### Chapter III

**Evolution of Sales**

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Chapter III

Evolution of Sales

3.1 Introduction

This chapter has two sections, offering two distinct views: the first, an academic view and second a practitioners’ view. The academic view delves into how the academic fraternity has viewed the evolution of sales and sales management through the sands of time. Several studies of academicians have been examined. The practitioners’ view examines how sales and sales management has evolved in the practical sphere in terms of adaptive selling. Finally, best practices in sales and sales management from a practitioner’s view are examined.

3.2 The Academic View

3.2.1 Drivers for change

Lingqvist et al. (n.d.) state that business-to-business buying has been “consumerized.” Buyers want the salesperson visiting them to have exceptional knowledge about their business and its nuances. Expectations are moving north-ward and more and more decision makers/influencers are moving into the buying journey. New channels of communication are seeing the light of the day and the buyers are much more prepared about their needs. They have their own friends in similar or allied industries and sharing of experiences takes place at the click of a button. Relationships need to advance from one-to-one to one-to-many. Brands are built and reputations enhanced or destroyed online. Information is available on real-time basis and demanded on real-time basis. Their research shows that a buyer is likely to use six different channels of engagement during his purchase journey and each of these touch points are potential image-builders or image-destroyers. Bids are required to be more modular and they are evaluated more and more by cross-functional teams together. Two-third of customers make up their mind even before the RFP process begins.
External environmental pressures have prompted many organizations to attempt to improve the effectiveness or productivity of their sales forces (A. T. Barker, 1997; Cravens, Grant, & Cravens, 1999; N. F. Piercy et al., 1997).

Internal forces also affect the selling organization in two aspects:

- Shift in company strategy and
- The requirement for greater productivity by managing the performance challenges.

Jones Eli et al. (2005a) compared the various changes affecting sales and sales management over period of time. They cited observations of Kahn and Schuchman in the 1960s as follows:

- Growing number of new products
- Markets for older products getting saturated
- Firms which were considered as non-competitive earlier becoming competitive
- Increasing amount of automation.

They further observed that the above mentioned changes confronted by sales managers have remained consistent over period of time and same type of changes are likely to present challenges 20 years hence also. These changes will necessitate new approaches in selling and sales management.

They stated that there are four external dimensions of changes:

- Customers: Their expectations continue to increase rapidly and evidence of this can be seen from declining customer satisfaction ratings.
- Competitors: D’Aveni (1997) and Hatch and Schultz (1997) describe markets of today as hypercompetitive. Even in this market, salespeople are expected to achieve revenue and profitability targets. Sales situations change rapidly and salespeople are expected to adapt quickly. Sales is no longer being looked at as transactional as concepts like customer lifetime value (CLV) are being talked about. Sales management practices are also getting aligned accordingly. Customers who are “switchable” are being located and targeted. Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems are playing their part in this.
• Technology: Salespeople are now expected to know more-faster. Technology is playing an increasingly important role by enabling the salespeople to store, retrieve and analyse “big data.” Technology is also helping salespeople in identifying when in the sales cycle, to give what information. Considerable amount of investment is being done on CRM packages and also SFA (Sales Force Automation) packages. Salespeople are expected to learn and adapt to these changes while continuing their “selling” role. It is therefore metamorphosing in a moving train!

• Ethical and legal environment: Both buyers and sellers are becoming increasingly aware of ethical and legal rights and responsibilities. Buyers are challenging false claims of sellers. Sellers are becoming more careful of what they talk about at the customers place.

Colleti and Chonko (1997) stated that expectations change faster than organizations’ response time. Organizations which do not respond fast enough would become obsolete. The following are the changed expectations of customers from the sales force:

• Salesperson knowledge: In earlier days, salesperson would use the first call to gather information about the customer. However, nowadays customers expect that salespeople do some pre-call preparation and find out in advance all information that is available in the public domain and internet (Jones et al., (Jones, Brown, Zoltners, & Weitz, 2005b). It is the skill of the salesperson to make meaning of the enormous amount of information available and make it more actionable.

• Speed of response: With technological advances, salespeople can communicate with customers faster. On the other hand, customers have also started expecting faster response. This may create overload conditions that are likely to affect salesperson productivity.

• Breadth of communication: In business-to-business selling, salesperson needs to “orchestrate” various organizational resources both internally and externally. This is even more important in key account management.

• Depth of communication: Understanding decision making and dynamics has become even more complex. Boundaries between buying and selling
are getting blurred as relationships are getting more complicated in view of increasing strategic alliances. Alliance partners are also competitors sometimes. Salespeople therefore need to be capable of analysing “power lines” across rapidly blurring boundaries in order to sell in an ever evolving business environment.

- **Customization**: Each customer now expects individual bespoke solutions. The “one size fits all” is a thing of the past. Sellers need to differentiate their commodity products through some sort of differentiation like bundling, adaption of product for a special application. This puts more pressure on salesperson to gather more information and disseminate more information.

- **Customers as co-producers**: Customization of products and building strong relationships more often now, involve co-creation of solutions. The salesperson needs to be able to get the customers to perform this role in an effective manner. This involves setting expectations, motivating the customers to contribute towards co-creating a solution and also doing it at the right time.

- **Change in company strategy**: Would include new product launches, mergers between two companies, redesigning of sales process (changing from direct selling to channel sales or vice versa), becoming more consultative in approach rather than transactional, entry into new markets and value-added services.

- **Performance challenges**: Could include high cost-to-sales ratio, not enough customer acquisition, complacency, lack of accountability, high turnover, not able to handle customer diversity or product diversity.

Thus sales force research and practice are at a critical juncture.

### 3.2.2 The evolved sales models

Behavioural factors nudging changes in sales models according to Anderson (1996) are: increasing customer expectations, final user avoiding buyer-seller negotiations, globalization, emergence of very large retailers and demassification of domestic markets.
Rackham (2011) found several environmental shifts have been happening and this has major implications for sellers:

- Buyers are becoming even more sensitive to price which means sellers must understand the true value levers so as to be able to sell value. At the same time, organizations need to factor in this environmental shift and be ready to be cost-competitive by putting even greater focus on cost containment.
- Buyers are becoming smarter and better informed which means organizations need to constantly develop their products. The focus needs to be on improving measurable comparison features. Buyers are also seeing through softer differentiators like company image and they are becoming less effective.
- New channels of operations are coming up. Sellers therefore need to explore use of multiple channels for broader market coverage and reach. This would result in conflict within channels and resolving this poses another challenge for the sales team.

Business buying behaviour also has undergone a very rapid change. The following are the three major changes which have happened:

- There is an increasing awareness that merely focusing on initial cost is not the most optimal way of purchasing. Maintenance costs, more/less operator time, requirement of more/less skilled employees, costs of replacement of defective parts are some costs which are now being accounted for. This has a positive and negative impact on the seller. Sellers are now talking about total cost of ownership and are tangibilizing benefits in terms of money. But not all salespeople are able to do this.
- Many organizations are rationalizing number of suppliers and moving towards buying from two or three suppliers. They are also vary of buying from only one supplier and putting all their eggs in one basket. Working closely with a few suppliers gives more options for “continuous improvement.” There is also reduction in wastage in time and effort, interacting with a large number of suppliers.
Sellers are now being segmented on basis of difficulty of substitution and strategic or cost importance of suppliers’ product.

