

DOCTORAL (PHD) DISSERTATION

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University of Sopron
István Széchenyi Management and
Doctoral School

**MODERATORS AND VARIABLES IN SOLUTION
SALES AND THEIR IMPLICATION TO SALES
PERFORMANCE IN AUSTRIA
AND GERMANY**

Doctoral (PhD) dissertation

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Sopron
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**MODERATORS AND VARIABLES IN SOLUTION SALES AND
THEIR IMPLICATION TO SALES PERFORMANCE IN AUSTRIA
AND GERMANY**

Dissertation to obtain a PhD degree

Written by:

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Prepared by the University of Sopron

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

b1	<i>regression coefficient</i>
B2B.....	<i>business to business</i>
B2C.....	<i>Business to Customer</i>
CL.....	<i>confidence interval</i>
Covid-19	<i>coronavirus diseases 2019</i>
CRM	<i>customer relation management</i>
DMU.....	<i>decision making unit</i>
e	<i>margin of error</i>
et al.	<i>et alia</i>
F	<i>quality measure significance</i>
F2F.....	<i>face to face</i>
IT	<i>information technology</i>
Mio	<i>Million</i>
MNC's	<i>Multi National Company</i>
MS	<i>Microsoft</i>
N	<i>population size</i>
p	<i>sample proportion, probability</i>
R&D	<i>research and development</i>
R ²	<i>quality measure</i>
RBT	<i>resource based theory</i>
S&P 500.....	<i>Standard & Poor's 500</i>
SIG.....	<i>significance</i>
SOCO	<i>selling orientation - customer orientation</i>
t	<i>variance</i>
TCE.....	<i>transaction cost economics</i>
U.S.....	<i>United States</i>
VBS	<i>value based selling</i>
Z	<i>critical value</i>

ABSTRACT

This dissertation provides a detailed overview of variables that can influence solution-oriented sales. In particular, the organizational and individual influence on sales performance are elaborated upon. These have their origin in the 19th century and have constantly evolved. Sales processes have always been interesting for scientists. Due to the free market but especially due to digitalization and globalization, individual customer solutions have become more and more important. In this regard, the following research question emerged: **Which variables on the individual sales person level influence the sales performance for solution selling?**

For a long time, the organizational level has been reported on and researched in practice but also in the academic literature. Here, mainly the structures, hierarchies and department interfaces of the companies were investigated. Hereby a gap in the personal sales level has developed. In the present study hypotheses were defined in the personal and individual sales area. In detail the effects of individual characteristics such as experience, prior knowledge or risk perception on personal sales performance were investigated. Further hypotheses were formulated in the areas of sales skills, communication and management requirements. In this regard disruptive events such as pandemics or sanctions were also included in the considerations.

Within literature research on the topic of solution-oriented sales, two qualitative preliminary studies as well as a comprehensive quantitative survey in Germany and Austria were conducted. The aim of the quantitative survey was to collect at least 300 opinions of different business-to-business companies (B2B) in the target area.

In this study, new scientific contributions were developed on the individual sales level. It has been found that adaptability and individual resources for developing a sales strategy are extremely important and critical to performance for many salespeople. In general long-term aspects such as customer relationships outweighed short-term motivations such as salary or bonuses. Revealed developments could be used to create new KPI performance criteria. Other results such as individual characteristics and capabilities can be used to deploy sales staff more quickly and so pay off earlier. These findings thus tie in with previous research results and provide new, unexplored insights into the individual sales level.

1 INTRODUCTION

Sales processes as well as the entire field of sales has changed significantly in the last couple of years. Globalization and new digitalization methods, as well as the increasingly complex customer behavior has put sales people in a new position to find appropriate efficient communication ways (Saura et al., 2019). These global topics in sales are not the only ones which influence salespeople but also sales managers in the sales funnel. Unpredictable situations like financial crises, inflation or the Covid-19 see firms struggle to keep their long-term strategies and meet their financial expectations (Bond et al., 2020). Sales performance is also closely connected to financial expectations and this is evident in academia as well. From the interviews, as well as the review of the literature, a large number of non-countable sales performance variables emerged: How long can a company keep a customer, satisfaction of the customer, efficacy of salespeople,...). In the B2B sector (Business to Business) “sales performance” is a complex variable which is not easy to predict. Former research on variables for sales performance show a small variance which affects the sales performance (Bolander et al., 2015; Evans et al., 2012; Verbeke et al., 2011; Zallocco et al., 2009). This specific part of sales was also appraised by scholars in the past (Evans et al., 2012; Matthews et al., 2018) and will be reviewed in the sections below.

Variables or also called drivers in sales have been investigated for decades and it has been found that performance, especially sales performance, is one of the key variable in the selling process.

Drivers for the sales process have been interesting since people started trading goods, long before money was established in the trading process (Verbeke et al., 2011). Such trading processes have been interesting for researchers since the 19th century. In these times the first sales process model, called persuasion model, was established. This model was called AIDA which is the abbreviation of Awareness, Interest, Desire and Action (Viio, 2011). Since that time scholars have enhanced the model to use it in a more professional way (Dubinsky, 1980).

The following literature review revealed that the determinants of such a sales process, which are called drivers or variables, are of utmost importance to control the sales performance of a or company or a sales person.

Verbeke et al. (2011) performed a literature review of academic articles about drivers which have influence on sales performance. He reviewed the meta-analysis by Churchill et al.

(1985) about sales performance which gives unique insight into the past. The meta-analysis by Churchill et al. (1985) spanned the years 1918 to 1982. Due to this Verbeke et al. (2011) decided to investigate in 25 years backwards from 2008 to 1982.

The former academic research shows that for example Churchill et al. (1985) focused on personal characteristics. The basic message from his meta-analysis was that such variables are not the most important ones which influence the sales performance. In other words, these personal factors depend too much on the psychological properties of the person.

Verbeke et al. (2011) presented a large overview in his research of the main personal characteristics. The main difference between the articles is that the research of Verbeke et al. (2011) is more finely grained when taking a closer look at the variables and subcategories.

The main suggestion of both academic articles is to find more precise grading, as well as influencing variables for sales performance. And this supports the significance of this present work.

The thesis wishes to examine this specific problem of influencing variables from a wider perspective and not only from a single side such as the personal view. The organizational variables are used in the articles mentioned before but will be explored with regard to in a deeper interconnection to the sales performance.

As mentioned by several academics long time ago there has been a shift from product-centred firms to offering totally integrated solutions (Sawhney, 2006). One of these reasons could be seen in the digitalization and automatization of different processes through different industries. Solutions become more and more significant in the sales environment. Panagopoulos et al. (2017) and Ulaga and Reinartz (2011) underline the importance of solutions in the sales business and suggest investigating in the individual and organizational characters of solution sales.

With this realization in the academic field, it was evident that the power of the seller has transferred to the buyer. This requires much more focus on solutions which means a bundle of products and services which will be adapted according to the customer's request and finally offered to the customer or stakeholders.

Through the globalization, firms are able to source their products from anywhere they want and resell it to other customers in the B2B environment. This is on the one hand an advantage but on the other hand also a disadvantage for product-centered companies. Product-centered companies do not have any competitive advantage over others. Such firms mainly depend on the price of the product and face competition with existing competitors. These companies are more and more under pressure regarding margin and profitability (Reinartz & Ulaga 2008).

To differentiate firms in the B2B environment a possible workaround could be to transform the product-centered firm, and especially salespeople, to solution selling. Solution selling was recognized by scholars in the past and confirms that offering solutions, results in increased return on sales (Worm et al., 2017). Recent literature on solution selling focuses mainly on the firm level (Koivuniemi, 2016). Scholars agree and argue that solution selling has top priority in B2B business and should be researched in depth (Guido, 2012). The actual market situation in case of Covid-19 shows a reassessment of firms in general. In this aspect the competitive advantage will be a possibility for companies to recover after the crisis.

To predict and adapt the sales process for higher sales performance, the topic of solutions selling on the personal level is highly interesting with regards to research in the area of the sales environment. La Rocca et al. (2016) and Murtha et al. (2014) argued that the salespeople will have an essential role in the interaction of a sales process. The focus will, therefore, on the individual and organizational variables and moderators of a solution sales process which could have an influence on the sales performance.

1.1. Significance

In sales in general, but especially in solution sales, the salespeople play a crucial role (Grewal et al., 2015; Kumar, Petersen & Rapp 2014). Seen from the organization, salespeople are valuable for companies to gain profitability, customer relation as well as reputation on the market. From interviews it was concluded that firms have recognized the importance of solution selling and sales person involvement. This coincides with the existing academic literature in this field.

International firms, including firms in the Fortune 100, have outlined that preparing salesforces which implement effective customer solutions has highest priority (Koivuniemi, 2016).

This finding gives evidence on company and management level from the practical environment that individual variables in solution sales will be highly important for sales performance. It was revealed that variables which influence the sales performance in solution sales are a current challenge. This challenge is present through different industries (mechanical engineering, automotive industry, energy sector, textile industry, IT-Services, service providers,...)

Sales performance in this context will not be limited to the financial aspect of a firm or individual performance. The present work will provide alternatives to the financial performance, although the financial point will still be an important one for all stakeholders. Therefore, research on solution selling could contribute to sales persons' income. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2015) examined that salespeople involved in solution provision are among highest paid employees by U.S. firms (Panagopoulos et al., 2017).

The significance of the mentioned topic for sales performance over a wide field of product and service providers which cover solutions for customers was highlighted. The sales performance will encompass alternatives beside the financial aspect and will help firms to build up more resilient tools to withstand critical phases of the economy.

1.2. Gaps

The specific sales related topic focused on described above. In detail this research took a closer look at the variables which influence sales performance in solution sales. Through a detailed literature review the major gaps were uncovered and outlined more in depth in the literature review below. A short extract of the main gaps will be mentioned in this paragraph to get a holistic overview of the problem.

The first gap that emerged is within the topic solution sales. In academic databases a vast amount of literature regarding solution sales can be found. Scholars agree that solution sales is becoming more and more interesting. Johannsson et al. (2003) stated that solutions in sales, which form a combination of product and services, will be more important in times of

digitalization. Many researchers after him recognized that solutions will be attractive research for academic and practitioner journals (Eggert et al., 2014; Worm et al., 2017; Colm et al., 2020). The question of why it is difficult to deploy solution sales in the industry remains, however.

Through the deep insight into solution sales it was found out that most of the existing literature focuses, with respect to solution sales, on the organizational level. Worm et al. (2017) confirms that finding in his research.

Because salespeople play a crucial role in sales processes, the individual sales person's role should not be neglected if one would like to get a holistic view on the sales performance. The growing importance of solution selling and the lack of investigations on individual sales person level could have great potential for future business deals.

Scholars in the field of marketing and sales confirm this. Salonen et al. (2019), as well as Worm et al. (2017) argue in the same direction and state that, detailed investigations should be done on the performance on individual level of the sales person.

Panagopoulos et al. (2017) advised, additionally, to examine the non-sales employees who are necessary to provide solution selling in the organization. This will be necessary to provide a complete picture of sales person solution selling. Doing so, the analysis will include also partially firm level analyses. Concerning integrity, further research on the activities performed to develop solution selling on sales person level is necessary (Panagopoulos et al., 2017).

A common gap within existing literature and empirical studies in this field is that the examined data are focused on a limited number of companies, industries or countries. So general evidence on the previous studies is not always given. It would require costly research.

The second big gap which arises through the research concerns the sales related variables and moderators. The literature review showed that many variables could influence the sales performance. So, sales performance is of utmost importance for scholars and that is why performance is the most cited topic in marketing research (Leigh et al., 2001). That implies that sales performance is one of the strongest variables for this present research. Yet, there are expected to be other variables that influence sales performance.

Through detailed review of the existing literature it could be seen that past research on variables had difficulties to measure a significant effect on sales performance. (Bolander et al., 2015; Evans et al., 2012; Verbeke et al., 2011; Zallocco et al., 2009). But if these variables do not have a bigger influence on the sales performance, there must be other ones which will be more important to research. One argument could be that in the past the focus was placed on psychological variables related to the sales person. It seems that they are too unconnected to the sales process itself.

Meta analyses in this field like Churchill et al. (1985) have done from 1918 – 1982 or Verbeke et al. (2011) from 1982 to 2008 showed improvements on the variables and the influence on sales performance. Because of the behaviour of buyers, the economy and its volatility, as well as the digitalization has changed tremendously, the variables have changed over time.

This specific part of sales was also appraised by scholars in the past (Evans et al., 2012; Matthews et al., 2018) and is of highest interest for the academic field. The mentioned gaps above are only an overview and will be analyzed in the following sections.

1.3. Research question

Especially in the first phase of the research the author tried to get a comprehensive overview of the topic solutions sales. This is necessary to understand the existing literature and find out more about the total sales process, as well as the current situation. As the thesis describes, the situation in sales has changed and will change and so it is necessary to create a holistic view.

First of all, tentative research questions as a starting point for review and data collection were created. In this study the research focused on the sales process itself to become familiar with the academic literature. This first online research gave an overview of the world of marketing and sales. Because the economy and the accompanying sales cycle are getting shorter it was equally important to gather empirical data to refine the research questions. The aim of the empirical data was to gain as much information as possible. In that way the author conducted the interviews with buyer, seller or both (sales- and buying processes) depending on people's role. This approach created a qualitative overview of sales process.

After the first pre study period and the literature review the research questions could be refined to focus more on solution selling. Due to unpredictable situations in the sales environment (financial crises, COVID-19, war, ...) solution selling is becoming more and more important and is seen in a strong relationship with sales performance (Koivuniemi, 2016).

The first empirical interviews generated very beneficial feedback. In most of the interviews through all empirical phases of this thesis the interview partners mentioned that the salespeople who communicate with a buyer or other sales related people are crucially important in relation to sales performance. In the academic literature about sales performance this was recognized by some specific scholars before and research on the individual sales person level was suggested. This outlines that sales persons are crucial in the sales process especially in terms of sales performance (Cornet et al., 2000, Grewal et al., 2015, Kumar, Petersen & Rapp, 2014).

Regarding the above-mentioned importance and the targeted literature review, as well as the empirical interviews on solution selling and main gaps, the following research question was developed:

- **Which variables on the individual sales person level influence the sales performance for solution selling?**

This study covers the current situation of sales in the years 2020 to 2023 and, thus, does not aim at a longitudinal analysis.

1.4. Contribution

The review of the literature as well as the empirical interviews revealed that a sales person or the salesforce of a firm will be one of the most valuable factors for an organization (Grewal et al., 2015; Kumar, Petersen & Rapp, 2014). Additionally, solution sales are getting more and more important in unpredictable situations (Bond et al., 2020).

Both findings above, as well as the confirmation from the empirical interviews, demanded a rethinking of the sales-related processes. Specifically, the processes should be more solution- and sales person-related. State of the art sales processes are mainly not solution oriented; instead they are product orientated (Wise & Baumgartner, 1999; Linz & Müller-Stewens, 2012).

It is recommended to adapt the sales process into to direction of solution sales and to take into consideration the salespeople who are mainly responsible for creating solutions for the buyer. This could be a further development for sales processes recommended by Mociief and Marshall (2005) and Sheth and Sharma (2008) who argued that the sales process has to become more relationship-oriented.

It is suggested to provide a framework for solution selling in consideration of individual sales person variables to improve sales performance. This study contributes to the existing knowledge of organizational and individual variables in sales as these moderator variables will be further developed. Furthermore, these variables are closely connected to sales performance which will be the most interesting variable for a firm.

Viio (2011) stated in his research that until 2010 the sales process in a business-to-business relation was mainly seen as how sales persons could do their jobs. This process depended mainly on the long history of rigid sales processes with little flexibility (Spiro & Weitz, 1990).

These days changes are being considered and there may be two major reasons. One reason is the rapid advance of digitalization in sales and in the industry, as well as the in parallel existing crises.

Scholars have recognized the interesting field of research in sales and have started making the first suggestions. Tuli et al. (2007) was one of the rare researchers who argued for the expansion of the research in solution selling on the individual level. He proposed a four-step

sales process instead of the seven-step model of Dubinsky (1980). The focus in the research of Tuli et al. (2007) was on the organizational level which is a basis to improve upon.

If the result of Tuli et al. (2007) and others can be extended by the individual level, it would be possible to adapt the sales process according to current complexity requirements. Therefore, it is necessary to deconstruct the process and get insights into the individual and organizational variables which influence the sales process and, finally, the sales performance.

The present thesis provides theoretical, as well as managerial, implications for salespeople and sales managers. The contribution on the theoretical level includes a holistic view of the sales process and the empirical data from expert interviews. Especially the individual variables which are related to sales performance were developed during the research work. The managerial implication consists of the potential of sales person level variables and the possibility of adaption and communication. Furthermore, the interconnection of organizational and individual variables will help managers to adapt sales environments continuously to positively influence the sales performance. For example, through feedback from the sales force market solutions could be adapted to be more resilient to disruptive events from outside of an organization. Implications for salespeople could include more efficiency in resource allocation and a higher degree of freedom for the sales process. Implications for stakeholders like buyers or suppliers could be a long-term relationship and better understanding of the long-term strategy of both buyer and seller.

1.5. Key terminology and moderator variables

In the Table 1 below, the main key terminology which is used in the present study can be found. These key terms are discussed in chapter 2 which contains the literature review of this work.

Table 1: Key terminology and definitions

Concept	Definition
Sales Process	A system of elements containing a series of actions or steps primarily conducted by the seller aiming at business engagement and the buying process (Viio, 2011)
Individual Sales Characteristics	Characteristics which are needed to deploy solution sales. For example, experience in sales, knowledge of sales and risk assessment (authors definition)
Sales Capability	Value creation and adaptive capability on the sales person level to develop solutions which meet buyers or customer requests (Hengstebeck et al., 2022, p. 379)
Solution	A solution is a combination of products and services that creates value beyond the sum of its parts (Johansson et al. 2003, p. 2)
Management Theory	Management theory is closely connected with leadership theory, and they are not defined in a common “wording” or “understanding”. However, management theory deals with the functionalistic institutions of an organization. (Darmer, 2000)
Management Requirements	Properties of an organization which are needed to enable solution selling on a personal or individual level (authors definition)
Adaptive Selling	Adaptive Selling describes the capability of a sales person to provide customized solutions to an individual customer request (Harindranath et al., 2019)
Cognitive Capability	Cognitive Capabilities means the capability of a sales person to contemplate, think and decide in various manner with the aim to influence the sales process (Mukherjee et al., 2012)
Intrinsic Motivation	Intrinsic motivation delineates a person’s motivation to complete a task or work for his or her own sake or enjoyment (Bande et al., 2016)
Process and Structure	The moderator variable process and structure in this work describe the organisational processes and hierarchy in a firm (authors definition)
Experience and Knowledge	With the experience and knowledge, the author means work experience in the field of sales as well as the knowledge in this field (authors definition)
Communication Capability	Communication capability in this context is the overall process of gathering, receiving or exchanging information between the seller and the buyer (Large, 2005)
Sales Performance	The sales performance will map a contribution for the sales person and finally for the company. In short terms it will be mainly financially figures but in the long-term performance also non-financial attributes could be counted. (Verbeke et al., 2011)

Source: Author’s own design

1.6. Research process

Research on a complex topic requires a well thought out research process. Therefore, the author searched in the literature data bases for different research processes. One of the important issues which arose through the specific literature research was the subject of logical processes. Peirce (1980) stated in his article that there are three different classifications in relation to working on a research topic. These are the abductive, deductive and inductive reasoning.

In the complex situation of sales, the author chose the abductive approach for the stated problem. The abductive approach starts with an upcoming problem. This problem will have a literature background and will be explored in detail. To underpin or elaborate the reason of the problem the author seeks to find the best explanation to the complex topic to shed light on the situation. Hurley et al. (2021) confirmed that abductive approaches for such complex studies are well justified in areas where many alternatives exist. In the figure below a model of the used research process is presented. The “T” marks the theoretical part, and the “E” marks the empirical part, whereby the size of the arrow indicates the weight of the part in the respective research phase.

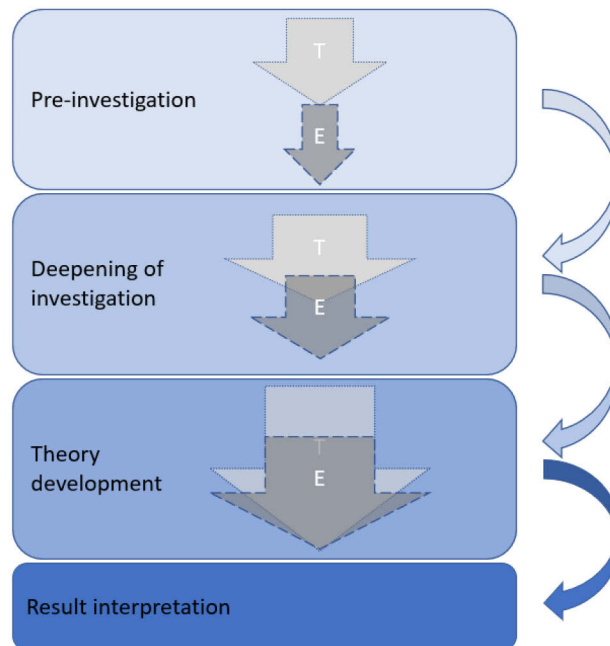


Figure 1: Model of the research process

Source: Author's own design

The presented research process followed a more linear way, whereby the output of each phase was the input for the next phase. Each phase consists of a theoretical consideration and empirical research. Both parts have different significance in each phase and influence or overlap partly on the different evaluation stages.

At the beginning of the research process a narrow literature research was carried out to receive a general overview of the solution sales topic and discover if there is a general gap traceable. After the short literature search a few qualitative interviews to verify if the problem matches both theoretical and practical area of research were conducted. The overlapping parts of theory and practice resulted in a deepening of investigation for the research process. It quickly became clear that this problem is of interest to academics and practitioners.

The second phase offered a broader understanding for the research topic. So, the theoretical and empirical part partly overlap. Results from interviews gave inputs for further refinement of the literature research. On the other hand, the literature findings gave better input to clarify the questions for the interviewees. This interplay of the two layers allowed for deeper knowledge and a better process which helped improve the academic contribution of this work.

This development required the refinement and adaption of the research process again. Through the literature findings it was possible to summarize variables and define specific moderators which influence the sales performance on the individual as well on the organizational level. The previously established research question was specified and adjusted according to the latest relationship between theoretical and practical findings. Through familiarization with the new information the individual sales person level was chosen as focus and relevant variables which influence sales performance were investigated. Since these individual variables always correspond with organizational variables, the main ones will be considered to gain a deeper insight into this level.

To establish the theory from the gained literature research and empirical interviews the task was to review theoretical background of each variable to find the right alternative and interpretation and compare it the new findings from empirical interviews.

The above outlined structure helps to understand the overall research process. Deep insight into sales processes was gained, especially in solution sales and the result was to choice of

the specific area of the influencing variables of sales performance. As the topic is very complex, it will be broken down in the next section.

1.7. Hypotheses

In the following paragraph the hypotheses were listed chronological for an overview. The detailed hypotheses development will be described in the chapter 2.7. Hypothesis H 2.1 to H 5.1 have the common rule that H1.1 is the prerequisite for sales performance. The hypotheses cover individual and organizational variables.

The first hypothesis analyses the direct influence of solution implementation in a selling process. This independent variable has a direct connection to sales performance and is formulated as follows:

H 1.1: Solution implementation increases individual sales performance

The second hypothesis covers the individual sales characteristics of a salesperson. This independent variable could be influenced by three moderators like experience, knowledge and risk perception.

H 2.1: Individually gathered sales characteristics will positively influence the sales performance

The third hypothesis focus on sales capabilities of a sales person which could be influenced by the adaptive and value creation capability of a sales person.

H 3.1: Individual sales capability characteristics will result in higher sales performance

In the fourth hypothesis the author investigates in the communication capability of a sales person and used solution engagement and the communication channels as moderators.

H 4.1: Communication capability positively moderates the relationship between solution implementation and sales performance

Because the present research covers individual and organizational variables the fifth hypothesis deals with the organizational requirements. The fifth hypothesis used resources, motivation as well as process & structure of an organization as moderators.

H 5.1: Salespeople who get individual and suitable resources will increase their sales performance

To understand the connection between the individual and organizational variables in accordance with depended and independent variables a research model was developed. The model explains the correlation between the five independent variables with the depending variable individual sales performance. Figure 2 below shows the research model including a detailed description of the moderators.

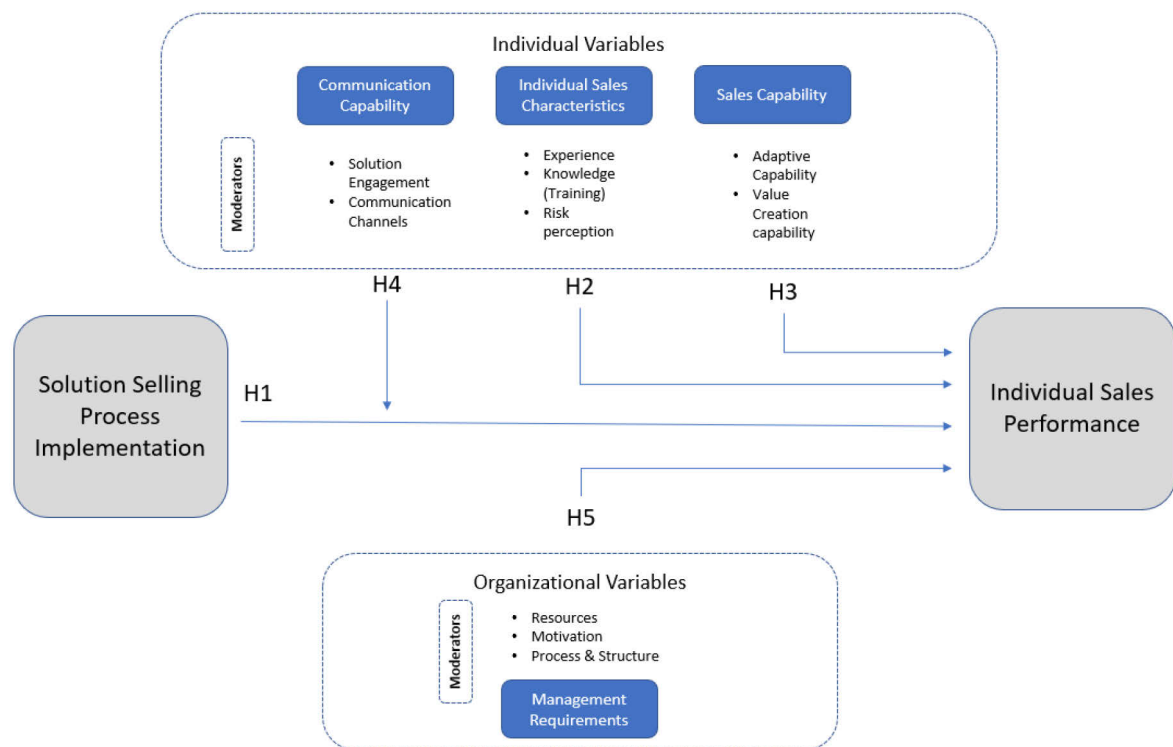


Figure 2: Research model of hypotheses

Source: Author's own design

The detailed hypotheses development will be described in the chapter 2.7. In the chapter 4.2 the analysis of the hypotheses is stated in the form of H1.0 to H5.0 (null hypotheses) and H1.1 to H5.1 (alternative hypotheses).

1.8. Structure of the thesis

This first chapter contained the introduction to the thesis. It described the general significance, gaps from the academic point of view and the contribution to the scientific literature. Sales performance is one of the most discussed variables in the academic field of B2B companies and depends on the different sizes of organizations, starting with retail stores to Multinational Companies (MNC's). The thesis focuses on a specific part in sales called 'solution selling'. It seems that solutions are becoming more and more important for a sustainable relationship between two companies.

