

# Determinants for Successful Business-to-Business Salesforce Transition to Adapt to Changing Customer Needs in South Africa

*As a result of disruptive technologies being launched in the marketplace, customers have changing expectations from organisations. It is important to understand how these changing expectations are being met, particularly in business-to-business (B2B) sales organisations. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to focus on how B2B company salesforces are responding to customer and market pressures for better service and greater relationships. The literature review identified six determinants for B2B salesforce transition that were tested in the research. The study followed a mixed method approach whereby qualitative and quantitative research methods were employed, using purposive sampling. For the qualitative study, data was collected through personal interviews from a purposive sample of 6 respondents, which was content analysed to identify themes. For the quantitative study, an online survey was administered using a structured questionnaire on a convenience sample, and the data was analysed using Principal Components Analysis. A key finding was the emergence of new pressures and mandates which are changing management thinking about the “front-end” of organizations, and moving companies towards a change in the role of sales, account management and marketing. The analysis identified six factors critical to successful transition: Changed role of salespeople, Customer focussed strategy, New sales skills, New sales metrics, New operating model, and Internal development interventions. It was found that the 4th Industrial Revolution (4IR) is heavily knowledge-based and requires new competencies for sales organisations to be successful, as well as new ways of doing business, including strategic and operational changes to address the customer requirements. The study provides a framework to implement the key requirements that have been identified for sales organisations to be successful in the era of change*

**Keywords:** B2B, salespeople, changing customer needs, sales organisation, 4IR, South Africa

## Introduction

As a result of globalisation, technology and social evolution, change in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is occurring faster than ever before (Dahlman, 2018). Such change directly translates to the reshaping of customer expectations. Over the last decade, customer demands from companies and salespeople have increased. These demands call for salespeople to supplement their traditional skills with a new cluster of problem-solving and value-providing ones (Agnihotri et. al, 2017).

Customer profiles and expectations regarding products and services, and subsequently their behaviour, have visibly changed. They are now engrossed

with gaining value, which indicates that organisations should increase their focus on providing improved or new value. With customers at the epicentre of the economy, everything shifts towards improving customer service and retention. Understanding how the customer identifies value in this new setting therefore becomes a fundamental survival factor for organisations (Berner & Van Tonder, 2003).

Traditional structures of marketing and sales functions are proving insufficient in response to the accelerating demands of customers and growing competition. The challenges on traditional sales organizations from new types of relationship- and value-based marketing strategies, productivity initiatives, development of multichannel strategies, and primarily new and greater requests from customers for service and relational investments dictate the need for a fundamental change (Piercy, 2010).

Since the announcement of the arrival of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) by the World Economic Forum (WEF) in 2016, there has been an immense amount of discussion on the topic, and its respective impacts on all facets of the world: from business, government, people and the future. From a business perspective, there are four major impacts identified: customer expectations, product evolution, collaboration in innovation, and organisational forms. This era has created and propagated unrealistic expectations of what constitutes success (Schwab, 2016).

With growing business transparency, increased consumer engagement and changes in consumer behaviour and preference arising, companies have had to re-examine the way they think and conduct business. The change that is required reflects a need for technological transformation and continuous growth by adapting the way companies design, market and deliver their products and services in order to remain relevant in a competitive world of consumer choice and prerogative (Principa, 2018).

As customers evolve and become better-informed (McDonald et al., 2000), the sales process becomes less about the sale of a product and more about relationship building. Sales is evolving into a strategic activity where the purpose of the sale is to build and maintain long-term relationships. Consequently, the salesperson is now a relationship manager. This change is occurring in the sales strategy itself, leading to organisational change, resulting in the assigning of full accountability for customers (as the company's greatest asset) to salespeople, trusting them to act as intermediaries of these assets (Ingram et al., 2002). In principle, the sales organisation would require the authority to steer actions in different functional capacities and therefore fulfil an essential role in enterprise-wide strategy (Storbacka et al, 2008).

Consequently, the aim of this study was to examine the requirements for B2B sales teams in South Africa to be successful in this era of rapid change, and what skills and organisational changes are required by the B2B sales organisation to be relevant. Three research objectives were developed to guide the research: (1) to identify the changes in customer expectations, (b) to determine the current challenges faced by the B2B sales organisation, and (c) to investigate the extent to which these changes and challenges are addressed.

## Literature Review

### *Changes in Customer Expectations*

One of the most significant changes in B2B marketing in the twenty-first century has been the extreme increase in the demands for greater service, new categories of relationships, and superior added-value by B2B customers of all kinds (Piercy, 2010). Customers have always sought pleasant, competent and dependable service, but advances in technology, have significantly raised these expectations. With the rapid change in customer behaviour, it is imperative for companies to stay current with customer expectations (Unitt, 2020). Since the affirmation of the advent of the 4IR by Klaus Schwab and the World Economic Forum (Schwab, 2016), vast discussion around it has occurred. It is described as a revolutionary change in reference to the extreme and rapid development of technologies and their influence on humanity as a whole. It highlights the innovative association between technology and the market in all industries based on IT (MinHwa et al., 2018). Since the 4IR impacts business models, it could rewrite customer expectations, product and service quality, open and cooperative innovation, and the administrative methods to deliver value. Role descriptions and specialised skills in various innovative business models should progress through these developments (MinHwa, et al., 2018). Hence, businesses need to now move to a “relationship model” with their customers, focussing on creating connections and selling solutions – shift from the traditional transactional model (Salesforce.com, 2020). It takes a new approach of thinking about everything in a company, from strategy to operations to organization structure (Sarkar & Chaudhuri, 2019).

