



Ideas drive change:

Creating a culture of continuous improvement
via My Contribution

Balfour Beatty



Introduction

In 2015, Balfour Beatty launched its Build to Last business transformation programme. The strategy drives continuous, measurable improvement against five goals: Lean, Expert, Trusted, Safe and Sustainable to help drive up performance.

Critical to the success of Build to Last is ensuring that every member of our workforce is engaged and has a personal stake in making the business stronger and helping us deliver for our customers. A key part of that is developing and supporting an 'innovation mindset' amongst our employees. Innovation is how we ensure we remain agile. It is part of our culture, an investment in the future of our business and helps us to continue to deliver for our customers and our customers' customers.

My Contribution is the channel which makes this a reality. It allows us to tap into a rich seam of creative thinking from people who understand the business better than anyone and want to make a meaningful contribution. It encourages and empowers every member of our team to be an innovator and for that innovation to take place across every part of our business. It has played a key role in helping Balfour Beatty go from strength to strength over the past five years, and has proven its value most recently during the COVID-19 pandemic, when our workforce used it to submit ideas to ensure that Balfour Beatty was able to adapt and innovate, as we outline later in this paper.

Of course, not every idea is innovative or transformative in scale on its own. However, we have found that the incremental changes from a number of smaller ideas can lead to significant overall improvements.

This short paper aims to set out in brief the principles behind My Contribution, the benefits it has brought to our business and customers, and what we have learnt since establishing it in 2015.

Developing an in-house think tank



Our employees are our experts and often have fresh and insightful ideas about how things could be done better or more efficiently. All too often, businesses ignore those grassroots ideas, or are never aware of them, with innovation and business change led from the top-down. Balfour Beatty wants to cast its net as wide as possible to harness the enthusiasm, knowledge and expertise of our team. By treating our employees as an in-house think tank, we want to make it clear that they have the endorsement of the senior team to be constantly on the lookout for innovation and improvement, and importantly, we want them to be sharing those ideas so they can drive change themselves, bringing benefit to the business, our employees and our customers. A key element of success is the willingness to listen and act on suggestions from others. Being in a position to achieve that requires both a culture of openness, collaboration and creativity, and a dedicated, safe way of embracing those ideas across the business.

My Contribution is the tool we use to crowd source good ideas, harness collective expertise and directly engage every staff member at every level of the business by enabling them to suggest and drive positive changes. It was launched across Balfour Beatty in the UK and US in 2015 as a fundamental way of working that enables and encourages employee-led innovations.

The scheme was relaunched in 2019 across the UK using a new Yammer based platform in association with employee idea specialists, Sideways 6, to make it easier for our thousands of employees across multiple locations to share their ideas and develop them through conversation with their colleagues – for those who do not have access to Yammer, they can phone the Balfour Beatty helpline team who will take the details and post into Yammer on their behalf, and there are also physical 'idea cards' which can be submitted. Relaunching My Contribution in this way has given it a new impetus, generating more interest and enthusiasm. Now that it is on Yammer, people can share their ideas from their mobile devices or their computer wherever they are and whenever inspiration strikes. Conversation goes beyond previously siloed teams and the business is better connected than ever. By collaborating on ideas with colleagues across the business, this improves the quality of ideas, drives a culture of learning and sharing, and helps to trigger new ideas.

How it works



All employees are able to put forward their ideas that can improve how we work, from innovative processes, to creating powerful technology solutions or coming up with fresh solutions to longstanding problems. My Contribution provides the platform and structure for those ideas and insights to be considered and developed – or to spark new ideas.

It is supported by a network of highly engaged and passionate 'Team MyC' volunteers across the business, who help promote My Contribution and act as sounding boards and advisers and encourage people to think 'outside the box' and be 'intrapreneurs' or innovators within the business.

Team MyC comprises around 400 employees from across the business each representing their geographic location, business function or specific area of expertise. Each member has been assigned one of five specific roles – MyC Business Leader, MyC Lead, MyC Ambassador, MyC Subject Expert and MyC Decision Maker, each with their own function to perform, but all designed to help evaluate, manage and deliver My Contribution ideas which will develop and change our business for the better.

Ideas that have merit and that drive business improvement are backed with the necessary resources from teams across the business to implement. Solutions vary from project specific innovations, rapid quick wins or longer-term business transformational changes. Engagement, progress and benefits (financial and non-financial) are measured and tracked in our My Contribution dashboards.

One of the key benefits in terms of ownership, transparency and collaboration is that anyone in the business can view the dashboards and drill down into the data behind MyC. Ideas are searchable by business area, project and function and this really allows people across the business to have visibility of, and track the benefits of MyC.

