

Value Based Sales Within B2B Companies in Finland

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ABSTRACT

Value based sales make the customer business grow profitably by understanding customers requirements by communicating value through customer business perspective. The salesperson must act more as a consultant and advisor by changing identity from a seller to a partner. This study explores how value-based sales is perceived by Finnish sales professionals. Drawing on 85 in-depth interviews, we conducted a theory-driven thematic analysis grounded in established academic literature. The analysis is based on first-person interviews, offering unique insight into an underrepresented national context related to views and insights on value based B2B sales in Finland. Findings reveal that value-based sales start with the detailed understanding of the customer's needs, strategy, business and environment. Sales success is associated with emotional intelligence and interpersonal credibility, and trust is both the method and outcome of successful value-based sales. Value is realized by solving the existing real business problems by the seller rather than presenting the generic features of the product. Value-based sales evaluates sales as the relationship management and is considered as not only economic exchange but also as a moral positioning. Value-based sales was experienced to be more time consuming but yielding long-lasting and stronger results to achieve better customer retention and profitability.

Keywords: Sales, Value-based sales, Customer interaction, Value creation

INTRODUCTION

Value based B2B sales makes the customer business grow profitably by understanding customers value requirement by communicating value through customer business perspective. The effectiveness of value-based sales relies upon establishing trust, demonstrating credibility, and providing clear evidence of delivered value. Value is increasingly understood as something created through collaboration and interaction. This transforms salesperson's role from selling products or solutions into active value co-creator, who participates into customer's business opportunities to ensure future growth for both selling company, customer and even customers customer (Terho et al., 2012, Anderson, Narus & van Rossum, 2006, Haas, Snehota & Corsaro, 2012). At the same time, customers are also active contributors to the value co-generation process, combining their and their company's expertise, resources and competences into the process (Grönroos & Ravald, 2011).

Value created can be related to product characteristics, company characteristics and functions, competences of participants, interactions

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or customer perception (Corsaro & Snehota, 2010; Aarikka-Stenroos & Jaakkola, 2012; Porter, 1998; Ballantyne & Varey, 2006; Sullivan et al., 2012). Value can be created in the internal processes of the selling and/or buying companies, external processes, knowledge creation, problem solving or along the value chain (Lepak et al., 2007; Aarikka-Stenroos & Jaakkola, 2012).

Value creation is based on interaction, and it does not follow traditional sales process, where the seller delivers products with set features. By offering benefits, value emerges from the interaction between parties as they jointly develop more suitable and value creating practices and solutions for both participating companies. (Haas, Snehota & Corsaro, 2012). This obliges the seller to have competencies to reconcile the value requirements of the customer and other stakeholders. (Töytäri & Rajala, 2015).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As sales has shifted from feature-based sales to value-creation interaction, the sales process has also evolved through improved understanding and advancing technology. Traditional sales viewed the process as a funnel that ended with closing a deal, whereas modern value-based sales process continues beyond the contract and even after delivery. It integrates the feature-benefit-value logic with key characteristics and competitive strengths drawn from traditional, service, expert, and value-oriented sales approaches (Holopainen et al., 2020).

Empirical research shows that companies can achieve differentiation through creating value in business-to-business relationships. The value of business relationship can be generated from multiple factors, such as product and service quality, reliability of delivery, personal interaction, market time, supplier expertise, and operations and acquisition costs creation (Ulaga & Eggert, 2006).

Many business-to-business companies consider understanding and selling customer value as essential part of marketing and sales strategies, as value-based sales improves sales performance more than the traditional selling approaches. Value-based sales can be implemented successfully by having right salespeople along with strong organizational support (Terho et al., 2017). Value plays vital role in managerial practice and serves as essential criteria for decision making. Value perceptions determine the relationship outcomes; and are actor specific, in progress, and subject to change over time (Vargo & Lusch, 2008; Corsaro & Snehota, 2010).

Value-based sales depend on the early involvement in customers' buying process to modify their value perceptions, develop shared understanding of value, and bringing both parties to a common solution. Value-based sales suggests fair pricing by using customer-perceived value as groundwork for negotiations. Key steps to measure and communicate value are include defined performance metrics, linking and prioritizing value elements, using comparative data, calculate realized value, and clearly communicating value impact (Töytäri & Rajala, 2015).