### *Challenges of the B2B Sales Organisation*

Radical transformation of the traditional sales role is occurring in many businesses. The challenges in this change are underpinned by growing levels of company spend on sales and account management and the rising significance of effectively managing B2B customer relationships, primarily in more cooperative methods of selling (Piercy, 2010). Sales people are expected to be “Relationship managers”; accountable for the successful growth of the customer relationship. They have to create value for customers, as well as for their own organisations. It is argued that not only the role, but also the attitude, competence and skill required of the modern sales people and relationship managers differ from those traditionally needed (Davies, et al, 2010).

The 4IR is heavily knowledge-based and calls for new capabilities. As such, sales teams, a major role in the labour market, have to fervently ensure that they are always up-to-date with latest technologies and skills required to most effectively carry out and retain their jobs (MinHwa, et al., 2018). Professional experts have advised that the upcoming decades will bring in the 4IR; and will move more decision-making from humans to machines. The subsequent societal changes will have an intense influence on both individual

sales and sales management research and practices (Syam & Sharma, 2018). The information-intensive economies steered in by the 4IR additionally highlight the need for organizational realignment. For instance, the Internet of Things has brought about an even larger interdependence between functional divisions, and a need for a collaborative innovative approach to sales and marketing. Sales and Marketing are the most critical teams in organisations as they generate revenues, and they both have common end group goals of increasing customer acquisition and retention, and of profitability maximization. They each include numerous actions that link with the other to enable value creation and customer-relationship management, and each yields positive effects on the other in the commercialization of new products. Customers often see them as a single function, which is not differentiable from the other (Mgiba, 2019).

Customer access to self-service channels is evolving the role of Customer Service Reps (CSR) and redefining how they provide service in the companies. While CSRs remain important, their core functions and responsibilities must change to keep pace with changes in customer service expectations and in how companies service and engage clients (i.e., increased use of self-service and automated channels) (Gartner, 2019c). Today's customers have access to more quality information and have less need to look to sellers for data and insights throughout the purchase. Sellers who use a sense making approach build confidence, reduce scepticism and, ultimately, close high-quality deals by focusing on and resolving customer information challenges. They accomplish this through a series of behaviours before and during customer interactions: connecting customers to relevant resources, simplifying information complexity and supporting customer learning (Gartner, 2019a).

### *Addressing the Changes and Challenges*

The change from transactional interactions with customers to value-adding relationships is becoming exceptionally difficult for many companies. Equally, the move to team-based selling for big customers emphasises new requirements in the sales organization (Jones et al., 2005). This change is likely to include organizational structure, performance measurement systems, skill and competency enablement, and incentive systems – all determined by the new definition of the role of sales (Piercy, 2010). Digitalized and automated economies are already clouding the boundaries between functional areas, and forming boundary-less organizations. Survival in the 4IR, requires the merging of expertise and resources, as it will likely decrease transactional costs due to collaboration in both communication and action. A potential merger between the sales and marketing functions is possible, since the difference between these functions is already declining, as they increasingly tend to be integrated (Mgiba, 2019).

Metrics are influenced by the strategic context that is shaped by an organisations corporate strategy, its competition, and its customers. Sales metrics should ensure there is consistency and alignment between customer needs, strategic organisational objectives and the actions for execution. Sales metrics enable organisations to not only measure performance but also

provides insights into effective sales management practices in elements such as skill development, realisation of goals, allocation of resources, and customer relationship management. Strategic synergy in metrics directing sales teams' behaviour, ensures they will be able to forecast, achieve and exceed the requirements of a dynamic market (Melnyk, et. al, 2005).

An option to address changing customer needs is a clear, concise customer strategy, headed by a Chief Customer Officer (CCO). The CCO is accountable for driving profitable customer behaviour and developing and implementing a customer centric culture to drive corporate strategy (Bingham, 2009). The CCO has direct line authority of all sales teams across an organisation, thus this will majorly impact the sales teams, as they are the people who will have to execute and live these new strategies and culture (Hagen, 2011). The organisation needs to have successfully implemented a customer-centric strategy and operating model, with a culture that is respectively aligned. This culture needs to be engrained in and lived by all sales people, in order for the transition of their roles to be successful in the 4IR – where the customer is the epicentre (Yohn, 2018).

Advanced digital technologies are producing new ways to improve and customize the customer experience across the entire customer journey, and as a result are creating new opportunities for innovation and growth (Gartner, 2020a). This digital evolution is enabled by the rise of 4IR. This digital activity loop affects the ways in which companies engage their customers and meet their changing preferences. From research and sales, to account management and aftersales service, connected technologies provide opportunities to improve efficiency and enrich customer experiences. This helps companies appeal to new customers and retain existing customers, and drive significant, service-driven value (Hood et al., 2016).

