

# DEMYSTIFYING SALES HIRING

A COLLABORATIVE STUDY BY METTL & SHRM INDIA, 2017

## How HRs can build a winning sales team?

—  
3-FACTOR MODEL TO FIND THE  
RIGHT COMPETENCIES FOR YOUR  
WINNING SALES TEAM



# Executive Summary

In today's complex world, organizations are changing at a rapid pace. Business leaders across industry verticals want nothing but fast and sustainable growth. This results in huge targets for the back-bone of any organization, which is the Sales Team. These pressures are complemented with highly demanding, technology-empowered and information-rich customers who are redefining traditional selling. For many sales organizations, selling has evolved from traditional product pitches to a more customized, highly tailored, and/or customer-focused solution pitches.

An important block in ensuring organizations grow at the desired rates and sell to these new-age customers is by building winning sales team.

The sales representatives, who are the face of any organization, need to be a step ahead of their customers to close the deal and meet business objectives at the same time. This challenge of building winning sales team isn't a simple task. HRs who are assigned this humongous task are struggling to meet the expectations from their sales leaders.

Since sales is a complex job, it might come across as difficult to fully understand every sales role in its entirety. Even the job description varies drastically across organizations and at times even within organizations. From the person selling a shoe in a store to a person selling complex aircraft solutions – all are at the end of the day “**Salespeople**”.

HRs and sales leaders need to understand which competencies make their top performers successful. These competencies then must be replicated to resolve multiple issues faced by HRs across employee life cycle ranging from shortlisting the right people out of the shrinking talent pool to hiring the best-fit candidate for organization's unique requirements to on-boarding these right people quickly to keeping them motivated and ensuring regular trainings for better productivity as well as returns on investments.

There have been attempts by others to understand and break down sales job roles in the past. Some have looked at the approach that a salesperson takes (his or her personal style) when dealing with clients and closing transactions. These studies have classified salespersons as Hunters and Farmers. Others have classified them

depending on whether they sell to businesses (B2B) or end-customers (B2C). Few others have classified sales job roles basis the media that is used to conduct the sales like tele-sales, field sales, channel sales, and franchisee sales.

**The purpose of this research is to address (and to a large extent simplify) this diversity to not only better understand the nature of sales across industries as well as buyer type and medium of selling, but also identify key factors that lead to success in various sales situations.**

Before deep-diving into identifying the right set of skills and motivations for various industries and sales teams, we conducted a survey which led us to discover:

Do people decisions (hiring, onboarding, training) affect sales performance?

How important are people decisions across industry, company size, and buyer type?

What is the impact of smarter people decisions on sales team performance?

How can HRs identify the right competencies to augment their people decisions?

Below are some of the **key findings** which were uncovered from our survey of 1600+ sales professionals across industries in the 2016-17:

1. Hiring the right talent emerged as one of the top 3 growth drivers to improve the performance of sales across industry, company size, buyer type (B2B/B2C).
2. Teams invest inadequate time to know why their top performers are successful in their organization.
3. High performing teams focus more on competency-based hiring & analytics and performance forecasting when compared to low performing managers.
4. Many organizations don't use simple tools like online assessments and structured interviews for hiring the right sales executive effectively.

These insights provided enough evidence to the fact that HRs must not only spend adequate time in identifying critical competencies for their unique requirements but also use well researched tools to ensure they do this at scale using state of the art technology.

Further to the survey, in-depth interviews across 65 sales professionals were conducted and below are some of the top insights of our study:

## 1 **Rethinking Sales Job Roles:** It's about What to sell, How to sell and Who to sell

We are all selling. But, do we all sell same product through similar process to same buyer? The answer is NO. As a result, for taking right people decisions with the objective of enhancing sales performance, it is critical to deepen your knowledge about your unique sales job roles. Mettl-SHRM India's 3 factor model with focus on Offering Complexity (What you sell), Process Complexity (How you sell) and Buyer & Environment Sophistication (Who you sell) can simplify this task of demystifying large number of sales roles into 27 logical categories.

## 2 **Sales Behavior Competencies Blueprint:** Personal Attributes, Work Orientation, Interpersonal Skills and Leadership Skills

With challenging customer expectations, sales team can no longer afford to be laid-back. Top performing teams are the ones which know the right set of behavior for their unique requirements. Basis our research, we have outlined a blueprint for sales behavior competencies for each of the 27 categories. These behaviors can be classified into Personal Attributes, Work Orientation, Interpersonal Skills and Leadership Skills.

## 3 **Sales Aptitude Competencies Blueprint:** Cognitive and Communication Skills

Salespeople are the face of any organization. They are the ones who know your customers and the ones that your customers are familiar with. Smart selling is more about building smart sales team. Cognitive aptitude and communication skills are must have ingredients for smart sales team. This report identifies the unique set of cognitive and communication skills for each of the 27 logical salespeople segments.

## 4 **Adopt state-of-the-art technologies** to build winning teams

Winning sales teams must be built by ensuring that all stakeholders involved in hiring/training evaluate using identified critical competencies. This can be achieved if state-of-the-art technology solutions are adopted at every stage of people decisions. For hiring right talent, recruiters must dissect the incoming talent through competency-based assessments and hiring managers must adopt these in structured interviews. Similarly, for effectively training the existing workforce, identifying the individuals' strengths and weaknesses through pre-training assessments is as important as ensuring training yields desired outputs through post-training evaluation.

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# Introduction

## “Shifting the sales team to meet the growing challenges”

Sales wasn't always this complicated. It used to be a person-to-person affair, built on handshakes and skilled pitches delivered in person or over copper wired telephones. Though the foundational sales skills of yesteryear are just as relevant to sales success today, the context of selling has been transformed by the forces of technology, globalization and the ubiquitous connectivity of a Wi-Fi-enabled workplace. We all know that sales training and sales effectiveness have been a cornerstone of many organizations' strategies to increase revenues and drive efficiency. As markets continue to grow and evolve in complexity, learning leaders need to align their organizations' initiatives with the selling skills needed to succeed in dynamic environments.

It's not only the skills that salespeople need for success in today's market. The sales cycle has also transformed, with customers now being able to educate themselves and access reams of information before even meeting a salesperson. Buyers have taken the reigns on the sales process and move through the cycle somewhat on their own terms and pace. This change has altered the customer engagement strategies that salespeople must master; they need to be able to adapt to each customer to account for where that customer is along the path to closing a sale, and position products and services accordingly.

So, are companies setting up their sales personnel for success?

Are they targeting sales competencies that reflect the 21<sup>st</sup>-century business landscape?



# Past Attempts At Similar Research

Since sales is a complex job, it is difficult to fully understand every sales role in its entirety. There have been attempts by others to understand and break down sales job roles in the past.

Some have looked at the approach that a salesperson takes (his or her personal style) when dealing with clients and closing transactions. These studies have classified salespersons as hunters (the ones who chase after new accounts and ones whose purpose in the sales chain is to gather leads and garner interest among clients), farmers (these are the ones who nurture and grow relationships with clients and mine them for more business over time) and closers (the ones who persist and chase after the client to ensure that the deal is closed). [1]

Others have tried to classify sales roles as Inside and Outside Sales to indicate how the salesperson follows up on leads and closes deals. While Inside sales refers to a salesperson working entirely from the office and using various media such as telephones to cold-call potential clients, Outside sales refers to salespersons who largely spend their time out of the office, meeting clients in person. [3]

The process of conducting sales and the qualities a salesperson needs to possess, have been further classified based on whether he or she is selling to an individual consumer or to a business. Retail and Enterprise sales (also sometimes known as Direct sales) require salespersons to possess an entirely different set of skills and qualities to be able to accomplish the result. While retail sales might be more transactional and short-term in nature, enterprise sales or selling directly to a business requires more consultative selling skills and the ability to grow and nurture long term relationships. [2]

Some other attempts at categorizing sales job roles have also considered salespersons selling to the government as being a separate species in themselves. [4]

Finally, sales processes have also been categorized basis the media that is used to conduct the sales. [5] This classification typically includes telesales, field sales, channel sales, franchise sales etc. As the names suggest it classifies salespersons basis their most commonly used method for generating initial contact with a client all the way to closing deals.

