

Motivation versus wisdom?

By Dr Chahid Fourali, Head of the MSSSB

Aims of the presentation

The aim of this paper is not to present an academic report that focuses on research/theory although the work is based on large scale research conducted in the UK in order to develop benchmarks of best practice. It is primarily a paper that aims to introduce the conference audience about a pervasive practical problem associated with supporting sales and marketing practitioners; and provides a practical answer. Accordingly the presentation based on this paper has the following aims:

- To highlight the need for world-class standards of best practice in all sectors including marketing and sales
- To demonstrate the challenge for developing a methodology for such objective
- To introduce the developed standards and
- To invite participants of the conference to be involved in future developments of the standards so as to ensure robustness of the outcomes and share the results with all contributors

Introduction

Motivation and wisdom are both needed in order to achieve success, but in so many books about selling, the focus is mostly on motivation. Here is a quick example to illustrate my point:

I read an article about the importance of selling and sales people called 'Passionate converts'¹. The article was very useful in arguing for the importance of the contribution of the selling profession to both individual companies and industries. However there was a dimension that was conspicuous by its absence: the importance of good practice.

Here are a few statements gleaned from the text in the article:

"To succeed in sales you need a combination of drive, ambition, competitiveness, passion for the product and, let's face it, a fairly thick skin."

"In sales the speed at which an individual is promoted is largely down to the individual".

¹ Editor's section (2006). Passionate Converts. Daily Telegraph (February 12th).

"If I can sell to people who do not want to know, I can sell anything".

Such statements are not unusual in selling training courses where the word 'passion' has almost become a cliché.

If taken out of context, the above statements could reinforce ***mis-selling*** and may be liable. Drive, ambition and self belief may be counterproductive if not guided by the latest wisdom on best practice. Enthusiasm is no replacement for good old professional practice. This leads to the key question: Do we have a clear description of best practice for sales or marketing?

The next section will address this question and present the answer provided by the UK's standards setting body for marketing and sales.

The National Occupational Standards (NOS) for marketing and sales

Over the past two decades, the UK vocational system has witnessed a revolution in training and development. Standards or best practice are at the core of this revolution. The standard issue was brought about by many educational and industrial professionals who stressed the lack of consistency among practitioners in various professions. In addition UK policy makers were increasingly becoming aware that what would make a difference in the future between competing economies is not quantity but ***quality*** (Leitch, 2006)². The quality must be underpinned by world class standards of professional practice associated with each occupational area to help increase both effectiveness and efficiency of UK products and services reflected throughout the value chain. In the context of marketing and sales this was exactly the task that was assigned to the Marketing and Sales Standards Setting Body (MSSSB), the Government-appointed sector body for marketing and sales. As a result of sustained research and consultation that spanned three years, we now have world-class standards for marketing and sales.

Description of the new standards

The national standards are based on a well tested method of job analysis known as functional analysis³. This approach initially identifies the key purpose of the occupational area and then proceeds to identify all the subsequent relevant functions/dimensions associated with this key purpose. The next two diagrams identify, respectively, the marketing and sales key purposes and derived functions presented below in the form of a wheel.

² Leitch, S (2006): Prosperity for all in the Global economy – World-class skills. Norwich: TSO.
(electronic copy can be accessed at: http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/leitch_finalreport051206.pdf)

³ See Fourali, C (1997). Identifying and Measuring Knowledge in Vocational Awards. Research in Post-compulsory Education. Volume 2, Number 2.

Purpose and functions of marketing

Marketing key purpose:

To advance the aims of organisations (whether private, public or voluntary) by providing direction, gaining commitment and achieving sustainable results and value through identifying, anticipating and satisfying stakeholder requirements (MSSSB, 2006).

In order to achieve these aims marketing may need to address several functions inextricably associated with good practice in marketing. Such broad functions are reflected in the circle below:

Marketing Standards wheel (MSSSB, 2006)



© MSSSB

Purpose and functions of selling

Sales key purpose:

To create, build and sustain mutually beneficial and profitable relationships through personal and organisational contacts.

