PM World Journal (ISSN: 2330-4480)
Vol. X, Issue II – February 2021
www.pmworldjournal.com   Personal Story

*How to Initiate a Project Successfully
at the Ideas Competition
by Irina Kulikova, PhD (tech)*

How to Initiate a Project Successfully at the Ideas Competition (a personal story) [1]

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Introduction

This paper looks at the modern case of project initiation through not only ideas competitions but also shares some lessons learned that can help you initiate your project successfully.

A project presentation is like a first impression: you can't change it later. You don't have much time to find the right words without preparation, to explain and show the important things. You should be quick, precise, clear, as well as full of expression and energy. Some lessons learned from author's successful experience are dealt with in this article.

Ideas competition as a modern trend.

The idea is the backbone of each project. It comes to us in different ways. It seems like ideas come from everything. You know about Newton and the apple falling on his head. No matter if that story is true or just a legend, the point is he was physicist regardless and thought about nature, about things and their interactions. So, as a result, we have Newton's laws. There are many of the same examples throughout history, and each idea usually needs some preliminary work or experience. It can be a market, trend, patent research, different experiments, diversification, etc.

All companies try to be innovative. They attempt to find ways for development through innovation implementation. To collect as many ideas as possible, the companies establish different competitions, hackathons, summits, etc. These events may be internal, external, or both. They are the first step of the innovation development model, in which you are collecting any and all ideas, no matter how crazy they may be.

For example, you can apply your idea to a Google competition [1], the European Projects Association (EPA) (a politically independent nonprofit organization) competition [2], or Tufts School of Engineering [3]. Some months earlier, Bcome 2020 – International Ideas Competition wrapped up. You can see it on the competition platform [4]. Even the Moscow government uses these methods, not just the big tech companies.

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[1] How to cite this article: Kulikova, I. (2021). How to Initiate a Project Successfully at the Ideas Competition (a personal story), *PM World Journal*, Vol. X, Issue II, February.

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Of course, the competition organizer should be respectable and honest. Only in this case can you be sure that your idea will not be stolen. Unfortunately, it is technically possible.

My story. The way to win.

Last summer, I took part in an ideas competition. This project ideas competition had come from the Complex of Economic Policy and Property and Land Relations of the Moscow Government for the first time. This Complex includes more than 20 organizations. Each employee from each organization could participate in the competition. It was exciting; practically all of us thought about giving it a shot. The main question was, "What is the best idea I have to offer?" Some of us were trying to bring not only one but several. Finally, more than five hundred ideas had been submitted. All of them were different, but each one fell under the following nominations:

- The best socially-conscious project;
- The best business process improvement project;
- The best economic development project.

The competition had three stages of selection:

In the first stage, the selection was made by the heads of project offices and organizations; as a result, ideas had been selected for employees to vote on.

In the second stage, the staff of Executive authorities and their subordinate organizations selected the ideas. The result was fifteen finalists for the Complex (three winners in each Complex Department).

In the third stage, a full-time round of the competition was held in which the winners of the second stage took part. The competition commission of the Complex decision chose the winner in each nomination. As a result, we had three ideas in the three categories, and one idea received the "audience award."

Further, project passports had been prepared for the winning projects, and the project initiation procedure was carried out.

Reaching the final round was a pleasant surprise for me. When I submitted the project to the competition, I was not thinking about winning. It was very nice that people believed in and voted for my idea.

Following this, we met with the Moscow Government Minister (Head of the Economic Policy and Development Moscow Department) for morning tea, discussed our projects, and received useful tips on preparing for the face-to-face tour.

Later, the Department organized a pre-defense of projects, which was very useful because we practiced speeches and answers to questions about the project.

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All this was also cool because we were working remotely for several months, and it even became unusual getting to see people in real life, not through a monitor.

The full-time tour took place in a beautiful, modern hall, in a festive and pleasant atmosphere [5].

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We showed up, answered questions, and then waited for the results of the jury's vote. My project won in the second category as the best project to improve business processes and working conditions.

Since the competition, I have already drawn up and presented the project implementation plan and budget. I received a certificate of the winner from the Head of the Complex and the Deputy Mayor of Moscow.

