



**SALES CULTURE**

**MANAGING THE MOST**

**UNDERESTIMATED**

**INFLUENCER ON**

**SALES PERFORMANCE**

**Food for Thought**

**POWERING**  
Accelerating Sales

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## SUMMARY:

### Sales Culture - the most underestimated influencer on sales performance

Sales Culture comprises the unwritten values, rules and habits of a sales organisation. It strongly determines its performance and the success of initiatives to further develop sales systems. In fact: a very strong culture drives sales performance, even if processes and skills of the team members are not extraordinary.

Years of experience taught us that the outcome of any initiative to improve sales effectiveness is highly dependent on whether the approach of such initiatives matches the Sales Culture. Chief Sales Officers (CSOs) often underestimate this co-dependency when initiating programmes to develop their sales organisation.

To avoid this trap, we propose to use the so-called 4C model which categorises company cultures by their degree of market orientation (vs. internal orientation) and the level of formalism (vs. entrepreneurship and freedom to act). This model helps to improve the understanding of company cultures and to shape sales acceleration programmes in a way that maximises their impact.

Sometimes, Sales Culture needs to be changed, too. There are six levers you need to activate to achieve that. These include creating a sense of urgency, co-creation of future cultural elements, influencing opinion leaders, continuous work on behaviour or hiring according to the intended sales culture. Changing Sales Culture is an also effort that needs a certain amount of patience to play out.

If you as a sales leader want to avoid that culture eats your strategy for breakfast (thanks, Peter Drucker), you need to analyse your sales culture and change it if necessary. This White Paper aims to give you insight and the necessary tools to work on it successfully.

## HOW SALES CULTURE IMPACTS SALES PERFORMANCE

The expression Sales Culture describes the unwritten beliefs, values, rules, and habits of a sales organisation.

If you have a strong, customer-oriented, and proactive Sales Culture, it can drive your company to sustained growth.

There are companies that have created very strong Sales Cultures and nurtured them for many years or even decades.

Take for example the very successful and well-documented company Würth, a worldwide wholesaler of fasteners, screws, and screw accessories. They also have a very strong culture of commitment – from being on time for meetings to achieving sales goals. Würth also promotes a strong customer focus, developing solutions that serve their customers (and their sales teams) better. Additional characteristics are reliability, predictability, honesty, and a down-to-earth mentality. Consequently, they measure closely how their sales teams, products or logistics perform. These are great ingredients for a high sales performance.

In a culture like this, salespeople welcome regular sales trainings (while in others such measures meet with reluctance) because they help to fulfil their

commitments (= goals). These trainings are also followed up and supported by the frontline sales managers. Therefore, a strong Sales Culture lubricates the other elements of a sales system.

**The Sales Culture can support great sales performance – and it can kill it. Its influence must not be underestimated.**

However, if you have a company that leaves a lot of freedom to their sales teams, it will be extremely difficult, for example, to implement a CRM system by pushing it to the teams or to establish detailed sales processes top down. In this case, either culture change is a pre-requisite for the success of these initiatives, or these

projects need to be adapted to the Sales Culture.

And, there is another often underestimated, aspect: strong Sales Cultures help certain personalities of salespeople to flourish whereas others will be rejected. This is not only a factor to be considered in the recruitment process but also in M&A situations, where different company and sales cultures are brought together. If the members of the new sales team are not compatible with the prevailing Sales Culture, you will either lose them or they will stay in their job as underperformers. This effect endangers the intended synergies of M&A on the sales side, as we have witnessed many times.

## MANY SALES EFFECTIVENESS INITIATIVES FAIL DUE TO NEGLECTING THE SALES CULTURE

Sometimes, new CSOs and their initiatives are stopped simply because they do not adapt to the Sales Culture of their new company.

Three years ago, a CSO joined a new company. He came from a Sales Culture in which processes were clearly defined in detail and salespeople were trained to work accordingly. Everything was being measured and closely managed. A culture, in which everybody valued a quick and consistent execution of strategies and processes given from the top; people were used to strictly follow orders.

The company this CSO then joined was completely different. Here, the teams broadly discussed strategies before executing them and consensus was sought, first. The company valued and fostered independent decision-making by business units and salespeople.

