



# Sales and Marketing Talent Landscape

A Special Report by  
Boyden Finland & OnWork  
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OnWork

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## Background & Motivation

- The Chairs and CEOs of Finnish companies have indicated that there is a **clear demand for scalable sales and marketing talent** with business and customer driven thinking.
- Development of **technology has changed business across the industries** and influenced customers' and clients' expectations, with emphasis on sales and marketing related roles.
- Based on our discussions with Finnish business leaders, **competence requirements are nowadays emphasized differently** than before.
- Boyden and OnWork executed **a fact-based study to find out how Finnish commercial careers have developed** over the years.
- **Our data** is based on 1,700+ sales and marketing profiles in Boyden's Finnish database.
- We utilize **advanced analytics** from statistical modelling to machine learning to make sense of the data.

# The Study in a Nutshell



## The Study in a Nutshell

- Impact of **gender, nationality and education** on career success didn't reveal surprises. Diverse talent is less likely to ascend to the executive level.
- Individuals who make it to the top are less likely to engage in lateral moves, **they stay in their jobs longer** than others. They **have fast progress especially early in their career**.
- **Internal career development** leads to slower career progress compared to career steps between firms.
- According to our data there was **no career benefit** from working in a top-100 Finnish firm.
- **P&L responsibility at age 40** is a sign that a person is on a good track.
- **Strategy and business development** responsibilities are associated with career success.
- Career success is associated with **Creativity, Conscientiousness, and Organized**.
- Millennials are **stronger in analytics, customer experience and sustainability** compared to older generations.
- There are **differences in soft skills** between sales and marketing. Millennials emphasize soft skills while older generations are more product and technically oriented.





## The Study in a Nutshell

- **Gender and nationality**  
Women make up 25% of the sample. It reflects the true gender distribution in the marketplace. Share of women is much higher in marketing (39%) than sales (17%). Culture diversity is also more pronounced in marketing where 8% are non-Finns. In sales only 4% are. Marketing is much more diverse from both gender and culture standpoints.
- **Position and age**  
47% of the individuals are currently in director or executive position which is expected in an executive search database. In sales exactly 50% of individuals are currently directors or executives. The corresponding marketing figure is 37%.
- **Responsibilities**  
Sales roles have more strategy, business development, and leadership responsibilities. Marketing roles emphasize market intelligence and branding. These indicate a clear distinction between sales and marketing. Sales has substantially more “hard” responsibilities.
- **Education**  
Overall 80% have master’s degree. Only around one tenth have bachelor’s degree. Marketing is more academic with 88% having at least a master’s degree. In sales the figure is 73%, and 16% have a non-academic degree. Sales is more diverse from the educational perspective.

# Career Success Drivers

## Key Research Questions & Approach

We want to understand through data which factors predict career success in sales and marketing. What are the demographics, career moves, responsibilities, and skills that equip individuals to top positions?

A statistical model allow us to put our hypotheses on data. It does not reflect what we think should explain career success.

Career success here is defined by a person reaching an executive position.



## Career Success Drivers

### Responsibilities

#### *Facts*

- Strategy and business development responsibilities are associated with career success.
- P&L responsibility by age 40 helps to land on top jobs. It is a sign of a good track.
- Branding responsibility is associated with less career success. Individuals who have had branding responsibility are less likely to ascend to executive positions.

#### *Conclusions*

- The findings around strategy and business development responsibilities are not surprising. We expect these to prepare individuals to positions with larger responsibilities.
- The branding finding has few potential explanations. Executives seldom have branding responsibilities and top-level branding positions are few. Hence there are limited number of promotional opportunities.
- The branding finding can also reflect the value organizations put on branding experience in other domains. In our sample that value seems limited.





## Career Success Drivers

### Diversity

#### Facts

- Women are less likely to ascend to executive positions. Given the field and level of education, work experience, soft skills and host of other factors, women experience poorer career success than men.
- Non-Finns are less likely to reach the top positions given similar background characteristics. Our diversity-related findings align with a number of international studies.

#### Conclusions

- Boyden's study "Furthering Female Leadership" identifies potential explanations, such as male dominated environments, old-school management, overt discrimination, and family obligations.
- Diverse talent experiences less career success. But generally there is no unbreakable "glass ceiling" as there are many successful diverse individuals in top positions in the data.
- In some firms diverse talent have truly equal opportunities.
- Organizations should ensure, through rigorous analytics, that their talent development and recruitment practices are free of biases, and that they are inclusive to people of all backgrounds.
- Higher standards for women and non-Finns make it more difficult to build and sustain diverse talent pipelines.

*Furthering Female Leadership:*

<https://www.boyden.com/media/boyden-diversity-study-furthering-female-leadership-7703577/index.html>



## Career Success Drivers

### Education

#### *Facts*

- Education drives career success. The higher the level of education, the better the chances of landing the top jobs.
- Career success without master's degree is certainly possible, but it is less likely.
- At executive level 82% have master's degree. Business and economics fields give an edge over other fields.
- The impact of education shows that pre-career human capital investments shape careers for a long time.

