



Salesperson Adaptability and Career Sustainability in the Era of Artificial Intelligence: A Critical Review of Sales Task and Role Transformation

Damar Kristanto¹, Vivi Rodliyatzulfa^{2*}, Edwin Fiatiano³

^{1,2,3} Faculty Of Vocational Studies, Universitas Airlangga

* Penulis Korespondensi: rodliyatzulfa@vokasi.unair.ac.id

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Abstract: Artificial intelligence (AI) and digital transformation are reshaping sales tasks, roles, and competency requirements, raising questions about how salespeople adapt and whether such adaptation supports career sustainability. This study examines the relationship between technological transformation, salesperson adaptability, task and role transformation, and career sustainability in the AI era. A Critical Literature Review (CLR) was conducted on 48 scholarly articles, comprising 30 studies on salesperson adaptability and 18 on sales career sustainability. The analysis combined proposition development, cross-examination of the two literature groups, and critical synthesis across individual, job/role, and career/profession levels. The findings indicate that AI is better understood as driving task transformation and redistribution rather than direct salesperson replacement. Adaptability is supported by resilience, change agility, technology readiness, learning, and psychological resources, while technology may also generate job demands through technostress, technological uncertainty, and job insecurity. Adaptation further contributes to role transformation toward consultative selling, relationship management, complex problem solving, and value co-creation. However, direct evidence linking salesperson adaptability to career sustainability remains limited. Career sustainability therefore extends beyond job retention to encompass employability, professional relevance, well-being, and the capacity to maintain professional value as work structures evolve. The findings position adaptability as both adaptive protection and adaptive transformation in sustaining the salesperson profession in the AI era.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence; Salesperson Adaptability; Career Sustainability; Task Transformation; Human-AI Collaboration; Sales Transformation.



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INTRODUCTION

Artificial intelligence (AI), digitalization, big data analytics, automation, and related technologies are fundamentally reshaping the organizations design jobs, execute business processes, and create customer value. Beyond productivity enhancement, these technologies reconfigure job structures, task configurations, competency requirements, and the boundaries between human and technology-performed activities. In sales, digital technologies and AI are increasingly integrated into core activities, including customer

information analysis, pricing, recommendation generation, proposal development, and customer interaction. These developments are transforming the configuration of the salesperson profession, particularly by redefining task allocation, role boundaries, and the capabilities required to sustain professional relevance. The increasing integration of AI into sales work is particularly consequential because AI can automate not only routine activities but also selected knowledge-intensive and decision-making tasks. Karlinsky-Shichor and Netzer (2024) show that machine-learning models can enhance B2B pricing decisions, while salespeople retain advantages when dealing with unusual or complex quotations. This finding suggests that the future of sales will increasingly rely on effective human-AI collaboration rather than human-machine substitution. Similarly, Elhajjar et al. (2024) show that digital technologies and AI increasingly automate both routine and cognitively demanding sales activities, while Chang (2022) identifies the growing use of AI in order handling, information processing, prospecting, and initial customer contact. Consistent with this trend, the McKinsey Global Institute projects a 13% decline in employment demand in customer service and sales between 2022 and 2030 under an accelerated automation scenario. These developments suggest that technological disruption is more appropriately understood as a process of work restructuring than occupational replacement.

Accordingly, the emerging configuration of sales work is increasingly characterized by human-AI complementarity rather than complete substitution. AI can enhance efficiency, consistency, analytical capability, and multitasking, whereas salespeople retain advantages in relationship building, adaptive creativity, contextual judgment, and ethical decision-making (Pappas et al., 2023). McClure et al. (2024) similarly conceptualize AI as a technology capable of both automating and transforming sales activities. Karlinsky-Shichor and Netzer (2024) further demonstrate that although machine-learning recommendations outperform salespeople in many pricing situations, salespeople perform better in complex quotations, with hybrid allocation between AI and salespeople producing higher profitability than either operating independently. Consequently, salespeople are increasingly expected to shift toward consultative selling, value co-creation, customer development, relationship management, and complex problem solving.