Like many leaders, this CSO used the same methods and approaches to propel top-line growth that worked very well in the former company. In this company however, they did not work. The initiatives were simply not executed.

Even worse: the teams did not trust the top management anymore and the numbers fell short of budget and expectations.

What had happened?

**Every major change of the sales system needs to fit the Sales Culture; or an accompanied culture change programme is required.**

The way this CSO wanted salespeople to work did not match their culture and the way he introduced decisions was counterproductive. As habits, values and beliefs are very hard to change, he completely underestimated the effort that would be needed to explain and implement the new way of working.

The same thing is true for many sales effectiveness initiatives or sales related projects in general.

Some time ago, a CSO of an industrial group introduced a CRM system. Every salesperson got access to the system and received user trainings. Nevertheless, even after months, people seldomly used it, they could not find many sales opportunities in the system, and they did not want to commit data to the system. Many sellers still used their offline notebooks, MS Excel or other tools to manage their customer contacts.

What went wrong?

The career of this CSO had started in Finance & Controlling and he wanted to have transparency of what was going on in Sales. The sales team and their leaders never received trainings in how to use the system to support THEIR activities. Moreover, many concepts used in the system (e.g. “opportunities”, “leads”) were not clearly defined and therefore not understood properly.

Consequently, the CRM system was mainly perceived as a means of control and many salespeople struggled to use it effectively.

**You either need to adapt your methods or you need to change the existing Sales Culture in order to implement new ways of selling.**

Furthermore, the culture of this sales organisation was one of strong independence of the sales teams in terms of their way of working and in terms of management. Therefore, the use of this CRM system was never strongly pushed by the frontline sales management.

In this case, an accompanying culture change program would have been necessary.

These two examples clearly show that if you want to change elements of a sales system<sup>1</sup>, you either need to adapt your initiatives and the way they are implemented to the existing Sales Culture - or you need to start changing the culture. If you neglect this important factor, you will fail.

Have you made similar experience in your career? Did you encounter invisible barriers when it came to implementing changes? If yes, try to recall what happened, whether you really understood what was going on.

This leads us to the important question: what exactly is a Sales Culture?

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<sup>1</sup> „Sales System“ describes all elements of sales in a company. It comprises organisational aspects (structure, processes, areas), sales management & incentivisation, sales tools, sales development & enablement as well as sales culture,

# WHAT EXACTLY IS A SALES CULTURE?

Before talking about changing Sales Culture, we need to have a better understanding of its elements. We already mentioned the three components: unwritten values, rules and habits of a sales organisation.

**Sales Cultures determine the decisions people make in a sales organisation.**

These three components guide the choices the members of a sales organisation make every day. For example, should I go for the short-term sale or shall I invest into developing large accounts? How much time should I spend for training and development? How should I collaborate with my colleagues in developing an international client or do I compete with them?<sup>i</sup>

Values, rules and habits are so ingrained in sales teams (especially long-term team members) that the members often do not consciously think about how they act and why they do so. New team members often adapt these behaviours very quickly. In some cultures, you never object to what you superiors say and you simply execute, in others, everything is discussed before execution.

This behaviour happens “automatically”, often not even consciously. Sales Culture is like the wind, you can only witness it by its results and effects, not by its causes.

## Three constituting components shape Sales Cultures

Let us take a closer look at the three major components constituting -a Sales Culture:

### 1. Values

Values are the ideals and priorities a team holds dearly to their heart. According to Stephen R. Covey, values are what people perceive as how things should be.<sup>ii</sup> If you want to engineer an effective Sales Culture that works for your sales team, you need to promote and agree upon the right values.

A company that is driven by the value of family life, for example, will provide a very different working environment than a company that has success/achievement/progress as their top value.

### 2. Beliefs & Mindset

There are two major definitions of belief from which companies can harness major benefits:

First, a belief is a thought you think repetitively, in other words, a habitual way of thinking. Very often, beliefs are stronger than facts. One frequent belief in sales is that you need to build a strong customer relationship before actually selling. According to research, it is the other way around.<sup>iii</sup> Second, certain beliefs form by the evaluation of subjects. If you dedicate your time and energy to analyse and evaluate certain subjects, you form long-term convictions that are tough to refute.<sup>iv</sup> These two insights also give you a way to change a belief system.

