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EMERGING WORKFLOWS, RELATIONSHIPS, AND IDENTITIES IN BUSINESS- TO-BUSINESS (B2B) INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (IT) SALES

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Abstract

Adopting Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become an organizational imperative, placing B2B IT sales professionals in a unique and paradoxical position: they are the primary agents promoting this disruptive technology while their own professional lives are being reshaped by it. While existing research has explored AI's impact on sales, it has often remained at a managerial level. This thesis addresses that gap by providing a bottom-up view that privileges the sellers' own perspectives. The central research question is: how is AI reshaping the workflows, relationships, and professional identities of B2B IT sales professionals? The study adopts a qualitative, exploratory approach guided by a sociomaterial lens. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with seven front-line sellers and analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis. The findings reveal that while AI offers significant efficiency gains, it also introduces a demanding "curation workflow," creates new relational frictions around surveillance and authenticity, and generates profound anxieties about skill commodification. In response, sellers are actively reconfiguring their value proposition, pivoting to a distinctly "human advantage" rooted in strategic acumen, empathy, and trust to navigate the paradoxes of their evolving role.

Keywords: B2B IT Sales, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Sociomateriality, Professional Identity, Workflows

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1. Introduction

How is AI reshaping the workflows, relationships, and identities of B2B IT sales professionals?

The adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become a global organizational imperative, fundamentally reshaping industries and labor practices. At the forefront of this transformation are Business-to-Business (B2B) IT sales professionals, who occupy a unique and paradoxical position: they are the primary agents promoting the disruptive, AI-driven digital discourse, while their own workflows and professional identities are simultaneously being reshaped by it. This study is motivated by the need to understand the lived reality of this dual role. It explores how these professionals navigate the pressures of an innovation-driven industry where they must constantly adapt to the very technologies they champion.

The broader context for this research is the socio-economic paradigm of Post-Fordism, which is characterized by a push for constant novelty, flexibility, and interconnectedness. AI acts as an embedded force within this paradigm, accelerating the development of new data-driven capitalisms. The IT sector, in turn, functions as a key architect of this reality, shaping narratives of technological progress through a powerful "digital discourse." While a growing body of work has explored AI's impact on sales, research often remains at a managerial or organizational level, focusing on strategy and adoption rates. This approach frequently relies on data from managers rather than salespeople themselves, thereby neglecting the direct, nuanced perspectives of those on the front lines. This thesis is therefore motivated by a desire to address this critical gap in the literature by providing a bottom-up view that privileges the voices of sellers.

The primary aim of this study is to provide a rich, qualitative understanding of how the enactment of AI is reconfiguring the professional lives of B2B IT sales professionals from their own perspective. To achieve this aim, the following objectives have been established: to examine how AI is altering the daily workflows and practices of B2B IT sellers; to analyze the impact of AI on the relationships that sellers maintain with their clients and internal teams; to

investigate how the adoption of AI is reshaping the professional identities of sellers; and to interpret these empirical findings through the theoretical lenses of sociomateriality and Post-Fordist labor.

To investigate this question from the perspective of salespeople, this study adopts a qualitative, exploratory research approach grounded in an interpretivist epistemology. This approach is ideal for exploring complex, emerging phenomena where the goal is to understand the meaning individuals ascribe to their experiences within their natural settings. The research is guided by a sociomaterial perspective, which is used as a sensitizing concept to analyze the inseparable entanglement of social practices and technology. Data was collected through seven semi-structured interviews with quota-carrying B2B IT sales professionals in Dublin, Ireland. The data was subsequently analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis to identify and interpret patterns related to the research question.

The findings of this study reveal that AI is reconfiguring B2B IT sales in complex and often contradictory ways. While the technology offers significant gains in efficiency by automating routine administrative tasks, it also introduces a demanding new "curation workflow," requiring sellers to constantly filter, validate, and re-prompt AI-generated content. This entanglement creates new relational dynamics; data-driven insights can deepen client trust, but the tools used to generate them can also create friction around surveillance, authenticity, and data privacy. In response to these changes, sellers are experiencing a shift in their professional identity. As AI levels the playing field by commodifying certain technical skills, sellers are forced to pivot their value proposition toward a distinctly "human advantage" rooted in strategic acumen, empathy, and trust-building. This pivot coexists with profound anxieties about future job security and the very nature of their profession.

This thesis is organized into six chapters. Chapter 2, the Literature Review, establishes the theoretical foundation for the study, situating AI within the context of Post-Fordism and the IT sector's "digital discourse" before identifying the critical research gap. Chapter 3, Methodology, outlines the research design, detailing the rationale for the qualitative,

interpretivist approach and the practical methods for data collection and analysis. Chapter 4, Findings, presents the thematic analysis of the interview data, structured around the core areas of workflows, relationships, and identities. Chapter 5, the Discussion, interprets these findings in dialogue with the theoretical framework, exploring the central paradox of how AI simultaneously empowers and burdens sellers. Finally, Chapter 6, the Conclusion, summarizes the key findings and the study's central contribution, provides practical recommendations, acknowledges limitations, and suggests compelling directions for future research.

2. Literature Review

To examine the specific pressures, workflows, and identity shifts experienced by an individual seller, it is important to first understand the broader economic paradigms and ideological discourses that govern their work. By starting with the widest context and systematically narrowing the focus, this review effectively situates the seller and, in doing so, reveals the critical gap in the existing research.

The chapter is organized into four main sections that execute this macro-to-micro strategy. First, it situates the adoption of AI within the broader context of Post-Fordism to establish the dominant economic and social logics of the contemporary workplace. Next, it examines the concept of “digital discourse” to analyze how the IT sector specifically shapes and promotes narratives of technological progress. The review then narrows its focus to the individual, exploring the paradoxical dual role of the B2B IT seller as both an agent and a subject of this discourse. Finally, by synthesizing these distinct but interrelated areas, the chapter concludes by highlighting a crucial gap in the academic literature, thereby establishing the rationale and foundation for the thesis.

2.1 Post-Fordism, Artificial Intelligence and New Capitalisms

As a multi-dimensional paradigm, post-Fordism can be understood as a paradigm that has reshaped borders, labor, enterprises, and subjectivities around the concepts of deregulation, flexibility, immateriality, interconnectedness, individualization, precarity, and contingency (Jessop, 1992; Vallas, 1999; Harvey, 1990; Hardt & Negri, 2000).

Its complete establishment can be traced back to being parallel to the increasingly neoliberal policies adopted by the United States and the UK in the 1970s, a time in which globalization was promoted as the solution to mitigate the socioeconomic problems of the overly-regulated, in-border Fordism (Harvey, 2005), signaling a “shift from the rigid, hierarchical, and mass-oriented production [...] to a more flexible, networked, and customized form of capitalism” (Fisher (2010, p. 211).

The post-Fordist workforce is primarily engaged in what Hardt & Negri (2000) term 'immaterial labor'—a form of work centered on knowledge, information, and communication rather than physical production. This shift towards more cognitive, service-based tasks blurs the rigid hierarchies of the traditional factory, promoting adaptability and autonomy in the enterprise while also leading to non-standard contracts and diminished job security (Vallas, 1999). The post-Fordist enterprise is composed more of outside consultants, specialists, and temporary workers, incentivizing teamwork, but also internal competition (Jessop, 1992, p. 57).

This new system of labor organization gives rise to the *network human* (Fisher, 2010), an autonomous, creative, flexible and unlocalized entrepreneurial individual whose mode of subjectivation goes hand in hand with neoliberal governmentality (Harvey, 2005).

Just as labor and the worker have transformed, so too has the nature of the enterprise. Under the paradigm, the push for constant novelty becomes a key asset to overcome crises while ensuring business profitability, which is done through the “acceleration in the pace of product innovation” (Harvey, 1990, p. 156). Businesses become more connected, while at the same time are called to reply more quickly to an unregulated market's demands. Interconnectivity, speed and responsiveness are achieved through networked production, which has enabled enterprises to shift production “to a dynamic, innovation-driven process dependent on data and algorithmic coordination.” (Harvey, 1990, p. 107).

The digital network serves as a techno-political instrument (Fisher, 2010, pp. 222-223) that both enables and legitimizes this paradigm—shaping new ways of *networked trading, working, producing and being* (Fisher, 2010) that are all aligned to, in essence, an urgency for responsiveness under uncertainty and contingency.

Artificial Intelligence, as both a product and driver of this innovation cycle, operates under the post-Fordist system of logics, reinforcing the primacy of the *hyper*: hyper-connected, flexible, personalized—equalizing societal structures to likes of the architecture of digital networks (Fisher, 2010). With algorithmic precision, AI further enables automation,

personalization, and real-time decision-making into economic structures, intensifying the logic of post-Fordist production and management and pushing its boundaries to a new level.

Kai Fu Lee (2019), ex-CEO of Google China, defines AI not as a single technology, but as a set of statistical techniques that include machine learning, deep learning, neural networks that exist with the ultimate goal of recreating human intelligence in a machine (Lee, 2019, p. 6). This definition is complemented by more recent conceptualizations of AI in the field of applied social sciences. Fischer et al (2022), for example, defines AI as “information systems that act rationally based on given information” (p. 136); Paschen et al., (2020) has a pragmatic approach around the AI’s rationality, with its final purpose being this defined as the capability to solve problems through achieving the best expected outcomes.

Originated between the 1950s and 1960s with research scientists in cybernetics, computer science, and statistics, what began as *symbolic AI* (rule-based, “if X then Y” systems) eventually evolved to the data-driven machine learning research in the 1980s, finally reaching to the more complex deep learning in the 2010s (Lee, 2019, p. 19). This evolution, says the author, can be credited to the increase in computing power, data, and both capital and geopolitical interests that surround the field (p. 56-57)— and is the reason why, today, AI is being implemented.

