

Business Idea Champions Where Do They Come From?

by Phil Phillips, PhD
Contributing Editor
phillips@chemarkconsulting.net

CHEMARK has found that ideas can be forthcoming from many different sources in business organizations. Ideas can be generated for example, from both within the organization itself, as well as outside the direct confines of the organization.

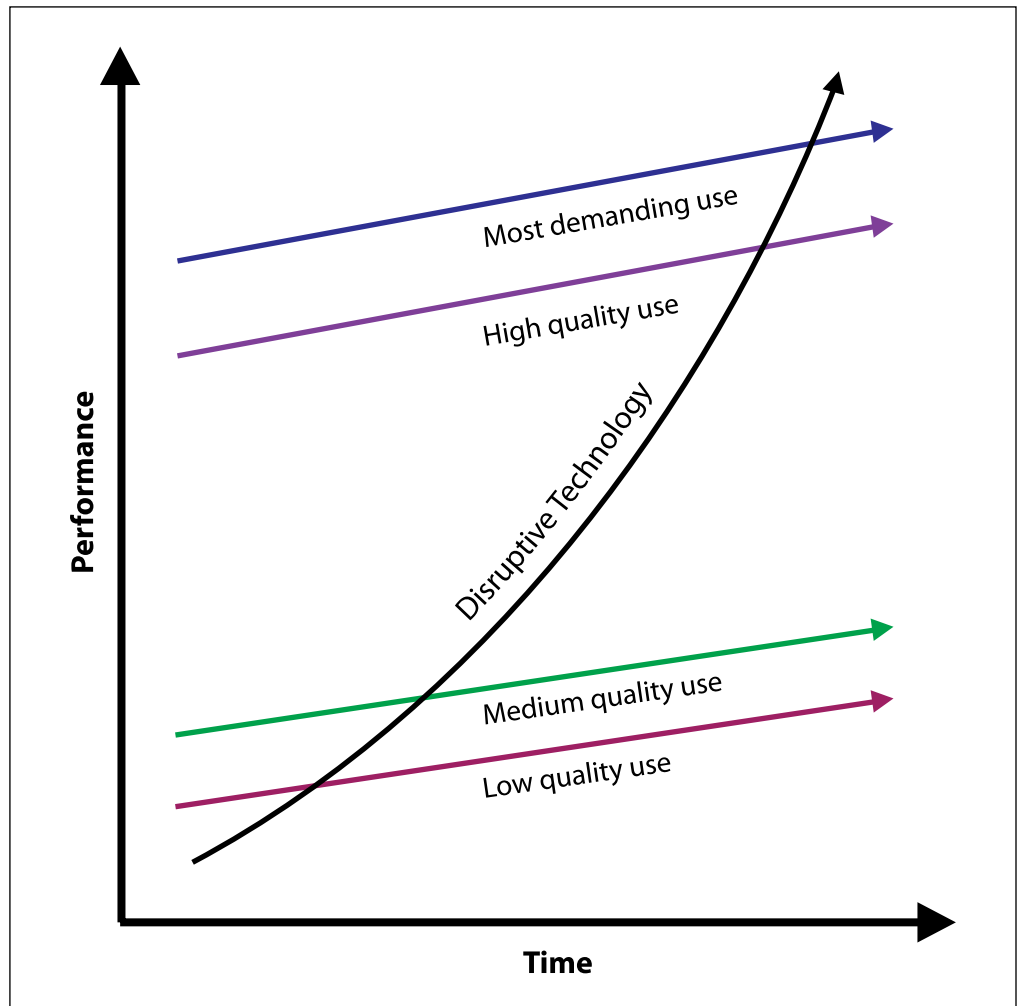
- Within the organizational entity
 1. Top management
 2. Middle management
 3. Labor

4. Sales Persons

- Outside the organization
 1. Customers
 2. Distributors
 3. Consultants
 4. Application suppliers

These idea sources are not uncommon and most of you are saying that you are aware of these sources and many of you have utilized these sources with relative success. However, there are two constraints in effectively utilizing these sources routinely and . . . successfully: The two constraints are:

An Idea Champion is a person who, once learning about the Idea, catches the vision of its tangible and intangible possibilities.



