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# Utilization of Technical Experts in B2B Sales

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## **Thesis abstract**

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The main objective of this research was to find out how technical experts and salespersons together could improve customer experience during different phases of a purchase process and influence in decision making in the context of business to business sales.

In the beginning, the generic customer purchase process is introduced. The next chapter describes the five common theoretical frameworks which in literature are identified as tools to influence decision making during different phases of a purchase process. The following chapter observes the potential challenges which could be faced while executing the theoretical frameworks in real sales cases.

The final part describes the decision making unit in general and also presents the model usually seen in the context of a mobile network operator. Also the different roles identified in decision making entity are described in this chapter.

In the research phase the current utilization level of technical experts in sales teams was investigated and some ways and methods to improve their contribution were studied. In the final part of the research the influencing theories presented in chapter 2 were surveyed in terms of the level of awareness both in theory and in practice.

The target group for this research consisted of technical experts and sales people from a case company having recent and relevant experience in business to business sales. The actual research was carried out using theme interviews and a survey type of a questionnaire.

**Keywords:** Purchase process, full time marketer, part time marketer, relationship marketing, consultative sales, SPIN, decision making unit.

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## Opinnäytetyön tiivistelmä

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Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoituksena oli kartoittaa kuinka osa-aikamarkkinoijat ja myyntihenkilöt yhdessä voisivat parantaa yritysmyyntin asiakaskokemusta ostoprosessin eri vaiheissa. Lisäksi tutkimuksessa pureuduttiin siihen, kuinka osa-aikamarkkinoijat ja myyntihenkilöt pystyvät vaikuttamaan asiakkaan tekemiin päätöksiin ostoprosessin aikana.

Tutkimuksen teoreettisen osion alussa esitellään asiakkaan ostoprosessi yleisellä tasolla. Seuraavaksi tarkastellaan viittä yleisintä kirjallisuudessa esiintyvää teoreettista mallia, joilla pyritään vaikuttamaan asiakkaan päätöksentekoon ostoprosessin eri vaiheissa. Seuraava kappale esittelee yleisimmät vaikuttamisteorioihin liittyvät haasteet ja mahdollisuudet niiden poissulkemiseen.

Teoriaosuuden lopuksi esitellään päätöksentekoyksikön kokoonpano sekä yleisellä tasolla, että mobiiliverkko-operaattorin kontekstissa. Myös päätöksentekoyksikön yhteydessä tunnistettavat erilaiset roolit esitellään tässä osiossa.

Tutkimusosiossa kartoitetaan teknisten asiantuntijoiden nykyistä roolia myyntitiimissä ja tutkitaan, miten heitä voisi hyödyntää paremmin. Tutkimusosiossa kartoitetaan myös sitä, kuinka hyvin teoreettiset vaikuttamismallit ovat haastateltavien tiedossa ja kuinka paljon niitä hyödynnetään käytännön tasolla.

Tutkimukseen valikoitiin ryhmä teknisiä asiantuntijoita ja myyntihenkilöitä, joilla on relevanttia kokemusta yritysmyyntistä. Tutkimus toteutettiin teemahaastatteluiden ja kyselyn avulla.

Avainsanat: ostoprosessi, päätoiminen markkinoija, osa-aikamarkkinoija, suhdemarkkinointi, konsultatiivinen myynti, SPIN, päätöksentekoyksikkö

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## Abbreviations

<b>B2B</b>	Business to business
<b>CEM</b>	Customer experience management
<b>CIO</b>	Chief information officer
<b>CMO</b>	Chief marketing officer
<b>CTO</b>	Chief technology officer
<b>DMU</b>	Decision making unit
<b>ERP</b>	Enterprise resource planning system
<b>FTM</b>	Full time marketer
<b>ICT</b>	Information and communications technology
<b>MNO</b>	Mobile network operator
<b>PTM</b>	Part time marketer
<b>RFQ</b>	Request for quotation
<b>RM</b>	Relationship management

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Case company

Ericsson Ab is a world leading Information and communications technology enterprise which acts as a product, service and solution provider. The customer base includes both fixed and wireless network operators but also companies from the industry and society sector like Helsingin Energia, MTV, Maersk Line, Volvo Ab etc. Telecommunication products delivered by Ericsson are used in more than 180 countries all over the world and in more than 1000 fixed and mobile networks. More than 40 percent of all wireless traffic are handled by Ericsson powered networks. This makes Ericsson one of the rare companies which have the ability to offer end-to-end solutions covering the most important telecommunication standards (Ericsson, 2014.)

## 1.2 Market analysis

The last couple of years have been very challenging for the majority of the companies all over the globe. The downturn has also hit the branch of telecommunications and thus caused a quite critical sales decline for all the key players in this area.

Therefore, there is an emerging need to ensure the right capability and competence in the case company to fulfill the future sales targets. This research seeks ways to help organization to grow the sales force and train all employees to take more active role in sales engagement in terms of consulting and customer interaction.

The motivation behind this research was to seek new ways to improve customer experience during purchase process through a more efficient team selling culture where sales account and technical experts act as an entity and form together a solid interface towards the customer.



Practicing and learning of sales skills among all the employees has had high priority in case company's future plan during recent years. Thus this research also evaluates sales methods such as consultative sales and SPIN which both has earlier only been tailored for people working full time in sales and marketing activities.

### **1.3 Objective and research questions**

The main objective of this research is to find out how technical experts and salespersons could together influence the decision making during customer's purchase process. The secondary objective is to evaluate the awareness of sales frameworks among selected research target group. These sales frameworks are commonly used to influence decision makers throughout the purchase process.

Considering these two described objectives, this research aims to find out the answer to following research questions:

1. How technical experts are currently utilized in sales teams?
2. How could technical experts be better utilized in sales teams?
3. How well the frameworks used to influence decision making during purchase process are known and utilized among the technical experts and salespersons in the case company?

Both qualitative and quantitative types of research methods are used in this study to reach the objectives.

### **1.4 Previous researches and limitations**

There have been several researches earlier around this topic. However the previous researches have mainly concentrated on enhancing the actual sales process and thus primarily concentrated on the behavior models of the personnel working in sales and marketing activities.

For example, Joni Aura's Master's Thesis had similar analysis around the different impacting methods and sales techniques but they were mainly observed from the salesperson's point of view. (Aura 2010, 1-6.)

The results of this research are applicable only to Oy L M Ericsson Finland which is part of enterprise Ericsson Ab operating all over the globe. Thus results and findings from this research are mainly relevant at Finnish market.

## **1.5 Structure**

The first chapter of this study presents an overview, some background information and the objectives of this research. The second chapter contains four sections. At first we dive into the purchase process and its phases. The second section introduces the frameworks used to influence decision making during purchase process. The third section lists the challenges of implementing those frameworks in practice and the last section describes the functions and practices behind decision making processes.

Third chapter of this study describes the used research methodology and the reliability and validity aspects on in theory. The fourth chapter introduces the results of both qualitative and quantitative part while conclusions are presented in the last section.

## 2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1 Purchase process

This chapter introduces the generic purchase process followed in most today's information and communications technology companies. Before going deeper into the process, this chapter introduces the way how customers generally perform their buying activities in business to business context.

The way the organization executes their purchase activities is in general called buying behavior. In the simplest form this means the set of actions where one defines the budget and requirements, and concludes actions to fulfill those (Holland & Young 2010, 12.) This buying behavior is generally accomplished through a set of actions which on the other hand is usually called a purchase process. Normally companies acquire raw material, goods, products or services in order to develop their own business, use a retail function or even produce new products and services to be offered, once again, to next level of customers. The group of purchasing entities can thus be originated from public or private sector or on the other hand from communities, organizations or institutes (Bergström & Leppänen 2009, 145.)

During the recent years it has been noticed that in the majority of business to business sales events the purchasing companies are spending more and more time on the decision making process thus executing the so called extended buying cycle. Thus the trend has been that the purchasing party has taken the lead in the purchase process in terms of agenda and timing. This fact on the other hand affects also the selling party and thus the sales strategy of selling company usually requires some tuning. In order to perform successful selling there is an increasing need for patience and willingness to advise the customer in such a long term purchase process. There is a couple of ways to ensure that the extended buying cycle is fully acknowledged and exploited by the selling party (Graham, 2000.)

Firstly one should sketch the client's buying cycle in order to get an image of the customer as a buyer in order to be able to plan the sales strategy accordingly.

Secondly the selling party should prepare for a long term process in order to avoid frustration and quitting the contact too early. In principle the selling party should execute a strategy where they are always around when the customer is on its way to make the decision to buy. In order to ensure such a position the selling party should share its sales philosophy to the client and thus demonstrate selling party's willingness to build a long term relationship with the customer and not only looking for some quick sales. Using such a pattern gives a clear indication and commitment to the client and helps to gain trust and acceptance and minimizes the atmosphere of pushing and pressuring. In successful scenarios the actual sale itself becomes a natural output of a process (Graham, 2000.)

As a conclusion, the extended buying process has modified the environment and thus it is vital that the selling party is seen as knowledgeable and capable to act as an advisor who possesses the cutting edge ideas and technologies. When this kind of approach is deployed correctly, it ultimately enables possibilities to demonstrate professional sales qualities and ensures that the client does not make decisions behind your back. In the end, the sellers willing to act like mentioned above are usually the ones who will be invited when the client is ready to sign the deal (Graham, 2000.)

