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Business manoeuvring: a model of B2B selling processes

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims at developing a model that captures the reality of complex contemporary B2B selling processes.

Design/methodology/approach – The grounded theory methodology was deployed in this study. In-depth interviews and interactive lectures were used for data collection.

Findings – This study indicates that contemporary B2B selling processes are complex and dynamic endeavours in which various (sometimes conflicting) interests are ultimately managed by the involved actors through a dynamic process best described as “business manoeuvring”.

Research limitations/implications – Possible avenues of future enquiry include investigation of other industrial sectors in which the proposed model’s description of selling processes is valid and assessment of the characteristics of companies (in terms of size and profitability).

Practical implications – The model proposed in this study can be utilised by practitioners to impose a useful conceptual structure on otherwise fluid and intangible processes – thus making them easier to analyse and thereby facilitating strategic corporate decision-making.

Originality/value – Based on the real life experiences of the involved actors, this model describes that complex contemporary B2B selling processes are dynamic processes and not linear or sequential ones.

Keywords B2B selling, Selling process, Decision making, Sales management, Business process

Paper type Research paper

The process of selling is an inherently complex phenomenon because it is ultimately dependent on solving problems in the context of personal human interactions (Leigh and McGraw, 1989; Weitz *et al.*, 1986). As Weitz *et al.* (1986), p. 178) observed: “Salespeople, like other experts in problem solving situations, operate in an extremely complex domain”. This already complex endeavour has become even more complicated as a result of several developments in business-to-business (B2B) markets in recent decades:

- First, in a contemporary B2B selling negotiation, both sides of the deal (buying and selling) typically involve multiple actors (Weitz and Bradford, 1999; Wortruba, 1991).
- Second, because the offerings of many manufacturing firms now include service elements, which are often variable and difficult to specify, an extra dimension of complexity has been added to traditional B2B selling (Windal, 2007; Neu and Brown, 2005; Wise and Baumgartner, 1999).
- Third, an increasing emphasis on the establishment of collaborative relationships between sellers and buyers (in which final solutions are developed gradually) has complicated the traditional transaction-based selling process (which typically involved brief interactions and “ready-made” solutions) (Hunter and Perreault, 2007; DelVecchio *et al.* 2004; Keillor *et al.*, 2000; Weitz and Bradford, 1999; Crosby *et al.*, 1990).



It is evident that there is growing scholarly concern regarding the extent to which marketing theory is actually capable of grasping the increasing complexity of today's business processes. For example, Gummesson (2005, p. 317) has dramatically contended that "... marketing theory must reinvent itself and be refined, redefined, generated, and regenerated – or it will inevitably degenerate". Indeed, Gummesson (2005, p. 317) has called for a paradigm shift in marketing theory, rather than "... incremental change based on the bulk of previous literature". According to the same author (Gummesson, 2005, p. 318): "...in times of major changes new concepts – reconceptualization – are urgently needed".

In a similar vein, Veludo *et al.* (2001, p. 1) noted that "... most empirical studies fail to catch the complexity of business interactions" and Lowe (2001, p. 1) complained that the majority of marketing research fails to address contemporary reality because it "... involves reducing complexity to atomised measurable, foundational certainties".

If these authors are correct in their assertions that the existing body of literature is insufficient for understanding the complex selling processes that now prevail in industrial markets, it is apparent that a more inductive exploratory approach is needed in marketing research. Such an approach would recognise the central importance of understanding the experiences and actions of the actors involved in order to understand what is going on in the empirical field. This, in turn, will require new concepts and terminology to describe the new reality under investigation.

The present study addresses these requests by presenting the first grounded theory of complex selling processes on B2B markets. The aim of any grounded theory study is to find the "basic social process that explains how people in the substantive area are continually resolving their main concern" (Glaser, 1998, p. 117). Such core process or general pattern "is what socially organizes the behaviour in the substantive area, hence the emerging theory" (Glaser, 1998, p. 117) and function as a centrepiece in the broader picture provided by a grounded theory. A broader picture like this is useful to practitioners since it can be used as a conceptual tool in their analysis of complex selling processes.

