



The SOQ Climate Tool

The story of how one company increased customers and morale by improving their climate for innovation.

Charlie Widdows is a co-founder of Solverboard, an open innovation business based in Bristol, UK. We worked with Charlie, fellow co-founder Phil Atherton and the Solverboard team running a two-day innovation workshop.

“Much of the following interview concentrates on what Charlie and Phil decided, following the workshop, and how they’ve worked with the team to improve climate and performance in the subsequent months.

Rob: In November 2016, we worked with you, and looked at the SOQ results for your team. The overall results were very good, but not for Idea-Time.

Charlie: I think this is the conundrum of a business trying to run before it can walk. We have so much to do, but we were finding ourselves spending our lives chasing our tails and fighting fires... Our problem pre-workshop, was that we weren’t giving ourselves time to think...



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One of the things that helped me think differently about this was working with an advertising agency. The people there are very protective of thinking time. And what we're trying to get to with Solverboard is just that: you go into a branded space, and you recognise people, and this becomes a 'place to go'. We'd been guilty of not creating that place to go for ourselves.

Rob: So, since the workshop, what have you done to change what you wanted around time for developing ideas?

Charlie: First, we realised that, like with any start-up, there's a hell of a lot to do. Solverboard is built on some principles for its effective use: leadership involvement and leaders leading. Phil and I decided, at Xmas 2016, to give ourselves more time to think and to weigh up our options.

We also realised that our people are always thinking about the work anyway... There were three key learnings: you're always 'on' — so it doesn't matter if you're not always present. Which was very liberating and took the pressure off, massively. Second, realising that we can't do everything, and things won't fall over and break. Third, we considered how to apply these points to the team and the workspace.

Rob: And how did you do these?

Charlie: ...We said to each other that we'd aim for a better balance. And we told the team this. We said that: in order to do your best work, find a balance.

But before this, we looked at roles and responsibilities... So, we implemented more focus and structure through clearer roles and responsibilities... Which meant they could self-govern.

It also meant that we could employ people better than us, in their area of quality. Plus it created a relaxed, friendly, working environment where they want to come to work. This gives people the freedom to achieve their work, in their own way...

Rob: So, 9 months later, after the climate measurement, what difference do you think it's made so far?

Charlie: First, it's made a difference to Solverboard's success. We're increasing users and revenue month by month. All parts of the engine are working well. Also, the office environment has improved. We work with other business in our building, and they notice our climate and morale. We have a fortnightly meeting to share what we're doing.

People look forward to the Solverboard part of that. We're a two year-old company, and working with some fantastic clients. All of these things have happened because the environment reflects our business, and there's a gentle hum of activity to say: all these constituent parts are working in harmony."

This interview is an extract from Dr Rob Sheffield's book *How Leaders Learn to Boost Creativity in Teams*, published by World Scientific © 2019 reproduced with kind permission.

Note: The Situational Outlook Questionnaire® (SOQ) provides a snapshot of your organisation's climate for change across 9 dimensions.



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