Naturally all sales occasions are different and thus vary in terms and conditions. Also the processes which clients go through in their decision making most likely vary from sale to sale. Anyhow, there are usually some common steps in the process which are cyclic in every sales occasion (Rackham, 1989.) Figure 1 presents the buying cycle containing research-based insights from every segment.

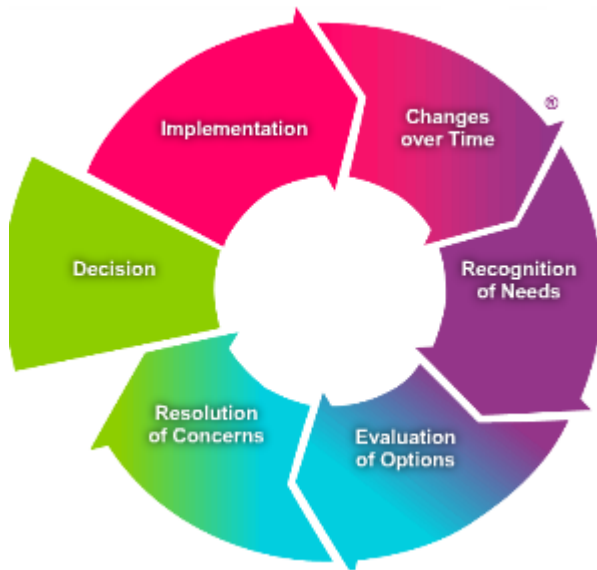


Figure 1. The buying cycle  
(Rackham 1989.)

As seen in Figure 1, the purchase process consists of several phases which in general follow each other. In most of the cases a need for change due to internal or external impulse acts as trigger for launching purchase process cycle. Usually the internal force is specified in terms of problem or challenge faced in company which then needs to be solved. Also time to time companies seek ways to enhance their current functional efficiency or seek new market alternatives (Brennan, Canning & McDowell, 2007.) The trigger for change can also come outside the company through external marketing and advertisement campaign describing new ways and solutions to develop the current business (Hutt & Speh 2010, 66.) Following chapters will describe all the stages of the buying cycle in more detail.

### 2.1.1 Changes over time

Change usually acts as catalyst and motivator which activates a purchase decision for something new. These changes can be external like changes in economic conditions, new legislation or the emergence of new competition. The other factors for such change could be internal like launching of new products and services,

new business strategies or simply the need to reduce costs. Also the lifecycle management can trigger need for change in terms of end of support for specific product, service or solution.

Usually the companies try to cope with dissatisfying products and services as long as possible but when they emerge severe enough, there usually exists motivation to seek new alternatives. All this is needed to keep daily operations running smoothly and with high enough performance (Rackham, 1989.)

### **2.1.2 Recognition of needs**

When the dissatisfaction with the existing environment is insurmountable there are normally some common challenges and questions which the purchasing company would ultimately need to answer. Such questions are usually something like below examples:

- What is the exact functionality or feature of new equipment or service what would be needed in order to succeed in future business?
- Would this above need and possible solution be severe enough to convince senior management to start tendering process?

After resolution of above two questions, the purchasing company needs to decide if there is enough motivation for investment in order to solve the possible issue preventing the current or future success (Rackham, 1989.)

### **2.1.3 Evaluation of options**

Rackham (1989) has discovered that the evaluation of options phase is often handled too lightly or even badly by a customer. In this phase, all the potential suppliers and service providers are evaluated using company specific evaluation criteria containing formal and informal steps. There are indications that the most active vendors in this stage are usually highlighted by the ordering company making them more favorable in the later phases.

However, the customer usually intends to make decisions objectively and use so called short-list approach where the purchasing company picks and chooses few product, service or solution providers from the total list of selling parties for the next round of discussions. Those next rounds of discussions could require demonstrations and presentations from all the vendors covering new prospects and the ones already providing products, services or solutions to purchasing company. In these demonstrations, all the providers are expected to show case their capability in real customer scenarios. Usually at this stage the request for quotations are sent to suppliers.

#### **2.1.4 Resolution of concerns**

At this stage the customer usually evaluates all the proposals received from suppliers. As the outcome of evaluation there usually appear many rounds of negotiations and bargain activities. With this the customer usually seeks ways to make the proposals more favorable for its use. When the time for the final decision approaches there might raise several concerns in the mind of the customer. If the solution to be purchased is large and costly then it is quite common for the customers to back off and execute their final review and sanity check using their most senior personnel to evaluate the request for quotation responds from the providers in order to minimize the risk. In this the phase customer might also seek for contractual protection to move responsibility more to the supplier in order to continue and perform the final buying decision (Rackham, 1989.)

#### **2.1.5 Decision**

When the time of final decision comes, the opportunities to influence customer have basically ran out. In principle, all the previous steps in purchase process have defined how the competing vendors or service providers are going to succeed. In general one should utilize all the possible ways in previous steps in order to gain some advantage over competitors. The supplier evaluation activities throughout the purchase process cycle as well as actual decision making or

consultation towards C-level management is usually carried by special group of people called decision making unit which is described more deeply in following chapters.

### **2.1.6 Implementation**

If and when the offered solution is accepted by the customer it is quite common that the sales team moves forward to the next sales engagement. However it would be wise for sales team also to participate into implementation part in order to ensure that the customer expectations recognized during the sales process are fulfilled during last phase of purchase process.

## **2.2 Frameworks used to influence decision making**

In general, one should try to influence the decision making unit as early as possible in order to secure success during the whole buying cycle and especially during request for quotation phase. In ultimate cases the vendor has ability and empowerment to affect the content of request for quotation.

In rare and extreme situations customer may purposely prefer some supplier over the others due to existing high level of maturity relationship between customer and provider. In those occasions, provider could consult and offer products and services which are accepted by customer even without separate request for quotation process giving thus exclusive position to provider (Iannarino, 2012.)

Following sub-chapters will present the frameworks which could be utilized by part time marketers and full time marketers when influencing the decision makers. Full time marketer and part time marketer concepts are described in more detail in chapters 2.2.2 and 2.2.3.

Nowadays there is wide range of different sales techniques on the market. Some of them have been discovered already late 90's but recent ones have popped during recent years. There are several benefits also for part time marketers to know some of the frameworks. As we know, ordinary life has come more or less



selling for example when suggesting a laptop or tablet for a friend or colleague. All in all it has come more or less vital to know how to sell own expertise in hardening market situation (Mind Tools, 2014.)

### **2.2.1 Relationship marketing**

In general the marketing based on relationships, networks and interaction is seen as relationship marketing. Relationship marketing is usually seen as long-term interactive and profitable relationship between the client and provider. Services marketing, quality management, network approach to industrial marketing, and indirectly the organizational theory lays the foundation for relationship marketing and expresses the most innovative contributions. In ideal situations, relationship marketing acts in market and society and also on organizational level assuming goodwill from all parties. In relationship marketing context, the marketing activities are seen as part of larger context both inside and outside the company which should enable long and short-term benefits to all parties. There is couple of issues which must be dealt when planning marketing process. At first the specific business should be identified and then the relevant relationship portfolio should be prepared and maintained. The second step should include the calculation of costs and revenues related to such relationships. Finally the profits of selected portfolio should be discovered (Gummesson, 1994.)

Relationship marketing framework can be divided into two basic types of theories which are market-based and network-based relationship marketing. As seen in Figure 2, market-based model can be seen as simpler form based on exchange relationships in market context whereas the network-based model deals complex relationships in business environment.

This research follows and uses the network-based relationship framework.

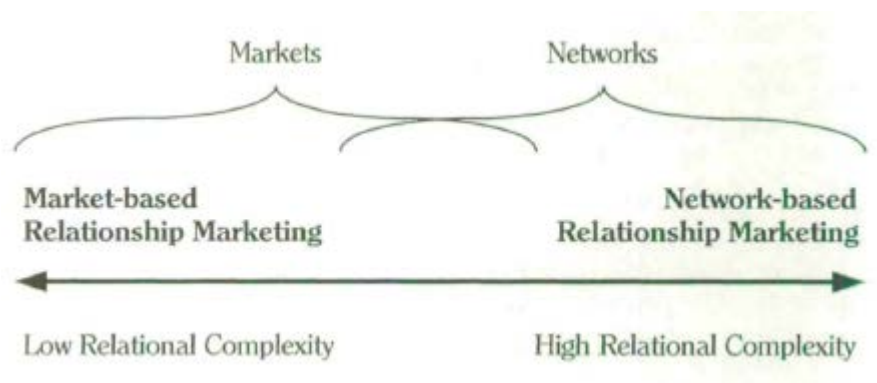


Figure 2. Two types of relationship marketing theories (Möller & Halinen, 2000)

Relationships in buyer-seller context exist quite rarely in either or and it is thus better to address them in terms of relational complexity. Complexity in this context can be seen as number of actors taking part in exchange, their interdependency, and nature of interaction. Also intensity and possible random events usually bring some complexity to relationship. Usually the form of task to be exchanged or executed through the relationship defines its complexity. As seen in Figure 2, complex exchange relationships usually occur in network context while simpler forms of relationships are defined as market-based. There are few reasons for this kind of division. Firstly the network-based relationships require a high level of mutual understanding between the parties. This kind of investment to learning and understanding builds the relationship and enables interdependency between actors ultimately making switching more difficult. This all enables the exchange context to become network-like (Möller & Halinen, 2000.)

