



Figure 1: **Executive alignment and sales engagement are critical inputs into the benefit realization process**

Over the years, sales has been on the hook for delivering millions of dollars in anticipated software benefits that never materialized. Much of this can be traced back to a lack of sales involvement during the creation of the business case. This translates into a void of ownership during delivery. An overreliance on service-driven project methodology makes it easy to fall into the trap of repackaging standard cost models and templates. This is a recipe for replicating past failures. Successful sales technology projects require a completely different perspective focused on aligning buy-in versus justifying benefits. Presenting a favorable quantifiable argument is no longer a guarantee of support.

What is new is more likely repackaged

There aren't many senior sales executives who built their reputation through the use of sales effectiveness tools. Sales is about building relationships and removing obstacles, not about capturing call plans and reporting to the home office. The benefits of these projects—increased visibility, accountability, standardization, scalability, and consolidation—are

frightening concepts to a traditional sales force. Plus, any sales executive who has been around for more than five years has been pitched a similar project before, and more than likely it failed. If the project was successful in the first incarnation then there probably wouldn't be a business case today.

The anticipated forecast improvements, higher fill rates, and reduced administrative spend typically included in a business case are often attached to multiple projects. These projects often fail to articulate what the connection is, beyond references to analyst articles or consultancy reports. Leadership also knows that the success of the project is entirely dependent on the buy-in of the sales force, and a traditional business case doesn't offer any insight on how that will be accomplished. If there is a level of skepticism at the leadership level, you can just imagine how the account teams and field sales feels about an investment of their time into a major change in how they do business.

Selling the story

All of this can seem rather bleak, but that is no reason to give up on the opportunity to drive real organizational improvements. It is true that sales organizations have been burned many times over the years on failed technology, but that can't facilitate complacency. When user adoption has the potential to undermine the business case, the traditional hurdle of presenting a favorable quantitative analysis carries less clout. Instead, progressive methods of business alignment and stakeholder engagement should be used to drive excitement. If you want to overcome the traditional bias and get your project approved, there are five major themes that you must consider.

1. Simplicity over complexity
2. Qualitative benefits
3. Sales engagement
4. Adoption metrics
5. Sales leadership alignment

While each theme is present in traditional technology methodology and benefits realization, their value and how to approach them for a sales effectiveness project is entirely different. Each theme is focused on building the appropriate support necessary within sales leadership to make this project a success.

Simplicity over complexity

It is relatively easy to build a complex business case that offers solid returns when dealing with the sums of money that drive the sales organization. A 1-2% reduction in trade spend will fund the vast majority of trade projects. The problem is that very few manufacturing organizations maintain a level of financial rigor that produces confidence among the decision makers that these numbers are grounded in reality. Spend time defining what the change means to the organization. Work with stakeholders to ensure they can relate to these opportunities. Uncover the concrete examples of bad business process that can be addressed through this effort. If sharing market insight is a manual process today, then demonstrate how new technology can automate this in terms that leadership will understand and embrace.

Qualitative benefits

The cornerstone of the business case can't be based entirely on fill rates, forecast accuracy, reduced inventory, or improved trade spend. While these numbers will round out the quantitative argument, they fail to carry credibility with leadership. To win over the organization, use clear examples as to how the initiative will help with historic pain points. Take the time to canvass the stakeholders up front and understand their priorities. While these improvements may not represent massive financial benefits, they represent the tangible changes that excite stakeholders. A 15% reduction in trade spend isn't going to motivate a director of sales, but eliminating a manual reporting process that produces unreliable results will.

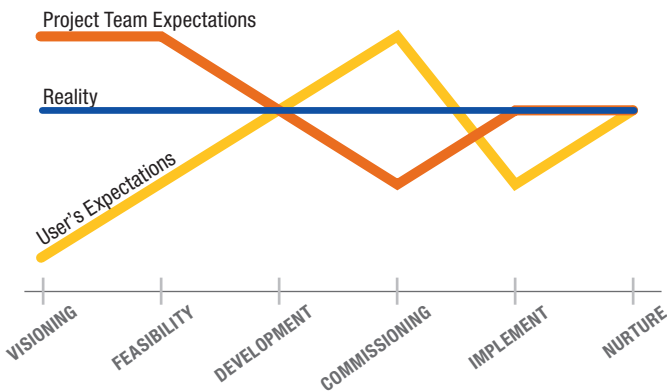


Figure 2: Qualitative benefits help manage the gap between expectations and perception that can derail your business case.

Sales engagement

The field sales organization has been through the rigor of a sales effectiveness implementation before. Look to them to identify what went wrong in the past and to highlight where the needs of the business were not met. The root cause often is attributed to poor translation from business requirements to technical development. In order to ensure the requirements are captured and executed correctly, the field sales organization should be part of the project from concept to execution. This starts with capturing their input into the business case.

