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**A STUDY OF THE EVOLVING NEEDS OF HIRING MANAGERS IN THE  
BUSINESS-TO-BUSINESS TECHNOLOGY SALES SECTOR IN IRELAND.**

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **A STUDY OF THE EVOLVING NEEDS OF HIRING MANAGERS IN THE BUSINESS-TO-BUSINESS TECHNOLOGY SALES SECTOR IN IRELAND.**

**EITHNE LEAVY**

The purpose of this study is to investigate from the perspective of hiring managers, the perceived gap that exists in third level education relative to the opportunity for well-educated sales professionals in the business-to-business technology sector in Ireland.

The author will explore the sector within the context of the Irish economy and present key data specific to the outlook and expected economic contribution to the Irish economy as well as considering salient risks to the sector's contribution.

The study builds on the work of prized journals within the field of sales and business education which examine the emerging skills required for success in the field of business-to-business technology sales. The results of the qualitative survey employed by the author, points to the importance of financial acumen as skill which is highly desirable by sales managers. These findings are important within the context of the relationship of education to sales success.

Also examined from the perspective of hiring managers, was the impact on sales performance in the field when recruiting sales executives who had sales/business focused third level qualifications versus those without. This paper achieves the objective of highlighting how sales pedagogy can be adopted to be more meaningful in the context of technology sales. It also exposes the opportunity for closer alignment between industry and education to support that development and if addressed could have the potential to accelerate the economic contribution from this sector.

## DECLARATION

### Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

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(Thesis/Author Declaration Form)

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## **List of Abbreviations**

Business-to-Business: B2B

business-to-business: b2b

Technology: Tech

Rep: Representative

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **Overview of Structure**

This dissertation will be set out in six chapters.

**Chapter One** of this dissertation introduces the background to the Technology Sector in Ireland specific to the importance of the economic opportunity for Business to Business sales and presents the decision to research the evolving skills requirements of the sector to determine if gaps exist between industry needs and sales education relative to the growing number of career opportunities.

**Chapter Two** presents the literature that currently exists discussing the gaps in sales education specific to employability in industry as well as the challenges of recruiting students into the sales profession and examines the research that exists on the ideal learning environments for producing sales ready students into industry.

**Chapter Three** outlines the research methodology chosen for this study, including an overview of the qualitative research design approach and an overview of the interviews structure, the questionnaire used and the justification for the chosen methodology together with the limitations of the methodology.

**Chapter Four** presents the results and findings of the research. Descriptions of the sample and survey instruments are provided and the emerging themes are examined and discussed.



**Chapter Five** discusses the findings of the study in the context of previous research and the implications for the sector.

**Chapter Six** presents conclusions and recommendations for industry along with opportunities for further research.

## **Introduction**

### **Background Information - Overview of the Industry & importance to Irish Economy**

According to IBEC and Technology Ireland (the leading representative body for the technology sector in Ireland), the technology sector contributed approx. €44bn to the Irish economy in 2020. Employing over 210,000 people, Ireland's Technology sector wages are 50% higher than the rest of the economy. The sector's actual contribution to GDP is approx. 13% and has seen growth of approx. 12% per annum since 2013. (IBEC, 2021). Also 9/10 global software, 9/10 US technology and all top 10 born on internet companies have EU HQs in Ireland. Una Fitzpatrick, director of Technology Ireland recognises that Ireland's technology sector is at the heart of our economy and will continue to be the driver of our success as we recover from the COVID pandemic however she cautions that our enviable success in this sector is not guaranteed. Investment in education is key to preserving our talent pool and our competitive advantage.

A quick search of LinkedIn suggests 1000+ technology sales jobs open in Ireland on any one day. (LinkedIn, 2022) If filled faster, there could certainly be a benefit to the Irish economy. However, much literature has been written cautioning the rigour of candidate identification and selection process to avoid the negative financial consequences for organisations of bad hires. (Murphy, 1988, Klewer et. al, 1995). Gallup estimates that the annual cost of replacing 100 workers at a company would be between \$660,000 and \$2.6 million. (Kitching, J. 2008) and the cost of attrition in the first year of a salesperson's career has been estimated at three to four times their salary (Van Clief 1991).

Several studies have found the role of salespeople is shifting due to the rapid advancement of technology, the complexity of products, and the increasing volume of information available in the marketplace (Peesker, K.M. et al., 2022). Therefore, it is important for B2B technology organisations to identify salespeople who will have the necessary skills and attitudes to deal with the complexities of the role and become productive fast. Technology sales is complex and requires a set of sophisticated skills. If we are not investing in addressing skills shortages and changing requirements in Technology Sales, does that put Ireland in a vulnerable position from a future employment /investment perspective?

It is critically important that business schools produce sellable graduates fit to take on readily available sales roles. (Nielson and Cummins, 2019). Whilst there continues to be large focus and investment in developing ICT skills within Ireland, the author suggests that a gap remains in focusing on developing sales education within business school which can be out of touch with key trends and needs of industry. (Luthy, 2000).

Given the huge contribution of B2B technology sales to the Irish economy, this is a gap where more research is urgently needed to determine if this should be addressed.

A March 2019 Irish Times article by Kevin O'Sullivan outlines that Ninety companies were to partner with Irish third level institutions to invest €100m into training 700 post graduate students in the areas of ICT but the investment does not cover business skills in sector. Leisen, Tippins, and Lilly (2004) assert that 75% of executives place sales skills as a priority on their wish list for marketing/business curriculum yet felt gaps exist. The author asserts that given the opportunity in the sector, it is important to ensure industry and education are in alignment.

As HBR article by Frank V. Cespedes and Daniel Weinfurter, insightfully points out, in the US labour market analysis firm Burning Glass states 60% of job postings for sales reps required minimum a university degree and it takes average 41days to fill a sales job compared with 33 days for others. (HBR, 2016) At what cost to business? From the perspective of hiring managers in technology sales, what are the gaps with current business programs for hiring into complex technology sales? If better qualified graduates were entering the technology sales market, would that a.) reduce time to find and hire candidates, b.) improve productivity ramp of sales executives in complex B2B technology sales roles?

## **Value of Research - Rationale**

Information symmetry between buyers and sellers means technology buyers are more informed v's previous times (Pink, D., 2012). In today's internet society, buyers can access the same information as sellers. Transactional sales can be automated and driven via AI or e-commerce, however considered purchases still require human intervention. Complex business to business (B2B) sales requires a set of sophisticated and digital skills to ensure alignment with new hybrid purchasing behaviours. (Hingley, 2021). Literature shows that sales performance is directly connected to university sales education (Bolander et al.,2014). Reuters recently raised the alarm on how reliant the Irish economy is to tax income from ten of the leading multinational organisations making up half of Ireland corporate tax revenue and that almost 25% of total tax revenue for the first half of 2022 came from corporation tax from multinationals. (Reuters, 2022). According to ESRI findings, a region's ability to attract high-value Foreign Direct Investment is influenced by factors such as its market potential, market growth, the percentage of the working-age population that participates in education and training programmes, and the level of expertise among its workforces. (ESRI, 2021). Therefore, if we are not investing in addressing skills shortages and changing requirements in the area of business-to-business technology sales, Ireland will be in a vulnerable position from a future employment and investment opportunity perspective.

## **Research Aims and Objectives**

The focus of this paper is for the researcher to investigate the attitudes of hiring managers in B2B technology sales in Ireland to the evolving skills they seek when hiring for success in their sales teams. The author will examine the current attitudes of hiring managers to candidates with sales/business focused third level qualifications and consider if graduates hired into technology sales with specific sales focused third level qualifications have any discernible impact on sales performance in the B2B technology sector. The research attempts to uncover if these sales managers have identified gaps in higher education that if addressed could support a better talent pool of candidates for faster productivity in role. This study will and by proxy, consider the potential contribution therefore to the Irish economy.

Contribution of the Technology Sector to the Irish Economy:

As stated above, the digital sector contributes approx. 13% to the Irish economy and currently growth of 12% per annum is observed. (IBEC, 2021) Sales roles are hard to fill suggesting there are not enough good candidates in the marketplace. The rationale for the research is to determine if hiring managers in the B2B technology sales sector agree a gap exists in third level education to help develop an adequate talent pool in order to accelerate successfully hiring the right candidates faster which will drive results faster and ultimately contribute back to growth in the economy.

### Evolving Sales Pedagogy & Influence on Career Choice:

The study aims to look at previous research on broadening the sales curriculum at third level. It will also research on how third level curriculum can influence career choices of students in the market place. Given the current well documented war on talent, if there was more emphasis on sales education could that make a career in sales more attractive thus increasing the available talent pool ? The interviews will attempt to ascertain how do hiring managers in the sector perceive sales education at third level and what skill set gaps are they identifying for new hires into roles and how might third level sales skills help address sales productivity. The interviews will seek to determine hiring managers thoughts on whether if third level curriculums were to designed better to address these gaps would make graduate hires more attractive and also help to speed up productivity in role. The researcher will analyse the outcomes and consider what impact might that have on the overall economy. The value of the research is in providing an important opportunity for triangulating and aligning the attitudes and opinions of senior stakeholders in industry with educators to improve prospects for graduates, industry and overall economic outcomes.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Introduction**

The literature review will delve into available literature associated with the pedagogy of sales education and will examine that in the context of data that articulates the contribution of the technology sector, specifically business to business sales, to the Irish economy. Further literature will look at the evolving needs of the technology business to business sales sector. This will be juxtaposed against literature discussing how technology organisations can impact attracting business students into the sales profession. Further literature that considers pedagogical approach to developing core skills for optimised sales performance will be reviewed in the context of business education. The criteria of hiring managers when seeking out technology sales reps will be examined to highlight potential challenges, limitations, and opportunities for closer alignment between business and education.

### **Contribution of Technology Sector to the Irish Economy**

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment state that Ireland is a global hub for the IT industry and home to a wide variety of active Irish technology firms as well as the headquarters for many of the world's biggest names in the EMEA (Europe, Middle East, and Africa) region. A total of 210,000 are employed in Ireland's technology sector including more than 80,000 high-tech experts and an additional 8,000 IT jobs are expected to open in Ireland each year. (enterprise.gov.ie, 2022). According to IDA Ireland, the ICT industry in Ireland generates €35 billion in exports yearly. More people are pursuing careers in technology, including technology sales,

because of its high earning potential. The result is high demand for skilled workers who can meet the needs of the sector (Irish Times, 2021).

In a recent “Future Ready” report Danny McCoy, IBEC’s CEO, highlights that the world of work is changing rapidly and whilst that comes with great opportunities it also comes with great risk. There is an urgent need for employers, educators, and government to work together to take advantage of how the world of work is changing in reaction to rapid globalisation and digitisation. In their study IBEC is advocating for “Smarter World, Smarter Work” on behalf of Irish industry to ensure its perspective is understood, championed, and implemented. They report the results when graduate recruiters were surveyed. While academic qualifications were generally the first box checked during screening, their emphasis shifted to general qualities and performance including subject matter expertise as well as more transversal skills such as personal leadership and business acumen. (Ibec.ie, 2021).

