

**The inexorable move towards an inside sales model in the field of business-to-business sales: an analysis from the service-oriented sales perspective**

How technology, gender equality and a more ethical buyer-seller relationship has pushed traditional sales models to a change of direction.

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## Abstract

This study examines the field of sales, more specifically the inside sales approach from a business to business perspective. It shows how it came to be the main sales format and moves forward to highlight the transition from field sales (outside sales) to inside sales.

This paper it is key to understand where sales, as a business activity, is moving towards and what factors influence changes from a sales point of view, with the objective of increasing the success of sales departments inside service providers companies.

This dissertation answers the question of which are the different key factors that have impacted the sales field in the past few years and has pushed traditional sales models to a change of direction. Some of the factors taken under analysis being: technology, gender equality and a more ethical buyer-seller relationship.

It is stated that companies that do not change and adapt in their sales methods become stagnant and so their profits. A move towards an inside sales model in the field of business-to-business sales has been happening for a couple of decades and this research helps clarify and proactively map these changes for the benefit of service providers companies.

The research method that this study implements is mainly qualitative, the objective is to confirm in the literature what are the main factors that can cause a shift in business to business sales methods.

Different people from different levels of sales departments have also been interviewed, with the aim of providing insights on the different topics that this study expects to be factors in the future changes of sales departments.

This research finds that mostly technology, alongside stronger ethical behaviour and society moving towards equality between men and women in sales, are aspects that keep influencing sales structures and will keep doing so in the foreseeing future.

## Introduction

### The issue and the need for it to be further investigated

The general area of study of this dissertation is sales. Sales refers to all activities involved in selling a product or service to a consumer or business. This study introduces the main characteristics of a service-oriented company. It also takes a closer look at the specificities of business to business (B2B) sales.

The idea is to deep dive in the field of business-to-business sales to provide an analysis of service-oriented sales departments and the inexorable move towards an inside sales model.

The idea is to draw upon the latest academic research in regards to different sales structures and what are the main characteristics and factors that influence it.

In the paper written by P. Thaichona, J. Surachartkumtonkuna, S. Quacha, S. Weavena and R. W. Palmatierb, "Hybrid sales structures in the age of e-commerce", we can find an evaluation of the main aspects of outside and inside sales structures, with a point of view on a new kind of model that can take the best of both. This study shows how inside sales has pushed traditional sales models to a change of direction. The higher goal of this dissertation is to define technology, gender equality and a more ethical buyer-seller relationship as main factors that are influencing the structure and the evolution of sales as a job and mostly as a department inside a corporate environment.

The main idea for this research comes from the experience acquired in the service industry. Evidence can be found in a number of different enterprises that sales models that do not adapt fast enough nor are able to be ahead of the change are destined to die. Blockbuster being a great example of it, the company kept investing in physical presence way past the time of moving inventory online and their sales crashed and the company ceased to exist (Forbes, 2014).

The background as sales manager provides insight into different sales B2B models in the service industry. With the information gathered, this study would be able to provide conclusions and guidelines for B2B service oriented sales departments on

what factors of change to look for in the foreseeing future to be able to anticipate changes.

With the objective of having a better understanding it is important to define different terminology that is used throughout the study.

## Definitions

A broader definition of business could be provided using the final benefit that a company provides: goods or services. The main difference between a service oriented and a product oriented enterprise, from a structural perspective is the fact that there is no manufacturing or logistics involved in the selling process. A tangible product that you can touch by hand is what would be sold in a product oriented company. In a service oriented company like a bank, media company or travel agency the final benefit provided is intangible.

For example, if we consider Nike mission statement: *Our mission is what drives us to do everything possible to expand human potential. We do that by creating groundbreaking sport innovations, by making our products more sustainably, by building a creative and diverse global team and by making a positive impact in communities where we live and work (nike, 2021)*. It is clear from their mission that they are trying to achieve everything their brand represents through the production of goods.

Focusing on service oriented firms, it is important to give a definition of business to customers (B2C) and business to business (B2B) companies. Taking into account the fact that most enterprises do provide services to both businesses and final clients.

B2C firms have their aim of selling directly to customers for personal use. For example, Bank of Ireland provides current accounts for people to receive their salary. B2B, meaning business to business, is when a service is sold to other businesses, for them to be either re-sold or to enhance the productivity of the buyer company. To give an example, customer relationship management companies (CRM) like Salesforce, *provide Customer Relationship Management as a strategy that companies use to manage interactions with customers and potential customers. CRM helps organisations streamline processes, build customer relationships,*

*increase sales, improve customer service, and increase profitability (Salesforce, 2021).*

In deeper details, B2B sales objectives can be defined as: build personal relationships, maintain open communication and provide the company with a long term revenue income (Gibbons, 2017).

B2C Sales instead has different objectives inside the company: establish transactional relationships, simplify the processes of buying and selling and give the company constant visibility and new clients (Treacy, 1993).

This study takes into consideration the two most relevant ways of handling sales from a company perspective. Field sales and inside sales, each of them carries different complexities but the main characteristics of one and the other is that inside sales handle all sales cycles remotely, mostly through phone calls, but also email and different online channels. Field sales or outside sales is the process by which salespeople visit clients in person and close the sale building personal relationships.

## Background information

In the past 50 years sales departments all around the world have undergone different structural changes. They have moved from outside only salesforce, to having both outside and inside sales structures, to the early 2000 where the role of the internet has introduced great technological advances and caused different changes in sales departments (Thaichon et al, 2018).