Sales Standards wheel (MSSSB, 2006)



© MSSSB

The Standards define best practice across the principal functions and the associated activities in achieving the key purpose. A total of 100 possible job roles in marketing and 50 job roles in sales were identified in the standards. Each of these job roles were defined in terms of targeted achievements, relevant skills and underpinning knowledge (For more information see MSSSB website at www.msssb.org). The structure of each job role included the following:

1. **What this unit of the standard is about.** Although not strictly part of the standard, this summary describes the context in which the unit is applied in the workplace. It may describe the role of the person to whom the unit applies and the type of work and activities involved,
2. **Outcomes of effective performance.** Each job-role unit (self-contained activities) contains a number of 'Outcomes of effective performance' which describe as clearly as possible the outcomes of performance which demonstrate competence,

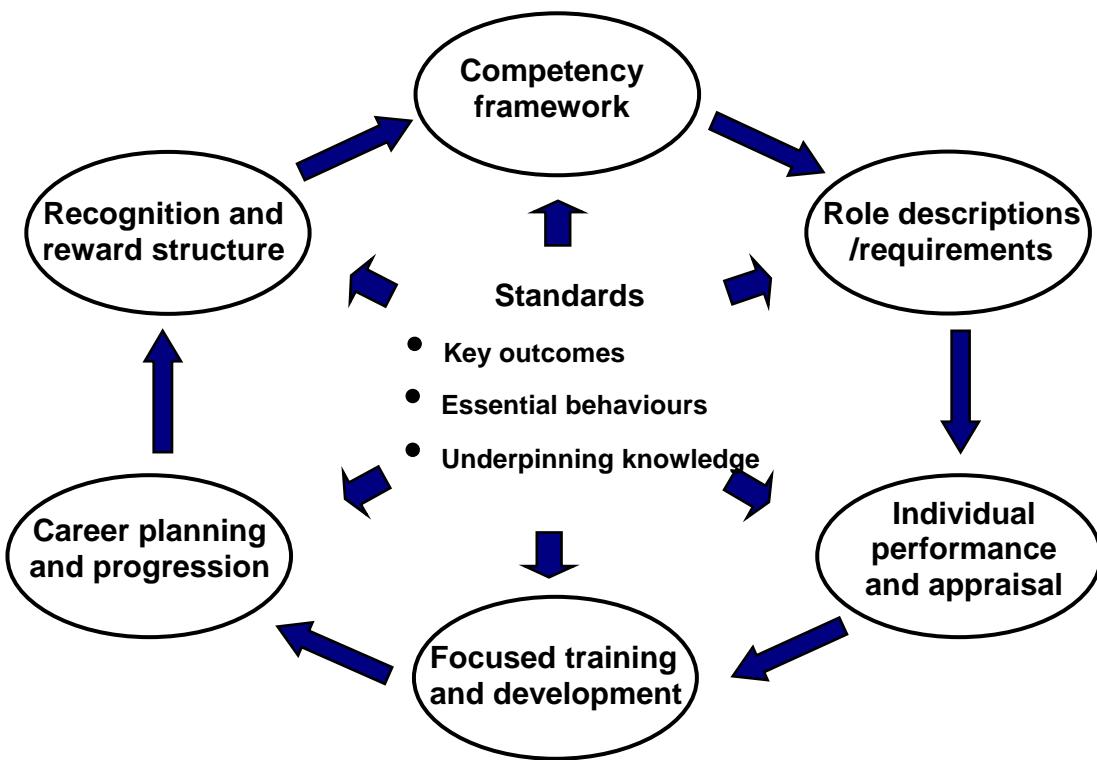
3. **Behaviours which underpin effective performance.** These describe the essential behaviours which the person must demonstrate to achieve the outcomes above,
4. **Knowledge and understanding.** This describes what the practitioner needs to know and understand if they are to perform competently. This description includes knowledge of relevant legislation, facts, theories and principles. Importantly, it covers the application of the knowledge underpinning competent performance.

