

Nomination: The Thought Spot – Operational Efficiency

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2. Problem Statement

Arapahoe County has been experiencing considerable budget constraints over two decades, causing strains placed on the organization and all employees. New ideas and methods needed to be developed to address the backlog of road repairs. The backlog of projects and the financial situation were enough for Arapahoe County to get each employee involved and engaged in the solution. Getting employees interesting in generating innovative solutions is especially difficult when they are asked to help solve problems, caused by budgets issues out of their control. First attempts to generate ideas proved fruitless when most ideas ended up costing more money and were only a benefit to the employee. Doug Stern realized that this was a much more complex issue than anticipated, and the old way of just asking employees for ideas was not working, so he developed the "Thought Spot".

3. Solution

To start the process, Doug needed to determine what the goal and desired outcome would be as well as define what innovation meant to Arapahoe County. The goal and innovation were defined as: Executing an idea which addresses a specific challenge and achieves value for both the company and the customer.

The Innovative process that Doug developed

- Focus on the specific challenge ahead.
- Train employees as to what Arapahoe County values.
 - Quality of work performed
 - Quantity of completed projects
 - Cost of projects reduced
- Establish a system
 - A bulletin board was placed at each facility with a note pad, in the shape of a light bulb. Employees were encouraged to write down any idea, big or small. The bulletin boards are sectioned off with three areas: ideas, discussion, implemented.
 - Ideas – these are left on the board for all to see and to get other opinions on the ideas. Sometimes ideas grow
 - Discussion – The management team at Arapahoe County meets on a regular basis and takes time to discuss each idea. Each note is then moved to the discussion section. The ideas stay in this section if more information is needed.
 - Implemented – Ideas moved into this section are then celebrated and talked about with all staff members.
- Reinforcement
 - Employees are rewarded for ideas that produce better quality work, help complete more projects, or save the organization money.

In addition, Doug had an idea contest to see what the employees would like to call this bulletin board and the winner named it “The Thought Spot”

4. Labor, Equipment and Materials.

A pre-existing cork board was used to create the “Thought Spot” and was decorated with items purchased online.

5. The total project cost less than \$50

6. Saving & Benefits to the Agency

➤ Engagement – The original goal was to get employees involved to generate innovative ideas.

However, this process has increased employee engagement and produced numerous innovative ideas. Using data collected from a third-party company, Arapahoe County fully engaged employees have increased from 28% in 2013 to 61% in 2021, with a 50% decrease in fully disengaged employee.

➤ Cost savings – the most notable projects are listed here.

i. Smashed culvert repair program process improvement

Using the Jaws-of-Life to fix smashed culverts paid for itself within the first 12 culvert repairs and is expected to save over \$300,000 over the life of the equipment.

ii. The award winning wide crack repair process has already saved the organization over \$680,000 and will continue to save money each year.

➤ Award Winning Innovative Ideas – Many additional innovative ideas are continually implemented.

- 2014 – Colorado LTAP State Innovation Winner for the creation on of a custom skid steer bucket
- 2015 – Colorado LTAP State Innovation Winner for the creation of a home-grown cell phone app used for tracking asphalt deficiencies.
- 2018 – APWA Wide crack maintenance project of the year
- 2018 - Federal highway administration Build a better Mousetrap award – cell phone app for tracking asphalt deficiencies
- 2018 – Colorado LTAP runner up for the creation of a slab saw cradle
- 2019 – APWA Jaws of life maintenance project of the year
- 2019 – Colorado LTAP honorable mention for the creation of a glass grid dispenser.
- 2020 – National Innovation award from the Federal Highway Administration Build a better Mousetrap contest. – jaws of life
- 2020 – Colorado LTAP State Innovation Winner – for the idea to use the Jaws of Life for routine drainage maintenance.