The idea behind this study is to try and identify where the future of sales is moving towards, more specifically of service oriented B2B sales.

The objective is to identify the elements that have made possible and necessary the latest shifts in sales departments and structures, in order to highlight them for the future. The objective is to define which factors and conclusions help us better prepare, manage and train the next generation of sales representatives.

One of the reasons to investigate this topic is because many professionals in the past decade had the opportunity to be part of both the field and inside sales force in different companies and at different levels. It is found that one of the reasons why field sales are still in place is a great lack of confidence from the buyer in regards to

the inside sales model and the difficulty to eradicate traditional field sales to an old generation of sales managers (Harvard Business review, 2020).

An older generation that still remembers the pre-internet era, when mostly men were sales people, with lack of sensibility about sustainability and sales ethics combined with an out of date idea of what a buyer seller relationship should be, is getting in the way of reducing costs, productivity and expenses control. More importantly, this attachment to an old sales model is reducing the possibility for companies to have greater success in implementing a more positive work environment from all these different perspectives: technology advance, women integration, sustainability and more ethical buyer-seller relationship.

## Research Question

This study investigates the subject through the reading and analysis of different articles in regards to the evolution of sales in service oriented B2B companies. It provides an example of what is working and what is not in terms of sales results using an inside sales only structure.

The following is the main research question that this dissertation is trying to answer.

Is the move towards an inside sales model in business-to-business sales inevitable?

This study investigates how in the field of B2B sales during the next few years, based on the different change factors like, technology, ethics and women in sales, will inevitably push a move towards an inside sales business to business model.

## Methodology

The methodology used is qualitative. To gather the best quality primary data six interviews are conducted with different people from sales departments in different companies and countries. To help maintain the balance the cluster of people interviewed is formed by people with different gender, age, nationality and level inside the sales hierarchy. To be more specific there are males and females, aged between 30 and 45 years of age, from different countries in Europe as well as a



South American participant. Everybody has at least one 5 years of experience in working in sales in at least two different companies, wide-ranging roles from sales representatives to director of sales.

## Next Steps

Moving forward into the dissertation, a literature review is developed with specific focus on the sales environment and its development in the past few years from a service B2B perspective. Different factors of change are analysed and introduced to be able to find relevant points from which the preparation of the questions for the interviews start.

In the following chapters, research questions are introduced in deeper details as well as the methodology used in the paper.

The main chapter of the dissertation is built around the interviews as well as the related findings and discussions.

During the literature review the objective is to deep dive into books and papers to help us prepare and structure the topics and questions to ask during the interviews.

## Literature review

### Introduction to the literature review

The following section of the dissertation provides information in regards to general structures and details of a sales department. The spotlight is on the different factors that are perceived as disruptive, so vastly needed to be taken into account when writing in regards to the future of sales. The study deep dive into the four most important aspects that have and will influence sales as a department, considering sales as a driving force inside a corporation different perspectives are taken into consideration.

### Sales structures: changes and developments

The theory developed by P. Thaichona, J. Surachartkumtonkuna, S. Quacha, S. Weavena and R. W. Palmatierb, in their: "Hybrid sales structures in the age of e-commerce" is used as one of the pillars of the dissertation. This article helps us understand the transitions of the sales departments in the past 50 years helping us define the characteristics and specificities of each shift. It also gives us an idea of a sales department structure that could be useful for the future.

It also provides a general overview of what is: outside and inside sales as well as the different tools provided to sales representatives thanks to the technological disruption of the early 2000.

To have a more detailed understanding of the specificities related to outside and inside sales the paper from Sleep, Dixon, deCarlo and Lam, 2020, "The business-to-business inside sales force: roles, configurations and research agenda" has also been taken into consideration as it gives a great overview on how inside sales force is a strategic benefit in comparison to outdated field sales structure.

There are many differences between inside and outside sales but as stated in the article from Steve W. Martin, "The Trend that is Changing Sales" we are rapidly moving towards an inside sales model. Field sales will still be implemented due to one main reason, inside sales and field sales require different capacities and they can be more adapted in different situations. For larger consumers and the vast majority of customers, inside sales representatives through the phone will be able to

do the job perfectly. Field sales will be more suitable for C-level or higher hierarchy organizations. This is important for this study because it is clear that these two jobs require different sets of skills and so different people to perform. Outside sales requires far more emotional intelligence, situational awareness, and planning. Inside sales, while equally demanding on the other hand, requires persistence, research, and back end work.

## The role of Technology

In the article "Technology Is Blurring the Line Between Field Sales and Inside Sales" by Zoltners, Sinha and Lorimer, 2019. We found how technology is driving sales departments to a merged solution between inside and outside sales and how consequently, companies must rethink how they structure, hire, support and manage their sales forces.

Technology in the sales department has been found to have a positive effect on sales person knowledge, productivity and performance (Obla, 2018). It has also been found that resistance to new technology implementation is quite common with sales people. Meaning that technological change like the use of a customer relationship management software like Salesforce has been proven useful to enhance long term performance. The difficulties, in terms of acceptance, happen to be more related to the changes perceived in the work environment than the technological change itself. In other words, the perception of change will be more difficult to accept than the implementation of the change itself. One of the factors that will help this transition is the support provided by management.

