The Secret to Successful Knowledge Centered Support (KCS)

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Contents

The Secret to Successful Knowledge Centered Support (KCS) 3

The Benefits of KCS 4

Building A Knowledge Base 5

Implement The KCS Double Process Loop 7

Best Practices Checklist 10

The Secret to Successful Knowledge Centered Support (KCS)

The digital transformation of business has brought tremendous opportunities for innovation. However, the evolution of technologies has created a growing challenge for support organizations. Customer support has moved from a back-office function to a more visible and often strategic position within organizations. As the front-line for interfacing with customers, support teams are faced with the increasingly important and difficult task of meeting the expectations of customers, and to do so in an agile way.

The answer many organizations are turning to is Knowledge Centered Support (KCS). KCS is a service delivery methodology in which knowledge management is applied to support operations through a culture of problem solving and knowledge sharing. The term was coined by the Consortium for Service Innovation in 1992 as a best practice for the collection, organization, and reuse of information.[1] Today, many organizations use KCS to resolve customer issues faster, optimize resources, and enable self-service.

The Benefits of KCS

According to a survey conducted by the Consortium for Service Innovation, there are both qualitative and quantitative benefits to implementing KCS. Companies who have implemented KCS enable support reps to find the answers they are looking for faster and more frequently, resulting in 50-60% increase in time to resolution.[2] Additionally, KCS helps speed onboarding and training, resulting in a 70% increase in time to job proficiency for new employees.[3]

There are also benefits to the job satisfaction and retention rates of support employees. The same study found a 20-30% increase in employee retention and a 20-40% improvement in employee job satisfaction among customer support employees using the KCS methodology.[4]

KCS allows organizations to capitalize on one of the biggest resources they already have: knowledge. However, for many teams, this is a very transformative initiative that relies on having the right technology and a collaborative culture before implementing KCS practices.

Organizations looking to KCS to meet the needs of customers are struggling with two significant challenges: building a knowledge base, and effectively using the knowledge base once it's in place.

QUICK STAT

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Building A Knowledge Base

A knowledge base relies on having content users will use and having the right technology. Organizations with successful KCS implementations understand the importance of both. However, you still need executive buy-in and the right culture to maximize your investment.

A Culture Of Problem Solving And Knowledge Sharing

Just like **digitization** or **digital transformation**, utilizing knowledge centered support does not equate to simply throwing more software into your customer support arsenal. KCS is first and foremost a people process; people provide knowledge, people record knowledge, and people use knowledge to provide the best customer support possible.

If your organization has departmental silos or a knowledge hoarding problem, your first step should be to asses the culture and look for other ways to **encourage knowledge sharing** within your team.

Find The Right Technology

A knowledge base can be used not only by support reps to quickly find information, but also by customers to serve themselves. Organizations should not overlook the importance of selecting a software that will meet their evolving business needs. KCS initiatives often fail to gain widespread adoption either because legacy tools don't have the agility needed to keep up with the business, or because knowledge cannot be easily found, even if it does exist. Every team has different requirements, but most share these common needs:

Easily Find Information:

What's the use of capturing knowledge from your customers if customer support employees can't find that knowledge when they need it? A knowledge management solution that is easily searchable allows employees to recall information and apply it to their every day interactions with customers.

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Intuitive To Use And Easy To Update:

Typically, any given customer support issue is encountered more than once. Each time an issue is encountered, updates need to be made to pre-existing documentation pertaining to that issue. As customer support evolves, so should your content.

Reporting:

Understanding the content that is most useful and identifying gaps in information are critical to a successful KCS launch. Support team leads should utilize reporting to help improve the quality of your content and the quality of support customers are receiving.

Integrations:

Perhaps the most critical feature of your knowledge base is that it be accessible by your team, wherever their work takes place. If you use Zendesk or Salesforce, for example, look for a solution that integrates with that software.

