



# **An Introduction to Outcome-Centric Selling**

in complex B2B sales environments

Completely Updated  
**Oct 2020**

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## Why it's time to focus on outcomes

Complex B2B buying journeys are inevitably complicated. Your customer's decision process is rarely straightforward or linear. Multiple stakeholders are involved, often with widely different perspectives and priorities. Without strong internal project sponsorship, consensus is unlikely and without consensus, action is unlikely.

These challenges have been compounded by the current coronavirus epidemic. And yet despite all this, a significant number of customers are still investing in new projects, but only when these investments satisfy three key criteria: the project must be **strategically relevant**, **tactically urgent** and be capable of delivering **rapid time-to-value**.

Today's business buyers need to be convinced that any project they invest in will deliver **worthwhile business outcomes**. This has profound implications for today's B2B sales organisations:

Rather than simply thinking in terms of their sales process, they must also seek to **facilitate the prospect's buying journey**.

They must establish a **consensus for change** before they promote the benefits of their solution.

And they must measure their progress in terms of tangible, measurable **advances in their customer's decision process**, rather than by the activities their salespeople have completed...

## The evolution of B2B sales methodologies

Business-to-Business selling has already evolved through one significant transition - from selling products to selling 'solutions'.

The first era of B2B selling was characterised by a product-centric sales approach that focused on features, advantages and benefits, with little regard for the customer's objectives. During this period, sales training was largely focused on transferring product knowledge and on teaching manipulative sales techniques with an emphasis on 'closing'.

The transition towards 'solution selling' started several decades ago and is characterised by a consultative, problem-centric sales approach that focuses on uncovering and solving customer problems. Most of today's most common B2B sales methodologies, including SPIN®, Challenger, Strategic Selling, Sandler, Customer-Centric Selling and many others can be regarded as variations on this common theme.

Unfortunately, customers buying these so-called solutions often fail to achieve the expected results. And in a world where business customers increasingly prefer to consume things 'as a service' rather than as an outright purchase, the inevitable impact on customer loyalty and on renewal rates will prove toxic for vendors that fail to pay the appropriate attention to customer outcomes.

### An outcome-centric perspective

That's why we - and a growing number of forward-thinking sales organisations and sales experts - have concluded that we need to shift gears again and transition from a problem or solution-led mindset to an outcome-centric approach to selling.

Your customers don't want generic 'solutions' - they expect specific business outcomes

This is not just a minor semantic difference. Today's prospects are not looking for generic 'solutions'. Before they are ready to commit to change, they need to be sure that they are going to achieve the specific business outcomes they are expecting, within their expected cost and timeframe.

If they cannot be convinced of this, they are likely to stick with the status quo. And if they are persuaded to sign up for the proposed solution and yet fail to achieve their expected outcomes, they are unlikely to renew or expand their relationship with the vendor.

## **Focusing on outcomes rather than needs**

It's worth making a distinction between the 'needs' that most solution-centric methodologies encourage salespeople to uncover and develop and the business outcomes that today's customers looking for.

Needs are often expressed in terms of the features, functions or capabilities the 'solution' is expected to offer, and many solution-centric selling methodologies emphasise this aspect of the discovery process. But a potential vendor's ability to satisfy those needs is not enough to guarantee that the customer will buy from them (or that they will do anything at all).

The customer's expected business outcomes are far more significant in influencing their decision whether to change, and if so what to and when. Outcomes represent tangible positive changes between the customer's current situation and a better future state. The achievement of these outcomes is usually the most significant factor in determining whether or not a project has been a success.

## **Decision-makers care about outcomes**

There are other significant reasons why focusing on business outcomes is a far more effective sales strategy than only focusing on needs. Low-level customer contacts often think in terms of needs that must be satisfied. But the high-level executives that typically form today's key project sponsors and economic buyers think in terms of business outcomes that must be achieved.

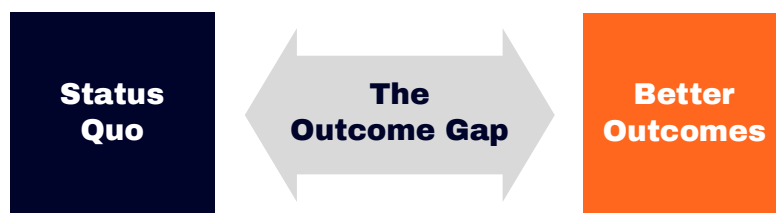
If your current contact is unwilling or unable to talk about business outcomes, they are unlikely to be the decision maker

If salespeople cannot get their current contact to talk about about the business outcomes they are looking for (and why they are important) rather than their functional requirements, they are almost certainly not the ultimate decision-maker. If they aren't able to identify the specific outcomes that they need to achieve, they are probably not very serious about the need for change.

