

What differentiates top IT sales performers?

**And how to find and
develop more of them.**



Introduction

Making better decisions about performance based on data

For an industry so focused on data, it is surprising that so many IT sales leaders and sales enablement professionals make decisions about improving sales performance and capability based on gut feel and opinions rather than data.

Low quota attainment, high turnover, and the desire to boost the bottom line by shifting people to more value-based selling models are core challenges facing IT organizations today.

The question on the minds of most sales leaders is: What can we do to improve the capability of our people so we can achieve revenue goals quicker?

For years, companies have answered this question by running 'blanket' sales training that fails to cater to the unique needs of individual sellers and regularly results in days spent learning skills that many participants may already know.

This is putting huge pressure on enablement professionals to develop, deliver, and monitor content focused on critical selling skills based on individual needs, but they don't have the time and resources to do this. As a result, sellers become disengaged and individual skills gaps are neither identified, baselined nor addressed.

Where the data comes from

The data in this report has been extracted from the skillseeker platform which was developed to help IT organizations take the guesswork out of improving the performance of quota-carrying employees.

The platform objectively assesses individuals' sales capabilities, compares results to best practice for a role, and curates learning that addresses each employee's skill gaps.

The skillseeker assessments are based on 25 year's experience assessing and developing employees in the IT industry.

This report analyses data derived from the platform, including what separates Top Performers from their peers and what sales skills IT companies see as important in the coming years for various roles.

The data in this report comes from 85,000 skill measurements of salesforces ranging in size from 30 to 6,000 based in APAC, EMEA, and North America.

'Desired for Role' profiles are created during Role Builder® workshops. These are attended by sales leaders, managers, subject matter experts, and those who represent best practice for the role profile being created. 'Desired for Role' profiles reflect which out of 43 core sales skills will be most important for that role to achieve their company's desired business results.

'Top Performers' refer to employees who consistently achieve the type of results their company desires - individuals who regularly overachieve quota, with above average deal size and minimal discounting. Their results were compared for similarities that differentiated them from lower performing cohorts.

Desired skills for the future by role

There are many revenue generating roles in the IT industry. One client had over 90 roles listed as part of their sales function. Different companies refer to similar roles with different role names eg. Pre Sales Engineers, Solutions Architects, Technical Sales.

For simplicity, we have amalgamated the 'desired for role' workshop results under three key role groups (see Fig 1).

The following are the critical skills identified by companies as being most important in the next 2-3 years for these role groups.

Details on specific or additional roles can be requested by contacting info@skillseeker.io

Fig 1. Top 7 skills 'desired for role'

Enterprise Sales Rep

- Influencing Others
- Setting Communication Objectives
- Closing
- Objection Handling
- Qualifying
- Questioning
- Listening

Pre Sales / Technical Sales

- Your Offer as a Solution
- Accountability & Follow up
- Communicating Risk to Clients
- Establishing Credibility
- Questioning
- Facilitation
- Response Persuasiveness

Professional Services Consultant

- Post-sales Planning
- Business Acumen
- Your Offer as a Solution
- Building Trust with the Client
- Creating Demand with Clients
- Developing Additional Opportunities
- Listening

Sales skills common to Top Performers



The following data is based on an analysis of the assessment results of all Top Performers across all IT sales-related roles (see Fig 2).

While companies recognize that different roles will require different skills, the results from Top Performers reveals a commonality of skill strengths.

This data would indicate that, no matter what the role, Top Performers are particularly effective at

having the types of interactions that lead to a deeper understanding of buyer and business needs. Planning the most effective use of their selling time comes a close second.

While many of the skills found in Top Performers are reflected in the 'Desired for Role', some are excluded such as 'Setting up meetings...' and 'Pre-Sales Planning'. This may reflect a slight difference between what skills companies believe a role needs and what their best people do.

Fig 2. Top skills for 'Top Performers'



Individual skill gaps vary significantly

Despite the consistency of skills in Top Performers, analysis of assessment results, when compared to their 'desired for role' profiles, shows a significant variance in individual skill gaps.

