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The DNA of Top Sales Organizations

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Initiatives: Delivery of Functional Responsibilities; Accelerating Sales Productivity with AI

In the constantly shifting B2B sales landscape, CSOs grapple with two challenges: the relentless pressure to hit quarterly targets and the need to sustain competitiveness in the long term. Use this research to learn how the best sales organizations design for adaptability in order to thrive.

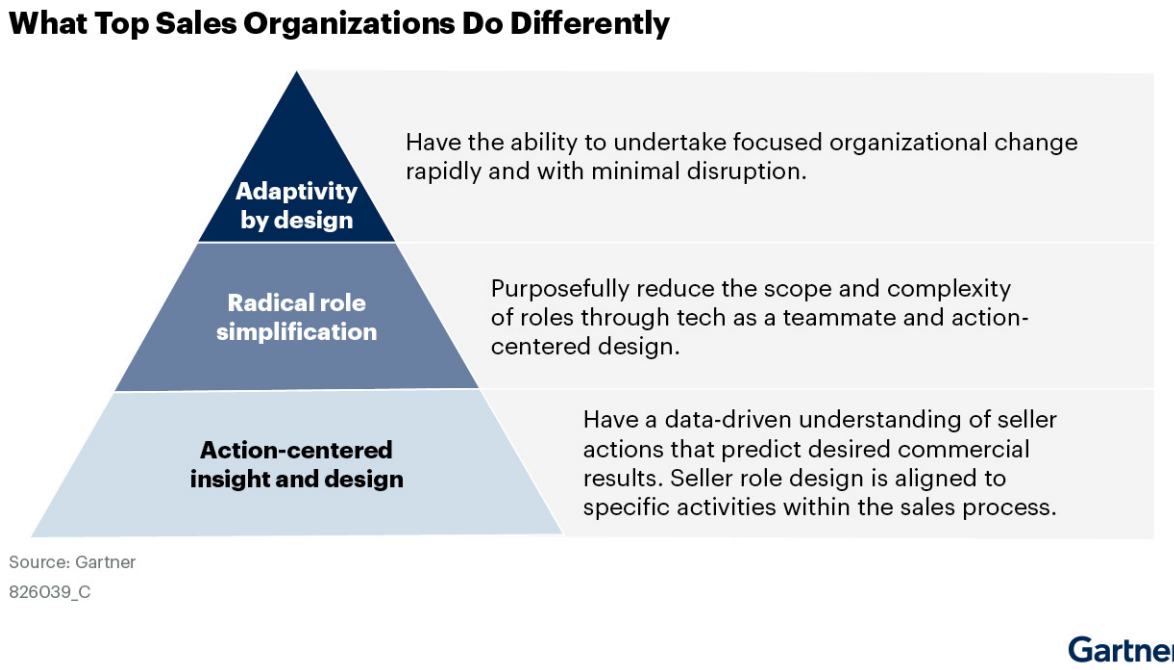
Analysis

Sales organizations are struggling to adapt to new technology, evolving buying behaviors, and economic headwinds. Yet, the pressure to sustain and grow revenue remains. CSOs who default to traditional seller-centric tactics like hiring, coaching and layering on sales tech to mitigate these challenges will face diminishing returns that actively erode sales performance by overwhelming reps.

Sellers are increasingly overloaded: 70% feel overwhelmed by the number of technologies needed for their work and 72% by the number of skills required for their roles. This directly hurts performance, as overwhelmed sellers are 45% less likely to meet their sales quotas. [1]

To break this cycle of stagnation and change fatigue, sales organizations should deploy a multilayered strategy to successfully drive growth through transformation. Figure 1 illustrates the three key components of this strategy that distinguish top-performing organizations.

Figure 1: What Top Sales Organizations Do Differently



Together, these key components help sales leaders identify the actions that matter most, focus seller effort on high-value work and adapt continuously as business conditions evolve.

- **Action-centered insight and design:** Focus on analyzing sales execution at a finer granularity than traditional sales process stages. Instead of viewing sales through broad workflow phases, such as prospecting or closing, using action-centered insight and design will help organizations deconstruct sales workflows into specific, measurable actions and discrete tasks that drive business outcomes. This approach enables organizations to assess sellers' day-to-day actions, replicate top-performer behaviors and align their overall sales technology stack to support workflows.
- **Radical role simplification:** Focus on redesigning sales roles by aligning them to high-impact actions and workflows while systematically removing, automating or reallocating low-value tasks. The goal is to narrow each role to a focused set of core responsibilities, so sellers concentrate on activities that directly drive commercial success.