**The purpose of Mettl-SHRM's research is to address (and to a large extent simplify) this diversity to not only better understand the nature of sales across industries and experience, but also identify key competencies that lead to success in various sales situations.**



1 Sales Executive: A Comparison of Competencies Between Different Business Categories. Aspiring Minds. <http://www.aspiringminds.com/featured-profiles/sales-executive-a-comparison-of-competencies-between-different-business-categori-0>

2 Hunters vs. Farmers [Infographics] of Sales Personnas. Greg Klingshirin, SalesLoft. <https://salesloft.com/resources/blog/2013/07/hunters-vs-farmers-sales-personnas-infographic/>

3 Different Types of Sales Jobs: What will your responsibilities be? Matthew Cook. Salesforce Search <http://www.salesforcerearch.com/bid/85370/Different-Types-of-Sales-Jobs-What-Will-Your-Responsibilities-Be>

4 B2B vs B2C Sales, Similarities and Differences. Greg Dunne. Mansfield Sales Partners. <http://www.mansfieldsp.com/mansfield-sales-blog/bid/50959/b2b-vs-b2c-sales-similarities-and-differences>

5 B2B vs B2C Sales, Similarities and Differences. Greg Dunne. Mansfield Sales Partners. <http://www.mansfieldsp.com/mansfield-sales-blog/bid/50959/b2b-vs-b2c-sales-similarities-and-differences>

# The Role Of Hiring In Redefining Sales

To examine the above issues in greater detail, Mettl along with SHRM India conducted a study to examine organizations' approach to identifying and developing sales workforce. Over last 8 months, 1600+ sales professionals completed a confidential survey reporting their approach to managing and improving sales team performance. Some of the key findings of the survey analysis are:

## RESPONDENT INSIGHTS

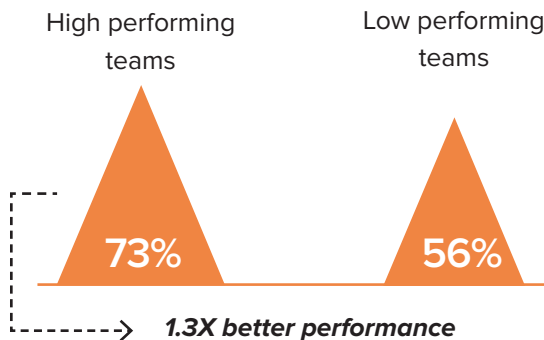


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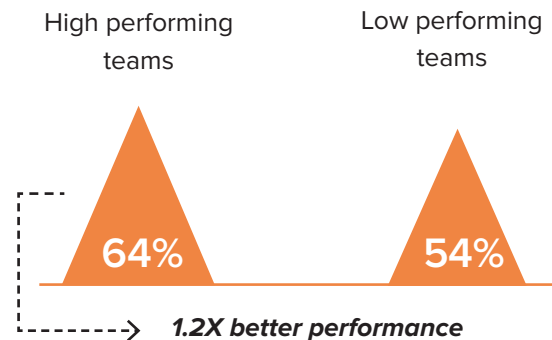
of respondents (who think hiring is critical) don't know why their top performers are successful.

## MANAGER INSIGHTS

### Focus on competency-based hiring:



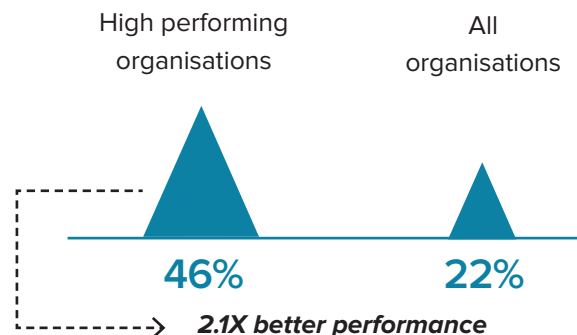
### Focus on analytics and forecasting:



## ORGANISATION INSIGHTS



### Use competency-based interviews



More details about the survey results are presented in Mettl's Sales Performance Study 2017.

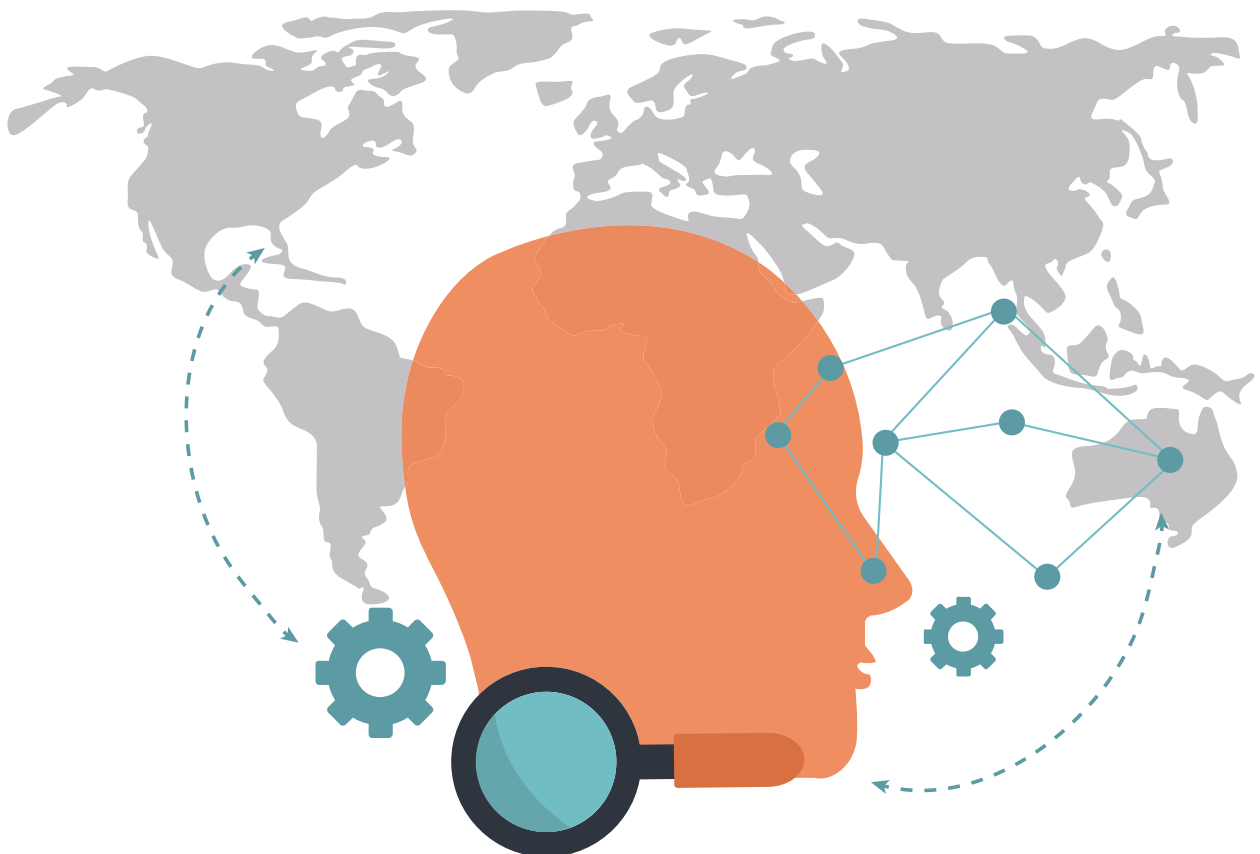
# Key Objectives Of This Research

Above insights along with Mettl's experience over the years, intrigued the research team into deep-diving into HR's key challenge of building high-performing sales team which delivers business goals while adapting with changing customer needs.

They undertook an extensive qualitative validation exercise by conducting 65 detailed telephonic conversations with salespersons in various industries who have recent as well as considerable experience in that industry. Interviews were conducted with two sample groups. The groups differed in the number of years of experience they had within a industry. The slightly less experienced group had experience within an industry that ranged from 3 to 7 years whereas the salespersons in the more experienced group had experience ranging from 8 to 17 years.

**These interviews were conducted with two-fold objective:**

- 1 To rethink large number of sales job roles** – This involved an exercise of understand the similarities and differences across the broad spectrum of sales job roles such that we can arrive at a common set of competencies as well as some critical competencies that might be required for certain sales job roles
- 2 To develop a sales competency framework** which can be practically used by HRs across industries to identify the right set of competencies for their unique requirements





# Rethinking Sales Job Roles: It's About What To Sell, How To Sell And Who To Sell



*We are all in sales. Some are doing traditional sales while other are doing non-selling sales.*

– Daniel Pink in his book on “To sell is Human”