When we talk about technology change in sales we also talk about digitalization, in the article "Practical insights for sales force digitalization success" by Andris A. Zoltners<sup>a,b</sup>, Prabhakant Sinhab, Dharmendra Sahay<sup>c</sup>, Arun Shastrid and Sally E. Lorimer<sup>b</sup>, it is found that most of the sales force is now required to have higher digital skills. Digitalization fundamentally affects infrastructure and with that it becomes urgent the need for people that are able to support this technological advancement while being sales or part of the sales department. The implementation of technology in this sense, like the use of cloud stored data and processes, disrupts the sales department. This kind of change needs to be implemented fast and

correctly. The risk being: low acceptance, so failure of digitalization and abandonment of technological advancement. Leading a company open to the possibility of being left behind compared to competitors and finally cease existence.

In the article from Rapp, Beitelspacher, Schillewaert and Baker, 2012 "The differing effects of technology on inside vs. outside sales forces to facilitate enhanced customer orientation and interfunctional coordination", it is possible to make a connection between the differences about inside and outside sales as well as how are both connected with the latest developments on technology and customer relationship. This paper takes the stand for an outside sales model and clarifies how customer relationships can be enhanced thanks to an outside sales force and how this can be applicable to an evolving inside sales model.

### The new ethics of Sales - Buyer-Seller relationship

In one of the most prominent CRM website is stated the following about sales ethics (<https://www.pipedrive.com/en/blog/sales-ethics>) : sales ethics refers to a set of behaviors that ensure that every lead, prospect and customer is treated with respect, fairness, honesty and integrity.

It means that, as a salesperson or marketer, you put the people you sell to first. You respect their choices and opinions instead of forcing your agenda on them.

Great insights and points for reflection are developed in Bush and Oakley, 2012, "Customer Entertainment in Relationship Marketing: A Literature Review and Directions for Future Research".

The paper is deeply focused on the social aspect of the relationship between seller and buyer in B2B sales. The paper gives us material to recognize obsolete sales strategies that are still in use and have a shaky stand from financial and ethical perspectives.

In the article from 2010 by Schwepker and Good, "Moral Judgment and its Impact on Business-to-Business Sales Performance and Customer Relationships", we go deeper into the buyer and seller relationships, as well as start the conversation about how ethical selling affects performance and long term relationships with buyers.

We also navigate the concept of customer oriented selling found in Thaichon et al, 2018.

Until now we mostly discussed the evolution, characteristics and differences in the structure of the sales department. We briefly just spoke about buyer-seller relationships and in the following article by Lassk, Ingram, Kraus and Di Mascio, 2012, "The Future of Sales Training: Challenges and related research questions" we outline the 4 main challenges that we will encounter in the future, related to this very topic: changing role of the Salesperson (related to the changes in the Sales structures outlined in Thaichon et al, 2018) ; Increased Accountability (related to ethical selling, Schwepker and Good, 2010); Enhanced Technology Capabilities (related to Technology in Zoltners, Sinha and Lorimer, 2019) and Cultural Diversity.

The article by Irfan Ameer and Aino Halinen, "Moving beyond ethical decision-making: a practice-based view to study unethical sales behavior", shows clearly how salespersons are now working in increasingly complex social settings, where they are expected to deal with various company-external actors. All these factors are influencing their way of selling. With the objective of long term performance and relationship, as well as the fact that most of the sales force is now working on the phone, salespeople are now more and more careful about not crossing the line to close a sale. At the same time they are putting extra effort on building a relationship based on trust and respect.

## The role of Women in Sales

Finally in regards to cultural diversity as one of the four main challenges for the future of Sales, Rutherford, Marshall and Park in "The moderating effects of gender and inside versus outside sales role in multifaceted job satisfaction" gives an insight about how gender is a factor of differentiation in sales roles.

We can find more information about the perception of women in sales in the article from Frederick A., Russ and McNeilly, "Has sex stereotyping disappeared? A study of perception of women and men in sales". In this article more than 200 women from MBAs are interviewed to clarify their position in the world of sales as well as a compared perception of their role in sales hierarchy compared to men. Capabilities

and attitudes are taken into consideration to define the best set of skills for the future. A distinction is made in the article where per stereotypes women would be better in inside sales roles when men would be perceived as performing better in field sales roles.

More points of conversation can be found in the study: "Women in Professional Selling: A Human Resource Management Perspective". In this article, Fugate, Decker and Brewer talk about how women in sales are aligned to take certain steps to have success in the future. Being good salespeople will bring them to be good managers for the next generations to come. The article talks about how more and more women are hired in sales with the objective for them to become managers as apparently they are more suitable for management positions. If they succeed in sales they will grow fast inside companies. Another point that is touched is how men often refer to the success of women as luck or just sporadic events, not due to their abilities in sales that is also often misread.

## The future of sales

In Cespedes and Bova, 2015, "What Salespeople Need to: Know About the New B2B Landscape" we start gathering ideas about what will be important for the future of sales and other than the previous cited challenges what sales managers should be on the lookout for to predict and adapt sales structures to up and coming changes.

One of the most important books that gives a glimpse into what will be important in the future of sales is "Sales Management: A Primer for Frontier Markets" by Robert E. Hinson.

It talks about all the important concepts that will touch all the different factors of change in this dissertation: consultative sales, sales force management, qualities of effective leadership in sales, and the use of technological tools such as Customer Relationship Management (CRM).

