

Salespeople as Boundary Spanners
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Exploring the Psychology of the Salesperson

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1 Introduction

1.1 Motivation: Salespeople as Boundary Spanners

“Excellent (customer) relationships arise only based on what a (sales) person makes out of her competence, empathy, intuition and all her will and freedom to do so. [Richtig gute [Kunden-]Beziehungen entstehen nur durch das, was ein [Vertriebs-]Mitarbeiter mit seiner Kompetenz, Empathie und Intuition und all seinem Wollen und Dürfen daraus macht.]“ (Schüller in Mühlberger 2012, p. 11)

Salespeople are the most important market interface for many companies. They function as the primary contact person for customers (Bendapudi and Leone 2002; Hartline, Maxham, and McKee 2000); generate relevant information outside the company’s boundaries (Pass, Evans, and Schlacter 2004); influence prices; and thereby impact revenues (Mishra and Prasad 2004). Especially in the business-to-business (B2B) context, personal selling in the field is the primary (and sometimes sole) sales channel. Business customers trust their individual seller (Doney and Cannon 1997; Liu and Leach 2001) and often develop a salesperson-specific loyalty (Palmatier, Scheer, and Steenkamp 2007; Sirdeshmukh, Singh, and Sabol 2002). Understanding how salespeople think and behave is an important insight for sales managers and general managers alike. This understanding is also an important basis for the curricula of the increasing number of sales schools (Fogel et al. 2012).

Not surprisingly, how salespeople effectively span the boundary between the firm and the customer as boundary spanners attracts significant research attention (Aldrich and Herker 1977; Bettencourt and Brown 2003; Crosno et al. 2009; Goolsby 1992; Singh and Rhoads 1991). Salesperson research examines the following key aspects: salesperson performance (Sharma, Levy, and Evanschitzky 2007; Singh 2000); selling effectiveness (Sengupta, Krapfel, and Pusateri 2000); the selling process and selling strategy (Schultz and Evans 2002; Wagner, Klein, and Keith 2001); salesperson motivation (Jaramillo et al. 2007b; Mulki,

Lassk, and Jaramillo 2008); and the nature of customer-oriented exchanges (Bettencourt, Brown, and Mackenzie 2005; Singh 1998).