Recognition is a fundamental element of My Contribution. Success is shared and celebrated on Yammer and across our employee communications channels with staff thanked for their contribution by the MyC team as well as their Line Manager. We also recognise the best ideas more formally through national annual and milestone awards as well as more frequent local awards for the best ideas and improvements delivered.

My Contribution is part of the annual Performance Development Reviews (PDRs) and Line Managers are encouraged to recognise employee participation for participation in My Contribution as well as identifying any specific objectives or development opportunities that My Contribution can offer, particularly to members of Team MyC.

As well as encouraging people to submit ideas on any business improvement at any time, we run specific campaigns in order to encourage and capture thoughts on key business objectives through a focused approach. A recent example was the My Contribution Safety Campaign we ran towards the end of 2019, aligned to our Zero Harm Safe goal and safety stand-downs. This has proven to be a powerful way of harnessing collective thinking through a 'hub mind' approach, and increasing collaboration and participation across the business. The Safety Campaign saw 567 #safe ideas submitted, including:

- > Anti-slip treads for concrete steps. A lot of our site compounds have temporary concrete steps put in place to access offices, facilities, welfare areas and so on. These can often get slippery when wet or muddy; the easy addition of non-slip edging strips could prevent falls and slips. These were installed within 18 days of the idea being submitted, on emergency escape steps and other locations on the site where the ideas was generated, and have been added to our Site Mobilisation Hub so that all sites can get them if required.
- > English lessons. Many operatives working on site are non-English speaking. One of our UK Construction Services team suggested that the project he was working on should arrange sessions for English tuition at the site compound. The aim was to enhance wellbeing and inclusion as well as improve communication at a site level ensuring that work instructions, RAMS, Safe Systems of Work and so on are clearly understood.
- > Gritting. As the colder nights draw in, sites and offices start to grit paths, parking areas, access roads and so on. The suggestion via My Contribution was that a simple push gritter would help spread grit efficiently and save people having to manually throw grit out of storage bins using spades. This idea was trialled locally on one of our projects before being made available for wider adoption.



COVID-19: Bouncing Back campaign

In April 2020, we ran our second group-wide My Contribution campaign called 'Bouncing Back'.

The aim of the campaign was to make sure Balfour Beatty is in the best possible position to rebound from the COVID-19 lockdown. In particular, we were asking colleagues for:

- > Anything that could potentially drive a productivity benefit to the tune of £10,000 - £1 million
- > That could mean our sites can open faster and safer across the UK
- > Ideas that could get our industry back on its feet and secure its future.

Over the course of the campaign, our workforce in the UK and US generated more than 550 ideas. These fell into four core themes:

- > *A Great Place to Work*: This includes new ways of working from encouraging more flexible approaches to reducing travel and carbon emissions
- > *Digital Future*: Exploring how we can use technology to enhance how we operate as a business, reduce our carbon emissions, and deliver better for our customers
- > *Back to Business*: Considering how our sites can scale back up in the new normal, from embedding new approaches using technology to ongoing social distancing

- > *New Markets and Capabilities*: Examining opportunities for utilising our skills and expertise, in new and adjacent markets as well as optimising the use of services from across the Balfour Beatty Group

Combined, the ideas in these themes formed a strategic roadmap which will help make sure that Balfour Beatty is fighting fit and gets back to full productivity - and more - as quickly as possible. This will allow us to seize the moment and turn this dreadful crisis into an opportunity.

Each of the 13 projects in the four themes had a project team and an Executive Committee sponsor responsible for developing it, delivering pilots where necessary, and making the ideas a reality. Colleagues who submitted ideas via Bouncing Back were invited to be a part of the project teams and to help shape the ideas as they move forward.

Our workforce were kept updated of progress on the ideas generated by Bouncing Back through a range of channels, from CEO blogs and direct emails, to yammer and 'talking heads' videos featuring those who submitted the ideas and the solutions we delivered. We also recognised the achievements and celebrated the successes of the MyC Bouncing Back campaign with personal thanks from the Group CEO at the end of 2020.

We see this as our chance to bring about lasting, positive change to create a 21st century business, industry and society. The role our workforce has played and are playing, via My Contribution is critical to the ongoing strength of the business and ensuring that it is fit for the future.