Lee divides the implementation of AI into four phases: (1) *Internet*, (2) *Business AI*, (3) *Perception AI* and (4) *Autonomous AI*:

1. Internet AI, whose implementation began in the early 2000s, uses powered algorithms that function as recommendation engines, optimizing content delivery based on user preferences (p. 106)—(e.g., *amazon.com*);
2. Business AI, which, according to the author, by the time of publication was the current stage of AI deployment, consists of AI analyzing large amounts of data to predict patterns, with the ultimate goal of optimizing business outcomes (p. 113)—(e.g.: *sales forecasts*);

3. Perception AI, which, as of today, is also being implemented in, for example, Smart Agriculture, is nothing but Artificial Intelligence applied to the physical world, digitizing it through sensors and smart devices (p. 121)—(e.g., *smart agriculture*);
4. Finally, the last wave of implementation, *Autonomous AI*, is about integrating and optimizing the previous three waves by combining advanced data processing with sensory capabilities to enable autonomous decision-making (p. 130).

As the implementation of AI advances, the author recognizes the potential disruption in the fabric of labor, highlighting the lack of a clear socioeconomic plan in place (Lee, 2019, p. 129). Under this perspective, the precarization of an already outsourced, contract-based, contingent workforce (Vallas, 1999) is taken to a next level, creating multiple modes of accumulation - new capitalisms - that sustain and advance the foundational aspects of post-fordism. Some examples of new capitalisms include *Cognitive Capitalism* (Moulier-Boutang, 2005), focused on the accumulation of knowledge and intellectual labor as economic value; *Network Capitalism* (Fisher (2010), where networks centralize control over production and power; *Platform Capitalism* (Srnicsek, 2018), where platforms leverage algorithms and data to govern transactions and control markets; and *Surveillance Capitalism* (Zuboff, 2019), which commodifies personal data, transforming it into prediction products that are then manufactured by the machine to predict and shape behavior. All four concepts seem to have at least three things in common: products of post-Fordism, co-existent, and, more than ever, powered by AI.

As the literature indicates, the post-Fordist paradigm created an information society in which intangible capital flows throughout the network. Through this very same lens, AI can be understood as transitioning from an experimental technology to an embedded force within the digital space. This transition allows AI to be understood not just as a tool, but as an embedded force that, building on the information society created by post-Fordism, helps multiply new accelerated, flexible, and innovation-driven capitalisms.

Given this context of emerging AI-powered capitalisms, the role of the Information Technology (IT) sector becomes central. Therefore, the next section will analyze how the IT

industry functions as the infrastructural backbone that both enables and accelerates this societal transformation.

2.2 Information Technology & Digital Discourse

Upon framing post-Fordism as the backdrop of AI-, data-centric capitalisms, the role of the Information Technology sector in the definition of current and future socio-economic landscapes becomes central. In fact, for more than 20 years, researchers have been pointing out its central role in organizing society. As Boynton et al. (1992, p. 259) explain, the IT sector's importance extends beyond just providing flexible software tools; it is a "central factor in the emergence of the post-Fordist forms themselves." The authors specify that this includes "enabling globally networked organizations, powerful and flexible financial control systems," and new types of decentralized production and learning. This highlights that IT's role is not merely supportive but foundational to modern organizational structures. Moving beyond an industry sector, IT can be seen through what Bourdieu (1990) calls a Social Field—a structured space with its own set of rules that allows power over other fields to be exerted through the idea of technological progress.

This idea is explored through what Fuchs and Fisher (2015) call the technology/*digital discourse*, defined as a system of knowledge that equates the structure and dynamics of society to those of information and communication technology, making it appear as universally progressive (Fuchs & Fisher, 2015, p. 235). The authors argue that the technology discourse is not neutral, but rather a legitimizing narrative that constructs contemporary capitalisms as inherently innovative and empowering. This idea aligns with Harvey's (2005) argument that neoliberalism, closely associated with post-Fordism and fully aligned with networked forms of capitalism, works as a project to restore class power, where discourses of flexibility and participation mask deeper patterns of inequality and control.

More than simply promoting the adoption of Artificial Intelligence, the field of Information Technology defines what counts as innovation, efficiency, and progress.

The *digerati*, concept used by Fisher (2010) to refer to the *digital literati*, or the elite of the IT industry, emerges as a symbolic class composed of technology evangelists and corporate leaders who aim to erase “the distinction between the capitalist and the worker” (Fisher, 2010, p. 93) while masking structural inequalities through a narrative of individual empowerment, meritocracy and innovation (Fisher, 2010, pp. 84-93). A clear example of the discourse promoted by the *digerati* can be seen in the *Techno-Optimist Manifesto*, published in 2023 by Marc Andreessen, an IT tycoon who is currently board member of Meta, HPE, OculusVR, among others. According to him, “Technology is the glory of human ambition and achievement, “the spearhead of progress, [...] the realization of our potential” (Andreessen, 2023). This techno-optimistic language is a clear example of the *digerati*'s discourse, framing technological advancement as an inherently positive and universal human achievement, while also reinforcing the innovation-focused narrative - excluding any discussion of its potential negative social consequences.

The realization of our potential is now being achieved through Artificial Intelligence and its deep learning capabilities, says Sam Altman, Chief Executive Officer of OpenAI, who claims that, thanks to *technology*, “people have become dramatically more capable over time; we can already accomplish things now that our predecessors would have believed to be impossible” and that, thanks to AI, “if we could fast-forward a hundred years from today, the prosperity all around us would feel just as unimaginable” (Altman, 2024).

While the tangible economic impact of AI is still being sized (Highfill et al., 2025), today, businesses do not just ask “Should we use AI?”, but instead see it as an imperative, being compelled to adopt it because of industry pressures, policy incentives, and the framing of AI as the current technology that can unleash future progress, and a key success factor that ensures AI-driven innovation (Axon & Bouckaert, 2024).

In conclusion, beyond promoting AI to accelerate transactions (Harvey, 2005), IT consolidates itself as a social force, exercising institutional power through the dissemination and internalization of the digital discourse—within and beyond its own domain. This process reflects

a broader reorganization of political and economical structures around a networked society, reinforcing the field's role not just as a technological enabler, but as a key architect of contemporary capitalisms through the creation and maintenance of networked ways of trading, working, producing and being.

Leveraging AI as a value-adding enterprise technology, a specific portion of the salesforce helps perpetuate a landscape in which the digital discourse shapes the very definition of progress. In the next section, we will briefly introduce how these professionals are, at the same time, agents of diffusion and subjects of the discourse they propagate.

2.3 The Dual Role of B2B IT Sellers

This section focuses on the business-to-business (B2B) Information Technology (IT) seller, a professional tasked with selling complex technology solutions to corporate clients. This role requires them to act as strategic partners, navigating long-term relationships and advising companies on major technological investments. It is this unique position—at the intersection of technology promotion and corporate strategy—that creates the central paradox explored here: they are both the primary agents of the AI-driven digital discourse and, simultaneously, professionals whose own work is being profoundly reshaped by it.

Due to this intersectional position, these professionals are a great example of the embodiment of the post-fordist condition in what Fisher (2010) defines as the network human—a connected, flexible, and entrepreneurial subject who moves between tasks, projects, and platforms in an increasingly individualized labor environment (p. 79). The digitally-enabled, future-driven mindset, intersected with the challenges of accelerated Business AI implementation (Lee, 2019), places B2B IT sellers in a dual position, crossed between the responsibility of promoting the now AI-based digital discourse while also adapting to its disruptions firsthand.

While promoting AI to clients, sellers themselves are also dealing with it in their daily practices. LinkedIn & Ipsos (2025) state that 56% of sales professionals are using AI daily, with significant gains in productivity. While B2B sales teams are observing an increase in Specialist

roles, with a deepening technical acumen and laser-sharp focus on specific parts of the portfolio (Elhajjar et al., 2023, p. 131), the foundational aspect of the profession remains the same: “building trust-based relationships, finding opportunities to create value for customers, and creating experiences that minimize friction” (Yee et al., 2024, p. 2). B2B sales interactions are often long-term, requiring sellers to create value and extending client loyalty while adapting to digital-first expectations that redefine what it means to be a successful, trusted seller.

Part of the B2B seller’s responsibility is to accompany the changes enabled by the very technologies they sell to their customers - iterating their own methods along the way. A few years ago, B2B customers completed around 67% of all buying tasks online before contacting a supplier (Steward et al., 2019, p. 298). More recently, it has been projected that 80% of B2B buyer-seller interactions are going digital by 2025, and buyers now use double the number of sales channels compared to 5 years ago (Gartner, 2020, cited in Daily Sales, 2025). These shifts have called sellers to upgrade their own practices, becoming more technically specialized, deepening product knowledge, and using digital prospecting and sales intelligence to improve performance (Elhajjar et al., 2023, pp. 131-136).

Where sellers once spent 70% of their time on cold calls, prospecting and administrative tasks (Hopes, 2021), automation now allows time savings of 10 to 15%, making it possible to focus more on value-adding customer interactions (Yee et al., 2024, p. 2). These figures reflect what Paschen et al. (2020) define as “collaborative intelligence”: an alliance between the human seller and AI technology that augments the role supporting salespeople’s decision-making.

However, AI adoption does not always translate to immediate positive upsides, oftentimes creating tension, pressure and confusion. LinkedIn & Ipsos (2024) find that 43% of sales executives feel overwhelmed by the number of AI tools available, and more than half admit they don’t know “where to begin” (p. 4). In terms of ability to perform, overreliance in AI also has a downside-by 2028, 30% of new sellers will lack critical social skills (Smith & Brown, 2025).

Dover (2022) refers to this as the innovation paradox: simply having the technology does not automatically translate to better results - the pressure to adapt to new tools added on top of day to day priorities interferes in the value realization.

When thinking about potential barriers to adoption, Paschen et al. (2020) note that some salespeople fear redundancy, while customers may be uneasy about AI-generated personalization and data use. Similarly, Smith (2024) highlights resistance to change and integration challenges as key barriers to adoption, particularly when technology is introduced without corresponding shifts in culture and training.

Even so, the rewards for adaptation are tangible. LinkedIn & Ipsos (2025) report that 65% of sellers believe using AI makes them more likely to exceed their sales quotas, 75% of salespeople who exceeded their quota use AI, in comparison to the 25% who also exceeded without its support.

In conclusion, as information technology enables buyers to transform their own selection process, it also drives B2B sellers to adopt new tools and ways of working, putting those professionals in commercial IT sales in a very interesting position. At the intersection of innovation, they are actors and subjects of the digital discourse, adapting their own practice around and through their customers' transformations.