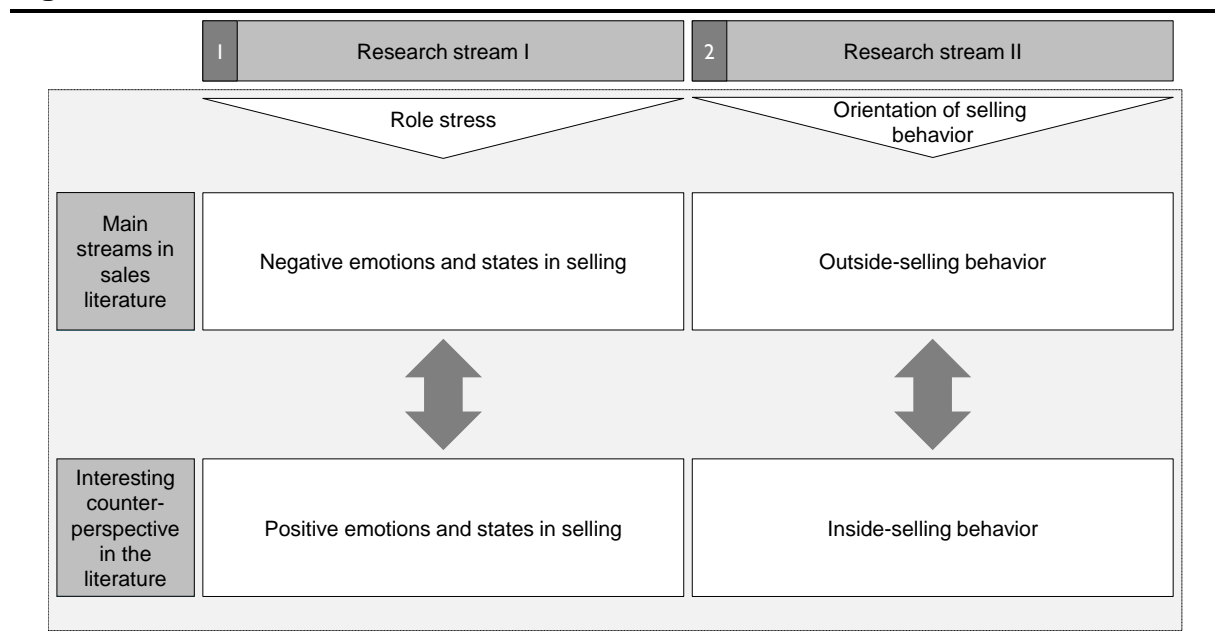
1.2 Research Questions

My thesis expands on two research streams in this context. The first research stream revolves around role stress of salespeople, the second research stream around the orientation of selling behavior (for an overview, see Figure 1-1). Five research questions guide my investigations. I aim at developing explanatory models on how salespeople shape role stress experiences and selling behaviors. The first research question evaluates existing theory:

Research question 1: How do existing intrapersonal and interpersonal theories contribute to explaining salespeople-related phenomena?

Research questions two and three (on role stress) and four and five (on orientation of selling behavior) are developed below.

Figure 1-1: Motivation of This Research



Research stream I: Role stress

Most salesperson research examines the salesperson as the taker of the boundary sales role (Stamper and Johlke 2003). The sales role is defined by the expectations of relevant others, primarily by the customers and the employing company (Boles, Wood, and Johnson 2003). Salespeople need to simultaneously satisfy the conflicting interests of the two parties to the selling exchange, i.e., their employing company and the customers. Considerable research has been conducted to investigate the resulting *high levels of role stress* salespeople experience (Boles, Wood, and Johnson 2003). Arguments in the literature based on role theory claim that ‘being caught’ between contradictory interests of the employing company and the customers results in role stress for salespeople with negative behavioral and psychological outcomes (Behrman and Perreault 1984; Goolsby 1992). Salespeople are often uncertain what is expected of them (role ambiguity) or do not know how to satisfy the differing expectations (role conflict). For salespeople experiencing high role stress, research shows a negative impact on job satisfaction and job performance (Arnold et al. 2009a; Michaels and Dixon 1994; Onyemah 2008). Some salespeople even psychologically withdraw from their job, which sooner or later leads to turnover intentions (Bettencourt and Brown 2003; Keaveney and Nelson 1993).

Whereas much research has been conducted on salespeople’s stress experiences at the sales boundary, some research indicates that also positive emotional states exist for salespeople at the boundary. Emotional states related to the sales position, a job often characterized by high autonomy (Griffin, Neal, and Parker 2007), are considered especially important for salespeople’s personal satisfaction and selling performance (Bagozzi, Belschak, and Verbeke 2010). Consistently, both inside and outside the field of sales research, researchers call for further investigation of salespeople’s emotional states. For example, Bettencourt and Brown (2003) ask for further examination of why some salespeople show

negative effects as a result of role stress while others remain unstressed. Along these same lines, job design researchers call for the investigation of employees who are proactively shaping their job world to experience higher job satisfaction (Wrzesniewski and Dutton 2001).

Most existing research in this area investigates salespeople's positive emotional state of job satisfaction and how it can be improved by preventing role stress effects (Jaramillo, Mulki, and Solomon 2006; Keaveney and Nelson 1993; Singh 1998). Job satisfaction is the pleasant emotional state of employees resulting from the positive appraisal of the job, the working conditions and the role (Locke 1969). Research has identified several variables that lead to reduced role stress and higher levels of job satisfaction for salespeople, including organizational variables, for instance, autonomy or empowerment, and relational variables, for example, feedback, and personal variables such as affectivity (Brown and Peterson 1994; Miao and Evans 2007; Wilkens and Nermerich 2011). Based on this research, companies try to create a job satisfaction-supportive environment to ensure salespeople's commitment and corresponding job performance (Christen, Iyer, and Soberman 2006). My thesis investigates the following two research questions in this context:

Research question 2: How does the individual salesperson interpret the expectations associated with her sales position and thereby takes and makes her boundary role?

