

**CASE STUDY**

# LINKLATERS

How Linklaters is transforming partner engagement and client services delivery through collaborative innovation.



# INNOVATION IN THE LEGAL SERVICES SECTOR

Collaborative innovation is well-established as a business practice and standard methodology for companies in industries that manufacture goods or create products – such as automobiles, consumer electronics, or software. However, as today’s business leaders experience organizational disruption and market-changing challenges, the demands of transforming traditional workplaces and adapting to customer needs are common across all industry sectors. Therefore, organizations in services sectors – such as legal, consultancy, and other business services – that previously have not been traditional innovation practitioners are now adopting agile methodologies and scalable innovation tools to keep up with the pace of change and help them adapt to today’s business needs. This case study explores innovation, including programs, culture, and technology at Linklaters, a global leader in delivering legal services and client-centric solutions.

# LINKLATERS AND A COMMITMENT TO INNOVATION

Like many organizations in services sectors, Linklaters has needed to rapidly respond to radical disruption and business-critical challenges including:

- Displacement of the traditional office environment and need for realignment to an agile, digital workplace
- The challenge of adapting to highly competitive conditions and changing client demands
- New workforce demands, whereby professional workspaces and personal environments are intertwined more than ever before
- An inclusive, modern approach to talent management, including hiring, onboarding, and managing new employees



*A Scalable Ecosystem For Innovation Across Linklaters*

To meet these (and other) challenges and to capitalize on new opportunities, Linklaters looks to its rich innovation ecosystem of people, culture, structure, and technology for expert insights and creative ideas.



## INNOVATION PLATFORM

Ideas Pathway



## INNOVATION PARTNER

HYPE Innovation



## SCOPE

31 offices in 21 countries



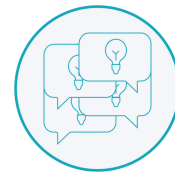
## COLLABORATION FRAMEWORK

Idea Campaigns, Hackathons &  
Competitions



## SCALE

Over 5200 Innovation  
Contributors



## RESULTS

100s of Ideas Implemented

At Linklaters, innovation is a core value in the company's purpose to deliver legal certainty in a changing world. To provide organizational support for its commitment to innovation, Linklaters coordinates its global innovation program through its **Innovation & Efficiency (I&E) Team**, led by Grant Beecham, Sr. Innovation Manager. The I&E Team provides guidance and structure, supported by scalable, user-centric technology, to fertilize and nurture Linklaters' culture of collaborative innovation.

### The I&E Team's role is to:

- Help share and cross-pollinate ideas between practice and office innovation teams
- Identify common themes and solutions that are already in flight in the firm
- Align people and resources to help design or implement solutions

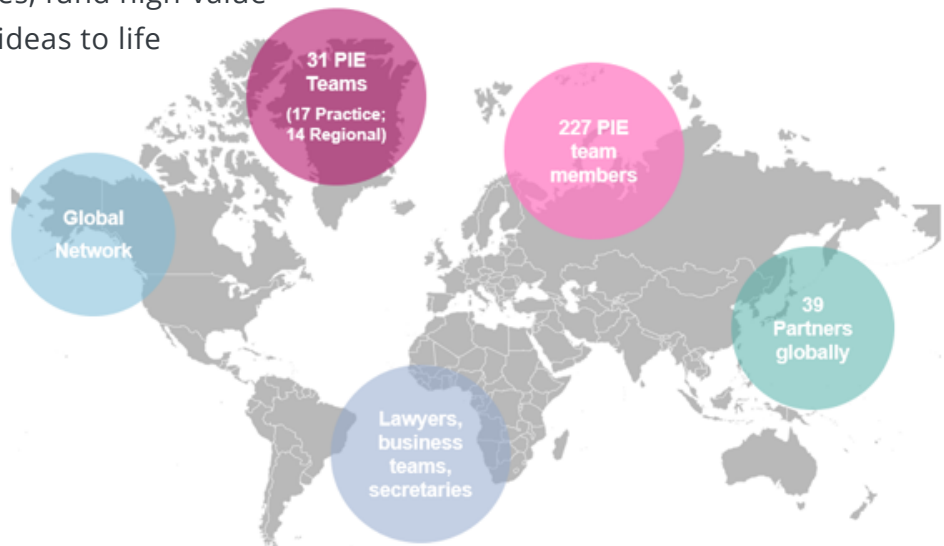
At the center of Linklaters' innovation ecosystem is its Ideas Pathway platform, powered by HYPE Innovation. The Ideas Pathway enables employees to collaborate at scale, capture and share ideas, and leverage best practices across the firm. Building on the firm's strategic decision to leverage market-leading technology, the Ideas Pathway is a global vehicle to communicate senior sponsorship for idea campaigns and a structured, visible process for idea implementation. With the Ideas Pathway providing a reliable, scalable innovation process, the I&E Team can better oversee, guide, and manage corporate-wide innovation initiatives. This structure is an example of a 'utility-style' model for collaborative innovation, enabling better resource management and boosting overall program efficiency.