It is clear that many people associated with marketing and sales practice may cover only a small dimension amongst the functions represented above. This applies particularly to specialist agencies that may only deal with say market research, advertising or PR etc. On the sales side, different industries may assign different activities to say, telesales, key account roles in line with the level of responsibility assigned to members of staff.

However all of them are encouraged to consider the views of their stakeholders (including those representing social interests). In addition any professional practice associated with marketing or sales need to take into account strategic considerations. These two aspects of the standards that are pervasive to any marketing or sales practice highlight clearly the aims for sustainability of businesses through the triple bottom line of profit, social and environmental considerations. This implies that stakeholders have expectations beyond the profit line and expect social and environmental aspects to be included as a primary part of the decision-making process.

The standards are therefore a good benchmark to help not only recognise but develop marketing and sales professionals throughout the industries. They are also a very good basis to develop credible qualifications that refer to skills that are relevant to the needs of the industries. As it was argued at the last national launch of these standards, a truly professional approach to marketing and sales is decisive for businesses who want to be competitive in the global economy. It is crucial that these standards are supported so that best practice spreads throughout the whole country and supports its economy.

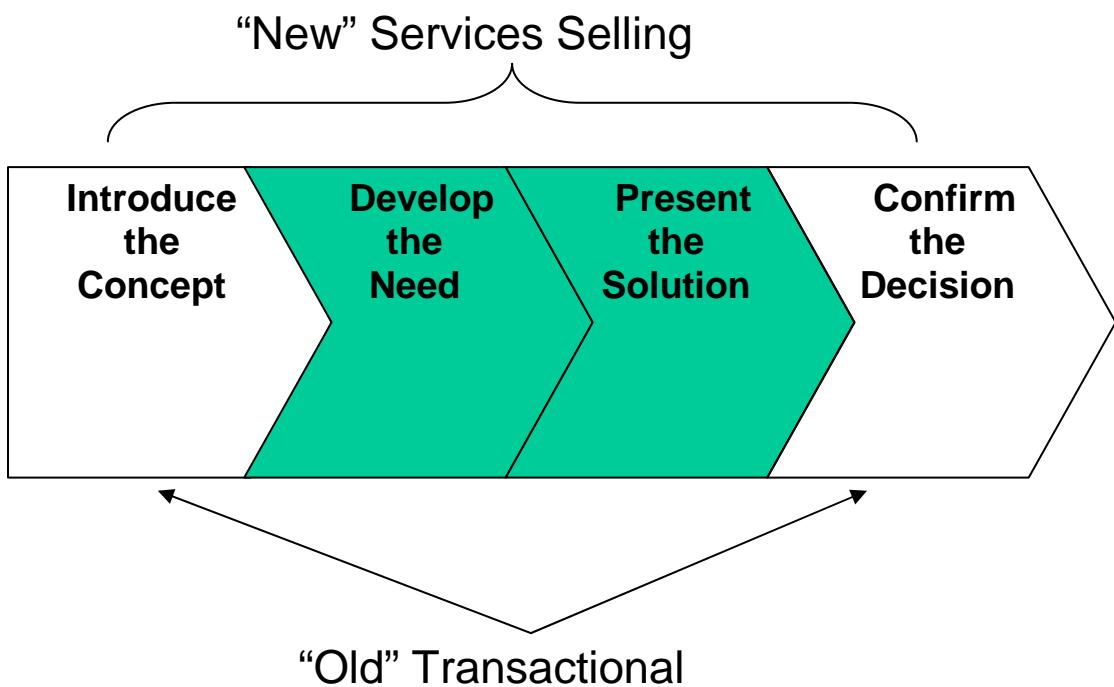
Standards are the difference between a competent workforce and an incompetent one. In a recent report 115 reasons were produced for the value of the standards. In short, the standards clarify job role requirements, support assessments/appraisal, help identify weaknesses in skills and knowledge associated with a job role and help recognise and reward achievements as shown below:



Early beneficiaries of the standards

As explained above there are many possible uses for the standards. Early implementers of the standards have been presenting at recent launch events around the UK, promoting the benefits they have derived already.