Cespedes et al. (1989) stated that the vocation of selling has changed from a single, energetic individual to that of a team working in a co-ordinated way across product lines. The business environment has forced customers to concentrate on large customers with complex purchasing requirements. Sales team members are located in different geographical localities and communication between them becomes even more challenging. The research shows that although there are differences in sizes between various companies studied, number of salespeople who worked together on shared account remained almost the same. They further posited that there are three areas that are most critical in sales co-ordination:

- Compensation systems:
  To ensure better teamwork, compensation systems need to be developed accordingly. If there are several people engaged in working on a single large account and team working is important, then a bonus based on total account sales works better. Large accounts also take time to nurture but compensation plans are usually short-term, as pointed out by the researchers.

- The Goal setting process:
  Team members need to have complete clarity about their roles and responsibilities. When this is not done, salespeople will not know what their roles are and therefore need to ask questions like: Is the goal of the salespeople in line with company’s strategic objective? Do the team members understand the goals clearly? Are the goals measurable?

- Staffing and Training:
  Team work in team selling is the sum total of individual efforts. The researchers state that different salespeople perform better in different circumstances.

- Loners need to be spotted by recruiting through a team process. Since in team selling persuasion is a critical skill and knowledge of internal processes is vital, they posit that it is better to recruit insiders rather than outsiders. As tasks change, training should also change.
Cespedes and Bova (2015) examined the buying process of business-to-business organizations and found that buyers actually work in a parallel fashion to make purchase decisions. They further found that:

- Effective sales interactions guide buyers forward through insights and added value. Social media is the least influential. This is because most products and services sold to business organizations are components in a wider usage system and customer value ultimately resides in that usage, not just the individual product. Also, decisions in a business-to-business environment are taken by multiple stakeholders and the champion who influences the collective decision and a good interaction with the sales team of the supplier helps him to do this well.

- Core-selling and account management skills still matter.

- Buyers use online search but this is to complement and not a substitute for interactions with sales representatives.

- Buying processes and sales tasks are changing. Earlier, prospects would ask for a reference list and potential suppliers would give a partial list of their customers. Now, customers interact with each other on the web.

- Prospects now “touch” your company at various touch-points: be it online or direct interaction, marketing collateral etc. and each of these touchpoints has an impact on selling tasks. Buyers also like to interact with others at the supplier side including technical experts, supply chain, pre and post sales personnel etc. They expect the salesperson to co-ordinate these interactions perfectly and efficiently.

The conventional seven steps selling process, as defined by Dubinsky (1981) have also evolved.

The conventional seven steps of selling were as follows:

- Prospecting: the method by which new prospects and customers were “hunted”. Customers are lost every year (Jolson & Wotruba, 1992) and therefore prospecting is a critical activity. Salespeople were expected to find their own prospects and prospecting was a large part of the selling job.

- Pre-approach: It included all activities done by the salesperson before the actual visit with a prospect. Sellers tried to find out more about the
prospect, their business, needs, previous correspondence, talked to gatekeepers and did homework about the prospect/customer.

- **Approach:** These are the first few minutes of the sales call and consisted of gaining rapport with the prospect. This included small talk, handshake, eye contact etc. Several approaches including but not limited to introductory approach, assessment approach, product approach, consumer-benefit approach, referral approach, consultative selling approach etc. were used.

- **Presentation:** This step consisted of making one presentation or making multiple presentations over several sales calls over period of time. After understanding the needs of the prospect, sellers would “customize” their presentation as to offer solutions to their needs.

- **Overcoming objections:** Life would have been wonderful if the salesperson makes a great presentation and the prospect would say, here is the business. This rarely happens as prospects have many objections. Earlier, objections were considered as hurdles which the salesperson had to overcome. Nowadays, increasingly, objections are taken as a sign not to pursue with the sale further.

- **Close:** Getting the prospect to commit to move forward. Once prospect has been met, needs understood, presentation made, objections handled, prospect is expected to go ahead. But the salesperson is expected to ask for the business, which is the step of closing.

- **Follow-up:** This involved selling a thank you letter or a follow-up call.

Each of the above-mentioned seven steps have evolved because of some transformational factors like a movement towards team based selling, increase in buyer knowledge and sophistication etc. Sales organizations have moved from a sequential selling process to a largely non-sequential selling process with the customer in the centre. Marshall et al. (1999) reported that considerable differences were found in the degree of “modernization” of the sales force. Some became more technologically oriented, some continued to operate the old traditional way, and some changed their approach while others claimed that there was little innovation occurring in their industry.

Various transformations in each of the seven steps which have happened are indicated in below:
Transformation in the prospecting stage:

Many times, prospecting stage is not performed by the salesperson himself. This is because the salesperson is considered to be an expensive resource. Prospecting is done by separate team like tele-callers. The social media (website, LinkedIn, Facebook) is also being used for making the prospect approach the selling organization. Database marketing and targeted emails through CRM is also replacing the prospecting job of the salesperson.

Transformation in the pre-approach stage:

A laptop with an internet connection makes the salesperson have lot of customer information on his fingertips. He calls on multiple people in the buyer organization rather than only the purchase department. No longer is pre-approach an individual activity: it has become a team activity. Amount of pre-approach and quality has substantially improved over prior years.

Transformation in the approach stage:

More multilevel and relationship oriented now. Salesperson in most likelihood has already his network in the buying organization. Calls are also multiple in nature.

Transformation in the presentation stage:

Canned presentations have been replaced by “adaptive selling”, “consultative selling” and “value selling”. Presentations are made after many meetings and salespersons are expected to listen much more (Marshall, Goebel, & Moncrief, 2003). Physical presentations have undergone a change with power point presentations becoming a norm. Presentations are also increasingly been delivered by teams (Deeter-Schmelz & Ramsey, 1995). More presentations are also being made to the buying centre instead of only purchase department. This impacts contents of the presentation.

Transformation in the overcoming objections stage:

Traditionally, the focus was on “what” to answer when objections come. Now, it is both on “what” and “how” to answer when objections come. This has increased the importance of listening skills and questioning skills. Importance of listening skills has also been identified as the single most important attribute sought in new sales recruits (Marshall et al., 2003).
Transformation in the close stage:

Traditionally, the objective of every sales call was the “order.” The focus has shifted from short term order to a long term successful realization of mutual goals. Life time value of customer is current lingo in sales and sales management. Buyer-seller relationships are being measured and improved.

Transformation in the follow-up stage

Traditionally, follow-up was more through phone calls or letters. This has been replaced by emails.

As a result of these transformations, the sequential seven steps have evolved into non-sequential seven step selling process. The evolved sales process assumes that the salesperson will perform the various steps of process but not in every sales call. They are based on various elements of the sales strategy and compensate for lack of customer orientation (in the conventional seven step selling process).