Not only Discussions on consultative selling have been developed, also the role of ethics in sales, and the stages of the personal selling process have been specifically

detailed and grounded in peer-reviewed case-study findings in the book giving us a lot of material to take from in the comparison of the results from our interviews.

### Conclusion of the literature review

Concluding this section we have found that all the following factors are relevant to the analysis of the topic in question. The inexorable move from field to inside sales has positive and negative aspects, the reliability and progress provided by the new inside sales model is helping shape the sales department of the future. Technology has been and will continue to be a factor mostly talking about CRM and the digitalization that is happening in the world of sales. Same as the great impact that is provided by the more and more women participating in sales activity.

This research is going to help clarify in detail what are the positive and negative aspects of the shift in sales strategy and if the role of women in sales is really a factor in the changes that we are experiencing in the world of sales.

## Research Question

**The overall topic this study investigates is as follows.**

*Is the move towards an inside sales model in business-to-business sales inevitable?*

This study investigates how in the field of B2B sales during the next few years, based on the different change factors like, technology, ethics and women in sales, will inevitably push a move towards an inside sales business to business model.

Following up on the main questions, different elements come to attention.

### **Research Objective 2**

Investigate how companies move from B2B field sales to B2B inside sales and what the next move will be.

### **Research Objective 3**

Determine what factors have influenced the change in strategy from field to inside sales.

### **Research Objective 4**

Investigate in details about the impact of technology advances, new corporate ethics, women being more present in the salesforce and a new kind of buyer-seller relationship in the move towards an inside sales model.

### **Research Objective 5**

Find the most important factors that influence the move towards the next big change in the future of sales.

During the investigation of research objective number 4 an additional set of subtopics are analysed further, developing the following hypotheses.

H1 - Technology disruption has pushed the traditional sales model to a change of direction, this is the most important factor that has impacted sales departments.



H2 - Gender equality, so the increasing number of women in sales has had a great impact on sales structure, not only from a managerial perspective but also on the front line.

H3 - The world of sales, alongside the corporate world, has become more and more sensitive to business ethics, this has a great effect on the way sales are carried out from an inside and field sales perspective.

The objective of these subtopics is to identify the main factors that influence change in the sales departments, to be able, for the future, to be ready to identify possible shifts and be ahead of the curve.

Interviews are carried out with six people working in sales departments at different levels and thanks to these research questions and more related to the subject, this study investigates the nature of changes in the sales structures and what is working or not working right now that could be on the verge of a change. The analysis will be qualitative and will highlight patterns and factors displayed in the interviews and evaluate them in relation to the success and results of the departments where the different Sales people or managers are currently working at.

The interviews are semi-structured and follow a funnel model where broader questions are asked first to move towards more specific questions. The questions asked in the interviews are as follow:

Interviews questions:

- How long have you been working in sales? What are the main changes that you saw happening since you started working in this field?
- Have you ever worked/managed a team of field sales? What are the main challenges and advantages of this kind of approach?
- Have you ever worked/managed a team of inside sales? What are the main challenges and advantages of this kind of approach?

- How do you think technologies like CRM have improved the quality of sales? What other technologies can you think about that have changed your work or the work of your team? What is the impact that they had?
- What do you think is the perception of the general B2B consumer of a sales representative? Why do you think it is like this? What kind of relationship do you want you or your team to be developing with customers? Is sales ethics a reality in your industry?
- Tell me about your perception of women in sales? Is it different from men from a career perspective? What do you think that being a woman could affect your performance (positively or negatively) being a field sales representative? What about Inside sales representatives? Can you compare the two?
- What skill/factor/element of sales have we lost in the past few years? Has it been a positive or negative loss? What was the impact of this element in the sales environment?
- Where do you see sales as a job in ten years? Which of the previously cited factors do you think will mostly affect that scenario?

## Methodology

As a research methodology a qualitative approach has been used. It is based on literature and findings related to the sales discipline. The limitation of this methodology is that it will be able to provide only guidelines for future reference and deeper studies, not quantitative results or an exact prediction. The reason for this is that what this study is trying to achieve is an overview on the different aspects that will have to be treated with special attention in terms of sales department development and evolution in the future. The objective being to successfully create or adapt a sales team in the next future to a changing and evolving environment.

Speaking of qualitative methodology the sample of the interviews is small and the results are subjective. They will give us room to observe and interpret them. The qualitative paradigm concentrates on investigating subjective data, in particular, the perceptions of the people involved. The intention is to illuminate these perceptions and, thus, gain greater insight and knowledge.

The procedure adopted follows the interpretivist approach as it acknowledges the difference between the opinions of different people in the field of sales. As per characteristics of the interpretivist approach the researcher develops empathy and rapport with the interviewees during the development of semi-constructed interviews.

During the development of the dissertation a deductive method has been used, the theoretical structure is explained and is the base of our dissertation. The move from field sales to inside sales, explained by the theory developed by P. Thaichona, J. Surachartkumtonkuna, S. Quacha, S. Weavena and R. W. Palmatierb, in their: "Hybrid sales structures in the age of e-commerce".

The process of deduction is followed during the dissertation as we start with theory and hypothesis, to move forward to data collection through a series of qualitative interviews. Finalizing with findings and conclusions.

An important source of primary data for the study is interviews with different people at different levels of seniority inside service related sales businesses.