And if by some miracle they do still end up buying from your organisation, if their desired business outcomes are not clear from the start it will be harder for you to prove the business value of implementing your solution. And if you can't prove the business value they have derived from implementing your solution, they are far less likely to renew or extend the relationship - and they will probably never become profitable.

## Stretching the outcome gap

That's why it is so important to focus on the business outcomes your customer is seeking to achieve at the earliest possible stage in your discussions with them. The "Outcome Gap" represents the perceived difference between their current situation and the better outcomes they can expect to achieve from implementing the best possible solution - preferably yours.



When this Outcome Gap appears to be small and stable, the customer is likely to conclude that they can afford to stick with the status quo. But when the Outcome Gap appears to be large and growing, they are far more likely to decide that they need to take urgent action.

Today's most effective salespeople help their customers to recognise the full business impact of the issues they are facing

Today's most successful salespeople don't just focus on discovering the customer's already-recognised needs: they educate the customer as to the full scope of the unconsidered negative impacts of failing to address these issues. And they introduce previously unconsidered issues and persuade the customer that - if ignored - these are also associated with additional significant negative impacts.

They stretch the customer's Outcome Gap to the widest possible extent, and in doing so increase the chances that the customer will decide to take decisive action.

[Follow this link](#) to find out more about the benefits of equipping, enabling and encouraging your sales force to take an outcome-centric approach.

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# Every customer has a unique value story

The primary mechanism for establishing this Outcome Gap is each customer's unique value story. This provides answers to the three critical questions that every prospective customer asks before they are prepared to commit to action:

- Why should they change (*rather than stick with the status quo*)?
- Why should they choose you (*rather than any other option*)?
- Why must they act now (*rather than wait until later*)?

Whenever there are weaknesses, gaps or inconsistencies in the answers to any of these questions, the customer's value story will remain incomplete and the probability that they will decide to take decisive action will decline dramatically.

That's why we place the creation of a customer-specific unique value story at the very heart of our outcome-centric selling system, and why so much of our approach is centred around guiding salespeople to progressively co-create compelling value stories with their prospective customers.

Let's address each of these questions in turn...

## Why should they change (rather than stick with the status quo)?

If your customer is not completely convinced of the need for change, they will probably continue on their current path. The wider the gap between their **current situation** and their hoped-for **better outcomes**, the more they are likely to decide to change direction.

Salespeople have a critical role to play in this: not just in helping the customer to acknowledge that the business impact of the issues they were already aware of is larger than they might previously have appreciated, but also in introducing significant new issues and their associated consequences that the customer might not have previously considered or thought to be relevant.

In complex B2B sales, every salesperson's most significant competitor is almost always the status quo

In addition to progressively stretching this perceived gap between the customer's current situation and better outcomes, salespeople also need to learn how the customer might already have been trying to deal with the issues, with what results, and what obstacles might remain in their way.

Identifying the **obstacles** that are or could be holding them back is an important element of shaping the customer's value story, because if the customer does not anticipate any obstacles along the way, they are likely to conclude that they don't need the salesperson's help.

The last of the four elements of this first part of the value story is the **cost of inaction**. What are the likely costs and consequences of failing to address the issue - and who else would be affected? Unless the costs and consequences of inaction are significant (and preferably growing), the customer may lack the motivation to change.

If the customer is to conclude that they need to change, salespeople have a critical role in amplifying the impact of the outcome gap, the obstacles that currently stand in their way, and the costs and consequences of inaction.

## Why should they choose you (rather than any other option)?

The middle element of the value story (each element of course overlaps with every other element) involves giving the customer confidence that the salesperson is proposing the best possible option for achieving their better future outcome.

That requires that salespeople understand all the **other options** the customer is actively considering, that they show how and why their approach is distinctively different from these other options, and that they manage to successfully translate this differentiation into the promise of provably better outcomes.

It's important to recognise that the customer's other credible options will often extend beyond the obvious direct competitors and may include in-house developed solutions as well as entirely different approaches to addressing the issue, as well as simply sticking with the status quo.

Claims of product superiority are rarely regarded as credible sources of lasting differentiation

Product- and solution-centric salespeople (particularly in technology-based businesses) are often driven to base their differentiation around the claim of better product functionality - but this is almost always a mistake, since these feature-based differentiators are often hard to prove and frequently overtaken by competitive developments.

Competing on the basis of having a distinctively different and superior **approach** generates far more effective, powerful, memorable and long-lasting positioning in the customer's mind than competing on the basis of short-lived 'better' features and functions.

Salespeople need to compete on the basis of simple, clearly articulated themes rather than long lists of dubious product or service differentiators. Their claimed differentiation needs to be encapsulated in the form of a simple phrase starting with "if there is one thing that sets our approach apart, it is..."

And unless salespeople can give the whole stakeholder group the **confidence** that their claimed differentiation will result in clear business benefits and provably better outcomes, they are likely to ignore or discount these claims.