### **Criteria of Hiring Managers in Technology Sales**

Extensive research of changing hiring criteria for sales roles job posts as well as how hiring managers perceive the necessary skills for successful salespeople hires, identified growing importance of analytical skills in order to stay ahead of their customers evolving needs and assimilate and present solutions that resolved their specific industry challenges. (Peesker, K.M. et al., 2022). But does alone this address the criteria of hiring managers in B2B Technology Sales. This level of analytical skills Peesker refers to for success in role also requires deep financial and business acumen



in order to present the right business case to the customer to support their financial objectives. Compounded by vast volumes of publicly available information and the reduction of information asymmetry as a result of technology, a far greater responsibility is bestowed on the sales person to be able to contextualise the information in a meaningful way in order to make a successful sale. Being able to develop a point of view enabling the sales person to become an effective challenger is critical in business to business technology sales in order to bring meaningful insights to customers and prospects and convince them not to accept the status quo. Other sales skills which hiring managers have identified in previous research as essential include collaboration (Claro & Ramos, 2018), listening skills (Cromer & Drollinger, 1999), and technology skills such as salesforce automation tools and social media tools (Román & Rodríguez, 2015) and (Hanson & Sharpe, 2019).

In consideration of sales education, should we only look at business degrees as the solution to the problem? For example, when compared to more traditional methods of instruction, online training is far more efficient. In the past, becoming academically qualified in software development required completing a degree in computer science. However due to some revolutionary technologies in the education business, we're now able to provide an academically credit-rated course that will place you in the workforce faster. This is very important because the right investment in digital skills in Ireland could have a dramatic impact on GDP contribution over the next few years (McHugh, R. 2022). Having the right digital skills is critical to ensuring success as a business not only in large enterprise organisations but also in smaller SMEs within the Irish technology sector. But is this enough? Examination of what hiring managers value will help to determine what should the emphasis in education be to support sales

success in role. Murray & Robinson (2001), concluded that university graduate recruiters of sales jobs in the UK did not value specific sales or IT skills training, rather that would be best served by the in-house programs of the companies themselves specific to their own commercial environments.

### **Evolving Needs of Technology Business to Business (B2B) Sales Skills**

A recent Gartner survey on the future of B2B Sales 2025 (Gartner, 2020) found that digital connections will increase the interdependence of people, processes, and technology, making traditional sales models less trustworthy over time and that by 2025 80% of B2B transactions will take place on digital channels. It is predicted that most sales organisations are unprepared for this. Sales leaders need adaptive solutions that optimise digital interactions to stay relevant and drive revenue. B2B buyers have had to adapt their own systems and processes to keep up with the changing landscape. Data-driven and revenue-focused tactics are the future of B2B sales. As a result, sellers are left with a lot of work to do. There are a number of factors that must be taken into consideration when it comes to the right education and tools for future sales organisations, company leadership, and the people who are shaping future sales leaders (Forbes, 2021).

Embedded into the philosophy of many further education institutions is the objective of helping its students to reach their full potential. But what skills do employers value? Different disciplines teach and learn differently. Meta-cognitive tools assist pupils comprehend their learning and reasoning. Some jobs demand subject-specific knowledge and for others, employers are less concerned with the topic studied and more interested in general capabilities. Some graduate recruiters are open to employing talent from outside their main area to guarantee diversity in the work place.

Some companies say a candidate's education gets them an interview, but their employability abilities win them the job. This employability challenge isn't about abandoning academic rigour or standards, but focused on how subjects are taught and judged. This needs education institutions to teach students how to express their knowledge, abilities, and traits in a way that future employers would recognise and value. (Artess, Hooley, and Mellors-Bourne, 2017)

Drawing on work from previous scholars, Finch et al. (2012) note, that studying the gap between marketing education and marketing practice, research has shown the relevance of meta-skills, which include communication, critical thinking, interpersonal communication, and leadership. Bridging the gap will help prepare sales students for the complexity of real world B2B technology selling. Recently, the sales profession has embraced knowledge generating and sharing as essential parts of their role to support them achieving revenue and performance goals. To be successful, sales people must be knowledge brokers and co-creators of value by sharing information with consumers. Therefore salespeople who want to generate value with clients must have a deep knowledge of the products, services, and ideas they sell, as well as the market, their rivals, and their target audience. (Itani et. al., 2022). This coupled with effective use of technology such as CRM or Social Media such as LinkedIn are all evolving skills required to succeed in B2B selling. Peesker et. al., (2021), assert that little research has contributed to the identification of evolving sales skills in predicting sales performance. This gap is surprising given the implication for on-going skills development in supporting sales outcomes for B2B sellers.

Transversal or 21st century talents can benefit the workforce and society (Gov.ie, 2021). As technology and global trends continue to touch many parts of modern life,

organisations will rely more on their employees' skills to remain competitive. The worldwide pandemic has increased the need for human development beyond traditional pedagogy to foster a collaborative, inclusive working dynamic. Transversal skills develops a solid set of competences that promote development of softer skills to address the challenges of today's working environment. Critical and innovative thinking, interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, media and information literacy, global citizenship, and other, (respect for religious beliefs and healthy living) will all play their part. (UNESCO, 2019).

### **Sales Performance of Sales / Business Graduates (self-efficacy in sales education)**

Findings in key sales pedagogy have concluded that after one year, salespeople hired from universities with a sales programme outperform those without. (Fogel et al, 2012; Bolander et al, 2014; Nielson & Cummins, 2018). On examination of why, it appears that university sales programmes and performance are mediated by increasing selling practises. Salespeople from formal sales programmes used rapport building, benefit presenting, and emotional response ultimately boosting performance. Research has also determined that when students participate in formal sales programs, attitudes to career choices can also be improved with wider implications on salespeople's efforts, lower turnover and ultimately increasing career longevity in sales (Ingram & Lee, 1990; Johnston et al., 1990).

According to Self Determination theory, individuals' optimal performance in many of life domains, including employment, is facilitated when autonomy, competence, and relatedness requirements are met (Itani et. al., 2022). Self-Determined learning theory

(Heutagogy) as written about by many scholars, states that learners should be able to use team based and peer to peer learning environments to generate new knowledge as well as have the individual learning skills to reflect on how their learning experiences will help future employability prospects. Self-directed learners like real-world simulations that test and enhance their skills. Business simulations such as the UK’s UBC (inter-university business simulation competition) provide the opportunity for business students to develop and practice their managerial and personal learning competencies.

Figure 1: UBC Self-Determined Learning (SdL) model. (Fearon, et al., 2020).

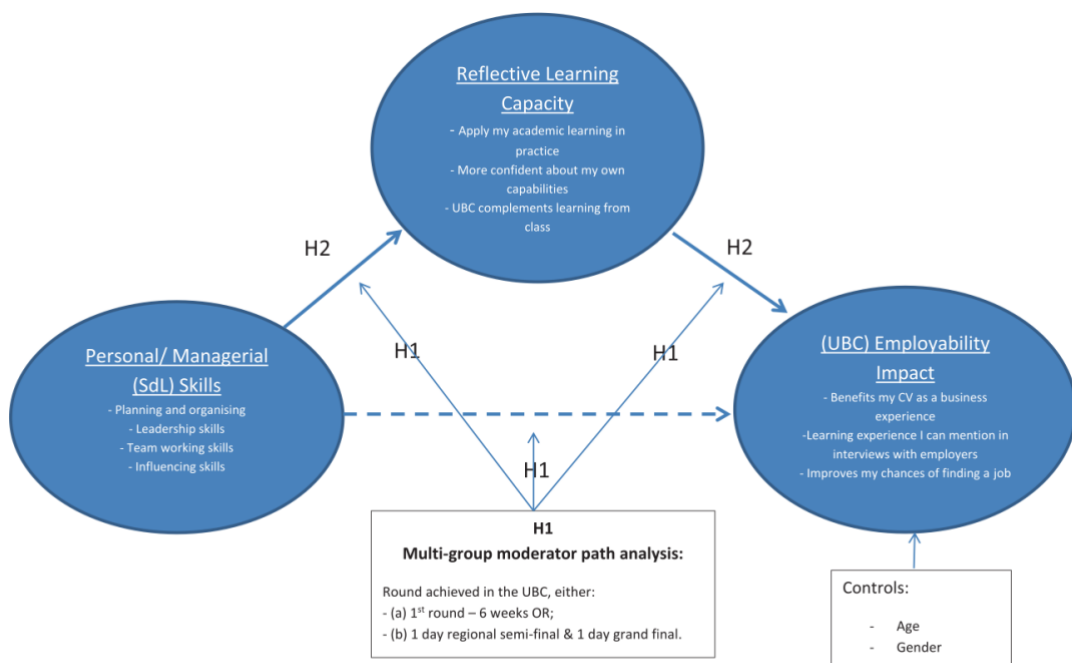


Figure 1. UBC self-determined learning (SdL) model.

An empirical review of the literature on Sales Education found that students who are exposed to such experiential methods of sales teaching can improve critical thinking skills. (Cummins et. al., 2020). Yet they also note that due to the recency of the growth of many sales programs that include experiential learning opportunities such as sales

competitions, limited research still exists on the efficacy of the programs that exist that can deliver improved sales education that will benefit practical sales skills development. This is important from a graduate identity perspective also. To get work after college, graduates need to craft a "narrative of employability" that demonstrates their skills and experiences. Specifically, in interview situations, graduates need to demonstrate critical thinking abilities to determine which components of their background (academic and otherwise) best serve the needs of a given organisation that matches with company expectations so that employers can assess their potential. (Hinchliffe, G. W., Jolly, A., 2011).

When it comes to a person's employability, it's not only about the transfer from tertiary education to work. Having an open mind and a thirst for knowledge is also a key component of employability, which is implicit in most definitions. It is possible to see employability as a means of helping oneself become a more competent person. Individuals with this employability skill set are not only well-versed in their technical field, but they can also put that expertise to use in a variety of dynamic scenarios, allowing them to grow professionally. (Hinchliffe, G. W., Jolly, A., 2011). Are Irish Education institutions doing enough here to provide experiential opportunities to graduates in an effort to improve their "narrative of employability". The author will assess this through the lens of the B2B technology hiring manager community who have participated in this survey.

### **Gap in Business School Sales Skills Development**

Sales research has grown in importance over the past 34 years, but academics have just scratched the surface of how to improve sales education and increase student interest in sales as a career path. (Deeter-Schmelz & Peltier, 2019; Hammond, 2020;

Nielson & Cummins, 2019). The Association for Advancement in Collegiate Business Education in the US, claims that business education must remain relevant to its practitioners in order to succeed. Scholars in the field of marketing agree with this assertion. A primary purpose of marketing education, according to Lincoln (2007), is to help students make the transition from student to practitioner, while Hill and McGinnis (2007) argue that students need to be prepared for real-world challenges. They assert that at the heart of what businesses want is curiosity, which is constantly seeking the new and different and not satisfied with what has already been achieved or conquered. The challenge of growing levels of competition, expansion of the global economy as a whole, and the unrelenting desire of consumers for new, cutting-edge solutions however compound the challenges of education and Industry alignment in keeping up with changing skills requirements. More and more business require sales practitioners who are curious and have the ability for critical, creative and reflective thinking and complex problem solving and these are the skills that sales students need to be learning in order to survive and thrive in the fast paced, ever-changing world of B2B technology sales. Many researchers have attempted to highlight the evolving skills gaps in marketing and sales between education and practitioners. Fitch et al (2012) agree that meta-skills are the foundation of practitioner skills in the field and therefore should be prioritised in education course development over more functional skills. Not only will meta-skills set graduates apart in terms of employability, but the skills they will bring to any potential organisation will help provide a competitive advantage.

