



Gartner®

The CSO Report

Gartner answers top CSO challenges.

2Q26

CSO 2Q26 insights to action

Each quarter, Gartner looks across client interactions, proprietary research data and external media to identify the top issues facing CSOs. In 2Q26, CSOs indicate continued pressure to grow while evolving their organizations to succeed in an environment marked by significant market disruption and changing buyer behavior.

Use this edition of The CSO Report to enhance decision making in 2026 and strengthen your sales impact.

Top CSO challenges

2Q26

Evolve to meet new buyer preferences



Drive seller productivity through enablement



Enhance performance through AI



Keep sellers motivated



Adapt to change



Source: Gartner

How can we meet growing buyer demand for digital-first buying experiences?

B2B buyers today want autonomy throughout the buying journey, increasingly turning to digital channels and generative AI tools to research solutions, compare products and validate decisions. The quality of a supplier's digital experience is a key factor in driving purchase outcomes today.

Sales and marketing collaboration on digital commerce management increases the likelihood of commercial growth by 2.1x compared to a siloed approach.

70%



of B2B buyers prefer a completely digital, self-service buying experience, with no interaction with sales representatives.

Source: Gartner

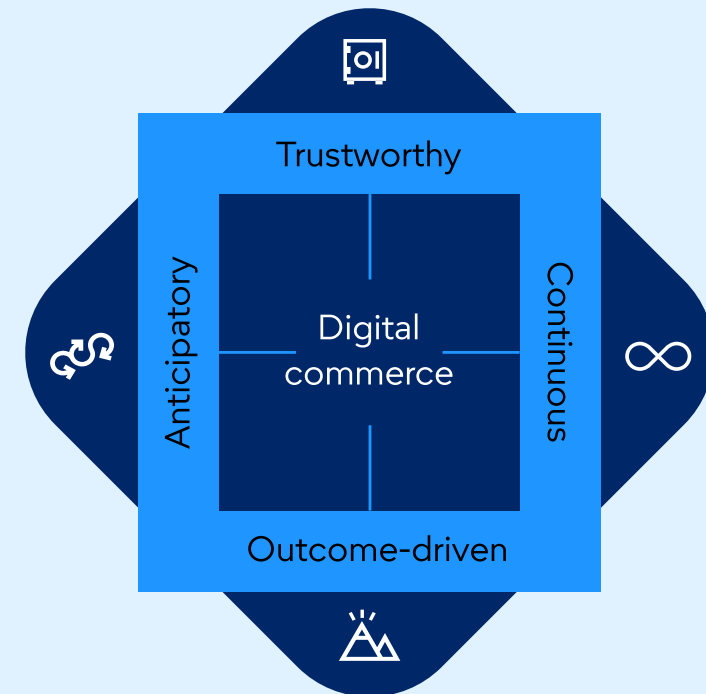
Evolve to meet new buyer preferences

Faced with this reality, CSOs often attempt to replicate existing sales models digitally or treat digital commerce as a buyer self-service channel. This approach restricts the creation of new revenue streams by preventing the organization from adopting routes to market (RTM) that could better capture untapped market segments and drive higher commercial impact.

CSOs should assess the full range of direct and indirect digital sales channels, evaluating trade-offs between cost, effectiveness and volume to determine the most appropriate RTM for delivering on strategic goals. Then, when deploying new digital channels, CSOs should adhere to four guiding principles:

- **Establish trust.** Organizations can deliver experiences customers perceive as trustworthy by providing transparency about data sharing, offering options for managing privacy and avoiding invasive or “creepy” personalization.
- **Act continuously.** Offer the opportunity for 24/7 engagement, ensuring continuity between channels and seamless experiences.
- **Be anticipatory.** Use your accumulated insight and data about the customers to recognize when they will need help, and provide a solution, often before a problem or need occurs.
- **Be outcome-driven.** Organizations must pivot from a transactional focus to orienting on outcomes, solving customer problems through whatever means necessary.