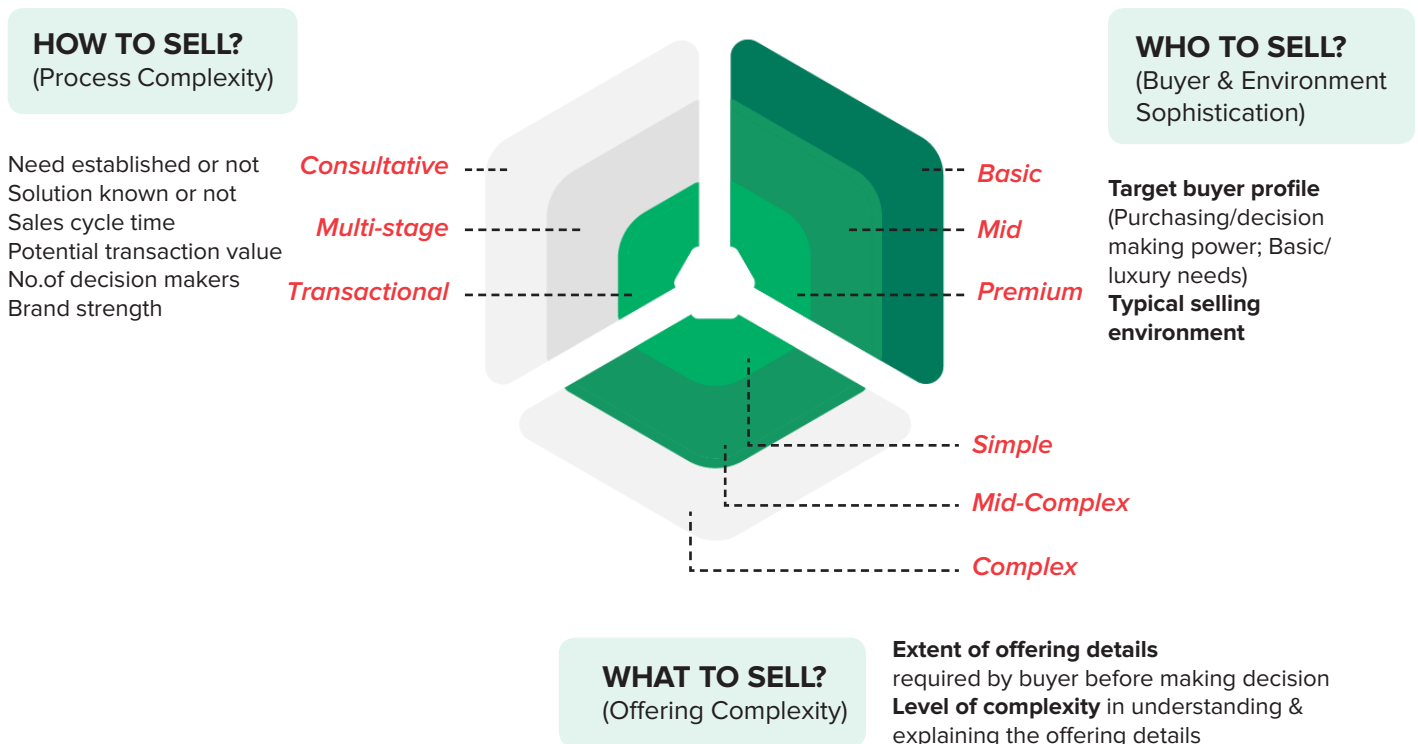


An important follow-up question to this thought is that “Are we all similar and interchangeable?”. Anyone would say – NO! To understand any sales job role, it is critical to understand what product or service is the salesman selling, to whom is he/she selling, is he selling it over counter or on telephone, is he selling for the first time or to repeat buyers, is the sale happening in small volume or large batch and many more.

The process of demystifying the complex and large number of unique roles into an all-encompassing tool has been a long and arduous one. Basis preliminary internal discussions, as well as the validation exercise with industry experts, a 3-factor model (Fig. 1) was put together that is comprehensive and considered salespersons as well as buyers (also referred to as consumer, end user, client, purchaser, etc.) as being the key elements to fully understand the salesman’s role.

- **What to Sell? (Product Complexity)**
- **How to Sell? (Process Complexity)**
- **Who to Sell? (Buyer & Environment Sophistication)**

Fig. 1: **3-factor sales model**



Let's understand these snippets in brief -

### WHAT TO SELL? (Offering Complexity)



Pertains to the offering being sold by the organization. It can be a product, a service, a solution or a combination of each of them. The extent of offering details required by buyer before making a purchase decision and level of complexity of the offering decides what the salesperson needs to know / do to effectively sell it to the maximum audience considered.

### HOW TO SELL? (Process Complexity)



Defines the process / methodology adopted by a salesperson to sell an offering. It can be simple in nature, involving a one-time face-to-face interaction with a customer, or a series of transactions involving multiple decision makers and multiple interactions. The more complex the selling process becomes; the more effort will be required by a salesperson to effectively sell it.

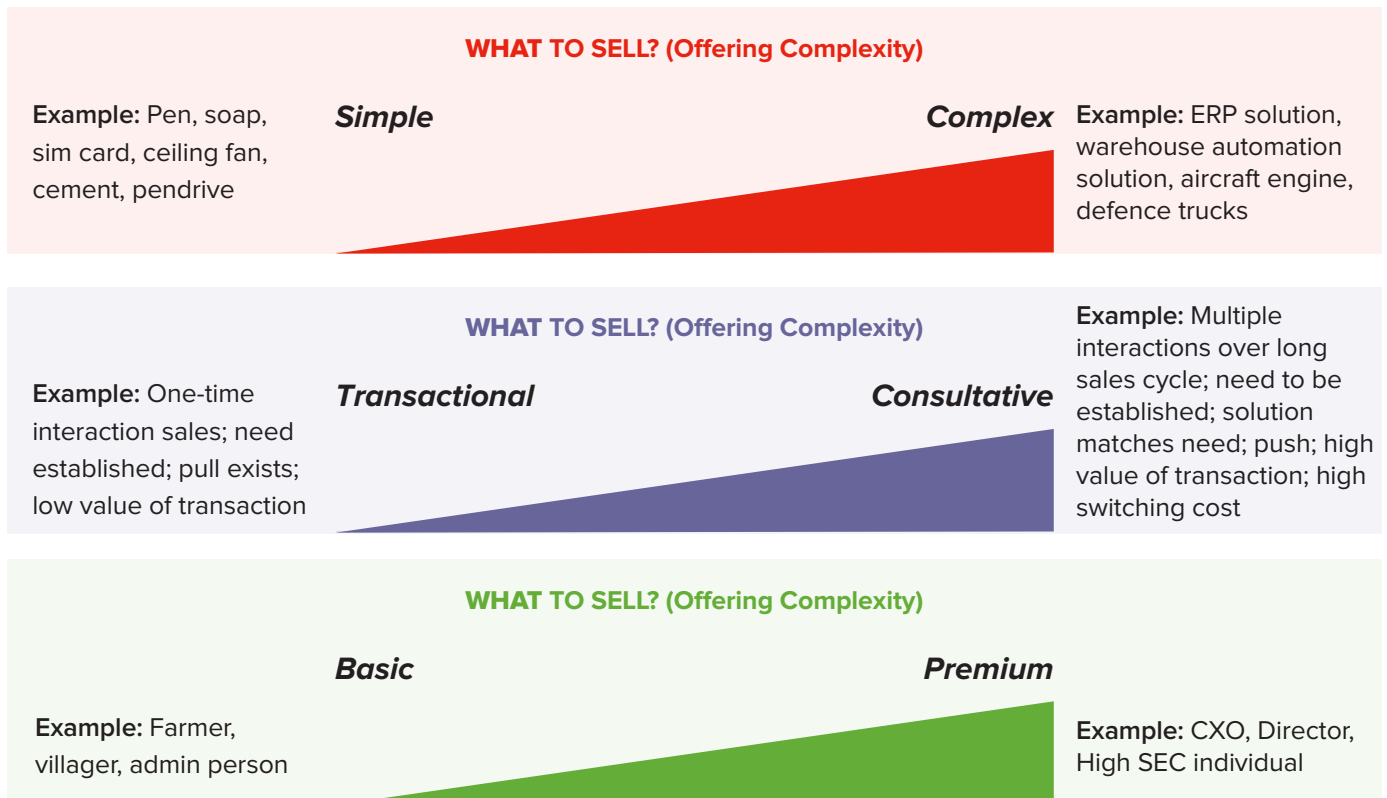
### WHO TO SELL? (Buyer & Environment Sophistication)



Refers to the buyer of the offering and the environment in which sales usually takes place. The background, affordability, need as well as the knowledge of the offering a buyer has can require a salesperson to adjust his/her interactions to convince them that they are buying the right product. Often, selling environment also influences the interactions between buyer and seller.

The above factors are critical to be considered to effectively capture the essence of most sales job roles. Understanding each of the 3 parameters in detail is essential before understanding their interplay (Fig 2).

Fig. 2: Definition of Critical Parameters



# 1. Offering Complexity

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One of the most influential parameters, the complexity of the offering answers the question: **What to Sell?**

This dimension refers to a combination of the factors that influence the sale of a particular product or service or a combination of both, in the market; what its features are, whether they are easily understood, and whether it will involve a low or high-volume sale among customers.

No matter what the sales person does or doesn't do, this factor to a large extent determines who they interact with, the tactics they must use, the process that will be followed etc.

For the purposes of our current research study, the product has been defined as any physical or virtual product or service that will be consumed, used, experienced etc. by the end user that it is meant for. This suggests that the product could be anything that ranges from what might be sold in retail shops to even software, which might be purchased, paid for and experienced virtually.

**We further divided this dimension into 3 parts:**

## **SIMPLE OFFERING**

A simple offering is easily understood by a customer as well as easy to explain by a salesperson. The need for the offering is clearly established, i.e. whether the customer really needs it or not, is known. No prior information gathering or time investment in terms of understanding a product is required. Simple products and services, have little or no ambiguity or risk associated with them, have a lot of information readily available for the consumer and do not require a salesperson to explain or handhold the customer on how to use them.

A few examples of the industries that sell simple offerings are FMCG/FMCD, Gems and Jewellery, Telecom, IT Hardware and Textiles.

