Fear, Uncertainty And Doubt [FUD]

Idea In Short

Fear, uncertainty and doubt (abbreviated – FUD) is term that describes a strategic attempt to influence perception through unfavorable opinions and speculation. In the business setting, a firm might engage in FUD tactics to discredit a competitor's product by by disseminating negative, dubious or false information.

FUD is an intentional tactic of rhetoric and fallacy. For ages, sales and marketing professionals have used this tactic to dissuade customers from considering a competitor's products. As a result, customers might wrongly perceive the competitor's product as inferior in quality, though facts may prove otherwise.

Amdahl Corporation

Though usage of the term - FUD – goes back to early 1920's, the current definition is attributed to Gene Amdahl, who left IBM in 1975 to found his own company, Amdahl Corporation. He used it to describe the fear, uncertainty, and doubt that the IBM sales people were spreading to their customers who might be considering the competitions products. The competition was Amdahl.

> FUD is the fear, uncertainty, and doubt that IBM sales people instill in the minds of potential customers who might be considering Amdahl products.

IBM

The saying used by IBM was:

> Nobody ever got fired for buying IBM equipment.

Open source advocate Eric S. Raymond, author of The Cathedral and the Bazaar, sums up FUD as:

> The idea, of course, was to persuade buyers to go with safe IBM gear rather than with competitors' equipment. The implicit coercion was traditionally accomplished by promising that Good Things would happen to people who stuck with IBM, but Dark Shadows loomed over the future of competitors' equipment or software. After 1991 the term has become generalized to refer to any kind of disinformation used as a competitive weapon.

SCO Unix

Another example of FUD is a famous case initiated by a company called Santa Cruz Operation [SCO]. SCO attempted to extract rent from all Linux users. It claimed that Linux included code that they owned. Hence, everyone using Linux had to be worried that SCO would soon come after them with substantial financial claims. SCO also took IBM to court over this matter. SCO did not disclose any code publicly, hiding behind the fact that they disclosed it all to a judge. This regrettably limited their ability to disclose it publicly. However, in February 2005, Judge Kimball ruled that SCO has presented no evidence to back up their claim, despite trash talking IBM in public for two years:

> Viewed against the backdrop of SCO's plethora of public statements concerning IBM's and others' infringement of SCO's purported copyrights to the UNIX software, it is astonishing that SCO has not offered any competent evidence to create a disputed fact regarding whether IBM has infringed SCO's alleged copyrights through IBM's Linux activities.

Fortunately, while this attempt to discredit GNU/Linux was unwelcome, it certainly lead to significant due diligence to ensure there was no risk to GNU/Linux.

Tips for consultants

Acknowledge FUD

Pretending fear, uncertainty and doubt don't exist creates further anxiety.In the Choiceology episode titled, A Bundle of Nerves, Professor Alison Wood Brooks recommends thinking differently about the physiological and mental symptoms that you're experiencing. The academic term for this is re-appraisal / re-framing 1. Re-framing your anxiety in a positive way is great. However, it's unrealistic to assume that you personally don't experience FUD.

Involve people

As a consultant, here is a mnemonic that helps you understand the definition of fear. It is:

> **FEAR - F**alse **E**xpectations **A**ppearing **R**eal

In the absence of real information, people make things up. To avoid distractions and client stakeholders' personal perceptions of the reality, engage in as many conversations as you could. Proactively engage across the board. Don't wait until you have figured everything out. It is better to over-communicate than make room for misinterpretation through under-communication. Talk with people, accept where they are and realize that change is a process. Give your clients the assurance and coaching, if required. More information will give you the information superiority and confidence required to catalyze change.

Insecurity

Clients hire consultants to solve specific business problems, add value and ultimately provide a service. As a consultant, if you are not solving their problem or adding value, then your clients let you go. Hence, consultants tend to be insecure overachievers. This is also the main topic of the book titled, Leading Professionals, by Cass Business School's Professor Laura Empson. We all want to do our best and if we feel we are still not doing well enough to keep the client business, then something is not working out. Losing a prestigious client doesn't look good for the consultant's career. This is, perhaps, the main reason why high-flying consultants are their own worst enemies. The pressure cooker environment at top Management Consulting firms may cool in future.

Embarrassment

As a consultant, you are in that client engagement because of your knowledge in that area. Yet, there are instances where you, despite your best efforts, don't have the answer. In my

opinion, that's OK as long as you can gracefully handle the situation. I can recall several instances in my consulting career where a silly question de-railed me. With my peers and superiors expectantly looking at me for an answer, I felt embarrassed. Experience has taught me to probe the client further for underlying constructs in handling such situations. I'm sure that many consultants fear embarrassment and will go lengths to avoid this situation.

Inferiority complex

This fear is closely related to imposter syndrome that affects many consultants. As consultants, we are hired to provide value beyond what the client's employees can deliver. By design, you will never have all the knowledge or experience to tackle your clients' challenges. As a consultant, you have an area of expertise that the client seeks. You may need time to figure out what your niche is, but you'll eventually get there. In the meantime, focus on the value you bring to your clients' businesses. If your client that wants something that you cannot deliver, reach out to peers, Partners / Senior Managers and enlist their support to fill your gaps. There's no shame in that. As long as you have the motivation, the right attitude, and a good set of tools on your side, you are good to go.

Failure

You're in the consulting profession to make it to the big league. You're in it to win it. As long as you take pride in the work you do and set out to provide a truly high-value service to clients, there isn't much to fear. That said, if circumstances beyond your control should lead you down that path, have a backup plan to cover you until you get back up again.

Summary

As a consultant, when leading through change, FUD is part of the process. Involve people early and often through communication. Conduct frequent townhall sessions as required to permeate change. People better absorb and digest complex messages as during change, if they hear them several times. If possible, paint an optimistic vision of the future, both for the business and their individual careers. Provide a holistic experience of the change. Acknowledge that FUD exists and help your client stakeholders through the change process. Overcoming FUD factor is a crucial skill of leading change for consultants as change

catalysts.