Thus, the aim of this study is to develop a conceptual framework that enhances the understanding and analysis (and thus the decision-making) of complex, contemporary selling processes

The remainder of this paper is organised as follows. The next section presents a brief review of the relevant literature on paradigms of selling. The methodology of the present study is then explained. The paper then presents the results of the study and the proposed model of contemporary B2B selling processes that emerged from the study. The paper concludes with a summary of the major conclusions and implications of the study.

Paradigms of selling

Most existing models of selling is based on the linear model of "seven steps of selling". These "seven steps", which were first articulated in the 1920s (Moncrief and Marshall, 2005), traditionally consist of the following sequential stages:

- (1) prospecting;
- (2) pre-approach;
- (3) approach;

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- (4) presentation;
- (5) overcoming objections;
- (6) close; and
- (7) follow-up.

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There has been several attempts to update this old model, for example, Shapiro and Posner (1976) modified this model when they suggested that a typical sales process consisted of the following sequential steps:

- (1) opening the sales process;
- (2) qualifying the prospects;
- (3) developing the presentation;
- (4) organising the justification;
- (5) making the presentation;
- (6) coordinating resources and personnel;
- (7) closing the sale; and
- (8) nurturing the account relationship.

In suggesting this modification, it is significant that the ultimate focus of Shapiro and Posner (1976) was on “nurturing” the relationship. It is noteworthy that these authors recognised the complexity of sales processes by incorporating “coordinating” and “organising” in certain steps of this model.

Another effort to incorporate the notion of complexity in a model of selling was made by Plank and Dempsey (1980), who emphasised the importance of the seller managing the overlapping dimensions of “selling” and “environment” by carrying out a careful analysis of the organisational buying environment. Nonetheless, their model maintained the tradition of sequential models of the selling process in suggesting four steps in sequence:

- (1) setting the stage;
- (2) determining the buyer’s need;
- (3) presentation; and
- (4) exit.

More recently, efforts have been made to develop the sequential “seven steps of selling” into models that reflect the dynamic and recursive nature of the selling process in real life. For example, although Ingram *et al.* (2008) proposed a so-called “trust-based sales process”, which consisted of certain stages (“initiating customer relationships”, “developing customer relationships”, and “enhancing customer relationships”), their model emphasised that these stages are interrelated (not sequential) in creating customer value. Similarly, although Persson (1999) suggested an ostensibly sequential model of seven stages (“relationship maintenance”, “problem identification”, “technical proposal”, “offering”, “technical and commercial negotiation”, “instructions for production”, and “installation and service”) and two overall phases (“relationship maintenance and proposal”, and “offering and installation”), the process was actually

recursive (or circular) in nature – as evidenced by the fact that it could be interrupted at any stage and returned to the first stage.

The driving forces behind these efforts to modify the traditional “seven steps of selling” by including elements that reflect the complex and recursive nature of selling were identified by Moncrief and Marshall (2005, p. 16) as: “... technology, the expanding strategic role of selling within organisations, team-based approaches to selling, increased buyer knowledge and sophistication, and others.” Other authors (Ingram *et al.*, 2008; Shapiro and Posner, 1976) have also nominated technological advances and long-term relationships with customers as driving forces behind attempts to develop new perspectives on selling.

Methodology

Research setting

It is apparent from the review of the literature (above) that some attempts have been made to develop models of selling that depict the reality of B2B markets. However, it is the contention of the present study that these models have failed to reflect such contemporary developments as the complexity produced by the involvement of multiple actors and the increasing use of service concepts in sales offerings.

With a view to developing categories that reflect the activities of contemporary B2B salespersons, the present study adopts so-called “grounded theory” methodology (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978, 1998, 2001, 2007). Gummesson (2006, p. 170) states:

Within the strategies of grounded theory (Glaser, 2001) it means that we search for variables and concepts that absorb the core of a phenomenon – without disfiguring its nature. In management disciplines this is primarily the object for qualitative research

This methodology is especially suitable for the present study because:

- grounded theory is based on empirically derived concepts and categories;
- it produces concepts that reflect the experiences and interpretations of the involved actors; and
- the methodology places isolated empirical data in a broader context, thus facilitating the conceptualisation of multi-dimensional phenomena (such as complex selling processes).