## **MODERATELY COMPLEX OFFERING**

Products and services which require a consumer to invest some time and energy to understand the various options available to them before arriving at a final decision are likely to be moderately complicated in nature. While this information and research may be done independently (i.e. through browsing the internet or other sources for information), one may also end up seeking help from salesperson. However, the overall risk and ambiguity

associated with such an offering is slightly higher than what is true for simple offerings and much less than what might be the case with complex offerings. Since these days' information is readily available, consumers usually end up doing their own research before approaching a salesperson to educate them.

A few examples of the industries selling such offerings are Agriculture, Healthcare, Media and Advertising, Real Estate, Hospitality, Automobiles and Electronics.

## **COMPLEX OFFERING**

Complex products/services are those that involve considerable ambiguity and risk and may have features that are not easily understood. Even though information about their features may be readily available, they may not be presented in a format that can be easily consumed by the end user. Therefore, the salesperson may be required to explain the product in detail, and provide support and information about its use, even after the transaction is closed.

This makes it essential for a salesperson of a complex offering to be more sophisticated in his/her approach, even when trading in retail sales. Since the buyer of such an offering may need extensive information, a salesperson must have an extensive domain understanding.

A few examples of industries selling complex offerings are Banking and Financial Services, Education and Training, IT Solutions and Heavy-Duty Infrastructure.

An important point to note and understand is that certain products can move from being complex to semi-complex or simple over a period, once their usage becomes more widespread and commonplace.

For e.g. Mobile devices when first introduced in late 1990s and early 2000s were considered complex in nature. Not all features were easily comprehended and there was considerable ambiguity about the various brands selling them. However, over period mobile devices have come to be considered as semi-complex product.

## 2. Process Complexity

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Another critical parameter is the complexity of the selling process. It answers the question: **How to Sell?** It refers to the aspects of a typical sale that happens between a company and its customer, which mainly corresponds to the time that will be taken to sell a product, the number of persons/teams involved in the same and the stages involved in getting the customer to finally buy the offering. It considers few factors such as the typical transaction value of an offering, its brand value and whether the transaction is a repeat/one-time case. The mode/channel of selling the product or service also has a bearing on the process complexity of the offering.

Selling process also refers to the interaction that takes place between the seller and the buyer before the buyer closes the transaction by paying for the offering and accepting it.

**This factor has been split into 3 types:**

### TRANSACTIONAL PROCESS

A sales process that involves a transaction made between very few stakeholders, or is something that ends within a short period of time (i.e. typically doesn't require more than 1 interaction between the buyer and the seller).

The need for a product sold in such kind of transactions is usually well established, and the salesperson has readily available solutions for the customer's problems. The decision makers involved in such kind of a process are also minimal.

There might be no intention of the salesperson for following up or maintaining a long-term relationship with the client.

### MULTI-STAGE/TACTICAL PROCESS

A sales process where a transaction requires multiple rounds of interaction between the buyer and the seller. Multi-stage transactions can be a result of the nature of the product (for e.g. purchasing a house/property where the deal is not closed for years at a time because of the time required to fully deliver the product etc.) or the process (for e.g. taking out a loan that may require multiple rounds of visiting the loan provider etc.)

The need for a product/service sold in such kind of transactions might not be known/established, and the

salesperson might not have readily available solutions for a customer's problems.

The decision makers involved in such kind of sales can be more than people involved in a transactional sale. The process requires multiple rounds of interaction because of the nature of the amount of regulation or the leverage to negotiate for the best deal.

### CONSULTATIVE PROCESS

A sales process involving a transaction where the consumer only has a vague understanding of his/her needs and may not have a clear understanding of what product or service is likely to suit them best. In such cases, the salesperson plays a critical role in not only understanding and clearly establishing the client's needs, but in also educating the client about the various solutions that might be available and what amongst them is likely to be most appropriate for their requirements.

This process requires the salesperson to have considerable knowledge and understanding of the market and competition to increase the odds of being able to win and close the deal. This type of process may typically be associated with large enterprises or when dealing with the government or public/political bureaus.

Since the consumers do not know what they need or what will suit their needs best, selling requires both a definition of the problem as well as the solution. The sales transaction can be of a high value and there may be high-level switching costs associated with the same. The decision makers involved in such kind of a process are usually more in number, especially people from the senior management in several organizations.

# 3. Buyer And Environment Sophistication

## This parameter answers the question: **Who to Sell?**

Who a salesperson sells to, makes a huge difference in how the 3 factors of the model change and interact with each other to give us a better understanding of the key competencies required for a salesperson.

The pull vs. push nature of products, market dynamics etc. could also influence the overall interaction between the consumer and the seller, since they add layers of nuances, rather than forming the foundation for defining and classifying sales interactions.

### This can be further split into 3:

#### BASIC

Such a customer belongs to a lower socio-economic background with typically minimal education and mostly invests in basic/necessary products. The buyer/consumer has a clear and basic need for an offering but has low purchasing power. A basic customer can also be a brand having an offering which suits the lower strata of society.

Typical examples of such conditions can involve customers with rural backgrounds buying FMCG products or agri products or LIC schemes for themselves, for instance.

#### MID

Such a customer belongs to a mid-socio-economic background and evaluates every buy based on value for money. He/she invests in premium products after excessive thinking - purchasing power is typically neither low nor high. The buyer/consumer may/may not have a strong understanding for the offering but recognizes the value for money for the same to be important. There might be a series of considerations and reconsiderations required to make the final purchase, and this may involve the salesperson to make multiple reiterations of the beneficial features of a product or a service.

Typical examples of such conditions can involve customers buying shoes at Bata or people from urban areas buying insurance.

#### PREMIUM

Such a customer belongs to a high socio-economic background and is generally less involved in buying basic/luxury things. Hence the salesperson should keep in mind that the customer experience is critical. The buyer/customer may have an understanding for a product/service but not necessarily a clarity about the right one to be purchased. These usually involve business level transactions and people from the C-suite category in organizations who are the key decision makers.

Typical customers of such conditions can range individual customers buying jewellery at a Tanishq store to the state government buying oil from Bharat Petroleum, for instance.



# Assumptions Made For The Usage Of The 3-Factor Model

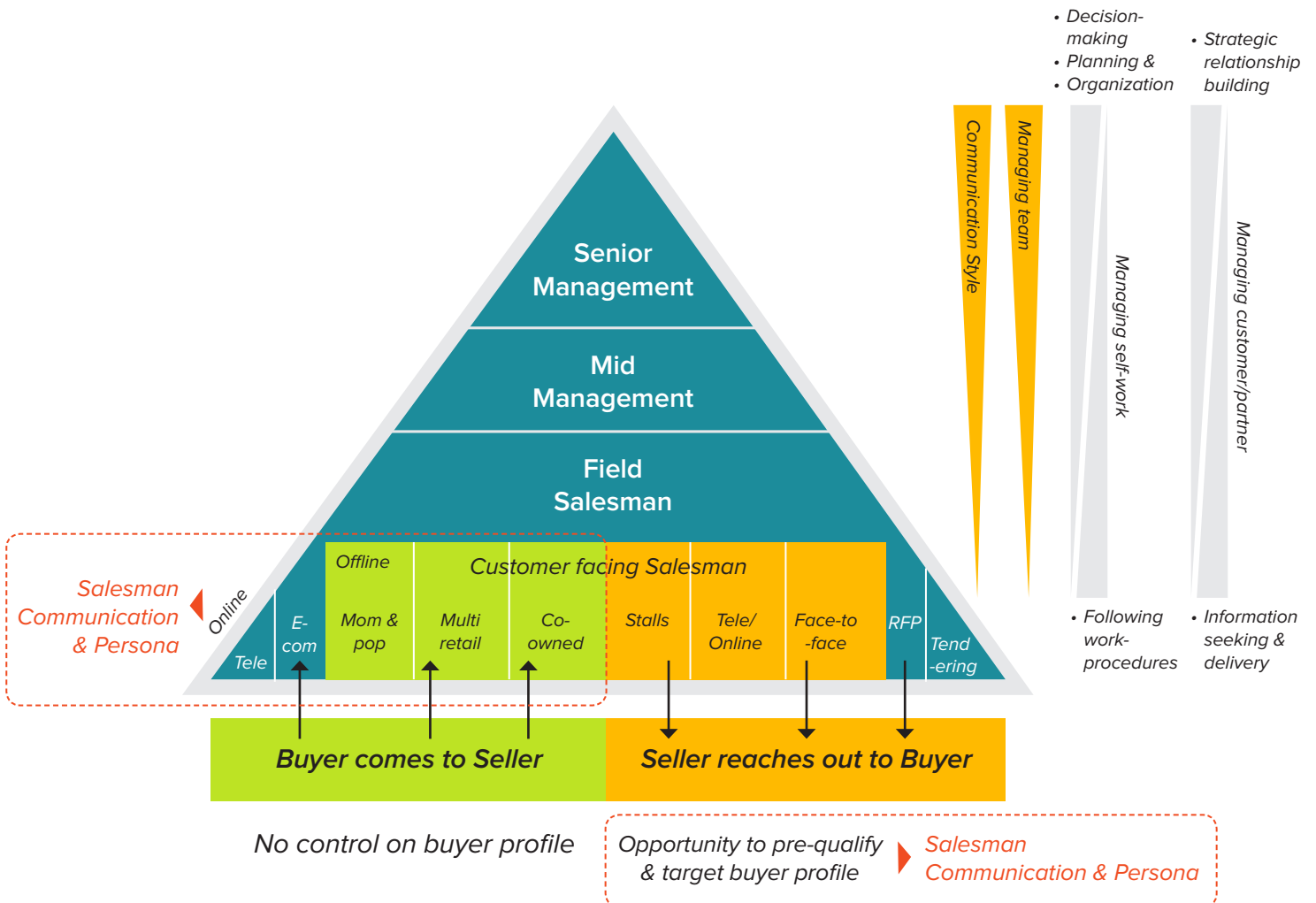
Before we describe sample job roles based on the 3-factor model, it is important to understand the critical scenarios which will make you understand these factors better.

