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ENGINEERING THE COGNITIVE AND AFFECTIVE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE OF THE KEY CLIENTS IN B2B SELLING CONTEXTS

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ABSTRACT

Creating a positive customer experience holds profound implications for business success. Based on a qualitative approach, this study explores how salespersons and their firms in B2B contexts generate the customer experience of key clients, i.e. of customers of pivotal importance. B2B salespeople engage in practices that enhance their clients' experience the nature of which is primarily cognitive and affective. Results also show that different touchpoints in customer journey can be used and that various actors are involved to strengthen the global customer experience.

Keywords: B2B selling; Customer Experience; Key Account; Buyer-seller Interactions

PRODUCT MANAGEMENT AND SALES, POSSIBLE SYNERGIES

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to investigate possible synergies between sub-processes of product management and of sales. To identify those, the authors analyzed 146 German job advertisements to define these roles. This analysis shows major overlaps. In the process identical and related task are identified. Based on this a process is defined which serves as the basis for the literature review conducted to show which steps of the product management and selling process would benefit from a cooperation. Thereby several positive synergies are found. Consequently, involving sales in the product management process on specific sub-processes is suggested.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE SALES FUNCTION TO THE EARLY STAGES OF INNOVATION PROCESSES: EXPLORING HOW KNOWLEDGE SHARING STRUCTURES SUPPORT OR HINDER THE FLOW OF KNOWLEDGE

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ABSTRACT

Salespeople, due to their boundary-spanning role, are in a favorable position to gather unique market information (Kuester et al., 2017) and play a crucial role in sharing it to guide innovation (Ahearne et al., 2010). Despite recognizing the significant role of sales as knowledge brokers between customers and the company (van den Berg et al., 2014), there is still a lack of research on how the knowledge accumulated in sales units is transferred and used in the innovation process, particularly in the discovery stage where uncertainty is high and market intelligence is crucial (Kuester et al., 2017). We explore the knowledge sharing structures within sales units and how they either facilitate or impede knowledge sharing. References are available upon request.

AI IN THE B2B SALES PROCESS: AN EXPLORATION OF AI-DRIVEN AUTOMATION AND AUGMENTATION ON SOCIO-TECHNICAL SYSTEM OF SALES ORGANIZATIONS

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ABSTRACT

The paper explores the socio-technical implications of artificial intelligence (AI) in the B2B sales process, focusing on the roles of sales managers, salespersons, and organizational practices. By applying socio-technical systems theory, the study explains how AI integrated into the sales process transform sales roles, altering the dynamics between human actors and technological tools. Experts interviews with ten sales academics and fifteen sales managers enrich the findings of the study in uncoverings the socio.technical impacts of AI in the sales process.

Key findings highlight that AI significantly alters decision-making autonomy, expands tasks involved in the sales process, and necessitates new skills and competencies within sales roles. AI-driven systems automate routine tasks, enabling sales professionals to focus on high-value interactions and complex decision-making. This requires sales teams to develop advanced analytical skills and adapt to new ways of working with technology. To this end, AI's role in enhancing personalized customer interactions presents new challenges and opportunities for sales training and performance metrics.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AS A RESOURCE IN B2B SALES MANAGEMENT: INSIGHTS FOR SALES MANAGERIAL PRACTICES FROM DATA-DRIVEN ORGANIZATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Artificial intelligence (AI) has become a central topic of discussion for decision-makers including sales management. According to prior research, sales is one of the key business functions where AI adoption is prevalent, offering revenue growth. Despite a growing body of academic research linking AI to sales, there remains a gap in understanding the implications of AI for sales management. In response to this gap, our study delves into the realm of AI-generated resources available to sales managers. We focus on understanding how these resources can be strategically leveraged within sales management practices. Our findings offer valuable insights for B2B sales managers.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence (AI); Sales Management; AI-Resources; B2B

UNDERSTANDING THE NATURE OF BUYER-SELLER INTERACTIONS IN B2B: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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STRUCTURED ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, buyer-seller interaction has gained significant relevance in academic research. In an era characterized by the dematerialization of physical locations, rapid cultural change, and an ever-increasing proliferation of digital tools that enable interaction, sales organizations are facing new ways of engaging with B2B customers. In 2020, Gartner's Future of Sales research indicated that by 2025, 80% of B2B sales interactions between suppliers and buyers will occur in digital channels. This is partly because 33% of all buyers prefer a seller-free sales experience—a preference that climbs to 44% among millennials. Thus, exploring and understanding the nature of buyer-seller interaction in a business-to-business context presents profound implications for both B2B researchers and practitioners.

Buyer-seller interaction has been a concept widely explored in business marketing literature, as evidenced by a large number of studies since the early '80s from the IMP Group. The "interaction approach" of the Industrial Marketing and Purchasing (IMP) Group (Håkansson, 1982) has provided a well-established theory to investigate interactions between buyers and sellers in an industrial context, including aspects such as communication, coordination, and adaptation of activities and resources that buyers and sellers allocate and/or use in the relationship (Wynstra et al., 2006). However, the literature has revealed gaps in interpretation, especially in terms of the conceptualization of the nature of buyer-seller interaction in B2B.

In recent years, some academics have certainly contributed to the topic. For example, in 2022, Aeharne, through conceptual work, provided significant insights in the buyer-seller field, highlighting how two significant shifts—a reduction in information asymmetry and a reduction in face-to-face interactions—have led to notable changes in both the attitudes and behaviors of buyers and sellers, as well as in their interactional process. Nevertheless, while Aeharne's work offers useful insights, it lacks a clear focus on the B2B context, emphasizing instead that "the insights are relevant to both B2C and B2B interactions." Additionally, B2B research presents unique challenges for researchers, often requiring approaches different from those used in business-to-customer (B2C) domains (Wiersema, 2013).

This work, therefore, intends to contribute to the advancement of studies about buyer-seller interaction by focusing specifically on the business-to-business context. We opted for a systematic literature review to highlight the current state of the art in B2B buyer-seller interaction literature and to provide practical insights for both sales and purchasing organizations.

To the best of the authors' knowledge, previous studies have systematically explored various aspects of B2B, such as customer behavior (Bilro et al., 2023), market segmentation (Mora Cortez et al., 2021), and digital marketing (Pandey et al., 2020). However, there is still no comparable systematic review on this topic, highlighting this paper's timely and relevant

contribution. This study seeks to address this gap by mapping the existing knowledge about B2B buyer-seller interaction, identifying and summarizing the main topics arising from the existing body of knowledge, pinpointing future research avenues, and offering a research agenda. The analysis is based on a systematic literature review of 85 papers. This study is of practical relevance for academics and managers, providing a descriptive overview of the main conceptualizations of B2B buyer-seller interaction. It also proposes a future research agenda, contributing to the evolution of research in this area and the advancement of new knowledge in B2B buyer-seller interaction.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The literature on business-to-business marketing indicates that for a relationship to be established and considered a "relationship," at least one interaction between the buyer and the seller must occur. In the "relationship stage" model, the initial stage is known as "partner selection," where the assessment of a potential partner's quality begins the development of the relationship (Powers & Reagan, 2007). From a temporal perspective, the first interaction marks the start of the relationship, but generally, interaction is an event that characterizes the entire process, up to the final stage, known as "relationship maintenance."

In B2B literature, the concepts of interaction and relationship are often examined together. As early as the 1980s, the IMP Group, through the lens of the Interaction Network Approach, hinted at the close interrelation between these two concepts. Other significant theories have also contributed to the examination of buyer-seller interactions in the B2B context. Service-Dominant Logic (SDL), associated with the concept of value co-creation, emphasized that service interaction arises from goods-in-use and from interactions between a buyer and a supplier (Vargo & Lusch, 2004a), highlighting the importance of interaction in the value creation process, where companies can better understand customer needs and improve business relationships (Grönroos, 2011). Social Exchange Theory, which suggests that social behavior results from an exchange process that maximizes benefits and minimizes costs (Anaza and Rutherford, 2014; Ellegaard and Andersen, 2015), also offers insights into how social norms and expectations influence behavior, aiding both buyers and sellers in managing interactions.

Following these considerations, buyer-seller interaction refers to exchanges between buyers and sellers. This definition, although broad, clarifies that interaction generally refers to exchanges, without specifying which ones. However, recent research has linked the concept of buyer-seller interaction with other closely related concepts, such as communication, negotiation, and collaboration, which often represent specific forms of interaction. For example, while buyer-seller interaction is often associated with "buyer-seller communication," literature has pointed out that this term typically refers to the exchange of information. Information exchange implies communication quality, which includes aspects like accuracy, timeliness, and adequacy of information exchanged between partners. Communication quality plays an essential role in maintaining close ties between exchange partners and achieving the goals of a buyer-seller relationship (Mohr & Spekman, 1994). Ahearne, Jelinek, and Jones (2007) consider information communication as one of the behaviors that salespeople can use to improve customer satisfaction and trust, even after a purchase has been made.

