Pitching Innovation to the C-Suite
Intrapreneural Thinking Hats

THE CMO HAT
Chief Marketing Officer

What's the target market?
How does it overlap with existing markets for your company?
What kind of channels and communications would be required?
How does your idea fit with the existing brand(s) and reputation?
What would a failure mean for existing brands, and how can you mitigate reputational risk?

THE COO HAT
Chief Operating Officer

How might this idea integrate with existing processes, systems, and workflow?
How might it align with, and/or impact, the culture?
What core competencies are leveraged, and what new competencies need to be developed?
What resources would be required to develop the idea, and later to implement it? Will any other part of operations suffer or be enhanced by people working on your idea?

THE CFO HAT
Chief Financial Officer

SHORT TERM
What would the next steps cost?
What are you really buying with that investment?
At the beginning you'll often be learning and experimenting; think about framing those efforts as expending resources to acquire valuable knowledge.

THE CEO HAT
Chief Executive Officer

Does your idea fit with the long term direction of the company?
Does it affect (cannibalize/help) existing markets, or open new ones?
Does it make the company a better company?
What's the max potential of your idea, at scale?
What do the huge successes and huge failures look like?

THE CLO HAT
Chief Legal Officer

What are the relevant laws and regulatory frameworks?
What are the risks?
What are the legal unknowns?
If you're successful, will anyone be mad enough to sue?
If you're unsuccessful, could anyone get hurt?

THE CTO HAT
Chief Technology Officer

How do you know your idea is feasible?
What technology will you need to buy, borrow, and/or invent?
How will your idea or operations fit with existing products or systems? What expertise are you missing?

LONG TERM
What might the costs look like?
What might the upside look like, in savings, revenues, or improved productivity?
What non-monetary resources would need to be committed?
It’s said that an entrepreneur must “wear a lot of hats,” and it’s true. Founders of small companies are managers and salespeople, strategists and marketers, visionaries and numbers people all at the same time. As time goes on, the most successful founders start taking giving away those hats to new employees of the growing company. They get a salesforce, a full time accountant, some middle managers, whatever the company needs. Sometimes, it can be difficult for founders to relinquish control and give up these hats, to trust others with a part of their creations. Other times, shedding day-to-day responsibilities to focus on only the most important issues can be a great relief.

The results of those entrepreneurial journeys become the context in which intrapreneurs must begin their efforts. At big companies, intrapreneurs live in a world where most people only “wear one hat,” so to speak, where labor is highly specialized and often compartmentalized. As the “founder” of an idea, you’re not forced to fill every job and play every role. New ideas still need to be considered from every angle. Walt Disney once said, “When we consider a new project, we really study it—not just the surface idea, but everything about it.” That’s what intrapreneurs need to do as well.

One of the most common laments of intrapreneurs from their early days is being blindsided by a question. It could be an engineer getting asked about a revenue model when pitching a technology change or it could be a marketing person getting asked a question about regulatory frameworks when trying to reach a new group of customers, but intrapreneurs will have to answer many questions from outside of their area of expertise.

Remember all the hats your company’s founders wore at first then gave away? To be a successful intrapreneur, you’re going to have to put those hats on yourself. You don’t have to wear them as “role hats” all the time and do every job, but you DO have to wear them as thinking hats.” At big companies, you’ll encounter people whose full time job it is to just think about legal and regulatory issues. You’ll have people who only work with numbers and money. You’ll have people who only deal with technology. You’ll have all kinds of specialists, and you’ll need to be able to talk to them and—eventually—convince them.

Before pitching your idea, think about it from the perspective of the “big chairs” in the C-Suite. Through what lenses will the most powerful decision-makers in your company view new ideas? Hopefully the following framework will help prepare you as an intrapreneur to have those early conversations without being blindsided.

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**Instructions**

Each of the following “hats” represents a hypothetical executive in your company. Not every title will line up exactly with your company’s leadership team, but whether or not you have a Chief Marketing Officer, for example, the questions about marketing will need to be answered.

Said another way, it’s somebody’s job to think about these issues. This isn’t a guide for how to pitch specific people, but rather, how to be prepared for the kinds of questions you can expect from corporate executives, many of whom are in specialized roles and responsible for seeing the company from one specific angle.

Finally, consider this a starting point. You know your own company, so we encourage you to build on this model. Modify questions and add perspectives based on the kinds of issues you know your company