#### *Conclusions*

- Based on our experience, career success is more education-driven in Finland than for instance in the U.S.
- Management in Finnish organizations appear less educationally diverse than in the U.S. There humanities and liberal arts are also represented at the top.
- A slow-impact remedy is to expand graduate hiring outside business schools to broaden the intake, and build the foundation for diversity in the long haul.
- Organizations should also check through analytics what are their promotion drivers, and assess if the role of education is appropriate and consistent with broader talent strategy.





## Career Success Drivers

### Soft Skills

#### Facts

- Career success is positively associated with the following soft skills: Conscientiousness, Creativity, and Organized.
- More than half of executives, 52%, are Creative. 82% are Organized and 44% Conscientious.
- Soft skills invariant to career success are Social Skills & Networking, Adaptability and Teamwork. Interestingly also Leadership & Influencing fall to this category.
- Soft skills negatively associated with career success include Learning and Thinking.

#### Conclusions

- Conscientiousness is shown to be conducive to job performance in academic studies. Our finding aligns with that.
- While on average creative types are successful, there are surely companies where Creativity is not rewarded careerwise.
- Creativity is interesting as organizations strive to develop more innovative cultures. It is also a top soft skill organizations are looking for in OnWork study "Soft Skills: Evidence from 50.000+ job ads."
- Organizations should verify through data which soft skills they value in their critical people decisions and ultimately replicate in their leadership.

Soft Skills: Evidence from 50.000+ job ads: <https://onwork.fi/wp-content/uploads/Soft-Skills-Report.pdf>

## Career Success Drivers

### Career Choices

#### *Facts*

- Individuals who make it to the top are less likely to engage in lateral moves. Instead they stay in their jobs longer before moving up.
- Working in a top-100 Finnish firm by revenue does not impact career progress. Small and large companies appear equally good at cultivating talent.

#### *Conclusions*

- Broadening skillset through lateral moves does not pay off in terms of career progress. But future labor market could value breadth and diverse experiences higher.
- Prospective career moves should de-emphasize company size: a smaller organization with a good skill or culture fit likely accelerates career more than the average large organization.
- The findings imply that it is more important to do the right things than be in the right place. To get ahead rather have “hard” responsibilities than work for the biggest firm.



# Career Step Patterns

## Key Research Questions & Approach

Sales and marketing careers steps are explored from three key perspectives.

1. How individuals climb the career ladder and what is the role of lateral moves?
2. Do internal career trajectories shape up differently than careers touching multiple firms?
3. What are the touchpoints with incumbent and external firms? And are these associated with certain career junctures?

Here the approach is deliberately descriptive.



#### *Facts*

- It takes on average 13 years of work experience and four positions before ascension to an executive position.
- Manager-level takes six years and involves one lateral move before advancement to director-level.
- Executive career trajectory is steeper. They spend nine years in professional and manager levels. Directors stay 13 years on the same levels.

