Sales process optimization, in Business-to-Business (B2B) organizations with solution selling methodology

A Dissertation
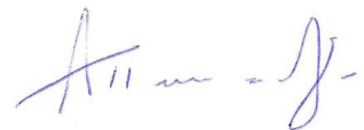Presented to
Faculty of Business and Media

by
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In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Bachelor of Business Administration

Selinus University of Science and literature
[Sep 2019]

I do hereby attest that I am the sole author of this thesis and that its contents are only the result of the readings and research I have done.

Apostolos Parsalis
Sep 2019

To Christos

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to especially thank my wife, my mother and all employers, managers and colleagues who believed in me and without whose guidance, support and inspiration I would not be able to do this project.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

ABSTRACT

This thesis has been created to give to any commercial or manufacturing organization, which is involved with Business to Business (B2B) selling model, and is mostly solution selling oriented, a guide of how it can set its revenue at a maximum level, by optimizing the sales process. Sales departments are the heart of any company. Regardless of their size or type of production, all companies have one thing in common: the existence of a sales department. . Even a "one-man show" company, has its own sales department. If a company has only one employee, one of his roles will be sales.

In the Business-to-Business (B2B) world, especially for the companies that sell complete solutions to their customers, all company's departments support what sales bring to the organization. This is what is called sales income. If any organization wants to maximize revenue and profit of this income, there are two main ways: a/ bringing more sales b/ reducing costs from any kind of procedure inside the company. This paper will focus on how an organization can have better results in numbers and quality, by optimizing the sales process, which will fulfill both above targets.

This paper will not focus on the day-to-day business of the sales people and the steps that they need to follow to achieve their objectives. The main target is to define the best sales process stages that will help the company to meet four goals:

a/ be a reliable partner for its customers

b/ handle all tasks in a professional way

c/ make sure all employees share the same knowledge

d/ ensure clear responsibilities among all employees

CHAPTER 1.   INTRODUCTION

The author of this thesis has been working for more than 20 years in different sales positions in various companies of different sizes. The majority of these companies follow the Business to Business (B2B) model and sell solutions, rather than just carry out "box moving" to their customers. Some of these companies have organized and well-structured sales departments, while others have no clear structures and processes, even if their sales department is sufficiently staffed. A common excuse of the management as well as the employees of these companies regarding the lack of sales processes, is that the need for a sales structured department with concrete and strict processes is suitable only for big organizations with many people and departments and not for any other middle size level company. They prefer to focus more on flexibility and not on processes that they believe would be a waste of time and money for them. Throughout a 20-year observation, the author has concluded that this is not a fact, and that a solid and concrete sales process can provide not only flexibility, but also better results in numbers. This thesis will focus on and try to prove this statement.

1.1   The need for this thesis

This thesis will fill the existing gap in literature regarding a standard or universal sales process model for B2B companies, especially for the complicated environment of solution selling. There is tons of information on the internet, in books and many presentations by sales and business professionals worldwide as well as in academic texts, but in most of this material there is a point that is overlooked. The most important problem is that the biggest percentage of this material takes in consideration the Business to

1

Consumer (B2C) model (Retail) and mostly the fast moving consumer goods market (FMCG), which is the biggest part of the global economy. Just a part of this material focuses on the Business to Business (B2B) model, which needs a completely different sales approach. Even less is the information that specializes in companies working with the solution selling methodology and not just "box moving" products or any other similar sales methodologies.

1.2 The aim of this thesis

The aim of this thesis is to work as a guide of "how to optimize your sales process", for B2B middle-size companies with a solution selling methodology. By middle size we mean companies that have organized sales departments but which are not well structured and have processes problems. This thesis might not work for very small companies but can be useful for their future, and probably cannot have much to give to well-structured multinational or huge organizations, which follow their own customized processes.

1.3 Explaining the main terms

1.3.1 What is a Business To Business (B2B) Company

What most people know and experience, as a business model in everyday life, is Business to Consumer (B2C) or Retail. "The term business-to-consumer (B2C) refers to the process of selling products and services directly to consumers who are the end-users of the products or services. Most companies that sell directly to consumers can be referred to as B2C companies" (Investopedia). The super market, a clothing shop, a shopping mall, a hair salon, a gas station are only some of the typical B2C companies that sell product and services to consumers.

2

On the other hand, the Business to Business (B2B) model is when a company sells a product or a service to another company for its own use as an asset, or as wholesale, so the latter will sell again that product to the consumer. "Business-to-business (B2B or, in some countries, BtoB) is a situation where one business makes a commercial transaction with another" (En.wikipedia.org).

1.3.2 What is solution selling

In the B2B (but also in B2C) model it is very common for companies to follow the solution-selling path. Solution selling is a sales methodology that was developed in 1975 by Frank Watts at Wang Laboratories. It fits companies that offer not only products but a mix of products (usually nowadays this can be not only equipment but also software), consumables, professional services, financing, consulting, engineering and a lot more (En.wikipedia.org). It is important to clarify that solution selling is not only for technical projects oriented companies, but also for a company that does not sell a standard, non-customizable product.

Typical companies that follow the B2B model with solution selling methodology are involved in construction, engineering projects, information technology infrastructure, software development, logistics, consultants, training, education and many other companies of any industry that highly customize their deliverables.

1.3.3 What is a sales process

"A sales process is a typical series of predictable events, or phases required to sell a product or service" (Nilsson, 2019). Each sale, handled either by a single sales person or by a team, needs to follow specific steps. These steps are important not only for managing

the sales department, but mostly for monitoring the sales pipeline. "A sales pipeline is a visual representation of sales prospects and where they are in the purchasing process" (SearchCustomerExperience, 2019). It is the most important tool of any sales department because it provides an overview of the sales forecast that is the most important parameter for the success of any company.