The evolved steps are:

- Customer retention and deletion
- Database and knowledge management
- Nurturing relationship
- Marketing the product
- Problem solving (also called as consultative or solution selling)
- Adding value/satisfying needs
- Customer relationship management

It has been graphically described in Figure 3.1.
On basis of the transformative factors, the seven steps have evolved as follows:

- Deleting some customers and adding new prospects:
  Organizations increasingly apply the “Pareto principle” of 80:20 to their customers. 80% of the business comes from 20% of the customers. Organizations are weighing whether doing business with a customer has a positive ROI or a negative one. Time and resources being scarce, present day sales organizations are “firing” some of their customers by handing them over to outsourced teams or channel partners Reichheld (1995). Thus, some customers get more emphasis and some less. This step is therefore the opposite of prospecting which talked about getting more and more customers.

- Pre-approach to Database and knowledge management:
  Swift (2001) states that sales strategy in modern day organizations involves construction, maintenance and use of database marketing. Sales organizations capture data of buying organizations including business nuances, people, past, present and anticipated needs. Salespersons benefit from this database and also are expected to contribute to it. The past method of working on the phone and studying hard copies of customer
records has been replaced by smart use of knowledge management systems.

- **Approach to Nurturing the relationship:**
  Relationship selling involves directing all selling activities towards building partnerships with important customers (Johnston & Marshall, 2008). Short term order-taking orientation is being replaced by long-term customer focus. The goal is now not which approach will work the best but more about providing best long term customer service. The approach step of the traditional seven steps is becoming inconsequential as relationships are already under development.

- **Presentation to Marketing the product:**
  Lines dividing sales department and marketing department are getting increasingly blurred as salespeople are getting more involved in market segmentation, development of new products (they are the eyes-and-ears of the organization, giving first end feedback) apart of traditional sales activities (F. V. Cespedes, 1995). Face-to-face presentations are being replaced by soft copies delivered through emails. Salespeople continue to remain conduits of information to the customers but the method of delivery has evolved.

- **Overcoming objections to Problem Solving:**
  The selling world has moved from objection handling to a more evolved “solution selling” or “consultative selling” approach. The salesperson in this approach focuses on becoming a “consultant” to the customer by understanding his needs, helping him identify business issues and proposing effective solutions (DeVincentis & Rackham, 1999). This has resulted in the focus shifting from an immediate order to becoming a valued partner to his customers. Mind-set of the salesperson has shifted from winning at any cost to win-win.

- **Closing to Adding value/satisfying needs:**
  If the needs of the customer are very well understood, the customer agrees that these are his needs, salesperson presents a co-created solution which satisfies his needs, handles objections then closing is almost automatic. So the focus on closing has been diluted in the evolved selling process. Thus
in the days of consultative selling, closing is almost anticlimactic where the salesperson figuratively offers his pen so that he can sign the order.

- Follow up to customer relationship management:

Cespedes and Maugham (2015) examined what salespeople need to know about the new business-to-business landscape. They traced the beginning of sales with the AIDA (Awareness, Interest, Desire and Action) model. The marketing generated lead goes from suspect to prospect to customer. In each step, salespeople perform a series of sequential tasks so as to close the business. But now, rather than a sequential movement, buyers actually work through four parallel streams which they described as:

- Explore: where buyers identify a need and begin looking at ways to address it.
- Evaluate: where buyers take a deeper look at various solutions based on self-research, peer research as well as meeting with vendor sales representatives.
- Engage: where buyers accept proposals from providers to move towards a purchase decision.
- Experience: where buyers use a solution, in proof of complex and develop perceptions about its value based on that usage.

With these changed buying and selling the researchers expound the following:

- Irrespective of the path taken for purchase, the sales force is yet important because they help buyers make decisions. Therefore, sales people have not been replaced by digital and providing relevant solutions remains key in most business-to-business buying scenarios. Interactions with sellers including technical demonstrations, sales presentations should therefore be about customer’s need and not generic. It also indicated that buyers use online search to complement and not replace face to face interactions with suppliers.
- Buying is a continuous and dynamic process in the sense that buying processes and sales tasks are changing. Events, white papers and websites are important sources of information for the buyer and have an important impact on selling tasks. The research found that many B2B sales models
firms are incapable of dealing with the reality that buying is now continuous and dynamic.

- No single tactic or selling methodology is a sure-shot way. Aligning buying and selling is a process. As time moves forward, many organizations may need to reconstruct their selling processes so as to make it effective and efficient.

Wotruba (1991) studied the evolution of personal selling and said that it has undergone five stages of evolution. Weitz and Bradford (1999) further went on to discuss roles of salespeople in various eras.

The Production Era:

In the production era, the sales objective was to make sales but the thinking was to achieve short term seller needs. The critical tasks involved were taking orders and delivering goods. Activities done by salespeople were meeting customers and informing them about features of products and services. Sellers in a buyer’s market did more of need fulfilment and were therefore “providers”. In the production era, there was not too much of a competition and demand outstripped supply. Feeling of monopoly would run amok and primary activities of the sales team was be to be “information brokers.” Sales supervisors saw their role as ensuring that the right number of salespeople were allocated to each territory. They emphasized on making the salespeople work harder.

The Sales Era:

During the sales era, the sales objective was to make sales and the thinking was yet short term. The critical tasks changed from just taking orders to making orders by convincing customers to buy using a hard-sell approach. The sales role came into play when competition increased and customers started having choices. The salespeople therefore tried to increase usage and increase their customer base. They did aggressive prospecting by meeting newer prospects. Stimulating demand became most critical. Salespeople therefore became “persuaders” making customers buy from them rather than competition.

The Marketing Era:
During the marketing era, the sales objective changed from making sales to satisfying customer needs. The assumption was that if customers are satisfied with the solution provided, they would continue to buy. The focus shifted from seller to the customer and his needs. The critical task of the salesperson transformed to match acceptable offerings to the needs of the customer. However, the choices offered to the customer were limited to those in the existing portfolio of the seller. The salespeople did not look at the customer’s profitability but had product-focused strategies. They however became increasingly customer-focused. Adaptive selling came into play and solution selling became the buzzword. The role of sales supervisors also changed from merely allocating resources to more of “selection of right people and train them” approach. Working harder became old fashioned and working smarter came into vogue.

The Partnering Era:

The latest era is said to be the partnering era. The sales force started focusing on building relationships. Salespeople started believing that a satisfied customer is not a loyal customer. Sustainable business became the phraseology to be talked about and the orientation of sales people changed from short term customer needs to long term customer needs. Salespeople became being tasked with creating alternatives by matching buyer needs with seller capabilities. All activities started with customer in mind and becoming even more customer-centric. Role of the salesperson metamorphosed from being a problem solver to a value creator. Key account management started becoming an important focus area.

The partnering role brought out three major differences as compared to other three roles:

- The skills requirement changed from managing purchase decisions to managing conflict over a larger canvas of decision makers and influencers.
- Salesperson’s objective became more long term with a focus on sustainability of relationships rather than only short term sales.
- Individual selling gave way to team selling. Selling started becoming more cross-functional in approach. Different stakeholders from buyer organization started interacting with corresponding stakeholders in the seller organization. Role of the salesperson became increasingly that of a co-ordinator, responsible for managing relationships. Titles of salespeople underwent a change from
“sales executive” to a “Relationship Manager.” The salesperson became the ambassador of the customer in his own organization and also the ambassador of his organization at the customer’s place. Conflict management within the organization and outside the organization started gaining importance in day-to-day activities (Dabholkar, Johnston, & Cathey, 1994). This also had some positive after-effects:

- Newer approaches started being explored.
- Salespeople started understanding their customers’ strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.
- Customers started articulating their issues and salespeople started listening more. The possibility of customer issues getting resolved increased.
- Assumptions got clarified and both sides started seeing newer perspectives.
- As understanding between buyers and sellers grew, appropriate resources started getting mobilized.
- Both parties started understanding that mobilizing resources requires an investment of cost and time, thus recognizing their value.
- Commitment towards relationship increased from both sides.