My project was an information systems navigator that includes an IDM system. The implementation of this project had included not only the creation of an information system. It is also about the integration of existing information systems in a common space, while further including the formalization and transparency of all processes, projects, and individual actions.

It is the next level of organizational development.

Winning the competition and being able to implement such a project is not only an interesting experience but also a responsibility. The project is public, and a large number of people are watching the progress of its implementation. Information about the competition and the project was published not only on the internal corporate portal but also on social networks.

Today, the project has been completed. During the implementation, I combined traditional project management with flexible technologies, which include tools such as Kanban and Scrum.

What helped me win?

1. The presence of the idea of the desired project. My idea was aimed at solving a real problem in a complex. To have such an idea, you need to observe existing

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processes, think about what can be improved in them, analyze current trends in business, technology, society, the experience of other companies, and begin to see things from a different point of view; then, just let your imagination run (links to individual sources). Some of its basics are reflected in my presentation at the Business Analysis Virtual PMI Conference, 2018.

2. A well-prepared presentation. What does it mean? The project takes on features when the idea develops into a plan. The same idea can lead to completely different projects. Therefore, you need to be clear about what you will get in the end, when, and by what means. The presentation clearly showed the problem (the current state of the situation) and its negative effect on the work of the Complex as a whole and on each employee separately. As evidence, not only examples of work discomfort are given but also figures on how negatively the current situation affects labor efficiency. The idea had a clearly defined goal, objectives, and ways to achieve it. A top-level assessment of implementation costs was carried out. The perspective and economic effect of the implementation of the idea is shown, expressed in specific values of performance indicators and money (in this case, it was about reducing costs). In addition, the presentation had a clear structure, a visual component, and was not overloaded with text and numbers, which usually affects presentations. All this was laid out in a corporate style. Actually, the idea and presentation ensured victory in the voting and reaching the final.

Therefore, to prepare the presentation of the idea, I recommend the following main sections:

- Showing the problem (in its current state), preferably in numbers. For example, I gave data on the timing of obtaining information on systems and the timing of obtaining access to them.
- Proposed solution (vision, goal, tasks, state, and effects). As a result, it is also good to give figures here. For example, I calculated the cost reduction and cost savings due to reasonable planning of work, which becomes possible with the availability of information.
- Now you need to identify the needs of the project. For example, I indicated the necessary licenses for product development, server resources, as well as the specialists that are needed for the successful implementation of the project.
- When everything is clear with the needs, you have to show specifically how the product will develop, the main steps. That is, you need to present a generalized implementation plan. My entire product was divided into functional modules, which were gradually built up and formed a complete product. That is, from MVP to a full-fledged product.
- Next, provide a calculation of the economic justification for the feasibility of the project, taking into account the development costs.
- Add the benefits description, and you'll get a fine project proposal.

3. Since the final was a face-to-face round, in addition to well-developed ideas and presentations, it was important to present them well so as to inspire and interest

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the jury of the competition. Public speaking skills can help you here. There is a lot of useful information and courses about this. I would like to indicate that, in my opinion, the most important thing is to speak clearly and understandably, without reading from a piece of paper or tablet. You should also try to make your speech more emotional and interesting. Try to involve the audience in your story. This can be done by asking a question. For example, I asked a question about an existing problem. The question was rhetorical, but people answered it, nodded in agreement, confirming what I said. They were involved and really saw in the implementation of the idea the solution to the existing problem.

Of course, everything may not work out right away. At the time of participation in the competition, I already had a lot of experience in conducting presentations and presales of company projects, and I had won the "Best Innovator" award at the World 2nd Innompic Games [6]. But if you don't start, you may never gain this experience.

Summary.

Thus, the victory in the competition, as well as in any other case, is the result of groundwork. And this can be learned. Don't be afraid to start.

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Irina Kulikova, PhD (tech.), PMP has over twenty years of experience as the project/program manager, business architect and consultant with the ability to develop new products, IT & Business strategy, to improve organization processes, to find solutions in the broad range of IT and R&D projects from separation fields, creating the ERP, GIS, accounting, e learning, e-documents, billing, expert, government systems etc.

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Irina has over fifteen years of experience as a professor assistant and teaching physics, information technologies, system analysis and information system design. Author of 40 articles, own blog "To hit pay dirt", she has 4 certificates of authorship on program products.

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