Gartner®

The New High-Performing Seller

Essential skills to supercharge your sales force

Introduction

Today's B2B buyers must navigate a complex web of stakeholders and business functions, which makes the sales process more complicated than ever before.

Seventy-two percent of sellers feel overwhelmed by the number of skills required to excel in their roles, and more than 85% want leaders to better identify required skills.

In this eBook, we delve into how as a sales leader, you can go beyond investing in technology and training to improve seller skills and results in a complex new buying environment:

- Understand the challenges you face as a sales leader.

- Get practical strategies to help focus your sellers on the right skills in the right way.

- Identify skill gaps within your team and effectively address them.

- Overcome resistance to change and foster a culture of continuous improvement.

- Get insights into measuring the impact of improved seller skills.

- Read success stories from sales teams who have thrived in this new era.

Take the next step in improving seller skills and optimize results across your entire team.

50% of sellers are overwhelmed by the amount of **technology** to do their job.

72% of sellers feel overwhelmed by the number of **required skills** to excel in their role.

n = 1,026 sellers
Source: 2024 Gartner Seller Skills Survey

Uncovering the new high-performing seller

Gartner research methodology

Key research question: What are the seller skills that sales leaders need to prioritize?

2024 CSO Priorities Survey

Surveyed **200+ B2B sales leaders** across industries and geographies about their 2024 sales priorities

2024 Seller Skill Survey

Surveyed **1,000+ B2B sales leaders** to understand how their current skill usage and mastery relates to performance

CSO and Sales Leader Discussions

Interviewed **35+ B2B sales leaders** to understand their perspective on talent strategy and skill development

Seller Skill Diagnostic

Assessed over **3,500 B2B sellers** to understand how their current skill usage and mastery relate to performance

Seller Time Spend Assessment

Assessed how and where over **8,000 B2B sellers** spend their time across the sales process and how this relates to performance

Core Signal Big Data Analysis

Analyzed over **100,000 job descriptions** for B2B sellers to understand how sales organizations focus on skills in talent acquisition

Source: Gartner
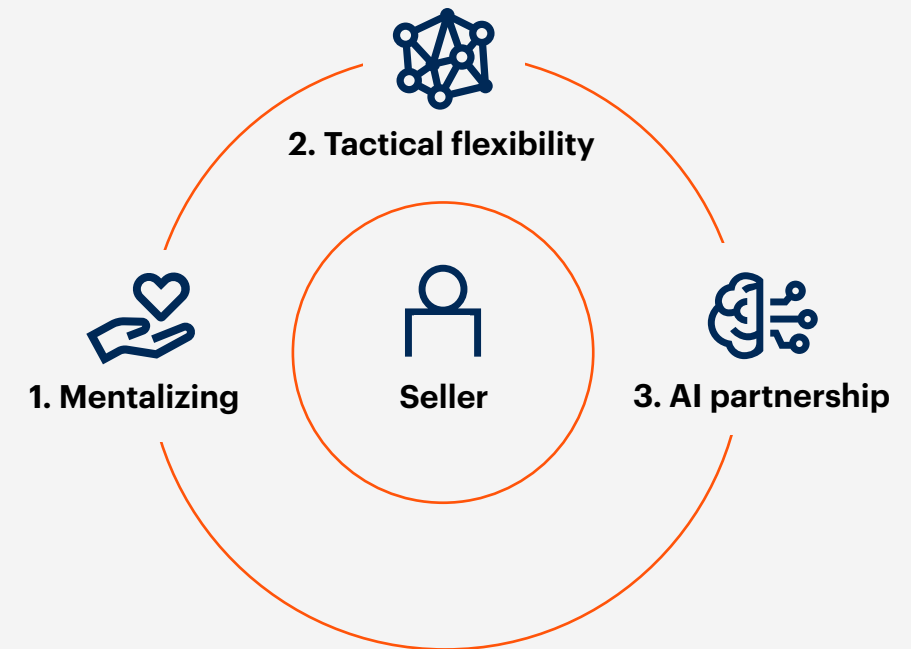
The new high-performing seller

Discover how you can help sellers master three key competencies and the associated skills needed to elevate performance and results.

