ISSUE SELLING TO TOP MANAGEMENT

Article authors: Dutton, Jane E. Ashford, Susan J. Have given a detailed described the process of Issue Selling and its significance to both the organizations and the individuals involved. They have shown how important the process of issue selling is for both organizations and individuals.

The stages of issue selling described in the article are actually irrelevant to most people who champion issues and attempt to sell them. The reason for this is that most people who undertake issue selling do not do so on a formal level, but tackle their problems with only a casual understanding of the implications of their actions. Most of these casual sellers do not even realizing that they are selling issues, these sellers do not go through the formal stages of developing their issue but still manage to accomplish their aims using intuition and common sense. The steps documented in the article are simply formalized names for concepts and practices that a manager with good communication and persuasive skills would undertake when they are attempting to sell an issue. All the steps and practices can only go so far as to convincing top management of an issues importance and in the end it is up to them whether to buy the issue or not.

If issue selling is a significant factor for organizations does that then mean that it is an area that organizations and individual managers need to take care to become fluent in the skills of issue selling?

An organization that invests in training primarily devoted to issue selling, either to give individuals the tools to make their issues more attractive. Or ways for top level managers to ignore issues that are shown to them, defeats the entire purpose of the issue selling process in the first place. If either party (individual or the organization) has control over success of the selling the balance will be upset between the buyers and the seller so that only the organization or the individual benefit instead of both.
In one case an individual with control over the success or failure of the sale of an issue has too much power for their station, and could be influencing top management to make the wrong decisions. An individual will normally be most concerned with their own development and progression. Of course an individual is also limited inside the organization that they exist in so sabotaging the organization to further themselves can come back to haunt them.

Whereas an organization that does not buy any issue is ignoring a huge resource in its middle and lower level management and adding to the workload of its top level managers if the organization is to continue to be successful. Organizations that place to much emphasis on issues that are relevant to the success of the organization as a whole and not individuals in it will fail similarly.

The study of issue selling is purely academic because to find better ways to sell issues does not help either the individuals or the organization become more successful. The process of issue selling is divided between the organizational goals and individual goals.

The point to investigating the intricacies of issue selling in organizations is not to develop more potent issue selling techniques but to transfer the knowledge gained into other areas that use similar persuasive techniques that are involved in issue selling. The Three perspectives for describing issue selling discussed in the article reflect how issue selling study benefits other areas:

- Social Problem Theory, shows that from backtracking issues to their foundation we can see how a problem is initially identified.
- Impression Management, is a study of the effects of issue selling on individuals and the organization, and delves into the area of how an individual prepares for issue selling in the interests of social studies and the interactions of people in an organizational setting.
- Upward Influence, eventuates with a series of influence strategies that lower level individuals use to attempt to sell their issues, these strategies are transportable and can be useful in other ventures.
These three areas are where the real gains from investigating issue selling lie, since each of these lines of investigation leads to techniques and information that is also useful in other areas.

Issue selling is very important to organizations because it allows top management to spread its awareness down the chain of command, and can let the middle level managers be instrumental in the development of the organization itself. Overall the article is an excellent source for an individual looking to investigate issue selling themselves but a poor resource for an organization to draw from. It serves as a guide to evaluating an issue and the actual selling of an issue giving any reader who takes not an increased chance of success when selling their issues. It is up to the individual to decide which issues are worthy of this increased chance of success as even an unworthy issue could succeed if delivered expertly, possibly causing organizational level problems.

**Bibliography**

Dutton, Jane E. & Ashford, Susan J. (1993), "Selling issues to top management", *The academy of management review*, vol. 18, no. 3, July, pp.397-428 (Original article)