



# The new transformational leadership demands **in** **B2B sales**

An H.I. Executive Consulting (H.I.E.C)  
White Paper



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## Introduction

Over the past few years, it's not just the way we live that has changed, but the way we do business. The pace of digital transformation across all industries has accelerated almost beyond recognition.

Organizations from startups to blue chip multinationals have put digital at the heart of their business in record numbers. In fact, research suggests that seven-in-ten (70%) organizations either have a digital transformation strategy or are working on one<sup>1</sup>.

Because of this, digitally transformed organizations are projected to contribute more than half of the global gross domestic product (GDP) by 2023 – or \$53.3 trillion<sup>2</sup>.



*The pace of digital transformation across all industries has accelerated almost beyond recognition*

Successful digital transformation is not just about technology; it's about transforming the way an organization does business from the ground up. The move to digital has caused new and different challenges for sales professionals. And not just in the B2C sales realm, but traditional B2B sales too. The B2B sales of today is being increasingly shaped by digital marketing, artificial intelligence (AI) and hyper-automation.

It is no exaggeration to say that the world has changed and will never be the same again. There has been a paradigm shift. This white paper outlines what skills leaders in B2B sales and marketing must develop to help them better meet the needs of today's digital buyers.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lucas Schellenberg".

**Lucas Schellenberg**

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.zdnet.com/article/survey-despite-steady-growth-in-digital-transformation-initiatives-companies-face-budget-and-buy-in/>

<sup>2</sup><https://www.statista.com/statistics/1134766/nominal-gdp-driven-by-digitally-transformed-enterprises/>

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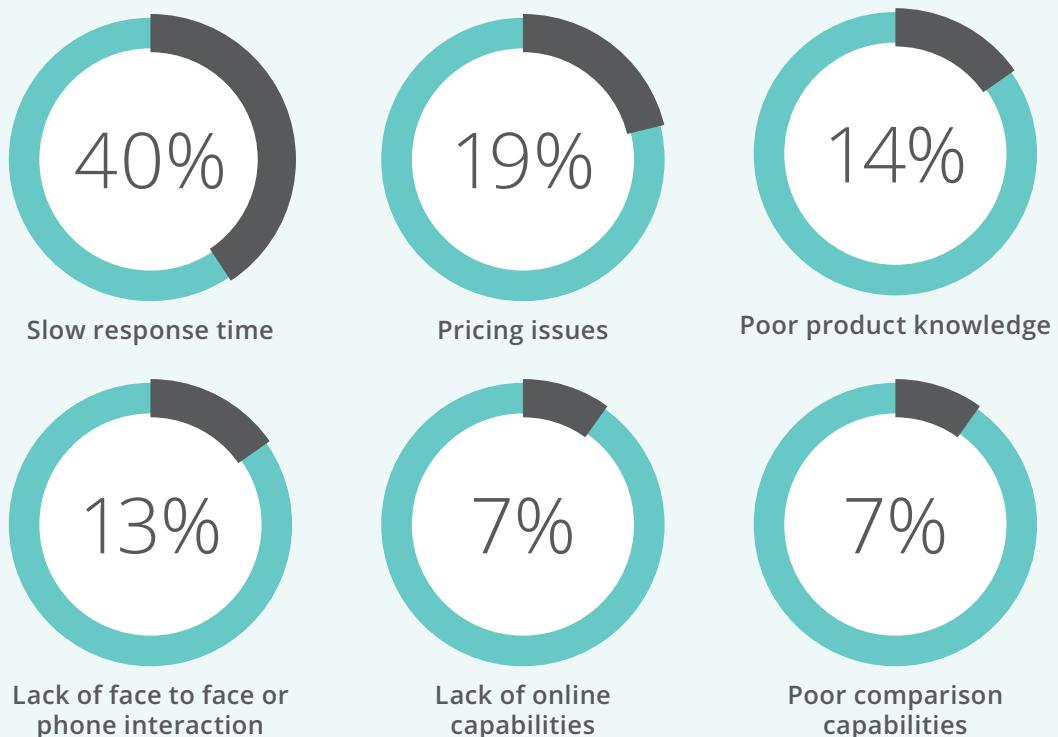
## The changing face of the B2B sales landscape

### An inflection point

B2B sales is now at an inflection point. A series of socioeconomic shifts, new buying habits, and technological advances have transformed the way B2B buyers want to engage with suppliers.