Companies regularly employ relationship marketing efforts to improve their business partner relationships (Zhang et. al., 2016). These companies are implementing customer-centric strategies, programs, tools and technology to enable effective customer relationship management (CRM). CRM goes beyond the Sales Force Automation (SFA) programmes that manage the sales force, to an organisation-wide coordination of analysing data to drive improved customer experience. It is a core business strategy to develop relationships with customers by delivering superior value propositions (Buttle & Kaplan, 2019).

## Methodology

The research methodology utilised was an adapted mixed method approach. The qualitative phase collected data from a purposive sample of 6 respondents, who were B2B sales experts from a variety of industries and with a minimum of ten years' experience. In-depth interviews were conducted online using Microsoft Teams, using a semi-structured interview guide. The purpose of this phase was to validate the factors from the literature review, to explore for any additional factors,

and to develop the questionnaire for the quantitative phase. Data was content analysed using Bryman and Bell's (2011) four step process.

In the quantitative phase, the structured questionnaire included demographic questions, and 24 statements using a five-point Likert rating scale, ranging from strongly agree (rating 1) to strongly disagree (rating 5). This questionnaire was pilot tested on four respondents to identify any misinterpretations. The population included all B2B salespeople in both direct and support functions, across a variety of industries, including financial, consulting, IT, and other logistics service providers. The sampling method used was a convenience sampling (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The questionnaire was administered using an online survey platform 'Survey Monkey', and emailed to respondents; 53 completed responses were obtained for data analysis.

Data was analysed using principal component factor analysis (PCA), with IBM SPSS statistics software, to identify hidden constructs and the underlying factor structure of a set of variables that are not always apparent from direct analysis (Zikmund et al., 2012). Orthogonal varimax rotation was used to optimise the factors (Pett, Lackey, & Sullivan, 2003). The relevant factors were determined using Eigenvalues > 1, cumulative percentage explained by factors exceeding 60%, and a significant decline in the scree plot. Validity was ensured through pilot testing of the questionnaire, although the results cannot be generalised due to the sampling method. Reliability was ensured through the use of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy, Bartlett's test of sphericity as significant at 0.000 (Leung, Keating, & Salkind, 2010; Pett et al., 2003), and a Cronbach Alpha test of 0.845, which is greater than the requirement of 0.7 for reliability of the questionnaire (Zaiontz, 2016).

## Results – Qualitative Phase

The convenience sample of six participants were highly experienced executives across a variety of industries. The analysis identified three key themes, in line with the research objectives, with the corresponding sub-themes, as given in Table 1:

**Table 1.** *Themes and sub-themes – Qualitative study*

Emerging Themes		
<b>1. Changing customer expectations</b>  <u>Sub themes:</u> <b>1.1 Availability of information</b> <b>1.2 Total solutions</b> <b>1.3 Engagement</b>	<b>2. Current B2B sales challenges</b>  <u>Sub themes:</u> <b>2.1 Change in selling approach</b> <b>2.2 New competencies required</b> <b>2.3 Information and</b>	<b>3. Addressing sales changes and challenges</b>  <u>Sub themes:</u> <b>3.1 Strategy</b> <b>3.2 KPI's</b> <b>3.3 Leadership</b>

These are each elaborated on below with excerpts from the interviews.

**Table 2. Theme 1: Changing Customer Expectations**

Sub-theme 1.1: Availability of information	Sub-theme 1.2: Total solutions	Sub-theme 1.3: Engagement
Customers rely on the info you provide and will hold you to it. They are also quick to question you if they find info different to what you provide.	Customers want partnerships. They also outsource instead of purchasing, to get full solutions	Customers want direct contact via multiple channels. They will engage anyone at any level, as required. Need for meetings has decreased.
“Access to information is a game changer”	“Bundled service offerings from a single source = partnering in the value chain ecosystem to achieve this”	Immediate attention and resolution. Want to spend least amount of time and effort. Central point of contact.
Global information available at fingertips empowers buyers	“Services are more important than product, together with partnering in order to get a total solution”	Relationship is not as important anymore. Multiple contact channels is key.

Given the increased availability of information available to customers, they have become a lot more demanding and more empowered to drive the relationship. This is also expected through a number of contact points that need to respond quickly to satisfy their requirements for instant gratification.

**Table 3. Theme 2: Current B2B Sales Challenges**

Sub-theme 2.1: Selling approach	Sub-theme 2.2: Skills and competencies	Sub-theme 2.3: Relationship management
The whole approach to sales and selling has changed. Product / service simulations are expected. Selling happens at symposiums and expos and via YouTube channels.	New competencies are required. The merge of knowledge and technical skill has begun. Sales organisation behaviour has to adapt to this change.	Relationship management has increased in importance. Visiting customers is key. They like to feel important – and they are. Expect you to be available all the time.
Selling has a total new job description. Sales teams are ambassadors for customers. There are too many options available to customers	Different expertise and knowledge is required. Development of solutions is needed. Working collaboratively with other departments is necessary. Be an expert. Be able to filter information and have consistent messaging.	Relationship management is very important but different now. Customers are less patient. They feel virtual platforms are cumbersome. Different type of personal interactions.

