



Finding an extra gear:

2nd annual sales operations & technology study



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Table of contents

Section I: The state of sales operations 4

Chapter 1: Sales operations remains well established 4

Chapter 2: Longevity brings accomplishments, yet opportunities remain 5

Section II: A broad and diverse focus 7

Chapter 3: Operations teams pulled in many directions 7

Chapter 4: Sales tech stacks have little in common 9

Chapter 5: Sales operations supports more than just sales organizations 10

Section III: Finding an extra gear 12

Chapter 6: Leverage analytics and explore AI 12

Chapter 7: Aim for dynamic processes 14

Chapter 8: Turn leaders into power users 16

Section IV: Concluding thoughts 19

Demographics 21

Section I: The state of sales operations

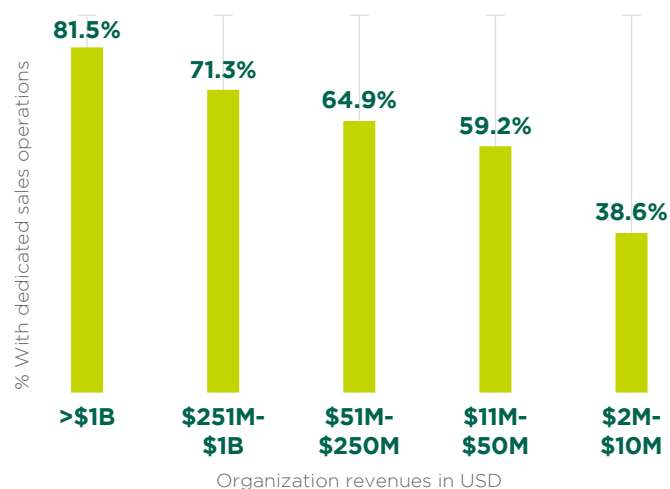
Sales operations is hardly a new concept; however, with the growing focus on data strategy, analytics and Artificial Intelligence (AI), it looks very different in many firms than it did just a few years ago. And it's certainly getting renewed interest from sales executives, not to mention marketing technology (martech) and sales technology vendors.

We start the readout of our 2nd annual sales operations & technology study with a look at the tipping point for incorporating sales operations into a sales organization, the progress sales operations has made as a discipline and the remaining opportunities for growth.

Chapter 1: Sales operations remains established

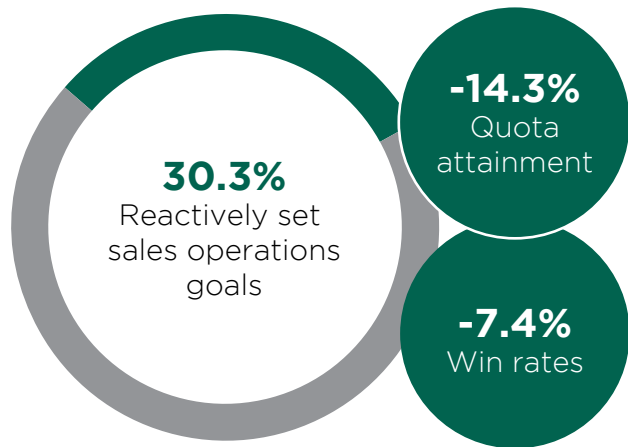
Sales operations is firmly established in the sales ecosystem, having been part of many organizations for 20 years or more. Today, 66.7% of sales organizations have a dedicated sales operations team or teams, with another 9.8% planning to install the function within the next 12 months. The larger the organization and the larger the sales force, the more likely it is that the sales operations function is formalized. Note that while smaller organizations may not have reached the tipping point needed to justify a dedicated sales operations function, they still perform many sales operations activities through the often-disconnected efforts of a range of functions such as sales management, finance, IT and more.

Sales operations most common in large sales organizations



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Sales operations resources scale with the size and complexity of the sales force. Sales operations headcount generally goes up when seller count goes up. Further, more than half of the sales organizations in the study (57.9%) were planning to grow the size of their sales force. Those that were growing also were more likely to be growing the size of their sales operations budget as well. However, one-third (34.6%) of the growing sales organizations anticipated their sales operations budget would remain as is, requiring them to be more efficient so they could “do more with the same.”



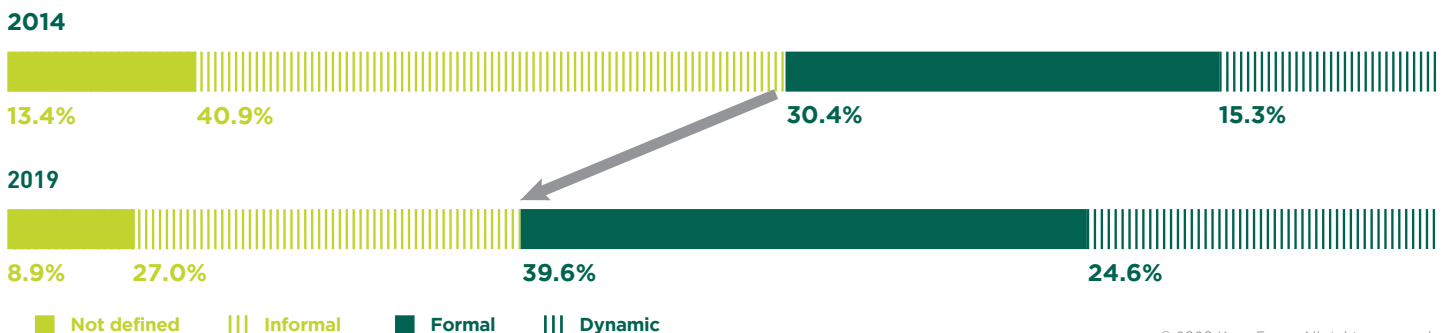
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Since it is so firmly established, it's not surprising that two-thirds (69.7%) of sales operations teams use a proactive approach to goal setting, either by defining priorities with leadership or by formally committing to a business plan with vision, metrics, etc. That's good, because the reactive approach used by one-third (30.3%) of sales operations teams is linked to poorer performance metrics of -14.3% quota attainment and -7.4% win rates.

