



**SALES  
MANAGEMENT  
ASSOCIATION**

RESEARCH REPORT

# **SALESPERSON LEARNING PREFERENCES**

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RESEARCH UNDERWRITER



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#### **Research Report: Salesperson Learning Preferences**

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# 1

## RESEARCH SUMMARY

### 1.1 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This research investigates the range of training and development practices utilized by sales organizations. These practices are rapidly evolving in response to emerging technology and the quickening pace of change in sales job content and learning objectives. This study illuminates which approaches yield the best results for sales forces, and how firms can anticipate future developments in learning approaches.

### 1.2 SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- Most firms' salesperson development efforts fall short of expectation. As implemented by respondents, all practices included in our research received low-to-moderate ratings. Salesperson best practice sharing is rated as most effective, though its 4.4 rating (on a seven-point scale) indicates only marginal effectiveness. Just two other practices reach the median rating of "somewhat effective": classroom training, and management observation of salespeople.
- Coaching and peer learning are seen as the highest ROI activities related to salesperson development.
- Best practice sharing is the most important salesperson development practice, and used by the most number of firms (92%).
- By comparing the ratings of importance and current effectiveness, we identified three practices that represent the most important improvement priorities: salesperson practice, "micro-learning," and online portals or enablement platforms. These three were rated among the most important, yet also among the least effectively development practices.
- Two practices were ranked among the least utilized, and also

among the most effective. These are “micro-learning” and salesperson certification.

- Just under one-third (32%) of respondents’ firms have not implemented mobile access for salesperson training content, and only 10% have fully implemented mobile-enabled training content.

Our research included both managers and salespeople. Comparing results from the two sample populations reveals their different perspectives on salesperson development.

- Salespeople rate their firms' effectiveness in most training topics higher than does management.
- Managers consider value proposition communication a training topic of higher priority than do salespeople, who are more likely to prioritize presentation delivery and effectiveness higher as a training topic than does management.
- Salespeople perceive a greater portion of their learning and development time to be self-directed than does management.
- Both management and salespeople believe training associated with self-directed objectives, or manager-developed objectives, should be increased, and training associated with company-directed objectives decreased, as a percentage of all training.
- Management ranks the use of outside content and roleplaying with feedback higher in importance than do salespeople. Encouraging the use of outside content is ranked sixth in importance by management, 13th by salespeople; role playing with manager feedback is ranked fifth by management, 12th by salespeople.



## 2

### **SALESPERSON TRAINING TOPICS**

Our research first looks at the topics focused on in salesperson training and development. In this and selected subsequent sections, we present management and salesperson responses aggregated separately.

We find that a broad array of development topics are considered important, though managers and salespeople prioritize topics' importance differently. Managers are more likely to consider value proposition communication a topic of higher importance than do salespeople, who are more likely to prioritize the importance of presentation effectiveness higher than management does. Perhaps more importantly, management takes a dimmer view of salesperson training effectiveness than do salespeople themselves, who, in comparison with management, rank training effectiveness higher in most topics.

Based on management responses, the topic which represents the most important improvement priority is qualifying potential opportunity in customers and prospects. Alone among all topics, it rated in the top half in importance, and in the bottom half of topics in effectiveness.

#### **2.1 SALESPERSON TRAINING TOPICS' IMPORTANCE**

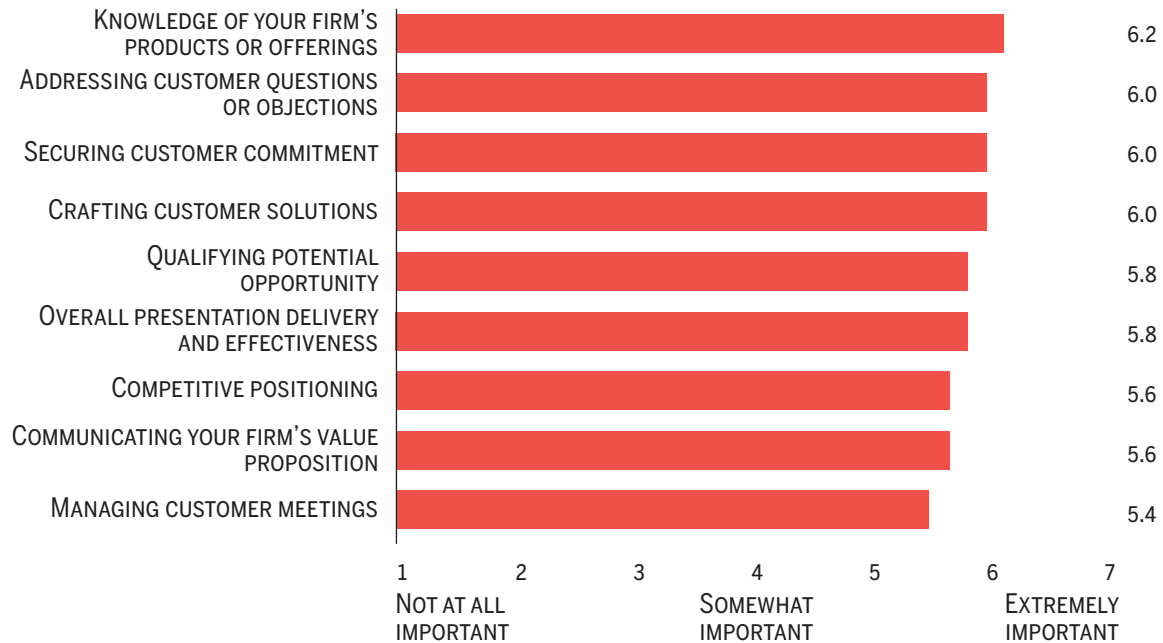
Among all respondents, salesperson training topics considered most important are knowledge of offerings, addressing customer objections, securing commitment, and crafting solutions. These topics each are rated 6 or higher on a seven-point rating scale (where 1 = "not at all important" and 7 = "extremely important"). Considered least important is managing customer meetings, though even this topic rates highly at 5.4.



## SALESPERSON TRAINING TOPICS

### IMPORTANCE RATINGS OF SALESPERSON DEVELOPMENT TOPICS

#### AVERAGE OF RESPONSES



#### RATING OF IMPORTANCE

N=208

#### 2.1.1 KNOWLEDGE OF A FIRM'S OFFERING IS CONSIDERED THE MOST IMPORTANT SALESPERSON TRAINING TOPIC.

Comparing responses from salespeople and management respondents reveals significant differences in rated importance for these topics. Management respondents rate all topics higher in importance than do salespeople, and assign significantly different relative priority. Management values communicating the firm's value proposition among the top three most important salesperson training topics (with a 6.3 rating); for salespeople, this topic rates seventh, at 5.3. Similarly, salespeople's highest-rated topic (6.1), knowledge of offering, is rated fourth in importance by management respondents (6.2), though still higher in absolute terms than salespeople's rating.





## IMPORTANCE RATINGS OF SALESPERSON DEVELOPMENT TOPICS

**COMPARISON OF SALESPERSON AND MANAGEMENT RESPONDENTS**

	EFFECTIVENESS RATING		RANKING		DELTA
	SALESPERSON	MANAGERS	SALESPERSON	MANAGERS	
COMMUNICATING YOUR FIRM'S VALUE PROPOSITION	5.3	6.3	7	3	(4)
COMPETITIVE POSITIONING	5.2	6.0	8	6	(2)
ADDRESSING CUSTOMER QUESTIONS OR OBJECTIVES	6.0	6.3	2	1	(1)
SECURING CUSTOMER COMMITMENT	5.8	6.3	3	2	(1)
QUALIFYING POTENTIAL OPPORTUNITY	5.5	6.0	6	6	-
MANAGING CUSTOMER MEETINGS	4.9	5.9	9	9	-
CRAFTING CUSTOMER SOLUTIONS	5.8	6.1	4	5	1
KNOWLEDGE OF YOUR FIRM'S PRODUCT OR OFFERINGS	6.1	6.2	1	4	3
OVERALL PRESENTATION DELIVERY AND EFFECTIVENESS	5.6	6.0	5	8	3
	N=115	N=93			

**2.1.2** MANAGERS CONSIDER VALUE PROPOSITION COMMUNICATION A TRAINING TOPIC OF HIGHER PRIORITY THAN DO SALESPERSON, WHO ARE MORE LIKELY TO PRIORITIZE PRESENTATION DELIVERY AND EFFECTIVENESS HIGHER THAN MANAGERS.

