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Customer experience in value-based selling

– Sales force's perceptions



Master's Thesis | Abstract

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This thesis investigates the unique characteristics of customer experience within business-to-business (B2B) transactions. The theoretical framework delves into the concepts of value and customer experience, their complexities, and intersections in the context of value-based selling. The theoretical framework aims to promote the case organization's understanding of customer experience and its potential to develop business in value-based selling.

The empirical part of this research was conducted through a field study. Ten B2B sales professionals participated in a workshop, where they responded to a survey and participated in a brainstorming session in small groups. The aim of the empirical research was to identify the sales professionals' personal perceptions on customer experience and its importance in the context of value-based selling.

This research contributes to the case organization's ability to differentiate itself and enhance business outcomes through a comprehensive understanding of the nature of customer experience in value-based selling. By acquiring this insight, the case company can make informed strategic decisions for better management of customer experience.

Keywords:

Value-based selling, customer experience

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Asiakaskokemus arvomyynissä

- Myyntihenkilöstön käsitykset

Tämä opinnäytetyö käsittelee asiakaskokemuksen erityispiirteitä yritysten välisessä (B2B) liiketoiminnassa. Teoreettisessa viitekehyksessä tarkastellaan asiakaskokemuksen sekä arvon käsitteitä ja monimuotoisuutta sekä niiden risteyskohtia arvomyynissä. Teoreettisen viitekehyksen tavoitteena on edistää kohdeorganisaation ymmärrystä asiakaskokemuksesta ja sen mahdollisuudesta kehittää liiketoimintaa arvomyynnin kontekstissa.

Opinnäytetyön empiirinen tutkimus toteutettiin kenttätutkimuksena, jossa kymmenen B2B -myyntihenkilöä osallistui työpajaan, jossa he vastasivat kyselyyn ja osallistuivat aivoriiheen pienryhmissä. Empiirisen tutkimuksen tavoitteena oli tunnistaa myyjien omakohtaiset näkemykset asiakaskokemuksesta ja sen merkityksestä heidän itsensä toteuttamassa arvomyynissä.

Tämä tutkimus edistää kohdeorganisaation kykyä erottautua ja kykyä kehittää liiketoimintaa ymmärtämällä perusteellisemmin ja syvällisemmin asiakaskokemuksen roolia arvomyynissä. Tämän ymmärryksen avulla kohdeyritys voi tehdä strategisia päätöksiä asiakaskokemuksen johtamisen tehostamiseksi.

Asiasanat:

Arvomyynti, asiakaskokemus

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List of abbreviations

Abbreviation	Explanation of abbreviation (Source)
CX	Customer Experience
NPS	Net Promoter Score
OEM	Original Equipment Manufacturer
TX	Target Experience

1 Introduction

1.1 Background and the commissioner

The economic world has shifted from traditional goods and services toward experiences. We now live in an experience economy where products and services are commoditized, and customers expect increasingly memorable experiences during their customer journeys. This shift has made customer experience (CX) a crucial differentiating factor and a key source of value for companies across various industries. (Pine & Gilmore, 1998.)

In today's highly competitive environment, customer experience has become central to achieving sustained success. Customer experience covers all the customer's interactions with the sales organization and goes further mere customer satisfaction, focusing on creating meaningful and memorable engagements that foster loyalty and advocacy. (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016.) As organizations increasingly recognize the strategic importance of customer experience, they are moving away from product-centric approaches towards customer-centric strategies to differentiate themselves in the marketplace (Pine & Gilmore, 1998).

The B2B world has also undergone significant transformations in recent years, driven by several overarching megatrends. These changes reflect shifts in technology, buyer expectations, and competitive dynamics, all of which are reshaping how companies interact with customers and manage their sales functions (Grewal & Roggeveen, 2020). The digital transformation has given buyers greater access to information, enabling them to research products, evaluate suppliers, and compare alternatives more independently before engaging with sales organizations (Lilien, 2017). As technology evolves, buyer expectations have dramatically shifted. Modern B2B buyers increasingly demand more personalized and value-driven interactions (Ulaga & Eggert, 2006), expecting a seamless experience across multiple channels, combining digital interactions with personal engagement (Lilien, 2017).

This shift in expectations necessitates a transformation in sales processes, moving away from a focus on product features and technical specifications towards approaches of consultative and solution-oriented (Anderson et al., 2007). Value-based selling has gained significant traction as a strategic approach in contemporary sales practices, emphasizing the creation of value for customers rather than focusing solely on the price or features of a product. Sales teams now function as trusted advisors who deeply understand the customer's operation and business and provide added value beyond the product itself. This approach requires salespeople to tailor offerings in a way that demonstrates tangible business results. (Terho et al., 2012.) As markets become more saturated and competition intensifies, companies are realizing that value-based selling is not only a differentiator. It is a necessity for maintaining long-lasting customer relationships and profitability. (Töytäri et al., 2011.) Emphasizing value co-creation has become a critical component of B2B sales success in this new landscape (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

The case organization of the thesis is specializing in hydraulic components and solutions. The company's recently updated sales strategy is centered on delivering valuable hydraulic solutions that meet the specific needs of its diverse customers. A primary customer segment consists of Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) clients across various industries. This type of customer integrates the solution as part of their own products and processes rather than being the end user of the solution.

The sales force of the case organization comprises a sales manager and eleven sales engineers, each tasked with managing relationships with strategically important customers. Historically, transactional sales have constituted the majority of the sales activities, forming a substantial part of its operations during the previous decades. However, in response to evolving customer expectations, market saturation and increased competition, the organization has strategically shifted focus toward strengthening the proportion of solution-based sales relative to traditional transactional sales, often associated with component sales. In the context of the case organization's strategy, a solution denotes a

customized technological entity that typically integrates elements such as account management, engineering, commercial components, customized parts, assembly, and testing.

The case organization has recently adopted a value-based selling approach. The objective is to orient the organization and especially the sales force toward prioritizing the value delivered for the customer through offered solutions. The initial focus of the implementation has been product-centric rather than customer-centric, with the case organization focusing on conceptualizing solutions and crafting value propositions tailored to specific customer segments.

Customer experience management has not been prioritized within the case organization's management strategy. Although annual customer satisfaction surveys have been conducted among designated target groups, customer experience has not been systematically integrated as a core element of the organization's competitive advantage or differentiation strategy. Without a structured approach to customer experience management, the role of customer experience within sales processes remains unexamined, and no clearly defined target experiences for customers have been articulated.

1.2 Purpose of the research and research questions

This study presumes that companies focusing on selling value from the perspective of product properties alone are at a disadvantage and less effective in achieving sustained success compared to those that consider the broader customer experience. As customers increasingly seek comprehensive solutions that address both their operational and experiential needs, companies must expand their value propositions beyond mere product attributes. The study presumes, by adopting an approach that will emphasize customer relationship and customer experience the company can foster stronger, more resilient B2B relationships and achieve sustained competitive advantage.

The aim of this thesis is to investigate the customer experience in the context of a case organization's newly adopted sales process. The aim of the study is to

gain an understanding of sales professionals' perceptions of their customers' experiences in the context of value-based selling. More precisely, the study seeks to address the following research questions:

- What are the perceptions of the sales professionals about the nature of the customer experience in value-based selling?
- What are the perceptions of the sales professionals about the target experiences in value-based selling?
- What are the perceptions of the sales professionals about the customer experience linkage to business outcomes in value-based selling?

The first research question seeks to identify the role and the nature of customer experience within the context of value-based selling by exploring the synergies of these elements across various stages of the sales process. The second research question aims to reveal customer experiences perceived as strategically significant within the framework of value-based selling. The third research question aims to identify the experiences the sales organization considers strategically important and identify whose experience is important in the customer organization. Additionally, the third research question examines the relationship between customer experience and the business outcomes of the sales organization with an emphasis on understanding how these experiences impact overall performance and success.

The topic of this thesis was selected for several reasons. First, the case organization has recently revised its sales strategy, by moving from a cost-centric selling approach towards a value-based selling approach. From this perspective, it is still topical and relevant to explore the processes of value-based selling and its implementation as part of the organization's core practices. Secondly, in applying value-based selling, the attention has tended to be on the value propositions articulated through the solution features, with relatively less attention to paid to the experiential values the sales organization has possibilities to deliver to the customers during value-based selling. In light

of the recent strategic changes, this aspect focusing on customer experience is therefore worth examining, especially at the beginning of a new sales strategy.

1.3 Methodology presentation

The purpose of the empirical research was to collect and analyze ten sales professionals' personal perceptions. The thesis implemented a mixed-methods research approach which consist of both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The objective of implementing mixed-methods research is to obtain broader and more in-dept answers to the research questions than with a single method alone (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2022).

In the face-to-face workshop, the sales professionals completed a survey and brainstormed in small groups, ending with presentations of findings and open discussions with the rest of the participants. The quantitative method consisted of a survey in which Likert-scale questions were organized thematically based on the three research questions of the thesis. Thematic analysis method was conducted for qualitative data collected from the open-ended questions of the survey and the recorded discussions during the workshop. The open-ended questions and the brainstorming topics were aligned with the three research questions of the thesis.

2 Customer experience in value-based selling

2.1 Customer experience in business markets

B2B customer experience (CX) research has developed significantly over the past decades. Initially, B2B research focused primarily on transactional elements such as price, product features, and service delivery (Anderson & Narus, 2009; Ulaga & Eggert, 2006). Early studies emphasized the rational decision-making processes of businesses, where value was largely measured in terms of cost savings and efficiency gains (Webster, 1992). However, as market competition increased and customer expectations evolved, the focus of research shifted toward a more comprehensive understanding of customer experience (Palmatier et al., 2006). Researchers began to understand that B2B relationships are not driven solely by transactional factors but also by emotional and relational elements (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). This led to increased interest in examining how elements such as trust, loyalty, and satisfaction influence long-term business relationships (Grönroos, 1997; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2002).

Customer experience has been studied and advanced in multiple disciplines (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020). Lemon and Verhoef (2016) describe customer experience as a multifaceted construct that includes all interactions between a business customer and a sales organization. Customer experience includes points of contact across the entire customer journey, and the overall experience is shaped by interactions.

According to McColl-Kennedy et al. (2015, p. 431) customer experience is *“...holistic in nature involving the customer’s cognitive, affective, emotional, social and physical responses to any direct contact with the service provider, brand or product across multiple touchpoints during the entire customer journey.”*

Zolkiewski et al. (2017) defines that customer experience is created by tangible and intangible interactions between organizations and other actors engaged in

customer interaction. The results of the customer experience are seen as a product of interaction instead of just individual observations.

Panina (2022) identifies a tension in the literature regarding the conceptualization of customer experience, highlighting two contrasting perspectives. The customer-centered perspective highlights the subjective nature of customer experience, viewing it as a personal, individual creation that is interpreted by each customer. This experience is seen as not pre-planned or controlled, but rather shaped by the customer's unique perceptions and interactions. In contrast, the provider-centered perspective focuses on the role of the sales organization, suggesting that the efforts of the provider can significantly influence customer experiences. This perspective centers on the experience drivers and stimuli generated by the organization or associated with the brand, aiming to steer and enhance the customer experience. (Panina, 2022.)