The partnering role brought into sharp relief the changed requirement of salesperson knowledge, skills and abilities required by the salespeople. Customer knowledge and industry knowledge are becoming important cornerstones on which relationships are being built.

Knowledge requirements started going beyond just product knowledge and evolved into:

- Knowledge of the buyer and his business
- Knowledge of strategies being employed by the buyer to be more competitive in the market place
- Knowledge of opportunities available at the customer place which his organization can cater to
- Knowledge of their own capabilities at an individual level and organizational level
• Knowledge of benefits offered by their own products and services in a tangible manner
• Knowledge of customer vision in the short term and long term
• Knowledge about business initiatives taken by the customer to achieve his vision
• Knowledge about the hurdles the customer is facing in his quest to achieve his goals

Skills requirement also transmuted to those required by entrepreneurs (M. H. M. Morris, Avila, & Teeple, 1990). Some additional skills and abilities required over the earlier eras included:

• Social skills of interacting with different levels and functions at the customer place
• Skills of mapping opportunities and people
• Skills of profiling selling situations and taking an approach accordingly
• Skills of working in a structured manner
• Skills of building credibility quickly
• Skills of building trust
• Skills of listening actively
• Skills of having a good business conversation
• Skills of prioritising opportunities
• Skills of handling conflicting requirements
• Skills of influencing in spite of having no formal authority
• Skills of working as a team
• Ability to move to more of a team selling approach
• Ability to be “actively patient” in a goal-oriented way
• Ability to balance between short-term and long-term
• Ability to multitask

Relationship quality started being measured and improved on. Providing exceptional service and continued interaction so as to cross-sell and upsell help in building a “brick wall” around the customer. Follow up in the conventional seven step process was more about providing after-sales service. Customer relationship maintenance in the “evolved” selling process is more about appointment of an individual to take care
of every aspect of the business relationship. Thus, there is a shift from “short-term” to “long-term” relationship, transactional to sustainable relationships.

The above have an important impact on what the sales supervisors should be measuring. Apart from the conventional measures such as sales, target vs achievement, share of wallet, profitability in the account etc. sales supervisors have also started measuring relationship quality (Dick & Basu, 1994). This is a function of

- Trust which the customer has in the salesperson and his organization
- Commitment being adhered to by both the buyer and seller
- Loyalty levels of the customer
- Ethical considerations
- Customer orientation
- Expectation of sustainability of business

Thus, with the emphasis shifting to building long lasting relationships with customers mandates changing the way organizations hire, up skill, assess and remunerate their sales team.

Adamson et al. (2012) wrote a seminal article in the Harvard Business Review on the end of solution selling. They describe the evolution of customer buying over period of years and what that means for salespeople.

Solution selling traditionally had the following elements:

- Salespeople were told to target organizations that had an acknowledged need for change, a clear vision of its goals and established processes for making purchase decisions.
- They were told to identify the MAN-the person who had access to money, had authority and a need.
- Engagement with the customer took place after the customer had identified a problem the supplier could solve
- They were coached to ask questions about the customer need and look for a hook to their solution
- Demonstrate how their solution is better than competition
- Identify an advocate/coach in the buyer organization who will help them navigate through the purchase process
The researchers conducted three studies: Firstly, they surveyed more than 6000 salespeople of 83 companies on their methodology of prioritising opportunities to target. Secondly, they studied purchasing scenarios of nearly 600 companies to understand how they make decisions, both formally and informally. Lastly, they studied 700 individual stakeholders who are involved in purchase decisions. They then reached a conclusion that solution selling is no longer valid as the top-performing sales persons no longer go by the old playbook and are operating as per a new paradigm based on three approaches.

Approach 1:

Instead of focusing on organizations which have established needs, focus on organizations which satisfy two criteria:

- Focus on customer agility: how decisively can the customer act when presented with a compelling case?
- Focus on customers who are in a stage of organizational flux because of external pressure or internal challenges. Such organizations accept insights and disruptive ideas given by the salesperson better because they are already challenging the status quo.

Therefore, according to their study, high performing sales people put more emphasis on customers’ potential to change rather than potential to buy. A fallout of that is that completely defined requests for quotation are responded differently. Traditionally, a RFQ (Request for quotation) would be looked at as an opportunity to showcase capabilities to fulfil needs well. The high-performing insight selling salesperson would try not to meet customer’s requirement but to “redefine” them. During the presentation of a solution as per RFQ, they would present what they think should have been there in the RFQ but is not there, thus bringing fresh insights.

The researchers therefore developed a scorecard which can be used by managers for prioritizing opportunities that need to be pursued. The questions to be asked include:

- Does the customer have significant current or potential spend?
- Is the customer financially sound?
- Does customer face external pressures to change, such as new industry regulations or loss of market position?
• Are there internal pressures to change, such as new management or rethinking of strategic direction?
• Is there organization-wide discontent with the status quo?
• Does the current supplier fall short of expectations?
• Is the customer unhappy with existing workarounds?
• Do internal stakeholders frequently share best practices?
• Do they attend conferences and other learning events?
• Do leaders look at broader organization for ideas?
• Do stakeholders engage in constructive dialogue when their assumptions are challenged?
• Do they seek to continue conversations about industry benchmarks and trends?
• Is there at least one confirmed “mobilizer” in the company?

Approach 2:

In the conventional method, sales people are taught on finding an advocate or coach who demonstrates attributes like willing to meet when asked, gives valuable internal information, is able to influence others, stands to gain from the sale personally and is considered credible within his organization. The researchers posit that all these attributes are not present in a single individual and therefore salespeople settle for somebody who has some of these attributes, thus missing out on identifying some key personnel.

In the study, they indicated that there are seven customer profiles which are detailed below:

• Go-getters:
  These are customers who are constantly concerned about organizational efficiency and efficacy. They are constantly looking out for new ideas on how to do things differently with an improvement perspective in mind. They believe in rapid implementation and are quick decision makers. For them, it is not important about where the new idea comes from but it is
certainly important what does the new idea do. When a salesperson meets a “Go-getter”, the conversation quickly changes from “why” to “how”.

- **Skeptics:**
  Skeptics are, as the word suggests, sceptical about everything the salesperson tells him. They begin with a premise that the salesperson is saying something because he wants to “sell” him something. They also have concerns whether the organization will be able to handle change. Therefore, from a sales perspective, skeptics require lot of “proof”. The salesperson needs to be wary about “pushing” through and requires lot of active patience.

- **The Friend:**
  This profile of customer is very easily approachable. They are open to meeting people from outside and will willingly allocate time for meeting salespeople. Emails to them will usually be replied to.

- **The Teacher:**
  Colleagues in an organization will usually solicit help from “teachers” who are perceived as good in convincing others. They have the ability of influencing others into a daring vision because of their passionate storytelling.

