

Art of Procurement Podcast Transcript

Episode 165

Articulating Procurement's 'Brand Promise' to the Organization w/ Chandar Pattabhiram

Philip: [00:00:30] Hi there, and welcome to today's Art of Procurement interview powered by SIG. I'm your host, Philip Ideson. Today's show is part of a mini-series of six different episodes that I recorded all live at the recent SIG Fall Summit. And this being a live recording, you'll be sure to hear some background noises from barista's making coffee to venue employees taping wire to the carpet. Lots of different little noises in between. We actually had a booth set up in the main corridor of the conference venue, so you are sure to get the atmosphere from the event from those interviews. And so, for this mini-series, I'm actually going to jump straight into the conversation. You'll hear me introduce the guest as we get going with the conversation. So, with that being said, let's roll the tape.

[00:01:20] Welcome to this episode of The Art of Procurement. I'm joined here at the SIG Fall Summit in Carlsbad by Chandar Pattabhiram. I think is... As we said, people like Pele and Bono go by their first name, we'll just go with Chandar. I think that's easier for me to pronounce. Welcome to the show Chandar.

Chandar: [00:01:37] Thank you Philip. Thank you for the Rockstar introduction, by the way. I appreciate that.

Philip: [00:01:40] No. I really appreciate you joining me. You're a pretty recent to the procurement function. What inspired you or motivated you to jump into this world that we all inhabit?

Chandar: [00:01:51] It's a great question. You know I've been with Coupa as chief marketing officer for about five weeks now. Before that I was chief marketing officer for a company called Marketo which was the leader in the digital marketing domain and I've been in other companies before that. But really when I looked at it when I left Marketo and when I looked at the Spectrum I felt that these two kinds of companies that are relevant today and companies that are directly associated with money and companies that are directly associated with how you make a revenue, how you earn money, and so too is how you spend money. And those are very mandatory companies as opposed to discretionary span. And as a result, I felt that just like Marketo was very much on the revenue cycle, Coupa is intrinsic to how you spend money in managing/tracking all aspects of spend management. And I felt that that category was ripe for growth and disrupting the traditional technologies in the space. That's what excited me a lot and that's why I'm here.

Philip: [00:02:43] Yeah. Well, welcome.

Chandar: [00:02:44] Thank you.

Philip: [00:02:45] I think it's only been a few weeks since you joined, right.

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Chandar: [00:02:48] It's about five weeks.

Philip: [00:02:50] What's your first impressions?

Chandar: [00:02:52] Yeah. I think it's good. It's really good. I am impressed with... I'm at this conference, my first conference in the industry. I'm impressed with the number of brands here. Great great great companies here talking about all their success stories and some really tangible metrics. We at Coupa pride ourselves in this whole concept of value as a service but it's about tangible value and metrics. I see a lot of great brands today. We have Capital One for example, talking about the specific metrics with them. We see a number of other great brands here talking about their metrics. So that's interesting for me. The other aspect is that there seems to be this mindset of we need to take procurement sourcing from yesterday's procurement to tomorrow's procurement going from a tactical function to just an easier function. This seems to be a mindset and then we just need a playbook to go make that happen. And that seems to be there today.

Philip: [00:03:47] No, I think... That's maybe synonymous with events like this as well there are where people who either are reading that change or want to be part of that change really here to learn a little bit more about what others are doing and kind of get inspiration from others because there is that move, and I see there are more and more organizations. They want to take not just the journey from tactical to strategic but then how do we actually break down the barriers of what we thought were possible before.

Chandar: [00:04:09] Totally.

Philip: [00:04:10] Because there's a wall that we kind of set ourselves up and say business partnering is everything we want to be but is actually something beyond that around innovation and supply markets and things that we can bring even more value. So, it's kind of seeing what the art of possible is even.

Chandar: [00:04:24] Totally right. Totally.

Philip: [00:04:25] I'm interested with your experience from your marketing side or the marketing hat on. As a CMO, you've obviously interacted with procurements in your past, not necessarily asking you to name names but as a stakeholder, perhaps what are some of the things that you look to procurement to do for you as a marketing stakeholder but also maybe some other things that we could improve on.