Create Your Knowledge Assets

Successful knowledge centered support requires some preparation. The following knowledge assets should be readily available in the knowledge base to ensure the correct customer support employees are assigned to the correct inquiries, and to develop a further understanding of the customer and their needs when working to resolve an issue:

Employee profiles:

Employee profiles should include information regarding the strengths and experience of employees, partners, and any other people who may potentially work with customers representing your brand.

Customer profiles:

Customer profiles should include any relevant information about the customer available including their title, work experience, relevant awards and achievements, previously expressed concerns, etc.

Knowledge Centered Support Article Templates:

The beauty of knowledge centered support lies in its ability to connect customer support employees with the experiences and knowledge of others to help them serve the customer efficiently. Pre-approved templates allow customer support employees to document knowledge in a way that is easy for others to locate.

This initial prep work will set up your customer support team for success as you move towards knowledge centered support. While it may take a little time upfront, having this information readily accessible to employees will pay off in the long run by speeding time to resolution.

Once you have the right tools and knowledge assets in place, it’s time to implement the KCS double-loop process for your team.

Implement The KCS Double Process Loop

There are eight ongoing steps to achieving knowledge centered support. They are represented by two separate loops, solve and evolve, which come together to form the knowledge centered support double process loop (the core of KCS).

Creating Documentation: The Solve Loop

The process begins with what's known as the solve loop. The overriding goal of this portion of the process is to document solutions and other relevant knowledge pertaining to specific problems encountered by customers. The solve loop is comprised of four steps:

1. Capture

The flow of knowledge surrounding any particular issue begins with the customer.When you or a member of your customer support team receives an inquiry, it is imperative that you document that knowledge using the customer's words. Support team members should create a post in your knowledge base to document the inquiry, along with any other relevant information or attachments.

2. Structure

Structure your customer support knowledge by creating a template for customer support employees to follow while documenting inquiries. This practice will ensure customer support documentation is consistent, and consistency makes information in the knowledge base easily searchable. With structured posts, customer support reps know exactly what they are going to find when they search for a word of phrase. In addition to consistency, structure in your documentation process provides guidance to employees. A well developed template guides employees through calls and serves as a reminder of what information must be gathered from the customer so that no information is neglected.

PRO TIP

The sooner you use the document, the better.

Immediacy increases the chance that the details of the interaction will be recorded as accurately as possible.

3. Reuse

If your customer support team is diligent about consistent documentation, reusing

customer support knowledge will be a breeze. This is the step where customer support employees should really begin to see the benefits of knowledge centered support. Every time an employee is assigned an inquiry, he or she should search the knowledge management system for previous posts surrounding the same issue before taking any other steps to resolve it. Someone else may have already identified a solution, or at least provided some additional information that will point you in the right direction.

In order for this step to be effective, your knowledge management solution needs a powerful search engine. Otherwise, you may miss out on valuable information and waste time conducting repetitive research or taking the wrong steps to help a customer.

4. Improve

By following the first three steps of the KCS solve loop, your customer support team will likely build up quite a collection of valuable knowledge. When pieces of this knowledge inevitably become outdated or irrelevant, it will inhibit employees from providing the best customer support possible.

To improve the knowledge living in your knowledge base, adopt a content curation strategy. Divide and conquer within your team by splitting up the posts in your community, and having each team member comb through their assigned posts to identify content that requires improvement or should be removed. Mark posts as green for no change necessary, yellow for relevant but requiring improvement, and red for no longer relevant.

This curation strategy will provide the clarity necessary in your community to easily capture, search, and reuse knowledge.

Refining And Adjusting Knowledge: The Evolve Loop

After the solve loop comes the evolve loop. Once you have identified a solution to a problem experienced by the customer and documented the process (the solve loop), you begin maintaining the knowledge so that it serves your customers and customer support employees to its maximum potential.

The evolve loop is comprised of the following four components:

1. Content Health

You can have all the content in the world stored in your knowledge sharing community, but if that content isn't relevant, up-to-date, and organized logically, it isn't doing your customer support team or your customers any good.