## **Attracting Students into Sales as a Profession**

Students are unable to learn about future employers' roles and organisational traits because they lack direct interaction with them. This lack of knowledge with the organization's norms, beliefs, and incentive systems makes it difficult for students to assess if their own needs, goals, and values align with those of the company. (Cummins, S. and Nielson, B., 2019, Fogel et al., 2012), Cummins and Nielson (2019) found that students' desire to find a job can be influenced by the integration of recruiting and learning in the classroom by participating firms. Research has found that when it comes to job retention and compensation, graduates of sales schools have a better track record than other college students. Therefore it is critical that B2B technology firms in Ireland are engaged and working with third level education to find and recruit sales students.

In a HEA report by the department of Education and Skills in Ireland, the 2015 National Employer survey concluded that although overall there is a satisfactory rate of collaboration between education and industry in Ireland, more could be done including more collaboration on course design relative to skills required, internships and placements and better facilitation of open days and jobs fairs. (HEA, 2015). The report notes that Ireland's economic competitiveness can be enhanced by a strong interaction between further/higher education and industry, and the education system is a critical component of a successful enterprise infrastructure in Ireland. Of some concern is the fact that whilst overall employer satisfaction with ICT skills was high, there was a lower rate of satisfaction with business acumen and awareness which is a key skill typically required in B2B technology sales. And notably, employer organisations who had higher levels of recruitment from outside Ireland stated that



Irish graduates have a lower level of practical workplace experience than their foreign graduates. As part of this study the researcher will test the interaction that exists today between the survey participants organisations and industry to determine any potential gaps that may persist.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this section is to present an overview of the research instrument designed to answer the research question set forth in this paper. A research paradigm is a worldview or set of beliefs that impacts research methods (Creswell, 2009). Social constructivist, pragmatic, postpositivist, and advocacy are Creswell's four research paradigms. Interpretivists argue that reality is a socially created construct in which individuals have their own sense of reality based on their own interpretations of the world (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2012).

### **Research Design**

The author has opted for a qualitative study implementing in-depth interviews using non-probabilistic sampling techniques. Qualitative research is a research strategy that usually emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data. As a research strategy it is “inductivist, constructionist and interpretivist” (Bryman, 2008. p 366). Qualitative interviews allowed the researcher to connect with

people more deeply. Rowley (2012: 262) emphasises that interviews are beneficial for “understanding experiences, opinions, attitudes, beliefs, and processes.

An email was sent by the researcher to fifteen identified sales managers in six technology sales organisations in Ireland including an overview of the research purpose and the questionnaire which was to be the subject of the interview. (See Appendix C). Included in the email was a request for consent and it was made clear that candidates were free to withdraw at any time from the study. (See appendix. B). A schedule of time slots was included into the email in an effort to ensure adequate time was made available to both the interviewees and the researcher to complete the research on time. Positive responses were received from eight candidates from four organisations within the B2B technology sales sector in Ireland. Four of the respondents were from the organisation where the researcher herself works and of the remaining four, two were from the same organisation. Two of the target participants responded apologising for not participating but elected not to due to other work commitments which limited their time. Two further targets responded that they would be on annual leave making it difficult to find an alternative time that suited, and three targets did not respond.

## **Research Questionnaire**

(See Appendix C).

The research questionnaire is set out in three sections. The demographics section which contains the first seven questions focuses on facts related to the present time and has the purpose of putting the interviewees at ease. The answers to these questions are captured in the participant profiles (Appendix A).

The second section asks the participants to rank in importance on a seven-point Likert scale, twenty-three skills they seek when hiring and onboarding sales executives. The following three questions are specific to their inhouse onboarding sales training and which skills provide the most value to their business.

The third section of the questionnaire contains seven further open questions exploring the relationships each organisation and manager has with third level institutions and their overall attitudes to hiring graduates.

The final two questions seek to determine any observable difference between sales/business graduates' performance versus other in their organisations.

## **Research Sample**

Qualitative research sample sizes should be subjectively small enough to allow the researcher ample resource to manage the research objectives yet of sufficient size to ensure new findings can be uncovered (Sandelowski, 1995). The size of the project also has an impact on sampling size with Braun & Clarke (2013), recommending 6-10 participant interviews is adequate for small projects as a desirable number to ensure data is manageable whilst still allowing patterns to emerge. "Heterogeneity of the sample" can also impact the theoretical saturation point (Guest et al., 2006). Yet this is not absolute as more data typically can add infinitely more data.

The sample used in any research is required to be purposeful (Mason 2002; Sparkes & Smith 2014) and based on maximum variation sampling, which allows the researcher to 'explore multiple facets of a problem and investigate issues holistically' (Sparkes & Smith 2014: 70). According to Maykut & Morehouse (1994), the researcher must pick people who are representative of the phenomenon's spectrum of experiences in order to highlight any meaningful experiential differences (Kind and Horrocks, 2010).

## Data Collection

The researcher determined to conduct a qualitative research method. Collection of data was from a series of one-to-one interviews which followed a semi structured approach using mainly open questions enabling a flexible and interpretative approach to the data collection allowing for convenience sampling. Convenience sampling obtains data from whoever is willing to participate, most approachable, or available to the researcher (Scholtz, 2021, Wienclaw, 2019). This has allowed the author to gather a depth of information in the most efficient manner. The purpose of collecting data in this way was to fully understand attitudes, opinions, and experiences of the interviewees to capture the critical skills that B2B technology sales managers prioritise when hiring sales executives and through this perspective consider the impact that offering more sales focused third level qualifications would make on the attitudes of hiring managers in the B2B technology industry relative to any identified impact on sales performance in the sector in Ireland. Konstantina et al (2018), point out that as previously concluded by Morse, less participants are required for a study where more usable data are collected. For this study each semi structured interview was scheduled to be one hour in length with a series of un-biased and open-ended questions providing ample opportunity for detailed responses for the analysis of the attitudes, experiences, and opinions of the eight participants all of whom are at managerial level and have hiring responsibilities within their organisations, making them a desirable candidate for sampling. Each organisation selected is situated within the B2B technology sector in Ireland. The interviews were subjective based on personal experiences of the individuals sampled. Therefore, the research approach chosen was interpretivist in nature. The author of this article is herself a sales

manager for a multinational B2B technology organisation and has access to a network of sales managers both colleagues and ex colleagues in other B2B technology organisations to support the interview process.

### **Participant Profiles**

The research attempted to explore the attitudes of hiring managers in B2B technology sales in Ireland to the evolving skills they seek when hiring for success in their sales teams and whether they have identified gaps in higher education that if addressed, could support a better talent pool of candidates for faster productivity in role. The researcher has selected and conducted interviews with eight sales managers who responded to the request for interview (See Appendix A; Participant Profile). They come from four different organisations within the B2B Technology sales field in Ireland all of whom have hiring responsibilities within their respective businesses. Two were male and six were female (despite inviting a more 50/50 participant sample to maintain a diverse and inclusive mix of gender representation). Each respondent is aged between 40 and 55 years of age.

Participant 1 is a female senior sales manager who works for organisation XXX, a US multinational organisation with six thousand global employees. She has been working in the technology sales sector for over twenty years and moved to organisation XXX 8 months ago. She has a headcount of eight direct reports who are sales executives, and she has hiring responsibility for her business. She currently has no open positions to fill.

Participant 2 is a female senior sales manager who works for organisation AAA, a US multinational organisation with one hundred and sixty-five thousand global employees. She has been working in the technology sales sector for over twenty years and has been in her specific role for six years. She has a headcount of ten direct reports who are sales executives, and she has hiring responsibility for her business. She currently has no open positions to fill.

Participant 3 is a female senior sales manager who works for organisation ABC, a US multinational organisation with seven and a half thousand global employees. She has been working in the technology sales sector for over fifteen years and has been in her specific role for eighteen months. She has a headcount of six direct reports who are sales executives, and she has hiring responsibility for her business. She currently has one open position to fill.

Participant 4 is a male senior sales director who works for organisation XXX, a US multinational organisation with seven and a half thousand global employees. He has been working in the technology sales sector for over fifteen years and has been in his specific role for three years. He has headcount responsibility for sixty sales executives and oversees hiring responsibility for his business together with his sales managers who are his direct reports. There are currently five to six open sales executive positions to fill within his division.

Participant 5 is a female business development manager who works for organisation 123, a US multinational organisation with one hundred and forty-three thousand global employees. She has been working in the technology sales sector for over seventeen years and has been in her specific role for seven years. She has a headcount of six direct reports who are business development consultants, and she has hiring responsibility for her business. She currently has two open positions to fill.

Participant 6 is a female area sales manager who works for organisation 123, a US multinational organisation with one hundred and forty-three thousand global employees. She has been working in the technology sales sector for over ten years and has been in her specific role for two years and 9 months. She has a headcount of six direct reports who are sales executives, and she has hiring responsibility for her business. She currently has one open position to fill.

Participant 7 is a male senior sales manager who works for organisation 123, a US multinational organisation with one hundred and forty-three thousand global employees. He has been working in the technology sales sector for seventeen years and has been in his specific role for nine years. He has a headcount of four direct reports who are sales executives, and he has hiring responsibility for his business. He currently has one open position to fill.

Participant 8 is a female senior sales manager who works for organisation 123, a US multinational organisation with one hundred and forty-three thousand global employees. She has been working in the technology sales sector for over twelve years



and has been in her specific role three years. She has a headcount of eight direct reports who are sales executives, and he has hiring responsibility for her business. She currently has two open position to fill.

Of note, one of the participants is a senior sales director who oversees a number of sales managers and has overall responsibility for a sales division (Participant 4) whilst another participant (participant 5) manages a team of business development consultants. Whilst the business development consultants are not full quota carrying sales representatives, they are part of the sales organisation and are responsible for proactively finding early-stage sales opportunities within a sales vertical in organisation 123.

## **Research Instrument**

The interviews were conducted using Microsoft Teams to enable the researcher to have more immediate access to the candidates, all of whom are busy professionals. Each meeting was recorded, and a transcript was automatically generated by the software to support the data analysis process later. During the interview, the researcher followed the questionnaire which had been previously provided and posed various questions to the sample candidates requesting firstly demographic details about their current roles and responsibilities. A section of the questionnaire which was sent in advance also included a request to rank twenty-three skills sought by hiring managers on a 7-point Likert scale. The participants were asked to provide this ranking in advance of the interview and this formed part of the open discussion.