This transformation, however, raises a fundamental issue of adaptability. As sales tasks, competencies, and role boundaries evolve, salespeople must continuously modify their behaviors, skills, and work practices in response to technological, organizational, and customer-related changes. Hamid (2022) demonstrates that technology readiness is positively associated with adaptive performance, with job meaningfulness mediating and proactive personality strengthening this relationship. In sales context, Hall et al. (2022) found that AI-feedback-rich environments and feedback orientation enhance perceptions of AI-feedback accuracy, which subsequently increase AI-feedback use and adaptive selling, with adaptive selling associated with organizational commitment and sales performance. Nevertheless, these effects do not necessarily extend to job satisfaction, indicating that technological adaptation may improve performance without simultaneously enhancing employee well-being.

The implications of these changes extend beyond immediate performance to career and professional sustainability. In an AI-driven sales environment, career sustainability

cannot be assessed solely in terms of retaining one's current job but must encompass employability, career mobility, professional relevance, job security, well-being, and the capacity to remain valuable as work structures evolve. Zhao et al. (2022) demonstrate that career adaptability contributes to sustainable employment, while proactive personality, career identity, and thriving at work strengthen this process. From a Job Demands–Resources perspective, technology uncertainty may function as a job demand that increases technostress and undermines well-being, whereas skill flexibility can operate as a personal resource that facilitates adaptation to technological change (Liu et al., 2023). Thus, adaptability should not be assumed to automatically generate sustainable outcomes, rather, it may simultaneously represent a resource for employability and a response to increasing demands for continuous skill renewal. Wang et al. (2026) reinforce this view by showing that resilience supports salesperson ambidexterity through adaptive and consultative selling in complex B2B contexts.

The implications of these changes extend beyond immediate performance to career and professional sustainability. In an AI-driven sales environment, career sustainability cannot be assessed solely in terms of retaining one's current job but must encompass employability, career mobility, professional relevance, job security, well-being, and the capacity to remain valuable as work structures evolve. Zhao et al. (2022) demonstrate that career adaptability contributes to sustainable employment, while proactive personality, career identity, and thriving at work strengthen this process. Similarly, perceived employability is negatively associated with job insecurity, whereas emotional exhaustion is positively associated with insecurity, highlighting the importance of organizational communication and employee involvement in sustaining careers (Saeed et al., 2023). These findings indicate that sustainable careers require not only the capacity to adapt but also organizational and psychological conditions that support well-being. This is particularly relevant in sales because the competencies required for professional relevance are themselves changing.

A critical issue in the existing literature is that salesperson adaptability and career sustainability have largely developed as separate streams. Research on adaptability tends to focus on adaptive selling, technology adoption, resilience, performance, and change agility. In contrast, career sustainability research emphasizes employability, job security, well-being, career development, and professional continuity. The two streams have not yet been sufficiently integrated to explain whether adaptability actually makes the salesperson profession more sustainable in the AI era. This gap is particularly important because AI is changing not only the technologies used by salespeople but also the competencies that define the profession. Elhajjar et al. (2024) identify increasing demand for combinations of technical and interpersonal capabilities, while Kovács and Zarándné (2022) emphasize flexibility, communication, interpersonal skills, analytical capability, problem solving, and digital competence. Similarly, generative AI can support copywriting, ideation, competitive analysis, and sales proposal development, while human judgment remains necessary to contextualize and refine AI-generated outputs (Grewal et al., 2025).

Nevertheless, adaptability may generate a paradox of sustainability. Salespeople adapt to AI partly to preserve their professional relevance, yet successful adaptation may

simultaneously facilitate the automation and redistribution of traditional sales tasks. Thus, adaptability may protect employability while contributing to the transformation of the occupation itself. This possibility indicates that career sustainability should not be equated with maintaining existing job configurations. Rather, it concerns the capacity of salespeople to sustain professional value as tasks, competencies, and role boundaries are continuously redefined. This perspective is consistent with Corsaro and Maggioni (2022), who conceptualize sales transformation as an interconnected process involving people, digitalization, integration, and acceleration. Salespeople are consequently not merely technology users but participants in a broader transformation involving technology, organizational processes, customer relationships, and professional identities.

