## Better ENERGEX Challenge a 'resounding success'

ENERGEX is one of Australia's fastest-growing organisations, currently employing 3,500 staff in delivering electricity and energy to South East Queensland. In March 2010, ENERGEX's Network Programming and Procurement (NPP) division partnered with Vulture Street to deliver a 'jam' (or online collaboration event) to discover new ideas for strategic improvements in the organisation. Christened the Better ENERGEX Challenge, the event involved 558 employees, including all staff from NPP division plus selected representatives from Finance, Human Resources and the senior management team.

Participants were asked to respond to three challenge questions under the general theme of discovering new ideas for building a Better ENERGEX, by posting their own ideas, and adding comments and/or votes to ideas posted by others.

Through a carefully designed communications program, ENERGEX was successful in achieving a participation rate for the event that compared favourably to response rates for more traditional forms of staff engagement. Importantly, voting intensity within the Challenge was very strong, with a vote-to-idea ratio much higher than the average, indicating a high level of demand within the group for a mechanism to express their opinions on potential changes in a constructive manner.

The Challenge showed how keen field and technical employees are to contribute to more innovative approaches to work, with staff making 3.5 times more contributions than supervisors.

The Challenge thus provided a highly effective way to involve employees in developing solutions to a wide range of business problems.

The total body of ideas and opinions generated by the Challenge were clustered into seven emergent themes for future action planning, in areas ranging from physical equipment investment to process innovation. ENERGEX management were particularly delighted with the diversity of ideas put forward, with suggestions covering topics as varied as improvements to recruitment practices and proposals for new organisational structures. This diversity highlights the value of posing a set of relatively broad challenge questions to a group that collectively represents many different perceptions and experiences within the one organisation.

ENERGEX management have now developed a full action plan for responding to the ideas generated during the Challenge, and within a fortnight of the jam closing had already established several steering groups to work on particular proposals. A number of quick wins have already been implemented, with other more strategic ideas being considered for longer term investment.

ENERGEX sees the jam approach as a valuable input to its evolving innovation process. "The Better ENERGEX Challenge was a resounding success," says Peter Price, Executive General Manager of NPP division. "Not only did we receive a large number of very high-quality ideas, refined by the group's votes and comments, we also learned a lot about effective staff engagement. The jam process gave our people a chance to contribute constructively to the solution of problems, as opposed to just telling us what the issues are. We learned a lot from the experience; at the level of practical initiatives we can immediately take forward, as well as what's needed to build a truly collaborative culture in our organisation."



positive energy

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