- **Adaptivity by design:** Combine continuous intelligence to detect and monitor external signals with scenario planning to evaluate risks and test assumptions. Together, these capabilities enable sales organizations to detect emerging shifts early, make rapid strategic decisions and reconfigure roles and workflows with minimal commercial disruption. This is based on an organizational and leadership philosophy that focuses on continuous evolution in response to constant market change.

Research Highlights

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Action-Centered Insight and Design

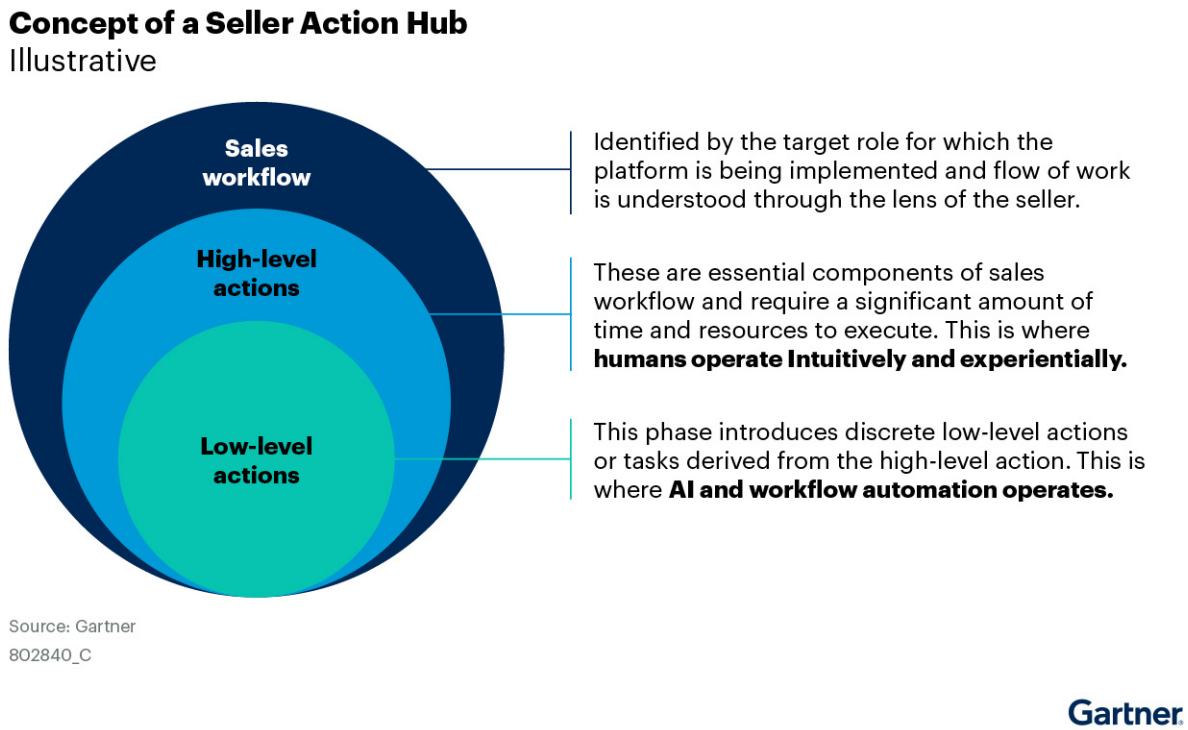
CSOs should use action-centered insight and design to understand how seller actions contribute to commercial outcomes and improve execution (see Figure 2). To operationalize this approach, deconstruct workflows into action-level tasks — map customer buying tasks to supporting supplier activities and skills to align roles into cross-functional pods that eliminate functional silos. CSOs can then leverage the action-level insights to score AI opportunities by commercial impact versus feasibility, ultimately embedding prioritized capabilities into a centralized seller action hub that delivers context-aware next steps directly inside daily rep tools.

