

De-Identified Themes

Theme 1: Challenges of human interaction in digital selling environment

- "...and in virtually we know that there's this whole issue around how do you, in a virtual world, establish rapport, build trust, particularly when you're selling solutions and not products anymore" (Group 1)
- "Do they know how to build rapport? Do they know how to establish trust in a virtual platform? I'm not sure any of us do" (Group 1)
- "All the challenges related to the interaction and the human factor that it's kind of different through virtual interactions" (Group 2)

Theme 2: Decrease in need for salespeople as intermediaries

- "You were a knowledge broker ten years ago, now that can't be your value add because they've got that information, so where are you at, how are you adding value..." (Group 1)
- "We had a discussion about artificial intelligence, to what extent it will replace salespeople roles. Chatbots, robots, and all of the roles that will be replaced. Incorporating the role of AI in the client interaction." (Group 2)
- "Product life growth is the idea that from a customer acquisition cost perspective the less you need to involve expensive sales people, the better." (Group 3)
- "...just in general technology is driving up everything that couldn't be done in the sales world, a foundation in tech knowledge too, the idea that there are more opportunities for people to self educate in all things sales related." (Group 4)

Theme 3: Change to more customized solutions

- "Obviously a big issue there is that things that were moving products to solutions are much more customized. Customized solutions are becoming more important and a real high delivery focus." (Group 1)

Theme 4: Shift toward consultative roles in solution selling

- "We see this skillset changing to much more sophisticated, analytical skills, you'll be seen as much more of a consultative role now because you're selling solutions" (Group 1)
- "So, do they really understand the value of what they're delivering, and can they clarify that ... and be super clear almost like the way a consultant is doing it." (Group 1)
- "We talked about how sales people are moving from the boundary spanning role to more like knowledge brokers" (Group 2)

Theme 5: Opportunity for international growth by Canadian organizations / sales

- “Canadians are much more domestic focused and I don't think we recognize that we're going to have to be more effective there.” (Group 1)

Theme 6: Developing strong client relationships, especially with economic volatility

- “the market is so volatile now ... it's probably more important now to have deeper connections inside your own client organisations and are our salespeople developing those networks” (Group 1)

Theme 7: Increase in client knowledge

- “How they now have to deal with super well informed clients who get a lot of information through a website and then to what extent they can deal with salespeople and what kind of knowledge they can get” (Group 2)
- “They're doing more research, they want to talk to chatbots, they want to help themselves” (Group 3)
- “but now the buyer is perhaps as knowledgeable as the sales person, so finding the value add there is certainly a challenge” (Group 4)
- “The other coin of digitization that we talked about was the fact that it's not just about the fact that knowledge is starting to become, there's this symmetry of knowledge between the buyer and the seller” (Group 1)

Theme 8: Importance of teaching value

- “So, when we talk about the process, we need to make sure that our students understand the whole customer journey and how through this process they will deliver value and add value, etc.” (Group 2)

Theme 9: Emphasizing specific analytical skills in sales

- “We just actually wanted to be precise about what we mean here because sometimes when we talk about analytical skills what we actually mean in a lot of cases is just creating or articulating a clear business case” (Group 3)
- “In analytics we need specialists, people who understand data, who are able to sort and are able to analyze and interpret what the story of data is telling ” (Group 2)

Theme 10: Sales education as more focused on support and mental health reflective of firms

- “have a full three hour course on mental health and sales as well as DEI and sales. That is firm driven” (Group 3)

Theme 11: Mentorship and Coaching in sales

- “So if you provide across what we just discussed that coaching and training and support on top of it, you’re going ... to have a salesforce that’s much more performant.” (Group 3)
- “More coaching and less managing, this came up as we started talking just more and more about mentorship” (Group 4)
- “Finally, I would say number one have a real conversation with the real industry and ask what they need, what we can do, what we can deliver, and make them understand that this is a win-win situation. Mentors for sales scholars” (Group 2)

Theme 12: Age gap prominence in sales environment

- “We had a discussion about the shifting demographics in sales. We noticed that there is a gap, an age gap, which is also critical. We have young sales people graduating or coming into the arena dealing mostly with older customers and that creates a big gap” (Group 2)
- “We have this older generation who have industry and product knowledge, and we have the younger generation who are more the digital experts. So, there’s this cross of sharing information” (Group 1)

Theme 13: Bridging the gap between the classroom and business world

- “Experiential learning and we need to bring industry into our classes. I see that also in my classes, I teach sales and sales management, and I’m talking theoretically, and students cannot relate.” (Group 2)
- “When you teach sales to students, most sales exchanges of value that we’re talking about are B2B sales, but students have never seen B2B sales....So how could we better show them what it even is.” (Group 3)
- “so many undergrad students will go to a job for the first time, they need to meet with a senior executive, they don’t have a clue about how that senior executive works, thinks, or operates. ... again lack experience with business.” (Group 4)

Theme 14: Use of technology to teach and support salespeople

- “is there a way that companies can leverage different digital platforms to be able to teach those skills to their sales students. We think that there are other opportunities in teaching analytics, teaching product expertise, and having the sales people have the right tools and materials at their hands when they're in meetings with clients.” (Group 3)

- “Lastly, in general just tools to guide the process throughout the sales process, I think there’s a lot of digital tools available to anyone working in industry, the streamline of the process is better.” (Group 4)
- “ how sales integrates into the broader company, even at a human resources level. Customer relationship management systems, salesforce.com, and such, is helping to streamline that.” (Group 4)
- “ how we moved to sales enablement softwares and the internal coordination and cooperation of different departments into facilitating the role of salespeople,” (Group 2)

Key Quotes:

- “ I think most of us that have teaching experience, are seeing students that are seeing a touchpoint with a sales course maybe once in the BComm or BBA, maybe twice. Compare that to any BComm or BBA student that is getting 2 or 3 accounting courses, 3 to 4 marketing courses, there aren’t many touchpoints with sales and that would be a nice thing to change.” (Group 4)