Data collection

Data were collected from 21 interviews (see Appendix 1, Table AI and 25 interactive lectures (see Appendix 2, Table AII) with several practitioners from three companies:

- (1) a global telecommunications company (which acts as a vendor of telecommunications solutions, networks, radio systems, and services);
- (2) a Nordic-based information technology (IT) company (which specialises in IT-outsourcing and project businesses); and
- (3) a smaller industrial services company (which provides mechanical, automation, and electrical services to the industrial sector).

Data were primarily collected from the interviews, each of which lasted for approximately 1-2 hours. The interviews were conducted by the author and took place

at the respondent's organization. The use of leading questions was avoided during the interviews; rather, interviewees were asked to respond freely to general "open-ended" questions about the challenges and difficulties they experienced during these business processes. According to Glaser (1978), such an attitude of "openness" (Glaser, 1978, p. 44) is crucial for the development of the emerging theory. Finally, existing categories were allowed to guide the interviews to some extent. The interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed, resulting in 1,012 pages of transcribed data.

Complementary data were also collected as feedback from the 25 interactive lectures, which involved the present author presenting the proposed model to a participatory audience consisting of managers from a variety of companies (the original three companies, plus others). Data from the participants were utilised to confirm and/or modify the developing model in several iterations.

This form of data collection was thus different from that employed in the interviews. For the researcher, the format of an interactive lecture required the presentation of the theory as a coherent whole, which was obviously different from asking exploratory questions of individual respondents. For the participants, the format of an interactive lecture presented them with a relatively "fully formed" theory, which was obviously different from being asked individualised exploratory questions. The data collected from these two distinct methods of collection (responses to questions in an interview/feedback in an interactive lecture) were thus quite different in both form and content. Taken together, the two forms of data collection were complementary and synergistic in developing the model.

Analytical procedures

In accordance with the recommendations of Glaser (1978), data were analysed through the processes of:

- coding;
- memo-writing;
- sorting; and
- theory writing.

During the process of open coding, a strategy of constant comparison was applied to:

- incident to incident;
- concept to incident; and
- concept to concept.

By this process, categories were formulated and properties were added. When a core category was distinguished, selective coding was utilised to delimit the coding process to include only those variables that were related to the core variable or core process. In practical terms, the core process was reformulated several times before a "final" version was achieved.

The sorting and writing process was used concurrently with the coding processes to develop ideas on categories and their interrelatedness. On several occasions memos were written with regard to ideas for an outline that incorporated a particular

formulation of the core category and the way in which it was related to the other categories.

When it was apparent that a fairly substantive model had emerged, this was committed to writing. However, the process of writing invariably led to new insights and further refinement of the categories and the outline. This process of continuous revision of the proposed model continued through the whole research process until the final model (as outlined below) emerged.

Results: a proposed model of complex B2B selling processes

The model that emerged from the data analysis after numerous iterations consisted of a general pattern, or basic social process (Glaser, 1978, 1998, 2001, 2007), named “business manoeuvring”. In other words, this core category describes how the actors resolve their main concern – which is to make business deals through the social process of “business manoeuvring”.

This general pattern is dubbed “manoeuvring” since it describes a process by which complementary processes are judiciously managed and balanced a little differently each time during the process of doing business. In other words, these other activities are “manoeuvred” (i.e. managed with dexterity and skill) in a pattern which is unique each time since they have to be in place “in the right dose at the right time”.

The activities being manoeuvred are represented by four interrelated categories that describe various selling activities:

- (1) business standardisation;
- (2) business fraternisation;
- (3) personalisation; and
- (4) probationary business rationalisation.

“Business standardization” describes activities related to formality and standardization while “business fraternization” denotes collaboration at the organizational level (internally or externally). “Personalization” is about attitudes and the disposition of people while “probationary business rationalization” is about concerns over costs and risks.

The proposed model’s four categories and its core category are illustrated in Figure 1. Before discussing these four categories in greater depth, it might be appropriate to describe the main message of this model, i.e. “business manoeuvring”.