4 principles for winning in digital-first B2B selling



Source: Gartner

Take action with Gartner resources



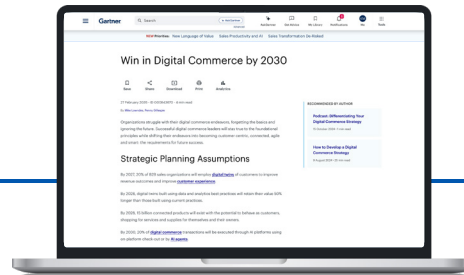
Learn how to **evaluate digital routes to market to identify the best way to reach target segments.**



Schedule a call with a Gartner analyst to navigate growing buyer expectations for seamless, digital-first buying experiences.



Learn how to **develop a digital commerce function that is customer-centric, connected, agile and smart.**



Already a client?

Use **AskGartner** to explore:

How can we meet growing buyer demand for digital-first buying experiences? ↗



How should sales enablement be structured and integrated to maximize sales productivity and effectiveness?

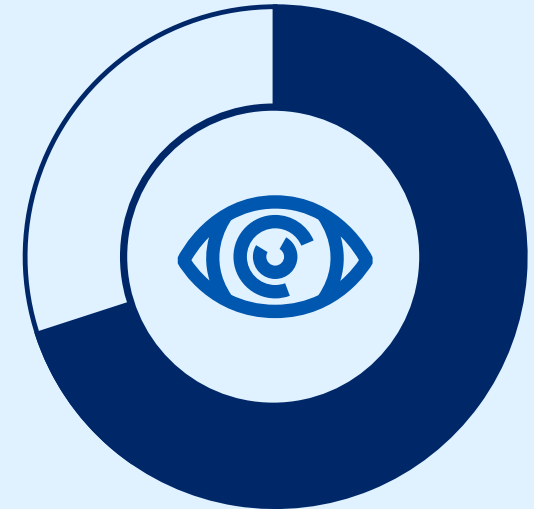
CSOs continue to focus on seller productivity, seeing new or improved tools and skills training as the top 2 levers. CSOs will look to their enablement teams to drive these initiatives, but enablement will need to evolve beyond static playbooks and traditional training to meet the volume and pace of change required.

Organizations that equip sellers with AI-enabled “next best actions” are 2.6x more likely to achieve commercial growth.

By 2028,

40%

of B2B sales organizations will use agentic AI learning reinforcement, relying on data fabrics rather than traditional triggers or training methods.



