

The Bottom Line on Sales Agility: Separating Fact from Fiction

Michelle Vazzana, PhD



Contents

Executive Summary	3
What is Sales Agility?	4
The Punchline: Agility is Situational	5
Organizational Agility	6
Situational Agility	11
Foundational Agility	14
Summary	18
Buyer Beware: Separating Conjecture from Reality Regarding the Nature of Sales Agility.....	19
Position #1: Sales Agility is About Flexing and Aligning to the Buyer Along Their Buying Journey	19
Position #2: Sales Agility is Synonymous with Agile Software Development	20
The Importance of Evidence.....	21
VantagePoint and Our Commitment to Thought Leadership.....	22
How our Customers Experience VantagePoint	23
How We Are Unique	23
Appendix.....	25
VantagePoint Solutions	25
AgileEdge®	25
Pipeline Coaching Code™ Training	25
Reflective Sales Code™ Training	25
Sales Agility Code™ Training.....	26
Sales Management Code™ Training.....	26
Details of Sales Agility Research Journey	26
Organizational Agility Research.....	26
Situational Agility Research.....	27
Foundational Agility Research.....	28

Executive Summary

In today's quickly changing sales landscape, agility has become the most important skill for sales enablement leaders and managers. We know this because our extensive research into high-performing salespeople and sales managers indicates that top performers make better decisions. They evaluate the situations they face, choose the best path forward, and execute in very intentional ways. This ability to assess a situation, choose and execute the best path forward, and continually monitor outcomes forms the bedrock of what VantagePoint has termed Sales Agility.

Sales organizations' biggest struggles are the lack of agility at the organizational, situational, and foundational levels that prevent them from quickly adapting to their customers' needs, and to the needs of their sales force.

However, decision makers who are trying to solve these problems for their sales organizations are being misled. An unfortunate number of Sales Training companies are exploiting the need for agility by presenting solutions that are completely divorced from the reality of what research reveals about Sales Agility.

VantagePoint Performance is the only company that is qualified to offer Sales Agility training because we are the only company that has done the research. We are providing this paper to dispel the myths about Sales Agility, to explain what it is, to share the research behind our approach, and to outline why it matters to organizations looking to enable an agile sales force.

What is Sales Agility?

Sales Agility is a hot topic and becoming the mantra within sales forces across the globe. Harvard Business Review is talking about it, Gartner and Forrester are talking about it, and many leading sales training companies are talking about it. With all this attention being paid to Sales Agility, it is about time VantagePoint put a stake in the ground, shared our research-based definition, and detailed the impact it can have on sales execution.

The primary focus for sales and sales enablement leaders around the globe is how to equip salespeople and sales managers to succeed in these turbulent times. Fast-paced changes, global upheaval, and rapid improvements in thought leadership and analytics make today's environment especially chaotic, confusing, and difficult to navigate. Although we don't have the secret to dealing with worldwide chaos, we have some definitive and useful perspectives on sales manager and salesperson enablement, specifically the acquisition of Sales Agility.

The first and most important point to clarify is that agility is a multi-faceted phenomenon within the sales force. Extensive research by VantagePoint and in collaboration with others points to three separate, yet interrelated levels of Sales Agility present within the sales force. We will present the research case behind our position, dispel common yet inaccurate representations of Sales Agility, and share how the most successful salespeople and sales managers behave in ways that exemplify effective sales agility.

When we embarked on this research journey, we didn't realize that agility would be the common theme. We tirelessly researched high-performing sales managers and salespeople to tease out the subtle nuances and behaviors that separated the best from the rest.

The humbling thing about being committed to research is that the researchers must be willing to be wrong and have their hypotheses disproved. That's what happened to us. And that's why the practice is called "research." First you search, and then you re-search. So, we continue to search and re-search, and through this process we have uncovered some powerful findings that have the potential to dramatically impact the way sales leaders enable their salespeople and sales managers.

To avoid the tedium of going step by step through the research details and demographics, we've placed the list of studies and key findings in the appendix of this paper. In this main section, we unpack our findings and explore the implications for sales enablement and superior performance.

Surprising and Powerful Themes

In our research studies over the past 14 years, we've identified some common themes that hold true for peak performance. These themes continually emerged and led us down a different path than the one we anticipated.

- Sales management and sales are both situational.
- There is no one-size-fits-all approach to effective selling or effective coaching.
- Effective decision-making is a key prerequisite for effective selling and coaching.
- The best decisions lead to the best execution.
- Most sales and sales coaching programs focus on execution and overlook the necessary first step of critical thinking and decision making – which form the heartbeat of sales agility.

The Punchline: Agility is Situational

If a seller or sales manager can get a proper read on their situation, the decision-making and subsequent execution improve dramatically.

As we continued to plug away at our research, an amazing thing happened. A pattern started to emerge that held true with each study. Agility is situational. But what does that mean? How do we define a situation? Well, it depends. The key theme in our research is that the best path forward “depends” upon the situation an individual is facing. If a seller or sales manager can get a proper read on their situation, the decision-making and subsequent execution improve dramatically.

What types of situations do salespeople and sales managers face, and what types of decisions do they need to make to improve sales execution and maximize performance? We identified three primary types of decisions that must be made

within the sales force that led to effective execution.

LEVELS OF SALES AGILITY



Organizational Agility

The first, and often overlooked series of decisions, involves the alignment of organizational goals to front-line sales execution. Whenever change happens either in organizational direction, or marketplace realities, the ability to survive and thrive boils down to what happens at the front-line level. This scares the heck out of sales leaders, and for good reason.