To better understand how AI reshapes the structure of the work of these professionals, the next section focuses on the sales process and the current major impacts of AI.

2.4 AI in B2B Sales Process and Customer Journey

After exploring the B2B IT seller, it is convenient to analyze in more detail how the B2B sales process is being influenced by AI.

The B2B sales process is traditionally structured as a multi-stage funnel that guides prospective buyers from initial contact to post-sale engagement, classically layered as a series of sequential steps which, besides orienting the seller into the next steps to drive the opportunity forward, also serves to evaluating the health of each opportunity, assigning probabilities of closing the deal and consequently refining the sales forecast (Davies, 2010).

Dubinsky (1981, cited in Moncrief & Marshall, 2004), present a classic division of the sales process in 7 steps: (1) *prospecting* (searching for new customers); (2) *pre-approach* (doing the homework about the customer); (3) *approach* (building initial rapport); (4) *presentation* (showing how your product or service can solve the customers' problem); (5) *objection handling* (uncovering true customer needs while dissolving resistance); (6) *closing* (negotiation and getting the commitment to buy); and (7) *following-up* (which include post-sales activities that ensure the customer is satisfied).

While global IT companies like Dell Technologies were already using algorithm-based lead scoring models to estimate buying propensity in the early 2000s (King, 2012, as cited in Paschen et al., 2020, p. 408), the current state of AI implementation has evolved significantly to touch every stage of the sales funnel, supporting sellers through predictive analytics, automated engagement, and adaptive decision-making tools that guide B2B customers throughout the buying process.

In the *prospecting* stage, AI can help leverage data on firms and individuals, enhancing targeting and positioning, demand estimation, lead generation and qualification (Syam & Sharma, 2018, p. 140). Tools such as ZoomInfo provide AI-powered market intelligence to find and prioritize prospects, while LinkedIn's Sales Navigator uses AI to help identify and target potential customers.

In both *pre-approach* and *approach* stages, automate routine tasks like scheduling and follow ups, while also assisting in personalizing communication (Paschen et al., 2020, p. 407). In these stages, companies like Clay and Outreach are helping sellers to create personalized messages that resonate with prospective customers, ensuring communication is not only automated, but also personalized.

In the *presentation* stage, AI can assist with prototyping and augmenting presentations through slide bots that optimize content and layout; additionally, the combination of natural language processing with machine learning can assist in recognizing emotions or themes that can provide insights interests and friction in the conversation (Paschen et al., 2020, p. 409).

Here, companies like Gong track overall sentiment, language and tone shifts, while Otter.ai transcribes meetings to summarize relevant information about the prospect, the opportunity, and next steps.

Next, companies like copy.ai are leveraging generative AI to help sellers to *handle objections* better through the creation of personalized battlecards. The *closing* stage is being improved with the creation of personalized proposals with dynamic pricing and contract lifecycle management (Paschen et al., 2020, p. 407). Conga and Zilliant are examples of companies that operate in this space.

In the *follow-up* stage, AI significantly enhances efficiency by automating workflows and various aspects of post-order service (Paschen et al., 2020, p. 410). At this point in the process, tools like Zendesk, Totango, and Gainsight leverage AI to monitor customer health, predict risks and opportunities, and actively drive retention, ensuring that customers receive attentive and proactive service throughout their journey.

To illustrate how AI is being enacted across the sales process, the following table provides a non-exhaustive overview of common AI applications and the solutions that enable them. The examples and reported benefits are drawn from a combination of academic literature, industry analysis, and company-published materials such as customer stories and whitepapers (see Appendix A for a complete list). While industry-published sources are not peer-reviewed, they are included here as a form of social proof that provides valuable, real-world examples of how enterprise clients are reportedly realizing value from these technologies. This approach complements the theoretical frameworks discussed previously with practical evidence of how AI's value is being framed and promoted in the field.

Funnel Stage	AI Use Cases ^{18, 19}	Solutions (e.g.)	Social Proof or Benchmark
1. Prospecting	Automated lead scoring & prioritization; Identification of ideal customer profiles using behavioral intent signals; AI-powered data enrichment for prospect insights.	Apollo.io; ZoomInfo; 6sense; Sales Navigator; InsideSales; Lusha	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apollo.io: Ashby booked 4x more meetings; Leadium grew annual revenue by 3x with inbound automation. • ZoomInfo: Snowflake achieved 90% higher opportunity open rates in key accounts, 25% higher customer engagement rate². • 6sense: Cisco increased MQL acceptance by 71%, and can predict buyers with 85% accuracy³. • LinkedIn Sales Navigator: sellers save over 1.5 hours per week on research, 46% higher InMail acceptance rates⁴.
2. Pre-Approach	Deep prospect research via AI-generated summaries; Automated social listening for trigger events; Intent-based buyer segmentation.	Clay; Sales Navigator; Copy.ai; Lift.AI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clay: OpenAI doubled inbound lead enrichment rates⁵. • LinkedIn Sales Navigator: Infosys got 1000x ROI after achieving USD \$370 million in sales pipeline²⁰. • Lift.AI: Drift customers achieved a 9X increase in conversations converting into pipeline opportunities through real-time buyer intent segmentation²².
3. Approach	AI-personalized multi-channel outreach sequences; Real-time messaging recommendations for calls/emails; Dynamic, AI-generated sales scripts.	Salesloft; Outreach; Gong.io	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outreach: Cisco saw 85% more activity from high adopters⁶. • Gong.io: PitchBook saved 3-5 hours of ramp saved per rep⁷. • Salesloft: NetSupport increased outbound activity by 30%²¹.
4. Presentation	AI-generated personalized pitch decks & proposals; Live sentiment analysis during presentations; Post-meeting summarization.	Seismic; Gong.io; Otter.ai;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seismic: HubSpot achieved \$18 million in annual efficiency savings, saving reps ~2 hours per week (equal to 126+ full-time employees gained without additional headcount)⁸. • Gong.io: HubSpot reps accelerated time-to-quota; onboarding time cut by 53%⁹. • Otter.ai: Aiden Technologies' sales team increased efficiency by 33%¹⁰.
5. Objection Handling	AI-driven risk analysis & counterargument recommendations; Real-time objection-handling playbooks; Buyer sentiment classification; Battlecards	Gong.io; Allego; Chorus.ai	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gong.io: Helps identify opportunities and weaknesses, increasing revenue per rep by 27%⁹. • Chorus.ai: 38% higher deal close rate with CEO engagement¹¹.
6. Closing	Predictive win-probability scoring; Automatic proposal optimization; AI-assisted contract redlining & risk assessment.	DocuSign CLM+; Conga; Zilliant; Clari	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DocuSign: Cox Automotive saw 31% faster time to execute agreements and 55% more agreements executed per month¹². • Conga: AXA signed 20% more contracts in the first month¹³. • Clari: HP Enterprise and Rapid7 leveraged guided selling and next best step suggestions, increasing win rates¹⁴.
7. Follow-Up	Automated customer health scoring to predict churn; Next-best-action triggers for engagement; Proactive renewal outreach cadences; Centralized customer inquiry management.	Gainsight; Zendesk; Totango; Planhat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gainsight: Increased CSM productivity ranks as the top benefit CS orgs will be measuring¹⁵. • Zendesk: Lush realized a 369% ROI, 17% improvement in service agent and 30% increase in manager productivity, and £350,000 in annual cost savings from avoided headcount¹⁶. • Totango: Aruba saw a 4% increase in engagement after using templates, and a 20 percent increase in retention rates¹⁷.

Table 1.**AI-Driven Technology Stack in B2B Sales.**

Note. AI use cases, solutions, potential benefits, customer stories were derived from a mix of academic sources, customer stories and marketing whitepapers, representing a current, non-exhaustive snapshot of the AI technology portfolio being used by business-to-business sales teams. For the complete reference list, please Appendix A.

As seen in the table above, global IT companies such as HubSpot, Aruba, Fortinet, and Cisco are already using AI tools and reporting tangible benefits. While the solutions are categorized according to the best-matching sales funnel stage, it's important to note that many tools span multiple phases of the process. This fluidity reflects a deeper transformation: the classic seven-step sales funnel remains a helpful reference framework, but the sales process itself is no longer linear nor sales-centric. Most of the tools listed above don't operate within a single stage—they run across them. AI now enables dynamic actions that respond to buyer behavior in real time: adapting messages, surfacing insights, and triggering next steps as the deal unfolds. What was once a linear process has become an increasingly responsive, data-driven journey. For instance, a tool like Gong.io provides real-time messaging recommendations that facilitate the *approach* stage, live sentiment analysis during *presentations*, and AI-driven playbooks for *objection handling*. This shift reframes how AI supports the sales experience—not in isolated steps, but as an orchestrator of the broader rhythm of B2B engagement.

Steward et al. (2019) trace the historical shift from transactional models to journey-based approaches in B2B, emphasizing that buyers now often complete over half of their purchasing process before engaging a sales representative (p. 288). At the same time, Lemon and Verhoef (2016) argue that today's customer experiences span multiple channels and touchpoints, with less organizational control and greater emphasis on emotional, social, and behavioral dimensions. This transformation requires organizations to go beyond managing discrete stages—to orchestrating dynamic and personalized *journeys*. AI plays a key role in enabling this shift. The capabilities here discussed are each helping to refine the customer journey in practice (Pendyala & Lakkamraju, 2024).

It is important to note that, as the transition to this data-intensive mapping presents additional challenges, and effective AI implementation depends on access to high-quality, unified customer data—a condition not always met. While technology platforms like Databricks and Snowflake can help organize unstructured, uncentralized data across the enterprise, they do not address all the challenges of AI implementation. Significant organizational and ethical

hurdles remain, including the adoption resistance discussed in section 2.3, data privacy concerns, and the fragmented nature of B2B ecosystems. As Pendyala and Lakkamraju (2024) note, success in the B2B context requires more than technology: it demands alignment between systems, strategy, and culture.

This academic concept of AI-human collaboration is also a prominent theme in industry discourse. For example, in a whitepaper aimed at sales leaders, the software company Gainsight (2024, p. 11) argues that “At the end of the day, humans are still best at navigating nuanced conversations. You need that skill to truly get the most value. AI is going to radically make customers and customer success better”.