Figure 2: Sales Workflows and Their Impact on Results



- Align roles to the customer journey and map required skills at the action level: Case Study: Unified and Customer-Journey-Aligned GTM StructureAs buyers increasingly move toward digital and multichannel buying, siloed commercial functions often struggle to deliver a coordinated buying experience. Use this case study to see how SMART Technologies mapped customer buying tasks to the activities and skills required to support them, then redesigned customer-facing roles and teams around those customer journey stages.
- Evaluate and prioritize AI investment opportunities to focus sellers on high-impact activities: Toolkit: Advance Your Sales Strategy by Embedding AI at the Action Level Sales operations leaders struggle to make informed AI investment decisions amid a crowded market of solutions and vendor claims. Use this toolkit to execute the six-step seller action hub methodology, deconstructing workflows into granular actions, assessing RevTech capabilities and identifying targeted AI opportunities (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Concept of a Seller Action Hub



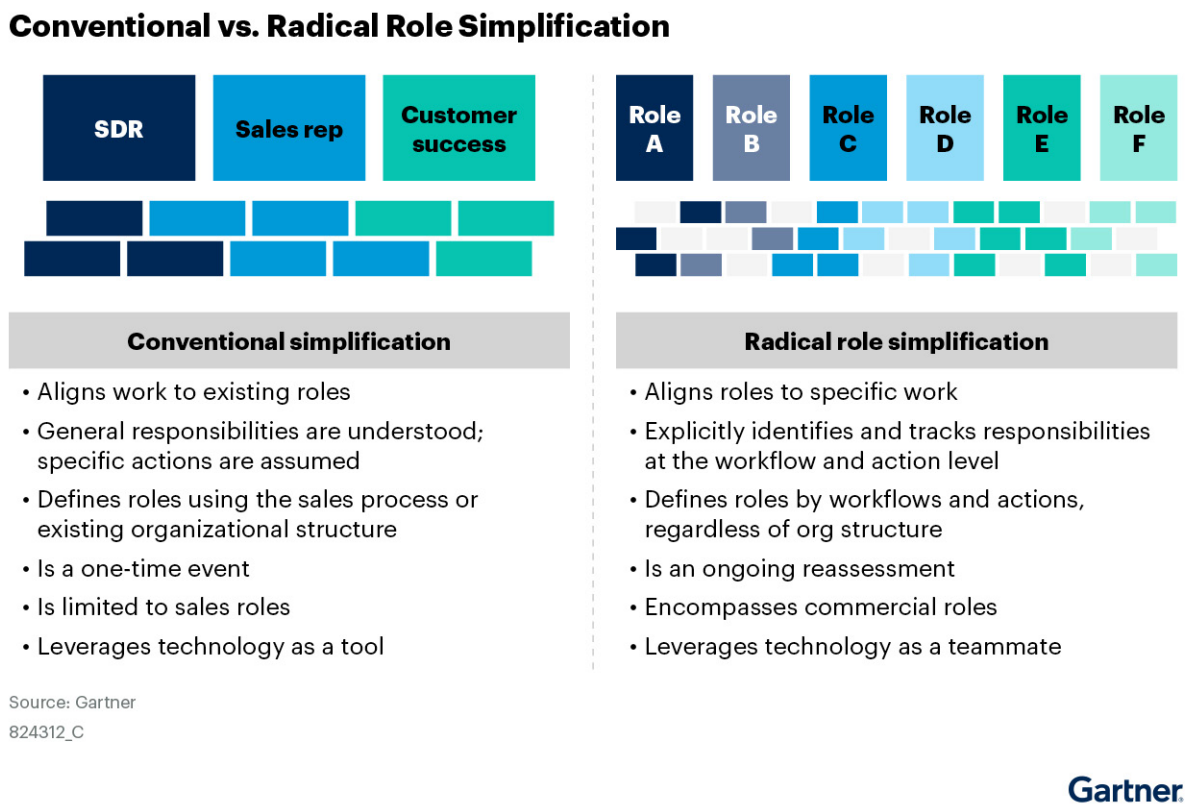
- Build a seller action hub to streamline seller workflows: Increase Sales Productivity With an AI-Powered Seller Action HubSellers are increasingly overwhelmed by disconnected technologies, workflow fragmentation and excessive context switching, making it difficult to sustain productivity. Use this research to design a seller action hub that connects seller workflows through AI-powered systems of action, automates routine activities and delivers context-aware recommendations directly within the flow of work.

Radical Role Simplification

CSOs should apply radical role simplification to reduce sellers from being overwhelmed by focusing effort on the activities that contribute most to performance. They can begin by aligning roles to the actions that drive results, then use technology to take on lower-value work and progressively redesign roles for AI-augmented ways of working.