No matter how effectively leaders strategize, execution of those strategies rests on the shoulders of front-line sales managers and salespeople. That's a hard reality, but it is true for every sales organization. What happens at the front line determines success or failure. So how do you ensure salespeople are executing the right things, in the right way, and at the right time to achieve organizational goals? You embed organizational agility into the hearts and minds of your front-line sales managers. This does not happen organically. Sales managers, who are often promoted from frontline sales roles, are focused externally on the customer, and align to the customer's needs above those of their own organization.

Organizational Agility is the clear and specific alignment of organizational goals (results), with targeted key performance indicators (sales objectives), and high-impact salesperson activities. Which activities are most high-impact and important? It depends. It depends upon the results you're targeting, which KPIs

need to move, and which activities must be executed consistently well to move the right metrics in the right direction.

This alignment is key because circumstances will change. And when they do, your organization, and your sales managers specifically, need to identify how to adjust their focus, how to make strategic decisions about which activities will accomplish the new objectives, and ultimately achieve results. The decision about which activities sellers must execute, how, and when, became the first critical component of our organizational agility framework.

To figure out which activities sellers must execute, start backwards at your destination.



This first set of decisions, those that align organizational goals with front-line execution, answers the question “what should my salespeople be doing?” It is one of the most important decisions a sales manager can make, and one that sets their sales team up for success. The ability for sales managers to make the critical decisions about how to focus seller effort equips organizations with the agility to adapt quickly and effectively to change. You can find detailed descriptions of our findings about organizational agility in our book [*Cracking the Sales Management Code: The Secrets to Measuring and Managing Sales Performance*](#), published by McGraw Hill in 2011. This alignment of activities to results is just the first in a series of three critical decisions that drive effective sales execution.

The next major decision a sales manager must make is to determine what to coach, how to coach, and when to coach sellers to ensure execution happens according to plan. Of all the things a sales manager could coach, what should they coach? That is often a daunting choice. Before we go any further it is time to take a stand on which type of coaching has the biggest impact on sales quota attainment. Another study we conducted examined the most prevalent types of

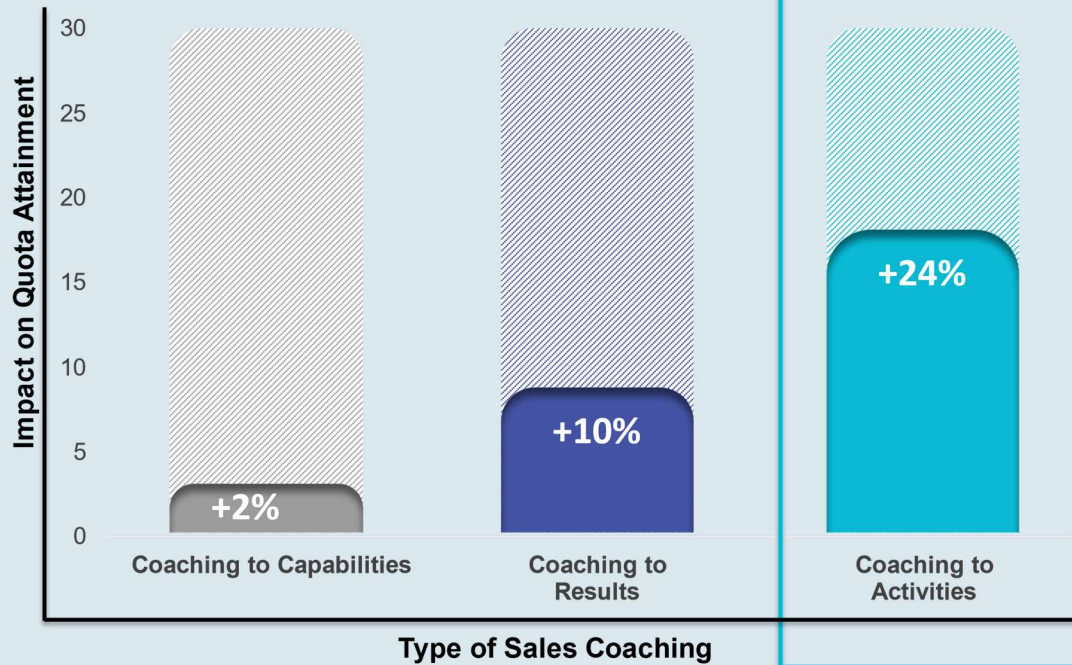
coaching sales managers provide. We want to debunk any assumptions you may be holding and provide a real answer.

We examined the degree to which sales managers provided the following three types of coaching, as well as their relative impact on variance in quota attainment:

THREE PRIMARY TYPES OF SALES COACHING:



Once again, history repeated itself. One of our hypotheses was dead wrong. We knew that activity coaching was powerful; however, we also anticipated that capability coaching would be positively and significantly related to quota attainment. Nope. Not even close. Below you will see the relative impact of the three types of coaching on objective quota attainment.