The researcher went on to review the participants responses to the Likert Scale to understand the skills they deemed as important when hiring a new sales executive for their organisation. This was followed by approx. thirty to forty minutes delving into several open-ended questions which allowed for discussion on the organisation's onboarding training to understand firstly the core focus areas for ensuring fast productivity once a rep is onboarded. Focus then moved to third level affiliations for recruitment and explored any potential alignment between the organisation and a third level institution. Attitudes to hiring graduates with and without sales/business qualifications were then explored versus experience and no qualifications. The participants were questioned about what gaps they believed exist in current education programs that if addressed might benefit the sales rep's ability to ramp performance faster. And lastly the interviews concluded by asking the participating sales managers to provide their experiences with new sales reps and how long it typically takes for a new rep to be productive in B2B technology sales and if there was any observable difference between sales reps with a sales/business degree versus those without.

## **Data Analysis**

Without the interpretative step associated with qualitative analysis, a set of data remains meaningless (Kuckartz, U. 2014). A typical method for recognising a theme in data is repetition (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Once the interviews were completed, a thematic analysis of the transcripts was undertaken by the researcher and clusters of similar responses have been coded into core themes and subthemes for interpretation. The advantage of thematic analysis is that it offers accessibility and flexibility in the field of qualitative research hence is ideal for those who are not trained researchers.

(Braun & Clarke, 2006). The transcripts of the interviews were recorded automatically by Microsoft Teams and were analysed in their raw form. Braun & Clarke, note that they encourage performing the analysis on the full data transcript and not tidying it up first. (2006). The author first read through a number of times and then coded the entire transcripts. Typically, codes are descriptive and interpretive and should relate back to the research question and should be identified as such on analysis of the transcripts. (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To achieve this efficiently, the author opted to create a new word document to gather the codes as each data item was read and analysed.

Once fully coded, the codes were reviewed relative to the research question and as patterns and clusters emerged these were identified as potential themes. Next any potential relationships between the themes unifying the data in relation to the research objective was examined and interpreted to ensure it was clear and purposeful and connected to the previous theme to provide an overall coherent perspective.

### **Researcher Positionality**

Holmes and Darwin (2020), posit that the research process may be observed to be affected by positionality. They suggest that researchers are already a part of what they're examining, and that this reality has already been understood by other social actors is acknowledged. A reflexive approach to research should be taken to enable the researcher and the reader to be aware of the researchers influence on the research process as well as maintaining an ethical approach to their research.

The researcher acknowledges that her positionality of this research could be influenced by the fact she herself is a sales leader in the B2B technology sector (where she has worked for approx. 20 years) and has hiring responsibilities for sales executives. Whilst every effort will be made to remove any identified biases when interpreting the data, because of the researcher's positionality, her analysis and interpretation of the interview transcripts could be influenced.

### **Ethical Considerations**

A researcher is bound by ethical considerations in two aspects of research: the dignity and welfare of any participants in research studies and also the honesty and accuracy in representation of their findings. They must always ensure the safety and welfare of any participants, human and non-human. (Gravetter and Foranzo, 2011). All research must be carried out in accordance with the principals as outlined by Belmont report. Firstly, the principal of respect, ensuring participants are capable of consent and are fully cognisant that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Secondly the principal of beneficence, minimising risk, and maximising benefits to the participants. And finally, the principal of justice ensuring fair treatment. The participant must be informed of the nature and objectives of the research (European Commission, 2013).

The researcher adhered to these principals and guidelines in all communication with the participants. Privacy and confidentiality and record keeping are all ethical considerations that a researcher must pay particular attention to in relation to the European Commission 2013 guidelines on ethical research which includes the data protection directive giving participants the right to anonymity, by protecting all

personally identifiable information in accordance with GDPR legislation. (European Commission, 2013). Informed consent was collected by the researcher from each of the sales managers who were participant in the interviews in the form of an email outlining the goal of the research and including the research survey upon which the interview would be based. Each participant was informed of the data collection and data storage methodology to be used as part of the research instrument and offered the opportunity to withdraw at any time (in adherence to National College of Ireland's ethics policy).

### **Limitations**

Although a qualitative approach was desirable to determine attitudes and opinions of the participants, qualitative studies are subjective and therefore subject to bias. Additionally, the sample size used for this study was small and whilst this allowed an opportunity for deeper analysis on the responses, it could potentially be a limiting factor as it did not provide the opportunity to expand the survey beyond the multi-national technology sales organisations in Dublin. A broader sample including indigenous Irish technology organisations would be useful to examine for similar or varying results. The research subject is broad. A narrower focus may have allowed for a larger quantitative survey of interesting statistical significance.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS**

### **Introduction**

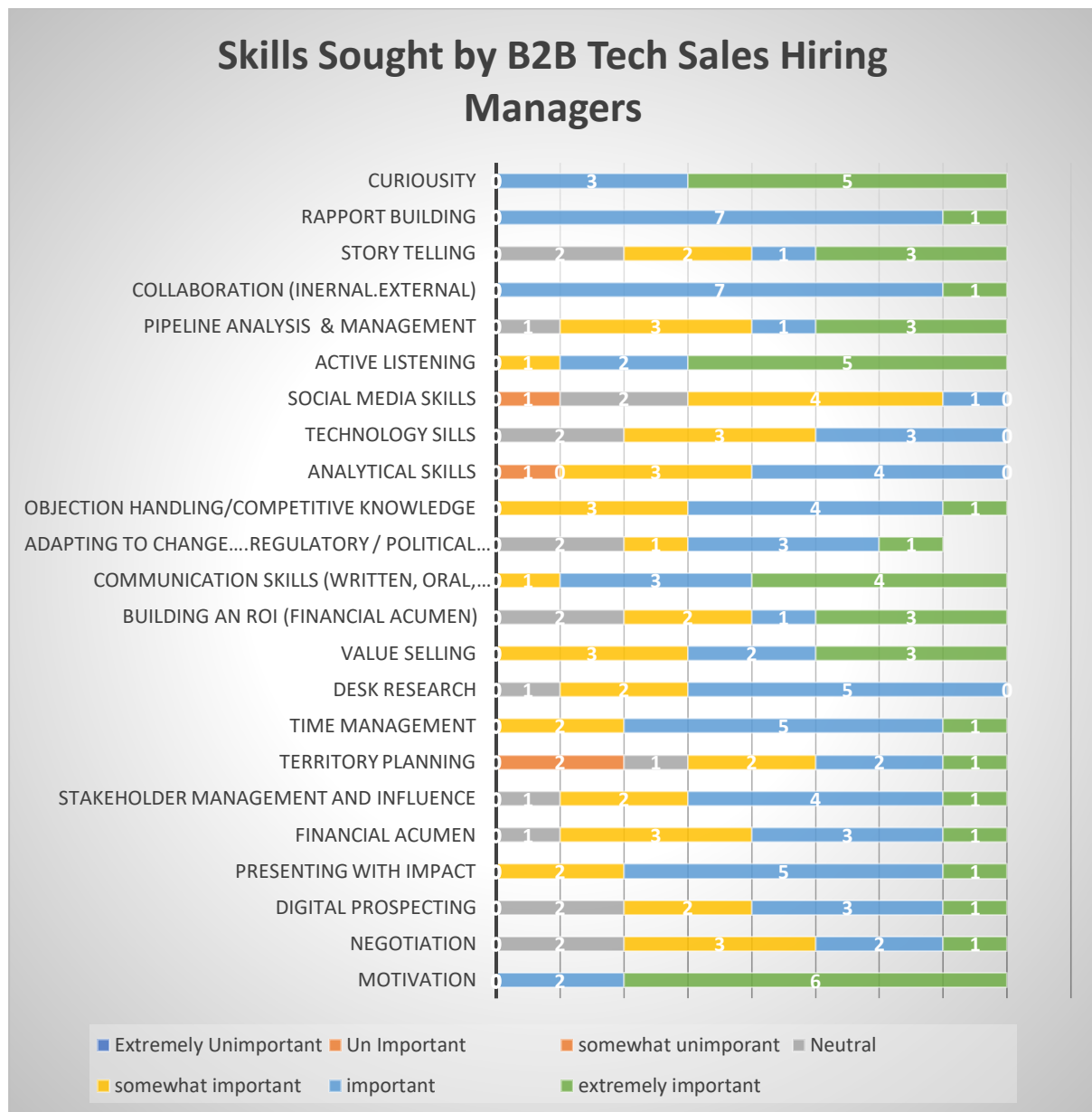
In this findings chapter, the researcher will outline the research objectives and present back the specific data that was collected and analysed against the literature which has previously been explored from the context of the interview findings. This will enable the author to conclude whether the research objectives have been achieved.

### **Theme 1: Criteria of Hiring Managers in B2B Technology Sales**

As discussed earlier in the literature review, the war on talent is of huge concern to hiring managers in B2B technology sales sector. LinkedIn recently reported that post pandemic, 45% of employers are struggling to fill roles with workers who have the necessary skills, and that candidate availability is lowest it has been since 1997. (LinkedIn, 2021). Competition is intense to fill roles and the cost of attrition is immense. Cooper (2012) determined it can cost up to \$200,000 to recruit a single sales person in the US. Gallup estimates that the annual cost of replacing 100 workers at a company would be between \$660,000 and \$2.6 million. (Forbes, 2022). Which puts huge pressure and emphasis onto the shoulders of hiring managers to make the right choice. 6/8 of the hiring managers interviewed have open headcount, totalling twelve open roles, which is indicative of the hiring challenge for B2B Technology Sales. The findings from the data analysis contained within the Likert scale in the survey attempts to distil the priority skills that would help address this challenge. And inform education what the emphasis for graduates might look like.

Visualizing research findings is a pragmatic technique to present mixed methods research that is directed both to the issue at hand and the actual world, two fundamental parts of pragmatism. (Creswell, 2008, Dickinson, 2010). To explore in more detail the skills sought by hiring sales managers in the sector, the researcher composed a seven-point Likert Scale with a list of twenty-three desirable sales skills gathered from empirical literature review on previous selling skills research (Cromer & Drollinger, 1999; Claro & Ramos, 2018; Hill & McGinnis, 2007; Peesker et al 2022). The results of the respondents are presented below as a stacked bar chart to achieve the objective of facilitating easier analysis of the results once grouped together via data visualization. And further below, they are grouped and totalled in an excel table.