The method that we use to collect data is qualitative interviews, six of them have been carried out to different people at different levels of sales departments. Different

open questions have been asked to the interviewees and everybody answered them freely with the guidance of the interviewer to stay on topic as per unstructured interviews method.

The objective is to have different points of view in regards of the three main factors that should influence trends shift in terms of sales that are:

- Corporate ethics and the impact of it on buyer-seller relationship
- Women in sales
- Technological advances - CRM and data driven performance plans

The limitations of this methodology is the lack of quantitative data as it is based only on interviews and interpretation, while sales is a field where numbers are very important. Another limitation that this study has found is that it has been more difficult to find women than men for these interviews. Probably because of the interviewer being male and my environment.

Below the table with some characteristics of people interviewed.

	<u>Age</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Nationality</u>	<u>Countries of experience</u>	<u>Years of sales Experience</u>
<u>Interviewee 1</u>	41	male	italian	Italy and Spain	9 years
<u>Interviewee 2</u>	32	male	italian	Italy, Spain and Ireland	5 years
<u>Interviewee 3</u>	31	male	argentinian	Argentina, Spain and Ireland	5 years
<u>Interviewee 4</u>	45	female	spanish	Spain and Ireland	23 years
<u>Interviewee 5</u>	38	female	italian	Italy and Ireland	11 years
<u>Interviewee 6</u>	43	male	spanish	Spain	20 years

## Analysis and Findings

### Introduction

During the development of the dissertation the focal topics have become more and more clear, the objective of having more clarity about which factors will affect the future of sales departments has been reached and highlighted. In this paragraph we will immerse in the outcomes of six different interviews that have been carried out in regards to the main argument of the thesis. The following is divided into the three main factors of change analysed as well as a comparative introduction on the experience of each one of them and their conclusions for the future.

### Changes in Sales

Overall most of the people that have been interviewed agreed on the fact that the biggest change that they witnessed in the past two decades has been the strong pull towards an inside sales model for sales departments. Considering all the benefits and negative aspects of selling through the phone. This is aligned with what is found in the literature on this regard, where we find an idea of how in the past 50 years the sales department have been transitioning from outside to inside sales models (Thaichona, 2018). The benefits being strategic advantages in terms of growth (Sleep, 2020).

People with more years of sales experience like interviewees 1 and 4, have highlighted deeply the positive changes in this new way of selling, for the company and employee. In this regard interviewee 1 says: *"At the beginning of my career it was unimaginable to be selling products with a high degree of specificity and technical difficulty on the phone"*. Interviewee 5, spoke about how the move towards an inside sales model has allowed the company to reinforce the evolution towards a more attentive approach in regards to employees health. The same connection has been made by Interviewee 2 and 3, even if they have less sales experience, they talked about how beneficial it is for the sales representatives to be able to work from anywhere they please. About this topic, interviewee 3 says: *"it was normal to drive a lot and now from the office or your own home, with a phone you can do the job, only traveling when you see fit"*. Digitalization and technology has also been cited as a factor in the changes of

sales models from field sales to inside sales, and moving forward talking about how the disruption of technology has produced a beneficial change (Thaichona, 2018). Interviewee 6 already talks about how all the product and service is now already available online in marketplaces changing the role of the sales person from a B2C, selling to the final client, to B2B, selling to the online marketplace for the public to buy it directly from there.

## Challenges and Advantages

Two questions during the interviews had the objective of qualifying pros and cons of the inside sales and field sales model. In more than one interview it was clear that what was perceived as an advantage for one model, it was inevitably a disadvantage for the other.

Related to the challenges of field sales all the participants agreed that in terms of: organization, logistics, cost vs productivity and mostly time, this approach can be a great nightmare for any organization. Interviewee 6 clarifies that even trying to gather more people at the same time makes you lose impact and effectiveness, affecting final results. On this regard interviewee 3 also shares his concerns about the rate of scalability of this kind of approach compared to an inside sales model. It is outlined that not all the same people can do the same job in terms of sales, you need different organizations and profiles for the field or inside sales jobs (Martin, 2013).

Still on the Field sales argument, the perceived advantages cited by the participants are all related to physical presence, even if the points highlighted are different. Interviewee 1 and 6 speak more about the impact that your professional physical appearance has, and how important it is to create a good feeling on the other person. The same thought is provided by interviewee 3, who also speaks about how it is also more difficult to get the truth out of a presencial meeting, the reason being that people always try to give a good impression, so are more inclined to give you false hope. Interviewee 2 and 4 agree on the importance of empathy and creating a relationship, same as the previous, but on the contrary of Interviewee 3 they think that physical presence speeds up greatly the sales cycle. On this argument interviewee 2 says: "it is very difficult to get the people in the right moment. A lot of times they do not have enough time or they are just not willing to listen to you". Same thought is

provided by interviewee 5 that talks about the fact that nobody is going to meet you in person anymore if they are not ready to close a deal: " It is much more efficient, the conversion rate on meeting a client is much higher face to face than on the phone. If you take a meeting in person you are much more likely to sign the contract". On the contrary, sometimes physical presence is considered an obsolete argument to close a deal (Bush, 2012). There should not be a need for it if the objective is to close the deal, as it could be done on the phone.