An example of business manoeuvring

In complex selling processes, there are elements of standardization. For example, during many major deals, the request formulated by the buying party is highly standardized and formal, (this being an example of activities denoted by the category “business standardization” in the proposed model). On the other hand, the selling party often experiences such standardized purchasing processes as a hindrance to the success of the project since these complex problems often require dialogue or mutual understanding of the underlying issues. In other words, the selling party often experiences the need for a more collaborative relationship in which the final solution can be developed incrementally (a collaborative relationship like this at the organizational level is described in the model using the category of “business

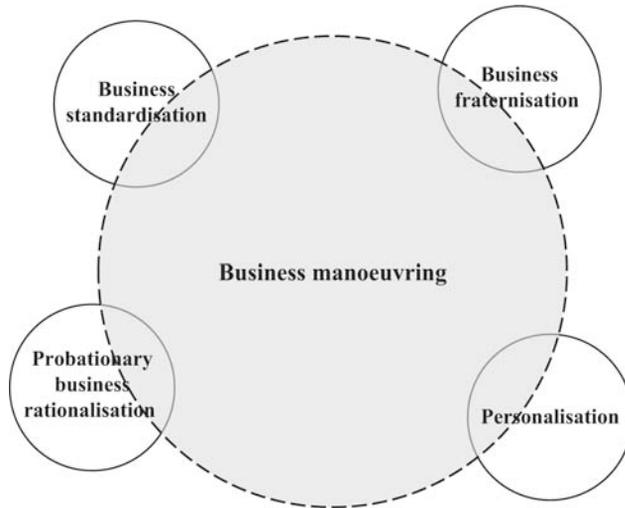


Figure 1.
Proposed model of B2B
selling processes

fraternization”). Thus, the selling party has to “manoeuvre” these two complementary tendencies so that the result is neither too much standardization (which will hinder the success of the project since flexibility and dialogue will be lost) nor too little standardization (the selling party also relies on standardized documents and procedures in order to obtain a successful outcome).

However, the process of manoeuvring does not end here. People and their attitudes play an important role in complex business processes (in the model, these dimensions are described using the category of “personalization”). For example, the expectations of different people have to be addressed continuously at different organizational levels; sometimes, personal relationships can be a means of establishing collaborative relationships at the organisational level (business fraternization) in order to create mutual understanding in important issues.

But no one will benefit if personal relationships are allowed to take over the more businesslike collaborative relationships (business fraternization), thus prioritizing personal agendas over the businesslike considerations of both organizations. So, not only do the selling parties have to balance (and manoeuvre) between the elements of standardization and collaboration (represented by the categories of “business standardization” and “business fraternization”), there is also a need to ensure that certain people are addressed correctly and that personal relationships (described using the category of “personalization”) are used in a businesslike sense but not allowed to take over.

Finally, let us assume that the buying party is to a great extent focusing on price issues (denoted using the category of “probationary business rationalization”). Perhaps the selling party feels that merely focusing on what a spreadsheet contains will not create the necessary mutual understanding that is crucial for a long-term successful business project. Still, considerations regarding costs and risks are important activities, on both the selling and buying sides of the deal. In other words, such

considerations play an important role in these processes, but there are other dimensions to consider as well.

Furthermore, each of these activities represented by the four categories in the proposed model is also present internally within the selling organization. For example, the selling party has standardized its solutions and has thus enhanced its internal effectiveness (“business standardization”). However, these standardization efforts cannot be overemphasized, leading to inflexibility and an inability to adapt solutions to customer-specific requirements. Therefore, there is a need for closeness and collaboration (“business fraternization”) internally between divisions in order to design and adapt a solution that matches a particular customer’s needs. During that process, personal relationships (“personalization”) are often used to establish such collaborative relationships (“business fraternization”) between different divisions. Similarly, economic concerns (probationary business rationalization) regarding risks and costs are present since risks and costs in each project are being calculated continuously. Still, there are aspects of a business project that are impossible to bring into the columns of a spreadsheet, e.g. a mutual learning process that will be crucial for future product development or other strategic considerations.

Thus, each of these tendencies (represented by the four categories in the proposed model in Figure 1) represents important activities that are present, both externally and internally, in the selling organization during a complex selling process. However, success does not lie in either of them individually, but in the judicious management of these complementary (and often seemingly contrasting) activities. In other words, they have to be in place in the right dose at the right time.

To exemplify, if the focus is purely on business standardization, this will lead to an overly formalized procedure from which flexibility and adaptations are missing. If we simply focus on collaboration and mutual understanding, i.e. “business fraternization”, we will miss out on the effectiveness and support deriving from formalized procedures such as standardized documents and procedures. Similarly, focusing purely on personalization will lead to understanding between individuals, but those issues will not be rooted in the organizations and businesslike considerations will be missing. Finally, if we focus solely on probationary business rationalization, and on measuring costs and risks, we will miss out on more intangible aspects, e.g. the long-term outcomes of relationships and collaboration.