Grönroos (1994a) defines relationship marketing as principle where objectives of all involved parties are met and relationships established, enhanced and ultimately maintained at a profit. This naturally requires a high level of mutual understanding, information sharing and kept promises between acting parties. As the setup and establishment of such relationships gradually takes quite much time, it's natural that they are usually long term based.

In Telecom industry the products, services and solutions are delivered all over the globe. All sale cases are large, complex and long term based. Ericsson which provides such services has need for specific marketing strategy which consists of

creation and maintenance of long term relationships towards customer organizations. Definition of marketing strategy usually contains also establishment of public relations towards government agencies and politicians. All these tie several tiers and functions inside of the client's organizations as well as inside provider's own organization. When looking last decades marketing literature there is some guidance available what comes to models of buying behavior on organizational level. There is also more complete framework related to network approach to industrial and business marketing but it has been quite rarely used in past marketing textbooks. In general the theoretical framework in marketing literature has not usually considered or included neither services related marketing nor business marketing parts. When looking into two real life examples in Gummesson (1996) research paper one can see that establishment of successful marketing strategy requires the whole organization to be tuned up towards long term customer relationships. Thus sales and marketing departments cannot provide the success only by themselves. Grönroos follows similar approach in his research papers (Grönroos 1994a, 1994b, 1996.)

This all has affected so that technology and marketing are nowadays more or less merged together. Also one noticeable thing is that boundaries between external and internal actions are decreased which on the other hand has turned into fact that many individual employees spend more time with the customer compared to time spent at office. Additionally there has been increasing need to build addition to external, also the internal relationships with colleagues inside home organization and towards internal suppliers and customers to complete the network of relations (Gummesson, 1996.)

As a conclusion one could express that all types of companies can benefit from relationship marketing framework. In business to business and service industries the approach is usually more natural to setup compared to consumer goods industries. However, the proper definition and establishment of relationship marketing framework is getting more and more important in order to succeed and survive in hardening market situation. During last 50 years, the relationship marketing can be seen as the most important paradigm and aspect in marketing

theory and practice, and it is leading the marketing theory back to its origin (Grönroos, 1996.)

### **2.2.2 Full time marketing**

This chapter describes possibilities of sales people to influence customer's decision making during a purchase process. Usually sales persons are employed to sales and marketing department and thus their main role is act as full time marketer. Therefore their primary role is to generate revenue to hiring company and influence positively customer relations.

Additionally there can be seen several ways where full time marketers can affect to decision making units' decision in business to business context. In general the decision making unit quite often utilize so called spreadsheet approach in their decision making during purchase process. In this approach all the possible vendors are listed one by one on the first row and scored using buyers specific weighted attributes in column A according their importance in eyes of buying company. Initially such approach sounds very logical and authentic. Anyhow it is still subjective and it can be influenced by full time marketer. As the corporate level decisions are still made by individual group of people, they tend to be emotional decisions and are justified later if possible. The key for full time marketer to benefit here is to have good relationships with the customer in order to have a chance to influence the columns put in the spreadsheet and thus help customer to see what their important and considerable needs are. In most cases the attributes listed in column A might be important and for real but in many cases the one who has managed to influence in to those also eventually wins the deal (Iannarino, 2012.)

If the attributes in column A are already nailed down then full time marketer could try to challenge the weighting of them. One common example is price which usually has quite high weighting in customer eyes. Here full time marketer could show how the lower price would cost them more through the lower gained value of such solution. With this approach full time marketer can affect the weighting to be adjusted from price to cost and towards value proposition type of scaling. As a conclusion it is full time marketer job to secure decision making units emotional

decisions are justified and directed to serve providers favor. This can be achieved by helping them to select measurable and tangible attributes and weight them properly (Iannarino, 2012.) As a conclusion one could say that full time marketer has a crucial role in affecting the clients purchase process through decision making unit.

### **2.2.3 Part time marketing**

The part time marketing can be seen as one of the toolkits of market based relationship marketing (Möller & Halinen, 2000). Gummesson (1998) makes statement that marketing in general should be seen in wider scope, requiring everyone's participation. When looking average company layout one could say that people working in marketing and sales department which are trained and hired to perform sales and marketing tasks are full time marketers while all the rest of personnel in the company are seen as part time marketers. Nowadays it is quite common that companies which mainly provide services and business to business marketing, have many people who are close to customer but are not directly working in sales department. As an example one can list employees like product and system designers, software designers, installation and repair engineers and technicians, human resource personnel, accounting people, receptionists and secretaries who ultimately can be seen as part time marketers in addition to their main role and responsibility in the company. However, all these employees influence to customer relationships partly during their working time, thus it is reasonable to say that full time marketers and part time marketers together form the overall marketing function. The vital thing here to notice is the fact that full time marketers can never make the company's success by their own. They cannot always be engaged with right customer with a proper knowledge or be in right time at a right place but for part time marketers instead, it is possible (Gummesson, 1998.)

Initially there is a need for change in mindset towards direction where every employee could feel and act as a customer towards their colleagues whom can be called as internal clients whom they request services and products. On the other

hand every employee should consider themselves as delivering good quality products and services towards their internal clients. When working this idea further we could place a statement which expresses that every individual in the company should market their competence, expertise and knowledge internally around their domain, making them ultimately successful also when dealing with external clients (Gummesson, 1991.)

Inside the industrial market environment and especially in service business, there usually exist much more e.g. technical experts acting as part time marketers compared to number of full time marketers under sales and marketing department. Also it is quite evident that full time marketers are usually not able to cover the whole market segment. This can be realized in situations where full time marketers might fail in time, place or type of a customer while making their efforts. On the other hand, the part time marketers usually gain advantage in being in the right place at a right time as they outnumber the full time marketers. In ultimate situations it can happen that technical experts acting as part time marketers are the only ones around the customer (Grönroos, 1994a.)

Eventually we could say that in many cases the part time marketer might even possess more important role in service selling and thus have more impact to customer planning future purchases compared to full time marketers (Grönroos, 1994b.) In literature, there are usually three identified concepts and theories used to approach part time marketer framework: services marketing theory, network/interaction theory of industrial marketing and total quality management (Gummesson, 1991.)

As a conclusion one could say that part time marketer has a crucial role helping customer throughout the purchase process by helping them to recognize and identify needs, provide consultancy help when evaluation options, and finally help full time marketer to justify favorable attributes and their weights in order to convince the decision making unit. All in all it is evitable that full time marketer and part time marketer together forms the solid foundation for establishing and maintaining good relationships with the customer.

#### **2.2.4 Consultative sales**

Mack Hanan introduced the term 'Consultative selling' at first in his book *Consultative Selling* in the 1970s. In that book Hanan introduced the role of full time marketer which acts as a consultant towards his prospect and thus laid the foundation for consultative selling approach. In this framework, the full time marketer mainly concentrates to asking questions and according to received information tries to select best alternative in terms of solution or product to fulfill prospects needs. Naturally in the best scenario such solution or product would come from full time marketers own product, service or solution portfolio (Connick, 2015.)

One challenge in consultative sales approach is the fact that it is critical from trust perspective as it demands existing relationship between the parties. However, that is also one of the advantages of this approach as usually there is already trust gained between the acting parties. This fact makes consultative selling more natural and easier way also for the part time marketers to offer their services, products and solutions (Graziano & Flanagan, 2005.)

Eventually, in order to succeed in this approach, the full time marketer need continuously understand the customer needs and provide solutions which would help the clients to achieve their goals. In general there can be identified three different areas, which are common for the full time marketers practicing consultative sales successfully (Daniels, 2006.)

Firstly such full time marketers actively engage in conversations with potential and current customers to seek their explicit and implicit needs. In such sales calls there can be achieved understanding of customer needs through mutual exchange of information. Such dialogs also can help customer to realize the potential need. Also the successful full time marketers mostly act from benefit-oriented rather than feature-oriented approach and thus are able to link the needs to benefits in more advanced way (Daniels, 2006.)

Secondly they can prepare creative solutions. To succeed in this area, the full time marketer needs to be able to select services and products from wide portfolio in

order to prepare unique solution for the customer. The full time marketer can achieve this by utilizing the part time marketers' technical expertise and thus together be able to show how the solution would bring the most value to the customer (Daniels, 2006.)

Lastly full time marketers successfully practicing consultative sales approach usually maintain their focus tightly in the value argumentation. In practice they can articulate all quantitative benefits of their product portfolio and thus are able to control the price pressure. However, the challenging part here is that the full time marketer should be able to make their clients to understand the fact that value of proposed solutions can enumerate from several sources like benefits of the service or product, possible customization, additional support services, reputation of provider company and finally from professionalism, knowledge and expertise offered by full time marketer. As a conclusion, success in these three principles requires a significant skill, resources and knowledge from provider organization. This can lead into situation where only identified key customers are selected and approached with this kind of deep commitment (Daniels, 2006.)