The aim of this work is to gather information from the existing literature, as well as from interviewees who are confronted with the vulnerable economy. Both information will be discussed in detail and broken down to the individual and organizational level. With the gained information from literature and practitioners' variables which could influence the sales performance and help to understand the mechanism behind the sales processes will be developed. This information will help to answer the research question of how solution sales will influence the sales performance, as well as which variables are responsible for such a change. Furthermore, the first chapter will explain the key terminology which is used in the thesis to give a better understanding of the existing literature. Therefore, variables and moderator variables will be summarized and categorized, as well as own variables based on the literature developed.

The chapter 2 is named literature review and describes the research concept and methodology and starts with an introduction to the sales topic. The aim is to provide a holistic view on sales and refine the view down to the specific problem of solution sales. To understand this complex topic this section will contain important information about the relation to definition of solutions in relation to sales. The main part in this chapter will deal with the review of the existing literature and the main findings on solution selling. In this section the significance of solutions will be developed and discussed in relation to the relevant variables. In the existing literature there already are different approaches to solution

selling but have not been broken down into the individual sales person level. Therefore, existing variables on organizational and individual level are used and will be extended by newly developed variables.

The research progress which is structured into four phases will be described in detail. Phase one will explain the general interest of solutions sales in the environment of sales supported by opinions of interview partners. The second phase describe the refined process of literature research, as well as a deeper insight gained from interviewees into the topic of solution sales. In phase three the gaps in the literature were identified and a quantitative survey of 300 respondents was conducted. With the quantitative survey a better understanding of the influencing variables on sales performance and solutions sales should be established. The fourth and last phase will describe the analysis of the gathered data to test the established hypotheses.

The main variables used in this chapter will also be discussed in relation to the existing theories. This will be necessary to understand the exact definition of each variable as the present thesis focuses on their relation to sales performance. Ambiguities with other relevant sales topics should be avoided.

Besides the main part of this chapter the sales process will be outlined to conclude the description and discussions.

Finally, the gaps and weaknesses will be discussed to underpin the importance of the research.

Chapter 3 describes the methods, approaches and tools used this thesis. In this section the research methodology selection is outlined in detail. Based on the research procedure of Reinders and Ditton (2011) a research process was established. According to the developed approach it was possible to create a four-step research concept which is based on qualitative and quantitative phases. The chapter includes also the data analyses and ends up with the hypotheses testing.

Chapter 4 will be used to present and discuss the empirical and theoretical findings in relation to the research question. This section describes the origination of a sales process from the beginning up to the conclusion. Therefore, all hypotheses will be discussed and interpreted according to the gathered information from qualitative interviews and the quantitative survey. The author revealed novel insights in the topic of solution selling and gained

practical guidance for sales managers. New scientific contributions were mentioned in the last section of this chapter.

Chapter 5 provides the conclusion of the academical investigation. First this chapter gives a summary of various research in this thesis. The methodological and conceptual contribution will be discussed, as well as the managerial and practical implications. Furthermore, results will be summarized, and limitations of the study mentioned for further research.

Chapter 6 will list all references used in this thesis.

Chapter 7 will summarize the forms, tables and figures used to explain outcomes in detail.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The present chapter of the research concept and methodology will explain the theoretical concept and methodology of the thesis. The concept is based on the existing literature. Therefore, the concept, as well as the methodology, is underpinned and justified according to the reviewed literature which will also be part of the present chapter.

At the beginning of this chapter insights into the solution selling processes and the related theories behind those processes are given. Step by step deeper insights into the subject are revealed and the stated problem will be elaborated on.

Attention will be drawn to the variables which were used in the research concept below. These variables and the related theories are connected to company resources and capabilities and are the cornerstones of the theoretical framework.

Therefore, the existing theories used by other researchers will be highlighted and the reference to the stated problem discussed. Furthermore, the author will give the statement to the epistemological and ontological positions.

2.1.1 Background and importance of solution sales

In this section the literature review will be presented to explore solution selling in the sales process in a business-to-business context (B2B). To understand the topic of solutions it is necessary to get a broad overview and include different subjects from the literature connected to solutions. The review includes literature from marketing and sales, as well as service offering, whereby the focus was on solution offerings. The starting point is the sales environment and its challenges over the last decades, sales in general and the related stakeholder behaviour, as well as the environment, have changed significantly (Saura et al., 2019). To predict and adapt the sales process to gain higher performance, the topic of solutions selling is interesting for scholars and the sales management. To conduct the systematic review the following main questions were used:

How is solution selling related to performance and effectiveness? What are the influencing variables that moderate this sales performance? The target of the systematic literature review

is to get and holistic view of solution selling and of the entire sales process. Importance shall be paid to the moderators which influence the individual solution process to enhance the performance of a sales person.

Through this systematic literature research, it was found out that there is a substantial number of literature resources about sales performance and efficiency. Scholars but also managers of a company are interested in adapting and investigating their sales processes to gain higher performance and increase the efficacy in their organization. This present thesis focuses on solution selling which is one possible part of the sales environment to improve the performance and efficiency. In this regard the author has reviewed literature on solution selling on organizational and individual level. The review showed that the majority of the research was done on the organizational level of solution selling and only little research on the individual level is available. One of the few articles which are available, examined the involvement of solution selling and the role of salespeople (Panagopoulos et al., 2017).

2.1.2 Aspects and topics considered in the literature review

Sales and solutions are a comprehensive topic in the literature and have to be reviewed in a selective way. The present thesis focuses on solutions created for customers in a sales process. These solutions could result in a specific product or service. Such solutions arise from individuals or teams of individuals. The literature was selected according to solution selling and the related processes on organization level, as well as individual level. Related to the topic, the review contains literature from the theoretical background of solution selling, industrial marketing, transformation of product-centred firms to solution selling. Specific interest in the literature was placed on the individual sales person level. Koponen et al. (2019) argued that little investigation was done on individual level which could be confirmed by the author. In this regard the review examined variables and moderators from the existing literature which could have influence in solution selling. Such effects and moderators are performance, efficiency, adaptiveness, communication, resources, and others. These variables and moderators should be used to combine necessary personal skills and techniques to influence the individual sales performance.

2.2 Selected sources for the literature review

To conduct a thorough literature review it is necessary to cover a broad view of the subject and collect as much related data as possible. There are several methods available which can be used to gather background information. In this present study the author uses the method of mythological innovation which was described by Onwuegbuzi et al. (2010). In their research work they argue to use several alternatives to collect related data to the research topic and collect qualitative as well as quantitative data from the literature. Hurley et al. (2021) argue in the same way and defined this method as an abductive approach which is often used for complex topics in the academic literature.

The literature review is a complex project and should be planned in detail. In this specific work the author follows the systematic steps of Rowley and Slack (2004) to conduct the literature review. They argued to start with the step of evaluating the information source, then moving on with the search process itself, creating the framework and concept and, finally, writing the literature review.

The objective of this review is to analyse the existing literature in terms of solutions in a sales process with the specific focus on variables which influence the individual sales performance. With the gained expertise, it will be possible to deduct possible outcomes to improve solution selling on individual and also on organization level.

In the first step the author will find out all about “solution selling” and “customer solutions” from the literature. Therefore, and general research will be done through the databases ABI/INFORM, GOOGLE SCHOLAR, SPRINGER, ELSEVIR, EMERALD, SAGE and STATISTA. In the second term the author refined the search through a combination of search terms. This will lead to systematically finding on articles depending to the actual research. For example, “B2B sales”, “business development”, “solutions”, “sales cycle”, “channel management”, “sales experience”, “customer experience”, “transformation”, “value based selling”, “salespeople” and “salesforce” were combined with “performance”, “efficiency”, “efficacy”, “adaptive”, “value”, “experience”, “role”, “capability”, “communication”, “expectation”, “motivation”, “risk”, “knowledge” and “resilience”, and others. This combination of terms yielded more than 149 articles, books and further academic literature which would be used for further research. In the Figure 3 below the author describes the literature review process in three steps.

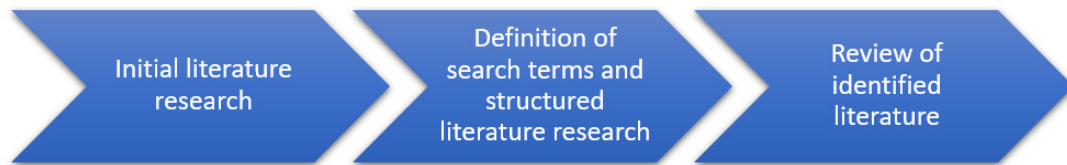


Figure 3: Literature review process

Source: Author's own design

2.2.1 Structure of this chapter

The present work is divided into different topics and subjects to provide a profound knowledge about the existing literature, research concept and methodology. First, the author examined the definitions of solution selling which could be found in the literature. Beyond the selected definitions and literature, the author summarized in the table below the level of research as well as the methodology and gaps. The next chapter will be the main part of the literature review and start with the main findings on solution selling. The next part will contain the key authors on solution selling and their core research. This part will reveal important variables which influence solution selling on organizational and individual level. The author then used these variables to find communalities as moderators on individual level. The next chapter will describe the related theory on solution selling and explain the fundamental relation to existing theories. To get a holistic overview the author starts with a profound description about the sales process and its stages and then move on with management theories which are related to the revealed variables and moderators. Management theories includes adaptive, creative, motivation, organization, practical intelligence, communication, and performance theory. Finally, the author evolved the existing gaps from the selected literature to contribute and adapt the existing framework with the present thesis.

2.2.2 Sales process

The aim of the literature review is to get a holistic insight into the solution selling environment. To understand the selling process in general and specifically in the B2B context, this section will describe the developments. The sales process was already interesting in earlier times which was recognised by practitioners and scholars. In the 19th century researchers in the field of sales established a first persuasion model called AIDA which is the abbreviation of the words Awareness, Interest, Desire and Action (Viio, 2011). Since that time scholars have enhanced the model to use it in a more professional way. Dubinsky (1980), referred to the AIDA model, and developed a modified seven step model which included a more detailed distinction of the different steps in a sales process.

This seven-step model includes the following process steps: prospecting, pre- approach, approach, presenting, overcoming objections, clos and follow up (Dubinsky, 1980). Within the actual research, the step of pre-approach is important and will be discussed with different sales processes. Pre-approach includes the planning and preparation of a sales person before he gets in contact with the customer. Whereas the steps by Dubinsky (1980) focus on activities in a sales process, this thesis suggests that also including the preparation of the sales person to use these activities in the sale process would be needed to reach a better sales process.

Moncrief and Marshall (2005) investigated the difference between traditional sales processes and an evolved sales process. Based on the seven-step model which represents the traditional sales process, Moncrief & Marshall (2005) argued that the market and the behaviour of customers has changed. They discussed that the traditional process needs to become a more relationship-oriented process. This underpins the importance of customer - seller relationship which will lead to solutions at the end of the process.

However, the evolved new model of Moncrief and Marshall (2005) describes a transformation from a sequential process to an interactive process. That means that in a sales process not all steps must occur as its necessary in a traditional process. The most important distinction regarding that model is that the different steps could also appear at different sales stages. There is no defined start or end of the process. This shows that the process itself is adaptable on the situation or customer behaviour.

Traditional sales processes are nowadays in some way not effective enough to gain a better performance. Today the market and firms are changing their organization and strategy more frequently so that the sales process needs to be adjusted in order to increase customer orientation (Viio, 2011).

Scholars in the academic field of sales processes have investigated the sales process to find possible solutions to adapt the process to fit for practitioners. Schmitz and Ganesan (2014) found that diversity in customer expectations is a trend in the current B2B sales environment. Firms struggle to find out customer expectations and then set up their business sales processes to fulfil the customer needs. Thus, it can be said that the first stages of a sales process are of utmost importance to establish solution selling through the entire organization.

To overcome the fast changes of the market and sales behaviour a sales process needs a feedback loop to adapt the internal process steps. One such an adaptive process is described by Binckebanck and Elste (2016). Their process consists of four steps which include: customer contacting phase, customer information, buying process and after sales service. In each individual step there is an exchange of information and so it will be kept adjustable at any time. Also, this process model of a selling process focuses on the actions which are carried out during a selling process.

Regarding solution selling, which is discussed in this present work, the main focus is on the individual selling level. One of the most frequently used sales processes which is outlined in the literature is the one by Tuli et al. (2007). This process describes a solution-based sales process from the customer perspective and includes the main steps of the solution. The relational process is divided into customer requirements definition, customization and integration of goods, deployment of products or service, post deployment and customer support.

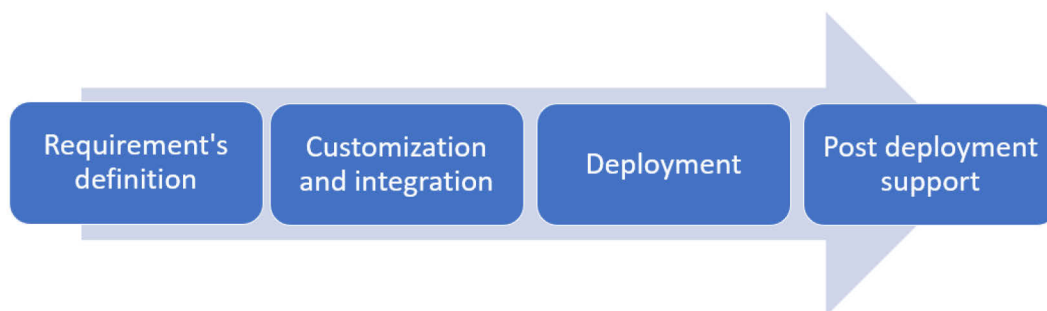


Figure 4: Solution selling process

Source: Adapted from Tuli et al. (2007)

2.3 Definition of solution selling

The first obligation to step into the topic of solution selling was examine what “solutions selling” stands for. Initially, it was found that there are different statements and arguments in the literature to describe solution selling. With little background on solutions, the definitions are not uniform throughout the literature on a holistic sales environment. Therefore, the literature was screened for definitions of solution selling and 13 definitions by important authors in the academic solution selling area were found.

The table below summarizes definitions of findings for customer solutions which was evolved through a systematic literature review. The conducted literature included academic and practitioner sources to cover a holistic view on solutions. Summarizing the selected definitions, three commonalities were detected: Solutions are designed to meet customer needs, they combine a bundle of goods and services, and they are integrated in a process and/or organization of a customer’s application (Tuli et al., 2007). Tuli et al. (2007) established in their research the perspective of solution selling from the supplier and the customer side. The customer view has a more process-centric view whereas the supplier has a more product-centric view. The process-centric approach could also be found in service dominant logic literature which is closely related to solution selling (Lusch & Vargo, 2006). The Table 2 below lists the most important definitions for solutions in the context of sales. The complete list of definitions will be shown in Annex 1 in chapter 7.1.

Table 2: Main definitions of solution in the academical literature

Definition	Level	Methodology	Author
Solutions for a customer will integrate tangible and intangible components.	Organization	Literature research	Bond et al. (2020)
A solution is seen in a wide perspective and consist of a relational process between customer and supplier. It combines customer requirements, customization and integration of products and services, post deployment customer support (p.2)	Organization/ Individual	Empirical research with 125 interviewees on suppliers and customers	Tuli et al. (2007)

Source: Author’s own design

Most of the reviewed literature refers to the organization level and describes the valuable processes and variables regarding solution selling. Few articles focus on the individual level which is confirmed by Koponen et al. (2019) and Ulaga and Koli (2018) who argue in the same way, that the research is scarce in the field of individuals. One of the few articles which investigate the sales person level in depth is by Panagopoulos et al. (2017) who describes the involvement of the sales person in solution selling on a personal level.

Another aspect on the selected literature is the methodology. The author screened the literature according to the methodology and outlined it in the table above. There are literature reviews as well as empirical studies available. To achieve meaningful insights in the mentioned topic the study covers the whole relevant range of research.

2.3.1 Fundamentals of the solutions selling theory

Given the literature on sales and the related theory, two main theories will be used to argue for solution selling. These are the resource-based theory (RBT) and transaction cost economics (TCE) which are also the most used theories in relation to supply chain management, marketing or management (Gligor et al., 2019). The RBT will be used to explore the strategic resources of a firm. Such resources are divided into tangible resources and intangible resources. Tangible resources would be physical assets like financial and human resources, raw material, machinery whereas intangible resources like organizational routines, behaviour of culture, knowledge, know-how, relationship with customer, customer experience, internal education resources would fall under intangible resources.

Barney et al. (2001) argued in his research that the resourced-base view on a firm is necessary to understand the competitive advantage which is related to capabilities of a firm. Both resources and capabilities will represent a bundle of skills, processes and routines which are responsible to distinguish one firm from another.

Worm (2017) and Wernerfelt (2005) draw attention to the fact that the basis for reviewing solution selling and its resources and capabilities is the RBT. Resources and capabilities are responsible for competitive advantage. Grant (2016) argued that knowledge and identifying knowledge is the most strategic resource of a firm.

Competitive advantage is necessary in the free market to ensure innovation and outperforming their competitors. Solution selling is one part to ensure competitive

advantage. Porter (1999) stated that there are two main strategies to attain competitive advantage for a firm. The one is cost advantage and the other is differentiation advantage. For differentiation the innovation process and investments are important. Roper and Turner (2020) argued, referring to Schumpeter's "growth model", that innovation in difficult economic situations like a crisis could create new and ideal resources.

This basic theory supports the idea that solution selling can create an additional customer value. This thesis wishes to adapt this current research based on these fundamental findings and extend it with qualitative and quantitative analysis.

Nevertheless, the topic in general covers also parts of TCE. This present research should give a unique insight into the role of a sales person who is integrated into the organization. Therefore, also the second most used theory in the supply chain area will be included in this work to understand the differentiation to the RBT (Gligor et al., 2019). Resources and capabilities are tightly connected to cost issues and performance of a firm. Especially solutions cover attributes like investments and risks on different levels such as individual or organization level. Palmtier et al. (2007) argue to examine also TCE in relation to solutions to cover, on the one hand, the theoretical view and, on the other hand, the managerial relevance which is rarely outlined in the literature.

The investigations mentioned above will be based on the RBT. Additionally, aspects of the TCE will be considered to cover cost impacts and describe performance in a broader context.

To emphasize the importance of the subject of solutions in this present work gaps in the existing literature must be pointed out. These gaps comprise the individual view on solution selling in different aspects. A sales person is a crucial factor for solution selling. That means that the people who have to find solutions have to have all necessary resources and capabilities to establish solutions for the customer. The gaps will be explained in more detail in a specific chapter.

2.4 Main findings from existing literature

Many studies have been conducted in the last years regarding sales solutions or service strategies. In the literature the term 'solution' is closely related to the term 'service' and they blur in a certain way. However, solution in B2B seems to be interesting for scholars and has been researched widely in the recent years (Eggert et al., 2014; Worm et al., 2017).

Many of the studies in the literature address that solutions or solution selling in the B2B environment could elevate firms to a higher level of performance. Guido (2012) and Koivuniemi (2016) confirm this with their research that customer solutions will be effective and have a high priority for firms around the globe.

Scholars distinguish between the individual sales person and organization level and focus on their established reviews or empirical projects. In the literature review only, little research was found on the individual sales person level. The majority of research was done on the organization level (Koponen et al., 2019; Panagopoulos et al., 2017; Ulaga & Kohli, 2018). This finding illustrates one of the biggest gaps in this subject.

The author examined different studies and literature and found out that solution selling is often related to the process of transformation from products-centred firms towards solutions. Linz and Müller-Stewens (2012) argued that the way from product selling to solution selling is multifarious. For example: differentiation from the competitor to raise price margins, differentiation in relation to the product itself (nonexchangeable goods) or creating a sustainable partnership and customer experience. The transformation could have several reasons but in most cases the perception of the customer is involved in the starting point of change. As described earlier, the globalisation, as well as the technical distribution, have increased and have brought great information potential to the customer.

That means that the power has moved from the manufacturer to the customer or buyer (Holland & Young, 2010). The behaviour in sales has so far changed through all processes and underpins the important topic of solution selling. This was also recognized by another research in this field (Linz & Müller-Stewens, 2012).

The dominant factor in the sales process seems to be the buyer who is in the position to push the shift from product-centred buying processes towards solutions. One of the main reasons for companies to do so is to outsource components or parts of production and focus on the own competences. At the same time, the firm could be more flexible and reduce costs and

could lower the invested capital (Linz & Müller-Stewens, 2012; Lovelock & Gummesson, 2004).

In general, the solutions are described as an integrated customized bundle of goods to meet a customer need. However, Tuli et al. (2007) stated that it is of importance to reflect upon this and also investigate how the customer may think about this topic.

This is important to check expectations of buyer and seller. Customers' or buyers' needs must be checked from the seller's side to create solutions and establish partnership with the customer. This thesis uses the question of Tuli et al. (2007) and will investigate the individual level to investigate the expectations placed on sales persons to provide solution selling. To research this specific attribute the existing models as well as the existing individual variables and moderators will be reviewed.

With the examination of definitions in solution selling a broad overview of the key authors in the field of solution selling was created. To get a deeper insight into solution selling and the related variables the core topics to evaluate further ongoing selection of the literature were established.

Tuli et al. (2007) argued that the view on solution selling is different between the supplier and the customer. In his research he focused more on the organization level rather than on the individual level. However, he was one of the scholars who explicitly mentioned that suppliers tend to have a product-centric view, whereas customers tend to have a process perspective or solution view. Such a viewpoint includes the requirement definition, customization and integration, deployment, as well as the post deployment support.

To deconstruct the sales process and to verify each process element a deep understanding of how organizations deal with individuals in an organization is necessary. Since this thesis wishes to find out which variables influences sales performance, it is necessary to examine the existing variables on organisational and individual level. Scholars before recommended similar approaches, which confirms the contribution to this present thesis.

Sawhney (2006) investigated the properties which could have an influence on the effectiveness of solution selling. He starts first to identify or analyse the customer problem and ends with the products or services to overcome the problem which are called solution. Hereby, the knowledge of the customer organization and the related products or industry is of utmost importance.

It was found that the process perspective was used by many researchers to develop their perspectives and research (Panagopoulos et al., 2017; Salonen et al., 2020; Worm et al., 2017; Macdonald et al., 2016; Verbeke et al., 2016). This underpins the importance of investigating the process-oriented view in more depth and taking a closer look at the individual sales person level.

Besides the process level at different stages in a solution process the related variables and moderators play a crucial role. If the variables and moderators could be defined for selected behaviours it would be possible to adjust the solution selling process to be more efficient and gain a higher output performance. Tuli et al. (2007) examined variables which describe what the supplier needs to offer to provide effective customer solutions on an organizational level. This shows the importance to investigate the needs of the sellers and buyer's side.

The aim of Tuli et al.'s (2017) article, as well as for other researchers from the table below, was to research and gain insights into variables which have influence on solutions on organizational or individual level. This thesis focuses on the variables which could be found in the literature. These variables do not strictly relate only to the organization level but also affect the individual level.

The table below splits the existing variables into organizational and individual variables. Even when the original article focusses on the organizational level, the variables themselves have influence on the individual level. In this case the few articles in the field of individual level were focused on and a good allocation of the variables was the goal.

In the next stage the extracted variables were summarized into umbrella variables called developed moderator variables. These moderator variables could have influence on sales performance and will be investigated further.

All the variables were developed by the main authors in the field of solution sales and will have highest importance. Through finding commonalities between these variables the right moderators which have influence on the individual sales performance were established.

With the transformation and segmentation of the variables into moderators, it is possible to use them for the further framework. The hypothesis will be constructed accordingly and will be tested through different stages. This will be explained in the chapters below.

Table 3: Consolidation of individual and organizational variables

Organization Variables (from literature)	Developed Moderator Variable	Individual Variables (from literature)	Developed Moderator Variable	Process level description	Author
Contingent hierarchy Documentation emphasis	Process & Structure Process & Structure	Incentive externality Political counselling	Motivation, Motivation	Requirement definition, Customization and Integration,	Tuli et al. (2007)
Encouragement for Creativity Customer Adaptiveness extrinsic Reward Resource Availability	Process & Structure Adaptive Motivation Resource	Sales person autonomy Customer demandingness Workload pressure Customer portfolio Heterogeneity Intrinsic reward	Resource, Knowledge Experience, Knowledge Resource Experience, Knowledge	Awareness Problem solution discovery evaluation	Bonney & Williams (2009)
Sales unit cross function cooperation Firms' product portfolio scope	Process & Structure Experience, Adaptive	Relation tie strengths Customer adaptiveness	Experience Knowledge Adaptive Selling	Requirement definition, Customization and Integration, Deployment, Post deployment	Panagopoulos et al. (2017)
Role expectations (Solution) Training Market-shaping behaviour	Process & Structure Resource Adaptive	Solution experience Value-based selling Risk perception	Experience Knowledge Knowledge	Requirement definition, Customization and Integration, Deployment, Post deployment	Salonen et al. (2020)
Technology intensity Buyer power	Process & Structure Resource	Sales capacity Value creation	Knowledge Experience, Knowledge	Requirement definition, Customization and Integration, Deployment, Post deployment	Worm et al. (2017)
Organization competence Customer orientation	Process & Structure Resource	Employee competence Sourcing network competence	Experience, Knowledge Experience, Adaptive S	Requirement definition, Customization and Integration, Deployment, Post deployment Feedback look of value in use	Macdonald et al. (2016)
Organization & Environment	Process & Structure	Role Ambiguity Cognitive Aptitude Adaptive Selling Selling-Related-Knowledge Work Engagement	Process & Structure Experience Experience, Knowledge Knowledge Motivation	Requirement definition, Customization and Integration, Deployment, Post deployment	Verbeke et al. (2016)

Source: Author's own design

As can be seen in the Table 3 above, moderator variables which correlate with existing variables from the literature were developed. The moderator variables are derived from the authors own research and will be used for the further framework. In addition, to the developed moderator variables one further moderator was added. Risk perception will also be used in the present investigation because this topic was also present in some rare literature findings and was mentioned as important in personal interviews. All moderator variables used are summarized below:

Moderator variables for solution selling - related to resources and capabilities

- Process & Structure – (Resource)
- Experience - (Capability)
- Adaptive selling capability - (Capability)
- Knowledge - (Resource & Capability)
- Motivation - (Capability)
- Resource - (Resource)
- Communication - (Capability)
- Solution engagement- (Capability)
- Value creation capability - (Capability)
- Risk perception (Capability)

2.4.1 Variable and moderator related theories

Based on the literature research variables and related moderators for solution selling which could have influence on the performance of an individual sales person were revealed. Churchill et al. (1985) investigated in a meta-analysis to find out associations between sales performance and related determinants. The research showed that one of the first criteria is the personal factor followed by the skills of the sales persons. After that he ranked role variables, aptitude and motivation. On the last place the organizational factor could be found. The result of Churchill's research showed that in the past the type of product was the basis for the sales performance.

Behaviours of seller and buyer have changed so that these variables and moderators have to be examined in detail. Contributions on the sales person level will be interesting for practitioners as well as academics at that point. To understand the basis of the revealed moderators the author investigated the theories which will be explained below.

Moderator levels for solution selling – related theories

- Adaptive Selling - (Script Theory)
- Value creation capability - (Creativity Theory)
- Motivation - (Intrinsic Motivation Theory)
- Process & Structure - (Organisational Theory)
- Experience& Knowledge - (Theory of Practical Intelligence)
- Communication & Engagement - (Communication Theory)
- Resources – (Performance Theory)
- Risk perception (Risk Processing Theory)

2.4.1.1 Adaptive selling – script theory

Cognitive research has been interesting for the sales since the 1980's. Since that time scholars have recognised that cognitive behaviours of the individual sales person could have influence on the performance of the sales person (Weitz et al., 1986). Saxe and Weitz (1982) as well as Weitz et al. (1986) have laid the base for research on adaptive selling. The awareness of the cognitive behaviour of the sales person in different situations in a sales process shed a new light on the sales strategy. If a sales person could use their cognitive knowledge to adapt the sales strategy, they would be more profitable than others who do not follow such a cognitive behaviour. Bonney and Williams (2009) described in their research that the cognitive-based individual sales person's cognition is related to script theory. Salespeople who continuously use adaptive behaviours must have knowledge of and experience with interaction with customers. In this perspective the first phase of identifying customers' personal needs and customer type behaviour is important to adapt the sales strategy if needed (Evans et al., 2000).