Panina (2022, p. 37) connects the two perspectives and defines customer experience as following: *“CX consist of customer’s multidimensional subjective responses to interacting stimuli coming from both the provider-firm and the customer’s context, which they encounter at touchpoints in the course of the customer journey”*. The definition indicates that the customer experience cannot be created and delivered exclusively by the seller organization and is personal and contextually interpreted. The approach emphasizes that customer experience can be influenced and consist of both organizational-related and customer-related factors. In this thesis, customer experience is defined according to Panina (2022, p. 37).

Lemon and Verhoef (2016) describe total customer experience as comprising sensory, emotional, behavioral, mental, and social responses. These diverse dimensions collectively shape how a customer perceives and interacts with a product, service, or brand throughout their customer journey, influencing their overall experience.

According to Schmitt (1999), sensory experiences arise from the human senses. However, customers do not experience a product in isolation. Instead, the surrounding atmosphere significantly influences their sensory perceptions (Ta et al., 2022). Emotional experience encompasses the feelings and emotions that arise during customer interactions, ranging from positive reactions such as happiness and enthusiasm to negative ones such as frustration and disappointment. Mental experience relates to the customer's cognitive processes, including both conscious and subconscious thought patterns (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). Behavioral experience includes the observable actions and responses of customers during their interactions (Schmitt, 1999). Finally, social experiences reflect the customer's connection with others and interactions in the broader social environment (Beckert & Jaakkola, 2020).

2.1.1 Target experiences of customers

In this thesis, the target experience (TX) refers to the desired customer experience sought in a sales organization that is aligned with the strategic goals of the business. It is established by the sales organization and reflects its overall goals. Panina (2022, p.75) defines target experience as “...*an intended customer experience that the firm aims to evoke as an outcome of its activities.*” Becker and Jaakkola (2020) argue that sales organizations do not directly generate customer experiences, but they can design, oversee and manage various stimuli that influence these experiences. Organizations focused on customer experience must be clear about the types of experiences they are trying to create for customers, as this vision guides management activities. According to Panina (2022) the multidimensionality and dynamic nature of customer experience pose challenges for understanding, measuring, and applying management practices.

In the early 2000s, customer experience management started to gain prominence within the B2B sector (Meyer & Schwager, 2007). Researchers began to explore how businesses could strategically manage and enhance each touchpoint along the customer journey to stage memorable and positive

experiences (Gentile et al., 2007). During the time, frameworks and models were developed to measure and improve B2B customer experience, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methods (Verhoef et al., 2009; Grewal & Levy, 2009).

Panina (2022) found in her empirical research that B2B sales organizations value distinct types of experiences that they deem suitable for their business. The target experiences tend to be broad and are often closely associated with customer satisfaction, however being able to categorize the nuanced target experiences to various themes, dimensions of experiences, target groups and scopes. Silva et al. (2021) suggests that by clearly identifying their target experiences, sales organizations can craft a compelling customer experience proposition. This approach not only directs the sales process, but also enhances brand engagement and fosters enduring B2B relationships.

According to Hollyoake (2009), studies indicate that positive customer experiences are valuable and contribute to the generation of collective value. Jaakkola et al. (2022) notes that in contemporary B2B markets, customer experience is regarded as a key factor in driving customer satisfaction, though it extends beyond mere satisfaction. Pine and Gilmore (1998) describe customer experience as the staging of unexpected, memorable interactions. Löytänä and Kortesoja (2011) contend that an unexpected customer experience emerges when, in addition meeting core expectations, the experience includes elements such as personality, timeliness, durability, surprise, emotional appeal, and respect for the customer's dignity. While exceeding the customer's expectations is essential for contributing impactful experiences, the fulfillment of basic needs of customers such as simplicity, is also critical in fostering a positive customer experience. (Löytänä & Kortesoja, 2011.) Jaakkola et al. (2022) contend that, in many B2B contexts, offerings evoke only mild customer responses, often perceived as routine or mundane. In these cases, a positive customer experience may simply entail a smooth, hassle-free operation.

Nathan and Schmidt (2013) suggest that many professional buyers form strong emotional connections with B2B brands and vendors. According to Bagozzi et

al. (2016), organizational buyers are not solely driven by rational factors. Instead, emotions have a significant impact in the entire buying journey. Kemp et al. (2018) elaborate that emotions in these decision-making contexts are closely tied to personal value and the reduction of personal risk. Personal value includes factors such as pride, peer admiration, a sense of achievement, and being viewed as a competent leader. Nathan and Schmidt (2013) further report that nearly 50% of professional buyers are influenced by personal value. With those who prioritize personal value being eight times more likely to choose higher-end options when comparing solutions. Personal risk reduction, on the other hand, involves concerns about making mistakes, losing credibility, appearing incompetent, or failing to stay competitive. Professional buyers face elevated levels of risk due to their responsibility for purchase decisions, making a strong emotional connection with vendors a valuable factor in managing perceived risks. (Nathan & Schmidt, 2013.)

According to Kemp et al. (2018) distinct emotions directly influence buyers' behavior, motivations, and cognitive processes. Table 1 presents specific emotions that professional buyers may experience. These emotions can influence their decision-making in several ways, potentially shaping their approach to risk, value perceptions, and ultimately purchase choices.

Table 1. Professional buyers' emotions and tendencies during customer journey (adopted from Kemp et al., (2018, p. 37)).

Emotions	Action tendencies
Interest	Urges exploration.
Excitement	Inspires approach behaviors.
Hope	Encourages goal-directed determination.
Expectation	Includes examination.
Joy	Urges play and creativity.
Pride	Promotes self-achievement.
Trust	Fosters confidence and relationship building.
Surprise	Increases attention and awareness.
Fear	Includes hyper-alert behavior.
Anxiety	Promotes caution.
Frustration	May incite aggression.
Regret	Purse action to repair or fix.
Shame	Encourages withdrawal and self-attachment.

Kemp et al. (2018) identify trust and fear as predominant emotions experienced by professional buyers during decision-making. Establishing and sustaining trust between the seller and buyer is essential, as it helps to alleviate negative emotions like anxiety and fear. In value-based selling, trust is a critical factor for effective communication and relationship quality between seller and buyer organizations. Due to the forward-looking nature of value-based selling and the inherent uncertainty involved, perceived risk is often high. Trust and credibility encourage stakeholders to make decisions and to share crucial information, which supports sellers in refining value quantification efforts. (Töytäri & Rajala, 2015.)

2.1.2 The main characteristics of B2B customer experience

In B2B and B2C environments, humans are always behind the decision-making (Hollyoake, 2009), but the nature of these experiences varies significantly due to differences in decision-making processes, customer expectations, and relationship dynamics.

In the B2B context, customer experience often involves complex, long-term relationships where decision-making typically involves multiple stakeholders and decision-makers within the purchasing organization. Buying center can include multiple people from various departments. Forrester (2021) reports that 63% of B2B purchases involve more than four people in the decision-making process. Each of them with distinct roles, priorities, and combinations of individual and organizational expectations (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Zolkiewski et al. (2017) states that customer journey consists of people that are not always active, and the combination of people involved may change during the journey.

In B2B environment individual actors possess individual experiences and responses during interactions. B2B customer experiences cannot be stated purely individual as they can be influenced by collective perceptions through social interactions in the customer organization. (Zolkiewski et al., 2017.) Panina (2022, p. 43) defines that *“B2B CX consist of the responses of multiple actors within a customer-firm to stimuli coming from the provider-firm, but also actors’ functional units and organizations as well as their individual context, which they encounter at touchpoints in the course of their journey within a business relationship”*. This contrasts with B2C environments, where purchasing decisions are often more individualistic and often involve a single decision-maker, making the decision-making process quicker and straightforward. The decision-making process is influenced by individual preferences and desires (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016), where B2B buying decisions are often driven by rational analysis and the need for alignment with organizational goals (Kotler & Keller, 2016). However, emotional connections to

vendors and brands are involved stimulating buyers' decision-making and behaviors (Kemp et al., 2018).

B2B customer experiences are shaped by the need for tailored solutions that address specific business challenges, requiring deeper engagement and a stronger emphasis on value creation throughout the customer journey (Bolton & Drew, 1991). The customization may involve adapting the product or service offerings and personalized proposal development (Anderson & Narus, 1998). In B2C markets, the focus is often on creating a seamless and personalized experience that meets consumers' immediate needs and desires (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

The dynamics of relationships in B2B markets are generally more complex, involving not just the transaction itself but also ongoing collaboration and support. This requires a customer experience strategy that focuses not only on the initial sale but also on maintaining and enhancing the relationship over time. (Frow & Payne, 2007.) The concept of a single journey is oversimplified in B2B environments where several actors are involved in different customer journeys (Zolkiewski et al., 2017). In contrast, B2C relationships are often more transactional, focusing on delivering immediate satisfaction and building brand loyalty through repeat positive experiences. B2C customer interactions tend to be shorter-term and driven by emotional connections, where companies strive to satisfy immediate needs and foster loyalty through continuous positive engagement with the brand (Homburg et al., 2017). These markets often rely on frequent touchpoints and high engagement to reinforce customer loyalty and generate repeat purchases (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

2.2 Value-based selling in business markets

Holopainen et al. (2020) divides sales processes into four distinct categories; traditional, service, expert, and value. Traditional product-focused sales approaches highlight product attributes, such as performance, durability, and cost-effectiveness, as key determinants of value in B2B transactions. This

approach assumes that B2B buyers are primarily rational decision-makers who evaluate options based on a logical assessment of these features (Anderson et al., 2007). Research suggests that while product attributes are important, they are not sufficient to create a competitive advantage, particularly in mature industries where differentiation based on features alone is challenging (Ulaga & Eggert, 2006).

B2B buyers are not solely focused on product characteristics. They also consider how well the product integrates into their operations, how easy it is to work with the supplier, and the quality of after-sales support. (Homburg et al., 2017.) This shift toward a more comprehensive value proposition, often referred to as value-based selling, emphasizes the criticality of understanding and responding to the customer's broader needs and pain points beyond the product itself (Töytäri et al., 2011). Unlike traditional sales approaches that may emphasize product features, value-based selling requires salespeople to function as consultants, engaging with customers to uncover their challenges and opportunities and positioning their solutions as a means to achieve strategic goals (Anderson et al., 2007). This shift from selling products to selling measurable value-driven solutions is increasingly recognized as critical in complex B2B markets (Terho et al., 2012).

Anderson and Narus (2009) define value-based selling as understanding the customer's needs and positioning the offer to highlight its benefits and its positive effects on the customer's operations. Töytäri et al. (2011, p. 494) defines value-based selling as “...*understanding and improving the customer's business in a proactive manner*”. Holopainen et al. (2020) describe value-based selling as an evolved sales approach that shifts from traditional feature-based selling to a value-creating interaction, with a focus on fostering customer experiences. This approach emphasizes understanding and delivering value that aligns with the customer's specific needs and future goals, rather than merely highlighting product features.

