suggestion system. All three organisations have robust evidence to demonstrate the feedback system in their organisation. Specific deadlines are set to process a suggestions, mechanism to report the feedback are also spelled out. Employees can clearly track the progress of their suggestion as well.

The practices noted in the organisations are shown in Table 10.

The pioneer system of Organisation A has further set up a mechanism of allowing employees submit their suggestions directly to the central system. This is because if there is any reservation with the direct supervisor, employees must not be discouraged by the feedback of their supervisors, especially when supervisors are normally the first level of evaluators. The assessment of sustainability of suggestion system through the feedback indicator should look for evidences such as:

- Provide encouraging feedback
- Setting up reminders to evaluators and implementers on pending suggestions

Table 9: Existing Evidences for Implementation of the Suggestion

#	Existing Evidences	Organisation A	Organisation B	Organisation C
1	Awarding only implemented suggestions	✓	✓	✓
2	Provision to replicate the suggestions in other departments	✓		
3	Centrally storing the suggestions for everyone's information	✓		
4	Evidence is available on implemented suggestions.	✓	✓	✓
5	Monitoring the system performance with regard to suggestion implementation	✓	✓	✓
6	Distributing the suggestion system performance report among all stakeholders		✓	✓

Table 10: Existing Evidences for Feedback

#	Existing Evidences	Organisation A	Organisation B	Organisation C
1	Provide encouraging feedback	✓	✓	✓
2	Setting up reminders to evaluators and implementers on pending suggestions	✓	✓	✓
3	Setting up realistic deadlines for processing the suggestions	✓	✓	✓
4	Provision to submit the suggestion to central administrator if needed	✓		

Table 11: Existing Evidences for Rewards

#	Existing Evidences	Organisation A	Organisation B	Organisation C
1	Financial Rewards	✓	✓	✓
2	Other reward such as Certificate of appreciations/ Nominating distinguished suggestion owners for taking part in local, regional and international suggestion contests	✓	✓	✓
3	Reward scheme is transparent	✓	✓	✓
4	Rewards are fairly calculated as per their savings	✓	✓	✓

- Setting up realistic deadlines for processing the suggestions
- Provision to submit the suggestion to central administrator if needed

Rewards

The rewards are considered as central to the sustainability of the suggestion system. This is well demonstrated in all three cases. All three organisations have established robust rewarding scheme. Further, the rewards are not limited only to monetary benefits and there are different categories to recognise the employees for their contribution. The evidences that these organisations exhibit are shown in Table 11.

The assessment of the sustainability of a suggestion system through the reward indicator should display the evidence for:

- Financial rewards
- Other rewards such as Certificate of Appreciations/ Nominating distinguished suggestion owners for taking part in local, regional and international suggestion contests
- Reward scheme is transparent
- Rewards are fairly calculated as per their savings

Organisation A further exhibits that after the first level of assessment, a reward is given for the suggestion and the suggestion is further recommended for considering for special awards that are established. These rewards are given during the annual award ceremony. The established scheme exhibits:

- Established special annual award categories.

Table 12: Existing Evidences for Evaluation

#	Existing Evidences	Organisation A	Organisation B	Organisation C
1	Dedicated schedule to evaluate the suggestions	✓	✓	✓
2	Dedicated evaluation team	✓	✓	✓
3	Providing reasons for rejected suggestion	✓	✓	✓
4	Making the evaluation procedures and team members transparent	✓	✓	✓
5	An evaluation criteria	✓	✓	✓
6	At least a chance to appeal against the decision		✓	

Table 13: Existing Evidences for Awareness

#	Existing Evidences	Organisation A	Organisation B	Organisation C
1	Promotional Events	✓	✓	✓
2	Newsletters	✓	✓	✓
3	Websites	✓	✓	✓
4	Thematic campaigns monthly		✓	
5	Information through bulletin boards and roll ups	✓	✓	✓
6	Employee Induction Program	✓		✓
7	Has a brand name	✓	✓	✓

Table 14: Existing Evidences for System Features

#	Existing Evidences	Organisation A	Organisation B	Organisation C
1	Dedicated suggestion scheme administrator	✓	✓	✓
2	A electronic system to receive and timely process the suggestion.	✓	✓	✓
3	Established roles and responsibilities to all stakeholders with regard to suggestion system	✓	✓	✓
4	User friendly system	✓	✓	✓
5	Multiple ways to submit suggestions		✓	✓

Evaluation

The evaluation is found to be significant to the sustainability of the suggestion system. The ‘evaluation’, thus, involves many components such as the process, criteria, and evaluation team responsibility procedures etc.