Adaptive selling behaviour has a great influence on the selling environment in general. Individuals in the whole selling process will benefit if they have adaptive knowledge and could use it in their daily business. This ensures that the foundation of the script theory routine behaviours could be used which promises a more effective performance in the working routine.

Since the behaviours and expectations in sales have changed Wang and Netemeyer (2004) concur that solution selling needs a wider understanding and adapting process. They argue that customers expect a more active role than only receiving products or service information. The new generation of salespeople is forced to implement new ideas to fulfil the customers' requirements. In other words that means that a sales person has to be creative in finding solutions for the customer. Bonney and Williams (2009) additionally stated that solution selling has changed the behaviours on customer and seller so that standard routine scripts are not enough for successful solution selling. The sales person's capabilities in the area of cognitive knowledge must be trained much more than the previous years.

2.4.1.2 Cognitive capability (value creation capability) – creativity theory

Salespeople are the forefront of a company and generate leads for a firm. Customers who are seeking for a counterpart who could create solutions for their own demands are looking for creative and solution-oriented salespeople (Wang & Netemeyer, 2004).

Creativity is part of social psychological theory which was earlier only a personal approach (Williams & Yang, 1998). Nowadays, creativity knowledge helps a sales person to understand and solve customer problems. Even if there is an existing solution which does not fit exactly for customer's needs, creativity could help to change the perspective and find other solutions which will fit better to the customer expectations.

Creativity is no longer only tied to the personal psychological system. Sternberg and Lubart (1998) emphasized that the interaction of individuals with the environment and the existing related components must converge to enhance creativity. Especially in solution selling the sales person is involved in different processes or is working with multiple partners to create a solution. Creativity and the related theory are more and more important to provide novel practical ideas. The advantage of creativity is that it is for free and everyone could learn creativity. Also, practitioners could be creative and provide novel solutions for customers.

Creative ideas are not restricted to a specific part of academia. They could be created by anyone (Nickerson, 1998).

2.4.1.3 Intrinsic motivation – intrinsic motivation theory

Salespeople can be distinguished according to with which they do the job of selling. The effort they invest in their job will bring a better performance at the end even when it is not in the short but in the long run.

Some of the people will need the motivation from their management or from the sales champion to be motivated. Others have their own motivation to contribute their best performance. This self-motivation is called intrinsic motivation (Wang & Netemeyer, 2004). Intrinsic motivation means that salespeople do not need an external motivation from the management. It is their own desire to do the best job or perform better in the next situation.

The intrinsic motivation is based on intrinsic motivation theory and argues that people who are competent and use effective strategies feel good. If such people then get additionally a tangible reward the intrinsic motivation will be amplified (Deci et al., 2001). The intrinsic motivation is closely connected to satisfaction as well as creativity. Similar to creativity a sales person needs time to develop solutions and so characteristics like creativity are needed. To provide new ideas scholars expect that a sales person will need a certain autonomy to be creative. Such autonomy in the job could strengthen the characteristic of intrinsic motivation (Hackman, 1980).

The present work will check the motivation of salespeople and managers in a leadership position with regards to solutions. It is expected that the intrinsic motivation could also amplify other factors which are needed for solution selling. Zhou (1998) stated that intrinsically motivated individuals tend to also have other characteristics which could result in a better individual performance.

In general, scholars agree that external motivation from management or organizations, as well as intrinsic motivation, improve performance and positively influence the individual sales person (Rubenson & Runco, 1992).

2.4.1.4 Process and structure - organizational theory

Salespeople work with customers, in teams or alone. However, the sales person is always integrated in a team and the team in business units and so on. This depends on factors like company size, product or culture. Organization theory is used to describe how individuals or groups work together and how the organization is structured. Organizational theory is related to management, as well as system theory (Hewege, 2012). Starting from the classical theory via systems theory the aspect of accounting becomes more and more relevant for organizations.

As described above, the sales environment has changed dramatically, and the market is less predictable for firms. That is why scholars argue that management control and accounting will have influence and this is described today by contingency theory.

It is necessary to understand how organization adapt and react according to their environment or the contingency influence factors (Hewege, 2012). As the market and behaviour of the stakeholders changes continuously, there will be no common solution for all companies (Otley, 2016).

Also controlling has changed over the years and the balanced score board card was established in the 1990s. Regarding solution selling and the in-depth interviews conducted regarding solution selling and surviving crises, many customers could consider further non-financial targets which are related to solution selling. A possible key performance indicator (KPI) could be the years of partnership or the time resources needed from offer to contract. It seems that the current situation will shape the sales environment again in the direction of a stakeholder approach.

From the perspectives of management accounting and solution selling the present analysis shows that the future is quite unpredictable so KPI's have to be adaptable and should be readjusted periodically. The frequency of adjustment is given by the market or sales environment itself.

Otley (2016) examined in his research the independent and dependent variables of management accounting which includes the most common variables such as: technology, uncertainty (competition), organization size, employee's engagement. These independent variables are connected to dependent variables which are described as performance, effectiveness, innovation, design of systems which can be related to solutions.

Accordingly, this thesis will use similar dependent and independent variables. In the literature relation to solutions, these variables are also called factors and moderators (Bonney & Williams, 2009). In that regard most articles mention effectiveness and performance as interesting for solution selling, as confirmed by Otley (2016) who revealed that effectiveness is used in contingency theories as one of the KPI of organizations. In most cases the effectiveness of the organization will be defined as financial performance.

2.4.1.5 Experience and knowledge – theory of practical intelligence

Companies tend to have a mixture of old and young people. This should ensure that experienced old people will pass on their experience and knowledge to the younger ones (Hansen et al., 1999). On the other hand, the younger people will implement new ideas in a firm to possibly adapt standard processes.

In general experience and knowledge is closely connected in theory as well as in practice. Knowledge could be seen as an intangible asset of an individual human and underpins the experience (Smith, 2001).

Of course, there will be base knowledge which will be attained through education at school or at universities. If sales persons then work in a firm which produces special products, they have to gain a different type of knowledge of their own products and also of the product of the customer. Beyond that base knowledge the sales person will gather customer experience over time. The more experience the sales person has the higher is the expectation of the firm regarding faster and higher sales performance.

In the literature two different types of knowledges are stated. One is the explicit knowledge and the other is the tacit knowledge. Explicit knowledge is academic knowledge which is well known and written in a formal language. Such knowledge will be trained at schools or universities. Tacit knowledge describes the practical and action-oriented knowledge which is based on personal experience (Smith, 2001).

It was concluded from academic literature that tacit knowledge is mainly the experience which individuals have as an intrinsic characteristic or which will be attained over time from personal work experience. Experienced people in the sales environment are often called champions. Champions are used to instruct younger and new salespeople (Salonen et al., 2020).

Experience in the role of a sales person, and related to the topic in this present work, will mainly depend on the customer and product experience as well as the organizational experience. As described several times before in this section, the sales environment and behaviour has changed and will continue to change. To be more resilient, individuals like sales persons, but also other individuals of a firm, have to learn from these changes and enhance their capability to improve the practical processes (Matthew & Sternberg, 2009).

The existing literature describes that experience will be learned through practice over time and reflection on the outcome of the activities. Since industries differ it is not easy to find a common ground to teach experience. This gap was addressed in the literature (Cianciolo et al., 2006).

To attain customer experience will not be an easy task, so scholars have investigated if experience could be taught. Mathew and Sternberg (2009) have focused on developing concepts for training methods of experience-base knowledge in their research. As a result, they assert that experience is based on the cognitive awareness of an individual and underlies three selective processes: encoding, combination and comparison of information.

Based on research of Matthew and Sternberg (2009) as well as on social theory-based methods, scholars know that training of individual and cognitive behaviour will enhance learning ability and improve gaining experience.

The current work will contribute to existing literature in those salespeople, but also the leadership of sales departments will be interviewed about their opinion regarding experience and previous work experience in sales. The intention of this work is to develop possible concepts how experience and knowledge could be transferred from champions to salespeople.

2.4.1.6 Communication and engagement (capability) – communication theory

Communication between humans is omnipresent. More than that, the technology has changed significantly so that it is possible for everyone who has a mobile device to communicate anywhere. In the last decades the technological change has elevated communication to one of the most important topics in sales. The present research focusses on the technology, as well as on the salespeople who use technology to communicate.

Besides the great potential of technology, individuals are necessary to communicate between two parties.

In a B2B sales setting the salespeople are the ubiquitous source of communication between the buyer and the seller (Sharma, 1999). Because the entire sales environment is getting more complex, the salespeople play an important role in a sales setting. They are responsible for enhancing the relationship between the buyer and the seller (Homburg et al., 2011; Tuli et al., 2007).

Since nowadays different possibilities are available for communication the human communication between buyer and seller is important. In times of the internet and cyber communication the personal contact, as well as the cognitive behaviour during a communicative action would be useful in a sales setting.

Fawkes and Gregory (2000) argued that communication between humans in sales could be traditionally divided into different levels. The first level is the intrapersonal level which means the communication of individual with themselves. Secondly, there is the interpersonal communication which describe the communication between two individuals. Related to a B2B setting this will normally be the case when a sales person is in a sales situation. The third level would be the communication within a group up to 20 people. Finally, there is the organizational communication which has defined structures regarding how to communicate. Whereas communication in general is well researched by scholars, communication in relation to business development has not been explored in detail (Koponen et al., 2019; Alamäki & Kaski, 2015).

Koponen et al. (2019) performed in their research an in-depth sales interview with both practitioners and educators which are in the field of B2B environment. The aim of this research was to find indicators for sales performance in relation to communication behaviours. The findings where that beside the common categories like cognitive, behavioural, and affective characteristics, salespeople need to have sales acumen. Sales acumen is defined as a sales person possessing characteristics like leadership skills, understanding and knowledge to convince customers.

A sales person who has sales acumen will use different styles of communication. It depends on the sales situation which style will be the best to achieve the highest performance and meets the customer expectations. The commonly used styles are storytelling and adaptive selling.

Storytelling is often used to provide a link between events or deliver information through different perspectives (Gilliam & Flaherty, 2015). Salespeople who use storytelling can build trust and convince a customer of their own product or service. Depending on the industry and culture of a customer, the salespeople have to decide which communication style is useful. Bellizzi and Hite (1985) assert that putting a little pressure on customers with closed questions in combination with storytelling could be helpful to convince a customer. Besides these aspects they further argue for using simple language to avoid uncertainty or misunderstandings in communication.

Adaptive selling, which was outlined earlier in this chapter, depends on script theory. This means that depending on the situation the sales person will use defined tactics to convince the customer. To provide and use defined tactics scholars have defined scores for selling orientation – customer orientation (SOCO). Saxe and Weitz (1982) have established a 24-item version which relies on the self-assessment of the sales person and is related to the needs of the customer. A general approach is also not possible because each selling situation is unique. Adaptive approaches are highly context-driven and depend to a high degree on the seller's experience (Giacobbe et al., 2006).

2.4.1.7 Sales performance - performance theory

Performance and efficiency are key words in relation to solutions selling. The aim of solution selling is to improve both areas. Many scholars state that solution selling could increase sales performance and make processes more efficient (Bonney & Williams, 2009; Tuli et al., 2007). This may be true if the seller has implemented solution selling throughout the entire organization and on the individual level. If the strategic work isn't settled properly the firms could have no improvement in performance. It could get even worse, so that the profitability will decline (Johansson et al., 2003). The same finding was stated by Roegerer et al. (2001) who mentioned that many suppliers are not in the position to attain their margins they expect from the customer.

The obstacle to increasing the performance is that there is not a universally applicable effect of the theory. That is why firms are struggling to integrate solution selling and achieve a better performance. The empirical research shows that only one out of four companies gain an extra margin of three to seven percent of return on sales (Johansson et al., 2003).

Sawhney (2006) asserted that solutions are more complex and, therefore, salespeople need more time to understand the problem and discuss the problem in detail with the customer. This leads, in general, to longer sales cycles with solution selling which has to be considered when a firm transitions from product-centred selling to solutions. Within longer sales cycles a sales person is supposed to support the customer through the whole sales cycle and even longer. During this time a sales person could get unique information and insight into a customer's firm or process.

With a profound and specific customer knowledge and general experience in sales it would help a sales person to adapt their selling behaviour and, thus, contribute to the individual sales performance (Weitz et al., 1986; Sujan et al., 1994). Scholars have recognized many social factors are related to selling in general and are important for a sales person.

Sawhney (2006) argues that the shift from product-centred firms to offering totally integrated solutions will pay off in several ways. The business with existing customers could be extended because companies offer a wider product or solution portfolio. Additionally, the customer can shift some of the work to the supplier side and so move the responsibility away which creates a benefit for the customer and a higher opportunity for the supplier. Sawhney (2006) stated in his research also that if the supplier found a specific solution, the supplier has less competition because the substitution barrier of the solution is higher for competitors.

One possibility to achieve a better performance through solution selling is to redefine the entire value chain. Wise and Baumgartner (1999) call such a process downstream. They argue that the complete value chain needs to be redefined and set up for solution selling. The traditional view of profit as the margin earned on the sale of a product is then no longer valid. Solutions need to be conceptualized in a different way regarding performance. On the one hand there is the financial performance and on the other hand there will be the non-financial performance.

Stanley and Wojcik (2005) suggest a holistic view on solutions and their related processes. If suppliers ignore these processes the additional cost will increase, and the performance will be underdeveloped.

2.4.1.8 Risk perception – risk processing theory

Salespeople are required in their daily business to sell products or services or a bundle of both, which are called solutions (Galbraith, 2002). When salespeople leave their usual way to sell their products or services, they enter unfamiliar territory. Salespeople will face challenges when they have left the product sales and go into the direction of solution selling. Maier (2021a) revealed in his pre study through qualitative interviews that risk perception is an important topic for salespeople. An investigation of risk perception is necessary when companies try to transfer their sales form product centric to solution sales.

There is no evidence whether solution selling harms the sales performance because of risk perception. However, risk in general is present for salespeople who are at the customer. There are many risks like performance risk, financial risk, social risk and many others. In relation to the present research the focus will be on the individual performance risk for salespeople.

Especially for a single sales person, the risk perception is one variable which will be examined in future research. When people are not trained or confident in a sales situation to have the right tools to establish a solution they could fall into a conservative attitude. This may get salespeople in inconvenient situations and create obstacles in their sales process (van der Borgh & Schepers, 2018).

In order to find out which theory is the basis for risk perception, the literature was screened for a definition. One useful definition could be found in the research of Conchar et al. (2004). They described the risk perception related to individual behaviour and how decisions are made. Risk perception, therefore, will be described via the perceived risk processing theory.

Van der Borgh and Sherpers (2018) built their theory framework on conservative sales behaviour in relation to the perceived risk. This view is similar to and meaningful for the present thesis because similarities between the product centred view and the solution sales view can be seen. Product centred could be seen as conservative products whereas solutions are individual new products. However, Van der Borgh and Sherpers (2018) describe the risk perception theory in different phases and different risks relate to individual salespeople.

In B2B sales situations and in combination with solutions sales the performance risk will be interesting in further investigations. Performance and risk are closely connected in sales processes. Johnson and Sohi (2016) argued that salespeople's efforts to sell new products

will turn into positive performance on the individual level. When salespeople are convinced of their product or service they will readily go the extra mile to engage with the customer and close the deal.

Allcot and Sweeney (2016) in contrast found out that salespeople strive to fulfil their sales targets when they have to promote their new products or services. One of the reasons could be that salespeople have to be sure to understand the new product in detail before they explain it to the customer. Challenges or problems may occur while trying to find a solution for the customer. So many uncertainties could appear.

The more uncertainties appear the closer the salespeople will tend towards a more conservative solution (Jost et al., 2003). This may hinder the solution sales process and will be a big challenge for companies to transfer their product-centred business into solution business. For such extreme situations scholars found that B2B companies are considering exchanging entire sales organizations and sales teams to transition from product-centred or conservative selling to solution sales.

2.4.2 Why to use moderators in this context?

The author verified the developed moderators with the existing literature and discussed scholars' opinions on the subject.

The research of Bonney and Williams (2009) deliver important insights on the sales person level. They argue that salespeople who follow the strategy of solution selling have to have the skill to recognize opportunities. It is necessary to recognize patterns and behaviours of the customer's business environment. These observations have to be transformed into actions by the sales person who should achieve a positive performance for the firm but also for the individual sales person.

The view of Bonney and Williams (2009) underpins the that the personal skills of a sales person could be one of the factors which will elevate solution selling to a better output level. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate the sales person's skills and education so that these sales persons are well prepared for solution selling.

Variables which could influence the salesperson's effectiveness are an important aspect and, thus, this work wishes to find out the most relevant variables and moderators which influence

solutions on an individual level. These variables effect supplier and customer in a certain way. Tuli et al. (2007) revealed that solutions effectiveness depends on the customer's but also on the supplier's behaviour. Both parties have to understand their core competence to understand the partner's role and adapt their internal processes.

There is no strict separation between organization and individual level. Both should be balanced and continuously adapted.

Bonney & Williams (2009) studied the cognitive insights of a sales person in relation to solution selling and explored three cognitive processes – "Awareness, Problem-solutions discovery and evaluation" (p 5). The three-step cognitive process is similar to the process steps of Tuli et al. (2007) which are called Requirement definition, Customization and Integration, Deployment, Post deployment.

The fact that solution selling is seen as process will help to gain understanding of the expectations placed on the sales person to fulfil the requirements. Researchers in this field have made comments which underpin the importance of this view. The present work contributes to existing literature in this direction.

Looking deeper into the key research on variables and moderators, the following insights could be derived from the literature. Tuli et al. (2007) argued that the communication of the value which a customer derives from solutions is important. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the relational processes between supplier and customer. Communication of features and benefits to convince a customer is not an easy task for a sales person. To communicate efficiently in selling situations salespeople have to understand the solution process as a whole. Only when the sales person is fully involved in the process of understanding the needs, identifying the operation context and providing a customized solution they will have success (Cerasale & Stone, 2004).

Dhar et al. (2004) also stated that sales persons have to invest time and high outlays in identifying the customer's needs and finding the right strategy to meet these needs. Again, it underlines the need on the individual level to be prepared to find and recognize the needs of a customer. On the other side the management must provide the right resources (time, communication techniques,) to establish solutions.

Resources depend both on individual level but also on the organization level. A sales person has to have enough resources which are tangible and intangible to recognize, understand and

develop solutions. Chonko and Jones (2013) confirm that the model of solution sales requires handling resources carefully. They recommend that beyond the traditional characteristics like persuasion the salespeople should become experts in resource planning.

Bonney & Williams (2009) mentioned that the existing literature is limited with regards to research on the sales person cognition. This topic is known by academic scholars, but research is scarce in terms of solution selling. The research of Bonney & Williams (2009) explained a new construct of the cognitive base of a sales person. As the trend of solutions is continuing in the B2B environment, recognition of sales opportunities will influence the success of solution selling.

Resources can be divided into tangible resources and intangible resources. Tangible resources are physical assets like financial and human resources, raw material, machinery and alike. Intangible resources are organizational routines, behaviour of culture, knowledge, know-how, relationship with customer, customer experience, internal education resources and the like.

Barney et al. (2001) argued in this research that the resource-based view on a firm is necessary to understand the competitive advantage which is related to capabilities of that firm. Both resources and capabilities will represent a bundle of skills, processes and routines which are responsible for distinguishing a firm from another.

Resources are the foundation which a firm on organizational level but also and individual sales person is based on. This present work focuses on the individual level and reveals the necessary capabilities to prepare salespeople for solution selling. In this matter special attention will be given to knowledge.

Sales person with expert knowledge use more strategies to adapt their communication to persuade a customer (Bonney & Williams 2009). Such sales experts are also named champions in the literature (Salonen et al., 2020). Findings from scholars provide evidence that the knowledge and also other moderators are combined in a relational solution selling process. Knowledge and education, which is a part of knowledge, plays an important role for the sales person through all the different phases mentioned by Tuli et al. (2007).

Evans et al. (2000) stated in relation to solution selling that effective sales persons first scan the customer. After the first identification and through the profound knowledge the sales person will adopt the right strategy to convince the customer of the solution. Weitz et al.

(1986) mentioned that the term solution selling was not a common wording in the academic field. The term of solution selling evolved through several changes in the sales environment. Through the differences in knowledge of a sales person and also through the usage of the term itself, solution selling become more and more known in the academic field and has influenced the individual sales performance.

2.5 Gaps and weaknesses of existing literature

The mainstream of research has provided significant benefits for the sales practitioners and academics. It was revealed that the majority of research was done on the organizational level, but the sales environment is not a monotonous field. However, scholars have recognized that there is a move in sales into a direction of solutions and services. A few articles which argue in the same direction were found. One of these articles was written by Wang and Netemeyer (2004) who argue that there were few investigations in solutions to explain the relation to performance and sales models.

Many scholars recognized that implementing solution selling is not an easy task. More research should be done in this direction in a general view. To highlight this importance, the findings of Wise and Baumgartner (1999) who carried out an empirical analysis are relevant. A survey of 1.000 largest manufacturers has revealed that only eight outperformed the S&P 500 and one third of the companies see their stock value decline. These companies were structured in a product-centered way and did not manage to transform into solutions businesses.

One reason why they fail could be the not well-defined role of sales persons in solution selling strategies (Worm et al., 2017). This underpins the current research question to investigate the individual sales person level and the variables which are related to sales performance.

Wise and Baumgartner (1999) argue in the same way that manufacturer or product centred firms have to rethink their strategy. Manufacturers know their core competences well. Besides this main or core activity these firms have to go downstream to the customer. In such a downstream process which includes financing, maintenance, spare parts or other consumables, the firm could create additional value for the customer.

There is a lack of research on the individual level which is important for solution selling. Tuli et al. (2007) described their research in a more contractual theory than evidence testing theory. Recommendations for further research would include topics such as the measurement of the effectiveness of solutions, evolving variables and their moderators both on supplier and customer side.

The present work will focus on the current literature of scholars in this field and contribute to the existing research. Variables and moderators which influence solutions selling on the individual level seem to be significant. Bonney and Williams (2009) revealed in their research that a possible factor whether a solution processes is effective or not could be the sales capability and, in particular, the cognitive processes of individual salespeople. Academic research on cognitive properties of a sales person is scarce. For more evidence these capabilities will be tested within this thesis.

Profound customer insights are of utmost importance to create solutions for a customer. Purchasing contacts are not enough. The sales person has to know multiple levels of the organization like engineering, management, manufacturing and finance. All these people have a crucial role and are necessary to provide added value for the customer (Cornet et al., 2000).

Williams and Plouffe (2007) stated that cognitive bases have a significant influence on the individual characteristics of a sales person. Such factors influence the effectiveness and should be considered in solution selling. However, times have changed and some of the factors are not relevant anymore. The reason is that the B2B environment is much more complex than years ago. A similar notion has been put forward by Sternberg and Lubart (1998) who argue that the success factors in sales the environment have changed over time.

Besides the mentioned and confirmed general contribution of solution selling, researchers agree on further research on the individual sales person's skills as well as on the necessary characteristics for transforming from product sales to solution sales (De Jong et al., 2014; Evans et al., 2012; Blocker et al., 2012).

Koponen et al. (2019) mentioned another important gap in his research. Given the fact that salespeople are one crucial source for building long term relationships to the customer, the communication capabilities of salespeople were focused on little in past investigations in the academic field. Therefore, Koponen et al. (2019) contributed one of the few articles in this field. The present thesis will build on these examined findings.

Communication capability to create solutions at the individual sales person level is underrepresented and should be more investigated as was argued by scholar who have been working in the communication field for years (Blocker et al. 2012; Hossain & Gilbert, 2021). Communication is responsible for the relation between the seller and the buyer and directly connected to the performance characteristics. This understanding is necessary to investigate in detail and understand the mechanism between seller and buyer.

Based on the found gaps in the literature, research will be done on organizational and especially on individual variables like skills, knowledge and motivation. The present thesis will pursue existing research and contribute to the current literature which is useful for scholars and practitioners.

2.6 Research model

As discussed above, the most cited and used theories for sales processes, especially regarding sales performance, are the resource-based theory (RBT) and transaction cost economy (TCE) (Gligor et al., 2019). Worm et al. (2017) used the same basis for their research on firm performance where the performance must be defined clearly. The communalities to the present subject of sales performance could be found in both individual and organizational variables. Therefore, the theory of RBT depends on resources and capabilities which overlap in both variables of the individual and organizational level. The perspective of TCE will be included as well. However, this theory will only refer to a few variables like risk perception and the related costs.

The author combined the theoretical concept of Worm et al. (2017) which focus on levels related to sales the performance with conceptual frameworks of other researchers which focus on the variables linked to sales performance.

Literature which examines the variables in relation to sales performance either on the organizational or individual level will use a classification scheme (Churchill et al., 1985; Verbeke et al., 2011; Salonen et al., 2020).

The author complements these theoretical findings by deploying a discovery-oriented, theory-in-use approach to create a research as well a conceptual model. The research model is illustrated in the figure below. Therein the interconnection between the solution selling

process and the individual sales performance is shown and the influencing variables will have direct influence on the process.

The research model is related to the work of Tuli et al. (2007). Tuli et al. (2007) defined the customer solution process in four different stages. The first stage is described as “customer requirements” the second stage is “customization and integration of goods and/or services” the third stage is the “deployment” of solutions and the fourth stage is the “customer support” process (Panagopoulos et al., 2017, p.145).

Prior studies have focused on the organizational level even when they were related to Tuli’s et al (2007) process. However, to contribute to existing literature and get new insight into the role of sales persons, Panagopoulos et al. (2017) argue for paying attention on the sales person level instead of the organizational level. The present research, therefore, focuses especially on the individual level and deconstructs the four-stage process which was established by Tuli et al. (2007). Interconnection between the organizational and individual level will be described in detail in the later stages of this thesis. Find below in Figure 5 the description of the research model of the hypothesis’s development.

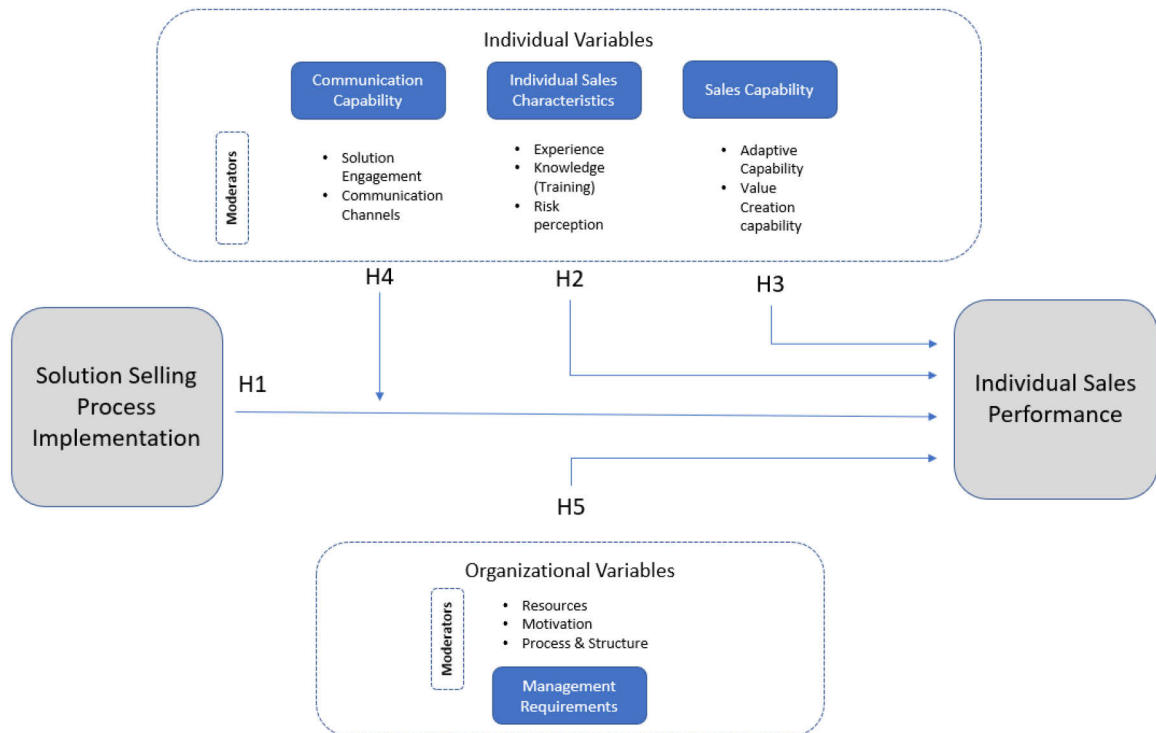


Figure 5: Research model of hypotheses development

Source: Authors own design

In the introduction chapter the research question was stated and variables regarding the individual sales person level which have influence on the sales performance were examined. This question was established because two main gaps are relevant in the literature.