The core category of business manoeuvring describes the complex interplay of these activities as the selling process is managed in a somewhat different way each time.

This dynamic and skilful act of manoeuvring these seemingly opposing tendencies constitutes the basic social process that is present when the selling actors resolve their main concern (which is to do business).

Finding and describing this basic social process, or general pattern by means of which these mutually-dependent principles are manoeuvred, explains what actually happens in the field and is the contribution made by this study. This is a new conceptual framework that can assist managers in dealing with the myriad of details and seemingly unrelated events constituting these processes since it puts events in a broader context which transcends their previous knowledge of the detail level. In doing so, it can assist them in their own learning processes, help them to orient themselves,

and contribute towards the decision-making process through the broader view it provides of a complex event such as a contemporary selling process.

This model can be viewed as the response to the requests formulated by Gummesson (2005, p. 318) regarding “reconceptualization” and “new concepts”, as well as Gummesson’s (2006, p. 170) requests for “concepts that absorb the core of a phenomenon”. This model is fundamentally different from the other model of selling in the extant literature since the message is one of dynamism and it sustains the idea that a complex selling process is not a linear or sequential one.

Having described the general pattern and core category of “business manoeuvring”, as well as some examples of the different activities that are being manoeuvred, it is appropriate to describe in more detail what constitutes the different categories.

Business standardisation

The data suggested that the category of “business standardisation” (see Figure 1) consisted of three subcategories:

- (1) purchasing standardisation;
- (2) selling standardisation; and
- (3) standardisation of the offering.

The first of these, “purchasing standardisation”, referred to data regarding the standardised procedures and documents that are typically adopted by buyers in the procurement process. Such standardised procedures can be a hindrance to the development of a close collaborative relationship with the seller because they impose a rather formal tone on the interaction as a whole. According to the global sales manager of the telecommunicating company, a collaborative relationship is essential for the development of customer-specific service-based solutions:

You need to understand each other ... to understand what can be done and what’s not possible.

The second subcategory of standardisation, “selling standardisation”, referred to the tendency of selling firms to standardise their processes. This subcategory included:

- the establishment of central business units in a firm for price negotiations;
- the establishment of formal qualification forums to determine the deals that are to be pursued; and
- the standardisation of knowledge regarding the management of complex selling processes (with the aim of making this knowledge less dependent on certain individuals).

The managing director of the marketing unit in the telecommunications firm made the following observation about standardised business processes:

We need centralised competence ... because there is too much local “smartness” ... too much local innovation on issues that have a generic answer.

The third subcategory of business standardisation, “standardisation of the offering”, referred to the tendency of firms to standardise service solutions to facilitate internal development processes and effective presentation of the offering to customers.

Business fraternisation

The second category in the proposed model (see Figure 1), “business fraternisation”, describes collaboration at the organisational level and the way in which two parties develop a close relationship based on mutual understanding and respect – which enables them to work towards a common goal. Such business fraternisation enables solutions to emerge:

- internally (when different units are working together within a large organisation to deliver what has been decided on); and
- externally (when the buying and the selling firm form a collaborative relationship to achieve a certain objective).

The data suggested that the category of business fraternisation consisted of four subcategories:

- (1) distance reduction;
- (2) operational trust;
- (3) fraternisation competence; (iv)
- (4) learning process.

The first of these, “distance reduction”, referred to the desirability of physical closeness in establishing close collaborative relationships (whether internal or external). For example, a project manager in the telecommunications company contended that the effective sale of service-based solutions requires the project unit (which is responsible for building the infrastructure) to be close to both headquarters (which is responsible for standardising service offerings) and the market unit (which is responsible for selling the offerings to the customers). This project manager commented:

It is difficult for X who is working at the market unit [at headquarters] to get paid afterwards for things we already have done when working in the project . . . Quite often, we have already started the activity when we recognise that this is probably a service . . . And then X has to begin to sell and negotiate . . . but she does not have any scope to negotiate because we have already started.

The second subcategory, “operational trust”, referred to the customer’s confidence in the selling firm’s ability to deliver the solutions that it promises and to manage needs that might arise in future.