Value-based selling closely aligns with the broader trend toward customer-centric business models, where the emphasis is on delivering value for the

customer as a means of generating value for the company itself (Rackham & DeVincentis, 1999). Studies supporting the effectiveness of value-based selling show that organizations that successfully implement this approach tend to achieve higher win rates, larger deal sizes, and greater customer loyalty (Hinterhuber, 2017).

Töytäri and Rajala (2015, p. 1) describe the value-based selling approach as being centered around the “...*identification, quantification, communication, and verification of customer value*”. In this approach, value-based selling activities are systematically planned, implemented, and leveraged to ensure that the value provided to the customer is effectively recognized and realized throughout the sales process.

When getting to know the customer in the planning phase, it is important to know that value-based selling approach may not be the optimum approach for all the customers. Kaario et al. (2003) suggests the sales strategy for each customer should be tailored to align with the specific characteristics of that customer. Töytäri et al. (2011) further propose that the selection also hinges on the distinct features of the solution. Töytäri et al. (2011) argue that the customer must be willing to be a partner in value-based selling. Successful value-based selling requires receptive customer that are open for communication, share their information and willingness to evaluate and co-create value. Transparency, respect, and trust between seller's and buyer's organization is inevitable for a collaborative partnership. (Töytäri et al., 2011.)

Keränen et al. (2021) has noticed that for sales organizations just deciding to sell value is rarely a sufficient way to implement value-based selling.

Organizations with less success in implementing value-based selling approach, often falls back to differentiate with competitive prices and product features rather than demonstrating value to customer's business. They state that one-size-fits-all approach is not suitable for every customer situation. Rather than relying on a single strategy, sales organizations should select the most appropriate scopes from the three different perspectives identified by Keränen et al. (2021). The approaches are centered either on benefits of products,

improvements into customers processes or realized performance outcome in customer's processes. Organizations usually starts from product-centric value-based selling and gradually transition to other more complex approaches. Before choosing the most suitable approach, the sales organization should first reflect the organization's strengths and capabilities, value creation opportunities in the target markets and customer's responsiveness and willingness to buy value. (Keränen et al., 2021.)

Value-oriented sales approach is not a new concept and its importance in modern solution sales is well known. Despite of the awareness and the interests in the topic, organizations still face challenges in putting the approach into practice. (Töytäri & Rajala, 2015.) One of the challenges is the requirement for sales professionals to develop a comprehensive knowledge of the customer's business and industry, which can require considerable time and resources (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Also, very few sales organizations fully recognize the value potential embedded in the solution and have the ability to quantify and convey the financial value to the customer (Töytäri et al., 2011).

According to Kotler and Keller (2016) the central part of implementation of value-based selling is the principle of co-creation of value and communication that resonates with the customer's strategic priorities. This entails interacting with customers to uncover their core needs, challenges, and objectives, and then tailoring the sales pitch to illustrate how the offering can solve their specific problems or enhance their business outcomes (Anderson et al., 2006). The goal is to establish a compelling value proposition that goes beyond the transactional aspects and emphasizes long-term benefits and competitive advantage (Rackham & DeVincentis, 1999).

According to Töytäri & Rajala (2015) value proposition can be pre-crafted for specific customer segment. Value proposition is considered as bundles of benefits and sacrifices that are addressed for business goals. However, an effective value proposition aligns with the perspectives of individual stakeholders and must be tailored to each customer. The value proposition should resonate, differentiate, and have an impact on customer economic

business. Focusing on value elements that are timely important and easy to understand will help to create the attractiveness. The offering is also attractive when it is either underestimated or unknown. The value proposition should be presented quantitatively and linked to economical key performance indicators. Rather than adjusting the value offering, the sales organization can also aim to shape the customer's desired value perceptions and existing viewpoints. (Töytäri & Rajala, 2015.)

A proactive approach is a crucial component in value-based selling. The seller can influence the customer's perception of the solution early on, thereby strengthening their position and preventing competitive tendering. Value-based selling will be difficult to implement the solution if is already defined by others. (Töytäri & Rajala, 2015.)

Sales tools used in value-based selling, such as reference lists, case studies, and value calculators, are important in justifying the value proposition. Reference lists and case studies demonstrate the feasibility and effectiveness of the proposed solution in similar market segments or contexts, which increases credibility and trust in the eyes of the customer. By presenting successful previous implementations, these tools help to assure the customer of the solution's reliability and its suitability for their requirements. In addition, the value calculator acts as a quantification method that allows the customer to assess the potential value of the proposed solution compared to their current situation or alternative options. This allows for a more objective assessment of the benefits of the solution, which facilitates informed decision-making. (Töytäri & Rajala, 2015.)

2.3 Combining customer experience with value-based selling

Value-based selling and customer experience are often seen as distinct parts of business strategy, but when integrated effectively, they can create powerful synergies that drive both customer contentment and long-term organizational growth (Terho et al., 2012; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). The alignment of these

two approaches stems from their mutual focus on delivering value to the customer, though through different mechanisms (Eggert et al., 2018).

Panina (2022) states there is a significant correlation linking experience to value. The studies conceptualize the B2B customer experience as emerging from the interactions involving the dynamic customer and the components of value creation in the B2B relationship. Customers assess their experiences based on personal and organizational objectives, leading to both personal and shared value perceptions (Lemke et al., 2011; Macdonald et al., 2016). This process emphasizes the evolving and situational nature of value, shaped by the adaptation of experiences and broader goals.

In B2B environment the value of solution is judged not only by organizational goals but also by individual goals of people involved (Macdonald et al., 2016). Value perceptions are not only formed by the solution qualities but also by the different experiences and relationship (Schmitt, 1999). Organizations can create competitive value propositions by combining co-creation activities and resources together with offering related value (Panina, 2022). Through engaging customers in the value creation process, organizations can tailor value offerings precisely to align with customer needs and preferences, enhancing differentiation and strengthening customer relationships.

The convergence of value-based selling and customer experience can be seen especially in their common emphasis on deep customer understanding (Beck & Rygl, 2015). Value-based selling necessitates that sales force engage in consultative dialogues with customers to identify their pain points and business objectives (Töytäri et al., 2011). This naturally leads to a more personalized customer experience, as the provided solutions are specifically tailored to the customer's challenges.

Value-based selling prioritizes delivering solutions that provide meaningful and measurable benefits (Anderson & Narus, 2009). This method closely aligns with the goals of improving customer experience, as both emphasize prioritizing customer success (Kumar & Reinartz, 2016).

Value-based selling improves the customer experience by helping customers fully understand the value of their investment (Anderson & Wynstra, 2010). When a company can clearly communicate the long-term benefits of its offerings, customers are more inclined to have a favourable experience, even if the initial cost is higher (Eggert et al., 2018). This alignment of expectations helps customers appreciate the value they receive, reinforcing positive perceptions of the company (Bolton et al., 2014).

A strong customer experience framework can support value-based selling by creating a more favorable environment for value-driven interactions (Kumar & Pansari, 2016). When customers have positive experiences with a company, customers are more inclined to trust the sales organization's value offerings (Palmatier et al., 2006). This confidence is vital in value-based selling, where the perceived uncertainty is often higher because of the emphasis on long-term outcomes (Anderson & Narus, 2009).

Pursuing an exceptional customer experience and implementing value-based selling are often seen as complementary goals (Terho et al., 2012; Kumar & Reinartz, 2016). However, there can be inherent tensions between these two objectives, particularly when balancing short-term customer satisfaction with long-term value creation (Eggert et al., 2018).

Value-based selling focuses on delivering solutions that provide significant, measurable benefits to the customer, often justifying a higher price point by emphasizing the sustained return on investment (Anderson & Narus, 2009; Töytäri et al., 2011). This method demands in-depth knowledge of the customer's needs and the capability to communicate the ability to effectively convey the value offering (Terho et al., 2017). However, this strategic focus can sometimes conflict with the immediate demands of enhancing customer experience (Beck & Rygl, 2015).

For instance, value-based selling often entails a rigorous assessment of the customer's business processes and a consultative sales process, which may require customers to commit time and resources to the engagement (Töytäri et

al., 2011). While this process is critical for aligning the solution with long-term objectives of the customers, it can also lead to friction if the customer expects quick and straightforward transactions, thus potentially impacting their perception of the experience (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

Moreover, in the effort of delivering value, businesses may need to challenge the customer's existing practices or push for changes required to maximize the effectiveness of the offered solution (Terho et al., 2017). While these recommendations are made with the customer's best interests in mind, they can sometimes be perceived as intrusive or burdensome, thereby detracting from the overall customer experience (Eggert et al., 2018).

2.4 Customer experience and business outcomes in value-based selling

According to Panina (2022), customer experience management is a valuable strategy in B2B markets. By integrating the emotional and functional needs of customers, sales organizations can differentiate themselves in ways that extend beyond the traditional factors of product, price, place, and promotion.

Homburg et al. (2017) also argue that customer experience has become a critical differentiator in B2B markets. Companies that excel in providing superior customer experience tend to establish deeper emotional bonds and trust with their customers, leading to enhanced commitment and reduced price sensitivity. This is particularly important as competition intensifies in B2B markets, making it more challenging to differentiate based solely on product features. Nathan & Schmidt (2013) states professional buyers' emotional connection to B2B brands and vendors incorporates lower price sensitivity and higher purchase rates.

Shifting from product-centric to customer-centric value propositions represents a critical development in B2B markets. Companies that continue to emphasize product features as their primary source of value risk being commoditized in competitive environments where technical parity is common (Ulaga & Eggert, 2006). Research shows that companies that adopt a customer-focused strategy, recognizing the importance of the entire B2B customer experience,

often perform better than those relying solely on product-centric strategies (Frow & Payne, 2007). Focusing on the experience not only addresses the customer's functional needs, but also fulfills their emotional and relational expectations, which are important when establishing sustainable business relationships (Eggert et al., 2018; Homburg et al., 2017).

Improving the customer experience has a beneficial impact on brand awareness, profitability, customer retention, commitment and satisfaction of customers and also employees (Adobe, 2018). Understanding and influencing the experiences of several stakeholders, instead of focusing solely on creating individual relationships with members of the buying center, provides a deeper and broader perspective on the customer, which ultimately leads to better business results. (Kriss, 2014; Shah et al., 2006.)

Panina (2022) suggests that, due to the various benefits, improving customer experience has become a critical focus for organizations in both B2B and B2C contexts. However, some companies remain reluctant to continue investing in customer experience management. The reason may lie in accountability challenges. Customers experience satisfaction and loyalty measures, such as Net Promoter Score (NPS), do not fully capture the holistic and multidimensional character of customer experiences. (Panina, 2022.)

