

CHAPTER 27

Selling Ideas Within the Organization

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ABSTRACT

Both employees and managers are encouraged to spot problems and suggest improvements and ideas that could boost organisational performance. But even when this is strongly encouraged, many ideas don't go farther than the discussion or brainstorm in which they are born. An idea is not sufficient to guarantee improvement; an idea must be communicated effectively, accepted and put into action to create value. In an organisation, the term selling ideas implies that people share their ideas with other people inside the organisation to get them to understand, support, and adopt the ideas. The internal idea selling is a key component in the effectiveness of management that is analysed in this article. Rather than viewing the practice as manipulation or political manoeuvring, it is seen as a relational, ethical and strategic process that is built on trust, credibility and working towards the organisation's objectives. The article takes into account organisational behaviour, persuasion theory and research on issue-selling in exploring how ideas do flow through organisations, why resistance is a normal and expected reaction, and how managers and professionals can (legitimately) influence decision-making. It is because the ability to build shared understanding, inspire commitment and to create collaborative action lies at the heart of lasting managerial effectiveness, and is not something that can be achieved through authority, intelligence or technical skill. Internal idea selling, in turn, becomes a key skill in organisational sustainability and a vital tool for personal growth.

Keywords: Idea selling; Internal persuasion; Influence; Organisational change; Managerial effectiveness.

1.0 Introduction

In complex environments, where the business landscape and technology are highly competitive and constantly changing, contemporary organizations function.

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To succeed in these circumstances, it is not only necessary to have a good strategy and the right mix of resources, but an ongoing “stream of ideas. Staff are expected to be creative, to spot inefficiency and to suggest ways of overcoming it. The analytical thinking, problem solving and innovations are one of the key competencies emphasized in management education. When they leave the classroom for the workplace, however, many people find they cannot simply sit down and decide on ideas; that’s often a disappointing finding. Even the most creative ideas don’t always get any further than conversation. Organisations are not simply rational systems where the most rational idea is embraced. They are social systems that are developed according to human actions, feelings, human relations, power systems and the development history of the society. Logical and evidences are not only important to make decision; trust, perception of risk, personal interest, organizational politics can also influence the decision. Ideas that are technically stronger, then, might not be successful if they are not presented well or are presented in an inappropriate context for the organisation.

Internal idea selling is the deliberate attempt to convince people of the importance and feasibility of a proposal and to encourage them to adopt it. It happens at all levels, from lower level staff making operational changes, to senior management making strategic changes. It’s essential process which is underrated. Many workers are reluctant to be active in promoting their ideas as they think that good things should sell themselves. This is impossible. People don’t usually act on the basis of their knowledge of what to do, and formal authority is rarely present. The key to getting results is persuading, cooperating and being credible.

2.0 Idea Selling as an Organisational Reality

The article explores the internal idea selling as a natural and necessary process of the organisation, and takes into consideration its ethical, relational and strategic aspects. When the managers know how ideas move in organizations, why they are likely to be resisted, and how persuasion might be used appropriately, they can be more effective, encourage new ideas and help themselves professionally.

The sale of an idea is never a single event or a formal presentation within an organisation. It is an ongoing process that takes place in meetings, informal communication, correspondence, presentations, and chance encounters. Often times decisions are made long before they are officially sanctioned, because advocates and informal supporters – along with a shared understanding – can make the difference as to whether a proposal takes root.

The research on issue-selling has confirmed that people can be responsible for directing attention towards certain issues or opportunities and can present them within a frame that will appeal to decision makers (Dutton & Ashford, 1993). Proposals that are

presented in the context of efficiency, competitiveness, sustainability and/or strategic advantage are much more likely to be accepted and advanced (Dutton et al., 2001).

Organisations are constrained by many factors, such as time, resources and competing priorities. Necessity of making decisions between alternatives involving trade-offs and risk, so ideas compete with each other. That competition favors proposals that are clearly communicated, strategically and persuasively, and leaves others aside for various reasons despite their technical merit. That is the reason that some flawed ideas fly and better ones do not. It's not the same as acknowledging that it is an organizational reality and accepting that its also a form of idea selling. It is not about the human element of decision making, however. Individuals make evaluations based on their own experiences, duties, and fears; understanding others' perceptions, adjusting messaging to them and establishing trust is the basis of successful idea selling.

3.0 Resistance and the Human Response to Change

It is human nature, a part of organisational life, to be hesitant to embrace new concepts. Resistance often meets a legitimate concern of risk, responsibility and resource distribution. The old and familiar rely on routines and systems that deal with complexity and uncertainty, while new proposals break the routines and add uncertainty.

This emotional attachment to current processes further contributes. Users may feel like a system they have created is theirs and a new proposal could be interpreted as a criticism of the old system rather than a change that will improve it. Responses are also influenced by the organizational history which leads to scepticism arising from previous failures, rejected projects, or previous disappointments and by employees' reasonable doubts that a new proposal will be successful in bringing about improvement or that it will simply be a repetition of past mistakes (Ford et al., 2008).

Knowing this, managers can take an approach to selling ideas that isn't irritated, but instead patient. Effective advocates talk with and listen to the people they represent; respond to any concerns; provide evidence; build credibility. It takes time and patience: building influence requires the establishment of trustworthiness over time, by being consistent and competent.

4.0 Persuasion, Influence and Credibility

Idea selling from within is about persuading and ethical persuading does not involve any coercion, manipulation, and only self-serving motives (Cialdini, 2009).