Research question 3: How does the individual salesperson's way of handling her sales position relate to stress?

Research stream II: Orientation of selling behavior

According to the main body of research on personal selling, salespeople are expected to strongly engage in outside-selling behaviors to direct most of their selling energy at customers (Plouffe, Hulland, and Wachner 2009). Outside-selling activities involve selling-oriented behaviors and customer-oriented behaviors (Saxe and Weitz 1982; Thomas, Soutar, and Ryan 2001) and are expected to result in high sales success (Franke and Park 2006). Sales-related activities that receive considerable research attention include adapting to specific customer needs (Boorum, Goolsby, and Ramsey 1998; Román and Iacobucci 2010); presenting products in a way that satisfies customers' needs (Bradford, Crant, and Phillips 2009; Hartline, Maxham, and McKee 2000; Martin and Bush 2006; Plouffe, Hulland, and Wachner 2009); and determining the optimal level of customer orientation (Homburg, Müller, and Klarmann 2011).

In contrast, some research investigates how salespeople engage in inside-selling activities, directing their selling energy at their own organization. Exemplary activities recently researched are internal influence behaviors or intrapreneurship, examples of which include adapting standard processes or resource availability in favor of the customer (Bettencourt and Brown 2003; Marrone, Tesluk, and Carson 2007; Plouffe and Barclay 2007; Plouffe, Sridharan, and Barclay 2010). Some researchers emphasize the salesperson's role as a coordination manager on behalf of the customer, e.g., managing informal support networks within the selling organization to ensure customer-oriented solutions (Evans et al. 2012). Sales research has only recently begun observing these shaping behaviors and still falls short in explaining related effects and motivational mechanisms. Singh and Koshy (2011a) call for a wider understanding of selling behaviors, encompassing all activities observed at the sales boundary. Schwepker (2003) calls for further investigation of how salespeople's commitment to exchange partners shapes selling behaviors.

My two research questions in this context are:

Research question 4: In which exchange partner do salespeople invest more selling energy?

Research question 5: Why do salespeople engage more in inside-selling or more in outside-selling?

1.3 Research Perspective: The World Through the Eyes of the Salesperson

As discussed in the previous sections my thesis investigates comparatively neglected areas like positive emotions in selling and inside-oriented selling behaviors. In addition, this thesis differs from previous research by its perspective: In simplified terms, my thesis looks at the world through the eyes of the salesperson. Existing research mostly looks at the salesperson through the eyes of the sales manager. This manifests itself in two foci of the existing literature:

- (1) Existing salesperson research is dominated by an organizational perspective.
- (2) Existing literature regards salespeople as rather passive and externally dominated individuals.

Ad (1): In accordance with the importance of salespeople, the salesperson herself is the key unit of analysis in salesperson research (Williams and Plouffe 2007). However, the majority of sales research is conducted from the organization's perspective (Plouffe, Williams, and Wacliner 2008). Even though data is often collected from the individual salesperson, research interests, constructs, and arguments are mainly structured along organizational interests such as performance implications or how salespeople can be led effectively to act in the interest of the organization (Brown and Peterson 1994; Giacobbe et al. 2006; Krishnan, Netemeyer, and Boles 2002; Onyemah 2008). Furthermore, studies researching relational phenomena such as trust or identity mechanisms, often aim at clarifying

the role of this concept for organizational performance (Bradford, Crant, and Phillips 2009; Brashear et al. 2003; Doney and Cannon 1997; Wieseke et al. 2007).