3 Research methodology

3.1 Research methods

This study aims to gain insights into customer experience in value-based selling by analyzing perceptions of sales professionals of the case organization. The research questions seek answers to (RQ1) *What are the perceptions of the sales professionals about the nature of the customer experience in value-based selling?*, (RQ2) *What are the perceptions of the sales professionals about the target experiences in value-based selling?* and (RQ3) *What are the perceptions of the sales professionals about the customer experience linkage to business outcome in value-based selling?*

The thesis implemented a mixed-method research approach which consisted of both quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative method consisted of a survey with Likert-scale questions. The survey sheet can be found in Appendix 1. This approach was chosen to minimize response bias and encourage honest feedback by protecting the anonymity of participants (Dillman et al., 2014). The qualitative methods consisted of open-ended questions from the survey, a brainstorming in small groups and open discussion together. The objective of implementing mixed-methods research was to obtain a broader and more in-dept answers to the research questions than with a single method alone (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2022).

The mixed methods study and data collection were carried out during a face-to-face workshop. The definition of a workshop refers to a structured event where a group of individuals gather to acquire new information on a specific agenda. They engage in learning, problem-solving, or innovation related to a specific challenge. The workshop offers an opportunity to explore research questions and generate insights. (Ørngreen et al., 2017.) In this thesis, a workshop refers to a meeting where people participate in reflection and learning on predetermined topic areas at an individual and group level. The content and flow of the workshop are presented in more detail in Table 2.

Table 2. Phases and content of the workshop.

Preparation
Planning agenda, schedule, and objectives
Planning and creating materials
Opening (5 min)
Presenting agenda, schedule, and objectives
Introducing the research questions
Training session (20 min)
Introducing concept of customer experience
Introducing concept of value-based selling
Repeat the research questions
Repeat the objective of the workshop
Survey (30 min)
Sharing printed survey paper
Questions organized based on research questions
41 pcs of five step Likert scale questions
8 pcs of open-ended questions
3 pcs of research questions
Brainstorming (25 min)
Group sizes of 3-4 person
One research question for each group
Presentations and discussion (30 min)
Presenting the reflections to the others.
Open discussion
Closing (5 min)
Collecting printed survey papers
Stopped recording
Closing the workshop

The researcher functioned as a facilitator throughout the workshop. It began with a structured presentation outlining the agenda, schedule, and objectives. The goal of the workshop was to provide an environment that encourages participants to express their views, observations, and experiences related to the three research questions of the thesis. Before participating in the survey, participants were given a short training session on the concepts of customer experience and value-based selling. The purpose of this training was to equip participants with a thorough understanding of these complex and multidimensional concepts, enabling to provide informed responses to the research questions of the thesis.

Following the presentation, each participant received a printed survey sheet that included both multiple-choice and open-ended questions. After the survey, the workshop moved into a collaborative phase, where participants were divided into three small groups to consider one of the research questions of the thesis. After the brainstorming, each group presented their reflections to the others. These presentations allowed participants to offer additional perspectives, which enriched the dialogue. Throughout this discussion, the facilitator provided guidance by introducing relevant perspectives or follow-up questions to maintain the depth and inclusiveness of the discourse. Finally, the facilitator formally closed the workshop.

3.2 Data collection

A total of ten sales professionals participated in the workshop. The workshop was held in Vantaa on 15th of October 2024 in a conference room. The room was reserved for the sales team only. This allowed the sales professionals to focus on the research without distractions. The workshop started after the monthly meeting in the afternoon at 2:15 PM and lasted approximately two hours.

The data collection was implemented in several ways. A large part of the data consisted of responses to a printed survey sheet in which participants wrote

their answers related to forty-one multiple-choice questions, eight additional open questions and the three research questions of the thesis. The multiple-choice section contained five-step Likert-scale questions organized into thematic subgroups that were aligned with the three research questions of the thesis. To encourage open-ended reflection, participants were asked to respond to the open-ended prompt “Something else you want to share? Write your comments below:” at the end of each topic. The survey was conducted independently and anonymously, so that each sales professional could response their own reflections and experiences without external influences or social prejudices affecting their answers.

The second part of the data collection in the workshop involved a recorded collaboration phase, which comprised brainstorming in small groups and the open discussions together. Each small group, consisting of 3-4 sales professionals with diverse sales experiences, focused on addressing one of the research questions outlined in the thesis. During this brainstorming session, the facilitator observed the group interaction and provided guidance by introducing alternative perspectives or asking follow-up questions as needed. For example, if a group identified “*Customer trust in the sales organization as critical to value-based selling,*” the facilitator would probe further by asking, “*Why is trust important?*” These prompts were intended to elicit deeper insights and encourage the consideration of diverse perspectives.

The second part of the data collection was conducted in a neutral and comfortable environment, allowing participants to freely express their opinions and experiences. Participants were asked for consent to record the session. The recording was destroyed after transcription. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently during the workshop and subsequently analyzed afterward.

3.3 Data analysis

In the data analysis stage, the quantitative and qualitative data were combined for comparing the findings and supplementing the data of each method (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2022). Each analysis was structured according to the research questions outlined in the thesis.

The data analysis commenced with an examination of the responses to the multiple-choice questions in the survey. Descriptive statistics were applied to analyze the quantitative data. The purpose of the analysis was to identify the central tendency of the responses and the frequency of each response option to identify the distribution of responses. According to Vehkalahti (2014) the Likert-scale survey provide baseline for trends and patterns across the participants. The quantifiable data can be statistically analyzed, and it can reveal key trends, variances, correlations, and general insights. However, in this study, the quantifiable data consisted of only ten respondents, which can be considered insufficient for performing comprehensive statistical analyses.

Following the analysis of the responses of the Likert-scale questions, thematic analysis method was performed for the qualitative data gathered from the open-ended survey questions. The data was carefully reviewed to gain understanding of recurring themes and ideas. The identified ideas were labeled with codes representing the core insights. To address the research questions, the codes were organized into cohesive themes (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2022). The quantitative data were then compared to the qualitative data to evaluate their alignment. By integrating the results, it became possible to identify prominent trends and perspectives evident in the responses.

After analyzing the anonymous data from the survey, a thematic analysis was performed on the recorded data gathered during the brainstorming in small groups and the open discussions together. The recording encompassed the presentations from the small groups, where each group shared their perceptions and responses to the research question they were assigned for

brainstorming, along with the comments and perspectives of individuals in the open discussion.

4 Results

4.1 The respondents' background and perceptions of value-based selling

Results from the survey

Based on the survey data (questions A and B in Appendix 1), the sales professionals possess substantial experience in sales, ranging from 10 to 38 years at the case company, with a median of 20 years. Thorough their careers, they have been responsible for numerous customers, with a median of 50 customers. The sales professionals who responded to the survey anonymously have been assigned numbers. Their business field, experience in sales within the target organization, and the number of customers each has been responsible for are presented in detail in Table 3.

Table 3. Background information of the respondents.

Respondent	Business field	Experience in sales (years)	Number of customers (pcs)
SP1	B2B sales	20	100
SP2	B2B sales	19	100
SP3	B2B sales	20	100
SP4	B2B sales	20	100
SP5	B2B sales	30	10
SP6	B2B sales	18	10
SP7	B2B sales	10	50
SP8	B2B sales	31	50
SP9	B2B sales	38	30
SP10	B2B sales	12	10

Figure 1 illustrates the sales professionals' perceptions of their value-based selling, with an emphasis on the role of their customers and how this approach is applied. Most of the sales professionals (6 out of 10) perceive that most their customers are suitable for value-based selling. However, there is a significant variation in responses regarding how sales professionals perceive their customers' role in collaborative efforts. One respondent perceives that their customers are primarily seeking for product sellers, whereas three respondents feel their customers seek for partners for value co-creation. Notably, most interviewees (7 out of 10) expressed a neutral stance on this matter.

Based on the data (questions 3 and 4), the sales professionals' approaches to value-based selling varies between customer-centric and product-centric orientations, depending on the specific customer context and situation.



Figure 1. Sales professionals' perceptions of their value-based selling (N=10).

Based on the data (questions 5 and 6), most sales professionals emphasize that the effective implementation of value-based selling necessitates a deep knowledge of customers, as well as the critical importance of active knowledge-sharing and collaborative engagement on the part of their customers. They consider it vital that customers not only assess the value proposition, but also

actively participate in co-creating value in partnership with the sales organization. Furthermore, a strong majority emphasized the importance of customers perceiving the value derived from the offered solution.

4.2 The nature of customer experience in value-based selling

Results from the survey

Figure 2 presents the sales professionals' perspectives on the role of customer experience in their value-based selling. The questions specifically address the synergies between these two concepts when integrated at the customer interface. Based on the data (questions 9–20), the variation in responses is low. Most respondents agree, with the exception of a few individual questions. The exceptions can be observed in questions 10 and 12.

Most of the sales professionals (7 out of 10) recognize that customer experience has become a critical differentiator within their business and their customers are even more interested about smooth and carefree collaboration between the companies. Most of the sales professionals (7 out of 10) believe when customer experience is effectively integrated into value-based selling, it provides powerful synergies. They also perceive that customer experience can be enhanced through long-term relationships, proactivity, and customization, which are essential elements of value-based selling approaches. Half of the respondents (5 out of 10) perceive that it is more favorable interact with customer who already have a positive experience with their company, while the other half expressed a neutral stance on this matter. A shared history between the parties was also mentioned in a response to open-ended question E:

"Shared history and existing partnerships play a big role in how a solution can be sold to a customer organization. It is much more difficult for new suppliers." (SP2)