Once they have gathered all the relevant information, the B2B buyers of today prefer to keep communication with a supplier quick, easy, and digital. In fact, a quarter (25%) of B2B buyers expect to get a response within just 10 mins<sup>3</sup>. So much so, that receiving a slow response from a supplier is said to be the biggest frustration for a modern buyer, even more so than price.

#### Slow response time is the biggest buyers complaint



Source: McKinsey B2B customer decision journey survey

Smart B2B sales leaders can use the fact that B2B buyers do so much research before they buy to their advantage by building trust during this stage. They can also use this part of the journey to gather insights, update their CRM, and manage leads throughout the sales funnel.

<sup>3</sup><https://www.salesforce.com/solutions/small-business-solutions/help-desk-software/?sfdc-redirect=351>

<sup>4</sup><https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/mckinsey-digital/our-insights/when-b2b-buyers-want-to-go-digital-and-when-they-don-t>

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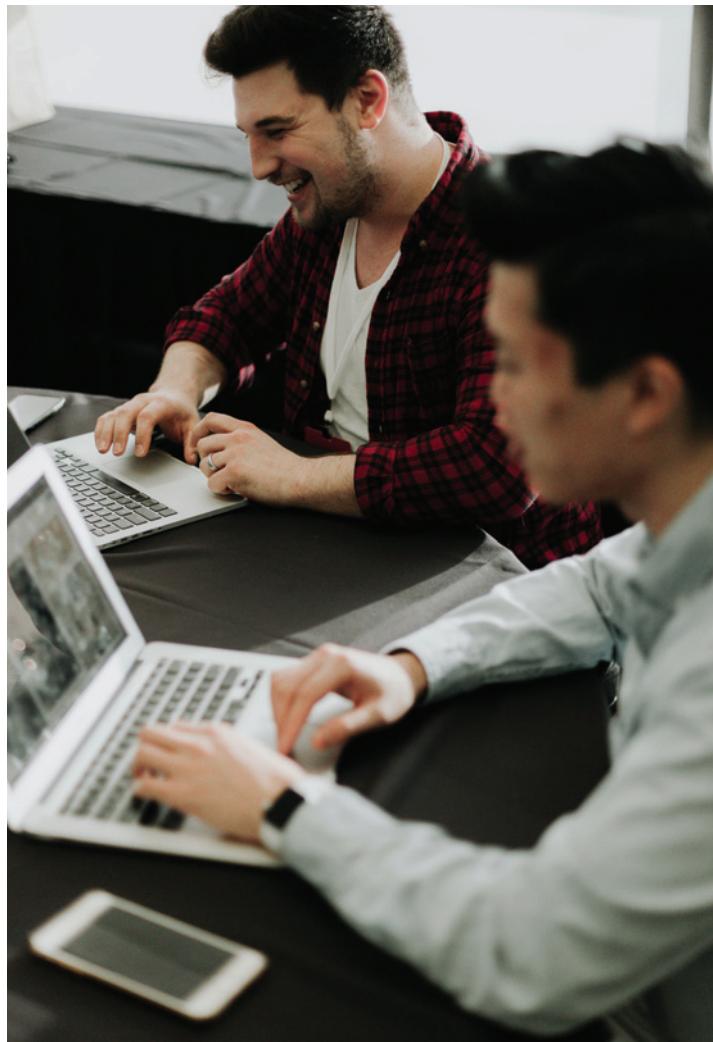
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## The changing face of the B2B sales landscape

### Moving the journey online

The rise of new technologies and buyer behaviors has changed the playing field. The buyer is now firmly in charge. Their behavior has shifted from top-down, one-way communications toward two-way discussions based on relationships, transparency, and collaboration. No longer can an organization simply push product and hope that their prospects take notice.