Your sales organisation has a system of beliefs that works like a filter and therefore forms their perspective and their perception of reality. We know several executives who view all outside events (sometimes even inside events) as dangerous and threatening to the organisation. They view themselves as victims of circumstances. These underlying beliefs can sabotage their effectiveness by putting them or their team into a paralysis that leads to inactivity and procrastination. In these sales organisations people do not feel accountable for their results, they are disengaged and have a habit of finding excuses for poor performance.<sup>v</sup>

They keep waiting for circumstances to change rather than aiming to change the circumstances. Another executive or team may perceive the same circumstances as necessity or even an opportunity to act. They keep working on avoiding pitfalls and manoeuvring through critical conditions to ensure success.

Therefore, mindset is key to Sales Culture because it drives attitude, motivation and ultimately behaviour of the team members and thereby of the entire sales organisation.

The only difference between the two is the system of underlying beliefs, functioning as filters and interpreters of circumstances and events.

To create a Sales Culture that incorporates, for example, self-discipline, autonomous learning, or frequent follow-up, you need to foster self-esteem and optimism. Therefore, you need to co-define not only the values you and your sales team want to (and are able to) share. Also, you want to build and nurture a belief system and a mindset / attitude that enables and leverages sales performance.

### **3. Rituals & Traditions**

Rituals and traditions, the "things a sales organisation have always done in that way" and "how they have always done it" - form an unwritten policy.

New team members learn and follow those rules, rituals, and traditions although these doctrines do not necessarily originate from company policy or

even corporate culture. Rather the organic evolution of the Sales Culture perpetuates those behaviours.

To break this up and install a new way of performing you need to make those rules transparent and visible.

This fact can become a risk to sales performance, as negative traits or non-productive habits might threaten productivity and especially sales managers need to take care of them.

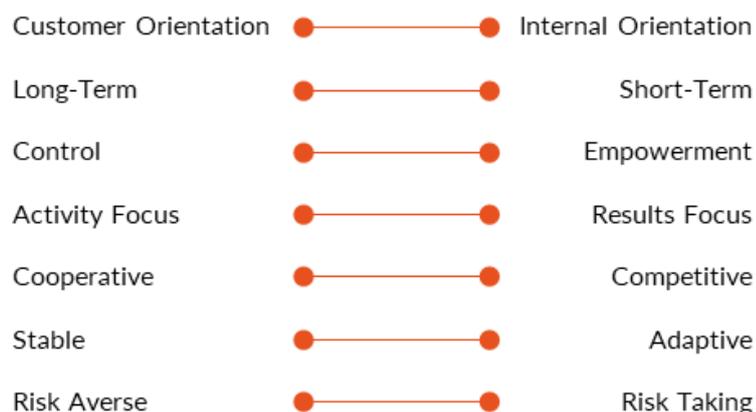
On the other hand, a Sales Culture that has rituals of sharing best practice or awarding great performance is an excellent foundation of sales performance. Many direct sales companies like Mary Kay have developed rituals of recognition for their best sellers.<sup>vi</sup>

#### Expert-Tip: Observe the behaviour of your sales organisation

When you are new in your role as a CSO or if you need to fundamentally change a Sales Culture, start with observation. Pay attention to the behaviour of your teams, to the values, beliefs, mindsets, or rituals and write your observations down.

## Dimensions describing Sales Cultures

If you look at these values, beliefs and rituals / traditions, you will see that they influence decisions in sales and how the sales system works in certain ways. These can be:<sup>vii</sup>



With these dimensions you can describe a Sales Culture quite well. This model helps a lot when it comes to analysing the existing sales culture and to define a potentially new one in detail.

### Expert-Tip: Categorise your observations and describe your Sales Culture

Look at your notes about the observed behaviour and analyse it, using the dimensions mentioned above. You can create a “fever chart” of your actual sales culture and compare it with what is needed to achieve your goals within your market situation. This gives you the foundation to begin a discussion with your leadership team to create awareness about the current sales culture and its (mis)fit to your companies’ situation and strategy.

## The 4 C's - Four Types of Sales Culture

If you want to compare sales cultures of different companies, it is useful to reduce complexity. Robert Quinn and Kim Cameron from the University of Michigan developed a model that you can use to identify the culture of your organisation.<sup>viii</sup>

A simplified approach helps to compare different Sales Cultures, e.g. between competitors or to adapt your management style.