To conclude, as noted by Hunter (2019), AI can both *automate* and *augment* the sales work, allowing commercial organizations to see beyond the funnel. As AI continues to mature, the B2B sales process is likely to resemble less a funnel and more a responsive, data-enriched journey, where automation supports personalization, and human insight remains indispensable.

2.5 Literature Gap and Research Opportunities

As the literature suggests, as AI deployment spreads across the enterprise, several scholars explore the potential of the technology to transform various aspects of B2B selling (Elhajjar et al, 2023; Syam & Sharma, 2018; Singh et al., 2019; Rodriguez & Peterson, 2023; Steward et al., 2019). From augmenting the capabilities of sales executives to automating routine tasks, AI is reshaping sales force structures and enhancing customer interactions (Chang, 2022).

Existing research has provided valuable frameworks for understanding the implementation of AI across the sales funnel (Paschen et al., 2020; Syam & Sharma, 2018), examining the relative effectiveness of AI in relation to human intelligence in different contexts (Chang, 2022), and investigating the *drivers and barriers* to AI adoption within sales organizations (Chen & Zhou, 2021).

Despite the growth in this body of work, there is still a lack of in-depth understanding of the current state of AI integration in daily B2B sales practices as research often remains at

managerial and organizational level (Rodriguez & Peterson, 2023), guarding distance from those who are in the field. Chen & Zhou (2021) also highlight that research on AI acceptance by sales teams often relies on data provided by corporate managers rather than directly from the salespeople themselves. While this research approach offers valuable insights into organizational intentions and perceived adoption, it may not fully capture the challenges and opportunities in the process of AI implementation through the perspective of those who live it in their daily practice.

To address this gap, this thesis poses the following research question: how is AI reshaping the workflows, relationships, and identities of B2B IT sales professionals?

In conclusion, this review has built the theoretical foundation for this question by moving from a macro to a micro level of analysis. It began by situating the rise of AI within the broader context of post-Fordist capitalism and the IT sector's influential 'digital discourse,' before narrowing its focus to the specific, paradoxical role of the B2B IT seller. Having established the rationale for the study, the following chapter will now outline the qualitative methodology and sociomaterial framework employed to investigate this question.

3. Methodology

This chapter details the methodological approach employed to answer the central research question of this thesis. As established at the end of the previous chapter, this study seeks to explore how AI is reshaping the workflows, relationships, and professional identities of B2B IT sales professionals. To fulfill this objective with the frontline perspective of the salespeople themselves, this study adopts a qualitative, exploratory approach. This chapter is organized into five main sections. First, it outlines the overall research design, explaining the rationale for an interpretivist stance. Second, it details the study's theoretical framework, explaining how a sociomaterial perspective was operationalized as a sensitizing concept for the research. Third and fourth, it describes the practical methods used for data collection and analysis. Finally, the chapter concludes by addressing the ethical considerations and limitations of the study.

3.1 Research Approach

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, which is ideal for "exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (Creswell, 2013, p. 380). Given that AI's impact on sales is a new and complex phenomenon, a qualitative design is essential. It allows for a deep, open-ended investigation into the perspectives of sales professionals within their "natural settings," moving beyond a rigid hypothesis to explore the nuanced processes at play (Maxwell, 2013; Creswell, 2013).

The methodology is grounded in an interpretivist epistemology, a philosophical stance that sees social reality not as an objective fact to be discovered, but as a phenomenon actively constructed through the participants' own interpretations of their interactions and context (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, cited in Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013, p. 79). This means the research prioritizes the participants' perspectives, ensuring that it is their insights, rather than pre-existing literature, that ultimately shape the study's findings (Creswell, 2013).

This interpretivist and exploratory approach is particularly well-suited for the present research. The deployment of AI in business is an emerging phenomenon where the meaning of

"AI" itself is still "in-the-making." An exploratory design is therefore necessary to remain open to emergent themes, friction, and improvisation, allowing for a context-specific understanding without imposing predefined categories (Stebbins, 2001; Maxwell, 2013).

In conclusion, this research design supports an investigation into how sales work and identity are evolving in practice through the complex and ongoing entanglement of sellers and AI.

3.2 Sensitizing Lens

This study is guided by a sociomaterial perspective used as a sensitizing lens throughout the research process. The sociomaterial approach challenges the assumption that technology and social life are separate entities, proposing instead their inherent inseparability in practice (Orlikowski & Scott, 2008, p. 433). From this viewpoint, the effects of a technology are not predetermined; they arise from how people choose to engage with, adapt, or ignore its features in specific contexts. This creates what Orlikowski (2000) calls "technology-in-practice"—a version of the technology that is constantly being shaped by its users.

This perspective is crucial because, as Singh et al. (2019, p. 4) note, "The ability of the technology to facilitate these transformations does not necessarily mean that it can be leveraged by sales professionals". The sociomaterial lens allows for a closer look at these contextual factors, grasping nuances that may, for example, be overseen in top-down studies. It is particularly useful for studying AI tools, which are often "black-boxed, not easily interpretable, and embedded in anticipatory quantification practices that shape action before outcomes occur" (Faraj et al., 2018, p. 63).

Therefore, this study specifically draws on Scott and Orlikowski's (2025) concept of "AI-in-the-making." This framework rejects the idea of a single, stable "AI" and instead focuses on the "AI multiple"—the many different versions of AI that are co-constructed in practice. As they write, "Instead of discovering an AI that is unified and coherent, we find an 'AI multiple'... a slightly different AI is done in each practice" (Scott & Orlikowski, 2025, p. 4). This lens invites a closer look at how AI is enacted in everyday sales work.

In practical terms, the sociomaterial perspective informed the research design. Key ideas like "enactment," the "AI multiple," "distributed agency," and "performativity" were used as sensitizing concepts (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 738) to develop the interview questions and guide the thematic analysis. This approach helps to surface the nuanced ways sellers and AI are entangled—shaping and being shaped by each other—without pre-determining the outcome.

3.3 Data Collection

A purposive sampling strategy was used to recruit participants through the professional networking site, LinkedIn. As a B2B seller themselves, the researcher was able to leverage their professional network on the platform to identify and target individuals with direct, current experience in B2B IT sales. The search was targeted toward professionals holding specific, quota-carrying titles such as "Account Executive" or "Account Manager" within global IT companies with over 5000 employees. This focus on major corporations located in Dublin was deliberate, as these are the type of companies shaping Ireland's role as a major European tech hub (Roberts et al., 2015) while also representing the kind of environments where AI transformation is actively unfolding.

This insider position helped to ease rapport during outreach and interviews; however, it also introduced a potential for bias. To mitigate this, reflexive notes were taken after each interview to surface and challenge the researcher's personal assumptions during the data analysis process.

A brief message was sent explaining the purpose of the study, and once the connection was accepted, participants received an information sheet outlining what the research was about, how the interview would work, and how their data would be protected (Creswell, 2013). They were then invited to schedule a 30-minute conversation, either online or in person, depending on what worked best for them.

The interviews were semi-structured (Creswell, 2013), allowing for open discussion around key topics like daily workflows, internal dynamics, AI tools, customer relationships, and

how people see their role evolving. Conversations were held either via Zoom or in a casual in-person setting like a coffee shop. Verbal consent was recorded at the start of each conversation, and all interviews were audio recorded with permission (Maxwell, 2013). The guide (see Appendix B) contains eight open-ended prompts organised around daily workflows, AI tool use, internal dynamics, and professional identity. The average interview length was 34 minutes.

Zoom interviews were transcribed using the platform's built-in tool, and in-person ones were recorded on the researcher's phone and later transcribed with third-party software (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013). Data was stored securely on the secure environment of UCD's Zoom and Google clouds and deleted once anonymized transcripts were completed. No names or company details were kept, and any quotes used in the write-up are referenced with broad descriptors like "Senior AE at a global SaaS company" (Maxwell, 2013).

3.3.1 Participant overview

The seven professionals who participated in this study are summarized in Table 2. The table provides an overview of each participant, including their professional role, years of sales experience, and their employer's industry sector.

For the purposes of this study, 'Years of Sales Experience' was determined by reviewing each participant's public LinkedIn profile and summing the time spent in quota-carrying roles such as Sales Development Representative, Account Executive, and Account Manager.

Table 2.
List of Participants

Participant ID	Years of Sales Experience	Employer Sector
P1	6	Enterprise Software (SaaS)
P2	3	Cloud & Cyber-security
P3	6	Logistics / On-Demand Platform
P4	8	IT & Business Advisory Services
P5	3	Digital Advertising (E-commerce)
P6	1½	Digital Advertising (Social Media)
P7	11 ½	Enterprise Software & Cloud

It should be noted that personal demographic data, such as gender or nationality, was not formally collected. This decision was made as the study's primary focus was on the participants' shared professional roles and experiences, which were the relevant variables for answering the research question.

3.4 Data Analysis

The interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or 'themes' within the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The approach combined both inductive and abductive reasoning.

The process began inductively, meaning the initial codes and themes were generated from the data itself—driven by the participants' own language and experiences rather than a pre-existing theoretical framework. Following this, the process became abductive. This involved an iterative dialogue between the emergent themes from the data and the theoretical concepts of the sociomaterial lens. This allowed the framework to sensitize the analysis, as emergent patterns were constantly compared back to the sociomaterial lens previously outlined.

Following Braun and Clarke's reflexive six-phase procedure, transcripts were first read repeatedly for familiarisation while analytic memos captured early impressions. A systematic,

line-by-line coding then labelled every meaning-bearing segment. Provisional codes were collated into candidate themes, which were reviewed for internal coherence and distinctiveness against the full data set. Themes were subsequently named and defined, and the final analytic narrative was drafted to articulate their contribution to the research questions.

In practical terms, verbatim transcripts were imported into NVivo and an open coding pass produced 33 first-cycle codes. Constant-comparison then highlighted conceptual overlap; similar codes were merged into 12 axial categories. A final selective round mapped those categories onto the study's sociomaterial focus, yielding three analytic dimensions (Workflows, Relationships, Identity) subdivided into nine themes that structure the findings chapter.