The new high-performing seller: 3 key competencies

To navigate today's complex sales landscape, high-performing sellers need to have three key competencies:

1 **Mentalizing** involves prioritizing the buyer's voice, understanding their emotions and anticipating their behavior. This practice uses uniquely human abilities such as **active listening, cognitive decoding and perspective-taking.**

2 **Tactical flexibility** allows sellers to be comfortable experimenting with different strategies to meet the ever-changing needs and requirements of more informed buyers in real time, focusing on skills such as **learning, agility and situational versatility.**

3 **AI partnership** supports sellers' abilities to optimize tasks such as customer messaging, data gathering and call summarization. Effectively **collaborating with AI** through use-case selection and prompt engineering is becoming a critical technology skill.

Portrait of a high-performing seller

2. Tactical flexibility

1. Mentalizing

Seller

3. AI partnership

Source: Gartner

The new high-performing seller: Business impact potential

Sellers who excel in tactical flexibility are 3.4 times more likely to meet quota, while sellers who possess strong mentalizing skills are almost 3 times more likely to meet quota. Similarly, those who demonstrate high proficiency in AI partnership are nearly 4 times more likely to meet or exceed quota compared to their peers.

Competencies that link to meeting quota

Likelihood of meeting quota
By level of seller competency

1x	**2.9x**	1x	**3.4x**	1x	**3.7x**
Mentalizing		**Tactical flexibility**		**AI partnership**	
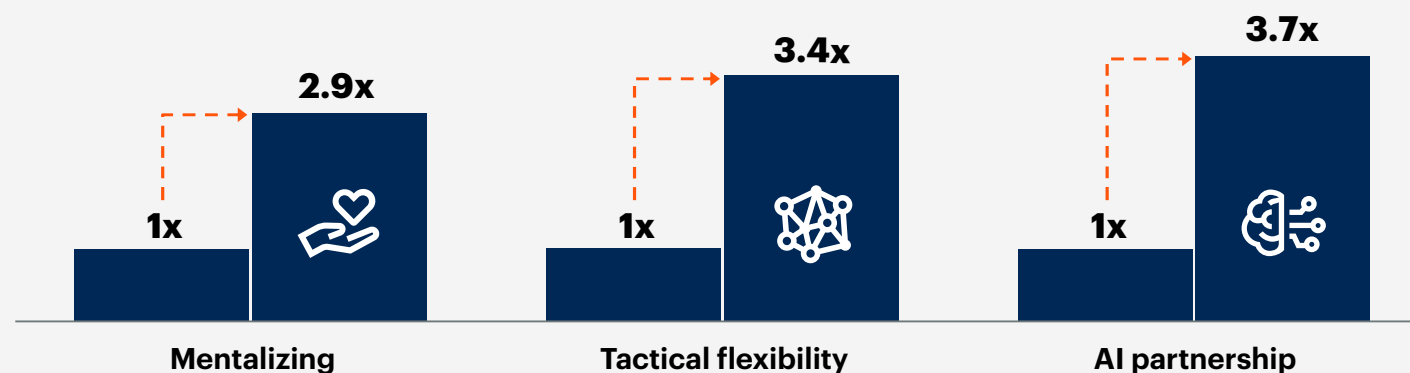
n = 602 B2B sellers
Q: Approximately what was your quota attainment in FY 2023?
Source: 2024 Gartner Seller Skills Survey

Developing the skills for execution

What skills are associated with these three competencies, and what do they mean for the day-to-day execution for sellers?

Learn more about procedures and techniques leveraged by high-performing sellers.

Mentalizing

Mentalizing is the ability of sellers to uncover the underlying needs, motivations and objections of buyers, even when these are not explicitly expressed. It is a purely human skill that plays a crucial role in successful sales interactions.

- **Active listening** is the key skill that enables sellers to fully engage with what buyers are saying and respond accordingly.

- **Perspective-taking** involves putting oneself in the buyer's shoes and imagining how the situation appears to them.

- **Empathizing** is when sellers showcase emotional intelligence by considering how the buyer's journey makes the buyer feel.

- **Cognitive decoding** involves synthesizing all available information to predict the buyer's behavior. This helps anticipate needs and determine what will resonate most with the buyer.

What is mentalizing?