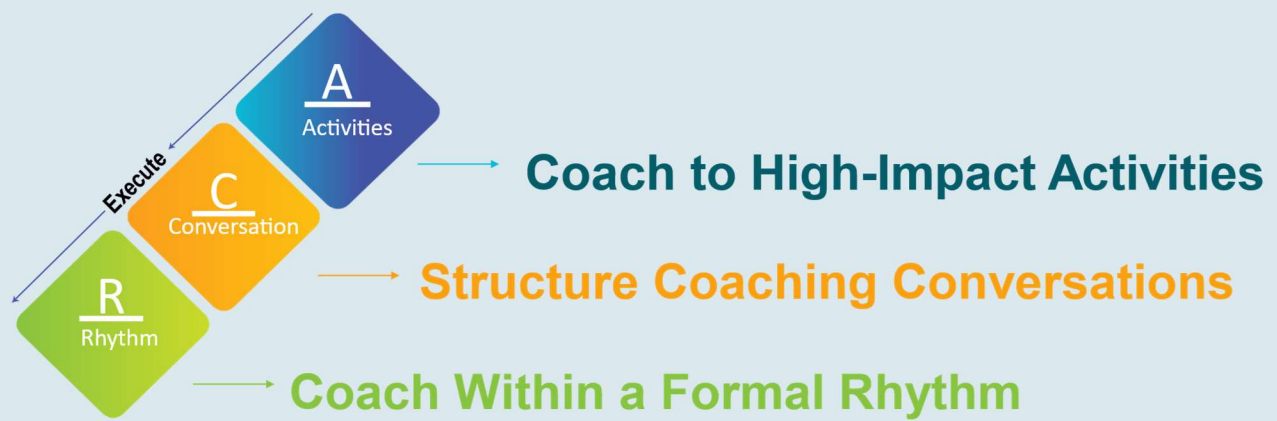
Shockingly, at 2%, capability coaching had an almost negligible impact on quota attainment. Most general leadership programs and competency model approaches extoll the benefits of capability coaching. Oops. Not the best use of the sales managers' coaching time unless specific capabilities are coached within the context of the high-impact activities they enable. Next, we found that results coaching (think pipeline scrubbing and forecasting) was far more powerful than capability coaching, but it still did not reach statistical significance in our study. Activity coaching was the only type of coaching that was positively and significantly related to quota attainment. This coaching study answered an important question: “Of all the things I could be coaching, what should I be coaching?” Activities, that’s what! But which ones? The ones that are most closely aligned to the achievement of organizational results. The high-impact activities.

At this point in our journey to Organizational Agility, we’ve identified which activities salespeople should be executing and managers should be coaching. The next question is how do the highest performing sales managers coach to activities in ways that separate them from the rest of the pack? Again, more surprises were in store for us. In another in-depth study we conducted of sales management and coaching practices, we identified some surprising, yet refreshing trends. It seems that the following patterns were counterintuitive, yet consistent across all the companies we studied.

High-performing managers differ from everyone else in the following ways:

- They coach fewer hours per month per seller compared with their less-successful peers (approximately 3-5 hours per month).
- They coach less frequently.
- They coach for longer durations.
- They cover fewer topics, in more depth.
- They are more formal in their coaching approach.
- They spend less time in the field.
- They are significantly less likely to use scheduled coaching time for inspection and forecasting.

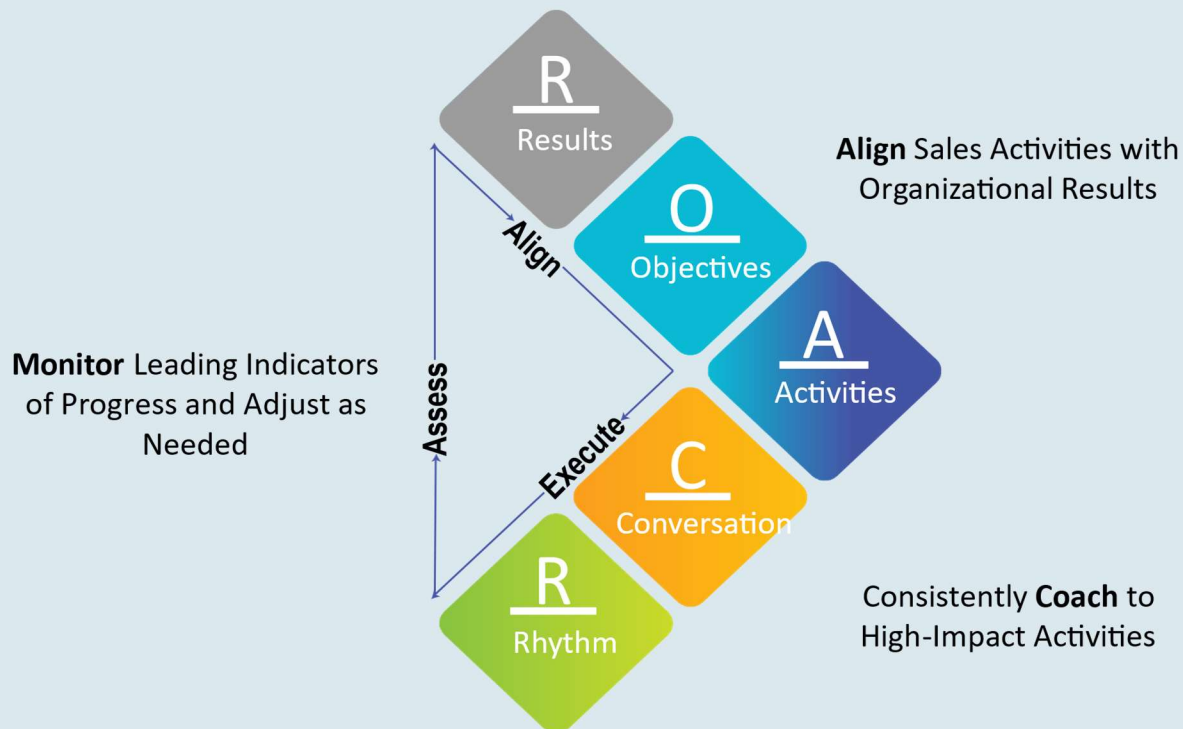
You can find a detailed description of the findings of this study in our book [*Crushing Quota: Proven Sales Tactics for Breakthrough Performance*](#), published by McGraw Hill in 2019. Although we cannot do a comprehensive examination of our findings in this brief paper, we know that the best performing sales managers focus selling and coaching efforts to those activities that matter most. How do they do it? The following image depicts the essence of the most powerful coaching.