3.5 Ethical Considerations and Limits

As the study has been classified as low-risk, written consent was not required, but every participant received an information sheet (Appendix C) and provided recorded verbal consent. Audio files were stored on encrypted UCD cloud servers and deleted after transcription; anonymised transcripts will be retained for five years, compliant with GDPR.

Several methodological constraints temper the transferability of these findings. First, the sample size is small ($n = 7$) and confined to a single tech hub (Dublin), limiting geographic diversity. Second, recruitment via LinkedIn produced a self-selected, networked sample, which may over-represent sellers who are already comfortable discussing AI. Third, data were collected within a three-month window (April–June 2025), so the study captures a snapshot rather than longitudinal change. Finally, the author's dual role as researcher and industry insider, while advantageous for access, introduces potential bias despite reflexive safeguards.

4. Findings

This chapter presents findings from seven semi-structured interviews with B2B IT sales professionals, conducted between April and June 2025. The analysis identified three main themes that explore how AI reconfigures professional workflows, relationships, and professional identities. An overview of these themes is presented in the table below, after which each will be discussed in detail.

Table 3.
Overview of Analytical Themes.

Thematic Group	Identified Themes	Illustrative Quote
1. Workflows	Automation; Augmentation; Curation	"All information 'always goes through the 'me' filter... a lot of times it also gives you bullshit."
2. Relationships	Trust versus Friction; Autonomy versus Collaboration	"A lot of prospects aren't opening any emails, because, like more often than not, they're written by ChatGPT, and you can tell."
3. Identities	Change as constant; skill leveling; human advantage; future anxieties	"One of my superpowers has been that I've been really good at taking notes... That's not something I can really boast about anymore, because everyone's as good as me now."

4.1 Workflows

Within the major category of *workflows*, three different themes were identified: (1) tools and use cases that shorten the time to complete administrative tasks; (2) the augmentation of the sales process itself; and (3) the role of the seller as a curator, mediator, and even a AE-AI hybrid as prompting becomes a new workflow, or an emerging *enacted structure* itself.

4.1.1 Administrative Task Optimization

All the interviewed executives are actively using AI to optimize time. Large Language Models (LLMs) such as ChatGPT, M365 Copilot, Google Gemini are used daily with the end goal of "automating all those administrative tasks and spending much more time with clients" (P1, personal communication, April 11, 2025). P7 provided a specific example where a specialist was going to a meeting they had booked a month in advance and asked him for

background information. They provided a specific example on how it helped him handle this administrative task much faster for a colleague:

I'll just go into the meetings' copilot chat, and I tell it... 'this is what the customer and I agreed on, and this is why we have this follow up'. And it was, maybe, 6 bullet points, and she's like – that's perfect. (P7, personal communication, April 24, 2025).

Beyond accelerating information retrieval, AI is also being leveraged to complete other administrative tasks such as calendar management, helping in “finding the perfect time in the day that works for that person and myself to meet up” with more ease (P6, personal communication, April 22, 2025).

Tasks related to the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) are still considered a major hurdle unattended by AI. Sellers still hope to one day be able to use “less time doing stupid admin and CRM things” (P7, personal communication, April 24, 2025). AEs mentioned how frustrating still having to do administrative work, noting that, while it has the potential of being a “huge tool” (P3, personal communication, April 16, 2025), it still doesn't help sellers with simple, proactive tasks like flagging stalled opportunities or automating.

A clear divide emerged between sellers from AI-forward companies, who have access to powerful, integrated tools across the enterprise, and those who rely on more basic, less-permeated workflows. P7, for instance, uses a sophisticated internal Copilot, while another (P3) has only chatGPT. The same P3 also mentioned they would like to use call analytics and coaching platform Gong, a solution positively mentioned as used by both P5 and P2.

The findings indicate that the enactment of AI in B2B sales is not uniform, but depends heavily on factors such as organizational culture, AI implementation stage, the AE's seniority level, among others. Still, the overall consensus is that the technology significantly reduces time spent on what one seller called the “boring tedious tasks of groundwork and prospecting” (P2, personal communication, April 15, 2025), freeing them to focus on more strategic activities, gaining time to “focus on more important things” (P5, personal communication, April 17, 2025).

4.1.2 Augmented Sales Process

The time saved from administrative tasks is reinvested into what sellers see as more important things, something with which AI also assists:

I need less time to prepare for a meeting... I write in one of these artificial intelligence pages, 'give me an executive summary of what this C-level wants to hear'... so, well, I need less preparation time. No, rather, I prepare more on how I'm going to deliver the message than on what the message is. (P1, personal communication, April 11, 2025).

P4 uses GenAI to summarize customer's extensive annual reports, pulling out key paragraphs related to the IT strategy, and then applies it to engage around their priorities: "It makes you come off like a respected business partner, because you've already put in that brainstorm in that research, and they'll either say, 'yes... that's great'. Or 'yeah, but we're actually more focused on this'. So it helps open up the conversation more" (P4, personal communication, May 15, 2025). This use case not only changes the way the AE performs their role of a trusted advisor, it also changes the way their customer perceives them, a nuanced topic which will be further developed in section 4.2.

This is taken a step further by P2, who uses an internal tool to benchmark their clients against competitors. This allows them to identify opportunities and generate data-driven strategies, approaching meetings with a compelling, pre-validated reason for a conversation.

Furthermore, during meetings, AI is currently assisting sellers know how to better handle objections, side-by-side: "I'll have ChatGPT open, and I'll be asking it kind of questions and kind of where to navigate the conversation." (P2, personal communication, April 15, 2025).

Finally, follow ups and thank you notes are also assisted by AI:

I can ask Copilot to "Hey, write me a follow-up email with the action points agreed upon"... Doing that for a C-level discussion, I could have easily taken 2 hours before, [while] now it's... 10 min, and it's probably better" (P7, personal communication, April 24, 2025).

These findings confirm that, beyond being leveraged as a time-saving device, AI is also enacted as a strategic partner that augments the seller's performance at every stage of the client interaction, from initial research to final follow-up.

4.1.3 Iterated Curation

A theme that permeated all seven conversations was the emergence of a new, critical workflow: the constant need for sellers to validate, filter, and curate AI-generated content. Infused in both internal and client-facing tasks, Artificial Intelligence is seen as an entry-level colleague: "it's like having an agent, you know, next to you, and always giving you an insight" (P5, personal communication, April 17, 2025); others are closer to it, reporting having found a new "friend in the job" (P2, personal communication, April 15, 2025).

Participants were often clear that this new friend requires constant supervision and coaching, and the most consistent finding was that the output from these tools cannot be trusted implicitly. As one seller succinctly put it, all information "always goes through the 'me' filter... [still] a lot of times it also gives you bullshit". (P1, personal communication, April 11, 2025).

This need for a "me filter" stems primarily from factual inaccuracies or insufficient quality of the deliverable. Multiple participants noted that AI can be confidently wrong, especially with specific data. One AE stated that when it comes to pricing, "the quote is always completely wrong – you can't rely on it" (P2, personal communication, April 15, 2025).

The same seller described the ongoing effort of having to manage the tool's output to meet regional standards, explaining:

I've trained my chatGPT to be in British English. It's frustrating, sometimes, when it spells optimization with a Z, but that's all that I can think of; little tweaks like that, nothing overly frustrating or wrong with it... I'd prefer to keep it than not. (P2, personal communication, April 15, 2025).

As a result, sellers are developing a new practice of iteration and curation, a process clearly illustrated by the AE from a food delivery platform (P3). After using AI to generate a marketing plan for a client, she realized the tone was misaligned with her client's profile. This

required her to perform the mediation: re-prompting the AI to produce a version that was simpler and more accessible.

All these examples show how sellers are actively assuming the responsibility of an *iterated curation*, coaching and refining AI to properly align and nurture different types of use and purpose.

The findings in the current section show that multiple AIs are being enacted by sellers in more complex ways than simple automation, moving from a linear workflow to a more complex entanglement where the line between human action and AI input is increasingly blurred. And as the workflows are transformed, so too are the relationships with their clients and teams.

4.2 Relationships

As AI becomes embedded in daily sales practice, it is reshaping how sellers relate to both clients and colleagues. Externally, it changes how trust is built and maintained, while also introducing new frictions around authenticity and data use. Internally, it shifts team dynamics by enabling greater autonomy but also raising questions about collaboration and cohesion. This section explores these tensions through two key dynamics: trust vs. friction and independence vs. collaboration.

4.2.1 Trust vs. Friction

One of the primary ways sellers are proactively building client trust is by leveraging AI to enhance interactions throughout the whole sales process, as demonstrated by the examples in section 3.1.2. By arriving at the first conversation with deep, relevant insights, sellers can bypass initial friction and immediately establish their credibility as a trusted advisor.

Still, the very tools used to generate these insights can become a source of client friction, creating a delicate balance that sellers must navigate. The use of AI-powered transcription during meetings, while useful for the seller, can be perceived as an intrusion by the customer. One seller recounted an experience where a client, after realizing a meeting was being recorded, asked them to turn that meeting off as they did not want to be recorded by an "evil [nationality] company" (P7, personal communication, April 24, 2025).

Another seller noted that this friction can occur even before the first conversation, observing that customers are afraid of inauthentic outreach: "a lot of prospects aren't opening any emails, because, like more often than not, they're written by ChatGPT, and you can tell" (P2, personal communication, April 15, 2025). This leads to important communications "being archived because there's that fear of it just being generic and written by an automated AI system" (P2, personal communication, April 15, 2025).

This tension around data is becoming a central part of the sales conversation. As one seller noted, the growth of AI has led to a parallel growth in customer concern around risk and data security, making a secure and integrated AI platform a key talking point for commercial conversations (P1, personal communication, April 11, 2025).

Another seller recognized the emerging boundaries between doing and protecting are still under construction as one of the challenges of the future: "there's a huge line between productivity and security, and the goal of the future will be to find where you put that for AI" (P5, personal communication, April 17, 2025), indicating the "in-the-making" aspect of ethical AI implementation and the consequent frictions that it causes.

This creates a new challenge for the seller. They must leverage AI to perform the role of a data-driven, hyper-prepared trusted advisor, while simultaneously managing the risk of being perceived as violating trust or privacy.

The seller's ability to know when to mediate the breadth and depth of tool usage, be it to reduce friction or to respect data privacy concerns, emerges as a new critical skill.

