IS A POST-COVID SALES MANAGEMENT ADAPTATION NECESSARY?

An exploratory study

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INTRODUCTION

- ✓ Large-scale & concurrent ecosystemic factors
- ✓ Covid 19 pandemic
- ✓ Massive digitalization

(1)Factors influencing the sales environment?
(2)Impact on salespeople?
(3)Sales management practices modified?

*"The **pandemic** accelerated existing trends in **remote work**, e-commerce and automation, with up to 25% more workers than previously estimated potentially needing to **switch occupations**" (Mc Kinsey, 2021)*

CRISIS MANAGEMENT: WHAT DO WE KNOW?

Systemic risks
Covid 19 pandemic: impact on the managerial level?
(Hueng, 2014)

Lot of industries (Tourism, health, finance, transport, etc.)
➔ loss of employment, decrease/ economic activity
(Aigbedo, 2021)

Rebound from crisis effects on **resilience**: customer satisfaction, profitability, etc.
(Huiskamp *et al.*, 2022; Aigbedo, 2021; Torres *et al.*, 2019)

Home-based service, New business models, Supply chains disturbed…
Sales function = "off the radar"?
(Ludwig, 2020)

POST-COVID MANAGEMENT: FEW PATHS FOR IMPROVEMENT

HR management in a post-covid situation?

(Gigauri, 2020)

Review of policies & practices ➔
Impact of remote work on management?

(Turley & Shannon, 1999)

Adapting management practices & behaviors; hybrid management?

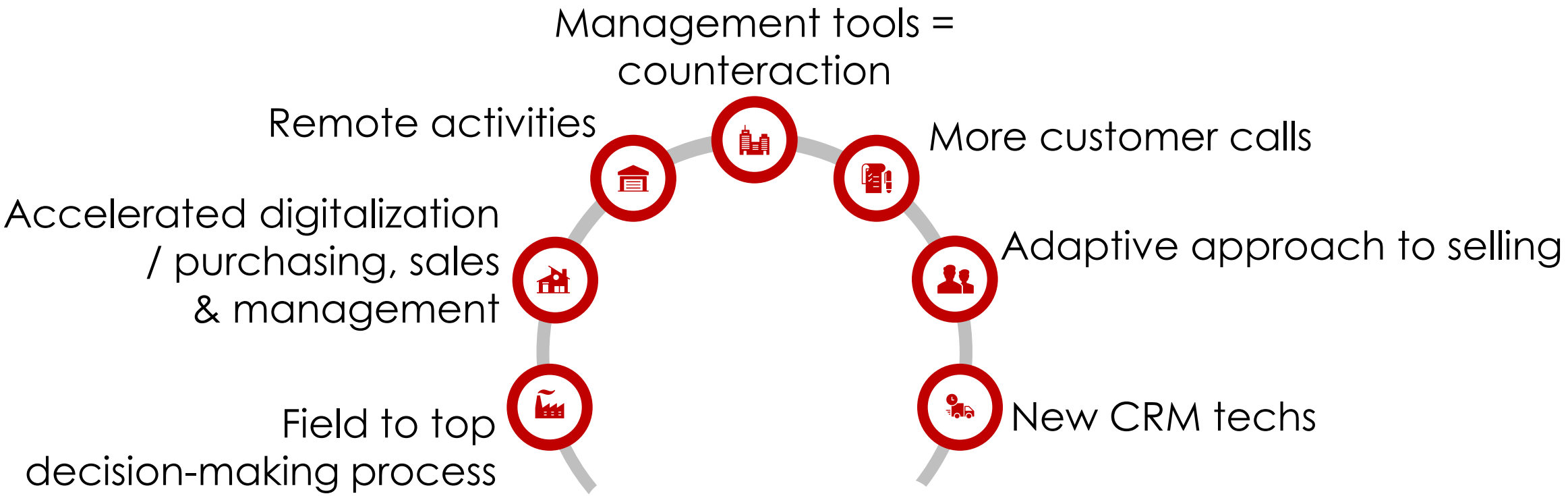
(Makarius *et al.*, 2021)

Social media & connected techs ➔
Human contact?
Mental disorders?

(Abbas *et al.*, 2021;
Larson & DeChurch, 2020)

SALES FORCES IN THE POST-COVID ERA

Sales managers: tensions between teams, management, & major customers



Alavi & Habel, 2021; Bullemore-Campbell & Cristobal-Fransi, 2021; Cron & Baldauf, 2021; Guenzi & Nijssen, 2021; Hartmann & Lussier, 2020; Rangarajan *et al.,* 2021; Zoltners *et al*., 2020

METHODOLOGY

Exploratory study

#	Position	Industry	Territory	Nb sales reps
1	Sales Manager	Insurance	Regional	10
2	Sales Director	Medical devices	National	6
3	Sales Manager	Hiring	Regional	20
4	Sales Manager	Industry	Regional	12
5	Sales Director	Medical devices	National	10
6	Sales Director	Industry	International	45
7	Sales Director	Industry	National	32
8	Sales Director	Tools	National	220
9	Sales & Marketing Director	Medical devices	National	8
10	Sales Director	Telephones	Regional	40
11	General Manager	Machinery	National	2
12	Sales Manager	IT systems	International	7
13	Sales Manager	Pharmaceutical	National	4
14	Sales Director	Insurance	Regional	Unknown
15	Sales Manager	Bank	National	5
16	Sales Manager	Bank	National	15
17	Sales Manager	IT systems	International	10
18	Sales Director	Real estate	National	15
19	Sales Manager	Real estate	Regional	3
20	Sales Director	Aerospace	International	3