As the B2B buyer journey has moved online, so must sales. Savvy B2B sales leads know this and are already using the latest and greatest technology stack to their advantage. They are using the data and insights they collect to engage with buyers at every stage of their journey, building trust and growing the bottom line, while leaving traditional salespeople behind.



*Savvy B2B sales leads are using the latest and greatest technology to their advantage*

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## The changing face of the B2B sales landscape

### Understanding customer sentiment

Collecting data at every point of the journey and using the insights contained within is critical for sales success. How demand generation is done can differ greatly by industry. What is imperative, however, is that no information is wasted, but captured and analyzed.

This way, the sales team can be confident that customer sentiment is accurate, and insight can be shared throughout the salesforce, allowing sales professionals to constantly refine their approach as the data is gathered and analyzed.

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Transformational leadership is imperative to equip sales professionals with the abilities and skills they need to succeed in the digital realm.

A B2B sales leader needs to have the spirit of a digital expert and the mentality of an entrepreneur. They need to be able to stay relevant amid a rapidly shifting landscape shaped by disruptive technologies and business dynamics.



To be successful as the B2B Sales landscape changes, a new way of thinking is required. B2B sales leaders must develop new practices that help them better meet the needs of their digital buyers.

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## The changing face of the B2B sales landscape

### A new way of thinking

Make buying simple and easy	Maximise customer value	Redefine customer value
<b>Easy</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Fast and simple to do business with</li><li>Lean, automated, industrialized, and scalable</li></ul>	<b>Configurative</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Innovative, bundles, pricing, and value capture</li><li>Self-parametrization offerings</li></ul>	<b>Scientific</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Big data-enabled customer analytics</li><li>Sales steering using predictive models or experiments</li></ul>
<b>Anywhere, anytime, any way</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Extensive use of digital channels</li><li>Alignment of all channels and touch points</li></ul>	<b>Collaboratively networked</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Collaborative selling with other business units or ecosystem partners</li><li>Co-creation with customers</li></ul>	<b>Experiential</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Virtual experience of products and services</li><li>Augmented reality, gamified, multimedia, multisensory</li></ul>
<b>Anticipated and personalized</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Customized interaction models</li><li>Preconfigured, segment specific value propositions</li></ul>	<b>Sales beyond selling</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Orchestrating partners and internal functions</li><li>Educating customers about value creation opportunities</li></ul>	<b>Sales without selling</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Generating "must have" situations</li><li>Influencer marketing to create customer pull</li></ul>

Source: H.I. Executive Consulting

Effective B2B sales leaders must not only make the connections across their revenue engine – between selling and marketing, sales enablement, service and partner enablement, analytics, and insights – but also understand the technology that underpins it.

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## Why transformational leadership is necessary

### What characterizes a successful leader

To be successful and inspire the teams around them, B2B sales leaders have always needed a mixture of social and emotional competence. These include humility, empathy, respect, presence, and intercultural understanding.

A leader must be able to observe, listen and reflect. Plus, they must be focused enough to adhere to the famous management principle of “measuring what matters”.



*A leader must be able to observe, listen and reflect*

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## Why transformational leadership is necessary

### Key skills and characteristics

There are additional leadership qualities that have risen to the fore as society has transformed digitally. To be successful today, a transformational leader needs to possess the following six skills and characteristics:

- **Digital literacy:** They must be up to date with innovation within the digital world. This requires a key understanding of AI, big data, the cloud, the internet of things (IoT), omnichannel retailing and social networks.
- **Failure culture:** They must allow employees to make room for innovation without fear of losing their jobs. Only then can companies master the dynamic, digital and cultural changes happening all around them and set off for new horizons with transformed and evolving business models.
- **Social skills and communication talent:** They must work hard to give confidence to every team member. This includes communicating openly and honestly rather than resorting to controlling techniques. Leaders should empower employees to work independently. This motivates them to accept challenges and changes with confidence. Good leaders lead by example. However, they implement a feedback culture with simple core values so that team members feel that communication channels are always open.
- **Team building:** Companies today are encouraged to employ people who differ in terms of age, background, gender, nationality, work experience, and values. Successful transformational leaders use this diversity to create flexible and agile teams that complement each other to ensure the best possible results. To do so effectively requires an understanding of the different talents within the team and the ability to develop them.
- **Dealing with disruption:** Transformational leaders must be able to quickly identify changes and make future-oriented predictions as to which trends are short-lived and which could prove disruptive to their business model. A visionary digital leader provides orientation and thinks holistically.
- **Flexibility, dynamism, and innovation for digital evolution:** To develop innovations before they become trends, a transformational leader needs creativity and the ability to think disruptively. This enables them to anticipate new processes and business models so that the business can stay one step ahead of the competition.



