

How do you utilise a Technical Sales Team to grow market share?



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I wish to thank the Kellogg Programme Investing Partners for their continued support.



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Executive Summary

Technical salespeople are instrumental to organisational growth and often can be the key component of winning or losing market share. Since the introduction of technology and its systemic growth into all aspects of business, the need for customer facing salespeople to become increasingly technical has become common place. There is now a need for increased knowledge that supersedes that of a technically connected customer. As the market moves on from the travelling salesmen model, it is now imperative for salespeople to offer highly solution focussed approaches, tailored to the consumer's needs, at a point in time. This technical and problem-solving ability when left isolated and misaligned from company strategies, has allowed for a high level of risk within a business as key market share holders in companies can move from organisation to organisation taking market share with them.

The aim of this report is to understand how technical sales team functions can be harnessed within an organisation and utilised to grow market share, whilst understanding the opportunities that technology integration and the forming of sales team functions can have on mitigating organisational risk and leveraging opportunity. The methodology comprises of a literature review on sales teams and their changing functions followed by a semi structured interview process with three front line salespeople, three sales managers within the agribusiness sector and three agribusiness owner operators who are customers of technical sales teams, to gain an insight on their experiences and observations. The analysis of these responses was the creation of codes and subsequently themes that assisted in the formation of the recommendations.

Key findings

Market share growth has become increasingly difficult to achieve with increased competition, dwindling competitive advantage and the exponential growth of resources over the internet. Both salespeople and management highlighted the changes that the impact of Covid-19 has had on the sales environment. There is a need for adaptability to not only mitigate risk but also to ensure relationships are maintained and where possible strengthened through the continued ability to offer the technical solutions required in real time. This has meant the need for technology in sales teams has become vital. The alignment of the sales team and

organisational strategy to this technology has become critical to maintain and develop value in the sales transaction.

Recommendations

- Develop a sales team structure that removes isolated technical sales functions and embeds these into a sales team focussed on end consumer solutions
- Build a team that is resilient to changing environments and adaptable to market needs, allow processes to change and analyse performance frequently
- Use the technical, relationship focussed sales team members feedback on market insights, create a channel for the consumer voice and react to these insights
- Embed effective CRM technology into the sales team, ensure this technological solution is fit for purpose for each aspect of the sales team function and adds a technical advantage
- Utilise the data input the CRM technology offers, react to the insights gained, and leverage the market based on the data streams available
- Align organisational strategies to the CRM technology being used and have clear aims of the requirement for the technology
- Ensure your technology solution builds in data to maintain market share and embed intellectual property to mitigate personnel change and allow for succession planning
- Train the sales team efficiently on the technology solution, engagement is key to retention, if the right technological solution is outputting the correct data required that is in line with organisation strategy and all staff are trained and engaged then market share growth can occur