4.2.2 Independence vs. Collaboration

Internally, AI is reshaping team dynamics by fostering a greater sense of individual autonomy, a change that sellers perceive as both positive and negative.

On one hand, sellers reported feeling more self-sufficient, able to solve problems without immediate recourse to their managers or peers, allowing them to be "more focused on [the] work specifically, rather than interacting with the others" (P5, personal communication, April 17, 2025).

This upside is illustrated by P3, who recalls a situation where they needed a marketing plan for a client, but their manager was unavailable. With a few iterations, they were able to create a plan (well accepted by their customer, as mentioned in 3.1.3) without any additional support.

While AI helps them be more efficient... It also has an isolating effect: "my manager doesn't have to be worried about me, because he knows that ChatGPT is going to help me with this kind of things" (P3, personal communication, April 16, 2025).

On the other hand, sellers may consciously challenge the tendency towards atomized work. P4, who described themselves as a social person, mentioned that, despite the availability of AI, they will "sometimes find excuses to talk to people" around the office, "because I just like to" (P4, personal communication, May 15, 2025).

Others avoid using AI in their communications, with collective preferences that it is kept out of the loop. In P2's company, there is the explicit preference of going in-person: "in terms of like the day to day formalities like interacting with managers or teammates, it hasn't really impacted that side of things at all. I think everything else is still very much communicated in person or elsewhere" (P2, personal communication, April 15, 2025). Same is the case with P6, who claims that "informal internal communication is written... by hand and without using AI [since] internally, people don't really care about the way they write" (P6, personal communication, April 22, 2025). At the most, mistakes are even welcome, as it shows communication between real people: "If there's a spelling mistake... it's all right." (P6, personal communication, April 22, 2025).

This is not to say there are no upsides internally. One AE actively profits from GenAI to "give advice on things like motivational team kind of exercises" (P4, personal communication, May 15, 2025).

Finally, just as with clients, the practice of transcribing meetings sometimes creates internal tension around team cohesion and accountability.

One of the sellers described how internal discussions around tasks led to internal pressure from colleagues to disable the AI and feeling the tension of “hey, this is what you said you were going to do in the meeting” (P7, personal communication, April 24, 2025), indicating that the technology ominous presence sometimes causes discomfort, while touching team dynamics and politics surrounding accountability.

As AI introduces new relational dynamics, it invites sellers to develop new relational skills. Be it by developing the ability to curate content, building external trust or collaborate across teams, the technology is also impacting the core identity and what it means to be a seller.

4.3 Identities

The changes in workflows and relationships driven by AI also have a direct impact on how sellers understand their professional identity. This section explores this transformation, examining how sellers are making sense of their evolving roles in a landscape where skills are being commodified and the boundaries of human expertise are constantly being redrawn. The following analysis will explore the pressures of perpetual adaptation, the new skill hierarchies that emerge, and how sellers work to define and assert their uniquely human advantages in response.

4.3.1 Change as Constant

As detailed in section 1.2, speed and perpetual novelty are fundamental elements of the digital discourse that enable IT sales practice. Sellers therefore work within what might be called a permanent-beta environment, where technologies, metrics, and expectations change all the time.

P1 captures this condition: “if you stick with what you have today, tomorrow you’re obsolete” (P1, personal communication, 11 April, 2025). The same participant illustrates how rapidly ideas become artefacts, noting that in a single year their firm’s AI initiatives moved “From being just an idea of artificial intelligence, to grounding it and putting it to work now” (P1, personal communication, April 11, 2025).

This intensifying tempo restructures everyday labour. P7 explains: “things are changing so quickly it's a full time job just trying to keep up with what's going on just so that I can be one step ahead of my customers” (P7, personal communication, April 24, 2025).

In practice, learning each new AI tool, curating and prompting it, to then learn about new releases, use cases and interfaces, has become a task in itself: “I think I have to be kind of relearning and unlearning things all the time” (P7, personal communication, April 24, 2025).

Veteran sellers frame this volatility as endemic to the sector: “But this is nothing new. This is personal to the IT industry” (P7, personal communication, April 24, 2025). As P1 observes, “you get used to being in an environment, an ecosystem that evolves all the time” (P1, personal communication, 11 April, 2025). Yet the cognitive load remains tangible, as P7 expresses:

I kind of know what I'm selling and getting the benefits out of them, and then I also have to do my real job. And then once you learn how something is done, and then it changes a little bit later, and then those are certainly annoying (P7, personal communication, April 24, 2025).

The stakes of non-adaptation are also clear. Reflecting on a former employer, P2 recalls that their previous company ultimately failed because it could not “keep up to date” (P2, personal communication, April 15, 2025). For today's sellers, then, continuous adaptation is not optional but a fundamental part of professional success (or survival), which highlights the importance that Human-AI entanglements also shape professional identity.

And as each quarter new AI features are rolled out, sellers in the IT industry position their human skills as their ultimate differentiator.

4.3.2 AI as a great leveler

The findings reveal that AI works as a great leveler and by simultaneously raising the floor of competence and lowering the ceiling of unique expertise, creating a more crowded and competitive middle. This impact is felt at both ends of the skills spectrum. For some sellers, the baseline for acceptable performance has been raised, as one seller explained: “It's not

acceptable anymore to be really bad... I have to be at least okay" (P6, personal communication, April 22, 2025).

At the same time, for other professionals, previously unique skills are now being commodified. A senior seller lamented this loss: "One of my superpowers has been that I've been really good at taking notes... That's not something I can really boast about anymore, because everyone's as good as me now" (P7, personal communication, April 24, 2025). This compression of the skill gap suggests that traditional talents are no longer the key differentiators they once were.

On the other hand, when looking to overcome specific weaknesses, this leveling is seen as a positive and liberating force. The same senior seller who worried about their note-taking skills saw an opportunity to capitalize their other talents: "I like talking to people. I like coaching people. So I think these tools will help me catch up to those people that have been better at doing the CRM" (P7, personal communication, April 24, 2025). In this way, sellers leverage AI as a liberating tool to automate tasks they dislike, a theme previously seen in the discussion on workflows.

The first is an external, social risk: the rise of superficial competence. As one seller warned, the danger is "that a lot of people can use ChatGPT instantly, but not really know what they're talking about, and it can make them come off as an expert when they've just copied and pasted" (P4, personal communication, May 15, 2025).

The second risk is internal: a feeling of deskilling through over-reliance. This was clearly articulated by another seller who confessed that for tasks they used to do themselves, they now outsource the cognitive effort to AI, which causes them to feeling "a little bit, maybe lazy... relying on it so much" (P2, personal communication, April 15, 2025).

AI simultaneously raises the baseline of competence while creating the risk of deskilling and a new pressure on sellers to prove their expertise is genuine. This is how leveling becomes more than just a shift in skills; it alters how individuals perceive their own value and ability to perform, promoting impostor feelings while reconfiguring professional identity.

4.3.3 The Human Advantage

Sellers consistently position relational skills such as empathy (being able to align to their clients' perspective), flexible rapport-building (improvising and adapting their pitch and tone), and strategic acumen (being able to think in their customers' terms) as the "human advantage", or. While many acknowledge the entanglement with AI on routine tasks, they still show that a mix of social skills and strategic acumen is what allows them to navigate, or even benefit from, an uncertain future.

4.3.3.1 Social Skills. The general consensus of the interviewed executives is that AI will not replace humans - at least not those who can leverage their critical social skills (Smith & Brown 2025) to their own advantage. The perception is justified by the belief that there is the external need of a customer to trust a real person before making any decision.

"I think the human element and building on relationships is still something that you cannot replace, especially in Ireland. There's a big relationship manifestation of sales here. They like to see you in person and... build the rapport first." (P4, personal communication, May 15, 2025).

P2 echoes this idea, summarizing it succinctly: "I think something that will always remain the same in sales is that people buy from people they like, no technology can kind of replace that" (P2, personal communication, April 15, 2025).

In terms of being displaced, those who believe in their capability of being *adaptably likeable* remain confident that AI (as of today) can only contribute to their success, and not replacement:

I'm not worried. I know that people are worried about things like, "Oh, I'm going to lose my job because of AI", and that's definitely not true. You just need to learn how to use AI... because when you're in sales... you buy from people that you like. So it is really hard to see people buying from a robot (P3, personal communication, April 16, 2025).

Sellers are willing to let go of repetitive jobs for the sake of meaning. "I believe that repetitive jobs, yes, they will be replaced... it frees up your time to be able to do more significant

work..." (P1, personal communication, April 11, 2025). And because AI can contribute to the commodification of many once-differentiating skills, trust-building becomes decisive. P6 explains:

Now the relationship building gets more important. Because everything about the data... is kind of managed by AI... what's gonna make the difference between a good and a bad account manager... is gonna be the way we approach the customer. (P6, personal communication, April 22, 2025).

The shift of the commodification of analytical thinking, the human skill of relationship building becomes the key success factor, exacerbating the shift from a squared 7-stage hunter to to a more consultative partner: "the role of Ae is going to turn from less of a hunting role and more of a knowledge role. I think we're going to be looked at as more of like... partners, consultants" (P4, personal communication, May 15, 2025).

Sellers and AI become entangled partners in the process:

I think we're gonna have... AI supporting us more and more in some of the tasks to help us, you know, focus on selling. I do think it's still a very important role, because the human factor is still very important. (P5, personal communication, April 17, 2025)

Deeply aligned to social skills, a constant theme that emerged under the umbrella of *the human advantage* is the use of strategic acumen as a differentiator that allows sellers to challenge the compressed talent pool.

4.3.3.2 Strategic Acumen. One seller explains how they are able to drive strategic conversations with their clients:

You have to prove the productivity uptake... It's easy to see, like an hour of a [worker's] time costs this much... and if you ask them like, 'Hey, how much time has this saved you,'... maybe like half an hour a day. And then you're like, okay. So if I pay this company 20 or €30 a month, I get... 10h a month for that (P7, personal communication, April 24, 2025).

Another seller described how clients frequently arrive with a budget for "AI" without a clear understanding of what it means for their business, creating an opportunity for the seller to diagnose their actual needs: "a lot of people hear artificial intelligence and say: 'ah, I have a budget,' but they don't even know what it is. They don't even know what they want or what they have" (P1, personal communication, April 11, 2025).