Mentalizing

Active listening

Perspective-taking

Empathizing

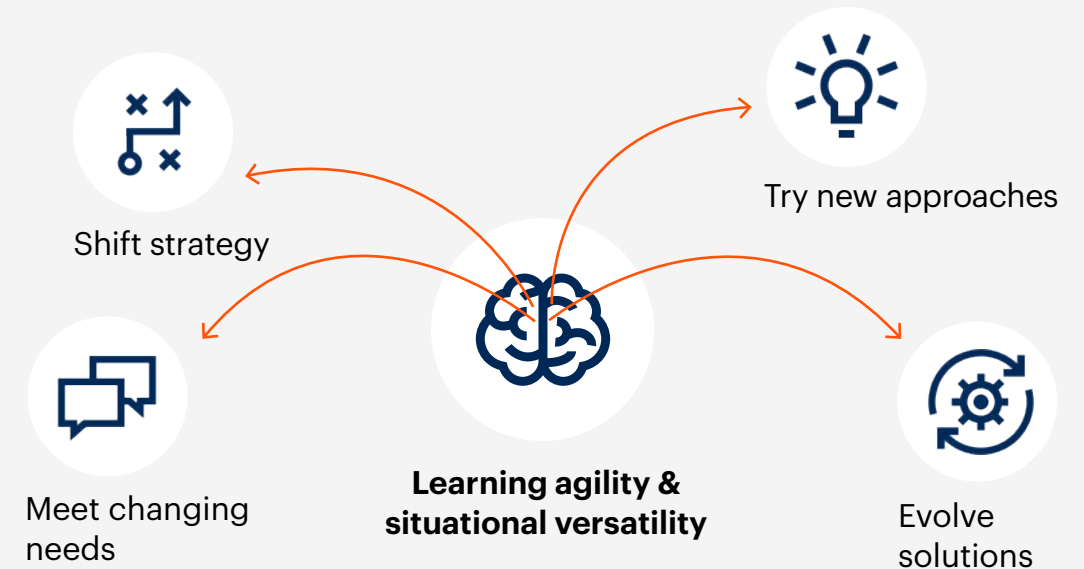Cognitive decoding
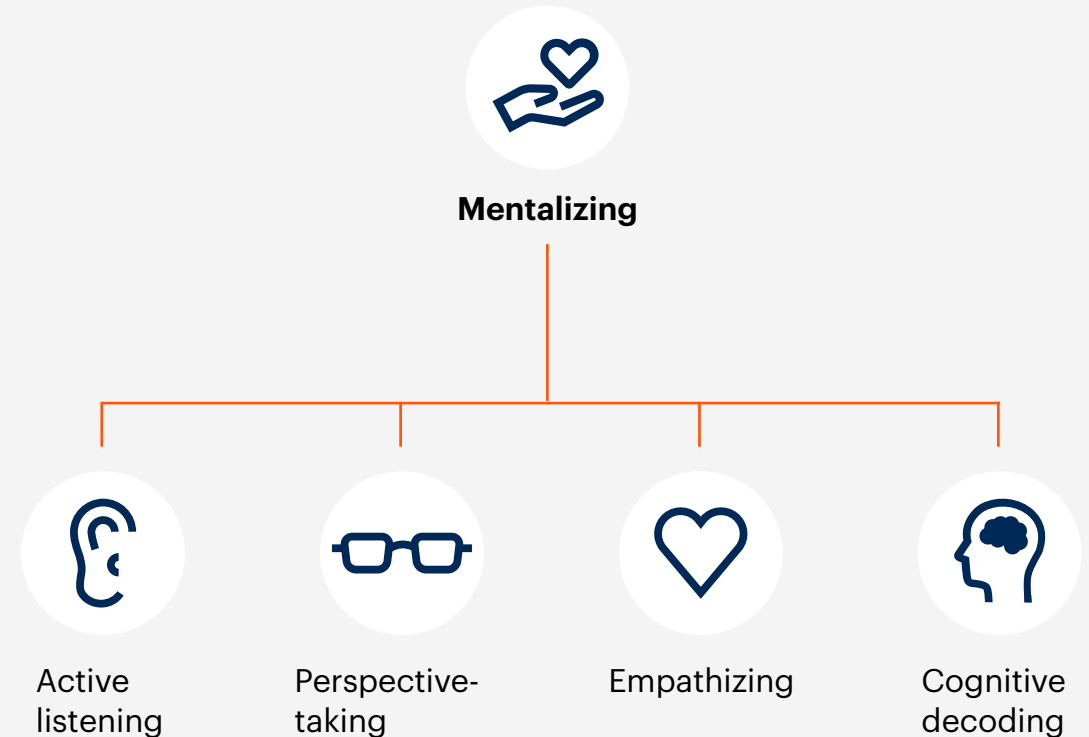
Source: Gartner

Tactical flexibility

In today's dynamic sales environment, it's crucial for sellers to **think outside the box.** Following a playbook is important, but it's just as important for sellers to be agile and adapt to the unique needs of each buyer.

