

Why

There are several examples of companies that at a certain point give their workers the freedom to work on whatever project they want with whomever they want, leading to surprising and successful outcomes (rumor is that this is how post-its were invented).

What

Give people a certain amount of time (e.g. a few hours a week, half a day per month or every two months etc.) in which they are free to work with whoever they want on whatever they want. The only condition is that they report on the results (ideas, reflections, improvements etc.).

How

Explain the idea and the concept.

You can decide if people should work on free projects all together at a specific time or if they are free to do so whenever they want.

Also, there is a choice to make between allowing workers to work only with others inside the company or also with people outside the company. We advise the latter if possible. You can allow them to work on business-related issues but perhaps for some of the time also on topics related to the social and environmental engagement of the company.

Find a way to share the ideas developed, e.g. twice a year spend a day or half a day with a department within the organization to share the work that has been achieved in free projects.

Also, decide on how and by whom the ideas will be evaluated and how successful ideas will be formally channeled into the organization for development.

When

When you want more connection and (cross-functional) innovation.

Skills and necessary training

Collaboration.
Initiative.
The ability to make time for free projects.

Possible workshop exercise

Discuss how this idea can be put into practice.
Reflect on: with whom inside or outside the company would you like to discuss possible improvements, a new idea etc.?

Critical success factors

Encourage people to use this opportunity to engage in projects in a cross-functional way (this could be an obligatory condition), but more importantly make the experience challenging, fun and interesting.
To be willing to really evaluate new ideas and to develop them if they are interesting, you have to be willing to make time for free projects and to allocate some resources to them.