- **The Guide:**
  Guides are people who share information and are usually perceived as people who know the inside working of the buyer organization. Because of the nature of information they trade, they are many times perceived as important and senior.

- **The Climber:**
  Climbers are people at the buyer organization who direct their attention on personal achievements in the corporate ladder. They actively support projects that add stars to their profile and make them as people with increased influence. Once a project is completed they also like to boast about their contribution in it and how it was critical.

- **The Blocker:**
Blockers are people who want status-quo. They do not like change and would like to continue to operate as they have been operating in the past. They therefore would not like to spend time with new suppliers and their salespeople.

The researchers argue that “star” salespeople pursue Go-getters, Teachers and Skeptics (called as Mobilizers) whereas average salespeople pursue Guides, Friends and Climbers (called as Talkers). Talkers do not take the disruptive discussion very far whereas Mobilizers do so.

Mobilizers will naturally be interested in knowing about their own company and not so much about the supplier company.

They do not like to be subjected to lot of questions-instead they would like the expert salesperson to share their insights. Subsequently, they ask lot of questions. Go-getters share insights because they want to do. Teachers share insights because they want to share. Skeptics share insights because they want to test.

High performing sales people do not assume that they have identified a mobilizer unless proved by action.

Approach 3:

High performing sales people coach the mobilizers (rather than getting coached!) and steer them towards making the purchase. They can anticipate likely objections, understand organization politics well and are able to coach the mobilizers who are more of ideas people rather than expert navigators.

Thus, high performing salespeople hunt out customers who are ready to change. They challenge them with provocative insights and coach them to buy.

A survey conducted by LinkedIn on “B2B Buyer’s Journey” in 2015 was conducted with 6000 buyers, marketers and salespeople from Australia, Canada, France, Germany, India, UK and USA. This survey tried to examine the changes in way buyer’s behaviour has changed and how it has impacted relationship between the three groups.

The findings were:
• Buyers like vendors more than one may think with 84% of the buyers describing their relationship with vendors as “good” and “very good”.
• Buyers are wanting more knowledge from salespeople and want “subject matter expert” and “provides consulting, education and tools”
• There are many internal influences on buying decisions implying that the salesperson needs to meet not only the decision maker but also the influencers.
• Buyers would like to engage with vendors who understand their company model, is a subject matter expert, knows company’s product and service and is like a consultant.

According to the survey, it is critical for the salesperson to turn the customer into a promoter.

3.3 The Practitioners’ View

This section delves into how personal sales has evolved over period of time. The first part discusses on the Pre-adaptive selling era and the second part makes a case on how “Adaptive selling” is the way forward in the near future.

1.3.1 The Pre-Adaptive selling era

The pre-differentiated selling era underwent four phases or transformations.

The traditional selling can be called Sales 1.0

Sales 1.0: The First Generation

This can be called as the “Rambo” generation. The salesperson had a single objective: achieve results anyhow. His credo was to get people to listen to him. He saw himself as an information giver to anybody who cared to listen. His orientation was that put in efforts and results will come. According to him, customers are “enemies” which need to be conquered. The Sales technique was AIDA (Attract Attention, Create Interest, Create Desire, and Push for Action). The philosophy was just sell it, whether the customer requires it or not. This resulted in lot of customer dissatisfaction. Domains in which this method was being used included selling to private individuals and certain financial products like insurance.

Sales 2.0: The “Nice Guy” Generation
There is a generation of sales guys who started right from the beginning and continue to work in this way: they could be called Sales Generation 2.0. There are the “nice guys” who are more of order takers instead of order makers. They develop good relations with the customer, make sure that they remain very satisfied, and constantly “serve” the customer with an objective of staying out of trouble. They are always smiling and believe that “customer is king.” They are there when customer calls up and give customer what he/she wants. However, they do not counter the customer in any way and therefore do not make any difference to the customer, either positive or negative. These type of salespeople are likely to become extinct in the present day of e-commerce.

**Sales 3.0: The Third Generation**

Sales 1.0 resulted in lot of customer dissatisfaction and therefore led to what the researcher calls “Customer is the boss” generation. This started in the US in the 1980s. In the second generation, customer was concerned king and the objective of the salesperson was to satisfy the customer at any cost. Credo of the salesperson was that he was ready to listen to needs in order to give a better response. His strength was meeting expectations but his weakness was that he was too predictable and there was no attempt to add value. His orientation was customer satisfaction, results and long term relationship. He worked either solo or in a team. This led to the third generation of sales. In this generation, salesperson tried to understand the needs of the customer, shaped the needs by influence and achieved his sales numbers. His technique was either DAPA or SPIN selling.

DAPA was defined as:

- Define customer requirement for your product or service
- Acceptance of the requirements by the customer
- Prove that your product/service satisfies the customer requirements the best
- Acceptance of the proof by the customer

The entire sales process is described as follows:

Define customer requirements:
- Visit objective for new prospects: Understand customer “As is” situation
- Visit objective for existing customers: Identify/generate new needs
- Action: Use open questions to steer the discussion. Listen actively to capture key requirements

Acceptance of the requirement by the customer:

- Visit objective: Influence customer needs
- Action: Meet decision makers and use leading questions and closed questions to confirm needs in words of the customer, email a discussion document to influence customer thinking by shaping his needs

Prove that your product or service can fulfil customer requirements

- Visit objective: Convert the prospect to our view-points
- Action: Make a one-to-one or one-to-many presentation with great impact, pre-handle objections, sell price, negotiate

Acceptance of proof by the customer

- Visit objective: Close the deal
  - Action: Close using any closing technique, tie up the loose ends, get written purchase order and advance

SPIN selling was more or less in line with DAPA except that the way questions were used was different.

SPIN had the following steps:

- Situation questions which uncover a context for uncovering buyer problems
- Problem questions which make the prospect talk about the problems and difficulties which he is experiencing
- Impact questions which makes the prospect discuss on the impact of the problem. They induce pain and are important for making the prospect anxious for a solution
• Need/payoff questions to get the prospect to state their explicit needs and the benefits the solution offers

The main objective of this type of selling was to make customer satisfied. One of the challenges of this method was that if you were selling industrial products, you would need to change your adapt your sales argumentation, but cannot change your product as such. This method also involved asking lot of questions to the prospect to really understand or unearth the needs. Customers started feeling that if he/she needs to answer such a large number of questions to all vendors, life becomes miserable. They therefore started making Request for Proposal (RFP) or Request for quotation (RFQ). So, customers expectation also changed in the sense, there were prospects who said, this is what I want-just give this to me whereas some prospects said, this is what I need, tell me what the solution you can suggest is. Thus, customers’ expectation from suppliers differed. Also, a satisfied customer is not necessarily a loyal customer.

Sales 4.0: The Fourth Generation

This generation can be called the “Added Value” generation. It started in Western Europe in the 1990s.

The objective of a salesperson was ultimately to gain customer loyalty. Since over period of time, products become more and more commoditized, salespeople from this generation started moving the expectations in order to become unique. The technique used was “refocusing”. If the offer of the salesperson was not different, he would make the customer realize that his major issue (often called the real problem) is something else which only his offer can satisfy the best. This can also be called “Changing the goal post”. This worked quite well in the complex sale. This approach was excellent as long as you had the decision maker in front of you. But that was not always the case.

