



Frontline Sales Manager Triangle

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Strategic Decision

The frontline sales manager triangle is a framework that equips frontline sales managers (FSMs) to make better and faster decisions, thereby increasing their effectiveness. The triangle provides the structure, clarity and principles to balance the three competing areas of customer, people and business in order to drive World-Class Sales Performance.

Strategic Issue:

How can FSMs better manage the competing areas of customer, people and business to increase their effectiveness and to drive World-Class Sales Performance?

Strategic Issue: A complex question that requires research, data, perspective, knowledge and context to answer

Nature's Strongest Shape

Architects use triangles when building bridges, roofs and other structures, and for good reason. Triangles are the single most important shape in engineering. Unlike a rectangle, a triangle cannot be deformed without changing the length of one of its sides or breaking one of its joints. In fact, one of the simplest ways to strengthen a rectangle is to add triangular supports at the rectangle's corners or across its diagonal length. A single support spanning two diagonal corners strengthens the rectangle by turning it into two triangles.

Introducing the Frontline Sales Manager Triangle

Triangles are strong, stable and balanced. As with triangles, there are three main areas to the FSM's role - customer, people and business. Each of these areas represents one corner of the frontline sales manager triangle.

The sides of the frontline sales manager triangle represent the scope of the FSM's role and the challenges between two adjoining areas—between customer and people, between people and business, and between customer and business. The frontline sales manager triangle also illustrates the interdependencies of each of the areas. Decisions made in one

area will impact the other two. For example, changing a customer-management strategy for a specific segment will impact people (e.g., performance, coaching) and business (e.g., funnel, results).

The frontline sales manager triangle provides a framework that illustrates the FSM's core areas of responsibility and the inherent challenges and interdependencies between each area. Increasing transparency and providing clarity by using basic triangle principles increases the FSM's awareness of the scope and responsibilities of their role and equips them

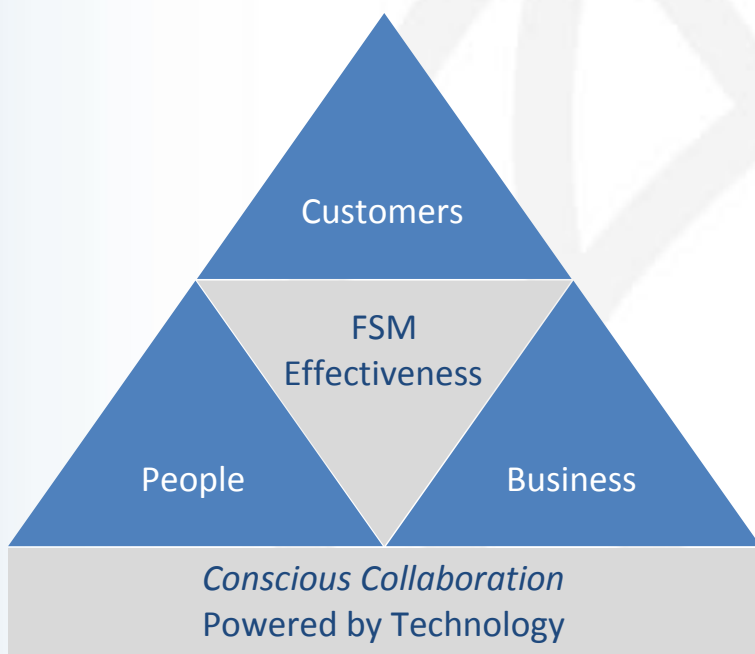


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to make better decisions faster. This framework increases the FSM's effectiveness and is a prerequisite to increased precision and performance sustainability in frontline sales management.

The Triangle Elements

The frontline sales manager triangle covers the three core areas every FSM has to deal with on a daily basis: customers, people and business, and the dependencies between them. These are the areas the FSM can directly manage, influence and measure. The foundation of the triangle is *conscious collaboration*, one of the individual behaviors that drives World-Class Sales Performance. Conscious collaboration is powered by state-of-the-art technology.

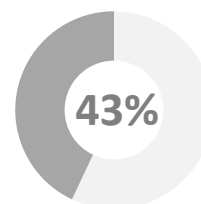
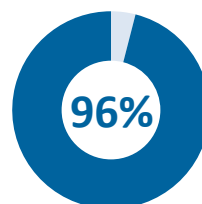


Customers: This area of FSM responsibility is all about customer-management strategies, their implementation and execution. It covers customer definition and segmentation, territory and account management as well as industry and market trends. Understanding the customers' typical challenges, their context and the relevant roles for the provider's services and capabilities are additional key criteria. Understanding how customers want to solve their problems, how they want to buy and how they want to engage with a provider allows the FSMs to design tailored engagement strategies focused on creating value to help customers achieve their desired outcomes.