What do top-performing managers coach? The most important activities. How do they coach? They structure their coaching conversations for maximum impact, orienting coaching toward deeper discussions of fewer topics. They have agendas, inputs, and outputs. They provide this coaching within a formal coaching rhythm. They do not overcomplicate this; they only formalize the things that matter most.

The final element of Organizational Agility involves ensuring that sales and coaching efforts are having the desired effect. The most agile sales managers monitor leading indicators to assess whether the right needles are moving in the right direction. Are close rates improving? Is the pipeline full of the right types of deals with the desired types of customers? If yes, business as usual. If not,

adjustments must be made to ensure continual alignment between organizational goals and field-level execution. This final decision about which leading indicators are moving in the right direction answers the question “is it working?” or, to be more specific, “are sellers executing the right things in the right way, being coached effectively, and having the desired impact?” The image below depicts the three primary decisions that enable Organizational Agility.



Now that we have distilled the research and practices around Organizational Agility, we will turn our attention to our powerful research on salesperson agility, starting with Situational Agility.

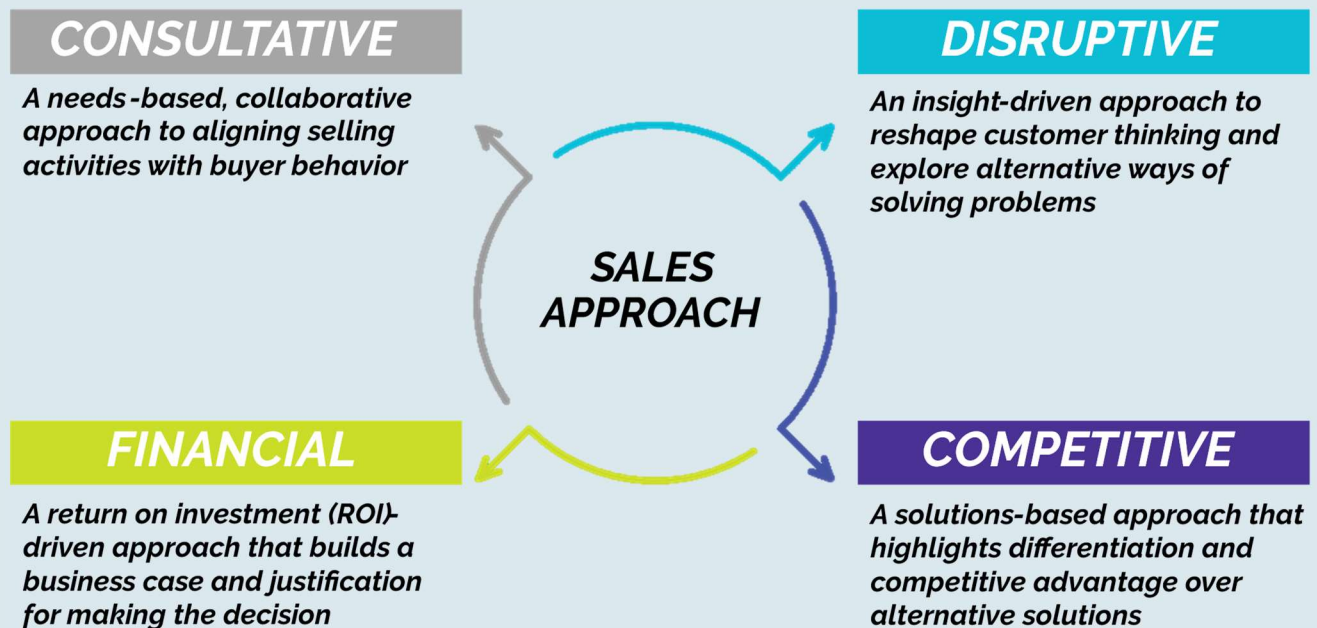
Situational Agility

The next series of studies originated with the Florida State University (FSU) Sales Institute. We became aware of these studies via VantagePoint’s involvement in a sales leadership summit held at Harvard University. One of our former colleagues was impressed with the innovative research shared by the FSU Sales Institute’s Director at that time. A series of research studies were conducted to answer an important question: “Is there one best sales methodology, and if so, is it the Challenger Sale?”

The first study in the series was an attempted replication of the original challenger study conducted by the Sales Executive Council. The researchers at FSU wanted to find out 1) is the Challenger Sale real, and if so, 2) is it the best methodology available on the market? The findings were consistent with the original study and confirmed that high performing salespeople were much more likely than average and low performers to self-identify as challengers. The surprise was that high-performing sellers were just as likely to self-identify as consultative sellers as they were challengers.

Even though the researchers at FSU were able to replicate the initial challenger research, they still had no answers regarding which methodology was the best on the market. The second study was initiated after one of the research participants in the first study mentioned that he had a tough time answering the survey questions. He said that the survey asked him what kind of seller he *was*. The answer he wanted to give was not reflected in the survey instrument. He said, “I utilize all of these approaches (challenging, relationship, consultative, problem solver, etc.) depending upon the situation I’m facing.”

This caused the researchers to ask different questions. “Do high-performing sellers adapt their approach to different buying situations, and does that lead to higher win rates?” This was a much more interesting set of questions and came closer to pinpointing which methodologies mattered most. The researchers gathered data on sales approaches used by sellers in three different companies. Salespeople were presented with three unique buying situations that were industry relevant. Here is what the researchers found:



High-performing sellers displayed four different patterns of selling, moving between these strategies as the situation dictated.

High performers do what works, not necessarily what they were trained to do.

Average and low performing sellers stuck to the same strategy regardless of the buying situation they were facing, and it was typically the methodology they had been trained to use. This was a troubling finding. Think about the implications for sales enablement efforts. When organizations launch a one-size-fits-all sales methodology hoping that it will create standardization and improve performance, they are unwittingly training their sales force to behave like their average and low performers. Yikes! High performers are least likely to adopt and use a standardized methodology. Why? Because that is not the best way to win more deals. High performers do what works, not necessarily what they were trained to do.