## **Why must they act now (rather than wait until later)?**

Even if - with the salesperson's help - the customer is now convinced that they need to change and even if the salesperson has persuaded them that their approach offers them their best option, they still need to convince the customer that they need to act now, rather than later.

Any significant investment in a new project is likely to go through some form of final approval process. It is likely that some of those responsible for final approval will have had little prior knowledge of or involvement in the project.

It is probable that some members of the approval group will be asking a variation of the following question: "why do we need to do this now?". If the response is not clear, even an apparently well-qualified opportunity can fall at this final hurdle.

That's why salespeople need to work closely with the executive sponsor of the project to ensure that the **internal business case** reflects the customer's investment approval criteria and makes a compelling case for proceeding with the project.

Final approval depends on confidence in the decisions the customer is being asked to make

Gartner's latest research highlights the critical importance of decision confidence in the customer's final approval process - confidence that the need to change is real, confidence that the best option has been chosen, and confidence that action is urgent.

This needs to be supported by **credible evidence** - in the form of existing customer testimonials, user references, case studies, third party research and so on - that gives the prospective customer confidence that their better outcomes will actually be achieved on time, within budget and with the minimum of disruption.

## A progressive process - and a collaborative exercise

The crafting of each customer's unique value story is inevitably a progressive process of discovery, verification and refinement. It is most effective when performed as a collaborative exercise with key members of the customer's stakeholder group.

That's why our approach to outcome-centric selling puts the crafting of the value story at the very heart of the sales process, and why we provide a one-page framework to guide the salesperson in completing the exercise, to summarise what they have uncovered, and to identify what they still need to find out and verify.

**Outcome-Centric Selling® | One-Page Customer-Specific Value Story Framework**

| Organisation  | Project                   | Salesperson                  | Updated                  |
|---|---------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Primary Business Challenge:                                       |                           |                              |                          |
| <b>Why do they need to change (rather than stay as they are)?</b> |                           |                              |                          |
| Current Situation   | Better Outcome            | Obstacles                    | Consequences of Inaction |
|   |                           |                              |                          |
| <b>Why should they choose you (rather than any other option)?</b> |                           |                              |                          |
| Solution Options  | Your Distinctive Approach | Their Specific Benefits      |                          |
|   |                           |                              |                          |
| <b>Why do they need to act now (rather than later)?</b>           |                           |                              |                          |
| Business Case/Urgency   |                           | Evidence/Decision Confidence |                          |
|   |                           |                              |                          |

The effort involved in crafting the story will pay for itself many times over, and the information and insights contained in the completed value story will provide the perfect foundation for the all-important executive summary of the salesperson's formal proposal to the customer.

This value story framework - together with simple definitions and guidelines - is just one of many editable templates available to clients of Inflexion-Point's Outcome-Centric Selling® system - you can [learn more here](#).

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## **Facilitating your customer's buying journey**

The recognition of the non-linear nature of the customer decision journey represents another crucial difference between solution-focused and outcome-centric sales methodologies.

Rather than thinking in terms of a deceptively straightforward and often over-simplified sales process with clearly defined steps and stages, outcome-centric selling recognises that the typical B2B buying decision journey is inherently complicated, non-linear and involves multiple stakeholders who often have different motivations and priorities.

Without strong internal leadership of the buying journey, stakeholder consensus is unlikely.

And without stakeholder consensus, action is unlikely.

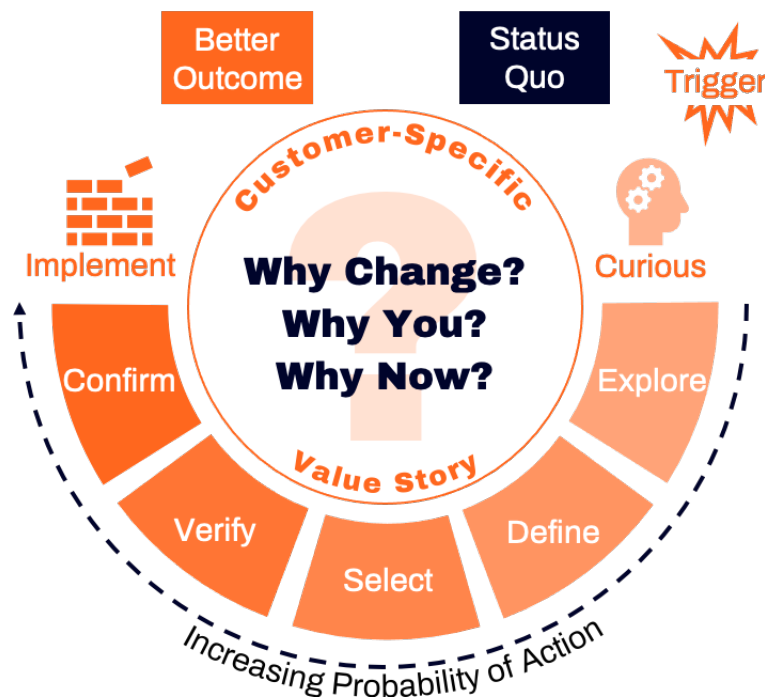
Having a compelling and coherent customer-specific value story is a powerful and critical foundation, but this is not enough...