Career sustainability consequently becomes a multidimensional issue. Dugan et al., (2023) conceptualize salesperson well-being should be considered across individual, organizational, and societal dimensions (Dugan et al., 2023), while the relatively limited integration of sustainability into professional selling further underscores the need to examine the long-term implications of technological transformation (Gabler et al., 2023). As salespeople serve as a critical link between organizations and customers, their ability to create and communicate value remains strategically important. Career sustainability, therefore, concerns not merely whether salespeople remain employed, but whether they can continue to generate professional value that is not easily commodified or automated.

A critical examination of the extant literature highlights a fundamental research problem concerning the relationship between technological transformation, salesperson adaptability, and career sustainability. First, research on salesperson adaptability predominantly examines adaptive selling, technology adoption, organizational commitment, or sales effectiveness as primary outcomes. Although Hall et al. (2022), demonstrate links between adaptive selling, organizational commitment, and sales performance, the relationship between adaptability and long-term career sustainability remains unclear. Second, career sustainability and employability research generally examines changing employment conditions at a broader level and provides limited insight into AI-driven transformation within sales. Zhao et al. (2022) and Chen et al. (2023) establish relationships between career adaptability, sustainable employment, career exploration, and job-search outcomes, they do not explain how adaptability operates when AI fundamentally redistributes sales tasks. Third, existing research tends to imply that adaptation produces positive outcomes, despite evidence that technological uncertainty and technostress may simultaneously increase job demands (Liu et al., 2023). Fourth, successful adaptation may itself accelerate occupational transformation by enabling greater integration of AI into sales work. The central issue, therefore, is not simply whether salespeople can adapt to AI, but whether and under what conditions such adaptation enables them to sustain professional value, well-being, and career continuity while the profession itself is being reconfigured.

Accordingly, this study integrates three previously fragmented levels of analysis: (1) Technology and task transformation, (2) Salesperson adaptability and (3) Career and professional sustainability. Building on this integrated perspective, the study addresses four research questions:

- RQ1.** How do AI and digital technologies transform the tasks, roles, and competencies required of salespeople?
- RQ2.** How do salespeople adapt to changes in technological, customer, and organizational environments?
- RQ3.** Does salesperson adaptability contribute to career and professional sustainability, or does it primarily facilitate the transformation and redefinition of the salesperson profession?
- RQ4.** If the salesperson profession remains viable in the AI era, which adaptive capabilities and forms of professional development are increasingly important?

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a Critical Literature Review (CLR) to critically examine research on the future of the salesperson profession in the context of AI, digital transformation, salesperson adaptability, and career/professional sustainability. A critical review seeks to identify assumptions, reconcile divergent findings, evaluate relationships among constructs, and develop a conceptual interpretation of a research problem. Grant and Booth (2009) position critical reviews as an approach capable of evaluating literature while generating conceptual synthesis, whereas Snyder (2019) emphasizes that literature review can function as a research methodology when literature selection, analysis, and synthesis are conducted systematically and transparently.

CLR is particularly appropriate because the future of sales cannot be adequately explained by counting studies showing that AI can automate sales activities. The relevant issue spans multiple analytical levels, technological change at the task level, changes in salesperson roles and jobs, individual adaptability, and consequences for career and professional sustainability. The review therefore does not assume either that automation will replace salespeople or that adaptability will automatically secure their future. Both possibilities are treated as propositions requiring critical examination. The review follows four stages:

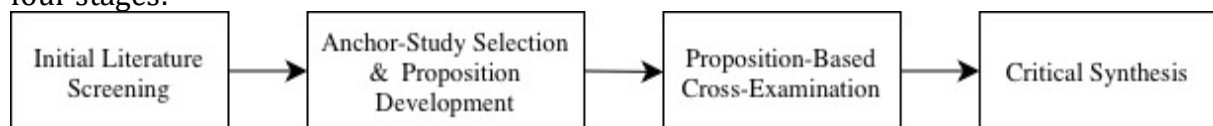


Figure 1. Four-Stage Analytical Framework for the Critical Literature Review

The review is based on a bounded corpus of 48 scholarly articles, comprising two complementary literature groups. Group 1 consists of 18 articles addressing sales career sustainability, including career sustainability, employability, job security, well-being, career adaptability, professional sustainability, and the future of the sales profession. Group 2 consists of 30 articles addressing salesperson adaptability, including adaptive selling, resilience, change agility, technology adoption, digital transformation, AI-enabled selling, consultative selling, human-AI collaboration, and salesperson role transformation. These two groups are not treated as independent bodies of literature. Rather, Group 2 provides evidence concerning the processes and mechanisms through which salespeople respond to technological and environmental change, whereas Group 1 is used to examine the broader career and professional implications of such adaptation. The corpus therefore serves as an

initial evidence base for critical synthesis rather than as an exhaustive representation of all literature on AI, sales, adaptability, or career sustainability.

Tabel 1. Corpus Literature

Corpus	Number	focus	Conceptual Function
Grup 2	30 articles	Salesperson Adaptability	Process / mechanism
Grup 1	18 articles	Sales Career Sustainability	Outcome / destination
Total	48 articles	Masa depan profesi salesperson	Critical synthesis

Source: Author's synthesis.

Stage I: Initial Literature Screening

The first stage involved establishing a bounded literature corpus comprising 48 scholarly articles. Corpus serves as a bounded initial evidence base rather than an exhaustive representation of all literature on AI, sales, adaptability, and career sustainability. Screening considers titles, abstracts, keywords, research objectives, major constructs, and principal findings. Articles are retained when they make substantive contributions to at least one of the following domains: (1) technological change in sales, (2) salesperson adaptability, (3) task, role, and competency transformation, (4) resilience and change agility, (5) technology adoption and human-AI collaboration, (6) employability and career adaptability, (7) job security, job insecurity and well-being, or (7) the future of the sales profession. The screening process is concept-driven rather than based solely on keyword matching. Articles that mention AI or adaptability without substantive relevance to sales work or career outcomes are not treated as core evidence.

To avoid inappropriate extrapolation across analytical levels, the literature is classified into three interconnected levels:

Tabel 2. Analytical Levels

Level	Description	Main Constructs	Analytical Question
Individual / Person Level	This level encompasses the individual capabilities and resources that enable salespeople to respond to and adapt to changing conditions.	Resilience, self-efficacy, grit, psychological capital, proactive personality, learning orientation, skill flexibility, technology readiness, emotional capability, career adaptability.	How do salespeople adapt to change?
Level 2: Job / Role Level	This level captures changes in sales activities and how salespeople perform their roles as a consequence of technological transformation and adaptation.	Adaptive selling, consultative selling, digital selling, AI-assisted selling, CRM utilization, social media selling, AI feedback, pricing decision, task automation, human-AI collaboration, ambidextrous selling.	How do technology and adaptation transform sales work?



Level 3: Career / Profession Level	This level examines the implications of technological and occupational changes for the sustainability and continued relevance of the salesperson career and profession.	employability, job security, career mobility, professional relevance, well-being, career sustainability, professional identity	What are the implications for career and professional sustainability?
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Source: Author's synthesis.

Stage II: Selection of Anchor Studies and Development of Initial Propositions

The second stage involves anchor-study selection and proposition development. Anchor studies are identified from the 30 articles in Group 2 based on their direct relevance to the research problem, conceptual clarity, empirical strength, and ability to explain relationships among technology, adaptability, role transformation, and professional outcomes. Selection is not based solely on citation counts or publication year. Instead, anchor studies are used as conceptual starting points for developing propositions that can subsequently be examined against the broader literature.