Sales plays a central role in these interactions but despite its importance, limited research has been done to examine the contribution of sales to value creation in business relationships. Haas et al. emphasized the relationship of value creation process and sales activities. They identified four key characteristics by viewing value creation as an interactive process such as shared involvement, balanced contributions from both parties, value creation through interaction, and social cognitive collaboration, highlighting sales as a co-creator of relationship value (Haas et al., 2012).

Earlier, three key elements of value-based sales have been identified to be understanding the business model of a customer, strong value proposition development, and clear communication of the value to the customer (Terho et al., 2012).

Value can be created between the customers and suppliers by triangulated exchange activities based on relation development, communicative interaction and knowledge renewal (Ballantyne & Varey, 2006). Value-based sales can improve sales performance more than the traditional selling approach, when implemented successfully by having right salespeople along with strong organizational support (Terho et al., 2017).

THE STUDY CONDUCTED

This study employs a qualitative, theory-driven thematic analysis based on interviews conducted during 2024–2025. For this study, 85 sales professionals from different industries like technology, insurance, banking, retail, media, consulting, logistics, software, travel, sustainability and cybersecurity from Finland, were interviewed.

All participants were Finnish sales professionals who work in a sales or sales management role. Interviews typically lasted between 20 and 40 minutes. The interviews conducted in person or via videoconferencing. A semi-structured interview guide was used with sufficient flexibility. To ensure confidentiality, all material was anonymized prior to dissemination by removing or generalizing identifying information without compromising the interpretive value of the data. Data analysis followed thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2008). Based on Braun and Clarke's (2008) approach, categories were developed deductively from academic literature.

RESULTS

Across all the interviews, value-based sales is not perceived as a single technique, but as a mindset and relationship strategy. This chapter presents findings from the thematic analysis. All quotes are drawn from the interview transcripts.

Deep Customer Understanding as the Core Mechanism

Value based sales start with the detailed understanding of the customer's needs, strategy, business and environment. Participants firmly emphasized

that research, preparation, and deep knowledge of the client's business and organizational context are the initial step of value-based sales.

"Basically, when I go to a new client, I research all the information available about their company." (Interview 22)

"You go much deeper into understanding the customer's organization. The seller must understand the customer's business and goals." (Interview 29)

"Exactly knowing and understanding the customer relationship brings advantage both to the seller and the customer." (Interview 57)

"Value-based selling starts by understanding the company's key numbers." (Interview 22)

"Salespeople need to understand the customer's business needs and offer solutions that clearly demonstrate tangible value." (Interview 5)

"I like to research and prepare thoroughly before meetings. Then I ask lots of questions to uncover insights." (Interview 34)

Trust, Authenticity, and Human Connection

Sales success is associated with emotional intelligence and interpersonal credibility instead of applying force techniques. Trust is both the method and outcome of the successful value-based sales, and it is treated as a long-term capital.

"I think in B2B, people buy from people." (Interview 13)

"They feel that they are met as individuals." (Interview 9)

"We don't need to badmouth competitors. If their product is better in some aspect, we acknowledge it." (Interview 25)

"When planning next steps, it's helpful to gauge the other person through basic questions and presence." (Interview 80)

"Value-based selling... for us is reliability and functionality especially in claim situations." (Interview 2)

"If you share common values, it makes the sales situation easier and creates belonging and connection." (Interview 15)

Value Creation Through Problem Solving and Tailored Solutions

Value creation is realized by solving the existing real business problems by the seller rather than presenting the generic features of the product. The salesperson must act more as a consultant and advisor by changing identity from seller to partner.