# AN INNOVATION STRUCTURE THAT DELIVERS STRATEGIC BENEFITS

To foster an innovation culture across a geographically dispersed global workforce in 31 offices across 21 countries, the I&E Team introduced a team structure called **Practice Innovation & Efficiency (PIE) Teams**. PIE Teams are typically led by sponsoring partners who coordinate innovation activities with employees in local offices or practice groups within the region. There is no ‘standard’ PIE Team: the composition of each team varies based on factors such as the nature of work of a practice area or the size of the office. To bring a diversity of experience and perspectives to the table, PIE Teams are ideally composed of at least one partner, counsel or managing associate, junior associate, trainee, secretary, and business manager.

## PIE Team Objectives

- Provide a structure that facilitates ideation, brainstorming, and problem-solving;
- Leverage the Ideas Pathway platform to share and collaborate both within local practice teams and across the firm;
- Improve visibility of innovation initiatives across various teams; and
- Coordinate resources, fund high-value projects, and bring ideas to life



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*Historically, our local practice groups have operated as a ‘culture within a culture within a culture’. Our challenge was to break through barriers erected by a classic organizational structure that is common in legal firms and to re-imagine how we could create a modern ecosystem for ideation and collaboration. The PIE Team structure enables our firm to harness local practice expertise and insights from employees in all functions and all seniority levels – partners, legal services professionals, and trainees. As a result, our PIE Teams are at the forefront in leading our innovation mission, helping us benefit from the cross-firm collaboration and knowledge-sharing in our HYPE-powered Ideas Pathway platform.*

*GRANT BEECHAM, Senior Innovation Manager*

# BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE INNOVATION PROGRAM

Innovation isn't something that emerged reactively at Linklaters to address industry, market, or competitive factors. Instead, innovation has grown organically and in parallel with a firm culture that values client-centricity, human capital development and service delivery excellence. With a leadership team that has long embraced entrepreneurship and innovation, Linklaters invests in both people and technology to support its innovation program. And, also fairly unique in the legal industry – the firm places its values at the very center of its corporate message both for clients and employees.


Providing its staff of 5,200 global employees with a scalable, user-centric innovation platform is a critical success factor in ensuring wide-scale adoption and accelerating employee participation. The Ideas Pathway breaks down traditional organizational hierarchies through idea campaigns that are not limited by role or seniority. Trainees, legal services support teams and departmental staff are all active contributors in submitting new ideas or building on ideas in campaign pipelines. Linklaters also taps into ideas from a wider ecosystem: for example, a hackathon invited students from Western Europe – including 100 participants and 13 teams – to imagine common challenges faced by Linklaters' attorneys and identify potential solutions. Furthermore, Linklaters' inclusive approach is reaping benefits beyond ideation and collaboration outcomes. Potential candidates value the firm's culture of creative thinking, giving Linklaters a powerful competitive edge in the recruiting process.