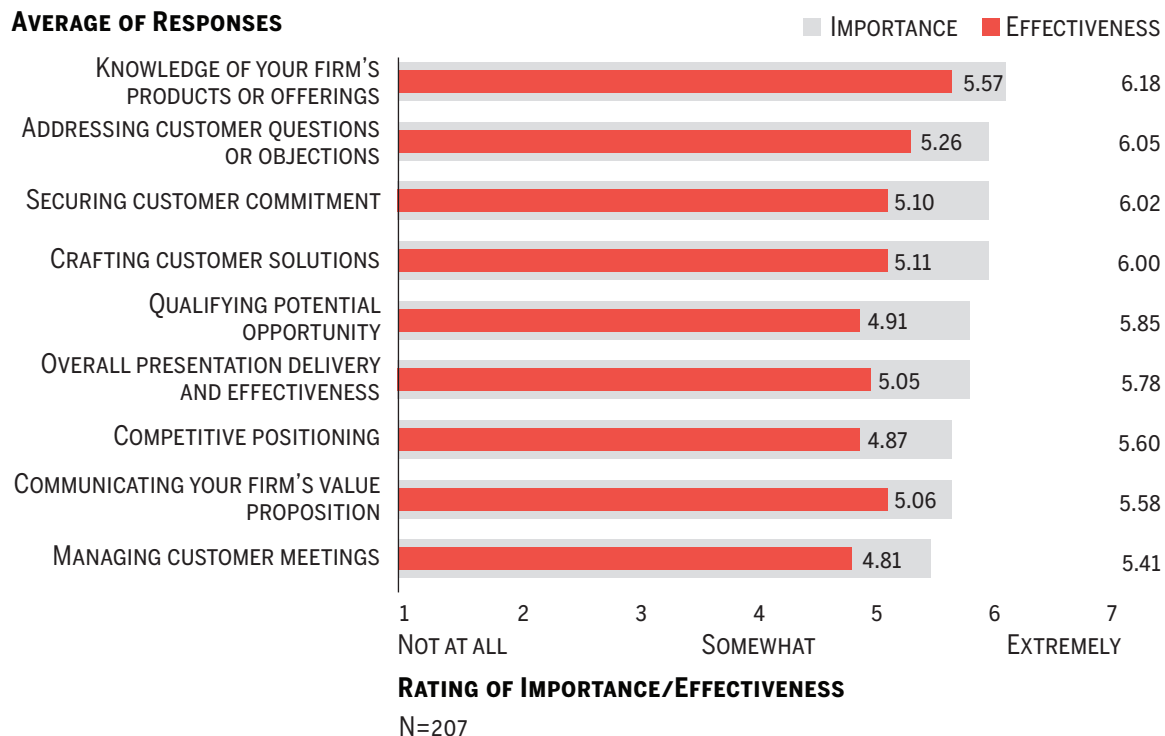
**2.2 SALESPERSON TRAINING TOPICS' EFFECTIVENESS**

Respondents also rated their firms' training effectiveness in the same set of nine topics. Knowledge of offering is ranked as the most effectively trained salesperson topic by all respondents, with a rating of 5.6 (and independently by management and salesperson respondents). Customer meeting management is rated as the least effectively trained salesperson development topic by all respondents, with a rating of 4.8. Sales managers rate this topic slightly higher in effectiveness than do salespeople (salespeople's rating is 4.7, compared to management's 4.9), though managers rank it fifth in effectiveness, compared to salespeople's ranking of ninth.



## IMPORTANCE AND EFFECTIVENESS RATINGS OF SALESPERSON DEVELOPMENT TOPICS

### AVERAGE OF RESPONSES



**2.2.1** AS A SALESPERSON TRAINING TOPIC, QUALIFYING POTENTIAL OPPORTUNITY HAS THE LARGEST GAP BETWEEN RATED IMPORTANCE AND EFFECTIVENESS.

## EFFECTIVENESS RATINGS OF SALESPERSON DEVELOPMENT TOPICS

### COMPARISON OF SALESPERSON AND MANAGEMENT RESPONDENTS

	EFFECTIVENESS RATING		RANKING		DELTA
	SALESPEOPLE	MANAGERS	SALESPEOPLE	MANAGERS	
COMMUNICATING YOUR FIRM'S VALUE PROPOSITION	5.1	5.0	6	2	(4)
MANAGING CUSTOMER MEETINGS	4.7	4.9	9	5	(4)
ADDRESSING CUSTOMER QUESTIONS OR OBJECTIVES	5.5	5.0	2	2	-
CRAFTING CUSTOMER SOLUTIONS	5.3	4.9	4	4	-
KNOWLEDGE OF YOUR FIRM'S PRODUCT OR OFFERINGS	5.6	5.6	1	1	-
COMPETITIVE POSITIONING	5.0	4.7	8	9	1
QUALIFYING POTENTIAL OPPORTUNITY	5.0	4.8	7	8	1
OVERALL PRESENTATION DELIVERY AND EFFECTIVENESS	5.2	4.9	5	6	1
SECURING CUSTOMER COMMITMENT	5.4	4.8	3	7	4

N=102      N=106

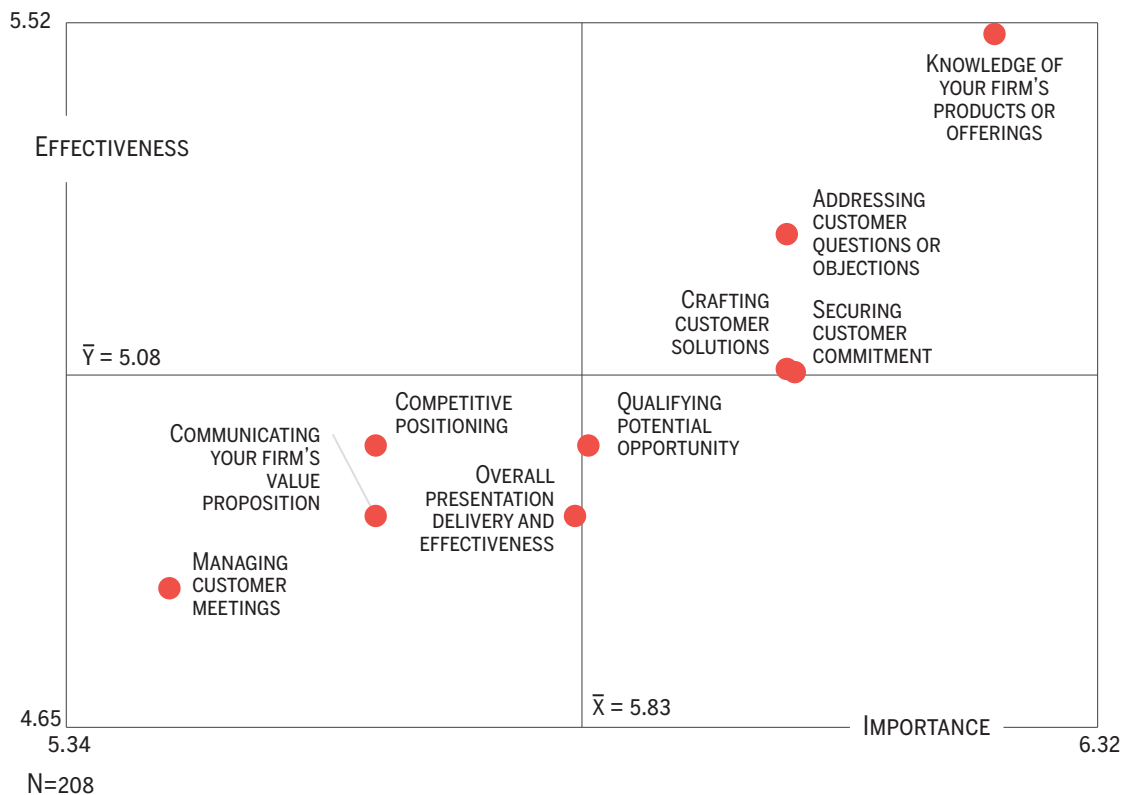
**2.2.2** SALESPEOPLE RATE THEIR FIRMS' EFFECTIVENESS IN MOST TRAINING TOPICS HIGHER THAN DOES MANAGEMENT .



### 2.3 IMPROVEMENT PRIORITIES BY SALESPERSON TRAINING TOPIC

When considered as a whole, the salesperson training topic which represents respondents' most important improvement priority is qualifying potential opportunity. It is rated among the least effectively trained topics, and rated among the most important. Among management respondents, securing customer commitment represents the most important improvement opportunity, using the same criteria.

