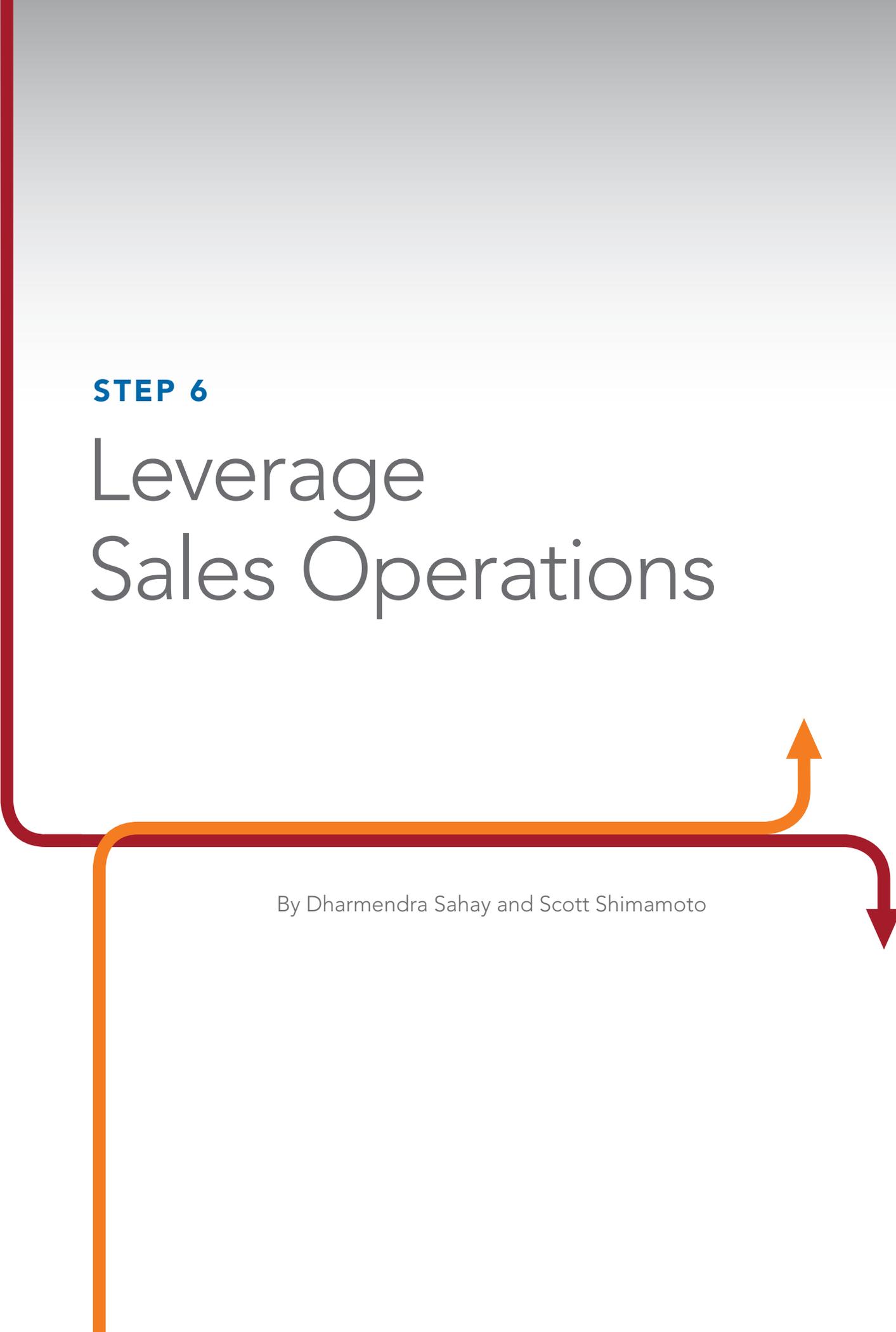


# Profitable Sales Growth in Six Steps



By Selling Power Editors and ZS Associates Experts

**SellingPower** ZS



**STEP 6**

# Leverage Sales Operations

By Dharmendra Sahay and Scott Shimamoto



**Selling has often been considered more art than science.** These days, however, the best sales forces are empowered by technology solutions and data.

Consider, for example, the relatively recent rise and growth of cloud-based applications, mobile technologies, social networks, big data, and sophisticated analytics. These trends and tools have been a gateway for many organizations to create greater [sales force effectiveness](#).

In part, the march toward science is why sales operations continues to be increasingly vital to sales success. Why? According to Dharmendra Sahay and Scott Shimamoto, Principals at ZS Associates, sales operations is uniquely positioned to leverage data and technology to support the sales organization, diagnose issues, and design solutions. In fact, Sahay and Shimamoto define sales operations by six categorical functions, all of which have deep roots in science and technology:

1) **Data management.** Sales operations managers help sales leaders pick and choose which data to examine. They also make sure data is clean, accurate, and complete (not to mention organized and rolled up into reports, ideally via a centralized and automated database).

# How Much Should Sales Operations Support the Sales Organization?

Although the primary function of sales operations is to organize data and generate deep customer insight, the practical role of sales operations varies widely from one company to the next, with each delivering different levels of service.

**Primary level: supporting the sales force.** This includes generating sales performance reports, managing administrative programs (for example, an incentive plan), and keeping CRM relevant.

**Second level: delivering information and insight to the right people at the right time.** This includes the ability to highlight emerging problems, misalignments, and other challenges.

**Third level: developing potential solutions to sales force effectiveness challenges.** Such solutions can exist in a range of critical areas, such as customer segmentation, sales resource optimization, sales process, talent development, and motivation.

**Highest level: becoming a strategic partner.** At this level, sales operations detects emerging customer or market trends and helps sales leaders determine how the business can take advantage of those opportunities before the competition does.

**2) Platforms and systems.** A sales organization's CRM and other platforms or applications must be integrated, robust, and cost effective. The goal is for these assets to deliver value to the sales team in a scalable, flexible fashion.

**3) Reporting and administration.** Sales leaders and the sales force don't have much use for data that's raw, inaccurate, or untimely. Efficient processes and accurate reports and dashboards enable sales leaders to respond to market challenges and drive revenue growth.

**4) Pricing and contracting support.** Given the pace of business, it's imperative that sales operations enables the sales team with high-quality proposals that can be turned around quickly and efficiently. Contracts must be positioned competitively; however, they must also fulfill company and customer objectives and establish mutual value.

**5) Analytics and business insight.** Intelligent analysis of raw data can be invaluable for sales leaders: Which customers are most receptive to certain products? What are the best practices of top-selling reps in the organization? Analytics from sales operations can provide answers to these kinds of questions and help sales leaders base decisions on facts, not intuition.

**6) Lead generation and management.** Many sales teams complain that leads from marketing are often useless. Meanwhile, marketers insist they've fulfilled their lead-generation objectives. The truth lies somewhere in the middle. The sales operations function can make generating, capturing, and following up on leads a seamless, cost-effective, and collaborative process.

The art of selling will continue to play a factor in sales success, and the influence of science and technology will likewise continue to grow. Organizations that nurture excellent sales operations teams will find it easier to maintain a competitive edge, enhance sales force effectiveness, and achieve consistent, sustainable sales success. ■



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