Self-service channels are reducing the need for sales. The need for salespeople is being questioned? Disruption to operating model.	Need to be adaptable and super flexible. Very tech savvy. Being forced to change. Negotiation skills are more important now.	Relationship is not as important anymore. Have to work harder for a sale.
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The selling approach needs to be more innovative and flexible to different expectations. Knowledge and technical skills are becoming critical, as well as the cross-organisational collaboration. Traditional relationship management is under pressure to adapt to changing requirements.

**Table 4.** *Theme 3: Addressing Sales Changes and Challenges*

Sub-theme 3.1: Strategy	Sub-theme 3.2: Key performance indicators	Sub-theme 3.3: Leadership
New strategy to embrace the change. More focussed key account management. Merge sales and tech teams to develop and sell total solutions.	KPI's have to be reassessed and aligned to drive the change in behaviour that is required. KPI's have to be linked to the strategy.	Strong leadership is key to drive adoption of the strategy and to manage the change to a customer culture.
Buyers requirements are different now, therefore we have to reinvent ourselves = new strategy. Work closely with other departments is necessary.	Total dismantle of old KPI's. New KPI's for the new role and competencies required now.	Leadership with high EQ is required to drive the change and new strategy. Employee satisfaction is important to engage and retain staff.
Business and customer strategy must be one and the same. Critical to be a people focussed business. People before profit adds to success. Customer culture is also required.	KPI's must be designed to drive change. Utilisation of CRM tools helps a lot. Training budget must be used.	Innovative leadership is required to manage and lead the new type of employees.

A clearly defined strategy aligned with the current changes, together with carefully designed KPI's linked to the new strategy, and strong leadership to drive the strategy narrative and achieve set goals, will enable the fundamental change and bring success to the sales organization.



## Results – Quantitative Phase

### *Respondent Profile*

The demographic profile of the respondents revealed a reasonable spread: 21% were directly involved in direct sales, 36% provided support services, and 43% were involved in both sales processes and provide support. More than one-third (32%) of the respondents reported to have more than 20 years of sales experience, followed by those with 11 – 15 years of experience at 21%, and the smallest group (13%) reported to have 16 – 20 years of sales experience.

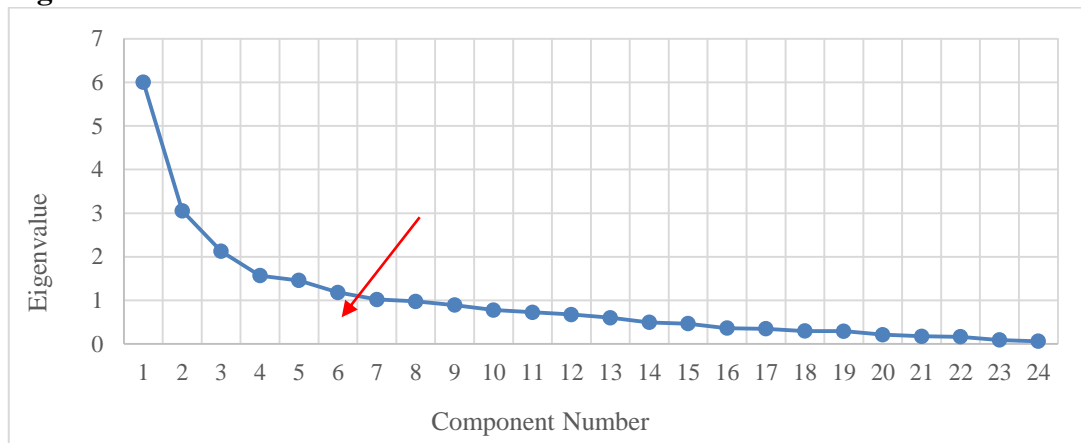
### *Factors Analysis Results*

Principal Component analysis was conducted on the data from the 24 statements in the questionnaire that related to the various attributes of each factor or construct. This revealed that seven factors met the eigenvalue criterion of a value greater than 1, and six factors explained > 60% of the variance. The results of the factor analysis after varimax rotation is given in Table 5:

**Table 5.** *Eigenvalues and Variance Explained*

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	6,003	25,010	25,010	4,595	19,145	19,145
2	3,054	12,724	37,734	2,405	10,021	29,165
3	2,125	8,854	46,589	2,280	9,500	38,665
4	1,565	6,521	53,109	2,252	9,385	48,050
5	1,455	6,063	59,173	2,145	8,936	56,986
6	1,180	4,917	64,089	1,705	7,103	64,089
7	1,019	4,247	68,336			
8	0,977	4,069	72,405			
9	0,889	3,706	76,111			
10	0,777	3,236	79,346			

A 5 factor solution was suggested by the scree plot as given in Figure 1; consequently 6 factors were used in this study:

1 **Figure 1. Scree Plot**

2  
3  
4 Factors loadings were produced by means of orthogonal varimax rotation.  
5 Rotated factors were then extracted based on variable values – the higher the  
6 value, the greater influence the variable has on the factor. Hair et al (2010)  
7 consider values with a reading of 0.5 or greater to be particularly significant,  
8 while loadings of 0.40 or greater are meaningful. Table 3 below shows the  
9 Rotated Component Matrix with the highlighted variables that loaded onto the  
10 six newly identified factors. Where a variable loaded on to more than one  
11 factor, it was only included in the most relevant factor.