## ASSUMPTION 1:

It is important to note that the model is applicable only for individual contributor roles in sales from every industry. The competencies desired out of a salesperson making individual sales are different from the one who is involved in selling to a business. There are certain competencies common to all job roles, keeping in mind basic selling aptitude. However, they might differ between roles that involve direct interaction with individual customers and the stakeholders of the business that the offering is being sold to.

As we proceed up the sales hierarchy (Fig.3), the competencies become more managerial / strategic in nature. For example, Sales Managers handle teams, make strategic decisions, build long-term relationships with customers and plan their sales in advance, while Sales Executives follow basic procedures of seeking what a customer wants and provide the same. The job roles in a higher level of sales management require patient customer handling as compared to job roles requiring one-time transactions with customers. Thus, the unique competencies required for managerial sales roles would need to be appended to the ones required for individual contributor sales roles.

Fig. 3: Sales Job Role Landscape



## ASSUMPTION 2:

While the definition of the 3 factors does not vary across retail and enterprise sales, the overall examples of the kind of interactions prevalent across retail and enterprise sales are considerably different. For our study, **Retail Sales** refers mainly to individual (or group of) consumers or buyers who would typically consume the product or service directly and do not go through the sales transaction with the intention of further selling the product or service (for profit) to anyone else.

**Enterprise Sales** refers to a purchaser who is either a business entity and is buying the product or service for their own internal consumption or may purchase the product or service with the intention of further processing it or selling it to others (who may be retail consumers). Enterprise therefore also includes middlemen such as distributors, agents and warehouse owners. We considered this to be an important dimension to be considered because it clearly defines the consumer element when trying to understand the sales process.

Additionally, basis our research and discussions with salespersons across industries, a consistent theme that has emerged is that organizations that sell products and services both to individuals as well as enterprises tend to have separate sales taskforces that deal with these two types of purchasers. This is not to say that a retail salesperson cannot sell to an enterprise client (or vice-versa); but rather that the process to be followed is typically different and the way the clients are handled are also key differentiators.

## ASSUMPTION 3:

The model's capability of differentiating competencies based on sales channel or brand strength have been incorporated in "How to Sell" and "Who to Sell" factors. Based on our research with experts, it is evident that channel as well as brand strength tend to primarily influence Communication Style and Salesman Persona (highlighted in Fig 2.1). But if the channel or brand has some unique features (which are not covered by our model), then we need to append these critical competencies with the competencies from this model. Some examples of this argument are presented below.

- In channels like in-store sales, retail sales or online sales, predominantly the buyer approaches seller. Thus, the salesperson has limited control over the buyer's profile. Hence, he/she can only adjust one's way of dealing with customers based on the ask, background, level of product knowledge etc. So be it an online sales platform or retail stores of bigger organizations, the sales representative will be expected to focus on good first impression management and customer delight. This gets covered in "How to Sell" and "Who to Sell" factors.
- When a seller approach buyer, they have an opportunity to pre-qualify the targeted buyer profile. Which means that, they most likely tend to have a pre-designed communication imagery in mind before setting out to sell the product. Telesales/online sales, face-to-face interactions as well as RFP/Tendering based proposals tend to have a pre-designed method of customer interaction. This gets covered through "How to Sell" factor.
- Similarly, the brand strength of the offering also has an important role to play in communication competencies. A Louis Vuitton store is most likely to have a sophisticated sales representative as compared to a Bata. This gets covered through "Who to Sell" factor. Also, the buyers expected at Bata will tend to have a low purchase power and a minimal need as compared to customers who prefer Louis Vuitton stuff.

## ASSUMPTION 4:

The interplay of the 3 factors does not render any competency to be frozen for the grid. One more assumption here is that, they vary along a continuum. When the salesperson who is selling a simple product moves to selling a difficult product, the only difference that becomes noticeable is in terms of the competencies required to process information using higher order cognitive abilities. The interpersonal skills of a person varies from being simple with customers to being sophisticated, considering the audience in mind.





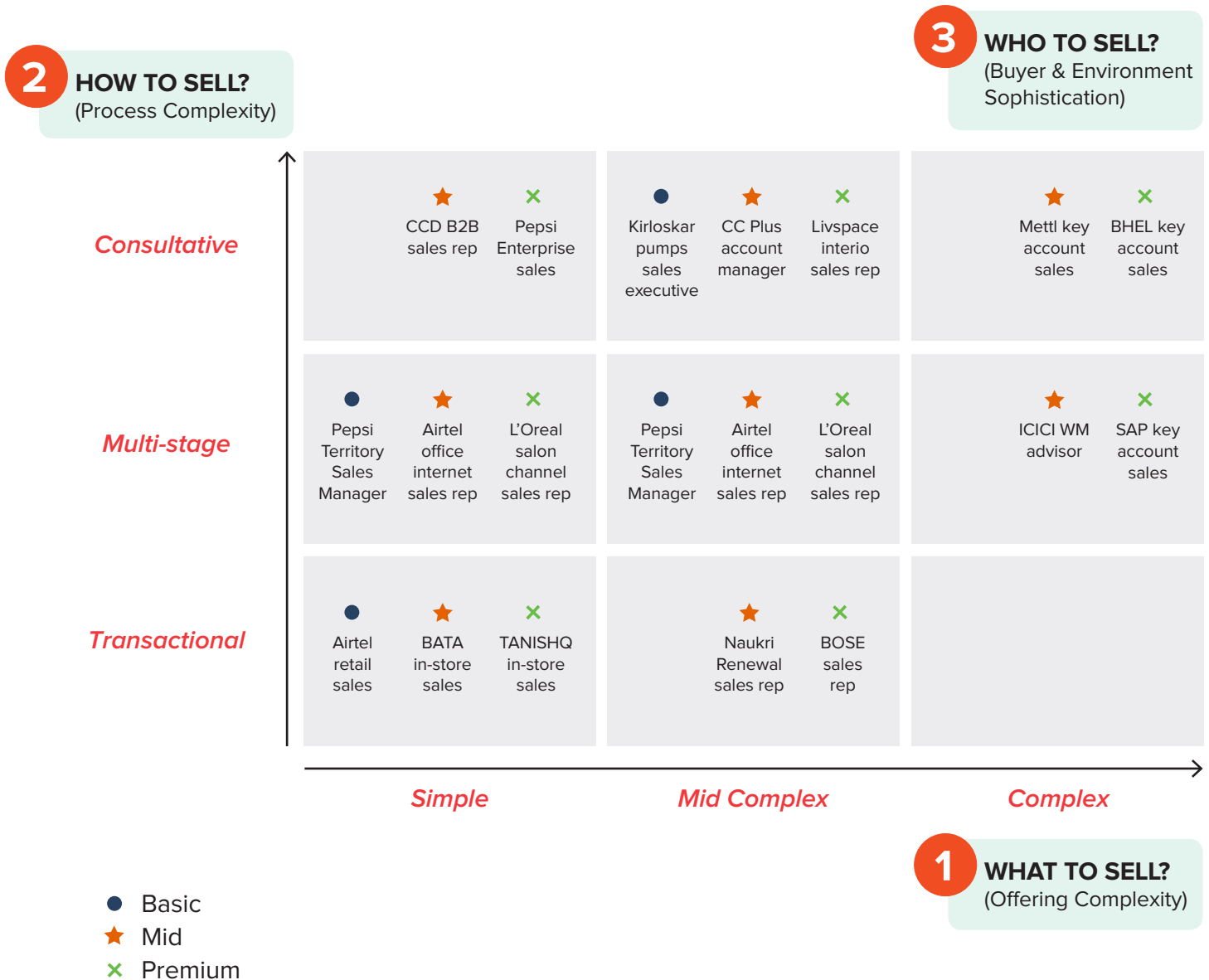
# 3-Factor Model For Sales Job Roles □□□

Given below is a representative diagram explaining (Fig. 4) sample job role examples categorized into 9 different clusters, each being the result of an interplay of the factors: What to Sell and How to Sell. The typical job roles that can be further used for understanding the interaction of the three elements would fall under individual contributor salespeople who are in-charge of dealing with customers directly and carry a sales target.

We arrived at 9 main clusters, where each would have 3 segregations each, with respect to the buyer involved.