Regarding the definition of "buyer-seller negotiation," literature has often interchanged it with "buyer-seller interaction," presumably because the focal point of the interaction is often the sale of a product or service, leading organizations to negotiate price or contractual terms. Nonetheless, recent literature shows that the parties may interact for other reasons not strictly related to the offer, indicating that buyer-seller negotiation is just a specific form of buyer-seller interaction where the buyer and seller discuss the terms of their transaction (Aeharne et al., 2022). Finally, when we talk about collaboration between buyers and sellers, it refers to an attitude in interactions that reflects a strategic orientation in the relationship, where firms share compatible goals, strive for mutual benefit, and acknowledge a high level of mutual interdependence (Claycomb & Frankwick, 2010).

As the literature demonstrates, different terms convey different meanings, but scholars often use these terms interchangeably. This is one reason why there is still a gap in the interpretation and understanding of the concept of B2B buyer-seller interaction. This paper aims to provide a systematic review of the existing literature on B2B buyer-seller interactions. Although some similar work has been conducted recently (e.g., Aeharne et al., 2022), there is still no systematic review focused entirely on the business context. This aspect underscores the timely and relevant contribution of this work, mapping existing knowledge on B2B buyer-seller interactions, identifying and summarizing the main conceptualizations in the current literature, and providing practical considerations for academics and managers.

METHODOLOGY

To summarize and integrate existing knowledge about buyer-seller interactions in B2B, this study adopts a systematic literature review. Systematic reviews are particularly useful when the literature is fragmented or provides mixed results, offering a clear and structured approach to analyzing existing research (Savino et al., 2017). Compared to narrative reviews, systematic literature reviews use replicable procedures to ensure greater transparency and clarity (Thorpe et al., 2005). The review was conducted from September to November 2023 and comprised several phases to collect a relevant list of articles, focusing on "buyer-seller interaction in B2B."

Regarding the database selection, Web of Science (WOS) and Scopus are the most popular journal quality lists, transcending various disciplines (Paul et al., 2021). Paul et al. (2021) suggests using only one journal quality list for a review, as using multiple lists may require separate assessments and consolidations of journal titles, potentially leading to inefficiencies. Scopus has a broader range of subject areas and categories compared to WOS, allowing researchers to better identify journals relevant to the review's domain. For this reason, only Scopus was chosen as the database for this study.

Based on terminology used in the literature, we identified relevant terms to represent buyer, seller, and the B2B context. Theoretical background analysis indicated that the term "interaction" has no synonyms that could adequately express the same concept. After some evaluations, we decided against merging "buyer" and "seller" into a single hyphenated word (e.g., buyer-seller). Initially, this might have seemed helpful, as it would capture the dyadic perspective of both parties. However, some relevant articles used separate terms, which would not be captured by the hyphenated string.
To ensure comprehensive coverage, we used Boolean operators "AND" and "OR" to create search strings. Specifically, "AND" was used between words in a combination (e.g., seller* AND buyer* AND interact* AND b2b), while "OR" connected different line combinations (e.g., seller* AND buyer* AND interact* AND b2b OR seller* AND buyer* AND interact* AND business-to-business). A maximum of 60 combinations were possible, leading to 60 distinct text strings entered into Scopus to perform the research.

SELLER	BUYER	B2B CONTEXT	INTERACTION
Seller*	buyer*	B2B	interact*
supplier*	customer*	b-to-b	
salespeople*	purchaser*	industrial	
salesperson*		business-to-business	
		"business to business"	

Table 1: Terms used and combined to perform the research

Scopus was queried for keywords in the title, abstract, and keyword list, which initially returned a sample of 794 articles. To align with our research scope, we applied the following filters to limit the field of inquiry: 1) Business, management, and accounting, 2) Articles, 3) English language. No time frame filter was applied, allowing the research to encompass all studies conducted from 1978 to the present on buyer-seller interactions in a B2B context. After applying these filters, the query returned 403 articles. The next step was to apply additional inclusion and exclusion criteria to narrow the publication list.

The decision was made to proceed as follows: First, all titles and abstracts of the 403 articles returned by Scopus were screened. The exclusion criterion applied at this stage was related to the meaning of the term "interaction." Many articles used the term "interaction" in a statistical context to refer to the interaction effect between two variables, where the effect of one variable depends on the presence or level of another variable. This initial criterion allowed us to exclude 147 articles.

The remaining 256 articles were then thoroughly reviewed in their entirety, with a specific parameter in mind—the "level of centrality of the interaction theme" within the article. This parameter indicates how central the theme of interaction between buyers and sellers is to the article itself. The level of centrality was categorized into five types: very low, low, medium, high, and very high.

Articles with high and very high centrality were immediately included in the final sample. Those with a very low centrality level were automatically excluded. For articles with medium or medium/low centrality, further assessment was conducted through a second reading of the entire article, with a comparison among them to determine which ones had greater significance for the purposes of the review. Following this procedure, a final sample of 85 articles was obtained.

FINDINGS

We used thematic analysis to extract and report key insights into the conceptualization of buyer-seller interaction. A coding activity on the final sample was conducted to identify the main conceptualizations of interaction. While some researchers opt for computational tools to organize and scrutinize their data, others adhere to traditional manual methodologies. Welsh (2002) argued that software might fall short in addressing issues of validity and reliability due to the dynamic and imaginative nature of thematic emergence during analysis. For this reason, this study opted for a manual approach to identify the main themes in B2B buyer-seller interaction. Thematic analysis helped us divide a large body of research into four different conceptualizations of buyer-seller interaction:

Interaction as a Context

Here, interaction is seen as an integral part of the relationship between the sales organization and the purchasing organization. It is not considered a direct driver or consequence of the relationship but rather as a contextual element within it (see Gilbert et al., 2022). This perspective recognizes that interaction is an inherent aspect of the buyer-seller dynamic, without attributing specific influence or impact to it.

Interaction as a Driver/Enabler

Many articles conceptualize buyer-seller interaction as a driver. In this conceptualization, interaction is viewed as a powerful force that drives change or enables specific outcomes. It is seen as an active contributor to achieving desired results, such as driving trust formation (Doney et al., 2007), relationship value (Hohenschwert & Geiger, 2015; Song et al., 2016), relationship identity (Simões & Mason, 2012), value co-creation (Grönroos, 2011; Enz & Lambert, 2012; Oh et al., 2015), new product development (Sundquist & Melander, 2020), rapport building (Kaski et al., 2018), and supplier business model (Guercini & Runfola, 2021). This perspective highlights the importance of fostering collaborative and interactive relationships to achieve desired outcomes.

Interaction as an Outcome

Here, interaction is perceived as the outcome of changes in buyer-seller relationships, particularly due to the adoption of digital technologies. Technological advancements have facilitated new forms of interaction and increased the frequency of interactions (Leek et al., 2003), altering existing relationships between buyers and their suppliers (Boeck et al., 2009). This perspective recognizes that digital tools and platforms have transformed the way sales and purchasing organizations engage with each other, leading to more frequent and varied interactions. B2B customers are rethinking how they interact with their suppliers (Guenzi, 2020), with some studies (e.g., Ray et al., 2020) indicating that customers increasingly prefer non-face-to-face communication with suppliers, sometimes completely bypassing human interactions. However, other studies (e.g., Rangarajan et al., 2021) have highlighted that the purchasing function may not be prepared for digital interactions, leading to delays in making complex purchase decisions.

Interaction as a Measure

Finally, interaction can be seen as a measurable indicator of the health and effectiveness of the buyer-seller relationship. This involves quantifying the frequency, depth, and quality of interactions to assess the strength of the relationship. Homburg & Stock (2004) found that buyer-seller relationships are particularly strong in cases of high-frequency customer interaction. This perspective emphasizes that the level and nature of interaction between sales and purchasing organizations can provide valuable insights into the overall health of the relationship. Even in specific situations like trade fairs, informal interactions can contribute to creating and strengthening business relationships (Sarmento et al., 2014). By measuring and analyzing interactions, managers can better understand the relationship's vitality, identify areas for improvement, and proactively address potential challenges.