1.3.4 Why solution selling needs its own sales process model

By the definition given already in the previous paragraph, it is obvious that the nonstandard product or service creates a complexity. This complexity that involves most of the times almost all departments and all employees of a company in every project justifies why a special sales process is needed. In addition to that, there are two reasons that are more important:

a/ In every sale, in every project, for every customer, a solution selling organization needs to evaluate both the customer and the project. In contrast to B2C or other models where the prospecting and the evaluation take place once for each customer, in B2B solution selling the company needs to evaluate every new case even if it is for the same customer and the same need. It is possible, under the new circumstances, that the company is not able to provide a solution this time or needs to design a new offer.

b/ In solution sales the buyer rarely purchases a solution and the real solution is developed after the sales process is completed (En.wikipedia.org). Let's give an example. If someone buys a door for his house, he will see the final real solution that he bought only once the installation of the door is completed. Before that, he only sees the product (the door in a show room), but not the real solution that he has bought (the door installed in his

house). That means that the sale will close only once the company delivers the solution and that is why in solution selling the sales process is unique.

1.3.5 Sales Department Structure

This thesis focuses on the sales process only. However, to implement a sales process it is important for the organization to have a well-structured sales department and many supporting roles from other departments of the company. A brief of these roles can be found bellow and could be an idea for future research.

Sales Representative – Account Manager – Key Account Manager – Area Sales Manager: He is in the front line closer to the customer. He identifies sales opportunities and follows all the process to make sales deals.

Technical Sales - Presales Manager - Solution Sales Manager: Specialists who comes between sales people and the customer, in order to solve and define technical points and build the final offer.

Project Manager. Responsible for any complex solution delivery

Sales administration, Lead qualifier, Supply Chain Administration, Inside Sales Support, Secretary: Supportive roles of the whole process.

Sales Manager: Managing the whole team and process

CHAPTER 2.   LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, the focus will be on existing literature. An overview of key findings, concepts and opinions regarding the sales process in B2B solution selling will be carried out. It will also attempt to show the state of current knowledge and critically evaluate the literature. This survey will be based on scholarly and other sources such as the internet, books and presentations of professionals, which explain what is the best sales process that can optimize the results of B2B solution selling companies.

2.1   Types of sales processes

2.1.1   Internet sources

When typing in the google search engine (www.google.com) "sales process optimization for B2B companies", 18.200.000 results come up. Many of them have to do with advertising or fishing web sites and others are simple articles that are not helpful. However, some sources provide qualitative and accurate data regarding the topic.
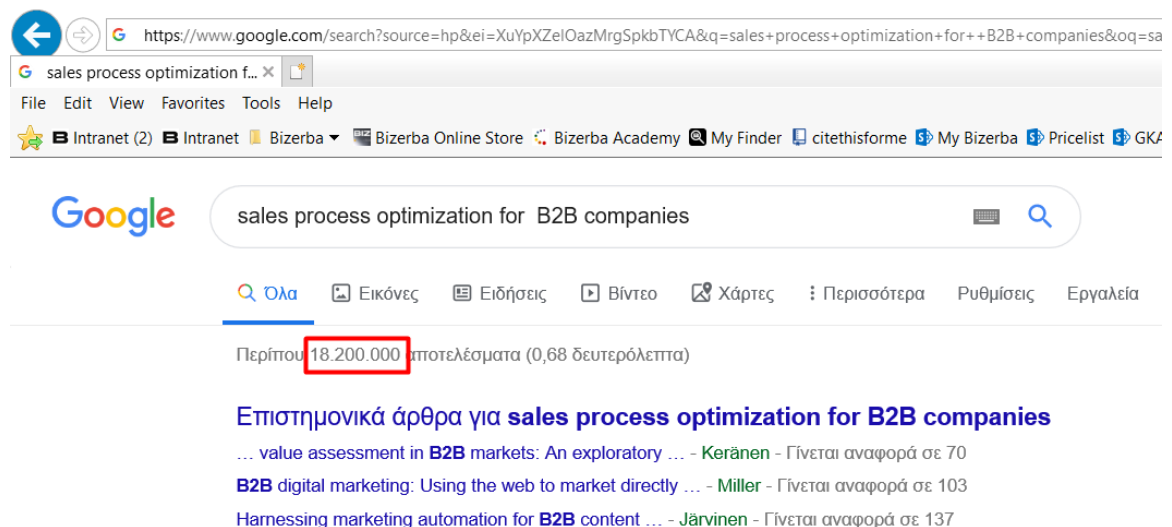
Figure 1 Google search results for B2B sales process optimization

Lucidchart.com (2017) have noted that the seven-step sales process in one of the most popular in business books. These steps are:

1. Prospecting
2. Preparation
3. Approach
4. Presentation
5. Handling objections
6. Closing
7. Follow-up
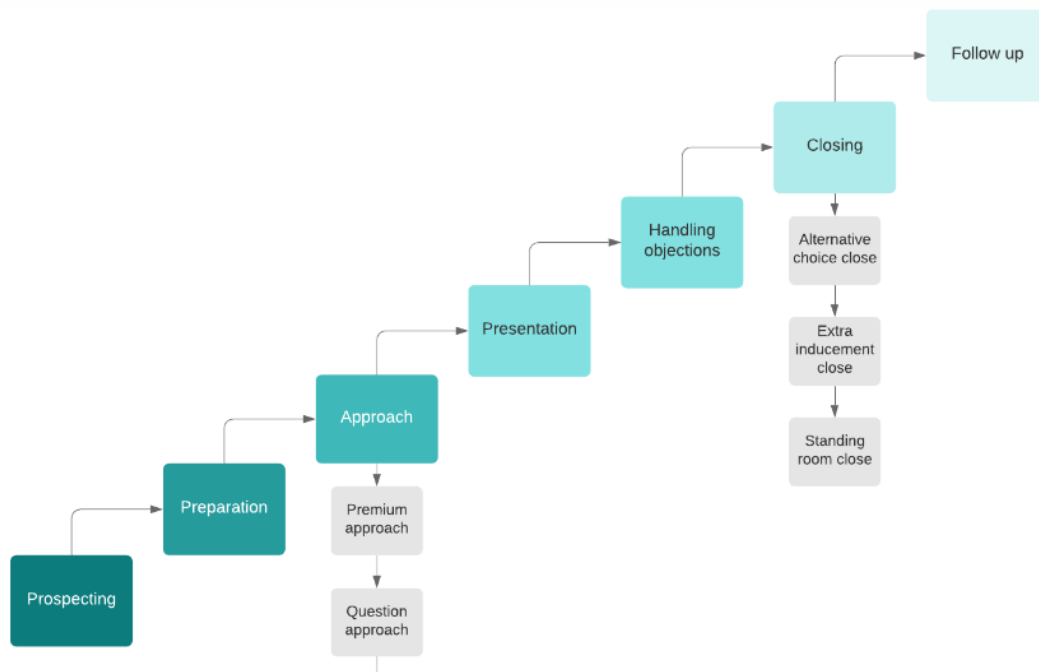
Figure 2 The 7 step sales process (Lucidchart.com 2017)