Within organisations, credibility is very important. If they perform well, with reliability and integrity, over time, they are trusted and their proposals are seriously

considered. The process of selling an idea starts well before the formal presentation: everyday behavior, teamwork and competence will create the attitude with which a pitch will be presented. The way a proposal is worded is also important. Solutions to a known problem in an organisation are more convincing than personal preferences. The chances of a proposal being accepted are significantly increased when it is tied to real-world results, such as efficiency gains, cost savings or customer satisfaction or competitiveness improvements (Heath & Heath, 2007).

Persuasion also is much about the timing. Proposals are more likely to be accepted when the planning, review or organisational change process is in motion, rather than at other times. The same idea, proposed in a stressful, distracting, or overload situation, gets a lot less done. Internal idea selling is therefore as much about emotional intelligence and being attuned to the situation as it is about the merits of the idea.

5.0 The Contribution of Idea Selling to Managerial Effectiveness

Influencing people is very important to the effectiveness of the manager. Very few managers implement ideas by themselves, they rely on teams, peers and senior management. No matter how well designed, programs and initiatives are not successful without support.

Internal idea selling can help foster commitment, not just compliance. Commitment means it is done well, sustained over time and owned by those responsible for it, compliance means it is done. When staff feel positively about an idea, they put in more effort, get over the hurdles that pop up and help it to thrive in the future. Idea selling also promotes innovation. Organisations that don't support sharing of proposals get stagnated and may stagnate. Managers encourage communication, legitimate persuasion and collective problem-solving to ensure that innovation is woven into everyday work, not an isolated effort. In the business world people who are successful at internal idea selling are often considered leaders. Earning visibility and credibility by way of substance and not self-promotion, and the influence gained over time fuels professional development and higher strategic responsibility.

6.0 Ethical Dimensions of Internal Idea Selling

Ethics has been the key in the practice. There is no exaggeration, deception or hidden agenda in the legitimate idea selling. It focuses more on the benefits for both parties and the well-being of the organisation, and it is necessary that proposals are presented accurately, relevantly and sensitively to those affected. Manipulative tactics might win a battle, but ultimately lose a war as they undermine trust and weaken relationships. Efforts to

build trust have been breached and further proposals have increased challenges. Ethical persuasion creates long-lasting credibility, facilitates teamwork and maintains a culture of ongoing improvement. Persuasion is also an act of listening; listening ethically. The act of selling an idea is not a one-way street; it involves being sensitive to reservations, willing to tweak a proposal, understanding other points of view, and taking on board other feedback. This type of collaboration helps to enhance decision making and fosters better relationships within an organisation.

7.0 The Influence of Organisational Culture and Leadership

Organisational culture sets much of the tone for the reception and penetration of ideas. In open, talkative, and psychologically safe cultures, internal idea selling is more likely to take place as there is no perceived risk of judgment, criticism, or reprisal by colleagues from even advanced ideas (Edmondson, 2019). These cultural norms are set and upheld by leaders. Leaders who listen well, encourage discussion and recognize contributions let people know that contribution is important and internal idea selling is seen as a positive and collaborative process, not politics.

On the other hand, punitive cultures, cultures that are unable to learn, cultures that are defined by hierarchy, they all stifle the exchange of ideas. Staff leave, innovation becomes less, and organisational learning decreases. Therefore, a culture that is conducive to experimentation, thinking about risk and constructive debate is essential for the ongoing success of organisations.

8.0 Challenges in Selling Ideas

Several difficulties recur. They can be exacerbated by hierarchical structures because they do not want to offend their superior or to look like they are being self-serving. It takes confidence, resilience and reflection to overcome these challenges.

It is natural for organisations to experience rejection, and good advocates view rejection as a learning moment and not a personal failure. Constructive feedback enables people to further adapt their proposals, enhance their communication skills and expand their influence in the future. Peer support, deliberate practice and mentorship each contribute to developing these capabilities.

9.0 Practical Approaches to Selling Ideas

There are a number of strategies that help people wanting to further ideas within an organisation:

- Building credibility and proven expertise – this is the foundation to all that comes next.
- Presenting proposals in terms of the organization's objectives and priorities so that they are immediately evident.
- Knowing the audience, their interests and what they are interested in, and modifying the communication in keeping with these values.
- The receptivity increases significantly when the moment has arrived for a proposal (strategically) and that is done.
- Practicing patience, empathy and active listening, that combine to foster trust and collaboration that are the basis of acceptance.

10.0 Conclusion

The success of ideas in an organisation is a key element of managerial effectiveness. In today's organizations influence is more important than status; communication is more important than the formal role. This article has considered the internal idea selling process to be an ethical, relational and strategic process that requires trust, credibility and convergence with the mission and goals of the organisation.

Unlike manipulation or political manoeuvring, good idea selling is focused on creating understanding and lasting commitment. Ideas will not gain acceptance, they will be accepted when people believe in them, recognise their worth and put in effort to make them a reality. Resistance is a natural phenomenon, and managers need to address it with understanding, patience and strategic positioning.

Managers need to be able to develop ideas as well as implement them in a constructive way to sustain effectiveness. Persons who develop and promote ideas ethically and effectively make more contributions to the success of the organization and to their own development. Organisations with open communication, ethical persuasion and a supportive culture are more innovative, more effective at making decisions and more likely to grow sustainably. Now, the sale of ideas in an organization is no longer an option but an essential to both organizational and individual excellence in a dynamic business environment.

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