- Reduce role complexity by aligning seller roles to actions: Toolkit: Radical Role Simplification Framework for SellersSellers often accumulate overlapping responsibilities and low-value activities over time, increasing role complexity and reducing productivity. Use this toolkit to identify the actions that drive commercial performance, reduce time spent on lower-value work, and redesign seller roles around the actions that matter most instead of broad job scopes (see Figure 4).

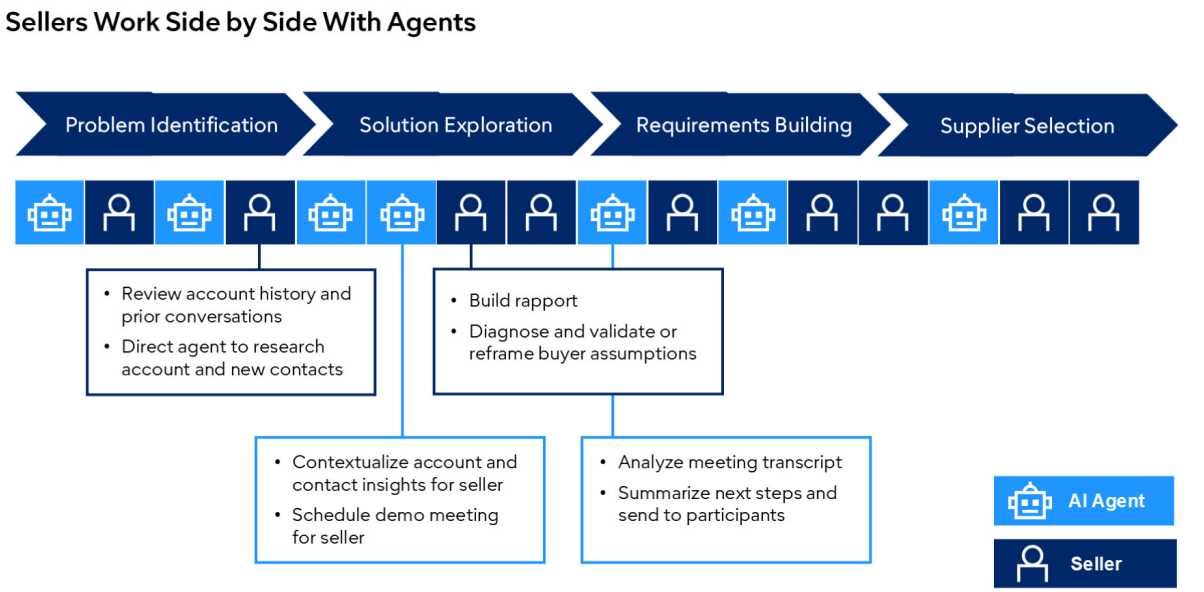
Figure 4: Conventional vs. Radical Role Simplification



- Shift low-value work to technology: Case Study: Improve Prospecting With Technology as a TeammateAs buyers become harder to engage, sellers spend significant time on prospecting activities that are difficult to scale and often deliver diminishing returns. Use this case study to see how Cisco deployed an AI-powered technology teammate to score and prioritize accounts, recommend next best actions and automate portions of the prospecting workflow.

- Design future roles around AI-augmented workflows: Redesign Roles to Elevate AI-Augmented Seller ProductivityAs AI assumes a growing share of sales activities, productivity gains and ROI will continue to disappoint if seller roles are not redesigned to reflect new ways of working. Use this research to redesign roles around AI-augmented workflows, automate low-value tasks and clearly define how work should be distributed between sellers and AI agents (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Sellers Work Side by Side With Agents



