



Knoco Newsletter

December 2019

How to market and sell KM in your organisation



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This newsletter covers the issues of marketing and selling your KM initiative within your own organisation.

Like it or not, this is a key part of the role of any KM team or KM champion, and the skills of marketing, influencing and selling will be critical to your success. This newsletter identifies some of these skills and provides you with some guidelines to follow as you begin the task of convincing your staff and management to try Knowledge Management for themselves.

A marketing and selling view of KM implementation

It is a truism that culture change (and [implementing Knowledge Management](#) is a culture change exercise) happens one heart and mind at a time. However, we also need to realize that each individual does not change their heart and mind all at once. There are a number of steps before an attitude is changed (see figure below) and it is worth understanding these steps, as you cannot move an individual more than two or three steps in any one interaction. The steps are these:

- **First Contact** - the first time that the individual hears the term "knowledge management".
- **Awareness** - they become aware of KM as something that may be an issue or an opportunity within the organization.
- **Understanding** - where you help them understand what KM means (in basic terms).
- **Acceptance** - where you help them realise that KM holds value for them and for the organization.

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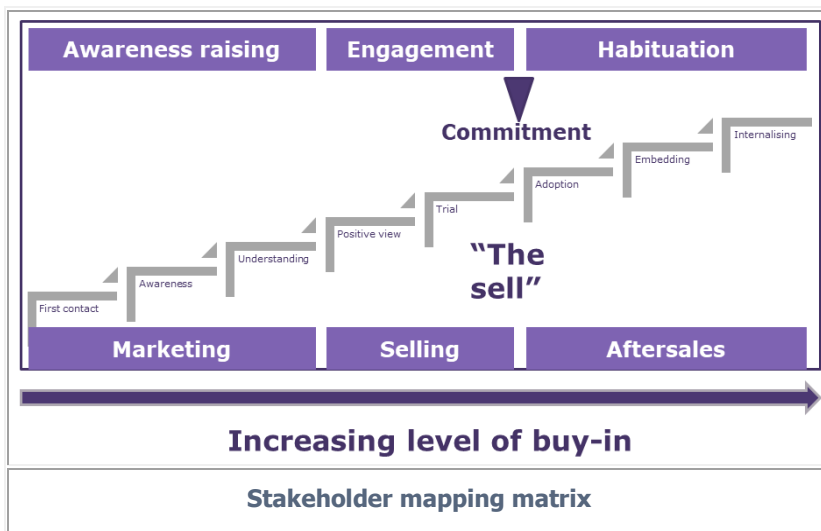
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- **Trial** - the point at which they agree to try KM. This leads to the first commitment threshold - the commitment to act. This is your "sell" - the point at which the individual "buys" KM - at least temporarily.
- **Adoption** - assuming the trial has gone well and delivered value, this is when the individual agrees to adopt KM in the longer term.
- **Embedding into work process** - this is where the individual, team and eventually company embeds KM into work process
- **Embedding into culture** - this is where people within the organization internalize KM as "something we just do." At this stage it becomes a core value.



You can use communication and education to introduce the topic of KM to the organisation, and to help develop a general understanding of the topic. This is **the Marketing Phase** of your KM implementation campaign, and will take people up the first three steps of First Contact, Awareness and Understanding.

However to influence people to see KM positively enough to try it and adopt it, you need to change from general marketing to selling KM to specific stakeholders. This is the **Selling Phase**. Marketing will still continue, but you also need to engage in what we can call Sales activity, namely getting people to commit to KM.

Even when they have adopted KM, your job is not over, and you need to support them through the aftersales activities of embedding KM into their work habits and culture.

[Contact Knoco](#) for assistance with all stages of KM implementation.

The knowledge manager as sales person

If your intent is for your stakeholders to commit to trying KM, you need to move from being an educator to being a salesperson. Sales people often have a bad reputation, based on the conventional idea of product-based selling as persuasion, regardless of the quality of the product or service. However, in KM, we know we have a winning product, of only we can convince others of its value. This convincing is the key, and it is where sales techniques are most useful.

Your effectiveness in implementing KM depends on your influencing and selling skills. You may have designed the best KM framework in the world, but the knowledge workers in your organisation will not beat a path to your door in order to use it. You have to go out and sell it, which means you need to know some of the tools and methods of selling and influencing. Your KM champions, and the enthusiasts in the business, can also be your sales force, so you need to empower them as sales agents to support you, and you need to transfer some of the sales skills to them as well. .

Several of the methods and principles are described below.

Selling on benefits

You first need to understand that your stakeholders do not want KM, or at least they do not want it for its own sake. They only want it for the value it will bring them.