IMPORTANCE AND EFFECTIVENESS MATRIX SALESPERSON DEVELOPMENT TOPICS



2.3 CRAFTING CUSTOMER SOLUTIONS REPRESENTS THE MOST IMPORTANT IMPROVEMENT AS A SALESPERSON TRAINING TOPIC, BASED ON MANAGEMENT RESPONDENTS' RATINGS OF TOPICS' IMPORTANCE AND EFFECTIVENESS.



Plotting importance and effectiveness ratings in a x-y scatter plot format helps to visualize relationships between respondents' importance and effectiveness ratings. This "Importance Effectiveness Matrix" assigns effectiveness ratings to the vertical y-axis, and importance ratings to the horizontal x-axis. The two axes intersect at the respective mean reported value for each scale. Each topic is thereby forced into one of four quadrants, as illustrated above. Topics ranked in the top 50th percentile for importance are sorted on the right half of the chart; those ranked in the top 50th percentile based on effectiveness are forced to the top half of the chart.

The lower-right quadrant contains training topics executed with relatively low effectiveness, yet considered highly important. Elements in this quadrant are management's most important improvement priorities. Qualifying potential opportunities appears in this quadrant.

The upper-right quadrant represents training topics with relatively high ratings for both importance and effectiveness. These include knowledge of products or offerings, addressing customer questions or objections, securing customer commitment, and crafting customer solutions. In relation to other topics, respondents will likely sustain focus in these.

Topics in the lower left-hand quadrant are relatively less important, and performed less effectively than others. In resource-constrained environments, firms are apt to reduce or outsource support for elements in this quadrant. Training topics in this quadrant are overall presentation delivery and effectiveness, competitive positioning, communicating firm value proposition, and managing customer meetings.

The upper-left quadrant includes training topics of relatively lesser importance, executed with relatively high effectiveness. Items in this quadrant are typically monitored to ensure continued effectiveness. No topics appear in this quadrant.



## 3

## LEARNING MODALITIES: WHERE DO SALESPEOPE LEARN?

Managers and salespeople perceive learning activities differently. Salespeople consider a greater portion of their overall learning to be self-directed, suggesting managers may underestimate the degree to which salespeople seek out learning without managers' involvement. Management and salespeople share an interest in decreasing the amount of learning and development associated with company-generated objectives, and increasing learning associated with self-directed and manager-directed learning objectives.

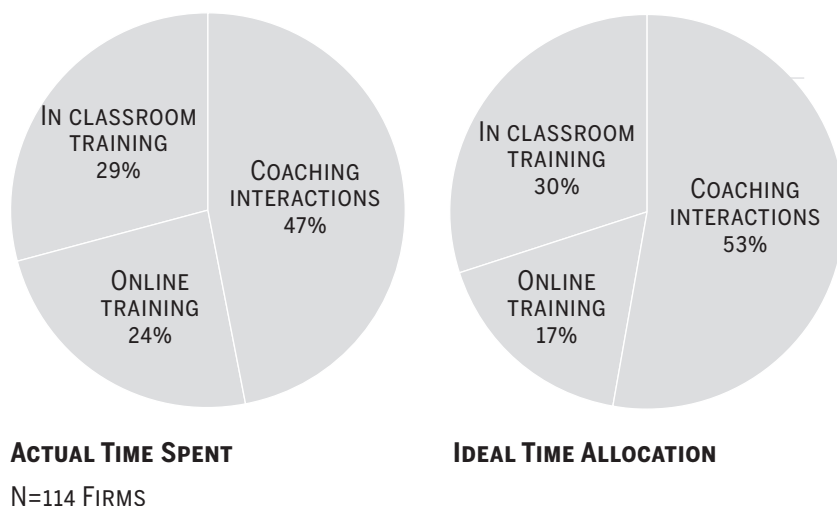
### 3.1 ACTUAL AND IDEAL LEARNING MODALITIES

Salespeople spend the majority of "learning time" in coaching interactions (47%), followed by classroom training (29%) and online learning (24%). This allocation of learning time by modality reflects the average of all management responses, weighted according to sales force size.

#### IDEAL AND ACTUAL SALESPERSON LEARNING BY MODALITY

#### MANAGEMENT RESPONSES, ADJUSTED FOR SALES FORCE SIZE

**3.1.1** MANAGEMENT WOULD LIKE TO SEE COACHING INTERACTIONS INCREASED, WITH RELIANCE ON ONLINE TRAINING DECREASED.

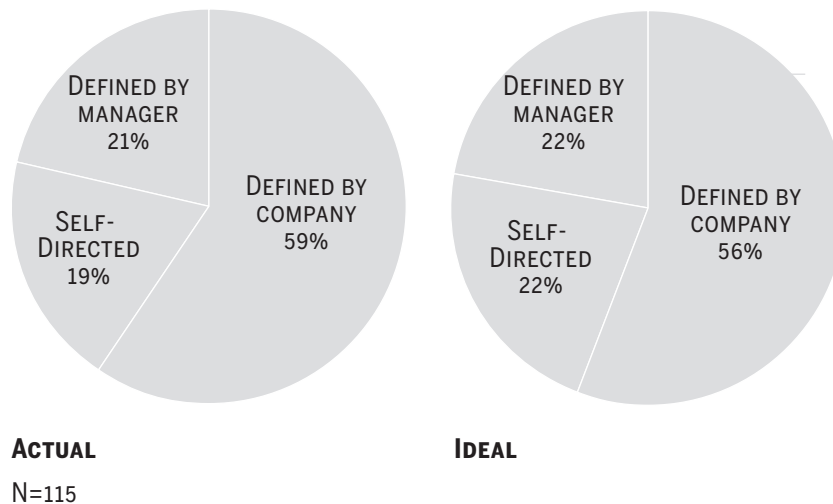


Respondents' ideal allocations of learning time suggest that firms wish to slightly reduce their reliance on online training (its ideal time allocation is 17% of all learning time), and slightly increase coaching interactions (from 47% currently to 53%). Classroom training's ideal time allocation is least changed, at 30%, increased slightly from 29%.

#### IDEAL AND ACTUAL SALESPERSON LEARNING BY SOURCE

##### MANAGEMENT RESPONSES

**3.1.2** MANAGEMENT WOULD LIKE TO SEE A marginally GREATER PORTION OF SALESPERSON LEARNING DIRECTED BY MANAGEMENT, OR SELF-DIRECTED FROM SALESPEOPLE THEMSELVES.



Similar actual and ideal allocations show less variation associated with who establishes learning objectives. The majority of these are defined by the company (59%), with the balance split in roughly equal proportions between management-defined objectives (21%), and salesperson-defined objectives (19%). Ideal distributions across these three categories do not differ materially.

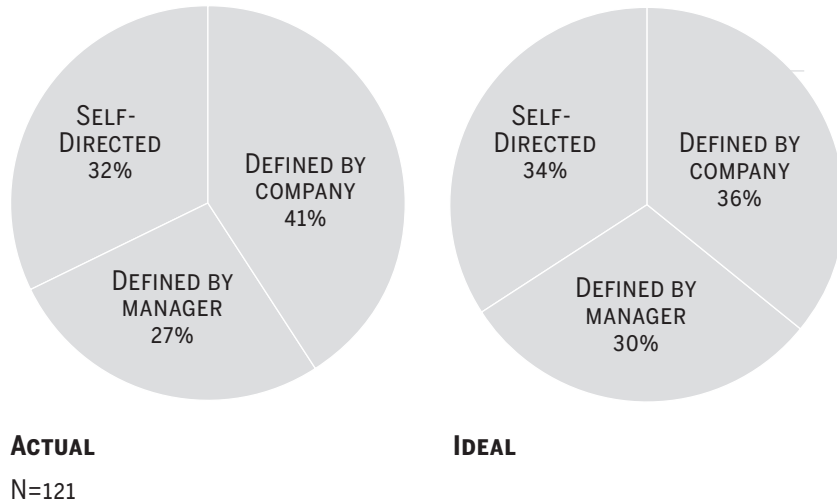
Salespeople view these distributions significantly differently. Salesperson respondents' average learning distribution has 32% allocated to self-directed objectives, 27% defined by management, and 41% company defined. Their ideal distribution suggests a significant reduction in company-defined learning (to 36%), and a modest increase in learning associated with manager-defined objectives and self-directed objectives (increasing to 30% and 34%, respectively).