Generally, they categorise culture along two basic criteria: is a company inwardly focused (e.g. towards efficiency, following internal processes strictly) or externally oriented towards markets (customers, competitors)? And second, is a culture more flexible and agile, or more structured and bureaucratic?

flexible and agile, or more structured and bureaucratic?

This segmentation leads to four different types of cultures:

<b>Flexibility &amp; Agility</b>	<b>CLAN</b> Collaborate	<b>ADHOCRACY</b> Create
<b>Control &amp; Structure</b>	<b>AUTOCRACY</b> Control	<b>MARKET</b> Compete
	<b>Inward Focus</b>	<b>Outward Focus</b>

Based on: [https://www.quinnassociation.com/en/culture\\_typology](https://www.quinnassociation.com/en/culture_typology)

### **The Clan – a culture of collaboration**

Clan cultures are strongly built on shared values and traditions. Personal relationships and esprit de corps are important. Leaders are perceived as mentors and influencers. The working environment is often friendly with a high engagement of the teams. Loyalty, participation in decision making, teamwork and consensus are important values in these organisations.<sup>ix</sup>

Developing strategies takes a lot of time, but once the team agreed on and understood them, they will be consistently implemented. Top managers will need to spend a lot of time communicating with the teams to get things done.

Very often, you find this type of culture in management consultancies or in companies with a very strong sense of purpose like Tesla or Apple.

Implementing strict and detailed sales processes or managing in an “order-and-execute style” will not work here. The best way to develop sales performance improvements in a Clan culture is to work them out together with opinion leaders, to pilot them and then use these success stories to spread them. The more the cornerstones of these improvements become common sense, the more they will be used by the sales teams.

In this type of culture, it is extremely important to work on beliefs first, and then on processes and tools. People need to clearly understand the “why” and the idea behind any initiative - and they need to be involved in defining how they should be executed.

### **The Adhocracy – a culture of creation**

Adhocracies are dynamic, agile, and entrepreneurial. Coming up with new ideas and taking risks is valued. This type of culture is very open to innovation and experimentation. Usually, these organisations are focused on growth and setting trends.

Adhocracies value initiative. Usually, they give their salespeople a lot of freedom.<sup>x</sup>

Rather than long-term planning, in this culture, the team values spontaneity (“ad-hoc”) and sprints rather than marathons.

Very often, you find this type of culture in younger companies, in advertising agencies and tech industries with rapid growth.

Similarly to the Clan culture, introducing strict and formalised sales processes “upon command” will not work. As Adhocracies encourage experimentation, you should focus on identifying and/or creating best practices and spreading them through the company for others to adopt them.

### **The Market – a culture of competition**

Market cultures are built around the idea of competition. Results are constantly measured, made transparent and often ranked by salespeople and -teams. The performance-based share of the income is comparatively high. Sales leaders drive their teams to surpass others in reaching their goals.<sup>xi</sup>

These companies often have carefully designed and formalised sales systems with clearly defined processes and tools. Additional aspects are standardised management routines and a strong emphasis on further developing the skills of their sales forces.

Due to the high level of internal competition and comparison with peers, the level of pressure on individuals to reach their goals is quite high. This leads to a comparatively high staff turnover among newcomers and to a high loyalty of those who feel comfortable in this culture.

One can find this type of culture very often in Direct Sales organisations, in transactional B2B sales and in Telesales and Sales Service providers.

Sales performance improvements need to prove that they work first. If they help to produce better results and if they become part of the formalised sales system, they will be accepted and used.

### **The Autocracy - a culture of control**

Autocracies work hierarchically, highly structured, and formalised. People follow written processes and leaders are valued if they organise and coordinate their teams efficiently. Like in Market cultures, measuring KPIs is a very important element of this culture too, but here they are mainly used for control.

Autocracies focus on running sales like well-oiled engines, sticking to processes and rules, delivering stable and reliable results. Leaders expect their teams to execute efficiently and smoothly what they asked them to do.<sup>xii</sup>

These companies often have difficulties to adapt to quickly changing market conditions. While they focus on meticulously sticking to processes, teams in this culture usually do not show a lot of pro-activity and entrepreneurial thinking.

On the other hand, you will find a high rate of execution of plans and achievement of goals.