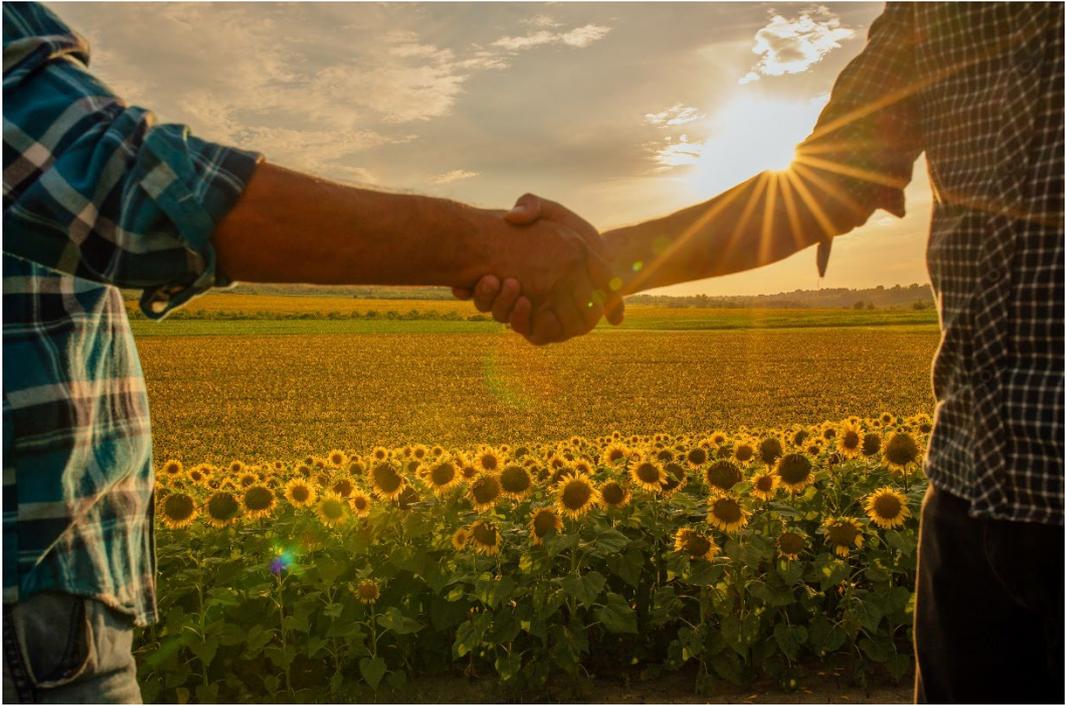


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1.0 Introduction

Can you think of an organisation that doesn't sell? Whether it be a service, product, or data entity, nearly all businesses today transact between themselves, their suppliers, or the public. Not all companies require a sales team, however, many leverage technical salespeople to maximise their potential within their given market, ultimately aiming to grow market share.

How many organisations have you heard of that justify a dip in sales, a loss of the big sale or customer, to the fact that their key technical salesperson has retired or had a better offer from the opposition. It is often seen as justifiable to lose market share due to a change in personnel.

How often have you changed a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) tool expecting increased productivity and engagement and initially see the opposite, resulting in efficiency decreasing and customers placed second whilst you put staff through session after session of 'upskilling', or making them 'technically fit' for your software rather than tailoring a solution to the requirements of your team.

Sales has always and will always evolve as markets change, customer needs adapt, and the world continues to diversify. There is the need for organisations to adapt to remain relevant and keep their place in the market. Those who can utilise their sales team to gather insights, tailor solutions and work cohesively, are likely to be able to pivot in their ever-changing market. This movement allows them to leverage their position to reach areas of the market or customers that had previously been unattainable.

The need to maximise market share is at the forefront of all organisation's minds, whether this is overtly through strategy straplines and key messaging, or at the executive or boardroom table. On average a 10% increase in market share correlates to an increase of 5% pre-tax Return on Investment (RoI) (Buzzell et al., 1975).

Traditionally a technical sales function within a business has been key to value creation with their customer set. A technical sales team member differs from a traditional sales team individual due to the level of knowledge and experience they hold. This can be product focussed however true technical sales teams hold a holistic view over the industry they operate in and often are problem solvers offering a product solution based on the depth of knowledge on an issue and their experience in overcoming this.

This one-on-one relationship and understanding of the customers wants and needs, has allowed a technical salesperson to produce and deliver a solution around this (Weitz &

Bradford, 1999). As dyadic relationships transition to teams offering tailored solutions, market share growth becomes more challenging. It is not now as simple as offering your competitors key talent a bump in salary or to release a new product into the market. As customer needs change and the world becomes more technical, with information more readily available than it has ever been, the reliance on the cookie cutter approach to sales has been mothballed.

The markets that most technical sales forces share has been described as hypercompetitive (Schultz, 1997). This competition is due to the growing consumer need to add value with a product and the requirement for knowledge to be proffered to the end consumer. This coupled with unprecedented inflation and the increasing cost to serve consumers, leaves technical salespeople in an environment of expectation and pressure for growth with tighter budgets and a need for innovation and creativity to succeed.

This paper will enable leaders within sales organisations to understand the opportunities available in a more customer centric sales environment. It will show how to leverage these opportunities to better prepare and equip their technical sales force, to maximise and prioritise market share growth. This report will also highlight sales tendencies and pitfalls that should be avoided, and the risks these challenges bring to an organisation that is not willing to change.

2.0 Aims and Objectives

Aim

- The aim of this report is to understand what steps organisations should take and what barriers to avoid when utilising a technical sales team to grow market share within a given industry

Objectives

- To understand what factors, need to be considered when using a sales team function to sell products
- To investigate what pitfalls are critical to avoid when building or developing a sales team
- To recommend key guidelines to assist with leveraging a sales function within an organisation to grow market share

3.0 Methodology

The methodology used in this project includes a literature review to investigate the research question alongside the five key study areas; the growing need for technical sales individuals to competently understand how to use the technology required for their role, namely CRM tools and tools of trade such as phones and laptops, how Covid-19 has changed sales, consulting sales vs sales skills, selling as a team and removing the lone wolf, and leveraging sales team to mitigate market turbulence.

Semi-structured interviews were then conducted to gather an understanding of experience of three front-line technical salespeople, three sales management, and three consumers, and how awareness and activity around the five key study areas would achieve increased market share.

Key themes were then extracted and explored from the literature review, and the qualitative data from the interviews, these themes were then analysed using thematic analysis to draw recommendations.

3.1 Limitations

As with any research into sales and sales teams the scope can be wide. All people interviewed for this project were currently employed or have been employed in the agribusiness and rural industries, this limits the perspective of sales teams outside of these market segments. As there were only three interviewees from each sector interviewed: frontline sales, sales management, and customer. Limitations can be drawn on the conclusions from each sector.