## IDEAL AND ACTUAL SALESPERSON LEARNING BY SOURCE

### SALESPERSON RESPONSES

**3.1.3** SALESPERSONS WOULD PREFER LESS COMPANY-DEFINED LEARNING, AND MORE SELF-DIRECTED AND MANAGER DEFINED.



## 4

### PRACTICES AND TOOLS

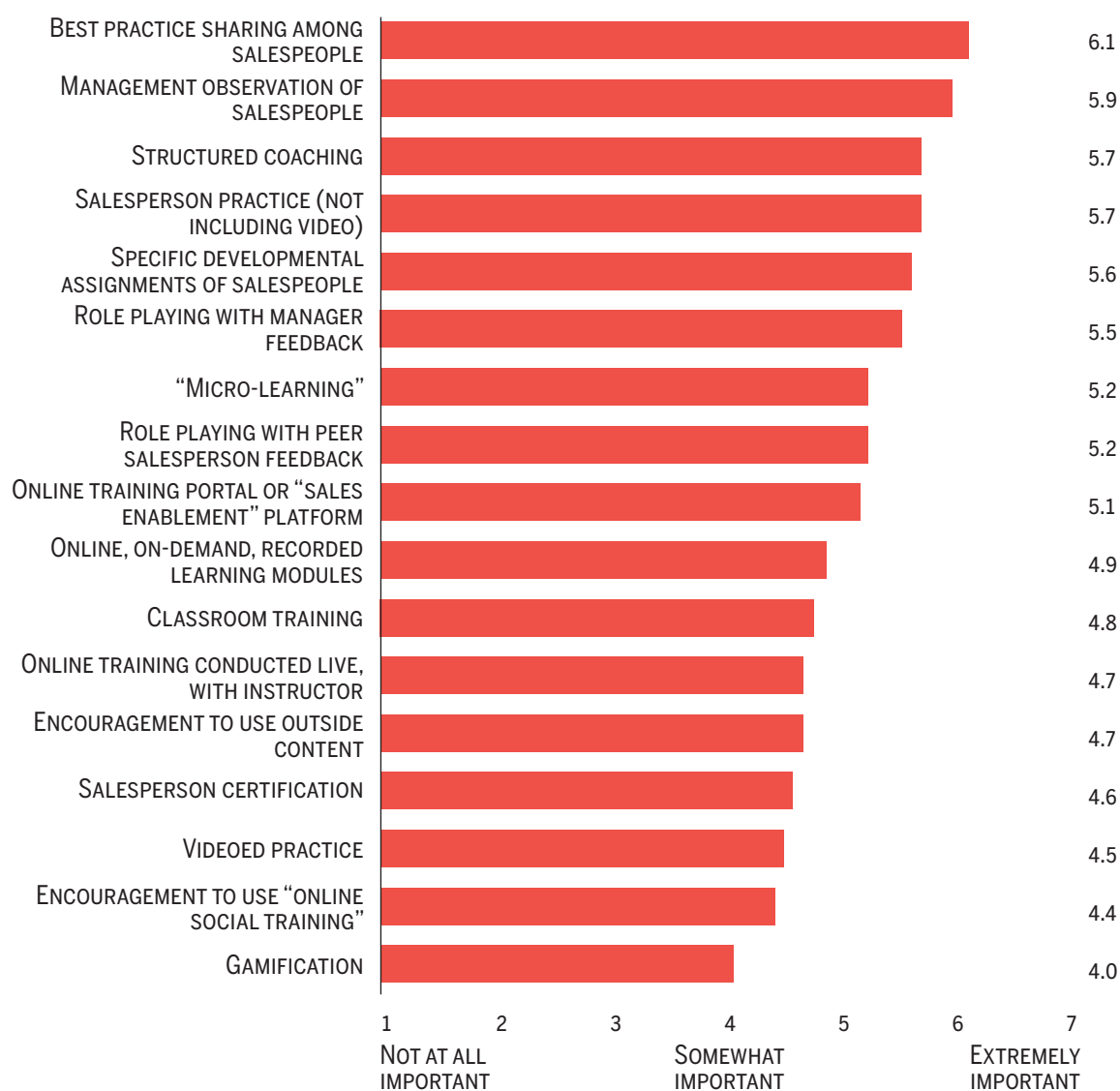
Firms use a broad array of learning practices and tools in their salesperson development efforts, and consider many of these to be important to salesperson development effectiveness. The most widely used, and also considered most important, is salesperson best practice sharing. However, effectiveness in most practices and tools is rated well below management expectation. Our research prioritizes three practices and the most important improvement opportunities, based on their highly rated importance, and their low effectiveness. These are salesperson practice, “micro-learning,” and online portals or enablement platforms. We also identify three implementation priorities – practices judged among the most effective, whose adoption lags others. These are “micro-learning,” and salesperson certification.

#### 4.1 IMPORTANCE

Management respondents rate best practice sharing among salespeople as the most important sales training practice or tool; its 6.2 rating was highest among 17 practices (ratings use a seven-point scale, where 1 = “not at all important”)

##### IMPORTANCE RATINGS OF SALESPERSON DEVELOPMENT PRACTICES AND TOOLS

###### AVERAGE OF MANAGEMENT RESPONSES



###### RATING OF IMPORTANCE

N=101 FIRMS

**4.1.1** BEST PRACTICE SHARING IS THE MOST IMPORTANT SALESPERSON DEVELOPMENT PRACTICE.

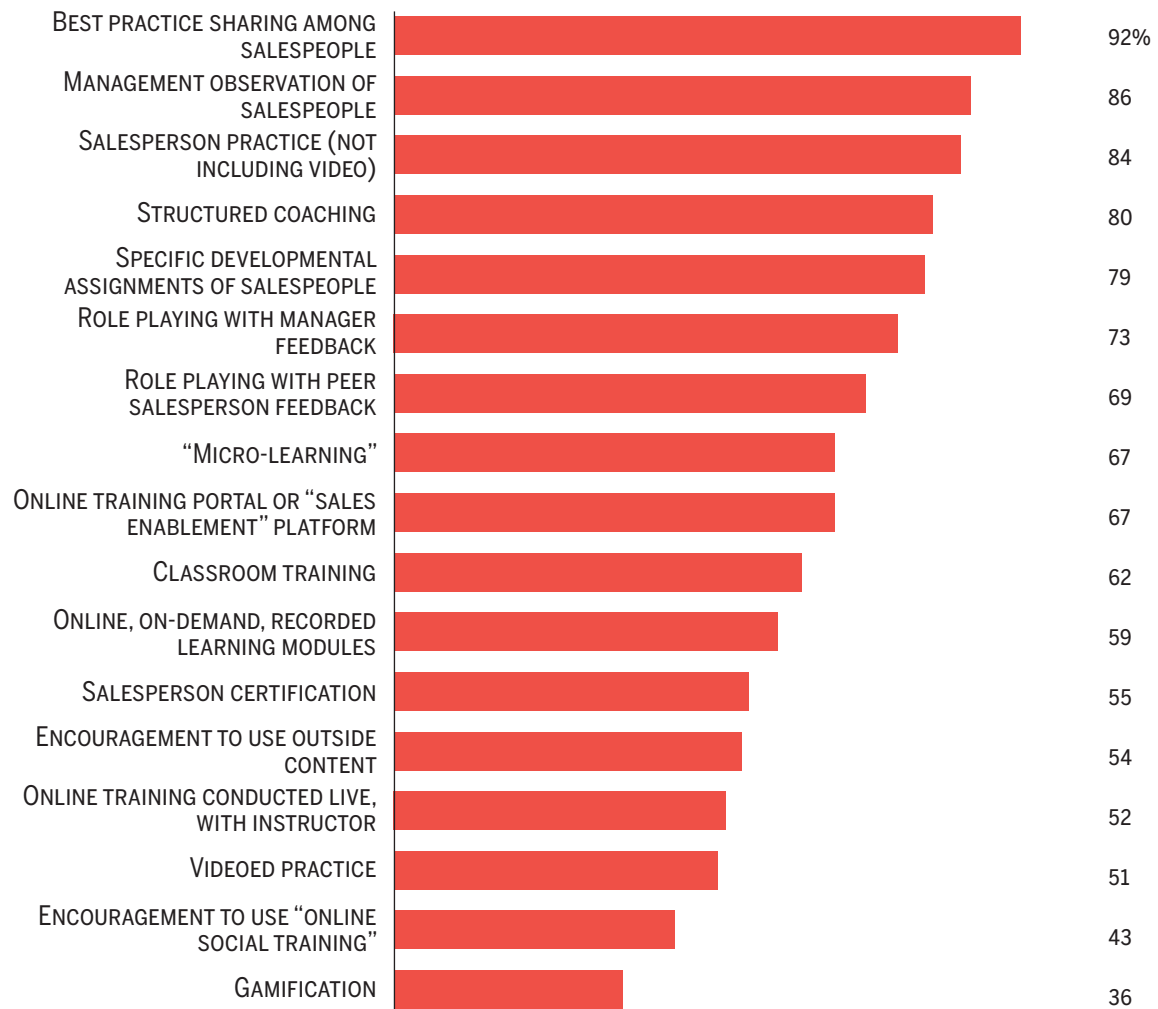




and 7 = “extremely important”). Also rated highly important is management observation of salespeople (6.0), structured coaching (5.7), salesperson practice (5.7), and specific developmental assignments for salespeople (5.6). Rated lowest is gamification (4.0).

