BME INNOLAB · KKV INNOFÓRUM 2026

Product–Customer Coupling

Why the breakthrough happens
when it happens.

> **WHAT THIS IS**
>
> One idea from cybernetics — Ashby's Law of Requisite Variety (1956): a system stays viable only if its regulator can match the **variety** of its world. Treat the customer as that regulator and adoption becomes a **coupling problem** — read end to end on one tool, a **coverage matrix**, across four moves: the reframe, the window, the search, the cost. **Read the coupling, and you can read the timing.**

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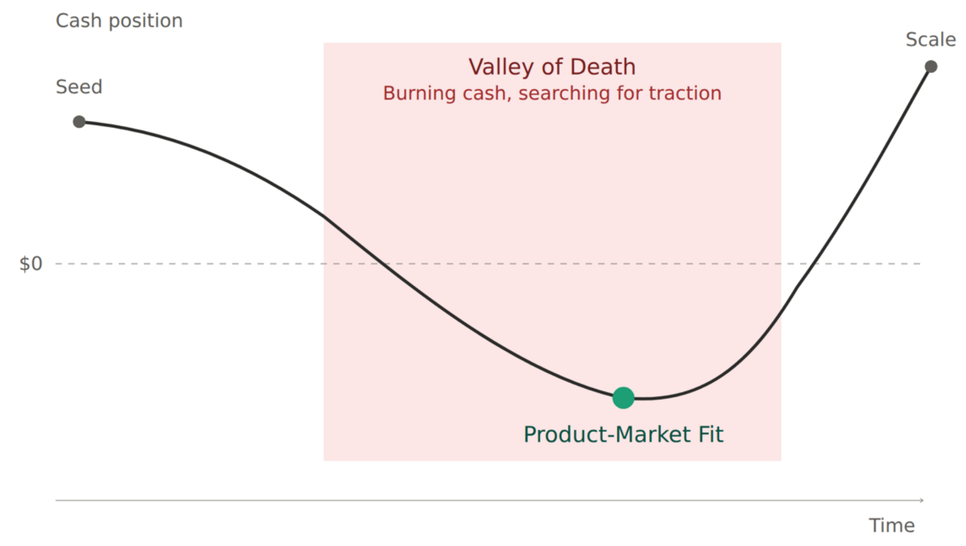
THE GAP

Everyone knows the valley — no framework says where the exit is

Capital buys you **time on the terrain**. Only fit gets you **out**.

THE CLAIM

PMF isn't luck or speed — it's a **structural coupling** you can read in advance.



Cash position over time — the valley is the terrain, PMF is the exit.

THE REFRAME

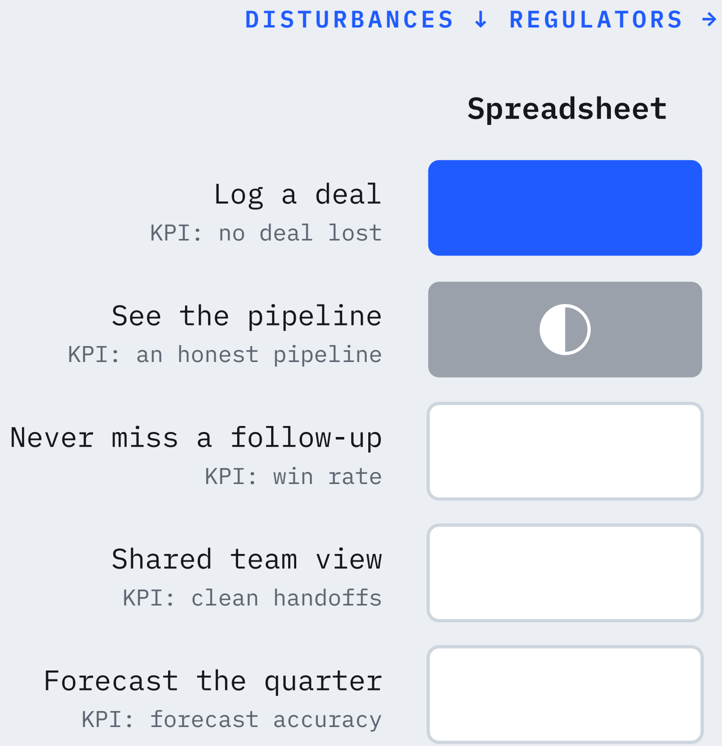
Your customer is not a blank slate — it's already a regulator

A sales team already has a way to not drop deals — a spreadsheet, email, memory. Your product joins **working machinery**.

Each **row** is a disturbance they must absorb — and **a KPI someone defends**. An empty cell isn't a missing feature; it's an undefended number.

SO WHAT

Discovery: open with "what do you do today?", not your demo. **Product:** sell **integration, not replacement**. Hire a workflow-learner before a closer.