**Table 2:** Survey Results of Skills Sought by Hiring Managers in B2B Technology Sales (Stacked Bar Chart):





**Table 3:** Survey Results of Skills Sought by Hiring Managers in B2B Technology Sales (Excel File):

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
	Extremely Unimportant	Un Important	somewhat unimportant	Neutral	somewhat important	important	extremely important	TOTAL
Motivation	0	0	0	0	0	2	6	8
Negotiation	0	0	0	2	3	2	1	8
Digital Prospecting	0	0	0	2	2	3	1	8
Presenting with impact	0	0	0	0	2	5	1	8
Financial Acumen	0	0	0	1	3	3	1	8
Stakeholder management and influence	0	0	0	1	2	4	1	8
Territory Planning	0	0	2	1	2	2	1	8
Time Management	0	0	0	0	2	5	1	8
Desk Research	0	0	0	1	2	5	0	8
Value Selling	0	0	0	0	3	2	3	8
Building an ROI (Financial Acumen)	0	0	0	2	2	1	3	8
Communication Skills (Written, Oral, Presentation)	0	0	0	0	1	3	4	8
Adapting to change...Regulatory / Political landscape etc.	0	0	0	3	1	3	1	8
Objection Handling/Competitive knowledge	0	0	0	0	3	4	1	8
Analytical skills	0	0	1	0	3	4	0	8
Technology Skills	0	0	0	2	3	3	0	8
Social Media Skills	0	0	1	2	4	1	0	8
Active Listening	0	0	0	0	1	2	5	8
Pipeline analysis & Management	0	0	0	1	3	1	3	8
Collaboration (internal.external)	0	0	0	0	0	7	1	8
Story Telling	0	0	0	2	2	1	3	8
Rapport Building	0	0	0	0	0	7	1	8
Curiosity	0	0	0	0	0	3	5	8
Totals	0	0	4	20	44	73	43	184

The result of the visualisation helps the researcher to identify that the skills most valued by hiring managers scoring highest in “extremely important” are motivation (6), curiosity (5), active listening (5), and communication skills (4). Whilst they not scored as most important, rapport building, and collaboration were each scored by seven out of the eight as important and by one participant as extremely important. The results build on the literature review findings of Hill & McGuinness (2007) where curiosity was identified as a key characteristic sought out by hiring managers. P1, P7, P8. All emphasised that if a candidate does not come across as curious, that is a red flag. The importance of curiosity is to explore and learn and identify the “clues” customers provide that support the sales rep’s ability to show genuine interest and perform excellent discovery activities, so they gain deep knowledge of the nuances and complexities of their customer’s businesses. Curiosity and active listening go hand in

hand are and were seen as core skills that the most successful technology sales reps have in common.

Surprisingly, despite the advances in sales force automation technology and digital prospecting post the COVID19 pandemic, technology skills and digital prospecting were not seen as skills that would be sought out by hiring managers as essential. And whilst important in role, several skills were called out as not essential in the hiring process because they could be developed through inhouse onboarding and development programs including territory planning, objection handling, social media skills, pipeline analysis and management and negotiation. As expected, time management, which was previously found by Wilson (2009) as being extremely important remains a high priority and so does desk research. This is evidenced by P7 who agrees and adds that particularly within a Hybrid world when you are not working directly with the team.

*“You need to be self-directed and be able to manage your time effectively”. (P7, Organisation 123)*

### **Interview Skills**

A key component of graduate employability is related to graduate identity as outlined in the literature review. Within in the data collected from the participants, it was identified that how prospect employees “show-up” in interview is a key component of hiring managers decision making process. Subtleties of broader skills are demonstrated through a candidates interview skills (such as zoom backgrounds etc.).

The participants were all attuned to these signals in citing that how they show up says a lot about how candidates will perform in front of customers. One participant (P1) specifically noting;

*“I had a guy who showed up in his kitchen for an interview and he was standing up on his island and the back of his background was full of dirty pots and pans and so on. And I just couldn't. I couldn't get away from that. I mean, he could have been doing the best interview ever, but again, it's like if that's how you respect me, that's how you're gonna respect our customers”* (P1, Organisation XXX).

Evidence of competence in transversal skills, those which are not specifically related to any academic discipline, are highly prized by the participants. P4 specifically highlighted emotional intelligence and self-awareness as the skills they seek out in an interview situation.

*“Drive for results and self-awareness, EQ. That's when I'm hiring anyway, that's the most important thing for me”.* (P4, Organisation XXX).

P3 concurred that evidence of self-awareness and coachability in interview is what they particularly seek out. P7 noted that they hire on attitude not prior university skills and through that lens.

*“You know in the first five minutes”.* (P7, Organisation 123).

if a candidate is someone of interest. A common theme amongst the participants in response to changing skills required not captured in the Likert Scale survey was

around the softer skills such as tenacity and resilience which P1, P3 and P7 in particular saw as crucial for B2B technology sales. They each maintained that whilst digital prospecting can be taught, the resilience to maintain momentum in outreach is something that is more difficult to teach and that self-efficacy that needs to be present to drive the sales executive to keep up the momentum and activity and find the right prospects and turn them into customers. An applicant's ability to understand and articulate this in interview is something that sets them apart.

## **Theme 2: Evolving Skills Needed in B2B Technology Sales**

The discussion with the participants revealed more interesting results particularly around the area of general business and financial acumen. The literature review revealed that the HEA National Employer survey (HEA, 2015) found that a lower rate of satisfaction exists from employers relative to business acumen skills developed within universities in Ireland when compared to foreign graduates. The interview findings seem to bear this out. P5 in particular is one of two participants with direct hiring responsibility for a number of markets including UK Ireland and Germany, Nordics and Benelux. Whilst all employees are ultimately located in Ireland, graduate recruitment by P5 extends to these jurisdictions to find those with the necessary local language skills. Therefore, P5 has exposure to university programs internationally and has identified a few interesting variances. P5 noted in particular the Nordic & German hires typically having that higher level of drive. It would be useful to determine if that drive is more evident because these graduates who have chosen to relocate naturally have that additional innate motivation which sets them apart or if something in their educational background drives that higher level of performance (such as maybe

participating in sales competitions at a master's level etc.). This would be particularly interesting in the context of Ireland's competitiveness for international sales positions. This was however beyond the scope of this particular study.

*"Whereas we find it much harder to get the same level in Irish candidates. Yeah. And is that down to the sales competitions and all of that that they that they really focus on that would be an interesting piece of research."* (P5, Organisation 123).

The other participant (P6) with responsibility for sales teams in a broader set of markets (including Africa, Middle East, US, Canada, and Southern Europe), highlighted that having an awareness of political, social, and environmental trends and issues can impact their business due to the dispersed geographic nature of the markets P6 sales teams serve. As Ireland is attracting more international B2B technology sales teams, hiring sales reps who have this awareness and understand how it can impact a sales approach is very important.

### **Financial Acumen**

All participants agree that good sales reps are educators. Being able to sell an idea with financial acumen is critical. P5 agrees and goes further by saying she specifically looks for candidates that have completed their education or masters in the area of business/finance and have that financial acumen to enable them to have a credible conversation around return on investment of the technology solution that is being proposed. In terms of candidate screening, that would be a specific requirement that P5 would ask the recruiters to seek out. P5 has found that candidates who have come from other disciplines besides business degree backgrounds have struggled to keep

up in role. (Her seven years of experience managing reps have taught her that). Typically, these candidates outperform others as they can bring the relevancy of their economics and business and finance education into their discussion. P7 manages a team responsible for selling HR Technology solutions and agrees they need sales reps who can understand how the organisation's revenue is generated but as they are more HR focused, their dependency of financial acumen is not as acute as it would be for a team selling Enterprise Resource Planning solutions such as P5. Another finding specific to business acumen is the agreement that a key element of technology sales is getting people to think about how they make money in the sales role.... coming in with a target focused mentality and analytical skills to help them develop the right strategy based on their territory to determine how they focus their time most efficiently in order to build a plan for how they will achieve their sales quota. How to be proactive and take control rather than being passive in role and waiting for things to happen. Here is where financial acumen can be taught more practically at third level. All agree that business/sales graduates should have a better understanding how to interpret an organisation's published accounts such as a profit & loss statement in an annual report. They need to determine how an organisation makes money, which in turn can help the sale executive develop insights into key financial leavers for an organisation which can be turned into a strategic point of view of how your technology solution will ultimately benefit their organisation

### **Theme 3: Hiring Managers Attitudes to Hiring Graduates**

One of the objectives of the interview was for the researcher to determine the attitudes of hiring managers in the B2B technology sector, to the business / sales graduate pool in Ireland and identify potential opportunities for improving collaboration between

industry and education. The interview specifically asked the participants first if their organisation had any affiliation with a third level institute for the purpose of talent acquisition. Interestingly of the eight participants interviewed, only one hires directly from a graduate pool (P5) and one other was aware of an intern program that was aligned to their organisation (P2) but would not hire a graduate with no work experience directly into a B2B technology sales role in their business. This was a surprising finding particularly as P5 works in the same organisation as P6, P7 and P8. Albeit is a slightly different sales focused role of hiring business development consultants who find and nurture early-stage opportunities and then pass them to sales teams to develop and close. Focusing on p5's experience of hiring graduates, revealed several interesting points. Pre-Pandemic, P5 used to go out to a business school in Dublin and also for German/Nordic roles, universities in Germany where P5 would have presented. Post pandemic, university fairs and somewhat dropped off. P5 would have been on the panel for sales competitions in Germany where people were completing their masters. And P5's organisation used to host a campus day where they would bring in candidates from big universities and run some workshops on interview skills with the master's classes. P5 developed a good rapport with one of the Dublin based business schools and from time to time would have gone to present on "A day in the life of a rep in organisation 123" to educate people on the role and what it specifically looked like. P5 acknowledged this was a great way to develop a pipeline of candidates for future roles. Typically P5 has found that students in business/finance courses have a preconceived idea of the career path they will follow and that is typically into practice solution roles in large consulting firms. They have not previously considered sales roles. When they understand the job and what is involved and how relevant their skills can be to proficiency in the technology sales role,

particularly for example of they are selling ERP solutions into Chief Financial Officers' etc, then it opens up their mind to a whole new career choice they had not previously considered. P5 recounted an experience with a university in Belgium where they organised a sales competition and invited all the large technology sales organisations to participate by playing the role of the customer in a competition simulation environment. The ultimate winners would go to the US to compete. In the evenings there would be a networking dinner and also P5's organisation would have a stand there where graduates could come and ask questions about careers etc. P5 said it was;

*"Really really beneficial.....and we got a good few candidates from them". (P5, Organisation 123).*

P2 articulated those graduates coming into sales roles from the intern program in situ in her organisation had surprisingly little business acumen and financial acumen in terms of their understanding of how a company works, and how technology sold into an organisation would be utilized most effectively and ultimately how it would impact and drive their growth. This is despite P2's involvement at country wide hiring fairs. What was obvious to P2 from participation at university hiring fairs was the lack of understanding university graduates had in relation to technology sales. Yet sales managers in her organisation were not directly asked for any feedback on business faculty course content, which could suggest a missed opportunity for more alignment between industry and education. The other sales managers interviewed confirmed there was no affiliation with third level that they were aware of. Again, this is alarming considering the HEA 2015 report referenced in the literature review which previously



called out that more could be done to collaborate on course design relative to skills required in university and how Ireland's competitiveness could be further enhanced if there was improved interaction between higher education and industry.

Overall, 6/8 hiring managers would value experience over degree but that may be because of their own experience and educational background and lack of understanding of current advantages that business curriculum brings to sales results. More research could be performed here to specifically identify any correlation between hiring managers own educational backgrounds and if that had any bearing on their beliefs and attitudes. In the course of the discussion, whilst most recognise the benefits that an intern programs can bring in terms of innovation and generation of new ideas, it would still be highly unlikely they would hire a graduate directly into a sales role unless they had some relevant work experience or prior experience such as selling insurance or in a call centre etc....something that demonstrates their aptitude around dealing with customers and how they performed in a results oriented environment.