The second important finding was that when high-performing sellers switch between different strategies based on the situation they faced, this adaptive behavior led to higher win rates. In addition, none of the four strategies (consultative, disruptive, competitive, and financial) emerged as a clear leader. So, the answer to the question “What is the best sales methodology?” is “It depends.” There was not a “best one” approach. The best approach depended upon the unique buying situation the seller was facing.

The image below highlights the following conclusions:

- On average, salespeople face between four and six unique buying situations. These unique buying situations reflect 5 – 7 specific buying factors, out of 25 possible buying factors, that most significantly predict adaptive salesperson behavior.
- High-performing sellers select the most effective of the four sales strategies to align to the buyer and increase the chances of a win.
- Average and low-performing salespeople use one primary strategy in all buying situations, and it is typically the one they were trained to execute.

Unique Buying Situations



Multiple Sales Strategies, Not One



VantagePoint sought to validate the FSU findings and try to replicate their results. We were able to validate their findings (see appendix for research details); however, in our continued quest for evidence-based sales frameworks, we had more questions that needed to be answered. This next series of studies and associated findings led to some additional insights into Situational Agility, as well as the discovery of the third and final level of Sales Agility: Foundational Agility.

Foundational Agility

The first question that arose after we validated FSU's findings was whether patterns existed between the 25 buying factors. By interrogating a large data set, we discovered three important things:

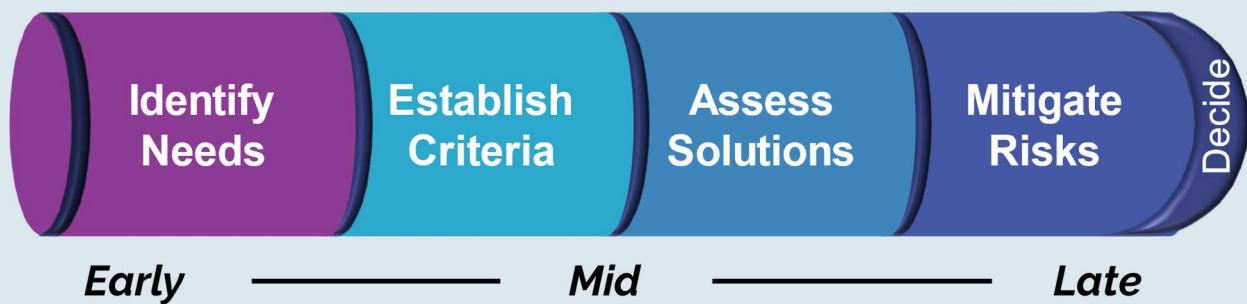
1. Seven of the buying factors in the FSU study rarely occurred and were removed from the larger set, reducing the total number to 17. This was extremely important for data analysis purposes and increased the reliability of the output.
2. The buying factors fit into five categories (see below), which was far easier for sellers to understand and examine. It is easier for a salesperson to get their head around gathering five distinct types of information versus 17 individual factors.
3. One buying factor, the buying stage of initial engagement with the salesperson, was significant in all buying situations we studied across many companies.

Buying Situation Factors



The conclusion we reached was that orienting seller effort toward only five buying factor categories was a more practical approach to Situational Agility and could be replicated. In addition, due to the significance of initial buying stage (see image below), we concluded that understanding the buying journey and how the buyer(s) navigate that journey was a foundational skill that was required for sellers to understand and make sense of individual buying situations. It was also instructive in helping sellers decide which of the four sales strategies was the best choice for the situation they face.

Stage of Buying Journey



The next question we sought to answer was how the four sales strategies (consultative, disruptive, competitive, and financial) related to one another. Was this distinction as discrete as the FSU team believed, or was it more nuanced? Also, we sought to find out whether consultative selling was truly a discrete pattern or more highly correlated to the other three strategies. Our hypothesis was that consultative selling was a launching point in the execution of any of the other strategies.

As indicated in the image below, the consultative selling tactics were highly correlated with the tactics within the other three strategies. So, in response to the

question “Is consultative selling dead?” the answer is a resounding no! Consultative selling is alive, well, and foundational to being able to execute any of the other strategies. In addition, the use of the consultative tactics was high regardless of the primary strategy selected, meaning that sellers execute heavy use of the consultative tactics even when they choose disruptive, competitive, or financial as their dominant strategy.



We also discovered that when a salesperson was engaged early in the buying journey, the use of consultative selling tactics was *six times higher* than if the salesperson was engaged late. This higher use of consultative tactics early versus late was replicated in two separate studies.

Since consultative selling is a critical component of sales agility, it warrants further discussion about what constitutes consultative selling. Confusion abounds regarding 1) what consultative selling is, and 2) if it is the same as basic sales skills. Through our research, we found that that an effective consultative selling program must include the following elements to enable Foundational Agility:

- Foundational sales skills such as call planning, opening, questioning, positioning capabilities, closing, and objection handling.
- Buyer psychology and the buying journey. Because buying stage / buying journey are so significant, salespeople need to understand how buyers navigate that journey, what their goals and motivations are at each stage, and how to align seller behavior accordingly.
- Effective call planning for conducting sales calls at various stages of the buying journey. Early-stage calls are more about discovery and identifying buyer problems and needs. Mid and late-stage calls are about differentiation and helping the buyer make sense of varying alternatives.