The third subcategory of “business fraternisation”, fraternisation competence, refers to the importance (for the selling company) of having knowledge of the market challenges facing the buying firm. The fourth subcategory of “business fraternisation”, learning process, referred to opportunities presented to both organizations to learn from each other with regards to the business process. For the buying firm, the relationship presents an opportunity to learn how to purchase appropriate solutions effectively in the future, whereas for the selling firm, the relationship provides an opportunity for:

- gaining knowledge of how the purchase process works in the buying firm;
- learning from past deals to develop future selling operations; and
- learning about new applications and how new services might be developed.

Personalisation

The third category in the proposed model (see Figure 1) was “personalisation”. This category referred to activities related to the attitudes and dispositions of people. The data suggested that this category consisted of six subcategories:

- (1) informal business;
- (2) pedagogic challenge;
- (3) service awareness;
- (4) changing expectations;
- (5) behavioural trust; and
- (6) personal selling.

The subcategory of “informal business” referred to the role that personal relationships can play in the selling process. A sales manager at the IT company described these relationships, which often result from previous projects, as being crucial to the chances of winning certain deals:

... one of the most important factors in ensuring that we come out of the struggle victorious
... is to have the right relationships with the people making the decisions.

The second subcategory of the category of “personalisation”, pedagogic challenge, referred to the challenges faced by a selling company in changing the perspectives and attitudes of people (both internally and externally) to its offered solutions. The sales manager of the telecommunications firm gave the example of the need to change the internal perspectives of employees who harbour a long ingrained tradition of selling pre-packaged technology solutions, rather than combinations of technology and services:

We have essentially been just “box sellers” ... I put the box here ... now I assemble it ... now it works ... call me if there are any problems.

The third subcategory of “personalisation”, service awareness is of importance as it means an awareness of the often intangible value associated with the purchase of a service function. This subcategory is closely related to the previous subcategory (“pedagogic challenge”). Because the solutions being offered are often rather intangible, it is important that the selling firm influences the way in which customers perceive the value that is inherent in the service offering. This requires the inculcation of “service awareness” – that is, an awareness of the value that comes from buying a function rather than a product.

The fourth subcategory of “personalisation”, changing expectations, can directly impact the ability to satisfy the customer as it refers to the expectancy levels of the buyer as being realistic or not. An example is when a customer that is getting a replacement of a system which constitutes or impacts their core business having unrealistic yet firm expectations regarding immediate significant improvement of their business activities in general.

The fifth subcategory describes trust on a personal level, behavioural trust, is referring to the behaviour of the selling firm’s representatives. Because service solutions are often intangible and difficult to grasp, it is important that the selling representatives always act in a way that engenders confidence.

The sixth (and final) subcategory of the category of “personalisation” was *personal selling*. This subcategory reflects the importance of the individual sales person to have skills in personal selling and an ability to listen attentively.

A model of B2B selling processes

Probationary business rationalisation

The fourth category derived from the data was “probationary business rationalisation” (see Figure 1). This category included the following subcategories:

- cost reduction (both for the buying firm and the selling firm); and
- risk reduction (both financial and operational).

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Conclusions and implications

Major conclusions

This study indicates that contemporary B2B selling processes are complex and dynamic endeavours in which various (sometimes conflicting) interests are ultimately managed by the involved actors through a process best described as “business manoeuvring”.

The model that is proposed as a result of this study therefore describes the B2B selling process in four categories:

- (1) business standardisation;
- (2) business fraternisation;
- (3) personalisation; and
- (4) probationary business rationalisation.

These four categories are held together by the core category of “business manoeuvring”, which describes the way in which these mutually dependent and complementary dimensions are managed in real situations.

The study finds that previous “linear” models of the selling process, most of which are based on the so-called “seven steps of selling”, are deficient in failing to capture the dynamic nature of contemporary B2B sales processes; in particular, linear models fail to recognise that, in contemporary selling processes, several dimensions coexist simultaneously. In contrast, the model proposed in this study recognises the concurrent dimensions of:

- formality and organisational issues (captured in the category of “business standardisation”);
- collaboration at the organisational level (represented by the category of “business fraternisation”);
- relationships at the personal level (captured in the category of “personalisation”); and
- concern about costs and risks (represented by the category of “probationary business rationalisation”).