DISCUSSION, MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDA

Future research on the nature of buyer-seller interactions in B2B should examine these interactions from multiple perspectives, focusing on interaction as a context, driver, outcome, and measure. As a context, interaction does not necessarily drive significant changes or outcomes, but it provides the foundational environment where key activities like negotiation, collaboration, and conflict resolution occur. Sales and purchasing organizations must transcend perceiving interaction as a mere part of their relationship. Instead of relegating it to a subordinate role, managers should recognize interaction as a dynamic force that both influences and is influenced by the overarching relationship. Researchers could explore how different contexts impact the effectiveness of interactions, asking questions like, "*What environmental factors shape the negotiation process?" and "How does the frequency of interaction impact conflict resolution?"*

As a driver, interaction can lead to outcomes such as relationship value, new product development, and value co-creation. Future studies should investigate additional outcomes influenced by interaction, like customer loyalty, market adaptation, and innovation diffusion. Researchers might explore new trends in interaction-driven changes, posing questions like, *"How do evolving customer expectations drive interaction changes?" and "What role do cultural differences play in shaping interaction outcomes?"*

Viewing interaction as an outcome, managers should understand that adopting digital tools for interacting could be the first building block for achieving long-term change. While acknowledging the enduring significance of interpersonal and face-to-face interactions, particularly in certain phases of sales and specific industries, the adoption of digital tools increases the number of interactions, thereby unlocking the potential for substantial change. This necessitates a strategic realignment and harmonization between buying and selling organizations, encompassing shared objectives and refined interaction methodologies. However, future research should consider drivers beyond digital technologies that lead to new forms of interaction, increased interaction frequency, or changes in interaction dynamics. This could involve exploring factors like globalization, supply chain shifts, or evolving customer demographics. Questions to address might include, *"What external factors are leading to changes in interaction patterns?" and "How do these changes affect the stability of buyer-seller relationships?"*

Finally, interaction as a measure can be used to evaluate the health of buyer-seller relationships. Future research could investigate how different contexts, industries, and companies use interaction metrics to assess relationship vitality. High interaction frequency may not always indicate a healthy relationship; it could signal persistent issues requiring more communication. Researchers could ask, *"How do varying interaction metrics correlate with relationship success?" and "What metrics best predict long-term stability across different industries?"*

CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS

As with any systematic review, the results of this study should be interpreted cautiously within the context of its limitations. The review exclusively relied on the SCOPUS database to assess the quality of publications, in accordance with the guidelines specified by Paul et al. (2021), which advocate for selecting a single list of journal quality to inform the review process for efficiency reasons. However, while SCOPUS generally encompasses all major publishers (e.g., Emerald, Sage, Elsevier, Wiley, or Taylor & Francis), it is conceivable that relevant research may have been excluded if indexed in other databases such as Web of Science (WoS).

Regarding the keywords included in the search string, the reference was made to existing literature, aiming to map as comprehensively as possible. Yet, there remains a small probability that some relevant terms were not included. Finally, concerning the interpretation of results and extraction of main themes, despite employing a manual approach for thematic analysis, the identification of topic terms likely reduced the degree of subjectivity in assigning theme names, ensuring a high level of replicability to the review process.

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NAVIGATING THE TERRAIN OF INSIDE SALES: AN EXPLORATIVE STUDY ON JOB REQUIREMENTS IN EUROPEAN JOB ADVERTISEMENTS

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STRUCTURED ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION

Sales activities have increasingly become virtual or hybrid, particularly following the digitalization of businesses that began in 2020 and has sustained since (Ahearne et al., 2022; Bages-Amat et al., 2020; Bauer et al., 2023). This has given rise to inside sales, defined as online or remote professional sales (Sleep et al., 2020). Inside selling includes having sales interactions via phone, videoconferencing, chats, email, and more (Sleep et al., 2020), and have proven more efficient and less costly (Zoltners et al., 2021). To the great advantage of salespeople and customers, inside selling has become an integral part of many sales forces, particularly in selected parts of the sales process. Customers, like salespeople, prefer remote meetings and interactions, as this allows for more flexibility and time efficiency, amongst other advantages (Rangarajan et al., 2021; Schmitz et al., 2021)

Notably, after 2020, there has been a significant surge in the literature on inside sales. This increase can be attributed, in part, to the widespread adoption of this sales strategy in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which necessitated a shift in traditional sales practices. The evolving dynamics of the marketplace, driven by the pandemic, have underscored the relevance and effectiveness of inside sales, leading to heightened scholarly attention and a richer body of academic work dedicated to understanding and optimizing this sales approach (Schmitz et al., 2021).

Table 1: Focus areas in existing inside selling literature

Topic	Authors	Description
(a) Role and Characteristics	Terho H., et al. (2023), Matthews L., and Edmondson D. (2022), Ohiomah A., et al., (2020), Sleep S., et al., (2020), Ohiomah A., et al., (2016), Rutherford B.N. et al., (2014), Masloski P. (2010), Miller B.K., et al., (2009), Boyle B.A. (1996), Marshall and Vredenburg (1991), Narus J.A., and Anderson J.C. (1986)	Unique role and essential traits required of inside sales personnel within an organization.

(b) Organization and Collaboration	Shi H., et al. (2023), Terho H., et al. (2023), Ramos C., et al. (2023), Thaichon P., et al., Conde R., et al. (2020), Sleep S., et al. (2020), Thaichon P., et al.(2018)	Optimal integration of inside sales within an organization and their collaboration with outside sales teams.
(c) Incentives and Control	Conde R., et al. (2023), Conde R., et al, (2022), Conde R., et al, (2021), Homburg C., et al., (2021), Conde R., and Prybutok V. (2020)	Specific incentive schemes and control mechanisms effective for managing and motivating inside sales teams.
(d) Technology	Chaker N.N., et al. (2022), Ohiomah A., et al., (2019), Gessner G., and Scott Jr. R.A. (2009), Potter W.D., et al., (1990)	Impact of technological advancements on the methodologies and strategies of inside sales.

Sleep et al. (2020) discuss the evolving role and configurations of inside sales forces in B2B environments. The authors identify three main drivers for the adoption of inside sales: advancements in communication technologies facilitating virtual customer interactions, customers' increasing reliance on online resources, and the competitive push towards a cost-effective CRM strategy. Above, they analyze the roles and capabilities of inside versus outside sales, covering aspects like job responsibilities, technical knowledge, selling and interpersonal skills, aptitude, and sales force control. Hereto, they highlight the expanded scope of inside sales roles, their need for enhanced analytics and information technology (IT) skills, and the transition towards hybrid control systems. Additionally, they identify four major B2B inside sales configurations: Inbound Sales or Sales Support, Sales Development, Team/Hybrid, and Discrete. Each configuration has advantages and limitations, such as enhancing customer retention, generating qualified leads, improving CRM effectiveness, and managing complete sales cycles independently. However, they also face conflicts between inside and outside sales, high turnover rates, coordination requirements, and limitations in proactive customer account development.

Despite the growing number of studies concerning inside sales, the job requirements for inside salespeople have not been systematically investigated to the best of our knowledge. This study aims to examine the requirements for inside sales positions in the current B2B environment, focusing on identifying the essential skills for these roles. As far as we know, the skills needed in inside sales have not yet been systematically investigated. As the inside selling role is evolving and becoming more relevant, it also becomes relevant how to train and educate future inside selling employees for companies and educational institutions. Therefore, our study aims to understand the specific skills required by inside sales personnel in their roles. This leads to our main research question: What specific skill sets are required for inside sales personnel in B2B sales across Europe? Next, we will proceed to introduce the methodology of our study.

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

This study is a qualitative, exploratory study to uncover requirements for B2B inside sales jobs in Europe. The study is based on a cross-European search for job advertisements. Searches were conducted in Italy, Austria, Poland, Denmark, and Finland, using the keywords “Inside Sales,” “Inside Selling,” and “Remote Selling,” The search was conducted during the period from 02.01.24– 10.01.24 via the following job sites; LinkedIn, Indeed, Stepstone, jobs.fi, oikotie.fi, epunkt.at, Karriere.at and jobs.at. The goal was to collect 100 job advertisements from each country, bringing the total to 500. The job advertisements were saved as URLs and HTML Files. Following the data-collection process, we analyzed a sample of 65 job advertisements – all of which have “inside sales” or “inside Selling” in the job title (Appendix 1).

Using data extrapolation software, we have extracted the job requirements for each job. This data was then thematically coded into categories and sorted into a comprehensive list of requirements for inside sales jobs in Europe.

Table 2: Requirements from 65 job advertisements

Requirements	**Examples**
Personal traits of the salesperson (52 Advertisements in which personal traits are required)	□ Dynamic, Flexible. Ability to excel in a rapidly changing environment; to adapt to rapid changes and adapt to new challenges without compromising effectiveness. Enjoys fast paced teams □ Efficient □ Ability to work independently, self-directed, self- motivated □ Proactive
	□ Up for a challenge, Desire to constantly challenge and develop oneself, Train themselves into a sales professional □ Mindset (entrepreneurial, commercial, service) □ Eager/willing to learn, Learns fast, Fast learner, curious, Coachable □ Goal-oriented, Motivated, generating results, result-driven, self-starter, comfortable with result- driven approach, determined, obsessed with getting results □ Resilient, Excellent stress management □ Not afraid to pick up the phone, probably don’t take no for an answer, will always go that extra mile to close the deal □ Social. Loves to mingle, bond and build relationships □ Cooperative, team player, Excellent team skills, Ability to work in teams □ High level of confidence, confident apperance □ Positive attitude □ Precision, Hig standards, consistent □ Reliability, Reliable, □ Customer-orientation,

	- Passionate, Enthusiastic - Open, Openminded - High degree of initiative - Commitment
Salesperson capabilities/competencies/Skills	- Excellent networker - Problem-solving skills - Organizational skills - Time management, ability to prioritize, manage time effectively. - Multi-tasking, maintain progress on multiple tasks
Language skills (44)	- English - European languages (German, east European, Finnish, Swedish, Norwegian, Italian, French, Spanish, Hungarian, Romanian, Polish, Ukrainian - Written and oral - Different levels of Proficiency

Communication skills (27)	□ Excellent listener □ Good communication skills □ Negotiations skills, Ability to negotiate with customers. □ Comfortable communicating in writing and on the phone, Excellent writer and verbal communicator, Excellent communication skills (verbal and written) □ Listening and dialogue skills,
	□ Strong communication and interpersonal skills with an aptitude of building relationships
Knowledge (11)	□ Commercial and business understanding Strong knowledge of B2B sales principles, methods, practices, and techniques. □ Proven sales record with knowledge of the assigned geographic region. Strong sales fundamentals and analytical background. □ Very good sales and industry knowledge □ Knowledge of wide range of molecular biology applications, products, and market. Knowledge of MSD products preferred. □ Knowledge of logistics and international trade
Educational level (36)	□ University studies (Bachelor, Msc, Gratuates □ Specialized training □ High School diploma
Experience (51)	□ Previous experience is required within sales
Technology (37)	□ MS Office □ CRM (Salesforce, Hubspot) □ SAP □ PowerBI □ ERP □ Autocad

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Categories for Inside Sales Job Requirements

We identified five categories for the list of requirements, each with sub-categories. The five main requirements-categories.