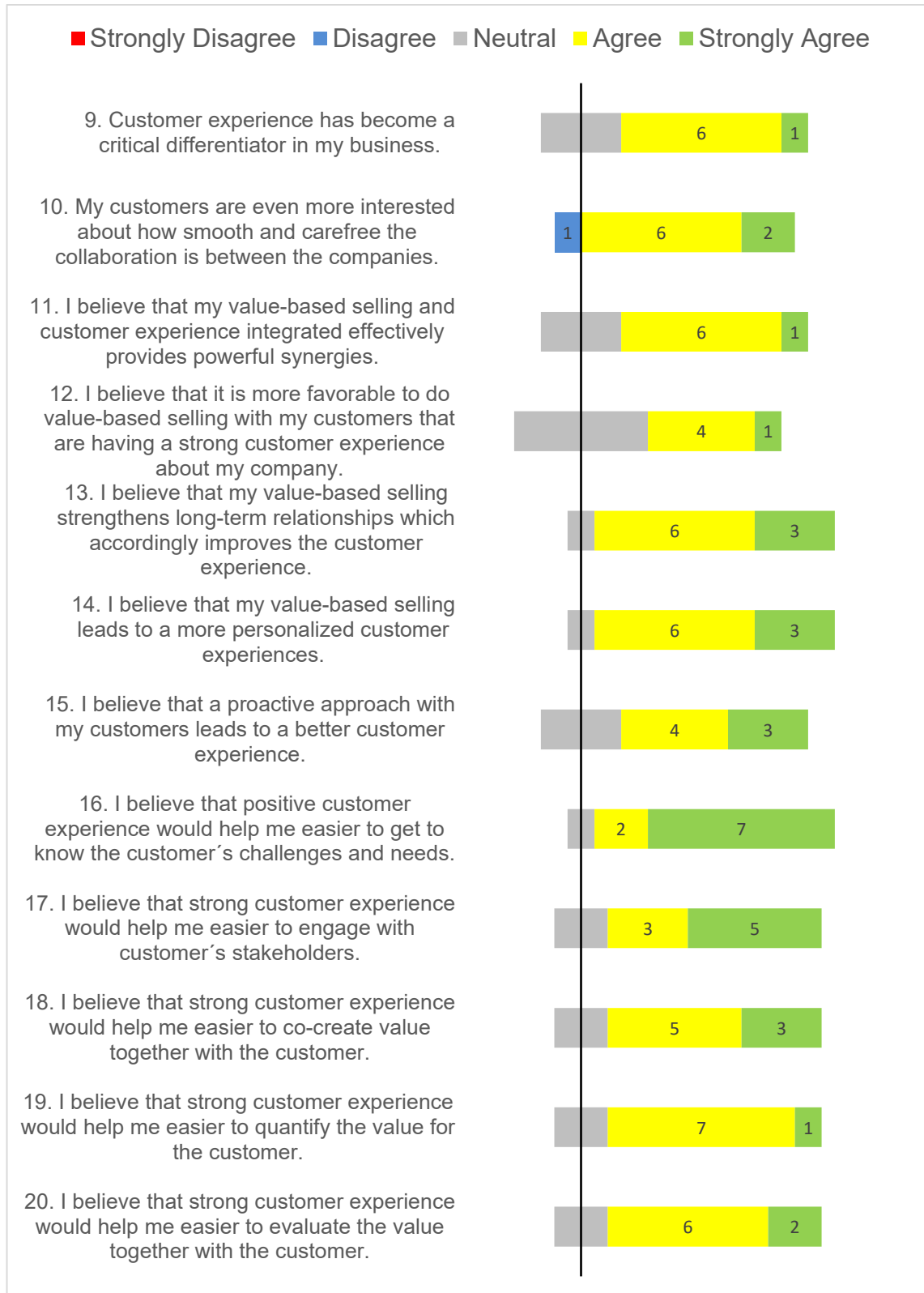


Figure 2. Sales professionals' perceptions of the role of customer experience in their value-based selling (N=10).

Based on the data (questions 16–20), a majority of the sales professionals (8 out of 10) believe that positive customer experience would help them in each stage of the value-based selling process; enabling them to better understand customer's challenges and needs, engage effectively with stakeholders, collaborate in co-creation, quantify value propositions and evaluate the perceived customer value.

The data from the open-ended questions in the survey consisted only of few responses. One comment emphasized the importance of well-prepared and well-argued value proposition, which also reflects the sales organization's respect for the customer and their business. Other individual comments highlighted the significance of building trustworthy and credible partnership with the customer organization throughout the entire organization.

Results of the recorded discussion

Customer experience in value-based selling was seen as important. The comments did not specifically address customer experiences at individual touchpoints or the customer's experience during the use of the provided solution. However, certain phases of the journey were highlighted in the discussions, notably the customer's familiarization with value propositions and the decision-making process.

The data analysis of the discussions revealed that the role of customer experience in value-based selling is described as multidimensional. A huge portion of the comments focused on the trust experienced by the customer and its importance in selling solution that can be seen as future-oriented and risky in the lens of the customer. In addition to the customer trust, customer experience was reflected in value-based selling through the lens of partnership, as well as the complexity of the experiences of the customer's stakeholders.

The sales professionals considered customer trust in the sales organization and the solution itself essential. Trust building was especially emphasized during the initial stages of value-based selling process. In particular, the technical

competence and expertise of the sales professional were seen as critical factors in building customer trust.

“The importance of customer experience in value-based selling is crucial. The customer must feel that the seller is technically competent.” (RH)

Additionally, the sales professionals noted that their customers often express interest in knowing whether other organizations have experience with similar solution.

“Customers initially ask who else uses them. They rarely dare to be the first to try. This is especially emphasized in OEM customer relationships.” (VL)

In value-based selling, shared history, customer journey and long-term relationship between organizations were considered significant. The sales professionals found that value-based selling is more easily conducted with long-standing customers than with new customers without prior relationship. The interpersonal chemistry between individuals from both organizations was considered as a crucial factor in customer relationship. Furthermore, a long-standing customer relationship enriched by positive customer experiences was considered to enhance customers’ forgiveness, which is reflected in the tolerance of bad experiences.

“Bad experiences are tolerated if there is a long customer relationship and many good experiences behind it.” (VK)

The sales professionals perceived that customer experience in value-based selling is pivotal in shaping decision-making. They view positive customer experience and trustworthy relationships as valuable factors that encourages customers to make decisions and take risks.

“Important to create positive customer experience. When daily actions are good, the customer has more confidence to make decisions and take risks.” (JH)

In most of the comments, the concept of the customer was not defined in detail. However, customers were not treated as a homogenous group; they were perceived as distinct from one another. The sales professionals viewed each of their customer as fundamentally unique from a customer experience perspective, with each individual in the customer organization having their

distinct personal needs and expectations. It was noted that the level of involvement in value-based selling was considerably higher compared to traditional sales, such as component sales.

"Value-based selling usually involves more people compared to traditional component selling." (VP)

The substantial number of stakeholders combined with different individual experiences were seen to complicate value-based selling. Consequently, the sales professionals perceived that the optimal sales approach and value propositions must be carefully selected to each specific case.

"Important to remember one size does not fit all." (VK)

"You have to be careful who you sell added value to."(JH)

The sales professionals viewed value-based selling as an approach characterized by versatile customer interactions. They perceive those interactions between people, co-operation and a shared success mindset contribute positively to the customer experience. Notably, during the workshop, no comments were made regarding any disadvantages associated with of customer experience in value-based selling.

4.3 Target experiences in value-based selling

Results from the survey

Figure 3 provides insights into the sales professionals' perspectives on their ability to identify their customer expectations and experiences, as well as their capability to influence and shape customer experiences to achieve desired outcomes. The findings reveal a notable level of consistency among the respondents, although some degree of variability is also observed.

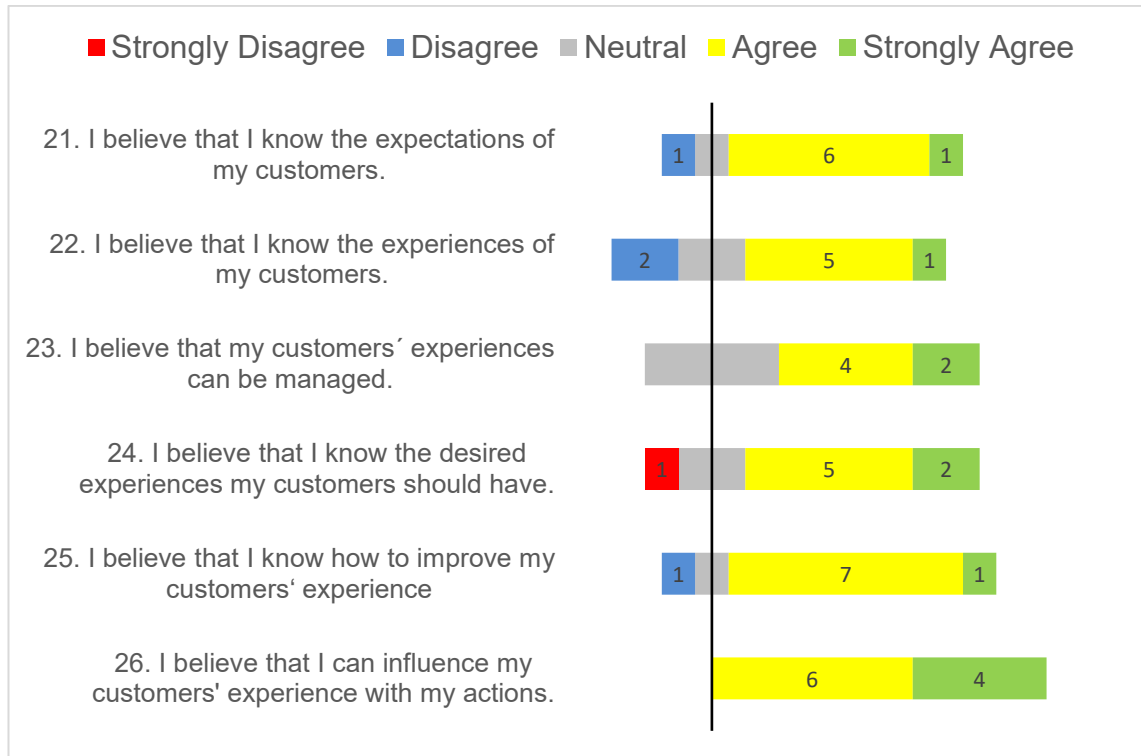


Figure 3. The sales professionals' perceptions of their capability to manage their customer experience (N=10).

Based on the data (questions 21 and 22), the majority of the sales professionals believe they possess a clear understanding of their customers' expectations and experiences. However, there is minor variation in the responses, as a small portion of the respondents disagree and do not believe they have insights into their customers' expectations and experiences. The majority (6 out of 10) view customer experience as a manageable aspect and all the respondents believe they can influence on their customer experiences with their actions. Additionally, the majority the sales professionals believe they know the desired experiences their customers should have and how to improve their customer experience. However, these two questions reveal minor variations in the responses. Individual respondents differ in their views from others, although the divergent responses do not come from the same sales professional.

Figure 4 illustrates the sales professionals' perceptions of their customers' expectations. The questions focus on the recognition of these expectations and

how the sales professionals perceive customer expectations in specific situations that are typical in value-based selling processes.

Based on the data (questions 27–29), a majority of sales professionals (6 out of 10) report that their customers have clearly expressed their expectations throughout the customer journey. Similarly, 6 out of 10 respondents indicate that they are able to identify both individual and organizational expectations of their customers. Notably, none of the respondents disagreed with these statements.

Questions 30–35 examine the sales professionals' perception of how their customers experience various value-based selling scenarios and the expectations customers have regarding collaboration. The respondents show a consistent perspective and agree that their customers expect a thorough understanding of their business challenges and proactive engagement. It is particularly interesting to observe that following questions elicit a divergence in responses, with no consistent agreement among the respondents, and an increasing proportion of respondents selecting a neutral option. The questions are related to how willing their customers are to invest their time and resources in the value-based selling process, and whether the customers are co-creating solutions with the sales organization or simply judging the solutions.

Similar divergences and differences among respondents are also evident in the question examining customers' expectations regarding the timeline of benefits derived from the solutions, ranging from immediate benefits to long-term value. Only 3 out of 10 agree that their customers are more likely to be interested to getting long-term value instead of immediate benefits. In contrast, a common perspective among the sales professionals is evident, as the majority of the respondents (6 out of 10) perceive their customers expect to receive value that is easily recognizable.