Tabel 3. Propositions

Proposisi	Definition	Conceptual Argument
P1 - Task Transformation Proposition	The impact of AI on salespeople is more appropriately understood in terms of the transformation and redistribution of sales activities than as direct occupational replacement.	The AI and sales literature indicates that technology can assume selected sales activities, while human salespeople remain relevant for activities requiring judgment, relationship management, consultation, and complex problem solving.
P2 - Adaptive Capability Proposition	Salesperson adaptability enables individuals to respond to technological and environmental changes through behavioral adjustment, technology use, and competency development.	This proposition is examined against literature on adaptive selling, resilience, change agility, technology adoption, skill flexibility, and proactive behavior to determine how these capabilities facilitate responses to changing sales environments.
P3 - Adaptive Sustainability Proposition	Salesperson adaptability may contribute to career sustainability by strengthening employability, professional relevance, and the capacity to navigate changing work structures.	Adaptability may support sustainability when it enables salespeople to develop capabilities that remain relevant to evolving job requirements and labor-market demands. However, the direct relationship between salesperson adaptability and career sustainability remains insufficiently established in the existing literature.



P4 - Adaptive Transformation Proposition	Adaptation to AI may not only support the continuity of the salesperson profession but also transform its task structure, role boundaries, and defining competencies.	As salespeople increasingly integrate AI into their work, some traditional activities may be automated or redistributed, while greater emphasis may be placed on consultative, relational, value-creating, and judgment-intensive activities. Adaptation may therefore sustain the profession through role transformation rather than through the preservation of traditional sales tasks.
P5 - Adaptive Burden Proposition	Adaptability does not necessarily result in sustainability because technological change may simultaneously generate job demands, including technostress, role ambiguity, job insecurity, and continuous skill-renewal requirements.	The literature on technology uncertainty suggests that adaptability may function as a personal resource, while technological change may simultaneously constitute a job demand. Skill flexibility can help individuals cope with technological change, whereas technological uncertainty and changing job characteristics may increase technostress and adversely affect well-being.

Source: Author's synthesis.

Stage III: Proposition-Based Cross-Examination

The third stage involves proposition-based cross-examination. Each proposition is examined against evidence from Group 2 and subsequently Group 1 using a proposition-driven approach to supplementary literature searching. Evidence is classified as:

1. Supporting - reinforces the proposition.
2. Qualifying - supports the proposition with specific conditions or limitations.
3. Challenging/Contradicting - challenges or contradicts the proposition.
4. Extending - introduces additional mechanisms, conditions, or concepts.

Stage IV: Critical Synthesis

The final stage integrates cross-examination evidence through four analytical levels: (1) technological change, (2) adaptation, (3) role reconfiguration, and (4) career/professional sustainability. This synthesis examines how AI-driven transformation and salesperson adaptability reshape tasks, competencies, roles, and career sustainability.

This CLR has several limitations. The bounded corpus limits the findings to a conceptual explanation rather than prevalence or effect-size estimates. Researcher judgment in anchor-study selection and proposition interpretation is mitigated through transparent criteria and evidence classification. Moreover, limited direct evidence links salesperson adaptability to career sustainability, highlighting the need for further theoretical integration. Finally, the study examines potential mechanisms of automation, augmentation,

task redistribution, role transformation, human-AI complementarity, and changing professional value rather than making deterministic predictions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The critical review of 48 articles indicates that salesperson adaptability is consistently associated with the ability to respond to environmental change, use technology, modify selling behaviors, maintain performance, and develop new capabilities. At the same time, technological transformation can generate job demands, technostress, job insecurity, task restructuring, and role redefinition. The central conceptual pathway emerging from the review is:

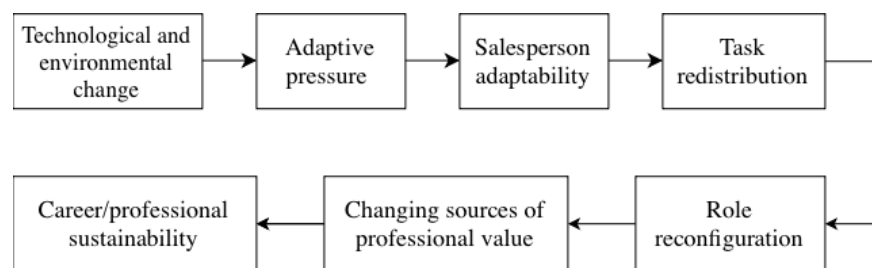


Figure 2. Conceptual Pathway

This relationship is not deterministic. Outcomes depend on task characteristics, organizational context, individual resources, technological configuration, and the nature of the sales role.