## The evolution of the sales function

*Gartner acknowledged that there have been significant changes in the selling landscape, along with technology advances that has required sales to elevate its role in shaping sales strategy<sup>5</sup>*

*It believes that the evolution of the sales operations function has implications for the structure, size, and capabilities of the sales team today. The growing capabilities of analytical and administrative tools can reduce manual work, whilst increasing the importance of building a team deep in technology skills, quantitative aptitude, and business acumen.*

*Gartner states "While the needs of all companies are unique, sales and sales operations leaders must consider these broad changes as they make decisions about scoping, structuring, and managing their teams"*

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gartner.com/en/sales/role/sales-operations>

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## Why transformational leadership is necessary

### Then and now

The current global business landscape is changing faster than ever before. This is causing a myriad of new and different challenges for the sales professional. Transformational leadership is needed to equip sales teams with the abilities and skills they require to ensure success within a hyper-connected economy.

Traditional management	Transformational leadership
<b>Position and Hierarchy:</b> Executives have formal power and can determine in the last instance	<b>Principles and Process:</b> Digital leaders act within binding principles and processes that can be reviewed
<b>Delegation and Control:</b> Managers control assignments, delegate tasks, and evaluate results. The focus is on the <i>how</i>	<b>Voting and Reflection:</b> Digital leaders prioritize and evaluate tasks and results with employees. The focus is on the <i>why</i>
<b>In levels and selective:</b> Information is regularly distributed across the hierarchy levels. Within the hierarchy, relevance and accountability lie with the managers	<b>Integrative:</b> Digital leaders network the competencies of employees and – depending on the situation – take on tasks themselves
<b>Individual:</b> Individual performance and goals count. Control and feedback are provided by the direct superior in two-person discussions	<b>Collective and continuous:</b> What counts are cooperation, personal behavior, and the quality of results. Feedback takes place collectively as a team
<b>Rules and consequences:</b> Rules are intended to avoid mistakes and conflicts. Compliance is monitored and consequences follow in case of violations	<b>In real-time and completely:</b> Leadership creates high transparency and availability of information. Employees should be up to date on their responsibilities
<b>Efficiency and Optimization:</b> Processes are optimized quickly with minimized risk. Scope for creativity is limited, changes are avoided	<b>Learning process and support:</b> Digital leaders provide binding processes for learning from mistakes and for the productive resolution of conflicts

Source: H.I. Executive Consulting

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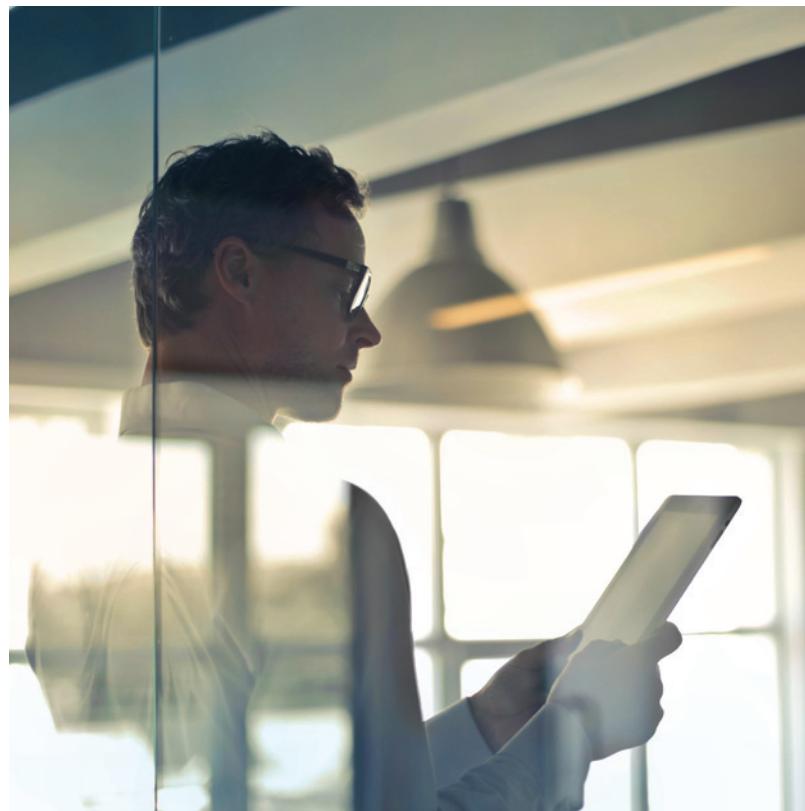
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## Digital create-ups are in demand