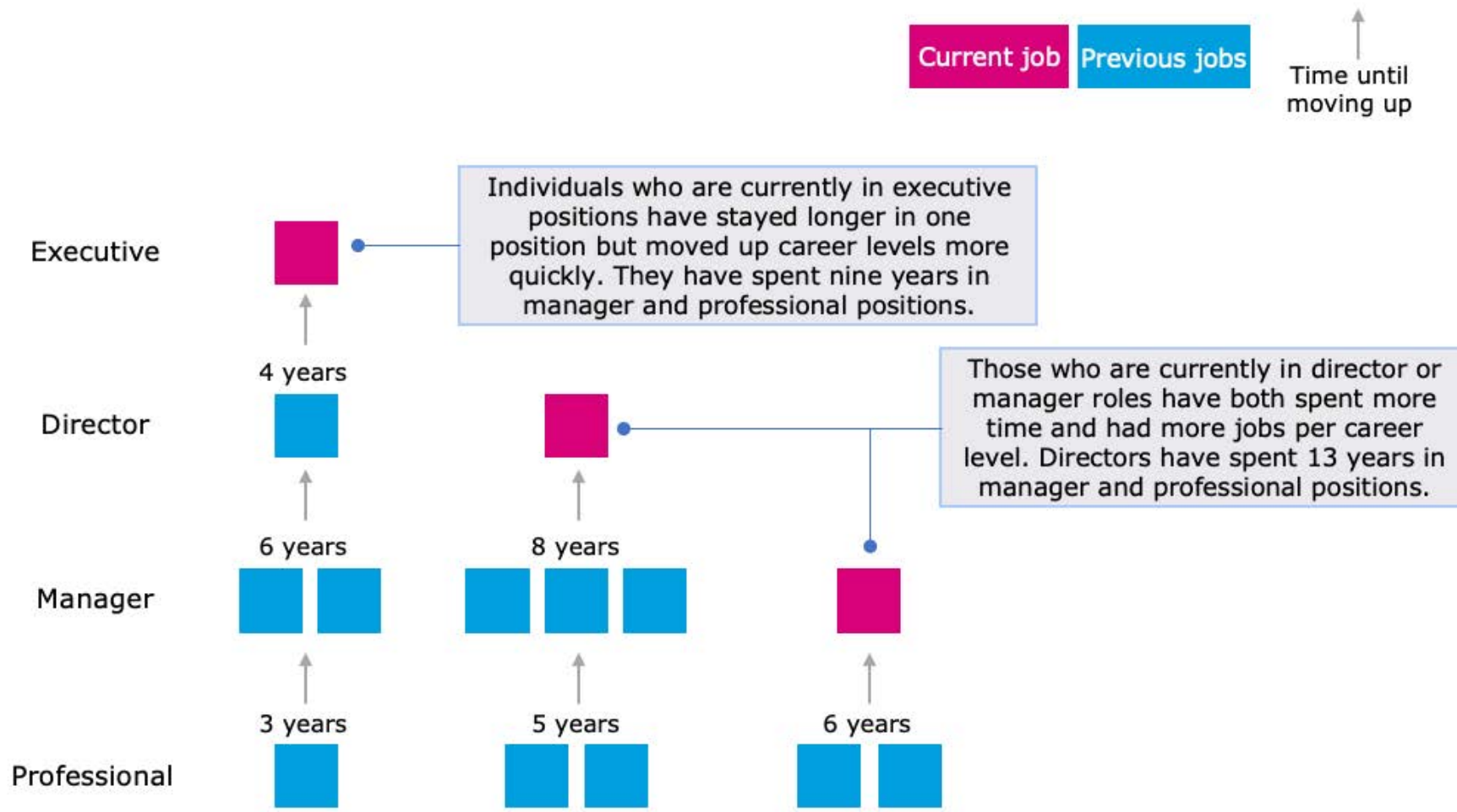
#### *Conclusions*

- First career steps are predictive of later career success. Quick early-career promotions are associated with later success.
- Executive labor market does not value lateral moves. More important to ascend fast than expand experience laterally.
- Retirement age is going up nationally. Interesting to see in the future if time spent and lateral moves at lower levels increase due to fewer executive vacancies.

# Career Step Patterns — Career Steps

## Career Trajectories Across All Individuals

Executives have faster early-career progression



#### Facts

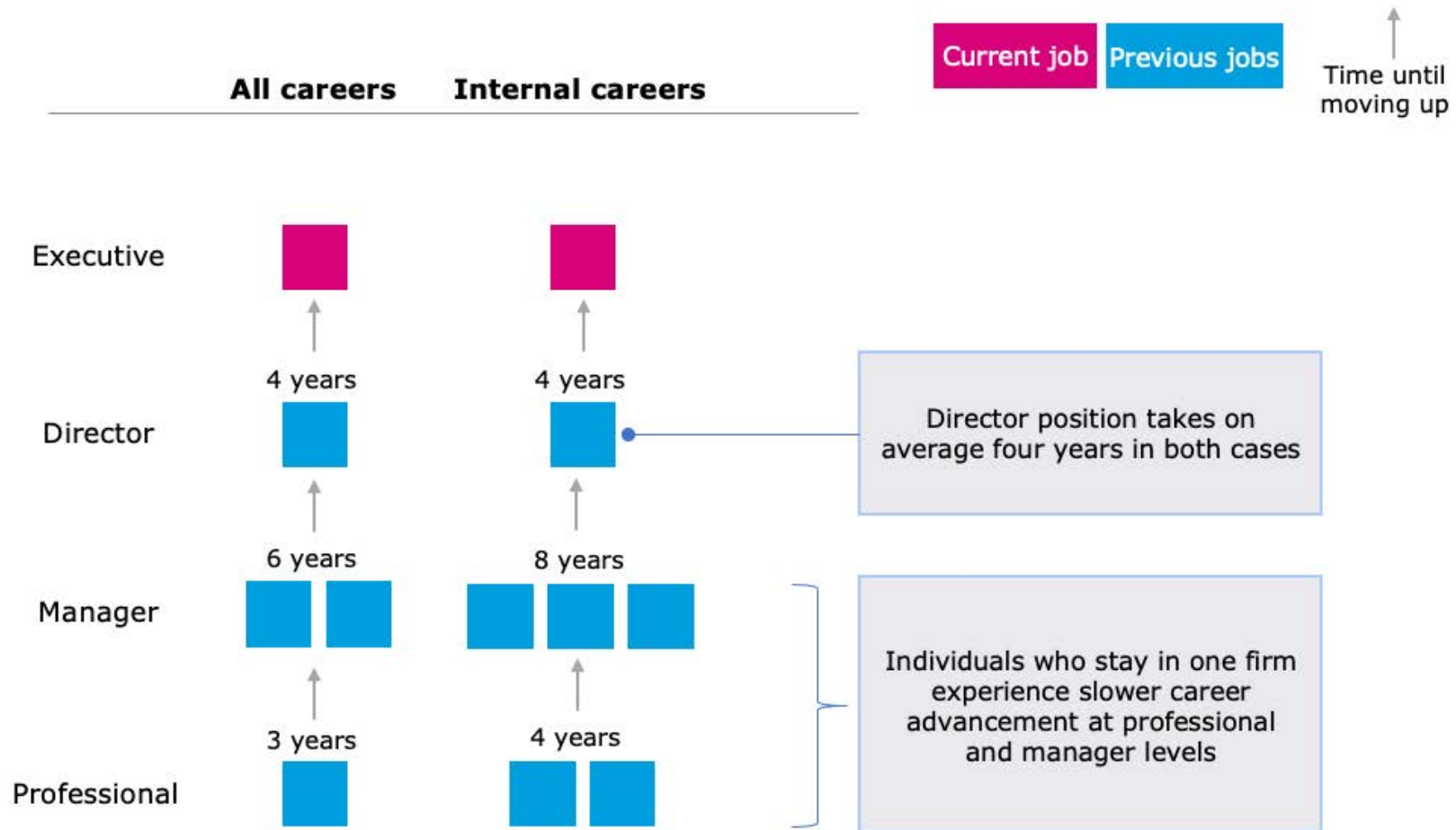
- Individuals who stay in one firm experience slower career advancement. It takes on average 16 years and six non-executive positions to reach executive-level.
- Internal careers involve lateral moves at both professional- and manager-levels.
- Director level takes four years aligning with firm-switchers.
- The clear difference between a “normal” and a purely internal career is the time spent in the professional and managerial positions.