PRACTICES AND TOOLS CONSIDERED IMPORTANT FOR SALESPERSON DEVELOPMENT

PERCENTAGE OF MANAGEMENT RESPONSES



N=101 FIRMS

**4.1.2** SALESPERSON BEST PRACTICE SHARING IS USED BY THE MOST NUMBER OF FIRMS (92%), GAMIFICATION THE LEAST (36%).

Three-quarters or more of all management respondents consider these five practices important (with a rating of “5” or higher), including 92% who consider best practice sharing important.

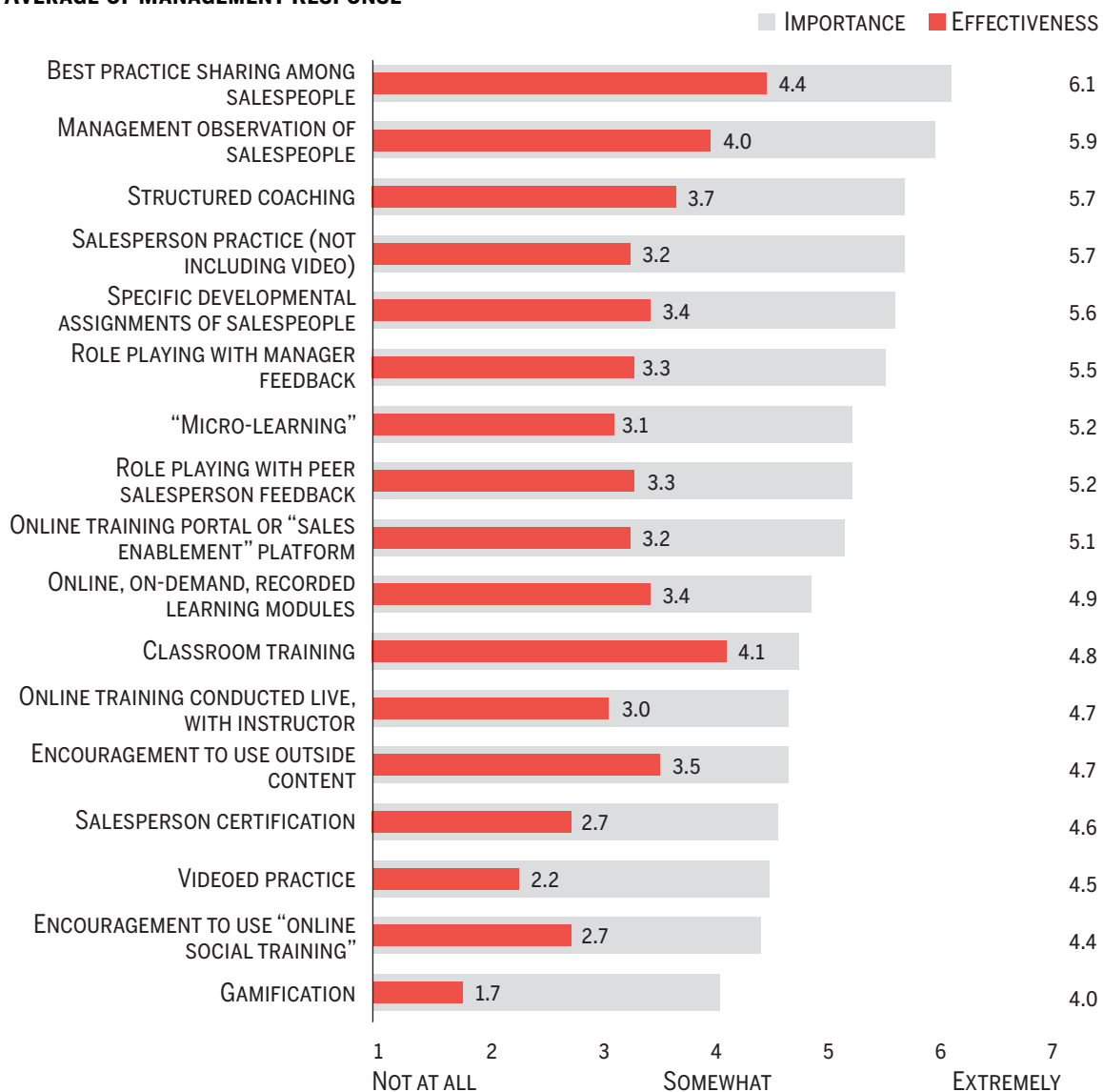


## 4.2 EFFECTIVENESS

Management respondents' effectiveness ratings for these practices are significantly lower. Best practice sharing among salespeople is rated as most effective, though its 4.4 rating (on a seven-point scale) indicates only marginal effectiveness (effectiveness ratings range

### IMPORTANCE AND EFFECTIVENESS RATINGS OF SALESPERSON DEVELOPMENT PRACTICES

#### AVERAGE OF MANAGEMENT RESPONSE



#### RATING OF IMPORTANCE/EFFECTIVENESS

N=101 FIRMS

4.2 EFFECTIVENESS RATINGS SIGNIFICANTLY LAG IMPORTANCE RATINGS FOR ALL SALESPERSON DEVELOPMENT PRACTICES AND TOOLS.



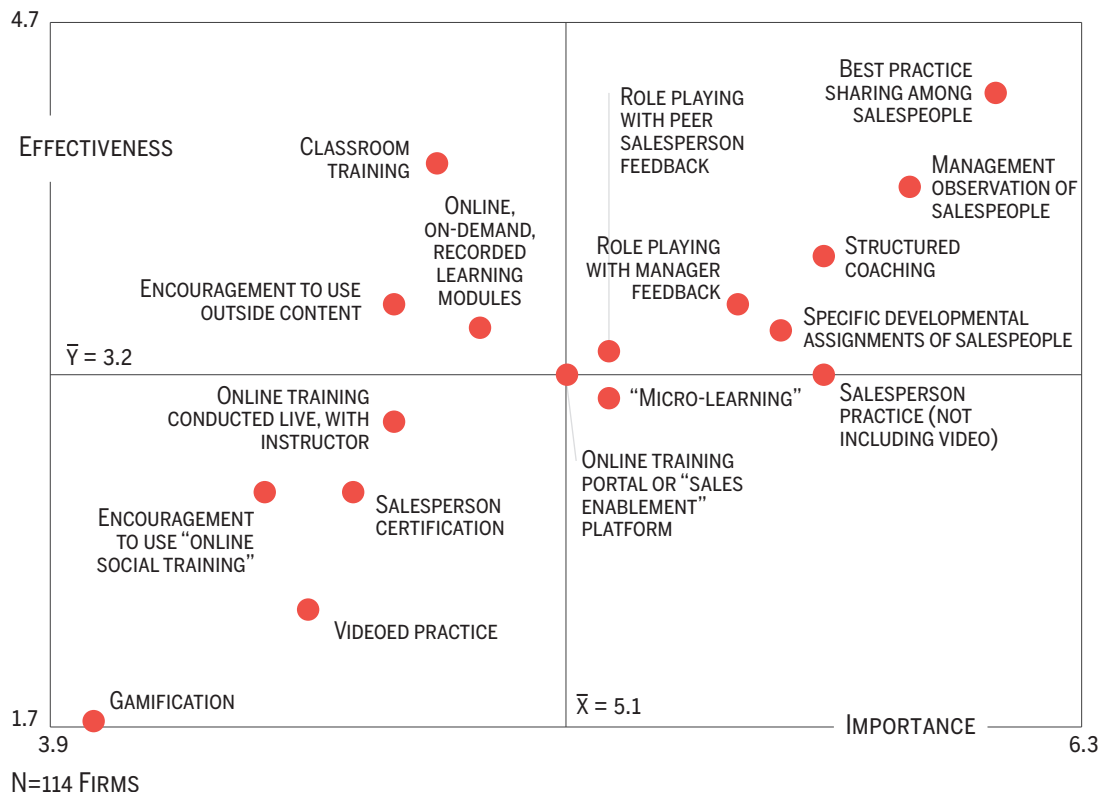
from 1 for “not at all effective” to 7 for “extremely effective”). Just one other practice, classroom training, exceeds the median rating of 4. (Management observation of salespeople rounds up to a 4.0 rating.) All other practices are rated under 4. Gamification and videoed practice are lowest rated, with effectiveness ratings of 1.7 and 2.2, respectively.