### A new way of thinking is required

A new way of thinking is required. To succeed, salespeople and leaders need to not only understand, but embrace the new processes and tools of the digital sales world. This is causing new leadership roles to emerge.

Today, sales teams are no longer made up of traditional sales professionals. Businesses realize there is a lot of untapped potential outside of traditional sales teams. Now, digital leaders and creatives are in demand. These 'digital create-ups' are adept at crafting experiences within the digital realm that lead to prospects discovering a product or service and then motivating them to act. They can be the difference between a brand succeeding or not.



*Digital create-ups  
are adept at crafting  
experiences within  
the digital realm*

*Digital create-ups understand the strategic shifts that are happening in technology and are always on the lookout for new, cost-effective solutions.*

*They are adept at responding to new stimuli, anticipating emerging trends and ensuring that the business remains ahead of the competition.*

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## Digital create-ups are in demand

Those looking to hire a B2B sales leader today should be asking themselves the following ten questions:

1. Do they have the right skills?
2. Are they motivated?
3. Are they willing and able to go the extra mile?
4. Are they committed to the plans and strategy of the company?
5. What potential do they have for the future journey?
6. Do they "walk the talk"?
7. Are they accepted and respected leaders?
8. Do they "team-up"?
9. Do they form a team with the board of directors?
10. Are they willing to develop, learn and improve?

Of course, simply looking at a CV rarely provides the answers. But even if all these ten boxes are ticked, it is still important that whoever is chosen fits well within the company culture.



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## Digital create-ups are in demand

### Skill requirements continue to morph

Data and analytical skills are increasingly coming to the fore. Whereas, the need for effective oral communication and stakeholder management is decreasing in its relevance.

The following table shows the sales skills that sales leaders deemed would be most important in five years' time:

### Change in rank of importance for sales operations skills over five years

Traditional management	Ranking for hires in 12 months	Importance in 5 years	Change in ranking
Data Visualization	14	1	13 ▲
Quantitative skills	5	2	3 ▲
Analytical problem solving	3	3	0
Forecasting and modeling	21	4	17 ▲
Data governance	19	5	14 ▲
Strategic planning	2	6	-4 ▼
Technical aptitude	15	7	8 ▲
Experience with a specific CRM platform	11	8	3 ▲
Application management	17	9	8 ▲
CRM experience	16	10	6 ▲
Application development	13	11	2 ▲
Statistical analysis	12	12	0
Project management	8	13	-5 ▼
Business acumen	9	14	-5 ▼
Effective oral communication	1	15	-14 ▼
Performance management	7	16	-9 ▼
Previous experience in sales	6	17	-11 ▼
Effective written communication	4	18	-14 ▼
Sales compensation design	20	19	1 ▲
Stakeholder management	18	20	-2 ▼
Sales compensation administration	10	21	-11 ▼
Territory design	22	22	0

