

Sales Enablement Leadership Responsibilities, Expectations, and Qualifications

By Robert M. Peterson and Laura Munoz

The brisk growth of sales enablement has granted firms valuable programs and processes, along with random acts of empowerment and missed opportunities. If sales enablement aligns firm resources to improve selling productivity and the customer journey, what are the responsibilities, expectations, and qualifications of the people who hold the senior-level sales enablement role? This study scrutinizes 131 job postings of director-level enablement roles and decodes each to offer the initial analysis of what this role is tasked with and expected to possess. Results show that the main responsibilities involve being a sales catalyst, creating a learning experience, developing marketing, and advancing sales operations initiatives. Expectations include being both an internal and external liaison, providing leadership, and being a systematic problem solver. Lastly, the main qualifications being sought in this role include possessing diverse experience already, having varied communication capabilities, distinct individual abilities, and collaborative skills to affect change and implementation.

Today's sales representatives face a multitude of changes from buyers, ranging from the way prospects wish to interact, to the frequency and duration of that interaction. Meanwhile, technology is altering the pace of business and the complexity of the sales technology stack. The internal demands to ramp up faster, learn more regarding solutions, train (remotely), spend more time in front of customers, and exceed quota, has created a sales position that is being constantly tugged in different directions. The challenge becomes, who will oversee this growing area of responsibility? From a leadership perspective, the dynamic interplay of formulating and implementing management strategy has become vital (Cuevas, 2018). To help fill this void, sales enablement (SE) continues to gain momentum across the world to align a company's sales ecosystem with marketing (Peterson, Gordon, and Palghat, 2015). Specifically, sellers can successfully drive revenue (Grodnitzky, 2018; Moore, 2020; Sieck, 2020) by reducing sales cycles, removing sales barriers (Klie, 2019), and leveraging technology (Rapp and Beeler, 2021).

SE has been defined as "an overarching dynamic capability that aligns varied firm resources to benefit the

customer journey and selling productivity" (Peterson et al., 2021 p. 543). SE is not necessarily a formal "department" in many firms (Peterson and Dover, 2020), as it can exist parallel to a capability allowing for the necessary flow of information, systems, and processes. SE is influenced by, and influences, digitized solutions to transform business models such as portfolio expansion, redesigning value propositions, platforms, and buyer personas (Dasser, 2019). SE leadership influences the go-to-market strategy that binds the internal firm activities that proficiently create the value customers seek. SE leaders routinely challenge the status quo, resulting in collaborations with other strategic partners that historically have had struggles generating robust sales ecosystems (Grodnitzky, 2018; Peterson and Dover, 2020; Rangarajan, et.al, 2020). All levels across the organization may be impacted by SE to maintain alignment between sales, marketing, recruitment, training, strategy, and organizational behaviors (Rapp and Beeler 2021). Such alignment requires incredible skill and responsibility.

Globalization and digital technologies transformation continue to push sales organizations to grow systematization (Cuevas, 2018). As the rise of new channels continues (Peterson and Dover, 2021), success depends on employing the right people, in the right seats (Collins, 2005). From a strategic perspective, these drifts and changes have been addressed by an increasingly popular solution. Although not new to

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everyone, sales enablement continues to grow in importance and responsibility (Peterson and Dover, 2020), and understanding the dynamic capability within the firm is in its infancy (Lauzi et al., 2023). Academic research is struggling to keep pace and provide insights into the evolution of this concept (Rangarajan et al., 2020) as practitioners are continuously innovating and evolving practices. What remains thoroughly unknown is the SE role itself, and how this emergent position is operationalized when ascertaining job requirements.

Transformational leadership (TL) lends itself very well in this research context and is an established theory that has been informative since its inception (Bak, Jin, and McDonald, 2022; Bass, 1985; Bono and Anderson, 2005; De Rue et al., 2011; MacKenzie et al., 2001). The theory suggests that leaders who embody the motives of followers will reach higher goals (Burns, 1978). A transformational leader emphasizes leading by motivating and changing the attitudes and behaviors of their followership base (Günzel-Jensen et al., 2018). Thus, TL is most powerful in the hands of those in central positions to influence networks (Bono and Anderson, 2005) and executives who arouse others to go beyond their interests to pursue collective goals (Bass, 1985; MacKenzie et al., 2001). This study takes a first step in providing a theoretical foundation for SE leadership in a highly managerially relevant domain that should accelerate the nascent research surrounding sales enablement.

This study focuses on what sales enablement leaders are expected to do, and what their responsibilities are. Moreover, what are the qualifications desired when filling such a strategic role? When hiring anyone, especially if it's the wrong salesperson, can cost the firm three times the salesperson's annual compensation (Zoltners et al., 2001). That impact is even more detrimental when the role is a SE director, which touches a wider number of sales personnel. A poor alignment between the selection criteria and the organization's business strategy and culture will lead to subpar outcomes (Bechet and Walker, 1993). The way SE is structured will play a key role in how it impacts not only leadership, sales productivity, the effectiveness of the function itself, and the extent to which it truly enables salespeople (Peterson and

Dover, 2021). If executed well, SE has been shown to have a direct negative impact on hindrance stressors, burnout, and turnover intentions, while increasing the sales performance of the salesforce (Westbrook and Peterson, 2020).

Thus, using job description data from SE postings, the purpose of this paper is to uncover the job responsibilities, scope, and qualifications that hiring companies use for this leadership position. This qualitative study employs a thematic analysis method, starting with an understanding of the importance and relevance of SE capabilities. Next, we describe the methodology, provide results from this research inquiry, discuss the themes that emerged, and the significant interconnections among themes and their implications. Finally, we offer conclusions and suggestions for future research.