Chapter 2: Longevity brings accomplishments, yet opportunities remain

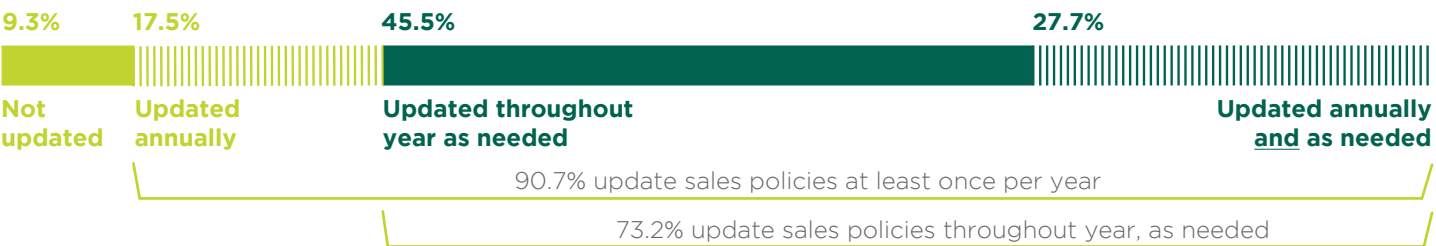
Longevity in sales operations efforts leads to progress across many elements of sales. For example, we have expounded on the benefits of formalizing the sales process for many years – specifically, a detailed sequential (but not necessarily linear) definition of the steps, metrics, activities and customer decisions that facilitate the lead-to-close process. In recent years, likely as a consequence of sales operations' focus and the installation of process-driven tools, there has been a notable move from informal to formal sales processes. Five years ago, less than half (45.7%) of study participants had formal or dynamic sales processes. Our most recent study, the [2019 world-class sales practices study](#), found that number had risen to two-thirds (64.2%). This trend is important, as sales process formalization has been shown to improve quota attainment, revenue plan attainment and win rates.

Sales processes are becoming more formal



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Frequency of sales process updates



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Perhaps even more notable, the vast majority (90.7%) of sales organizations in our study reported that they look at and refine their sales processes at least annually, with three-quarters (73.2%) updating it as needed throughout the year. While these frequent updates do not necessarily live up to the standard of a dynamic process (more on that later), they illustrate how sales organizations are attempting to bring structure and order to an increasingly complex selling environment.

Despite this progress, there is still ground to cover. Most sales organizations remain challenged by technology adoption and integration issues, accompanied by traditional struggles with tasks such as forecasting. In fact, only one-third (34.1%) of sales organizations said they met the majority or all of their sales operations objectives.

Outcome of sales operations initiatives over past two years



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This is accompanied by an increase in those expectations, as most sales executives acknowledge the need to better leverage data,

analytics, AI and tech tools. This both creates opportunity for and puts pressure on sales operations leaders and their teams.

Section II: A broad and diverse focus

If there was one word to describe the trends in sales operations, it would be breadth. The sales operations ecosystem is big, and it's getting bigger. As the scope of responsibility and interaction grows, we find only general commonalities among sales operations functions and tech stacks, with each forming to fit the unique needs of the sales organization.

Chapter 3: Operations pulled in many directions

We asked sales organizations with a dedicated sales operations function which activities were owned by sales operations and which activities sales operations was heavily involved in. We specifically looked at 21 activities which, for ease of response, we divided into four categories:

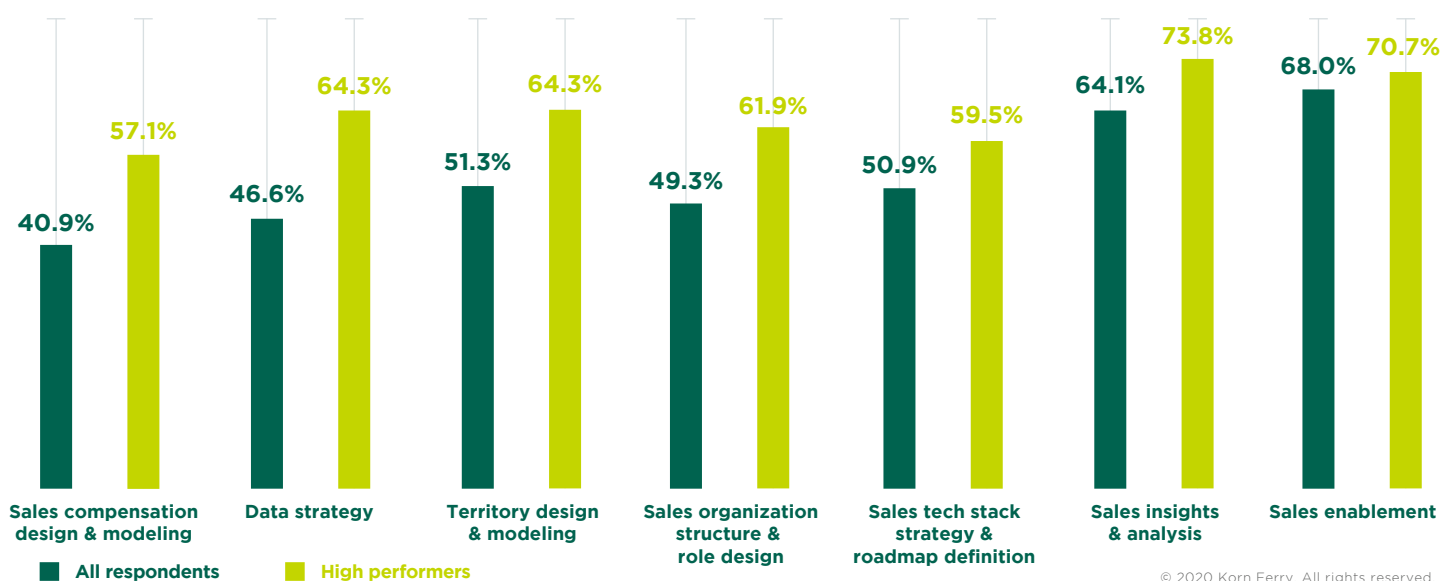
- **Sales performance management** – includes the activities associated with collecting and distributing data, analytics and insights, including the forecasting process.
- **Process & technology** – covers the activities associated with maintaining the sales process, the sales technology stack used to execute it and the data resident in those systems.
- **Sales support** – refers to activities linked to the execution of the sales process; for example, enablement (which is still part of sales operations in some, though increasingly fewer, organizations), proposal support, pricing and more. The highest performers in our study averaged 74.1% coverage of this bucket of activities, as compared to 54.5% for overall study participants. This was the most notable gap between the full sample and the high performers.
- **Sales planning support** – consists of activities required to set the sales organization up to enable execution of the go-to-market strategy (e.g., territory structure, quota setting and compensation planning).