n = 296

Source: 2019 Gartner State of Sales Operations Survey

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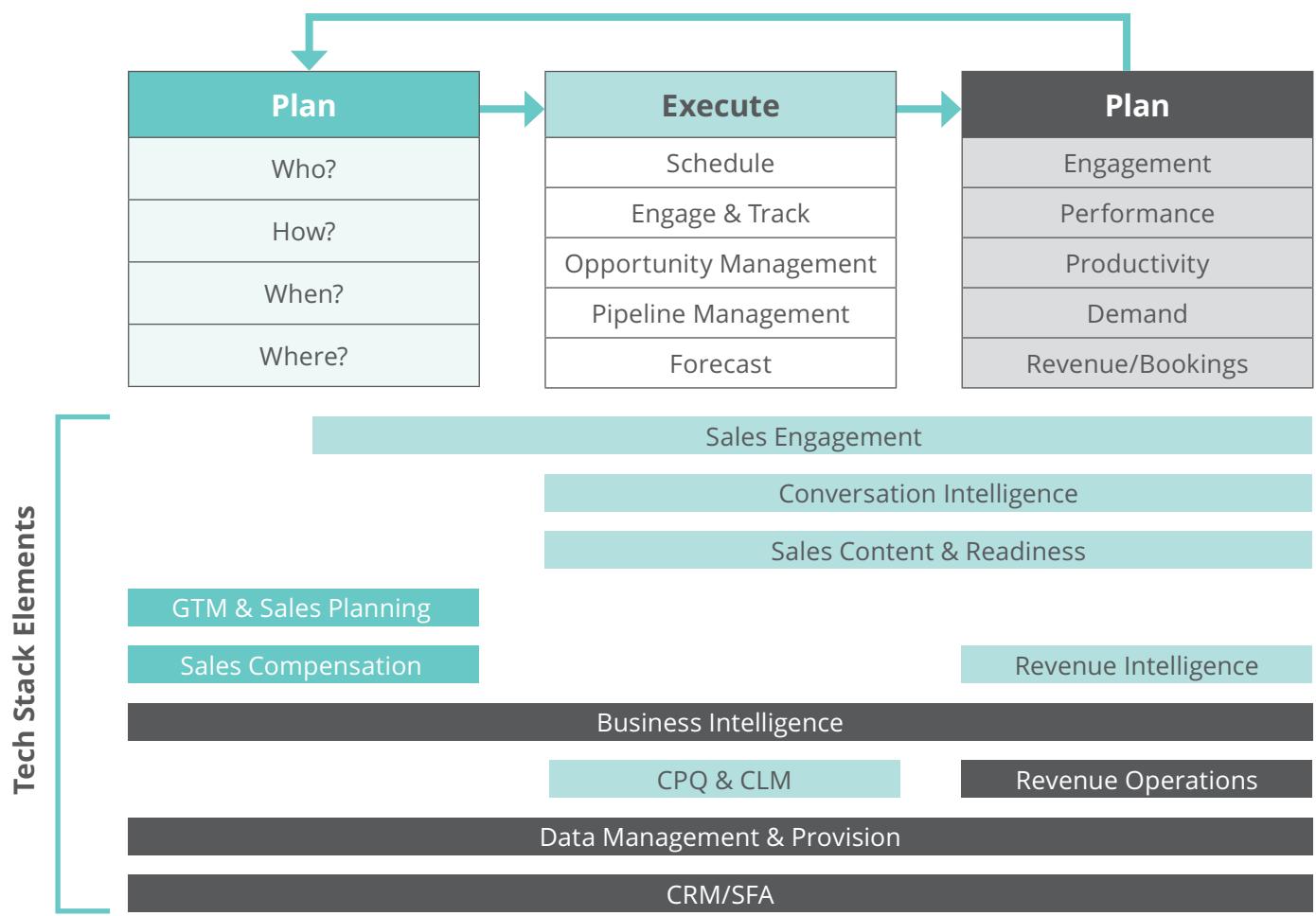
## Digital create-ups are in demand

### Key sales tech requirements

Once the right B2B sales leader is in place, it is important that the business has the right technology available so that they can work effectively across the revenue engine.

It is about connecting the dots. Where marketing was once an instrument for sales, now marketing, sales and technology need to co-exist alongside each other.