## Key phases in the journey

Salespeople need to acknowledge that their customer’s decision journey will inevitably have twists and turns along the way. They need to recognise that it can go forwards or backwards at any stage or get abandoned altogether. But they also need to believe that they have the capacity to influence it.

One of the critical roles of an outcome-centric salesperson is to accurately diagnose where their customer currently is in their journey, and to collaborate with the customer to eliminate the obstacles to moving forward together to the next phase.

Accepting that the customer can move backwards as well as forwards, it’s important to recognise that almost every successful complex B2B buying journey passes through each of the following phases at least once:



### Status quo

This is the state that most potential customers are likely to be in, most of the time. They seem (to an outsider observer, at least) to be satisfied with their current situation, and do not yet appear to be actively concerned about any of the issues we have chosen to target.

## **Trigger event**

But then something happens - either inside or outside their organisation - to draw their attention to an issue they had not previously considered to be important.

## **Curious**

As a result of the trigger event, the potential customer becomes curious about the issue, and they typically invest some time and resource in a basic initial investigation, usually via web search.

## **Exploring**

If their initial research suggests that the issue is worth understanding in more detail, the customer typically moves into a more active exploration of the issue, its consequences for the business and the potential solution options available to them.

## **Defining**

Once a consensus has started to emerge around the need to take action, the customer then normally moves into a phase during which they start to define which options they should shortlist, who should be on the decision team, which decision criteria they should use and what the decision process and timeframe should look like.

Salespeople that successfully engage and influence the customer during the curious, exploring or defining stages are far more likely to win than those who only become aware of the opportunity once the customer has reached the “selecting” phase

## **Selecting**

Having decided how they are going to decide, the customer then moves into the selecting phase, during which they typically exhaustively evaluate their shortlisted options, seek proposals from qualified suppliers, and attempt to reach a consensus around their preferred option.

## **Verifying**

Once the customer has identified their preferred option, they will typically then seek to verify their decision and to make sure that they have negotiated the best possible terms and conditions as well as seeking to eliminate any remaining concerns or reservations about either the need to pursue the project or their preferred option.

## **Confirming**

If the project is of any significant size or impact, an internal business case typically needs to be submitted for final approval, often to a person or body that may not have been involved in the details of the decision process to date.

By the time your customer reaches the confirming phase, the remaining focus of competition has usually shifted from the alternative options the customer had been considering for this project to all of the other different projects the customer is also thinking of investing in, and it becomes more important than ever that the final approval person or body has clear positive answers to the three critical value story questions: why change, why you, and why now? If not, your sales campaign can fail at this last hurdle.

## **Implementing**

Once the customer's order has been received, the next step of course is to work with them to implement their chosen solution. But they often still do not regard their buying journey as over even after the new solution is up-and running.

## **Outcome achieved**

In an outcome-centric world we need to recognise that the customer's buying journey is only over when they have successfully achieved the business outcomes they sought to accomplish when they set out on their journey in the first place.

## **Recycle and revisit**

The likelihood of a positive decision and a successful outcome declines whenever a customer bypasses or rushes one or more of these phases - this behaviour typically simply stores up trouble for later.

Many buying journeys end up revisiting previous phases

Whilst successful buying journeys tend to pass through each phase at least once, customers will often revisit one or a number of these phases as their circumstances change.

This is why it is so important for salespeople to be aware of the current phase of the customer's buying journey at all times, to recognise that it may move backwards or stall, and to do all they can to identify and eliminate the obstacles that may be holding the customer back.

[Follow this link](#) to find out more about taking a customer-centric approach to managing your organisation's sales process.

04

## **A flexible framework rather than a rigid process**

It should be obvious that salespeople need effective tools and guidelines to support them in today's complex B2B buying environments - but that traditional rigidly-defined linear 'sales processes' will inevitably fail to offer the necessary flexibility.

Rigid, centrally dictated and over-prescriptive rules are inherently unproductive in complex, highly variable B2B buying environments and are anyway likely to be ignored by the more intelligent and effective salespeople in favour of the things they have learned actually work in practice.

That's why our approach to outcome-centric selling is best thought of as a flexible framework that enables intelligent salespeople to diagnose where they are in each opportunity and guides, reminds and equips them in what they need to know and do to facilitate each phase of their prospective customer's buying journey.

## Moving the middle

It's necessary to acknowledge that some members of today's sales community - although apparently effective in product- or solution-driven sales environments - will simply not be smart or adaptable enough to survive in a world of enhanced customer expectations, whatever sales system or methodology they follow.