This type of culture can be found in many manufacturing industries, where reliability and zero-defect mentality are necessary to ensure a high product quality.

In Autocracies, sales performance improvements are often developed and implemented in a formalised top down process. The execution is usually closely monitored and managed.

### Conclusion

All these cultures can be successful, depending on the competitive situation, the uniqueness of the product/service or the growth of the whole market.

Changes in these factors can create the need to change the Sales Culture, too. Adhocracies work well in smaller and fast-growing companies, but the bigger the organisation gets, the more structure becomes necessary. Inventors of categories (e.g. Brita for household water filters, Universal Investment for investment fund administration services or Motorola for mobile telephones) developed just fine until low price competition or new technologies came up and enforced a change of their Sales Cultures.

If you compare companies of the same type of culture, you may find differences in sales effectiveness. This suggests that there are some additional overarching factors that determine winning Sales Cultures.

Therefore, the next chapter will take a closer look at the parameters that differentiate “winning” sales cultures from others.

### Expert-Tip: Compare your Sales Culture with your competitors

When discussing with your teams, it is always helpful to compare your Sales Culture with those of your competitors. Using the grid mentioned above also helps you to better understand whether your current culture still fits with the size and market position of your company. This generates additional insight and might help to create a sense of urgency to evolve it.

# CHARACTERISTICS OF WINNING SALES CULTURES

Some Sales Cultures seem to work better than others, but what is it that makes them more successful?

There are three important characteristics of Sales Cultures that determine their effectiveness in terms of sales:<sup>xiii</sup>

## Treating customers well

No company can have long-term success if it mistreats customers. Therefore, Sales Cultures that focus on achieving short term goals “no matter what” or incorporate greed to “motivate” salespeople, damage the reputation of a company. Common examples of such a behaviour are overpromising or lying, selling products and/or quantities that are not needed, hiding product risks, “pipeline filling” etc.

Therefore, be careful when putting too much pressure on your sales team or using an aggressive incentive system without safeguards. You need to make sure that your management team does not allow the type of behaviour mentioned above, even if it helps to achieve short term goals.<sup>xiv</sup> It sounds altruistic, but the internet enables spreading experience and opinions with suppliers to the whole world. Therefore mistreating customers will fire back quickly and thoroughly.

## Consensus to live the Culture

Often you find different Sales Cultures within the same company, e.g. in different international subsidiaries or sales departments.

It seems obvious: a Sales Culture that is not lived by at least most of the teams and their managers is weak. It leads to different choices in similar situations, creating a “company within the company”. In this case, customers will be treated differently by different salespeople (e.g. concerning pricing, quality of service etc.) which will damage the reputation in the market. Therefore, successful cultures make sure, that important rules and values are consistently executed. The hard part for international or global companies is to define them in a way that allows different nationalities to accept and adopt them. They need to allow national adaptations without losing the core values and beliefs

To ensure this, a winning Sales Cultures respects the needs of their sales teams, too. Otherwise, they will not live by it.<sup>xv</sup>

## Intensity and Passion

Another important factor is the intensity in which people embrace the culture. The more passionate people are concerning their culture, the stronger the positive impact on performance will be.<sup>xvi</sup>