- **Learning agility** allows the seller to experiment with different sales approaches to solve customer problems based on the specific situation.

- **Situational versatility** is the ability to shift strategy for sharing content with customers based on their changing needs and requirements.

By mastering these skills, sellers can swiftly adjust their approach to meet the evolving needs of clients and maximize their sales effectiveness.

What is tactical flexibility?

Shift strategy

Try new approaches

Meet changing needs

Learning agility & situational versatility

Evolve solutions

Source: Gartner

Key competency: 3

AI partnership

Technology utilization is now table stakes for seller requirements, and top sellers differentiate themselves by effectively partnering with AI. This requires leveraging AI as a teammate, integrating it into the workflow, and knowing precisely when and how to collaborate with technology on specific tasks and responsibilities.

- **Use-case selection** involves knowing which solution or resource can best assist in a given situation and intuitively navigating decision trees countless times a day.

- **Prompt engineering** is the process of translating ideas into the appropriate commands and prompts for AI systems. It involves formulating problems, creating instructions or questions, submitting and refining, developing a persona, providing examples and adding context.

By embracing AI as a partner and teammate, sellers can enhance their productivity, streamline their workflows and achieve better results in today's technology-driven sales environment.

What is AI partnership?

AI partnership is all about knowing how to best **leverage technology** to automate and augment key tasks and responsibilities.