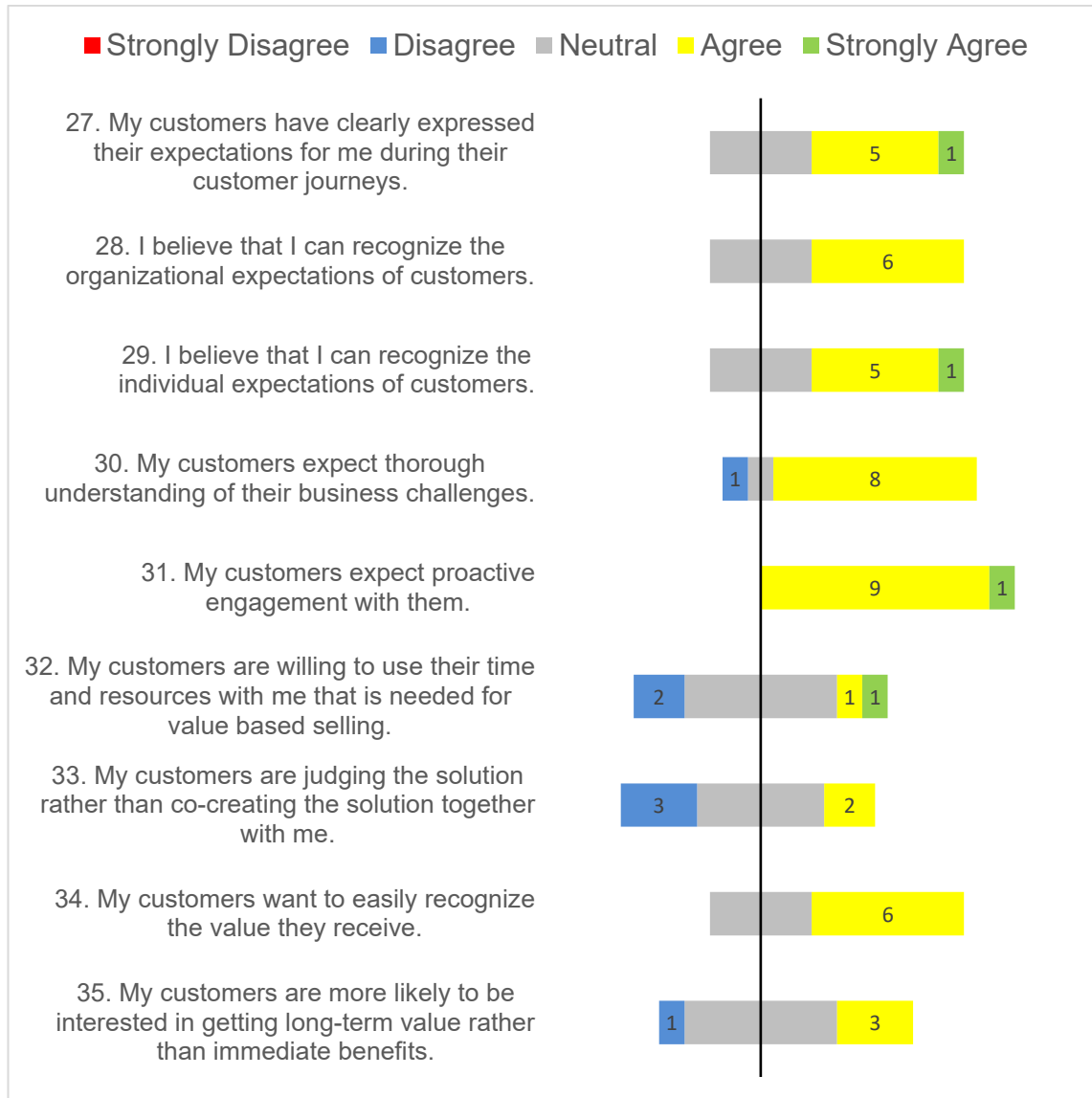


Figure 4. The sales professionals' perceptions of expectations of their customers (N=10).

Based on the data (open-ended question E), which relates to the target groups in the customer organizations from the perspective of targeted customer experience, the respondents share a consistent view. The sales professionals reveal that they primarily engage with the customer organization's purchasing and engineering departments, making the customer experience within these departments a critical focus. Furthermore, the experience of managerial staff is considered valuable, as they hold influence within the customer.

“Engineering department when choosing the solution, but also be taken into account purchaser (big ego)” (SP5)

“In the daily business the operative people, easiness of co-operation. R&D opens the door, management is an attractive partner.” (SP3)

The analyzed data (open-ended question F), which relates to the challenges in value-based selling, reveals the sales professionals’ pain points. The comments indicate that challenges arise particularly in terms of how willing and capable their customers are in recognizing the value of the offered solutions within their business. In such cases, the customer tends to focus on the purchaser, who is perceived as a cost-oriented discussion partner.

“Buyers don't necessarily want to see the big picture and are only interested in the price because that's how buyers are measured.” (SP8)

Other comments highlighted the challenges associated with the obtaining relevant information from their customers and their products, as well as managing shifts in customer’s expectations regarding the solution vision.

Results from the recorded discussion

The analyzed data reveals the sales professionals have varying perspectives on the target experiences in value-based selling. Key themes such as trust-building, emotions, long-term relationships, problem-solving partnerships, customer expectations and customer value emerged from the comments. Most comments did not assign target experiences to specific groups, except for the buyer, mentioned in relation to understanding value. Instead, the target group was generalized as “the customer”. The scope also shifted from individual touchpoints to focusing on the broader customer relationship and the entire customer sphere. Notably, there was a focus on specific areas of value-based selling, such as the value proposition, solution vision, and perceived value.

The sales professionals perceived that customer trust is essential in value-based selling and was considered as a target experience itself and as a cumulative outcome of various experiences. Without customer trust, the sales

professionals believed the communication between the organizations is incomplete, thereby obstructing the comprehensive understanding of customer's needs. They commented that sales professional has a key role in trust building via their personal expertise, ability to shape customer expectations and demonstrating respect for the customer and its needs in value-based selling.

"The salesperson should trust their own expertise to be able to influence the customer's thoughts and expectations about the solution. This improves the customer's trust." (RH)

Sales professionals perceived that in value-based selling, efforts should be directed toward staging customer experiences that elicit strong emotional responses. The emotional responses, such as excitement, should be kept involved during the whole value-based selling process. Furthermore, the sales professionals contented that especially presentation of novel and unexpected solutions for the customer is particularly effective in fostering emotional responses from customers.

"Need to keep the value-based selling emotionally interesting thorough the process." (MR)

"Wow effect. Surprise with a new proposed solution. The customer gets more than they expected." (RH)

The sales professionals emphasized the importance of customers perceiving the sales organization as a competent problem-solving partner, capable of effectively addressing their needs. The sales professionals emphasized that, in addition to the salesperson, the entire sales organization and supply chain must earn the customer's trust.

"The customer's trust in the seller company, the seller itself and the whole supply chain that they are capable to solve the customer's needs." (RH)

The sales professionals acknowledged the importance of customers perceiving a long-lasting partnership with the sales organization. Meaningful conversations, the feeling of being heard and understood, the introduction of innovative solution and smooth and care-free interactions can be seen as factors that contribute to such experiences. The sales professionals perceived

that in a long-term relationship the objective is to reach situations where both parties experience themselves as satisfied and successful in their collaboration.

"The seller organization's everyday actions play a more significant role in the customer experience. Such as active communication, delivering on time, having products available etc... There is no such a need to stage unforgettable experiences." (AT)

"Both parties are satisfied with the solution and the end result." (MR)

The sales professionals recognized that customer expectations are crucial in shaping their value-based selling approach. They emphasized that the foundation of value-based selling is to create solutions that ultimately meet those expectations. The objective is for the customer to experience that they are receiving what they anticipated.

"It is important that the customer gets what they are expecting." (JH)

However, the customer's strong vision and a set of expectations, especially in the beginning of the value-based selling process, can pose challenges if it deviates from the solution proposed by the sales professional. For this reason, shaping customer expectations is deemed essential for ensuring a positive customer experience.

"The customer has a very strong vision about the solution, and it is challenging to bring differing views on the table." (VP)

The sales professionals emphasized that comprehending customer value is crucial in value-based selling. The objective is to make certain that the customer fully understands the value of the proposed solutions and thus be able and willing to invest in that value. The sales professionals find it challenging to justify a premium price when the perceived value by the customer is minimal.

"Customers rarely want to understand the whole. They get hung up on details instead of understanding the whole. Usually just the price." (JH)

4.4 Customer experience and its impact on business outcomes

Results from the survey

Figure 5 illustrates the respondents' perceptions of the relationship between customer experience and business outcomes in their value-based selling. The questions address both sales performance and explore whether customer experience is linkage to customer retention, brand advocacy, and price sensitivity.

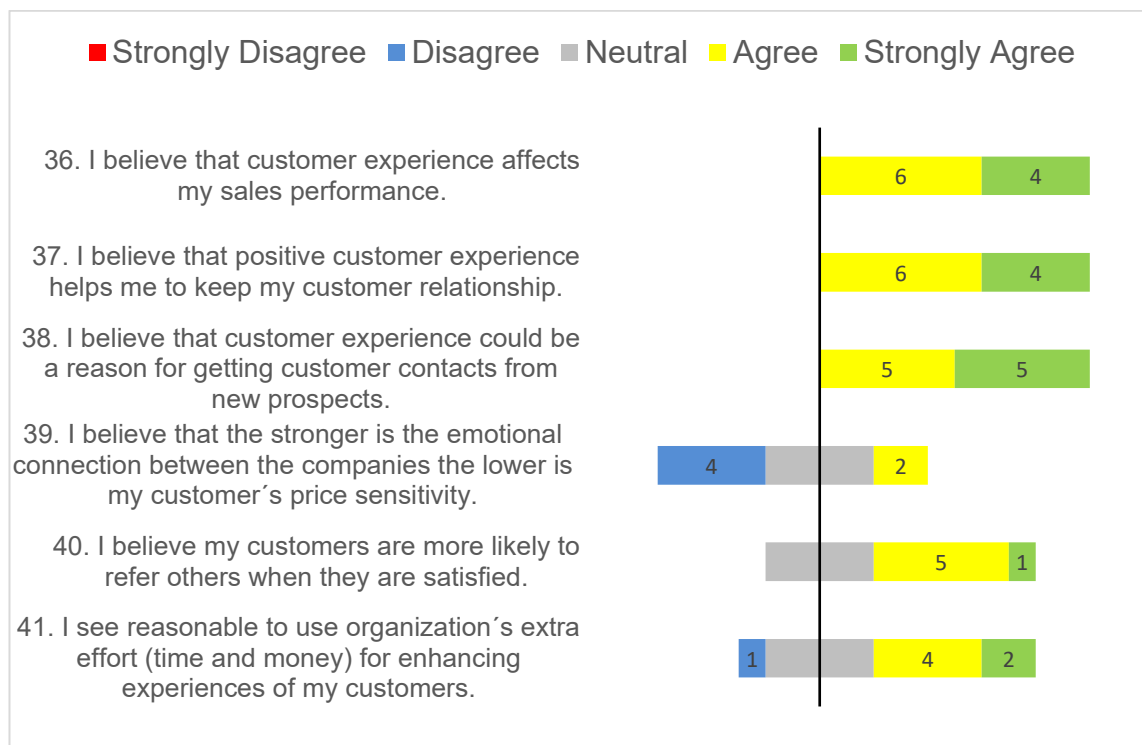


Figure 5. The sales professionals' perceptions of customer experience linkage to business outcomes in their value-based selling (N=10).