#### 4.3 IMPROVEMENT PRIORITIES

Three salesperson training practices and tools represent management respondents’ most important improvement priorities: salesperson practice, “micro-learning,” and online portals or enablement platforms. These practices are rated among the least effective practices, and rated among the most important. These are isolated in the lower right quadrant of the Salesperson Training Practices Importance and Effectiveness Matrix, exhibit 4.3 below. (The methodology for this analysis is explained in detail in section 2.3.)

IMPORTANCE AND EFFECTIVENESS MATRIX SALESPERSON DEVELOPMENT PRACTICES

#### RATING ADJUSTED FOR SALES FORCE SIZE



**4.3** MANAGEMENT’S MOST IMPORTANT IMPROVEMENT PRIORITIES ARE THOSE ITEMS RATED AMONG THE MOST IMPORTANT, BUT ALSO AMONG THE LEAST EFFECTIVE. THREE PRACTICES EMERGE AS SUCH PRIORITIES: SALESPERSON PRACTICE, “MICRO-LEARNING,” AND ONLINE PORTALS OR ENABLEMENT PLATFORMS.



#### 4.4 UTILIZATION AND EFFECTIVENESS

UTILIZATION AND EFFECTIVENESS RATINGS FOR SALESPERSON DEVELOPMENT PRACTICES

	UTILIZATION	EFFECTIVENESS
BEST PRACTICE SHARING AMONG SALESPeOPLE	96%	53%
MANAGEMENT OBSERVATION OF SALESPeOPLE	88	52
STRUCTURED COACHING	89	47
"MICRO-LEARNING"	75	45
SPECIFIC DEVELOPMENTAL ASSIGNMENTS OF SALESPeOPLE	87	34
CLASSROOM TRAINING	92	50
ONLINE, ON-DEMAND, RECORDED LEARNING MODULES	83	42
SALESPERSON CERTIFICATION	64	44
SALESPERSON PRACTICE (NOT INCLUDING VIDEO)	84	31
ONLINE TRAINING PORTAL OR "SALES ENABLEMENT" PLATFORM	80	35
ROLE PLAYING WITH PEER SALESPERSON FEEDBACK	83	36
VIDEOED PRACTICE	60	32
ROLE PLAYING WITH MANAGER FEEDBACK	86	41
ONLINE TRAINING CONDUCTED LIVE, WITH INSTRUCTOR	78	30
ENCOURAGEMENT TO USE OUTSIDE CONTENT	94	31
ENCOURAGEMENT TO USE "ONLINE SOCIAL TRAINING"	84	23
GAMIFICATION	59	16

N=114 FIRMS

**4.4** BEST PRACTICE SHARING IS JUDGED EFFECTIVE BY 53% OF RESPONDENTS, THE HIGHEST PERCENTAGE OF ANY PRACTICE OR TOOL.

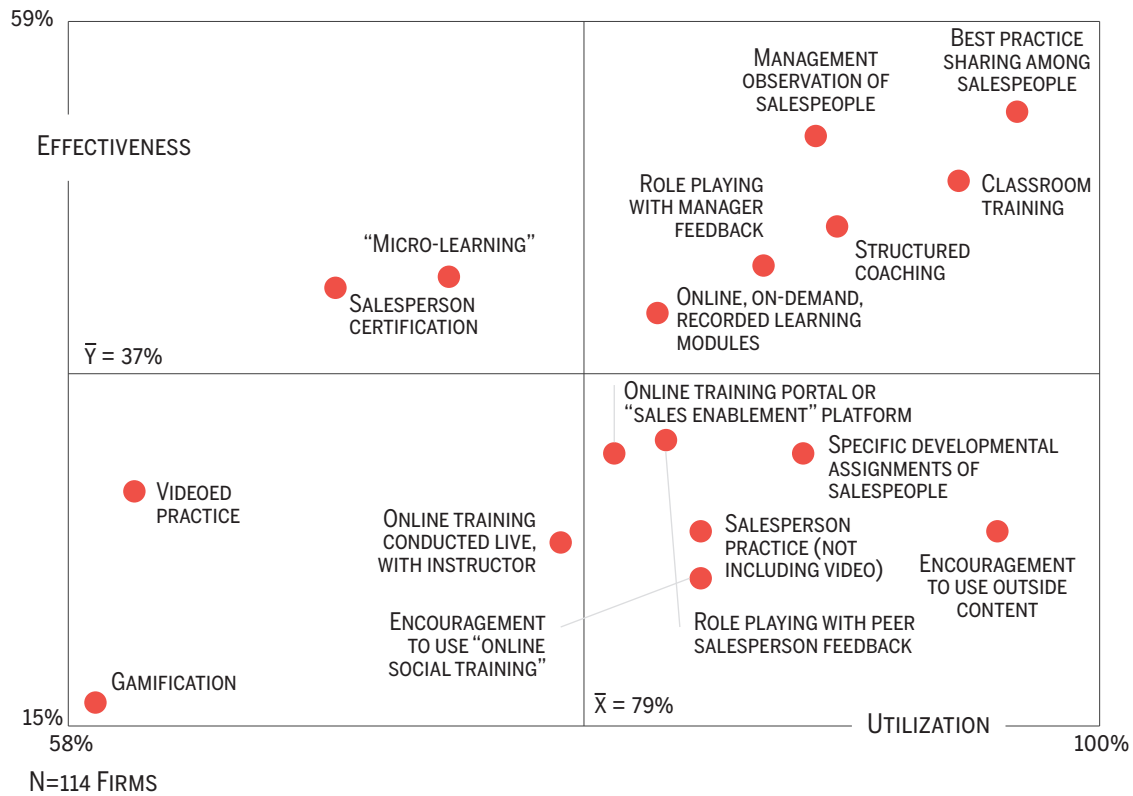
All 17 practices and tools researched are utilized by 59% or more of respondents (gamification rates the lowest utilization percentage; best practice sharing among salespeople, as the most utilized at 96%). Also among the most frequently used (by at least 90% of respondents) is encouragement to use outside content (94%) and classroom training (92%).

Best practice sharing is judged effective by 53% of respondents, the highest percentage of any practice or tool. Just 16% of respondents rate gamification effective in their organizations.



## 4.5 IMPLEMENTATION PRIORITIES

UTILIZATION AND EFFECTIVENESS MATRIX SALESPERSON DEVELOPMENT PRACTICES



4.5 TWO PRACTICES EMERGE AS AMONG THE LEAST UTILIZED AND MOST EFFECTIVE: "MICRO-LEARNING" AND SALESPERSON CERTIFICATION.

Several practices are among the most frequently considered effective, but also among the least utilized. These might be considered implementation priorities for our population. These practices are "micro-learning" and salesperson certification. "Micro-learning" is utilized by just 75% of firms (ranking 14th of 17 in utilization among practices), and is considered effective in 45% of firms utilizing it (ranking 5th among all practices). Salesperson certification is used in just 64% of firms (ranking 15th), and considered effective in 44% of them (ranking 6th).



#### 4.6 COMPARING SALESPERSON AND MANAGEMENT PERSPECTIVES ON TRAINING PRACTICES

Only management responses are summarized in the subsection above, but our research also gathered training practice and tool ratings from salespeople. Comparing these with management's perspectives offers interesting insight into where management's and salespeople's views may diverge.