Firstly, the relationship between performance and sales models was hardly researched with regard to solution selling (Wang & Netemeyer, 2004). Secondly, there is a lack of research on the individual sales person level which is important for solution selling (Tuli et al., 2007).

Within the literature review significant academic literature was examined and it was investigated which theory was used in past research for similar problem statements. It was found that there were lot of investigations in the past using the psychological classification scheme (Churchill et al., 1985). Verbeke et al. (2011) stated in his meta-analysis research that the past articles mainly looked at the personal characteristics as determinants of sales performance. He argued, and that was also mentioned by scholars in the past, like Churchill et al. (1985, p.117), that further research should be done on “influenceable determinants of sales performance”. Furthermore, Verbeke et al. (2011) recognized that the topic of communication in sales will be crucial for further research. He stated that the communication in general, the communication channel itself as well as the personal communication capability will be subjects for further research on sales performance.

The gaps recognized will be considered in the following chapters. The outcome should be a great contribution to the existing literature as well as on the managerial sales level.

2.7 Hypotheses development

2.7.1 Solution process and sales performance

In the chapters before the sales process was described in detail. This sales process has improved over the last decades. The reason why the processes have to be adapted from time to time was because the environment or the behaviour have changed. In the early 19th century, the AIDA model which was a rough four step model was well established (Viio, 2011). Managers at these times saw the big potential in sales and margins which results in sales performance. Currently another factor plays a crucial role, the globalisation. It is possible to sell rare goods from other continents with big margins. All these circumstances force sales managers and scholars to improve the sales process. Dubinsky (1980) refined the

process into a seven-step model which created a more accurate sales process. This includes advertising, planning, production, and so forth. Within this improvement it was possible to increase the margins and sales performance. Then, the sales process worked because the economy was improving most of the time and the products were requested from the market. The market was tied to companies that offered these products or services. The sales power was with the producer or manufacturer and not with the customer (Holland & Young, 2010).

A dramatic change began around the year 2000. With the arise of the internet and digitalization and the existing globalization, customers had the chance to find products or services on a much bigger platform. It was possible to source now from all over the world with nearly similar conditions. This was the time when product-centred firms started to face difficulties with their sales processes and strategies.

Since that time companies have struggled to find the right process to achieve an increasing sales performance or at least keep a sustainable sales performance. Moncrief and Marshall (2005) argue that the traditional sales process must be changed from and sequential to an interactive process. This means that a process should be adaptable so that the products or services could be adjusted according to the customer's expectation.

The power has changed from the producer to the buyer or customer (Holland & Young, 2010). From that time on scholars recognized that solutions must be considered in a sales process besides product-centred production. Many scholars like Tuli et al. (2007), Binckebanck and Elste (2016) or Worm et al. (2017) conducted investigations. The main message from theses scholars is that for solutions the sales process has to be adaptable and interactive.

Hulthén et al. (2016) who was deeply involved in the measurement of performance, stated that the total process of sales and the operations planning is the key concept to increase the sales performance. He also mentioned that many companies struggle and have problems to increase the sales performance. The main reasons are that there is no standardized process to measure sales performance, the performance itself is not clearly defined in the literature, measurements mainly depend on hard figures of revenues on the organizational level and not on the cross-functional processes or individual levels.

The mentioned shift from the sequential product-centred processes to the interactive processes under consideration of the cross-functions could lead to higher sales performance.

In that way the first hypothesis was defined and will be tested through the qualitative and quantitative survey.

H1.1: Solution implementation increases individual sales performance

2.7.2 Individual sales characteristic

Figure 2 shows the research model and indicates the individual sales characteristics. Within each variable moderators which would influence that variable are mentioned.

Salonen et al. (2020) encourages the view that risk perception and experience will have influence on the sales performance. He relied on configuration theory to describe the necessary conditions to create solution selling engagement. The engagement process is important to prepare people to offer solutions and convince the customer or buyer. In the present research it is assumed that the salespeople are engaged and in the position to present solutions. However, configuration theory is often used for complex problem statements at individual or organizational level (Meyer et al., 1993). The explained theory assumes that specific conditions must be present to get a causal output of a process or situation.

The statement of Salonen et al. (2020) that specific conditions must be present to achieve target is supported. In the present thesis the target will be the individual sales performance and, therefore, gained practical experience plays a crucial role. Therefore, the approach of the practical intelligence theory was used. Prior research in this field revealed that solution selling experience could help salespeople to engage with solutions selling processes (Franke & Park, 2006). These investigations support the current problem statement and will provide contributions on the individual sales performance level.

However, these conditions shall be added with additional knowledge which will be transferred through trainings to the salespeople. Weitz et al. (1986) stated that the gained practical skills and knowledge will help salespeople to engage with solutions. The present thesis contributes to this practical experience with professional knowledge for solutions. If salespeople got professional trainings, they would be more confident in using different methods in sales situations and, thus appear confident to the customer. The concept of training will be reviewed in detail so that the professional training as well as the training by

sales champs will be explored. Salespeople, especially in the onboarding phase, could benefit if they were trained by a sales champ (Keränen & Liozu, 2020).

Additionally, the risk perception should be steered in a positive direction. Risk perception is a very important topic on the individual sales person level. If people are not aware of the sales situation or do not feel confident to establish the right solution people, could develop a conservative attitude. In that way, risk perception could create obstacles in solution sales (van der Borgh & Schepers, 2018).

This thesis contributes to the existing research on individual sales characteristics through using existing theories and findings from the area of solution engagement and adding more moderators to determine which variable influence sales performance.

H2.1: Individually gathered sales characteristics will positively influence the sales performance

2.7.3 Sales capability

Sales capability is mentioned in the research concept as an individual variable. From the literature numerous views on sales capability could be gathered. It is one of the most important variables in reference to the individual sales performance.

Worm et al. (2017, p. 498) defined the moderator variable “sales capability” as summary of attributes of knowledge and identifying decision makers. He argues that solutions must be sold to the right people, otherwise the process will be inefficient, and resources may be wasted. The related theories behind the view of Worm et al. (2017) but also of Ulaga and Reinartz (2011) and Tuli et al. (2007) are the resource-based theory (RBT) and transactional cost economy (TCE).

In this thesis sales capability is understood as the moderator’s adaptive capability as well as value creation capability. With former research the focus was placed on the organizational level. This present research put the focus on the individual level of salespeople so that the background would be slightly different.

Salespeople are forced to adapt their sales concept at the customer. Whereas Worm et al. (2017) used their research to identify the right decision maker, this thesis wishes to find the right sales concept or behaviour. The adaptability of salespeople depends in that way on the script theory and in connection to resources at the organizational level. In contrast to Panagopoulos et al. (2017) who worked on one of the rare projects related to individual sales persons, this thesis focusses on the adaptability of the sales process itself. Panagopoulos et al. (2017) used their investigations to find a relation between the product adaptability and the sales performance. It was found that the product adaptability has a positive influence on sales performance. This thesis can, thus, connect to the research of Panagopoulos et al. (2017) and contribute information on the adaptability of the individual sales process at the customer.

The adaption of the sales process will have influence on the TCE perspective. If salespeople cannot identify the right way to sell the solution, it will create an inefficient sales process, and this will have direct influence on the sales performance.

Adaptive capability is tightly connected with the value creation capability. In the literature value creation capability is mainly allocated to the organizational level but the present research proposes to see the main advantage with the salespeople themselves. Worm et al. (2017) investigated in his research when solutions will pay off. Through intensive literature review he found out that there is less value creation know-how available among B2B firms.

Existing literature has mainly focused on the organizational level with regard to value creation. That means that when a firm creates value for their customers, the focus is to establish or create a new solution in the form of a product or service. This will induce new processes or machines and create costs for the organization (Tuli et al., 2007).

This research aims at examining this variable of value creation capability on the individual level. This thesis wants to verify if individuals are in the position to improve performance when creating an additional value during the sale process.

Uлага and Reinartz (2011) confirm that sales capability will be of utmost importance for sales performance because it has direct influence on profitability. This recognition on the organizational level will be extended to the individual level through the present research.

H3.1: Individual sales capability characteristics will result in higher sales performance

2.7.4 Communication capability

Communication, especially the direct sales person communication, is crucial for seller and buyer communication (Panagopoulos et al., 2017). In a B2B sales situation the value creation or solution will be established by two parties. On the one hand there is the seller and on the other hand there is the customer or buyer. Both parties have to communicate in an effective way to find the right solution for the problem. This shows that communication capability will be responsible for the performance of a company and implicitly also the performance of the individual sales person. Hossain and Gilbert (2021, p. 222) support this view and argued that “\$ 9 trillion U.S dollar” will depend on sales communication.

Communication has a long history in the academic field and was examined in different ways in relation to sales and sales performance (Anders et al., 2020; Blocker et al., 2012). Most scientific articles deal with the channel selection, communication techniques and the personal physiological factors of communication (Maier, 2021b).

Through detailed investigation in prior research of individual parameters it has been found that many articles focus on the interpersonal skills level (Rentz et al., 2002).

The historical studies revealed a useful parameter to understand the importance of interpersonal skills, however a communication capability conceptualization is missing.

To extend the foundation of the conceptualization, the present research focuses on individual communication capabilities which are related to the sales performance. This includes, for example, the communication frequency, the communication channel, with whom will be communicated and many more aspects.

Previous investigations have revealed that the importance of communication in the field of sales is essential for performance characteristics. However, studies, in particular the communication impact in a B2B sales cycle, must be researched for a better understanding in relation to the sales performance (Cano et al., 2005).

One of the rare articles in this specific area was written by Koponen et al. (2019, p. 238) who focused on four competences on a sales person level. These are: “behavioural, affective, cognitive communication component and sales acumen”.

Considering the vulnerable sales environment, the recent crises have changed the behaviour of customers or purchasers. Such challenges were recognized in the past but not in this frequency with which they have occurred over the last years. Due to digitalization and globalisation these cycles of changes are becoming shorter and shorter. D'Urso and Rains (2008) argued that communication theories need to be rearranged which happened automatically to a certain extent. Because of communication technology advancement like social media, the salespeople are forced to communicate continuously through platform technologies (Anders et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the frequency of communication with the customer has changed dramatically. Whereas in the past the verbal communication was well established and sufficient for many B2B companies, most of the communication has moved to emails. E-Mail communication has been established as the standard communication in B2B (Baeva, 2016).

The salesforce is driven to have much more communication than in the past. Thus, salespeople are forced to be economical with their resources. However, it is argued by scholars like Cano et al. (2005) that whatever channels are available the important point is to understand the customer's preference with regards to communication. This means communication capability is the understanding of the customer's needs in all areas. In this way the salespeople have to pay attention to the complex topics of the customer. Anders et al. (2020) confirmed in quantitative research that customers prefer multiple channels of communication.

These findings are a good foundation for the present thesis and research which wants to find out explicit communication capabilities which are needed in the daily business of salespeople, and which directly or indirectly moderate the sales performance. Additionally, based on Koponen et al. (2019) the sales acumen, which shows significance on the individual sales person level, will be examined in detail to find a better understanding of whether there is a correlation between the sales person's acumen and individual sales performance.

Related to sales acumen, the attention of a sales person and especially the listening process will be important to be scrutinized during the research process. Both attributes of attention and listening were mentioned as underrepresented in former research. Blocker et al. (2012) as well as Hossain and Gilbert (2021) argue that effective communication requires a professional background of sales training. Emphasis, therefore, will be given in the research

of the present thesis in the capability of salespeople who are in the progress of B2B solution selling.

Besides the communication aspect between the seller and the buyer, the salespeople must be convinced to be engaged in solution sales. Ulaga and Reinartz (2011) state that not all salespeople who are in sales positions are ready to deploy solutions in their daily business. This forces the management of firms to invest in communication with their salespeople. Ulaga and Loveland (2014) argue that salespeople or even parts of the salesforce must be replaced to engage the salespeople for solution selling. However, this view needs to be verified in the abductive research process through quantitative and qualitative interviews and surveys. The main problem with engaging salespeople for solutions is the fact that in the past the power was with the seller Holland and Young (2010) and so the seller sold mainly the single product or service. In recent years this power has shifted to the buyer or customer so that the firms are driven to leave the path of product-centred sales towards to solutions.

Salonen et al. (2020) revealed through their literature review three main insights which are interesting for solutions selling. Salespeople must be motivated, engaged and trained for solutions which is, in the present thesis, more related to the individual's sales characteristics. This basic criterion is confirmed by Verbeke et al. (2011).

The innovation in this respect is that this thesis will highlight the solution engagement aspect between the seller and the customer or buyer. In past research this focus was only on the seller's organization. Thus, the work by Homburg et al. (2009) and Salonen et al. (2020) is used to shift the focus to the seller and the customer. With the abductive research process this thesis will offer unique insight and contribute to existing research.

H4.1: Communication capability positively moderates the relationship between solution implementation and sales performance

2.7.5 Management requirements

The variables above describe the individual parameters of sales persons related to their moderator variables. These variables will be tested through their hypotheses whether they have an influence on the individual sales performance.

Because sales performance depends on individual and organizational parameters an umbrella variable called “management requirements” was created. This variable will be moderated by three variables which emerged by searching the literature regarding organizational moderators. These variables are resources, motivation, and process & structure.

Resources are the backbone of an organization. When academics think of resources in relation to strategies, Michael Porter’s analysis of the strategy against competitors will often be discussed. This states that the internal environment has been analysed according to its strengths and weaknesses but also the external environment like competitors or customers will be reflected (Grant, 1991).

The resource-based theory (RBT) on a firm’s organization is important because resources are involved in several stages of a sales process. Especially for the strategy development, the RBT as well as the capabilities of the organization could be a good foundation.

Barney et al. (2001) stated that the conventional resource-based view on an organization has changed since their first research 1991. However, from the standpoint of today, the standard situation is that companies must answer the following questions. What is the firm’s business? Who are the firms’ customers? And which of the customers’ needs could be fulfilled?

The contribution of this thesis is that the focus will not be on the firm’s external position but on similar questions of the RBT from the organization related to the internal salespeople. The questions include the mission of a company beside the resources and capabilities.

- What is the salespeople’s role and which resources do they need?
- Who are the salespeople’s customers inside / outside of the organization?
- Which organization resources are needed to satisfy the salespeople?

These crucial questions were developed during the abductive process of the pre stages for this thesis. With the view from the organizational level towards the individual sales person level, the above mentioned three main variables crystallized: resources, motivation, and process & structure.

Salonen et al. (2020) argued in their research, regarding transformation of salespeople from product-centric sales to solutions, that the organization has to provide individual and organizational resources. They recommended special support by different resources from the organization which help individuals to transition to solution selling.

The author sees similarities in this approach for the present investigation and formulated the related questions in the qualitative survey.

Regarding resources for the sales process and the organizational structure questions were posed regarding the flexibility and the clarity of the organization. Both attributes are important as salespeople are confronted with a fast-changing sales environment and also changing positions internally.

The moderator variable motivation which is normally not expected as an organizational variable is included. The contribution of this thesis is that the focus is on the individual sales person's performance. That is why the organization has to motivate the salespeople to have the right ideas for customers' solutions.

In the literature the motivation related to solutions is combined in the wording "value-based selling" (VBS). Value-based selling is tightly connected with solutions which will be provided for customers. In the research of Mullins et al. (2020) it is discussed that when new products are established or positioned on the market which is like establishing solutions for the customers. However, Mullins et al. (2020) argue that the individual motivation as well as the team motivation is important and influences the individual sales performance. Little research is available regarding motivation and the direct influence on sales performance. So, the present thesis contributes to the existing literature with the new view on the role of resources in solution selling.

H5.1: Salespeople who get individual and suitable resources will increase their sales performance

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In the chapter above the literature findings as well as the theoretical relationship of sales were discussed. Especially, solutions sales and the influence on sales performance are interesting for academic's researchers as well as for managers in their organizations. In that manner different variables and moderators were screened and analysed. For example, adaptive selling, cognitive capabilities, motivation, experience & knowledge, communication, risk perception, process & structure as well as resources were explored in detail. Based on the theoretical findings through the literature review empirical data was also gathered to provide a well-founded research result.

3.1 Methodology selection

In the present chapter the methodology and approach applied in this thesis will be expanded on. In case that there is always an interplay between the empirical and theoretical phases the author described in a narrow part the literature search process. The full description of literature review will be outlined in the chapter above. In the following parts of this section the emphasis will be on the four research phases which are: Phase 1 – Qualitative Pre-study 1; Phase 2 – Qualitative Pre-study 2; Phase 3 – Quantitative Survey; Phase 4 – Data Analysis. The interview phases as well as how the in-depth interviews are conceptualized will be described. Furthermore, the development of the quantitative survey will be explained and analysed including categorization and coding for the online survey.

In order to explain the details of the methodology it is necessary to explain why and how the following methods were used. At the beginning a problem between solution sales and sales performance was observed in practice. The question whether this problem existed in the literature and, if yes, whether answers were available, emerged. Thus, the literature research was started and it was found that in general literature in this field is available. But when examining the subject of solutions sales the impression that little research had been done on the individual sales person level was soon confirmed. However, there is literature about sales and solutions, so it is not a completely new topic for scholars. Thus, it was decided to continue with a descriptive research method. The descriptive research method is often used for problems where literature is in general available. To examine the specific research question that addresses a gap this method is recommended. McCombes (2022) argued for

using the descriptive method for problems where literature exists, and the existing gap visible in practice needs to be verified.

Since it was decided to examine the sales population of Austria and Germany regarding solution sales and the related sales performance, an initial feedback from practitioners was regarded as helpful. This is why it was decided to structure the research procedure in pre-studies with qualitative interviews to develop the scale for the overall and final survey. Through the qualitative input of the pre-studies additional information was gained from the interviewees. The most significant benefit, however, was the qualitative contribution on the subject.

Qualitative interviews are characterized by a high degree of openness towards the object of research and the views of the persons observed. This means, that the chosen method should be as open as possible. This leaves the interviewees enough room for their own explanations in an interview. Through the gained additional information, it is possible to adjust or to adapt the quantitative survey. Reinders and Ditton (2011) defined in their research a schematic procedure for a qualitative research procedure and a separate one for a quantitative procedure. This schematic design was used and adapted for the present thesis. Since the quantitative survey was administrated through two qualitative pre-studies, the schematic procedure was divided into two circles. The first cycle was responsible for the pre-studies and the second cycle was responsible for the main survey of the thesis. This procedure ensures systematic approach to these complex subjects. The following figure show the generated procedure.

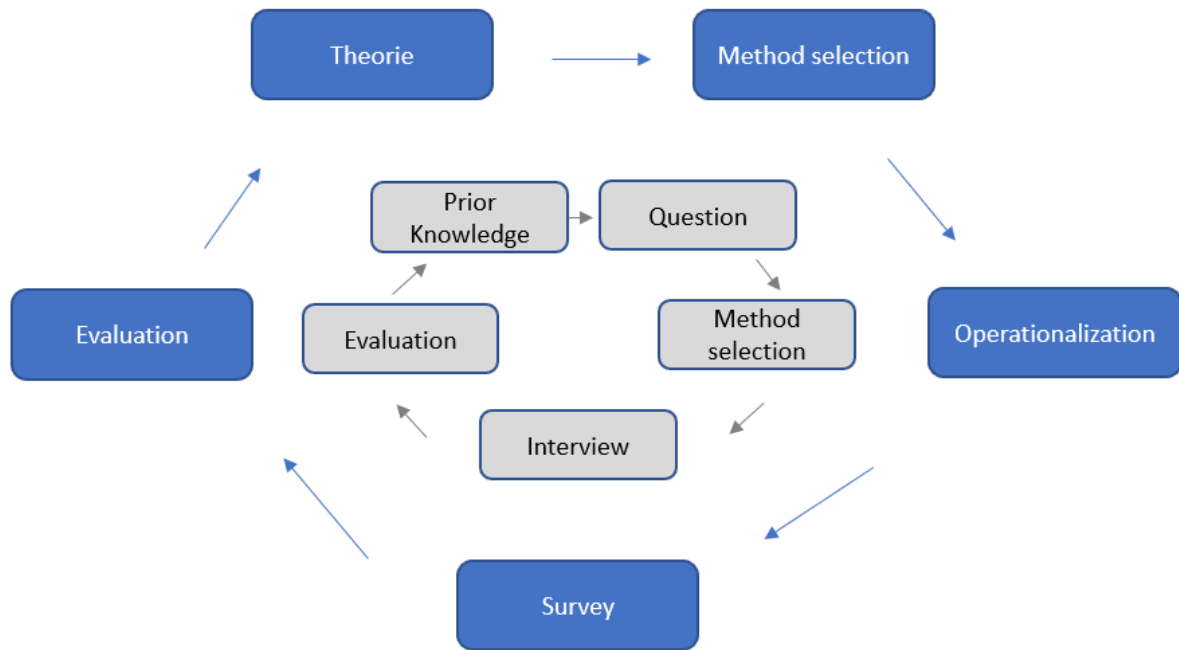


Figure 6: Schematic procedure of research

Source: Author's own design in the style of Reinders & Ditton (2011)

3.2 Research concept

At the beginning of this thesis general information about sales and sales performance was provided. This was necessary to step into the academic literature and find the smooth approach to the subject. The furthers necessary academic literature were collected through a systematic literature review. The formal steps were described in detail in chapter 2.2.

Through deeper insight into sales and the related literature the idea emerged that it would be beneficial to combine the quantitative survey with qualitative interviews. The best solution would be to have different pre-studies to gradually get closer to the problem. Hulthén et al. (2016) carried out a similar analysis in performance measurements processes and used multiple case studies which were helpful to conclude his investigation. Another similar recommendation and approach were employed by Do and Mai (2022). Do and Mai (2022) did deep investigations into the organization learning environment and derived conclusions regarding firm performance. He also argued the qualitative phases contribute to quantitative research. Especially in complex topics this could help to create a broad understanding and

include different views of the interview partners. For the present thesis it seems that this approach could be successful and, therefore, two qualitative phases were included. This approach is called abductive approach in the academic literature. The abductive approach starts with gaps in the literature. These gaps have to be identified and then analyzed in detail. Complex topics like solution sales could be examined by an abductive approach. Hurley et al. (2021) stated that the abductive approach could be an appropriate tool for such multivarious topics.

Gioia (2021) confirmed that using qualitative methods contributes to the quantitative survey. It enables greater depth of the subject and creates the ability to adapt the next stage of the research. Especially in sales, where it is necessary to adapt the research context according to the current situation, this would be a great benefit.

It was decided, to carry out different pre-study phases consisting of empirical qualitative interviews. These interviews were entirely carried out by the author himself. This was complex and intensive but gained a specific and broad insight into the subject of the thesis. The interviews themselves were structured in an open way as semi-structured interviews. With this method the questions are formulated to gain as much information as possible in a short time. The formulation of the questions partly followed Krosnick and Presser (2009). The fact that the author interviewed all interview partners by himself provided many meaningful insights.

Below the research concept is shown in detail. The author developed a systematic gain in knowledge about solutions sales and the revealed literature gap. With this concept it was possible to structure this complex topic into different “smaller” phases. Panagopoulos et al. (2017) who researched in a similar field of sales also used different phases for the research concept. Both the general literature and existing research concepts in the field of sales underlined the value of this research concept for the present thesis.

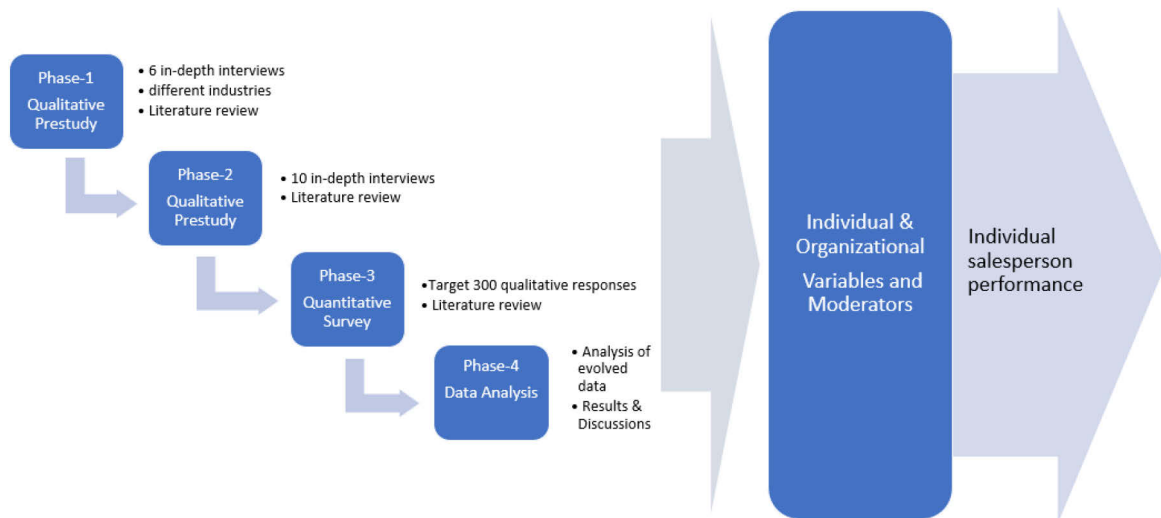


Figure 7: Research concept

Source: Author's own design

The following chapters will outline the research phases in detail.

3.3 Phase 1 – Qualitative pre-study

To get an overview of sales processes and the existing literature an online search to find out basic information from academic publications was carried out. This initial literature review was necessary to define the problem and gaps in the literature. After a short time of review it could be seen that the topic of sales processes had quite a long history and is also discussed in present and up to date articles and journals. Especially solutions in connection with sales will be an interesting field of research (Bond et al., 2020).

The objective of the general online search was to gain a general impression of sales and the related processes. To get a more specific insight into the complex topic, it was decided to get access to academic data bases to continue with the literature review. Therefore, the author used the university library as well as the university online databases. The following online data sources were used for the systematic literature review: ABI/INFORM, GOOGLE SCHOLAR, SPRINGER, ELSEVIR, EMERALD and SAGE and STATISTA.

An iterative process to refine the search results and get a deeper insight into the academic problem was used. In the first academic search process the terms “solution selling” and “customer solutions” were used to receive more specific information.

After receiving some specific information it was concluded that the selected topic of investigation was of great interest for scholars. Research in sales would have a greater benefit if there were also managerial implications. Therefore, a general interview phase in different industries was carried out. Empirical feedback supports the literature review and will provide additional current information from the industry.

The author conducted six in depth interviews in different industries (oil&gas industry, energy industry, construction industry, process industry, certification services and business consulting services). To get an overview of the solutions sale's topic the interview questions about the topic solutions in a sales process were constructed in an open way. In other words, it was assumed that companies used a product-focused strategy and the question whether solutions could help improve profitability was put in the foreground (Maier, 2021b). The detailed questionnaire can be found in Appendix 1.