Chandar: [00:04:46] No, I think you know... I'll talk about two aspects of it. Maybe I'll talk about how does procurement elevate itself in an organization. That's kind of one

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part of it. Two is how does procurement help marketing and do better in these two aspects of it. So, we're kind of thin slices and talk about the first part of it.

[00:05:04] You know going back to the point we just made about going from tactical to strategic procurement from a marketing perspective is you think of everything as a brand. Right. And I think of everything as a product. Like... just like we take Apple takes iPhones to market, Coupa takes their product spend management cloud platform to market. Think of every procurement executives looking at it saying I want to take my procurement function internally to market as a product. Think of it from that mindset. So, you're thinking about how do I market it internally. How do I start talking about the value of it as opposed to all the activities? It's one thing to say that I saved money which a lot of people talk about but talk about more strategic value of procurement in terms of driving agility to the organization, driving competitive advantage for the organization, and then driving the visibility span, the visibility compliance, control all those pieces that come along with that that a CFO cares about as much as you know saving money which a procurement person could talk about, right.

[00:05:57] So, procurement as a brand, I would say think of it as a product and say how you would take it to market and have the mindset that you are the brand owner of this product. How do I start talking about the value as opposed to what we do? Right? You know I have this saying that people buy candles not because they like candles but because they want light. It's about the value. So that's on one side of it.

Philip: **[00:06:18]** So, if I could just ask before you talk about marketing specifically. What are some of the pillars or some of the building blocks or foundational pieces if you will that a CPO listening to this could actually put in place to start building a brand or to start thinking about their positioning or to think of their stakeholders. There's a good community as a tribe that actually want to be involved in what you are doing.

Chandar: **[00:06:41]** This question...

Philip: **[00:06:41]** That's what you're doing on the outside.

Chandar: **[00:06:44]** Totally. Like in any brand, as a marker, you look at what's your brand promise in your mission statement. So, I would look at every CPO and say as my function... I mean for example I was talking to a CPA of Pierre Chang's. Very strategic, a great guy. And the company is an awesome Coupa customer. And the question is how do I look at that and treat it as what's my mission statement, what's my brand promise, internally to my customers and stakeholders and drive? What are the set of metrics I'm going to measure myself as strategic success as opposed to just using the traditional mindset of save money, save

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money, etcetera. So, that is the foundational fabric for me to say define your internal brand promise, define the big strategic metrics for success, and find joint wingmen. Be a joint wingman or wing person with the CFO to say, "What are the metrics that a CFO cares about and closely aligned with that." I would be... I would say as a starting point; how do you establish your internal brand or product within the company.

Philip: [00:07:33] And so, onto the marketing side of things. As a stakeholder, what are some of the things that we could do to help you... or if somebody is listening again who is trying to build a relationship with their marketing stakeholders to help them manage their marketing spend. What are some of the things that they can do?

Chandar: [00:07:48] Yeah. The two aspects for me is agility and visibility. Right? You know some of the traditional technologies I've used -- I was at IBM and other companies before that for whether it is doing purchase requisitions or whether it's doing you know all the purchasing paper or other procurement paper, the agility has not been there. And one of the some of the new technologies for example that excited me, and I used to Coupa and Marketo was the agility. And when I say agility it is you know -- as Rob Bernstein, the CEO of Coupa has a great line which says that "the best UI is know no UI" which means bring information to the point of action that you already are in. Like if I'm using email as my primary system of workflow approved collaboration bring that here. Don't force somebody into that. So that gives me the agility. I could be sitting here in this conference right here and I have a purchase requisition approval on my email, I hit a button and I'm done, right. I'm not going to log in to some poker or something like that. So that agility piece is important for me. The second is the visibility of the CMO saying "I really want to quickly look at the fact that house what percentage of spend is under management for me. How is these lies? How is that dice? Who's not spending in my department? That's as important for me than money is going to get wasted on a budget. Having that tractability, I feel that... I would selfishly say as a user of Coupa before than a marketer of Coupa that was those things that the agility and the visibility was very beneficial for me.

Philip: [00:09:13] As a CMO, and this is probably a very broad sweeping statement, but did you really care about saving money particularly? What other objectives did you have that we as a procurement enabling function for you or a service or product, when we talked about procurement being a product, what could we focus on that helps you do your job?

Chandar: [00:09:34] I think you know saving money is a good thing, first of all you know. They're all saying a dollar saved is a dollar earned, right. So, let's not...