#### **Theme 4: Which Degree Matters ?**

To determine if hiring managers saw any discernible difference between those with business degrees and those without in terms of candidates they do ultimately hire, hiring managers were asked if they would be more likely to hire candidates who had a specific sales/business degree in their educational background versus those who may have had an alternative or even no degree. P4 would not encourage anyone to base a hiring decision on a chosen degree course alone suffice to say if a candidate had completed a sales degree, it would show intent in terms of career and that would

be interesting in itself. P5 agreed that 80 % of their organisations hires are graduates and in fact not having a degree would be a red flag, potentially indicating an issue with their drive. No analysis was available to the participants on the performance of the populations within their organisation with business degrees versus those with other degrees but all agreed that education was more about demonstrating the motivation and attitude rather than the actual specific qualification. A willingness to learn and coachability being a huge factor in sales executive success. P8 revealed she recently interviewed a candidate who came from the aerospace industry and had no technology sales experience but demonstrated he has a willingness and a hunger to learn. This was interesting because when explored further the sentiment was that the business acumen which came from participating in a degree level education, regardless of which degree, increased the speed at which more complex concepts were understood. It was noted however that so many variables play into how someone performs. Using the definition of sourcing and closing their first deal independently as a B2B sales executive being productive, each participant was asked how long it takes before a new hire in their organisation is productive. Three suggested it takes three to six months and two participants suggested between twelve and eighteen months, with the rest somewhere in between. B2B technology sales is complicated. It is not something a rep can just do. Varying skills are required to deal with organisations of different complexities and sizes such as Small to Medium Business, to Mid-Market to Enterprise organisations. All operate differently and have their own set of approaches that a sales executive needs to understand. Much of this comes with experience rather than something that can be taught in schools. Yet conversely, in some hiring managers experiences, more mature candidates may have sales experience but struggle with keeping up with the volume of skills they need to learn to become proficient in role.

Only one of the participants had any experience of candidates who had exposure to sales competitions within their curriculum (p5) so it was not possible to do any comparisons in the experiences of sales managers hiring candidates with that background experience and whether that made any difference to first year performance (as asked in question 19).

### **Theme 5: Gaps in Business School Sales Skills Development**

To help identify the attitudes of hiring managers in relation to potential gaps that might be a barrier to hiring business / sales graduates into B2B technology sales roles, the participants were asked to specifically identify what skills they would like business schools to be teaching in sales education to better support their rep's performance and their business productivity. Identifying the skills which the participants felt would have the biggest impact on performance is useful for aligning industry and education. The findings concluded that hiring managers (except p5 whose experience was not based on an Irish university) believe there is a lack of experiential type learning scenarios. It was highlighted that it would be useful to provide students with exposure to full sales lifecycle for a typical B2B technology solution. New-hires that come from start-ups for example (where P1 tend to focus recruitment efforts) don't necessarily give them that exposure they need for larger more complex B2B technology sales environments therefore new-hires are not always connecting the dots. Prospecting in B2B technology sales involves creating compelling hooks using creative use of technology to cut through the prospecting masses. Understanding that when in role, dedicating a number of hours of sourcing a week is required to be successful and all the skills that sit behind that to bring that to work every day.

Financial Acumen – as outlined above was deemed by all as a very important part of being able to develop a credible point of view with a customer. Understanding how their business and organisation is structured. Who the decision makers are and how to justify an investment to the chief financial officer. What does a procurement process look like? P1 stated in her experience that;

*“Most junior reps are very naïve around those sort of conversations”*. (P1, Organisation XXX).

P1 suggested that aligning with tertiary on this in terms of educating the sales professionals of the future would be beneficial. P2 agreed and states that that whilst graduates have the textbook details on financial impact, they don't have practical knowledge. P3 suggested the inclusion of education on the fundamentals of how does an organisation go through a complex procurement process (RFP etc).

The overwhelming feedback from the participants what that there is a huge gap in graduates understanding of organisations or industries' monetisation strategies. Ultimately when you put a piece of technology in, how is that going to impact an organisations overall goals. That means being able to have that conversation with various departments of an organisation; Marketing, HR or Legal Not just IT. One participant suggested;

*“give them some industries and actually get them to figure out how to really talk about know how the company runs, how an actual business runs. And you know the impact of everything and how do you use technology, where are they in their ranking as an organization? So what's their goals to get to #1 and what does a 10 year plan look like”* (P7, Organisation 123)

In terms of live calls, many have never spoken to a live customer. The experience of the participants is that it is difficult to get inexperienced new hires to start on the phone or in zoom meetings, they'd rather do email. All emphasised the importance of role plays in a safe environment as part of experiential learning process. P4 made a good point around preparation and performance and a comparison with sports at an elite level where there is a lot of preparation time versus game time to realise high performance and that is similar to what high performing sales people need to also get to grips with. Preparation time versus game time is a bit like sales training versus live sales calls. And the more college education helped with that preparation the better the skill levels might be.

P7 noted that more technology organisations should be identifying opportunities to provide third level with free certification opportunities to educate them on the technology capabilities of that organisation. This is a huge missed opportunity for those who do not as decision makers are users of the technology in the future. As well as improving the calibre of graduates and exciting them about the technology they could potential be selling.

All agree, importantly what Business schools need to help graduates understand is patience and tenacity in complex B2B technology sales. Some cycles can take 12 to 18 months and you need patience to manage a sales cycle like that.

## **Theme 6: Attracting Students into Sales Professions**

Cummins and Nielson (2019) found that students desire to find a job can be influenced by the integration of participating firm in the classroom. In the war on talent a huge supply and demand gap exists in B2B technology Sales. The participants referenced a number of discussion points in the interviews which touched on these difficulties.

Firstly, of the eight participants, there were a total of twelve open roles.

And all advised it takes up to six months to source a suitable candidate to fill a role.

When considered in the context of the entire sector the economic impact on the Irish Economy is huge. Despite this, 6/8 interviewees do not participate in recruitment fairs.

Each hiring manager is aware of the draw of the high earning potential of the roles within their business. (Although the average earnings per rep was not quantified in the interview) but noted that perhaps potential candidates do not realise,

*“How many wealthy young people are working in B2B technology sales”. (P1, Organisation XXX).*

One of the main challenges the participants identified is that technology sales is not typically seen as a career choice and it is necessary to introduce real life experiences that might excite graduates about the possibilities.

*“Thinking about Enterprise Ireland and their mentoring roles. I mean, if you brought that into the lecture at third level education about, like, even setting up an enterprises and the role that they play.” (P3, Organisation ABC)*

There was consensus amongst the participants of shared experience of B2B Technology Sales being sometimes seen as a sort of an “accidental career” yet all marvelled how technology sales provides an incredible opportunity to work in some of the top organisations in the world and be well remunerated for it with fantastic career options. An interesting anecdote came for P4 (Senior sales director) who confirmed that in his family amongst his siblings, there is a teacher, an engineer and an accountant. If you asked a 5 year old to draw them when it would come to the sales person they wouldn't have a clue. As a discipline, profession and pathway, sales doesn't connect in terms of career choices at leaving cert level or college. How to you brand sales to get more people to realise the potential of the opportunity and pursue it more intentionally ? The other participants agreed and suggested that the likes of Enterprise Ireland together with the B2B Technology Sales organisations have a responsibility to spend more time in mentoring roles within third level education to raise the reputation and profile of the sector and attract more high calibre graduates to the industry.

## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The focus of this paper was for the researcher to investigate and examine the impact offering more sales focused third level qualifications would make on the attitudes of hiring managers in the B2B technology industry to also consider if more graduates hired into technology sales had specific sales focused third level qualifications would there be any discernible impact on sales performance in the B2B technology sector and by proxy, consider the potential contribution therefore to the Irish economy.

The rationale for the research is to determine if hiring managers in the B2B technology sales sector agree a gap exists in third level education to help develop an adequate talent pool to accelerate successfully hiring the right candidates faster which will drive results faster and ultimately contribute back to growth in the economy.

The first key finding from the survey supports the initial view from HBR that sales executives' jobs typically require a university degree as a minimum to enter a screening process for in the B2B technology sales sector. Also confirmed was the time that it takes time to fill roles (up to six months in the results found here), leading to the straightforward conclusion that the shortage of suitably qualified candidates to fill roles faster, is costing organisations and the economy money. This is not particularly surprising based on the most recent LinkedIn job search for technology sales roles in Ireland (Over 1000 sales executive jobs available in sector). When it comes to the idea of producing sellable graduates to help address the identified hiring challenges that exists within the Irish B2B Technology Sector, the findings of the survey relating to the skills most sought by hiring managers support the view by Finch et al. (2012) that increasing importance of Meta-Skills that translate across various disciplines, are



an area that needs focus and enhancement in education course design. These skills include time management, collaboration, curiosity, and rapport building. This survey completely supports that view and the suggestion that business curriculum should evolve to orient more towards activities can build on these skills in a meaningful way. The use of experiential learning techniques such as sales competitions closely aligned with Industry participants, was identified by P5 as being hugely beneficial to the process of engaging with and identifying potential candidates for future hire. This is in agreement with the earlier findings of Nielson and Cummins (2019) who found that inviting sponsors from industry into the sales classrooms in the US can have a positive impact on career choice as it gives students an opportunity to ensure their values and goals are aligned with those of the target organisation (Fogel et al., 2012). Alarming however, the study highlights a potentially large gap in classroom participation by the B2B Technology Sales industry in Ireland.

Work needs to be done here because as articulated by Fearon et al., (2020), not only can this address student's intent to pursue a career, aligning industry and education in experiential learning has a positive impact on the self-determined learner skills and overall employability benefits, exposing students to how real-world businesses operate and helping them create an employability narrative. Business simulations within sales education need to include industry representation to connect with sales classrooms to help the development of sales pedagogy and ultimately support a higher calibre of graduate available for recruitment and thereby improve sales performance of graduates when hired into firms. Sales competitions could be seen as the preparation time versus the game time so long as the simulations are relevant and have input from industry in terms of relevancy and outcomes. Typically in high

performing teams, they spend a lot of time in preparation versus very little time in game. And that can be similar to Technology Sales. If people are spending most of their time in sales meetings or calls and not dedicating enough time to training and education they are likely not performing at their optimum because their skills are not as refined as they should be.

Organisations are organic and ever-changing trends impact priorities. (EG COVID). Consideration of how to engage and build meaningful relationships through that lens is so important in the context of B2B technology sales. If industry do not participate here however, this highlights a disconnect that may impact a hiring managers ability to better evaluate candidates' suitability for role as well as potentially narrow the gap between simulated experiences and real-world situations.

Building on the previous research by Peesker et al., who identified the importance of Analytical Skills in their research into hiring for sales success, another skill emerged as being highly valued by hiring managers in the sector, Financial Acumen. The complexity of the role with advances in technology and the need for sales executives to manage an ever-increasing information set as knowledge brokers, highlights that increasingly, sales executives need to be able to not only analyse this data and make sense of it, but to leverage a point of view in a meaningful way with a key decision maker for a high value technology purchase, Financial Acumen is not only desirable but essential. The suggestion that financial acumen comes in through having the curiosity for example to identify something that a target prospect organisation could be planning well into the future that could have potential to develop as a lucrative opportunity. But also brings an opportunity to a customer in a particular industry

based on what others have done that could benefit them if they did something similar. Being skilled in financial acumen is a fundamentally important skill to enable a sales executive to analyse their territory through that lens and have that understanding of the vertical to equip a rep to challenge a customer to exploit that opportunity.