The list below expresses some of the key characteristics for full time marketers practicing consultative sales approach during purchase process discussions:

- Actively seek opportunities for discussions with non-technical buyers as they might be technical buyers internal clients
- Be active listener and use consultative questioning techniques to fetch all possible information in order to propose the best possible solution both technically and financially
- Plan your meetings professionally to ensure high meeting quality for both you and for your customer
- Prepare or support writing of justification for business case in terms of financial profitability (Schmitz, 2014.)

To conclude one could state that full time marketer successfully practicing consultative sales approach should focus their effort during the early stages of the purchase process. During the first miles it is possible to make the most value and



influence to customer way of thinking and even discover new solution possibilities which would give customer enormous value (Anonymous, 2001.)

### **2.2.5 SPIN selling**

Neil Rackham and his study received recognition in the 1970s when he led the one of the largest research study of successful sales and selling effectiveness. Xerox and IBM which were supporting this huge project involved a team of 30 researchers who studied approximately 35,000 sales calls in more than 20 countries. In total the research lasted 12 years. As a result from those studies he introduced the groundbreaking classic SPIN sales model (Rackham, 2015).

In this research, SPIN selling approach is handled as one of the methods under consultative sales framework and is primarily seen as part of full time marketer's toolbox.

The SPIN selling framework utilizes a number of questions which should be asked when moving through the purchase process in logical manner ending to successful outcome. The "S" describes the situation type of questions. These are usually used in the beginning of engagement in order to collect information about prospects business environment. These questions are meaningful in building relationship with the customer.

"P" stands for problem questions, which try to seek what problems the customer might have encountered in the past, what bad experiences they may relate in their daily business. Utilizing problem type of questions, allows one to determine which product or service possibly could help in order to remove these obstacles and move to the next stage.

"I" includes implication type of questions, which are quite often more complex, ultimately relating to problem questions and thus explore their effects and consequences. These questions are used to convince the customer and build their understanding on the consequences of the problems and thus make them more prepared to receive a resolution, which you hope will be the sale of a new product or service.

"N" leads one to the all-important need-payoff questions. Successful full time marketers and in some cases also the part time marketers usually masters this questioning technique. Inquiry set like this steers the prospect to tell the questioning party all the reasons why they should buy product, service or solution presented to them. At this phase one have crossed the line from being just a product-oriented representative and become a true consultant (Zagami 2007.)

### **2.2.6 Buying facilitation**

There exists also hybrid approach called a buying facilitation which tries to develop consultative sales and SPIN methods even further. In this framework the main idea is to gather data, execute needs analysis and advice the buyer to see possible internal issues they should solve before starting any tender process for new product or service (Morgen 2007.)

In this approach the part time marketers and or full time marketers responsibility is to support purchasing party in discerning what is possibly missing, is there anything internally to be applied in order to solve the problem, what are the additional components needed for a full solution, what should be selection criteria for external solution if applicable, how to support decision makers in selecting best possible solution which could be integrated to the existing system (Morgen 1996.)

The buying facilitation approach is built around six principles which support the idea where the sales should not be seen anymore as product oriented and seller based, but rather seen as buyer-centric, service-focused and ultimately solution targeted. The six principles of such facilitation are listed below:

1. Without buyer, there is no sale
2. Keep the relationship with customer staff and management team as main priority due to fact that it defines if there is a need for a service or a product?
3. The service should be seen as main goal where discovery defines the outcome and a sale is seen only as potential solution. Also providing

tools to help clients in discovery, offers the best service rather than pushing one's own agenda in terms of products.

4. As discussed in SPIN based model, the seller should come up with the questions whereas buyer has the answers.
5. One tends to buy only when they cannot meet their needs. Potential buyer should let discover the potential solution by themselves and marketer (part time or full time) should only guide the client in this path by using proper need payoff type of questions.
6. The companies and firms tend to buy using their own specific purchase processes. Thus rather than steering sellers own sales cycle, one should concentrate, support and influence client during its purchase process.

As a conclusion, when the buyer is seen primarily as party which needs support there is more likelihood to generate sales. Part time or full time marketers' task is to steer the customer to direction leading them to make the best possible decision. In this journey and discovery path, the right type of facilitative questions will help the buyer to see their real needs (Morgen, 1996.)

### **2.2.7 Team selling**

Still many technical experts might think that selling requires low level of thinking and thus is somehow mechanical task which just needs to be done. Anyhow when one thinks the companies renewing e.g. their enterprise resource planning system it is very obvious that there is a huge demand for expertise required in such an activity. For example a need analysis would take great effort in order to maximize e.g. the production process in the company. In such situations one naturally needs to involve technical experts who have the knowledge and competence to suggest the best possible solution in such occasions. It is thus quite common that in communications and information technologies related sales calls there is full time marketer e.g. salesman or account manager handling the sales process and part time marketer e.g. technical expert handling the product, service and/or solution related items. This kind of team selling setup is the part of relationship marketing

framework and whenever this kind of roster works seamlessly together it makes possible to achieve good results and successful sales (Hernberg 2013, 95.)

### **2.3 Challenges in influencing frameworks**

Usually there are always some challenges to involve non-sales oriented employees to take initiative to practice their sales skills. On the other hand even in situations where the individual would be ready and motivated to take a next step in role of part time marketer, there still exists some boundaries which needs to be resolved. Following sub-chapters describe areas which are challenging for technical experts in journey of becoming successful part time marketers.

#### **2.3.1 Part time marketer on uncomfortable zone**

Quite often the technical experts are willing to stay and act from their own expertise area and comfortable zone rather than jump out of their knowledge area. This natural habit usually prevents the experts to expand their response level towards a customer what comes to items or areas outside their key competence area. This usually generates challenges when discussing with actual selling activity of certain product or service with the customer. In such situations the expert might feel himself inadequate and in order to prepare the experts for such situations, there should be clear goals and basic training available (Hernberg 2013, 62-63.)

According to Hernberg (2013, 63.) research clearly shows that in many information and communication technology companies the technical experts can be very effective in add-on sales type of situations and possibly even generating new sales with new customers when participating to sales events like exhibitions etc. The challenge here usually is that technical experts do not want to take official role in sales organization and thus want to avoid the responsibility of selling as such.

Anyhow there is huge potential in technical experts to be used as part time marketers as long as selling activities remain their secondary roles only and main role still continue to be technical expert.

What comes to developing those part time marketer skills one needs to twist the sales call upside down as Hernberg (2013, 68) states. One should think what technical expert has to offer towards potential customer — naturally technical expertise. Secondly one should think when technical expertise is most useful for client — most likely then when one need to solve problems. Then would it be natural to offer ones expertise in order to help customer to solve problems? This kind of attitude and thinking process gives completely different viewpoint for a sales call.

Technical expert could take more active role in the situation where one notices the potential challenges and problems the customer currently have. In those cases, the offered technical expertise could solve issues which ultimately could trigger new sales event towards customer (Hernberg 2013, 68.)

### **2.3.2 How to motivate part time marketers to sell**

Perhaps the biggest challenge for nowadays modern organizations is to strive and steer the technical experts to take the first steps to become part time marketers. One and perhaps the most important lesson is to let the experts still be experts in technical side but seek their acceptance and try to motivate them to think potential issues which would ideally be discovered even few steps ahead a customer (Monto, 2013.)

Additionally well-tailored trainings related to facing the customer complemented with efficient messaging towards customer, usually gives better results than pure sales skills courses (Monto, 2013.)

Generally the technical experts are self-driven, intelligent, thirsting for knowledge, self-respecting and highly committed. Leadership should thus keep those facts in mind when leading those experts and especially if seeking their willingness to act in a sales team. Additionally experts usually appreciate freedom in their daily work,

and thus the level of bureaucracy should be set as low as possible. The leaders should concentrate to communality and working culture and take care that experts has the proper framework to do their job well. As a conclusion, when encouraging technical experts to act more in sales, following items should be considered:

- Worthwhile content of job
- Avoidance usage of term: selling, which usually affect resistance
- Define and give fair and meaningful goals
- Ensure that compensation culture supports the whole working community to do their best to achieve the best possible work contribution

(Hernberg 2013, 213-214.)

### **2.3.3 Challenges in consultative sales framework**

There might be challenges in adopting consultative sales approach properly in every manner and situation. One aspect which is usually faced is the fact that technical experts might have tendency to keep their service role rather than grow their role in sales. If this happens in larger scope it could affect the fact that companies might lose their viewpoint of selling products and services to their customers. Another challenge which might occur is the fact that technical experts do not always want or their character just not fit into sales template which thus makes them not able to fulfill the requirements needed from them (Dunn, Thomas & Lubawski, 1981.)

As stated in previous chapters, in order to maintain and practice the consultative sales type of approach successfully one must keep the knowledge base wide and up to date. In past decades it was perhaps enough to know only the details of the specific product, service or solution to be offered but now when practicing consultative sales approach one need to understand also the clients business environment from larger viewpoint to ensure the offered product or service fits into clients business objectives. To simplify this, it is not anymore enough to provide just a data sheet to collect successful sales. Instead the prospect needs to be

convinced about potential enhancements through the gained monetary value of certain product, service or solution would provide (Dunn, Thomas & Lubawski, 1981.)