Although these steps are a good start, and it is true that they are the basic model, they cannot fit all kinds of business. To work in B2B solution selling there are some important steps missing here, such as evaluation of the potential prospects and next steps after closing.

In the same source (Lucidchart.com, 2017) a closer to solution selling process can be found. Now the steps are six:

1. Preparation
2. Diagnose
3. Quality
4. Educate
5. Solving
6. Closing
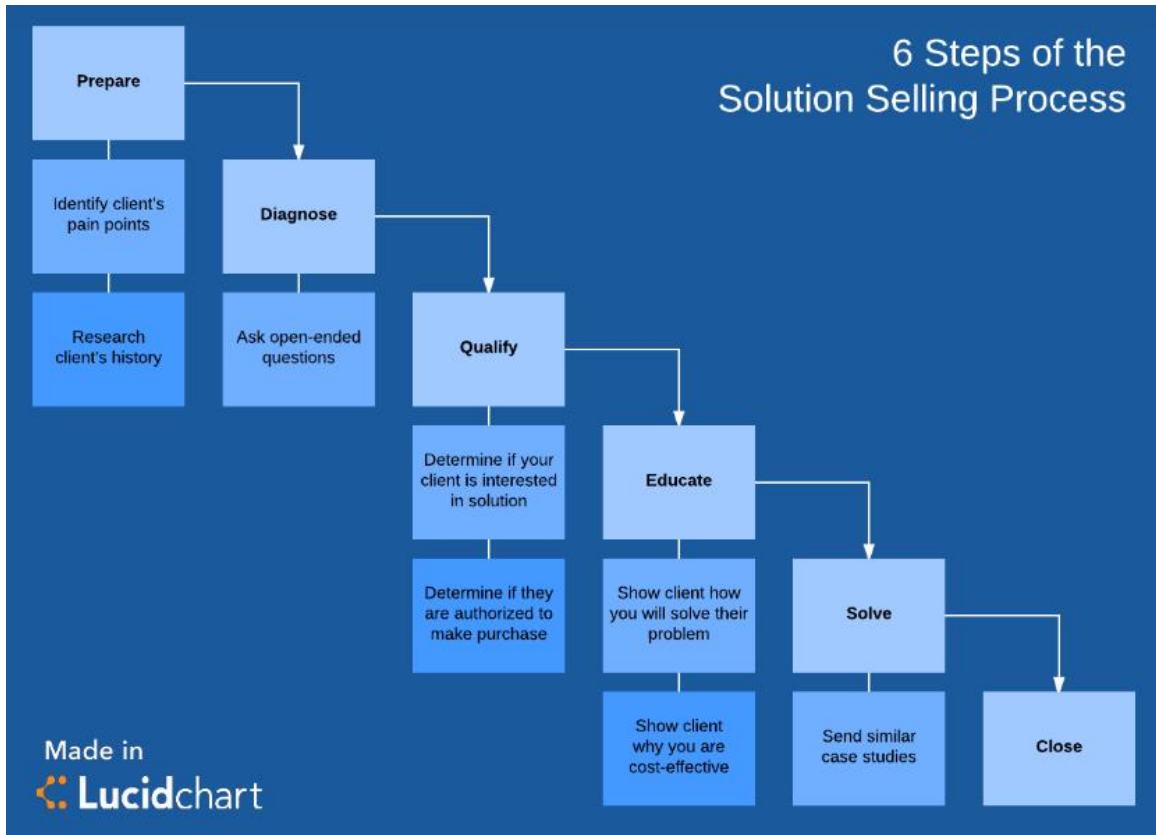
Figure 3 6 Step solution sales process (Lucidchart.com 2017)

Although this is a very close to the best practice sales process for B2B solution selling, some important steps are missing, such as prospecting. In fact, a good solution sales process model could be a combination of both above processes.

Another approach is the modern sales process that can be found on SnapApp (2017). This is called a modern approach especially for B2B and has the following six steps.

1. Prospecting

2. Connecting
3. Researching and understanding
4. Pitching
5. Demonstration
6. Close

This approach is very interesting because it is designed especially for the solution selling and has steps such as researching and understanding that seem better than other outdated processes. But still, connecting steps are very generic and probably need more customization for each individual organization.

Another sales process special for solution selling is the seven stages of sales process (Spacey, 2018). These stages are:

1. Relationship building
2. Consultative sales
3. Needs analysis
4. Solution design
5. Closing
6. Solution Delivery
7. Account Management

This is a sales process that includes steps after the sales deal. Solution delivery is important for B2B solution selling, and account management (monitoring after the solution is launched) is an important step of the process and cannot be found in models other than solution selling.

