

How to Avoid 'Idea Resistance'

Innovators
Assemble



Paul Taylor,
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Assemble panel, tells us just how
organisations can find ways to
avoid innovation.

Getting traction around good ideas is one of the biggest challenges would-be innovators face in organisations.

That's because many of us , sometimes without realising it, close down ideas from others. And, if those ideas are potentially disruptive to established practice or ways of working, you will almost certainly encounter even more resistance to change.

Over time organisations have developed numerous tools to kill off ideas. Here are a few!

1. **Have a meeting about it**

Meetings can crush ideas. Putting your freshly hatched idea in a meeting room is asking for trouble. It's only a matter of time before someone says: "That sounds good in theory, but what's the business benefit?" or even... "We've already tried that." Meetings are the best place to shoot down the person who is trying to generate new ideas.

2. **Take it to a manager**

The middle layers of organisations are responsible for managing the business (keeping the wheels turning and not rocking the boat). Innovation (inspiring new thinking and taking risks) is often seen as trying to mess with 'success'.

There is evidence too that managers can undermine employee creativity through interference – changing goals and getting over involved when they should just steer clear.

3. **Suggest the idea is 'escalated'**

Most hierarchical structures are uniquely designed to ensure that any decent idea never goes near the top table. Any idea that emerges closest to the customer has to work its way up through a series of managers, any one of whom is likely to veto it. As David Burkus points out, research suggests that there is often a cognitive bias against new, innovative ideas – a 'hierarchy of no'.

The higher an idea moves up the chain of command, the more likely it is to be rejected, as the people furthest from the ideas source will have a lesser understanding of its potential value.

4. **Ask For A Report On It**

Once you've written a report about an idea, it's no longer an idea. It's a project.

That will attract all sorts of project management attention, far too early. As soon as the Gaant chart appears it's time to pack up and go home.

5. **Ask To See The Data On It**

'Data fixation' is an innovation killer. The trend towards having an evidence base for absolutely everything removes the gut instinct from your idea. Measuring things too early means you constrain experimentation. And experimentation includes the possibility, the high probability even, of failure.

It's not necessary, or even possible, to completely remove these idea killers. But 'knowing your enemy' and developing strategies to avoid these pitfalls, will boost your capability for innovation.

We can protect ideas by building up our evidence base of why we should give something a go. The more you've thought about it the more persuasive your idea is, especially if a group of people have worked on it together.

In my experience I've found it can be useful to follow these three steps:

Idea Selection

Most of our organisations don't suffer from a lack of ideas, they suffer from a lack of process that identifies the ideas worth having. It's not an idea problem; it's a recognition problem.

Perversely, the answer to unlocking creativity isn't to go looking for ideas – but to go looking for really good problems. If you can articulate the problem you've solved, people are more likely to buy into what you're doing.

Idea Deployment

Having the idea is the easy part. An idea without execution remains simply that—an idea, a paper exercise, no more impactful than a passing thought. Come up with a hypothesis - something that is easily testable.

For example, "If a workplace provides pastries and snacks, employees take fewer breaks to go off site." Break things down to the simplest possible test. Spend less time talking about 'What would happen?' and start demonstrating 'What happened'.

Idea Extermination

Your ideas might be wrong, even when your instincts are right. Knowing when to let go is vital. Innovation is all about discipline in the creation and implementation of new ideas that create value. If ideas are allowed to live too long they can become zombie projects. Successful innovation is as much about stopping things as starting things.

To support innovation, we need to create a climate that protects early stage ideas and become comfortable existing with ambiguity.

Rather than just being highly efficient killers our organisations need to become better at idea selection, deployment and extermination.

There's lots more to come! Hear more tips about getting buy-in and taking people on an innovation journey in the first ever Innovators Assemble panel on 3 April, at 9.30am. It's part of your DIN membership and you can book [here](#).