4.0 Literature Review

The Value of Sales: An introduction

One of the key themes identified in the literature was that of value. This can be simply defined as understanding your customers' needs and furthermore providing a solution tailored to these needs (Weitz & Bradford, 1999). The following literature review explores the value of utilising a technical sales team to increase market share within an industry, through technology, the effects of Covid-19 on the sales relationship, consultative sales vs personality traits, the growing reliance on a sales team, the removal of the 'lone wolf', and leveraging a sales team to mitigate market turbulence.

4.1 The growing need for technological competence

The role of technology in most walks of life over the past 20 years has become more and more prevalent as nearly all roles now require technology utilisation and awareness or have been changed by the adoption of technology (Tuli et al., 2007). This is no different in the sales environment and as such the need for technical sales teams to not only be technology literate, but to utilise technology from a value-add perspective both for their organisation and their customers (Bolander et al., 2015). Whether this be the introduction of a CRM solution, or tailoring a solution to a customer's problem, the need to competently use technology efficiently is invaluable in a role that is often time pressured, and results focused (Tuli et al., 2007).

With the level of information now available to buyers through the availability and ease of access of the internet and mobile phone apps, sales forces can no longer simply avail product information to their customers (Verbeke et al., 2011). The need to be one step ahead of the buyer is becoming ever more crucial (Peesker et al., 2021). This often involves the need to analyse a problem in a more granular way, to ensure solutions that are offered are customized to the client, such as an effective drench schedule for sheep showing resistance issues or an agronomic recommendation prior to seed being drilled. Successful utilisation of technology is leading sales away from the one size fits all approach, as personalised outcomes now offer increased value that was not previously commonplace.

Technology makes the Business to Business (B2B) interactions much more relationship heavy (Marcos-Cuevas, 2018). The increased frequency for these interactions to no longer be face to face, due to the adoption of technological solutions, results in relationships now being built and maintained through multiple platforms. The need for increasing the number of touch points to a customer has become vital in developing and nurturing these relationships. The positive influence that LinkedIn has had on the social media scale has allowed individuals to establish credibility and create a personal brand to highlight their point of difference in the market (Peesker et al., 2021). With the progress of Google and social media, organisations now have the opportunity to effectively brand and market their technical sales team to create a uniqueness from competition within the market. This approach could showcase the individuality and technical ability of a team to not only increase the sense of value to potential customers, but also highlight that value to their sales team (Bolander et al., 2015).

The literature does however expose some common drawbacks that the widespread use of technology has caused within the sales force. The demand on sales teams to provide solutions in real time, coupled with organisational adoption of CRM models has increased workload requirements without the removal of other required everyday tasks (Jones et al., 2005). In a study by Speier and Venkatesh (2002), a survey of 454 salespeople across two firms that had recently executed sales force automation tools, found that although initially there were measures of positive perceptions after training, after six months the technology had been widely rejected, and staff turnover had significantly increased.

4.2 How Covid-19 has changed sales

The rise of the pandemic changed the dynamic of sales almost overnight. With working from home becoming prevalent and face to face contact becoming restricted across the globe, providing real time solutions to customers whilst working to remain relevant became crucial to not only business success but business survival. The reliance on the B2B relationship developed further as individuals became isolated and the focus for technical sales teams moved from prospecting new sales opportunities to connecting and upselling to existing clients (Peesker et al., 2021).

As we move out of a Covid-19 world the need to change and adapt will continue and there will be a need to bring back key sales processes. There is now opportunity to leave many antiquated sales techniques behind which will in turn change the traits required for success in the sales environment. Those with the ability to change and explore new approaches in a more virtual world, will take preference of those who are more resistant to change (Peesker et al., 2021).

In contrast, the true effects of Covid-19 and the literature available around the effects the pandemic is having on the role technical salespeople undertake is limited. As such, further research will need to be undertaken to truly corroborate early findings and directly link these to the Covid-19 pandemic. What is clear in the literature (Tuli et al., 2007) and (Bolander et al., 2015), is the criticality of frontline technical salespeople having the ability to interact directly with their customer. This direct link has the ability to grow market share (Lai, 2016).

4.3 Consulting Sales vs Sales Skills

The ever-changing environment in which technical sales teams have operated in recent years, has been led by technology change and Covid-19. This has meant that customer expectations from salespeople have increased. Process improvements and updated CRM technology have

become forefront for many businesses. As the consumer continues to adapt within the same environment, it is key to ensure organisational change is in line with customer needs. High precedent is being set on salesperson knowledge, the depth of communication and the customisation of solutions (Jones et al., 2005).

The modern sales ecosystem demands that a sales team not only has a level of knowledge that surpasses that of their customers, but that they have the ability to frame this knowledge to create solutions in line with their customers business objectives and the challenges they face (Davies et al., 2006). This more consultative role differentiates the technical salesperson from the competition and creates the stickiness required to create long lasting relationships (Peesker et al., 2021).