#### **2.3.4 Contradiction between full time and part time marketers**

As Baron (1999) discusses, information and communication technology sales usually involves 2 persons to the sales call, a salesman and a technical person. Also very much it occurs that the salesman has an explanation and justification to basically all the questions rose from the client while the technical person can be more cautious and in some cases not so excited about features and benefits of the product and or a service. As a result this could raise opposed impression and thus such sales call usually does not give the expected result.

As understandable this kind of team selling should be designed so that both salesperson and technical expert would support each other and work with same agenda which naturally means that both parties need to be conscious of this common paradigm and execute their pre-work accordingly.

Increasing amount of companies using team selling framework has adopted it as part of their sales process. Also the companies' successfully established team-selling culture seems to improve their sales mainly due to fact that the team of engineer and salesperson is very effective combination compared to individual (Baron, 1999.)

As already discussed in previous chapter, the big question is how to make this combination work effectively. Studies have shown (Baron, 1999) that engineers need to get some basic sales training in terms of team and individual selling. Also both parties should learn to utilize consultative sales approach and thus work as advisors rather than pure salesmen. Lastly it is very important that both parties in the sales team understand the benefit of this kind of tandem selling.

## **2.4 Decision making unit**

As presented in the previous chapters there are several methods, possibilities and challenges when trying to influence to decision makers during purchase process. This chapter describes decision making unit in more detail. Firstly one could say that decision making unit plays key role throughout the purchase process. The people involved in decision making unit can vary during the path of purchase and it is thus vital to influence correct people in decision making unit in the correct time. Following chapters will describe decision making unit function in general and also give brief introduction to mobile network operator specific decision making unit function which usually purchases products, services and solutions from mobile infrastructure company like Ericsson.

### **2.4.1 Generic model**

On organization level, there are usually several people who affect the purchasing function and thus into process itself. Those individuals are active in the process during different times along process lifetime. As Bergstöm and Leppänen (2009, 145-146) emphasizes, the part time marketer and the full time marketer have a crucial role identifying the behavior of the decision making unit in order to specify and allocate marketing communication in the most efficient way.

The purchase behavior of organization can vary a lot depending on size and type of the company like public or private sector. Selling party should also keep in mind that people working in purchase activities are generally professionals who effectively use different negotiation tactics and other practices which should be kept in mind. In general when the buying behavior of the target company is well discovered, offering correct type of solution and acting correctly in different situations is secured (Bergström & Leppänen 2009, 145-146.)

However it is important to remember that organizations are only seen as high level entity and there is always a group of people who make the actual decisions and directs different activities related to sourcing (Brennan et al. 2008, 35.) As Ojasalo and Ojasalo (2010, 35) emphasize in their research, there is always a group of



people influencing the final purchase decision. Usually the people who have a direct involvement into customer's purchase process have possibility to affect the direction where the customer wants to take each particular tender process. Usually decision making unit consist of people belonging to same organization which through their authority can affect to the purchase project and its results and conclusions. Also an important detail to remember is the fact that not always the people in the decision making unit remain same from case to case. When going deeper into the decision making unit and the individuals involved, one can discover several roles under this function. Few typical roles for people being part of decision making unit are (Ojasalo & Ojasalo, 2010.):

- Initiators
- Users
- Influencers
- Gate keepers
- Buyers
- Decision makers
- Controllers.

According Ojasalo and Ojasalo (2010, 35-36) initiators usually identify the problem or need which leads into new product or service launch. The users are most commonly people who will use the new product or service after purchase and implementation. The influencers usually provide evaluation information needed to select the best possible provider from group of selling parties. The role of gatekeeper usually controls the information and asset sharing during the time when the purchase process is active. Actual buyers are the ones who place an order and are thus connected to the selling part. The decision makers possess the final authority and thus they usually make the final decisions. After approval from the decision makers, the controllers perform budget calculation and supervise it throughout the life cycle of the purchase.

Due to fact that there are people behind the decision making unit function, the group dynamics and individual aspects affects into buying decision. Also the type of the purchase affects to level of commitment depending on the type of the sale e.g. routine purchase or new and complex solution which usually grasps the whole team work actively around the case. Also all the individuals belonging to the decision making unit has their unique personality, special collection of expertise, some organizational area of responsibility and finally understanding how to achieve the organizational and personal goals. In order to understand organizational buyer, the marketer need to be aware of these regularities (Hutt & Speh 2010, 77, 82.)

As emphasized, the providing part should be fully aware of the people influencing to final purchase decision in order to know whom to be in contact during the purchase process and what kind of information those people keep important and attractive (Ojasalo & Ojasalo 2010, 37.)

The final decision is made by corporate decision makers. They ultimately have authority to engage the organization to co-operate with specific supplier. The decision makers thus grant the final acceptance for purchase (Michel, Naudé, Salle & Valla 2003, 68.) This makes the identification of such group of decision makers as key activity for marketer but it is usually quite difficult task especially for complex target organizations. Also usually such identification is more challenging in situations where the big decisions are carried. Finally to make it even more challenging, the decisions makers can also vary depending of phase of the decision making process (Michel et al. 2003, 68.)

Table 1 below combines the decision making unit roles into different phases of purchase process.

Table 1. Decision making unit roles throughout purchase process  
(Reproduced, Salminen 2008)

Purchase process	Initiators	Users	Influencers	Gate keepers	Buyers	Decision Makers	Controllers
Changes Over Time	**	**				**	
Recognition of Needs		**	*		*		
Evaluation of Options			*	*	**		
Resolution of Concerns					**	**	
Decision		*	*		*	**	
Implementation		**					**

\*Participates, \*\*High impact

#### 2.4.2 Mobile network operator specific model

In a mobile network operator context the decision making unit and purchase process varies depending of the type of procurement. In small scale scenarios the operators usually have relatively tight budget allocations and in that case most of the effort from provider side is spent to users and influencers at customer side which usually play considerable role in steering the budget owner towards products or services from provider. On the other hand when handling frame agreement type of large scale procurement, the customers usually follow the full purchase process and providers thus need to elaborate towards procurement organization and convince the C-level decision makers. In those scenarios, the users and influencers in customer organization do not play such big role. In theory the goal for provider is usually to influence all participants throughout the purchase process but in practice it is quite common that kind of key decision maker analysis is performed by the provider. In such analysis the key decision makers are identified and approached in order to secure the most favorable result in negotiations (Möykkynen, 2015.)

To develop this further in context of purchase process, procurement elements and decision making in telecommunications, one could say that mobile operators has come very professional during recent years. Due to this, it is vital for the vendors

also to give a full attention in order to manage these situations. In practice this means that the vendors need to be equally good and systematic in negotiations, or otherwise it will just be chicken race with a price. Generally it is thought that mobile operators base their purchasing decisions mainly or even only on technology and price aspects when comparing the vendors. However it has been noticed that beyond those, the operators also seek solutions which do not require too much effort from them as they can be short on resources. Then what comes to actual decision making, the procurement team usually tries to give impression that they are the ones who do the final decision. However usually they only recommend the best solution from their perspective to actual decision making entity which in most case is C-level management (Jarne & Hoffbauer, 2015.)

Anyhow, even if the procurement team does not make the final decision they should be seen and faced with all possible respect and professionalism. Thus the part time marketers and full time marketers plays critical role in helping and influencing the procurement team by being familiar with the role and responsibilities they carry during overall purchase process. The part time marketers and full time marketers should be highly trustworthy and respond always in time during the negotiations. As a conclusion, the best what part time marketer and full time marketer can do is to give the procurement team true arguments and verify the benefits of offered solution in order to convince their own internal stake holders which are C-level decision makers in this context (Jarne & Hoffbauer, 2015.)

What comes to actual decision makers in decision making unit entity, they usually follow and utilize the Kraljic model developed by Peter Kraljic at Harvard University in 1983 (Mind Tools, 2015.) In this model, the purchasing organization places profit impact and supplier risk in a matrix format illustrated in Figure 3.

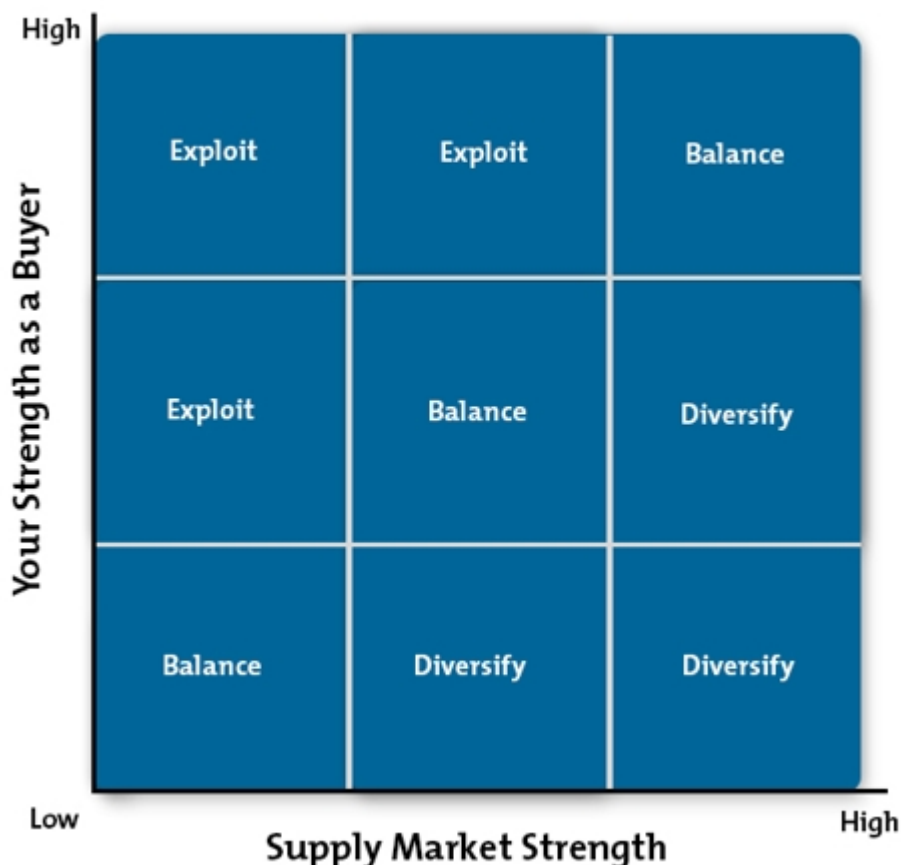


Figure 3. Purchasing portfolio matrix (Mind Tools, 2015).