Personal Traits

a. Flexibility and adaptability
b. Independent

c. Learning orientation
d. Goal-result-driven
e. Team-orientation
f. Attitude

Personal Competences and Skills

g. Networking
h. Problemsolving
i. Communication and negotiation
j. Technology
    i. CRM (Salesforce, Hubspot)
    ii. MS Office
    iii. SAP
    iv. Power BI
k. Language

Knowledge

l. Sales specific
m. Domain-Market specific

Education/degree

n. Different levels of university
    i. Either Business or specific field (Life science, engineering etc)
o. High School
p. Specialized trainings

Experience

q. 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5 years
r. Inside sales
s. Telesales
t. B2B

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

Summarizing the findings, the most requested requirements are personal traits such as goal orientation, a positive attitude, and a particular mindset. The competencies and skills requested can be divided into the subcategories of Networking, Problem-solving, Communication, negotiation skills, Technology, and Language. Not surprisingly, there is a strong indication that these skills are key requirements for an inside sales job. The knowledge needed can be sorted into sales-specific knowledge (e.g., knowledge about the sales process) and domain-specific knowledge (knowledge of a particular industry). Finally, the most sought-after profiles are bachelor-degree holders. The requested experience is primarily from similar jobs and telesales, with a strong preference for 1-5 jobs experience.

The initial findings warrant some questions about the specific traits needed for inside sales, according to job advertisements, but based on these preliminary results, it is not clear how these are different from other types of sales jobs. So, even though the inside selling job function exists, on a practical level, companies seem to search for employees with most of the same requirements as other sales jobs.

DISCUSSION AND LIMITATIONS

The results show what requirements are needed for inside sales jobs, but it is not clear based on job advertisements, how these traits differ from other types of sales jobs, or if the requirements are different. (Sleep et al, 2020) notably identified four archetypes of inside selling 1) Inbound sales or sales support, 2) sales development, 3) Team/hybrid and 4)

Discrete (p. 1042). These archetypes might be relevant to understand how the inside selling job function differ from other job functions, apart from being conducted hybrid/remote. Future research should include comparing different types of sales jobs to examine similarities and differences in the skills and capabilities needed for different types of inside and outside selling jobs. Comparing the job-tasks and descriptions might similarly increase knowledge on this. Finally conducting qualitative interviews to understand the inside selling function would be recommendable for future research. The findings of this preliminary study are a discussion basis for researchers, trainers, and company representatives alike, and they indicate possible needs. The emphasis on personality traits such as goal orientation and positive attitude points to the importance of attitudinal factors in inside sales. These personal traits should be honed and encouraged in curricula alongside conventional academic practices to ensure well-rounded graduates are produced for inside sales jobs. Furthermore, our findings on the key skills required - networking, problem-solving, communication and negotiation, technology, and language - provide possible evidence that multidimensional competencies remain critical in the B2B environment. The realization that bachelor graduates from business or relevant industries are preferred is a call to universities and vocational training institutions to establish curricula that meet this demand. In this context, dual study programs that combine comprehensive industry knowledge with contemporary inside sales techniques could be helpful. The preference for applicants with previous similar jobs, tele sales experience, and especially 1-5 jobs underline the importance of experience as it potentially contributes to a quick adaptation to inside sales tasks.

However, there are several aspects of this preliminary research to consider. First, the sample size is small, consisting of only 65 job advertisements. The requirements are not all equally important, and this has not been considered. Some of the adverts were originally in another language and have been translated into English using the Words translation function; this may have led to minor misrepresentations of certain requirements. Only jobs with the title of inside sales or inside selling were chosen. The study does not show whether the results represent best or worst practice in business, as the results are drawn from job advertisements, leaving room to investigate, what type of skills lead to optimal performance in the inside selling job, rather than what companies request. Finally, we have not compared the job descriptions to the job descriptions, which will be an interesting next step. There seem to be some cultural differences between the countries that have not been addressed in this preliminary stage of the research. The study also encounters several additional limitations: it encompasses only five European countries, relies exclusively on internet announcements, and employs a static analysis confined to a short period, without observing the dynamic evolution of the process over time.

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THE SALES AND MARKETING INTERFACE – SOLVED!

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ABSTRACT

Sales and marketing functions are critical to delivering the desired value to customers, but there are still questions to be answered about how to collaboratively manage this interface to generate improved sales performance. We review current research into the interface and presents a case study that outlines a management strategy that delivered above industry average revenues. The case study takes place within South American subsidiaries of a European MNE. By specifically providing opportunities for interaction during the planning of mutually important tasks, management can provide structures and agile processes that generate open communications, knowledge sharing, and trusting, productive Sales/Marketing relationships.

Keywords: Sales/Marketing Collaboration; Business-to-Business Markets; New Product Launches; Case Study; Agile-Stage-Gate

SAME RESULT, DIFFERENT PATHS: HOW SALESMEN AND SALESWOMEN LEVERAGE PAST RELATIONSHIPS TO REACQUIRE LOST CUSTOMERS

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STRUCTURED ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION

Reacquiring customers who have switched to other providers is becoming a critical priority for many business-to-business suppliers. For instance, after the SolarWinds cyberattack, Microsoft has been working to regain trust from its various customers and partners (Friedman et al. 2021). Similarly, suppliers in different industries such as hospitality and tourism, health care, and education have faced a rapid increase in customer churn, making reacquisition efforts more essential and pressing.

Leach et al. (2021) explore the role of supplier advocacy in salesperson efforts and success in reacquiring lost customers. They define supplier advocacy as the activities of individuals within a customer's buying center who influence supplier decisions. They categorize these individuals as advocates, who favor a salesperson or the salesperson's organization, and adversaries, who oppose them. They discover that advocates boost both sales effort and customer reacquisition, while adversaries heighten salesperson perceptions of reacquisition difficulty. However, they do not investigate how these motivational effects of advocacy vary between salesmen and saleswomen.

Previous research indicates that men and women differ in how they cope with success and failure (Deaux and Emswiller 1974), and their effectiveness in using relational cues (Sanchez-Burks 2002). However, no recent work has examined how these differences influence customer reacquisition. This could be a crucial issue as most practice has been designed for training and developing salesmen and does not consider how to best develop saleswomen. Building on the work of Leach et al. (2021), we explore how salesperson gender moderates the effects of supplier advocacy on customer reacquisition. We use Gender Socialization Theory (Eagly 1987) to understand how salesmen and saleswomen interpret and utilize supplier advocacy and, consequently, how this advocacy impacts reacquisition success.

This paper contributes to the literature in several important ways. First, it considers an extension to the model of supplier advocacy by considering gender differences in how advocates are leveraged to win back lost customers. Second, it helps to fill in the gap in gender differences in b2b selling context by considering the mechanisms by which women and men achieve selling results. Third, in doing so, it provides useful tools for sales managers in training and managing salesmen versus saleswomen.

SALESPERSON GENDER DIFFERENCES

Generally, women are underrepresented in B2B selling (Gartner 2020). In addition, a pay gap still exists (Zwierzchowski 2023). Larsen and Mullen (2020) found that saleswomen still perceive a high degree of sexism in their work from supervisors and colleagues as well as customers. Despite these circumstances, several studies examining gender differences and sales performance suggest that differences are generally minor (Dion, Easterling, and Javalgi 1997, McColl and Truong 2013) and possibly disappearing (Siguaw and Honeycutt 1995, Franke and Park 2006). Most sales research identifying differences between salesmen and saleswomen has examined salesperson job satisfaction (Rutherford, Marshall, and Park 2014) and organizational commitment (Boles et al. 2007) rather than performance. Additionally, no research has focused on differences in processes of getting to sales outcomes. This is important in understanding how to develop men versus women in the salesforce. If they way they succeed is different, then their preparation should make sure it addresses multiple paths to success. Thus, the examination of advocacy in reacquisition selling presents a unique relational context to evaluate performance differences between salesmen and saleswomen.