An important design element of the Ideas Pathway is to provide a 'safe space' for practice teams to 'think behind closed doors' and try out ideas at a smaller scale. With a forum to adopt a 'fast-fail' approach, the ability to test-drive ideas boosts the confidence of idea contributors, facilitates conversations, and accelerates a change-oriented mindset. It was also important for the I&E Team to recognize that not all ideas can or should be implemented, either due to resources and organizational bandwidth or because of a lack of suitability or alignment. By communicating expectations and establishing an open, inclusive culture, the I&E Team can successfully nurture its innovation culture, even in an industry that is not traditionally known for collaboration.

# IMPACT OF IDEA CAMPAIGNS

Linklaters launched its Ideas Pathway in March 2019. Built in the HYPE Enterprise platform, The Ideas Pathways allows teams to run sponsored idea campaigns but also provides open channels for idea contribution. The HYPE partnership was key to the program’s successful start. In the planning phase, the I&E Team worked closely with HYPE’s innovation consultants to incorporate best practice methodologies for design (intuitive, easy to understand) and process. As the I&E Team planned the initial rollout, their focus was not only on learning the platform’s technology and its functionality. One of the biggest benefits in partnering with HYPE has been their approach to help Linklaters understand the behavioral impacts of innovation in the organization: What is the psychology behind online innovation and online collaboration? What is our purpose for the platform? What decisions are behind investing in collaborative innovation?

The first idea campaign was launched in 2019 by Linklaters’ Singapore office and focused on increasing agile working in transactional practices. The campaign was open for idea submission over a five-day period: during that time, the campaign generated 43 ideas with 250 comments, with 54% of the Singapore office employees participating in the challenge. The outcome was recognized as a success and the ideas from this first campaign about new ways of working proved to be invaluable when the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted the traditional office workplace. To address issues in home and work-life balance that arose from the Covid-19 crisis, the I&E Team ran a company-wide Family and Careers Network campaign to share ideas and resources for working parents, including ideas for home-schooling and entertaining their children: the campaign was featured in the Financial Times and The Lawyer.

 **READ** [\*A perspective on agile working during Covid-19\*](#)



# INNOVATION AT LINKLATERS

## APPLYING DESIGN THINKING FOR THE LEGAL INDUSTRY

The Global Legal Design Competition focused on how to reimagine client briefing materials and other legal documents by applying a human-centered approach to design. The initial competition was focused on redesigning the pre-completion memo shared with firm stakeholders before closing an M&A deal. The challenge objective was to produce a document that could be easily read and absorbed by people without a legal background. The outcome: this user-centric, design thinking approach is now widely adopted across the firm, incorporating client feedback in a continuous innovation cycle. To date, the campaign has generated 46 ideas for redesigning documents, including Linklaters' trainee offer letter and client newsletters.

## CAPTURING VALUABLE INSIGHTS FROM NEW EMPLOYEES

By encouraging trainees and new employees to contribute and share ideas, Linklaters embeds the culture of innovation almost from day one at the firm. Tapping into fresh insights from trainees is leading to novel approaches and innovative programs. One highly visible outcome is the successful launch of Linkubator: a trainee-led podcast about legal technology and innovation:



**LISTEN**

<https://www.linklaters.com/en/insights/thought-leadership/innovation/linkubator/linkubator-podcast-series>

# INNOVATION AT LINKLATERS

## LEVERAGING BEST PRACTICES, AVOIDING SILOS

The Global Capital Markets Channel launched a high-value initiative that didn't focus on generating new ideas. Instead, the goal was to share ideas already implemented in one of the local practices, minimize the occurrence of practices innovating in silos and boost overall collaboration. PIE Teams created a channel in the Ideas Pathway exclusively for ideas that were currently in use. Each PIE Team picked their top three ideas, selecting ideas that could be used within the practice, resulting in 81 'best practice' ideas from 649 contributors. As an outcome of the campaign, this channel is now always open to as a 'best practices' pathway to cross-pollinate ideas.