Results of the Group 2 Analysis: Salesperson Adaptability Adaptability as a Response to Environmental Change

The first finding from Group 2 indicates that salesperson adaptability is primarily conceptualized as the capacity to respond to a dynamic environment, rather than merely as the ability to use technology. Hamid (2022) demonstrates that digitalization transforms the structure and patterns of work, thereby requiring employees to develop the readiness to adjust to new work structures. Technology readiness is positively associated with adaptive performance, while proactive personality and job meaningfulness influence this relationship. Similarly, Kalra et al., (2024) show that salesperson change agility is associated with behavioral performance and, subsequently, sales performance. Based on a sample of 237 B2B salespeople, their findings indicate that change agility is positively associated with behavioral performance, which subsequently contributes to sales performance. These findings indicate that adaptability is not merely passive acceptance of change. It involves actively modifying behavior, experimenting with new approaches, and assuming responsibility for navigating changing work conditions.

Adaptability as a Psychological Capability

Adaptability is supported by various personal resources, including resilience, self-efficacy, psychological capital, persistence, proactive personality, learning orientation, and flexibility. Wang et al., (2026), based on 469 B2B salespeople, found that resilience positively influences adaptive selling, consultative selling, and salesperson ambidexterity, with adaptive and consultative selling partially mediating these relationships. Customer demandingness further functions as an important boundary condition. These findings

suggest that resilience enables salespeople not only to cope psychologically but also to expand their cognitive and behavioral repertoires in response to changing customer demands. Similarly, Ewe and Ho (2024) identified positive mindset, belief-in-oneself, and persistence as psychological capabilities supporting sustainable work performance. Continuous learning further facilitates the development of these capabilities. Thus, salesperson adaptability involves not only technical skills but also psychological resources that enable learning, experimentation, and persistence under uncertainty.

Adaptability as Technological Adaptation

Technology as an Enabler of Adaptation

The Group 2 evidence indicates that technology can function as an adaptive resource rather than merely a substitute for salespeople. Hall et al. (2022) found that AI feedback and feedback orientation enhance perceived feedback accuracy, which increases intention to use AI feedback and supports adaptive selling. Similarly, Itani et al., (2022) showed that social media and CRM facilitate knowledge creation and value co-creation, strengthening salespeople's roles as knowledge brokers and value co-creators rather than transaction-oriented performers.

Technology as a Job Demand

The findings also highlight the potentially adverse effects of technological change. Liu et al., (2023) found that perceived technology uncertainty functions as a job demand that increases technostress and reduces job satisfaction. In a two-wave study of 296 financial services employees, technology uncertainty negatively affected subjective well-being through heightened technostress. Furthermore, skill flexibility shapes this relationship. High skill flexibility can transform coproduction experiences into a job resource that develops skills relevant to future work, whereas low skill flexibility leaves coproduction primarily as a job demand.

Behavioral Adaptation to Task Transformation

A key finding from Group 2 is the shift from examining whether salespeople can adapt to understanding how sales work changes through adaptation and automation.

Redistribution of Tasks Between AI and Human Salespeople

Chang (2022) provides a conceptual basis for understanding AI-human task redistribution, arguing that their relative effectiveness depends on the sales process, transaction characteristics, relationship context, and buyer characteristics. AI is relatively advantageous in mechanistic and analytical tasks, particularly information provision, lead generation and qualification, initial contact, and routine transactions. Human salespeople retain advantages in activities requiring complex problem solving, relationship recovery, emotional, negotiation, empathy. Thus, AI adoption is better understood as task redistribution rather than direct salesperson replacement.