2.1.2 Book sources

In "Management of a Sales Force" (Spiro, Rich and Stanton, 2008) a sales process is presented as consisting of eight steps. These are:

1. Prospecting / initial contact
2. Preapproach - planning the sale
3. Identifying and cross questioning
4. Need assessment

5. Presentation
6. Meeting objections
7. Gaining commitment
8. Follow-up

Armstrong and Kotler (2012) presented a seven step sales process:

1. Prospecting
2. Preapproach
3. Approach
4. Presentation
5. Handling objections
6. Closing
7. Follow Up
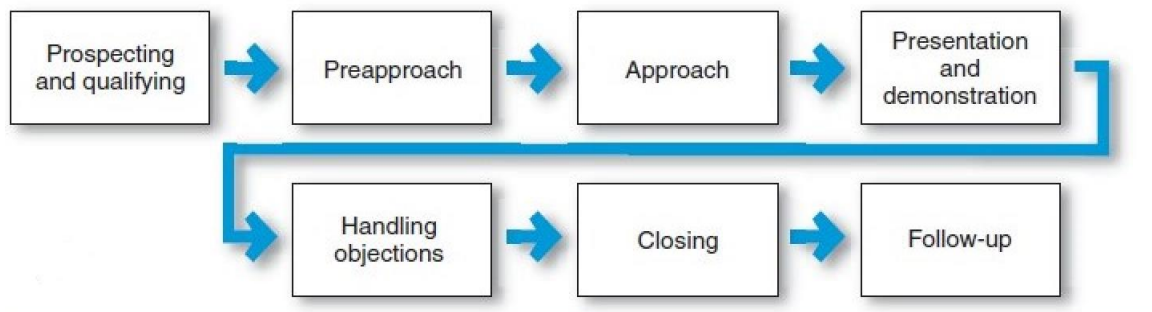
Figure 4 Armstrong and Kotler (2012) Sales Process

As we can see here, the steps are almost the same and it seems that these are best practises. Here we have the follow up step after the sales deal is closed, which is very important for B2B solution selling and a qualification procedure. However, for a sales process to fit B2B solution selling, there are many other things to be considered, as more steps in the qualification stage that have to be done after the approach step.

2.1.3   Presentations by professionals

A presentation called "How to Design a Sales Process for B2B sales" (Nilsson 2019), has much information about the sales process and a special slide for the solution sales process with the following steps:

1. Suspect
2. Unqualified Prospect
3. Qualified Prospect
4. Interest in Solution
5. Select solution
6. Solution deployment

This approach is suitable for solution selling in B2B. There are six stages and it focuses on qualification, which is one of the most important steps and continues after the selection of the solution with the deployment.

2.2 Benefits in using sales processes

A common question will be: Why does a company need a sales process?

Nilsson (2019) gives three reasons:

1. Higher Conversion. A sales process increases companies' conversion rate and that increases sales

2. Bigger deals. With deep understanding of a sales process, sales people can handle big projects with more confidence

3. Less time. A good process helps to recognize which projects the sales people need to invest time in and which project to abandon.

The goal of the sales people is to find new customers. However, most sales people spend much of their time maintaining existing accounts. (Armstrong and Kotler 2012). Although building long-term relationships with existing customers is one serious target, it is important for a sales team to keep a balance between new and existing customers. A good sales process can help the company and each individual sales person, to have a clear view of this situation and give focus where it is needed every time.

"The implementation of a good sales process with clear stages has some unique benefits, such as predictable outcomes that can lead in more sales, easy to work on repeatable activities and tangible results" (Dvorak, 2019).

"The more formal the sales process and the deeper the relationship, the better the sales results". (CSO Insights, The Research Division of Miller Heiman Group, 2019)

CHAPTER 3.   METHODOLOGY

3.1   Research Questions

This thesis will try to answer three questions regarding the main topic.

1. Can an optimization of the sales process improve the results in numbers?
2. How can this be done?
3. How can an organization design the best sales process?

3.2   Research Methodology

The methodology used for this thesis will be based on both qualitative and quantitative design methods, which include observations, unstructured interviews, and surveys.

3.3   Research Data

The research for this thesis will be based on existing literature and secondary data. All relevant data from the surveys and the researches that will be used in this thesis will be noted in the next chapter (Findings), while the full content of these researches will be noted on the references of this document.

In addition, data from 20 years of observation and unstructured interviews from the author within the sales departments that he has worked for will be used. This is the full list of these companies:

Akadimaiki, Germanos Group, INT electronics, Latris, Datalex, Acmon Data, Bizerba.

CHAPTER 4.   FINDINGS

4.1   CSO Insights Researches

CSO Insights, the research division of Miler Heiman Group, has made some very interesting researches on the sales performance of companies, with a very interesting outcome regarding the sales process.

4.1.1   CSO Insights Sales Relationship Process Matrix

"The Sales Relationship Process Matrix is a framework for assessing sales effectiveness that keys on two critical elements. The depth of relationships organizations have with their customers (vertical axis) and the extent to which the sales process is formalized and deployed (the horizontal axis)" (CSO Insights, The Research Division of Miller Heiman Group, 2019).
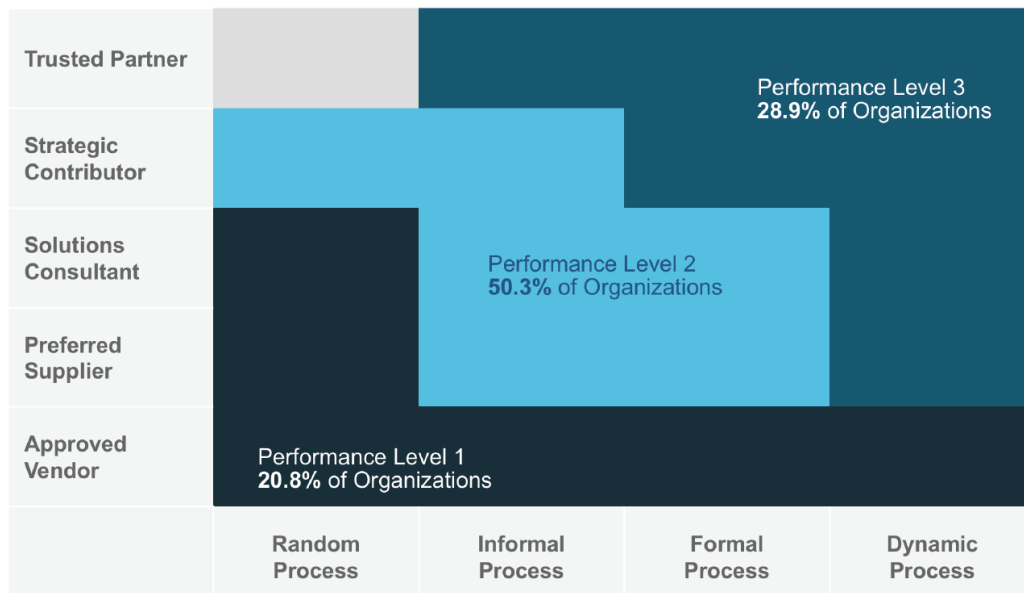
Figure 5 CSO Insights Sales Relationship Process Matrix