### Expert-Tip: Compare your Sales Culture with these “winning” characteristics

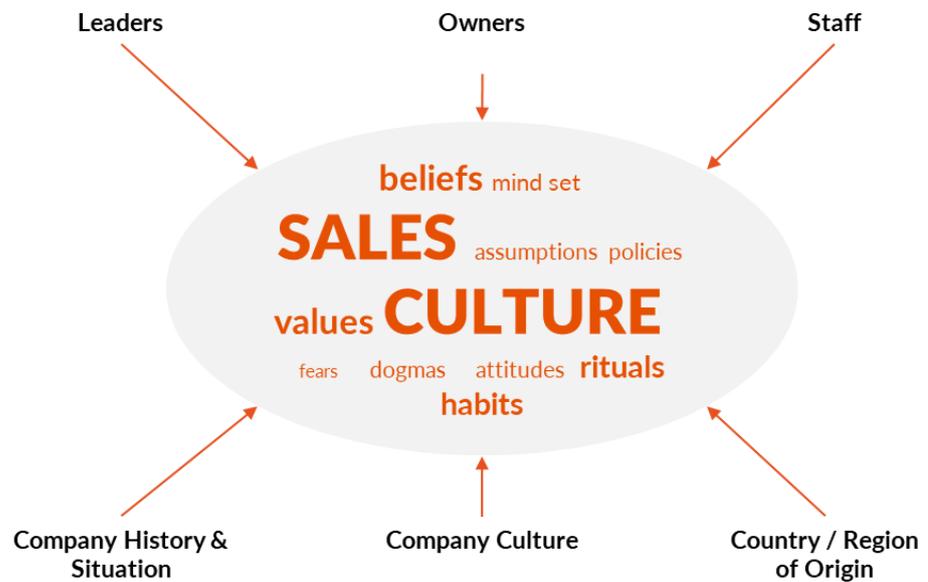
When analysing your existing Sales Culture, it is necessary to have a critical view on the three aspects mentioned above. As they are so important, you should conduct customer and staff surveys to get an objective picture on where you stand and where you need to act.

# HOW TO INFLUENCE SALES CULTURES

Once you have a grasp on the components of Sales Culture, the next logical step is to look at levers to change it or even to engineer a new one.

## Six forces shaping Sales Cultures

There are six forces that influence a Sales Culture. Some can be used as leverage for change, others need to be considered when designing the intended culture:



### 1. Leaders

Shaping a company culture is one of the most important tasks of a CEO when further developing a company and/or implementing a strategy. The same applies for CSOs or Chief Commercial Officers when it comes to Sales Culture. They are role models and carefully watch their actions.

As mentioned before, the leaders in any organisation need to "walk the talk". The frontline managers are the ones who need to model the preferred culture. Therefore, all leaders need to buy into the intended culture and commit to live by it. You want to change a Sales Culture? Start with the leaders.

### 2. Owners

Owners, especially founders, have a tremendous influence on corporate cultures. Of course, they often have created them. Owners take on a special role which is usually not surpassed by anyone else in the organisation.

Often, their influence remains even if they hand over the operational business to others. If you want to change a Sales Culture, you need to be aware of this and – ideally – convince the owner to play her symbolic role accordingly, emphasising the values you want to foster. It is obvious that these cannot be completely different from the ones the owner stands for, but gradual changes are possible, especially in times of crisis or when it comes to handing over the business to a new generation.

### 3. Staff

Talent, personality traits, and backgrounds of salespersons form the nature of Sales Culture. Hiring the right people who not only match the culture but also add to it and develop it, is crucial. Otherwise, the team will fight it like a virus that needs to be expelled from the system. You can change your Sales Culture by effectively influencing the individual staff members by training, coaching, and holding them accountable. You also need to win the hearts and minds of the teams to accept the change. You will also sooner or later need to lay off those who are not comfortable with it or are opposing it – passively or actively.

### 4. Country/Region

This factor works in two directions: on the one hand side, the culture of the country of origin has influence on the company and its Sales Culture. Competitive cultures for example are more common in US-based companies whereas the co-operative aspect is stronger in enterprises headquartered in Scandinavia or Asia.

On the other hand, companies doing business in culturally very different societies need to adapt the Sales Culture of their subsidiaries.

### 5. Company Culture

Sales Culture generally is a subset of a corporate culture. If your sales team is "culturally" cut off from the rest of the organisation, problems arise such as loss of control and even a hostile or toxic work environment that can lead up to the sales team revolting against company policy. Therefore, any attempt to evolve the Sales Culture should be aligned with the corporate culture.

This is especially important in times of change. If you want (or need) to change the Sales Culture, you either need to adapt the company culture as well or you are contained within its boundaries.

We have seen many companies where strong CSOs tried to change the Sales Culture in their business towards proactivity and customer orientation while the rest of the company stayed reactive and internally focused. They either failed or created big frustration within the sales teams who felt not supported by their colleagues. Consequently, they had to fight with a lack of customer satisfaction.

On the other hand, strong Sales Cultures can catalyse changes in the corporate culture too. You just need to make sure that you do not culturally detach from the rest of the company

## 6. Company History and Company Situation

The origin story and the development stage of a company heavily influences the Sales Culture. For example, the standing and self-image a sales rep demonstrates in front of a prospect often depends on the market position, the corporate identity, the history, and self-image of the company.