##### SALESPERSON DEVELOPMENT PRACTICES CONSIDERED IMPORTANT

##### PERCENTAGES OF SALESPERSON AND MANAGEMENT RESPONDENTS RATING "IMPORTANT"

	SALESPERSON	MANAGEMENT	VARIANCE
ROLE PLAYING WITH MANAGER FEEDBACK	36%	73%	103%
CLASSROOM TRAINING	39	62	60
GAMIFICATION	24	36	49
ROLE PLAYING WITH PEER SALESPERSON FEEDBACK	49	69	42
VIDEOED PRACTICE	37	51	39
STRUCTURED COACHING	59	80	36
ONLINE TRAINING PORTAL OR "SALES ENABLEMENT" PLATFORM	51	67	32
SALESPERSON PRACTICE (NOT INCLUDING VIDEO)	64	84	31
MANAGEMENT OBSERVATION OF SALESPERSON	66	86	30
ONLINE, ON-DEMAND, RECORDED LEARNING MODULES	46	59	28
ONLINE TRAINING CONDUCTED LIVE, WITH INSTRUCTOR	41	52	28
SPECIFIC DEVELOPMENTAL ASSIGNMENTS OF SALESPERSON	62	79	28
ENCOURAGEMENT TO USE "ONLINE SOCIAL TRAINING"	34	43	26
BEST PRACTICE SHARING AMONG SALESPERSON	77	92	20
"MICRO-LEARNING"	56	67	19
ENCOURAGEMENT TO USE OUTSIDE CONTENT	48	54	14
SALESPERSON CERTIFICATION	52	55	7
	N=113	N=101	

**4.6 BOTH MANAGEMENT AND SALESPERSON RATE BEST PRACTICE SHARING AS THE MOST IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTAL TOOL, FOR SALESPERSON.**

Management views all 17 practices and tools researched as more important than do salespeople. Both managers and salespeople rate best practice sharing among salespeople as the most important practice. And, for most practices, managements' and salespeople's relative rankings are within a few places of each other. There are, however, two notable exceptions where



management and salesperson perspectives vary significantly. Management's importance rating for salesperson role playing with manager feedback is 38% higher than salespeople's; managers rank this as the sixth most important practice, while salespeople rank it 14th of 17 in importance. Salesperson certification is rated just 5% higher by managers than salespeople, but is positioned as 14th-most important by managers, and fifth-most important by salespeople.

Differences in effectiveness ratings from salespeople and management respondents are more varied. Management rates the following practices and tools as significantly less effective than do salespeople: gamification (rated by management as 35% less effective than salespeople's rating), salesperson practice (-22%), developmental assignments for salespeople (-21%), videoed practice (-18%), "micro-learning" (-18%), and enablement platforms (-14%). And, management rates the following practices and tools significantly more effective than salespeople: encouragement to use outside content (management rates 15% higher in effectiveness than salespeople do), and role playing with management feedback (+15%).

Four practices were ranked substantially differently between the two groups. Management ranks two practices seven positions higher than do salespeople: encouraging the use of outside content (ranked sixth in effectiveness by management, 13th by salespeople); and role playing with manager feedback (ranked fifth by management, 12th by salespeople). Salespeople rank two practices substantially higher than does management: "micro-learning" is ranked sixth in effectiveness by salespeople (12th by management), and salesperson practice (ranked third by salespeople, 10th by management).

These variances should be considered within the larger context of generally low effectiveness ratings across all practices and tools researched.



# 5

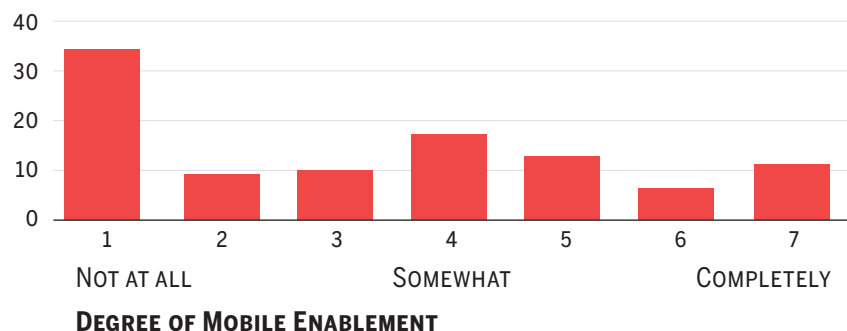
## MOBILE ENABLEMENT

Just under one-third (32%) of respondents' firms have not implemented mobile access for salesperson training content, and only 10% have fully implemented mobile-enabled training content.

FIRMS' DEGREE OF MOBILE LEARNING ENABLEMENT

### PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF FIRMS

**5.01** ABOUT TWO-THIRDS (68%) OF FIRMS HAVE MOBILE-ENABLED SALESPERSON TRAINING CONTENT, THOUGH JUST 10% ARE "FULLY ENABLED."



N=187 FIRMS

Among firms with mobile-enabled training content, laptops are utilized by 76%, desktops by 66%. Apple iOS smart phones are most frequently enabled; 65% of respondents' firms enabled training content on iPhones.

SALESPERSON ACCESS OF MOBILE ENABLED TRAINING CONTENT BY DEVICE TYPE

### PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENT FIRMS



N=86 FIRMS

**5.02** MOST FIRMS HAVE TRAINING ENABLED ON PCs AND MOBILE DEVICES.





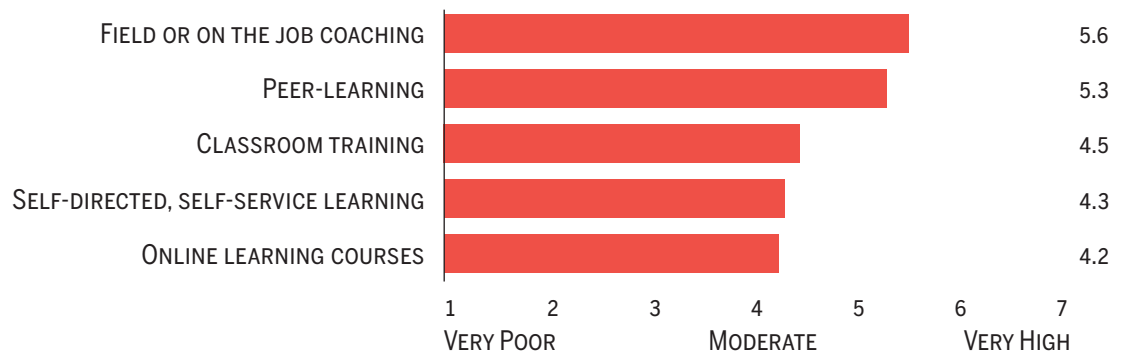
# 6

## ROI

Management respondents rate field coaching and peer learning as the highest ROI training activities. Among firms implementing these approaches, 78% had high return on field coaching investments, 73% experienced high ROI on peer learning investments. Rated lowest in ROI is online learning; 38% of respondents indicate high return on these investments.

### SALESPERSON DEVELOPMENT PRACTICES' ROI RATINGS

#### AVERAGE OF MANAGEMENT RESPONSES



#### RATING OF RETURN ON INVESTMENT

N=107 FIRMS

**6.0** COACHING IS SEEN AS THE HIGHEST ROI ACTIVITY RELATED TO SALESPERSON DEVELOPMENT.



# 7

## ABOUT THE RESEARCH

This research investigates how salespeople prefer to learn, and the effectiveness of various learning delivery approaches. It examines training modalities such as in-the-field coaching, online courses, and classroom instruction, as well as more specific communication media such as web, print, video, and mobile applications.

Specific questions addressed include:

- What technologies, delivery methods, and modalities are used by sales organizations to train and develop salespeople?
- Are there generational differences in how salespeople prefer to receive training information?
- What impact do various learning delivery approaches have on sales productivity, and firm performance?
- What are sales management's priorities in developing sales force learning programs?
- What practices yield the best return on training investment?

### 7.1 RESEARCH APPROACH

This study aggregates participating firms' responses to a web-based survey. The Sales Management Association developed the survey and recruited participants from our membership and broader audience of sales managers and sales operations professionals. In exchange for participating, we offer respondents advance copies of the detailed study report.

Before reporting results, we eliminate invalid or ineligible responses, and sometimes contact respondents to clarify their responses. Survey results are only reported in aggregate, and never in a way that would compromise the identity of any single respondent. All individual respondent data are treated with strict confidentiality.



## 7.2 RESEARCH TIMING AND SCOPE

This research represents summarized data from 260 respondents, comprised of 102 individual contributor salespeople and 158 managers. Management respondents provided data on their firms' practices, while salespeople's responses reflect their personal experience only, not that of others in their firm. Management respondents' firms directly employ more than 83,000 sales professionals. Data was collected in January and February 2017. Respondent demographics and descriptive information are summarized at the end of this report.

## 7.3 RESEARCH UNDERWRITERS

This study was made possible in part through the underwriting support of Allego. The Sales Management Association underwriters provide annual financial support to The Sales Management Association. Underwriters may suggest research topics, participate in ongoing research projects, and encourage participation or otherwise promote research initiatives.

Underwriters are not involved with research administration, data collection, analysis, interpretation, or report development, unless explicitly noted in the report. Also, unless noted, underwriters do not pay a research-specific fee or directly commission research initiatives.

The Sales Management Association wishes to thank its underwriters whose support helps make our research possible.