This paper contributes by providing a roadmap of the SE responsibilities and qualities of the senior architects/directors of sales enablement. Specifically, this inquiry will identify the relevant qualifications and how they are ultimately tied to the expectations and responsibilities framework for the SE leadership role. It will serve as an initial step to effectively identifying the role of SE, and its extent of interaction within the firm. Quite literally it will uncover how SE is operationalized. This insight will also bolster future research in terms of organizational capabilities, skills, knowledge, and activities undertaken in the name of improved sales results.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Operationalizing Sales Enablement

Sales enablement's rise has been consistently experienced among many businesses and organizations for the last decade. Roughly 59% of global sales leaders report having a committed sales enablement team or person in their organizations (Brudner, 2020), indicating that SE is not an afterthought. As an "overarching dynamic capability", SE endeavors to equip salespeople with expertise, skills, methods, and tools via cross-functional collaboration to increase sales retention and productivity while providing a positive customer experience (Peterson et al., 2021). Peterson and Dover (2020) noted several angles when defining sales enablement where a training, marketing, or operations perspective was present.

A pivotal issue concerns seeing SE efforts as a source of competitive advantage. Changes to the buyer's journey (Peterson and Dover, 2020), an insatiable need for digital content (white papers, infographics, blogging, and social selling), as well as a pandemic that changed the sales process creating uncertainty for buyers and salespeople, thus positioning SE as a central capability in sales organizations. Furthermore, the descending trajectory of performance by salespeople missing their quotas remains consistent (Hyken, 2018, Giblin et. al, 2022)

Yet, the question remains, how is SE operationalized at the individual level? SE must arrange digital tools and platforms, create and disseminate engaging content, and be a facilitator for internal and external teams and units (Dasser, 2019). It also must define what metrics will measure the function, and what services sales and marketing will provide each other (Moore, 2020). In a survey of sales leaders, SE was seen as critical to the success, or even survival, of sales organizations, and the SE function must be supported by data-backed coaching. Investment into SE leads to growth, outperforming revenue targets, and should not be part of the roles and responsibilities that marketing teams, or sales managers, accomplish (Brudner 2020).

Forces and Change Leading to SE

At a salesperson level, sales has experienced high-level transformations, such as buyers who exhibit a deeper product/service knowledge, evolving relationships across boundaries (leading to sales automation needs), the extension of end-to-end processes (to accommodate the tactical and strategic organization), and the increased need for compliance and transparency (Cuevas, 2018). In addition, salespeople are no longer the only source of information as technology has empowered buyers who seek a different interaction with these salespeople and tend to reach out at later stages of their journey.

At a macro level, Matthews and Shenk (2018) noted sales has been impacted by the broad impact of the Internet of Things (i.e., physical objects, "things," implanted with sensors and software, to exchange data with other systems over the internet). This requires salespeople to encompass both human/soft skills, such as relationship building, and hard skills, such as data analysis. Furthermore, organizations continue

to evaluate how salespeople interact with customers, and the time and resources needed while focusing on appointing multi-service teams (Cuevas, 2018).

Transformational Leadership and Sales Enablement

Burns (1978), in his classic work on leadership, introduces transformational leadership, and MacKenzie et al., (2001) offered a robust perspective in the sales area. Since then, the theory has been used to explain both leadership and organizational behaviors (Bak, Jin, and McDonald, 2022; Northouse, 2016; Wright et al., 2012). In contrast to transaction leadership, which produces expected workplace outcomes, TL leads to employee performance that exceeds expectations (Bass, 1985). Most transformational leadership research has focused on the impact on the followers of that leader. Such leadership links to positive outcomes, e.g., follower job satisfaction, improved mental health, performance, and motivation (DeRue et al., 2011). It generates positive affective states in followers and elicits the development of trust (van Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013). Followers also engage in more organizational citizenship behaviors and feel a higher positive impact when they experience transformational leader behaviors (Tepper et al., 2018). However, leaders can also endure losses such as emotional exhaustion and turnover intentions (Linn, Scott, and Mata, 2019). See van Knippenberg and Sitkin (2013) for other critical reviews of this theory.

Based on a review of the literature (Bass, 1985; Bottomley et al., 2016; Caillier, 2014; Northouse, 2016), four transformational leader behaviors exist that can be tapped to motivate followers: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration.

Idealized Influence (i.e., acting as a charismatic role model for followers) leverages leaders who are respected by their followers (Avolio, 1999; Bass, 1985) and thus, have a strong impact. Leaders then model behaviors based on an articulated vision (Wright et al., 2012).

Inspirational motivation (i.e., actively communicating a vision and ideals to followers) creates a vision shared by everyone regarding their organization's future while also communicating expectations. Building motivation calls

for followers to be highly engaged in the shared vision and for reciprocal targets to be set for themselves and the organization (Northouse, 2016). Consequently, team spirit and organizational commitment can be increased in this environment (Bak, Jin, and McDonald, 2022).

Intellectual stimulation (i.e., exciting followers by challenging assumptions) promotes innovation and creativity by rethinking work performance, questioning well-established assumptions, re-framing problems, and creating innovative ideas. It is essential leaders engage in promoting creativity and be receptive to new ideas (Bottomley et al., 2016).

Individualized consideration (i.e., listening to needs and concerns) calls for being attuned to the needs, concerns, and desires for the development and success of the team. The leader should be a mentor while creating and sustaining a nurturing environment where innovation and learning occur (Caillier, 2014; Günzel-Jensen et al., 2018).

Overall, these four behaviors emphasize motivating and changing followers' attitudes and behaviors (Günzel-Jensen et al., 2018) and are effective as they include a wide range of characteristics and behaviors, e.g., a shared vision, goals, emotions, values, standards, and ethics for both leaders and followers (Bak, Jin, and McDonald, 2022; Bass, 1985).

Transformational leadership has been especially beneficial for innovative work behavior. Early work by Cummings and Oldham (1997) argued that if leadership was to inspire innovative work behavior, it should motivate and support rather than control followers. Exhibiting any of the transformational behaviors raises the followers' intrinsic motivation, which is the inspirational process that links creativity and innovative work behavior (Günzel-Jensen et al., 2018). Thus, to serve as a catalyst of innovative work behavior, transformational leaders must provide mental stimulation that empowers followers to critically think, face new tasks, and adopt different ideas to become active problem-solvers (Avolio, 1999).