Note: Typical journeys would contain more components than this, but we have simplified for graphical clarity.
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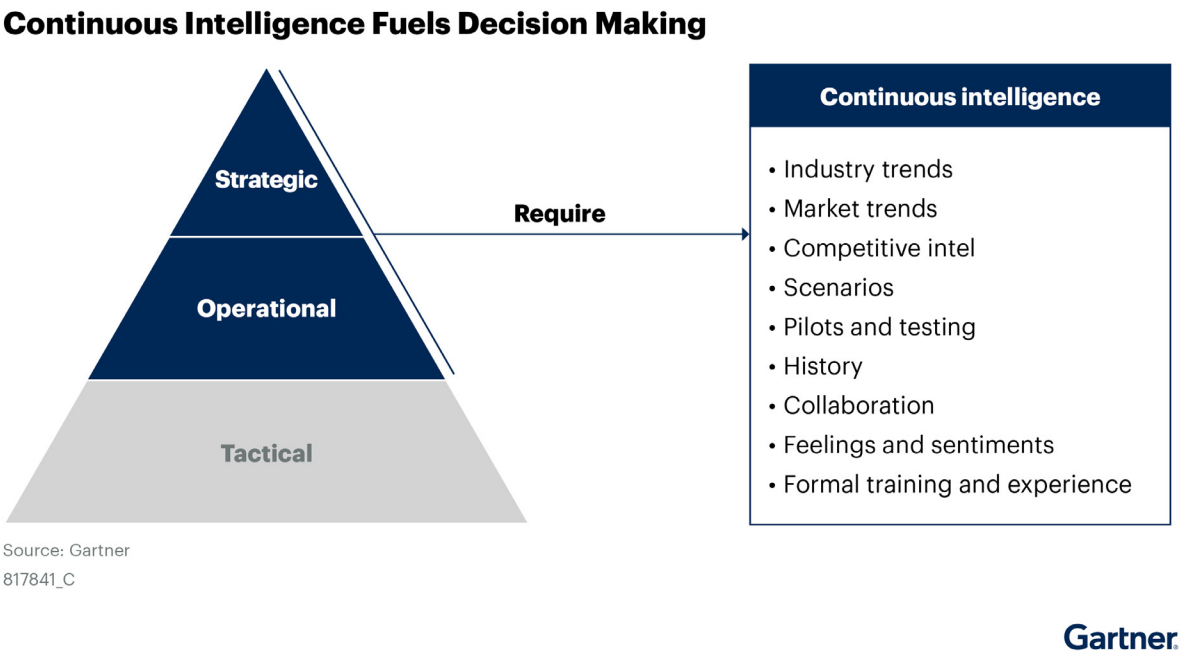
Adaptivity by Design

CSOs should plan for adaptivity by design to strengthen their organization's ability to respond to changing market conditions. They can start by building continuous learning and seller adaptability, then develop intelligence-driven decision making, and extend those capabilities through AI-enabled planning and scenario simulations.

- Embed continuous learning to sustain adaptability: Build Ongoing and Adaptive Learning for Sellers With EverboardingTraditional sales training often fails to sustain skill development over time, leaving sellers to adapt to changing customer needs and business priorities on their own. Use this research to replace point-in-time training with everboarding, a continuous learning approach that delivers personalized coaching, reinforcement and development within the flow of work.

- Build the commercial organization's adaptability through continuous intelligence: How to Adapt Your Sales or Revenue Operations Model for Future GrowthSales organizations frequently fail to detect emerging market shifts, changing customer needs, and competitive disruptions early enough to respond effectively, putting future growth at risk. Use this research to build continuous intelligence and scenario-planning capabilities that help monitor change, evaluate risks and adjust plans proactively (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Continuous Intelligence Fuels Decision Making



- Use AI scenario simulations to outpace market shifts: Operationalize Sales Planning to Outpace the CompetitionAs market conditions change faster than organizations can update annual plans, CSOs risk losing the ability to anticipate competitive and market disruptions before they affect revenue performance. Use this research to operationalize a revenue flight simulator that uses AI-enabled simulations to pressure-test critical decisions and evaluate uncertainties before resources are committed.

Evidence

[1] **2024 Gartner Seller Skills Survey.** This survey was conducted to understand what seller skills are needed to excel in a changing B2B sales world, where buyers prefer digital; data and technology usage is expected; and the relationship with technology becomes more that of being teammates. The survey was held from January through March 2024. The online sample included 1,026 B2B sellers across North America (n = 696), Western Europe (n = 182) and Asia/Pacific (n = 148). Industry segments included banking and financial services, healthcare, information technology, manufacturing, business services, and telecommunications. Qualifying respondents had at least one year in the role at an organization with at least 50 sellers and enterprisewide annual revenue in 2023 of at least $25 million or equivalent. Disclaimer: The results of this survey do not represent global findings or the market as a whole, but reflect sentiments of the respondents and companies surveyed.

Contributors

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Seller Time Spend Assessment

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Case Study: Improve Prospecting With Technology as a Teammate

Sellers Need Technology as a Teammate Not a Tool

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