“Technological shifts cause problems and opportunities. Where would the coatings industry be if EPA had not been creating a ‘push’ for its change?”

- Effectively capturing the ideas and communicating same and,
- Finding an effective Idea Champion.

We will address only the Idea Champion in this article. What is an Idea Champion? Why is the Idea Champion important? Where can an Idea Champion come from?

An Idea Champion is a person who, once learning about the Idea, catches the vision of its tangible and intangible possibilities for the organization and either has now or has been given, the authority to proceed. An additional key attribute the Idea Champion must possess is an emotional attachment to its theme. Ideas can be generated, catalogued, prioritized and assigned for promotional follow up, but without the Idea Champion who sees the unique possibilities of the idea and provides the initiative and emotional promotion to fuel its flight, it many times, will fall far short of its potential even though the idea is in fact good for the company.

Initiative to consider a broad array of Ideas is usually aligned with a disruptive change in the business environment. We find this especially true when our industry has faced technological shifts that are disruptive to their normal way of doing business. Although most times less dramatic “shifts” occur that must be dealt with, here are some major event examples in the coatings industry:

- General metals segment rapid adoption of dry powder coatings starting in the early 1970s.
- Automotive and other major segments moving rapidly into electro coat starting in the mid-1960s.
- Plastic substrates taking significant

share from metal causing a coatings technology shift starting in the mid-1970s.

- UV coatings replacing lacquers and 2K coatings for two-dimensional plastic and wood substrates starting in the early-1980s.
- EPA pushing for less solvent emissions starting in the early – 1960s.
- Nano technologies changing (disrupting*) coatings applications and markets. - 2007

Technological Shifts Cause Problems and Opportunities

Where would the coatings industry be if EPA had not been creating a “push” for change? Without this directive our industry would certainly not have expended nearly the resources and converted to other coatings technologies without a market to accept them . . . an unmet need. The technology broadening we saw starting in the late 1960s and early 70s ushering in new coating systems such as, powder, UV/EB, e-coat, high solids and water-based were a direct result of a technological disruptive shift need created by a “third party” in the coating industries environment . . . EPA.

As suggested, these “shifts” are many times subtle and much less obvious than the ones thus far discussed. Subtle shifts can produce some of the neatest opportunities for those who both recognize them early as well as a willingness to act quickly to establish a “champion” to expedite its movement. Subtle “shifts” can be advantaged and momentum gained without showing your hand early, thus creating an opportunity for successful pre-emptive strike position prior to other suppliers getting their act together to compete.

*A disruptive innovation is an

innovation that helps create a new market and value network, and eventually goes on to disrupt an existing market and value network (over a few years or decades), displacing an earlier technology. The term is used in business and technology literature to describe innovations that improve a product or service in ways that the market does not expect, typically first by designing for a different set of consumers in the new market and later by lowering prices in the existing market.

In contrast to disruptive innovation, a sustaining innovation does not create new markets or value networks but rather only evolves existing ones with better value, allowing the firms within to compete against each other’s sustaining improvements. Sustaining innovations may be either “discontinuous” (i.e. “transformational” or “revolutionary”) or “continuous” (i.e. “evolutionary”).

It has been our experience that when projects fail it is usually characterized by the absence of a volunteer champion.

Some companies sponsor “idea champions” by providing free time. 3M is an example of this type management style. Within large companies, “idea champions” go by various names and include, but not limited to, advocate, change agent or entrepreneur.

Within smaller companies an “idea champion” could be the entrepreneur owner, the founder, a consultant, the next generation of family ownership, etc.

Ideas can be generated at anyplace along the supply chain of a company, both inside it as well as outside the company proper. These ideas can be captured and prioritized by members along this supply chain. However, an idea can only be “championed” effectively by someone within the organization itself. **CW**