12  
13 **Table 6. Factor loadings after orthogonal varimax rotation**

	Rotated Component Matrix					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
CUS6	0,801	0,023	0,164	-0,047	0,169	0,049
STR4	0,747	-0,207	0,002	0,173	0,271	-0,020
CUS5	0,741	0,077	0,294	-0,002	0,112	0,046
CUS3	0,735	-0,015	0,090	0,163	0,164	0,189
CUS4	0,702	0,254	0,193	0,085	-0,197	0,103
ORG1	0,672	0,248	-0,204	0,133	-0,135	-0,018
CUS2	0,667	-0,341	0,202	-0,165	0,007	0,111
ORG2	0,503	0,182	-0,003	0,047	0,496	-0,005
LDT2	-0,051	0,802	0,115	-0,074	0,061	-0,034
STR2	0,077	0,657	-0,058	0,137	-0,028	0,274
STR3	0,255	0,525	-0,025	0,179	0,097	0,397
COMP2	0,142	0,096	0,795	0,163	-0,007	0,040
COMP1	0,347	-0,107	0,690	0,367	-0,043	-0,190
ORG4	0,042	0,073	0,558	-0,252	0,170	0,124
COMP3	0,351	-0,393	0,541	0,022	0,142	0,287
MET2	0,033	-0,109	0,076	0,874	0,062	0,018
MET3	0,213	0,307	-0,188	0,579	0,103	0,351
STR1	0,145	0,430	0,115	0,578	0,195	0,284
CUS7	-0,112	0,242	0,279	0,500	0,453	-0,220

ORG3	0,078	-0,017	-0,004	0,143	0,768	0,280
COMP4	0,180	0,210	0,016	0,305	0,627	-0,204
MET1	0,071	-0,341	0,328	-0,236	0,610	0,054
LDT1	0,048	0,167	0,068	0,075	-0,007	0,835
CUS1	0,443	0,104	0,250	-0,013	0,145	0,447

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

Rotation converged in 11 iterations.

Factor 1 has an eigenvalue of 6.003, and eight relevant statements load onto this factor, as given in Table 7. The statements speak to the role of the sales team in understanding customer needs and building of strong relationships, in order to provide high levels of customer service, service-quality as well as relationships. Consequently, this factor has been labelled '*Role of salespeople*'.

**Table 7. Factor 1 loading**

Factor 1: Role of salespeople			
Variable	Attribute	Question	Factor Loading
CUS6	Customer centricity	Salespeople create integrated service offerings of value for their customers.	0,801
STR4	Strategy	Sales teams strategically position the enterprise capabilities around the customers' future requirements	0,747
CUS5	Customer centricity	Sales team role is to develop a shared strategy with the customers	0,741
CUS3	Customer centricity	Salespeople are accountable for the successful growth of the customer relationship.	0,735
CUS4	Customer centricity	Salespeople have individual and personalized relationships with their customers.	0,702
ORG1	Reorganisation	Salespeople manage a range of complex interfaces with internal functions and departments.	0,672
CUS2	Customer centricity	Sales teams understand their customers resource requirements	0,667
CUS1	Customer centricity	Salespeople are focussed on matters that are most important to their customers	0,443

Factor 2 has an eigenvalue of 3.054, with four statements loading onto this factor that have to do with the need for there to be a customer centric culture and strategy, and its alignment to the overarching business strategy, as given in Table 5; this factor is termed '*Customer-focussed strategy*'.

1 **Table 8. Factor 2 loading**

Factor 2: Customer focussed strategy			
Variable	Attribute	Question	Factor Loading
LDT2	Enablement	Technology is necessary for sales teams meet their objectives	0,802
STR2	Strategy	Alignment between sales processes and the goals of market and business strategy is necessary.	0,657
STR3	Strategy	A concise customer strategy is mission critical for sales organisations to be successful in 4IR.	0,525
STR1	Strategy	Enterprise-wide customer centric culture is necessary to move everyone into the 4IR where the customer is the epicentre	0,430

2  
3 Factor 3 has an eigenvalue of 2,125, with four variables loading onto this  
4 factor, relating to the lack of resources, competencies and technological skills  
5 of the sales organisation in the 4IR, as given in Table 9; this factor is termed  
6 '*New sales skills*'.