The following categories were used for the interviews:

1. Demographics
2. General topics
3. Products and Service
4. Customer
5. Sales representatives
6. Organization
7. Colleagues
8. Sales Performance
9. Education

3.4 Phase 2 – Qualitative pre-study

According to the findings of the first phase the second phase of research and was planned and another pre-study was conducted. This was necessary because in the literature and, especially in the managerial environment, solution selling is not well established. The second phase was broken down to individual level and the connections of solution sales with sales performance. Therefore, the drivers and moderators (variables) related to sales and solutions.

The literature research was refined again to get a more target-oriented information on the topic solution selling and the associated variables in relation to sales performance.

To identify the required literature in relation to solution selling and sales performance the keyword search was extended. The following keywords were used: B2B, sales channel, sales cycle, sales performance, customer solutions, customer relationship, solution selling methods, sales person resources, sales force transformation, and so forth. The author searched for citations in promising articles and carried out manual search in sales and marketing in journals like Journal of Marketing, Journal of Personal Selling, European Journal of Management, Journal of Academy of Marketing Science, Journal of Industrial Marketing Management, Journal of Management and others.

The following online data sources were used for the systematic literature review: ABI/INFORM, Google Scholar, ELSEVIR, EMERALD, SAGE Premier, Springer Compact and Statista.

In the second phase the search was refined through a combination of search terms. This led to systematical findings on articles related to the current work. The presented figure below shows the refined search process.

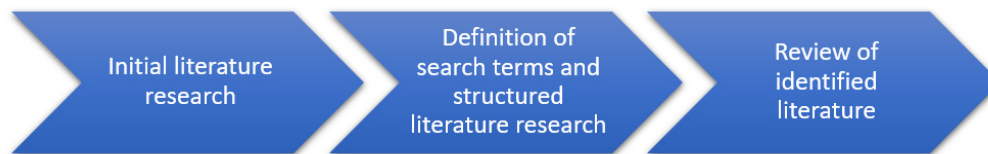


Figure 8: Literature review and analyse strategy

Source: Author's own design

The systematic approach requested the refined and adaptive literature review as well as gathering information from practitioners. In that way the author planned in depth interviews with specific industry partners to get deeper insight into solution and sales.

In this pre-study the author conducted ten in-depth interviews to get practical feedback which could contribute to the literature review at this stage of research. The author developed interview questions which were used for an empirical interview pre study based on the

concept of expert interviews (Wassermann, 2015). Schütz (1972) argued that an expert is a person with profound knowledge of a specific area in his business.

The first pre-study focused on practitioners in different industry sectors. In the second stage the intention was to get a deeper insight into the knowledge of experts in different industries. Therefore, the “Austrian Foreign Trade Office” was contacted to get the contact details of experts in different Austrian industries.

The contacted interview partners were selected from the following segments: mechanical engineering, energy services, building industry, industrial service industry, software service, medical device industry, certification service, healthcare products, process gas industry, consulting services. The selected interviewees are 50% from industry segments and 50% from the service segments. In order to get academically relevant feedback the division of experts into industry and service segments was necessary.

The author selected ten potential interview partners who are experts on sales and/or leadership in sales. In the B2B context some of the salespeople could also have a dual function in their organization. On the one hand they are primarily the sales representatives for the company they work for, but on the other hand they receive products or services which makes them customers, too. This is quite an interesting position and a contribution gained from the pre-study. If people are in such a position, they will have a more holistic view on the process compared to people who have only one function in an organization.

The in-depths interview questionnaire comprises the following categories with the focus on variables in sales which are connected to solutions. All categories contain three questions which are formulated for an open answer. The questions were constructed and designed according to the work of Krosnick and Presser (2009). In the in-depth interview the following categories were used to gather as much information as possible.

1. Demographics
2. General
3. Adaptiveness
4. Cognitive Capabilities
5. Motivation
6. Process & Structure

7. Experience and Knowledge
8. Communication
9. Resources
10. Risk Perception
11. Capability & Resources
12. Ranking

3.5 Phase 3 – Quantitative pre-study

From the gained knowledge of phase 1 and phase 2 the research was refined and finalized with phase 3. Like in the first phase the main interest of practitioners was in the uncertainty or risk perception besides knowledge and resources, whereas the second phase revealed the variables communication, motivation, and experience & knowledge.

These findings are of great interest and draw attention on the connection of the variables to sales performance.

The next step deepened the literature research to reveal more about solution selling and the research of academics in this field. The research showed that most of the research was done on organizational level. Panagopoulos (2017) confirmed that only a few academic articles describe the individual sales person level in the context of solutions and the related sales performance. Based on the revealed empirical research from phase 1 and phase 2 as well as from the literature review, a summary of existing individual and organizational variables was established. These variables are influenced by moderators. The moderators could be discrete and/or detailed properties which could have an influence on the variables. However, several moderators were described and summarized under specific umbrella terms. For example, intrinsic reward and work engagement will be covered by the umbrella term “motivation”. The summary of these variables and moderators is not a meta-analysis but a collection of information from as much literature as possible which is relevant for this present subject. Finally, the following moderator variables for the research were established.

1. Adaptive Capability - (Script Theory)
2. Value Creation Capability - (Creativity Theory)
3. Motivation - (Intrinsic Motivation Theory)
4. Process & Structure - (Organisational Theory)
5. Experience - (Theory of Practical Intelligence)
6. Knowledge - (Theory of Practical Intelligence)
7. Communication - (Communication Theory)
8. Solution Engagement – (Communication Theory)
9. Resources– (Performance Theory)
10. Risk perception – (Risk Processing Theory)

Beside the established moderator variables, the related theories and the interrelationships in respect to solution selling in the literature review were described.

To investigate further on the individual sales person level a quantitative questionnaire to carry out a large survey was created. To do a quantitative survey the first step is to limit the population size so that a sample size can be calculated.

Sample size calculation is an important instrument to verify the significance of a study. Therefore, the area of the study was limited to two counties where a good statistical background was given. Thus, Austria and Germany served as population for the present thesis.

The first step was to verify the population size in general and then try to find specific sales figures. Mohanasundari (2022) confirmed in a statistical review that a research process depends on the sample size. If the sample size is too small the results are invalid. On the other hand, when the sample size is too large, too many results are considered and this does not yield reliable results.

Through online research on statistical online data bases like STATISTA several figures were found. At first the author searched for statistics related to Germany employees. In general, in Germany 44,866 Mio (Rudnicka, 2022a) people are employed. To refine persons who are employed in small, medium and large companies were filtered out. The figure amounts to 29,430 Mio. In the next step the goal was to find out what number of people were employed in the field of sales. Therefore, the author used a statistic about sales from 1999 up to 2014. In this statistic the number of salespeople in Germany is stable at around 3 Mio. In 2011

there was a peak of 3,174 Mio and in 2014 2,896 Mio (Rudnicka, 2022b; Rudnicka, 2022c). Therefore, an average number of salespeople of 3 Mio in Germany is assumed. These number confirm that approximately 10% of the number of employees in small, medium and large companies work in the field of sales.

This number was also used for Austria because not so many statistics are available to derive a population size. The total number of employees through all fields will be 4.31 Mio (Mohr, 2022). If the same ratios from Germany are used in Austria, it can be seen that approx. 3 Mio people work in small, medium and large companies. Taking the 10% of people who work in sales again, 300,000 people can be used in the investigation.

In total a population size of 3.3 Mio people who work in the field of sales in Austria and Germany was used. This represents the population size “N.

To calculate the sample size a further parameter like the “Z” value or confidence interval needs to be defined. Standard confidence levels are in the range of 90%, 95% or 99%. In the present calculation a “Z” value of 90% was used. This means that, taking into account the error margin, that the answers given in the questionnaire will be 90% true.

A statistical calculation always has a probability and this probability has a margin of error “e”. This margin depends on the sample size. If the sample size is small, the margin is higher and if the sample size is larger, the margin of errors decreases. In the present calculation the margin of error is 5%. That means, if an answer is marked "true" by 80% of the sample, the same is true for 75% to 85% of the total population.

The p value is called the statistical significance (SIG) or alpha. The value is always between 0 and 1. The significance value describes the probability of rejecting a true hypothesis. The levels are between 0,01 and 0,05 that means between 1% or 5% for one tailed test.

In accordance with the above-mentioned description the following numbers were used for the calculation:

$$Z = 1.65$$

$$p = 0.5$$

$$e = 0.05$$

$$N = 3.300.000$$

The calculated numbers were used in following formula which was used for descriptive studies where the number of the population size is limited and known (Ritschl & Stamm, 2016; Mohanasundari, 2022).

$$\text{Sample size} = \frac{[z^2 * p(1 - p)]/e^2}{1 + \frac{[z^2 * p(1 - p)]}{e^2} * N}$$

Equation 1: Sample size formula

Source: Ritschl & Stamm (2016)

As a result of the above-mentioned figures the equation deliver a sample size of 273 which represents the sales population size of 3.300.00 people which work in the field of sales. This number was the starting point for the quantitative survey which was conducted through this present thesis.

3.5.1 Survey construction

After the main variables and moderators were defined an online questionnaire was created. For each moderator variable three to four questions are used to verify the hypotheses. Additionally, participants were asked about the sales performance as well as demographic information. Each question employed a five-point Likert scale. The complete questionnaire can be found in Appendix 3.

Since this questionnaire should at least be filled out by 273 people to represent the population size of Austria and German, it must be easily accessible and designed in a simple manner.

The questionnaire was created using the survey software 'Unipark'. The Unipark survey software allows several question designs with graphic inputs. This made it possible to create an attractive questionnaire for all who completed it. The software is used by many universities and scholars which makes it very suitable for academic research. A screenshot of the program editor is shown in the ANNEX 7.5.

Each question was programmed with great attention to different software features, for example mandatory field, variable name, return option, plausibility check, etc.

3.5.2 Survey distribution

In the previous section the required number of answers to the questionnaire to obtain reliable data was set at 273. This is a relatively high number given the response rate and it needs a detailed plan to achieve this number of responses.

Before the survey is distributed all possible distribution channels need to be considered carefully. However, it will be necessary to adapt the distribution to the response rate of a survey. Thus, the response rate must be calculated.

Qualtrics (2022) stated in an online article that the response rate depends on different properties of the survey. The most important ones are stated below.

- Deployment method of the survey (online, via phone, personal interview or in written form)
- Duration of the survey (Depends on how many questions the survey will have)
- Topic of the survey (If the topic is complex it will be hard to collect responses)
- Deadline (Expected feedback time from the interviewees)

$$\text{Response rate} = \frac{\text{number of questionnaires completed}}{\text{number of questionnaires sent}}$$

Equation 2: Response rate definition

Source: Qualtrics (2022)

Through intensive literature reviews it could be found that the response is subjected to wide variation. In the present thesis the survey involved B2B participants among which the response rate is slightly higher than among B2C participants, according to literature. Still, the response rate for this thesis was calculated rather conservatively at 5%. Thus, the number of required responses could be calculated.

$$\text{Response rate (5\%)} = \frac{\text{number of questionnaires completed (273)}}{\text{number of questionnaires sent}}$$

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Number of sent questionnaires} \\ = \frac{\text{number of questionnaires completed (273)}}{\text{Response rate (5\%)}} \times 100 \end{aligned}$$

Number of sent questionnaires = 5,460

Equation 3: Response rate calculation

Source: Qualtrics (2022)

This calculation shows that at least 5,460 participants are necessary to achieve the response rate of 5% correctly filled in questionnaires.

To gather this high number of participants it will be of utmost importance to get targeted information about B2B contacts in Austria and Germany. Therefore, the chamber of commerce as well as the chamber of foreign trade in Austria and Germany were contacted. Both institutes were supportive in providing sources where contact details of the selected B2B area could be found. These were, for example, exhibition lists, registered companies in the institutes, etc.

In that way 309 company addresses from the chamber of foreign trade and 1,929 company contacts from the chamber of commerce for Austria and Germany were obtained.

In order to reach such a high number of participants it was decided early to include social networks in the survey process. Therefore, an additional 3,081 contacts from the platform LinkedIn were selected. In total 5,319 contacts were obtained. Each contact received the online survey link to complete the questionnaire. Since the response rate was not as high as expected after the first round, companies were contacted by phone to improve the response rate. Finally, after direct phone calls and three “launches of the survey” the response rate of 377 people was reached. The general response rate was 7% which is moderate for surveys. After filtering and checking the answers in detail 313 result of the survey were usable for the present thesis.

3.6 Phase 4 – Data analysis

In the next phase the data which was collected through the survey was analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

The analysis was done through a descriptive statistical analysis. Thus, different statistical measures such as means, correlations, standard deviations between the variables were checked to find correlations and test the hypotheses.

In the first stage the numeric results in the Excel file were adjusted so they could be processed in SPSS. This meant renaming variables and recoding the three negatively formulated questions. The next step was to recode the Likert scale to analyze each question. In the ANNEX 4 an extract of the dataset is shown.

Finally, 313 complete data sets were confirmed and used for analysis.

Table 4: Valid number of survey participants

		N	%
Cases	Valid	313	100.0
	Excluded	0	.0
	Total	313	100.0

Source: Author's own design retrieved from SPSS

To verify the results of the survey participants a five-point Likert scale was used. Likert scales generate in general ordinal variables. However, in the academical field the scale level is controversial discussed (Leonhart, 2013; Stier, 1999). The discussions describe the compared use ordinal or metric scale levels. The author used the common research practice and carried out the analysis with metric or interval scale levels (Wu & Leung, 2017; Bortz & Schuster, 1999).

The survey contained several demographic questions. Regarding age it was seen that most participants were in the range of 36 to 50 years which was closely followed by the range of 20 to 35. These results show that 80% of the survey participants were between 20 and 50 years old.

Table 5: Distribution of age

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	14-19	10	3.2	3.2	3.2
	20-35	122	39.0	39.0	42.2
	36-50	124	39.6	39.6	81.8
	51-60	47	15.0	15.0	96.8
	61+	10	3.2	3.2	100.0
	Total	313	100.0	100.0	

Source: Author's own design retrieved from SPSS

To visualize the result the author established and additional chart of the outcome as bar chart. This chart is shown below in Figure 9. The variable of the age will be used later on to draw connections to education or participants profession. In the survey the author don't distinguish between gender of the participants. The main demographic focus was on the countries Austria and Germany. Further demographic focus was on the profession as well as the industry segments. It could be one of the future investigations to analyze the demographic properties in combination with sales topics in the overall survey.

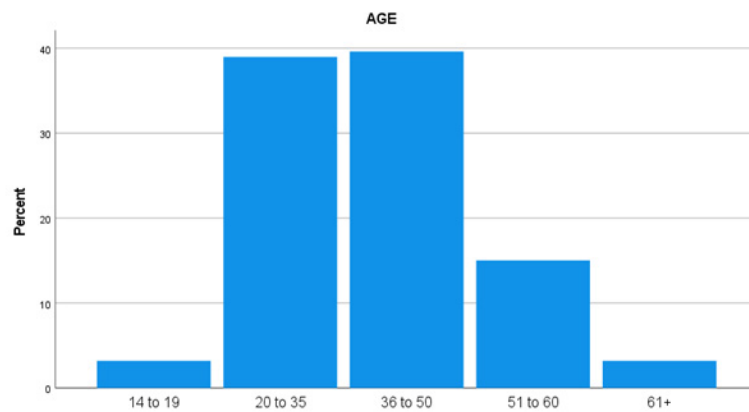


Figure 9: Distribution of age in percentage

Source: Author's own design retrieved from SPSS

One of the most important demographic questions in the large survey was the professional position. At the beginning of the survey participants were asked whether they worked in sales. If not, the survey ended. If they did work in sales, they had so specified their position.

The figure below shows the percentages for each position. It is to be noted that more than 60% of people worked directly with the customer. This is a meaningful value and contributes to the survey results.

Table 6: Distribution of profession

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Sales Manager	73	23.3	23.3	23.3
	Salesperson	126	40.3	40.3	63.6
	Sales Back Office	68	21.7	21.7	85.3
	other	46	14.7	14.7	100.0
	Total	313	100.0	100.0	

Source: Author's own design retrieved from SPSS

The next demographic question which was asked concerned education. It was expected that many would have a BA or MA degree but the results showed that most people had a more basic level of education. This was surprising because the survey covered 17 industry sectors. This result may also be related to the age of the participants as 39.6% were in the range from 36 to 50. More restricted age groups could have resulted in better traceability. Still, a correlation analysis was carried out. The analysis showed a negative correlation (-0.156) between age and the education level. That supports the statement above. In general older people have a lower education level than younger people.

Table 7: Distribution of education

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Basic education	134	42.8	42.8	42.8
	University degree	101	32.3	32.3	75.1
	Professional (Doctorate or equivalent)	5	1.6	1.6	76.7
	other	73	23.3	23.3	100.0
	Total	313	100.0	100.0	

Source: Author's own design retrieved from SPSS

Though unrelated to the survey participants were asked about the size of the company they worked in. This information is crucial for another detailed question in the survey and is relevant for trainings and specific education in solution selling. The table below shows the distribution of the company size. The survey showed a widespread industrial field through companies. The result was surprisingly for the author in case that the target was concentrated on the B2B industry which contains mainly small and medium companies. The majority of the participants work in large companies which are indicated with a minimum of 250 employees. The survey addressed Austria and Germany. It seems that the contacts evolved from the chamber of commerce focuses on the large industry organizations. So, the next demographic question will contribute to the revealed company size.

Table 8: Distribution of company size

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Micro	39	12.5	12.5	12.5
	Small	82	26.2	26.2	38.7
	Medium	78	24.9	24.9	63.6
	Large	114	36.4	36.4	100.0
	Total	313	100.0	100.0	

Source: Author's own design retrieved from SPSS

The Table 8 above evaluates the distribution of the company size and covers a wide range of companies in various industries. To derive deeper insights into the distribution of age in the different company sizes a bar chart analysis was constructed. The Figure 10 below describes the correlation between the age and the company size and revealed that younger people tend to work in smaller companies whereby older people tend to bigger or even large companies. This information will be interesting for human resource departments to adapt their onboarding processes according to their sales team.

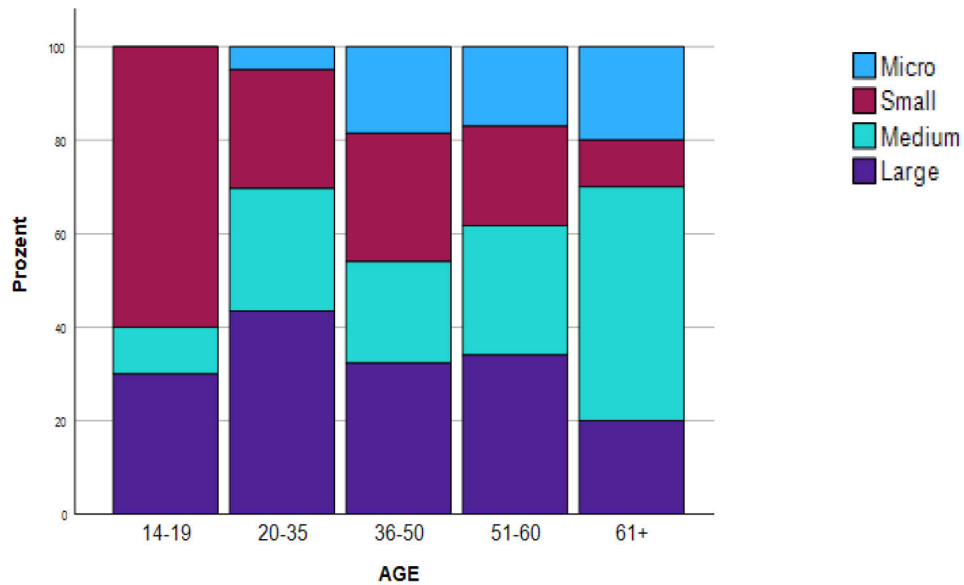


Figure 10: Correlation of age and company sizes

Source: Author's own design retrieved from SPSS

The Figure 11 below shows an excerpt of all covered industries. The author categorized these in 17 industries such as automotive, raw material industry, secondary material industry, energy distribution industry, mechanical engineering, electro machines, health industry, chemical industry, IT, finance sector, industry services, retail trade, wholesale, tourism sector, textile industry, food industry and construction industry. It indicates that most answers were obtained from the automotive industry with 7.6% followed by the trade industry with 6.7%.

The industry part in the survey was programmed as an open field. To categorize the covered industry segments, it would be statistically meaningful to categorize these segments. In the actual thesis this information is indicated as an auxiliary variable but no further analysis will be done with the covered industry segments. To draw conclusions without any categorization will not give evidence for further investigations.

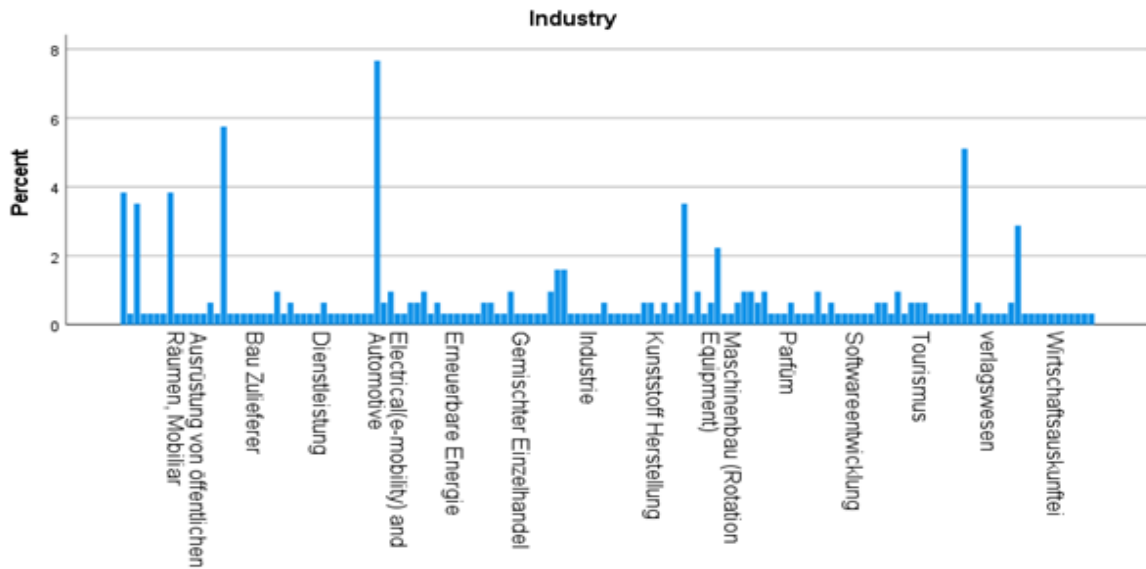


Figure 11: Distribution of covered industries

Source: Author's own design retrieved from SPSS

Before analyzing each variable, it was necessary to check the data regarding reliability. To verify this reliability the author used the Cronbach's Alpha test.

Cronbach's Alpha is one of the most widely used methods for a reliability testing of multi-item scales (Diekmann, 2011). The background of the reliability check is to calculate the means of all coefficients. As a result of this calculation the coefficient will lie between zero and one, whereby a higher coefficient indicates better the reliability (Malhotra, 2012). After review of statistical literature there is no common understanding of the lowest acceptable value for the reliability. Murphey and Davidshofer (1988) established one of the models which could be used for validation. They divided the model in five values for the coefficient. 0.9 means high reliability, 0.8 to 0.9 indicates a moderate level, 0.7 is a low level of reliability and the lowest acceptable level is between 0.6 and 0.7 for Cronbach's alpha. The values below 0.6 were not used for further investigations. This model was also accepted and used by other academics like George and Mallery (2013).

For the present thesis the lowest acceptable coefficient level was around 0.7. In some moderator variables the statistical analysis showed a lower value. In such cases the author eliminates the variable which did not fit to the context.

Table 9: Calculation of Cronbach's Alpha for experience

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.729	.743	4

Source: Author's own design retrieved from SPSS

All other Cronbach tests are shown in the ANNEX 7.6.

In the next phase of the analysis regarding the statistical results of the survey the author summarized the meaningful variables of each group from the Cronbach's Alpha test and developed new umbrella variables. These new developed variables are stated in the Figure 5 and analysed in the Table 10. In this table the mean values of the new developed variables were calculated to see which of these variables will have a high importance for the survey attendees. It could be seen that solution implementation will have the highest mean value and most important for salespeople. On the second ranking sales capability will be indicated followed by sales performance. The next rankings are communication capability, individual sales characteristics and management requirements.

The mean values will only indicate the selection of the Likert-scale ranking and will give no evident conclusions about the hypotheses. Therefore, further analysis has to be done with the evolved data from the overall survey.

Table 10: Descriptive analysis of developed variables

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Sales Performance	311	2	5	3.94	.852
Individual Sales Characteristics	313	2.10	5.00	3.7470	.50826
Sales Capability	313	2.13	5.00	4.0329	.55012
Management Requirements	313	1.56	5.00	3.7106	.60431
Communication Capability	311	1	5	3.77	1.025
Solution Implementation	313	2.00	5.00	4.1134	.66198
Valid N (listwise)	309				

Source: Author's own design retrieved from SPSS

With the elaborated and reprocessed data it is possible to test the hypotheses with statistical methods. On the basis of the analysed data it is possible to use the multiple linear regression method. The formula for the effect size will be $f^2 = R^2 / (1 - R^2)$. The mentioned effect size and R^2 are the coefficient of determination. In the actual statistical calculation, the regression coefficient as well as the significance will be used to evaluate the hypotheses. To determine whether the hypotheses apply or not the judgement of Cohen (1992) was accessed. An effect of 0,1 will be seen as a low whereby and value of 0,3 has a moderate and values above 0,5 means a high effect on the depending variable. In general it means that if the independent variable increases by one the depending variable increases by 0,5 on a scale from one to five Cohen (1988).

For the hypotheses there are less previous mathematical calculations to judge if the hypotheses are valid or not. Seen from the statistical view the multiple linear regression method is enough to evaluate the developed hypotheses. However, in the part of the discussion chapter also previous statistical parameters like correlations and control parameters will help to interpret the results. With the above setting and literature requirements the hypothesis was tested according to the multiple linear regression method.

In case of the first hypothesis H 1.1 Solution implementation increases individual sales performance, following results were achieved.

Table 11: Multiple linear regression of H1.1

Koeffizienten ^a		Nicht standardisierte Koeffizienten		Standardisierte Koeffizienten		95.0% Konfidenzintervalle für B		Kollinearitätsstatistik		
Modell		Regressionskoeffizient B	Std.-Fehler	Beta	T	Sig.	Untergrenze	Obergrenze	Toleranz	VIF
1	(Konstante)	1,367	,265		5,150	,000	,845	1,890		
	SolutionImplementation	,626	,064	,488	9,825	,000	,501	,751	1,000	1,000
2	(Konstante)	1,322	,288		4,594	,000	,756	1,888		
	SolutionImplementation	,630	,065	,491	9,713	,000	,502	,757	,971	1,030
	V57_Alter=14-19	-,215	,248	-,045	-,865	,387	-,704	,274	,934	1,071
	V57_Alter=20-35	-,096	,097	-,055	-,984	,326	-,288	,096	,793	1,261
	V57_Alter=51-60	-,123	,130	-,051	-,941	,347	-,379	,134	,854	1,171
	V57_Alter=61+	-,188	,248	-,039	-,760	,448	-,675	,299	,940	1,063
	V9_Mitarbeiteranzahl=Micro	,112	,142	,044	,786	,432	-,168	,392	,808	1,237
	V9_Mitarbeiteranzahl=Small	,146	,110	,076	1,328	,185	-,070	,363	,762	1,312
	V9_Mitarbeiteranzahl=Medium	,180	,111	,092	1,623	,106	-,038	,398	,775	1,290

a. Abhängige Variable: Sales Performance

Source: Author's own design retrieved from SPSS

For the hypotheses H1.1 which is analysed by a multiple linear regression with one independent variable (Solution Implementation), the parameters and regression coefficients are $b_1=0.626$; $R^2=0.238$; $F(1.309) = 96.526$; with $p < 0.001$. This result indicates that the model is significant, and the null hypothesis could be declined. With this model 23.8% of the variance by the depending variable could be explained and is seen significant ($b_1=0.626$; 95%; CL:[0.0501;0.751], $t=9.825$, $p < 0.001$).