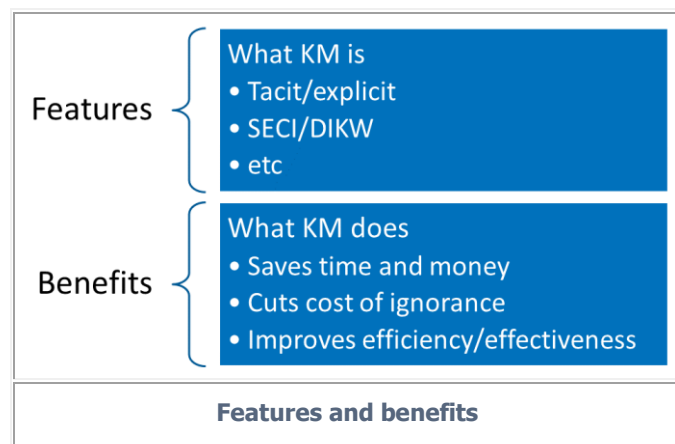
You may know the statement by Harvard marketing professor Theodore Levitt: *"People don't want to buy a quarter-inch drill. They want a quarter-inch hole"* - and they want that hole to put up shelves so their house is tidy. A drill salesman is actually selling the ability to improve your house.

Similarly your stakeholders do not want to buy knowledge management, but they might want to buy the benefits that KM can give them. Infosys Chairman Kris Gopalakrishnan said that "Unless people are able to see and experience the direct benefits of KM, no amount of incentives, rewards or recognitions are likely to elicit sustained enthusiasm, participation and involvement". You therefore need to know what those benefits are before you can start to sell, and find ways in which they can see these benefits for themselves.

It is a common "rookie" sales mistake to sell their product on Features, not on Benefits. A Feature describes a fact or characteristic about a product, while a Benefit is something your customer actually wants; something your product will do for them. For example a vacuum cleaner might have the features of cyclone technology and a lithium-ion battery pack, but the customer only wants to know whether it will get pet hair out of a carpet. If you try to sell on features rather than benefits, the customer

may be totally uninterested. "[Feature-dumping](#)" is a trap salespeople fall into, because it is easy, it makes sense, and they understand, and love to explain, all the technicalities of the product. However it just doesn't work as a sales technique. You have to sell on Benefits.

In KM terms, features might be the whole explicit/tacit discussion, or components such as communities of practice and taxonomies, while the benefits are more efficient working, fewer mistakes, and "knowledge at your fingertips". Test your presentation material for feature dumping - for example how soon do you present examples of benefits, and how soon do you talk about tacit/explicit, or DIKW? If the benefits slides come first, then well done. If the theory slides come first, you are probably feature dumping.



To avoid feature dumping, you need to ask your customer or stakeholder what they are struggling with in terms of knowledge, and so find out what their knowledge pain points are and therefore what value KM will give them. You need to listen carefully to their answers. Listening is one of the core skills of the sales person, and until you understand what they think they need, you cannot sell KM to them as a solution. Listen, don't tell.

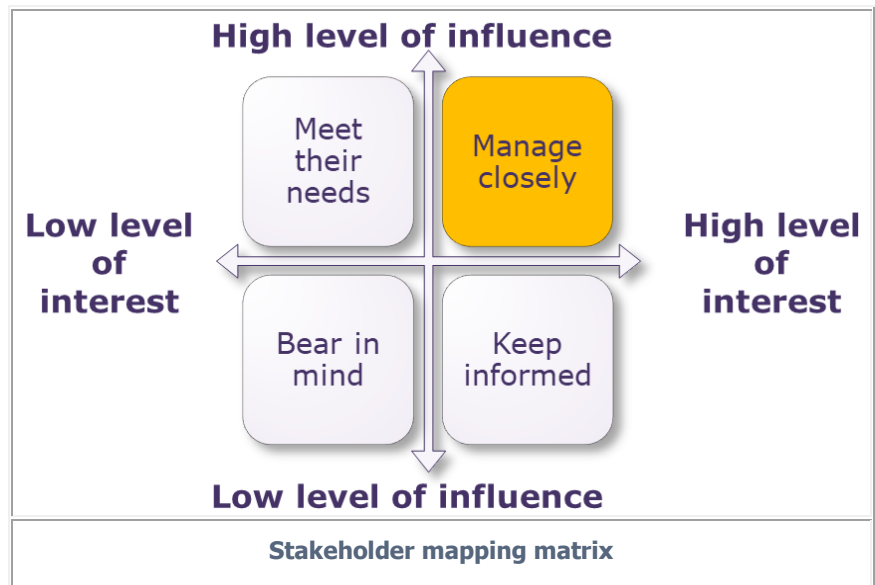
Telling isn't selling. Listen to the customer needs, and sell KM on the benefits it will bring the customer.