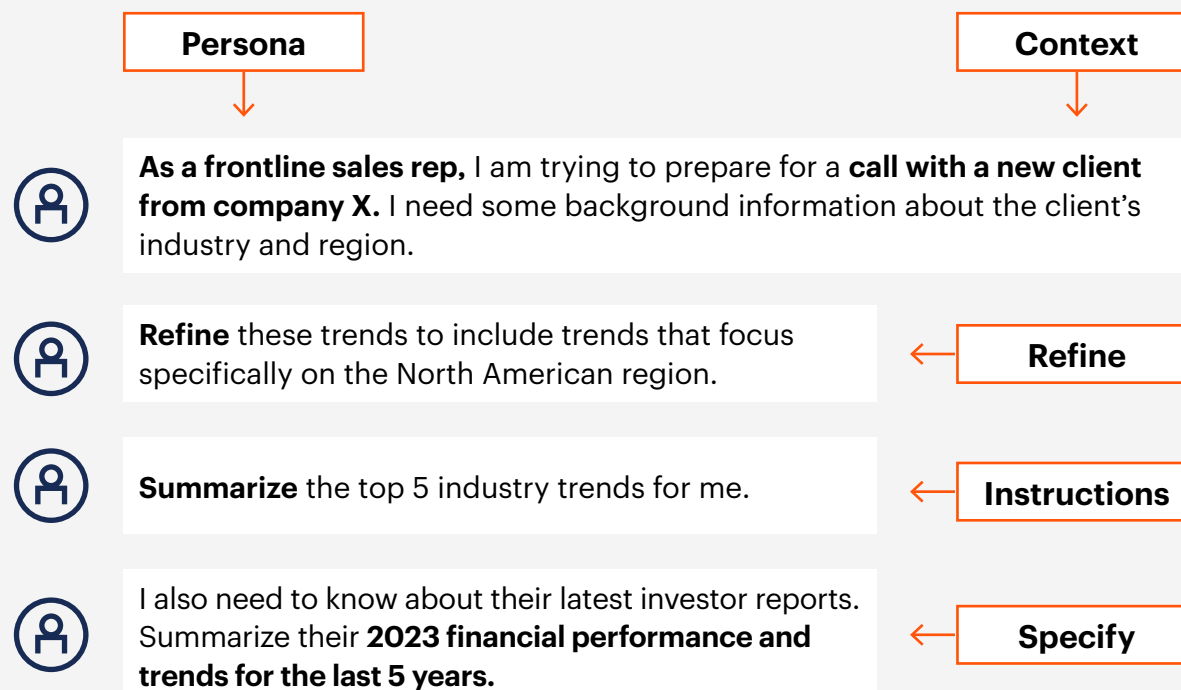**Responsibilities**

Technology
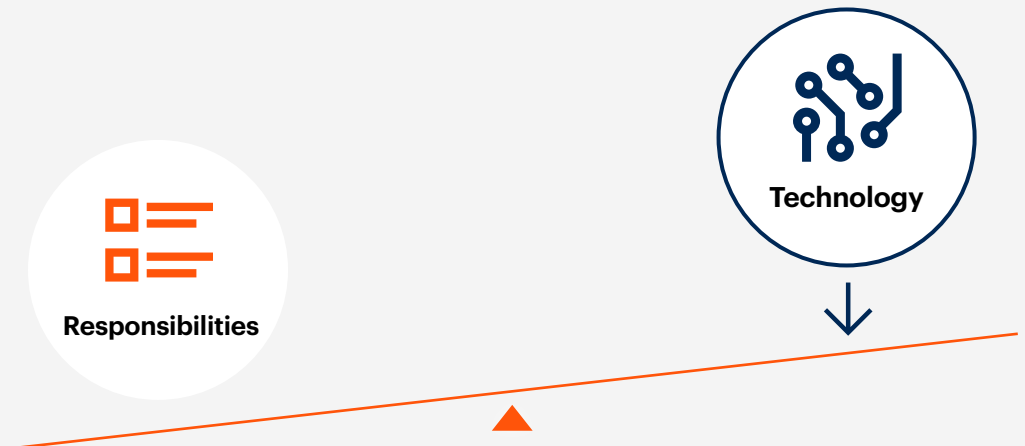
Source: Gartner

AI partnership: Prompt engineering in action

Imagine you are a seller gathering background information for sales calls. Here's how to use prompt engineering for greater impact:

1 First, **identify the problem** and learn the customer's company information to demonstrate an updated knowledge of industry trends.

2 Fine-tune your approach by **by synthesizing and summarizing key take-aways** from the 10-K reports and other relevant sources.

3 **Create a persona** that aligns with your target audience, using examples and adding context to ensure the prompt is tailored to their specific needs.

By mastering prompt engineering, you can obtain more precise information to enable customer engagement with valuable and personalized insights.

Skill: Prompt engineering

High-performing seller

Persona

Context

As a frontline sales rep, I am trying to prepare for a **call with a new client from company X.** I need some background information about the client's industry and region.

Refine these trends to include trends that focus specifically on the North American region.

Refine

Summarize the top 5 industry trends for me.

Instructions

I also need to know about their latest investor reports. Summarize their **2023 financial performance and trends for the last 5 years.**
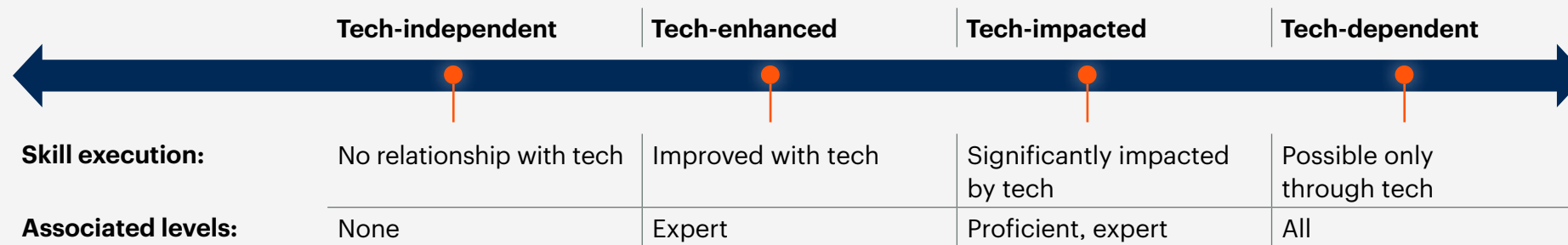
Specify

Source: Gartner

Tech's role in skill execution

Technology can no longer be viewed as an add-on when considering seller competencies and skills. Instead, we have integrated technology into a new competency model that focuses on execution, seller behaviors and the level of tech reliance required.

- **Tech-independent:** These are purely human skills where technology does not play a role.

- **Tech-enhanced:** These skills are primarily human, but technology can enhance and elevate them to an expert level.