And it's equally true that the relatively small percentage of consistently elite sales performers - who usually turn out to be quick learners as well as being blessed with practical and emotional intelligence - will always be able to adapt and thrive to a rapidly evolving business environment.

The greatest performance improvements come from supporting 'middle-of-the-road' salespeople

It's the largest 'middle-of-the-road' group of salespeople - if they are reasonably intelligent, open to learn and committed to their personal development - that will benefit the most from being guided by the collective learning of their colleagues combined with the emerging best practices of other successful sales organisations.

There's little value in applying an inflexible sales process to a complex and non-linear buying environment. That's why our approach to outcome-centric selling has been implemented as a flexible framework rather than a rigid process, and why we take pains to incorporate the winning behaviours of each sales organisation's top sales performers.

Salespeople are more willing to adopt the framework because they see it as a supportive skeleton rather than a suffocating straitjacket, because it supports their initiative rather than suppressing it, and because it reflects the accumulated wisdom of colleagues they regard as role models.

## Guidelines, checklists and one-page plans

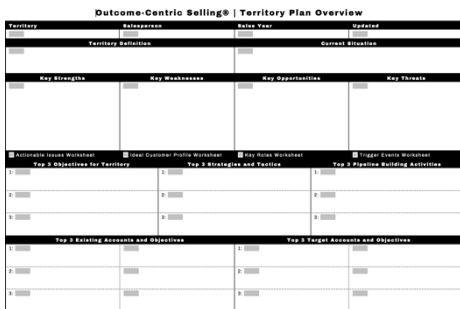
Inflexion-Point's Outcome-Centric Selling® System brings together thoughtful guidelines, situational checklists and clear one-page plans to equip and encourage intelligent salespeople to think clearly and make smart choices before, during and after every interaction with their customers.

It recognises that even the most highly trained professions - pilots, surgeons and so on - benefit from using simple checklists to remind them of what they need to know and do when performing complex tasks - and that every salesperson, no matter what their experience level, can also benefit tremendously from situationally relevant checklists, guidelines and sales tools.



## Territory and account plans

It's hard for organisations to strike a happy medium: territory and account planning is often either not done at all or ends up being a lengthy and complicated exercise that is rarely referred to or revised as the sales year evolves. Neither extreme is satisfactory.

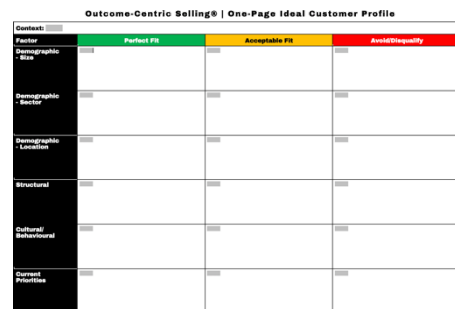


That's why our approach to outcome-centric selling includes simple one-page territory and account planning frameworks that stimulate the salesperson to think about where their time and effort should be invested and enable them to establish and monitor the appropriate strategies and tactics.

## Targeting the right opportunities

Unless you happen to be the undisputed brand leader in your sector and are enjoying a limitless stream of high-quality inbound enquiries, your salespeople cannot afford to wait for customers to come to them.

They need to have a crystal-clear understanding of the actionable business issues your organisation is best at addressing, the organisations that are most likely to suffer from them, the roles that are most likely to want to deal with them, and the trigger events that draw their attention to the importance of the issue in the first place.



That's why our approach to outcome-centric selling includes simple one-page planning frameworks that enable your salespeople to clearly identify and pursue the issues, organisations, roles and trigger events they should be targeting.

## Preparing for every significant sales conversation

One of the most profound behavioural differences between today’s top sales performers and the rest is that they recognise the value of planning and are willing to invest in preparing for every significant conversation.

This involves doing the appropriate research, anticipating what each prospect is likely to be interested in, being aware of what their most successful outcome would look like - and preparing the insights they want to share, the questions they want to ask, and the questions they anticipate their prospect may ask.

| Outcome-Centric Selling®   One-Page Conversation Planner and Analysis |                       |                      |                          |                                 |
|---|-----------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Organization  | Project               | Salesperson          | Type/Location            | Date                            |
| Logistics   |                       |                      |                          |                                 |
| Your best possible realistic outcome                                  |                       |                      |                          |                                 |
| Purpose of the meeting  |                       | Agenda/Topic/Timing  |                          | Participants                    |
| Conditional next step   |                       |                      |                          |                                 |
| Your Questions (Learn)  | Your Insights (Share) | Your Stories (Share) | Your Questions (Prepare) |                                 |
| Key conclusion  |                       | Analysis             |                          | Agreed Actions/Tasks/Timeliness |

That’s why our approach to outcome-centric selling includes a simple one-page conversation planning framework that prepares salespeople to achieve the best possible outcome from every significant customer interaction, including agreeing next steps that will serve to advance the customer’s buying journey.