After adding the control variables age and company size the relationship between solution implementation and sales performance did not change. There is still a significant positive correlation between solution implementation and sales performance. The null hypothesis can be rejected ($b_1=0.630$; 95%; CL:[0.0502;0.757], $t=9.713$, $p < 0.001$).

There are no significant differences between the categories for the control variables age and size of the company. 25% of the variance of the dependent variable can be explained by the model and the model is significant. $b_1=0.630$; $R^2=0.251$; $F(8.309) = 12.653$; with $p < 0.001$

Same situation could be found with the hypotheses H2, H3 and H5 and will be described in the following paragraphs.

For the hypotheses H2.1 which is analysed by a multiple linear regression with one independent variable (Individual Sales Characteristics), the parameters and regression coefficients are $b_1=0.744$; $R^2=0.197$; $F(1.309) = 75.631$; with $p < 0.001$. This result indicates that the model is significant, and the null hypothesis could be declined. With this model 19.7% of the variance by the depending variable could be explained and is seen as significant ($b_1=0.744$; 95%; CL:[0.575;0.912]. $t=8.697$. $p < 0.001$).

After adding the control variables age and company size the relationship between solution implementation and sales performance did not change. There is still a significant positive correlation between solution implementation and sales performance. The null hypothesis can be rejected ($b_1=0.770$; 95%; CL:[0.6;0.941]. $t=8.885$. $p < 0.001$).

There are no major differences between the categories for the control variables age and size of the company. 22.1% of the variance of the dependent variable can be explained by the model and the model is significant. $b_1=0.770$; $R^2=0.221$; $F(8.309) = 10.696$; with $p < 0.001$

For the hypotheses H3.1 which is analysed by a multiple linear regression with one independent variable (Sales Capability), the parameters and regression coefficients are $b_1=0.882$; $R^2=0.324$; $F(1.309) = 149.504$; with $p < 0.001$. This result indicates that the model

is significant. and the null hypothesis could be declined. With this model 32.4% of the variance by the depending variable could be explained and is seen significant ($b_1=0.882$; 95%; CL:[0.74;1.024]. $t=12.227$. $p < 0.001$).

After adding the control variables age and company size the relationship between solution implementation and sales performance did not change. There is still a significant positive correlation between solution implementation and sales performance. The null hypothesis can be rejected ($b_1=0.887$; 95%; CL:[0.742;0.1.031]. $t=12.06$. $p < 0.001$).

There are no big differences between the categories for the control variables age and size of the company. 33.7% of the variance of the dependent variable can be explained by the model and the model is significant ($b_1=0.887$; $R^2=0.337$; $F(8.302) = 19.15$; with $p < 0.001$).

For the hypotheses H5.1 which is also analysed by a multiple linear regression with one independent variable (Management Requirements), the parameters and regression coefficients are $b_1=0.7$; $R^2=0.248$; $F(1.309) = 101.869$; with $p < 0.001$. This outcome indicates that the model is significant, and the null hypothesis could be declined. With this model 24.8% of the variance by the depending variable could be explained and is seen significant ($b_1=0.7$; 95%; CL:[0.563;0.836], $t=10.093$, $p < 0.001$).

After adding the control variables age and company size the relationship between solution implementation and sales performance did not change. There is still a significant positive correlation between solution implementation and sales performance. The null hypothesis can be rejected ($b_1=0.708$; 95%; CL:[0.861;0.836]. $t=5.152$. $p < 0.001$).

There are no meaningful differences between the categories for the control variables age and size of the company. 26.6% of the variance of the dependent variable can be explained by the model and the model is significant ($b_1=0.708$; $R^2=0.266$; $F(8.302) = 13.68$; with $p < 0.001$).

Because hypothesis H4.1 uses a different approach the moderator analysis was used to verify if the hypothesis could be seen as valid under the estimations stated. The moderation analysis is used to investigate under what circumstances an effect will exist or vary the effect magnitude. Hypothesis 4 delineate the correlation between solution implementation and sales performance whereas the communication capability will be the moderator. With the moderator analysis it will be possible to measure the influence of communication on the sales performance value. In Figure 12 a simple model of a moderation is shown.

Following variables were used for the moderation analysis:

Y = Individual Sales Performance

X = Solution Selling Implementation

W = Communication Capability

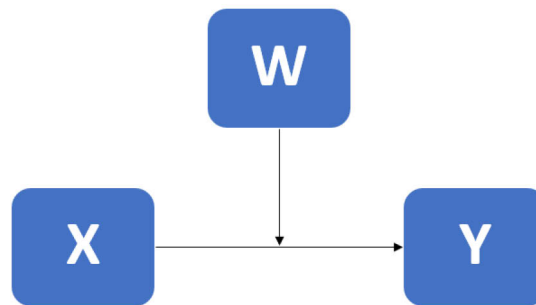


Figure 12: Simple model of a moderation

Source: Hayes & Rockwood (2017, p.47)

The moderator W influences the effect of X on the variable Y. In common investigations through different fields the effect from X to Y is measured over time. In such cases time will be the moderator. With the explained simplest model we could see that every variable could be a moderator on the effect. The advantage of the moderator analysis is that moderator hypotheses could be analysed with regression models without category properties for X and W. The following equation will describe the regression model of H4.

$$\hat{Y} = b_0 + b_1X + b_2W$$

Equation 4: Equation for moderation

Source: Hayes & Rockwood (2017, p. 47)

To execute the calculations via SPSS the author used the regression analysis in combination with the free available PROCESS software. PROCESS is a free software application and could be implemented in SPSS to calculate moderators influence on the effect. The use of the application simplifies the verification of the hypothesis. For the hypothesis 4 we finally

get the result of the significance of $p = 0.0720$. This means that the influence of communication capability strictly speaking has no influence on the individual sales performance. The limitation whether a variable is significant is below $p < 0.05$. We could see that the achieved value is slightly over the setting. For such small differences discussions will be made in the next chapter.

To sum up the presented results, Table 12 shows for which hypotheses the null hypothesis is valid and for which hypotheses the alternative hypothesis can be stated.

Table 12: Summary of the hypotheses testing

H 1.0	Solution implementation declines or does not increase individual sales performance	X
H 1.1	Solution implementation increases individual sales performance	✓
H 2.0	Individually gathered sales characteristics will not or negatively influence the sales performance	X
H 2.1	Individually gathered sales characteristics will positively influence the sales performance	✓
H 3.0	Individual sales capability characteristics will not result in higher sales performance	X
H 3.1	Individual sales capability characteristics will result in higher sales performance	✓
H 4.0	Communication capability does not moderate the relationship between solution implementation and sales performance	✓
H 4.1	Communication capability positively moderates the relationship between solution implementation and sales performance	X
H 5.0	Salespeople who get individual and suitable resources will not increase their sales performance	X
H 5.1	Salespeople who get individual and suitable resources will increase their sales performance	✓

Source: Author's own design

To get an overall understanding of the analysis's variables and their connections a correlation analysis has been carried out. With this analysis it was possible to provide a correlation matrix which will be helpful to interpret the results for the discussion chapter.

In the above-mentioned analysis of empirical data the defined questions for each moderator variable were summarized and a connection for each variable was found. In this analysis the mean level as well as the significance and correlation coefficient are used to explain the

importance of each variable related to the individual sales performance level. In general, the revealed information gives enough strong output to state if the null hypothesis could be neglected or not. To interpret the output it will be helpful to use a correlation matrix of the developed variables and to verify these according their significance and correlation. The table below shows the connections between the correlation levels. The correlation coefficients related to sales performance of the developed variables show the highest connection for the sales capability followed by management requirements, solution implementation, individual sales characteristics and communication capability.

According to the merge of the moderator variables and the correlation matrix it was possible to analyse the hypotheses more in detail. As stated in the introduction it was the intention to provide practical added value and guidelines for organizations to take actions in solution sales. Therefore, a deep analysis of the individual and organizational variable was carried out. The following correlation matrix describes the relation to and the priority of each variable for the individual sales performance.

The correlation matrix in Table 13 shows that if focus is only on the mean levels of the moderator's variable, these are not the best way to interpret the results of the survey. In the discussion chapter extensive relationships between the different revealed results will be discussed.

Table 13: Correlation matrix of individual variables

		Sales Performance	Individual Sales Characteristics	Sales Capability	Management Requirements	Solution Implementation	Communication Capability
Sales Performance	Pearson Correlation	1	.443**	.571**	.498**	.488**	.332**
	Sig. (1-tailed)		<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	311	311	311	311	311	309
Individual Sales Characteristics	Pearson Correlation	.443**	1	.598**	.337**	.518**	.385**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	<.001		<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	311	313	313	313	313	311
Sales Capability	Pearson Correlation	.571**	.598**	1	.567**	.675**	.514**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	<.001	<.001		<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	311	313	313	313	313	311
Management Requirements	Pearson Correlation	.498**	.337**	.567**	1	.487**	.411**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001		<.001	<.001
	N	311	313	313	313	313	311
Solution Implementation	Pearson Correlation	.488**	.518**	.675**	.487**	1	.390**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001		<.001
	N	311	313	313	313	313	311
Communication Capability	Pearson Correlation	.332**	.385**	.514**	.411**	.390**	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	
	N	309	311	311	311	311	311

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

Source: Author's own design retrieved from SPSS

The main and most important information which could be deducted from the table above is the correlation of the developed variables and the sales performance. The highest correlation could be seen between the sales capability followed by the management requirements and the solution implementation. Behind the individual sales characteristics the communication capability could be found. The most astonishing result is that the sales capability has the highest correlation in relation to all other variables. The author found out that within the variable sales capability the adaptability has the highest correlation to individual sales performance.

The detailed statistical results will be described in the Annex 7.6. Therein all developed variables are listed in a correlation matrix. This detailed investigation is necessary to interpret the overall results and hypothesis. For example, motivation, has the second highest correlation with the individual sales performance. In the hypothesis H5.1 the author expected that suitable and individual resources will help to motivate salespeople to increase their performance. The correlation matrix underpins this statement in terms of a strong correlation value. Motivation in this study is embedded in the organizational variables. Management shall consider such a result as a mission to rethink their motivation system.

The correlation matrix showed that individual variables as well as organizational variables could not be seen as separate fields. Existing studies have the focal point at organizational variables and rarely include individual ones. This unique study is one of the rare research projects where individual variables are the focal point. From the author's opinion these two types of variables shall be always considered in combination to each other whereby the focus could change according to different situations.

4 PRESENTATION and DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The data collected summarizes existing literature on sales processes, especially with a focus on solution sales. Gaps in the academic literature were identified particularly on the level of the individual sales person. Moderators and variables were extracted from different literature sources. Furthermore, the target was to point out the differences but also communalities between sales literature and the practices of today with a large-scale survey. Therefore, novel insights were gained with the present study on solutions sales and especially on the individual sales person level.

4.1 Findings and relation to the prior research

At the beginning a specific topic of solution sales literature and the related gaps therein had to be identified. Therefore, an academical research concept of four phases was established and carried out. Each phase revealed gaps in the specific area of solution sales which were considered for this present study.

The feedback from Phase 1 and the literature review phase was surprising. In general, the interviewees were greatly interested in the subject of solution sales and open to learn more about solution implementation. This open feedback shows that people who are in the frontline of sales business or in a management position recognizes the uncertainty in sales. Sales behavior is changing all the time, so the future outlook is very exciting. Three main concerns emerged in the conversation with salespeople and managers to provide solutions in sales. These main concerns were “resources” (time), “risk perception” and “knowledge” (Maier, 2021a).

The Phase 2 yielded a more meaningful insight and new academical information. The topic seems to be interesting for both practitioners and scholars. The academical gap regarding few investigations for solutions in sales literature is confirmed by practitioners as well. They argue that it takes too long to achieve solution selling patterns for a sales person in a standard sales job. It would be a contribution to give managers a guideline to provide salespeople with information and training regarding solution selling. At the end of the questionnaire the interviewees were asked to rank the categories according to priority and importance in

solution sales. The most important ones in the second pre-study are communication, motivation and experience & knowledge.

Phase 3 and Phase 4 were used to collect the main data of the overall quantitative survey. The statistical results are shown in the previous chapter 3.6. In the following chapter these results will be discussed in relation to the authors interpretation.

In particular, the individual sales performance level raised questions for practitioners and scholars. Thus, it became the intention to find answers to the related research question: Which variables on the individual sales person level influence the sales performance in solution selling?

4.2 Interpretation of the elaborated hypotheses

4.2.1 Solution selling implementation

Whereby marketing and sales is well described and explored in the academic literature solution selling seems to be a specific field with rare literature. The actual research work therefore focused exactly on that spot are in marketing and sales field. The aim of solution selling process implementation should be to improve the sales performance at the end of sales process. The sales performance itself will be not seen as the hard financial output it is more defined as a subjective perception. Verbeke et al. (2011) investigate in a similar direction and analysed meta studies of sales to find our drivers for sales performance. With their research, which is actually 15 years, ago it seems that the communication and knowledge seems to be the important property to influence the sales performance. To verify 15 years later the author developed following hypothesis for solution selling.

H1.1: Solution implementation increases individual sales performance.

Scholars argue that a sales process has to be adapted from time to time (Moncrief & Marshall, 2005). There could be several reasons for such a change. However, the frequency of adaptation is actually higher or shorter than in the past. Because processes depend strongly on customers' or buyers' expectations, and so companies have to follow their behaviour. That explains that the force has changed from the customer to the buyer (Holland & Young, 2010). This implies that also the sales cycles and the performance behaviour has changed.

Hulthén (2016) was concerned regarding the measurement of performance. He stated that there are no standardized measurements for performance values. Many companies struggle to increase firm or individual performance. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to find out more about the individual sales performance which has a significant influence on the firm performance. In the present research performance will be seen as a subjective perception of the survey attendees.

From the linear regression analysis of the hypothesis test it follows that the regression coefficient b_1 related to a scale from 1 to 5 is evaluated with $b_1=0.626$. In addition to that the analysis show a significant value of $p<0.001$. Within the compiled results the null hypothesis of H1 could be rejected.

Under the overall information gathered through the actual research some more information will be revealed. In the quantitative survey two explicit questions regarding solution implementation in relation to performance were asked. The questions in general received high mean values which gives evidence that there is a high positive attitude towards solution implementation.

The highest mean value of these was reached by the variable V53 with 4.21: “To sell solutions will strengthen the long-term customer partnership”. This variable correlates with V12 “Experience”. V12 “I think that customer experience will positively influence solution selling” with the mean level of 4.19 will be important for individual performance. This implies that solutions in a sales process have a big influence on customer relations. In addition, customer long-term relations will have influence on the individual performance.

With respect to new customers, the participants were asked regarding V54 “Solutions help me to gain new customers”. This moderator variable has the second highest mean level of 4.01. The survey result underlines the information from the qualitative interviews of the pre-studies. Solutions in relation to new customers will not have as great an importance as long-term partnership.

Within the analysis the research merged the two variables of solution implementation and created one metric variable for further analysis. The new developed variable solution implementation achieved the second highest mean level of 4.11. The high mean level will be supported by the Pearson correlation factor of 0.488 found out through a correlation matrix.

Beside the test of the hypothesis the author found out two further correlations which are indicated with higher performance levels. The correlation of solution implementation with individual sales characteristics is indicated with 0.518 and the highest correlation could be found with sales capabilities with a value of 0.675.

The shown values underline the revealed gaps found in the literature review. On the one hand especially medium and large companies hold on to the product centred structure like mentioned of Wise and Baumgartner (1999) and on the other hand the role of sales persons seems to be not well defined which was mentioned in the research of Worm et al. (2017).

The quantitative survey as well as the qualitative interviews revealed that added value and long-term partnership is strongly related to individual sales performance.

The above outcomes and findings are highly interesting for scholars and managers. They clearly outline that companies have to act on both individual and organizational level and combine these levels in terms of performance.

4.2.2 Individual sales characteristics

In the next step the focus will be on the individual sales characteristic's variable. The moderators experience, knowledge and risk perception will be analyzed. All moderator variables could have a direct impact on the variable mentioned before which is described with the second hypothesis:

H2.1 Individually gathered sales characteristics will positively influence the sales performance

With the former described the linear regression analysis it was possible to make a statement on the hypothesis. Regarding the regression coefficient $b_1=0.744$ and a significance level of $p<0.001$ it could be derived that the null hypothesis could be rejected.

The variable individual sales characteristics covers three relevant moderator variables like experience, knowledge and risk perception.

The mean value of each moderator was used to verify the importance of different moderator properties. The highest value of 3.97 was found with the 'experience'. This shows that experience could be relevant for the individual performance. The result emphasizes the

importance of the moderator variable of experience but will not have the potential to give an indication of the overall relevance in relation to performance.

Prior research in this field revealed that solution selling experience could help salespeople to engage with solutions selling processes (Franke & Park, 2006). The survey confirms that statement in a more precise way because the experience questions are divided into customer experience and general sales experience.

Salonen et al. (2020) performed similar research and focused on solution selling engagement under consideration of experience, management support, risk and training. They investigated the influence of different moderators and finally stated that each moderator had a varyingly strong influence on the engagement in solution selling. Depending on which skills already exist, individual or organizational support will be required.

The present study gives relevant insights into the manifold area of solution sales. The variable “I have sales experience which is comparable with solutions” has the lowest value. That means that salespeople who have direct customer contact have too little solution experience. This statement is confirmed by the fourth question that most of the salespeople have had to gain their experience by themselves and were not guided through a sales champ.

Keränen and Liozu (2020) found out that especially for the onboarding process of salespeople it would be more efficient if they were guided by a sales champ. The study confirms this statement and proposes to extend this guidance by the sales champ further beyond the onboarding process. The moderator variable “Knowledge” would positively influence the sales performance” with the lower mean value of 3.53 supports the statement above.

This relevant insight of the quantitative survey has important managerial implications. If salespeople are trained for solution selling and guided by a sales champ, the onboarding phase will be shortened. This will have the positive effect that the efficiency cycle of a sales person’s work will be shorter than without guidance of a sales champ.

In addition to the moderator variables experience and knowledge the survey participants were asked regarding their risk perception behavior. Salonen et al. (2020) encourage the view that risk perception has a big influence on the engagement in solution selling and should be considered as a critical condition. They argue that the risk behaviour depends mainly on the organizational and management support. However, the study of Salonen et al. (2020)

focused only on one specific company. The gained output cannot be generalized from their study. The present study revealed, therefore, a meaningful insight throughout different industries.

This present survey revealed a more positive insight from salespeople. The majority of the participants see that solution sales could help to develop new products or services (mean score 3.71). That is a more positive light on solution selling in terms of risk behaviour. However, the salespeople know that solutions could harm their individual sales performance if the product or service does not deliver what it promises.

Researchers like Jost et al. (2003) and Allcot and Sweeney (2016) argued that risk perception could harm salespeople's personal performance. This survey shows a more positive picture and bolder actions regarding risk behaviour. The risk to harm the personal reputation as well as the customer relationship seems to be no limitation for implementing solution sales patterns in the daily business.

With the new merged variable individual sales characteristics the mean level with 3.74 will be on the fifth place which underlines the low priority as expected after the literature review. This was quite a new insight on the light of sales. In case that the mean level of a variable is too less to provide a meaningful statement the correlation matrix was consulted. The correlation coefficient of 0.443 shows the same ranking as the mean level. This result implicit that prior literature which focused on these individual sales characteristics especially experience is not up to date anymore.

Interesting results show the variable risk perspective. This present study reveals unique and new positive perspectives of salespeople. It seems that the perception of sales has changed from a more conservative view to a more flexible on depending on the situation. Salespeople with direct customer contact seem to have a more positive view than the management. The qualitative interviews, including the large-scale survey, were carried out at end of 2022. This implies that salespeople faced many unpredictable situations in the months and years leading up to that point. For example, in 2020 when COVID-19 appeared, salespeople had to do their job from one day to the other remotely and mainly online. At this time many of the products were delayed due to rare raw or secondary materials.

Today, much more online services are available to do the daily jobs. It seems that salespeople see the unpredictable risk not too negatively. Instead, they find chances for new products and service opportunities.

While Salonen et al. (2020) recommend considering risk perception one of the leading moderator variables, this study shows that the risk perception of course must be considered and supported by the management, but it does not have the highest influence on the performance value. The results are in accordance with prior research by Bonney and Williams (2009) as well as Ulaga and Loveland (2014) who stated that individual skill are more strongly related to solutions than risk perception.

The second hypothesis could be confirmed by the survey results since individual parameters, especially customer experience as well as solution trainings and guidance from a sales champ, will have a positive influence in sales performance.

4.2.3 Individual sales capability

In the most important variable seems to be sales capability. The variable describes the individual capabilities of a sales person. On the one hand the variable deals with the personal adaptive capability - for example to adapt the sales process directly in front of the customer. It is not limited to the customer processes as also internal sales process will also require adaptation during a sales cycle. On the other hand, it is also important in solution sales to adapt the product or service itself so that a sales person can create an additional value for the customer. In the present research this additional value is described as value creation capability. The third hypothesis was formulated as,

H3: Individual sales capability properties will gain higher sales performance

According to the linear regression analysis the regression coefficient $b_1=0,882$ and the variable is significant with $p<0.001$ in that way the null hypothesis could be rejected.

In case of the high effect and the 32,4% variance value this hypothesis seems to be most important in relation to individual sales performance.

Weinstein A. (2020) described in his research that value creation is seen as an amorphous wording and covers the main objectives quality, service and relationship. In his article he focused on different customer or buyer ages. He investigates the value of buyers who were born around 1980. The present study takes into account a broader and more meaningful view of all ages as well as different industries and presents a meaningful output.

The research of Ulaga and Reinartz (2011) is more relevant for this present study. They argue that the individual sales capability could be important to increase the personal profitability in general. They carried out one of the rare investigations into individual research for performance and forced scholar for further research.

The present research confirms the correlation values between “sales capability” and “sales performance”. The data shows the highest correlation value of 0.571 against other new developed variables. The overall mean value of sales capability is the second highest value with 4.03. With the detailed Pearson correlation this effect was strengthened. From the correlation matrix the adaptability is indicated with a value of 0.558 which is the highest value of all variables whereby value creation stats with 0.474 which indicates also a high value against other variables. It turns out that value creation will be replaced by the adaptability as the most relevant variable for capabilities of a sales person.

Mainstream existing literature focused on the organizational level for value creation (Tuli et al., 2007). This is in some way true because value creation is closely connected to the adaptation of a product or service. However, the personal interaction in a sales process will have a big impact on performance in this case.

Binckebanck and Elste (2016), Patterson (2007) and Schmitz and Ganesan (2014) recognized in their research that the adaptation of the sales process will have importance for the outcome, and especially for the sales performance. The present research confirms that the current study is of utmost importance when considering prior research. With the findings of this research a strategy how firms could adjust the individual support to gain higher performance levels can be shown.

This supports the existing finding that salespeople have to listen to customers and find out what their needs are. This allows the conclusion that participants have a positive attitude towards adaptive methods during the sales process. Such feedback means that people seem to be open to adapting their sales behaviour which could generate a positive outcome of the sales situation. However, the participants mentioned that they do not have much freedom to change the sales process. It seems that this depends on the organizational structures and formalities. In the survey the attendees were asked regarding the support of non-salespeople. The Feedback and the survey showed that there is lack of support for salespeople in the front to adapt their product or service. This finding supports the investigation of Panagopoulos et al. (2017) who wrote one of the rare research articles on the individual level. Unfortunately,

he used only companies located in North America so the output could not be generalized. Therefore, the present study highlights novel insights. The crucial finding of this survey is that firms have to improve adaptability to support the salespeople for requests of the markets or buyer behaviours.

The personal sales performance will be influenced by the sales capability and has direct connection to the performance (Ulaga & Reinartz, 2011). This is not new as can be seen from other researchers. But it was not exactly clear how the individual factors are involved in the performance.

Directly connected to the variable that the sales person tries to find out how they can adapt the sales process during a conversation is the variable V38 “I listen to the customer and understand the needs or the problem” which shows the highest mean value. This information is important because it is connected to the variable adaptability as well as customer experience. The better the sales person knows the problem, the better he can support to find a solution. Furthermore, participants were asked how the value creation is connected to the customer cooperation. The mean value which was second in importance in this category confirms that the relationship is very important. This implies that the better the connection to the customer the more information could be collected.

On the other hand, the variable V41 “I have profound knowledge of the customer’s business and strategy” will have the lowest mean level for the moderator value creation. This implies that salespeople know that they have to listen to the customer to find out the problem and try to adapt their sales strategy but there will be one reason or more why they have too little information about the customer’s business strategy. With the output of this study, it is confirmed that salespeople have to find out more about the customer’s business strategy. This will be part of the communication through the whole decision-making unit (DMU).

With this particular feedback from the quantitative survey the third hypothesis can be confirmed and be seen as the most important variable to influence the sales performance.

4.2.4 Communication capability

Regarding the general topic of sales performance, the literature review revealed that communication capabilities could be crucial to building a relationship with customers or buyers. Hossain and Gilbert (2021, p. 222) confirmed with their research the importance of

communication and found out that “\$ 9 trillion U.S dollar” were spent by companies for sales communication. Communication is a complex topic and is investigated by scholars from different perspectives. The present study examined the communication capability of salespeople in relation to performance from two sides. On the one hand the study analysed the communication channels used by salespeople. This part includes the general channels used in the organization like CRM tools, online tools (Teams, Zoom,...), e-mail, phone,... but also social media channels (LinkedIn, Xing, Facebook,...). Such social media channels could be used either for business or private purposes. The boundary is not clear cut as these areas blur in a certain way. On the other hand, the study investigated the communication engagement of solutions. Novel insights regarding how a sales person is in the position to interest the counterpart for solutions were revealed. Engagement behaviour patterns were found through systematic questions regarding communication topics.

The hypothesis H4 was analysed by a simple moderator analysis through SPSS. In order that the significance level exceeds slightly the limit of $p > 0.005$ the null hypothesis could not be rejected. The result shows that communication will not influence the performance in terms of solution selling according to the statistical criteria. However, communication is a big area and the survey revealed interesting information for managers.

The investigation which sales channels will be used by salespeople is highly interesting and will be pursued further. Especially the direct sales communication in solutions sales by salespeople seems crucial but is rarely investigated in the academic literature (Panagopoulos et al. 2017).

From four specific questions regarding the communication channels for individual salespeople the variable V29 “CRM Systems support the increase of my personal efficiency in sales” has the highest mean value according to descriptive statistics. However, many companies fail to use CRM tools in the right way. In many cases the tools are too complicated and need too much bureaucracy. Damerow (2017) pointed out in his organizational survey that 39 percent of companies have inaccurate data of their clients which leads to inefficiency as well as miscommunication.

This important information is quite an interesting insight given by the salespeople. From the interviews in the pre phase, the author received the feedback that CRM Tools are available but not used continuously or correctly for reports and data collection. So, organizations and salespeople are struggling with the efficiency of CRM tools. Especially if the organization

has a significant fluctuation level, the time when salespeople pay off will be extended. This leads to longer onboarding times.

Because that direct communication is crucial the author wanted to get detailed feedback about the depending variable. The literature of Anders et al. (2020) shows that phone, email and personal face-to-face meetings are the main preference for direct communication. However, since the present study was carried out in the COVID-19 crises the main preference lay on online meetings like Zoom or MS Teams. The present study is a non-longitudinal survey, so the specific variable V27 “I use online tools more often than personal meetings” should be considered with care. The author suggests carrying out a similar survey after COVID-19 and comparing the outcome.

The lowest mean values were seen with variable V28 “I use social media like LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram and so on to post references or other positive information to increase my personal performance”.

Through the literature review different articles regarding social media influence on sales were examined. One article from Karjaluoto et al. (2015) found out that digital marketing in social media does not yield specific revenue values. However, he argues in the direction of lead generation. This is so called “soft-selling” and should acquire new customers. The result of the mentioned article underlines the subordinate role.