8 **Table 9. Factor 3 loading**

Factor 3: New sales skills			
Variable	Attribute	Question	Factor Loading
COMP2	Competencies	Sales and business skills salespeople possess are inadequate to meet the dynamic customer needs in the 4IR	0,795
COMP1	Competencies	Salespeople do not possess the relevant technological expertise to cope and manage in the 4IR.	0,690
ORG4	Operating model	There is indeed little to no difference between sales and strategic marketing function within the context of 4IR.	0,558
COMP3	Competencies	Salespeople do not have the correct resources and processes required to succeed strategically in the 4IR	0,541

9  
10 Factor 4 has an eigenvalue of 1.565, with three relevant statements loading  
11 onto this factor that have to do with measurement of customer orientation, as  
12 given in Table 7; this factor is termed '*Customer-centric sales metrics*'.

14 **Table 7. Factor 4 loading**

Factor 4: Customer-centric sales metrics			
Variable	Attribute	Question	Factor Loading
MET2	Metrics	Targets and goals are important in gauging performance.	0,874
MET3	Metrics	Sales metrics ensure there is consistency and alignment between customer needs and strategic organisational objectives	0,579
CUS7	Customer centricity	Customers' needs and expectations have fundamentally changed with the advent of 4IR.	0,500

Factor 5 has an eigenvalue of 1.455, with four relevant statements loading onto this factor, which have to do with the structure of the sales organisation and the change required to a more integrated system, as given in Table 8; this factor is termed '*New operating model*'.

**Table 8. Factor 5 loading**

Factor 5: New operating model			
Variable	Attribute	Question	Factor Loading
ORG3	Operating model	There is indeed a shift from individualistic customer relationships to team-based selling and service amongst the sales teams	0,768
COMP4	Competencies	Employee's role has changed in line with changing customer landscape, which resulted in increased complexity and accountability.	0,627
MET1	Metrics	Current metrics help direct employees' expected outputs in line with changing customer landscape'.	0,610
ORG2	Operating model	Integration of capabilities into a seamless system that delivers superior customer value is required.	0,496

The final factor 6 has an eigenvalue of 1.18, with one relevant variable loading strongly on to this factor, which has to do with the development interventions required by sales teams, as given in Table 9; this factor is termed '*Internal development interventions*'.

**Table 9. Factor 6 loading**

Factor 6: Internal development interventions			
Variable	Attribute	Question	Factor Loading
LDT1	Enablement	Learning & development interventions are required internally within the company to enable the sales teams.	0,835

## Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of this study was to examine the requirements for B2B sales teams in South Africa to be successful in this era of rapid change, and what skills and organisational changes are required by the B2B sales organisation to be relevant. This aim was addressed initially through the qualitative study, which guided the more descriptive quantitative study. The resultant six factors identified by the factor analysis (summarised in Table 10 below) provide the determinants for successful B2B salesforce transition to adapt to the changing customer needs, and are discussed as follows.

**Table 10. Determinants that drive successful B2B salesforce transition**

Factor 1: Role of salespeople
Factor 2: Customer focussed strategy
Factor 3: New sales skills
Factor 4: Customer-centric sales metrics
Factor 5: New operating model
Factor 6: Internal development interventions

### *Discussion pertaining to Factor 1: Role of salespeople*

Understanding customer needs is key to providing them with good service and meeting their requirements. This in turn results in building strong relationships with customers, and establishing loyalty. Especially in this time where so many options exist, building and maintaining relationships and loyalty is necessary for survival. Sales people are expected to perform this role for their companies. The requirements and outputs of this role is very distinct and very different from the traditional sales role.

Berner and Van Tonder (2003) discuss the changing consumption patterns and consumer profiles which have significant implications for service organisations and the resultant organisation development changes that are required. Storbacka et al (2007) highlight the change of sales from a function to an integrated process, becoming strategic rather than operational. This is supported by Zalloco et al (2009) who provide insights to the resultant sales management practices that require re-examination.

The literature review found that customers increasingly demand problem-solving and creative thinking about their business (Piercy, 2010), and sales people are expected to be “Relationship managers”; responsible to grow the customer relationship (Davies et al, 2010; Buttle & Kaplan, 2019). This was confirmed in the qualitative research where all interviewees commented that the approach to sales is now totally different, with sales teams becoming ambassadors for their customers, albeit with a changing relationship. Consequently, to be customer centric and a relationship manager is identified as a key factor, consistent with the literature.

### *Discussion pertaining to Factor 2: Customer focussed strategy*

The literature review as well as the qualitative and quantitative research, highlight the significant requirement for a customer-focussed business strategy. A clearly defined customer centric strategy is required. It must be fully integrated into the organisations business strategy. This highlights the crucial role of the sales organization and the importance of strategic alignment to the success of the sales organization, as these people are the face of the company, and are the ones delivering to the customer. This strategy will give rise to the relevant metrics fully aligned to achieving the company objectives and targets.

Yohn (2018) states that organisations need to have successfully implemented a customer-centric strategy and operating model, with a culture that is respectively aligned, in order for salespeople to transition to the new role

and expectations. Parvatiyar and Sheth (2001) indicate that an increasing number of companies are implementing customer-centric strategies to enable effective customer relationship management.

Clemons (2008) points out that the availability and use of information by consumers has so greatly affected consumer buying activities that all of the underlying principles of corporate strategy need careful reconsideration. The major change in customer needs compels businesses to pursue a completely different tactic of placing their focus on customer needs. It takes a new approach of thinking about everything in a company, from strategy to operations to organization structure (Sarkar & Chaudhuri, 2019).