The possible evidences to be exhibited by the organisations to demonstrate the “evaluation” are shown in Table 12. Although the evaluation committee’s decisions are final in Organisations A and C, Organisation B believes in providing an option to appeal against the decision. This indeed can increase the suggestion implementation and further motivate employee participation.

Therefore, the assessment of the sustainability of a suggestion system from this perspective should look for evidences such as

- Dedicated schedule to evaluate the suggestions
- Dedicated evaluation team
- Providing reasons for rejected suggestion
- Making the evaluation procedures and team members transparent
- An evaluation criteria

Awareness

All three organisations display good practices for creating awareness of suggestion systems within their organisations and demonstrate that through these campaigns, they elicit

employee creative ideas. The range of evidences to support the suggestion system awareness is tabulated in Table 13.

Rightly therefore this indicator should display evidences of these for the assessment of the sustainability of a suggestion system:

- Promotional Events
- Newsletters
- Websites
- Thematic campaigns monthly
- Information through bulletin boards and roll ups
- Employee Induction Program
- Has a brand name

System Features

Organisations reveal that they have a variety of mechanisms for their employees to make their suggestions and they provide clear guidelines to use their suggestion system. The roles and responsibilities for suggestion systems stakeholders and dedicated administrators are in place to support the suggestion system. The evidences as shown in Table 14 are consistently displayed by all three organisations.

The below evidences should be looked for when assessing the “system features”

- Dedicated suggestion scheme administrator
- An electronic system to receive and timely process the suggestion.

Table 15: Existing Evidences for Resources

#	Existing Evidences	Organisation A	Organisation B	Organisation C
1	Availability of financial resources	✓	✓	✓
2	Procedure to seek resource support	✓	✓	✓
3	Are allowed to escalate any related matters to their superiors and superiors in turn take it to higher management for a swift action		✓	✓

Table 16: Existing Evidences for Team Work

#	Existing Evidences	Organisation A	Organisation B	Organisation C
1	Provision to submit ideas in teams	✓	✓	✓
2	Team Rewards	✓	✓	✓

- Established roles and responsibilities to all stakeholders with regard to suggestion system
- User friendly system
- Multiple ways to submit suggestions

Resources

The final indicator of the system capability factor is the resources. Organisations should have financial as well as other physical resources to support their suggestion system. There must be some established way of availing physical resources to test their ideas. The evidences that three organisations bring forward are shown in Table 15.

Therefore the resource availability could be evidenced through:

- Availability of financial resources
- Procedure to avail physical resources
- Management support to source resources

Factor 3: Organisational Encouragement

Team Work

Consistently, all the three organizations recognise the importance of the teamwork and encourage team

submissions. It was also evidenced by Organisation A that high value suggestions often are from the team suggestions. Organisation B, however, has a different viewpoint that employees preferred making individual suggestions, so that rewards are not shared with all. Organisation C too recognises the team work and has provisions to submit the ideas in teams. The evidences for teamwork in all three organisations are demonstrated in Table 16.

Expertise

Organisation A demonstrated that it is the expertise and the domain knowledge that their employees possess that result in making award winning suggestions. It also claimed, overall, it is the talent of their employees that brings the success to their suggestion system. Similarly, Organisation B too demonstrated that their employees clearly fall into three categories as low-skilled, medium-skilled and high-skilled. According to their statistics, it is usually mid and high skilled employees who contribute more to the suggestion system. In Organisation C, it was noted that, it is again because of their talented employees they win international awards for their suggestions. The prevailing practices across three organisations are shown in Table 17.

The assessment of expertise thus can include following evidences:

Table 17: Existing Evidences for Expertise

#	Existing Evidences	Organisation A	Organisation B	Organisation C
1	Suggestions get awarded at local or international competitions	✓	✓	✓
2	Organisation has talented employees	✓	✓	✓
3	High value suggestions are received from experienced employees	✓		
4	Experienced or high skilled workers make more suggestions when compared to others	✓	✓	✓

Table 18: Existing Evidences for Training

#	Existing Evidences	Organisation A	Organisation B	Organisation C
1	Creativity Related Workshops and trainings	✓	✓	✓
2	Trainings to use suggestion system	✓	✓	✓

Table 19: Existing Evidences for Employees Participation

#	Existing Evidences	Organisation A	Organisation B	Organisation C
1	Making the scheme open to all for participation	✓	✓	✓
2	Evidence available to demonstrate the participation	✓	✓	✓
4	Organisation or Employees win awards for their suggestions	✓	✓	✓
5	Setting participation targets e.g. (min suggestions per year)		✓	
6	Encourages suggestion for any area and not necessarily for cost savings	✓	✓	✓
7	No strict boundary between job role and creativity	✓		

- Suggestions get awarded at local or international competitions
- Organisation has talented employees
- Experienced employees make more suggestion when compared to others or
- High value suggestions are elicited from experienced employees

Training

The practice of training employees to use suggestion schemes and creativity is consistent among all three organisations and they consider it as an important element to the suggestion system. Following evidences demonstrate the training element in all three organisations.