The present study on personal sales level is of utmost importance and contributes to the scientific literature. It seems that social media presence will be a “must have” in current times so that customers are continuously up to date with different messages about products, services or organizational information. But it will not be as important as scholars argued before. It seems that the individual characteristics and the direct communication skill have much more influence on the performance of a sales person.

The “solution engagement”, as it is called in this study, will describe how salespeople could engage with solutions when they are in communication with the customer or buyer. In research articles the focus lay mainly on the seller’s organization (Homburg et al. 2009; Salonen et al., 2020). With this study the individual characteristic of solution engagement by salespeople was highlighted.

The descriptive analysis shows that two variables have the same mean value. These are V31 “I spend more than 30% of my time for sales communication with my customers” and V32 “I encourage my customers in the communication for solutions”.

The author sees variable 31 from a positive standpoint. It implies that salespeople have enough time to communicate with customers. In other words, the internal bureaucracy in organizations does not seem so high that salespeople will have too little time for the customer. In contrast to the pre-study with a sizeable sample from Germany and Austria, the result is positive. In the second pre-study which was done before the quantitative survey, time resources were seen as an obstacle for the individual performance. That is why the quantitative survey includes this important resource question. However, the present survey revealed that in general bureaucracy will be tolerated. This correlates with the CRM topic. Companies in different industries use CRM tools but have no strict obligation to use these tools in the right way.

The variable V32 with the same mean value seems to be also important in that context. To encourage a customer, it is necessary to communicate and use enough time for this endeavour.

The variable V30 “I communicate with the whole decision-making unit” is rather low. That shows that salespeople talk with different decision makers during the sales process. The value will be higher and may lead to a better performance if salespeople include the whole DMU in the communication process.

The variable V33 “I invest time to make customers rethink their purchasing preferences” has the lowest mean value in this section with 3.69. This means that if the customer chooses another product or service, the sales person does not have time to convince the customer to rethink his decision. In such a case the sales person will focus on another customer where the potential to make business is higher. Through the qualitative interviews it was found that this variable is closely connected to the performance targets.

The fourth hypothesis was formulated as,

H4: Communication capability positively moderates the relationship between solution implementation and sales performance.

This fourth hypothesis could not be seen as valid in case that the moderation of communication on the performance is too low. Whereby, the significance level with 0,07 is

slightly over the limit. According to the questions in the survey there couldn't be seen a direct connection between performance. The question is formulated more into the direction engagement of solutions than performance.

The survey confirmed that communication through different channels is expected from customers. Social media is not directly related to sales performance. This is more marketing information than a performance tool. Much more important are the skills of sales persons to communicate through different channels about a product or service. Contrary to former research the presence on social platforms is necessary but has less influence than expected.

4.2.5 Management requirements

The variables and moderators which were discussed before depend on the individual characteristic of a sales person. The aim of this study is to investigate different personal or individual characteristics. To connect this study with the prior research, which is mainly based on the organizational level, link to these variables was established. To get a holistic view of the performance in solution sales, it is necessary to consider the organizational influence on the individual performance. Even Ulaga and Reinartz (2011) underpin the importance of solutions in the sales business and suggest investigating the individual and organizational characteristics of solution sales.

While some of the earlier mentioned variables were investigated in other academic articles the present variable called "Management Requirements" is a new view in relation to the individual sales performance. With management requirements three main drivers which will be examined and scrutinized through the qualitative and quantitative survey were connected.

These moderators are "Resources, Process & Structure as well as Motivation".

Together with these three main drivers the author established the following hypothesis to verify the importance and influence on sales performance.

H5: Salespeople who get individual and suitable resources will increase their sales performance.

Under the use of the linear regression analysis the regression coefficient was calculated with $b_1=0,70$ and the variable show a significance level with $p<0.001$. In that way the null hypothesis could be rejected.

In the survey first section of management requirements, the participants were asked about their own individual resources. Through the descriptive statistics analysis it was found out that the most important variable with the highest mean value is V44 “I have all technical resources (Laptop, Tablet, Phone,...) I need for my sales activities”. That gives evidence that the technical equipment level of salespeople is quite enough. There seems to be no big difference between small and large firms.

The next lower mean variable V43 “ I get enough support from my colleagues or non-sales people to create solutions”. This variable is quite interesting because the salespeople in the forefront always need people in the background. It seems that there is too little support for salespeople like back-office assistance or, in the case of engineered products, there is always a need for R&D support to create new products or services.

On the last place the variable V45 “I have enough time to establish solutions for my customers” can be found. The value reveals that salespeople need more time to find the perfect match for customer expectations. This can be related to the variable V35 “I can modify our product/service to offer customized solutions”. The variable sales capability has a strong correlation of 0.567 with management requirements.

The second organizational variable which will be discussed is the moderator variable “Process & Structure”. This moderator variable describes the relationship between the individual sales person and the organization in terms of the internal processes and structure of departments.

The result of this variable could be interpreted in a way that internal processes and the structures are what salespeople expect. However, the highest mean value was found with the variable V47 “The organization structure is clear for me, and I know the responsibilities of the leaders in detail”. That means the structure is well reported to the organization.

The second and third variable have nearly the same mean value. Much more interesting is the variable V46 “Our organization is flexible and can easily adapt according to the market behaviour” is on a very low level. A missing flexibility in the structure of departments which have to be more agile in these times can be assumed. While in the past strategies and department transformations were carried out in 5-, 7- or 10-years cycles, up-to-date organizations have to build their processes and structures in a way that they could be adapted immediately.

In last place the variable V48 “Our organization inform also non-salespeople about our customers and projects so that everyone which helps to establish solutions”. This value could be seen in connection with the variable V43. If people were not informed about solutions and the connected customer, the support of the non-sales people is not as expected. Moreover, if people could identify themselves with the end-product or the customer, the support would be much better and would have a positive influence on sales performance.

The last variable in this section is the motivation level. The highest mean value was found in the section “management requirements” with moderator variable V50 “My personal motivation is to create customer solutions which gain in higher performance for the customer”. This correlates with the variable V49 “My personal motivation is only the financial benefit from the job” with the lowest mean level showing that financial incentive is not the highest motivation for employees.

Further motivation characteristics are V52 “Identification with the company and the product or service is motivating me” which reached a high mean value. Followed by the variable V51 “My leader and/or management is motivating me to create solutions”. This outcome is quite interesting and important for organizations. A connection between training and motivation can be seen. It can be assumed that if people got solution trainings which will be initiated by the leader or management, there would be a higher motivation for salespeople.

The analysed results of the survey and the analysis showed new insights into the sales transformation. In the existing literature it can be found that most of the research focuses on the organizational level like Cornet et al. (2000) who argued that people have to know multiple levels of the organization. The present study, however, showed that the processes and structures of an organization were well defined and communicated. So that gap, which is mentioned by Cornet et al. (2000), should not appear in the majority of industrial firms in Austria or Germany.

More important are the rare research and ideas from scholars like Bonney and Williams (2009) who stated in their research that cognitive processes of individual salespeople could be becoming important for the future. The present study underpins this importance. “Sales capability”, especially the adaptability in a sales process, seems to be the most important factor for achieving a higher performance. However, to reach a high-performance level a surprising insight was discovered. The management requirements are in second place when

it comes to performance. The interpretation of the results showed that the motivation and the non-sales support is of utmost importance to increase individual sales performance.

Sales managers in an organization will have two main targets to work on if they want to transform sales into solution sales. First, they have to invest into the individual sales capability resources. That means that salespeople have to get more degrees of freedom in their sales process to create solutions. These degrees of freedoms include time, support from non-sales and data from the CRM system. Secondly, they have to provide the management requirements not only depending on financial benefits. The motivation should be related to the non-financial aspects for the next sales generation. Another benefit of this study is the finding that the selection of salespeople should focused more on capabilities than on experience as well as provide an optimized onboarding through a sales champ. All these steps will help companies to enhance sales performance at the end and shorten the transformation process.

In this specific investigation of resources, motivation as well as process & structure in seems to have major influence on the individual sales person's performance. The survey shows that the motivation as well as the training in solutions on the individual level is not what salespeople expect, respectively need, to perform well.

4.3 New scientific contribution

4.3.1 Unique research in Austria and Germany

The novelty of this research is manifold in different aspects. **It's the first research in terms of individual sales performance in relation to solution selling involving different industry sectors in Austria and Germany.** The research encompasses qualitative interviews in relevant industry sectors with salespeople and sales managers and will be supported through an emitted quantitative survey to 5,319 contacts. With meaningful feedback from 377 respondents a deep analysis of both qualitative and quantitative inputs was done. From the scientific perspective this research contributes the rare existing literature which mainly focus on psychological, organizational or meta-analysis results (Verbeke at al., 2011). The few available research articles cover either a small number of companies or industries sectors and will not explain meaningful outcome in this field (Salonen et al.,

2020). The research question calls for a deep analysis of different variables and moderators on the individual sales level. The current research developed the individual variables in different fields on the salesperson level.

4.3.2 Long-term performance and customer loyalty

The scientific contribution in this actual research is that implementing solution selling processes in sales strategies of B2B companies will increase the individual sales performance in the long term. Especially medium and large companies have hold on too long for product centred strategies. In that way it will be hard to hold customers on the long run. Analysis like S&P 500 showed that product-centred firms failed to reach their expectations in terms of performance. The main contribution to see solutions as long-term performance is confirmed through several qualitative and quantitative inputs in this research. It seems that the time of COVID-19 fostered the solution selling approach in the industry. **If companies include solution selling processes the customer loyalty and long-term performance values will increase.** The research result shows that the expected hypothesis H1.1 is relevant and will be accepted. Through the collected statistical data the author showed the subjective performance increase through solution implementation. The positive side effect through the qualitative input revealed that when customer and buyer know and understand their strategies the loyalty of both partners increase. With loyalty the author means that both partners understand and respect their strategic long-term activities. Solution selling patterns could be seen as a sustainable KPI (key performance indicator) for management strategy evaluations.

4.3.3 Sales experience lost the first rank in relation to performance

In terms of individual characteristics and capabilities this research revealed an important contribution. Different scholars in the past declare individual characteristics like experience (Salonen, 2020; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016) or communication (Verbeke at al., 2011) as crucial in terms of performance. This research allows a different perspective on the complex topic of individual sales characteristics. **Sales experience in relation to solutions is replaced from the first rank as one top driver for sales performance.** With hypothesis H2.2 the

author expected that individually gathered sales characteristics positively influence the performance. In case that the actual research covers experience, knowledge and risk within the variable individual sales characteristics the author could accept the result in general. A detailed view on the variable 'experience' shows the fact that it is not as much important than other characteristics. With the correlation matrix the author was able to confirm the result that the 'experience' lost the first rank in correlation to performance. However, experience still help to engage for solutions. In detail sales experience will help for onboarding processes and should supported through individual training. This will lead that new hired salespeople pay off earlier. The special part 'customer experience' fosters long term relationships which is important for individual sales performance.

4.3.4 Solutions gain a positive risk setting

Beside the investigation of main drivers the research spawned a side effect. The surprising impact was the risk perception. **The survey revealed that salespeople have a more positive setting on risk perception than the management level.** That implicit that sales managers should hand over more responsibility to salespeople which could lead to higher performance values. The new contribution was expected in case that hypothesis H2.2 was positively formulated regarding the characteristics experience, knowledge and risk perception. From the authors perspective this is based at the time when the research was done. In case that this research was conducted during COVID-19, salespeople learned to deal with new situations day by day. Especially salespeople received positive experience for example with new communication tools (MS Teams, Zoom,...) and styles (virtual).

4.3.5 Adaptability has the strongest influence on sales performance

The most important academical finding is the potential of the adaptability in a sales process. Hypothesis H3.1 promised this performance will increase through individual sales capabilities like adaptability. The concept of the hypothesis was that with the ability to customize the sales process and create added value for the customer through advice performance could increase significantly. This property is capable of a salesperson flexing style to adapt to that of the buyer. The astonishing result and high correlations are in line

with the finding of scholars who saw the importance of adaptability rising (Viio, 2011; Nguyen, 2019). Adaptability in sales processes, but also in terms of product and service, diminishes value creation in it's priority. **The research developed that adaptability has the strongest influence on sales performance in regard to solutions selling.** This novelty implicit that a specific or individual support of the organization and especially non-salespeople will be necessary for salespeople. The finding has a big impact but also a leverage for the human resource management. With this recognition it will be possible to adjust the recruiting process to find suitable staff for customer solutions.

4.3.6 Individualised motivation

The last-mentioned novelty revealed through this research is named with management requirements. Hypothesis H5.1 expected that if a sales person get individual resources and personalized incentives that the sales performance will increase. This variable is new in the academical literature in this perspective and connect the individual with the organizational characteristics. Whereby the processes and the organization level seem to be in line with the expectations from salespeople but the resources and motivation revealed new insights. In conservative industry segments like automotive or mechanical manufacturing companies have to transform their motivation and incentive system. Financial incentives will no longer be the only scale for motivation. **Motivation and incentives have to be individualised and must include non-financial ratings.** Therefore, the management has to establish new individual KPI's for performance levels. For example, duration of partnerships with customers, individual completed training modules, training through sales champ or green goals could be new indicators.

Beside the individual KPI's also resources should be personalized. Individual training and organizational non-sales support will positively influence the individual sales performance.

5 CONCLUSION

The study reviewed the available literature on solution sales and sales performance. The compiled literature allowed the identification of rare research articles in the field of individual sales. Most of the common literature is concerned in parameters and variables by the organizational level.

This research study contributes to prior academic literature in terms of sales process transformation and solution selling literature. The findings provide several important insights into solution sales and help managers to understand the connection of the organizational and individual level. Because this topic is relevant for managers and scholars, sales performance is often treated in academic discussions and studies (Leigh et al., 2001).

The table below summarizes the tasks like research question and five developed hypotheses. From the academical view and the supervisors feedback the targets for the research are well achieved and novel insights in solution sales were developed. The research question was answered successfully. The five hypotheses are validated according to statistical methods and interpreted in the discussion chapter.

Table 14: Concluding summary of research question and hypotheses

Reserach question, hypotheses	Results
RQ: Which variables on the individual sales person level influence the sales performance for solution selling?	answered
H1: Solution implementation declines or does not increase individual sales performance	validated & declined
H2: Individually gathered sales characteristics will not or negatively influence the sales performance	validated & declined
H3: Individual sales capability characteristics will not result in higher sales performance	validated & declined
H4: Communication capability doesn't moderate the relationship between solution implementation and sales performance	validated & accepted
H5: Salespeople who get individual and suitable resources will not increase their sales performance	validated & declined

Source: Author's own design

5.1 Conclusions

The question regarding ways to sell products or services has a long history, whereby product-centric sales was dominating in the past (Dubinsky & Rudelius, 1981). The business 30 years ago was mainly product-driven. In times of globalisation and digitalization the business has been shifting more and more towards a service-oriented industry. Scholars and organisations have recognized that solution implementation is not an easy task. That is why many firms are struggling with the transformation from product-centric processes to solution selling. Previous academic literature yielded rare output on how to transition the salesforce from product selling to solution selling (Panagopoulos et al., 2017; Ulaga & Loveland, 2014).

As a general output this study revealed the information that different parameters are responsible for the individual sales performance. This is not a completely new idea since Salonen et al. (2020) argued in a similar direction. Analyses by Churchill et al. (1985) and Verbeke et al. (2011) about variables in sales provided a starting point for this present research. The novelty of this study is that the rare existing studies on individual performance were extended and viewed from a new perspective. The intention was to gather more scientific information on the sales person level in relation to the sales performance. From this point of view the following research question was formulated.

Which variables on the individual sales person level influence the sales performance for solution selling?

To answer this question existing literature concerning relevant variables was examined. Therefore, the rare literature on sales person level was used and combined with the literature on the organizational level. Since many variables emerged, especially on the organizational level, these were combined into moderator variables. The next step was to summarize these variables and find a transformation to the sales person level. These transformed categorizations were the new variables for further research in this study. To give an example 'workload pressure' or 'sales person autonomy' which was researched by Bonney and Williams (2009) was transformed into the new variable 'individual resources'.

With this new and unique transformation of variables it was possible to describe the connected individual sales variables. The final newly developed variables are 'individual sales characteristics', 'sales capability' and 'communication capability'. Since the individual

sales person is always embedded in an organization with defined structures and management rules this influencing factor was also included as the variable 'management requirements'.

Verbeke et al. (2011) called the salespeople the 'knowledge brokers'. He identified five subcategories in a meta-analysis which considered literature from 1982 – 2008. Therein the highest driving factor was the 'selling-related knowledge' followed by the 'degree of adaptiveness', 'role ambiguity', 'cognitive aptitude' and 'work engagement'. However, these findings were identified on the basis of the number and frequency of variables, or moderators in the literature. In the same way they mentioned that the field of sales is changing and, thus, practices differ from the literature. They suggested doing further research on organizational and individual level. Therefore, the present study contributes to former research and reveals new directions in solution sales for scholars and practitioners.

Scholars see a vast movement in the sales environment. This study found that additionally to knowledge, experience and motivation which are important moderators 'adaptability' of the sales behaviour is crucial to improving the performance. This is followed by the 'value creation' moderator. This supports the fact that solutions in sales which will be the driving forces in the future.

However, this study contributes to the existing literature in several ways. On the one hand it supports findings like Ulaga and Loveland's (2014) who identified 13 different individual characteristics. Some of them are in line with the present study. In their research they interviewed 20 managers and revealed that the managers see most deficits in learning orientation, customer service orientation and intrinsic motivation. However, the current research focused not only on the manager level but rather on salespeople. That means the findings can be compared and contrasting aspects identified. Salespeople want to learn more but they need individual training and not standardized sales training. Also, the customer orientation will be seen differently as well as the intrinsic motivation. In general, it seems that there is not only a change in the sales technique; there is also a development in the behaviour and in the individual sense of the sales job. Managers have to provide adapted and targeted trainings adapted to their customers and products or services.

Another interesting moderator variable is the risk parameter. Salonen et. al (2002) argued that risk perception must be seen as a critical condition which is negatively connotated. Their research, however, may not be as relevant as only one organization was considered. In the

present study risk seems to be perceived more neutrally or even positively. Many of the participants connect risk in sales to the development of new products or services in the long run. That means that managers should trust salespeople and give them a higher personal responsibility for business decisions.

Common findings could be identified with Salonen et al. (2020) regarding the training of salespeople. In both research studies the main result is that if sales champs support salespeople, especially through the onboarding phase, they will pay off in a shorter period than if they have to make their own experiences. This study showed the same preference on the side of salespeople which will be helpful for managers in their onboarding programs.

Scholars like William and Plouffe (2007) mention that companies struggle to reach their targets when they execute their transformation from product-centred in to service-orientation. They suggest rethinking the sales strategy in the complex B2B environment. It seems that especially the last three years have transformed the salespeople's behaviour. The new normal for everyone is that many daily tasks have changed since COVID-19. This helps the sales organization with its transformation. Salespeople seem to have a positive attitude and accept the transformation rules easier.

5.2 Recommendations and managerial implications

The investigation revealed that solutions in the sales business will no longer disappear. The study derived from the qualitative interview phases as well as from the quantitative survey that solutions are a part of the company's strategy and will become more interesting over many industry sectors. Conservative industry fields like the machinery manufacturing industry will see the biggest impact on solutions in the next coming years. Therefore, different managerial implications must be considered to foster the transformation for solutions.

To find purposeful human resources is currently a 'hot project' for many companies. In different interviews the topic of human sales resources is seen as a critical one. Many companies struggle to find 'right' skilled salespeople. This means that a sales person has to pay off in a short period of time after a defined training phase. If this is not the case the

performance of the sales person is negative. Companies have to adapt their selection process for sales employees. The task of sales experience should not have the highest priority. More important is the capability of adaption. The human resource department must find out the capability of adaption of each new employee. This will help companies to pay off earlier and adjust the sales team structure.

Firm performance is utmost important so that the sales team shall consider further tools to improve the individual sales performance. The study revealed that at the time of the onboarding phase a guidance of a sales champ will support and shorten the training phase. In other words, that means that the sales person will pay off earlier and the firm performance will increase. Human resource departments shall consider the onboarding phase as crucial to train new salespeople and allocate a sales champ for their guidance.

The research revealed that training itself should be seen as crucial for salespeople. Salespeople confirmed in the interviews but also through the overall survey that the output of external training is often low. With external training the author mean that trainings will be held by an external consultant. The main reason is that external training consultants are not familiar with the strategy of the firm and so offer a standardised training session. Trainings should be purposive to the sales community. It could be tailored to one person or a sales group or even a training for specific country sales team. This may lead to longer preparation time for consultants but to higher performance for the company and may increase the reputation of the consultant.

Motivation of employees in general is more important than in all the years before. The survey unambiguous revealed that financial motivation of salespeople is not sufficient to keep these people on the long-term. The company is forced to implement further non-financial incentives for their motivation. Through the interviews the author experienced that for example team events, flexible working hours, flexible work locations, flat hierarchies, agile teams, profit sharing and others will help to motivate the sales teams.

The previous managerial implication as well as the general topic of individual performance is closely connected to the long-term firm performance. In general, the research revealed that solutions increase the long-term performance of a firm. To keep customers on the long run it is less cost-intensive than acquire new customers. To know the customers strategy and

their long-term targets will help to keep up loyalty. This will help for example in times of short time crises like COVID-19 to understand and solve delivery or price situation.

These new managerial implications strengthen the support on the internal organization level especially for the human resource department. Bond et al. (2020) described in his research the function of a CSM (customer success manager). In a short the CSM is responsible that a customer derives a value which will be promised by a seller.

In the same way there should be a new function called ESM (employee success manager). Such a person should be located in the human resource department and will be responsible that salespeople and employees receive individual support. This will ensure that salespeople increase their individual sales performance.

5.3 Limitation and future research avenues

The limitation of this present study offers avenues for further research topics. First, this study revealed only insights in two industrial countries (Austria and Germany). A broader international view on solution sales would contribute to the field and give even more insights. Secondly, in this study the priority was on the B2B customer area. It could be useful to investigate into the B2C environment too and make connections between the business cases. All in all, it seems that there is a shift towards service- and solution-orientated sales. Thirdly, the research was done during COVID-19 which means that people were in a special work mode with home office, digital developments and other disruptive behaviour. A comparative survey should be done after a few years to verify the outcomes of this study.

Finally, this study compiled moderators and variables closely related to the individual sales performance. Sales performance will be mainly seen in organizations as financial performance. As the study revealed performance is a rather complex topic in the future sales environment. The author calls for scholars to address the question of what measurements will be useful for future B2B business performance. What will be classified as performance for a firm in the future and how to differentiate between the industrial sectors.

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7 ANNEXES

7.1 ANNEX 1 – Definition of solution in the academical literature

Definition	Level	Methodology	Gaps	Author
Solutions for a customer will integrate tangible and intangible components.	Organization	Literature research	Influence on solution providers (sales, customer other units), risk transfer, performance evaluation	Bond et al. (2020)
Integrated solutions have to meet customers' needs and combining products and systems with services to operate a system throughout its whole life cycle (p.360)	Organization	Empirical study over 3 years of 92 interview partners in Uk, Sweden and France	Key Account management, Risk analysis and Management, Financial acumen, Legal skills, Information management, Innovation management, Portfolio management	Brady et al. (2005)
A Solution is a radically new approach to create value in the total system for the customer. This contains innovative cooperation and mutual trust which gain customer value proposition (p.1)	Organization	Empirical interviews	New skill for individuals, transitions cost in consideration of long-term goals, risk management, measurement of profitability	Cornet et al. (2000)
Salespeople have to offer solutions business and products that provide modular combinations which deliver solutions for the customer (p.5)	Organization	Empirical study with 2000 sent surveys	Transforming people for solutions, Individual perspective	Day (2006)
Bundle products together with services will deliver packages and allow value creation for the customer (p.2)	Organization	Interview with industrial companies	Individual impact when moving from product centric to customer centric method	Galbraith (2002)
Solutions are a wide offering of products and services to fulfil most of the customers' needs and are related to the customers economics. (p.13)	Organization	Empirical research with more than 100 companies	Concentrated on the US market, focused on organization level	Hax & Wilde (1999)

A solution is a combination of products and services that creates value beyond the sum of its parts (p.2)	Organization	60 interviews with solution providers	transformation of individual level	Johansson et al. (2003)
Solutions have the focus on intangibles like skills and knowledge and needs interactivity as well as connectivity and relationships (p.24)	Organization	Literature review	Individual and practical relation	Lusch & Vargo (2006)
Solutions are a combination of customized products and services to attain higher outcomes (p. 8)	Organization	Literature review	Preparing to deliver solutions Attractiveness of solutions (externally and internally)	Sawhney (2006)
A solution is a fundamentally different approach to the customer and creates additional value (p.3)	Organization	Interviews with <i>Fortune</i> 100 companies	Skills to achieve individualized customer needs	Sharma et al. (2002)
A solution is seen in a wide perspective and consist of a relational process between customer and supplier. It combines customer requirements, customization and integration of products and services, post deployment customer support (p.2)	Organization/ Individual	Empirical research with 125 interviewees on suppliers and customers	Measure solution effectiveness, defining supplier and customer factors for example: customer experience	Tuli et al. (2007)
Integrated Solutions are a combination of products and services which is satisfying a customer need (p.138)	Organization	Interview with industrial companies	Measurement of performance, transformation of organization and individual level,	Wise & Baumgartner (1999)
Solutions combine wide ranges of services and products from internal and external sources (p.100)	Organization	Empirical data from a synthesized research process. In total 100 in-depths interviews	Activities to achieve solution service innovation. Finding patterns which drive solutions or service innovation.	Kindström & Kowalkowski (2014)

7.2 ANNEX 2 - Pre-study phase 1

Topic: Solution Selling

Screening Question: This is a short survey about solution selling in the context of sales. Globalisation and digitalization have brought many advantages into the business market in general. Despite these advantages we see that firms which are “product-focused“ struggling with their strategy to gain profitability. With this interview we would evolve the perspective if the transformation from product-focused sales into solutions-selling could create more differentiation and competition. In a wide perspective, what is your opinion about this topic?

Demographic Questions

1. How old are you?
 - Young professional (14-19)
 - Early Career (20-35)
 - Middle Career (36-50)
 - Late Career (51-60)
 - Close to/after retirement (61+)

2. What is your professional position?
 - Leadership position (Manager)
 - Sales person
 - Customer
 - Other

3. Which is the highest level of education you have obtained?
 - low (basic education)
 - middle (Bachelor)
 - high (university - Master or higher)

4. What type of degree have you obtained?
 - Technical
 - Business
 - Other

5. How much is your sales person target turnover per year?
Or if you a sales manager: What is your employees sales target?
 - < 1 Mio €
 - 1,1 to 2,9 Mio €
 - 3 to 4,9 Mio €
 - 5 to 7 Mio €
 - 7,1 and higher Mio €

6. In which business environment are you working

B2C (Business to Customer)

B2B (Business to Business)

7. In which field are you working (automotive, mechanical industry,...)

.....

Category 1 - General:

Have you ever heard of solution-selling? O Yes O No

Do you know in general the difference of solutions selling vs product selling? O Yes
O No

Do you implement solution-selling patterns in your business? O Yes O No

Do you think solution-selling is related positively to sales? O Yes O No

Is it tough to recover from a crisis period in your business? O Yes O No

Category 2 – Your Product or Service...

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree
... is implemented in customer application, facility, or service (so not a end product)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
... needs an extra explanation of salespeople to describe all functions and features	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
... description is available online so that customer could gather all information	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
... influences with certain parameters or properties the product of your customer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
... is rather complex	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Category 3 – Your Customer...

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree
... is well known by you or your sales representative	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
... is frequently in “personal” contact with you or your sales (before Covid 19)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
... is mainly in contact with you or your sales through E-mail (more than on phone)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
... is not a single contact. You and your sales are also in contact with other people from the customer (technician, buyer, quality,...)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
... carry out decisions in a team	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Category 4 – You or your sales representative...