To assess the health of the content in your community, answer these four questions about each piece of content:

- Does the title of the document clearly reflect the content?
- Does the content use keywords consistent with your organization's message and with other content living in your community?
- Is the structure of the content uniform with other content in the community?
- Is the content a duplicate?

If you find that a piece of content fails to meet one or more of these requirements, adjust accordingly. These are extremely easy fixes to make to ensure the knowledge in your community belongs there and is empowering your team to improve the customer experience. Many knowledge management solutions include features such as duplicate reports, which alert you when duplicate content has been uploaded, as well as content curation tools and professional services to assist you in keeping your content healthy.

2. Process Integration

The purpose of following the KCS double process loop is, first and foremost, to give your customers the absolute best customer support experience possible. For that reason, a knowledge management system that integrates with your CRM, helpdesk, ticket tracking system, or any other technology aimed at better understanding and communicating with your customers is a must.

This integration means that customer support employees can access information about their customers across multiple channels in a timely fashion and have a wellrounded understanding of the customer's needs as they work to resolve their issues.

3. Performance Assessment

In addition to assessing the health of the content living in your knowledge management system, it's important to review the performance of customer support employees. The vast majority of team leaders already evaluate the performance of their employees. The mistake lies in how they evaluate performance; customer support teams moving towards knowledge centered support should not evaluate team members based on their individual knowledge.[6] They should evaluate team members based on the quality and quantity of what they contribute to communal company knowledge.

If knowledge hoarding is an issue in your team, you may need to reassess your team's structure. Ensuring that every team member has a clearly assigned role with evenly distributed responsibilities will promote collaboration and knowledge sharing.

4. Leadership And Communication

This leads us to our final step in the evolve loop: leadership and communication. Motivating team members to collaborate is ultimately the responsibility of the leadership team, and the best way to do so is to set goals.

Setting collaboration goals for your team, such as how many times a week they should share content or how often they should engage with content shared by others, provides your team with collaboration guidelines that will set them up for knowledge centered support success. Consider publishing a leaderboard to publicly acknowledge support team members who are consistently contributing and consuming content.

Communicate these goals by creating a post in your community; not only will this foster collaboration, it will encourage others to document everything and post regularly in your knowledge management system. Ultimately, collaboration should be second nature for your customer support team. But setting clear, achievable goals is the perfect way to get the ball rolling.

PRO TIP

Many organizations struggle to keep the structure of content uniform in their communities.

As discussed in the "structure" step of the solve loop, create a few pre-approved templates for employees to use during customer calls to capture knowledge.

Best Practices Checklist

- ☐ Define goals and objectives of transitioning to knowledge centered support
- ☐ Prepare knowledge assets prior to beginning the KCS process:
  - ☐ Employee profiles
  - ☐ Customer profiles
- ☐ Knowledge centered support article templates
- ☐ Capture customer knowledge in the words of the customer
- ☐ Structure customer knowledge to improve consistency and provide guidance to employees
- ☐ Reuse knowledge to speed time to resolution
- ☐ Constantly assess knowledge for relevancy and maintain as needed
- ☐ Assess employee performance based on collaboration, not individual knowledge
- ☐ Communicate best practices and goals to the team

Ultimately, your success in transitioning to knowledge centered support will not only depend on the technology you employ, but also on your team's willingness to solve problems, capture, and evolve knowledge with the customer in mind every step of the way. If you continuously follow the double process loop and stick to the KCS best practices checklist, your team will experience faster time to resolution, and your customers will be more satisfied with their experience with your brand.



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Bloomfire is the leader in knowledge engagement, delivering an experience that connects teams and individuals with the information they need to do their jobs. Our cloud-based knowledge engagement platform gives people one centralized, searchable place to engage with shared knowledge and grow their organization's collective intelligence. For more information or to schedule a demo, visit www.bloomfire.com.

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