Table 4. Redistribusi AI dan Human Salesperson

Sales Activity	Relative Advantage
Information retrieval	AI-dominant
Lead generation/qualification	AI-dominant
Initial contact	AI-dominant
Routine transaction	Increasingly AI-dominant

Analytical processing	AI-dominant
Complex problem solving	Human-dominant
Relationship recovery	Human-dominant
Empathy/intuitive understanding	Human-dominant
Value co-creation	Increasingly human-dominant
Consultative selling	Increasingly human-dominant

Source: Adapted from Chang (2022)

Empirical Evidence of Human-Machine Hybrid

Karlinsky-Shichor and Netzer (2024) provide empirical evidence for human-machine complementarity in B2B sales. Their field experiment showed that automated price recommendations increased relative profit by 11%, while salespeople performed better on unusual or complex quotes. A counterfactual hybrid strategy, in which AI handled suitable cases and salespeople managed complex ones, generated 7.8% higher expected profit than salesperson-only decisions. These findings suggest that the future role of salespeople may depend less on performing traditional tasks and more on applying human judgment and effectively collaborating with AI.

Salesperson Role Transformation

Elhajjar et al., (2024) show that digital disruption has reshaped salesperson roles by automating routine and increasingly complex cognitive tasks through AI and big-data analytics. Based on 565 job descriptions, a survey of 380 B2B salespeople, and 33 semi-structured interviews, their findings suggest a shift in B2B sales toward new role requirements. Similarly, Pappas et al. (2023) argue that technology does not necessarily eliminate retail salespeople. AI enhances consistency, efficiency, and multitasking, while human salespeople retain advantages in customer relationships, adaptive creativity, and ethical considerations, suggesting a synergistic AI-human sales model.

Results of the Group 1 Analysis: Sales Career Sustainability

Following the analysis of Group 2, Group 1 was examined to investigate the broader consequences of salesperson adaptation. The findings indicate that career sustainability extends beyond sales performance and job retention to include employability, sustainable employment, well-being, and the ability to maintain performance amid changing conditions.

Employability as a Resource for Career Sustainability

One of the most consistent patterns identified in Group 1 is the importance of employability. Kovács and Zarándné (2022), based on 5,548 job advertisements and identified 31 categories of skills, found that digital marketing increasingly requires a combination of hard and soft skills, including flexibility, teamwork, interpersonal skills, initiative, motivation, oral communication, stress resilience, digital and technical skills, analytics, problem-solving, critical thinking, customer relationship management (CRM), and customer insights.

These findings indicate that adaptability has implications for employability when translated into market-relevant capabilities. Thus, adaptability alone is insufficient, it must be developed into competencies that enable individuals to remain employable as occupational requirements evolve.

Career Adaptability and Sustainable Employment

Zhao et al., (2022) provide a more direct link between career adaptability and sustainable employment. Their findings indicate that proactive personality positively influences career adaptability, with career identity and thriving at work functioning as mediating mechanisms. Task interdependence further moderates these relationships. They conceptualizes career adaptability as career capital that enables individuals to cope with career-related changes and supports sustainable employment. However, because the study focuses on new-generation employees rather than salespeople, its findings provide indirect theoretical support rather than direct evidence of salesperson career sustainability.

Job Security Is Not Equivalent to Career Sustainability

Saeed et al. (2023) found that perceived employability reduces perceived job insecurity, while emotional exhaustion increases it. Organizational communication and employee involvement also reduce job insecurity. Importantly, job insecurity reflects the risk of losing the current job, rather than the sustainability of an individual's broader career. Moreover, boundaryless career orientation weakens the negative relationship between job insecurity and well-being by enabling salespersons to build knowledge, experience, and professional networks across organizations.