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree
... are interested to know more about your customer to evolve solutions for them.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
... have experience in solution selling	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
... are open for training in solution selling	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
... will gain more responsibility through solutions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
... could harm existing sales relationship through solution selling.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Category 5 – Your company...

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree
... supports solution selling	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
... would gain better performance through solution selling	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
... need differentiation against competitors	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
... regularly train salespeople (general training)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
... emphasize on their salespeople	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Category 6 – Your colleagues...

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree
... are aware of solution selling	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
... would also know more about solution selling	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
... are interested to improve their own sales performance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
... are open for new knowledge	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
... work closely with you or other colleagues in projects	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Category 7 – Sales performance...

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree
... of sales person increase with solution selling	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
... of company level increase with solution selling	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
... in combination with solution selling could be key performance indicator	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
... is related to a bonus agreement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
... on individual or firm level is related to your salary	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Category 8 – Education in solution selling...

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree
... is important for future sales opportunities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
... is necessary to distinct from other sales	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
... will gain more overall knowledge	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
... will create positive effects on my personal life	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
... will help me for my career	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Category 9 – Others: Please provide additional information on the topics you are interested or on the issues in which further research shall be done?

7.3 ANNEX 3 – Pre-study phase 2

Topic: Drivers and Moderators in Solution Selling

This is a in depths interview about solution selling in the context of B2B sales. A solution is seen in a wide perspective and consist of a relational process between customer and supplier. It combines customer requirements, customization and integration of products and services, post deployment customer support (Tuli et al. 2007). The author is screening the drivers and moderators for solution selling within this in depths interviews. The aim of the interviews is to find out the most important drivers and moderators which will be discussed in a separate examination from the author.

Demographic Questions

8. How old are you?
 - Young professional (14-19)
 - Early Career (20-35)
 - Middle Career (36-50)
 - Late Career (51-60)
 - Close to/after retirement (61+)

9. What is your professional position?
 - Leadership position (Manager)
 - Sales person
 - Customer
 - Other

10. Which is the highest level of education you have obtained?
 - low (Basic education)
 - middle (Bachelor)
 - high (University - Master or higher)

11. Which size has your company you work for?
 - Micro (< 10 employees or < 2 M€)
 - Small (< 50 employees or < 10 M€)
 - Medium-sized (< 250 employees or < 50 Mil)
 - Large (> 250)

12. How much is your target sales order intake per year?

Or if you a sales manager: What is your employees target for sales order intake per year?

- < 1 Mio €
- 1,1 to 2,9 Mio €
- 3 to 4,9 Mio €
- 5 to 7 Mio €
- 7,1 and higher Mio €

13. In which field are you working (automotive, mechanical industry,...)

Category 1 – GENERAL

Have you ever heard of solution-selling? O Yes O No

Do you know in general the difference of solutions selling vs product selling? O Yes ONo

Do you implement solution-selling patterns in your business? O Yes O No

Do you think solution-selling is related positively to sales? O Yes O No

Are you interested to know more about solutions? O Yes O No

Category 2 – ADAPTIVENESS

1. Which approaches do you use?
2. What sales styles will be expected from your customer?
3. In which way do you adapt your sales style? (presentation technique, material,)

Category 3 – COGNITIVE CAPABILITIES

1. Do you need different creative ideas to sell or promote your products? If, yes describe in detail.
2. How do you organize your creative approach? (single, group...)
3. Which are in your opinion the most important factors of a sales person to establish customer solutions?

Category 4 – MOTIVATION

1. What is your general motivation for your sales job? (money, reputation...)
2. Is motivation in your opinion needed in your job? If, yes why.
3. Which persons are important in your company to motivate you?

Category 5 – PROCESS & STRUCTURE

1. Describe in brief your structures in your firm?
2. Which role play leadership for you in relation to the organization structure?
3. How much time (in percentage) do you need for non-selling work? (bureaucracy)

Category 6 – EXPERIENCE & KNOWLEDGE

1. Do you think experience in general is important for solution selling? (if yes why?)
2. What is needed to gain customer experience?
3. What is needed to gain knowledge of product and services from your own firm?

Category 7 – COMMUNICATION

1. Which communication methods do you use in your sales process?
2. How much time in percentage do you need for communication (internally, externally)?
3. What is your opinion in regarding face to face communication?

Category 8 – RESOURCES

1. When you think on resources, which resources do you use in your daily job?
2. How can you improve your performance?
3. Do you see solution selling as a long or short term increase of performance? (or both)

Category 9 – RISK PERCEPTION

1. In case of solution selling do you think the risk, increase or decrease? If, increase why?
2. What are the consequences of increased risk in your job?
3. Do you think solution selling could harm your performance and reputation?

Category 10 – Capabilities & Resources

Which capabilities are the most important ones in our opinion?

Which resources are the most important ones in our opinion?

Category 11 - RANKING

Please rank the following drivers according your opinion from 1 to 8:

(one will be the highest importance and eight the lowest importance)

Adaptive Selling

Cognitive Capabilities

Motivation

Process & Structure (Organization)

Experience & Knowledge

Communication

Resources

Risk

7.4 ANNEX 4 – Quantitative survey

Topic: Does “Solution Selling Implementation” increase the individual sales performance

1. Demographic Questions

2. How old are you?

- Young professional (14-19)
- Early Career (20-35)
- Middle Career (36-50)
- Late Career (51-60)
- Close to/after retirement (61+)

3. What is your professional position?

- Sales Management Position
- Sales person
- Sales Back office
- Other

4. Which is the highest level of education you have obtained?

- Basic education
- University degree (Bachelor or Master)
- Professional (Doctorate or equivalent)
- other

5. Which size has your company you work for?

- Micro (< 10 employees or < 2 M€)
- Small (< 50 employees or < 10 M€)
- Medium-sized (< 250 employees or < 50 Mil)
- Large (> 250)

6. In which field are you working (automotive, mechanical industry,...)?

2. Solution selling process implementation H1

1. To sell solutions will strengthen the long-term customer partnership
2. Solutions help me personally to gain new customers

3. Individual sales characteristics H2

a. Experience

The following statements refer to your personal experience. Please rate them considering to solution selling.

1. I have sales experience which is comparable with solutions
2. I believe sales experience help salespeople to create solutions.
3. I think that customer experience will positively influence solution selling.
4. I gained my sales experience by myself (means not guided through a sales champ).

b. Knowledge (Training)

The following statements refer to your personal knowledge about solution selling itself but also on your customers knowledge. Please rate your personal opinion.

1. I receive continuous training in "solution selling" to increase my individual performance.
2. I receive continuously general sales training (products, sales, negotiation,...) that enhances my ability regarding solution sales
3. I would be highly appreciated if i were trained regarding solutions in sales
4. Training would positivly influence my individual sales performance

c. Risk perception

The following statements refer to your personal risk perception. Please rate yourself and the influence of risk on our performance.

1. Solutions sales could harm my individual sales performance.
2. Solution sales could harm my existing customer relationship.
3. Solution sales could harm my personal reputation
4. Solution sales will develop new products or services

4. Communication Capability H4

a. Communication Channels

The following statements refer to the used technology possibilities in your job when you communicate with a customer. Please rate yourself what you use in your daily business.

1. I prefer to use emails rather than phone calls as a communication tool.
2. I use online tools like Zoom, MS Teams... more often than personal meetings.
3. I use social media like LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram... to post references or other positive information to increase my personal performance.
4. CRM (Customer Relation Managmeent) Systems supports increase my personal efficiency in sales

b. Solution Engagement

The following statements refer to the communication strategy. Please rate yourself which communication techniques you implement in your process.

1. I communicate with the whole decision-making unit (project manager, sales, purchaser,...) and not only with one counterpart in terms of solutions.
2. I spend more than 30% of my time for sales communication with my customers
3. I encourage my customers in the communication for solutions.
4. I invest time to make customers rethink their purchasing preferences.

5. Sales Capabilities H3

a. Adaptive Capability

The following statements refer to your adaptive capability. Please rate yourself with regards to solution selling how you adapt your process.

1. I´m in the position to adapt the selling process to facilitate solutions selling
2. I can modify our producs/service to offer customized solutions
3. I´m positively related to use adaptive selling methods for solutions selling

4. During my conversations with the customer I try to find out the adaptiveness for solutions from his side

b. Value Creation Capability

The following statements refer to your cognitive capability. Please rate yourself how to find the best suitable solutions.

1. I listen to the customer and understand the needs or the problem.
2. I try to find opportunities to improve customers performance
3. My intention is to cooperate with the customer as a partner to establish solutions
4. I have profound knowledge of the customers business and strategy

6. Management Requirements H5

a. Resources

The following statements refer to your personal resources. Please rate yourself how to deal with resources.

1. I have enough time to establish solutions for my customers
2. I get enough support from my colleagues or non-sales people to create solutions
3. I have all technical resources (Laptop, Tablet, Workstation,...) I need for my sales activities.

b. Process & Structure

The following statements refer to the firms processes and structure. Please rate opinion with regards to solution selling.

1. Our organization is flexible and can easily adapted according the market behavior
2. The organization structure is clear for me and I know the responsibilities of the leaders in detail
3. Our organization inform also non-sales people about our customers and projects so that everyone which helps to establish solutions

c. Motivation

The following statements refer to your motivation in your sales position. Please rate yourself with regards to solution selling.

1. My personal motivation is only the financial benefit from job.
2. To create customer solutions which gain in higher performance for the customer.
3. My leader and/or the management is motivating me to create solutions.
4. Identification with the company and the product or service is motivating me.

7. Individual Sales Performance (depending variable)

1. Solutions will give me the opportunity to exceed my sales targets

7.5 ANNEX 5 – UNIPARK survey software

Survey design (main dashboard)

The screenshot shows the main dashboard of the TIVIAN survey software. The top navigation bar includes the TIVIAN logo, the project name 'Sales Umfrage PhD Arbeit', and user information 'grthmaier'. The main content area is divided into a left sidebar with navigation options and a central workspace. The workspace displays a table of survey questions with the following data:

TITEL	ID	INFO	AKTIONEN
Standardseite	6274529		+ @ @ @
111 Sprachauswahl	11681622	🟢 V	@ @ @ @
111 Abfrage Vertriebsperson oder nicht	6283161		+ @ @ @
111 Einfachauswahl untereinander	11676074	🟢 ! V	@ @ @ @
111 Kein Vertrieb (v_02 = 2)	6283251		+ @ @ @
111 Kein Vertrieb Beendet (31)	6283252		+ @ @ @
898 Text und Bild	11676216	🟢	@ @ @ @
DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS	6263420		+ @ @ @
111 AGE	11659392	🟢 ! V	@ @ @ @
111 PROFESSIONAL	11648243	🟢 ! V	@ @ @ @
111 EDUCATION	11648244	🟢 ! V	@ @ @ @
111 COMPANY SIZE	11648245	🟢 V	@ @ @ @
142 Textbereich	11648246	🟢 V	@ @ @ @
SALESPERSONS Experience	6263419		+ @ @ @
111 QUESTION 1	11642364	🟢 V	@ @ @ @
111 QUESTION 2	11648264	🟢 V	@ @ @ @
111 QUESTION 3	11648265	🟢 V	@ @ @ @

Question design

The screenshot shows the question design interface in TIVIAN. The question is titled 'QUESTION 1' and is in German. The question text is 'Ich habe Vertriebs Erfahrung die auf Lösungsorientierung beruht'. Below the question text, there is a text input field for the answer. The interface also shows options for question type, language, and category. The bottom section shows the answer options for the question:

VARIABLEN-NR.	CODE	ANTWORTOPTION	ANSWER
V_4	1	0 1	starke Ablehnung
V_4	2	0 2	Ablehnung
V_4	3	0 3	neutral
V_4	4	0 4	Zustimmung
V_4	5	0 5	starke Zustimmung

Question sample

Question 1:

I have sales experience which is comparable with solutions

Fill in your experience. If you have not had any direct experience, please select the most appropriate selection.

strongly disagree

disagree

neutral

agree

strongly agree

Question 3:

How old are you?

Please select your age.

14 - 19

20 - 35

36 - 50

51 - 60

61 +

Question 4:

What is your professional position?

Please select your business professional.

Sales Management Position

Salesperson

Sales Back office

Other

Question 8:

I have sales experience which is comparable with solutions

Fill in your experience. If you have not had any direct experience, please select the most appropriate selection.

strongly disagree disagree neutral agree strongly agree

Question 9:

I believe sales experience help salespeople to create solutions

strongly disagree disagree neutral agree strongly agree

Question 10:

I think that customer experience will positively influence solution selling

strongly disagree disagree neutral agree strongly agree

Question 11:

I gained my sales experience by myself (means not guided through a sales champ)

A sales champ is a sales person with profound knowledge and an efficient sales strategy.

strongly Disagree disagree neutral agree strongly agree

UNIPARK – Variable Export for SPSS (extract)

K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R
v_57	v_7	v_8	v_9	v_10	v_4	v_11	v_12
Alter	Position	Berufsausbild	Mitarbeiteranzahl		Ich habe Vert	Ich glaube, da	Ich denke, da
2	2	1	2	Textilbereich	3	5	3
2	4	2	4	Chemie	1	4	4
4	1	1	2	Großhandel	5	5	5
4	4	2	3	Ich bin als Int	5	4	4
3	2	2	2	Electrical(e-m	4	5	4
2	3	2	3	Energiesekto	2	4	3
3	1	3	2	Metals & Allo	4	5	4
4	1	2	1	Dienstleistun	5	5	5

7.6 ANNEX 6 – Statistical analysis

AGE

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	14 to 19	10	3.2	3.2	3.2
	20 to 35	122	39.0	39.0	42.2
	36 to 50	124	39.6	39.6	81.8
	51 to 60	47	15.0	15.0	96.8
	61+	10	3.2	3.2	100.0
	Total	313	100.0	100.0	

Education

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Basic Education	134	42.8	42.8	42.8
	Bachelor or Master	101	32.3	32.3	75.1
	Doctor or equal	5	1.6	1.6	76.7
	other education	73	23.3	23.3	100.0
	Total	313	100.0	100.0	

Company Size

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Micro	39	12.5	12.5	12.5
	Small	82	26.2	26.2	38.7
	Medium	78	24.9	24.9	63.6
	Large	114	36.4	36.4	100.0
	Total	313	100.0	100.0	

Calculation of the Chronbach's Alpha for each moderator

Experience

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.729	4

Knowledge

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.691	4

Risk

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.804	2

Adaptability

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.744	4

Value Creation

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.719	4

Motivation

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.696	3

Resource

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.654	3

Process & Structure

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.726	3

Performance

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.689	2

Calculation of the Chronbach's Alpha for developed variables

Management Requirements

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.845	9

Communication Capability

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.608	4

Sales Capability

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.826	8

Individual Sales Characteristics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.756	10

Mean value of used moderators

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Sales Performance	311	2	5	3.94	.852
Experience	313	1.75	5.00	3.9792	.63072
Knowledge	313	1.00	5.00	3.5327	.67724
Risk perception	313	1.00	5.00	3.7109	.87538
Adaptive capability	313	2.00	5.00	3.8823	.62368
Value creation cap.	313	2.25	5.00	4.1842	.59463
Resources	313	1.00	5.00	3.6890	.70700
Process&Structure	313	1.00	5.00	3.5479	.74882
Communication Capability	311	1	5	3.77	1.025
Motivation	313	1.67	5.00	3.8946	.69175
Solution Implementation	313	2.00	5.00	4.1134	.66198
Valid N (listwise)	309				

Mean value of developed variables

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Sales Performance	311	2	5	3.94	.852
Individual Sales Characteristics	313	2.10	5.00	3.7470	.50826
Sales Capability	313	2.13	5.00	4.0329	.55012
Management Requirements	313	1.56	5.00	3.7106	.60431
Communication Capability	311	1	5	3.77	1.025
Solution Implementation	313	2.00	5.00	4.1134	.66198
Valid N (listwise)	309				

Correlation Matrix new developed variables

		Sales Performance	Individual Sales Characteristics	Sales Capability	Management Requirements	Solution Implementation	Communication Capability
Sales Performance	Pearson Correlation	1	.443**	.571**	.498**	.488**	.332**
	Sig. (1-tailed)		<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	311	311	311	311	311	309
Individual Sales Characteristics	Pearson Correlation	.443**	1	.598**	.337**	.518**	.385**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	<.001		<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	311	313	313	313	313	311
Sales Capability	Pearson Correlation	.571**	.598**	1	.567**	.675**	.514**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	<.001	<.001		<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	311	313	313	313	313	311
Management Requirements	Pearson Correlation	.498**	.337**	.567**	1	.487**	.411**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001		<.001	<.001
	N	311	313	313	313	313	311
Solution Implementation	Pearson Correlation	.488**	.518**	.675**	.487**	1	.390**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001		<.001
	N	311	313	313	313	313	311
Communication Capability	Pearson Correlation	.332**	.385**	.514**	.411**	.390**	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	
	N	309	311	311	311	311	311

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

Correlation Matrix with moderator variables

		Sales Performance	Experience	Knowledge	Risk	Adaptive Capability	Value Creation Capability	Resource	Process	Communication Capability	Motivation	Solution Implementation
Sales Performance	Pearson Correlation	1	.379**	.367**	.174**	.558**	.474**	.346**	.372**	.332**	.550**	.488**
	Sig. (1-tailed)		<.001	<.001	.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	311	311	311	311	311	311	311	311	309	311	311
Experience	Pearson Correlation	.379**	1	.358**	.364**	.536**	.557**	.268**	.266**	.384**	.270**	.505**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	<.001		<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	311	313	313	313	313	313	313	313	311	313	313
Knowledge	Pearson Correlation	.367**	.358**	1	.102*	.328**	.306**	.268**	.188**	.212**	.259**	.328**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	<.001	<.001		.036	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	311	313	313	313	313	313	313	313	311	313	313
Risk	Pearson Correlation	.174**	.364**	.102*	1	.288**	.293**	.036	.035	.230**	.146**	.270**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.001	<.001	.036		<.001	<.001	.266	.266	<.001	.005	<.001
	N	311	313	313	313	313	313	313	313	311	313	313
Adaptive Capability	Pearson Correlation	.558**	.536**	.328**	.288**	1	.632**	.397**	.409**	.464**	.445**	.609**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001		<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	311	313	313	313	313	313	313	313	311	313	313
Value Creation Capability	Pearson Correlation	.474**	.557**	.306**	.293**	.632**	1	.495**	.358**	.463**	.500**	.610**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001		<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	311	313	313	313	313	313	313	313	311	313	313
Resource	Pearson Correlation	.346**	.268**	.268**	.036	.397**	.495**	1	.574**	.305**	.553**	.433**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	.266	<.001	<.001		<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	311	313	313	313	313	313	313	313	311	313	313
Process	Pearson Correlation	.372**	.266**	.188**	.035	.409**	.358**	.574**	1	.345**	.575**	.341**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	.266	<.001	<.001	<.001		<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	311	313	313	313	313	313	313	313	311	313	313
Communication Capability	Pearson Correlation	.332**	.384**	.212**	.230**	.464**	.463**	.305**	.345**	1	.396**	.390**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001		<.001	<.001
	N	309	311	311	311	311	311	311	311	311	311	311
Motivation	Pearson Correlation	.550**	.270**	.259**	.146**	.445**	.500**	.553**	.575**	.396**	1	.466**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	.005	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	
	N	311	313	313	313	313	313	313	313	311	313	313
Solution Implementation	Pearson Correlation	.488**	.505**	.328**	.270**	.609**	.610**	.433**	.341**	.390**	.466**	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	
	N	311	313	313	313	313	313	313	313	311	313	313

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

Linear regression of hypothesis H1

Koeffizienten ^a										
Modell		Nicht standardisierte Koeffizienten		Standardisierte Koeffizienten		95.0% Konfidenzintervalle für B		Kollinearitätsstatistik		
		Regressionskoeffizient B	Std.-Fehler	Beta	T	Sig.	Untergrenze	Obergrenze	Toleranz	VIF
1	(Konstante)	1,367	,265		5,150	,000	,845	1,890		
	SolutionImplementation M	,626	,064	,488	9,825	,000	,501	,751	1,000	1,000
2	(Konstante)	1,322	,288		4,594	,000	,756	1,888		
	SolutionImplementation M	,630	,065	,491	9,713	,000	,502	,757	,971	1,030
	V57_Alter=14-19	-,215	,248	-,045	-,865	,387	-,704	,274	,934	1,071
	V57_Alter=20-35	-,096	,097	-,055	-,984	,326	-,288	,096	,793	1,261
	V57_Alter=51-60	-,123	,130	-,051	-,941	,347	-,379	,134	,854	1,171
	V57_Alter=61+	-,188	,248	-,039	-,760	,448	-,675	,299	,940	1,063
	V9_Mitarbeiteranzahl=Micro	,112	,142	,044	,786	,432	-,168	,392	,808	1,237
	V9_Mitarbeiteranzahl=Small	,146	,110	,076	1,328	,185	-,070	,363	,762	1,312
	V9_Mitarbeiteranzahl=Medium	,180	,111	,092	1,623	,106	-,038	,398	,775	1,290

a. Abhängige Variable: Sales Performance

Linear regression of hypothesis H2

Koeffizienten ^a										
Modell		Nicht standardisierte Koeffizienten		Standardisierte Koeffizienten		95.0% Konfidenzintervalle für B		Kollinearitätsstatistik		
		Regressionskoeffizient B	Std.-Fehler	Beta	T	Sig.	Untergrenze	Obergrenze	Toleranz	VIF
1	(Konstante)	1,158	,323		3,586	,000	,523	1,794		
	IndSalesCharM	,744	,086	,443	8,697	,000	,575	,912	1,000	1,000
2	(Konstante)	,993	,348		2,854	,005	,308	1,678		
	IndSalesCharM	,770	,087	,459	8,885	,000	,600	,941	,965	1,036
	V57_Alter=14-19	-,055	,255	-,011	-,216	,829	-,557	,446	,923	1,083
	V57_Alter=20-35	-,128	,099	-,074	-1,295	,196	-,324	,067	,796	1,256
	V57_Alter=51-60	-,044	,133	-,018	-,329	,742	-,305	,218	,854	1,171
	V57_Alter=61+	-,163	,252	-,034	-,647	,518	-,660	,333	,941	1,063
	V9_Mitarbeiteranzahl=Micro	,160	,145	,062	1,098	,273	-,126	,446	,805	1,242
	V9_Mitarbeiteranzahl=Small	,122	,112	,063	1,091	,276	-,098	,343	,765	1,308
V9_Mitarbeiteranzahl=Medium	,304	,114	,155	2,665	,008	,080	,529	,762	1,313	

a. Abhängige Variable: Sales Performance

Linear regression of hypothesis H3

Koeffizienten^a

Modell		Nicht standardisierte Koeffizienten		Standardisierte Koeffizienten		95,0% Konfidenzintervalle für B		Kollinearitätsstatistik		
		Regressionskoeffizient B	Std.-Fehler	Beta	T	Sig.	Untergrenze	Obergrenze	Toleranz	VIF
1	(Konstante)	,386	,294		1,314	,190	-,192	,963		
	SalesCapM	,882	,072	,571	12,227	,000	,740	1,024	1,000	1,000
2	(Konstante)	,354	,312		1,134	,258	-,260	,968		
	SalesCapM	,887	,074	,574	12,060	,000	,742	1,031	,969	1,032
	V57_Alter=14-19	-,236	,234	-,049	-1,007	,315	-,696	,225	,934	1,070
	V57_Alter=20-35	-,063	,092	-,036	-,681	,496	-,243	,118	,790	1,265
	V57_Alter=51-60	-,118	,123	-,049	-,963	,336	-,359	,123	,855	1,170
	V57_Alter=61+	-,269	,233	-,056	-1,151	,251	-,728	,191	,938	1,066
	V9_Mitarbeiteranzahl=Micro	,030	,134	,012	,223	,823	-,234	,293	,808	1,237
	V9_Mitarbeiteranzahl=Small	,107	,103	,056	1,038	,300	-,096	,310	,769	1,301
	V9_Mitarbeiteranzahl=Medium	,148	,104	,075	1,416	,158	-,058	,353	,775	1,290

a. Abhängige Variable: Sales Performance

Linear regression of hypothesis H4 with moderator analysis

Run MATRIX procedure:

***** PROCESS Procedure for SPSS Version 4.0 *****

Written by Andrew F. Hayes, Ph.D. www.afhayes.com
 Documentation available in Hayes (2022). www.guilford.com/p/hayes3

Model : 1
 Y : Sales Performance
 X : Solution Implementation
 W : Communication capability
 Sample
 Size: 309

OUTCOME VARIABLE:
 Sales Performance

Model Summary

R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
,5175	,2678	,5374	37,1795	3,0000	305,0000	,0000

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	3,9103	,0447	87,4099	,0000	3,8223	3,9983

Solution	,5410	,0685	7,8986	,0000	,4062	,6757
Comm	,1473	,0444	3,3189	,0010	,0600	,2347
Int_1	,1067	,0612	1,7421	,0825	-,0138	,2272

Product terms key:

Int_1 : Solution x Communication capability

Test(s) of highest order unconditional interaction(s):

	R2-chng	F	df1	df2	p
X*W	,0073	3,0351	1,0000	305,0000	,0825

Focal predict: Solution (X)

Mod var: Communication capability (W)

Data for visualizing the conditional effect of the focal predictor:

Paste text below into a SPSS syntax window and execute to produce plot.

DATA LIST FREE/

Solution Comm Perform

BEGIN DATA.

-,6623	-1,0267	3,4733
,0000	-1,0267	3,7590
,6623	-1,0267	4,0448
-,6623	,0000	3,5520
,0000	,0000	3,9103
,6623	,0000	4,2686
-,6623	1,0267	3,6307
,0000	1,0267	4,0616
,6623	1,0267	4,4924

END DATA.

GRAPH/SCATTERPLOT=

Solution WITH Perform BY Comm

***** ANALYSIS NOTES AND ERRORS *****

Level of confidence for all confidence intervals in output:

95,0000

NOTE: The following variables were mean centered prior to analysis:

Communication capability Solution

Linear regression of hypothesis H5

Koeffizienten^a

Modell		Nicht standardisierte Koeffizienten		Standardisierte Koeffizienten		95.0% Konfidenzintervalle für B		Kollinearitätsstatistik		
		Regressionskoeffizient B	Std.-Fehler	Beta	T	Sig.	Untergrenze	Obergrenze	Toleranz	VIF
1	(Konstante)	1,346	,261		5,165	,000	,833	1,859		
	OrganizationalM	,700	,069	,498	10,093	,000	,563	,836	1,000	1,000
2	(Konstante)	1,393	,270		5,152	,000	,861	1,926		
	OrganizationalM	,708	,070	,504	10,120	,000	,570	,846	,980	1,021
	V57_Alter=14-19	-,359	,246	-,074	-1,460	,145	-,843	,125	,934	1,070
	V57_Alter=20-35	-,158	,096	-,090	-1,639	,102	-,347	,032	,798	1,254
	V57_Alter=51-60	-,050	,129	-,021	-,388	,698	-,304	,204	,854	1,171
	V57_Alter=61+	-,157	,245	-,032	-,639	,523	-,639	,325	,941	1,062
	V9_Mitarbeiteranzahl=Micro	-,103	,142	-,040	-,725	,469	-,382	,176	,797	1,255
	V9_Mitarbeiteranzahl=Small	-,052	,109	-,027	-,476	,634	-,265	,162	,768	1,302
	V9_Mitarbeiteranzahl=Medium	,133	,110	,068	1,208	,228	-,084	,349	,775	1,291

a. Abhängige Variable: Sales Performance

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Günther Maier

Weiz, 15.03.2024

DECLARATION ON IDENTITY

I, the undersigned DI(FH) DI Günther Maier, declare that **the printed and electronic versions** of the doctoral dissertation and thesis booklet **are identical in all respects**.

Sopron, 15.03.2024

DI(FH) DI Günther Maier
(PhD candidate)

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