On average, dedicated sales operations teams owned or had a heavy hand in 11.4 of the 21 activities listed:

| | | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------------------------------------------------|-------|
| Sales performance management | | Sales support | |
| Sales metrics & analysis (e.g., KPI) | 76.0% | Sales enablement | 68.0% |
| Forecast & pipeline management | 73.2% | Quote mgt./deal desk/discount validation | 54.3% |
| General reporting (excluding forecast pipeline reports) | 69.0% | Lead generation/prospecting | 52.3% |
| Sales insights & analysis (e.g., executive, customer) | 64.1% | RFP/proposal management | 51.7% |
| Sales leadership communication | 56.5% | Order validation | 46.3% |
| Process & technology | | Sales planning support | |
| Sales tech stack (including CRM) administration | 66.0% | Territory/account administration | 63.7% |
| Sales process definitions & updates | 63.2% | Sales quota setting & administration | 53.9% |
| Data management (cleanse, de-dupe, augment) | 62.2% | Territory/account coverage design & modeling | 51.3% |
| Sales tech stack (including CRM) strategy & roadmap | 50.9% | Sales organization structure & role design | 49.3% |
| Data strategy (including governance process) | 46.6% | Sales compensation & commissions administration | 47.7% |
| | | Sales compensation design & modeling | 40.9% |

Across all activities, sales operations teams had the highest focus on traditional activities such as metrics, forecasting, reporting, sales process and data management. They were least likely to be involved in upstream activities (design and definition prior to administration) such as sales compensation program design, organizational structure and design, sales tech stack strategy/roadmap definition and data strategy.

All respondents vs. high performers: ownership of strategic sales operations activities



Interestingly, the highest-performing¹ sales organizations in our study were those in which sales operations owned/was heavily involved in 14.2 activities, on average, showing a slightly broader remit for sales operations in those organizations. These high performers also were more involved in strategic activities

than the overall survey population, on average owning or heavily involved in 63.3% of the strategic activities vs. 54.3% coverage in the overall study population. Not only do the most successful sales operations teams get involved in more activities, but they also are more likely to engage with strategic endeavors.

¹ The highest performers are those who are in the top 20% of the survey population for win rates of forecasted deals, quota attainment and revenue plan attainment and who are in Level 3 on the [sales relationship process \(SRP\)](#) matrix.

Chapter 4: Sales tech stacks have little in common

It's a mistake to equate sales operations with tech tools. As noted in the previous chapter, sales operations has a variety of responsibilities. However, with the increasing proliferation of sales technology providers and increasing executive interest, sales operations is at the forefront of selecting, integrating and managing tech tools.

Almost two-thirds of respondents indicated that sales operations owned or was heavily involved in the administration of the organization's sales tech stack. This compilation of technology tools increasingly covers a wide range of selling actions. Respondents told us that, on average, 10.7 such tools were in use in their organizations, with another 4.3 on the roadmap (little change from 2018).

| Most common tools in use | | Most common tools planned for next 12 months | |
|-------------------------------------|-------|----------------------------------------------|-------|
| 1. Forecast & pipeline management | 77.0% | 1. Data augmentation | 32.2% |
| 2. RFP/Proposals | 71.6% | 2. Lead & account intelligence | 30.3% |
| 3. Sales training & learning | 67.9% | 3. Opportunity planning & management | 30.1% |
| 4. Sales performance analysis | 66.6% | 4. Channel mgt. tools (incl. PRM) | 27.5% |
| 5. Social selling tools | 63.9% | 5. Sales coaching | 27.3% |
| 6. Discount request & approval | 60.4% | | |
| 7. Account planning & management | 59.6% | | |
| 8. Pricing configuration & analysis | 58.3% | | |
| 9. Opportunity planning & mgt. | 54.9% | | |
| 10. Territory & account analysis | 51.5% | | |

Surprisingly, even the top 10 most commonly used tools only had an average penetration rate of 62.2% (slightly less than two-thirds). This means there is still much variance across tech stacks, and no particular category of technology is considered universal. (CRM systems are the closest to being universal, used by 94.0% of sales organizations in this study and serving as the backbone for many of the tech tools

we analyzed.) This diversity is not surprising when you consider the literally hundreds of sales technology companies in existence today, many of which are trying to launch their own categories.

Despite such a long list of tools in use, few organizations (25.9%) agreed that they had a sufficient set of tools to supplement CRM

Sales tech stack practices

Our sales tech stack is well aligned to the seller's workflow.