#### Conclusions

- Home-grown talent needs more experience to reach executive-level which is striking and counterintuitive.
- Internally grown talent has 16 years’ worth of verifiable results, performance reviews and talent evaluations behind in their company. Hence there should be little ambiguity around their growth potential.
- Individuals who move between firms have in total 13 years and much less in their incumbent firm at the time they are moving to an executive position.

# Career Step Patterns — Internally Developed Career Trajectories Within Firms

Internal career progression is markedly slower





#### Facts

- In sales and marketing at manager and above levels almost 60% are hired from outside and only around 40% promoted from within. This reflects a clear “buy” rather than “build” orientation.
- Directors are three times more likely to raise to executive level by leaving their incumbent firm. 7% of transitions at the director-level are internal while 21% are external “promotions”.
- Tenure-at-exit varies significantly across levels. Managers who turn over have spend roughly six years in the company they are departing from. At executive level this figure is 11 years.

#### Conclusions

- “Buy or build” is fundamental to any people strategy. It cuts through every people domain: how people are hired, developed, rewarded, and retained.
- The data here align with our experience that Finnish organizations tend to emphasize “buy” over “build”. This is in a clear contrast to the U.S. where home-grown talent is valued in promotion decisions especially at the higher organization levels.
- Directors in sales and marketing are case in point. They tend to get promoted by switching firms. This pattern is likely to substantially decrease career incentives among directors and even below.

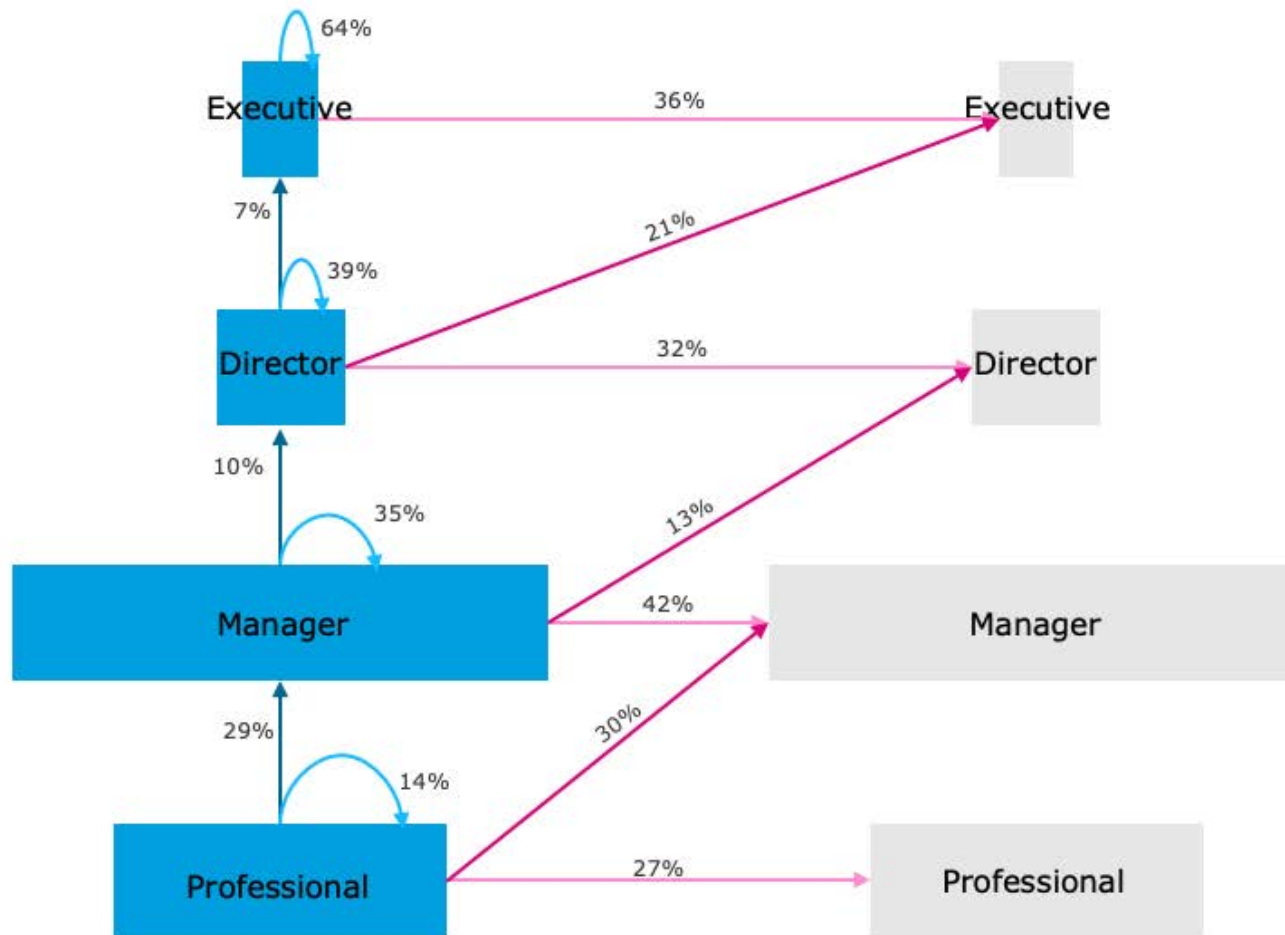
# Career Step Patterns — External Touchpoints