Based on this research and the creation of this table, which CSO Insights have been making for the last eleven years, the conclusion is that the more formal the sales process, the deeper the relationship, the better the results (CSO Insights, The Research Division of Miller Heiman Group, 2019).

4.1.2 Sales process and customer

In the same research by CSO Insights there is an important finding. Companies with high level of sales relationship with their customer have a sales process aligned with customer needs. When the sales process takes in consideration the customer's process, closing can be improved.
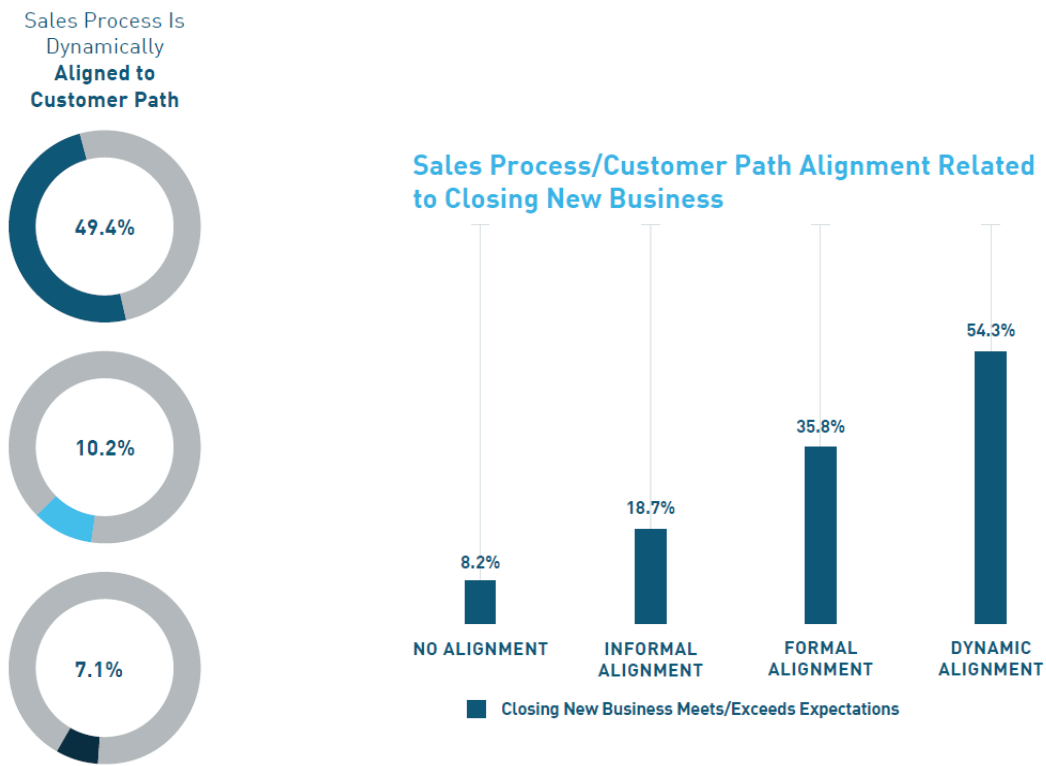
Figure 6 CSO Insights sales process align with customer

4.1.3   CSO Insights 2019 world class sales practises study

81% of the participants of this research agree that if a company has a rigorous forecasting process (which needs a strict sales process), this will lead to forecast accuracy.

4.1.4   CSO Insights 2018 sales operations and optimization

In this research it is clear that organizations have reported heavy involvement of the sales process definition in sales performance, while at the same time 27, 7 % has reported that they already achieve a dynamic sales process model.
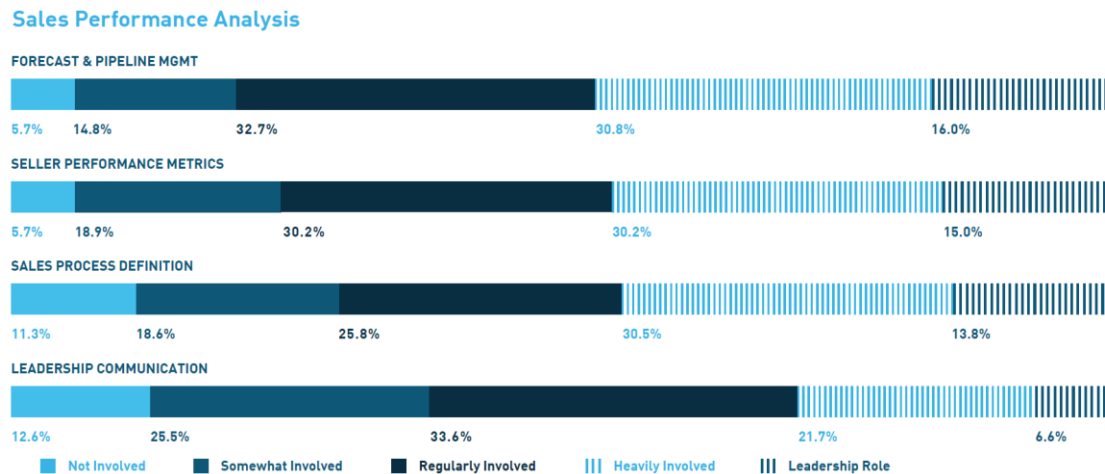
Figure 7   CSO Insights 2018 Sales Performance Analysis

4.2   Harvard Business Review (HBR) researches

This is a research published by Steve W. Martin for Harvard Business Review (HBR) and indicates "what separates high performing organizations from average underperforming organizations" (Martin, 2015).