Moreover, the judicious management of these four dimensions (captured in the core category of “business manoeuvring”) is what actually characterises the “real-life” management of contemporary B2B selling processes.

Theoretical contributions

In terms of theoretical contributions, this study has achieved its primary purpose of developing empirically based, actor-related concepts to provide a better theoretical understanding of complex selling processes in B2B markets. Moreover, the study has organised these categories into a conceptual model that describes how the involved actors resolve their main concern (of doing effective business) through the dynamic interaction of these concepts.

In addition, the study has recognised the emerging trend whereby a substantial service element is increasingly being introduced into previously goods-based exchange processes. This is a topic of immediate interest as an increasing number of contemporary industrial companies are turning to services and service concepts to gain competitive advantages.

Practical contributions

In terms of practical contributions, the empirically derived model proposed in this study can be utilised by practitioners to impose a useful conceptual structure on otherwise fluid and intangible processes – thus making them easier to analyse and discuss. This practical utility can range from issues of major import (such as strategic corporate decision-making) to issues of internal education and training (such as initiating a more reflective learning process regarding these matters in general).

Regarding corporate decision-making, the conceptual structure presented in this study can thus be used to analyse business processes. This structure can be used before, during and after a business project as it represents a common language of otherwise fluid and intangible processes. To exemplify, before a certain business project, this model can be used as a map to check if all these different components have been considered properly. During a business project, this structure can be assisting managers in their analysis of the next step to undertake. Moreover, after completion of a particular business project, practitioners can utilise this model to undertake a comprehensive and coherent review of what actually happened. Such discussion can provide valuable insights into the firm's strengths and weaknesses in terms of choosing and managing future business projects.

Limitations and implications for further research

As with all theoretical models, the model advanced in the present study has certain acknowledged limitations. First, it is derived from a limited number of interviews. Second, it is acknowledged that the proposed model is relatively deficient in terms of detailed descriptions of certain aspects of the categories within it.

It is apparent that further research is needed to determine the conditions under which the model described here is valid. Possible avenues of future enquiry include:

- investigation of other industrial sectors in which the proposed model's description of selling processes is valid;
- assessment of the characteristics of companies (in terms of size and profitability) in which the model is valid; and
- investigation of the significance of cultural and geographical factors in determining the validity of the model.

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Appendix 1. Interviews

Data were collected from interviews that were recorded and transcribed and then analysed.

A model of B2B selling processes

Interview	Date	Respondents	Company	Organisational context
No. 1	2005-02-28	Business director	Telecommunications company	Managing and coordinating global hosting businesses (headquarters)
No. 2	2005-02-28	Sales manager	Telecommunications company	Responsible for selling activities in global hosting deals (headquarters)
No. 3	2005-04-28	Tactical marketing manager	Telecommunications company	Marketing strategies, infrastructure solutions (headquarters)
No. 4	2005-05-11	Sales director	Telecommunications company	Sales and marketing function (accounts)
No. 5	2005-05-13	Project manager	Telecommunications company	Project manager (business unit network) responsible for delivery of network solutions (Japan/Sweden)
No. 6	2005-05-17	Market unit manager	Telecommunications company	Responsible for marketing and selling activities at market unit (accounts)
No. 7	2005-05-27	Sales manager	IT company	Sales manager for outsourcing projects
No. 8	2005-06-14	Project manager	Telecommunications company	Project manager (business unit network) responsible for delivery of network solutions (Sweden)
No. 9	2005-06-22	Key account manager	Telecommunications company	Key account manager (network solutions)
No. 10	2005-06-22	Managing director	Telecommunications company	Managing director (accounts)
No. 11	2005-08-25	Managing director	Industrial services company	Founder and director of industrial services company
No. 12	2005-09-22	Manager of mechanics division	Industrial service company	Responsible for delivery of mechanical services to industrial customers
No. 13	2005-09-26	Sales manager	Industrial services company	Responsible for overall sales and marketing activities
No. 14	2005-09-29	Key account manager	Telecommunications company	Key account manager (hosting solutions)
No. 15	2005-11-10	Marketing director	IT company	Marketing director and member of management team
No. 16	2005-11-24	Key account manager	IT company	Sales and business manager (outsourcing deals)
No. 17	2005-11-24	Project manager	IT company	Project manager (outsourcing deals)
No. 18	2005-11-28	Global sales manager	Telecommunications company	Global sales and marketing activities (hosting deals)
No. 19	2005-12-13	Senior business manager	IT company	Business manager with project responsibility – (outsourcing deals)
No. 20	2005-12-16	Business manager	IT company	Business manager (outsourcing deals)
No. 21	2005-12-23	Managing director	IT company	Managing director of Swedish division