We're Bouncing Back! Let's Learn from the Lockdown

What have we learned from the lockdown? Share your ideas that will have a BIG positive impact on our business



What we have learnt since 2015

Nothing is perfect. We are constantly honing and improving our approach to make it as easy as possible for our workforce to contribute to keeping our business innovative, agile and efficient. Some of our learnings, since 2015, have been:

- > Giving people a voice and a role in building a stronger business from the inside out is paramount;
 - > When it comes to innovation and identifying ways to improve our business, the best people to ask are our people;
 - > Our senior teams must sponsor and own My Contribution and exhibit behaviours of listening leaders to encourage idea submission;
 - > The further to the frontline project based workforce you get, the deeper the level of understanding of our challenges and how these can be overcome;
 - > It must be easy for people to get involved in My Contribution and it must feel safe to do so;
 - > Driving change comes from an innate desire for people to own and drive their ideas to successful outcomes;
 - > Employees need to know their ideas will be listened to and fairly considered and assessed;
 - > Not every idea can be taken forward and even good ideas will need fine-tuning and further development. Every idea must be acknowledged and feedback provided so employees understand that the submission has been appreciated, fully considered, and why it has not been successful. The worst outcome is for people to become disengaged;
- > Building a culture which gives people the space to fail is also important. It is vital to make it clear that there is no shame in suggesting an idea which is not taken forward. Innovation is an area where the journey is often as important as the destination. The way My Contribution works, even where an idea itself is not successful, it can become part of another idea, or can stimulate discussion about a different way of solving the same problem – there are no bad ideas;
 - > Ideas being taken forwards must be implemented swiftly and celebrated to ensure people feel their ideas are valued, to maintain momentum and to encourage others to submit their own ideas;
 - > There must be some form of recognition - those who have made a difference by taking part in My Contribution should be acknowledged and given full credit;
 - > Employees need regular reminders and encouragement as well as examples of successful ideas to inspire them to have their own. This is done via a range of channels, for example: Yammer itself, events, e-newsletters, TV screens, posters, the company intranet, employee communication channels and team meetings.
- Our priority is to convert ideas into outcomes. In order to maintain the momentum of My Contribution, and the buy-in and engagement of our workforce, it is really important that they have visibility of how their ideas are taken forward and are helping to improve the business.

Examples of successful ideas raised via My Contribution



There have been a wide range of successful innovations delivered through My Contribution in addition to those generated via the Bouncing Back campaign. These have delivered a range of benefits of different sizes, all of which help us to be a stronger and more efficient business. Every idea is important.

Some examples of innovation successes delivered through My Contribution are:

- > Digital tool, Autodesk BIM 360™ Field, now embedded across UK Construction Services, was an idea which was submitted and developed via My Contribution. This innovation drives defect-free delivery and has identified £1 million of savings. It takes site documentation and inspection requirements online, providing instantly accessible, up-to-date evidence, allowing customers to check progress and quality in 'real time' and giving them a tool to support snagging and asset management.
 - > One of our Highways team suggested the use of Helmet First Aider ID Stickers and 'in helmet' basic first aid kits to improve onsite safety. The stickers are designed to provide easy identification of First Aiders. Designed to fit inside a safety helmet, the first aid kits, which include dressings, cleansing wipes, plasters and burn bags and gel, speed up the identification and treatment of injuries. Given that work on many of our schemes can take place some distance from the nearest welfare unit or first aid station, these steps could be of significant benefit to our onsite workforce. Following the suggestion, sample kits have been ordered and a trial is being run on two of our Highways projects.
- > One of our Commercial Directors suggested replacing staffed barriers with automated barriers throughout one of our Smart Motorway projects, thereby reducing labour requirements. Previously each barrier would require one PVM (Permanent Vehicle Marshall) to open and close the gate while works are carried out. Occasionally, PVMs are targeted by members of the public who want to gain access to the area. The new barriers can be opened automatically to authorised people. This has led to a reduction in labour costs and a smaller number of incursions into the site by members of the public, who appear less inclined to pass an unmanned barrier. The introduction of the new barriers will save approximately £2.15m to the project as a whole over three years.
 - > As part of the scope of one of our Pumping Station refurbishment works, the team were required to construct a new chamber around a newly replaced non-return valve, consisting of a reinforced concrete base, brickwork walls, and a reinforced concrete capping beam atop the walls housing an access cover. The original sequencing consisted of the capping beam being cast in-situ. An idea proposed via My Contribution suggested that the capping beam be cast in the supplier's yard off-site where they already have the plant, resource, and equipment to do so in a controlled environment. The capping beam was cast off-site at the same time as on-site works, with the access cover pre-installed. The whole unit was delivered to site just in time and installed in a single lift. Overall this saved £32,256 in costs, 1.8 weeks on the critical path of the programme, increased productivity, and meant less activity and therefore risk onsite. As it was a short duration project, this represented a 20% saving on the contract programme.

Conclusion

Fostering innovation requires an environment which supports creative thinking and allows it to flourish. For Balfour Beatty, crowd sourced innovation via My Contribution has become a powerful way to harness the creativity of our workforce while simultaneously ensuring they are invested in taking the business to the next level.



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