In this matrix the purchasing part usually compares its own strengths to suppliers' market strengths. In extreme situation, it can happen that only one vendor is able to deliver the required solution (Jarne & Hoffbauer, 2015.)

In order to avoid price race, the vendors usually try to emphasize their strengths already in pre-request for quotation phase when customer is more prepared to listen and do not take such marketing speech as a kind of trick related to ongoing tender phase. Following such approach, it would be possible to gain advantage in actual request for quotation phase (Jarne & Hoffbauer, 2015.)

As a conclusion one can emphasize that part time marketer are mainly connected to users, influencers, buyers whereas full time marketers are mainly linked to buyers and decision makers during the purchase process.

### **3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This Research was implemented using both the quantitative and qualitative methodologies supported by the case study approach. Following chapters describes the selected methods on theoretical level and in practice. Also the theory behind reliability and validity aspects are described.

#### **3.1 Case study**

During past decades the case study approach has been used as qualitative research method to review a real-life events and situations. As Yin (1984) expresses in his book the case study can be seen as empirical survey which investigates current trends in real-life context. The case study can be useful also in situations where limits between context and phenomenon are not crystal clear and in situations where there exist evidence from multiple sources (Yin, 1984.)

However there are also scholars who claim that a low number of cases cannot offer reliability for the results. Whatever the truth, as long as the case study is carefully planned it can provide accurate results and literature shows lot of examples for such disciplines (Soy, 1997.)

The most common way to perform the case study is to utilize a six-step model. In first step the research questions going to be used during the study are defined and determined. Usually the object of the case study is a person or group of people. Several data collection methods are used to study the object leading to understandable answers to research questions (Soy, 1997.)

The case selection and data gathering and analysis techniques are selected in second phase. During this step the researcher selects whether single or multiple real-life cases are to be examined. Also the data gathering approaches and methods are defined during this step. The main strength of a case study as research method comes from the fact that it generally uses several sources and techniques in data collection. With this approach, the validity and reliability are

ensured already in design phase leading ultimately well-constructed study (Soy, 1997.)

The third step in model contains the data gathering preparation part. As there is usually lot of data available from several sources, there is requirement to organize the data systematically (Soy, 1997.)

The fourth step contains the actual data collection from the field. There is a need for systematic and comprehensive data gathering from several sources. The data needs also to be stored in formats that can be re-processed, sorted and referenced during the actual analysis. One benefit of case study type of research is the fact that it is flexible and adaptable during the process as far as changes are documented accurately (Soy, 1997.)

The fifth step in model includes the data evaluation and analysis part. The raw data is to be explored in order to be able to see possible correlation between research object and research question outcomes (Soy, 1997.)

The last phase in case study type of research is final report generation which contains all the relevant findings from the results. One benefit of case study is the fact that it can express complex issues in understandable way. It also keeps the research independent from the researcher making it possible for supervisors and other audience to review and comment the final report draft. By utilizing the received feedback, the researcher is able to prepare new revisions (Soy, 1997.)

### **3.2 Reliability and validity**

The credibility and quality of qualitative analysis has usually two main elements: data collection and the credibility of the researcher. To gain credibility, precise techniques and methods for data collection need to be secured. Additionally a careful analysis of the data must to be secured. Credibility in data analysis is secure when reliability and validity are handled with high priority. The second element is the researcher's credibility that consists of personal experience and competence on the subject. Also the selected method should be argued and justified in order to gain trust for research. The researcher has to understand the

components of validity and reliability when starting research and use check points to ensure they are kept in mind during the research process. In the end validity and reliability aspects should be evaluated by researcher in order to verify their consummation (Patton, 1999.)

### **3.3 Qualitative research**

In qualitative research the process is referred primarily rather than the outcomes. Use of qualitative methods enables researchers to find out how people make sense of their experiences, work, and their structures of the world. It can be seen as fundamental instrument for data collection and analysis where data is gathered from human's instead of using inventories or machines. Qualitative research usually includes some field work like meeting people face-to-face and observing behavior in natural environments. The qualitative research process can be seen as inductive where the researcher builds concepts, hypotheses, abstractions, and theories from details (Creswell 2009.)

As described in Chapter 1.3, primary objective of this research was to seek 1) How part time marketers are currently utilized in sales team and 2) How could part time marketers be better utilized in sales team? (Questions 1 and 2) To achieve this, the qualitative part of this research contained subject introduction to interviewees consisting of both full time marketers and part time marketers (Appendix 1) and thematic interview using leading type of questionnaire (Appendix 2).

### **3.4 Data collection**

In the beginning, pre-selected group of part time marketers and full time marketers (Account Managers, Solution Managers, Solution Architects and Services Engineers) were contacted and their willingness to take part in research was requested. The input data for qualitative part was collected via thematic interviews during March and April 2015.



Thematic interviews were selected to be the method of research as they offer a natural way to express questions from a broad scope. Especially when the themes are advertised in advance there can be a mutual understanding among the group of interviewees but still the method makes it possible to leave the order of the questions open (Hirsjärvi et al. 2008, 203.) Such a method also establishes more interaction as the respondents themselves can suggest areas which they see important (Yin, 1984).

During interview sessions the researcher followed the list of questions in best possible way in order to verify that all participants were queried with same questions. Anyhow due to various backgrounds of the interviewees the length of theme and order of questions varied slightly. However all themes were concluded with participants.

One interview was carried out with setup of two participants concurrently whereas all the rest were carried out as individual sessions. Actual interviews took place in a private setting physically on workplace or over online communication tools. Duration of each session was between 1 hour and 1 hour and 30 minutes.

Table 2 presents the details of the interview sessions. All sessions were conducted in Finnish and translated into English by the author.

Table 2. Interviewees and the duration of each session

The interviewee	Interview duration
Experienced Solution Architect (27.3.2015)	1 hr
Experienced Solution Architect (7.4.2015)	1 hr
Senior Services Engineer (10.4.2015)	1 hr
Senior Solution Architect (13.4.2015)	1 hr 30 min
Key Account Manager I (29.4.2015)	1 hr
Key Account Manager II (29.4.2015)	1 hr
<b>Total</b>	6 hr 30 min

In total, 3 Solution Architects, 1 Services Engineer and 2 Key Account Managers were interviewed for this study. The selection of respondents was based on their level of knowledge and experience what comes to sales and purchase processes. Solution Architects and Services Engineer was selected in order to gather part time marketer perspective and on the other hand the Key Account Managers to fulfill the full time marketer viewpoint what comes to affecting customers purchase process.

### **3.5 Quantitative research**

The secondary objective of this research was to seek how well the frameworks used to influence the purchase process were known among the part time marketers and full time marketers as stated in research question 3. This part of research had descriptive objectives as the aim was to evaluate the methods and frameworks used to influence the decision making during a purchase process. A quantitative survey was selected to be used as a technique because according to Malhotra & Birks (2003, 224) it allows information to be clearly defined and it is typically based on a large number of representative samples in terms of participating respondents.

The structured way of the questionnaire survey was selected due to widely acknowledged advantages like speed and low costs. The survey questionnaire is included in Appendix 3 and it is described more detailed in the following chapter.

In this research the quantitative data was collected using a structured questionnaire based on the frameworks introduced in chapter 2.2. In the first part of the questionnaire the interviewee's awareness of influencing frameworks was surveyed. Also the level of utilization was measured in the first part.

The second part of the questionnaire concentrated on identifying the positive effects and the challenges of influencing the frameworks. As the survey was conducted together with the theme interview part the response rate was 100%.

## 4 ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

In this chapter the results of the research are analyzed. Outcome is divided based on the main objectives of this study, structure of the theme interview and questionnaire items. The last part summarizes the key takeaways from the results.