## Discovery guides and checklists

Good discovery is the essential foundation for successful sales opportunity management, and yet many salespeople rush the process and cannot resist the ‘itch to pitch’ the moment a potential customer acknowledges a need that the salesperson believes could lead to a sale.

That’s why our approach to outcome-centric selling includes the creation of customised discovery guides that equip salespeople to have deeply diagnostic conversations with potential customers, ensuring that they uncover not just the customer’s issues but also their aspirations and all the associated implications.

| Outcome-Centric Selling®   One-Page Discovery Framework  |         |   |                                    |      |
|--|---------|---|------------------------------------|------|
| Organization   | Project | Salesperson   | Type/Location                      | Date |
| What do you want to get out of this discovery session?   |         | What do they want to get out of this discovery session?                 |                                    |      |
| How would they describe their current situation?   |         | How would they describe the better future outcome they are looking for? |                                    |      |
| Issues   | Impact  | Obstacles   | Goals and consequences of inaction |      |
| Your prime customer's role in the decision process   |         | Who else is likely to be involved?                                      |                                    |      |
| Analysis   |         |   |                                    |      |
| Current phase of buying journey: <input type="checkbox"/> Explore <input type="checkbox"/> Evaluate <input type="checkbox"/> Explain <input type="checkbox"/> Refine <input type="checkbox"/> Select <input type="checkbox"/> Verify <input type="checkbox"/> Confirm <input type="checkbox"/> Close |         |   |                                    |      |
| Type of buying journey: <input type="checkbox"/> Familiar purchase <input type="checkbox"/> Technical purchase <input type="checkbox"/> Unknown   Type of purchase: <input type="checkbox"/> Immediate <input type="checkbox"/> Secondary <input type="checkbox"/> Unknown                           |         |   |                                    |      |
| Your assessment of the opportunity: <input type="checkbox"/> High-probability qualification success <input type="checkbox"/> High-probability assessment success   |         |   |                                    |      |
| Agreed next steps, who, when...  |         |   |                                    |      |

## Consistent opportunity qualification

Another profound difference between top sales performers and the rest is that they recognise the value of systematically qualifying every opportunity against a set of consistent criteria and are unwilling to invest their time in pursuing poorly qualified opportunities they are unlikely to win - whilst their less effective colleagues continue to throw resources at lost causes.

**Outcome-Centric Selling® | MEDDPIC+RR Opportunity Qualification Worksheet**

| Organisation               |         | Opportunity   |   | Score |
|----------------------------|---------|---|---|-------|
| Factor                     | Status  | Definition  | Justification/Evidence  |       |
| <b>M</b> Key Metrics       | Unknown | What are the specific outcomes/expectations that customer needs to see to be successful?                | How do we get better enough to confidently qualify this factor? | 0     |
| <b>E</b> Economic Buyer    | Unknown | What is the person or group with authority and control over your budget and spend?                      | How do we get better enough to confidently qualify this factor? | 0     |
| <b>D</b> Decision Criteria | Unknown | What are the things that the customer will use to decide which solution to choose?                      | How do we get better enough to confidently qualify this factor? | 0     |
| <b>D</b> Decision Process  | Unknown | What is the process the customer will use when making their selection?                                  | How do we get better enough to confidently qualify this factor? | 0     |
| <b>P</b> Approval Process  | Unknown | What is the process the customer will use to get things approved or not to go forward with the project? | How do we get better enough to confidently qualify this factor? | 0     |
| <b>I</b> Incentive to Pain | Unknown | What are the incentives to buy and pain points caused through a failed purchase decision?               | How do we get better enough to confidently qualify this factor? | 0     |
| <b>C</b> Champion          | Unknown | Who are the individuals who will be responsible for us as a vendor at the customer?                     | How do we get better enough to confidently qualify this factor? | 0     |
| <b>C</b> Competition       | Unknown | What are your main competitors/alternatives and why?  | How do we get better enough to confidently qualify this factor? | 0     |
| <b>R</b> Relative Priority | Unknown | What is the relative importance of this project when compared to other projects at the customer?        | How do we get better enough to confidently qualify this factor? | 0     |
| <b>R</b> Risk Factors      | Unknown | Are there any other obstacles or risks that may affect the success of this project?                     | How do we get better enough to confidently qualify this factor? | 0     |

That's why our approach to outcome-centric selling incorporates an evolved one-page version of today's most widely adopted qualification framework (MEDDPIC+RR) for complex B2B sales, including enhancements such as the identification of key risk factors and the relative importance of the project compared to the customer's other potential investment priorities.

## Identifying and engaging key customer stakeholders

Today's buying decisions involve multiple customer stakeholders - often many more than might be initially apparent to the salesperson. And whilst they all may have a say in the decision, the two critical roles are usually those of ultimate economic buyer and executive project sponsor.