[Contact Knoco](#) for assistance on defining KM benefits.

Segmenting your customers

Every salesperson needs to know their market and their customer base, in order to prioritise sales activity, and to identify generic benefits. There are number of ways to segment your KM customers and stakeholder.

You can segment them according to their interest in, and influence on, the KM program, using the plot below. This allows you to prioritise your efforts in the "High Interest, High Influence" segment.



You can segment according to organisational level.

- **The knowledge workers** are a core customer segment. These are the people who use knowledge to make decisions for a living. You need to sell them KM as a way to make better decisions, and to work more efficiently and effectively.
- **The senior managers** are also a very important segment for you, as they will provide your budget and your high-level support. You need to be very clear on the benefits they are looking for from KM, and make sure you can demonstrate you are delivering these.
- **The middle managers** are one of the most difficult segments to sell to. They are the people who make the resource decisions, and who can either free their people to work with you, or can tell them "don't engage with KM, it's not part of your 'real job'". You probably have to sell KM to them individually, and you need to identify the KM benefits that will persuade them to support you.

Finally can segment in terms of level of engagement.

- **About 1 in 5 people instinctively "get" KM** and become immediately enthused, moving rapidly from "first contact" to "positive perception" and

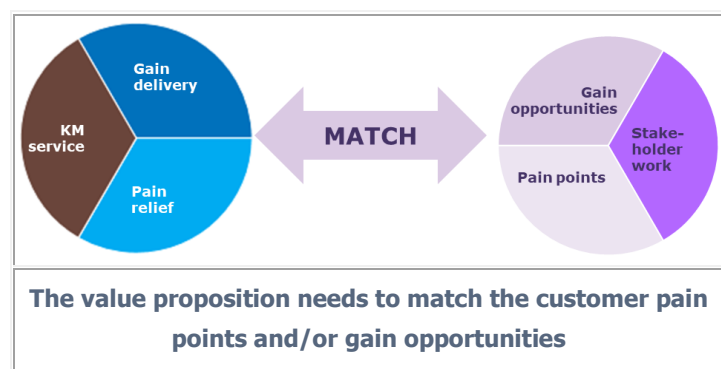
"trial". These people are likely to become your allies, supporters and early adopters of KM.

- **About 3 in 5 people don't care about KM one way or the other.** They will engage in KM if they have to, if it's part of the job, or if everyone else is doing it. Selling KM to them will require a range of influencing tactics described later in this chapter.
- **About 1 in 5 really don't like KM at all.** They think it is a personal threat to make them expendable, or a way of "stealing their ideas". These people will resist KM, unless it is made unavoidable and fully embedded into performance management so that their job prospects suffer if they refuse to share. Leave these "hard sell" customers to the end of your process.

[Contact Knoco](#) for advice on stakeholder management.

Creating the value proposition

The value proposition for KM is a promise of the benefit for the stakeholder, and is the primary reason why the stakeholder will engage with you. The value proposition is crafted from a match between your KM services, and the stakeholder's view of the benefits. As shown below, the Stakeholder has "pain points" (annoying problems) in the way they do their work, or "gain opportunities" where they could gain benefit. The value proposition matches these with pain relief or delivery of benefit. You will craft a value proposition for each of your main stakeholder groups or individual stakeholders.



A great example of a value proposition is from Uber - "Tap the app and the car comes directly to you. Your driver knows exactly where to go, and payment is cashless". A promise of three positive factors that sets Uber apart from ordinary taxis, and which remove three of the main taxi pain points - the driver can't find you, doesn't know the route, and you have to fiddle with cash.

You can structure your value proposition in a number of ways - you can use the structure "Knowledge Management will Help X to do Y through Z", for example

"Knowledge Management will help your people avoid repeat mistakes by giving them easy and quick access to lessons and knowledge from the past". Or you can use the structure "Claim, Proof, Call to Action", for example "Joining the Community of Practice will give you access to knowledge to help you do your job quicker/faster/better. We have already seen that happen in the engineering community, where questions and requests for advice are answered within hours. Would you like to try it and see if it helps you"?

Try writing a value proposition for your key stakeholder groups. [Contact us](#) if you need help.

Influencing techniques

The knowledge manager needs to understand the basics of influencing and persuasion in order to move the stakeholders up the buy-in ladder. The book ["Mind Gym"](#) describes nine influencing tactics you can select from, based on the character and situation of the "buyer". These are described below.