When talking about the challenges of inside sales we go back on the premise of being the contrary of the advantages of field sales. Most of the participants talk about the difficulty of creating trust and a solid buyer-customer relationship like interviewee 6 that talks about the impossibility of getting a closer relationship with the client only through the phone. One of the factors that impact this, as cited by interviewee 4 is that in a lot of service providers companies the sales cycle is divided between different sales agents. Building a relationship affects performance and the long term benefit for the company in a positive way (Schwepker, 2010). Changing agents makes this process and the information get lost and there is not enough time to cultivate a relationship before the customer gets handled to the next level of representatives. Interviewee 1 also talks about the problems with information but from the perspective of it being obsolete or incorrect due to the fast changing environment in customer companies, participant 1 underlines how this could be avoided by going personally to the client.

Interviewee 3 explains how it's also from his point of view more difficult to build trust. On top of it he considers the difficulties in processes that must be followed strictly to be able to reach the scalability objective. As pointed out by interviewee 2 and 5 the lack of process following and the need for scalability can have as outcome a low quality of sales.

Almost all the participants anyway think that there are greater advantages for the company in an inside sales approach, even with everything that has been said already.

They all agree that in terms of organization, time management, productivity, cost and scalability this is the right way to proceed. There are also different positive factors that we find throughout the interviews. Interviewee 2 and 4 speak about how easier it

is for the sales team to learn being all together in an office and on the phone. They can learn from each other and improve much faster. The same happens with information, not only can be shared much more easily inside the team, but also, as said by participants 3 and 4 the customer through digital files and email can have access to a greater amount of information in real time that can help win the sale faster. Another factor that needs to be taken into account as 3 out of 6 interviewees have spoken about that, is the possibility for the managers to correct and teach better and most effective ways in real time, making the representatives and the team grow better and faster. Interviewee 6 says: "For the manager it is much easier to explain the sale and for the representative to perpetrate it. You can sell the idea of it not only with your words".

## Technology

One of the main factors of change that have been analysed is the impact of technology in the sales world. The most important question that has been asked is the opinion of the participants regarding CRM. An important thought that has been developed in the literature and found no backup in the interviews is the fact that adaptation to new technologies could be a set back for the companies (Obla, 2018).

All the interviewees have agreed that it's a great tool and can be used for so many things. Starting from collecting monitoring and evaluating information as cited by interviewee 4 and remarked by everybody else. Interviewee 1 has his doubts about the fact that it has become a tool to micro manage and control all the activity of a sales representative to a sick extent, so positive but must be managed with care. He says: "CRM is a valid tool, when it is used to help the sales representative. When it's not a maniac tool to get information for the sake of having more information".

Interviewee 2 and 3 on the other hand think that this characteristic of control is one of the best features, same as interviewee 6 that thinks that can be used from this point of view to motivate and increase healthy competition on key productivity indicators (KPIs) and other productivity standards. A negative point on CRM is brought also by interviewee 5, she thinks that CRMs have helped avoid many repetitive and tedious tasks, but sometimes to an extent where we lose touch with the reality of the customer and we are able to see it only as a number in the system. This provokes the low quality of sales that has been talked about in the previous



paragraph. She says: "Generally speaking something has been lost using CRM, all the effort in the investigation of leads has been cut off, as the information is already available".

When asked about other technologies that have impacted the world of sales and can have a stronger impact on the future of this department most of the participants have talked about different technologies that they think are the most impactful.

One thing that is said in more than one interview is the use of video conference technology. Interviewee 1, 3 and 6 speak highly of it and the great impact in terms of reach and scalability that it has and will have in the future. Interviewee 6 says that we are now able to reach twenty people in one day while before it was only one per day: "From a sales perspective a team instead of doing 20 visits per month can make 20 calls per day, much more capability and higher sales targets and results".

Information can also be shared in the video conference and the effectiveness of sales is much higher than using the phone only. You are able to create trust and relationship as well as getting more decision makers in the same room at the same time, before that would have been a logistical nightmare. They all agree on this last point.

Other technologies that have been cited are as follows.

By participant 2:

- Call registration and passive listening. Each manager is able to listen and correct every step of the way the representatives.

By participant 4:

- GPS for field sales, that helps get to the appointments on time and target specifically a certain area to the full potential for field sales.
- Task automatization, less time invested and automatic reminder or action when it's needed.

By participant 5:

- Online signature softwares.

All the points made before sustain the point that digitalization is happening in all areas of sales and sales must be more and more tech savvy to be able to perform their job at the highest level (Andris, 2021).

## Sales ethics and perception

During the interviews different factors have been highlighted that affect the perception of the sales representative as well as the connection with sales ethics. Each interviewee has a different opinion and they all agree that it depends on certain factors, like the nature of the sales representative and/or customer state of mind, company reputation, nature of the product or service.

One term has come up twice from interviewee 3 and 4, consultative sales. On this topic interviewee 4 says: "Where I have worked in my career, it has always been consultative sales. The sale was always made inside a consulting approach. The objective was help building, thanks to the service, incremental sales for the client itself. That's what we tried to build".

The objective is to give more and more importance to the customer's needs and adapt the service to their necessities. As we could see in interview 1, 2 and 5, due to accessibility the clients are bothered everyday by a great number of calls, so it becomes difficult to discern what is needed and what is just another sales representative, as interviewee 1 said: "As a sales representative I'm looking for a service that I believe in and I can sell. The reality is that there are a lot of necessities but everybody is trying to sell. So it's difficult to distinguish between value and need".