In response, the seller's role shifts from pushing a transactional order to performing a strategic assessment, guiding the client from a buzzword to a concrete business case: "we say, 'Ah, well, look, we evaluate, we do an assessment of the status or maturity they have now.' And when we see it... it's that you don't need artificial intelligence. You need automation" (P1, personal communication, April 11, 2025).

This focus on tangible outcomes is a conscious strategy echoed by others, whether it is linking technology discussions directly to their potential to "impact revenue" (P2, personal communication, April 15, 2025) or using AI-generated performance reports to build a data-driven justification for continued investment (P5, personal communication, April 17, 2025; P6, personal communication, April 22, 2025).

Building the case for AI is positioned as a critical workflow that directly elevates the sellers' identity. Being able to uncover and advise how emerging technology directly impacts customers' business, and translating an emerging technology into a value-proven solution is positioned by the sellers, more than a mere skill, as a response to leveling. However, this strategic response may be understood as one of the causes of the very real anxieties that arise.

4.3.4 Future anxieties

The most immediate of these anxieties is a new psychological pressure created by the tools themselves. As workflows are accelerated and relationships become tighter, there is an internalized pressure to perform fast, catching up with the pace of the AI peer: "it sort of made me want things to go very quickly, now." (P5, personal communication, April 17, 2025).

This personal feeling of impatience is the first layer of anxiety. Beyond this internal acceleration, several participants articulated a deeper concern regarding role-security, recognizing the systemic consequences of automating entry-level positions:

I do think in sales development... that job is more at risk just given that... probably, it could be done online... We do have BDRs that generate pipeline for us... But... what's to say that that could just not be... pushed in with our role here... an entry level job? I do think that a lot of the time that could be kind of done without them present, you know, just like filling out a form, and it getting directed on to us, or whatever (P2, personal communication, April 15, 2025).

The fear of obsolescence for junior talent creates a systemic anxiety about the future of the profession itself. It points to a structural issue, where the system demands senior expertise while dismantling the pathways needed to nurture it, as one seller pointed out: "I'm quite afraid of... the position that junior employees are going to be in... it's gonna be awfully difficult to... hire those junior people. But where do you expect to get the seniors If you don't have the juniors?" (P7, personal communication, April 24, 2025).

Finally, this systemic anxiety culminates in a profound, moral questioning that perfectly summarizes the dual role of the IT seller (section 2.3). As agents of promoting a digital discourse of disruption, they are simultaneously subjects of its potentially self-undermining logic. This existential questioning raises in moments of deep reflection, disclosing the personal weight of driving shifts that could be seen as an unwantedly mandatory shot at one's own foot: "every now and then I get this sense of existential dread like, am I fighting like... what side of history am I on... actively selling this AI product?" (P7, personal communication, April 24, 2025).

In conclusion, the findings reveal that the Human-AI collaboration in B2B IT sales has a mixed arrangement of gains and tensions. AI removes much of the "boring, tedious" administrative work, yet it also introduces a quieter layer of labor in constant curation and re-prompting.

These workflow changes have an impact in both external and internal relationships: data-driven insights can deepen client trust, even as privacy concerns and meeting recordings trigger fresh friction; internal team interactions oscillate between greater autonomy versus isolation, and struggle with new forms of tracking accountability.

In terms of identitarian shifts, sellers notice long-valued skills losing their edge, while highlighting a “human advantage” rooted in empathy, contextual judgment, and rapport as more important (and fragile). Strategic optimism about AI’s support coexists with clear anxieties over role security, junior career paths, and moral responsibility.

The lived experiences of workflow acceleration, relationships negotiation, and identitarian self-redefinition provide the empirical base for the next chapter, which examines the broader implications of AI in B2B IT Sales through the theoretical foundations outlined earlier in the thesis.

5. Discussion

Building on the interview findings presented in Chapter 4 and the broader literature on post-Fordist labor, digital discourse, surveillance capitalism, and sociomaterial enactment, it is now convenient to return to the main research question: how is AI reshaping workflows, relationships, and identities of B2B IT sales professionals?

From the front line perspective of IT industry sellers, the findings show that beyond the efficiency gains, AI creates new tensions that point out to the reconfiguration of the whole professional identity.

First, Entangled Workflows (4.1) unpacks how AI accelerates routine tasks yet demands new skills as mediators of AI as their digital copilots. Next, Surveilled Relationships (4.2) shows how the same automation that builds credibility can trigger privacy concerns and demand new skills on . Finally, Reconfiguring Identity (4.3) traces how AI's leveling of basic skills both democratizes entry-level performance and forces sellers to foreground strategic and relational acumen.

This discussion mainly explores a central paradox that emerged throughout the interviews: how AI simultaneously empowers sellers with unprecedented efficiency while burdening them with new forms of invisible labor, relational friction, and professional anxiety.

5.1 Workflows

B2B IT sellers are harvesting the direct benefits of AI, which liberates them from dealing with “boring tedious tasks” (P2, personal communication, April 15, 2025) to focus on “more important things” (P5, personal communication, April 17, 2025) such as client interactions.

As different forms of Seller-AI entanglements emerge, they become dependent on factors such as the maturity of the technology stack, with the most visible difference between P5's deeply AI-ingrained process versus P3's more traditional approach to sales. *AI adoption* is not always something only dependent on the employee, but also conditional to the company's culture and maturity, which may, long term, expand the digital divide to AI skills. At least 2 AEs, P3 and P2, would like to or miss having Gong at their current company's tech stack, while P5,

for example, is improving his pitch each call with the tool. This phenomenon relocates the locus of responsibility of use to the organization, complementing Singh et al. (2019)'s commentary on resistance to adoption, and aligns with Orlikowski & Scott (2008)'s concept of multiple AIs: different companies, with different technology stacks and data policies create AI-multiples, and organizational context also matters.

B2B IT sellers are mostly welcoming of the change brought by their company's AI implementation. Observed in all interviews is the fact that, as both internal and external workflows are both automated and augmented (Hunter, 2019), the now "AI-paired-AEs" are mostly excited about the renewed focus on enhancing value-adding interactions (Chang, 2022).

However, In order to work with AI, sellers are having to develop a new set of skills around coaching AI to get better along with it: iterated curations. While "always by your side... giving you an insight" (P5, personal communication, April 17, 2025), oftentimes this insight needs to be reworked, iterated, and curated through what P1 called the "me filter" (P1, personal communication, April 11, 2025) becomes the new pivotal, co-constituted emerging workflow.

This co-constitution of human and machine, where the final output is a product of their interaction, challenges any simple divide between tool and task. The result is the imposition of a hidden, critical "curation workflow": the cognitive and temporal effort sellers invest to iterate, and validate AI-generated insights through their "me filter", oftentimes getting past the generated "bullshit" (P1, personal communication, April 11, 2025) that bad data can impact the speed, output quality and ultimately tool adoption.

In conclusion, while the lines between the seller and AI are indeed blurred, a new and demanding clarity emerges in the seller's responsibilities. The role evolves into that of an "intelligence orchestrator". This involves navigating and synthesizing outputs from different AI-driven sources to create a coherent and effective sales strategy, while navigating issues such as data quality.

The ability to properly execute the curation workflow and successfully master the iterative process of co-creation is quickly becoming a core skill that differentiates a great seller

from a merely good one. It is important to note, though, that “if you put in trash, you get out trash” (P1, personal communication, April 11, 2025).

5.2 Relationships

As AI-driven workflows intensify, relationships are redrawn around a central thread - the need to balance the intimacy enabled by data with the friction caused by surveillance and ethical concerns. This emerging tension between closeness and intrusiveness affects both external client relationships and internal team dynamics, yet in slightly subtle ways: external friction being more often about perceived intrusion and inauthenticity, while internal friction being more about accountability and trust, and the atomization of the sales work.

As the lines between AE and AI blur, the 7-stage funnel (Dubinsky, 1981, cited in Marshall & Moncrief, 2004) is completely dissolved into the uncentralized, diffused customer journey, sellers that leverage AI show up as “a respected business partner, because you’ve already put in that brainstorm in that research” (P4, personal communication, May 15, 2025). This is a positive aspect that is welcome as an answer to the need of being more aligned to a hyper-connected, multi-channel, complex B2B customer’s emotions and priorities (Lemon & Verhoeff, 2016).

On the other hand, customers seem to be noticing that hyper-personalization may equal soullessness, as in the example given by P2 when talking about the downside in email open rates due to the frequency of ChatGPT-made-looking messages. Beyond this emerging suspicion, clients have been demanding meeting recordings to be turned off because they don’t want to be recorded by corporations (P7, personal communication, April 24, 2025).

Internally, the emerging workflows foster independence, allowing sellers to brainstorm for internal meetings (P4), retrieve meeting information to facilitate follow up (P7) and generally, “bother others less” (P5, personal communication, April 17, 2025) – the latter a more negative consequence of the “human-AI collaboration” defended by Paschen et al. (2020).

While some sellers don’t explicitly notice the impact in their internal team dynamics (P2), others actively resist this atomization effect. For example, P4 talks to their colleague “just

because they like to” (P4, personal communication, May 15, 2025), and others may even prefer fully human “spelling mistakes” in their internal communications (the case of P6) as opposed to a perfectly written, m-dashed e-mail. This preference for an “AI-free” communication is also invoked in P7’s tale of their colleagues explicitly asking for internal meeting transcription to be turned off also as a means to avoid being held accountable for everything they say on the fly.

Both external and internal tensions point out to the surveilling aspects of data extraction and the manufacturing of prediction products, characteristics of Zuboff’s (2019) *surveillance capitalism*. The discomfort arises from the “black-boxed” (Faraj et al., 2018), opaque nature of AI. Ultimately, customers and teams are resisting the “anticipatory quantification practices” (Faraj et al., 2018) that arise from data extraction and conversion to prediction products (Zuboff, 2019).

As sellers navigate the tension between data-driven intimacy and privacy-allowing space, they need to actively manage unwritten social rules and expectations, acting as an ethical guard that seeks to maintain the balance of the “huge line between productivity and security” (P5, personal communication, April 17, 2025), working independently with AI and collaborating with teammates.