The benefits of TL have been deployed using a myriad of theories and mechanisms as well. In progressive order, some theories are job characteristics (Hackman

and Oldham, 1976; Piccolo & Colquitt, 2006), self-concept-based (Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993), self-concordance (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999; and Bono & Judge, 2003), self-determination (Ryan & Deci, 2000), social networks (Ameri, Honka, and Yie 2023; Bono and Anderson, 2005), contagion (Tims et al., 2011), public service motivation and mission valence (Caillier, 2014), conservation of resources perspective (Lin, Scott, and Matta, 2019), and positive organizational behavior theory (Bak, Jin, and McDonald, 2022). To serve as a beacon for followers, transformational leadership continues to be a sustained and relevant theory addressing leadership.

Transformational leadership can become an overarching competitive advantage in firms where the SE function is operationalized as a catalyst focused on the positive impact this style has on its followers. Followers would be all the organizational units that bring value to the customer and strengthen the value proposition. Departments such as operations management, supply chain, marketing, and sales would experience increased creativity and passion to remove barriers to the sales cycle. In addition, it would strategically prepare a company to better deal with issues previously mentioned, such as buyers with deeper knowledge who contact sales at later stages, an extended buying/selling process, and the increased call for transparency and compliance, as external sources shaping the SE function. At the individual level, SE can orchestrate awareness and thought leadership, extend expertise and cultivate trust across the organization.

METHODOLOGY

To better understand the trajectory of sales enablement personnel and the specific qualities desired, job ads often give an insightful window into what corporations are seeking from individuals in terms of skills and goals. "From a research viewpoint, posted job ads offer 'objective' information, in that they describe what organizations desire," (Mantrala et al., 2012, p. 170). These postings are a repository of market data that have been content analyzed in various circumstances to understand organizational intentions and outright strategic plans (e.g. Ryan et al., 2000; Todd et al., 1995).

Mantrala et al. (2012) used job posting analysis to determine if firms in India recruited to support similar strategies and principles as those in more developed economies. In another rare investigation using job descriptions focusing on sales management, Mathews and Redman (2001) analyzed job ads to determine if they contribute to recruiting the wrong salespeople. They found that some of the culpability for poor sales hires could be attributed to the nature of advertised posts. This finding brings back the importance of crafting a job description that accurately depicts the expectations and day-to-day activities of the new hire, especially at the senior level.

Finding job descriptions that include responsibilities, expectations, and qualifications is not new. Mathews and Redman (2001) concluded job descriptions were a contributing factor to salesperson turnover. Their results indicated that the recruitment of high-quality individuals is hindered when the nature of the job description lacked a range of essential information necessary to succeed. Peterson and Dover (2021) also observed that a current general assumption for North American firms is to expect that SE will lead to increased revenue while noting the lack of consistency on how to approach this capability among firms, while also serving a myriad of stakeholders.

Sample

A common sampling approach within qualitative research is a purposive sample to attain a discerning and in-depth understanding of the topic of interest. The selection of cases (i.e., job descriptions), known as purposive sampling (Braun and Clarke, 2006) or criterion-based selection (LeCompte and Preissle, 1993), is a sound strategy used to identify cases that will provide a rich account of the phenomena being investigated (Johnson 2015; Weiss, 1994).

Purposeful sampling allows the capture of different cases in the larger population to maximize the range (Weiss, 1994). The researcher must set a priori criterion of what constitutes infrequent types or variations that might include “filter” questions, contrast, and contrast within the context. Thus, grounded in academic and practitioner-based literature review of sales enablement, a bifold criterion was established for job descriptions

that maximized range: a) job descriptions that included the keyword “sales enablement” (sometimes called “sales readiness or revenue enablement”) as part of its description, and b) the job descriptions would be at the director or Vice President level to guarantee they were leadership positions.

Data Collection

The objectives to select the job descriptions were used to discern the themes. These objectives aimed at exploring and describing, in a holistic manner, what are the job responsibilities, scope, and qualifications that hiring companies use to define sales enablement leadership positions. Data was collected from multiple online search job engines for four months. This type of information is known as pre-existing textual data as it involves the selection and use of words that are already in existence (Braun and Clarke, 2006), whether in oral or written form. Pre-existing textual data, a secondary source, is valued because one can have access to experiences and perspectives without biasing or shaping the responses through the researcher’s data collection and methods (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

The sample consisted of a total of 131 job postings from Career Builder, Monster, Indeed, LinkedIn, and the Sales Enablement Society website. Only the job descriptions at a senior level met the criteria for inclusion. For example, Director of SE, Director of Global SE, VP of SE, and Director of Global Field Enablement. None that were merely managerial in stature were selected. The sample includes a heavy emphasis on SaaS firms (software as a service is a software licensing and delivery model in which software is licensed on a subscription basis and is centrally hosted) nearly 45%, with several other industries, such as technology, education, healthcare, etc. The sample size is within range of what previous studies conducting qualitative job analyses have performed in areas such as professionals in the digital environment (Park, Lu, and Marion, 2009), sales professionals (Mantrala et al., 2012), and health care professionals (Levin and Weiss-Gal, 2009). No data was discerned regarding the precise number of employees to be served, compensation of the job opening, or the precise location of the opportunity. While many did offer suggested cities to work from, just as many noted a remote capability in the job description, or it was not mentioned at all.

To obtain richness regarding the phenomenon of this study, an investigator triangulation method was employed (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Following Tello et al. (2012), the two principal investigators were involved in coding the job postings. In this way, investigator triangulation was used to reduce researcher bias by involving more than one observer in data interpretation (Bøllingtoft, 2007).

Data Coding and Analysis

The qualitative method selected for this study was thematic analysis (TA), one of the most used methods in qualitative research. TA identifies themes and patterns of meaning across a data set based on a research question (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Among its strengths, TA offers flexibility as it can be employed to answer almost every type of research question. Themes can be acknowledged from either a “top-down” fashion, where the researcher uses data to examine some theoretical ideas, or a “bottom-up” fashion, based on what is found in the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006), which is the case in this study.