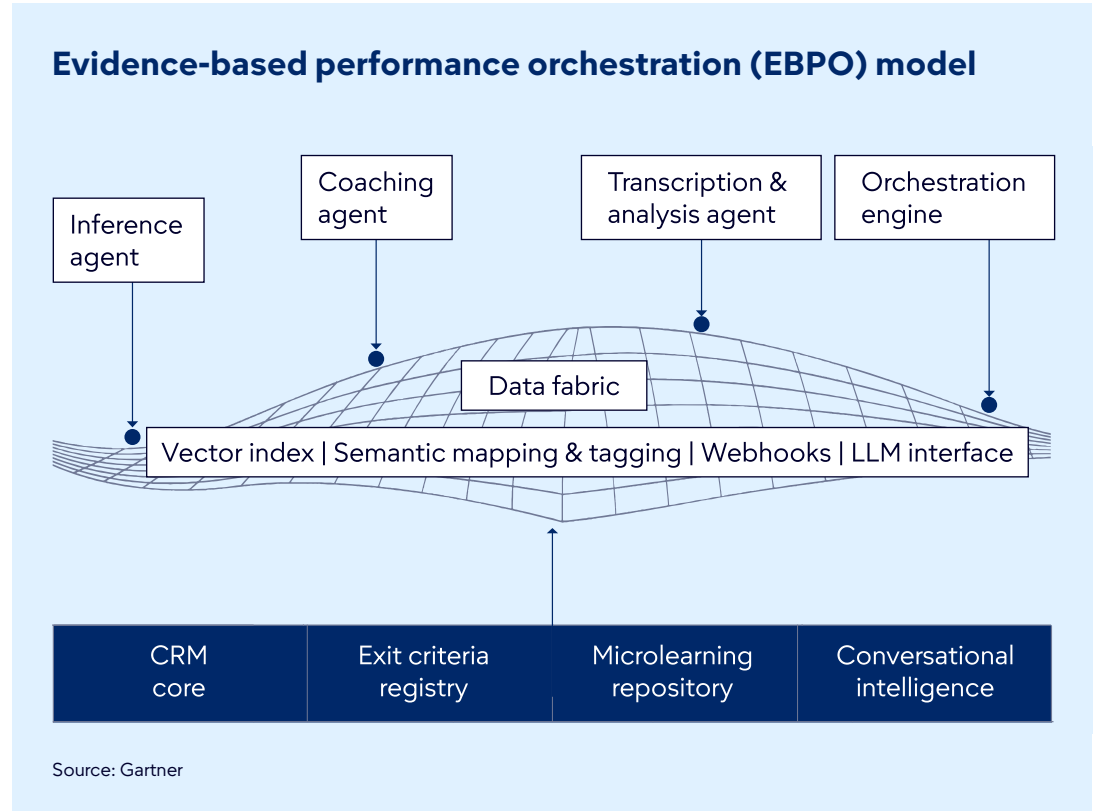
Source: Gartner

Drive seller productivity through enablement

Leading sales enablement organizations use AI to embed enablement in the flow of work, tracking and shaping seller behaviors at scale through evidence-based performance orchestration (EBPO).

EBPO uses a multiagent system to analyze deals, identify specific missing exit criteria and deploy the precise microlearning needed for the seller to close that gap.

EBPO moves organizations from subjective sales enablement to objective performance orchestration. It “orchestrates” outcomes by ensuring every seller has access to the precise microskill required, based on observable behaviors tied to successful outcomes, to unlock a specific buyer commitment at the exact moment it is needed.



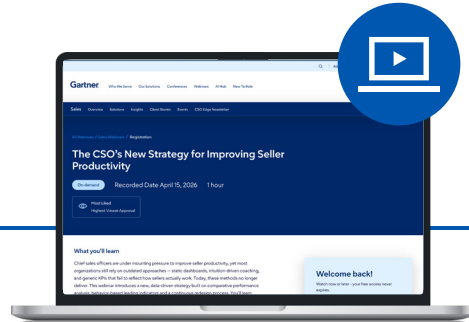
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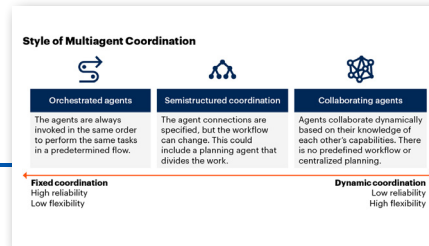
Use the [Gartner Comparative Seller Performance Diagnostic](#) to assess the drivers of seller productivity and enable data-driven coaching for sustained revenue growth.



Watch our [webinar](#) to discover a data-driven approach for identifying high-impact seller behaviors and enabling performance-improving coaching.



Direct your enablement function to adopt an EBPO approach, and [Drive Seller Performance With AI-Powered, Real-Time Enablement](#).



Already a client?

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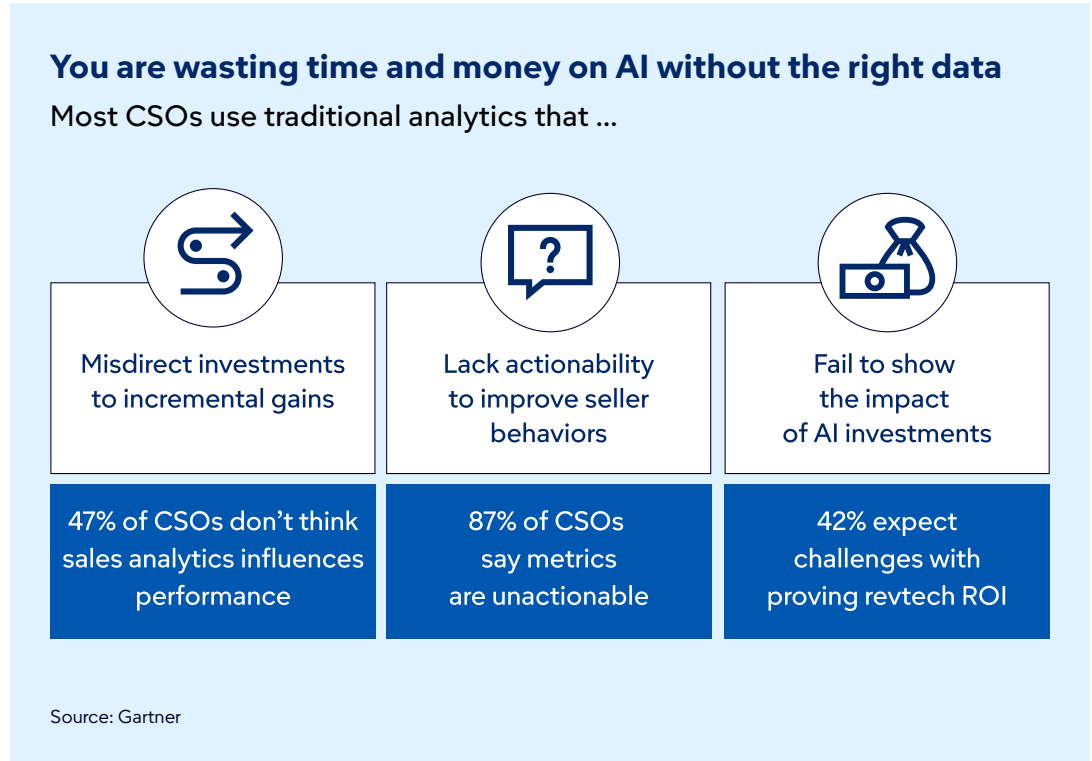
How should sales enablement be structured and integrated to maximize sales productivity and effectiveness? ↗



