

Coherent Sales Ecosystems

A People Centric View of Sales Effectiveness

In today's world, there may not be a dearth of sales opportunities. Innovative offerings at one end and greater purchasing power at the other are waiting to be matched for value creation. Technology and better access are also advancing the infrastructure available to make this meeting possible. Yet, most companies are struggling to meet their sales objectives. What's missing?

There is increasing evidence that the bottleneck for sales performance may have shifted. In the VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous) atmosphere, the business as usual approach is not sufficient. We need higher order human faculties like imagination, innovation, perseverance, enthusiasm and inspiration to play a larger role. The call to activate the emotional engagement of the Salesforce is clearer now, more than ever.

The following illustration attempts to present a comprehensive system of Sales Effectiveness that integrates the rational and emotional aspects of a Salesperson's world.



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I have been a salesman; and continue to be in some sense. On the best of days, being in sales gives one the feeling of being a soldier on the front. We are the forefront of the company's thrust into the uncharted territory in the face of all the hostility. There constantly remains, in midst of all of this, a sense of mission that makes all the effort and turmoil worthwhile.

Of course, this sense of mission is bolstered by the belief that your organization stands behind you. Its vast machinery is geared to help you add value to the customer and make you look good in front of them in the process. From the point-of-view of the salesperson, this is where the difference between great organizations and the others begin to show up. Great companies allow salespeople the time, resources and the mental space to plan for their budgets, build relationships with the customers, plan customized offerings for them and contribute to the sales and margin of the company. In the "other" companies, salespeople find themselves on the defensive with their customers with products or solutions that don't deliver the promise, service contracts that under-perform, late shipments or slipping deadlines. They reach out for help. However, in this turmoil they find their managers, though well intentioned, are too distracted themselves to be good mentors. The salespersons' motivation slips and they begin losing momentum in their career. Suddenly, being on the front does not seem worthwhile; a bit like the army that realizes that the rations, the arsenal, the letters and the commendations are not arriving. It is then the sales person begins to look out. A few quarters of this and the salesperson has moved on; adding to the statistics: "The Company suffered 36% attrition this year; compared to 38% in the industry. We are putting together a strategic retention plan starting with hiring people who fit our profile."

While the preceding example is contrived, it gets played out in part or in full in several organizations. What are we missing? Are our primary representatives to our customers feeling valued and served? Where is the sweet spot where the needs of the organization and the salespeople engage to create a vibrant force?

It is in view of this challenge that we put out this signature document on "**A People Centric View of Sales Effectiveness**". What we propose in it is not just a retention approach, but a comprehensive view of a system that addresses the deepest needs of organizations as well as the individuals who have chosen sales as the profession to build fulfilling careers. Some of the nuances that we have attempted to address here are:

People Centricity in addition to Funnel Centricity:

A vast majority of the literature available on Sales Effectiveness tends to centre on traversing the sales funnel. However, what most of it overlooks is the **ecosystem** that motivates and supports the Salesperson as he constantly churns the sales cycle.

Sales Design in addition to Sales Execution: This perspective is clearly targeted at Senior Leaders who have the breadth of view to look at Sales design, even as the function churns out the numbers via month on month execution. The intent here is to create a blueprint of a sales ecosystem that promotes congruence within the sales function by ensuring that all support systems are aligned to the success of the Salesperson.

Personal Outcomes (PO) in addition to Business Outcomes (BO): Selling is as much an emotional role as it is rational. Salespeople tend to seek emotional rewards (recognition / partnership etc.) as much as the monetary rewards. A truly sustainable Sales Effectiveness Model would necessarily address Personal Outcomes (PO) in addition to the Business Outcomes (BO).

The People Centric View

Salespeople come to work every-day as distinct individuals; complete with their own missions, values and capabilities. Organizations they work for can assist them in meeting their functional and personal aspirations by providing guidance and support at 2 levels

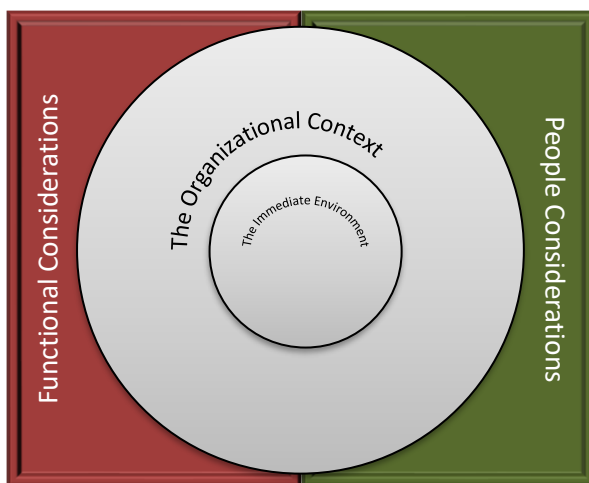
1. **The Immediate Environment:** This represents a salesperson's day to day experience as embodied in the value fit, sales processes, technology interfaces and the development inputs that he receives regularly. These are determined by his manager or at most the sales function.