We were curious to know which of the consultative tactics was most predictive of wins. Again, we were surprised at what we found. Our hypothesis was that uncovering needs would be the most predictive tactic; however, it turned out that obtaining incremental commitments along the buying journey was the

consultative tactic most predictive of wins. This has significant implications for consultative selling. It means that when planning individual sales interactions across the buying journey, a very intentional focus on gaining commitment at each stage matters. A lot.

Any planning process should begin with the end in mind and work backwards. A salesperson has a much better chance of gaining incremental commitments if they identify them ahead of time and put together a cohesive plan for the sales call that includes seeking and sharing information relevant to the desired outcome. This makes sense in everyday life as well. When you get in your car, you map out your route based on your desired destination. This idea of beginning with the end in mind is the same approach used in creating Organizational Agility: starting with desired results, linking to objectives and KPIs, and selecting the sales activities that are most strongly aligned.

If a salesperson doesn't understand the fundamentals of a buying journey, it is highly unlikely that they can understand that different buying situations involve different buying journeys.

The most important aspect of Foundational Agility is to understand how buyers buy, what motivates them at each stage, and how to plan and execute sales conversations differently at various stages. If a salesperson does not understand the fundamentals of a buying journey, it is highly unlikely that they can understand that different buying situations involve *different* buying journeys. Again, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to Foundational Agility or consultative selling. How a seller plans and executes the best sales calls depends upon where the buyer is within their buying journey.

Summary

The net outcome of these studies indicates that the most effective approach to both managing and selling is situational. Sales managers must coach and orient seller behavior to the most important activities that drive the desired organizational results. Managers must continually evaluate leading indicators to determine if the right needles are moving in the right direction. Having the agility to make real-time adjustments helps ensure that field level execution is aligned with organizational priorities. This approach to sales management and coaching enables true [Organizational Agility](#).

The highest-performing salespeople are agile. They exhibit four different patterns of sales behavior and flex between those patterns depending upon the buyer's situation. They seek and make sense of a variety of buying factors to tease out the buying situation, choose the sales approach that has the best chance of a win, then execute the appropriate tactics, constantly monitoring buyer reactions and changes in the buying situation. This approach forms the heart of [Situational Agility](#).

Consultative selling is more than just one of the four sales strategies. It is a foundational set of skills that equips sellers to assess the buyer's location within their buying journey, determine buyer motivations and objectives, and then plan and conduct sales calls differently at different points along the buyer's journey. This flexing of the sales approach and aligning seller behavior to the buying journey forms the basis of [Foundational Agility](#).

In this next section we explore some common perspectives in the sales training industry and the degree to which they reflect our detailed research findings.

Buyer Beware: Separating Conjecture from Reality Regarding the Nature of Sales Agility

We can make sense of all the rhetoric on Sales Agility by examining some popular claims made about it in the sales training marketplace. Just because an organization makes a claim, even a compelling one, does not make it true. There are two popular positions on Sales Agility that we have encountered. We thought it would be instructive to discuss them and how they fit into the overall Sales Agility framework. Understanding these two perspectives and the degree to which they connect with our robust research findings can help you as a consumer of sales and sales manager training make sense of this crowded and confusing marketplace. This is particularly true if you are hoping to make a high-quality, low-risk decision on how to best enable your sales force to be agile.

Position #1: Sales Agility is About Flexing and Aligning to the Buyer Along Their Buying Journey

This is an accurate, yet incomplete perspective, and is only part of a more comprehensive story. Although it is true that the most successful salespeople identify the buyer's position within their buying journey and adapt their behavior accordingly, this just scratches the surface of Sales Agility.

The findings of our research detailed the importance of the buying journey, how that fits into the three levels of Sales Agility, and other crucial factors that must be considered to become an agile salesperson. The buying journey is an essential component of Foundational Agility. This focus on the buying journey is

important, but not sufficient to enable other forms of agility, specifically Situational Agility.

Position #2: Sales Agility is Synonymous with Agile Software Development

We must admit that this is a very clever position to take; however, there is no research evidence to suggest any type of commonality between these two disparate topics. SCRUM is the most prevalent methodology used for agile software development, and the basis for this position, so we will unpack why it is not an appropriate fit.

SCRUM is a methodology used to develop products – both software and hardware. Product development is discrete, and developers have high control of the development environment. Sales is not a discrete discipline. It is a rapidly moving target involving the behavior of humans. Sales is a low-control environment strongly influenced by buyer psychology and buyer behavior.

This clever, yet inaccurate position on the comparability of agile software development to agile selling is appealing because it is almost impossible to prove or disprove and doesn't require evidence-based research of high performing sellers.

In addition, the idea of “sprints” in the SCRUM methodology involves teams of developers, working concurrently yet independently, on quite different and discrete pieces of software. This is just the opposite of what happens in sales. In fact, the salesperson must be highly involved in every aspect of the sales process, marshalling many resources to bring about a unified approach to the customer. Additionally, the comparability of agile software development to agile selling is appealing because it is almost impossible to prove or disprove through evidence-based research. The analogy, while appealing, is fundamentally flawed.

The Importance of Evidence

In far too many cases, researchers design studies to support conclusions they've already reached.

Regarding evidence-based frameworks, most sales training companies rely solely on case studies to “prove” the efficacy of their methodologies. They train to their specific methodology and look for evidence that it worked. In far too many cases, researchers design studies to support conclusions they have already reached. This approach to research falls into the category of confirmation bias.

We believe that this approach is backwards and a bit self-serving. Serious researchers study high-performing individuals, isolate the patterns and behaviors of high performers, and develop frameworks to replicate high-performer behavior. This is true in all domains, not just sales.

We are not suggesting that case studies are bad. We use them as well, primarily because they are interesting and paint a story of what a buyer might expect. The downside of relying exclusively on case studies is that they do not require research and they typically only involve one company. How do you know that the case study results hold true across multiple and varied organizations? How do you know if the methodology is truly reflective of what high-performing sales managers and salespeople do in the real world?