Consequently, it can be concluded that an enterprise-wide customer strategy is required by the B2B sales organisation, and is **accepted** as a determinant for successful transition.

#### *Discussion pertaining to Factor 3: New sales skills*

This factor related directly to the need for specific sales skills, resources and competencies. MinHwa, et al (2018) highlight that the advent of the 4IR calls for tremendously new capabilities and as such, the sales teams have to fervently ensure that they are always up-to-date with latest technologies and skills required to most effectively carry out and retain their jobs. Piercy (2010) points out that the new sales environment is radically different from the transactional approach of the past.

The literature review clearly indicated that the sales skills and competence requirements from the B2B sales team has fundamentally changed. Salespeople need to acquire new skills and competencies to meet the new expectations of them. The research data shows that the respondents feel that they do not currently possess the necessary skills and competencies to meet their customers changing needs.

By combining the literature review and the research results it can be concluded that new skills and competencies are definitely required by the sales organisation for sales success, and is **accepted** as a determinant for successful transition.

#### *Discussion pertaining to Factor 4: Customer-centric sales metrics*

This factor identified that new, customer-centric sales metrics are required. Melnyk, et al (2005) mention that strategic synergy in metrics directing sales teams' behaviour, ensures companies will be able to forecast, achieve and exceed the requirements of a dynamic market. Zalloco, et al (2007) state that the current changes to the role of B2B sales teams indicate a need to re-evaluate sales performance metrics. This was confirmed by the qualitative research which highlighted that metrics have to be reassessed and aligned to drive the change in behaviour that is required and must be linked to the strategy.

Both the literature review as well as the qualitative research indicates that new sales metrics are required to be established in line with the new expectations of the B2B sales teams. The current methods of performance measurement are not adequate to drive the behavioural change required to enable the shift to the new and different way of operating. The new metrics will drive this change in behaviour now required.

By combining the literature review and the research results it can be concluded that new, relevant customer-centric sales metrics are among the top attributes required by salespeople for sales success, and is **accepted** as a determinant for successful transition.

#### *Discussion pertaining to Factor 5: New operating model*

This factor points towards a reorganisation of current structures, incorporating more cross-functional coordination of departments, as well as the associated competencies and metrics required to address the changing customer requirements. Mgiba (2019) points out that the information-intensive economies steered by the 4IR highlights the need for organisational realignment, bringing about significant interdependence between functional divisions, specifically sales and marketing. They each include numerous actions that link with the other to enable value creation and customer-relationship management. Hulbert, et al (2003) states that the establishment of integration of cross-functional relationships is required to drive the process of defining, developing and delivering superior customer value propositions. To be successful in the new open market integration of a company's capabilities into a unified system that delivers superior customer value is required.

There is a lot of dependency and requirements from different departments/functions in the company that are necessary for providing integrated solutions to customers. This is the reason why reorganisation is necessary to enable the sales teams to effectively deliver on their mandate. This will ensure that there is seamless and efficient customer service provided.

While this is identified as a determinant of successful salesforce transition, this might not be immediately achievable given the onerous demands for change management and organisational restructuring.

#### *Discussion pertaining to Factor 6: Internal development interventions*

Sales enablement is an iterative process of ensuring sales teams are equipped with the relevant means required to win customers and deals. These resources include customer profiles, market information, content, tools, knowledge, and technology to effectively sell or service customers. Gartner (2019b) categorises sales enablement as a critical role in helping sellers navigate the evolving challenges of today's complex buyers. It is crucial for enablement teams to constantly benchmark themselves against their peers and adjust their strategies and support to stay relevant in today's commercial environment. Sales enablement's primary responsibilities commonly include



sales onboarding, training and coaching. It is important to note enablement teams share certain responsibilities with other functions/teams in their organization.

Although only one variable loaded strongly on to this factor, it is important that salespeople are appropriately supported and developed internally, given the new competencies and skills required to meet the changing customer needs.

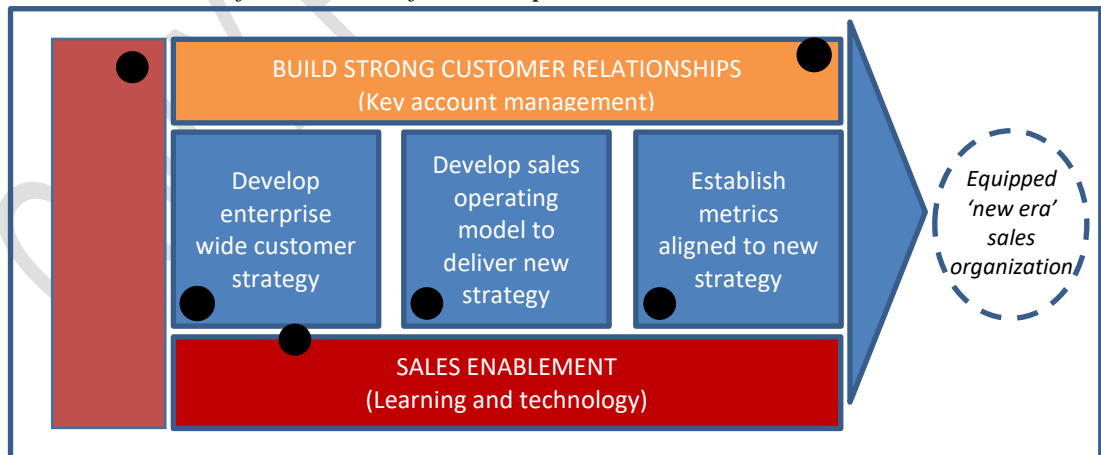
## Recommendations

To assist organisations in successful B2B salesforce adaptation to meet changing customer needs, A list of key requirements have been identified for sales organisations to be successful in the era of change:

- Enterprise wide customer focussed strategy
- Metrics/performance measures aligned to strategy
- Sales enablement including competencies, skills and technology
- Operating model enabling seamless provision of customer service
- Role of salespeople in establishing customer centricity and building strong customer relationships

Below is the recommended framework for implementation of the identified requirements for the sales organisation, as illustrated in Figure 2, and discussed below:

**Figure 2. Framework for B2B salesforce adaptation**



## Customer-centric organisation culture

It is crucial for companies to establish a customer-centric culture in order to become and remain relevant in today's commercial environment. There must be a fundamental mind-set change from being product / asset based to one that is customer-service based. All customer related activities must be value-adding

to the customers. Products and services must be built to meet customer requirements. Time and effort must be put into understanding the voice of the customer, thus enabling an informed and deliberate customer experience. Sales teams should see themselves as advocates for their customers. Regardless of the type of business, creating consistently exceptional **customer** experiences plays a major role in business success.

#### Building strong customer relationships

Emphasis must be placed on building strong relationships with customers. These relationships is what will assist to build and maintain customer loyalty. An important element in achieving these strong customer relationships is key account management. The fundamentals of key account management will assist the sales teams to understand their customers business and requirements, and effectively plan collaboratively with their customers. This is an ongoing activity.

The Six Markets model should be utilised to determine the requirements of the sales team across the various markets. Adopting the six markets approach to relationship marketing allows focus on creating value all along the value web, with each stakeholder group, as appropriate (Christopher et al., 2005; 2008).

#### Enterprise wide customer strategy

Development of an enterprise wide customer centric strategy is the first step. This strategy will be the foundation from which the organisation will build its path to becoming truly customer focussed.

It is important that this strategy must be approved at the highest level and implemented across the company. Second to this, there must be support and ownership of this strategy at an executive level. A Chief Customer / Sales Officer role should be established to spearhead the implementation of this strategy, and inculcate a culture of customer centricity. This role will be responsible for the entire sales organisation and ensure they are always equipped both strategically and operationally to carry out their mandate.

#### Operating model enabling seamless provision of customer service

An operating model must be designed to most effectively deliver on the strategy. The new world of B2B sales requires collaboration with multiple departments in a company. This must be considered when developing the new operating model. As the sales team is dependent on these other departments, formal SLA's must be established and adopted. There must be clear role definition with respective metrics and service level agreements (SLA's) to ensure accountability and execution accordingly. Reporting lines must also be considered. Consideration must also be given to integration of roles and functions, to effect seamless service.

### Metrics/performance measures aligned to strategy

Metrics must be fully aligned to the new strategy to ensure that the correct behaviour is entrenched in the organisation. Sales metrics must not be based only on numbers. It must also include the new roles and expectations of the sales team. These must include relationship building and account planning metrics. Metrics must be formalised in signed performance contracts to ensure adherence and execution.

### Sales enablement including competencies, skills and technology:

Given the rapid pace at which technology is changing, this function needs to be agile in keeping up with the latest trends and ensure that the sales teams are accordingly equipped. These include tools, templates, protocols, guidelines and technology. This function should report directly to the Chief Customer / Sales Officer as this person will be ultimately responsible for the enablement of the sales teams. This is an ongoing activity.

### **Limitations of the research**

A key limitation of this study is the sample size of the quantitative research. Only 53 complete responses were obtained. A greater number of responses would be recommended for further research. A random sample could also be utilized to enable generalization of the results to the population. The same study could be repeated in other countries to compare similarities and differences.

The current global COVID-19 pandemic we are in, has resulted in a total evolution to the ways of working and engaging. This brought into play social distancing and working-from-home practices, which impacted on the data collection for the qualitative research. All interviews were conducted online which brought with it, its own set of challenges such as distractions at home, loss in connection during load shedding, and delayed transmission. This could have resulted in interviewees not being able to fully impart all of their thoughts due to the breaks in flow of conversation.

### **Recommendations for Future research**

To expand on the findings emanating from this study and address the gaps within the scientific body of knowledge, the following key areas are suggested for further investigation:

- To determine and evaluate specific skills that are required for this new sales role
- To develop new customer-centric metrics / measurements to drive the behavioural change required

- To conduct a longitudinal study after an intervention to adapt the salesforce organisation to determine the relative success of such a programme.
- To conduct a quantitative study to test the proposed framework for applicability and validity.

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