How can AI be effectively integrated into sales strategies and processes to enhance performance and decision making?

While 88% of CSOs report that their AI initiatives have met or exceeded expectations, these early AI investments have tended to focus on incremental efficiency gains, saving sellers an average of 4.8 hours a week. CSOs have so far struggled to reinvest these time savings into high-impact activities.

As CEOs and boards see other organizations achieve dramatic revenue gains through AI-first go-to-market motions, CSOs will be expected to showcase more than incremental productivity improvements. With 70% of CSOs reporting that they are accountable for the ROI of sales-focused AI initiatives, this pressure is likely to increase over the next few quarters.



Enhance performance through AI

CSOs must use AI to redesign the work of sales, not just the quota. This means designing the technology architecture to fit sellers' needs, integrating it into workflows and intentionally applying AI to augment sellers' capabilities and create actionability rather than simply collect data. CSOs who use AI to reimagine how selling is done can unlock step-change improvements in seller productivity, customer relevance and commercial performance. Those that don't risk being left behind.

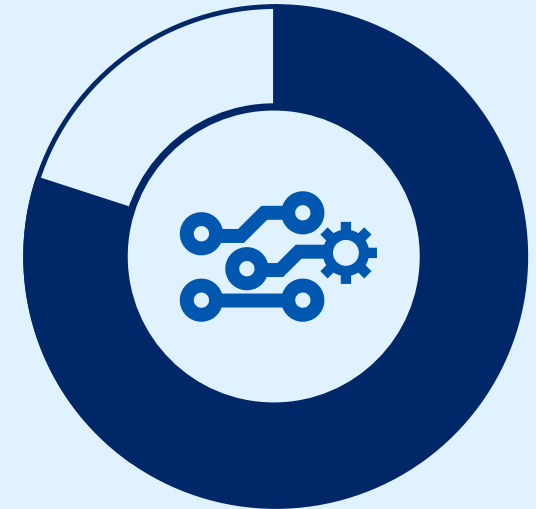
The CSO must develop the vision for how agentic AI will support commercial objectives. This vision should be used both to win enterprise support for sales AI initiatives and articulate how IT and AI partners can work with the sales organization to deliver those initiatives.

Without a CSO-owned view of where AI should enhance selling workflows, organizations risk misaligned investments, low adoption and missed commercial impact.

By 2030,

80%

of sales leaders will consider AI integration in sales workflows as a critical factor for competitive advantage.