The spreadsheet is real, working machinery — it just **strains at the edges** and misses the bottom rows.

THE WINDOW — TIMING

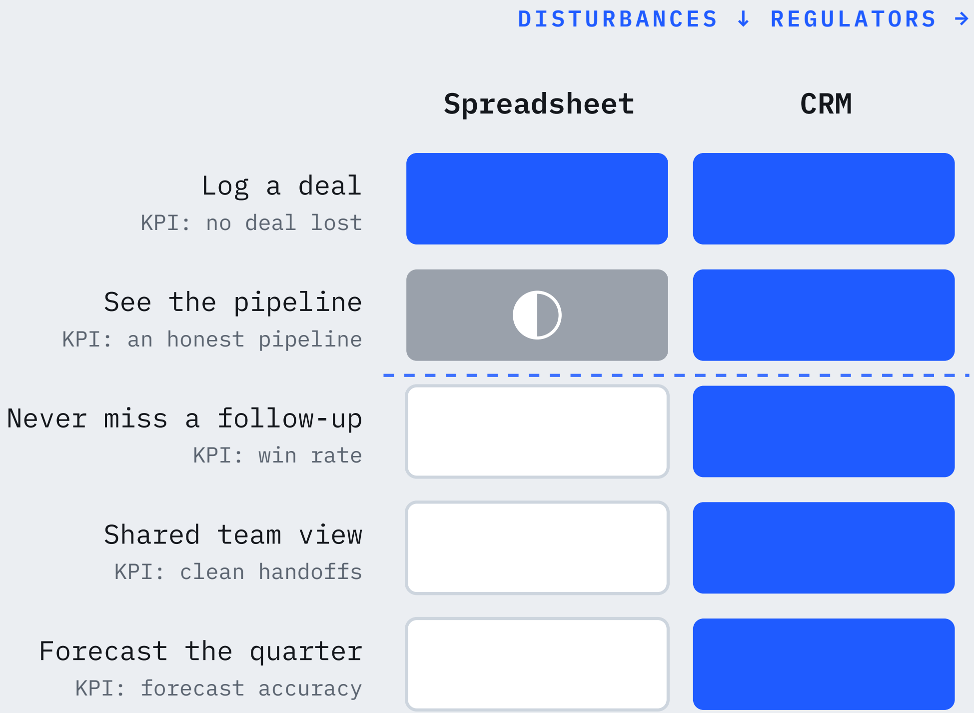
The window opens when their **world outgrows** its tools

The team grew and went remote. The spreadsheet still covers the top rows — but the **new rows below the line** now decide the quarter, and only the CRM reaches them.

Timing is **structural, not lucky** — look where the incumbent **strains at the edge**, not where it executes poorly.

SO WHAT

GTM: target the segment the shift **already hit**. **Product:** build for the opened rows, not parity. Qualify on **"has the shift reached you yet?"**



The door is open **exactly where the spreadsheet's coverage runs out** — the rows below the line. The CRM didn't win on 'log a deal'; it won on the rows the shift made matter.

THE SEARCH

Converge by **model-based search** — not faster probing

Winners close the gap rows **in order** (1→3) — a search path, not random probing.

Coverage ≠ capture. Closing rows wins the deal; getting paid is a separate fight.

SO WHAT

Roadmap: close rows **money-first**, not vanity rows. **Org:** someone owns the call to **keep going — or stop**.

A converging team closes the gap rows **in a deliberate order** — a search path, not random probing.