Reasoning - using logical argument to make a compelling business case for KM, which needs to be a case for the individual as well as a case for the company. You need this argument, though people seldom "buy" KM based on logic.

Inspiring - appealing to emotions and creating the vision for KM. You would use this approach when you want to generate emotional commitment to the vision. The inspiring tactic demands conviction, energy, and passion, but is particularly effective with the 20% of early adopters, and often with the most senior managers.

Asking Questions - leading the other person to make their own discovery of the value of KM. This is one of the more difficult tactics to use because it is impossible to know how the other person will respond. You have to be able to think on your feet, but if you can, this is one of the most powerful approaches to use when talking to senior staff.

Cosying Up - Your stakeholder will almost always feel positive toward someone who makes them feel good about themselves, and involves flattering people into trying KM. Don't use this approach when talking to people who are much more senior than you, and when cosying up can look like "sucking up". And don't use it when you don't believe what you're saying. People find it very easy to detect insincerity.

Deal Making - when you promise the stakeholder something in return for their agreement to proceed with KM. Your ability to use this approach depends very much on your confidence and ability to offer something in return. To maintain trust, make sure you deliver on any promises made!

Favour Asking - simply asking someone to get involved with KM as a personal favour. This tactic works well only when the other person cares about you or their relationship with you. If used sparingly, it is hard to resist, but be aware you may have to pay back the favour at some point.

Using Silent Allies (aka Social Proof) - using the fact that others are getting value from KM as an argument in its favour. Social proof consists of sharing stories of people, as similar to your "buyer" as possible, who are using KM and gaining benefits as a result. This is the "voice of the person on the street" you see in TV commercials endorsing a product. The reason the advertisers use this approach is because people are influenced by such stories. On a deep subconscious level, people who are uncertain about the product will use the "person on the street" as an indication that they will get value from the product. This technique works well with the 60% audience segment that doesn't care about KM for its own sake but might be convinced by benefits other people received.



Collect stories and video of successful KM trials to use as social proof

Invoking Authority - appealing to a rule or principle. This technique is one you use late in the roll-out programme to convince the 20% of laggards, once you have the support of senior management, when the KM policy is in place and when KM has become a clear expectation.

Forcing ("Do it or else") The best example of the use of this tactic in KM comes from Bob Buckman, ex-CEO of Buckman Labs, with his statement that "the people who engage in active and effective knowledge sharing across the organization should be the only ones considered for promotion". This is a technique that senior management can use on your behalf, and that may be needed to remove the last few vestiges of KM non-adoption late in the roll-out phase. Obviously this tactic cannot be used until KM has become fully adopted and fully embedded, and when managers and knowledge workers alike are completely convinced of the value of KM.

Viral marketing

The culture change in KM is not top-down or bottom-up, but side to side. People see others getting benefit from KM (the Social Proof mentioned in the previous section) and are therefore more willing to try it themselves. KM spreads from person to person, through example and peer pressure, like a domino effect. Your marketing campaign, once the success stories start coming in, is therefore less like a normal marketing campaign and more like a viral campaign, where the users spread the message.



[Domino, by Bro. Jeffrey Pioquinto, on Flickr](#)

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To use this approach as part of your KM marketing campaign:

- Begin conducting trials and "proof of concept" studies of KM in-house, with your most willing advocates
- When the trial is a success, ask the advocate to tell their story on camera, or on in-house social media
- Record a short YouTube-style video story, along these lines - "This was my problem, I tried KM as a solution, this was the benefit I got".
- Use these videos widely - embedded in PowerPoint, on the company Intranet, in your KM introductions etc., and as part of your KM communication programme.
- Encourage people to share the videos, and other stories of KM value.

Countering the objections

You need to be prepared, as part of your sales campaign, to meet the common objections and push-back you will receive. These include the following. Note how, in

each case, the first response is to seek to understand their issue and not to dismiss it. You cannot counter an objection without fully understanding it.

"We are too busy for KM". Busyness is a pain point, so find out why they are busy and what they are busy doing. Once you understand this, you can begin to explain how KM can help. KM can remove waste time, can help avoid reinventing wheels, reworking solutions, and revisiting old problems. Data from the oil sector suggests it can cut program times by up to 16%. KM is the lazy way to work. As one of my colleagues said "You work surrounded by the knowledge of others. Why on earth would you not use it? It will save money and time, it will make your life easier, and you will do a better job". Basically, if people are so busy, there is no argument NOT to introduce KM. And if they are still too busy to take the time to talk, ask when there will next be a lull, and promise to come and help them never to become so busy again.