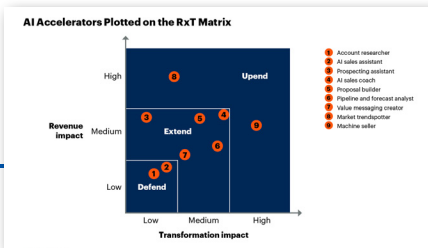


Source: Gartner

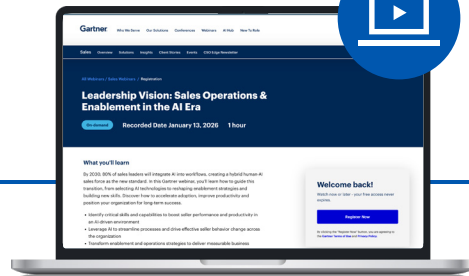
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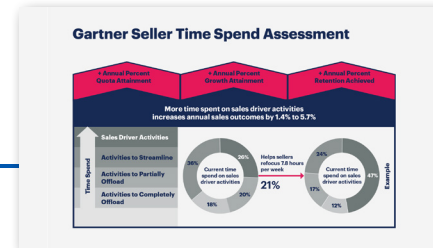
Develop an AI vision and learn how to **Boost Sales With a Clear Agentic AI Vision**.



Watch our **webinar** to learn how to improve seller productivity through smarter AI adoption and enablement.



Use the **Gartner Seller Time Spend Assessment** to pinpoint the places where sellers spend significant time without generating enough positive returns.



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How can AI be effectively integrated into sales strategies and processes to enhance performance and decision making? ↗



How do we keep sellers focused and motivated amid economic uncertainty, market disruption and fear of AI job replacement?

Seemingly every week we see new predictions about widespread job displacement due to AI. For now, however, Gartner data indicates that productivity gains from AI have not led to downsizing of the workforce, with less than 1% of recent layoffs attributed to AI efficiency. Still, sellers are not oblivious to this discourse and CSOs should remain alert to the possibility that anxiety about job losses will impact seller engagement and motivation.

With the majority of sales organization budgets still allocated to talent, CSOs cannot afford to have unfocused sellers.



Keep sellers motivated

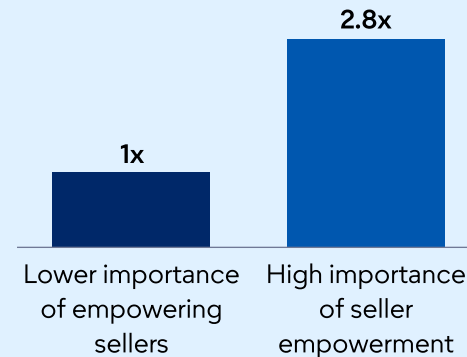
To address seller motivation and engagement, CSOs should focus on how they can use AI to reduce drag and empower sellers. High levels of seller drag – demotivation away from work – are detrimental to quota attainment and seller retention. Rather than position AI as a replacement, CSOs should highlight how it frees sellers to focus on the creative and strategic aspects of their work and empower sellers to identify new ways to use it.

At the same time, CSOs can directly address seller anxiety about replacement by redesigning their employee value proposition (EVP) to emphasize stability and job security. Top sellers – especially those with a longer tenure and a track record of reliability – could be offered stability in addition to their cash compensation. For example, stay packages – or prenegotiated severance side letters – help top performers feel more safety during tumultuous times.

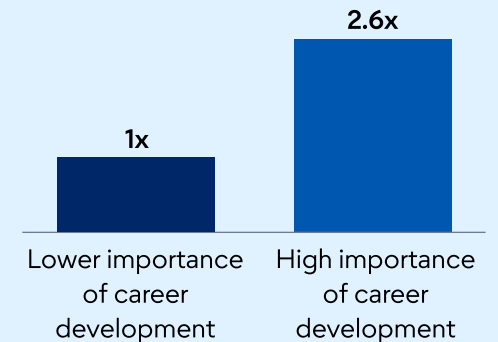
Sales organizations that focus on seller empowerment improve their likelihood of strong commercial performance by 2.8x.

Empowering and developing sellers links to improved performance

Likelihood of strong commercial performance
By importance of seller empowerment



Likelihood of strong commercial performance
By importance of sellers' career development



Source: Gartner

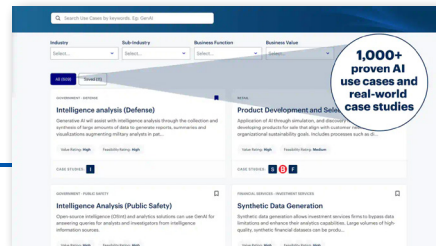
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Learn how **Cisco** adopted **technology as a teammate** and offloaded key tasks throughout the prospecting workflow to AI and machine learning.