A robust TA is a four-step process in which appropriate criteria have been followed. The process involves transcription, coding, analysis, and reporting (Braun and Clarke, 2006). During transcription, the study recorded the data, and job descriptions, in a master depository. Care was observed to maintain an appropriate level of detail, ensuring there were no omissions to maintain accuracy. Regarding coding, each job description was coded looking for themes. Coding yielded over 100 initial codes, denoting a thorough, inclusive, and comprehensive process. The themes were checked against each other to offer descriptors that are logical, reliable, and distinctive.

Content analysis was performed to comprehend the job responsibilities and qualifications. Two reviewers were used, and themes were gleaned from the job descriptions themselves. An inter-rater reliability coefficient of .93 indicated a high level of agreement among the raters, and compare favorably with Kassirjian's (1977) 85 percent rule for reliable content analysis. The goal of the analysis was to uncover organized themes and patterns while harmonizing a systematic narrative with illustrative excerpts. As a further reliability test,

a member check was conducted where the analysis was shared with sales enablement professionals at a national gathering of the Sales Enablement Society, and at two chapter meetings across the US, where they provided suggestions for improvement, or additional details (Zellweger and Sieger, 2012). The sales enablement professionals offered comments and most took the opportunity to add fullness to the narrative by providing supplementary stories or anecdotes to further explain how/why some firms desire certain skills or expectations. All were pleased that empirical work had been conducted and it was not merely a vendor's opinion or anecdotal thoughts. Lastly, the report aims at using language that is detailed and provides a good fit between the method and the reported analysis while placing the researchers as active members of the process (Braun and Clarke, 2006). An example of the qualifications coding sheet appears in the Appendix.

RESULTS

The results from the thematic data analysis, based on the job descriptions, yielded three elements for the requirements of the position: responsibilities, expectations, and qualifications for the position. Responsibilities comprise the duties, or tasks, assigned to be performed by the sales enablement director. Expectations are the anticipated overarching behaviors, or outcome-oriented processes, that are essential in the role. The qualifications of the candidates are the unique combinations of knowledge, skills, and abilities that help a firm decide if a person is experienced and competent enough to perform the essential duties outlined in the job description.

The analysis uncovered seven areas of responsibility and four expectation areas that hiring companies operationalize as part of their sales enablement leadership descriptions. The seven areas of responsibility were: 1) Sales Catalyst, 2) Education & Training, 3) Content Marketing, 4) Metrics, 5) Onboarding, 6) Sales Operations, and 7) Marketing Strategy. The expectation areas that complemented the responsibility areas, listed in order of mention were: 1) Internal Liaison, 2) Leadership, 3) Systematic Problem Solver, and 4) External Liaison. Figure 1 depicts the overarching assimilation of the comprehensive listing of the responsibilities, and the abundant cataloging of qualifications.

Figure 1 – Sales Enablement Responsibilities, Expectations, and Qualifications Requisites
N = 131.



Table 1
Responsibility and Expectation Areas for Sales Enablement Director Job Descriptions

Areas	Number of Job Descriptions Where It Was Required	Percentage
Responsibilities		
Sales Catalyst	104	79%
Education and Training	88	67%
Onboarding	62	54%
Metrics	64	49%
Content Marketing	63	48%
Sales Optimization	41	31%
Marketing Strategy	26	20%
Expectations		
Internal Liaison	66	55%
Leadership	37	28%
Systematic Problem Solver	33	25%
External Liaison	17	13%
N=131		

Responsibilities

The analysis denoted seven themes that emerged from the responsibilities area. The following is a description for each theme provided by the data, and excerpts that complement the domain.

Sales Catalyst: This was the richest domain in terms of content and focus on sales and process improvement, including rapport objectives. It was present in 104 out of 131 job descriptions analyzed. Companies see sales enablement as “change agents” where disruption/innovation and working across traditional silos to improve productivity is expected. Examples are: “Develop productive relationships within the organization to drive sales objectives.” “Develop and improve sales processes at all stages of the funnel”, and “Excel at change management and driving new processes within and across teams.”

Education and Training: A significant number of job descriptions, 88 out of 131 analyzed, called for a strong focus on educating, training, and coaching the salesforce. Knowledge and skills in the proper hands bring value and increased efficacies. Examples include: “Conduct business needs analysis and translates them into educational programs,” “Develop, lead, and manage the delivery and execution of training programs, continuous education, and self-service certifications,” and “Evaluate program effectiveness.”

Onboarding: These are the actions and the process of integrating newer employees to become experienced and field ready. Illustrations include: “Responsible for the on-board function of new recruits,” “Identify and refine onboarding requirements,” “Requirements must have a timeline (30, 60, 90, 180, and 365 days),” and “Report progress of new hires against business objectives and goals.” Goals are often the “speed to readiness” of employees and retention of knowledge.

Metrics: The data also showed the need for strong analytical skills. KPIs (key performance indicators) are an underlying culture for skilled SE leaders. Not all job descriptions contained revenue-based metrics; some were geared toward training or onboarding. Examples include: “Development of metrics to quantify current states and desired outcomes,” “Design and implement

metrics to ensure consistent evaluation and measurement of accreditations,” “Metrics on the effectiveness of sales enablement investment and programs,” The ability to use industry benchmarking information to identify market trends and test alternative approaches was also heavily mentioned.

Content Marketing: Many firms see sales enablement as having a significant marketing content component. This represents an emphasis on planning, developing, and producing collateral (studies, infographics, webinars, etc.) to improve sales productivity and effectiveness. Examples include: “Select delivery methods and process of adoption,” “Decide ‘best practices’ on finding and re-using content,” “Content focused on deal wins, customer success stories, and research, and “Creation of sales tools such as cases.”

Sales Optimization: This area activities responsibilities such as designing, implementing, and managing sales forecasting, budgeting processes, and evaluating and selecting sales productivity tools that simplify/ streamline the selling process. It often contains go-to-market planning, sales incentive, and compensation evaluation. Examples are: “Experience with account planning, solution mapping, and value proposition,” “Owns underlying data quality and implementation of systems,” and “Integrate methodology into pipeline and forecast improvement with an evolving selling system.”

