

# Develop a Knowledge Strategy That Everyone Buys Into

## Ecopetrol

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Ecopetrol, the National Oil Company of Colombia, needed to develop a knowledge management strategy in preparation of being publicly traded on the stock market.

To develop the strategy they convened a three-day meeting of the top 200 people from across all parts of the company to figure out what they needed to do about knowledge. The meeting was held at a beautiful retreat in the mountains near Bogota. To obtain the diversity of thought they needed at the meeting, they invited representatives from fifteen MAKE winners (Most Admired Knowledge Enterprises) to speak on the first day of the meeting. However, they were not



asking these organizations, that had a mature knowledge management program in place, to tell them what Ecopetrol should do, rather they were looking for a diversity of perspectives on the topic of knowledge management. For this reason the representative from each company was asked to speak for only 15 minutes.

After each presentation, time was set aside for small group discussion – not Q&A - but pairs or trios talking together to make sense of what they had just heard.

The second day was devoted to a [Knowledge Café](#) where the Ecopetrol managers worked in small groups to incorporate what they had heard the first day. The Knowledge Café questions were, “What are the critical areas of knowledge that Ecopetrol needs to manage?” and “What KM processes should we focus on to manage that knowledge?” Those who had made presentations the day before also participated in the knowledge café, moving from table to table along with all the managers. After six rounds of the knowledge café, with managers listening to and building on the ideas of other managers from different parts of Ecopetrol, the group began to



coalesce around twelve knowledge areas and had also developed ideas about what KM processes would be most useful.



There was time at the end of the day for all the guests to have a conversation in a “fish bowl” while other participants circled around to ask questions and to hear the responses.

The third day was [Open Space](#) where participants selected which of the twelve topic groups

derived from the knowledge café, they wanted to join, based on their own expertise and interest. The goal of each open space group was to set up action plans for the topic they were working on. Near the end of the day, the Open Space groups had a plan to implement each of the initiatives. Those plans were presented back to the whole group for discussion and revision.



Ecopetrol had a knowledge management strategy after three days of convening and conversation – one that the 200 top managers were committed to because they had created it.

Ecopetrol successfully implemented the knowledge management strategy they put together during those three days. Over the next few years, Ecopetrol developed 25 communities of practice, held 30 expert meetings and 19 technological environment forums, all of which made use of Oscillation Principle to periodically convene community groups, experts and diverse organizational member in technological environment forums.