## Career Flows Within and Across Firms

Most upward moves at the director level involve a firm change

**Incumbent firm**

**External firm**



- Internal upward
- Internal lateral
- External upward
- External lateral

Flows sum to 100% per level

# Emerging Capabilities, Soft Skills, and Personas



## Key Research Questions & Approach

- We want to understand through data which capabilities are emerging to better grasp the changing sales and marketing landscape.
- How emerging capabilities like analytics, customer experience, and sustainability vary across key dimensions like generation?
- Are there soft skill differences between sales and marketing?
- Do generations give rise to personas with varying soft skill profiles?



## Emerging Capabilities

### *Approach*

- We analyzed emerging capabilities by going through positions listed in the career profile. Knowing the starting year in the position we mapped their evolution over time.
- We focused on analytics, sustainability and customer experience as these are top-of-mind across many leading organizations globally.
- Based on our data they have drastically gained traction in the recent decade in the Finnish sales and marketing context.
- One caveat is important to note. It is evident that some of the patterns reflect certain terms becoming trendy and replacing other, less nifty ones. As a result we expect our findings to reflect the upper-bound development.

## Emerging Capabilities

### Analytics

#### Facts

- Overall only 5% in sales and marketing have analytics capabilities.
- In marketing 6% have analytics capabilities. In sales the figure is 4%.
- Among age 50+ the sales and marketing figure stands at 3%.
- Age 40 is a clear demarcation line. Among millennials 12% have analytics capabilities.
- Positions with analytics mentioned have multiplied in recent years, from 1% with start year 2005 – 09 to 8% in 2015 – 19.

#### Conclusions

- Analytics is fundamentally changing business models, but the requisite talent is in short supply.
- The pool with substantial management experience plus analytics capabilities is small.
- A trade-off between long experience and analytics capabilities is reality today.
- Over time the analytics-savvy population will grow markedly as younger generations enter the workforce.
- Assuming these trends continue, by 2025 15% of positions might touch analytics.





## Emerging Capabilities

### Customer Experience

#### *Facts*

- Customer experience shows a deep generational divide in sales and marketing. Among millennials its share is 10%. Gen X and above figure stands at 4%.
- Customer experience has seen rapid growth in recent years.
- Around 9% of positions which have started in 2015 or later mention customer experience. This is a significant increase from the decade before.

#### *Conclusions*

- Organizations are changing in how they interact with customers, resulting in strong demand for CX talent.
- Customer experience capabilities were nascent until very recently but now are quickly becoming more abundant.
- The pool with substantial management experience combined with customer experience capability is small.

## Emerging Capabilities

### Sustainability

#### *Facts*

- Sustainability has gained ground since the early 2000s in sales and marketing.
- In 2005 – 09 it was mentioned in 2% of positions, but then doubled in the following five years.
- The rapid growth has not continued in the 2015 – 19 positions.
- Millennials are much more likely to have sustainability capability than older generations.

#### *Conclusions*

- Organizations worldwide have brought sustainability front and center. It has invariably created demand for expertise in this area.
- At least our data suggest that the fastest growth period of sustainability is over.
- Younger generations will over time make sustainability more abundant in the sales and marketing talent marketplace.