A sense of urgency can unleash a boost in engagement and sales performance in one company while another business suffers from a slowdown like a ship that has lost its sails.

In addition, if a company is in attack mode and wants to accomplish rapid growth, the culture needs to be very different from a well-established market leader defending its already strong position.

### Expert-Tip: Understand your leverage and use them

If you are on your journey to change your Sales Culture, you should thoroughly analyse these six levers. You might find out, that you can use some, while others cannot be change but need to be taken into consideration. Maybe you need to adjust the target culture you want to achieve.

## Six steps to influence Sales Cultures

Keeping the levers in mind we mentioned above, there are 6 steps to influence a sales culture.

### 1. Create a sense of urgency

When you want to initiate a culture change, you need to create an emotional impact. In negative terms, you know this under the name of trauma.

If you ask people (who are old enough) where they were on 9/11 as the World Trade Center was hit by planes they will most likely be able to remember the exact circumstances in which they received the news. An event that causes a strong emotional reaction "burns" a mental image into the long-term memory that will not be forgotten.

In sales transformation, traumatising your salespeople, however, is not a suitable option. But you can use times of crisis to create a strong sense of urgency and purpose.

Rahm Emanuel, the former chief of staff of President Obama said during the financial crisis 2008: “You never let a serious crisis go to waste. And what I mean by that it's an opportunity to do things you think you could not do before.”<sup>xvii</sup> The same applies for leaders who want to change a Sales Culture, especially if you want to do it quickly and profoundly.

In this case you need to create (or emphasise) a “burning platform”, an imminent danger to the business (e.g. situations of turnaround / restructuring), that makes it obvious to most of the team, that things need to change.

## **2. Involve your sales team in defining a preferred Sales Culture**

For your business, the most important first step to create a productive environment leading to high-performance is to define the Sales Culture you want to develop.

Very often, a business attempting to form a productive culture formulate values and behaviours that work well on paper in a closed boardroom. However, the chances of such an approach to work out in reality are extremely slim.

Executives and managers have some preconceived notions about how the perfect Sales Culture should look like. Sometimes they realise that their ideas for the Sales Culture usually do not fit to the organisation and the team at all. This leads to disappointment and frustration because those ideas will not lead to results. Therefore, a proper analysis and understanding of your staff and your current culture is important before trying to engage in shaping a new one.

This why you should co-define the future Sales Culture with the team members who are the ones most affected by it. The involvement of the very people who will be responsible to teach, model and embody the new Sales Culture need to be convinced and on board with the change. The only way to achieve that is by giving them a voice and a part in the development of the Sales Culture.

### **Expert-Tip: Actively involve your sales team in defining a Sales Culture**

Make sure, as you formulate and co-define a working Sales Culture, that key opinion leaders from sales management and the sales teams are involved from the beginning. This enables you to learn about the strengths and personality types in your sales organisation. Thereby, the new and evolved Sales Culture has a higher probability for acceptance in the team. Usually, if the leaders do

not work with their sales team, the execution fails - even if they had great ideas.

If you let the sales team in on the discussion from early on, these ideas will come to fruition. Since the team members were involved in the design of common values, rules, and behaviours, they are much more likely to identify with the new culture and live by it.

**Expert-Tip: Start creating a common culture after M&A transactions immediately**

Companies that have recently been involved in mergers or acquisitions usually strive for synergies, also in sales. In order to ensure optimum sales performance, they need to work on creating a "new" Sales Culture, especially if the merging companies were of roughly the same size.

Often, the aftermath of such transactions feels like a battlefield. One of the major reasons is that they create uncertainty for the teams and a clash of cultures. Manoeuvring through the all the land mines, the most productive way to harmonise the activities of all involved parties is to create a common sales culture.

If most of the sales team members can identify with the new situation, the "new" company and culture, your team will show a higher performance and adapt much more easily. Again, you need to involve every party that is going to be affected early on, because that will lead to the best results.

### **3. Harness the powerful influence of CEO/CSOs and leaders**

If you need to change the Sales Culture, make sure your CEO and a possible owner actively support and influence the change as opinion leaders and role models. They need to walk the talk – alongside with frontline managers. This needs to be a planned and orchestrated effort.