Our sales tech stack is tightly integrated (including with CRM), allowing for efficient data flow.



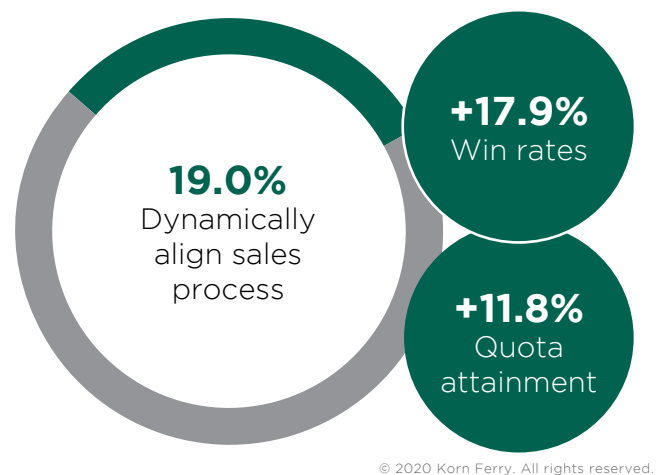
Disagree Neutral or somewhat agree Agree

functionality and support sales. That begs the question, “How many tools are too many... or too few?” We did not find a strong relationship between the number of tools deployed and sales success, as measured by either win rates or quota attainment. In our data, the bigger issue was less about the number of tools and more about the integration of those tools into the workflow and CRM framework.

Sellers are strapped for time, and organizations have invested in a range of tools to redeploy that time from non-selling to selling time (now currently only 30% of a seller’s week). Having tools that seamlessly support a seller’s daily routine can prevent unnecessary time loss as sellers move in and out of tasks and systems; however, only 27.3% of sales organizations were confident in their alignment.

Only 28.4% of respondents agreed their tech stack was tightly integrated among applications and with CRM. There is a range of reasons for this. Integration into the CRM system takes time, effort and, often, resources outside the sales operations team (e.g., sales tech must compete with a range of other projects for IT resources). Due to a siloed structure, sales enablement or sales leadership may contract with a tool provider without preplanning the implementation. Or a tool may be deployed as a pilot for one specific sales team, and the deployment never expands to benefit the rest of the business. While quicker to deploy, standalone tools and a disconnected stack suffer from duplicated efforts, mismatched data and spotty usage. The more integrated the tech stack, the better the win rates (+9.4%) and quota attainment (+8.1%).²

Alignment is detailed and impactful

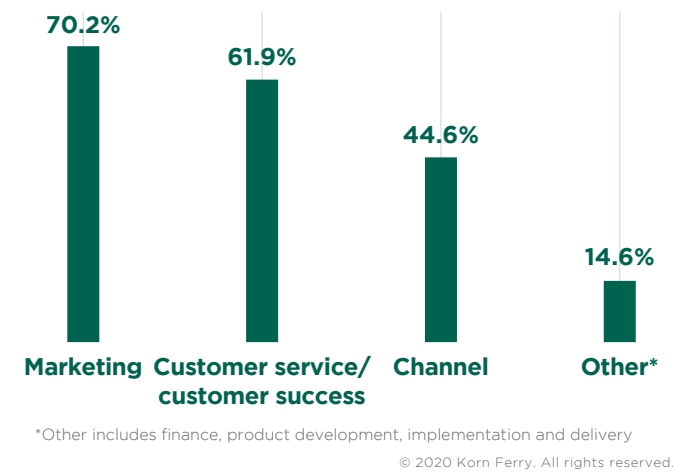


Chapter 5: Sales operations supports more than just sales organizations

Another trend we’re seeing is an increase in the percentage of sales organizations aligning their sales processes to the customer’s path – the steps ideal customers take throughout the lifecycle of a solution, from buying through to implementation and usage. Organizations with a tight and dynamic alignment of sales process to customer process are more successful than those who have a more informal approach (+17.9% win rates and +11.8% quota attainment). This requires a sales organization to be more thoughtful about the process steps that occur before and after the traditional lead-to-close phases. The move is away from siloed approaches where marketing owns the awareness piece, sales owns the buying steps and customer service (or customer success) owns the post-sales responsibilities. World-class sales organizations are more focused on a seamless and continuous approach, which supports the customer’s increasingly complex path.

² Our 5th annual sales enablement study found a similar positive linkage when looking at the integration of sales enablement content management (SECM) tools with CRM.

Dedicated sales operations teams support functions outside of sales



A natural consequence of this is that support functions such as sales operations and sales enablement are expanding their audiences beyond just frontline sellers and their leaders. It was common among our survey respondents for sales operations to support marketing (70.2%) and/or customer service/customer success (61.9%).

Specifically, sales operations assisted marketing with lead generation processes, data analysis and management. In some cases, they also helped with the administration of the marketing automation platform and its integration with CRM. This is important, as our 2018-19 sales performance study showed that only one-third of sales organizations had a common definition

of a lead or an agreed-to process for nurturing leads. This not only creates issues with time and duplicated efforts but, more concerning, it also creates a disjointed experience for customers. The more sales operations can bridge the gap, the more likely common processes can be established.

The customer service/customer success side is equally important. Our 2018-19 sales performance study also found that, in the average sales organization, 70% of revenues were attached to existing customers. Yet most sales organizations reported that they were much more confident in their ability to renew business than they were in their ability to expand it. The lack of a connection between post-sales teams and sales teams can hamper account management and limit information sharing.