Based on the data (questions 36–38), all of the respondents agree that customer experience impacts their sales performance, and that a positive customer experience strengthens the relationships with their customers, positively influencing customer loyalty. The respondents perceive that positive customer experience enhances brand value, thereby facilitating the acquisition

of new prospects. A majority of the respondents (6 out of 10) also perceive that customer experience fosters brand advocacy. However, divergence and disagreement in the responses were observed in relation to questions concerning price sensitivity and the allocation of organizational resources for improving customer experience. Only two out of ten respondents agreed that an emotional connection between the organizations is linked to price sensitivity. A majority of the respondents (6 out of 10) agreed or strongly agreed that investing in customer experience is reasonable. However, one respondent disagreed, while three respondents selected a neutral option.

The results from the recorded discussion

The findings from the discussions suggests that the sales professionals perceive customer experiences as a driver of positive outcomes in their sales activities. The analysis identifies recurring themes within the comments, including customer loyalty and retention, customer lifetime value, brand advocacy, collaboration, and seller's organizational capabilities.

The majority of the sales professionals' comments were associated with customer retention and loyalty. A positive customer experience was perceived as fostering loyalty, forgiveness, and trust within the customer relationship.

"Good customer experience can be seen as loyalty in customer situations." (VK)

"Good customer experience can be seen as forgiveness in customer situations."
(VK)

Additionally, it was suggested that a positive customer experience contributes to increased sales and profitability, ultimately enhancing customer lifetime value. However, one sales professional noted that customer experience alone does not drive increased sales if the customer has no further needs.

"A good customer experience deepens the customer relationship and naturally increases sales and makes it easier to do it profitably." (VP)

"A good customer experience won't increase sales if there's nothing left to sell."
(AT)

The sales professionals perceived a connection between customer experience and collaboration and brand advocacy. They observed that negative experiences tend to reduce the willingness to collaborate and can lead to less business over the long run. Conversely, positive customer experiences were believed to enhance opportunities for discussions and facilitate the introduction of new concepts to the customer.

"A bad customer experience reduces the willingness to co-operate with us." (AT)

"A bad experience will probably weaken the business in the long run." (VL)

"Easier to have more open discussions." (RH)

The sales professionals emphasized that positive customer experiences also have a direct impact on individuals within the seller organization. They noted that favorable customer experiences can enhance employee satisfaction and enjoyment in their work, which in turn is perceived to positively influence the overall customer experience.

4.5 Reliability, validity, and limitations

The objective of the empirical study was to investigate the perceptions of a small group of individuals. The group size was ten people, representing a specific sales force in a specific business environment. The research design affects the limitations of the results, as they only present the unique, individual perspectives of a specific group. The results cannot be generalized due to the subjectivity, personal context of the observations and distinct characteristics of the case organization, such as its unique product offerings and the specific customer segments it serves.

The use of group discussions during the workshop facilitated a collaborative environment. It encouraged for open dialog which may enhance the reliability of the insights gathered. However, the small size of the participants, ten sales professionals, poses a challenge to reliability. The results may not consistently

reflect the broader population of sales professionals from a similar business environment.

The workshop was conducted in connection with the sales team meeting. The workshop was scheduled for the afternoon as the last program number. The schedule was tight and may have an effect on quality of the results.

Furthermore, workshop as a format that contained training and discussion, may influence participants' responses, introducing biases and limiting the diversity of perspectives represented, as participants may feel inclined to conform to group norms rather than express their true opinions. However, the incorporation of anonymous quantitative measures may have enhanced the robustness of findings and minimize response bias and encourage honest feedback.

Based on the feedback received from the participants, multiple factors emerged that could have impacted the reliability of the research. Few respondents found the English language challenging, as the questions in the survey contained terms that were unfamiliar to them. Additionally, the participants perceived slight nuances between the questions, which made it difficult to fully understand the questions and the perspectives they aimed to capture. Furthermore, multiple participants found answering multiple-choice questions contradictory, as terms such as customer, experiences, needs, or expectations were seen as ambiguous. The participants noted that they interact with multiple customers, each with potentially different experiences, needs, and expectations. Moreover, within the same customer, experiences, needs, and expectations were perceived as context-dependent, changing with varying situations.

5 Conclusion

5.1 The role of customer experience in value-based selling

The first research question of the thesis investigated the nature of customer experience in value-based selling. The target of the study was to knowledge the underlying concepts and explore the opportunities that the integration of customer experience can offer. This research is particularly relevant as it provides valuable insights for sales organizations to develop a cohesive sales strategy that holistically addresses customers' operational and experiential needs. This research provides answers to *Is customer experience worth considering as part of a value-based selling strategy?*

Modern literature underscores the growing importance of customer experience. While early research predominantly focused on the B2C environment, there has been a notable shift toward examining customer experience in B2B context. (Grönroos, 1997; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2002.) In a B2B environment, customer experience is defined by distinct features that differ from those typically found in B2C environments. The differences arise from the involvement of multiple individuals within customer organizations, making the management of experiences and customer journeys challenging, complex and dynamic. (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Zolkiewski et al., 2017.) However, a commonality between the two contexts is that human decision-making remains at the core. Personal needs and expectations of individuals shape their experiences, which subsequently influence the overall experience of the customer organization. (Hollyoake, 2009; Zolkiewski et al., 2017.)

At the center of value-based selling is a customer-centric approach (Holopainen et al., 2020). Value-based selling is characterized as a method that focus on creating and delivering value for the customer. Its primary goal is to support the customer by creating solutions that are both needed and valued by the customer. This approach is often described as intensive, requiring mutual commitment from both organizations to ensure the successful planning,

implementation and optimization of the solution, all driven by a shared objective. (Töytäri & Rajala, 2015.)

Value-based selling is regarded as a collaborative rather than a transactional approach (Töytäri & Rajala, 2015). The focus shifts from the amount of time the customer saves when engaging with the sales organization to the quality of the *time spent with it*. This quality of time is considered a primary factor in evaluating the customer experience (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). The importance of customer experience in the key stages of value-based selling is considered essential. Literature suggests that customer-centric value-based selling inherently includes elements that facilitate the generation of favourable customer experiences, indicating a synthesis between the two. (Terho et al., 2012; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016.) Both perspectives prioritize the customer at the core, with the shared goal of supporting the customer (Eggert et al., 2018).

Customer experience is increasingly recognized as a fundamental source of value, providing experiential value to the customers. Sales organizations that can create experiential value can present a value proposition that not only accounts for the value of the solution but also the value of interactions and relationships. (Panina, 2022.) In this context, customer experience is fundamental to the co-creation and perception of value in value-based selling.

The findings of the empirical research reveal that the value-based selling process involves collaboration between the sales organization and its customers. The customers' mindset, attitude, motivation, and engagement throughout the process are key indicators of a successful outcome. Most of the sales professionals believe that customer experience is key to promoting collaboration at every stage of the sales process.

The sales professionals emphasized the importance of building trustworthy relationships. They observed that, from customer's perspective, value-based selling is often future-oriented and inherently risky. Consequently, the customer's emotional and cognitive experiences are crucial in building trust and fostering willingness to engage with the proposed solution. Based on empirical

findings, the sales professionals expressed that one-size-fits-all approach is ineffective. Instead, they view individuals within customer organizations as unique, each responding differently based on their personal needs, expectations, and experiences.

The research findings, encompassing both the theoretical framework and the empirical study, suggest that integrating customer experience into value-based selling generates synergies that enhance value for both parties. Customer experience facilitates a favourable environment for value-driven relationships (Kumar & Pansari, 2016) and acts as an additional source of value beyond solution-oriented benefits, delivering value through interactions (Panina, 2022). Importantly, the sales professionals did not perceive any negative connection linking customer experience and value-based selling.

5.2 Strategically important experiences

The second research question of the thesis explored target experiences that sales organizations seek to influence in their customers in value-based selling. The term *target experience* was intentionally chosen over *desired experience* to underscore its strategic role in customer experience management. It was chosen also to highlight its provider-centered perspective, where the sales organization is perceived as having a significant influence on shaping customer experiences through its actions.

The research on target experiences is highly relevant as it provides the sales organization with valuable insights into which experiences are strategically significant in relation to other customer experiences. The findings prioritize experiences, offering a clear vision for directions and objectives for the organization's management and employees, thereby guiding both collective and individual efforts toward achieving these targets. The research provides answers to *What experiences are strategically relevant to pursue?*

The theoretical framework related to the research question is incomplete, as it is not fully aligned with value-based selling. The notion of target experience has

gained attention in recent academic literature, with discussion often framing experiences aimed for as intended experiences. Many sources equate these experiences with good, positive or satisfying experiences, but such descriptions are overly simplistic. (Panina (2022.)) The experiences are characterized in multiple ways. As a fundamental level, they aim to meet the customer's core expectations. However, increasing attention is given to the significance of staging experiences that are meaningful, unexpected, and memorable. (Bolton et al, 2014; Pine & Gilmore, 1998.) The emotional experiences are recognized as powerful influencers on behavior, motivation and cognitive processes, significantly shaping the overall experience of the customers (Kemp et al., 2018).

The findings from the empirical research reveal that when the sales professionals addressed the topic, the strategic role of target experiences did not merge as a prominent focus. Instead, the discussion centered on the experiences that the sales professionals considered important and relevant, rather than an examination of the sales organization's overall strategy. Nonetheless, many of the comments exhibited notable similarities with the organization's sales strategy.

The findings of the empirical research reveal the target experiences focus on fostering *trusted, long-term emotional relationships, where the customers perceive the sales organization as a reliable partner capable of providing valuable and innovative solutions for their needs*. An interesting observation is that the sales professionals' comments regarding target experiences, in terms both target group and location, were relatively passive. Rather than being linked to specific touchpoints or channels, target experiences were presented at a more general level, focusing on the overall customer relationship. However, certain phases of value-based selling process were recognized. The primary target groups mentioned were the engineering and purchasing departments, which are typically seen as decision-makers within the customer organizations. Notably, the end users of the solutions, were not mentioned in any of the comments.

The empirical research identifies emotional responses, including customer trust, satisfaction, and excitement, as key factors influencing customer behavior and engagement in value-based selling. Customer trust, in particular, was highlighted as a critical factor and was considered essential at all levels of business. In addition to the emotional aspects of the experience, the cognitive dimension was also deemed crucial, especially in the process of educating customers and shaping their perceptions of the vision and value of the solution. However, no references were made regarding sensorial experiences and their potential to differentiate and shape emotional and cognitive responses.