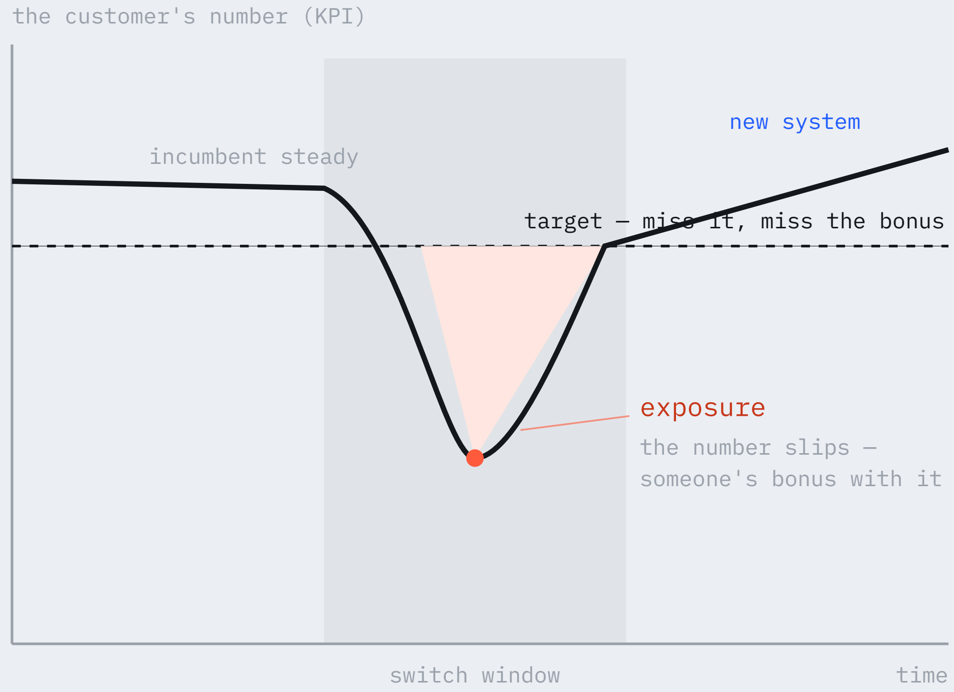
THE COST

Two costs — and the one they fear is exposure

- **Destruction** — the familiar setup torn out. "We used to do it like this." The obvious cost.
- **Exposure** — mid-switch, their **KPIs run unprotected**. Miss the quarter during cutover and it's someone's **target, bonus and credibility** on the line.

SO WHAT

Pricing: absorb the dip — parallel-run, pay-on-milestone, SLAs. **Org:** put a **Customer Success owner** on the transition — exposure is a role, not a salesperson's pitch.

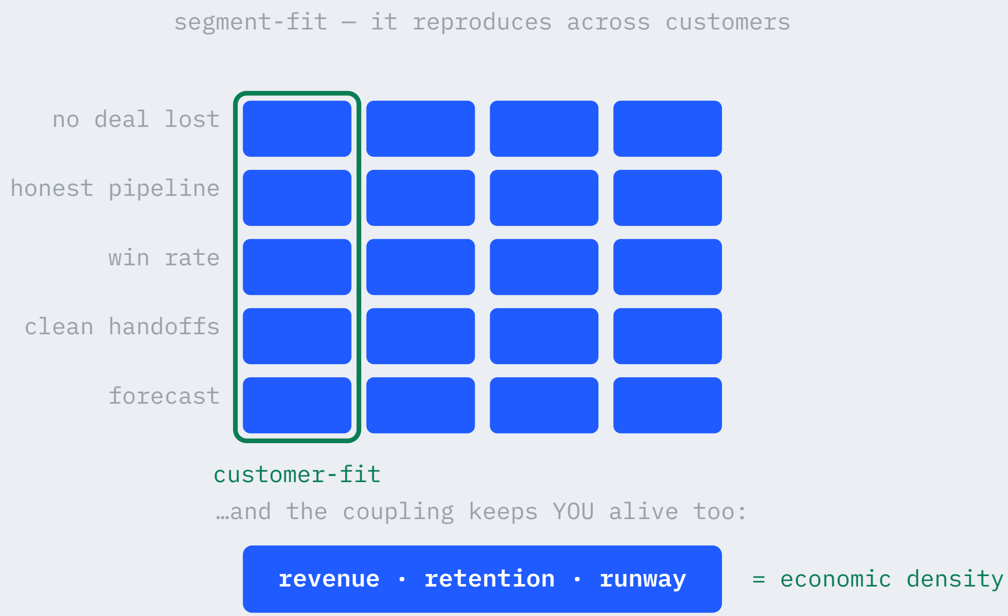


PUTTING IT TOGETHER

PMF = a repeatable coupling, dense enough to keep you alive too

Not a feeling — **every row covered** for one customer, **reproduced** across the segment, dense enough to pay for your own survival.

That's the climb out of the valley: customer-fit reproduced at segment scale, with enough economic density to stabilise your revenue, retention and runway.



Every row covered for one customer (**customer-fit**), reproduced across the segment, dense enough to stabilise your own numbers — **that's PMF**.

MONDAY MORNING

Four moves — map, time, search, price

MAP	What is this customer **already doing** to stay alive? What breaks if you're removed?
TIME	What shift in **their world** makes you necessary now, where you'd have been redundant before?
SEARCH	Close the gap rows **money-first**; who owns the call to keep going — or stop?
PRICE	What do you **destroy**? What's **exposed** mid-transition — whose **KPI and bonus**?

THE ONE LINE TO KEEP

The valley is the terrain. PMF is the exit. PCC is the map.

Capital buys time on the terrain. Only a viable coupling gets you out — and PCC tells you **where the door is**.

PAPER	papers.ssrn.com · abstract 6618399
COMPANION	egomango.github.io/pcc-paper
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COMPANION TO THE PAPER

Product-Customer Coupling: Why Product-Market Fit Happens When It Happens

> **switching cost** = **destruction cost** + **exposure cost**

Founders price destruction — feature parity, migration work. They under-price exposure. Enterprise pilots die on exposure.

Companion to Babel, 2026 (SSRN)

Tamás Bábel · BME · 29 pp · SSRN — the formal model and five falsifiable predictions.