Discover how CSOs use **Gartner-validated AI use cases** to reduce sales drag, motivate sellers and accelerate performance.



Use the **CSO guide to AI-driven revenue growth**, and learn how to improve seller impact and accelerate growth.



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How can we remain flexible and adaptable in the face of changing buyer behaviors and market disruption?

CSOs are grappling with continued macroeconomic volatility, impacting their ability to hit in-year revenue targets. Sixty-two percent of CSOs report that macroeconomic volatility and uncertainty (e.g., economic, geopolitical, regulatory and supply chain disruptions) is the top barrier to delivering on their functional priorities over the next six months, yet 48% struggle to adapt plans in response to sudden changes in business context. The events of the first few months of 2026 underscore this challenge.

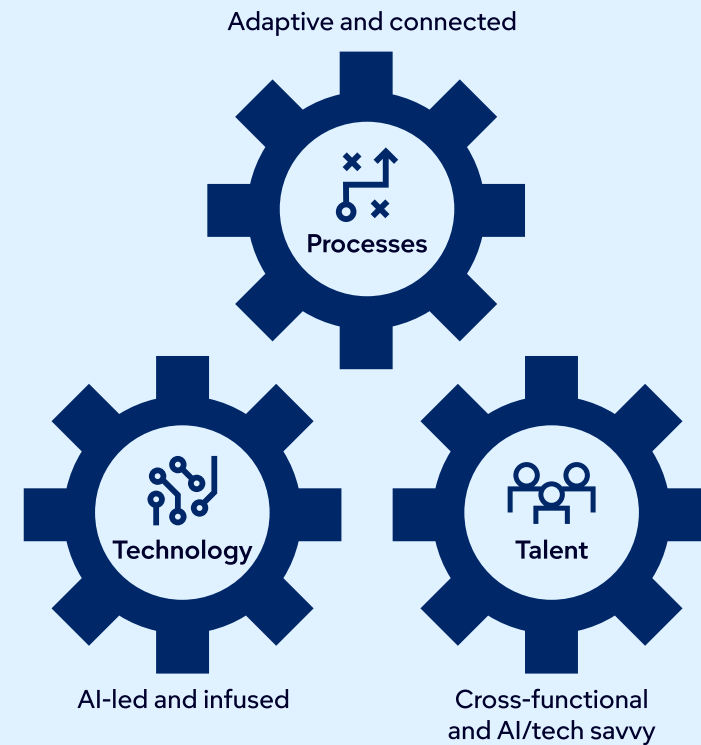


Adapt to change

To pivot quickly in a rapidly changing environment, organizations must focus on two capabilities: continuous intelligence and flexible role design. Continuous intelligence enables organizations to detect market shifts and emerging disruptions; when combined with robust scenario planning, this supports rapid decision making. At the same time, the organization must be capable of acting on these shifts. Top sales organizations use action-centric insight and design to reimagine and simplify workflows and roles, allowing leaders to shift resources more quickly in response to change.

Organizations with a highly adaptable design are 3.2x more likely to have strong performance than less adaptable organizations.

AI-first organization

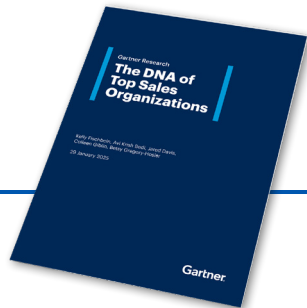


Source: Gartner

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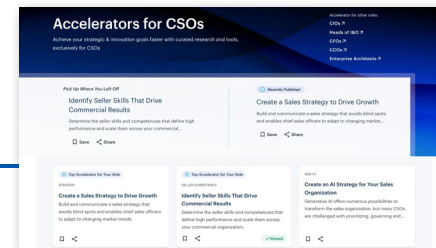
Use the guide on [The DNA of Top Sales Organizations](#) for action-oriented insights to reimagine sales roles for greater adaptability.



Build a continuous intelligence capability by learning [How to Adapt Your Sales or Revenue Operations Model for Future Growth](#).



Create an AI strategy for your sales organization that enables strategic conversations and guides prioritization and investment decisions.