1. Simple Transactional Sales (Basic, Mid, Premium)
2. Mid Complex Transactional Sales (Basic, Mid, Premium)
3. Complex Transactional Sales (Basic, Mid, Premium)
4. Simple Multi-Stage Sales (Basic, Mid, Premium)
5. Mid-Complex Multi-Stage Sales (Basic, Mid, Premium)
6. Complex Multi-Stage Sales (Basic, Mid, Premium)
7. Simple Consultative Sales (Basic, Mid, Premium)
8. Mid-Complex Consultative Sales (Basic, Mid, Premium)
9. Complex Consultative Sales (Basic, Mid, Premium)

Fig. 4: Interplay of What, How and Who





A field sales distributor of an HUL or Airtel product and an In-store sales executive for a Bata/Tanishq would fall into the same cluster – Selling simple offerings which are transactional in nature. In a typical retail scenario, the salesperson's role is merely reduced to providing bare minimum guidance or supporting the purchase in terms of service.

To a large extent, the salesperson may have no role to play. However, when selling to a business, a salesperson's role maybe limited to providing a bargain, drawing up necessary paperwork, ensuring delivery etc. and providing necessary support services. A sales representative for Oyo rooms/Volvo buses would fall into the cluster where selling mid-complex offerings are transactional in nature. For selling these products/ services easily, a salesperson needs to have some amount of product knowledge and an ability to compare multiple products and highlight their key features.

A sales representative of a Hair and Shanti Spa services and Ultra Cement for example would fall into the category of selling simple products which might require a bit of handholding. Hence, for selling these products/services easily, a salesperson needs to have some amount of product knowledge and an ability to compare multiple products and highlight their key features.

This would be different from a Dr. Reddy's Medical representative or a Bharti AXA Insurance agent, since they are selling moderately complex offerings. The latter might be required to understand client's needs, educate the customer, convince/negotiate the customer/ multiple stakeholders, persist till the closure and possess understanding of market and competition.

When it comes to strategic/consultative selling, domain knowledge and advanced communication skills are a must for a sales person. A SAP sales representative or a Star Sports account manager, for example should have brilliant product knowledge, sophisticated consultative selling skills and the ability to compare multiple products and highlight key features to the audience involved.



# Competency Framework For Sales Job Roles

One of the key results of the research study has been an understanding of the success factors associated with entry level sales job roles. This has aided the designing of a competency framework, which highlights the critical competencies that make sales a success for candidates being hired for such roles. Given below is a universe of the most critical competencies (Fig. 5).

Fig. 5: Competency Framework



The purpose of identifying a competency is to describe what skills and foundational knowledge are considered necessary for successful performance on the job. An appropriately identified competency, however, encompasses a more contextualized description of such knowledge and skills. Said another way, a sales competency needs to go well beyond simple notions of **“this skill plus that skill plus this knowledge equals good sales”**.

That is, a competency represents skills and knowledge as they manifest on the job, subject to the influence of company culture and the business environment. For example, planning is a competency for employees in sales roles, and “planning” represents a distinct set of activities and demonstrated skills such as assessing risks, setting goals, prioritizing those goals and laying out the steps to achieve those goals within the framework of a sales cycle.

# Understanding The Competency Framework

As shown above, the majority of critical competencies required for success in Individual Contributor Sales roles could be categorized into 4 major Meta competencies:

- **Personal Attributes**
- **Work Orientation**
- **Interpersonal Skills**
- **Sales Aptitude**

As we move up the landscape of job roles, a set of *Leadership Skills* would be required to excel in senior roles, which is to be appended to the framework with time. Broadly, the 2 major divisions of all competencies would be *Sales Behavior* and *Sales Aptitude*. Sales behavior can be effectively captured by the first 3 meta-competencies and Sales Aptitude by the last.

As per the remarks of a Sales Leader of an IT Solutions Company, ***one must look for a right combination of Behavioural Traits and Basic IQ Hygiene, before hiring for a sales role.*** While some skills are trainable on the job, certain innate behavioural and aptitude skills are an advantage to have for a salesperson.

**One important consideration here is that the research study has collated only the most critical competencies to be a part of the framework, which are widely believed to be contributing to major part of the success in the role.**

## Sales Behavioural Competencies Blueprint

It is believed that a good salesperson has certain innate qualities that bring him success in the role. While some skills are trainable, few behavioural/personality traits can make a salesperson stand out from others.

Since sales cannot be entirely taught, one must have the willingness and hunger to learn on the job, do the amount of running around required to hone one's skills. It has been established by industry experts that behavioural traits carry more weightage for success in a sales role; for it's the personality make up of a salesperson that gets him to establish good relationships over time and create a brand image for himself.

A salesperson is expected to have certain generic competencies that might be required at any point in his/her career, irrespective of the hierarchical position. Some of the basic competencies that any salesperson must have are:

- **Accountability**
- **Following Work Procedure**
- **Drive for Results**
- **Understanding Customer Needs**

### • **Influence**

Apart from these as one moves along the continuum of our sales parameters, certain competencies keep getting added/deleted from the requirement.

For example, selling a simple FMCG product like a soap/shampoo would require the salesperson to have a minimum level of Accountability, the ability to Follow Work Procedures, an ability to Understand Customer Requirements as well as a bit of Influence, wherever required. Be it an Airtel Retail Sales Executive or a Bata In-Store Sales Representative, a basic ability to sell products confidently would be required when dealing with premium customers.

However, as the sales proceeds from a simple to a moderately complex product, the salesperson is must have a good Learning Agility, to pick up and master the complexities of selling the offering. As the product keeps getting complex, the salesperson would be required to have a good communication ability.

Fig. 6: Competency Blueprint

**1 HOW TO SELL?**  
(Process Complexity)

**3 WHO TO SELL?**  
(Buyer & Environment Sophistication)

<b>Consultative</b>	Self Confidence Planning and Organization Drive for Results Networking Establish Trust Negotiation and Influence	Self Confidence Self Awareness Learning Agility Planning and Organization Drive for Results Networking Establish Trust Collaboration Negotiation and Influence	Self Confidence Self Awareness Learning Agility Planning and Organization Drive for Results Networking Establish Trust Collaboration Negotiation and Influence
	Accountability Self Confidence Following Work Procedures Planning and Organization Drive for Results Understanding Customer Needs Establish Trust Influence	Accountability Self Confidence & Learning Agility Following Work Procedures Planning and Organization Drive for Results Understanding Customer Needs Establish Trust & Collaboration Influence & Negotiation	Accountability Self Confidence & Learning Agility Resilience & Self Awareness Following Work Procedures Planning and Organization Drive for Results Understanding Customer Needs Establish Trust & Collaboration Influence & Negotiation
	Accountability Following Work Procedures Drive for Results Understanding Customer Needs Influence	Accountability Learning Agility Following Work Procedures Drive for Results Understanding Customer Focus Influence	Accountability Self Confidence Self Awareness Learning Agility Following Work Procedures Drive for Results Understanding Customer Focus Influence
<b>Multi-stage</b>			
<b>Transactional</b>			
	<b>Simple</b>	<b>Mid Complex</b>	<b>Complex</b>

- Low
- ★ Mid
- ✕ Premium

**2 WHAT TO SELL?**  
(Offering Complexity)



## CASE 1: RETAIL SALES IN ANY INDIAN STATE

As per the National Sales Head for a famous FMCG company, nearly 70-80% FMCG business in India continues to be done from retail stores. Be it a small grocery store in a remote village area or a large retail chain in a tier 1 city, the sales job of a company revolves around convincing a retailer to display their products. As markets become more and more developed, selling becomes complicated.

This is because the consumers are evolved and are more aware of different products available in the market. This requires sales personnel in charge of retail chains to have evolved selling skills. The same applies to an online forum selling their products. The scenario involving direct sales to customers buying products from stores directly however only needs basic customer handling skills.

Managing massive operational work therefore becomes a responsibility of an area distributor, for example. If we take any city having close to 7-8 lakh retail stores, it becomes a challenge for FMCGs to reach only a certain % of store out of all. These operational challenges are often accompanied by another one pertaining to handling a team. In such an industry therefore, behavioural competencies like Accountability, Following Work Procedures, Understanding Customer Needs and basic Influential capabilities become essential for sales to successfully grow.

While a salesperson selling a simple product may not require very polished knowledge about the offering, he/she may require certain Planning and Organizing skills as well an ability to build and Establish Trust. For example, an HUL distributor for Field sales / Channel Sales Representative of a Premium Spa chain will be required to do a bit of negotiation, collaboration and learn better skills as they move from selling more complex products.

## CASE 2: MEDIA SALES FOR A PREMIUM BRAND

The media space being a typically B2B scenario, the salespersons are assigned specific accounts that they must close, build and manage. Media and Advertising as an industry falls into the category of Mid-Complex Multi-Stage Sales. Here, the salesperson of a premium company is required to display an ever-growing hunger about acquiring information about prospective clients / market trends, and this is necessary for survival in the industry. Once these sales people meet clients/brand managers of companies which have premium audiences, their job is to meet them and understand their requirements in detail first.

At this point, he/she should be able to effectively gauge the objective of the communication and marry the same to what he/she must offer. Building a proposal for the same proceeds this step and requires him/her to use one's negotiation tactics to strike the best deal.