Sales operations can play an important role in facilitating that exchange of information. Not only does sales operations’ involvement provide sales with more opportunities to deepen customer relationships, but it also can provide critical information to marketing about the most impactful features and benefits of a solution, help sales enablement build out quantifiable success stories and help product development prioritize enhancements for future solutions.

| Sales operations’ support of marketing | Sales operations’ support of customer service/customer success |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lead qualification Data management of marketing data Marketing campaign management Metrics and analysis Marketing automation management | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Metrics and analysis Data management of service/success data Customer satisfaction data collection, management Platform management, process automation |

Section III: Finding an extra gear

Precisely because sales operations is so broadly deployed, many sales operations leaders focus on a narrow horizon: “How do we help the organization achieve its sales goals this year, and how do we help them plan for how to best meet them next year?” And while this is assuredly valuable work for the enterprise (and admittedly longer term than a make-the-number-this-quarter focus), there may be some missed opportunities.

In Section III, we look at opportunities to “find an extra gear” – not to abandon the work currently being done, but to look for processes, tools and approaches that can have an exponential impact. AI and analytics are two of the most promising.

Chapter 6: Leverage analytics and explore AI
AI is seemingly everywhere, at least as a topic of discussion. In the past several years, AI in sales has gone from being cutting edge to being mainstream – or at least on the radar – for most sales operations teams. (For more about AI, see our white paper: When you think AI in sales, think augmented intelligence.)

Even so, much confusion and hesitation remain in the marketplace. The sales technology landscape has exploded and, with the increased messaging in the market, the definition of AI has gotten a bit loose. Here we define AI technologies as those that process very large amounts of structured and unstructured data to develop actionable insights. Importantly, AI technologies self-modify their underlying algorithms based on data and results. While many organizations use rules-based engines or analytics, we find that few sales organizations (5.4%) deploy actual AI broadly within their tech stacks, some are working within specific use-cases (28.3%), and the majority (66.2%) have not embedded it at all.

For those who have deployed AI, the most common applications are in areas where there are troves of structured and unstructured data to fuel the insights and algorithms. This includes many of the activities and tools noted in previous chapters.

Most common use cases for AI

| | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| 1. Lead generation/prospecting (account intelligence, lead scoring, etc.) | 51.1% |
| 2. Performance and planning (forecasting, compensation planning, etc.) | 46.3% |
| 3. Sales enablement (content management, training, etc.) | 42.8% |
| 4. Sales cycle management (opportunity and account planning) | 39.3% |

Furthermore, although there is not yet enough data in our sample to create statistically valid correlations for those with broad adoption, the positive linkages are strong enough to merit a second look by sales operations leaders. When we asked study respondents what was holding them back from broader usage, they cited five common obstacles:

Most common impediments to pursuing AI

1. Lack of mindset and understanding of AI and its potential
2. Inadequate budget and/or resources (e.g., data experts)
3. Insufficient, inaccurate or inaccessible data
4. Lack of clarity around the implementation
5. Inability to find the right solution for specific use case(s)

The first two obstacles on the list – lacking the mindset to explore AI and allocating the resources to pursue it – are closely linked. Many respondents reported that their leadership was skeptical of the ability to change sales force behaviors or that AI would bring sufficient value to justify the expense. Their doubts are not without merit. While AI can automate many activities (e.g., automatic updates of opportunity information in the CRM) and create more selling time for salespeople, it's not all self-contained.

Much of the promise of AI requires salespeople to act on the insights and recommendations that surface, sometimes without a clear understanding of the algorithm that produced the output (e.g., use this piece of collateral, price this solution as a bundle, walk away from this deal). Moving to an AI-enabled tech stack

requires change management just like any other major initiative. And while most recognize the need for data experts on staff, they also need to consider potential changes to the hiring profiles for sellers and their managers.

While change management, communications and talent considerations may assist with the first two challenges, it will take time and tools to build up the data to solve for the third: insufficient, inaccessible or inaccurate data. AI requires data... and lots of it. Too often, organizations rely on salespeople to manually enter data into their CRM, which (as noted above) is fraught with errors, can reduce the scope of captured data and eats up valuable selling time. Those looking to implement AI should consider data sources across the enterprise, options for automating data entry, and methods for cleansing and augmenting data when developing an AI roadmap.

The final two challenges are related as well: not being able to map out an implementation that works for the organization's unique needs and not being able to find (or narrow down) a solution that meets those needs. When implementing AI (or anything else, for that matter), it is important to do so with specific use cases in mind. Spurred by buzz in the market, many sales operations leaders feel pressure from their leaders to "explore AI" without sufficient agreement on exactly which business problem they are trying to solve and how to assess/measure results. Sales operations can help by formally assembling an advisory board of sellers, managers, marketers and others to solidify the strategy.

Common pitfall: lack of a data strategy

Respondents mentioned a lack of data as an impediment to AI usage, but we find most organizations suffer from an even more fundamental issue: They lack a data strategy. A data strategy is a documented plan that provides a structured framework for sales organizations to effectively manage and use data as an asset to proactively make better decisions. A data strategy includes (a) clear ownership, starting with executive sponsorship, (b) agreement on how the data will be used, (c) a structured approach to ensuring data quality, process and system integrations, and (d) a commitment to continually monitoring and fine-tuning the strategy.

Our [2019 world-class sales practices study](#) showed having a data strategy was a “Top 12” organizational practice, meaning it had a very strong positive correlation to a wide range of sales results. However, only 30% of respondents said they had a data strategy. Our recent white paper, [Defining a clear data strategy: a blueprint for success](#), includes more information on how to assemble your data strategy and why it needs to be driven by the CSO (not just sales operations).

Chapter 7: Aim for dynamic processes

In and of itself, AI won’t make a difference unless the organization is equipped to act on the insights it brings. We mentioned in our opening that sales organizations have made tremendous strides over the past five years in moving from informal to formal sales processes. The next step is to evolve those processes, yet again, to the dynamic level. Dynamic processes address the challenge of speed that plagues sales organizations. Sales organizations have been struggling to catch up to the changes in their

buyers’ processes and [expectations for many years](#).