RESULTS (1)

Role of the Sales Manager:
Strategic + operational

*"2 tracks in my decisions, discussions & engagements with the team: a **tactical** level & a **strategic** level." (6)*

*"**Guide** for our group's approach & **support** for the human development of our teams." (9)*

*"**Responsible** for the sales target of all of my division (…) a **mentor** for my unit, (…) also acting as a **VP** for some meetings with customers." (12)*

*"Main activity: **take care** of my people, **educate**, be the first line of the **support** for them." (16)*

RESULTS (2)

External change factors affecting the sales force: Covid

*"Very **brutal**, **disruption** of their business (…) **worried** about their situation." (9)*

*"**Hard time** at the very beginning, (…) customers just **canceled** all the projects." (12)*

*"Main challenge: **interaction** with customers during & after the pandemic; (…) Potential customers are still **afraid**." (14)*

*"Probably 1 of the biggest **financial crisis**, (…) really high inflation, first big issue." (16)*

RESULTS (2)

External change factors affecting the sales force: Others

*"Due to **the war** (…) we still don't know how the situation will look in the following days." (12)*

*"**Educate customers** how to use digital applications and now they **don't need to visit** us, & we just simply don't have customers in the meeting room." (16)*

*"The **technology**: we used a lot of because this is important because (…)*
*But during the pandemic, a lot of people were **scary** & they **don't want to meet**." (19)*

RESULTS (3)

Impact on the sales force :
Job & personal aspects

*"There were those who had the **agility**, the **flexibility** to ada.pt, and others who did not live this situation well." (2)*

*"We also had felt this **responsibility** for everyone who are **hired** by our company, for whom we need to find a **job**." (12)*

*"There are some who **don't succeed** in selling at a **distance**. There are no rules, it's very **heterogeneous**." (1)*

*"In a team, you have **10%** very good, **30%** good, & **60%** who require a lot of follow-up." (7)*

RESULTS (4)

Impact on Sales management

*"Some managers are **against telework**." (8)*

*"I presented it to other managers, and they told me that what I am doing is **the future**, but for me in my team, it will not work." (1)*

*"The Covid was a **stress management**." (4)*

*"We need to set up a **digital management system**." (11) (10)*

*"We had to go to **home office**. Not all people are so self-controlled and can work on their own. (…) This is not the **kind of the life** that you are looking for." (15)*

*"Definitely **technology** is helping, (…) We had to **switch off** so many face-to-face **meetings** with customers, we started to reach our customers and negotiate via **Teams**. It's really **terrible**." (13)*

RESULTS (4)

Being more Strategic

*"The first thing, is the **strategy**; with the COVID the situation was **very difficult**." (12)*

*"I think there many people felt like we've **lost** a little bit of **meaning** in our business." (5)*

*"Few months ago, nobody expected the situation in Ukraine with Russia, right? We need to really be very **flexible**, very **agile** to change and **adapt** our **priorities**." (13)*

*"The most important thing was the **structuring**. I now have a real planning activity. You really have to have a **medium-term vision** of all.*

*And that's one of the points of **complexity**, because you have to sequence everything and have a very global vision of everything." (8)*

RESULTS (4)

Improve & strengthen Communication

*"After the Covid crisis, I **increased** the number of face-to-face, 1-on-1 **meetings**, to **consolidate** relationships and **reassure** them." (8)*

*I had to **structure** all the previous **informal communication**; It is necessary to keep moments of **direct** and visual **contact**." (9)*

*"We must **increase co-construction**." (5)*

*"I also have **1-on-1 meetings**/week with the team members, **everyone**, just to **discuss**: 'how's it going? what's working; what's not working." (6)*

RESULTS (4)

Strengthen skills through Coaching

*"You have to **get out** into the **field**." (1)*

*"There is an **obligation** to **accompany** people." (10)*

*"They ask for **more presence**: 'come', 'accompany me', 'we'll spend a day together'.*
They almost find me appointments where they wouldn't need me to come."(2)

RESULTS (4)

Support Change

*"First, the **shock**, the impact was very **brutal**, then they felt a **disruption** of their activities that generated **anxiety**. Some started to see the **positive aspects**, & finally they became ready to **transform** themselves." (8)*

*"In the first phase, we went from full-time to **part-time**, which created **anxiety** and a **loss** of **motivation**. In the 2d phase, we felt a **loss** of **team spirit**, **exhaustion** and more **turnover**." (3)*

*"I'm **not sure** I've found the **right mix**. I've tried to **adapt**, but I'm still in the process of **building**." (3)*

*"A **culture** of **managerial innovation** needs to be developed." (1)*

CONCLUSION

The **modified role** of salespeople and their managers: acquisition & processing of **data** = multi-faceted effect of communication **technologies**

Abbas *et al*., 2021; Ahearne *et al*., 2008; Avlonitis & Panagopoulos, 2005

Managers: **how to act** and react?

(Burhan *et al*., 2021; Chi *et al*., 2021)

Looking for **meaning**

(Geels, 2004)

New reality: questioning of the **levers** of action / new **skills** expected

(Huiskamp *et al*., 2022; Li *et al*., 2021; Neise *et al*., 2021; Rodriguez & Boyer, 2020)

CONCLUSION

(Post-)crisis context **dimensions** ➔ interpersonal, team & cross-department **communication**

Level of perceived **insecurity** / increasing **isolation** of sales people & sales managers

Team dynamics: innovative working & **collaborative** approaches

Trends in **digitalization** of sales & the **hybridization** of management

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QUESTIONS?

THANK YOU!

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