### Key Sales Tech Requirements



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## Digital create-ups are in demand

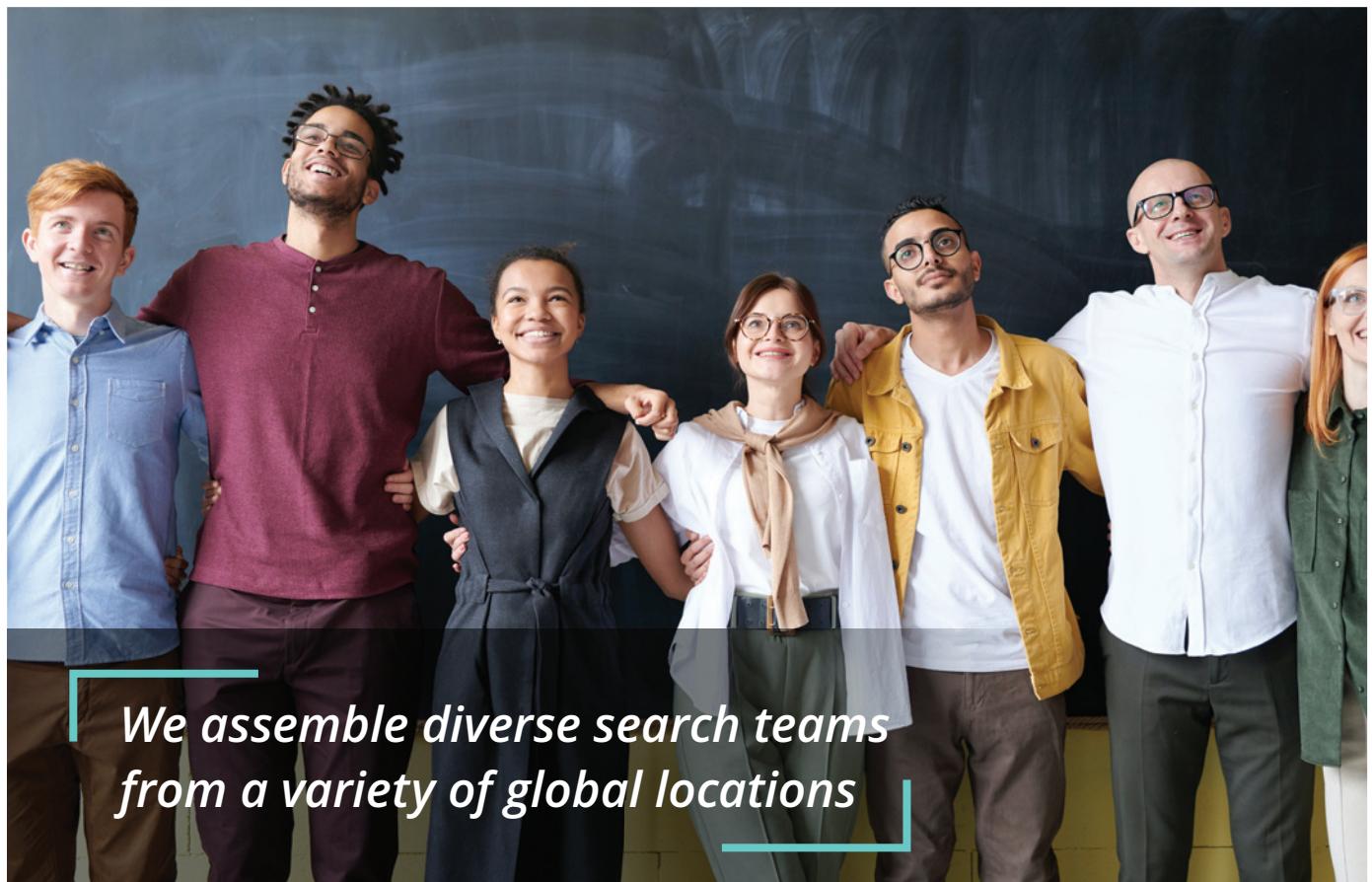
### The benefits of diversity

A diverse outlook and experience at executive level is proven to deliver enhanced performance, as well as offer both economic and social benefits. While gender dominates the diversity agenda, considering background, education, values, self-expression, and ethnicity to ensure equal opportunity is also important.