Consultative sales however are limited by the effectiveness of the technical salesperson to interact and identify with the customer, the information required to form a solution (Reid et al., 2002). If the salesperson is overly technically minded and is not picking up on sales cues through their customer conversations, there is the risk of providing technical offerings misaligned to customer needs and ultimately damaging customer retention and risking their businesses standing in the market.

4.4 Selling as a Team, Removing the Lone Wolf

The utilisation of resource in the modern sales network has become integral to winning market share. With ever increasingly refined products, services, and technologies, the ability to coordinate technical assets alongside commercial focus and organisational direction has seen a rounding out of the B2B relationship (Jones & Chonko, 2005).

There has been a movement from lone wolf sellers to team players (Dixon et al., 2003). It has become more prevalent in the sales environment for collaboration within and between organisations, to create value at the point of sale (Baumann et al., 2015). The value of these partnerships for the buyer has become evident, however as a technical salesperson it can be a difficult solution to offer as the level of control diminishes outside of his/her organisation. Although the tailored solution is offered, the ability to influence the final decision has been diminished due to the higher number of variables. There is currently a research gap pertaining to B2B sellers collaborating to offer a solution to their customer.

The prevalence and progression of Key Account Management (KAM) has become more evident today. With an ever increasing technical and tailored solution required for the customer. Organisations are developing solutions that intersect many avenues of their business. For example, in the agriculture sector a chemical purchase for a spray out may combine input from an agronomist, seed specialist, fertiliser advisor and end technical expert. The multilateral selling approach is becoming more common as the solution required by the customer often moves past the capabilities of the salesperson and requires a more coordinated approach (Workman et al., 2003). This approach is deemed to create long standing value in the relationship and move sales from being short term and transactional to deeper solution focussed relationships (Marcos-Cuevas et al., 2014). This added complexity is proving key to developing enduring relationships. There is a certain level of fluidity required to respond in an ad hoc manner as opportunities arise (Bradford et al., 2012). The drawback to having a fluid team capable of offering diverse solutions, is the need for internal alignment whilst keeping all elements working to the common objective. Due to the cross-functional areas that many fluid teams work, clear and concise communication is empirical to its success (Lia & Yang, 2017). The need for the account owner to overcome any technical barriers and coordinate smooth communication is vital.

4.5 Leveraging Sales Teams to Mitigate Market Turbulence

Market turbulence, in recent years, with the introduction of Covid-19 into the sales environment, has led to organisations having to consciously respond to changing dynamics in their respective industries. Companies often must adapt to events in the market. Those who respond to this turbulence most effectively are likely to improve their competitive advantage (Jones et al., 2005).

With its consistent and frequent focus on customer interaction, a technical sales team is well placed to leverage these exchanges. They can feedback real time data and information from their buyers to allow their respective organisation to be malleable in times of change. The ability to react to a market requirement at speed and be dynamic with solutions as markets develop, using sales teams as listening posts, could develop new customers and cement existing relationships to give organisations and advantage over their competition (Jones et al., 2005).

Role clarity and organisational objectives can play a key role in the effectiveness of a technical sales team. Being able to draw key insights out of their customers and the market they operate in (Bettencourt & Brown 2003). If there is no structure to the level of detail, or the information that is required as feedback on market turbulence, sales team members can lose clarity in their technical roles and become misaligned. Resulting tensions can occur from these conflicting expectations.

5.0 Analysis

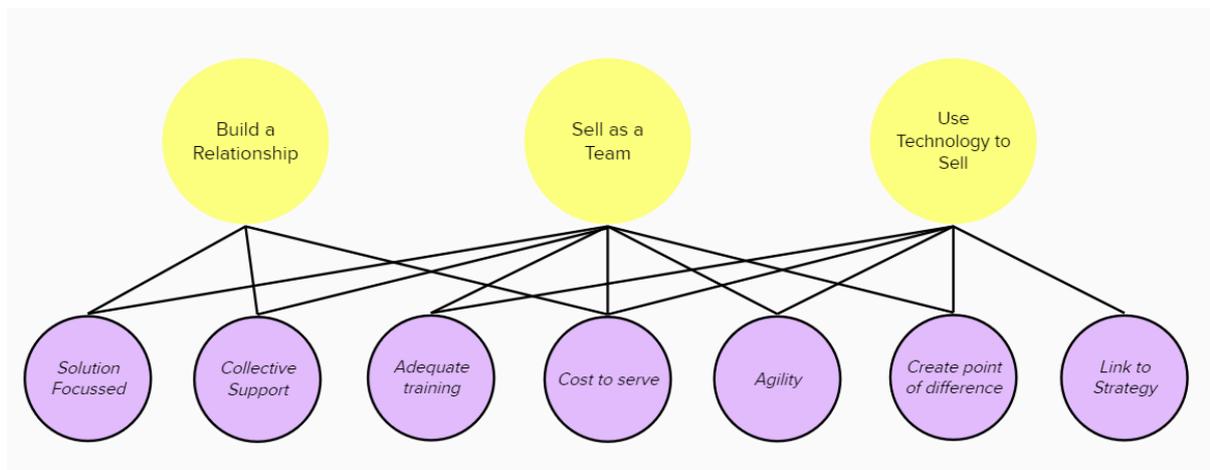


Figure 1. Analysis of themes from literature review and semi structured interviews

5.1 The Need for Value

Value plays a key part in any sales transaction, the perception of value for the customer, and the viability of the transaction for the seller. As the world continues to recover from Covid-19 and global inflation hits nearly unprecedented heights, consumers demand for value in their salesperson interactions has increased (Bolander et al., 2015).