“Dynamic” processes are those that are agile enough to be continuously refined with analytics, yet structured and detailed enough to be the driving force behind how the organization sells. This agility becomes critical as sales organizations harness the power of their data into insights. Such dynamic sales processes yield greater results than formalized processes alone.

| Formality of forecasting process | Ad hoc | Informal | Formal | Dynamic |
|----------------------------------|--------|----------|--------|---------|
| Win rates of forecasted deals | 45.9% | 46.0% | 47.1% | 49.4% |
| Quota attainment | 56.5% | 56.8% | 58.7% | 63.0% |
| Revenue plan attainment | 97.9% | 99.8% | 100.9% | 102.1% |

This logic holds true for supporting processes as well. Let’s take the forecasting process as an example. Accurate forecasting is critical to the overall financial health of the business, as it is used to make inventory and staffing decisions, determine investment strategies and represent the company to investors. However, in our 2018-19 sales performance study, we found only 18.7% of sales organizations achieved forecast

accuracy rates of 75% or higher (meaning they closed 75% or more forecasted deals in the manner – timing, products, quantities, etc. – that was originally forecasted). In addition, frontline sales managers are spending twice as much time on forecasting and other internal reporting as they are coaching their salespeople.

Top challenges with forecasting

| | |
|--------------------------------------------------|-------|
| 1. Seller subjectivity | 40.5% |
| 2. Lack of predictive data | 38.4% |
| 3. Limitations in technology | 31.2% |
| 4. Lack of sales management rigor in the process | 30.8% |
| 5. Lack of a formal sales methodology | 22.0% |

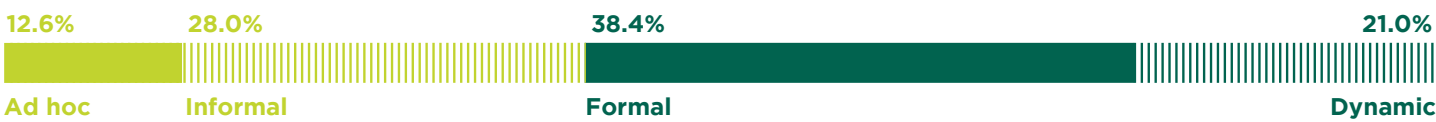
When we asked why forecasting remained such a burden, respondents reported the usual suspects of process, data and tools.

Higher win rates of forecasted deals equate to greater accuracy, and organizations that used a more formal or dynamic forecasting process reported 8.4% higher win rates for forecasted

deals than those using an informal or ad hoc approach. Only 21.0% of sales organizations in our study were using this level of rigor in their forecasting.

In this context, a “dynamic” process is one that utilizes predictive data combined with historical data and information from sellers and their

Forecast process maturity



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Common pitfall: lack of a reliable CRM backbone

Over two-thirds (69.9%) of study respondents relied on reporting from their CRM system to inform their forecasting efforts. Along with spreadsheets (at 67.6%), CRM was the most commonly used tool. The inherent challenge is that only 34.0% say their sales organization is highly confident in the CRM data, and only 39.3% say their CRM system significantly improves the productivity of their salespeople.

Thus, CRM as a backbone for forecasting is bound to lead to a rash of issues such as incomplete information, managers building standalone spreadsheets to adjust forecasts up or down based on gut feel, a performance management approach that discourages sellers from categorizing opportunities accurately, etc. (If you find idiosyncrasies in funnel velocity, such as opportunities flowing quickly from early stage to closed-won, your funnel review approach likely needs more rigor.) Our studies consistently show that better results come from CRM adoption when it is combined with a formal or dynamic process.

Organizations that lack confidence in their CRM data should look at deduplication, cleansing and augmentation solutions and consider new options for entering data into the CRM (e.g., populating contacts from email and calendar appointments or populating account information from business intelligence services).

managers. It also means that the forecasting process is well aligned to the overall sales process and that weightings and decision-gate criteria can be adjusted based on changes in the markets or insights into customer segments.

Chapter 8: Turn leaders into power users

In addition to more advanced data management and technology utilization, sales operations leaders who want to have a greater impact on sales outcomes and elevate their discipline need to increase their engagement with sales leaders – from the executive level to frontline sales management.

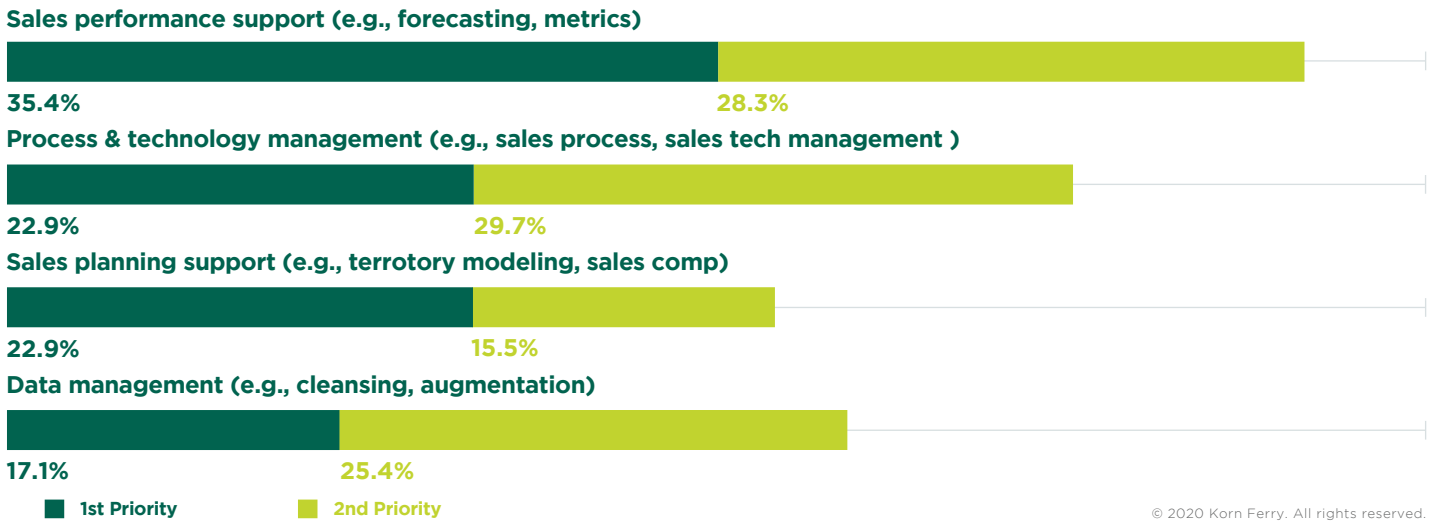
We asked the leaders who responded to our study (executives, sales directors and