We anticipate gender differences will affect the role of advocacy on customer reacquisition based primarily on Socialization Theory (Eagly 1987). Socialization Theory posits that gender differences in beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors are the result of a socialization process and patterns within culture norms (e.g., Eagly 1987, Eagly and Johnson 1990, Howard and Hollander 1997). Across cultures, women are typically socialized with *communal* values such as caring, helping and relating, while men are typically socialized with *agentic* values such as independence, self-confidence, and assertiveness (e.g., Gilligan 1982).

Gender Socialization Theory has been widely applied to various contexts, including stress coping behaviors (Matud 2004, Rosario et al. 1988), prosocial, individualistic and competitive orientation (Van Lange et al. 1997), and moral/ethical tendency (Mason and Mudrack 1996). Altogether, these studies show that compared to men, women are more affiliative (Matud 2004), and more prosocial with cooperative interaction styles (Van Lange et al. 1997). Women generally act more reciprocally (Heinz, Juranek, and Rau 2012) and are more interdependent, relationship-sensitive, and attentive to the network and quality of relationships (Mason and Mudrack 1996, Iacobucci and Ostrom 1993). On the other hand, men are generally more instrumental and problem-focused (Matud 2004), independent and competitive (Zelezny, Chua, and Aldrich 2000), self-confident and goal- and task-oriented (Eagly and Johnson 1990). Overall, prior research shows that women display greater relational sensitivity than men.

Due to this socialization process, men and women also develop different relational schemas. Once schema are established, men and women tend to behave in ways consistent with expectations (Bussey and Bandura 1999). Thus, for salespeople, once a relational schema is internalized into tacit knowledge, it becomes a motivational factor affecting perceptions and actions accordingly. Since saleswomen are socialized to be more relationship-sensitive, and responsive to relationship networks and quality (Mason and Mudrack 1996, Heinz, Juranek, and Rau 2012, Iacobucci and Ostrom 1993, Macintosh and Krush 2017), they are more likely to act upon relational cues like supplier advocacy for problem-solving. Conversely, salesmen, who are socialized to be independent, problem-focused and goal-oriented (Eagly and Johnson 1990, Matud 2004, Zelezny, Chua, and Aldrich 2000), may rely more on their own ability, competence and competitiveness to overcome challenges. Thus, salesperson gender will likely influence the identification and use of advocates and adversaries in customer reacquisition.

Further, several studies have found that women tend to use coping strategies that are aimed at changing their emotional responses to a stressful situation, whereas men use more problem-focused or instrumental methods of handling stressful experiences (Endler and Parker 1990, Matud 2004, Ptacek, Smith, and Dodge 1994). Since adversaries within a buying center might present the reacquisition of a lost client as a stressful task, we believe examining how salesmen cope with adversaries differently from saleswomen could afford additional insights to the Leach et al. (2021) model, as well as informing practice of potential behavior differences in how salesmen and saleswomen work, important information for accurately training and managing men versus women in sales positions.

HYPOTHESES

We propose that there are gender differences between how advocates benefit the reacquisition efforts of salesmen and saleswomen. Specifically, due to a communal values socialization process, saleswomen are more likely to read and react to relational realities. Furthermore, they are more likely to leverage supportive relationships such as advocates to successfully reacquire customers (Eagly 1987). In contrast, due to a more agentic values socialization process, salesmen will tend to be self-reliant and rely more on their efforts to ensure successful customer reacquisitions. Thus, for women compared to men, advocates will more likely enhance reacquisition directly. Furthermore, advocacy relationships will more strongly alter perceptions and effort levels. For men, reacquisition will be more strongly related to sales effort. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed (see Figure 1):

H_1: *The relationship between Advocates and customer reacquisition will be stronger with saleswomen than salesmen.*

$H_{2A\ \&2B}$: *The positive (negative) relationship between Advocates (Adversaries) and perceptions of difficulty will be stronger with saleswomen than salesmen.*

$H_{3A\ \&3B}$: *The positive (negative) relationship between Advocates (Adversaries) and sales effort will be stronger with saleswomen than salesmen.*

H_4: *The relationship between sales effort and customer reacquisition will be stronger with salesmen than saleswomen.*

METHODOLOGY

Data for this study was acquired from the authors of Leach et al. (2021). Below is a summary of how the data was originally obtained and the sample. This is followed by a description of our analysis splitting the sample by gender and examining model parameter differences.

Sample

The study used a sample from a Qualtrics panel of outside sales experts who sell only to business clients and have at least three years of sales experience. They work for different firms and in various sectors. The researchers collected 500 valid surveys from outside sales experts in Canada and the US. Salespeople were asked to choose a specific customer they had lost and tried to win back, and to answer all the questions related to that customer.

Constructs

Measurements of all constructs mirrored those in Leach et al. (2021). We tested for differences between male and female salespeople. While men and women did not differ with respect to their sales performance (i.e., percent of goal achieved), or the type of product sold; our sample of men is older ($\chi^2 = 18.2$, d.f. = 2, $p < 0.01$) and more experienced (i.e., years in sales, $\chi^2 = 15.7$, d.f. = 2, $p < 0.01$; years in current position, $t = 2.93$, $p < .01$).

Measurement Validation

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed including all the measurement items to test the relations of manifest indicators to their intended latent constructs. To examine the potential confounds of sales experience and age, multi-group analyses were computed for each, and parameter differences examined. These analyses indicate that high and low experience groups did not differ on any of the hypothesized parameters. High and low age groups differed only with respect to the degree advocates reduced perceived difficultly of the reacquisition ($\Delta\chi^2 = 4.86$, $\Delta df = 1$, $p = 0.03$), with older salespeople perceiving easier requisitions in the presence of advocates. This parameter was non-significant for salesmen and for saleswomen. Thus, it appears that the impact of gender in this study is not confounding with sales experience or age. Additionally, age and experience level were included as control variables in the model.

Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

To impose the hypothesized pattern of relationships in the proposed model, structural parameters were allowed to vary freely or were fixed to zero. We controlled for salesperson age, sales experience, the type of product sold (i.e., good for resale, business service, business good), account size, market competitiveness, and the prospect's reason for leaving (i.e., for better price, better fit, reduced need, or dissatisfaction). After controlling for these variables, the results of the structural equation model showed that the proposed structural model fits well with the data (CFI = .97, TLI = .96, GFI = .96, RMSEA = .05, $\chi^2 = 160.24$, df = 69).

To examine the moderating effects of gender, we used the well-established two group analysis method for examining moderator effects in structural models (Palmatier, Scheer, and Steenkamp 2007). Salespeople were separated into two groups based on gender. Moderation is examined by evaluating a chi-square difference test between two nested models: one where the hypothesized relationship is constrained to be equal across male and female groups, and one where these can vary across groups. The results of this analysis show two parameters are significantly different between male and female salespeople. Specifically, the result of the two-group comparison shows that (1) with the presence of adversaries, saleswomen (H8B: $\gamma = -0.25$, $p < 0.01$) are more likely to decrease their effort than salesmen ($\gamma = -0.01$, ns) ($\Delta\chi^2 = 5.72$, $\Delta df = 1$, $p < 0.01$), and, while not hypothesized, (2) when tasks are difficult, women ($\gamma = 0.33$, $p < 0.01$) are more likely to increase their effort than men ($\gamma = 0.14$, $p < 0.05$) ($\Delta\chi^2 = 3.87$, □df = 1, $p < 0.05$; see Table 1). Furthermore, providing some support for H1, the direct relationship between Advocates and reacquisition was only significant with saleswomen. The relationships between advocacy and perceived difficulty were not found to differ across saleswomen and salesmen, thus, findings do not provide support for H2a, or H2b. The positive relationships between advocates and effort did not differ between saleswomen and salesmen, thus, we did not find support for H3b. Likewise, effort resulted in reacquisition success similarly for both saleswomen and men, thus we did not find support for H4.

DISCUSSION

Findings suggest that, while generally having a positive influence on the reacquisition efforts of both salesmen and saleswomen, the mechanisms by which advocates impact reacquisition may differ based on salesperson gender. Specifically, we find that saleswomen, in particular, strategically leverage these positive relationships to facilitate reacquisition without the need for exerting more time and effort. Conversely, salesmen seem to become more motivated by the presence of advocates to put in higher levels of effort that, in turn, lead to higher levels of reacquisition. These findings support Socialization Theory and may provide insights into how relationships and relational characteristics of selling situations are leveraged differently based on gender.

Gender differences have been demonstrated across many aspects of the selling domain (Franke and Park 2006). Socialization research points to markedly dissimilar socialization architypes for males and females that lead to gender differences in the development, reliance and utilization of various forms of procedural and tacit knowledge. In this study, we examine and find interesting differences between salesmen and saleswomen in how advocacy affects reacquisition. We find no evidence that the level of reacquisition differs across genders. However, for saleswomen, advocates can enhance reacquisition directly. Meanwhile, for salesmen, advocates enhance reacquisition indirectly through increasing sales effort.

