

Are you limited by false assumptions?

When I develop strategies with divisional and departmental teams, one of the most common mistakes teams make is to discount radical options too early. Believing that the potential solution will be unacceptable to their bosses, and won't fit in with the corporate agenda, the team kill the idea at birth.

These beliefs and assumptions may be based on some reality, or just team members' general perceptions. They are damaging, however, if they stop a great idea from seeing the light of day.

What's more, the downturn has changed attitudes and beliefs in the boardroom just as they have on the shop floor. Your assumptions should be tested before being accepted as fact.

For example, I recently worked with a commercial team who were considering options for growth. One of the options was a more radical change to pricing strategy (link: <http://www.netmba.com/marketing/pricing/>), which appeared to move away from the corporate pricing policy.

When the head of the commercial team tested this option with her CEO, she found that her ideas mirrored the latest thinking in the boardroom. As a result she is now piloting her strategy with a view to roll out later this year.

If you feel that you have a radical, but exciting alternative solution, here are the steps to take:

1. Discuss the idea early with your senior stakeholders to gain their feedback, thoughts and challenges
2. Position the idea within a range of options. In the end it may be a combination of these original solutions that creates the best way forward.
3. Set out the idea's benefits and risks objectively so that a balanced discussion is generated
4. Articulate the ways in which you can reduce the downside of the proposal. For example, my client is testing the new pricing strategy in a specific area of the business before making a decision on wider roll out.
5. Remember that your job is to come up with the best possible solution for the business. Others will seek to make compromises along the way soon enough; you don't need to do that for them.

Proposing radical ideas requires courage as much as it requires analytical insight. Going against the organisation's generally accepted ways of working – whether real or imagined – may not be the easiest way forward. But if your idea can benefit your organisation it is the right thing to do.