Both they and the other stakeholders will each have personal perspectives, priorities and motivations that need to be understood and addressed as well as satisfying the collective needs of the decision making and approval groups.

That's why our approach to outcome-centric selling includes a simple one-page stakeholder profile that enables salespeople to identify, engage and assess the perspective, role, attitude and influence of all the key members of the customer's stakeholder community.

**Outcome-Centric Selling® | Stakeholder Assessment**

| Organisation | Name | Title | Project/Opportunity |                      |                   |                     |                     |                          |
|--------------|------|-------|---------------------|----------------------|-------------------|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|
|              |      |       | Role in Decision    | Priority Perspective | Personal Interest | Attitude Towards Us | Resources Available | Personal Success Outcome |
|              |      |       | UNCERTAIN           | UNCERTAIN            | UNCERTAIN         | UNCERTAIN           | UNCERTAIN           | NOT YET ATTEMPTED        |
|              |      |       | UNCERTAIN           | UNCERTAIN            | UNCERTAIN         | UNCERTAIN           | UNCERTAIN           | NOT YET ATTEMPTED        |
|              |      |       | UNCERTAIN           | UNCERTAIN            | UNCERTAIN         | UNCERTAIN           | UNCERTAIN           | NOT YET ATTEMPTED        |
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|              |      |       | UNCERTAIN           | UNCERTAIN            | UNCERTAIN         | UNCERTAIN           | UNCERTAIN           | NOT YET ATTEMPTED        |
|              |      |       | UNCERTAIN           | UNCERTAIN            | UNCERTAIN         | UNCERTAIN           | UNCERTAIN           | NOT YET ATTEMPTED        |
|              |      |       | UNCERTAIN           | UNCERTAIN            | UNCERTAIN         | UNCERTAIN           | UNCERTAIN           | NOT YET ATTEMPTED        |
|              |      |       | UNCERTAIN           | UNCERTAIN            | UNCERTAIN         | UNCERTAIN           | UNCERTAIN           | NOT YET ATTEMPTED        |
|              |      |       | UNCERTAIN           | UNCERTAIN            | UNCERTAIN         | UNCERTAIN           | UNCERTAIN           | NOT YET ATTEMPTED        |
|              |      |       | UNCERTAIN           | UNCERTAIN            | UNCERTAIN         | UNCERTAIN           | UNCERTAIN           | NOT YET ATTEMPTED        |
|              |      |       | UNCERTAIN           | UNCERTAIN            | UNCERTAIN         | UNCERTAIN           | UNCERTAIN           | NOT YET ATTEMPTED        |

## Facilitating the customer's buying journey

In complex B2B sales environments, one of the other key factors that differentiates today's most effective sales organisations from the rest is their recognition that their salespeople need to flexibly facilitate each customer's buying journey rather than insisting that they all adopt a single rigidly defined "one size fits all" sales process for every opportunity.

Outcome-Centric Selling® | Buying Journey Checklist for [PHASE]

|  |                     |
|--|---------------------|
| Customer situation and key indicators  | Our objective       |
| <b>Assessment</b><br><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |                     |
| Key sales focus  | Key buying enablers |
| Actions addressing the next phase  |                     |

That's why our approach to outcome-centric selling includes simple "page-per-stage" guidelines that help intelligent salespeople to accurately assess the current phase of their customer's buying journey, enables them to identify and access the relevant sales tools and buying enablers and reminds and guides them about what they need to know and do to advance the decision process.

## Customer-specific value stories

We've already established the central importance of each customer's unique value story in complex B2B sales environments, and we believe that every salesperson should be equipped, enabled and encouraged to progressively develop the answers to their customer's "why change, why you and why now?" questions through the evolution of the opportunity.

That's why our approach to outcome-centric selling includes a simple one-page value story framework that ensures all the necessary information has been collected, collated and understood. The resulting customer-specific value story then provides the perfect foundation for the all-important executive summary of the salesperson's subsequent proposal.

Outcome-Centric Selling® | One-Page Customer-Specific Value Story Framework

|  |  |                         |                          |
|--|--|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| Organization   | Project  | Salesperson             | Updated                  |
| Primary Business Challenge                                 | Why do they need to change (rather than stay as they are)? |                         |                          |
| Current Situation  | Business Drivers   | Outcomes                | Consequences of Inaction |
| Why should they choose you (rather than any other option)? |  |                         |                          |
| Business Options   | Your Distinctive Approach                                  | Their Specific Benefits |                          |
| Why do they need to act now (rather than later)?           |  |                         |                          |
| Business Urgency   | Evidence/Decision Confidence                               |                         |                          |

## Mutual success plans

Your customer's expected outcomes are much more likely to be achieved when they reflect a shared understanding between customer and salesperson as to what is expected and how those better outcomes can be most effectively accomplished.