When breaking down how to instil value into a sales interaction there were three common themes that were highlighted through the literature review and semi structure interviews. The need for a two-way relationship that was built on solution focussed sales over transactional sales was evident. Alongside this solution was a level of support that further strengthened the relationship but enabled growth to both customer and sales function as new opportunities were identified. This more engrained sales function had a deeper holistic view of their customers and as such were able to lower their cost to serve through effective account management.

The need to sell as a team was another consistent theme, however this was primarily driven through an organisation and sometimes was not realised by the end consumer. As above

selling as a team allowed a wider group to offer tailored solutions and support functions whilst collectively lowering the cost to serve on an account through larger productivity and the ability to share solutions. However, selling collectively as a team also underlined an organisations opportunity to create a point of difference and increase agility within a market that was becoming increasingly diverse and competitive.

The final theme highlighted was the need to use technology to sell. Utilising the right CRM function, for example, within a sales team and then training the sales team in line with the desired output of this data, allowed again for increased agility, a lower cost to serve and a more unique point of difference.

6.0 Findings and Discussion

6.1 A More Clued-Up Consumer

All interviewees stated when researching a product for purchase, they start their inquiries online, and when they have made the decision on what to purchase or require a higher level of knowledge than is available online, is when they engage with a sales function. These findings corresponded with the research by Verbeke et al., (2011).

“If I need information about a product or am making a purchase I always start online.” - Consumer

“My mind is made up now on a purchase before I even set foot in the door.” - Consumer

Research by Peesker et al., (2021) who discussed the need for sales teams to use technology in line with sales targets, to remain one step ahead of the myriad of information available to consumers online and add value through the sales process. This was also highlighted by two interviewees who talked of the need to ensure the digital tool on offer could provide a solution to the customer, but also worked in line with key organisation strategies to maximise sales growth.

“Technology is there and fully capable of growing market share but if you are not syncing this to your business objectives then it will become unproductive. Organisations need to work with its technology solution to move this in line with the business strategy.” – Sales Manager

“If you don’t set clear direction about the digital tool and then train your sales team around this direction, then your technological solution will not provide the outcome you require from it.” – Sales Manager

6.2 From Transactional to a Relationship

A technical salesperson’s relationship to their customer has always been key in successful sales teams and has formed the straplines in many sales organisations. The movement from closing a sale to opening a relationship was expressed through the interviews conducted, and upheld the research by Marcos Cuevas, (2018).

“Transactional sales in the last two years have meant more sales with a quicker turnaround. Now people need items when they need it so client lists can grow as transactional sales become the norm.” – Technical Salesperson

“No one likes the car salesperson, no one likes to be sold to like that anymore, we want service.” - Technical Salesperson

“If I buy regularly then the relationship is so important. I need to feel value in each interaction and that the company has my best interests at heart.” - Consumer

One interviewee talked of the importance of the relationship between the technical salesperson and the organisation. It was discussed how a strong customer relationship could sometimes contrast to the expectations of the company, particularly if technology and CRM models have not been adequately aligned to expectation. This led to a salesperson cost to serve no longer being suitably visible. This fluidity and two-way relationship alignment was also highlighted through Bradford et al., (2012).

“You need to hold control over certain elements in a B2B relationship and not be dictated to. Sales people still have an obligation to their organisation first and foremost.” - Technical Salesperson

“Relationship is still important, customers come to you if the price and supply is where it should be, next on their list is now relationship. In B2B sales the relationship is important as committing on stock and holding price has become a growing business risk, so mitigating that risk is key, and a strong B2B relationship can do this. You

need the salesperson to be able to build relationships and observe opportunities, you need to mould the person to your business needs.” – Sales Manager

However, one interviewee contrasted this view and felt that the impact of Covid-19 on the sales environment in their opinion had lessened the reliance on a strong relationship. They believed that relationship moved behind price and the ability to source product when needed. This view contrasted the literature review, however the research by Marcos-Cuevas et al., (2014) and Bradford et al., (2012) were both conducted prior to the pandemic.