The investment of time up front will pay immense dividends throughout the life of the project. The ability of key field sales resources to influence activities behind the curtain will buy credibility with broader user adoption further down the line. Effectively communicating the business case creates a pull strategy in which users are excited about the project and asking questions about when it will be available. This creates informal lines of communication to leadership about the need to embrace this new technology.

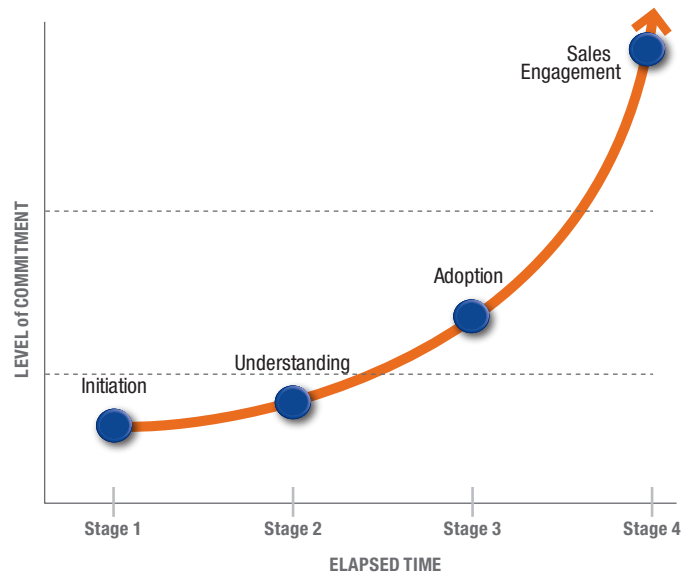


Figure 3: Establishing ownership means engaging early and often. Let sales drive the vision of what this effort looks like.

Adoption metrics

One of the most difficult disciplines in a technology project is defining the metrics that manage user adoption. It is important to capture the three to four metrics that you intend to track during the business case development. More than likely these targets will shift as you progress, but that is expected. User adoption is such a major driver of the overall benefit that it needs to be actively managed. If you can demonstrate a well thought out plan you are far more likely to get executive support.

Simple user engagement surveys can be effective ways to track adoption early on in a project. Asking consistent questions about awareness and expectations can help identify and manage the areas that need the most focus. One common downfall that this helps manage is the tendency to oversell a project. Field sales representatives are very aware when benefits are being pushed aggressively, and this typically has an adverse impact on engagement. Surveys proactively identify these red flags before they become an obstacle.

Sales leadership alignment

Any successful project needs a champion who represents the public face of the effort. While executive support is important you still need the one true believer who can motivate and influence the organization. While this is the case for most projects, this is even more critical when dealing with sales effectiveness projects. Motivating the sales force requires a credible voice of the field versus a perceived agent of the home office. Ownership should never exist in the IT organization. Once this champion is identified, find a way to get some “skin in the game.” This can mean taking on some of the budget or even incorporating the project into goals and objectives. If the champion isn’t willing to be exposed financially or through other means, then their support doesn’t really exist.

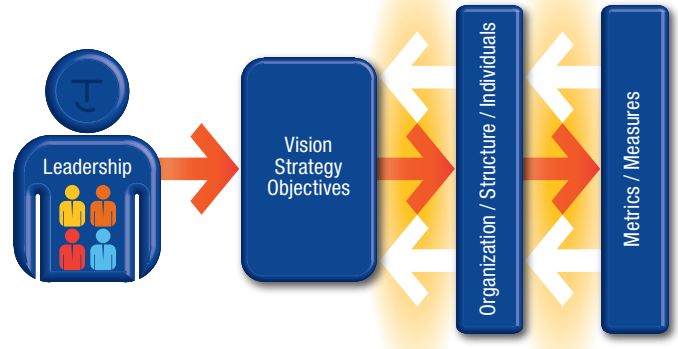


Figure 4: **Leadership will have insight into the project, but a single project champion must be visible to the organization.**

These five themes help fortify the technology selection process as software improves and resources continue to be constrained. Within the sales effectiveness space, organizations are through the bleeding edge of technology and starting to reap a defendable competitive advantage with these tools. The ability to standardize process, gain insight, and share learning across the organization is a requirement in the future CP battleground. Don't let an inability to sell the message keep you from realizing the benefits that are required to win at the point of sale.

Clarkston Consulting has developed innovative approaches to help address these challenges through our collaboration with leading CP organizations. Driven by active engagement and a sense of ownership within these efforts, we have been able to partner with our clients to deliver strategic solutions and results.

About the author

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References

- 1 (Reference - <http://www.supplychainshaman.com/new-technologies/march-of-the-penguins/>)

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