Marketing Strategy: Companies expect marketing savvy from this hire, who will help execute and foment collaboration across different groups. Examples are: “Be a key member of the solutions marketing leadership team to influence marketing strategy and end-to-end marketing execution,” “Partner with marketing to drive joint go-to-market,” and “Be a dynamic strategist responsible for executing the broad-based B2B marketing strategy and tactics to support overall marketing plans and business objectives.”

It is important to note that while such positions are expected to lead the SE capabilities and facilitate change and improved processes, some companies require direct selling capability as well. Excerpts supporting this finding are found in quotes such as “Achieve and exceed quota,” “Successfully sell new business opportunities by leveraging best practices,” and “Build and manage

a list of new individuals and clients to drive business development.” This area may offer fruitful future research in exploring how realistic these companies are in defining the sales enablement function and what occurs in a sales enablement leadership role.

Hierarchical Responsibilities Relationships

In qualitative research, themes are typically observed at three main levels. The first level is represented by overarching themes that capture an idea in a collection, which tend not to have codes or data. The next levels are topics, that capture an organizing concept, and subthemes, which denote prominent and specific aspects of one theme (Braun and Clarke, 2006). A map depicting the confluence, themes, and sub-themes of the analysis is provided in Table 2.

The first overarching item that emerged was Learning, accounting for 81% of the sample, which encompasses Onboarding, and Education and Training sub-themes. Learning denotes the responsibility placed on the SE leader to take care of the developmental needs of people from onboarding to continuous day-to-day operations such as overseeing the responsibilities assigned to the position. Another item to emerge was Marketing (64% of the sample), which captures the role a sales enablement director is expected to play in terms of content marketing and marketing strategy. This theme demands specialized knowledge for developing usable

customer-oriented information, managing a “content management system” and timing of campaigns, pricing strategies, etc. Additionally, the person must also build bridges between marketing and sales as part of the strategic and tactical duties.

Sales Operations, present in 59% of the sample, contains sales optimization and metrics sub-themes. This theme encapsulates the business activities, processes, and accompanying data/metrics/key performance indicators that help a sales organization pursue strategies and objectives. The last hierarchical relationship observed was Sales Catalyst, a dominant focus that defines the sales enablement leadership function. Sales Catalyst was present in 79% of the sample, where the individual is expected to oversee and streamline sales effectiveness across the organization while improving efficiency.

Expectations

Four areas emerged from the Expectations theme: *Internal Liaison*, *Leadership*, *Systematic Problem Solver*, and *External Liaison*. Table 2 holds the subtheme information while Figure 1 contains the aforementioned four overarching expectation themes that were derived from coding each posting and excluding duplication mentions within the same posting. The following is a description of each theme found in the data as well as excerpts that further delineate each expectation.

Table 2
Emerging Over-Arching Responsibility Themes for Sales Enablement Director Job Descriptions

Areas	Number of Job Descriptions Where It Was Required	Emerging Over-Arching Themes	Number of <i>Unique</i> Job Themes and Sample Size Percentage
<i>Responsibilities</i>			
Onboarding	62	Learning	113/81%
Education and Training	88		
Content Marketing	62	Marketing	84/64
Marketing Strategy	26		
Sales Optimization	31	Sales Operations	67/59%
Metrics	64		
Sales Catalyst	104	Sales Catalyst	104/79%
N=131			

Internal Liaison: This represents the need for a person who can act as a conduit, the most mentioned request in the sample, 59%. Instances were: “Partner with Industry Strategy Team to bring products to markets,” “Act as a liaison/partner between Indirect Sales, Customer Support, Professional Services, Marketing, Finance, HR, and other internal stakeholders,” and “Collaborate with leaders to identify opportunities where they can be supported with data and insights.”

Leadership: Sales enablement directors must exhibit guidance from a multi-facet approach, where they lead initiatives in diverse communities (sales, channels operations, etc.), noted overtly in 28% of the postings. Examples include: “Lead from a tactical standpoint a sales community, supporting their effectiveness in winning technical decisions,” “Lead a team of sales and channels operations professionals, and “Lead a team of contributors and managers that develop and implement training, enablement, and delivery to customers, partners, and employees.” One reality of the job descriptions is shaping others who are not subordinates: “leadership skills and ability to influence others in the organization with no direct reporting relationship.”

Systematic Problem Solver: SE professionals must exhibit inductive and deductive reasoning, along with other advanced critical thinking skills to thrive in this complex environment (25%). These people focus on challenges and try to objectively approach an obstacle using collaboration, they are skilled at asking questions and gathering relevant data to construct viable alternatives. Examples are: “Identify knowledge and skill gaps across the company (sales, vendors), conduct assessments and roll out programs,” “Identify the gap between onboarding and sales training,” “Deductive reasoning – the ability to apply general rules to specific problems to produce answers that make sense,” “Inductive reasoning – the ability to combine pieces of information to form general rules or conclusions. This includes finding relationships among seemingly unrelated events.”

External Liaison: The descriptions clearly state the responsibility to engage with stakeholders outside the company in numerous instances (13%). The desire for sales expertise and the mission of the SE role blends in many instances, hence this role is not solely an internal

director. Examples from the job descriptions include: “Support the development of the Global Partner Program, including incentives and specific programs,” “Leverage external events”, and “Work across several functions and interacts with clients.”

Sales Enablement Silo

When analyzing the job descriptions, a unique trend emerged. The analysis showed that 66% of the sample operationalized SE as a company-wide endeavor. This means that the job description mentioned each of the seven areas of responsibility in the delineation. Surprisingly, 13% of the job descriptions seeking a senior sales enablement person were still outlining a role that was unidimensional in scope. In short, firms labeled their job as seeking sales enablement leadership, but the role really pertained to onboarding or training and did not branch from there. One potential explanation for this silo reality is that some firms might be jumping on the “Sales Enablement” movement and labeling their job description as such. Most firms see SE as an organizational dynamic capability (Peterson et al, 2021), yet still, some firms have not fully adopted that perspective.