The conclusion is that the sales professionals defined multiple target experiences, which exhibit similar elements to those outlined in the theoretical framework, such as customer engagement through emotional and cognitive experiences. However, the focus was primarily on interactions throughout the journey, with less emphasis on the customer's sensory experiences, social experiences and experience in use. The empirical findings indicate that the significant portion of the nature of the target experiences centers around elements that are prerequisites for value-based selling, rather than experiences specifically designed to generate memorable experiences. The sales professionals defined target experiences that facilitate open and seamless collaboration. This aligns with the theoretical framework, which view co-creation and resource allocation as essential components of the value-based selling process.

5.3 Enhancing business outcomes with customer experience

The third research question of the thesis investigated the linkage between customer experience and business outcomes in value-based selling. The aspect of business outcomes instead of business performance, was intentional. While financial outcomes are often considered key metrics in business contexts, this thesis sought to explore the relationship in a broader sense. Business outcomes encompass the wider, long-term strategic impacts that customer experience has on the seller organization consisting of both behavioral and

financial outcomes, offering a more holistic perspective of value of customer experience to the business.

Although the thesis did not examine the methods and conditions for developing customer experience management from the organizational perspective, it is generally considered that pursuing target customer experience outcomes is a strategic decision at the executive level. As an investment, understanding its medium- to long-term holistic impacts on business outcomes helps organizations decide whether to prioritize it. The research on the relationship between customer experience and business outcomes can be considered relevant, as the findings provide valuable support for organizational decision-making. The research provides answers to *Why customer experience is worth of investment?*

Customer experience is regarded as a crucial factor enabling sales organizations to meet the diverse demands of their customers while differentiating themselves from competitors (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). This differentiation through customer experience is especially emphasized in mature markets, where technical parity is prevalent, and competition is intensified (Homburg et al., 2017). Customer experience is considered as a new source of value and a solution against commoditization (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). By fostering interaction and relationship value through customer experiences, organizations can deliver value not only through their offerings but also through the quality of interactions and the dept of relationships. (Panina, 2022)

Academic literature argues that customer experience, through emotional connections, plays a vital role in customers' decision-making process, influencing customer behavior and motivation, and potentially shaping their value perceptions and approach to risk (Kemp et al., 2018). Furthermore, it is suggested that customer experience is linked to increased brand awareness, higher employee satisfaction, greater average order value, improved customer retention, better return on investment, enhanced satisfaction rates (Adobe, 2018) and higher purchase rates and lower price sensitivity. (Nathan & Schmidt, 2013).

The empirical study reveals that the sales professionals regard customer experience as a significant factor in shaping their business outcomes. They identify its influence not only on revenue but also on customer loyalty, retention, brand advocacy, customer lifetime value, collaboration and organizational capabilities. However, they perceive customer's price sensitivity as being less influenced by customer experience.

The insights from the empirical study reinforce the understanding that customer experience is linked to customer behavioral outcomes. Emotional factor, such as trust and cognitive elements, such as belief in and motivation toward the solution, are crucial factors for shaping the customer's behavioral outcome influencing the sales process. In value-based selling, it particularly influences the critical customer interactions with the sales organization including information sharing, resource allocation for value co-creation, risk assessment, value perception, and the purchase decision itself.

The impact of customer experience extends beyond individual stages of the value-based selling process, influencing the entire customer relationship. This underscores the importance of customer experience, especially in B2B contexts and value-based selling, where relationship play a central role. As a conclusion, sales organizations can strengthen their competitive position by focusing on customer experience, which in turn enhances customer lifetime value.

The study's findings highlight a clear beneficial connection between customer experience and value-based selling. However, the empirical study does not quantify the impact of different business outcomes. Drawing from the research presented in the theoretical framework regarding the synergies, it is logical to conclude that the quantitative impact of customer experience on various business outcome is least as significant as commonly observed in B2B sales contexts.

5.4 Recommendation and managerial implications

The results of the thesis demonstrate that customer experience should be recognized as an important element of a value-based selling strategy. It is recommended that the case organization embed customer experience management into its core management practices. The evidence underscores that customer experience offers strategic tools and opportunities to gain a competitive advantage and to differentiate. By comprehending the influence of customer experience, the case organization can enhance their value-based selling processes, better cater to the diverse needs of their customers, and foster mutually beneficial relationships.

It is recommended that the approach extends beyond customer experience to include all decisions and actions that guide the organization toward a truly customer-centric model, where resources are intentionally aligned to address customer needs. Moreover, it is advised that the implementation of a customer-centric approach begins with strategically significant customers. This strategy facilitates the cultivation of long-term partnership.

Concurrently, a product-centric value-based selling approach can be employed by targeting customers who exhibit a need for and are likely to appreciate the proposed solution. However, this approach poses significant challenges for the sales organization, as securing customer engagement is inherently difficult when the need does not emerge from the customer themselves.

It is relevant to acknowledge that value-based selling approach may not always be the most effective sales approach in every context. Despite its advantages, value-based selling relies on a customer who is both willing and able to collaborate, and who understands the importance of the value the solution offers.

It is recommended that the case organization integrates customer experience into its value propositions. In addition to the value offered by the solution itself,

the value generated through collaborative experiences enhances the value proposition, going beyond just fulfilling functional needs.

The case organization's sales force understands their target experiences. It is recommended to further explore and refine the target experience portfolio, moving beyond generalizations and focusing on the strategic role of these experiences. The target experiences should be examined comprehensively, with an expanded focus on exploring the role of various factors. For instance, the scope could be refined to concentrate on specific touchpoints and extending beyond individual touchpoints and customer relationships to include the customer's internal processes and experience in use. Furthermore, a deeper analysis of the experiences of different target groups and stakeholders is needed, extending beyond the engineering and purchasing departments.

In the implementation of customer experience management, it is crucial to recognize that it is not merely about improving the quality of a single department, such as customer service, but rather about fostering an organization-wide cultural commitment. This commitment begins with management to embed customer experience through strategic decisions as a core component of the value the organization delivers.

The content and findings of this study act as a source of inspiration and motivation for the case organization in embedding a new strategic approach into its organizational DNA on a permanent basis. Rather than being a standalone project, this represents a long-term solution that demands commitment, careful planning and patience. However, the scope of this thesis is limited and does not encompass all the elements for effective customer experience management.

5.5 Future research ideas

The thesis demonstrated that experiences are both multidimensional and highly individualized. Since the study focused on sales professionals' perceptions of customer experience in value-based selling, a valuable direction for future research would be to explore customers' perspectives. Alternatively, future

studies could examine sales professionals' perspectives with a larger sample size, as the limited group of 10 participants in the thesis restricts the generalizability of the findings.

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Survey

The purpose of the survey is to gather information about the sales professionals' perceptions of customer experience in value-based selling. The objective is to utilize the results to understand the existing situation in order to be able to improve business performance by deepening the understanding of customer experience and its potential to enhance perceived customer value.

The survey takes 10-20 minutes for you to response. Each statement has different answering options. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree, using the following scale:

1 = Strongly Disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Neutral

4 = Agree

5 = Strongly Agree

Your answer will be treated anonymously.

The survey is divided into different topics. Topics are value-based selling, nature of customer experience in value-based selling, target experiences in value-based selling and customer experience linkage to business outcome in value-based selling.

General information

A. How many years have you worked for the company in sales?

B. How many different customers you have been responsible for over the years?

Value-based selling

1. Value-based selling approach can be utilized for most of my customers.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

2. My customers are even more looking for partners for value co-creation instead of product sellers.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

3. Typically, my value-based selling takes a customer-centric approach where the solutions will be created together with my customer for their needs.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

4. Typically, my value-based selling takes a product-centric approach where I aim to find an application and customers who find the features of my solution valuable in their business.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

5. It is important that my customers share their knowledge, thoughts and needs in order to understand them in value-based selling.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

6. It is important that my customers participate in value creation in value-based selling.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

7. It is sufficient that my customers' role is to judge the value proposition without participating in co-creation in value-based selling.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

8. It is important how my customers evaluate/experience the value of the created solution in value-based selling.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

C. Something else you want to share? Write your comments below:

Nature of customer experience in value-based selling

9. Customer experience has become a critical differentiator in my business.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

10. My customers are even more interested about how smooth and carefree the collaboration is between the companies.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

11. I believe that my value-based selling and customer experience integrated effectively provides powerful synergies.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

12. I believe that it is more favorable to do value-based selling with my customers that are having a strong customer experience about my company.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

13. I believe that my value-based selling strengthens long-term relationships which accordingly improves the customer experience.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

14. I believe that my value-based selling leads to a more personalized customer experience.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

15. I believe that a proactive approach with my customers leads to a better customer experience.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

16. I believe that positive customer experience would help me easier to get to know the customer's challenges and needs.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

17. I believe that strong customer experience would help me easier to engage with customer's stakeholders.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

18. I believe that strong customer experience would help me easier to co-create value together with the customer.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

19. I believe that strong customer experience would help me to easier quantify the value for the customer.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

20. I believe that strong customer experience would help me to easier to evaluate the value together with the customer.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

D. Something else you want to share? Write your comments below:

Target experiences in value-based selling

21. My customers have clearly expressed their expectations for me during their customer journeys.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

22. I believe that I can recognize the organizational expectations of customers.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

23. I believe that I can recognize the individual expectations of customers.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

24. My customers expect thorough understanding of their business challenges.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

25. My customers expect proactive engagement with them.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

26. My customers are willing to use their time and resources with me that is needed for value-based selling.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

27. I believe that I know the expectations of my customers.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

28. I believe that I know the experiences of my customers.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

29. I believe that my customers' experiences can be managed.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

30. I believe that I know the desired experiences my customers should have.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

31. I believe that I know how to improve my customers' experience.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

32. I believe that I can influence my customers' experience with my actions.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

33. My customers are judging the solution rather than co-creating the solution together with me.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

34. My customers want to easily recognize the value they receive.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

35. My customers are more likely to be interested in getting long-term value rather than immediate benefits.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

E. Whose experiences in your customer organizations are the most important and why?

F. What are the biggest challenges in your value-based selling? Why is that?

G. Something else you want to share? Write your comments below:

Customer experience linkage to business outcome

36. I believe that customer experience affects my sales performance.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

37. I believe that positive customer experience helps me to keep my customer relationship.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

38. I believe that customer experience could be a reason for getting customer contacts from new prospects.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

39. I believe that the stronger is the emotional connection between the companies the lower is my customer's price sensitivity.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

40. I believe my customers are more likely to refer others when they are satisfied.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

41. I see reasonable to use organization's extra effort (time and money) for enhancing experiences of my customers.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

H. Something else you want to share? Write your comments below:

Research questions

The following research questions will be discussed later in the workshop. However, you have a possibility to add your (additional) comments into this paper.

(RQ1) What is your perception about the nature of the customer experience in value-based selling?

(RQ2) What is your perception about the target experiences in value-based selling?

(RQ3) What is your perception about the customer experience linkage to business outcome in value-based selling?