“With Covid there has been a disconnect from face-to-face time, you may be the most liked and hold the relationship, but there was a shift to price and availability of product not on one-on-one relationship sales” - Consumer

6.3 Creating a Point of Difference

Developing a point of difference in the market you operate has usually meant product innovation and new product lines. As technology progresses and the world becomes more connected, organisations unique selling points have become more diverse and allowed for large institutional diversity.

“It has been so important to find new ways to connect to the customer, that is how market share is grown, find differing ways to reach out, find alternative solutions. Those who have been successful have found different ways to do business.” – Technical Salesperson

The research by Peesker et al., (2021) around utilising the growing brand presence on social media, was echoed by two interviewees who had used social media tools to showcase their team offering and highlighting support functions previously not customer facing.

“Nothing works unless you have a team to fulfil your plan, but your customer must know your team, not just the salesperson.” – Sales Manager

“It has been so important for me to sell as a team, when getting to the final hurdle of signing the customer we always used the team to seal the deal, we attracted a lot of business through our media platforms.” - Technical Salesperson

6.4 Technology Solution – Ensure it is a Solution

The literature showed the evolution through technology in the last 20 years, and how this has permeated into all parts of the sales function. If the ability to sell more to more people was not inherent through a technological solution, the integration of these into technical sales teams would not have occurred. The research conducted by Speier & Venkatesh (2002) highlighted the need for technology to align a fit for purpose CRM solution with a robust training plan, to ensure staff remain engaged. This sentiment was restated by two interviewees who had experience of working with technology, that slowed down the effectiveness of a sales function, and hindered its ability to meet customer needs and effectively sell.

“I have also experienced behaviours will not change if the system/tech is not interactive and clunky, or significantly increases admin time. Humans are creatures of habit and behaviour will change if there is an incentive to do so. Get this mix right and adoption rates will increase.” - Technical Salesperson

“Technology in modern society can make up for human inefficiencies, but for that to be effective you need to ensure you have the right human components to align with your technology, this connection is key.” – Sales Manager

“If you don’t utilise the data that you are creating then you miss opportunities.” - Technical Salesperson

“You should always allow a salesperson to sell, don’t hold people back with technology.” - Consumer

“If the data inputted in the CRM is incorrect or outdated at the time of succession into a role, you have to effectively start again, and this can lose market share.” – Sales Manager

“Management not reading the information being inputted has become a problem.” - Technical Salesperson

The interviews also highlighted experiences whereby strong technology adoption, alignment between a technical sales team, the organisational objectives, and customer needs, resulted in greater productivity and market share growth. The agility to react to a customer’s unique needs and manage numerous data points, often in different geographical areas, allowed for solutions that were more technical in their offering and more sound in their conclusions.

“Competitors faced the same disconnect, those who were adaptive and were able to be strategic around customer needs were able to get the upper hand.” – Sales Manager

“It is so critical for businesses to utilise the data they are obtaining. If you have customers already buying certain products from you, use this information to leverage the market to build market share.” - Technical Salesperson

“Use technology from CRM data to offer the tailored solution at the time, do they need technical, or do they need a product?” – Sales Manager

“Use technology to gather feedback, talk to your customers and react to the data you collect, engage with customers on multi-level technology to understand them.” - Technical Salesperson

6.5 How do we Win?

In their interviews, all participants talked of the sales ‘team’ rather than the salesperson. When questioned further on this, the consensus within their own experience was that the movement from a sales individual to a sales team, was almost as widespread as the use of technology. When giving examples of successfully winning market share from a competitor three interviewees stated that, having clear targets and sales strategies flowed through a sales function from senior leadership. This coupled with technical support and the utilisation of data, offered an organisational alignment that had been missing in more isolated sole person sales functions. This link to having a commercial focus and clear direction for a sales team was highlighted in the literature from the research conducted by Jones & Chonko (2005) and Workman et al., (2003).

“A General Manager would direct the sales team and lay out targets and strategies, sales team worked alongside operations to ensure business growth.” - Technical Salesperson

“We have always used automated reports in my previous roles, these were tailored to the organisations strategies and growth objectives and aligned with developing the business further to grow market share. I don’t have that in my current role and feel our alignment suffers.” – Sales Manager

“Management needs to understand what they are trying to achieve in each sector of their business and use their sales function in the field to gather market intelligence.” - Technical Salesperson

“Utilise the team to close the deal.” – Sales Manager

“Isolated sales team members prevent us from seeing all the opportunities available to that customer, thus creating a narrow-minded sales focus.” – Sales Manager

6.6 Greater Adaptability Breeds Greater Opportunities

Turbulence in nearly all industries leads to opportunities for sales organisations. The need for both companies and individuals to be adaptive in their response, and their offering, has allowed for market share growth. This adaptable approach was highlighted by Jones et al., (2005) above.