Offerings like these are not very easy to sell in one go, but require multiple rounds of interactions that would help establish trust, collaborate and negotiate with stakeholders. Usually this requires a good learning agility and advanced communication skills, because in the process of building a relationship with the client, the salesperson is indirectly attaching a brand value to himself/herself.

Similarly, Consultative sales would require a sales person to do a lot of networking, collaboration and influence, since such sales build upon a person's relationship management skills. A Bharti AXA Sales Representative or a SAP Sales Executive for instance, is expected to have brushed up his basic skills on managing self and his work, but would be required to be assessed upon his customer handling abilities.

### CASE 3: A TYPICAL SALES SCENARIO FOR IT SOLUTIONS

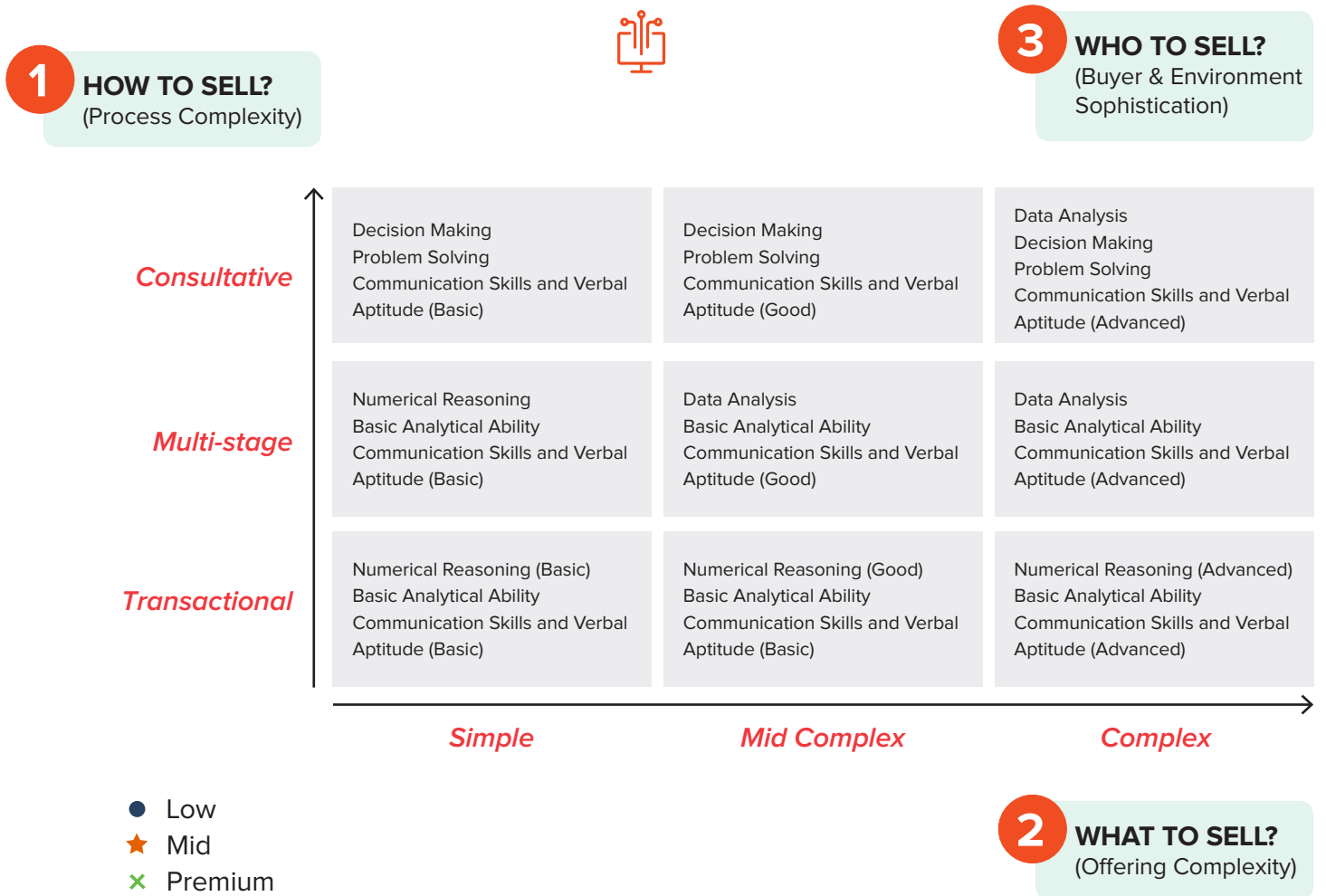
In well-known IT giants like Wipro, Infosys, SAP, L&T Infotech, the sales can be understood to be primarily B2B. There is a sales team containing about ½ sales representatives and a manager. Additionally, a lot of backend processes are in play.

High end solutions like SAP servers, often require the team to have a technical expert who knows the product in and out. The team might also have a financial expert and a member from the senior management. Since these solutions are pitched over a long sales process (typically 3-6 months), it requires the salesperson to display a high amount of Resilience. It requires him/her to list down targeted accounts, reach out to CIOs and plant heads and make initial conversations regarding success stories of their products.

What is important here is to understand 3 things: the customer, the motivations of the influencers involved as well as the budget plan. Good salespeople can influence the RFP if they understand the people involved better. This calls for a lot of collaborative abilities. Also, a strong ability to observe, listen and gather relevant information that can aid in closing the deal as well as a sharp alertness toward the timing and price opportunity is required in such cases. One requires a lot of persistence since relationship management and persuasion are expected to keep up till the end of the transaction.

# Sales Aptitude Competencies Blueprint

Fig. 7: Critical Competency Framework



A salesperson must be assessed on his/her general intelligence to excel in sales.

To quote a famous IT Solutions Leader,

“ *The commonality in all Sales Roles is numbers, whether IT/FMCG/ Manufacturing, it all boils down to certain targets and numbers* ”

Hence, Numerical Reasoning, Basic Analytical Ability and Data Analysis have emerged out to be certain essential skills that the candidate must be assessed upon, prior to hiring. Apart from these as one deal with multiple stakeholders or sells in a consultative scenario, he/she might be required to take key decisions regarding matters. Hence as we move up vertically up the model, Decision Making and Problem-Solving skills make up two other important competencies.

It is important to keep in mind, the Communication skills and verbal aptitude of a candidate. They are supposed to be polished and more advanced when either dealing with premium audiences or selling complex products.

# Adopt State-Of-The-Art Technologies To Build Winning Sales Teams

*“As money comes to HR technology, so do new ideas and smart people. The result: we are seeing one of the most innovative times ever in the HR technology market.”*

– Josh Bersin, Principal and Founder, Bersin by Deloitte

Recruitment is no doubt a war, and the new millennium altered the concept of talent management in this regard.

Excellent work space, Modern hiring system, Better engagement, Easy communication, Learning and development and Frequent feedback are merely some of the many asks from the new generation of talent, which now highlights a changing workforce – a generational shift, if you prefer. With this, the perception of HR has also undergone a massive change, moving from a support function into something more advisory in nature.

In fact, HR is no longer the ancillary role that it once was – to employ and manage grievances. They are now an entity that affects the bottom line of an organization, where some of the focus areas now include:

- **Talent Sourcing, Acquisition & Retention**
- **Employee Systems of Engagement**
- **Performance & Productivity Analytics**
- **Learning Management**
- **Training Administration**
- **Succession Planning**

This, to top off the tip of the HR iceberg. In parallel, certain technologies that bind these new focus areas hover in the realms of social recruiting, online skills assessments, Bring Your Own Device (BYOD), e-learning systems and more.

Yes, the HR tech industry is at a stage of rapid innovation to keep pace with the changing demands of Talent Measurement. This report touches these disruptions and trends in this multi-billion-dollar business, which in the coming years, is predicted to set the tone for organizational HR automation.

Given the sheer size of the global recruitment market, the traditional paper-résumé-screen-interview-selection method is hardly the most optimum in matching talent to the right job.

Online recruiting and applicant tracking systems brought great efficiency to the process, but social recruiting remained a realm apart in providing global businesses a solution to build an effective workforce.


The use of assessments beyond recruitment – in the measure of engagement, conducting training, ROI of development programs and more – generates great interest from a variety of organizations. After all, there is immense value in the data acquired from assessments. This growing interest has led to a sharp increase in the market size for assessments, and more importantly, the breadth of assessment technologies - a goldmine of an opportunity.

With the shift to an online platform, assessments have reached a higher level of sophistication in terms of content, administration, results, benchmarks and more.







# Additional Insights And Learnings

1  **The complexity of the sales process is influenced to a large extent by the nature of the product being sold.**


Some products require multiple interactions because of the features of the product or because the product or service maybe such that it can be delivered only in stages or the overall sales relationship is long-term in nature. Additionally, the amount of regulation or government intervention in a particular industry can lead to certain steps in the sales process becoming mandatory and thus increasing the complexity of the transaction.

2  **The complexity of the sales process may also be influenced by the amount of negotiation that is possible in the transaction.**

Greater the bargaining power that the consumer has, the more iterations and discussions that the process is likely to have. Such situations are also likely to involve multiple stakeholders on both sides.