The above generations led the sales fraternity to do some soul searching by asking themselves a few questions:

• Should the sales approach be dictated by product or customer?
• Should sales people be paid a fixed rate or commission?
• Should sales people be supervised more or left alone to do their job themselves?
• Should sales people be more projective or empathetic?
• Should sales people be more flexible or rigid?
• How frequently should the salespeople meet their prospect/customer?

This led the sales fraternity to an answer that selling approach for selling to a loyal satisfied customer will be different than that of a prospect whom you are meeting for the first time. Meeting a professional purchase department person who has floated a “Request for quotation” would be different than meeting a prospect who knows some issues he is facing and he is looking out for solutions.

1.3.2 The Adaptive Selling Era

A robust selling approach in the pre-third millennium selling era was first contact, understanding the need of the customer, developing a value proposition and closing. The challenge in the third millennium is that this approach does not cover the entire buying journey any more as 60% (maybe 89% in 2017) of the buying journey is already completed before the salesperson meets the customer. The best salesperson in the world is of no use if he/she is not present on the customer’s buying journey.

Figure 3.2 Percentage of purchase journey before engaging with a salesperson

Source: The B2B behaviour survey 2014-LinkedIn Survey

This has led to twenty new sales practices which are critical for selling in the third millennium:

• Use the web in order to identify and target prospects
• Master social selling in customer acquisition
• Multiply need quantity and quality through fermium
• Increase sales efficiency by mastering the engagement funnel
• Align the sales process with the buying process, the buying journey and need triggers.
• Use the web to prepare contact
• Connect with contact person using information from social media
• Diagnose the buying situation
• Use new tools and techniques to discover
• Build the argumentation
• Master story-telling to influence and convince
• Use power-point for one-to-one and one-to-many presentations
• Master the use of tablet in one-to-one meetings
• Master web-meetings to present a solution, an offer or to follow-up a project
• Master competitive selling
• Build impactful documents to read on pc or tablet
• Manage new types of objections
• Master live and remote communication tools
• Build loyalty through personal media
• Master multiple sales model

Thus the salesperson has to learn many new skills and adapt to remain relevant in the third millennium selling era.

The Adaptive selling methodology works on a premise that there is no one standard selling approach. Selling situations are different and buyer behaviour is different based on type of buyer.

I. Adapting on basis of the selling situation:

The selling situation is determined by three entities:

• The Prospect/Customer
• The Seller
• The Offer
A two-by-two matrix can be created which defines the four selling situations (see Figure 3.3 overleaf).

The attitude of the customer in relation to the offer can be from transaction to loyalty. He may say,

- Your offer does not interest me
- I’m not convinced
- That’s interesting, let me think about it
- I’m buying right now.

Expectations in relation to the salesperson could range from:

- I want you to give me this, just do it (Little or no value addition by the salesperson)
- Give me information and then I will decide
- You have understood my specific needs, now you give me advice
- I want you to tell me what I need to do and I will do accordingly. (just do for me whatever is necessary-Maximum value addition by the salesperson)
The salesperson needs to adapt to these four distinct selling situations and call for four distinct approaches. They are:

- Assertive Selling
- Consultative Selling
- Expertise Selling
- Relational Selling

**Assertive Selling:**

The salesperson needs to use this approach when prospect states that he has understood what he wants and is not in favour of a salesperson’s offer or organization. This situation is mostly encountered during prospecting. The salesperson needs to adapt to this situation by being very directive in nature because the customer is not expecting him to add value.

The sales profile can be called as “Hunter Seller”
Consultative Selling:

This approach is to be used when prospect has a problem and is aware of it and does not know how to solve it and therefore welcomes value addition from the salesperson in solving it. The salesperson understands the issues clearly and then proposes a solution depending on what the customer wants and also on basis of what he needs. He may many times have to ‘shape’ or influence the needs of the customer. The profile of the salesperson can be called as “Consultant Seller.”

Relational Selling:

This approach is to be used when customer is aware of his problem and he wants to be supported by the salesperson. He also trusts the offerings of the salesperson’s company. The sales approach is affective in nature as compared to directive in the case of assertive selling. The salesperson needs to treat the customer as a VIP and keep him happy. The sales person’s profile is that of a caretaker seller.

Expertise Selling:

This selling approach is used when customer is aware of his problem and welcomes support by the salesperson and trusts his company’s offering.

The salesperson’s profile is that of an expert seller.

The above mentioned adaptive selling also has an implication on both sales management and compensation.

II Adapting on basis of the buyer behaviour:

Customers are of different types in terms of the way they behave in the buying centre and the salesperson needs to “adapt” to their “behaviour” to remain relevant.

Customers can be classified into four different types based on the behaviour they exhibit (Segel, n.d.):

i. The Director
ii. The Analytical personality
iii. The Relator
iv. The Socializer
Each of these types have their own unique characteristics and the salesperson needs to “adapt” to them to be successful in selling.

Customer Type: Director

Characteristics:

a. They are very demanding in what they want
b. In an organization, they drive things
c. When they want things they want it immediately
d. Not prone to small talk
e. Very determined and not too caring about other’s feelings
f. Very goal-oriented

How to “adapt”: 

a. Avoid beating around the bush
b. Talk facts
c. Be accurate and succinct
d. Complement their purposefulness and firmness
e. Do not tell them that they have made mistakes
f. Do not be an obstacle to their end target

Customer Type: Analytical

Characteristics:

g. Logical and objective
h. Believe in facts and details
i. Not prone to small talk
j. Want lot of information
k. Analyse all possibilities and judges accurately
l. Discerning and dispassionate

How to “adapt”: 

a. Talk with verifiable facts and data
b. Give proof wherever possible
c. Do not make loose statements
d. Do not try to sell on basis of relationship
Customer Type: The Relator

Characteristics:

a. Strong need of belongingness
b. Know lot of people
c. Good in networking
d. Get things done on basis of relationship
e. Good source of referrals

How to “adapt”:

a. Ask them for their opinion
b. Include them in the decision making process
c. Make them feel part of the sales process by asking lot of questions
d. Get them to talk more

Customer Type: The Socializer

Characteristics:

a. Very outgoing and friendly
b. Wants to build relationships
c. Loyalty not important because they may have friends with competition too
d. Love to talk
e. Make new friends easily

How to “adapt”:

a. Salesperson should sell himself first
b. Make the customer like you
c. Compliment the customer frequently
d. Remember their names and use them when meeting next
e. Engage in a “light” way

3.4 Best Practices in the Business-to-Business sales scenario

Business-to-Business selling has three major challenges: firstly, there are several decision-makers and influencers, secondly, the salesperson is many times confused
who is the decision maker and who are the influencers and finally the sales cycles are very long.

In view of the above, it is important to answer the following questions from a salesperson’s perspective:

- How does the salesperson identify in an error-free manner, the needs of the Prospect, even though they are not stated needs?
- How does the salesperson identify which organizations would be most likely to buy
- How does the salesperson identify the right people who make decisions and how can the salesperson build relationships with them
- How does the salesperson differentiate his product
- How does the salesperson identify competition and take proactive action for competing against them
- How to access how close the salesperson is to closure
- Etc.