### 4.1 Current part time marketer utilization in sales team

There was a common view and understanding among the group of interviewees what comes to current utilization level of part time marketers in sales team. Majority of the respondents agreed that part time marketers are used in all phases of purchase process except in decision making phase what comes to influencing decision making unit and other stakeholders during customer purchase process. For instance, Experienced Solution Architect (27.3.2015) indicated that:

“Part time marketer carries critical role in presenting roadmaps and technical information of future products and services during changes over time and recognition of needs phases. “

Additionally Experienced Solution Architect (7.4.2015) highlighted that:

“Part time marketers expertise is very much needed in identifying products, features and services which are about to reach their end in terms of life cycle management and thus would require attention from customer.”

There is also pro-active aspect to be taken into account during changes over time phase which should be utilized as stated by Senior Solution Architect (13.4.2015):

“There should be continuous monitoring and harvesting of all current and potential new customers what comes to verifying their current status reflected to purchase process cycle. Also analyzing the key financial figures would sometimes be useful when finding opportunities to offer some new or revised solutions or services to customers.”

He also continues that during recognition of needs phase, there are possibilities to:

“Select critical and important customers and try to affect input criteria in request of quotation phase to favor case company”.

What comes to evaluation of options and resolution of concerns phases in customer purchase process, there existed common understanding that part time marketers carry responsibility mainly on technical side. Experienced Solution Architect (27.3.2015) emphasizes that:

“Part time marketers usually deliver customer workshops, share technical information to full time marketers what comes to products, their features and services. Part time marketers also actively give input to request for quotation and even try to influence into content of it by contacting customer personnel whom are responsible of defining the content of tender documentation. Finally part time marketers try to tailor and downsize the offered solution and find components which could be left out without sacrificing the overall scope”

On the other hand part time marketer also has possibility to express their importance from business perspective as Senior Solution Architect (13.4.2015) describes:

“Part time marketers can contribute in influencing decisions made during evaluation of options phase by analyzing competing parties, addressing procurement team by emphasizing case company benefits and by using relevant value argumentation approach.”

“Part time marketers should maintain continuous information flow between procurement and sales team and be prepared to answer immediately to all the additional queries from customer. “

As stated earlier, interviewees did not see that much for possibilities for part time marketers to influence decision phase in purchase process. Anyhow Senior Solution Architect (13.4.2015) identified some areas where the part time marketers could possibly bring some value:

“Part time marketers could give mentoring or coaching to full time marketers to secure their success in making final impression towards decision making unit. Finally if the decision making unit decides not to go with case company solution, then part time marketers should help full time marketers to find out and evaluate the reasons behind not been selected.”

As a conclusion there was common understanding that both full time marketers and part time marketers should together have continuous discussions with customer what comes to future needs and possibilities. Such approach would make it possible to prepare for best possible solutions in future tenders.

#### **4.2 Ways to improve part time marketers engagement in sales team**

In second part of theme interview, the purpose was to find out ways and possibilities to improve part time marketers' utilization while affecting decision making during customer purchase process. Both Key Account Managers I and II (29.4.2015) emphasized that:

“The main challenge is to find out the part time marketers with right competence at right time in specific customer engagements if such resource is not available in current pool.”

Another aspect lifted by full time marketers was the fact that:

“Everything what happens during implementation phase by part time marketers (positive / negative customer perceptions) will surely affect the case company's success in future when another cycle of changes over time phase occurs”

From part time marketers perspective the possible ways to improve their utilization can be summarized into insights from Experienced Solution Architect (27.3.2015) and Experienced Solution Architect (7.4.2015) who claimed that:

“Part time marketers should be involved more with discussions with C-level management during decision phase negotiations where they could bring some simple but efficient technical insights which might be missing from full time marketers presentations”.

“Part time marketers could sit more closely with the customer in order to build close relations and thus affect future decision making positively by increasing number of influencers at customer organization.”

Experienced Solution Architect (7.4.2015) also continued that:

“Full time marketers in case company should ask more consultation from part time marketers when considering new offerings to customers and while finding areas in customer networks which would require enhancements and thus create opportunities to offer something new”.

Senior Solution Architect (13.4.2015) concludes the part time marketer possibilities by stating that:

“They should in general have access to bigger share of the cake in terms of promotions and bonuses in order to motivate them to take more active role when working in sales team”

He also continues that:

“Part time marketers should focus on building good relations to influencers in purchasing companies. They should also understand the roles and responsibilities at customer side in order to gain positive affect in future decision making”.

### 4.3 Awareness of purchase process influencing frameworks

The five frameworks widely accepted by literature were discussed in Chapter 2.2. These frameworks are commonly utilized to affect customer’s decision making during a purchase process. Table 3 describes those influencing frameworks and how those are known among interviewees.

Table 3. Awareness of the purchase process influencing frameworks

Interviewee	Relationship marketing	Consultative selling	SPIN selling	Buying facilitation	Team selling
Experienced Solution Architect (27.3.2015)		X	X	X	X
Experienced Solution Architect (7.4.2015)		X	X		
Senior Services		X	X		X

Engineer (10.4.2015)					
Senior Solution Architect (13.4.2015)	X	X	X		X
Key Account Manager I (29.4.2015)	X	X	X	X	X
Key Account Manager II (29.4.2014)	X	X	X		X

As seen in Table 3, all the respondents know consultative selling and SPIN selling frameworks. Relationship marketing as a term and as framework was known by 50% of the respondents. On the other hand only 2 out of 6 had heard about buying facilitation. What comes to team selling framework, 5 out of 6 interviewees knew that from the past.

#### 4.4 Utilization of purchase process influencing frameworks

Table 4 summarizes a number of frameworks which have been used in real sales cases by respondent when impacting decision making during customers purchase process.

Table 4. Utilization of purchase process influencing frameworks

Interviewee	Relationship marketing	Consultative selling	SPIN selling	Buying facilitation	Team selling
Experienced Solution Architect (27.3.2015)		X	X		X
Experienced Solution Architect (7.4.2015)		X	X	X	
Senior Services Engineer (10.4.2015)	X	X			X

Senior Solution Architect (13.4.2015)	X	X	X	X	X
Key Account Manager I (29.4.2015)	X	X		X	X
Key Account Manager II (29.4.2014)	X	X		X	X

As seen in Table 4, the consultative selling approach has been utilized by all the respondents, whereas SPIN selling is used by only 3 out of 6. The buying facilitation method has been used by 67% of the respondents where 3 out of 4 had utilized it unconsciously. The team selling approach was also very much utilized by 5 out of 6 whereas relationship marketing was utilized by 4 out of 6 interviewees.

#### 4.5 Most effective frameworks

In this part the interviewees experience about the most effective frameworks described in Chapter 2.2 were surveyed. Usually such experience is gathered while working in real sales case that took place when impacting customer decision making during purchase process.

Experienced Solution Architect (27.3.2015) stated that:

“Consultative sales approach has been most useful in small scale cases, while team selling has worked mainly on pure hardware related sales. On the other hand in major deals all the frameworks has been used in mixed manner and simultaneously.

What comes to buying facilitation and relationship marketing, they have proved to be most efficient in pre-request for quotation phase, when influencing content of it or impacting possibility of avoiding it completely. SPIN method has mainly been useful when working with new customers and trying to seek their implied needs.”

Experienced Solution Architect (7.4.2015) outlined that:



“SPIN method is successful in right framework while discovering needs but overall my experience is that all the described frameworks must be mastered well in order to make successful impact time after time.”

Senior Services Engineer (10.4.2015) made clear conclusion that:

“Relationship marketing framework has had most affect following with team selling and consultative sales approaches.”

On the other hand, Senior Solution Architect (13.4.2015) stated that:

“SPIN has been absolutely the most affecting framework when influencing customer decision making.”

Key Account Manager I (29.4.2015) made interesting statement where he addressed that:

“Buying facilitation framework was used with one customer where the solution where build basically from the scratch together with the customer and thus neglecting outside competition in terms of request for quotation race. In that particular offer, case company managed to position itself to be only alternative left for customer to choose from. In such situations the price tag for working solution is naturally not the biggest concern for customer.”

#### **4.6 Most challenging frameworks**

In this part the interviewees experience about the most challenging frameworks described in Chapter 2.2 were surveyed. Usually such experience is gathered while working in real sales case that took place when impacting customer decision making during purchase process.

Experienced Solution Architect (27.3.2015) stated that:

“SPIN method is very challenging if used as only framework whereas relationship marketing and buying facilitation cannot be used for new customers as they require long common history with the customer.”

Experienced Solution Architect (7.4.2015) expressed that:

“I cannot identify any specific method which would have more challenge than others. Part time marketers usually utilize all the methods mixed depending on situation.”

Senior Services Engineer (10.4.2015) responded with:

“In order to practice SPIN framework successfully and influence customer decision making, it would require extensive experience. All the other frameworks which I have personally utilized have been rather natural and thus not been challenging as such.”

Senior Solution Architect (13.4.2015):

“The first challenging thing among the sales team is to agree on which of these frameworks are to be used. After that one could say that relationship marketing framework is challenging if there is only limited time to be spent with the customer. On the other hand, utilization of the team selling approach would require the sales team to have common understanding and good relationships and working chemistry between each other.”