Qualifications

Beyond the noted responsibilities and expectations were the unique qualifications necessary to perform a Sales Enablement senior-level position. What qualities or accomplishments must someone possess to perform this multifaceted work? The job descriptions offered a range of coveted skills, and themes were evident. Hierarchical qualifications of note were experience, skills (both human/soft and “hard”), and interacting effectively when attempting to perform all the duties envisioned. Tables 3-6 contain the subtheme data.

Experience: The experience demands placed in this role were abundant and the most coveted qualification was to have training and onboarding experience for the various stakeholders they will empower, with 50% noting this quality. Having prior experience in Sales Enablement was desired through prior positions and was requested by 47% of the job descriptions. A large portion, 43%, wanted sales experience as a requirement. Given the nature of the deliverables, it would be

beneficial to have a salesperson's mindset/perspective to be effective. Additionally, project experience was also noted as a qualification by 38% of the job postings. Examples of the various desires include: "Develop a comprehensive onboarding plan (boot camp) and continuous development program," "Quota Carrying/Sales experience a must," and "7-10 years of Project Management experience." Table 3 contains the data for all nine areas of experience requested.

Communication: The key to supporting others is communicating in a variety of ways. Excellent written (50%) and verbal (49%) communication skills were highlighted as crucial skills. Both "presentation" and "interpersonal" abilities were desired as well. The fact that several of these qualifications were mentioned shows the importance of dialogue among the stakeholders. Many firms noted "excellent communication" skills desired (35%), without granularly stating the precise type. See Table 4 for the precise percentages desired within the job descriptions.

Internal Self Qualifications: Employers look for a range of personal talents and traits that will help make the person effective in the role. Personal competencies represent a potpourri of desired talents and employers want them all in one individual. To be effective, the individual must arrive at the job with an analytic mind that is proficient in using metrics (63%) to fulfill the mission. This person must be the quintessential problem-solver who identifies an issue and rolls out a solution (58%).

Understandably, being *organized and hitting deadlines* (47%) is needed for results. Moreover, being a person filled with *passion, drive, and work ethic* was a prominent quality (43%). Examples include: "Proficient in establishing learning and performance metrics and measurements", "You look first to yourself for solutions to thorny problems," "Highly organized with a keen sense of attention to detail and meeting deadlines," "Figure out what is broken, and put together a plan for fixing it with little direction, self-starter and driven-to-win." Table 5 contains the full list of sought-after characteristics.

External Self Qualifications: Managing up-down across (44%) and collaborating (40%) are key abilities noted in the job descriptions. This person must venture beyond corporate silos and foment improved methods for serving the sales ecosystem and customers. The SE job requires leadership (39%); in many respects, it's "influence" (17%) since the SE leader must deliver results, obtain compliance, and have others support the initiatives. Meanwhile, they have few incentives to get others to comply, and without the salesforce (and others) being direct reports. Being an interdisciplinary team player (25%), in essence, a change agent (20%), was a common theme. Examples include: "Work with interdisciplinary teams being innovative, accountable, reliable, and thrive in a constantly changing environment," "Proven leadership in the development and design of effective programs that drive sales and customer satisfaction," and "Influence successfully without direct management authority," See Table 6.

Table 3 – Experience – Previous Involvement in Specific Domains

Experience Qualification Areas	Job Descriptions Seeking This KSA	Percentage of Job Descriptions Seeking the Theme
Training/Onboarding	65	50%
Sales Enablement	61	47%
Selling	56	43%
Project	50	38%
Marketing	30	25%
Sales Management	30	25%
Sales Ops/Support	32	24%
Global Culture	30	23%
Channels/Partners	22	17%

KSA = Knowledge, Skill, Ability

Table 4 – Specific Skills/Traits Qualifications Desired

Communication	Job Descriptions Seeking This KSA	Percentage of Job Descriptions Seeking the Theme
Written	66	50%
Verbal	64	49%
Presentation	55	42%
Generic Communication	46	35%
Interpersonal	24	18%

KSA = Knowledge, Skill, Ability

Table 5 – Internal Self Qualifications

Individual Qualifications	Job Descriptions Seeking This KSA	Percentage of Job Descriptions Seeking the Theme
Analytics/Metrics	83	63%
ID Problems – Rollout Solutions	76	58%
Organized/Detailed/Time Management/Met Deadlines	62	47%
Drive/Work Ethic/Passion	56	43%
ID Problems – Rollout Solutions	50	38%
Fast Change Environment/Quick Learner	49	37%
Self-Starter/Motivated	41	31%
Proven	26	20%

KSA = Knowledge, Skill, Ability

Table 6 – External Self Qualifications

Qualifications Vis-a-Vis Others	Job Descriptions Seeking This KSA	Percentage of Job Descriptions Seeking the Theme
Manage Up/Down/Across Company	58	44%
Collaborate	52	40%
Leadership	51	39%
Develop People	39	30%
Interdisciplinary Team Player	33	25%
Change Agent	25	20%
Influence	22	17%

KSA = Knowledge, Skill, Ability

DISCUSSION

SE has become a major element in many companies and the number of firms with a formal SE presence has doubled year-to-year consistently (Cachey, 2019). According to Peterson and Dover, (2021, p. 155), “85% of firms surveyed across the globe have sales enablement initiatives (meaning at least 3 functions

being deployed)”. This was based on their survey sample of 371 firms in 24 industries. Moreover, Fortune 500 SE leaders concluded that cultivating a salesperson’s insights to customers, gaining earlier access to an executive buyer, and creating function-specific proposals are among the top priorities SE leaders can implement to be successful agents of change in their organizations (Dornon, 2018).