## DRIVING STANDARDIZATION, EFFICIENCY, AND AUTOMATION

This campaign focused on process improvement, tapping into the collective intelligence across the firm with an aim to gather ideas relating to productivity, efficiency, and standardization. All employees were invited to contribute, and the challenge invited ideation on topics such as:

- Are there tasks being undertaken that are prone to error, are high in volume or repetitive?
- Is there anything being done currently that could be automated, simplified, or even eliminated completely?

With over 65 ideas contributed to date, the campaign is a successful example of how service organizations can leverage collaborative innovation to improve business and operational processes.

# ACCELERATING ENGAGEMENT, DRIVING CULTURAL CHANGE

However, more fundamentally, the Ideas Pathway is a valuable agent to transform conversations within and across global practices and to accelerate cultural change across the firm. Linklaters has always internally embraced the value of critical thinking, questioning existing processes, and reimagining client service delivery. But this foundational thinking about innovation was hard to scale beyond individual ‘innovation champions’. Individual practices were mini-cultures and ecosystems of themselves, with differences across practices in operations and their processes.

Now the Ideas Pathways facilitates engagement on a larger scale, bringing the possibility of having conversations with everyone across the firm.

With a design focus on simplicity and ease of engagement, idea campaigns can be easily launched by the PIE Teams. Campaign sponsors are provided with a playbook to communicate and introduce challenges. Intuitive, user-friendly tools within the HYPE platform ensure campaigns are easily accessible to contributors. By removing geographic, organizational, and technology barriers to collaboration, ideas are surfacing more freely and reaching the right people who can take action.

One concern of the I&E Team early in the program: the potential to generate high volumes of ideas without the ability to manage them. Consequently, success metrics for the innovation program aren’t solely measured by the volume of ideas submitted in the Ideas Pathway. As Beecham explains, “Our objective isn’t necessarily to generate large quantities of high-level ideas, but instead to generate a manageable amount of high-quality ideas that can be moved through the evaluation, selection, and implementation pipelines.”

## HOW LINKLATERS BOOSTS EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AND FACILITATES AN INNOVATION CULTURE

Senior sponsorship highlights the value of innovation to the firm

Open channels encourage participation at all organizational levels

Intuitive, easy-to-use Ideas Pathway platform reduces technology adoption barriers

Inviting trainees to participate enforces an innovation culture from day one

## LOOKING FORWARD, A FUTURE-READY MINDSET

As Grant Beecham observes, “Our strategic commitment and programmatic approach to innovation is a unique differentiator for Linklaters. We see this time and again in discussions with clients. Corporate legal professionals are often not contributors to traditional innovation. Clients are impressed by our success in utilizing a campaign-based approach to transform legal services and processes. They recognize the consistency and cohesiveness of our legal team – how we operate under ‘one banner’ and see results in the form of outstanding service delivery.”

As well as the centrally-driven innovation strategy, the individual practices have been forward-looking themselves. In July 2018, the M&A practice brought in Greg Baker, a senior associate with 10 years of transactional experience, as the firm’s first Innovation Lawyer. Greg has acted as a facilitator of innovation activities within the global M&A practice, a translator between technology, innovation and other teams and the practice, and has driven initiatives using design thinking, process improvement, automation, and cutting-edge technologies. Since then, the firm has added other innovation lawyers to strengthen that productive bond between the practices and the I&E Team.

In the pipeline for future innovation initiatives, Beecham would like to use the platform to engage directly with clients. This could be envisioned through collaboration with clients’ legal departments and in-house counsel and would leverage Linklaters’ expertise to offer ‘innovation as a legal service’. In this model, Linklaters could run idea campaigns through the Ideas Pathway on a client’s behalf: for example, to reimagine legal workflows, introduce new legal technology, and modernize legal documents.