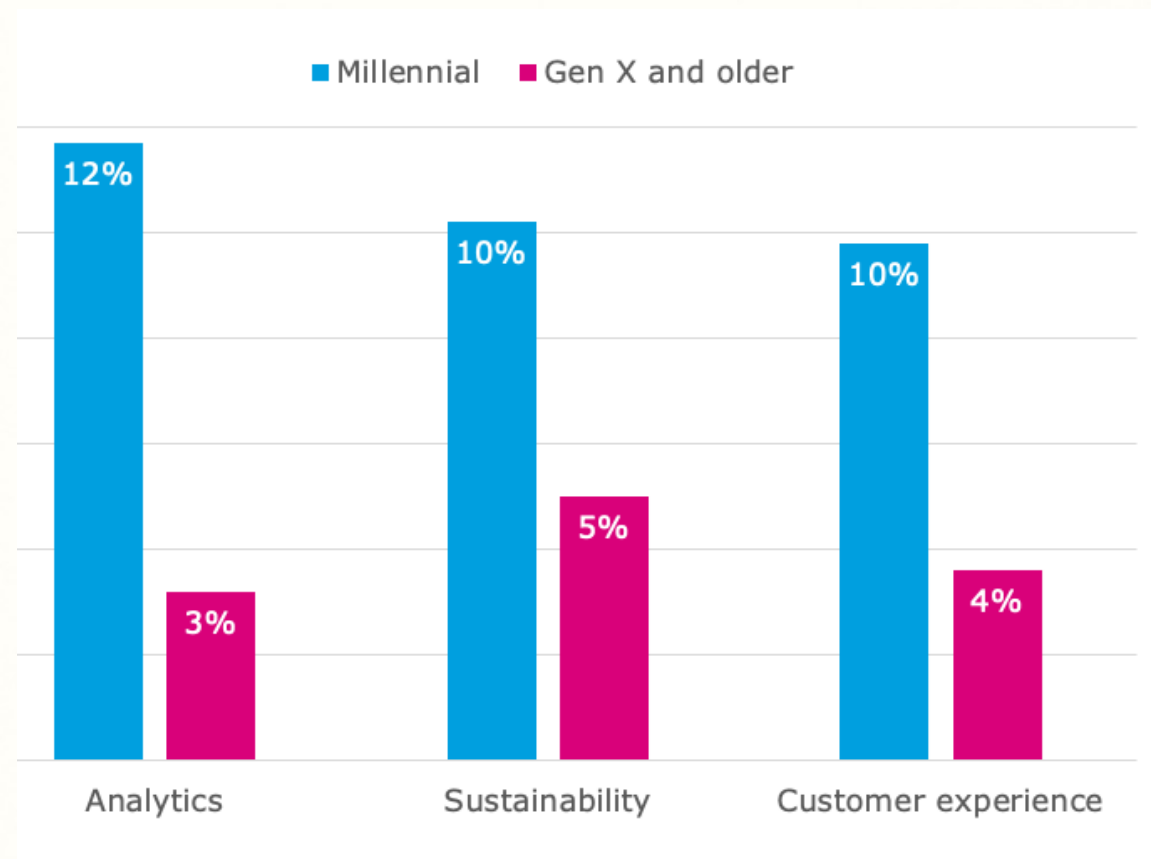


## Emerging Capabilities — Millennials vs. Gen X and Older

### Generational Differences in Emerging Capabilities



### Emerging skills are much more prevalent among millennials







## Soft Skills and Personas

### Facts

- We observed minor divergence between sales and marketing soft skill profiles.
- Social Skills and Networking and Thinking are stronger among marketing than sales.
- Organized is higher in sales.
- Marketing is clearly higher in Creativity.
- Generations have clearly distinct personas.
- Millennials overall emphasize soft skills more, Independent and Social Skills and Networking standing out.
- Gen X and older are more technical and product-oriented.

### Conclusions

- Substantial overlap in soft skills between sales and marketing implies that individuals should be quite mobile between the two domains at least from this lens.
- The generational shift in personas is clear. This will have profound implications on organizations and leadership in the coming decades.
- Organizations should verify through data their personas and how they fit the future business environment to inform critical talent planning decisions.