frontline sales managers) where they see more opportunity for sales operations involvement. From their perspective, they said the greatest benefit could be derived from more sales performance support activities (e.g., leadership communications, executive insights, reporting and forecasting).

Sales operations possesses tools and competencies that are unique to the sales organization and, when applied to the growing repository of sales data, they can save leaders time and generate opportunities for success.

The impact starts at the top with executives. Many operations teams model options for executives as part of the annual planning

Sales leader perspective: areas that could benefit from more sales operations involvement



process; for example, the impact of moving to a vertical sales structure or the expected results of moving to a quarterly quota for sellers. In addition to these modeling and scenario builds, sales operations should consider proactively sharing more insights throughout the year. Most leaders (most people, for that matter) are overwhelmed by the information available to them and the choices at their disposal. Sales operations can play a key role in synthesizing large amounts of information and allowing for continual adjustments as needed. For example:

- Unusually high/low new-opportunity generation in a specific vertical may be reason to consider redeploying campaign

investments.

- Volume of activity may create impetus to increase or decrease the number of accounts assigned to specific sales roles.
- Booking activity may drive changes in the coverage model to more/less lead routing to distributors.

Our sales managers are accountable for the sales force's effective use of sales tools and resources.



Sales managers at the frontline represent a different audience. They often are on the receiving end of forecasting instructions, tool requirements and other compliance directives; however, they are not often engaged early on in the decision-making process to influence agreements. As a result, sales managers can be a weak link in operations success.

Take, for example, two key practices within modern sales operations: the deployment of a data strategy and the implementation of a sales tech stack. Managers can be the accelerator or the roadblock to such initiatives. Our study reports that less than half of organizations (43.8%) find that their sales managers take accountability for ensuring the frontline takes advantage of tools.

The key to engaging frontline sales managers

is to provide them with manager-specific insights. For example:

- Providing managers with dashboards by team and by individual that contain inputs for coaching sessions pulled from a range of systems.
- Generating analyses and recommendations on worst/best ranges around the forecast number to minimize subjectivity.
- Creating questions to use in funnel reviews that highlight common pitfalls and challenges.

Providing these insights saves leaders time and creates a strong case for why tool usage is so critical. It also builds a stronger partnership than simply requiring leaders to drive compliance with a forecasting tool.

Common pitfall: lack of a business plan

It's hard to engage sales leaders and managers when they don't have a clear vision of exactly what you are trying to accomplish and your path for getting there. While the majority of organizations in our study has a proactive approach to setting the direction for sales operations, only a quarter (26.7%) took that approach the extra step by creating a business plan. While a plan or charter is not as vital for an established discipline like sales operations as it is for relatively new functions such as [sales enablement](#), it can be a useful communication tool, especially when attempting to reposition sales operations or justifying a budget increase. Such a plan not only includes the major initiatives for the near- and long-term, but also a mission and vision, clarity on audiences and specificity on which metrics you plan to impact and how.

In addition to revenues, sales operations teams in our study were focused on increasing selling time, win rates, new account acquisition and penetration into existing accounts. A business plan connects specific initiatives and leading indicators to these broader goals. For example, if the key goal is to increase existing account penetration, then sales operations can conduct analyses to pinpoint which accounts may have the most untapped potential based on historical and predictive data analysis. Laying this out for sales leaders helps them better understand how sales operations fits into their overall picture and how they, as leaders, might better partner with their operations colleagues.

Section IV: Concluding thoughts

Finding an extra gear is all about digging deeper and not being satisfied with the status quo. There couldn't be a better analogy for our *2nd annual sales operations & technology study*. This year's study validated our findings from the prior year and, frankly, what our own experiences have already taught us: Sales operations is an established discipline in many organizations.

With rapid advancements in technology, changing buyer behaviors and an ever-shifting selling environment, sales operations can be a driving force behind sales performance; however, it can't achieve the kind of impact organizational leaders are looking for by just doing more of the same.

To help your sales operations discipline find that extra gear, let's conclude by taking a look at some of the areas where sales operations can make an impact, as identified in this year's study:

Formalizing sales processes – Sales processes are becoming more formal, with 64.2% of respondents in this year's study following formal or dynamic processes. That's up from 45.7% in 2014 – a step in the right direction, as formalized sales processes have consistently been shown to lead to better sales performance over the years.

Despite this progress, there is still room to grow. Sales operations can and should take the lead in identifying sales technology solutions

and how they will be used in the sales process. They can use this as an opportunity to define sales processes that have previously been informal or random and make improvements to processes that are already formal.