As businesses are waking up to the benefits of a diverse and inclusive workforce, the requisite corporate structures to harness this talent pool are often missing. This leaves businesses unable to enjoy the multitude of benefits that diversity brings.

A company-wide and human-centric approach to diversity is key to establishing a corporate structure that will support a diverse talent pool. Ensuring a diverse interview panel is a key component of this. It is important to arrange unconscious bias briefings for decision makers, review client evaluation practices to ensure fair assessment, and collaborate to assemble diverse internal project teams to minimize bias.

At H.I.E.C, we ensure we assemble diverse search teams from a variety of global locations for every assignment, to foster creativity and offer clients a rounded perspective.



***We assemble diverse search teams  
from a variety of global locations***

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## Key learnings

### A seismic shift

There has been a seismic shift. Technology has impacted all our lives and has caused B2B buyers to become smarter and more prepared. Buyers today know what they want and when they want to buy it. Whilst sales remains central to any ambitious organization, it is increasingly lagging. Savvy organizations acknowledge that a change is needed. However, they are often unsure how to get there.

We provide a catalyst for change. Today it is a case of disrupt or be disrupted. Only by thinking beyond the analogue, anticipating change, and acquiring the best digital talent can organizations hope to compete.

This paper has emphasized the need for transformational leadership in B2B sales. Sales leaders who are stuck in their ways need to change their mindset or they will simply be left behind. At the same time, organizations must widen the net to source the best candidates for change. Through our partnership with AI-based behavioral analytics platform, Wisnio, H.I.E.C can enable clients to make data-driven, unbiased decisions so that they can build high-performing leadership teams.



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## Key learnings

### Our Approach: A note from the CEO, Stacey Mainiero

Since our inception, we have redefined the executive search model. Our success comes from our ability to identify changing market dynamics and then attract high-level candidates.

Our clients want different qualities from talent today. The exponential rise of data has disrupted traditional business models beyond recognition and redefined success to beyond the analogue. This means they require a different breed of sales leader that is technology focussed and has deep-rooted analytical skills to drive transformation and change.



*Clients require a different breed of sales leader that is technology focussed and has deep-rooted analytical skills*

The growing dynamic of the internet has changed everything. Sales has become a technology game. There is a real need for transformational leadership today to compete. This has been driven by both radical technological change and a requirement for a contemporary culture that is based upon diversity and inclusion.

Building and maintaining a world-class sales team is an ongoing challenge for B2B companies. Today, digital create-ups that merge digital expertise with an entrepreneurial spirit are in demand more than ever before. Make sure that you fit the bill.

At H.I.E.C, digital is in our DNA. For over a decade, we have been working with clients on digital leadership and have a deep understanding of the strategic and operational skills required today. We help businesses find the right people for the right jobs at the right time. We are experts in identifying and engaging with digital talent across the globe that meet the challenges of the new economy. We help B2B businesses drive forward with transformation and change.

*Stacey Mainiero*

**Stacey Mainiero**

Chief Executive Officer, H.I. Executive Consulting (H.I.E.C)



## About H.I.E.C.

H.I. Executive Consulting (H.I.E.C) is a leading global executive search firm focused on hiring Board, CEO and Senior-level executives worldwide. The company was established in 2012 by a group of senior partners from leading global search firms with a view to disrupt the traditional approach to executive search by placing a premium focus on hiring transformational leaders across the sectors we serve.

Rapid globalization has given rise to new types of disruptive leaders, spread across the globe, in the traditional and transformative functional areas. At H.I.E.C, we connect the world's leading corporations, private equity, and venture capital portfolio firms with a new wave of leaders to help them scale and win in the digitized economy.

Operating across 13 offices in North America, Europe, the Middle East, and Asia Pacific, we have cultivated a new professional standard that challenges the norm. Our agile, borderless team structure enables us to deliver bespoke services from an integrated group of consultants working as one team focused on one goal: to deliver exceptional services and outstanding results in our clients' best interests.

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To learn more about how H.I.E.C finds salespeople and leaders who understand and embrace the new processes and tools of the digital sales world, [click here](#).

[www.hiec.com](http://www.hiec.com)

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