

DIGITAL ADVENTURES / SALES × AI × LEADERSHIP

Where is your sales organisation on its AI journey?

Mario Pufahl · 11 September 2026

Why many companies overestimate their maturity

Almost every company is exploring artificial intelligence. Copilot licences have been purchased, chatbots tested and some processes automated. That often creates the impression of substantial progress. But using individual AI tools is not the same as AI transformation. Several stages separate an AI-assisted email from an intelligent sales organisation. An honest question is worth asking: how mature is your sales organisation's use of AI really?

AI maturity is not created by technology alone

Many companies judge maturity by the software they have introduced. That is too narrow. What matters is how consistently AI has been integrated into processes, decisions, leadership and collaboration. A high level of AI maturity is not demonstrated by the number of Copilot licences. It is demonstrated by better sales outcomes.

Stage 1: AI as an assistant

At the first stage, AI supports individuals with well-defined tasks: meeting summaries, email drafts, conversation preparation, CRM documentation, lead research, translations and proposal components.

Responsibility remains entirely with the person. AI can save time, improve quality and reduce administration. For many organisations, this is a useful starting point because the benefits can be measured quickly.

Stage 2: AI as an advisor

AI develops from an assistant into a thinking partner. It does not just create content; it assesses situations and offers recommendations. Examples include opportunity analysis, identifying missing stakeholders, next-best-action recommendations, account prioritisation, cross-selling and upselling opportunities, risk analysis and forecast support.

The salesperson still makes the decision, but with better information. This is where business value can increase substantially.

Stage 3: AI as a process partner

AI performs defined process steps independently: updating CRM records, standard follow-ups, gathering internal information, drafting proposals, preparing meetings, generating documents and coordinating workflows.

AI operates within explicit rules. People intervene when decisions or approvals are needed. The emphasis moves from individual productivity to scalability.

Stage 4: AI as a team of agents

Several specialised agents work together. One analyses accounts, another assesses opportunities, a third drafts proposals, a fourth monitors renewals and a fifth supports forecasts. They exchange information and coordinate defined tasks.

The salesperson becomes the orchestrator of a digital team. Instead of deciding every individual task, they guide the overall system.

Stage 5: The intelligent sales organisation

The highest stage is not complete autonomy. It is intelligent connectivity. AI supports the sales process from lead generation to long-term customer development. Sales, marketing, service and customer success draw on the same knowledge base. AI identifies opportunities, risks and actions, while leaders use current data and reliable forecasts.

People focus on relationships, trust, complex decisions and accountability. AI handles the data-intensive, repeatable work for which it is suited.

Why self-assessments are often too optimistic

In workshops, I often ask: “Which stage is your company at?” The answer is frequently “Stage 3 or 4.” A closer look may reveal licences, initial pilots and a chatbot, but unchanged processes, incomplete data, missing governance and only a few regular users. Many companies are still at stage 1. That is not a problem. Misjudging the starting point is: it creates unrealistic expectations and misplaced priorities.

How to start sensibly

The biggest mistake is trying to build fully autonomous sales immediately. A step-by-step approach is more useful. First identify tasks with a high administrative burden, then processes that are highly standardised. Specialised agents make sense once data quality, governance and acceptance are in place. Maturity develops progressively, not through a single technology change.

Three questions for your self-assessment

1. How much time does your sales team still spend on administration rather than customers?

2. Does AI already support decisions, or does it mainly produce content?
3. Would your sales organisation work in exactly the same way tomorrow if Copilot were switched off?

The more honest the answers, the clearer your actual starting point.

First published in Digital Adventures. English translation by Sales.Decoded.

[Read the original on LinkedIn](#) · sales-decoded.com/en/