The assessment of training thus to evidence the following:

- Creativity related workshops and trainings
- Trainings to use suggestion system

Employee Participation

The final indicator of the organisational encouragement is the employee participation. All organisations consistently demonstrated the importance of the employee participation for the sustainability of a suggestion system. First of all, all organisations have made their suggestion scheme open for all employees and particularly they don't focus on suggestions that are meant only for cost saving. Suggestions can involve any improvement, such as improvement in employee morale or satisfaction. Organisations display the participation rate in the suggestion scheme. Organisation A has given a target to the departments, whereas Organisation B has linked it to their performance review program, while Organisation C has not linked the participation to any specific targets. It can

be said that target setting might improve the suggestions; however, the targets are not mandatory.

The practices across the three organisations are as shown in Table 19.

Organisation A further encourages employee participation by not strictly drawing a line between the job role and creativity efforts. If a suggestion brings value it is more likely to be considered as a suggestion. The assessment of the employee participation should evidence that the organisations has:

- Making the scheme open to all to participate
- Evidence available to demonstrate the actual participation (number of suggestions)
- Organisation or employees win awards for their suggestions
- Setting participation targets (e.g. minimum suggestions per year)
- Encourages suggestion for any area and not necessarily for cost savings
- No strict boundary between job role and creativity

Factor 4: System Effectiveness

Customer Satisfaction

The first indicator for system effectiveness is the customer satisfaction. The customer satisfaction is the priority in Organisations B and C and, as such, they encourage suggestions from their customers as well. Organisation A too has mechanisms to collect feedback of their customer satisfaction but it is not categorically assessed to portray how much the suggestions directly contribute in customer satisfaction. But, all three organisations display their

Table 20: Existing Evidences for Customer Satisfaction

#	Existing Evidences	Organisation A	Organisation B	Organisation C
1	Provision for customer suggestion	✓	✓	✓
2	Evidence of commitment to customer satisfaction	✓	✓	✓

Table 21: Existing Evidences for Product Quality

#	Existing Evidences	Organisation A	Organisation B	Organisation C
1	Evidence available for commitment to enhance product quality	✓	✓	✓

commitment to customer satisfaction through their suggestion system.

Therefore, this indicator should include evidences such as:

- Evidence of commitment to customer satisfaction

Product Quality

All three organisations recognize the importance to their product quality. This is the goal of their suggestion system. Thus, the organisation should demonstrate that it is committed to improving their product quality and thus uses its suggestion system for receiving suggestions related to product quality improvement.

Improvements in process

The main outcome that all three organisations emphasize on their suggestion scheme is the improvement in the process as shown in Table 22. Therefore the assessment should evidence that the organisation evidences a number of process improvements.

To assess the process improvements, following practice should be visible in the organisation:

- The number of improvements taking place as a result of systems

Profitability

The profitability is consistently demonstrated in all three organisations. Although the cost saving is not the only motive of their suggestion system, employee suggestion help save cost or help to generated new revenues.

This indicator can thus evidence any or all of the following:

- There are new revenues generated
- There is cost saving

Employee Productivity

The final indicator on system effectiveness is the productivity of employees. Suggestion system's goal is also to improve the productivity of the employees in terms of employee safety and satisfaction, organisational accountability and commitment and employee confidence. All three organisations demonstrate (Table 24) from their stated objectives of the suggestion system that their goal is to improve the product quality besides the cost savings.

All three organisations, as shown in Table 24, demonstrate the same and thus it can be said that assessment of the productivity to evidence:

- Employees feel safe and sense of accountability are satisfied with their job
- Employees demonstrate sense of accountability and commitment to organisations
- There is improvement in employee participation rate
- System objectives are set to improve the productivity

Table 22: Existing Evidences for Improvements in Process

#	Existing Evidences	Organisation A	Organisation B	Organisation C
1	Evidence available to demonstrate process improvement	✓	✓	✓

Table 23: Existing Evidences for Profitability

#	Existing Evidences	Organisation A	Organisation B	Organisation C
1	Evidence of new revenues	✓	✓	✓
2	Evidence of cost savings	✓	✓	✓