## **CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Conclusion of Findings**

It is clear based on the experiences of these participants that perceived gaps do exist in Business/Sales Education. Yet the sales managers surveyed upheld the findings of Murray & Robinson (2001) that the specific degree was not deemed overly critical when seeking the best candidates. What the research also suggests to us, is that there is little to no alignment between sales education and the B2B technology sales hiring managers currently despite the evolving complexity of the sector and the vulnerability to competitive threats from other jurisdictions. Another interesting point worth mentioning that seems to bear out in the research is that even internally within organisations there are gaps in collaboration inter-departmentally in relation to graduate talent attraction policies. (Four of the participants were from the same organisation, 123, yet only one had any engagement with the education sector). This despite the fact that career progression opportunities for junior graduate hires could ultimately see them move into sales teams the other participants lead. This was also the case for P1 and P4 who were also representative of the same organisation, XXX. Whilst P1 was not aware of any affiliation with third level, P4 did mention that there was a specific university recruitment program lead looking after an emerging talent team within his organisation for hiring into the business development group but he was

not aware of the details of the program. Given P4 is a senior sales director at XXX, this certainly reveals that the involvement of sales management is minimal in terms of any engagement with third level as well as cross functionally with those that do.

Based on the results of this survey, Industry and hiring managers have identified gaps in skills development at third level that would enhance their seller's ability. Specifically, around the area of Financial Acumen and Meta-Skills. However, they need to take more responsibility for a proactive approach to closing that gap by engaging with education to enhance the pipeline of B2B technology sellers of the future and maintain Ireland's world competitiveness in this fast-changing economic environment.

In Ireland, there doesn't seem to be a unified strategy that gives students and recent graduates a chance to hone their abilities and showcase their accomplishments, such as sales competitions that exist in other geographies. The process of assisting students in adapting their abilities to new contexts and challenges is not standardised either. Careers offices, placement coordinators, research and innovation offices, and advisory groups are all examples of places where employers and educational institutions can interact with one another. Unfortunately, as highlighted here, these many components of the system seldom coordinate with one another, leading to insufficient use of direct employer feedback to influence and support educational endeavours.

Educators, businesses, and students all need to work together if it is to succeed in developing and integrating enhanced employability skills into the sales curriculum to boost Ireland's attractiveness and drive continued economic success in the business-to-business technology sales sector.

## **Recommendations**

Numerous opportunities for further research have emerged from this study.

In terms of evolving skills required for sales success in the B2B Technology sector, further research could be to survey business graduates and assess their perceptions of skills important to succeed in Technology sales and compare that to the attitudes of hiring managers as uncovered in this research. It would then be useful to conduct a longitudinal study of recent business/sales graduates in Ireland who have entered the sector and benchmark their first-year actual performance versus their peers to examine the exact impact their education has on their first-year results.

Sales competitions and graduate careers fairs need to have a stronger place in the Irish Technology Sales Sector. Industry needs to understand better the opportunities these competitions can bring to them in terms of enhanced talent. Education institutions in Ireland need to recognise the huge benefits that engaging and leveraging industry involvement in a more coordinated way can have on their graduate population. Hiring success can provide continual positive progression for both education institutions and industry. The power of the alumni and network that can be established through successful programs can raise the power of their relative brands in market. Ibec and Technology Ireland should play a leading role in overseeing and bringing these valuable players together through their member networking forums.

And finally, to close the gap on industry-to-industry alignment, there is an opportunity for sales hiring managers to provide those involved with graduate programs with

valuable insights in terms of their changing expectations for success in role. A suggested approach would be to arrange sector focus groups where graduate programs are identified across the industry and best practices and learnings are shared collectively. This is a highly transient yet relatively small and well-connected industry. A stronger collective industry with superior skills would benefit all. Whilst there is natural competition between organisations for talent, as a whole the sector needs to recognise the benefits of universally raising the standards.

Pro Rata population in the EU, Ireland has the highest proportion of under 15's. (Eurostat, 2020) The role of government, industry and higher education is critical to optimise Ireland's advantage here. B2B technology sales has a clear role to play in Ireland's future economic success and the opportunity to attract, properly train and align with industry is there for the taking.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A: Participant Profiles

Participant No.	Organisation	Position	Length of time in role	Number of direct reports (Sales Executives)	Hiring Responsibility (Y/N)
P1	XXX	Senior Sales Manager	8 months	8	Y
P2	AAA	Inside Sales Manager	6 years	10	Yes
P3	ABC	Senior Manager	18 months	6	Y
P4	XXX	Senior Sales Director	3 years	4 managers (Oversees 60 Sales Reps)	Y
P5	123	Senior Business Development Manager	7 years	6	Y
P6	123	Area Sales Manager	2 years 9 months	6	Y
P7	123	Senior Sales Manager	9 years	4	Y
P8	123	Senior Sales manager	3 years	8	Y

## APPENDIX B: Email invite to participate including consent form.

Eithne Leavy @

14:16

EL

FW: Eithne Leavy - MBA Dissertation - Help Required :)

To: Eithne Leavy

**CAUTION: DO NOT CLICK** links or attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe..

Dear Lucy,

For my MBA dissertation with National College of Ireland, I am currently researching the perceived gap that exists in Irish third level education relative to the opportunity for well-educated sales professionals in the B2B tech sector in Ireland.

In so doing, I am trying to identify the evolving needs to the Tech Industry in hiring sales professionals and if gaps existed within 3<sup>rd</sup> level education that if addressed could accelerate the economic contribution to the Irish economy from our sector.

In order to facilitate my qualitative research I have designed a questionnaire as attached with 19 x research questions. I am planning to collect data from approx. 10 sales managers in the tech industry and have identified you as someone who's input would be highly valued.

I would like to arrange a 1 hour interview with you to collect your answers to these questions. The interview will take place over Microsoft Teams in order for the data to be recorded and a transcript to be made available for thematic analysis of the various responses. They will be coded into core themes and subthemes for further interpretation so support my research findings and final report.

Your identity will not be revealed in the final report and the transcript and recordings will be stored on a secure device which is protected by a password and antivirus software. Each transcript will be saved separately and will not include any identifiable candidate name in the naming convention when saving and storing the transcript. Please note : you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Do you consent to participating and if so would you be free on either of the following dates / times.

Date	Time	Name	Preference (Indicate with "X")	Alternative suggestion
Tuesday 5th July	16:00 - 17:00			
Wednesday 6th July	18:00 - 19:00			
Wednesday 6th July	19:30 - 20:30			
Friday 8th July	13:30 - 14:30			
Friday 8th July	18:00 - 19:00			
Saturday 9th July	11:00 - 12:00			
Saturday 9th July	15:00 - 16:00			
Saturday 9th July	19:00 - 20:00			
Sunday 10th July	11:00 - 12:00			
Sunday 10th July	15:00 - 16:00			
Sunday 10th July	19:00 - 20:00			
Monday 11th July	13:00 - 14:00			
Tuesday 12th July	18:00 - 19:00			
Tuesday 12th July	19:30 - 20:30			
Wednesday 13th July	13:00 - 14:00			
Wednesday 13th July	18:00 - 19:00			

If not, please feel free to suggest an alternative that works for you.  
 (Ideally I would like to schedule interviews between 05July and 15July to ensure I can meet MBA dissertation deadlines).

I understand this is an investment of your time so you have my huge appreciation in advance for your participation.  
 Please let me know via email or phone/SMS if you have any questions.

Kind Regards  
 Eithne

Eithne Leavy | Sales Director, CX SaaS Applications  
 CX Sales, Commerce and Marketing | Mid-Market Sector  
 IE Mobile: +353 87 7530927

Oracle MidMarket | Western Europe | Applications



Dissertation -  
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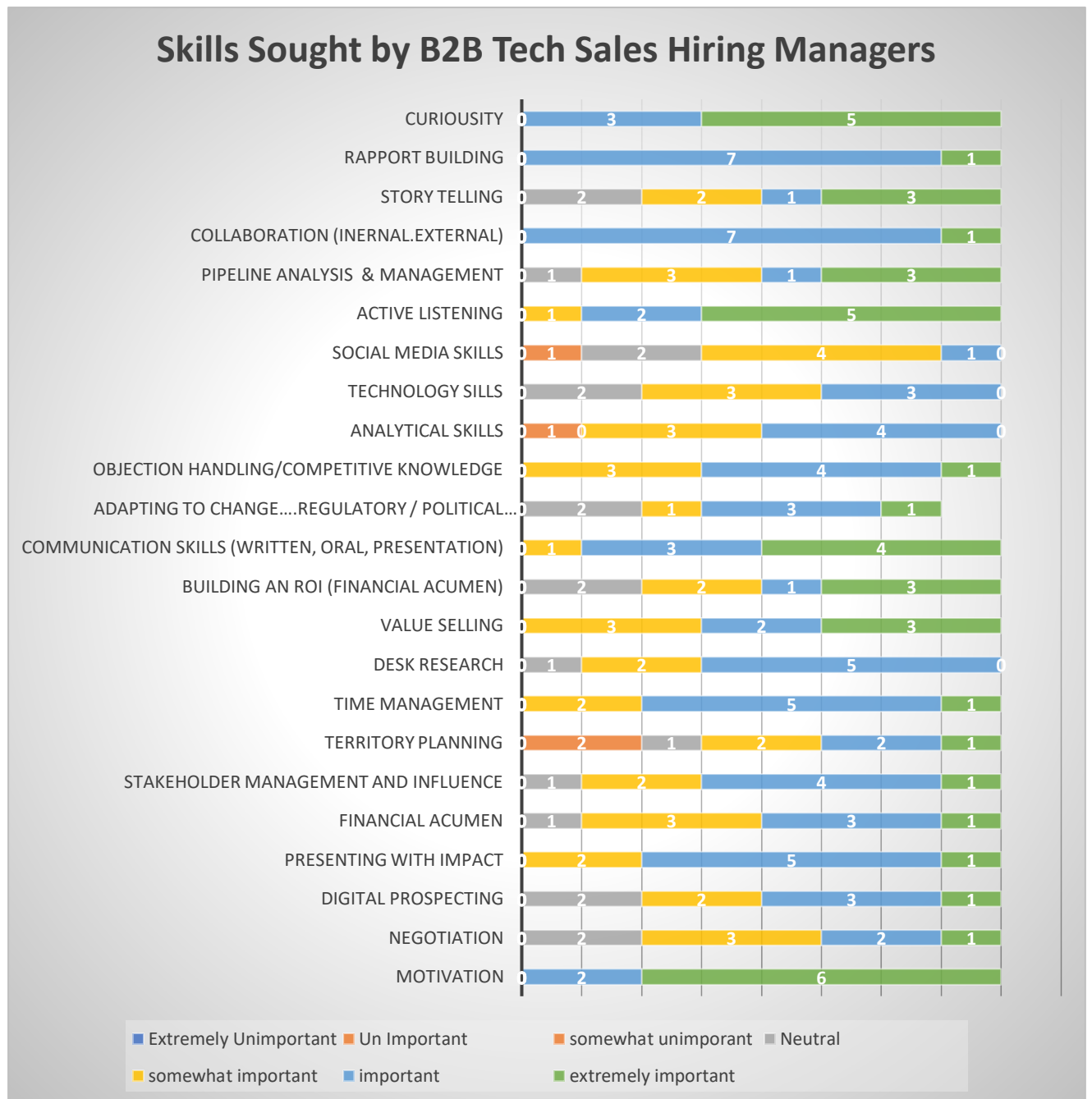
## APPENDIX C: Interview Questionnaire.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
<b>Demographics</b>								
Q1	What organisation do you currently work for ?							
Q2	What is your current position ?							
Q3	How long have you held that position ?							
Q4	How many direct reports do you currently have head count for ?							
Q5	Do you have any open head count currently and if so how many open roles ?							
Q6	Do you have responsibility for hiring in your sales organisation ?							
Q7	How long on average does it take you to currently find and fill a sales role ?							
<b>Hiring and Onboarding Skills</b>								
In the context of staying competitive, what are the changing skills required by Sales Managers in today's Tech Sector :								
Rank the following skills when hiring sales people? (on 7-point Likert scales where 1 = extremely Unimportant and 7 = extremely important)								
		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>
		<b>Extremely Unimportant</b>	<b>Un Important</b>	<b>somewhat unimportant</b>	<b>neither unimportant or important</b>	<b>somewhat important</b>	<b>important</b>	<b>extremely important</b>
	Motivation							
	Negotiation							
	Digital Prospecting							
	Presenting with impact							
	Financial Acumen							
	Stakeholder management and influence							
	Territory Planning							
	Time Management							
	Desk Research							
	Value Selling							
	Building an ROI (Finanvial acumne)							
	Communication Skills (Written, Oral, Presentation)							
	Adapting to change....Regulatory / Political landscape etc.							
	Objection Handling/Competitive knowledge							
	Analytical skills							
	Technology Sills							
	Social Media Skills							
	Active Listening							
	Pipeline analysis & Management							
	Collaboration (internal.external)							
	Rapport building							
	Curiosity							
	Story Telling							
	Others (Please specify & rate importance)							