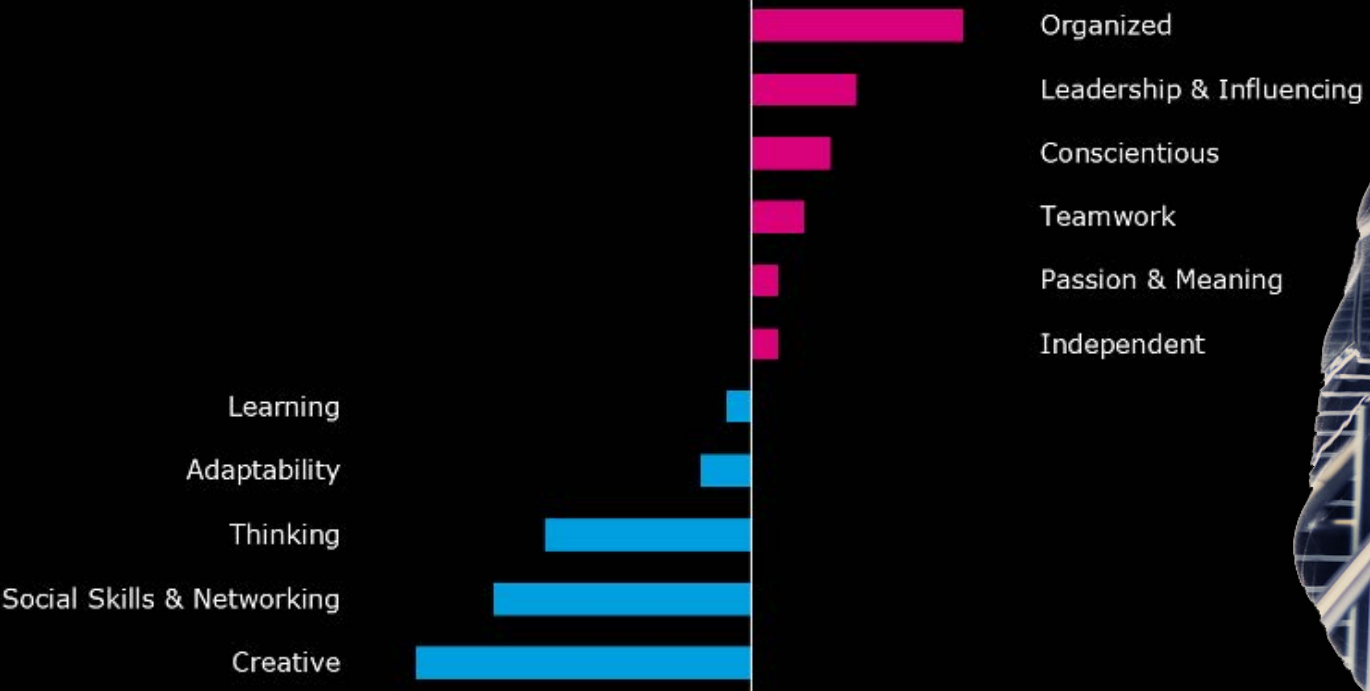
# Soft Skills — Sales and Marketing

## Soft Skills Profiles

Sales and marketing soft skill profiles vary somewhat

More common in Marketing

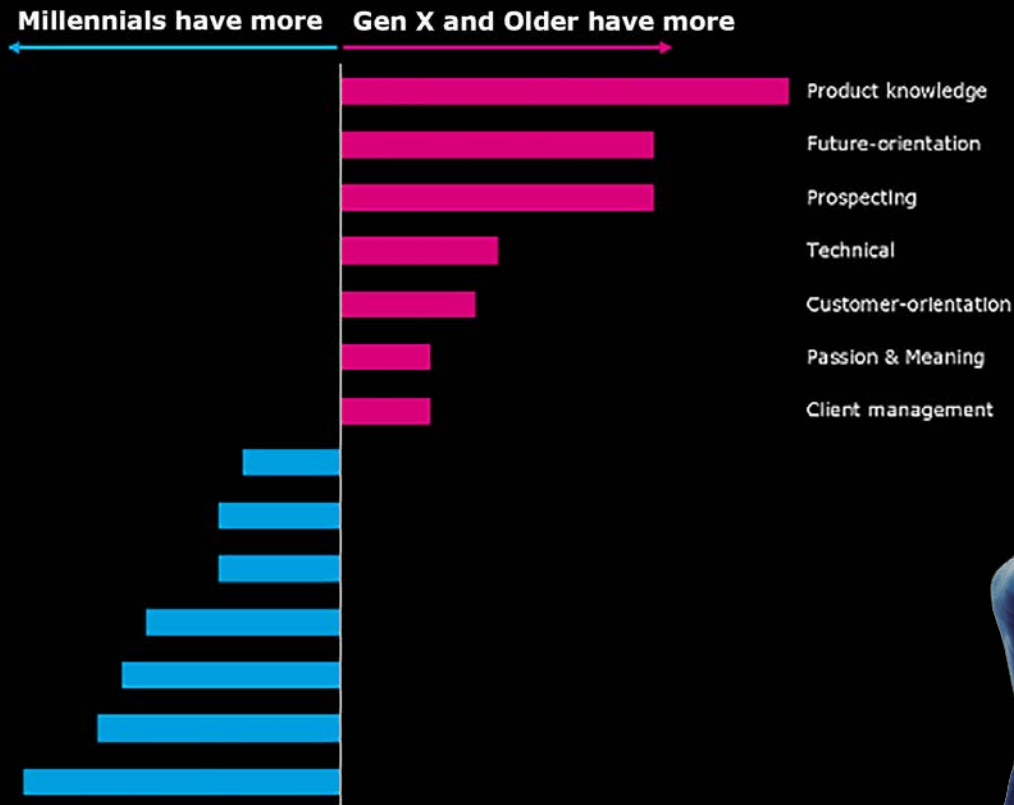
More common in Sales



# Personas — Millennials vs. Gen X and Older

## Generational Personas

Millennial personas are markedly distinct from older generations



# To attract, enhance and promote sales and marketing related talent — Company Level

## Leadership culture

Develop your employer brand and make inclusive leadership culture a strategic focus area

Increase importance of business and market landscape awareness to ensure organizational success and develop further leadership practices

## Talent management

Establish systems and processes to attract, develop, engage and retain talented individuals inclusively; utilize predictive analytics to enhance decision making

Create a work environment where talented people can realize their full potential

## Succession planning

Establish effective succession planning process and practices backed-up by sound analytics; ensure that internal candidates develop their skills and knowledge accordingly

Highlight the importance of proactive succession planning with broad qualification for leadership level positions' nominations



# To succeed in sales and marketing related roles — Individual Level

## Business savvy

Company, industry and market landscape insight is essential to all marketers and sales leaders regardless of the position and industry sector

Career stage defines the level of competence

Gather proactively business insight and express your willingness to take over career-advancing responsibilities and roles

## Function specific competences

Broaden your skillset by developing further the technical skills required in sales and/or marketing or specially in your profession

Overall, at the early career stages explore areas of specialization and at the latter career stages as an enabler to enhance your team and people skills and knowledge

## Soft skills

Effectively contribute to the achievement of business goals by developing an understanding on people and leadership practices that are relevant to all positions across industries

As a professional invest daily in developing your soft skills —  
As a leader utilize your skills to make an impact and develop competences in your team and across the company.