Table 24: Existing Evidences for Productivity

#	Existing Evidences	Organisation A	Organisation B	Organisation C
1	Employees feel safe and sense of accountability are satisfied with their job	✓	✓	✓
2	Employees demonstrate sense of accountability and commitment to organisations	✓	✓	✓
3	There is improvement in Employee participation Rate	✓	✓	✓
4	System objectives are set to improve the productivity	✓	✓	✓
5	Suggestions aimed at morale improvements are have a reward scheme	✓	✓	✓

Table 25: Existing Evidences for Job Control

#	Existing Evidences	Organisation A	Organisation B	Organisation C
1	Flexibility in working environment	✓	✓	✓
2	Innovation supportive practices	✓	✓	✓
3	No standard routines	✓	✓	✓
4	Employees have job autonomy	✓	✓	✓
5	No task standardisation	✓	✓	✓

- Suggestions aimed at morale improvements are have a reward scheme

motivate the employees to make suggestions, they don't encourage running the scheme as a competition.

To assess the sustainability of a suggestion system it should be noted that:

- Suggestion making is not mandatory and not established as competition in the organisation.

Factor 5: System Barriers

Job Control

The last factor is the system barriers that include two indicators: Job control and completion. Organisations A, B and C demonstrate that job control is a big barrier to creativity. Therefore, organizations ensure that it has flexible and supportive work environment, innovation supportive practice and freedom to try new things, as shown in Table 25

It should be taken into consideration that following practices are in practice in the organisation and eliminates the impact of job control on the sustainability of a suggestion system:

- Flexibility in working environment
- Innovation supportive practices
- No standard routines

Competition

The last indicator on the system barriers is the competition. Although, the organisations set department level targets to

THE DISCUSSION

All three organisations demonstrate good evidence for Factor 1, namely the leadership and organisational encouragement. Top management of the organisation consistently participates in honouring the suggestions and moreover sets examples by participating directly in making suggestion as uniquely noted in the Organisation B. The supervisor to the suggestion is also consistent across all three organisations. They display different forms of support to encourage the suggestion schemes. A supportive culture is further noted. Free flow of communication, Open Door Policy and networking are other forms of supports noted.

Good evidence and support are also demonstrated for system capability across all three organisations. Moreover, they are fairly consistent among all three organisations. Although the rewards are designed uniquely, all three organisations demonstrated good reward scheme. Similarly, the robust

Table 26: Existing Evidences for Competition

#	Existing Evidences	Organisation A	Organisation B	Organisation C
1	Suggestion making is not mandatory and not established as competition	□	□	□

evaluation process too is visible in the organisation. In all three organisations employees, receive feedback and they have easy to use systems. Although the system features differ among the organisations while one provides variety of ways to make suggestions, others provide good guidelines to use the suggestion system. Awards are further given only when suggestions are implemented.

The third factor is the organisational encouragement is also well-demonstrated within the all cases. Firstly, all three organizations recognise the importance of team work and facilitate the team suggestions. All employees are eligible to participate in the suggestion scheme. All three organisations demonstrated that their suggestion scheme has an impact on customer satisfaction, product quality, process improvement, and profitability and employee productivity. In all three organisations, employees have freedom to perform their tasks and make their suggestions as per their own will. The analysis of the three cases evidences a list of practices relating to each of these factors.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper is to apply the sustainability assessment framework to three organisations and list the good practices associated with each the factors. The research has provided a unique understanding of the relative importance of these factors. The evidences of good practices across the three organisations are presented. As a future research, the stages for sustainability can be developed and practices can be categorized to each of these factors. The framework is useful for the suggestion systems that have goals or objectives such as profitability, customer satisfaction, workplace process improvement, improvement in product quality and improvement in employee productivity etc. The assessor should identify the key informants preferably the suggestion system administrator who can provide evidence and explain their suggestion scheme. It must be ensured that the informant has good understanding of their suggestion system and be able to provide the evidence of practices as required. Upon completion, assessor should identify the indicators that show 'No Evidence' for improvement.

This research used three case studies with a focus on general outcomes of suggestion systems. Organisations sometimes can have specific outcomes for their suggestion system and hence this framework can be tailored to take into consideration the specific system outcomes and propose a framework accordingly. The study included three organisations, thus the practices corresponding to each indicator can be increased by studying more organisations across different industries.

This framework is limited to the users of suggestion systems within the UAE; as such framework can be extended to the use of global perspectives by studying some cross-

cultural suggestion system. Finally this research developed qualitative assessment method. This can be extended to assess the sustainability through quantitative data.

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