Regarding this study, the results indicate that Sales Enablement responsibilities are structured in four theme areas: Learning, Marketing, Sales Operations, and Sales Catalyst, with Sales Catalyst and Learning the most prevalently noted. Hiring companies also express four areas of expectations: Internal Liaison, Leadership, Systematic Problem Solver, and External Liaison. The qualifications needed to perform this leadership-laden Sales Enablement role include diverse and adept Experience, Communication, Individual Skills, and Collaborative Abilities. Finding candidates that exhibit all these capabilities, in a newly emerging job path, is a monumental task.

A SE director needs to be a catalyst for sales, an active facilitator, and work in a fully independent position that is separate from the sales manager role. Just under half (43%) desired previous sales experience as a prerequisite for the job. Possessing a sales mindset would help greatly, but how do you pry this person away from that career path to move into something that has even less control and a larger span of responsibility? The “catalyst” is prominently and repeatedly declared in the study. In essence, the “change agent” mentality is needed to move corporate inertia toward a new set of behaviors and a more profitable outcome for all stakeholders. The task entails getting the traditional corporate silos to pull in concert, whether that be reducing new sales representative onboarding and time to first deal, quota (Wiseman et al. 2022), or mapping every marketing asset or customer journey decision point back to leading indicators that can be plotted and tied to training to improve all metric and customer experiences.

The clear ability to engage/lead others in different functions/departments is paramount for this role, especially across levels within the firm as recently noted by Lauzi et al. (2023). The person must “manage up, down, and across” as noted in 44% of the descriptions. Not an easy task, but even more difficult when using only “influence” to elicit results; generally the power that SE directors have. This might be why so many firms seek project management experience (38%) to perform this job well. One person noted it felt like s/he was throwing a wedding, weekly, within the firm, with all the communication, buy-in, and moving parts that evolve daily.

Sales Enablement leadership can be a silo, incorporate multiple areas of enablement, or company-wide reach within the organization. Silo functions are undoubtedly not the best operationalization to support an initiative aiming at efficiency and improvement. Thus, to flourish and continue to evolve into a capability that supports and empowers sales and sales processes, SE leaders must maintain a holistic focus as noted in numerous job descriptions.

The SE role authentically interacts with other departments to deliver objectives. Acting as a change catalyst is key as it touches many functions of the firm, including marketing, sales operations, strategy, and learning and development. While a full set of responsibilities and expectations now exists via this study, there is scarce mention of corresponding power or reporting authority. This very pivotal role will effectively rely on influence to get the job done. To a degree, these obligations, with unknown resources/budgets earmarked to garner results, make this job description unique within most firms. Arguably, it is one of the few senior-level positions that hold such ill-defined standard operating procedures to deliver on expectations.

The results also highlight the need to extend our knowledge of the role of TL and SE. Traditionally, research has focused on employees’ willingness to invest themselves in the fulfillment of organizational goals and grow their autonomous motivations (Ferner et al., 2015). Through the areas of learning, sales operations, marketing, and being a sales catalyst, TL becomes an ally to the responsibilities posed by SE leadership positions.. In addition, TL shows nurturing autonomous motivation, so SE leaders fully value their tasks and employees go through an internalization process (Decy and Ryan, 2000). This helps make leaders’ values and goals their own, strengthening the value SE leaders bring to the table.

Transformational leadership has also been linked to employees’ subjective experience while helping to sustain a job environment that presents more resources and fewer demands for such employees (Ferner et al., 2015). Leaders who turn to TL will be able to nurture a healthier work environment without necessarily causing a sustained strain on the psychological health of their employees while creating psychological gains such

as commitment and engagement. It is expected that through their words and actions, SE leaders will show meaningful practices for high-quality motivation while presenting a compelling vision to their employees. In the end, SE is hoped to have a synergistic effect on sales (Peterson et al. 2021), while reducing stressors on the sales force (Westbrook and Peterson 2020).

Lastly, the results confirm that SE is not a technological solution. SE has responsibilities in seven distinct and cross-functional areas and can be viewed as the glue that helps bind all the disparate functions together in a more homogeneous way. To view SE as simple as CRM or technology at large would be limiting the dynamic capability of the role in the firm. It's too narrow a view and it was barely mentioned in any of the 13 marketplace definitions outlined in Peterson and Dover (2020). Rangarajan et al. (2020) noted that SE is about "people, process, and performance". Technological tools can assist these endeavors, but SE is more of a dynamic capability (Peterson et al, 2021) versus a technology play.

Theoretical and Managerial Implications

Given the infancy of the Sales Enablement field, any theoretical basis of the discipline should begin with its classification (Hunt, 2010), as it fundamentally helps in organizing what to study. The few SE trade books and academic research on the topic (which are even more scarce) lack a logically developed and supported schema for grouping what the role entails. This initial work is vital as it provides an empirically driven analysis of 131 companies' hiring practices which could be theoretically leveraged for discussion and further hypothesis development.

Eventually, researchers will be able to conduct performance/effectiveness studies and perhaps measure the precise effect of sales enablement activities. Accounting for variance within the sales domain is extremely challenging (Churchill et. al, 1985) in its own right, let alone when a field is in its infancy. Cron and Slocum (1986) argue that a salesperson evolves through a four-stage career path: exploration, establishment, maintenance, and disengagement. It might be logical to accept this theoretical perspective for Sales Enablement, and detailing the expectations

and responsibilities is a judicious first theoretical step. Further exploration would include scale development which dictates an encompassing understanding of the span of control, responsibilities, and expectations with which these SE directors are tasked. To that end, any theory and scale development might be driven by the learning, marketing, operations, and sales catalyst areas noted in the finding. This classification scheme would offer a foundation for further delineation and affords a clearer conceptualization of the diversity of SE roles.

Several transformational leadership implications for theory result from this study. TL theory has been extended to include sales enablement positions for the first time and aids in responding to a research gap (Bak, Jin, and McDonald 2022; Westbrook and Peterson 2020). As noted by the results, SE leaders are faced with complex work where responsibilities and qualifications demand varied expectations such as being a leader, an internal and external liaison, and a systematic problem solver. Utilizing transformational leadership to guide these efforts would be aligned with Bono and Anderson's (2005) work that found leaders who exhibited TL behaviors tend to hold more central positions in advice and influence networks within their organizations. Researchers have asserted that TL would elicit individuals to pursue collective goals as they would transcend their interests (Bass, 1985).