Key Account Manager I (29.4.2015) expressed one real life success story about influencing right people:

“Customer experience management solution was offered to one customer, even though the chief technology officer was not impressed with it. Anyhow the business unit anyhow wanted the solution so it was ultimately chosen by the customer. This confirms the fact that one needs to convince the right people at the right time, and who those people then are can vary case by case. “

He also emphasized that perhaps the most important and vital statement that is applicable to this whole research by stating that:

“Ultimately nothing overcomes the substance knowledge; if the customer knows his challenge, problem, product or service area better than we as a sales team do, then it does not matter which ever theoretical framework we try to utilize.”

Key Account Manager II (29.4.2015) continued that:

“Top challenge is to convince the right people at the right time. Usually addressing the chief technology officer is not enough; one must go to the chief marketing officer and sometimes even the chief information

officer. The challenge for part time marketers is mainly to be able to speak on the right level when engaging with C-level management.”

#### **4.7 Summary of the findings**

As a conclusion it can be seen that part time marketers in the case company are already heavily involved in the sales teams and are thus impacting the customer decision making entities.

However, it is also very visible that the number part time marketers who are known and trusted by the full time marketers and thus also by the sales teams, is quite limited. Taking that fact into account it can be said that there is definitely need for improvement and action to be able to bring more capable part time marketers into current sales teams. Additionally the fact is that not many of the employees in the case company realize their important role as part time marketers. It is thus evitable that the results of this research and the awareness of every individual's responsibility must be communicated more efficiently in the future.

Thus it can be seen that in the future it would be beneficial that the current active part time marketers and full time marketers could mentor future candidates on their path of becoming successful part time marketers. These candidates should be also mentored to be familiar with the activities, roles and responsibilities when engaged in future sales teams.

What comes to the theoretical frameworks used to impact customer decision making it is also very visible that some of the theories are very well known and utilized a lot, whereas as others, such as buying facilitation are almost unknown. Thus, it is evident that there is room for further improvement in the field of learning and practicing these theoretical frameworks. Additionally a majority of the respondents noticed phases and situations where part time marketers could be involved more during customer purchase process.

As a final conclusion it has been very clear throughout the whole research that the current part time marketers and full time marketers are already working well

together and they have common understanding of the aspects while working as sales team.

## **5 CONCLUSION**

In this chapter the reliability and validity aspects of this research are discussed. In the second part the final conclusions, findings and final statements regarding the whole research process are expressed.

### **5.1 Reliability and validity of this research**

The reliability and validity of this study were secured by using precise techniques and methods while securing the input data gathering. The data was collected from multiple sources and the researcher had a full access to the internal material of the case company. The researcher has worked ten years for the case company and the last five years in a solution architect position and thus relatively close to the sales teams. This background ensured a deep knowledge of the internal dynamics in the organization and it has also influenced the interpretation of the case study data.

### **5.2 Discussion**

The main objective of this research was to find out how technical experts and salespersons could together influence decision making in the customer's purchase process and provide a positive customer experience. The secondary objective was to evaluate the awareness of the frameworks which are commonly used to impact decision making during the customer's purchase process.

Based on the results of this research one can say that all the objectives were achieved. As stated earlier, it has been very clear throughout the whole research process that current part time marketer and full time marketers are already working well together. They seem to have clear and common understanding what comes to aspects, responsibilities and possibilities while working as sales team.

In future it could be beneficial to broaden the geographical area of interviewees to cover the sales teams from all Nordic countries and from central Europe. With

such approach the survey would gain more diversity in terms of different sales strategies and cultures from different regional areas.

The usage of quantitative and qualitative research methods in terms of questionnaire and theme interview proved to be a right decision when looking at the results achieved through this research. Optionally this kind of research could have been carried out as a survey type of research only but it would have missed many valuable insights which now were gathered during theme interviews.

As a final conclusion one can say that a proper and efficient usage of the methods and frameworks presented in this research combined with deep substance knowledge will make a big difference when influencing the customer decision making entities and provide a positive customer experience.

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#### Interviews:

27.3.2015, Jorvas	Experienced Solution Architect
7.4.2015, Jorvas	Experienced Solution Architect
10.4.2015, Jorvas	Senior Services Engineer
13.4.2015, Jorvas	Senior Solution Architect
29.4.2015, Jorvas	Key Account Manager
29.4.2015, Jorvas	Key Account Manager

## APPENDIXES

### APPENDIX 1. Introduction Package <Power Point Presentation>



Master's Thesis

## AGENDA

- › Preface
  - Introduction
  - Objective
  - Research questions
- › Theoretical Framework
  - Purchase process
  - Frameworks to influence purchase process
- › Research
  - Theme Interview
  - Survey

## PREFACE - INTRODUCTION



- › The last couple of years have been very challenging for majority of the companies all over the globe.
- › The downturn has also hit the branch of telecommunications
- › This research seeks ways to help our organization to grow in sales and prepare all the personnel be active to take initiatives in sales consulting activities and customer interaction.

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## TERMINOLOGY



- › Sales persons like Account Managers and/or Key Account Managers which in this study are called as Full-Time Marketers (FTM) whereas their primary task is to generate revenue to hiring company and influence positively customer relations.
- › Technical persons like Solution Managers, Solution Architects, Services Engineers which in this study are called as Part-Time Marketers (PTM), whose primary role in sales team is to contribute via their technical expertise

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## PREFACE - OBJECTIVE



- › Main objective of this research is to find out, how PTMs and FTMs together could influence the most into customers purchase process
- › Secondly this research evaluates awareness of sales and other methods used to influence decision makers throughout the purchase process are known and used in case company

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## PREFACE – RESEARCH QUESTIONS



- › How technical experts are currently utilized in sales team?
- › How could technical experts be better utilized in sales teams?
- › In what extent the frameworks and methods used to influence purchase process are known and utilized among PTMs and FTMs in case company?

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## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK



- › Purchase process
- › Frameworks to influence purchase process



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## PURCHASE PROCESS



- › **Changes Over Time** - Change usually acts as trigger and motivator which activates buying decision for something new
- › **Recognition of Needs** - When the dissatisfaction for existing environment is high enough, the company decides if there is need for investment to solve the issue
- › **Evaluation of Options** - Potential suppliers and service providers are evaluated using company specific evaluation criteria (all relevant suppliers evaluated here)

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## PURCHASE PROCESS CONT'D



- › **Resolution of Concerns** – Short List phase where usually appear many rounds of negotiations and bargain activities
- › **Decision** – Procurement department leaves its suggestion to Decision Making Unit (DMU) which makes the final decision. DMU usually consists of group of to C-level management and possibly external consultants.
- › **Implementation** - execution phase of the delivery project.

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## FRAMEWORKS TO INFLUENCE PURCHASE PROCESS



- › Relationship Marketing
- › Consultative Selling
- › SPIN Selling
- › Buying Facilitation
- › Team Selling

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## RELATIONSHIP MARKETING



- › Usually seen as long-term interactive and profitable relationship between client and provider
- › Marketing activities are seen as part of larger context both inside and outside the company which should enable long and short-term benefits to all parties.
- › defined as principle where objectives of all involved parties are met and relationships established, enhanced and ultimately maintained at a profit.

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## CONSULTATIVE SELLING



- › FTM acting as a consultant towards his prospect and thus laid the foundation for Consultative Selling technique.
- › FTM mainly concentrates to asking questions and according to received information tries to select best alternative in terms of solution or product to fulfill prospects needs
- › Demands existing relationship and trust between the parties.
- › Provides natural viewpoint for PTMs to identify opportunities in add-on sales principle

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## SPIN SELLING



- › Framework utilizes a number of questions which should be asked when moving through the purchase process in logical manner ending to successful outcome
- › In this research, SPIN selling approach is handled as one of the methods under consultative sales framework and mainly assumed to be utilized by FTMs.

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## BUYING FACILITATION



- › Takes Consultative Sales and SPIN methods further
- › Idea is to gather data, execute needs analysis and advice buyer to see possible internal issues they should solve before starting any tender process for new product or service
- › PTMs / FTMs role is to support client to find if there is anything internally which could be used to solve problem, what are the additional components needed, how to support decision makers in selecting best possible solution which could be integrated to existing system
- › Useful also when trying to avoid open RFQ by patching the existing solution

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## TEAM SELLING



- › In usual ICT related sales call there is FTM e.g. salesman or account manager handling the sales process and PTM e.g. technical expert handling the product and service related items.
- › This kind of team selling setup is part of RM framework in total and whenever this kind of roster works seamlessly together it makes possible to achieve good results and successful sales

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## RESEARCH – THEME INTERVIEW



- › Theme: Background of interviewee
- › Theme: How are PTMs currently utilized in sales team?
- › Theme: How could PTMs be better utilized in sales team

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## RESEARCH - SURVEY



- › How many frameworks or methods you knew before?
- › How many of those known ones you have utilized in past?
- › From your experience, which method has had most affect influencing decision making in purchase process? (Open question)
- › What has been most challenging when using those frameworks or methods? (Open question)

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# ERICSSON

### APPENDIX 2. Interview questions

1. Theme: How are part time marketers currently utilized in sales event?
2. Theme: How could part time marketers be better utilized in sales team

## APPENDIX 3. Survey Questionnaire

1. Question: How many frameworks or methods you knew before?
2. Question: How many of those known ones you have utilized in past?
3. Question: From your experience, which method has had most affect influencing decision making in purchase process? (Open question)
4. Question: What has been most challenging when using those frameworks or methods? (Open question)