5.3 Identities

In the IT sector’s permanent-beta world, post-Fordist time–space compression (Harvey 2005) normalizes acceleration and the threat of obsolescence. “But this is nothing new, this is personal to the IT industry” (P7, personal communication, April 24, 2025).

Other sellers agree: “If you stick with what you have today, tomorrow you’re obsolete” (P1, personal communication, 11 April 2025).

AI exacerbates that rhythm, turning acceleration into internalized, systemic impatience, and casting the seller as the network human, a self-entrepreneur who must unlearn and relearn at unprecedented pace (Fisher, 2010; Jessop 1992).

AI raises the performance floor while appropriating niche “super-powers.” “It’s no longer acceptable to be bad” (P6, personal communication, 22 April, 2025), yet senior reps lament

losing once-unique skills such as meticulous note-taking (P7, personal communication, 24 April, 2025). Over-reliance even sparks fear of losing their own agency: “I’m starting to feel lazy” (P2, personal communication, April 15, 2025). Orlikowski and Scott’s (2025) framing of *distributed agency* captures this unease: the machine now is responsible for previously human workflows, causing the skill compression and the fear of being dispossessed of other, perhaps not so obvious, super powers.

Sellers counter the levelling by off-loading administrative work to AI and doubling down on what cannot be automated: trust, empathy, rapport, and strategic business acumen. This “human pivot” shifts the locus of performativity (Orlikowski & Scott, 2008) from data labour to relational craft, echoing Gartner’s “critical social skills” agenda (Smith & Brown 2025).

Yet, success demands evangelizing the very AI that devalues one’s skills. B2B IT sellers thus become both agents of the digital discourse (Fisher, 2010) and subjects of its precarizing effects of post-fordist labor, living the tension between self-empowerment and deprecation that leads to feelings of “existential dread” and questions on “what side of history am I on?” (P7, personal communication, April 24, 2025).

In conclusion, the findings from this study illustrate a clear model of how post-Fordist principles manifest in the daily lives of B2B technology sales professionals. Through their enactment of AI, these sellers become human-AI hybrids who actively reconfigure the nature of their work.

This reconfiguration unfolds across the interlinked domains of workflows, relationships, and identities. The emergence of “iterated curation” as a new workflow and “ethical guarding” as a new relational skill are clear examples of constitutive entanglement, with the sellers’ daily enactment of AI serving as the engine of change. As these workflows are transformed, relationships are reconfigured, generating social frictions that illustrate the tensions of surveillance capitalism and provide a real-world counter-narrative to a purely optimistic digital discourse, also within the very same industry that promotes it.

Finally, this reconfigured work landscape forces a rebuilding of professional identity. The "human pivot" can thus be understood as a strategic response to the precarity and acceleration inherent in post-Fordist labor, representing the modern knowledge worker's attempt to secure a uniquely valuable position in a reality they are co-creating with the machine. The journey from workflow enactment to rebuilt identities offers a tangible picture of how work is being reconfigured with ever-increasing speed and complexity—a reality that makes the seller's strategic, human-centric response a critical necessity in a skill-compressed and increasingly competitive landscape.

6. Conclusion

This study set out to answer the question: how is AI reshaping the workflows, relationships, and identities of B2B IT sales professionals?

The findings show that AI reconfigures B2B IT selling not by acting autonomously, but through its enactment by sellers, who become human-AI hybrids. This process (i) accelerates tasks but also demands new labor from sellers as curators and ethical guardians; (ii) enables data-driven intimacy but also generates new frictions over surveillance and authenticity; and (iii) compresses technical skill hierarchies, pushing sellers to pivot their professional identity toward uniquely human capacities. The central paradox identified is that AI empowers sellers with efficiency while simultaneously burdening them with new forms of invisible labor, relational friction, and professional anxiety.

The central contribution of this thesis is to bring sociomaterial and critical social studies together to provide a micro-level view of how macro-level theories manifest in a contemporary profession. By applying a sociomaterial sensitizing lens, this study offers a rich, empirical understanding of the "seller-AI hybrid," where human and machine are inseparable parts of a new work practice. It demonstrates how abstract concepts like post-Fordist precarity, surveillance capitalism, and the "AI multiple" are not just theories, but are the lived, daily experiences of modern professionals navigating a landscape of constant, accelerating change.

The findings of this study offer several practical recommendations for both sellers and their leaders.

For sellers, the study suggests a need to (1) prioritize data literacy and "curation" skills to effectively manage AI tools; (2) learn to leverage the tensions around surveillance to build client trust by proactively managing consent and data use; and (3) consciously foster their "human edge" by rehearsing the relational and strategic capabilities that automation cannot replicate.

For leaders, there is a clear opportunity to (1) formally recognize and support the new "curation workflow" to prevent burnout; (2) mitigate the "AI digital divide" by investing in high-quality, integrated tools and shared resources; and (3) bolster human-to-human collaboration and coaching to develop the critical social skills that are becoming more valuable than ever. A key strategic need is to design AI-ready career paths that nurture junior talent from day one.

The findings of this thesis should be considered in light of several key limitations. As a qualitative study, the goal was to achieve depth and nuance rather than broad generalizability. The insights are drawn from a small sample (n=7) operating within a single geographic tech hub (Dublin), representing a deep dive into a very specific segment of the global sales profession. The experiences of these sellers in large, AI-forward technology companies may not reflect those in smaller companies or different industries. Furthermore, this study offers a "snapshot" in time, and the rapidly evolving nature of AI means these workflows and identities are subject to constant change. These limitations, however, offer clear and compelling directions for future research. A key area would be to investigate organizational readiness for AI adoption, building on the "AI digital divide" identified in this thesis. Future work could also evaluate the effectiveness of enablement programs designed to train sellers in the new skills of "iterated curation" and "ethical guarding," as well as the "critical social skills" threatened by an overreliance on AI. Further research into team dynamics could explore the long-term effects of AI on collaboration and cohesion. Finally, these avenues could be complemented by quantitative methods to measure the costs of curation, or by broadening the perspective to include the experiences of sales managers and customers.

Finally, the biggest conclusion that emerges from this research is that not a specific skill, but a mindset of strategic optimism is required in the current landscape. The "human pivot" represents a deep-seated confidence that technology cannot replace the relational core of sales. In a landscape of constant change, this optimism can be understood as both a coping mechanism for the cognitive dissonance of rapid transformation and a strategic response to hold onto the uniquely human value that no machine can replicate. Sales is human, after all.

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Appendix B – Interview Guide

1. Introduction

- “We’re exploring how AI impacts your workflows, relationships, and professional identity as a tech AE.”
 - “I’ll record for transcription but anonymize it” (verbal consent)
 - “Quick snapshot of your territory — what do you sell, to who?” (Introductory icebreaker)
-

2. AI in Workflow

Q1: “What AI tools do you use in your daily sales activities — in CRM, sales intelligence, communication tools?”

– **Probe:** “Can you give me specific examples?”

Q2: “Can you walk me through how AI changed a specific task or step — like lead qualification, forecasting, or account management?”

– **Probe:** “How did you do this before AI? What’s different now?”

Q3: “What’s been the biggest benefit of AI in your workflow — and what’s still frustrating?”

– **Probe:** “Can you give a concrete example?”

3. Relationships

Q4: “How has AI changed the way you connect with your clients — in terms of personalization, communication quality, or frequency?”

Q5: “Has AI changed how you collaborate internally — with sales teammates, tech specialists, or managers?”

– **Probe:** “Any positive or negative shifts in roles or team dynamics?”

4. Identity & Role

Q6: “Has AI shifted how you see your role as an AE — or the skills that matter most?”

Q7: “Do you feel any tension between promoting AI solutions to clients and adapting to AI tools yourself?”

– **Probe:** “How do you navigate that tension?”

5. Adaptation

Q8: “What skill or mindset are you developing to stay effective with AI — like technical fluency, data use, or strategic selling?”

– **Probe:** “How are you going about that?”

Q9: “Have you let go of any old sales habits because of AI? What was that like?”

– **Probe:** “Was it tough to change?”

Q10: “Ever disagree with what AI recommends? How do you decide whether to trust yourself or the tool?”

– **Probe:** “Can you recall a specific time?”

6. Future Outlook & Close

Q11: “What changes do you see coming in your role over the next few years as AI evolves?”

– **Probe:** “What’s exciting — or concerning — about that?”

Q12: “What’s one thing you’d improve in the AI tools you use?”

– **Optional wrap (if time):** “Looking back, what’s the biggest personal shift AI triggered in your work?”

Appendix C – Participant Information Sheet

AI in B2B IT Sales: Practice, Use, and Meaning

Researcher:

Luan Ferreira - EMJMD TISE UCD, UWK, NOVA, PUEB - luan.ferreiradeavila@ucdconnect.ie

What is this study about?

This study is about how AI is reshaping the daily work, relationships, and professional identity of B2B sales professionals in the enterprise tech sector. It focuses on the lived experience of sellers—how they use, adapt to, and make sense of AI in their roles.

Why have I been invited?

You have been invited because of your experience working in B2B sales within the technology industry. Your insights will help deepen the understanding of how AI is being put in practice in the field.

What will happen if I take part?

If you agree, we'll schedule a 30–45 minute conversation, either in person (e.g., coffee) or via video call. I will ask for your verbal consent in the beginning of the call, then go over a few open-ended questions about your daily sales work and your experience with AI tools. With your permission, the conversation will be recorded for transcription purposes. You can decline to answer any question or stop the interview at any time without consequence. *Data will be stored in a secure drive / only accessible to the researcher - will be erased once analysis process completed.*

Is it anonymous?

Yes. No real names, company names, or identifiable details will be used in the study. Quotes may be used, but only with general descriptors (e.g., "Senior AE at a global SaaS company").

Will I get to see the findings?

Yes. If you'd like, I'll share a brief summary of the findings once the thesis is complete.

Do I have to take part?

No—it's entirely voluntary. You can decline or withdraw at any time, no questions asked.

Contact for Questions or Concerns

If you have any questions, feel free to email me at any time.

You may also contact my supervisor if needed: [Marguerite Barry](mailto:marguerite.barry@ucd.ie) - marguerite.barry@ucd.ie
Director, School of Information & Communication Studies, UCD