Adaptation and Sustainable Work Performance

Group 1 shows that sustainability also involves well-being and sustained performance, beyond job retention. Ewe and Ho (2024) found that positive mindset, belief-in-oneself, and persistence support sustainable salesperson performance during disruption, reinforced by continuous learning, proactive help-seeking, and personal goal setting. Similarly, Dugan et al., (2023) conceptualize salesperson well-being through the interrelated dimensions of people, processes, and performance, highlighting the reciprocal relationship between well-being and performance.

Cross-Examination: Group 2 and Group 1

Cross-examination between the propositions derived from Group 2 and the evidence from Group 1 indicates varying levels of support.

Table 5. Cross-Examination

Proposition	Evidence	Status
P1. Task Transformation - AI changes or redistributes tasks rather than directly replacing professions	AI automates routine and analytical tasks, while human salespeople retain advantages in complex, relational, and judgment-intensive activities.	Strongly supported, with qualification
P2. Adaptive Capability - adaptive capabilities help salespeople respond to technological and environmental change	Resilience, change agility, technology readiness, learning, adaptive selling, and consultative selling consistently support adaptation.	Supported
P3. Adaptive Sustainability - adaptability enhances career sustainability	Evidence supports employability, sustainable employment, work performance, and job security, but direct evidence linking salesperson adaptability to career sustainability remains limited.	Conditionally supported

P4. Adaptive Transformation - adaptation can sustain and transform the sales profession	AI shifts sales work toward consultative, relational, value-creating, and complex roles.	Strongly supported
P5. Adaptive Burden - adaptation may create burdens and does not always enhance sustainability	Technology uncertainty, technostress, emotional exhaustion, job insecurity, and skill depreciation highlight the potential costs of adaptation.	Supported

Source: Author's synthesis.

The synthesis of the reviewed literature indicates that P1 and P4 receive the strongest support at the task and role levels, while P2 is well supported at the individual and behavioral levels. P3 requires greater qualification, as direct evidence linking salesperson adaptability to career sustainability remains limited. P5 provides an important counterweight, demonstrating that adaptation is not inherently beneficial and may also generate psychological and career-related costs

CONCLUSION

This Critical Literature Review of 48 articles generates six principal conclusions. First, the future of sales is better understood through task transformation than occupational replacement. AI increasingly performs routine, mechanical, analytical, and information-intensive activities, while humans retain relative advantages in empathy, relationship building, contextual judgment, complex problem solving, and value co-creation. Second, salesperson adaptability is a multidimensional capability that extends beyond adaptive selling, encompassing resilience, change agility, technology readiness, learning, self-efficacy, psychological capital, proactive behavior, and skill flexibility. Third, technology can function as both a resource and a demand. AI, CRM, social media, and digital tools can strengthen knowledge, adaptive selling, and performance, while technological uncertainty can generate technostress, exhaustion, and job insecurity.

Fourth, adaptation sustains the salesperson role through role transformation. The future relevance of human salespeople does not necessarily depend on retaining all traditional sales tasks, but on shifting toward activities in which humans retain a comparative advantage, such as consultative selling, complex problem solving, relationship management, value co-creation, and contextual judgment. Fifth, career sustainability extends beyond job security. It includes employability, career mobility, professional relevance, well-being, and the capacity to transition as occupational structures change. Sixth, adaptability does not automatically guarantee sustainability. Its effects are conditional on whether adaptive capabilities can be converted into market-relevant skills, employability, professional value, and career mobility, and whether adequate organizational resources are available. Without such resources, technological change may generate technostress, skill depreciation, insecurity, and exhaustion.

Overall, the literature does not support either a binary "AI replaces salespeople" narrative or the assumption that "adaptable salespeople will inevitably remain secure." Instead, salesperson adaptability has a dual function. It operates as adaptive protection, helping salespeople maintain relevance, performance, employability, and

responsiveness to change; but it also operates as adaptive transformation, reshaping tasks, role boundaries, competencies, and the very meaning of professional selling. Therefore, career sustainability in the AI era depends less on whether salespeople can preserve their existing jobs than on whether they can preserve professional value as the nature of sales work itself evolves.

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HALAMAN INI SENGAJA DIKOSONGKAN