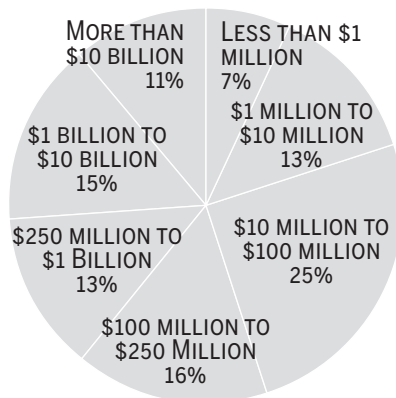


# 8

## RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

### RESPONDENTS' FIRM REVENUE

#### PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS



N=260 FIRMS

**8.1** MOST PARTICIPATING FIRMS HAD ANNUAL REVENUES IN EXCESS OF US\$100 MILLION; 7% WERE UNDER US\$ 1 MILLION.

### 8.1 FIRM SIZE

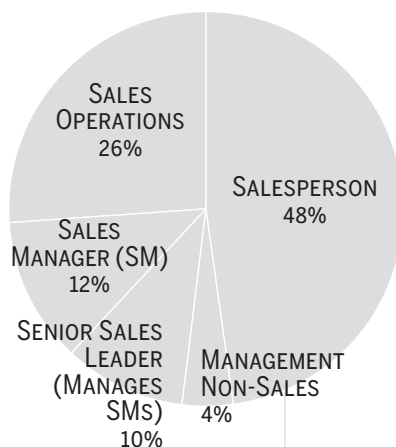
Respondents' firms ranged in size from small to very large. Fifty-five percent of respondents' firms had annual revenue in excess of US\$100 million; 11% were firms with annual revenues in excess of US\$10 billion.

### 8.2 JOB ROLE

Just under one-half of respondents (48%) are salespeople; the balance are managers. Ten percent are senior sales managers (managing sales managers), 12% are sales managers (managing salespeople), 26% are sales operations or sales effectiveness leaders in their firms. An additional 4% are in non-sales-related management positions, such as marketing or human resources.

### RESPONDENTS' JOB ROLE

#### PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS



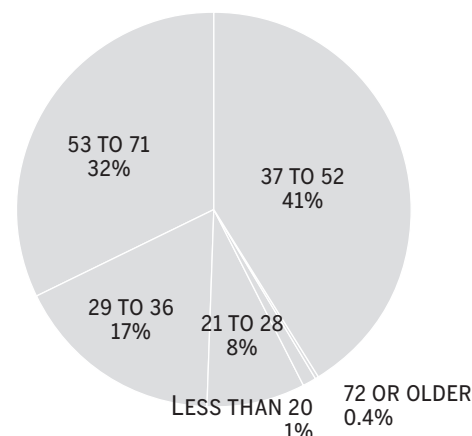
N=260 FIRMS

**8.2** ROUGHLY HALF OF RESPONDENTS (48%) ARE SALESPERSON, AN ADDITIONAL 48% ARE MANAGERS IN SALES-RELATED FUNCTIONS, AND 4% ARE NON-SALES RELATED MANAGERS IN THEIR FIRMS.

### 8.3 AGE

#### RESPONDENTS' AGE

#### PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS



N=255

**8.3** 73% OF RESPONDENTS ARE BETWEEN THE AGES OF 37 AND 71.

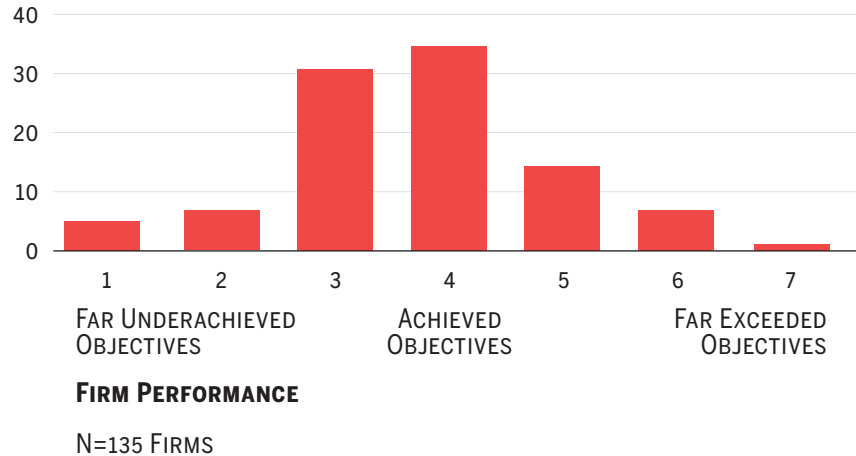


## 8.4 FIRM PERFORMANCE

### RESPONDENTS' SALES OBJECTIVE ACHIEVEMENT

#### PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF FIRMS

**8.4.1** FIRM SALES OBJECTIVE ACHIEVEMENT DISPLAYS AN APPROXIMATELY NORMAL DISTRIBUTION ACROSS RESPONDENTS.



Fifty-seven percent of management respondents' firms met or exceeded firm sales objectives in the preceding 12 months. Respondents were asked to rate their firm's achievement of sales objective based on a seven-point scale ("1" for far underachieved objective; "4" for met objective; "7" for far exceeded objective). We use this performance rating approach in order to normalize company performance across large and small firms, and high and moderate growth sectors. Eight percent of respondents rated sales objective achievement in the highest two categories ("6" or "7").

### INDIVIDUAL SALESPERSON RESPONDENTS' ACHIEVEMENT OF SALES OBJECTIVES

#### PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS

**8.4.2** INDIVIDUAL SALESPERSON ACHIEVEMENT SHOWS MOST SALESPeOPLE OVER-ACHIEVED THEIR OBJECTIVES.



## RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Among salesperson respondents, 87% met or exceeded personal sales objectives in the preceding 12 months; 38% of these respondents indicate their personal sales objective achievement is in the highest two categories ("6" or "7"). Given the diversity of practice related to assigning individual salesperson objectives, we consider these salesperson performance data to be of less value.

### 8.5 SALES FORCE SIZE

#### SALES FORCE SIZE

NUMBER OF SALESPeOPLE	
MIN	1
25TH PERCENTILE	16
MEDIAN	80
75TH PERCENTILE	1,000
90TH PERCENTILE	8,000
MAX	30,000
AVERAGE	2,399
TOTAL	590,128

N=260 FIRMS

**8.5** ON AVERAGE, RESPONDENT FIRMS DIRECTLY EMPLOY 2,399 SALESPeOPLE. THE MEDIAN VALUE IS 80 SALESPeOPLE.

Respondents firms have an average of 2,389 salespeople, and a median value of 80 salespeople; 25% of respondent firms have 1,000 or more salespeople.





## APPENDIX

### VARIANCE IN SALESPERSON DEVELOPMENT PRACTICES' IMPORTANCE RATINGS

#### SALESPERSON'S RATINGS COMPARED TO MANAGEMENT'S

	SALESPERSON	MANAGEMENT	VARIANCE
ROLE PLAYING WITH MANAGER FEEDBACK	4.0	5.5	38%
MANAGEMENT OBSERVATION OF SALESPERSON	4.8	6.0	24
VIDEOED PRACTICE	3.7	4.5	23
STRUCTURED COACHING	4.8	5.7	21
ENCOURAGEMENT TO USE "ONLINE SOCIAL TRAINING"	3.7	4.4	20
ROLE PLAYING WITH PEER SALESPERSON FEEDBACK	4.4	5.2	19
ONLINE TRAINING CONDUCTED LIVE, WITH INSTRUCTOR	4.0	4.7	19
ONLINE TRAINING PORTAL OR "SALES ENABLEMENT" PLATFORM	4.4	5.1	16
SPECIFIC DEVELOPMENTAL ASSIGNMENTS OF SALESPERSON	4.9	5.6	16
CLASSROOM TRAINING	4.2	4.8	14
BEST PRACTICE SHARING AMONG SALESPERSON	5.5	6.2	12
SALESPERSON PRACTICE (NOT INCLUDING VIDEO)	5.1	5.7	12
ENCOURAGEMENT TO USE OUTSIDE CONTENT	4.2	4.7	11
"MICRO-LEARNING"	4.7	5.2	11
ONLINE, ON-DEMAND, RECORDED LEARNING MODULES	4.4	4.9	10
GAMIFICATION	3.8	4.0	6
SALESPERSON CERTIFICATION	4.4	4.6	5

N=113 FIRMS    N=101 FIRMS



DEVICES USED BY SALESPERSONS TO ACCESS ONLINE LEARNING

**AVERAGE USAGE RATING BY FIRM**