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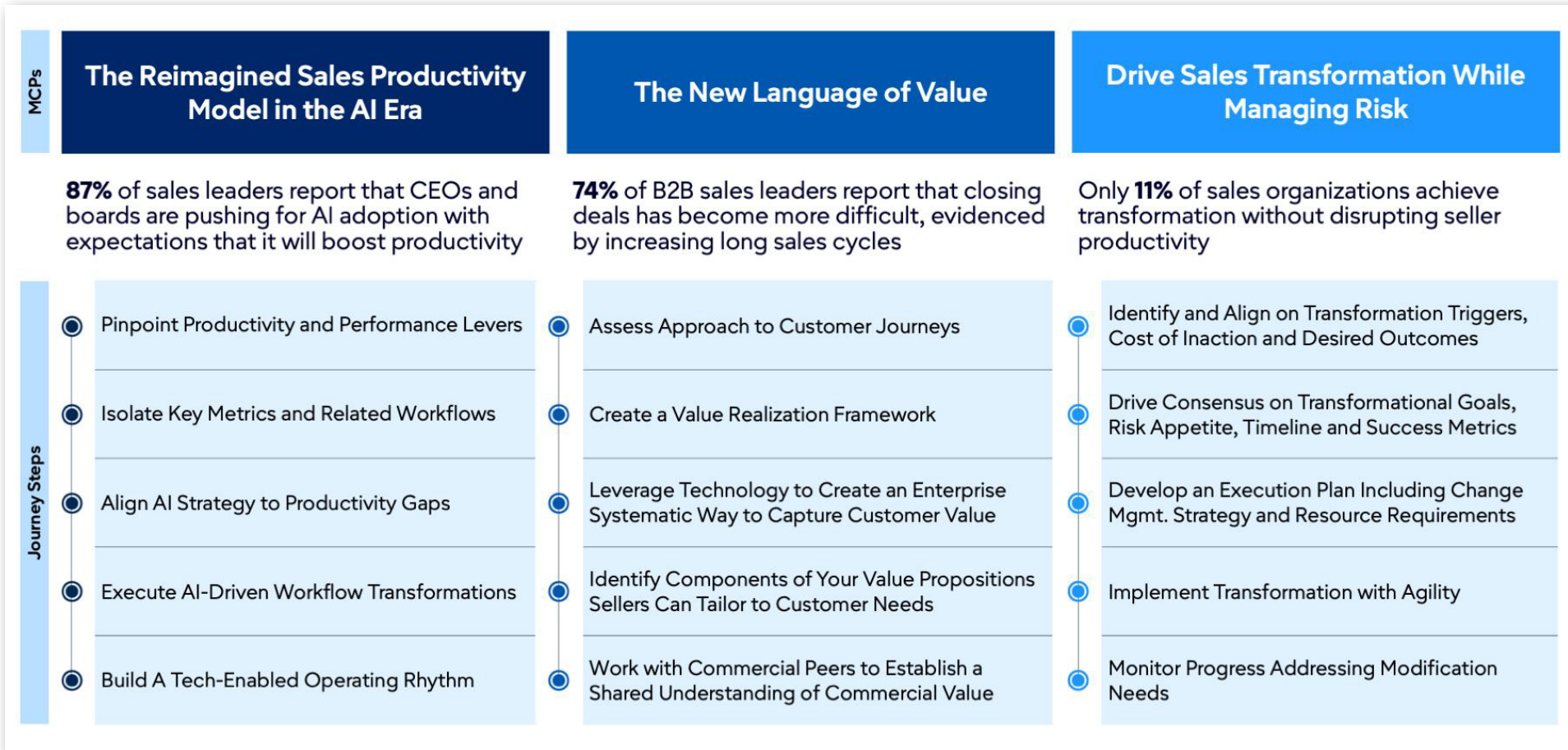
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[How can AI be effectively integrated into sales strategies and processes to enhance performance and decision making?](#) ↗



CSO mission-critical priorities (MCPs)

With information everywhere and countless voices telling you what to do and where to focus, how do you separate what's urgent from what's truly essential? Gartner for Sales helps you focus on what matters most by prioritizing time, resources and MCPs that drive results. [Talk to us](#) to learn more.



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