The first launch event took place in front of a packed house at the RSA in London. Sir Digby Jones, former Minister of State for Trade and Investments, gave a compelling presentation about the value of sales and marketing to the competitiveness of UK Plc. Teri Walker, Global Programmes Manager of Xerox, told the audience about how useful Xerox found the standards in helping them move from an old model of selling to a new model of selling that highlights **“an in-depth understanding of our customer’s industry and their business issues”**, enabling salespeople to **“develop solutions that deliver measurable ROI”** as shown in the diagram below.



Used with kind permission from Teri Walker.

Among other benefits realised by Xerox include:

- a "national sales language" to define Global Account Management (GAM)
- development of individual skills gap assessments to support personal development and training requirements
- support for performance management process and reviews
- development of role profiles to select and recruit new account managers

In Cardiff, after a supportive presentation by Andrew Davies, Welsh Minister for Enterprise, Dr Anthony Marsella, Chief Marketing Officer of Samsung UK, explained how Samsung had applied the standards to:

Training and Development

- Developing individual skills
- Creating winning teams
- Skills Mapping
- Gap assessments to support personal development and training requirements
- Linking to business strategy
- External benchmarking

Performance Management

- Skills Framework, including web-based self-assessment
- Supporting performance management process and reviews

- Common framework for managing personnel development within the performance management process – defines learning path in account management
- Organisational skills development targets

In Edinburgh, Keith Arundale, Master of the Worshipful Company of Marketors explained:

- That the standards were welcomed by the Worshipful Company of Marketors, the livery company for senior marketers, representing marketing in the City of London given the opportunities they offer
- The value of the standards in raising the professional practice and professional status of marketing in the City boardrooms
- The value of standards in supporting marketing and entrepreneurship education
- The value of standards in addressing the currently neglected need for marketing skills in the boardroom including within the FTSE 100 companies
- The value of the standards in encouraging CEOs, including those in FTSE 100 companies, to develop their marketing skills

In Belfast, Ade Brine, Director of Partnerships, Citation PLC described how the standards will:

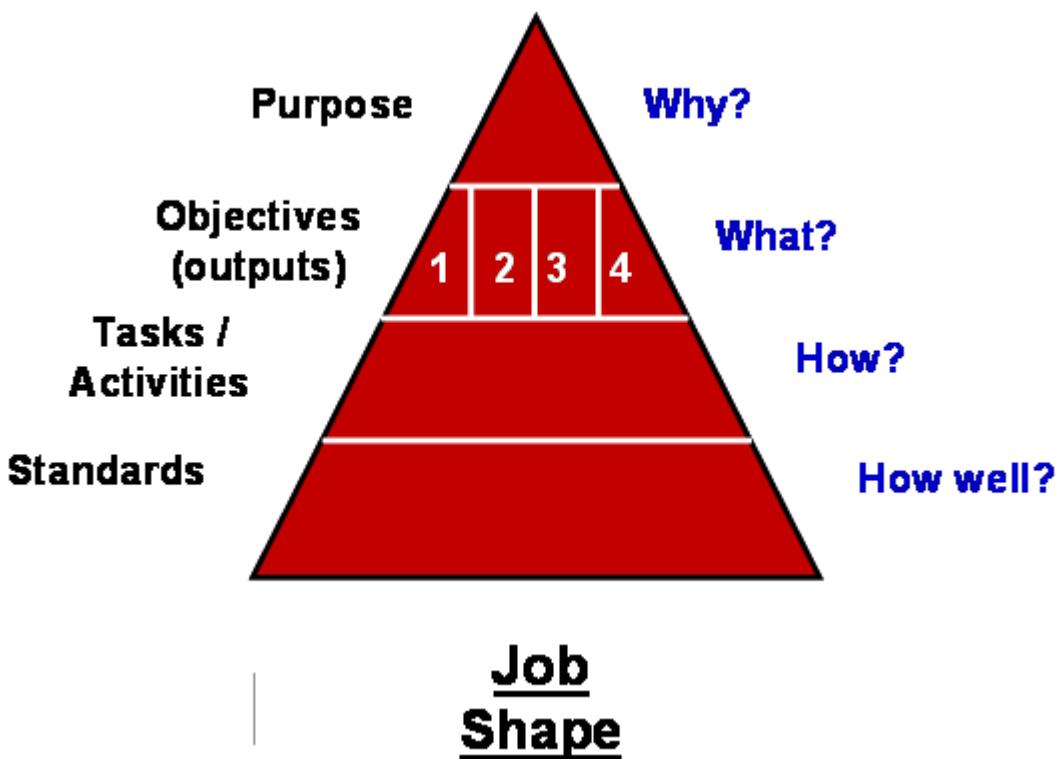
- Provide prospects and customers with a more structured sales experience and increase the likelihood of their needs being met
- Provide sales staff with a framework for self analysis to improve career prospects
- Enable sales managers to benchmark sales staff and manage 'activity', not just 'results'
- Give senior directors a more effective sales resource and improved profits