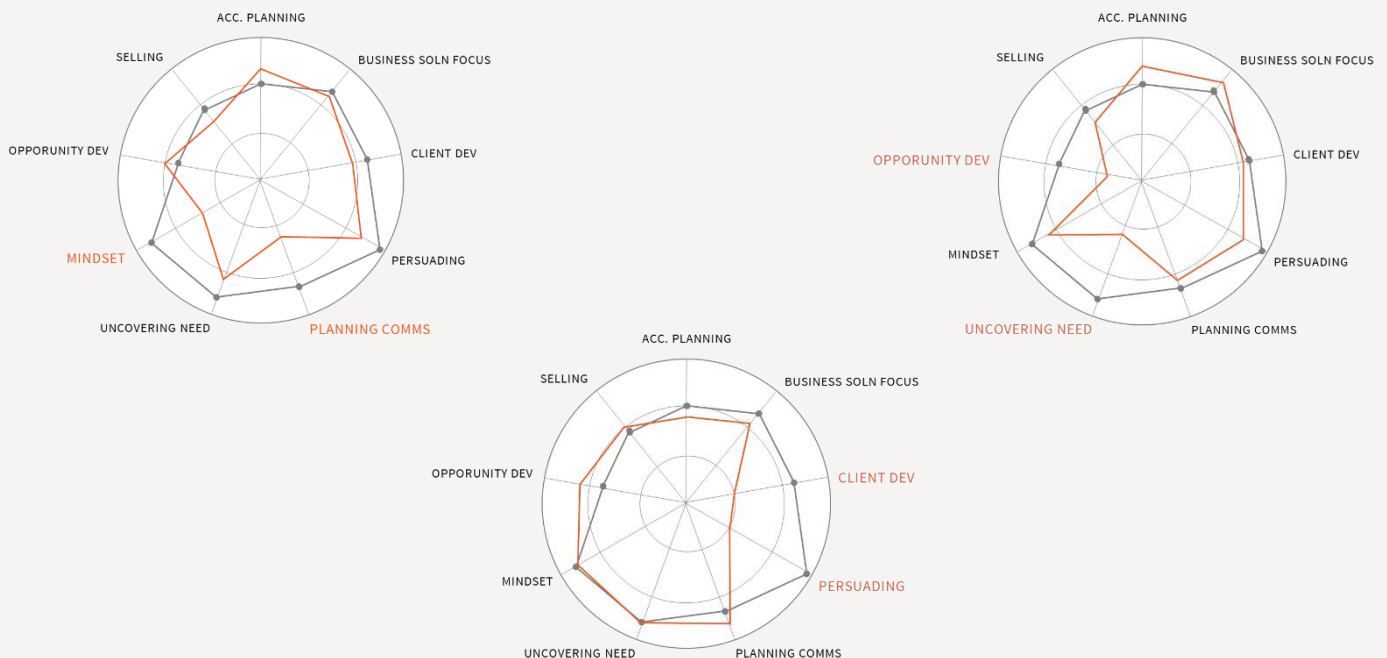
Below is an example of three individual reports taken from skillseeker (see fig 3).

Everyone was in the same role at the same company and each had the same 'desired for

role' profile (grey line). However, individual assessment results (orange line) generated significantly different skill gaps.

This suggests the most effective way of addressing individuals' skill development requirements would be to run focused skills development in cohorts of similar skill development needs or curate individualized learning according to individual skill gaps.

Fig 3. Individual skillseeker reports against a pre-sales role – top 2 gaps



Conclusion & Recommendations



Conclusion & Recommendations

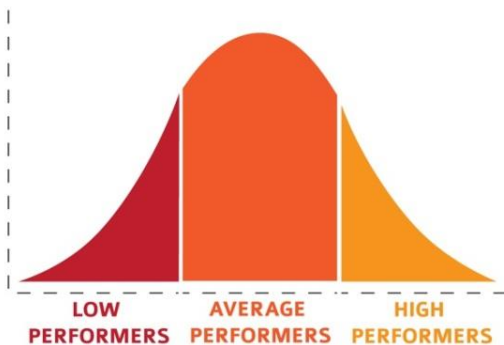
Every client defined sales success as some type of revenue attainment. However, the type of revenue clients seek has changed in the last decade as more IT companies seek more cloud sales and more profitable deals.

The definition of Top Performers reflects a desire to move away from product selling and discounting and towards providing customers with value beyond price and product features.

This is supported by the analysis of Top Performers' skills who take a more consultative approach to selling which enables them to adjust their recommendations accordingly.

Historically, there has been a lack of clarity around what skills Top Performers hold, what skills are most desirable for their role, and how to assess current capability.

Rather than guessing the skills people need to develop, sales leaders would be better off assessing the skills of their people and comparing these results against the skills required (or the results of Top Performers) before embarking on any training.



Sales leaders wishing to shift the 'bell curve' (turn more average performers into Top Performers) would benefit from data on what differentiates these groups.

Individual skill gaps, when compared to the skills required for their role, varied significantly. This would indicate that a more individualized approach to training and coaching would be more effective than blanket training programs.

With the lack of time and resources of sales enablement teams, a platform like skillseeker that provides coaching and training recommendations, based on an assessment of individual skill gaps, may be a solution to consider, especially for companies with large salesforces.

For more information on how to establish the capability of your people or more information on additional skills,
contact info@skillseeker.io