Improving forecast accuracy – Forecast accuracy is an area where most sales organizations continue to struggle. Our [*2018-19 sales performance study*](#) found only 18.7% of sales organizations closed 75% or more of forecasted deals in the manner – timing, products, quantities, etc. – originally forecasted. By taking the lead in the formalization of processes and the integration of technology into those processes, sales operations can have a significant impact on productivity and predictability.

Increasing selling time – Sellers continue to be strapped for time with customers, with only 30% of their time, on average, spent selling. This year's study showed once again that implementing sales tech was a high priority for many organizations; however, only 25.9% felt they had the tools they needed to support the sales team, and only 28.4% had tightly integrated currently implemented applications with CRM. This means sales is still spending time shifting among various applications and manual methods of performing tasks such as call prep and follow up.

Sales operations can increase selling time by taking the lead in identifying the tools that best address the sales force's most pressing

needs. This includes the use of AI and analytics. Then they can drive the implementation of these solutions to ensure they are integrated seamlessly into CRM and the formalized sales processes.

Impacting customer success – Our [2018-19 sales performance study](#) found that, on average, 70% of an organization's revenues are from existing customers. Many organizations have hired customer success managers and implemented programs to relentlessly pursue higher levels of customer satisfaction. These new roles and programs can be more effective using technology.

Sales operations can leverage its expertise with sales tech to support the selection and implementation of technologies dedicated to customer success. It also should ensure these technologies are integrated with the tools used by sales to facilitate communications and coordinate activities between presales and post-sales teams for a better customer

experience.

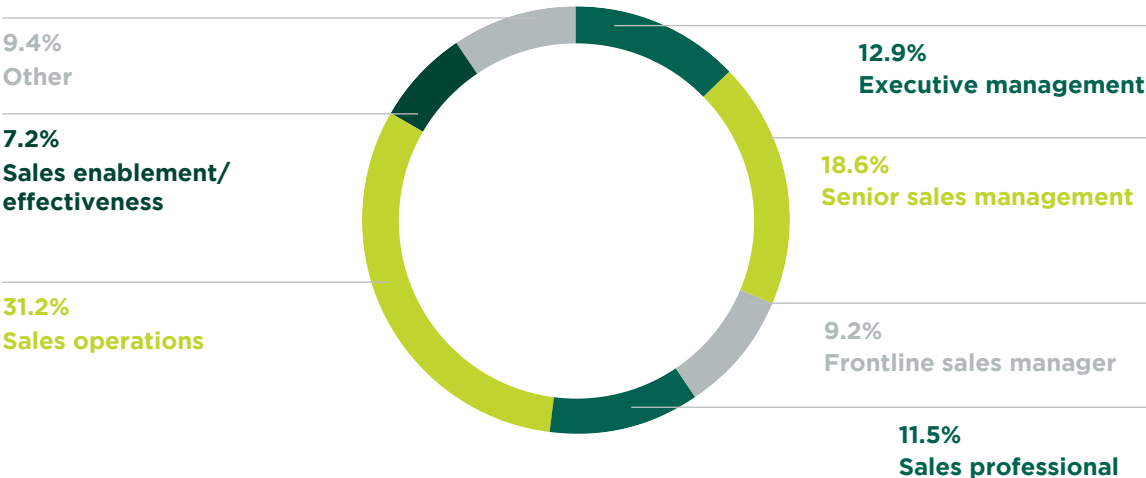
Supporting leadership – Finally, sales operations can have a company-wide impact by supporting leadership throughout the organization with access to information. Of course, this includes dashboards and tools to support frontline sales management, but it also includes tools that provide easy access to the information senior leadership needs to make quick, effective decisions as well as the tools needed by leaders in supporting functions such as finance, marketing and sales enablement.

It's not unusual for sales operations leaders to be overwhelmed with urgent requests for reports, forecasts, and updates to systems and processes. Yet if you want to find ways to make the sales system work more smoothly in the long term, you'll need to step back and consider the strategic level. Are your plans more of the same, or are you exploring ways to find that extra gear for an even greater impact on the organization?

Demographics

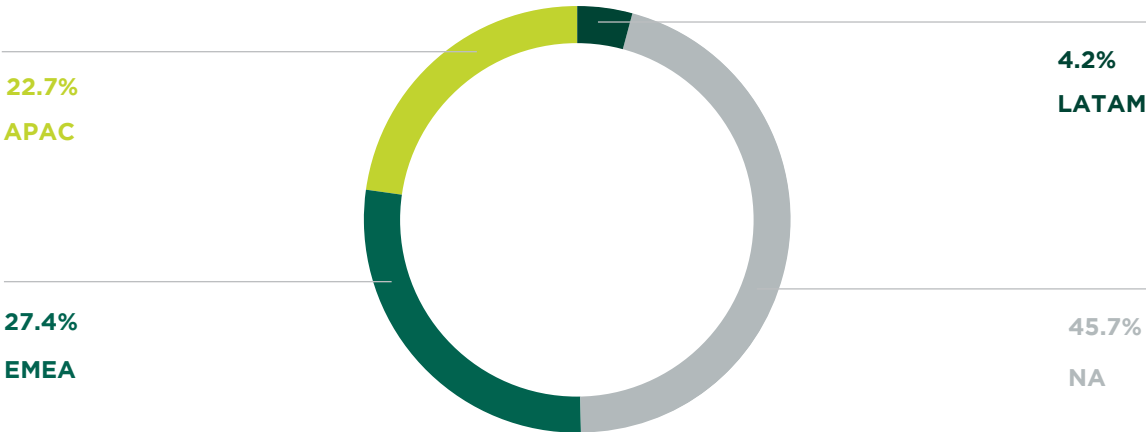
Our 2nd annual sales operations & technology study respondents included 807 sales operations leaders, sales executives, sales managers and sales enablement leaders. The study also represents perspectives from many regions and industries and covers a wide range of roles and company sizes.

Survey participants by role



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Survey participants by region



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