“Sales teams that have shown the ability to be adaptable and resilient in recent times, have allowed business to survive. I see these two as an absolute requirement for future business to sustain performance in an unpredictable and changing world.” – Sales Manager

One interviewee spoke about their ongoing engagement with a company due to the efficiency in which the interaction took place and the solution that was offered. This level of adaptability although may have seemed fast and impressive to the customer, involved numerous touch points internally, that were able to draw on real time data, and react dynamically to create an end solution. This malleability has seen market share growth for those who have achieved this efficiently and effectively. Jones et al., (2005) corroborated this observation in the literature review.

“Quick, effective problem solving, keeps me engaged with an organisation.” - Consumer

6.7 Collective View

Many interviewees, whether they be in management, part of an existing technical sales function, or a purchaser, all talked of the value held in a relationship. Covid-19 has moved many day-to-day sales to being transactional and quick fix solution focussed. Those

organisations and teams that had a dependence on return business all highlighted that customer experience and value were imperative for them to remain competitive and a trusted partner. The right technological solution in the right place, with adequate training and clear operational function, were also highlighted. Management expressed the need to utilise data that was inputted to create opportunities and solutions. Technical salespeople felt the direction given to them through their management structures allowed their CRM use to be more impactful and moved away from being a tick the box exercise. Consumers saw the effectiveness of slick data use through the perception of a solution and interaction that was built around their needs and tailored to them.

In contrast, two technical salespeople interviewed in front lines sales roles, highlighted elements of disconnect to their companies CRM use and the one size fits all approach to training. This meant the techniques they adopted in the field, when initialising sales discussions, relied heavily on their own lived experience and the relationships they held, rather than having a clear organisational template and direction they were able to follow.

6.8.1 Front Line Technical Sales Findings

Interviewees who were actively involved in technical front-line sales had seen how their organisation had developed and progressed with the introduction of new technologies. Two interviews mirrored the research by Peesker et al., (2021) to use the tools available and stay one step ahead of your consumer.

“I now have lots of technology solutions and can use these to show a customer what is in it for them, how can I improve your business?” - Technical Salesperson

“We have had to move a lot of meetings online, training has also moved online, now if I don't have to jump in a car, then I won't.” - Technical Salesperson

Front line sales team members experience of organisations sales functions observed that, often approaches could be generic and a one size fits all approach was frequently utilised. This created an alignment to themselves as the salesperson, as opposed to the organisation, as the sense of individuality was noticed intrinsically. This contrasted to the research of Jones et al., (2005) and Lia and Yang (2017), who highlighted the needs for a fluid and malleable approach to salespeople's development.

“I always have in my own mind, my own brand and my own reputation.” - Technical Salesperson

“The company would have more success if I was developed in line with my personality. We all sell differently based on age, experience, and our own personality traits.” - Technical Salesperson

6.8.2 Management/Employee Findings

Employees of sales teams continued the rhetoric around the link between a salesperson and the technology available to be a critical component in growing market share. The power of training staff correctly, but also in line with the technologies required, output was key to capitalise on the large amounts of data and information that a sales management team were requiring. If this relationship with the technology is not prioritised, the value at the customer interaction level falls short as highlighted by Verbeke et al., (2011) in the literature review.

“We as leaders need to take ownership of the tools we have given to the sales team and tailor training to that.” -Sales Manager

“I have seen great sales force CRM platforms. So much information is available through an effective platform, you can see the efficiencies they provide.” – Sales Manager

“A CRM tool is only as good as the training and the information that you put in, rubbish in rubbish out.” – Sales Manager

The changes Covid-19 has made to the sales arena was also highlighted through the interview process, especially by management. The understanding was Covid-19 highlighted the importance of relationships in sales transactions as the value was seen in the people. The environment in which B2B sales now operates has changed from a look and feel perspective, however the key principles of the sale have not, value, solution, price, and supply.

“Through Covid we were tested to adapt. How can we offer technical solutions when we weren't able to be face-to-face? There was a lot of collaboration and problem solving, we solved issues collectively and often this involved the customer, relationships were certainly strengthened.” – Sales Manager

“My thoughts are that we need to be hiring people who show traits of adaptability and resilience. If those traits and qualities are there, we can adapt faster and develop deeper relationships with our customers, through effective solutions.” – Sales Manager

6.8.3 Consumer/Purchaser Findings

When interviewing the consumers and purchasers of goods and services provided by technical sales teams, there was a clear theme of service and value becoming more prevalent as the world moves out of the Covid-19 environment. As mentioned by Jones et al., (2005) and Peesker et al., (2021) deepening the communication with a customer, moving away from closing a sale, and more towards developing a relationship built on trust that meets customer needs, has become a focal point for consumers. A strong and engaging customer experience will win repeat business and is increasingly removing price from the equation.

“The person I dealt with was focussed on providing great customer experience in the smallest amount of time.” - Consumer

“Knowledge, availability and then price, the first two can run in any order depending on my level of desire or motivation to make a purchase.” - Consumer

“If the first time I buy something it is a great customer experience, it removes price, I just need to know I will be looked after.” - Consumer

“There will always be somebody cheaper.” – Consumer

Overall, Sales Managers interviewed in this project felt they were aware of the requirements to build sales teams to grow market share. The importance of the relationship to customer was highlighted alongside effectively training staff in line with the outcome required from their CRM technology solution.