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Table A1.
The interviews conducted during the study

Appendix 2. Interactive lectures

During these lectures, the present author presented the substantive model to a participatory audience consisting of managers from a variety of companies (the original three companies, plus others).

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Interactive lecture	Date	Company	Participants
No. 1	2006-03-09	IT company	Key account manager (outsourcing) (one person)
No. 2	2006-05-04	Industrial services company	Sales manager (one person)
No. 3	2006-06-21	Telecommunications company	Managers from global services division (two persons)
No. 4	2007-01-30	IFL/Marketing executive program	Managers from: Perimed AB, Vin och Sprit AB, Ericsson Microvave System, Folksam, Akzo Nobel, Wacker-Kemi AB, Celanese Emulsions Norden AB, Öhrlings Pricewaterhouse Coopers, FöreningsSparbanken, PokerStars, SG Equipment Finance, Casco Products AB, Fastighetsaktiebolaget Norrporten, Preem Gas AB, ELFA AB, Combitech, Fortum, Arbetslivsresurs Ar AB (22 persons)
No. 5	2007-03-16	Sandvik	Managers from the Coromant division (eight persons)
No. 6	2007-04-10	IT company	Sales director, business managers, project managers (ten persons)
No. 7	2007-05-02	Stockholm School of Economics/MTC (Marknadstekniskt Centrum)	Managers from: Volvo Bus Corporation, BAE Systems, Mazarin Ltd, WM Data Infra Solutions, Alomora AB, Volvo Truck Corporation, Uddeholm Tooling, AGA, Astra, Perstorp, Iggesund, Sandvik, Papyrus, Trelleborg AB, AlfaLaval, Stora Enso, Green Cargo AB, Uddeholm, ABB, FMV (40 persons)
No. 8	2007-05-14	IT company	Managing director and marketing director (two persons)
No. 9	2007-05-31	Haldex	Vice-president (one person)
No. 10	2007-06-19	IT company/Breakfast meeting	Business consultants, IT manager (seven persons)
No. 11	2007-06-26	Sectra	Vice-president (one person)
No. 12	2007-08-08	BAE Systems	Managers responsible for marketing, sales and business development (six persons)
No. 13	2007-08-21	Telecommunications company	Managers from management team at global services division (18 persons)
No. 14	2007-08-30	Alfa Laval Tumba AB	General manager (materials and chemistry centre) (one person)
No. 15	2007-09-07	Papyrus	Marketing director and business unit manager (two persons)

Table AII.
The lectures

(continued)

Interactive lecture	Date	Company	Participants
No. 16	2007-10-25	IFL/Hanken (sales leadership master class)	Managers from AGA, Cargotech, Kemira Grow How, Kone, Outotec, Saab Baracuda, Wärtsila, (19 persons)
No. 17	2007-10-31	Accent Equity	Managing director and partner (one person)
No. 18	2007-12-21	PMP Marknadskonsult AB	Managing director and key account manager (two persons)
No. 19	2008-01-16	InterVenture AB	Investment manager (one person)
No. 20	2008-02-28	Mercuri International	Founder, managing director (Sweden), managing director (Norway) (three persons)
No. 21	2008-03-27	MTC	Managers from Volvo Trucks, AGA, Posten, BAE Systems, CMG Logica, MTC (nine persons)
No. 22	2008-05-14	MTC	Managers from Volvo Trucks, AGA, Posten, BAE Systems, CMG Logica, MTC (nine persons)
No.23	2008-09-18	MTC	Managers from Volvo Trucks, AGA, Posten, BAE Systems, MTC (eight persons)
No. 24	2008-11-20	MTC	Managers from Volvo Trucks, AGA, Posten, BAE Systems, (eight persons)
No.25	2009-02-13	Volvo Trucks	Managers from Volvo Trucks (five persons)

Table AII.

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