This is where it gets sticky. In addition to an examination of the impact of a particular methodology, you may want to understand the methodology's genesis. How was it derived? When? With whom? These are the tough questions that as buyers, you have the right to ask and have answered to make the most informed sales training and enablement decisions.

Although we have only presented two popular perspectives on Sales Agility, we are sure that more will emerge. Our passion for research and intense curiosity about what separates the highest performers from the rest of the pack will yield additional insights over time. We hope that other companies in our industry make a higher commitment to research and offer new insights. We all benefit from a better understanding of the nuances that lead to breakthrough performance. We hope this deep dive into Sales Agility, and the importance of

evidence-based frameworks, will help you become a more informed and discerning consumer of sales training and enablement solutions.

VantagePoint and Our Commitment to Thought Leadership

What is a thought leader? Someone who asks tough questions and relentlessly moves forward seeking evidence-based answers to those questions. Thought leaders go into their efforts with hypotheses but are willing to be wrong. When thought leaders do not get the answers they expect, they look for additional data to help understand disparities. Thought leaders bring new, and often counter-intuitive insights into how top-performers behave and how those behaviors differ from the rest of the pack.

A core value of VantagePoint is our commitment to research and evidence-based intellectual property. We conduct deep, ongoing research into the behavior of top-performing sales managers and salespeople and use that research to form the basis for new and innovative frameworks for better decision-making and better execution.

Other companies in our industry develop methodologies and then conduct studies to prove the efficacy of their methodologies. We feel this is backwards and does not lead to new insights. For example, we discovered that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to either selling or coaching that leads to breakthrough performance. Selling and coaching are situational and must adapt as situations change. Our Sales Agility frameworks are the result of 9 studies over 13 years and we will continue to conduct research to find and provide new insights to our customers. We do not rest on our laurels. We continually challenge our assumptions, ask new questions, and find new and surprising answers.

VantagePoint is first to market with new insights. We were the first sales training company to take a stand and claim the sales manager as the pivotal role in improving sales performance. We were the first sales training company to go against conventional wisdom that says “a standard methodology” is the best way to enable your sales force. Imitation is the best form of flattery, and we are flattered that other companies in our space are now moving in the direction of Sales Agility and situational fluency. We know that every company in our marketplace claims they have research-based methodologies. They claim they have an agile approach. In a crowded sales enablement space, it is vital that buyers look for evidence-based frameworks to make high-quality, low-risk decisions.

Because of our evidence-based approach to sales enablement, we bring solutions to our customers that look quite different from those of our competitors. This is often surprising to our customers and initially feels risky. We propose a unique way to approach sales enablement, one that has not been introduced by any other sales training company. To that end, we provide thorough evidence as to why our frameworks are truly reflective of high-performer behavior, as well as the best, most direct path to replicating that behavior.

How our Customers Experience VantagePoint

Let us examine VantagePoint from the customer's side – the only side that really matters. Our clients would tell you they find our collaboration with them to be what distinguishes us from other partners in the Sales Enablement space. We are appreciated for our adaptability to our clients' business practices, their industry and even their corporate personality. We get a buzz out of co-developing a customer-aligned learning experience, with case studies and application exercises that make the learning very “real-world” for participants. So much so that they feel they are getting “real work” done during the training. We are described as the company that leads “with heart,” demonstrating our sincere interest in helping our clients attain measurable business results from the investment they make in their commercial organizations via our training programs and integration process.

People are often judged by the company they keep. At VantagePoint, we are privileged and honored to be chosen to share company with highly discerning, global corporations. Names you know and trust like Abbott, Johnson Controls, Nielsen IQ, and Siemens Healthineers to name just a few. We have assembled an incredibly talented, gritty group of professionals who work side-by-side to delight our customers. The culture could be described as role-up-your-sleeves, share your ideas openly, make decisions with candid and honest input, choose a direction, then get it done. There is no room for egos or arrogance at VantagePoint – but we love to acknowledge and celebrate outstanding results.

How We Are Unique

We are not a fit for everyone. Some organizations want a one-stop-shop where they can get every need their sales force may have from one sales training company. This is like making the choice to go to a buffet versus a specialty restaurant. At a buffet, you have a wide variety of choices, but none of them are

typically outstanding. If you want the best sushi, you are unlikely to get it at a buffet. We are not and never will be a one-stop-shop.

Our commitment to research and innovation ensures that our solutions are best in class. We do not dilute the power of our solutions by going wide. We go very deep into a few vital areas to ensure maximum impact. We develop deep and long-term relationships with our customers, often collaborating with them in very unusual ways. Many of our customers choose to participate in our ongoing research and innovation, helping us find new and powerful ways to drive the best sales performance.

Appendix

VantagePoint Solutions AgileEdge®

The AgileEdge® is a diagnostic process that uses client data and machine learning to provide deep insights into the sales management and coaching practices that drive sales performance, as well as the buying situations salespeople face and the sales approaches that win. These insights help our clients get a deeper understanding of their current state and use those insights to make informed sales enablement decisions.

[Find out more about VantagePoint's AgileEdge®.](#)

Pipeline Coaching Code™ Training

The Pipeline Coaching Code training enables sales managers to assess the health of their team's pipelines, coach effectively to properly qualify deals within the pipeline, and more effectively move deals through the pipeline. This allows managers to ensure their salespeople are pursuing winnable deals and shaping those deals to increase win rates.

[Find out more about VantagePoint's Pipeline Coaching Code™ Training.](#)

Reflective Sales Code™ Training

The Reflective Sales Code training enables salespeople and sales managers to understand the buying journey, reflect on the underlying buyer psychology shaping the buying journey, anticipate and shape buyer motivators along the buying journey, and plan and conduct sales calls aligned to the buyer's position within their buying journey. The Reflective Sales Code is VantagePoint's sales training that enables Foundational Sales Agility.