"It will cost too much". This is easy to answer - "If you think KM is expensive, try ignorance!" Try to understand the cost concerns of the customer, and once you fully understand these, explain how KM can reduce waste costs associated with repeating past mistakes and failing to capitalise on known solutions. Data from the oil sector suggests it can cut program costs by up to 12%. There are plenty of [case studies of value generated through KM](#); memorise a few of these from contexts similar to yours so you have some real-life examples to show that KM is a money-saver; an investment rather than a cost.

"We tried Knowledge Management. It didn't work". This is a common objection and valid objection. Why try again? What's different this time? First you need to understand what they tried before and why it failed. "That's interesting. Tell me what you tried?....." Maybe it wasn't introduced as a change program, or it was led by a single technology tool, or one of the other top 7 reasons for KM failure. Then you need to be able to explain that you have learned from the failure, that you have learned from successful implementations in other companies, and that it will be different this time.

"It won't work here; we are different". "It may work in Western Engineering companies, but we are different. We are lawyers/non-profit/Venezuelan/Taiwanese/whatever." Firstly you need to understand what is different about the work that they do, and how they currently work with knowledge. Then it is very useful to have a case study of KM working in a similar context, so you can say "It works at organisation X, and they are lawyers/Venezuelans/whatever". However at its heart, Knowledge Management is about how people interact with other people and with knowledge from the past, and all organisations are made up of people. Unless they can argue that their people are really not like other people, then the argument doesn't really stand.

"It will take too long. We need results now". Firstly you need to understand why there is this sense of urgency, and the sort of timescale where they need results. Then you can work out whether there is a short-term KM pilot that can give them quick wins. Tell them they can have both short term and long term. Let's think of some pain points where we can apply KM right now. At the same time work towards the longer-term culture change which delivers the step change in performance.

"We do this already". Firstly you need to ask them what they are already doing, and what sort of value they get from this. Then you can explain what else you can bring, and the additional value this could add.

"It's simple; I will just tell my people to get on and do it". Firstly you need to ask them where they think KM will help, then explain that although it is simple to start, it's not easy to get it to stick. Offer to work with them to make sure that KM is truly used to make the biggest possible difference, and that it works in the long term as well as the short.

KM aftersales

Once the stakeholder has agreed to try, and then adopt, KM, your job is not done. You need to work with them to ensure KM becomes a long term success. If it is, then they will be a vocal supporter, they will play their part in the viral marketing, you can use their story as social proof, and the KM implementation takes one step closer to being a complete success.

You need to be a support for them, answering any issues they may have with KM and suggesting additional ways in which it might help them. Sign them up to the "KM users' community" so they can share their successes with others, and use others to solve any implementation problems. Make sure they are a happy customer as happy customers are loyal customers. Put your internal customers first - before and after sales - and you will succeed.

News from Knoco

[Knoco Australia](#)

Knoco Australia exhibited at the Australian Project Management conference in October promoting Knowledge Management and Lessons Learned In September the ISO

committee for the Knowledge Management standard ISO30401 completed its work on the vocabulary which will be issued as part of the Human Resources Vocabulary document. .

Knoco China

The China KM master WeChat group brought us over 50 Chinese top 500 companies and couple of solid inquiries. We started preparing for the WeChat group about a month in advance. Applying KNOCO's principle of how to run a Community of Practice(CoP), we attracted over 100 people joining our group. After strict assessing, we had about 50 companies joined our KM master group officially as test run. Now every week there are new threads popping up from the Chinese KM practitioners. KMers discuss and share their views, as well our KNOCO's KM masters answer the questions that have been well appreciated. Here I'd like to thank all of our KNOCO masters for your kind support, especially to Cory Cannon from KNOCO US , Fabio Ferreira Batista from KNOCO Brazil, Ian Fry from KNOCO Australia, Nick Milton from KNOCO UK, J.Carbonell from KNOCO Spain, and Javier Martinez from KNOCO Chile.

Knoco Chile

We have participated in Asunción (Paraguay) in the training course "Regional School of Nuclear Knowledge Management" organized by the International Atomic Energy Agency of the UN. From January onward we will be leading 2 different programs. The first is called IKASKUNTZA 2019, launched by the Chamber of Commerce of Gipuzcoa with the aim of helping 4 SMEs to develop their map of critical knowledge and a plan to transfer that knowledge. The Share4value initiative launched by Repsol, Cegos and Chateauforum seeks to create a space to share knowledge between Learning & Development professionals belonging to relevant companies in Spain with a presence in Latin America.

Knoco UK

Nick was recently recognised by CILIP, the UK's library association, when his book "The Knowledge Manager's Handbook" (written with Patrick Lambe) was awarded the Information Print Resource prize.



Nick receiving his award from David Stewart, CILIP president

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