One interpretation of these findings is that while salesmen and saleswomen may be equally successful at reacquiring customers, they do so differently. These findings indicate that salesmen are more likely to reacquire customers by allocating effort and working hard, whereas saleswomen may be reacquiring customers not by shear effort alone but by being more apt at leveraging important advocates, in other words, by working smart. The concepts of working hard and working smart have a long history in the sales literature and both have been found to be important antecedents to salesperson success (Fang, Palmatier, and Evans 2004, Sujan 1986). Our findings suggest that a salesperson's use of advocates and adversaries in reacquisition activities may be an additional context where these concepts help explain sales phenomenon. Further, demonstrating that the mechanisms differ, but results do not, may help to explain a lack of research demonstrating gender differences in certain domains of selling since direct relationships may not reveal differences.

The identification of gender differences in customer acquisition, and particularly with supplier advocacy, is an important consideration for sales managers, in terms of account assignment, as well as training and development needs. Managers should be alert to where working smarter and where working harder might make the most difference and capitalize upon salesperson differences. While gender may provide one clue as to strengths in this area, it should not substitute for strong behavioral management and observation of individual differences. Additionally, training and development, as well as coaching, should recognize the potential differences in how men and women succeed. Insistence on one-approach-fits-all in these areas could potentially disadvantage women in the sales force.

LIMITATIONS

Our study uses third-party panel data that is proprietary and may affect the applicability of the results. Also, we use cross-sectional data to study causal relationships that are valid over time (i.e., environmental conditions, leading to reactions, leading to outcomes). Moreover, we only ask respondents about lost customers who were targeted for reacquisition. This is needed for this study, but it limits the applicability to all lost customers. Therefore, we suggest more research on supplier advocacy in the reacquisition process that can support our findings with longitudinal and experimental methods. We tested the model and hypotheses in this study with data from one source. Future research using dyadic data would be useful as buyers may have different and more precise views of supplier advocacy in reacquisition efforts. Similarly, while self-report performance data that is objective has been proven to be reliable and unbiased (Churchill Jr et al. 1985), buyer feedback may enhance the credibility of measures of reacquisition success.

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Figure 1: Gender differences within a model of supplier advocacy

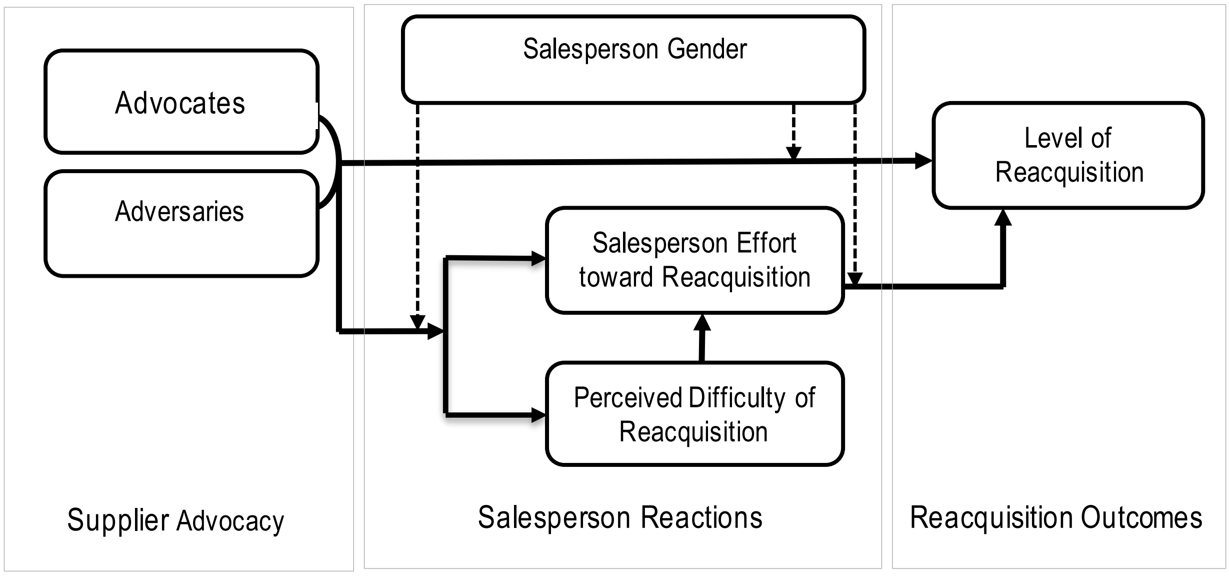

Table 1: Structural relationships among constructs

				Gender as Moderator			
				Male	Female		
			SE	SE	SE	ΔX²	
Structural Paths							
Advocates	→	*Perceived Difficulty*	-.04	-.08	-.01	.58	*H2a*
Adversaries	→	*Perceived Difficulty*	.40 **	.44 **	.36 **	.71	*H2b*
Advocates	→	*Salesperson Effort*	.56 **	.56 **	.54 **	.95	*H3a*
Adversaries	→	*Salesperson Effort*	-.12 *	-.01	-.25 **	5.72 **	*H3b*
Advocates	→	*Level of Reacquisition*	.12 *	.07	.23 *	2.09	*H1*
Adversaries	→	*Level of Reacquisition*	-.05	-.07	-.03	.10	
Perceived Difficulty	→	*Effort*	.23 **	.14 *	.33 **	3.87 *	
Salesperson Effort	→	*Level of Reacquisition*	.20 **	.19 **	.19 *	.02	*H4*
Correlations							
Advocates	↔	*Adversaries*	. 15 **	.22 **	.07		
Structural Model Goodness of Fit Statistics							
n			500	307	193		
Chi-square / df			160.24 / 69			272.94/ 147	
CFI / TLI / GFI / RMSEA			.97 / .95 / .96 / .05			.95 / .94 / .93 / .04	

*p<.05, **p<.01

TOWARDS A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF FRONTLINE EMPLOYEE SABOTAGE

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to improve our understanding of frontline employee sabotage, a critical but understudied area that impacts customer relationships. These are intentional actions by employees, as sellers for example, that negatively impact the services offered. By making a systematic review of the literature and analyzing articles published since 1994 by manual coding, the study synthesizes existing knowledge into a typology of types of sabotage. This new typology, based on criteria such as frequency, visibility, or motives of sabotage, provides a nuanced understanding of the concept. It also identifies research gaps, especially the influence of customer experience on employee sabotage.

Keywords: Frontline Employees Sabotage; Systematic Literature Review; Customer Relationship

EXPLORING THE APPLICATION OF AI FOR FORECASTING B2B SALES: A COMPARATIVE STUDY IN THE INTERNATIONAL AUTOMOTIVE AFTERMARKET

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the effectiveness of artificial intelligence in predicting business-to-business sales in the global automobile aftermarket. The research examines the differences between conventional sales forecasting methods and sophisticated artificial intelligence approaches, with a specific focus on a manufacturing company. The research assesses the performance of AI models compared to traditional time series analysis using a comparative analysis. The findings demonstrate the capacity of AI to improve the accuracy, flexibility, and scalability of forecasting in a global market setting. This study enhances our understanding of the practical use of artificial intelligence in sales prediction for the automobile aftermarket.

Keywords: Business-to-Business; Predictive Sales Forecasting; Artificial Intelligence; Comparative Analysis

COACHING SALESPEOPLE: HOW AI AND MANAGERS SHOULD ADAPT THEIR COACHING TO POSITIVELY IMPACT THEIR SALESPEOPLE'S MINDSET

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ABSTRACT

Artificial Intelligence can replace managers by providing salespeople with adequate feedback and recommendations. There is limited knowledge about how salespeople *feel* when dealing with an AI coach. Building on construal-level theory and two experiments among 244 B2B sales professionals, the study investigates how sales coaches should frame their coaching to increase salespeople's positive mindset. Our research shows that sales managers should frame their coaching at different construal levels (high vs. low), depending on the expected objective, either increasing hope or self-efficacy. Conversely, AI coaching should be framed at a high construal level to effectively promote self-efficacy and hope.

DESIRED OUTCOMES FROM B2B SELLING – A CONCEPTUALIZATION

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ABSTRACT

Even though outcomes from selling have principal attention in research and management, the literature offers no conceptualization of desired outcomes from business-to-business (B2B) selling. To narrow this gap, his study conducts a systematic review of measured outcomes in B2B sales research and organizes these outcomes in a value chain framework - "The B2B Sales Performance Outcomes Chain." This conceptualization proposes six types and 20 subtypes of outcomes and shows how the outcomes are related to each other. This framework can advance researchers´ choice of outcomes in research models and managers´ choice of outcomes to target, train, and monitor. Implications and future research are suggested.