- **Tech-impacted:** Skill execution is significantly influenced by technology in this level.

- **Tech-dependent:** These are skills that cannot exist or be effectively executed without the support of technology.

By understanding the role of technology in skill execution, sales leaders can effectively leverage the power of technology to drive sales success.

	Tech-independent	Tech-enhanced	Tech-impacted	Tech-dependent
Skill execution:	No relationship with tech	Improved with tech	Significantly impacted by tech	Possible only through tech
Associated levels:	None	Expert	Proficient, expert	All

Source: Gartner

Seller competency grid with tech as a teammate

The seller competency grid provides a clear understanding of what "tech as a teammate" truly looks like. With this tool, sales leaders can now assess how any revenue technology investment will enhance seller performance and drive them to the next level of proficiency.

Competency grid: Tech reliance

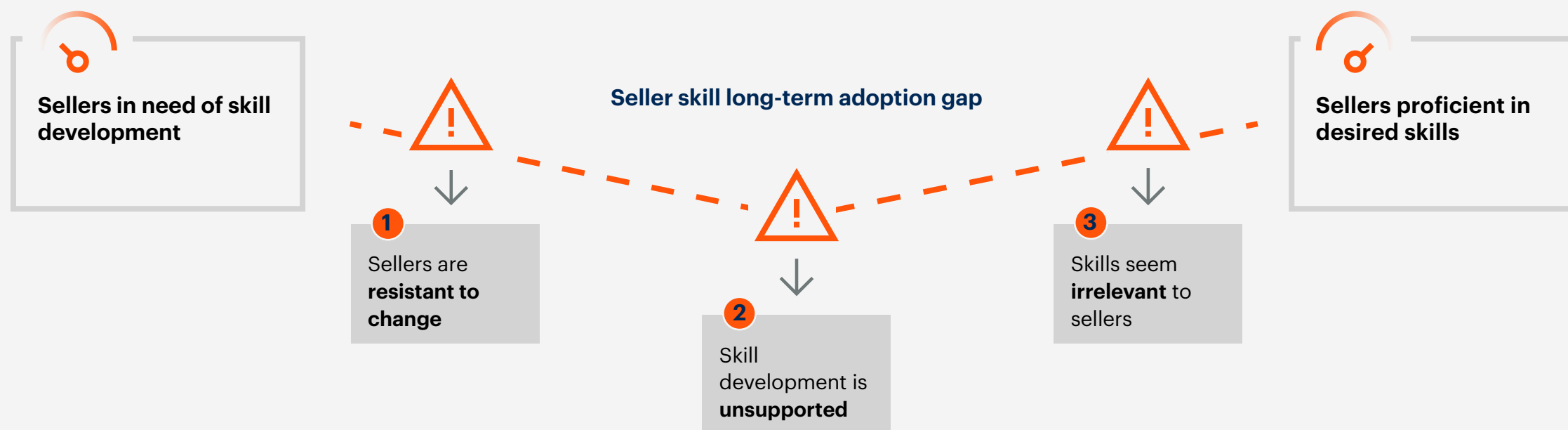| Skill	Tech reliance	Basic	Proficient	Expert	Ineffective behaviors
Learning agility	Tech-independent	Participates in brainstorming sessions to learn about new ideas	Frequently recommends new solutions to solve obstacles to customer engagement	Experiments with different sales approaches to advance purchase decisions	Uses the same solution when faced with new problems
Active listening	Tech-enhanced	Notes purchase-related buyer concerns and points	Carefully listens to the buyer and asks follow-up questions	Uses audio analytics to assess buyer voice and discussion reaction	Frequently goes on to monologue, evidenced by low ratio of buyer to seller speaking time
Opportunity prioritization	Tech-impacted	Understands the prioritization criteria and follows guidance to identify promising leads	Uses data insights such as buyer's digital footprint to determine touchpoints	Trusts data about ill-fitting opportunities and resists "sunk cost fallacy"	Focuses only on the no. of opportunities, without considering the organizational fit
Use-case selection	Tech-dependent	Is aware of available sales technologies and their functionalities	Proactively identifies tasks that can benefit from AI support	Identifies the right AI "partner" to achieve desired outcome	Attempts to find suitable AI for a task without understanding the tool's functionality

Source: Gartner

Embedding skill development in the fabric of the sales organization

To ensure the associated behaviors and preferred skills are adopted, sales organizations should integrate skill development into their sales organization.