Best Practices in sales:

Given below are best practices curated from top sales experts from the practitioners’ field. They have been listed alphabetically.

Steve Anderson of Performance Methods Inc.

- Identify champions who understand differentiated value of the seller and build relationships
- Align own objectives with those of the prospect
- Post-sales, make sure that customer is able to get tangible value and make sure that they understand this which will result in deepening of relationships

Bob Apollo of Inflexion-Point Strategy Partners:
• In many cases, the competition is not other vendors but the unknown decision making process itself

• Salesperson needs to ensure that the prospect has a history of buying from vendors with similar profiles as their own—a “company fit”

• Business-to-Business buyers avoid risk and look for proven products and services. Smaller organizations which do not have a reference list of similar work done in the past face difficulties of proving themselves.

• They therefore need to convert weaknesses into opportunities by emphasizing on things which larger organizations find it difficult to do like faster decision making, better service levels etc.

Naomi Assaraf of CloudHQ:

• Ensure that the prospect has a need and a budget

• Salesperson should understand the buying process

• Invest time in building relationships with the right people at the prospect’s place

Irene Becker of JustCoachIt:
• Senior leaderships should go for sales meetings so as to establish credibility quicker and have more compelling sales conversations. They should also build personal relationships with decision makers.

Butch Bellah of Bulls Eye Brands Inc.:

• When the prospect is a larger organization, they take longer to give data.

• Therefore, many competitors keep away from the prospect, but they may be daunted by the large prospect kind of working or lack of quick responses.

Steve Benson of Badger Maps:

• Salespeople need to adapt their approach to suit the selling situation if the standard approach does not work. This may involve understanding the prospect better and connecting with decision makers.

• Sales managers need to monitor opportunities to see if there is progress being made and also if the opportunity is worth progressing.

• Indicators of progress and ideal matrices need to be formulated by supervisors.

Kirsten Boileau of SAP:

• Salespeople need to leverage the power of social selling while selling to Business-to-business enterprises.

• They also need to practise social listening and gather information about issues their prospect face.

• This information may be critical in making winning pitches.

Jeb Brooks of The Brooks group:
• Salespeople need to shift from tactical mind set to a strategic mind set. This means that they need to come across as experts.

• Salespeople need deep knowledge about customer’s business, the decision making process, the industry in general and needs of various stakeholders in the prospect’s organization

• Buying teams are becoming bigger than earlier and therefore salespeople need to demonstrate their business acumen to increase trust in themselves and their solution.

• The seller and their organization need to provide thought leadership so as to be seen as experts.

Bill Carmondy of Trepoint:

• On an average around 5.4 people are involved in decision making as compared to 1 or 2 in earlier days.

• Many salespeople target only one of the decision makers.

• It is important to connect with decision makers and social selling hooks like sales navigators can be used

• Sales is a marathon and not a sprint and therefore investment in time and effort for sustained period will yield results for the salesperson

Jim Cathcart of Carthcart.com:

• Customers need to see the salesperson as an attractive source of solutions.

• Salespeople therefore need to be easy to do business with. They also need to identify their champion at the customer’s place

Kevin F. Davis of Topline Leadership Inc.:
• While selling, it is important for the salesperson to know what step in the buying process their prospect is in by asking an important question, “What steps have you taken thus far with regards to making this decision?”

• Another important information to find out is the problem the customer is trying to solve.

• If the salesperson is able to identify at least one more additional customer need that the prospect does not recognize they have, chances of success increase

Craig Elias of Shift Selling Inc.:

• 80% of decision makers who are new to their job make major decisions within 90 days of joining because they would be dissatisfied with existing status. This is the golden period to approach them from a sales perspective.

• If salespeople miss this window, chances of closing the deal decreases

• Salespeople need to start building relationships with the organization by developing relationships locally, then upsell to that person and also cross-sell to other locations in the same division

John D. Elsey of Richardson:

• Salespeople need to build trust when in front of the prospect/customer

• The salesperson’s job is not to sell something but to steer all stakeholders around a solution to their issues

• It is important to map all decision makers

• It is critical that the salesperson’s team is also prepared to meet the customer’s team

Jon Ferrarra of Nimble LLC:
• The most important key to business-to-business selling is to constantly find ways to help the customer grow and become more successful.

• Most difficult part is to identify the people with whom the salesperson should connect with.

Peter Fillmore of Momenta Systems Inc.:

• Salesperson should not rush into a product proposal even if asked for. They should ask questions to dig deeper as the final decision will be made by many stakeholders.

• The project outline should be co-created.

• Three key components need to be incorporated in the proposal: goals, payback and time drivers. This should be followed by the product offer.

Patricia Fripp of Fripp & Associates:

• Although business-to-business selling is complex, the sales presentation needs to be simple with a clear message.

• The message also needs to be specific so as to build credibility.

Joe Hart of Dale Carnegie & Associates Inc.

• A sale happens when the buyer feels that his fears are fully validated and addressed by the salesperson.

• This calls for excellent interpersonal skills and genuine interest to understand.

Alice Heiman of Alice Heiman LLC
• Salespeople need to understand who else should be involved in the meeting. If the buyer says that he/she is the only person to be talked to, this may be because they are insecure.

• Salesperson needs to win the buyer over by understanding what they need and want and help them understand how to achieve that

• Planning is critical for maximizing wins

Leanne Hoagland Smith of Advanced Systems:

• People buy from people whom they trust

• People buy the salesperson first

• Value is unique for different people

• Salespeople need to meet as many people as possible and connect to their value drivers

Jonathan Hodge of Advantage Performance Group:

• Salespeople need to understand the unique buying cycle of each prospect and each opportunity so that they can align their sales effort to their timeline.

• They therefore should not rush in a proposal because they are ready with one. It may be possible that at that time, the buyer may be just in the process of discovering their needs.

Mark Hunter of The Sales Hunter:

• The salesperson needs to be seen as a “peer” with the organization whose business he is trying to attract. This means he needs to relate to the buyer’s industry, key challenges.

• If the salesperson is able to be seen as a peer, they may be able to reduce the negative impact of the purchase department on the decision.

Keith Johnstone of Peak Sales Recruiting:
• Salespeople need to work with ‘mobilizers’ who admit the existence of issues in their business practices and processes. Mobilizers also are willing to commit resources to exploring their business need further.

• Salespeople need to provide the mobilizers ammunition to achieve consensus amongst other stakeholders.

Connie Kadansky of Exceptional Sales Performance:

• Salespeople need to overcome three types of “sales call reluctance”

• Firstly, they need to work on their reluctance to meet high level of decision makers and rely on working with lower level influencers

• Secondly, they need to overcome reluctance in engaging complex sales and related activities by having a strategic plan in place and not having any emotional discomfort.

• Lastly, they need to overcome stage fright if any, while addressing the audience by mastering skills of presentation

Nick Kane of Janek Performance Group:

• Salespeople need to have a strategic plan in place to steer through maze of stakeholders and activities

• They also need to understand the buying process which the buyers would have put in place to make sure that the decision is unbiased

• Various departments involved in the decision would have different needs. Different levels of stakeholders would also have different levels of influence. Salespeople need to have a comprehensive understanding of individual issues faced so that they can articulate how their solution can help different departments.