Linklaters' strategic commitment to innovation is resulting in a fundamental transformation in the firm's approach to developing the next generation of legal professionals. The firm engages closely with trainees and new employees to encourage and nurture an inclusive, open environment of collaboration in a digital-centric workplace. This mindset aligns with an overall shift in the legal industry as firms adapt to disruptive and changing workplaces. To attract and nurture talented, young legal professionals, Linklaters provides an ecosystem that embraces new ways of working and development of diverse skills. This includes support to explore emerging areas of law, the freedom to allow new employees to work on specific areas of interest, and the use of innovative, legal technology.



*More than ever before, organizations are realizing the potential impact of online programs for their workforce, especially with the rapid user adoption of digital collaboration tools by remote and home-office employees. Now, they are considering how online programs can be extended and scaled to support the business as a whole, both within the organization and externally with clients or partners. We are seeing increasing numbers of organizations establish programs where 'Collective Intelligence' is a utility that supports the full range of business needs, specifically when insights and teamwork are required from more people than can fit in a room.*

Colin Nelson, Chief Consulting Officer, HYPE Innovation

Linklaters is seeing an evolution in its approach to innovation. The focus is less about finding disruptive, high-impact ideas and instead pivoting to how to leverage the Ideas Pathway to tap collective intelligence across the firm, with innovation being an outcome in some scenarios. This federated approach is helping Linklaters achieve operational benefits such as process improvements, cost optimization, and improved service delivery: standard, valuable efficiency goals for service-oriented organizations. By nurturing an innovation culture, supporting an agile, inclusive workplace, and continuously innovating client services, Linklaters is well positioned as a leader in the legal industry both for today and the future.

## EXPERT ADVICE FOR INNOVATORS

- 1** Fund your innovation champions: Provide structure, resources, and innovation expertise to support implementation of high-value ideas. Linklaters' innovation structure, with a central team supporting regional or local practices, enables innovation initiatives to scale across the organization efficiently and cost-effectively.
- 2** Communication, communication, communication: This is all about managing people's expectations about the purpose and outcomes of innovation campaigns. Be clear to participants about what you are asking for, why you are asking for their involvement, and what will, and won't, happen to their ideas.
- 3** People and Structure = A Successful Program: By bringing the right people into your innovation team and building a scalable structure to facilitate engagement, you will generate benefits beyond 'classic' innovation. The result is a scalable process that drives collective intelligence as a utility across the organization, with innovation being just one of the outcomes.

# Linklaters

## **ABOUT LINKLATERS**

Linklaters is a leading global law firm, supporting and investing in the future of our clients wherever they do business. We combine legal expertise with a collaborative and innovative approach to help clients navigate constantly evolving markets and regulatory environments, pursuing opportunities and managing risk worldwide. Our 5,200 people, of which almost half are lawyers, are located across 31 offices in 21 countries. In order to offer our clients the highest quality advice, our lawyers across three divisions; Corporate, Dispute Resolution and Finance, specialise in industry sectors as well as practice areas.

## ***HYPE*** ***INNOVATION***

## **ABOUT HYPE**

HYPE Innovation is a global leader in innovation ecosystem management software and services. With HYPE, organizations can engage employees, customers, and partners in strategy building, idea and partner management, and innovation project management. Our client community includes global companies such as Airbus, AkzoNobel, ConocoPhillips, Deutsche Post DHL Group, Fujitsu, Mattel, Merck, Nokia, PwC, Saudi Aramco, Siemens, Toyota, and UNICEF.



## **CORPORATE HEADQUARTERS**

HYPE Softwaretechnik GmbH  
Trierer Straße 70-72  
53115 Bonn  
Germany

Phone: +49-228-2276-0  
[www.hype.de](http://www.hype.de)

## **NORTH AMERICA OFFICE**

HYPE Innovation Inc.  
485 Massachusetts Ave.  
Cambridge, MA 02139-4018  
USA

Phone: 1-855-GET-HYPE  
Email: [info@hypeinnovation.com](mailto:info@hypeinnovation.com)  
[www.hypeinnovation.com](http://www.hypeinnovation.com)