TL fosters autonomous motivation in employees such that they can completely value their tasks (Ferner et al., 2015; Gao, Murphy, and Anderson, 2020). This suggests that job resources promote an internalization process that allows employees to adopt their leaders' values and goals as theirs (Ferner et al., 2015). These transformational tenets lend themselves to the SE job description requirements as these individuals would be centrally located to interact with other executives, who often fiercely defend their areas in the pursuit of their key performance indicators. Additionally, given the extended reach of SE responsibilities, gaining buy-in from others and modifying a wide array of organizational processes is nothing short of transforming silos. Overall, the transformational leadership views, and the budding sales enablement literature, now have an empirical interaction with a tremendous amount of managerial overlap in which to implement change.

The arrival of the Sales Enablement role is transforming how the firm onboards, trains, tracks, and provides ongoing empowerment to the sales force and it is well beyond the sales manager's purview (Lauzi et al., 2023; Peterson and Dover, 2020; Rangarajan, et.al, 2020). Although some attention in the popular press has been noted, this study provides strong evidence through an empirically derived job description analysis of how this new dynamic capability operationalizes itself within the firm. The specificity and clarity of the categories represent an important step for both practitioners and academicians.

Sales Enablement has become an important role at many firms, and according to the findings, it interacts with many other company functions and departments, each with its own needs and perspectives (Lauzi et al. 2023). For firm leaders, this study allows a comparison of expectations with others in the marketplace. Remarkably, only 56% of firms with SE approaches have a SE "charter" or formal vision and strategy (Sales Enablement Pro, 2022). Considering the findings, perhaps improvements in recruiting and selection criteria can be another benefit. The key is better alignment between the goals of the firm, the sales salesforce, and most importantly, customers. Sales Enablement is charged with this lofty goal, and such alignment would represent a major step forward for most selling organizations.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The approach of this early research study to understand the responsibilities and qualifications of senior Sales Enablement jobs certainly has limitations. The analysis used a cross-section of job descriptions from five robust sources, but additional databases are always desired and a larger sample size is always coveted. Moreover, an additional triangulation method, such as an inter-method, could be used to confirm the findings and reduce misinterpretation by comparing multiple data sources. In this way, the information obtained from job postings could be corroborated through the review of other relevant documents, such as internal policy documents and flowcharts of processes.

From a sales force perspective, SE must be explored as to how the contributions of this role assist the

salesforce and contribute to the changing nature of the salesperson's job. The entrepreneurial nature of salespeople (Serviere, 2010; Mallin and Serviere-Munoz, 2012), where multiple factors impact performance, is where sales enablement finds itself today. SE can certainly impact sales effectiveness, efficiency, and utility. However, if done poorly, or with an individual without the requisite skills, it would negatively affect everyone. Thus, what are the precise outcomes of this SE endeavor and how is it affecting the various internal and external (customers) stakeholders?

Much like when buyers are studied to understand the needs and demands of the salesperson, what are the desires and requirements as various internal stakeholders interact with Sales Enablement personnel? Multi-level (e.g., salesperson, frontline sales manager, marketing director) perspectives may expand future sales research efforts (Johnson et al., 2014; Johnson 2015). Forthcoming research might pair intra-firm (e.g., Sales Enablement - Salespeople) or inter-firm (e.g., the sales force and customers) in dyadic pairs to assess Sales Enablement benefits.

Understanding a SE's logical career path and progression would be useful. While there are tracks in college studies for sales, marketing, and operations, how do these people prepare for such demanding work and fulfill all the responsibilities, expectations, and qualifications stated in the job descriptions? Since metrics and analytics were so paramount in the job requirements (Rangarajan et al., 2020), it would be important to understand what downstream metrics offer the best accounting of Sales Enablement variance. What are the leading metrics for efficiency, effectiveness, and ROI? Moreover, how do you measure and evaluate the SE director's role?

With this research as a base, future work should include a taxonomic approach to understanding the world of a SE leader. Similar to Moncrief's (1986) study depicting the activities of a sales representative, an empirical approach would be very beneficial to understanding what SE practitioners do, the span of control and responsibilities, and the different types of micro-roles that these professionals perform beyond the role's job description. What is the daily reality of activities and, subsequently, the various SE job types?

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Appendix- Partial Coding Sheet for Qualifications of Job Description Postings

Job #	EDUCATION				EXPERIENCE SECTION										ONLY JOB SKILLS, not job responsibilities																		
	Interdisciplinary team	Team player	Bachelor's degree	MBA preferred	SF Exp	Curriculum dev/ training/onboarding	LMS exp	Project Mgrt Exp	Sales/ selling exp.	SaaS/ Cloud	Experience	Sales Ops/support Exp	Channels/ Partner Exp	Marketing exp	Global culture exp	Interdisciplinary team	Mgt Up Down Across	Fast change Environment	Lead/Leadership	Analytic	Metrics	Distant virtual environment/remote	Travel	Communication	Verbal	Written	Presentation skills	Interpersonal	Management	Quick learner/ Fast pace	ID problems	Implements/ execute/ rollout	Work ethic
1	x				5	x										x							x		x		x		x				x
2	x				10	x											x						x		x		x		x				
3	x	x	x					x								x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x										x
4	x	x	x		4	x	x	plus 4	4							x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x										x
5	x															x	x	x	x														x
6	x															x	x	x	x														x
7																	x	x	x	x	x	x	x										x
8	x	x	x		8			8									x	x	x	x	x	x	x										
9	x							5					x	5		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x										
10	x											10				x																	
11	x	x			10	x	x	x								x																	
12	x	x				8	4	4																									
13	x					10	10									x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x										
14					9	3	x	x	x	x							x																
15																x																	
16																																	
17																																	
18								6	6							x	x	x	x	x	x	x											
19																																	
20	x	x																															
21	x	x																															
22	x																																
23	x																																
24	x																																
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26	x																																
27	x																																