Ron Karr of Karr Associates Inc.:
In creating a strategic plan, all disciplines from the seller’s organization need to get involved.

If the customer can also be got involved, chances of the plan getting implemented are much higher.

Alice Kemper of SalesTrainingWerks.com

- Selling to large key accounts requires a team approach.
- Since selling to large accounts has a longer sales cycle, there needs to be a well thought out plan.
- This plan also needs to include ways of differentiating both the team and the solution.

Craig Klein of SalesNexus:

- Bigger the buyer organization, the more bureaucratic it is, as regards to decision making
- Salespeople need to be careful in choosing which clients they would like to go after, as substantial resources are required in developing relationships

Mike Kunkle of Transforming Sales Results LLC:

- Salespeople need to understand buyers’ buying process exit criteria (BPEC).
- Buyers need to feel comfortable to move to the next stage by hearing, seeing, sensing, understanding or believing and these are called BPEC.
- Salespeople need to use both logos and pathos to make buyers shift from one stage to another.

Dave Kurlan of Kurlan & Associates:
Three things which differ while selling to large business-to-business organizations are more number of decision makers, hardship in meeting them and higher level of competition.

Key skill that a salesperson needs to possess is active patience

Erik Peterson of Corporate Vision Inc.:

• Salespeople need to use the strategy of “land and expand”.

• Large organizations consist of smaller units. Salesperson should sell to a smaller unit first so as to be established as a trusted source. Then, the salesperson needs to expand his business within the larger organization.

Daniel Pink, Author of “To sell is human”:

• The salesperson needs to think of himself as a management consultant by understanding the buyer’s business, identifying pain areas and providing solutions

• Salesperson needs to avoid the trap of “fundamental attribution error” by creating different messages for different decision makers. Salesperson should not put too much emphasis on the personality of the stakeholder. They should not build their messages on a departmental need but on the overall organizational need. This ensures quicker consensus amongst various stakeholders.

• Salespeople should use “pivotal agreements” which are exchanges of information etc which the salesperson should give off by getting something in value (e.g. access to decision makers). Doing this helps the salesperson protect his margins.

Steve Richard of Execvision:
• Salesperson should treat all stakeholders in the buying group with lot of importance and know each of them as a person.

• Salesperson should make sure that he is not “out-relationshiped” by his competitors.

Linda Richardson of Richardson:
• Buyers rarely require salespeople for their product knowledge.
• They need salespeople for the insights they provide and their ability to solve their problems

Steven A. Rosen of STAR Results:
• Sales supervisors need to play a role which is different than just closing deals— they need to use the selling situation for coaching their salespeople on the field. Asking questions make the salespeople understand issues, situations and objections, making salespeople find their own solutions: thus raising the averages of the entire team
• This means that the sales supervisors need to be trained to be coaches and that is a very good investment
• Sales supervisors can also attend customer meetings wearing their sales hat, but the maximum benefit can be achieved when they are coaches.

Aaron Ross of Predictable Revenue:
• Many organizations think that sales is a necessary evil and is expensive.
• They need to understand that sales is a high-ROI investment and build a sales machine which works effectively and efficiently

Jill Rowley of Social Selling Strategist:
- Business-to-business selling organizations need to create an “Ideal customer profile” (ICP). This requires the sales team to find out more about customers before initiating a conversation.

- The more the salespeople know about customer business and their strategy, the more effectively they can position their product offerings and solutions.

- The salespeople also need to create an influence map of the stakeholders using social media and other tools. They also need to find ways and means of building rapport with them.

Neal Schaffer, Keynote speaker, Maximize your social:

- Social media can be of great help in mapping various stakeholders in the organization. It can also help the salesperson in understanding the hierarchy of the organization.

- The salesperson should also use social media to find out about the competitive landscape in a particular opportunity.

- They should also use social media to engage with decision makers by adding value to online discussions.

Time Searcy of Hunt Big Sales:

- Although large enterprises buy because of the benefits a solution offers, because of the large number of stakeholders involved in the decision makers, fears develop. Fear overtakes the benefits and the salesperson needs to make all stakeholders overcome the fear to be successful.

Kurt Shaver of The Sales Foundry:

- Linked in is one of the most powerful tools to map decision makers and influencers and to check their postings, comment on them and gain insights.

Amar Sheth of SalesForLife:
• Knowing how buyers are connected and whom they are connected can help increase the velocity of the sales cycle.

• Online searches can reveal positions taken by people. This information is free and does not take too much of time to download and can be used to contextualize the offer

Colleen Stanley of Sales Leadership Inc.:

• It is important for the salesperson to adapt conversations according to industry, influence of buying and the business line.

• The start of the conversation often determines what the salesperson is perceived as.

Brian Sullivan of Sandler Training:

• In large business-to-business selling, knowledge of competition is critical in terms of their business models, offerings and possible value propositions.

• This helps in strategizing a winning approach

Babette Ten Haken of Sales Aerobics for Engineers:

• There is a difference between selling to startups, small businesses and selling to large enterprises.

• The salesperson needs to understand how his solution affects the organization today as well as tomorrow

• Working in a cross-functional manner helps in gathering and acting on this information

Andrea Waltz, Author of GoforNo:
• Selling to large business-to-business enterprises requires more tenacity. This is because objections may come any time during the sales process.

• The salesperson needs to remain committed to the deal in such cases. More the salesperson goes through such cases, more proficient he will become.

Craig Wortmann of Sales Engine Inc.:

• A salesperson should not take yes for an answer. This is because in business-to-business selling there may be many decision makers need to agree with your proposal

Rene Zamora of Sales Manager Now

• Salespeople need to earn the trust of each person they meet at the customer organization.

• Salespeople should make it sacrosanct not to move forward in the deal without meeting all decision makers, including C-level.

• Information can be gathered face-to-face or by phone or other methods like zoom meetings.

• Asking quality questions help in earning trust at higher levels

3.5 Conclusion

Sales has evolved over period of time. Major external dimensions of change are customers themselves having greater expectations, competitors become hyper-competitive, technology evolving rapidly and legal environment becoming more transparent. Salespeople earlier were knowledge brokers as customers used to look up to them for knowledge about their product. Now, all information is available on the internet and many times the customer may know more about the product than the salesperson. The present day salesperson needs to respond much faster, have a greater breadth and depth of communication and communicate with each of his customers in a unique way. The linear step-by-step sales process defined by academicians earlier has been replaced by a non-sequential sales process. Customers are of different types and extant literature indicates that there are seven different customer profiles and the modern day salesperson is expected to “adapt” to them while selling. The “One size fits all” approach has becoming archaic. In fact, practitioners classify the entire sales era into “Pre-Adaptive stage” and “Post-Adaptive Stage”. Sales has passed through
four generations: The first generation being the Rambo generation where salespeople saw themselves as information givers, the second generation where salespeople looked at customers as kings who need to be satisfied at any cost, the third generation where the selling became more “consultative” in nature and finally the generation where salespeople started from the beginning by being “nice guys” to the customers. Adaptation by the salespeople also underwent progressive growth. Salespeople starting adapting on basis of the selling situation (becoming more assertive, consultative, relational or expertise-driven) or on the basis of behavioural styles of customers.