Connected to this point, interviewee 2 states that sales are a hated category, but it's becoming more and more ethical due to the fear of losing a long term relationship. All the participants agree about the importance of creating long term relationships, so ethics of sales becomes a key factor. In the literature it is highlighted the importance of ethical sales to build long term relationships and to allow the company to keep growing and shining (Schwepker, 2010).

This comes back to consultative sales as found in interview 3 and 4. The objective must be the long term development and health of the client in relation or not to the seller business. Interviewee 3 says: "You should always be directing your effort to help your client grow and be better. Client growth must be the pillar of your strategy, if they become bigger and better you will also do. Sales should engrave that in their mind".

The consultative approach and all around help to the client, as stated by interviewee 6, brings also a downside factor, clients are getting used to having somebody available for them all the time, invading personal barriers and expecting full availability 24/7. The cost of not being there once is the possibility of losing the client.

This is related to the increase of difficulty in social complexity to sustain a more ethical sales cycle and it is something that will have to be deeply taken into account in the future of the department (Ameer, 2019).

## Women in sales

From a research point of view this was one of the main factors of change in the world of sales in the past few decades, saleswomen being a greater part of the sales departments, historically a men's job. It appears that is much less of a factor than expected. Both the women interviewed, participant 4 and 5, agreed on the fact that it is almost irrelevant to analyse this factor as a change input for the sales environment. Interviewee 5 says: "It's a small factor. At least not decisive. In some jobs empathy is more needed, so there is a difference".

They both agree that it's not a specific sales factor but it's more about management as well as society in general. Talking about women in management positions, interviewees 1 and 6 agree on the fact that it happened to them back in the day that at the moment of finalizing an agreement, they have seen clients asking women to be passed to their "boss". On the contrary in the literature we were able to find that women in the past few decades have been hired with the objective of becoming managers as their social skills and attitude makes them more suitable for the role (Fugate, 1988).

From a field sales perspective interviewee 1 and 2 agree that to start the conversation being a woman it could be maybe easier, but the reality is that it does not matter. It is all about skills and service. In the inside sales model they all agree it does not matter being male or female. Only interviewee 6 has said that maybe initial reception is better if a man is on the other side of the phone, but still almost irrelevant. He says: "Expectations towards women are still higher and harder to reach". Interviewee 3 says that for him it is irrelevant if it is a man or a woman working in sales, on the phone it is the same, capacities is the only thing that matters: "There is absolutely no difference in performance, right now in my team it is almost all girls. I don't see the difference, just a matter of who was better".

## The future of sales

Towards the end of the interviews it was possible to talk about what has been lost in the past few years in the sales environment. Different participants highlighted the lower quality of the sales due to lack of personal touch and standardized relationship through the phone, like participants 4 and 5. Interviewee 1 talks about business meetings and dinner that could help fortify and create a long term relationship, same as participant 4 that also speaks about the fact that in the past during the field sales era she was able to make friends with clients. Now it is much more difficult.

Interviewee 2 has no opinion about it and participant 3 looks at sales as a normal job that has been finally demystified. The only not related point about the future of sales has been brought up in interview 6 where the participant talks about how now sales cycles are much faster, connecting with what has been said before about availability. Good for the business and bad for the relationships.

In regards to the future of sales, the participants talked about different factors in the scenario. They all agree that technology will have a great impact. Consultative sales have been brought up a couple of times by Interviewee 3 and 4. At the same time interviewee 2 and 3 agree on the importance that digital marketing will have in the qualification of new clients based on needs and information. Interviewee 1 on the other side sees a future of only people talking on the phone where relationships are lost and the only things that matter is information and number, interviewee 4 sees the same but with a positive lens. Interviewee 5 on the contrary thinks that in certain industries sales will go back to a more human and field approach, as people will be working from home will be able to organize themselves better and if needed go and see the client: "From my point of view there will be a change of direction. Mostly because now we are bothering clients without barriers through the phone, we will go back a bit on the human relationship".

Participant 6 catching up on working from home is worried about availability in the future. A solution could be a specific person in the company taking care of work-life balance to set the much needed boundaries, he says: "I have the feeling that this way of working, half remotely, is here to stay. If the company and the employees reach an agreement it would be great".

In the literature we find different points being made but the most important one is for

sure the consultative approach to sales, it is the one that more companies are adhering to and the one that will have the most impact in the future (Hinson, 2018).

## Discussion

In this last part of the dissertation different implications and findings will be discussed and evaluated.

It is clear from the interviews carried out that in the past few years a lot has changed in the world of sales, and clearly a lot is expected to be changing in the future. All the interviewees agreed on the fact that the implementation of an inside sales model has been beneficial for service providers companies to be able to control logistical and organizational cost of sales departments. It also comes to light the fact that what was believed to not be possible to sell on the phone, it can be sold.

The move towards the inside sales model has taken its time and it is not at all sudden as perceived in the beginning, as there is evidence that for some companies field sales at the moment of closing a contract is still a reality. From the data collected from the participants it is clear that the inside sales vs field sales fight will probably never be over and the transition to a full inside sales model never completed.

There are different reasons for it, first of all the massive impact of **technological changes** have made selling easier, but at the same time create awareness on what is important in terms of sales for long term health of enterprises, that is being more focused on what the customer wants than a specific model. This means that at some point the inside sales model will be the preferred way to go for most companies that want to survive, taking into account that if the client wants a physical presence at the moment of selling, enterprises need to be able to provide them with it.