4.2.1 The importance of sales process

Among others, this research shows the importance of the sales process. "Fifty percent of study participants from high-performing sales organizations responded they had sales processes that were closely monitored, strictly enforced or automated compared to just 28% from underperforming sales organizations. Forty-eight percent of the participants from underperforming sales organizations indicated they had nonexistent or informal structured sales processes compared to only 29% from high performing sales organizations" (Martin, 2019).
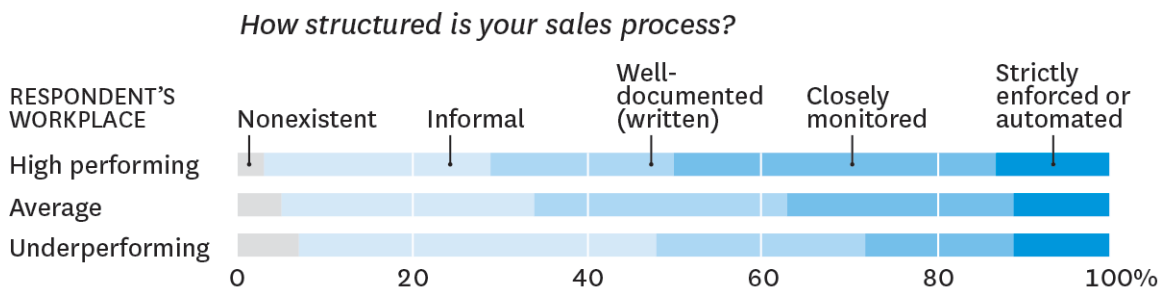
Figure 8 HBR the importance of sales process

4.2.2 Formal sales process generates more revenue

Another research from Harvard Business Review (HBR) proved that companies with strict sales processes can gain up to a 28% increase in their revenue compared to companies that do not follow a standardized sales process (Plaksij, 2019)

4.3 Dealmaker Index Study

"The TAS Group, with reference to the Dealmaker Index Study, states that 70% of the companies that follow a structured process in sales are high performers; over 70% of business forecasts were accurate for the companies with a defined sales process" (Plaksij, 2019).

4.4 Sales process white paper (Cappco Partners)

4.4.1 Sales Process Value

Cappco Partners, a company that specializes in improving sales and marketing performance, published a white paper about "the value of implementing and managing a consistent sales process". "The data included in the white paper has been taken from a variety of sources including Accenture, Gardner, Milen Heiman, IBM and publicly available information and statistics" (Cappco Partners, n.d.).

Research from Accenture has shown that an average of 40% of sales people achieved their quota. At the same time 92% of sales people, who follow a consistent and strict sales process, achieved their quota.

According to salesfrorce.com research, the implementation of a sales process based on the experience of wining deals of each company can increase win rates at least by 25%.

4.4.2 When a sales process is good enough

In other researches by Accenture and Economist, sales people who had implemented a strict sales process responded to some questions that have shown the following:

40% of sales people do not follow the sales process

44% of sales people sell only the product and not the solution

43% of sales managers do not leverage new sales processes

These findings show the difficulty of implementing the appropriate sales process.

4.5   Performance Practitioners Research

Owen, N. and Miller, A. in their report The five most dangerous is facing sales leaders today, have proved that a structured sales process is the key to success. The bottom line of their research is that sales can never result efficiently unless the sales process in continually and closely managed. Two important findings of their research:

More than 90% of the sales people have serious issues to balance among the key stages of sales process
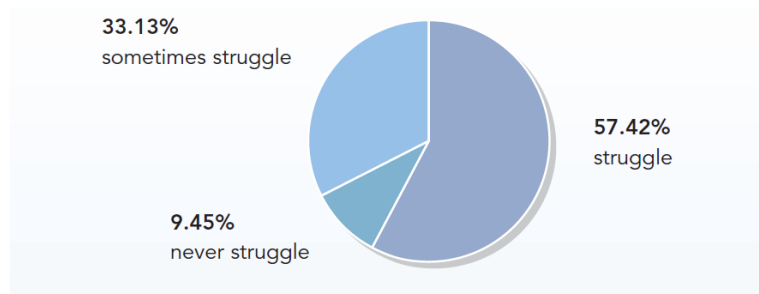
Figure 9 Performance Practitioners Research: Sales Process Balance

At the same time, more that 82% do not have a sales process or don't follow the one they have.

82.29% say they don't have a consultative sales process or are not following the one they have

18.60% clearly identified consultative sales process that has identified competencies for each step in their sales process

32.74% does not reflect a consultative sales approach

48.65% consultative sales process in place yet not being followed
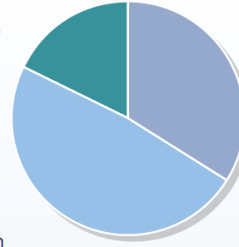
Figure 10 Performance Practitioners Research: Sales Process Compliance