Boyden has been named a Top 10 Best Executive Recruiting Firm by Forbes, and ranks among the top 15 largest global retained search firms in the world. Our reputation is reinforced with each successful engagement.

We are trusted advisors specializing in executive search, interim management and leadership consulting for a diverse client base spanning startups, SMEs, multinationals, and a broad range of ownership structures, both private and public.

A vast global footprint, 70+ offices in over 45+ countries, enables us to provide personal service at the local level, develop long-term relationships, and act as advisors and partners to our clients.

**Boyden Oy**  
Eteläranta 14, 4th floor  
00130 Helsinki  
Finland



**OnWork partners with organizations to help turn their people into a competitive advantage. We are deeply experienced with a proven track record. Our work spans organizations in different stages of life cycle. We mix our Finnish roots with substantial international experience.**

**We leverage our deep experience, system thinking and solid frameworks. Our analytic capabilities are top-notch. We have delivered cutting-edge work for leading Nordic and Fortune 500 firms.**

**We are nimble and pragmatic. Our experienced team works closely with senior leadership. We always strive for a lasting impact.**

**Onwork Oy  
Lönrotinkatu 5  
00120 Helsinki  
Finland**

# The team behind the Sales & Marketing Talent Landscape Study



**Carita Lahti**

Managing Partner  
Boyden Finland



**Jan Gustafsson**

Managing Partner  
Boyden Finland

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OnWork



**Kimmo Sollo**

Senior Partner  
OnWork



**Tatu Westling**

Partner  
OnWork



**Paula Hyssy**

Associate  
OnWork



## Appendix 1 — Data

### *Data:*

The data are based on 1730 anonymized sales and marketing CVs in Boyden's Finnish database. Only English language CVs are included in the data. CV data are self-reported. In cases where employer organization is not a top-500 firm, the employer remains unknown. To alleviate any potential issues raising from this missing data, we rely on a subset of individuals who have worked in top-500 firms throughout their careers. This smaller dataset is used only for analysis of external career moves in the "Career step pattern" section.

### *Data processing:*

The unstructured CVs are turned to a structured and analyzable dataset by OnWork. All positions in the CVs are identified and hence the data have multiple rows per individual, each representing a position. The final longitudinal data have 8782 rows in total. Data elements such as soft skills and responsibilities are extracted using keyword matching against dedicated dictionaries. Job titles are matched using O\*NET, an occupational database developed by the U.S. Department of Labor. Data processing is conducted in R.

## Appendix 2 — Methods

### *Descriptive analysis:*

Most descriptive analyses use standard methods in this type of work. During the analysis process we used various other methods, for instance topic modelling (LDA). It is a machine learning technique to classify text content.

### *Statistical analysis:*

Logistic regression analysis is used to isolate the key drivers of career success. Reported findings are statistically significant at the 10% level. The observed patterns are not necessarily causal. For instance, education correlates with smarts (not included in the statistical model) which is known to be conducive to higher job performance. Hence our model likely overstates the impact of education. Further, no model can perfectly predict career success – far from it. Range of unobserved factors and sheer luck play a big role too. We also miss potentially important variables. For example, international work experience is difficult to extract and would result in many false positives.

## Appendix 3 — Soft skill definitions

To comprehensively capture soft skills, OnWork has built an extensive dictionary of around 650 key words and phrases. This dictionary is drawn from three sources: the European Commission's Skills and Competencies framework; the European Dictionary of Skills and Competencies; and commonly occurring words and phrases. The dictionary was then categorized into 11 key soft skills described below.

- **Adaptability:** Succeeding in a dynamic environment; dealing with pressure and uncertainty; handling stress; fast-moving
- **Conscientiousness:** Being careful and meticulous; a desire to do one's work or duty well and thoroughly
- **Creative:** Innovative, curious, open-minded
- **Independent:** Self-starter, confident, proactive, self-motivated
- **Leadership & Influencing:** Ability to manage, develop, and motivate others; persuade others
- **Learning:** Self-development and growth through education, training, or experiences
- **Organized:** Ability to multi-task, plan, and prioritize
- **Passion & Meaning:** Enthusiastic, energetic, motivated; a desire to make an impact and contribute to meaningful work
- **Social Skills & Networking:** Communication and interpersonal skills and traits; stakeholder management
- **Teamwork:** Ability to work well and cooperate with others; share knowledge with team members
- **Thinking:** Analytical, cognitive and strategic skills; using logical reasoning and analysis