Q9	How long is your current Sales onboarding training ?								
Q10	What sales skills are covered in your onboarding training ?								
Q11	Of these skills, what provides the most value to your sales results ?								
<b>Third Level Sales Skills</b>									
Q12	Does your organisation have any affiliation with any third level institute for the purpose of talent acquisition. If so, who, Tell me a bit little about it.								
Q12a	Do you have any input into the curriculem design for these institutions.								
Q13	Describe your organisations screening process for junior sales candidates and how likely would you be to hire a business school graduate straight from college ?								
Q14	Would you be more likely to hire them if they had sales specific modules included in their course ? What sales education specifically might you look for ?								
Q15	Would you be more likely to hire a graduate with no business degree but who had 1 year sales experience.								
Q16	Would you rather hire a candidate with no business degree but with 2-3 years sales experience ?								
Q17	What skills do you wish business schools were teaching in Sales Education ?								
<b>Experience of working with new Sales People :</b>									
Q18	How long on average does it take before a new hire becomes productive (eg : Finds and closes first opportunity).								
Q19	What difference have you observed in first year performance for those with Sales qualifications versus those without.								



**APPENDIX D: Likert Scale Results – Stacked Bar Chart:**



## APPENDIX E: Interview Transcripts (SAMPLES).

### Sample 1:

0:26:0.120 --> 0:26:4.280

Eithne Leavy

And anything else that I've missed that you think is important?

0:26:4.340 --> 0:26:7.810

P1

Yeah, I would say two things. Uh, resilience.

0:26:8.480 --> 0:26:8.810

Eithne Leavy

Yeah.

0:26:9.290 --> 0:26:11.310

P1

And tenacity in the role.

0:26:12.970 --> 0:26:13.720

Eithne Leavy

OK.

0:26:26.770 --> 0:26:27.340

Eithne Leavy

Yeah.

0:26:13.800 --> 0:26:29.380

P1

Nice. So so again for context, the role is you get you are given a a territory and that territory can have anything up to 1800 domains, total www.whatever and your role is to get that down to 400 domains.

0:26:30.310 --> 0:26:39.40

P1

And your role is to get the 400 domains. Based on your research analysis, LinkedIn so on right zoominfo figuring out what's a good fit.

0:26:39.950 --> 0:27:11.600

P1

And that takes grit. That takes tenacity, right? That takes a level of, you know, 234 hours every week of just going through sifting through counts. Then you've gotta go and create that, you know, connection with the prospect. And and some majority cold. So, you know, you gotta be resilient. You know, you're probably going to make 30 phone calls. No. Only get two that will pick up or so on. So, you know, I always say disciplines. Tenacity and resilience are the three things that I'm looking for. And then the self-awareness pieces. Another one.

0:27:11.780 --> 0:27:17.210

P1

And really high on my agenda, self-awareness, because I think if you're self aware, you can teach people anything.

0:27:18.20 --> 0:27:18.310

Eithne Leavy

Yeah.

0:27:29.340 --> 0:27:29.740

Eithne Leavy

Yeah.

0:27:42.140 --> 0:27:42.450

Eithne Leavy

Yeah.

0:27:17.970 --> 0:27:44.300

P1

You know, if you're, if you're open to feedback and we've a big emphasis on coachability, I don't know if that's a XXX Organisation word that was made-up. I don't know if that's actually the dictionary, but Coachability and we we actually interview for coaching, for, for coach ability. And the reason being is, is that the role is a very, very prescribed role that you have to learn. And if you're not willing to take on board the feedback where your gaps are and what you're missing, then you won't survive.

## Sample 2:

Eithne Leavy

OK. So would you be more inclined to hire A graduate if they had specific modules included in their course specific sales modules?

0:24:10.170 --> 0:24:11.350

Eithne Leavy

So if you know.

0:24:10.20 --> 0:24:11.870

P2

Yes, I would veer towards, yeah.

0:24:12.420 --> 0:24:18.190

Eithne Leavy

Because if you have somebody doing a business degree but there's no focus on selling, for example, it could be.

0:24:19.880 --> 0:24:20.140

P2

Yeah.

0:24:19.390 --> 0:24:20.590

Eithne Leavy

I think I think, yeah.

0:24:21.870 --> 0:24:22.250

P2

Yeah.

0:24:21.460 --> 0:24:28.360

Eithne Leavy

I think that's what I'm trying to identify. If there's gaps in selling in education that might make it easier for hiring managers.

0:24:28.870 --> 0:24:33.660

P2

Well, there's a huge gap going back to the business and commercial document. They don't know how companies run.

0:24:34.730 --> 0:24:47.800

P2

You know, they don't know. Like if you you look on a financial institution and how that runs,

how do they make money? What is their, you know, even things like what is their company goal? You know, as an organized, what do they stand for?

0:24:48.500 --> 0:25:18.700

P2

You know, so if they're talking about, you know, green assignability, what's that mean to them? You know, where they they don't know as well. Like when we put technology, what type of outputs going to give them, where it goes in the organization, return on investment and then it's the follow the kind of thread around you know the organization. So we might tell a solution for or indeed in development but they need to get deeper into that. What does that actually mean. You know so are we selling a solution for the mission critical applications?

0:25:19.120 --> 0:25:33.770

P2

Or is it for something else? It's for a project? Or what is it you know? Because they miss so many different opportunities cause some other part of the organization cause the organization companies have change is not just IT anymore. If the deal with HR or legal different parts, you know.

0:25:34.420 --> 0:25:40.120

P2

So that's something I think they really need to understand how it all fits in, you know.

P2

Yeah. And if you don't know that, you ask curious questions that you find out, you know, you build your for example, they should always have the cost of the customer's objectives or goals as an organization to shouldn't have an org plan of exactly how it works. They should understand the footprint, you know, in that organization from a technology and how that technology performs. So it's basic things that need to know and how it all you know.

0:31:4.970 --> 0:31:17.320

P2

Comes together, you know? So from a customer perspective, it's is a CapEx OpEx. How's the budget aligned you know, is it once a year once you know if it's run rate business or if it's big, you know projects?

0:31:18.790 --> 0:31:19.30

Eithne Leavy

Yeah.

0:31:17.950 --> 0:31:27.570

P2

How's that done? Who's on the board like? That's the key. One to win business. So if you've if the board decision who's actually on the board and can we influence the board as and do we know if it's?

0:31:28.330 --> 0:31:33.780

P2

HR, or different parts of the business, rather because we assume sometimes it's just IT, it's not you know.

### Sample 3:

0:42:9.830 --> 0:42:10.300

Eithne Leavy

OK.

0:42:11.420 --> 0:42:20.870

Eithne Leavy

Next question. Would you rather hire A candidate with no business degree but a longer period of sales experience? So two to three years or more?

0:42:21.550 --> 0:42:23.700

P7

Yeah. Yeah, probably. Yeah, absolutely.

0:42:24.90 --> 0:42:24.520

Eithne Leavy

Yeah.

0:42:27.850 --> 0:42:28.140

P7

Yeah.

0:42:25.250 --> 0:42:35.40

Eithne Leavy

For all of the reasons you've stated already, UM and what skills do you wish business schools were teaching in sales education?

0:42:36.980 --> 0:42:38.870

Eithne Leavy

So what do you think might make a difference?

0:42:43.670 --> 0:42:49.210

P7

It's again, it goes back to a you can't teach experience.

0:42:50.120 --> 0:42:50.450

Eithne Leavy

Yeah.

0:42:51.970 --> 0:42:56.470

P7

But what you can teach probably is a little bit more.

0:42:58.400 --> 0:43:3.740

P7

Yeah, you can teach. Reading the balance sheet some of the Business School, some of the, I'm not sure they're all.

0:43:4.790 --> 0:43:6.330

P7

Able to understand.

0:43:7.550 --> 0:43:18.260

P7

Profit and loss of an organization does I able to understand where if you're looking at an annual report, can you tell me where the revenue?

0:43:19.150 --> 0:43:28.120

P7

Is made. What is the company actually making his revenue when you're looking into an annual report to you understand, what are the key?

0:43:29.60 --> 0:43:33.90

P7

Leavers for those organizations and how you would be able then.

0:43:34.420 --> 0:43:34.980

P7

To.

0:43:36.20 --> 0:43:45.630

P7

Have a strategic understanding of what your solution is going to enable them to benefit or what the nature of solution or whatever finance solution or water.

0:43:46.350 --> 0:43:52.870

P7

CX marketing ecommerce solution would be able to do it's it's trying to translate that into.

0:43:54.940 --> 0:43:59.730

P7

What? What are the? What are the business gaps and and being able to to see if?

0:44:1.50 --> 0:44:11.670

P7

But again, I think SI think sales is a is an experience job where you're really learning from from speaking with people and from experiencing.

0:44:12.560 --> 0:44:13.250

Eithne Leavy

Yeah.

0:44:13.460 --> 0:44:15.510

P7

And from being thrown in the deep end.

0:44:16.230

-->

0:44:34.20

P7

Basically, in some way shape or form that you have to it's sink or swim in some way, shape or form.