The top-level executives not only have to model the preferred behaviour. They should also reward people who show commitment and alignment with the target culture. Whoever stands on the top of the food chain has the best shot at creating a dramatic shift in the Sales Culture.

**Expert-Tip: Make Sales Culture a regular topic in management workshops**

You need to make sure, that all levels of leadership embody the culture consequently and consistently. They need to emphasise the key rules and values repeatedly. This requires a constant exchange within the management team to ensure agreement.

#### 4. Continuously repeat and positively enforce preferred behaviour

To enhance and increase sales performance, training is key. In our experience, it works best alongside with additional coaching of the frontline managers. Without continuous efforts to train and further develop skills in your sales team, the performance will at best plateau or even decrease.

Also training measures in your team co-form the Sales Culture. If everybody learns a certain methodology this also affects their behaviour and decision making. For the trainings to be effective, you want to establish the value of continuous learning and improving.

There is a proverb that illustrates this step perfectly: repetition is the mother of learning. Only repeated behaviour will form neurological pathways that eventually make performing new actions easier and easier over time. The same is true for changing Sales Cultures. Only if sales teams exercise and practice preferred behaviour they form new habits that sustainably change Sales Culture.

For behaviour to become habitual, there are several tools you can use. For changing the Sales Culture, as a prerequisite, the sales team needs to know the motivation and the reasoning behind the change. You do not achieve awareness for the "why" behind such efforts by telling team members once. But as you want to achieve the new patterns of behaviour you need to repeat it again and again until after the organisation reaches a certain threshold of level of awareness.

In summary, you must continuously communicate and explain the preferred behaviour to the sales organisation. In the next step, you reward this desired behaviour and celebrate the people who demonstrate it as positive role models.

**Expert-Tip: Know that your corporate culture goes deeper than corporate design**

Sometimes, we think by changing the look of the surface, we have changed the whole thing. It is quite common: CEOs and CSOs do not work on shaping a productive and value-based culture but they put a happy face sticker on it. They think, they have dealt with the situation with new logos, colours, and shirts. This happens often especially after M&A transactions.

The truth is that they only treat symptoms, but they do not work on the culture; they only sugar-coat it. To effectively create and develop a working Sales Culture, you need to incorporate and work on all the factors we have previously described. Thereby, you take care that your Sales Culture actively and sustainably ensures high-performance and you can reap the results as you initiate change and improvement.

## 5. Allow time for the development of new behaviour

The desire for instant gratification does not stop at the door of organisational development. Executives often want to see immediate results. Contrary to this preference, reality shows that developing a Sales Culture is a process that takes time – often up to a year before you start seeing results.

Impatience makes executives halt efforts of change too soon which negatively impacts the further development of sales effectiveness. Instead, you want to continuously take measured steps that incrementally lead to the preferred Sales Culture. Usually, this takes a year. In times of crisis this can go much quicker as we have seen during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Expert-Tip: Measure the effects and results of change

Measuring the cultural changes, e.g. by customer and staff surveys, analysing CRM data or interviewing newcomers after a while on their perception of cultural aspects allows you to track whether you are still on the right path. It also gives you the foundation for rewarding positive behaviour and for communicating your values often to accelerate the transformation.

## 6. Hire new people with your desired Sales Culture as a compass

Very often, the thought of sales superstars brings forth certain qualities in the mind of recruiters. They look for certain aspects and character traits hoping those will result in an increase in sales performance as they bring them on board.

However, they often do not consider the Sales Culture they are able to perform in and this can lead to disastrous effects. If you hire a salesperson and their personality does not fit the existing Sales Culture, they will not be able to perform the way one would expect. Furthermore, there is a high probability that they will not be accepted by their peers. On the other hand, it is very helpful if they fit the desired future Sales Culture which is usually an evolved version of the current one. Make sure new salespeople match with the desired Sales Culture in your company.

## EVERY JOURNEY STARTS WITH A SINGLE STEP

This famous quote from Lao Tzu is also true for cultural change. Even if it seems complicated to work on it, the reward of success is huge.

We had the privilege to support great companies in their journey towards a more winning Sales Culture. We experienced how much energy was unleashed within sales teams during that process and still see sustained positive effects even after almost a decade.

We want to encourage you, dear reader, to start with your first step on the journey to a winning Sales Culture.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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