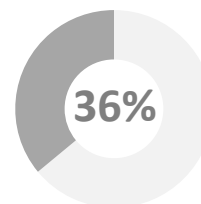
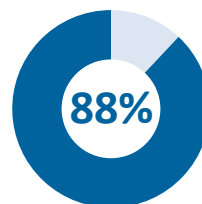
Strategic Data

- World-Class Sales Performers
- All Respondents

"Our management team is highly effective in helping our sales team advance sales opportunities."



"Our management team is highly accountable for their sales teams' continuous improvement."



Frontline sales managers play a crucial role in sales execution, productivity and overall sales performance. The frontline sales manager triangle gives these managers a framework that helps them balance the competing demands of customers, people and business and drive sustainable performance improvements.

SOURCE: 2014 Miller Heiman Sales Best Practices Study



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People: This area represents the FSM's most important asset – the sales team. Whether the FSM is managing a large-account team or a team covering a territory or industry, success with people starts with knowing individual sales professionals and understanding their current level of business awareness to determine the best strategies for resource allocation, professional development and coaching.

As we discussed in detail in the Miller Heiman Research Note *Providing Perspective*, business awareness consists of five layers. Layer 1 encompasses the sales professional's individual selling experience and professionalism. Layer 2 focuses on the sales professional's ability to sell successfully. Layer 3 covers various knowledge areas such as a provider's products and services, industries and markets, and internal resources. Layer 4 is comprised of specific customer-management strategies that define how an organization wants to connect and engage with customers and prospects. Layer 5 is the sales professional's decision-dynamic expertise. Sales professionals with a high degree of decision-dynamic expertise have strong messaging, orchestrating and leadership skills at all levels of the customer's hierarchy and all stages along the customer's journey.

While layer 1 can be addressed with successful hiring techniques, layers 2 and 3 are the core responsibility of sales enablement services on content and training. Individual coaching plans build on the selling experience and professionalism hired at layer 1 and cover layers 2 through 5.

Creating development plans and defining and executing coaching objectives are essential elements to leveraging a sales team's full potential. Coaching is not a one-size-fits-all approach. For the FSM to be effective and maximize performance, they must identify those sales professionals who have the most potential that can be developed through coaching. Success requires that they not forget the A-players, either. However, these already successful team members need more praise than coaching. To unlock the power of team coaching, FSMs must use their leadership skills to inspire A-players to share their best practices with the rest of the team.

Performance management is the next field of action and focuses on applying the metrics that are often defined by sales operations. Whichever metrics are chosen, it's essential to understand that key performance indicators (KPIs) don't replace the FSM's role as leader and coach. KPIs are goals to be achieved and should be connected to the compensation plans that define the playing field. Leading through sales coaching enables sales professionals to achieve KPI targets. Finally, FSMs are also responsible for identifying hiring gaps and firing needs.

Business: This area encompasses the business strategy and the derived sales objectives. The cornerstones are often defined by sales operations, ideally based on a sales operations framework that covers the different areas of the sales system and the underlying infrastructure. The defined methodologies and processes cover opportunity management, funnel management, account and/or territory management. Performance-management principles and compensation plans are also included in this business area.

Success in the business area requires KPIs that the FSM can manage, influence and measure directly and simultaneously. Lagging indicators such as revenue and market share represent business objectives that can be measured but cannot be directly influenced and managed by the FSM. A strong focus on leading indicators, specifically the quality of those activities that lead to



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the desired business objectives, is the key to success. Examples of these activities include the quality of customer calls and meetings, the quality of prospecting activities, CRM data quality, completion of account plans, and conversion rates all along the funnel.

The right leading indicators can be linked to the coaching plans for individual sales professionals. Adjusting regular coaching sessions based on the latest leading indicators increases the FSM's effectiveness and the team's overall performance. Additionally, the right leading indicators help the FSM make better decisions faster.

The main foundation of the frontline sales manager triangle is *conscious collaboration*, an individual behavior that is connected to the organizational attribute *collaborative culture*. For FSMs, conscious collaboration means to collaborate wisely among the three core areas, to collaborate on a cross-functional level when it comes to allocating resources to the team's opportunities, to orchestrate collaboration across the buying organization, and to prepare the ground for their team members. Conscious collaboration is also vital due to the FSM's unique position, sandwiched between the sales team and senior executives.

To drive FSM effectiveness, there must be a solid infrastructure powered by technology. It must not only connect marketing automation and customer relationship management systems, but also connect these applications with the enablement and collaboration platforms. Providing FSM-specific views and reports is a prerequisite to driving their effectiveness in a sustainable way.

Related Miller Heiman Research Institute Notes:

*Frontline Sales Managers: Enablement Needed
Providing Perspective*

About the Miller Heiman Research Institute: MHRI is a research organization dedicated to improving the performance and productivity of complex B2B sales organizations. We help members develop and hone sales strategies by providing thought-leading research, critical analysis, benchmarking against World-Class Sales Organizations and customized insight into their strategic issues through our advisory services. Through our extensive research into the best practices, strategies and decision frameworks of World-Class Sales Organizations, we help our clients apply these insights to their organization through published research, keynotes and presentations as well as analyst inquiry.

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