In Contrast front line technical sales individuals highlighted that their organisations had been one dimensional in their approach to training and this in turn created a disconnect to the organisation and led them to become misaligned to their organisations sales goals.

Consumers emphasised the need for a strong customer experience and the development of a relationship when completing a sale. This expectation aligned with that of the Sales Managers objectives for their teams when working to attain market share growth. The purchaser also

noted the slick perception of a transaction was engaging and successful in winning the sale, even though they may have not been aware of how many people had a part to play in the sales solution offered.

7.0 Conclusions

Sales interactions hold value as intrinsic to the transaction, whether that be the salesman with a car boot full of product and a briefcase, or a slick sales team each adding a component to a sales solution. The perception of value in recent years however has changed, and the expectation of knowledge and tailored solutions has become prevalent.

The growing use of technology within organisations and the implementation of this initially drove sales organisations and team members to offer greater value based on their technological adoption, and in contrast as the internet and search engines developed customers' ability to up skill and problem solves themselves, left sales teams with a gap to close to remain ahead of their customers knowledge build.

As the introduction of technology such as the internet and CRM became prevalent within sales teams, the need to build customer stickiness grew as points of difference became smaller and competition increased. Technical salespeople were tasked with building a relationship and leveraging this to sell products or solutions. Several interviewees stated that if they held a strong relationship with a sales team member from an organisation that they purchased from frequently, they were more likely to remove price from the conversation.

In recent years the Covid-19 pandemic has challenged technical sales teams who often operated in face-to-face environments to work remotely, tailor solutions using technology over touch and feel, and work to maintain and grow relationships both new and old in a more isolated world. Those organisations who became adaptable and resilient to this change, were able to forge greater outcomes for their customers through challenging older sales models and working to develop a fresh approach to technical sales.

Whether it be front line technical salespeople, organisational management, or end customers, the people who participated in this project all highlighted the need for technical sales functions within a selling organisation. However, to develop market share there is a need for the technical sales team members to operate within a team, to offer technical solutions to

what are increasingly challenging problems. Relationships with consumers are key and are increasingly multi-faceted based on the cumulative technical knowledge of the consumer.

The importance of the successful implementation of technology such as CRM or online technical support systems, if they were trained for in line with outcomes, and the data utilised within an organisation, was highlighted throughout the project. These types of technology now give technical sales teams the access to the market, and furthermore increases global connectiveness to competitors and customers, allowing, when utilised in line with organisational growth strategies, the ability for technical sales team to grow their market share.

8.0 Recommendations

- Develop a sales team structure that removes isolated technical sales functions and embeds these into a sales team focussed on end consumer solutions
- Build a team that is resilient to changing environments and adaptable to market needs, allow processes to change and analyse performance frequently
- Use the technical, relationship focussed sales team members feedback on market insights, create a channel for the consumer voice and react to these insights
- Embed effective CRM technology into the sales team, ensure this technological solution is fit for purpose for each aspect of the sales team function and adds a technical advantage
- Utilise the data input the CRM technology offers, react to the insights gained, and leverage the market based on the data streams available
- Align organisational strategies to the CRM technology being used and have clear aims of the requirement for the technology
- Ensure your technology solution builds in data to maintain market share and embed intellectual property to mitigate personnel change and allow for succession planning
- Train the sales team efficiently on the technology solution, engagement is key to retention, if the right technological solution is outputting the correct data required that is in line with organisation strategy and all staff are trained and engaged then market share growth can occur

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Appendix

Kellogg Interview Questions

1. Introduction – Tell me about yourself?
 - a. Your role
 - b. Type of industry you operate in
 - c. Your previous experience
2. How has sales and sales teams played a part with the roles you have held throughout your career?
3. What changes have you noticed in your requirements from a sales team in the last 2 years? (*Covid influence*)
4. How has technology such as CRM and cellular, impacted your interaction with an organisation's sales function?
 - a. Can you give me an example of this working in a positive way?
 - b. Can you give me an example where this has not worked well?
5. Tell me about a great interaction/purchase you have had/made with an organisation?
 - a. Tell me why this was such a good experience?
6. If you have a problem with a purchased product, or are looking for information to make a purchase, where do you go to find this information, or deal with the problem?
7. Have you ever been let down by a sales team member, and what effect did this have on your future decision making when dealing with this sales team member?
8. Please tell me what a salesperson did to win your business/purchase?
9. What factors dictates where you buy high value purchases?
10. How important is your relationship to the organisation or salesperson when deciding on making a purchase?
 - a. Why are these items important to you?
11. Closing remarks from the interviewee, is there anything around sales teams within organisations you think we should have discussed which we have not?