4.6   Gartner Researches & Reports

Research done by Gartner Group has shown that any company can earn the benefits of any innovation, and they can be much higher if the four vital components are in growth too. These elements are Technology tools (i.e. CRM software), Sales Process, Sales Trainings and performance related compensation. The sales process is a vital component for growth.
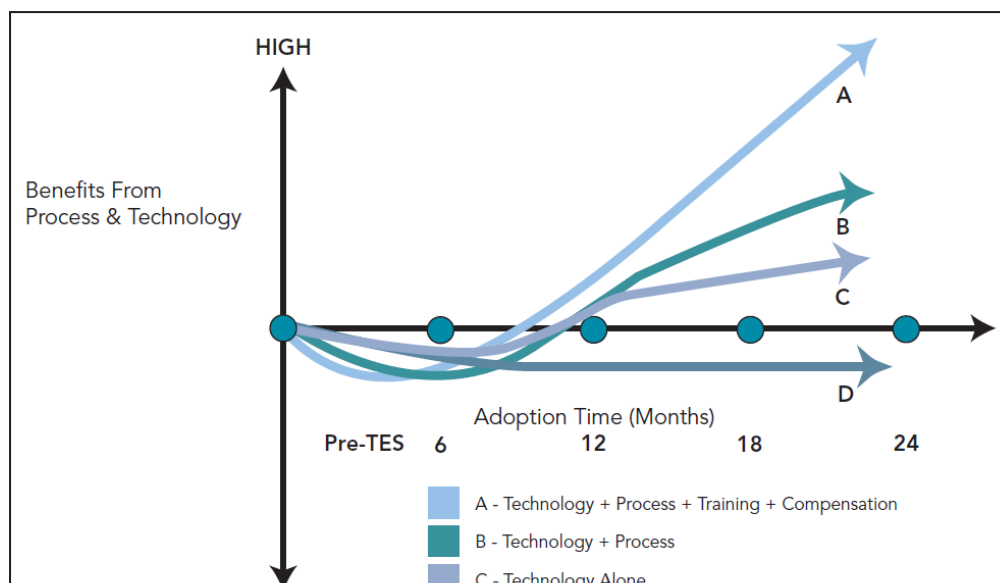
Figure 11 Gartner Group Diagram: Benefits of sales process

4.7   Companies observation

All companies that the author of this paper has worked for more than 20 years have organized sales departments. However, not all of the time do they have strict and well-structured sales processes. After clear definitions of a sales process, an increase in revenue between 20% and 28 % has been generated for all these organizations, regardless of their industry or the solution that they sell.

CHAPTER 5.   DISCUSSION

5.1   Can a clear and defined sales process optimize the results of a company in numbers?

All data agree that a well-structured and clear sales process could not only increase company's revenues, but also help the company be a great performer in its industry. Without a defined and closely monitored sales process, the company will underperform.

At the same time, sales people, when working under a consistent and strict sales process, achieve their targets more easily and in a shorter period. Nevertheless, this could be the most challenging thing when designing a new sales process. Sales people do not like to follow rules and processes. They like to feel free, but this is the trap. Usually they get lost in the day-to-day business routine, they do not manage their time efficiently and they end up losing the deals without knowing why. With this approach they feel that they work hard, which is true, but in fact they work almost two times harder reaching half of the results, compared to working in a strict place of rules, a solid sales process.

Moreover, sales managers that manage their teams without a sales process or do not force them to follow the one they have, are underperforming compared to those that they do the opposite. They are underperformers in numbers and also in managing and controlling their teams. In addition, they are not able to demonstrate a valuable sales pipeline, which is the solid method of forecasting, and the main element of a successful company.

However, to implement a new sales process or change an existing one to bring it closer to the company's needs is a big challenge. Not only because it is difficult to convince sales people to follow it, but also because it needs special knowledge to identify the unique needs of each individual organization and customize the sales process.

5.2 How can an organization define the best sales process?

5.2.1 Define customer's buying process

Every organization sells to customers. If it builds a sales process that does not meet its customers' culture, mentality, processes, timeframes, type of communication etc., then probably the result will be negative. The buyer decides the procedure. The seller might set some rules and probably can make some fine tunings, but the main process will be defined by the profile of the customer and the existing rules of the market. Therefore, behind each step of every sales process must be the step of the buying process of the customer.

5.2.2 Define the stages of the sales process

Before defining the sales process, the organization has to define its sales methodology. This thesis deals with B2B solution selling companies and has already proven that this model needs a special selling process. Having in mind that the company needs to customize the process according to its own needs, a typical sales process model that works for these companies will follow.

1. **Suspect/ Prospecting:** This is the first step. The sales department needs to identify the potential, write down data for companies that are not customers yet, find contact details, create buyers personas, set targets, and organize the approach methodology.

2. **Approach/ Unqualified Leads Creation:** Sales people must contact the potential customers, according to the sales policy of their company. By using the tools that each company has created for this step, they must try to understand if the potential that was designed internally in the previous step, is really a potential. At this step it is not important if the customer is ready to buy, but if they have the capability to buy any time in the future. This is called Unqualified Lead. Unqualified Leads can be created not only by direct approach of sales people, but also as incoming from many other sources such as, road shows, exhibitions, advertisements, social media, web sites etc.

3. **Customer and Project Evaluation, Lead conversion to close or Opportunity (Qualified Lead):** At this step the sales department needs to evaluate the customer or the specific need and to answer a basic question. Is this customer close to buying? If the answer is yes, then there is a conversion of the lead into a qualified opportunity. Otherwise, the lead is closing. However, to answer if a customer is close to buying a selling solution is a complex step. Many companies have specific questionnaires, Request for proposal (RFP) documents, which include the requirements that they need from a customer and they set as minimum to be considered as an opportunity for them, while others have an internal procedure (usually meetings or specific requirements) to evaluate a customer or a project. There are many ways to do the evaluation but the important thing is to have a standard procedure with no exceptions.

4. **Define Solution:** This step is important, because it is necessary to investigate the needs of the customer and the requirements, so as to define the solution that is going to be offered. Unlike other sales models, in solution selling, the seller works closely and together with the customer to define the requirements and design the solution. Before any offer is sent, it is important to agree with the customer on the design of the solution,

any technical issues, financial terms and what exactly the solution that is going to be offered is. Unlike other models, in solution selling the revision of the offer has a high cost, is complicated and must be avoided. For any change, a completely new solution must be created. Many companies, in order to avoid offer revisions, give negative points to sales people that do that.