Several methodologies were also suggested in stressing the relevance of the standards to business needs. In particular Jim Johnson, Managing Director for Radian, after illustrating the number of contexts in which he managed to support businesses through the standards, argued that the sales standards can be presented at the heart of the balanced scorecard approach as shown in the diagram below:



Courtesy of Jim Johnson

Tim Royds, of highclere sales training and consultancy, provided a 'pyramidal' validation of the sales standards through the following diagram:



Courtesy of Tim Royds

This shows how the standards underpin the quality of inputs into a job, which have to be managed in order to achieve the right outputs and give purpose.

There are also several indications from a number of bodies that explained the need to revise their marketing practice in the light of the standards. This was very much encouraged by Alan McIntyre, Marketing Director for Scottish Enterprise, during his presentation in Edinburgh at IBM, Scotland.

The above points confirmed the many benefits of having standards of best practice⁴. These could be summarised in the following broad categories:

- Performance Management
- Assurance of product and service delivery
- Recruitment and selection
- Job design and evaluation
- Identifying learning needs
- Delivering and evaluating learning programmes
- Public recognition certification of competence
- Regulating professional and occupational qualifications and institutions

There is therefore a strong argument for encouraging all sector to develop best practice standards that will become the main reference for best practice. Sales practitioners are keen to develop their status as a credible profession. It seems that the creation and adoption of credible standards would significantly help this process.

The Way Forward

The standards have long been overdue to support individuals, companies and, ultimately national economies. This view which was hypothesised several years ago is proving to be vindicated according to early feedback that has started emanating from early users of the new standards. For instance a recent poll of 150 organisations that were introduced to the sales standards, all stated that they found them useful⁵.

This is a very welcome position as it supports the objectives assigned to the MSSSB when it was set up over 8 years ago.

It is important that sales and marketing professional bodies and institution will rally around this idea and cooperate to build world-class best-practice standards that will help establish the professionalism of their sector.

This task is complex and on-going. MSSSB is aware of this and has already started the revision of its current standards to ensure they take into account the latest developments in the field.

Finally, the title 'Motivation versus Wisdom' aimed to highlight the need to develop the necessary skills and understanding before acting. Motivation is welcome in any initiative but it clearly is not enough to lead to best practice. Even 'best practice' itself can be subject to different

⁴ Bob Mansfield & Lindsay Mitchell *Towards a Competent Workforce* Gower 1997

⁵ Marsh, Wayne (2009). Sales NOS Development Interim Report. Benson Payne.

interpretations. Therefore it is important that the standards are underpinned by clear principles/values. Our experience suggests that the wider these values are the more sustainable will the standards of best practice be.

Postscript: MSSSB, the national body for marketing and sales, welcomes involvement from marketing and sales practitioners who are keen to take part in projects that help develop the professionalism of the marketing and sales communities. If you would like to be involved, please contact: Dr Chahid Fourali at chahidfourali@cim.co.uk