Group 4 - Discussion transcript
Sales Trends in the Digital Economy

1.   What are the key digital trends impacting sales?

Group 4: Quite similar to what has been said already, we had online sales, leave generation, a lot of the top of the funnel things that you were talking about (group 3) is increasingly becoming automated, AI has had a big impact on that, tech enabled going up, 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 is more opportunities for people to self educate in all things sales related. We also noted analytics, made more easily available through tech, and buyers' use of tech. I think that it is an important point that has come up a variety of times already, as mentioned earlier it used to be the sales reps as the knowledge broker, but now the buyer is perhaps as knowledgeable as the sales person, so finding the value add there is certainly a challenge. Automation of repetitive, non-complex tasks, so again, top of the funnel stuff. 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.

2.   How are shifting demographics and other trends creating new challenges for sales?

Group 4: Just the number of channels and the number of skills per channel that are increasingly out there, selling virtually is a channel, and again we really dove into this idea of endless sources of sales education now. Whether that's at universities or colleges or private companies…Uvaro, has anybody heard of this? It basically sounds like they're doing a sales certificate that's not accredited, that's just you pay $500 to get a sales certificate. But you know that's out there now, there's plenty of those opportunities.

3.   How do leading organizations create high performing sales tech enabled sales teams?

Group 4: We talked a lot about having a clear sales methodology. For an organization to have a really strategic sense of where they're going with sales, 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. Self-training again comes into it. We talked a lot about that, that idea of self-training in sales roles. More coaching and less managing, this came up as we started talking just more and more about mentorship, so many businesses seem to be moving so quickly that mentorship or apprenticeship is not as much of a priority as it used to be. That could end up being potentially a challenge. Alongside that, a less synchronous manager day-to-day. Perhaps less daily oversight, tweaking, in that mentorship kind of role.

4. How can we utilize data analytics to improve sales performance?

   Group 4: For question 4, we said as much as possible. We talked about giving tools to sales reps so that they can manage themselves with data, in real time as well, and discussed a lot about the idea of balancing out against the idea of analysis paralysis. The idea that most field reps now have access to a world of data. That could be an opportunity or it could be a massive challenge. Lastly, focusing on data analysis of removing non-sales related activities. The idea again, similar to analysis paralysis, of helping teams and people to understand that not all data is relevant sometimes. We talked about finding the cowbell. Finding that sharp moment of information in a 30 minute discovery call, it's always that one moment that makes the difference.

Sales Education and Research in Canadian Universities

5. What are the knowledge gaps and the implications for teaching and learning, especially in a Canadian context?

   Group 4: First of all, from a business education point-of-view at the university level I think that the biggest point that we really landed on was this idea of touch points in sales education. Whether it's in a BComm degree or BBA or any undergraduate degree, 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. We talked a lot about the idea of just a gap in business understanding. We were saying that 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. The opportunity is therefore there for them to be dismissed more readily because they're not speaking the same language. That's a gap that is going to be hard to overcome. Again, lack of apprenticeship, listening, and again lack of experience with business. We talked a lot about this idea of active listening. I think this is something that we as sales educators can work upon. Teaching active listening, define that cowbell in the mix, define that one shining moment in the thirty minutes of maybe more irrelevant discussion.

6. What are the key opportunities and challenges of sales education in Canadian universities?

   Group 4: We combined both education and research into one here. The opportunities are; we need more courses, we need to bring in experienced sales professionals, pilot courses, an opportunity to kind of break new ground, teaching focused faculty, but we came back to this idea that students are the solution. I think the biggest opportunity for all of us, I think we know, students love sales courses, they love it, they see the value in it, even if administration doesn't, the students do, and

that could be a valuable tool for all of us to leverage. Challenges could be a bias regarding sales, certainly with both research and teaching there's politics, hierarchy involved in our institutions, money, who owns the program. I know we had challenges with this, I'm sure you have as well, where there's sometimes fights about whether the department of management gets sales or does the department of marketing, or something else. Within those silos, another challenge is sales performance data not being available. We identified that as a big gap and I think we heard that around the room as well. Qualitative research is sometimes easier to access than quantitative data from companies, they don't want to share that data. Standards are also getting higher, fewer channels to publish in as far as research goes, and private sales related resources. So many companies out there publish white papers that are really good, they're not pure research but they're pretty good, so it can become a challenge.