Long-term skill adoption challenges

How sales enablement struggles to achieve long-term adoption of skills

Sellers in need of skill development

Seller skill long-term adoption gap

1 Sellers are **resistant to change**

2 Skill development is **unsupported**

3 Skills seem **irrelevant** to sellers

Sellers proficient in desired skills

Source: Gartner

Case in point: Embed seller skills for lasting behavior change

Scenario

Traditionally, skill development is treated as a training issue, with organizations aligning competency models to training programs. However, this approach often fails to drive long-term skill adoption, as it neglects the need to motivate sellers and hold them accountable for applying the skills. By implementing those strategies, Salesforce successfully embedded seller skill development throughout its sales organization, driving lasting behavior change and skill usage. Sellers were surrounded by skill reinforcements, motivated to adopt new skills and provided with the necessary resources to continuously develop and grow.

Solution

Embed seller skill development across multiple facets of the sales organization to ensure behavior change and skill usage.

About Salesforce

Industry: Enterprise software

Headquarters location: San Francisco, California

Revenue: $34.86 billion (2024)

Employees: 72,682 (2024)

Source: Gartner

Case in point: Embed seller skills for lasting behavior change
Solution highlights

Sellers were surrounded by skill reinforcements and motivated to adopt skills

Competency model
A humanized competency model aligned specific actionable behaviors with role competencies.

Career development
A framework linking skills to different career paths enhanced sellers' motivation to learn and apply new skills.

Assessment
Manager and seller assessments identified skill gaps across all competencies, allowing for targeted, tailored learning interventions.

Seller

Compensation
Integrating skill application into performance evaluation and compensation created additional incentive to adopt desired behaviors.

Integrated learning
Nudges and workflow integrated learning allowed sellers to address skill gaps close to the moment of need.

Source: Gartner

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Action steps

To truly leverage high-performing sellers and ensure the associated behaviors and preferred skills are adopted by the broader sales organization, sales leaders should integrate skill development into the fabric of their sales organization.

Take these immediate actions to start effectively developing and improving seller skills across your organization.

1

Prioritize the seller skills that align with your sales strategy.

2

Assess how sellers are utilizing different skills today and understand which will support the most efficient seller workflow across your organization.

3

Sustain long-term behavior change through behavioral nudges and just-in-time learning.

Gartner for Sales Leaders

Everything you need in a single solution to:

Align commercial functions • Retain and motivate top talent • Drive digital revenue growth • Improve seller productivity through revenue technology

Actionable insights

Be a better sales leader
Exclusive insight to accelerate the data-driven decision-making process

Be a better business partner
Cross-functional insights to improve collaboration across the business

Thrive with tech insights
Insights on digital innovation and business transformation to prepare leaders for the future

Decision-making tools

Turn strategy into action with tools to accelerate key initiatives and drive better business outcomes

Peer networks

Provide access to one-on-one chats with industry leaders, peer-led discussions, polls and technology ratings and reviews

Engaging events

Includes invitation to Gartner CSO & Sales Leader Conference with numerous educational breakouts and opportunities to connect with peers and Gartner experts

## Sales enablement and sales operations insights

Unique and exclusive insights to help enablement and operations leaders:

- Develop operations strategies to support business growth

- Tap into data analytics for better forecasting and capacity planning

- Attract, retain and develop sales talent with compensation and training best practices

- Define enablement strategies to improve sales team execution

Gartner.com experience

A customized gartner.com experience that gives you access to the most relevant insights and tools for your role
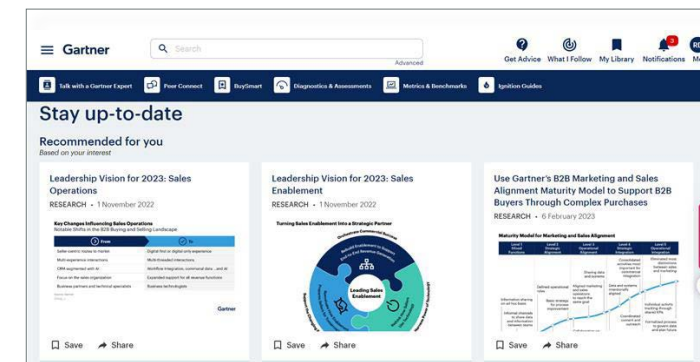
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