Keywords: Sales Performance Outcomes; B2B Selling; Conceptualization; Systematic Review

UNDERSTANDING ACCOUNT-BASED MARKETING IN B2B MARKETS

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STRUCTURED ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION

Account-based marketing (ABM) has emerged as a popular B2B marketing approach across industries. For example, SiriusDecisions' industry whitepaper finds that 93 percent of global B2B sales leaders consider ABM extremely or very important to their organizational success (Lillian, 2018). According to ABM Leadership Alliance (2020), over 70 percent of managers perceive that ABM allows for a higher return on investment compared to any other marketing approach. Indeed, industry leading B2B firms are widely investing in developing ABM practices (see Burgess & Munn, 2021).

Despite the increasing interest in ABM among businesses, there are only few academic research on this topic. The extant literature on ABM is almost exclusively based on commercial sources, such as managerial books, consultancy whitepapers and blog posts (e.g., Burgess & Munn 2021; Vajre & Spett, 2019). Although these sources can provide interesting insights into this topic, we find that the current practitioner conceptualizations lack systematic justification and structured analysis on what ABM entails, and they provide little insights on how ABM differs from other popular marketing concepts, such as digital content marketing or key account management. Overall, the commercial sources tend to build on success stories rather than a systematic analysis of the concept and its practical implications of ABM, making it difficult to critically understand how and when ABM should be leveraged in B2B markets.

Against this backdrop, the purpose of this study is to conceptualize ABM and explore its key activities, drivers and outcomes. Due to the dearth of academic research on ABM we build on qualitative theories-in-use (TIU) approach to understand this timely marketing approach by interviewing managers responsible for ABM activities in multiple B2B industries. We make three substantial contributions to marketing literature. First, we define ABM and provide insights into its key elements thus clarifying how the ABM process is executed in B2B firms. Second, we provide new insights into the nomological network of ABM by exploring its key antecedents and outcomes. Third, in doing so, we provide illustrate how modern B2B marketing works in close collaboration with sales in the context of large customer accounts.

The rest of this inductive study is structured as follows: We first provide insights for ABM based on a review of practitioner literature to lay out a meaningful conceptual basis for this study. Then, we describe and justify the TIU approach and associated data collection and analysis methods. Thereafter, we report the preliminary results and conclude by discussing the key implications of the findings for theory and practice.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

ABM is widely adopted marketing approach in business, but its meaning and conceptual underpinnings remain vague. To date academic research has not yet explored this topic and all extant insights in this domain are based on practitioner and consultancy sources. An analysis of these definitions indicates that there are four frequently mentioned characteristics of ABM. In short, ABM is a (1) strategic approach that is (2) personalized to specific customer accounts and the members of their associated buying groups, and (3) executed in close collaboration with sales to (4) attain performance through attaining customer-centric outcomes such as addressing needs, facilitating customer experience or building customer relationships.

First, ABM is largely viewed as a strategic approach across various definitions. Lillian (2018) articulates ABM as not just a tactic or technology, but a change in mindset and a strategic discipline. Similarly, Adobe (2019) and Salesforce (2023) underscore its strategic essence, focusing on ABM as a customer-centric approach requiring close collaboration between sales and marketing. Vajre and Spett (2019) extend this view by characterizing ABM as an end-to-end go-to-market strategy that utilizes data-driven targeting and personalization. Second, definitions highlight that targeting and personalization are central to ABM. For example, Salesforce (2023) highlights the need to treat each account as a unique market, necessitating a highly personalized one-to-one approach, and Essex (2023) notes that ABM aims to engage buying teams with tailored marketing content to efficiently increase sales revenue. Third, most definitions stress the need to see ABM as an integral approach to sales though closely aligned marketing-sales collaboration. Finally, many definitions highlight that ABM centers on attaining performance through focusing on customer centric outcomes. For example, Lillian (2018) and Baker (2023) emphasize the importance of increasing relevance and specificity in engagements for first-class customer experience.

While insightful, the existing practitioner works are lacking thorough empirical basis and systematic justification and they don't highlight how ABM differs from other close constructs such as digital content marketing or key account management. Also,the drivers and outcomes of ABM remain unexplored. We approach these shortcomings in extant research with a qualitative TIU study as discussed in detail below.

METHODS

Research Approach

Since academic research has virtually ignored ABM as a research topic, we adopt a discovery-oriented approach of theories-in-use (TIU) to conceptualize this practitioner- based marketing concept. TIU research builds on three core foci: (1) the construction of organic marketing theories with a particular focus on new and emergent phenomena; (2) the enhancement and clarification of existing theoretical perspectives; and (3) the provision of a framework for guiding subsequent empirical research efforts (see Zeithaml et al. 2020).

As discussed above we started the research process with preliminary review of practitioner-oriented literature, aimed at identifying prevalent definitions and discerning the common key themes that pervade these definitions. The second phase focuses on an qualitative data collection and data analysis based on structured interviews with ABM managers representing a spectrum of industries, each bringing a unique experiential perspective and insight to the phenomenon under study (Challagalla, Murtha, & Jaworski, 2014; Zeithaml et al., 2020).

Data Collection and Data Analysis

To attain a comprehensive understanding of ABM we contacted internationally operating firms in several European countries. We focused on firms known to have invested in ABM and contacted managers responsible for ABM in the firms. The data collection covers diverse industries, encompassing both service and manufacturing sectors in B2B contexts. Our criteria for selection deliberately excluded consultants, focusing instead on individuals directly involved in implementing and managing ABM within their organizations. The data collection is still ongoing, currently including eight expert interviews from different industries. We highlight that the full data collection procedure will be ready by the conference. The data collection aims at attaining total around 20 interviews although the adequate number of interviews will be pending on attainment of data saturation.

The respondents have an average of 15 years of relevant experience (see Table 2). The interviews lasted between 40 and 80 minutes (on average 61 minutes) and were conducted using open-ended questions to allow the managers to freely share their insights and ideas related to ABM without any restrictions (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006; Zeithaml et al., 2020), though the interview guide was structured around four main themes: (1) the concept of ABM, (2) boundaries and relations with other functions, (3) its key areas (4) and antecedents, moderator, mediating variables and outcome.

According with TIU approach, the interviewer possessed extensive practical knowledge in the research area, and participants' insights were sought using a managerial approach to language. (Zeithaml et al., 2020). The data analysis builds on grounded theory analysis well suited for TIU research, involving open, axial, and selective coding (e.g., Strauss and Corbin 1998).

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

We structure the findings based on established TIU research guidelines: we start by defining the ABM and discussing its key elements based on the rich interview data. Later, we move into relating the developed conceptualization of ABM into its key drivers and outcomes.

Definition of ABM

The study interviews align rather closely with the definitions of ABM in practitioner literature. Yet, data analysis enables attaining richer insights into the various nuances and key elements of ABM. Building on the data-analysis we define ABM in following way: "ABM is a strategic marketing approach based on data and technology that focuses on enforcing personalized marketing campaigns for selected high-value clients to closely meet the specific needs, challenges, and business objectives of the key decision makers in each account along the customer journey for facilitating marketing performance goals in a customer-centric way in close collaboration with sales." We discuss the key elements of this definition below.

Most interviewees noted that account-based marketing (ABM) represents a strategic marketing approach for their organizations. By its strategic nature, the respondents noted that they leverage ABM systematically to facilitate sales, instead of ad-hoc campaigns. This is because of marketing function has opportunities to influence buying and usage center members in the customer organization as in many cases salespersons have only a limited access to diverse buying center members. While the idea of investing in account-specific campaigns is not radically new, the opportunities provided by customer data and digital marketing technologies have made it possible for marketing functions to implement account-specific marketing programs both efficiently and effectively.

As the definition highlights, key focus of ABM lies in enforcing personalized marketing campaigns for selected high-value clients. The interviewed managers emphasized the significance of tailoring the ABM activities closely to the specific accounts and the individuals within them. Thus, unlike broader Digital Content Marketing (see Terho et al., 2022) initiatives that rely on segment or buyer-persona focused mass-personalization, ABM builds on closely meeting the specific needs, challenges, and business objectives of the key decision makers of certain account(s) along the customer journey. In doing so, firms engage in ongoing research of their customers, although the depth of internal analysis may vary. The ABM research ranges from examining the account's strategic objectives, to mapping of decision makers within the account to gain a comprehensive understanding of each individual's pain, to further offering usage-related insights related to the specific account.

Interestingly, while being always personalized to certain accounts' specific informational needs, we found evidence from fully tailored, one-to-one ABM campaigns, towards multiple-account focused ABM that was tailored for a specific group of accounts with similar challenges building on data-based account insights. We also find evidence of using ABM in all stages of customer journey among the studied firms: ABM can support the salesforce prospecting efforts in pre-purchase phase by making the buying center members aware of the supplier firm and the opportunities how it can support the account through its offerings and new products. ABM was widely leveraged during purchase phase, especially to support long and challenging sales negotiations with fully tailored customer-specific campaigns that address the arising customer problems with convincing evidence for example building on fully tailor-made whitepapers for an account sent in e-mail newsletter for relevant stakeholders. Some firms also used ABM to facilitate sales-service communications in post-purchase phase for example by proactively communicating forthcoming component upgrade needs for specific customers purchased equipment or installed base, often leading to instant service sales opportunities.