Philip: [00:09:41] You need to be responsible.

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Chandar: [00:09:42] You have to be responsible for it, right. That's important. But you know in the Maslow's hierarchy of importance diversity, I'm always kind of on the lower side of it, right. And that's why even in Coupa, we don't talk about saving money as a primary brand promise. Yes, we have a number of companies saving money and we talk about maximizing the value of every dollar spent on an organization. Right? All organization spends. Savings is one... it's not taking a dollar and making it 60 cents. It's taking a dollar and say can I buy a dollar and fifty worth of value for that same dollar. So, thinking about that is one thing, strategically thinking. And then, going back to what's important for me as CMO, ultimately marketers in any organization care about competitive advantage and how do you beat the competition. How do you end? How do you drive efficiencies in such a way that you are agile as an organization to be competition? So, creating processes and making sure that those processes are very agile, and correlating spend management ultimately with indirectly driving advantage to an organization is something that a marketer would value over time.

Philip: [00:10:48] Final question because I know we've got to start to wrap up just by the nature of the sessions that we have here at the event today. I do have to know what excites you about where procurement is going as you've been kind of getting new stuff emerged in what procurement... the direction that we're going and perhaps some of the opportunities that exist for us as a function.

Chandar: [00:11:07] Yeah. I think you know... It's an interesting question. If I Google Earth that, as I like to say kind of look at it on the top, I think the concept of smarter software driven tool tribal intelligence and tribal patterns is something that is very interesting and exciting to me. Specifically, for example if you take Coupa, it's one thing to have intelligence of the software at a specific application level, whether using a procurement or an invoicing or an expenses application. It's also an odd thing to have intelligence at a sweet level but meaning across the intelligence having intelligence to tell users what to do proactively at a combined sweet level.

[00:11:51] But the most important thing here is you can leverage at a tribal community level. Right? And that to me is a game changer as in software specially -- I think Coupa could present the manifestation of the ad is using tribal intelligence and patterns to give/ to be prescriptive to our users on the best course of action to take. In other words, you're taking the collective wisdom of the community to drive the best courses of action.

[00:12:16] I will tell you for us for example we have five hundred and fifty billion dollars' worth of spending going through our system. How do you take the collective wisdom of order into the hands of companies in that span and provide

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prescriptive intelligence to users across a set of activities whether I'm sourcing suppliers, whether I'm approving invoices, whether I'm doing the right requisitions

etcetera? Bringing that intelligence into the function based on community, I feel is where the excitement is. And I feel that that's really -- tribal patterns and tribal intelligence is something that can be very very efficient and game changer for us.

Philip: [00:12:57] It's really interesting as somebody who's been in the profession for a number of years. Probably more than I would like to admit. The idea of community is something that really... the benefit of community whether that's from a knowledge share perspective, whether it's from an information gathering and aggregation of data and as you say kind of pattern recognition. All those things where we start to correct all of the knowledge that exists across everything that all of our organizations are doing today to make us more powerful is something that makes me so interesting.

Chandar: [00:13:28] You know I remember the movie Minority Report, right. They kind of -- I don't know if Steven Spielberg movie where you predict the crime before it happened. It's kind of the same kind of thing is that if somebody you know that there's some expense report is something's going to happen, and I would be proactive about it, be prescriptive about it. But use the community intelligence as the data input to drive those strategic realistic decisions.

Philip: [00:13:51] Chandar, I want to thank you very much for joining me on this shot pod here at the SIG Summit. What I'm going to do is I will link up to the Coupa website and also to your LinkedIn profile so that if listeners want to kind of continue the conversation and learn a little bit more about you, they can do that. Those will be at the show notes for today's episode. That's going to be at artofprocurement.com/chandar. That's artofprocurement.com/chandar. Thank you very much.

Chandar: [00:14:15] Philip, it's a pleasure. Have a wonderful day and enjoy the conference.

Philip: [00:14:17] Thank you very much.

Chandar: [00:14:18] Cheers.

Philip: [00:14:19] Thank you for listening to another episode of The Art of Procurement. To find an archive of all past episodes, you can go to artofprocurement.com/episodes. And to ensure you never miss another show, go to artofprocurement.com/subscribe.

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