3  **The competencies across several job roles tend to have a lot of overlap as well.**

Some competencies such as relationship management is critical for most sales job roles where the nature of the process is consultative. Additionally, consultative processes also require a key step of understanding client needs before the salesperson can initiate next steps such as solution presentation, negotiation etc. Understanding client needs also involves doing research, asking the right questions, probing, understanding the business, market and competitive environment that the client operates in. Other key competencies that are consistent across job roles are drive for results, product knowledge, persistence, communication skills etc.

4  **While a certain amount of basic intelligence is required, most entry level sales job roles do not require any prior knowledge or experience in sales.**

However, gaining experience becomes important for one to be able to grow in their sales job roles. Additionally, the progressions through different levels in the organization varies from company to company even within the same industry.

# Conclusion



Selling works when an organization, and its sellers, excel in certain key areas. As sales organizations focus more and more on the human side of sales acceleration, sales competencies are being prioritised as the foundation to better hiring, training and development of sales executives.

Especially in high-growth organizations where reps are being hired quickly, sales competencies are a great method to establish a common language, process and benchmark for hiring in sales. However, it's quite likely that commonly used competencies will fail to deliver any measurable improvement in your team's performance or your bottom-line.

This study attempts to classify and break down sales job roles such that competencies that are common as well as different for these job roles could be gleaned. Going forward, this study will be used by Mettl to classify and customize assessments for all sales job roles, across various industries, customer type and company sizes based on their requirements.



## THE VALIDATION EXERCISE: QUALITATIVE RESEARCH TO CHECK MODEL RELEVANCE

The finalization of the model, the examples in the tables above as well as the critical competencies came together as a part of a qualitative validation exercise that was undertaken. The exercise involved detailed telephonic conversations with salespersons in various industries who have recent as well as considerable experience in that industry. Below are some key details of the research exercise.

### • SAMPLE

We conducted interviews with two sample groups. The groups differed in the number of years of experience they had within a industry. The slightly less experienced group had experience within an industry that ranged from 3 to 7 years whereas the salespersons in the more experienced group had experience ranging from 8 to 17 years.

The table below provides information on the number of people interviewed across various industries along with the organization names.

Fig. 8: Less Experienced Interviewees

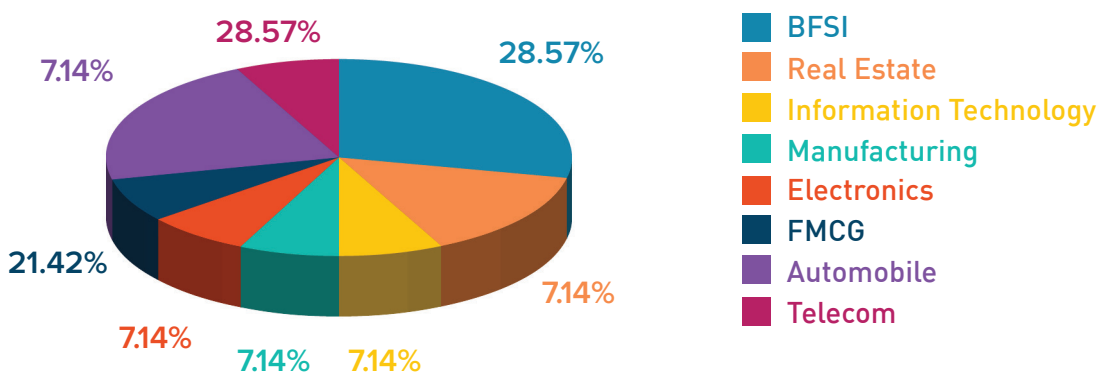
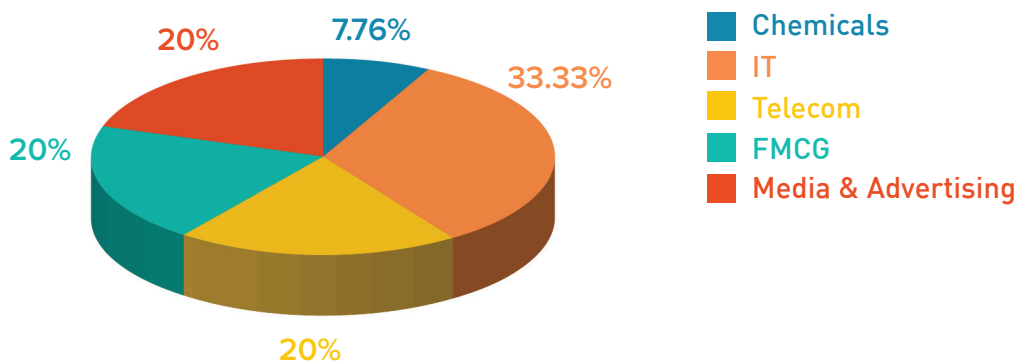


Fig. 9: More Experienced Interviewees



## • **METHODOLOGY**

We conducted telephonic interviews with the salespersons that lasted on average between 30 minutes to 1 hour. The conversations started with an explanation of the purpose of the study and an introduction to the initial conceptualization of the 3 factor model. We then proceeded to ask the salespersons some standard set of questions regarding their understanding of the industry they worked in and the sales interactions that were most prevalent in the organizations that they had worked for. These conversations were either recorded (with the interviewee's consent) or were noted down verbatim. The following are the questions asked during these conversations.

1. With regards to the product or service you sell, can you provide information regarding the nature of the:
  - Product (simple vs. complex)
  - Process (simple vs. complex)
  - Target Buyer (basic vs. premium)
2. Are the products sold exclusively to retail consumers or other businesses?
3. Are there different arms of the sales department that serve retail consumers vs. other businesses?
4. Is there a greater prevalence of (greater emphasis on) selling the products and services to retail consumers or businesses?
5. Is it typical (or commonplace) to have multiple levels of salespersons be involved in a single transaction?
6. What is the career progression like for a salesperson in your industry?
7. What characteristics / aspects of an individual determine his or her success in this role (i.e. what are some critical competencies necessary for an individual's success in this role)?
8. Any differentiating competencies for an Entry and Managerial Role?
9. Could you provide a detailed example of a sales interaction that you have had?
10. Number of Contact Points/Stakeholders/Member Involved in a particular transaction?
11. Concrete examples of the Product
12. What other industries are similar to your industry? If someone were to switch jobs, which would be the industry where they are likely to fit in easily.

## • **DATA CONSOLIDATION AND INSIGHT GATHERING**

Post these interviews, the notes from these conversations were collated and insights gathered. Any suggestion for changes or edits to the model have been incorporated in the descriptions provided in the previous sections of this document.

Additionally, the other major insight has been regarding the competencies necessary for someone to perform well in the various types of sales job roles. These competencies have been listed as part of the 3-factor model above under 2 categories - Behavioural as well as Aptitude.



Mettl is one of the largest and fastest growing online talent measurement solution provider globally, and has been at the forefront of online assessment technology since its inception in 2010. It enables organizations to build winning teams by taking credible people decisions across two key areas: Acquisition and Development. More than 1600+ corporates, 24 sector skill councils / government departments and 10+ educational institutions have benefited from its award-winning solutions. Using research-backed assessments, efficient delivery on cloud platform and in-depth analytics, Mettl delivers transformative results for its customers. It creates customized assessments for use across the entire employee lifecycle, beginning with pre-hiring screening and candidate skills assessment, training and development programs for employees/students, certification exams, contests and more. With thought leadership as its top priority and a lot of industry-leading discussions on ground breaking HR developments, Mettl's blog ([www.mettl.com/blog](http://www.mettl.com/blog)) is one of the most prolific destination for the HR community. Mettl has won various accolades in the recent past - NSDC has selected Mettl as one of the 14 companies to drive innovation in the skills area in India and Thomas Friedman has written about Mettl and its technology impact in New York Times. Additionally, Mettl is a winner of the India Emerging 20 Award and the Michael Porter & IFC-Mint Strategy Award for Technology Enabled Assessments, held annually to recognize and honor the best Indian companies in different niche categories.



SHRM India provides a platform for thought leadership, sharing of best practices and professional networking within the Indian and global HR communities in order to take the profession higher through continuous and collaborative learning. It is a one-stop shop and the go-to resource for solutions and services to handle all people-management challenges. With more than 285,000 members globally, membership is truly a unique offering that provides rich content through comprehensive online resources on [www.shrm.org](http://www.shrm.org). This huge repository of articles, research papers, case studies and related material on every aspect of HR within the Indian and global contexts constitutes the most current and comprehensive body of knowledge in HR. Supported by a bank of over 50 subject matter experts and internal expertise, the SHRM India Knowledge Center offers cutting-edge resources, across all the key and emerging HR disciplines. These include thought leadership, advisory panels, tools and templates, virtual events, forum and research. As the leading advocate for HR professionals' worldwide and providing HR research and education, SHRM launched an unparalleled study to define not only the knowledge, but also the competencies required of today's HR leaders. The result of this rigorous research was the SHRM HR Competency Model which forms an important foundation for the new SHRM Certifications - SHRM-CP and SHRM-SCP.



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