**Consultative sales** appears to be the most important approach to be taken into consideration. In different words all the participants agree that sales ethics is important. But should be pointed towards the benefits of the clients, right now ethics is pushed apart if a sale needs to be closed. The reason being overworked markets, with so many competitors that quality of sales gets left behind. Scalability has become more important than quality as the objective appears to be higher performance with less costs, more impact with less resources, following the trend of cost reduction started with the transition from field to inside sales.

Rules must be set for consultative approach as well. Work-life balance needs to be taken much more seriously as well as a higher level of qualification of clients to avoid everybody bothering everybody all the time, due to an increase in competition and number of companies offering different services to the same market.

In the first part of the dissertation we made different hypothesis that we can now discuss:

*H1 - Technology disruption has pushed the traditional sales model to a change of direction, this is the most important factor that has impacted sales departments.*

Indeed in the interviews it appears that technology has been one of the biggest factors in the change from traditional field sales to an inside sales model. We have to take into consideration that everything around sales thanks to technology has changed as well. The invention of the GPS for example as cited by one of the participants has helped the sales department to save money on trips and time spent looking for companies location around cities. We can say the same about video conferencing, helping to get 20 decision makers in the same room at the same time as said by interviewee 6.

*H2 - Gender equality, so the increasing number of women in sales has had a great impact on sales structure, not only from a managerial perspective but also on the front line.*

In regards to this hypothesis we were not able to find evidence or opinions in favour of it. The two women interviewed were expressing the fact that in the sales department they do not see very much this distinction between men and women. They could see it on the other hand from a managerial perspective. On this point the literature disagrees even if the only papers found on this regard were dated before 1990. The men interviewed mostly did not take into great consideration the increasing number of women as in their experience, maximum 20 years, women have always been there.

H3 - *The world of sales, alongside the corporate world, has become more and more sensitive to business ethics, this has a great effect on the way sales are carried out from an inside and field sales perspective.*

This hypothesis has been proved correct by the interviews and literature.

Consultative sales and sales ethics is a factor that influences the sales department now and will in the future. Using mostly field sales to improve the relationships and inside sales to be more ethical and correct possible to create a great corporate image as expressed by interviewees.



## Conclusions and Recommendations

In this dissertation we have tried to answer the following question, *"Is the move towards an inside sales model in business-to-business sales inevitable?"*. The objective for answering this question was to highlight the fact that there has been a very big change in the way sales departments are working and most importantly the fact that the world of sales has been adapting to different changing factors.

During the course of this dissertation different sub questions have been analysed, in regards to the factors of change related to the world of sales in the past decade, we were able to gather different answers, opinions and points of view, some of them were aligned with the thoughts that the author had at the beginning, like for example the fact that the move towards an inside sales model is inexorable. Some other answers were fresh points of view about the future of the topic at hand, like the fact that we are now missing out a lot on a relationship level between buyer and seller.

The research tool that has been used was mainly qualitative, different interviews have been carried out on people from different backgrounds, ages and professional levels. There has been some difficulties to find the correct people and right balance of diversity between the interviewees and clearly more people and a broader approach could have helped to narrow down answers and point of view to a more statistical vision of the topic.

It has been encountered that even if the questions were specific enough the answers were sometimes very diverse in their specific content, the elements in the answers of the interviewees seem to be mixed and there is nobody that has the same point of view on all the different topics. We can find people that agree on specific issues for different reasons, and then totally disagree or have completely different points of view on other topics.

As said before, looking back at the interviews we should have provided more guidance at the moment of receiving the answers to help the interviewee have a specific opinion on things that some of the previous interviewees said or thought, that way the analysis would have been less broad and more specific. Interviewing more people could have helped fix this issue as well.

As said for the future it could be useful to have a bigger cluster of people to interview and maybe focus on one specific factor of change once recognized as the most important. In our case that could have been technology and the effects that it has on all the other sub factors that we have analysed.

In regards to data that have been collected, something that was unexpected is the very low impact that the women as a factor of change in the industry had. Most of the people did not think it was relevant to address this as a factor of change, must be taken into account that the men felt uncomfortable answering the question as they did not feel entitled to. The women on the other hand diminished that as a non factor.

Different hypotheses have been analysed and out of the three initial ones two have been demonstrated by literature and the interviews.

H1 - Technology disruption has pushed the traditional sales model to a change of direction, this is the most important factor that has impacted sales departments.

H2 - Gender equality, so the increasing number of women in sales has had a great impact on sales structure, not only from a managerial perspective but also on the front line.

H3 - The world of sales, alongside the corporate world, has become more and more sensitive to business ethics, this has a great effect on the way sales are carried out from an inside and field sales perspective.

Technology has pushed the traditional sales model to change. Ethics is very relevant in the world of sales and the direction towards it is moving. The research was not able to demonstrate the impact of more women in the field of sales as it has been found irrelevant.

For the future it could be useful to deep dive into the technology factor that had and has so many implications in this field of study at this time. Managers and sales experts could find material of interest in the data and findings collected by this

dissertation as it could be used to develop a sales strategy based on what are the most important factors that are and will impact this department in the future.

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# Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

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Research Students Declaration Form  
(Thesis/Author Declaration Form)**

Name: Aron Villa

Student Number: x15013600

Degree for which thesis is submitted: Msc in Management

Title of Thesis: **The inexorable move towards an inside sales model in the field of business-to-business sales: an analysis from the service-oriented sales perspective**

Date: 17/08/2021

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