"That customer is a hyper-specific customer in which you have obviously set very specific goals, and the level of personalization, in my case, is very high." (Firm 1)

"We try to understand with account-based marketing, what the customer's business initiatives are and align our activities and strategy with their customer business initiatives. (Firm 3)

"Personalization is key. The goal is to make the message as personalized as possible, focusing on the pains of the company, but even better, on those of the specific decision makers." (Firm 4)

Finally, we find that firms' ABM activities are highly sales focused. This sales focus manifests in two ways. First, interviewees noted that ABM sales collaboration is crucial for the success of ABM, to the extent that sales can be viewed as the primary beneficiary of ABM activities. In most studied firms, a sales team was the internal customer of ABM team, which in turn provided tailored resources for the needs of the sales situation. The data analysis underscores the importance of joint discussions and efforts between ABM managers and the sales team. Interviews indicate that key account managers (KAMs), responsible for managing the account, are critical for ABM as they possess valuable insights into the customer's specific needs and pain points. Thus, in many cases ABM practitioners actively participated in pre-sale calls and worked closely with sales to ensure a deep understanding of customer pain points. Interviewees also highlighter that the objectives of ABM managers and sales teams should be closely aligned and jointly evaluated for best outcomes. Second, the interviewees noted that ABM was highly accountable practice and in most firms ABM teams could show a measurable impact for facilitating revenues. We conclude that ABM managers can play central role in supporting the key account managers in achieving their concrete objectives through various marketing activities.

"I sit to the right of the Key Account Manager. That Key Account Manager is the salesperson, the reference person for that account" (Firm 3)

"When you talk about a key account, it is a role that follows that client, it is typically the point of contact for that client in your company. They are not specialized in any product or service, they are not a technician, but a salesperson, a relationship person who needs to understand the client's needs, understand the client's environment, how it works, and perhaps anticipate needs, suggest improvements in certain areas. Account Based Marketing collaborates with the key account and takes marketing actions to support the key account, in this case, the managing director is my client. So, my ultimate goal is to ensure that my team achieves the objectives. That is my final goal, and of course, in parallel, to ensure that the client is satisfied, maintains and improves trust in the company, and enhances relationships." (Firm 1)

"This is a case of complete alignment between marketing and sales, because marketing prepares the entire structure that helps sales to target the ideal customer; the latter will provide feedback to sales, which will then report back to marketing (any issues with the messages or the channel). This is a fundamental approach, especially in ABM (Account Based Marketing)." (Firm 4)

Drivers and Outcomes of ABM
The data analysis indicates four major drivers for ABM. Two of the drivers relate to the needed change in organizational culture whereas two of the drivers are marketing function/team capability-focused drivers.

First, interviewees noted that the top management's marketing function commitment is needed for successfully implementing ABM in the organization. Many B2B firms have dominant sales functions whereas the role of marketing function has traditionally been a mere support function focusing on building general brand awareness and providing materials for sales. Interviewees noted that optimally the top management should recognize that a contemporary marketing function can play an important role in supporting the customer journeys of informed and empowered customers in areas where traditional field sales have challenges. Without this top-management commitment, ABM is unlikely to attain the needed investments and attain needed access to the other parts of the organization. Interviewees noted that the marketing accountability is the central enabler of the positive change in the top management commitment.

"The top management must understand the role of marketing as a strategic "tool" and its role in enabling sales. This also requires that marketing people must learn how to talk about data and showcase the returns on marketing investments." (Firm 6)

Second, interviewees also highlighted the need for the cultural change among the salesforce for enabling successful ABM. If salespeople don't understand the role of ABM and how to effectively communicate together, ABM practices will become ineffective.

"It was a matter of mindset towards salespeople because there was a lot of adaptation and study involved. We had to communicate it and make sure the salespeople understood the new

approach internally. […] The biggest challenge it's a change in mindset, a change in approach, and also an educational effort because you have to educate the sales and extended team." (Firm 3)

Third, ABM requires marketing function to possess required competencies for digital marketing and technologies. The interviewees have indicated that technology serves as an enabling factor for the creation and implementation of ABM. According to the interviews, the marketing function needs to have the up-to date competencies to leverage the possibilities provided by technology and tools such as sophisticated customer analytics, CRM, social media, and marketing automation.

"It involves targeting large accounts and specifically building something within them, using software technologies to better address the interest and awareness of many individuals within the account." (Firm 2)

Fourth, ABM requires a data-driven approach, as the ABM process necessitates deep customer insights and personalization. Interviewees systematically highlighted that ABM, is fundamentally a data-driven marketing approach and that it cannot be effectively implemented without deep account insights. The personalization and ability to obtain detailed customer knowledge necessitates investments in technology and data.

"We influence the data analysis group by saying "we need to know XYZ" and they put together dashboards where we find that data and then we can analyze, look at it, and share it with sales to develop future strategic actions. For each individual client, we have that data." (Firm 3)

Finally, the interviews underscored the outcomes that can be attained through ABM. According to all of them, ABM has proven to deliver a higher return on investment (ROI) in comparison to traditional marketing approaches, with a primary benefit being an increase in revenue. In addition to generating revenue, one notable benefit highlighted by the ABM managers is the enhancement of customer relationships and partnerships with the accounts managed through ABM.

"The international team compares the performance of clients who are followed by Account Based Marketing and those who are not followed by ABM. And in fact, there are two digits of difference in terms of growth." (Firm 1)

"Immediate improvement is evident in relationships because you are able to organize One-to-One events with them, and therefore on those occasions, you are able to build relationships much better." (Firm 1)

STUDY CONTRIBUTIONS

This study offers three significant insights. First, it appears to be the first academic exploration of ABM in the realm of B2B marketing. Our research not only introduces ABM but also sets the stage for future studies by defining what ABM is and highlighting its core components. Second, we expand on the understanding of ABM by linking it with similar concepts like digital content marketing and key account management, and we start to uncover the main factors that influence ABM and its effects. Lastly, this study adds depth to the B2B marketing literature by shedding light on how modern B2B marketing operates in companies with large customer bases and how these firms can use ABM to improve their sales strategies.

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IDENTIFYING IMPOSTOR PHENOMENON AS A NEW DETERMINANT OF SALESPEOPLE'S BURNOUT AND EXPLORING THE MODERATING ROLE OF CUSTOMERS AND MANAGERS

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ABSTRACT

The impostor phenomenon- or the internal beliefs of incompetence, is a widespread phenomenon affecting 85% of working professionals and goes hand in hand with poor mental health and burnout. Salespeople facing increased expectations (technical knowledge, changing customers) develop the impostor phenomenon. Our study explores the mechanisms salespeople can use to counterbalance the effect of the impostor phenomenon on burnout and avoid increased turnover among sales teams. Building on job demand-resource theory, and a survey among 223 B2B salespeople, the study demonstrates how personal (flourishing) and managerial (manager support) resources attenuate the impostor phenomenon.

TOLERANCE TO AMBIGUITY AND ADAPTIVE SELLING: MODERATING ROLE OF AGE

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ABSTRACT

Tolerance to ambiguity is a personal trait influencing one's comfort and proficiency in navigating uncertain situations and has been largely overlooked in the sales context. This study contributes to the sales literature by linking a salesperson's tolerance to ambiguity to adaptive selling behavior. Using responses from 209 financial institution employees, study results show that tolerance to ambiguity positively impacts adaptive selling behavior. A post hoc analysis showed that this relationship is moderated by age and is stronger for employees under 37 years. The results highlight the importance of considering tolerance to ambiguity qualities in salespeople recruitment and training.

TOWARDS A LIMITED LANGUAGE MODEL IN SALES RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

This study presents an innovative method for examining sales literature using the advanced machine learning technology of BERT. Expanding on our previous research, we apply BERT to a corpus from the Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management and further extend our study to include the top ten sales-related journals. Our objective is to demonstrate the effectiveness of the BERT model in identifying and comparing topics across these prominent journals, marking the initial phase in developing a specialized LImited LAnguage Model (LILAM) for sales content. we present the preparatory steps (less the technical aspects and configuration) and emergent findings thus far.

EDUCATING THE MINDSETS AND SKILLS OF "OSEKKAI" SALES EXPERTS

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ABSTRACT

Sales education is still an important issue even today with the evolution of various technologies such as AI and chatbots. Although there is a lot of research in this field, it is extremely difficult to transfer the mindset and skills of successful salespeople to actual sales learners because each person's personality is different. This paper presents a case study of the sales practice and education of a "OSEKKAI" entrepreneur whose company she founded went public on the stock market. "OSEKKAI" is a Japanese word meaning to do what you can for the other person without worrying too much about his or her complexion. It is similar to kindness, but slightly different in nuance. The case study is analyzed against the effectuation theory of thinking styles of outstanding entrepreneurs, suggesting the possibility of a highly reproducible sales education method.