That's why our approach to outcome-centric selling includes a simple, sharable mutual success plan framework that encourages both parties to work backwards from the customer's expected outcomes and identify what needs to be done (and by whom) in order for those objectives to be met.

| Outcome-Centric Selling®   Mutual Success Plan          |                          |                          |               |                  |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|---------------|------------------|
| Project Overview  |                          | Expected Better Outcomes |               |                  |
| Current Situation                                       | Expected Better Outcomes | To Be Achieved By        | All necessary |                  |
| Key Inter-Linking Outcomes from Expected Outcomes Below |                          |                          |               |                  |
| Outcome   | Who By                   | When                     | Priority      | Notes            |
|   |                          |                          |               |                  |
|   |                          |                          |               |                  |
|   |                          |                          |               |                  |
|   |                          |                          |               |                  |
|   |                          |                          |               |                  |
|   |                          |                          |               |                  |
|   |                          |                          |               |                  |
| Customer Decision and Approval Terms                    |                          |                          |               |                  |
| Notes   | Work In Progress         | Notes                    | Vendor Terms  | Work In Progress |
|   |                          |                          |               |                  |
|   |                          |                          |               |                  |
|   |                          |                          |               |                  |
|   |                          |                          |               |                  |
| Notes   |                          |                          |               |                  |

## Customising these guidelines, checklists and plans

Whilst these guidelines, checklists and plans reflect the emerging best practices being adopted by today's most effective B2B sales organisations, they are most effective when they are customised to reflect your unique business environment and the experiences of your best salespeople, and are part of every salesperson's daily working routine.

That's why our approach to outcome-centric selling involves customising and optimising the key elements of the framework to match your specific requirements, and why each element is designed to be included in your CRM and sales enablement systems.

We also offer the option to deploy the ready-to-implement Outcome-Centric Selling® edition of Membrain's award-winning sales effectiveness platform - the only CRM solution that has been developed for the ground up with complex B2B sales environments and a guided selling philosophy at the centre of its design goals.

[Follow this link](#) to find out more about Membrain or any other aspect of our Outcome-Centric Selling® System.

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## **Putting these principles into practice**

Even if some of these concepts may strike you as revolutionary, the most effective way of adopting an outcome-centric selling is typically an evolutionary one.

We have learned that the best approach is to start by equipping your salespeople to collaboratively develop unique value stories with their most significant potential customers.

These value stories can co-exist with an established solution-centric sales approach and will serve to introduce the important concept of customer outcomes to your salespeople.

You can then build on this important first step by progressively transitioning to a buyer-journey centric approach to opportunity management, typically by getting your salespeople to identify the current phase of their customer's buying journey even while temporarily continuing to apply your existing sales-centric pipeline stage definitions.

At the same time, you can also prioritise the progressive introduction of the one-page sales tools and plans, driven by their potential short-term impact on sales effectiveness. For many organisations, these early initiatives will include consistent opportunity qualification, stakeholder assessment and conversation planning.

## **Managing the full transition**

This initial 'parallel running', once mastered, will then allow you to completely transition the basis of your sales process to a buying-journey-centric approach at a convenient point - typically at a sales-quarter or sales-year boundary.

## **Accurately revaluing your pipeline**

We offer one word of practical warning: the immediate short-term impact of insisting that your salespeople think in terms of the customer's buying journey, particularly when combined with a newly robust approach to opportunity qualification, often results in previous pipeline values being reduced.

This is perfectly natural, and to be expected. The exercise will inevitably flush out opportunities that should never have been in the pipeline in the first place, or whose actual stage, value and realistic probability of closure were knowingly or unknowingly exaggerated.

## **Focusing sales energy where it will have maximum impact**

But from that moment of truth onwards, you and your salespeople will be justified in having much more confidence in the accuracy of both the sales pipeline and the resulting forecast - and you can be sure that they will be focusing their energies in the areas where they can have the greatest impact.

If your current CRM supports a guided selling approach, you should be able to embed some of these principles into your current implementation.

But if - like many organisations - you have been disappointed by the return on your CRM investments, we recommend that you also consider moving to a platform that is optimised for complex B2B sales such as Membrain.

[Follow this link](#) to find out more about how Inflexion-Point can help you to master the transition to outcome-centric selling.

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# About us

Inflexion-Point Strategy Partners are a UK-based sales effectiveness consultancy with a global client footprint, and we are proud to be one of the pioneers in enabling forward-thinking sales organisations to adopt an outcome-centric approach to selling.

Many of our clients are technology-based businesses in the all-important scale-up phase between being a start-up and behaving like a slow-moving established corporate.

As we hope this document demonstrates, we have a great deal of practical experience in the strategies and tactics that are needed to support an outcome-centric selling approach.

If you like what you have read in this guide, if you believe what we believe about the future of B2B selling, and you are curious enough to want to find out more, please drop me a line or [book a call](#).

Regards

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Bob Apollo'.

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