[Find out more about VantagePoint's Reflective Sales Code™ Training.](#)

Sales Agility Code™ Training

The Sales Agility Code training enables salespeople and sales managers to assess and make sense of the unique buying situations they face, choose the best sales approach that is most likely to lead to a win, and then execute the tactics within that approach, continually monitoring buyer reactions and progress. This innovative program, the only one of its kind in the sales training marketplace, enables Situational Sales Agility.

[Find out more about VantagePoint's Sales Agility Code™ Training.](#)

Sales Management Code™ Training

The Sales Management Code training equips front-line and second-line sales managers to ensure organizational goals are aligned to front-line sales execution. This is accomplished by equipping managers to align organizational results and KPIs to specific high-impact sales activities, ensure managers effectively coach to those critical activities, and monitor leading indicators of success to determine progress against targets. This equips sales managers and leaders to be agile, making timely adjustments to sales and coaching effort to ensure alignment between effort and desired outcomes. This program enables sales managers and leaders with Organizational Sales Agility.

[Find out more about VantagePoint's Sales Management Code™ Training.](#)

Details of Sales Agility Research Journey

Organizational Agility Research

Sales Metrics Research:

2008-2010: USEF and VantagePoint gather metrics data from 17 global sales organizations.

- Total number of metrics after elimination of duplicates: 306.
- The Results, Objectives, Activities (ROA) framework for measuring and managing a sales force was born.
- Published in our bestselling book *Cracking the Sales Management Code: The Secrets to Measuring and Managing Sales Performance*.

Sales Coaching Study: 374 salespeople from a global manufacturing and services company. Formed the basis for my PhD dissertation.

- Three types of coaching (Capability, Outcome, and Activity) were examined regarding usage level and impact on quota attainment.
- Punchline: Activity coaching was the only type of coaching that was significantly and positively correlated with quota attainment. Which activities to coach? It depends. No one-size-fits-all.

2015-2017: Sales Management and Coaching Practices Research:

- Initial study: 518 managers from 12 global sales organizations. Examined sales coaching practices, sales role characteristics, formal management rhythms.
- Punchline: no one best way to coach. Coaching is variable and there is no one-size-fits-all. Patterns were identified that separate the top 25% of managers from the rest.

Sales Management Coaching Practices additional research:

- Revalidated and expanded management practices and coaching research with 1,862 managers, 4,863 sellers, from 18 companies. 2017 – 2022.

Situational Agility Research

Florida State University Sales Institute

2012: Replication of Challenger Research, 780 salespeople

- Reps in the top 50% were more likely to self-identify as challengers versus bottom 50%.
- Reps in the top 25% were just as likely to identify as consultative sellers.
- Reps in the bottom 50% were more likely to identify as relational sellers.

2013: Situational Study

- 1,500 salespeople from 3 different companies.
- High performers had a dominant selling style based on the situation they were asked to address.
- Average and low performers use the same approach regardless of the situation they face
- High performers used a consultative style more than the other 3 strategies.
- Asking sellers what they “do” is very different and much more meaningful than asking them what they “are.”

2014: Win Rate Study

- 793 salespeople, three companies, 1,586 total sales opportunities were analyzed.
- Each seller identified an opportunity they won and an opportunity they lost.
- Situational characteristics were identified as well as tactics deployed in the opportunity pursuit.
- Tactics used reflected the four patterns of sales behavior.
- Challenger-style selling was only successful in four of the 13 different situations analyzed.
- High performers were more likely to deploy the sales strategy with the best chances of winning compared with the rest of the sales organization. This pattern held true for all three companies participating in the study.

2017-2019: VantagePoint validation of FSU Situational Study Findings

- 885 salespeople, 397 sales managers, 9 companies, 1,770 opportunities analyzed.
- Between 5 and 7 buying factors (out of 25) were most predictive of adaptations in seller behavior and these 5-7 factors were clustered to identify between 4 and 6 unique buying situations for each sales force.
- High-performing salespeople are the most likely to deploy the strategy with the greatest chance of a win in each buying situation.
- Four different sales strategies were deployed.
- Consultative and competitive are the most prevalent and contrast less experienced sales forces vs highly experienced sales forces.

Foundational Agility Research

2020-2021: VantagePoint Study of Buying Factors

- 4,196 opportunities reported by 2,098 sellers were analyzed across 7 companies to determine which buying factors were most prevalently used. Eight factors with very little use were eliminated, reducing dimensionality in the analysis. The 17 remaining factors formed 5 categories of buying factors that comprised each unique buying situation.
- Although the number of unique buying situations varied, four unique buying situations were the most prevalent number per client.
- One buying factor, buying stage, was the only factor present in every sales opportunity and formed the foundation for the identification and understanding of all buying situations.

2021: VantagePoint Sales Tactics Study

- 2,124 opportunities were analyzed across 1,062 salespeople and were analyzed to determine how use of the tactics within the four strategies related to one another.
- The four strategies are not as discrete as once believed. Although there are four patterns of sales tactics, a mixture of tactics from various strategies are deployed in each opportunity.
- The consultative tactics were deployed heavily in every opportunity regardless of which strategy was identified as dominant.
- Consultative tactics were deployed most heavily when the buying stage was early versus late. Consultative tactic usage in early-stage deals was 6x higher than consultative tactic use in late-stage deals.
- Consultative tactics are necessary for determining the buying stage and determining whether to pivot to one of the other three strategies.
- Consultative tactics are foundational to strategy deployment and necessary to pivot to another strategy.