"The aim is always to dig out the customer's pain points and find solutions for them." (Interview 49)

"It turns sales into a conversation about the customer's needs, rather than a monologue about our products." (Interview 5)

"For example, I have discussed customers' business pain points or future goals with them." (Interview 9)

"Instead of selling separate services, they get everything at once." (Interview 37)

"You must identify the company's pain points to provide the right solution." (Interview 5)

"We want the work to reflect the client's brand style." (Interview 13)

Long-term Relationships Over Short-term Transactions

Based on the interviews, that success is measured through relationship durability, not by calculating the immediate revenue. Value-based sales evaluate sales as the relationship management as an alternative to deal closure. Participants linked value-based sales with loyalty, retention, and repeat cooperation extended for years.

“These types of sales projects are often long but also rewarding.” (Interview 9)

“We forego short-term gains for long-term client loyalty.” (Interview 20)

“The customer becomes committed.” (Interview 31)

“Building trust comes at a cost: we forego short-term gains for long-term client loyalty.” (Interview 20)

“Once you’ve made a sale, it’s easier to sell again to the same person later.” (Interview 34)

“It increases account retention.” (Interview 16)

Ethical Alignment and Shared Values

Ethical and value alignment between buyer and seller remarkably influences the success of the business. Value-based sales is considered as not only economic exchange but also as a moral positioning. Ethical considerations, sustainability and shared organizational values have emerged strongly as filtering mechanism and brand building especially in Finnish B2B culture.

“If your values and the client’s values don’t align, stop selling to them.” (Interview 82)

“We’ve made conscious choices not to sell our products to questionable or unethical actors.” (Interview 25)

“It is quite challenging to make deals sometimes if the values do not meet at all with the customer.” (Interview 80)

“There have been situations where we’ve declined clients if their actions were against our values.” (Interview 38)

“We also ensure product responsibility through brand criteria and highlight our corporate responsibility.” (Interview 19)

“Maybe here I am sometimes a kind of messenger regarding those values.” (Interview 25 Interview 80)

Process Length and Outcome Quality

Value-based sales is more effective and describes as slower process. it requires longer sales cycles and extensive preparations. It was stated that quality of the outcome outweighs the speed for better retention and profitability. Time investment is not taken as inefficiently but as strategic investment. Almost all the respondents acknowledged that value-based sales is more time consuming but yields long-lasting stronger results.

“It’s a harder and longer process.” (Interview 28)

“It can make the process longer since you’re focusing on value and relationships rather than quick deals.” (Interview 16)

“The process requires a lot of background work and preparation before the actual sales meeting.” (Interview 5)

“These projects are often long but also rewarding.” (Interview 79)

“You can’t offer medicine if you don’t know what’s wrong.” (Interview 33)

“It’s longer and different. It takes years until you become part of the company.” (Interview 58)

Price Dominance and Conceptual Ambiguity

In some of the interview’s contradictory and limiting themes were raised. Some participants responded that value-based sales does not to be always beneficial. Sometimes, customers do not want to have a long and deep discussion and price still overrides the value argumentation.

“It depends on the customer and their values. I don’t have a one-size-fits-all example.” (Interview 18)

Few interviewees found difficulty in understanding the term value-based sales and used it as unclear terminology. They were unable to answer the related questions. This shows the concept is widely used but inconsistently named or defined.

“These concepts are a bit unclear to me.” (Interview 71)

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to explore how value-based sales is understood and its implementation in complex B2B environments in Finland. The thematic analysis of 85 interviews revealed that value-based sales is not applied merely as a sales technique, but it integrates customer understanding, ethical values, relational trust and long-term business benefit. The findings propose that value-based sales operates simultaneously on emotional, cognitive and strategic levels.

At the same time, some limitations were considered, specifically in price-sensitive markets and in the inconsistent understanding of the terminology and concept itself.

Value-based sales is conceptualized less as a tactic and much as a holistic relational philosophy characterized by adaptive tailoring, strategic patience, emotional intelligence, communicative clarity, moral positioning, and cognitive depth. Value-based sales is applied across industries (technology, insurance, banking, retail, media, consulting, logistics, software, travel, sustainability, cybersecurity, restaurants, etc.) and the dataset shows solid cross-industry consistency. This indicates that value-based sales is used as a universal B2B sales standard in Finland, instead of niche methodology. It is used less as a fixed sales techniques in B2B market in Finland but more as broader concept including customer understanding, trust building and developing long-term relationship.

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