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2. The Organizational Context: These are the factors that are not visible on a day to day basis, but have a tangible impact on the effectiveness and motivation of the sales person. These are usually determined and driven by organizational strategy and policy.

At both these levels, real and sustainable sales effectiveness emerges only when both the functional aspects (Sales Value Propositions) as well as the People aspects (Performance and Career Considerations) converge. This suggests the following high level framework for sales effectiveness.

Figure 2 – A Framework for People Centric Sales Effectiveness



We now attempt to study the components of the different segments of this framework:

a. Functional Considerations in the Organizational Context: This segment of the model is focussed on the overall value proposition that the organization offers to its customers. Each organization targets business outcomes like Sales / Market Share, Margin, Return in Assets etc. With this end, they put out products and services in the market and package them with explicit (or sometimes implicit) service promise. They build support services (like marketing) and infrastructure (like the delivery and service structures). They explore channels for taking these service and products to big and small customers. The level of excellence of each of these aspects is the constant companion of a sales person.

One of the most important aspects of the success with customers is the **emotion** that these invoke in the salespeople about their ability to help them achieve their Business Outcomes (BO) as well as the Personal Outcomes (PO).

Element	Emotional Connotation
Product Features – The distinctive features advantages and benefits of my product	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (PO) Do I feel confident in approaching the customers for more complex sales based on their product / service experience? (BO) Do our products and services deliver value to the customers?
Marketing Support – The creation of a holistic brand image of the product and allied services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (PO) Do I feel a sense of pride in representing this brand? (BO) Does the brand (with all considerations including price) make it easy to sell the product/service as compared to others with similar features?
Service Strategy – Post sales support provided to customers to regain the performance promise promptly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (PO) Do I feel confident that my personal credibility will be maintained or enhanced by the post-sale service experience of the customers? (BO) Does the post sales service experience make it easier to upsell / cross sell or gain greater share of wallet?
Account Strategies – Distinctive strategies to get a disproportionate share of the mind / wallet of key accounts through a win- win relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (PO) As a representative of the overall brand and product propositions, do I feel valued by our most important accounts? (BO) Are the most important accounts able to meet their own goals by partnering with us? (BO) Do we enjoy a disproportionate share of the minds and wallets of our most important accounts?
Channel Strategies - Distinctive strategies to get the desired performance standards from the channel partners through a win- win relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (PO) As a representative of the overall brand and product/service propositions, do I feel valued by the channel partners? (BO) Are the channel partners able to meet their own goals by partnering with us? (BO) Are the channel partners meeting the company's performance objectives?
Product Availability / Fulfilment - The systemic and consistent ability to deliver the products and services reach the customer on-time, in-full, at cost	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (PO) Do I feel credible in selling products, knowing that the orders placed will be fulfilled on time in full? (BO) Will we miss our targets if the orders placed are not fulfilled?

b. People Considerations in the Organizational Context: The people side of sales effectiveness is as important as the functional side. The ability of an organization to systematically engage the emotions of the salespeople (in addition to the 1:1 emotional support of the immediate manager) is a huge factor in overall sales effectiveness. ***It is often said that our thoughts provide us the direction to move in, but emotions serve as the fuel that gives traction to our actions.***

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In the case of salespeople, who are regularly required to stretch in excess of resources and job descriptions, the role of the emotional connect becomes even more important. Even their core-work process demands mastery of the emotions; of their customers as well as themselves. The predominance of emotions is especially noteworthy in countries like India which are culturally inclined towards extrinsic rewards (provided by others) rather than intrinsic rewards.

Addressing the people side of sales effectiveness ensures that salespeople are not consumed in unresolved emotional issues with the organization. Instead, they are free and motivated to provide undivided attention to the cause of delighting customers and channel partners.

Any model that does not include these people considerations would underserve the cause of sales effectiveness. Some of the elements that must form the part of any effective sales design from this context are as below.