5. **Offer:** Based on the solution that was defined in the previous step, a complete offer must be sent now to the customer.

6. **Offer evaluation by the customer:** At this step, a series of contacts with the customer take place, in most of the cases following the customer's internal process. At the end of this step, a final decision by the customer will come up. Accept or Reject the offer. If the offer is rejected a next final step of a follow up to investigate why this happened is necessary to be taken.

7. **Solution Implementation:** If the offer is accepted this new step begins which has some sub steps that all together are usually called "order to cash". All steps bellow usually are not referred as part of the sales process, but in solution selling methodology there are many things in these steps that the sales department must be involved in, even partially.

7.1 Kickoff meeting: A kickoff meeting is the first meeting with the project team and the client. This step will define all the details of the implementation and make sure that everyone has a common understanding of the project and their roles. Even if the solution has been already analyzed, now it must be discussed in depth with all the details that do not affect the financial terms of the offer, but it needs to be organized and agreed for the implementation. Any final details must be defined now and any agreement must be signed before or at least at this stage.

7.2 Implementation: While the implementation of the solution is not part of the sales process, it is important for the sales department to have the information of the critical milestones during this procedure. Once this step finishes, the sales department will contact again the customer for the next final steps after the implementation is accepted by the customer. A protocol of approval is important to be signed once the customer accepts the solution and which will be very useful for the next step.

7.3 Payment: After the protocol of approval is signed, the sales department must send an order to the financial department to issue the relevant invoice and take care of the payment.

7.4 Customers Satisfaction: The customer care department in cooperation with the sales department and specifically the sales representative that closes the deal has to check the customer satisfaction level of the solution. There are many formal ways, documentations and methodologies for this step.

7.5 Lessons learned sessions: For future projects optimization, it is important to find what went wrong and what worked well in every project.

To put it in a nutshell, a seven-step sales process, as shown below, seems to be the most appropriate for Business-to-Business (B2B) companies with solution selling methodology:

1. Prospecting
2. Unqualified Lead
3. Opportunity
4. Solution Definition
5. Offer

6. Evaluation by the customer

7. Implementation

5.2.3 Define the outcomes for each stage

While the steps of the sales process are ready and aligned with potential customers buying process, it is important to use them to define the expected outcome and the objective. What exactly is expected by each step and what are the sales people supposed to achieve? No organization wants to have a theoretical sales process. The sales process is a tool that is needed to set specific outcomes to work such as time frames, quality, numbers, etc

Every step also contains sub steps and needs a specific action plan to be achieved. The day-to-day action that needs to be achieved by the sales people must be defined in order to efficiently move from one step to the other, reach the targeted outcome and get a valuable sales pipeline.

5.2.4 Define the sales process tools

Tools have a very important purpose in the sales process. Especially nowadays that there are many technology tools that can help the organization to reach more efficiently the target of the implementation of a sales process. Tools also show how professionally an organization works and builds trust with the prospect.

In solution selling there is a complexity of the deliverables that consists of products, services, consumables, financing, consulting, contacts maintenance etc. This complexity

creates questions and misunderstandings. The appropriate sales tools can answer any question in a short period and can help to significantly reduce the time of the sales process.

Depending on the individual needs and structure of the sales department, there are some common tools that can be used.

- Customer Relationship Management software or CRM is the heart of the sales process as it facilitates the workflow, integrates the process and monitors the sales pipeline.
- Sales and marketing intelligent tools, such as platforms for the qualification of the prospects, market analysis etc.
- Lead handling and prospecting tools
- Analytics and reporting tools such as Business Intelligence (BI) software
- Training tools
- Day to day use tools (emails, presentations, demo, competition analysis, buyers personas, guides, ROI calculators etc.)

The sales tools must be in a consideration from the beginning of the design of a new sales process in the sales department.

The sales tools and especially the selection of a Customer Relationship Management software (CRM) could be a subject for future research.

CHAPTER 6.   CONCLUSION

The sales people hate the sales process. The high-level management loves a structured and strict sales process. This is a common story for almost every organization.

This is also the case in the B2B model with solution selling methodology. Sales people have always believed that they will have more flexibility working without a sales process, since they believe that freedom in their moves is the key to success. They also do not like to be supervised and share information inside the organization including the sales department.

However, the high-level management always wants the organization to run under strict rules without any exceptions for the day-to-day business. This includes the sales process. They believe that they can have better results and better control of the organization if they closely supervise the sales people and if they have day to day real data and full details of the daily business which most of the time leads to micromanagement.

The truth lies, as always, somewhere in the middle. Sales people need to have flexibility and be able to cover the individual needs of each customer and the organization has to take quick decisions during the period of a sales deal. On the other hand, it is obviously true that a solid and structured sales process will guide the sales people to work with the appropriate time management and optimize their daily workflow for achieving more easily their targets.

The most important thing, when a company adopts a solid sales process model that works strictly and is well structured, is the accurate forecasting. For the complex

environment of B2B Solution Selling, where everything is customized and the decisions of the customers are long term, there is nothing more important than the sales process. Although it is not the only parameter for a company's forecast, it is the foundation on which the sales pipeline will be built, which will lead to an accurate forecast for numbers and resources.

A well-structured and strict sales process, based on proven models and at the same time custom designed on the unique needs of each organization, will help the company to improve efficiency. It will define what each department is responsible for, increase revenue & forecasting accuracy, and make it easier to determine which metrics and key performance indicators (KPIs) to track. The most important thing is that it will lead to continuous improvement.

Today's business world is going through a time of disruptive change. Business processes in general are the most important tool for any organization to stay stable in a volatile economy. The design and adoption of a well-planned structured, strict and solid sales process is the key element to help any organization to be able to follow and deal with the next day proactively, while is achieving to lead from the emerging future.

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