Element	Emotional Connotation
Organizational Reputation – The extent to which the “badge” of the company enhances my esteem with customers , partners and my social circle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (PO) Do I feel a sense of pride as being an employee of this company? • (BO) Do we, as a company, command respect from our customers? • (BO) Do we, as a company, command respect from our channel partners?
Leadership Styles – Leadership styles that makes the daily effort worthwhile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (PO) Does the leadership of my company inspire me to do my best every day? • (BO) Are the leaders of my company sensitive to the needs of the customers and channel partners?
Integration with the Organization – The extent to which salespeople, even when located or calling in distant areas feel valued, supported and included with the organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (PO) Do I feel like an integral part of the organization? • (BO) Is the Sales function adequately supported by other functions in serving the customers well?
Career Development – The assurance that the careers of salespeople are being furthered while they are out serving the customers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (PO) Do I feel that my long term career goals will be fulfilled in this firm? • (BO) In general, is the sales team motivated and engaged with the organization?
Policies - The extent to which policies facilitate in-field working or, at least, do not distract from it.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (PO) Do the policies of make it easier for me to discharge my professional duties? • (BO) Are the policies of the organization sufficiently differentiated to take into account the realities of the sales situation?

c. Considerations in the Immediate Environment: The organizational context and the elements discussed thus far are probably uniform for all the functions in the organization. The sales function usually, and on merit, demands some variations to the standard organizational practices. Take technology, for instance. While salespeople will use the same mail client or intranet as the rest of the organization, they will definitely need enhanced support to provide for issue like remote access and specific applications like customer relationship management, lead management etc. Similarly, while general compensation principles applicable to the entire organization work for sales too, specific reward plans by way of short cycle incentives need to be put in place to push sales numbers. This section focusses on some of these sales function specific factors.

Element	Emotional Connotation
Enabling and Motivating Supervision – Qualities of the Sales Managers that motivate and enable sustained performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (PO) Does my supervisor care for me as a person? • (BO) DO I feel that I am a part of a successful team?
Motivating Rewards – Linkage of rewards to the key business drivers and selling cycles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (PO) Do the sales rewards motivate me to a higher performance? • (BO) Are sales rewards aligned to the key business drivers?
Value Fit – The extent to which the individual values of sellers are served by the day to demands by the supervisor, customers an processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (PO) Do I feel I can be myself at work? • (BO) Does my immediate work environment supports the espoused values of the organization?
Enabling Sales Processes – Processes that serve as an enabler / multiplier or impede the sales person's performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (PO) Do the prescribed sales processes make my life easier? • (BO) Do the tracking and reporting systems balance diligence vs. effort? • (BO) Are the sales processes aligned to the overall strategy of the organization?
Enabling Technology – Sales specific technologies that support specific functional needs like CRM, distributed information collation etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (PO) Does the organization's technology make my professional and personal life simpler? • (BO) Has technology been adequately leveraged by the sales function?
Continuous Capability Development – Access to skill development from multiple sources to keep abreast with changes in products, competitive moves and customer requirements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (PO) Do I feel that I am constantly growing as a professional • (BO) Does the company equip the sales team with the skills and resources to handle the dynamic challenges in the market place?

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How you can use this Signature Perspective

Even as we put together this document, we can visualize some of our high driving sales clients bracing themselves at the complexity of the proposed model. “There are just too many factors. Sales is a simple function!!” However, the question we urge them to ask themselves is “Do you know of any sales force that has not addressed or underperformed on any of the listed factors and yet been successful?” We urge sales leaders to adopt a mind-set of **“Requisite complexity”**. It is for them to take up the task of bringing clarity, incisiveness and consistence within and among the different aspects of this model. If, and only if, they are able to do so will the salesperson in the field be able to execute the true task of serving customers with focus and energy.

We propose multiple ways in which this model may be used. Some examples could be:

1. **Launch of a Sales Team:** This can be used to launch a new sales team or a specific sub-team (new market entry, a new channel, a speciality product etc.). This model allows you to sculpt a sales system that will rise to optimum swiftly rather than over years of failing, learning and fine-tuning.
2. **Step changing the effectiveness of an existing team:** As a sales team faces greater challenges through market or competitive shifts or just renewed internal ambitions, the elements of the sales effectiveness system need to change. This model will allow the entire system to change while maintaining internal congruence. This can be used as an effective checklist of things to revamp.
3. **Maintaining a track of the Sales Team’s Conviction:** This signature can be used to formulate a questionnaire / survey that can be administered to the sales team to gauge its level of conviction on systemic sales effectiveness across performance periods.

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