On the one hand, this organizational perspective allows for the interpretation of research results with respect to benefits for the organization and thereby ensures the relevance of the research for the managerial practice. On the other hand, the organizational perspective does not allow the individual salesperson's perspective to surface. Sales research does not capture how salespeople perceive and interpret their job world by listening to the salesperson's voice in its own right. Important facets and mechanisms governing the sales boundary might be missed.

Ad (2): Most sales research depicts the salesperson as a rather passive individual, determined by outside, interpersonal forces such as expectations, written contracts, or other pressures (Goolsby 1992; Lo, Ghosh, and Lafontaine 2011; Tekleab and Taylor 2003). They are considered to be aligned with the goal of sales performance and selling effectiveness as a result of their employment contract (Eisenhardt 1989; Jaramillo et al. 2007a), guided, ruled by, and dependent on their exchange partners (Singh 2000). Furthermore, salespeople are described as being 'torn' between the interests of exchange partners (Bettencourt and Brown 2003), instead of as actively 'managing' different interest. Hence, sales research and its assumptions picture a rather pre-determined salesperson that accepts the rules and tries to satisfy all interests she is confronted with.

It is interesting to note that the sales literature deviates in this regard from other literature streams. *In sales research*, salespeople have attracted far less research attention as self-determined employees who engage proactively and thereby shape their job in a very individual manner. A few studies investigate how salespeople engage in extra-role behaviors and deviate from other's expectations (Van Dyne and LePine 1998; Zhu 2013). Researchers introducing the concept of salesperson navigation examine the neglected internal dimension

of the sales role, thereby expanding the view of salespeople to a more proactive individual (Plouffe and Barclay 2007). However, all of these attempts are single independent research investigations which thus far have not been adopted by the sales research mainstream.

Outside of sales research, in contrast, some articles extend existing theories, such as role theory, by incorporating new constructs and develop new perspectives in job design research. The new approaches and constructs depict the individual as more active and independent and thereby shift explanatory power to the individual (Lyons 2008; Wrzesniewski, Dutton, and Debebe 2003). The importance and dimensions of salespeople's self-determination at the sales boundary and the interplay of self- and other-determination have yet to be explored. I follow this idea and view salespeople as interpreting and creating their sales boundary in terms of perceptions and actions. For an overview of salespeople's self-determination and other-determination, see Table 1-1.

Salespeople are confronted with differing exchange partners and working styles and need to make sense of them in order to avoid continuously seesawing back and forth. By explicitly exploring the salesperson's subjective perspective on boundary spanning, I follow the research call by Evans et al. (2012) to investigate salespeople's individual perceptions of their boundary relationships, the resulting creativity and selling behaviors, and how salespeople view the interplay of the buying and the selling organization.

Table 1-1: Self-Determination Versus Other-Determination of Salespeople

Dimensions	Self-determined	Other-determined
Characteristics of the salesperson	Active, in control, self-authored, endorsed, proactive, engaged	Passive, reactive, alienated
Perceived locus of causality	Internal regulation: The salesperson herself evaluates the activities and decides how to act	External regulation: The salesperson is externally regulated by different exchange partners, including customers, company, boss, colleagues
Motivation of the salesperson	An activity is pursued for the inherent satisfaction of the activity itself: The salesperson is highly engaged in specific (selling) behaviors because these are aligned with her values and beliefs. She shows high interest, excitement, confidence, and persistence	An activity is performed to attain specified outcomes (instrumentalities): The salesperson engages in specific (selling) behaviors in order to, for example, (1) fulfill target agreements, (2) gain acceptance in the organization, or (3) avoid becoming attackable and experiencing more pressure
Drivers of locus of causality	Innate psychological needs drive priority setting in terms of one's own beliefs	Control and regulative mechanisms pull attention and orientation to external forces. They vary in the degree of internalization
Involvement of self	The salesperson perceives her thoughts and actions as consistent with her own self. This status provides her with enormous strength to fight for her way of doing the sales job	Salespeople vary in the degree to which external demands are aligned with their personal convictions: Some are aligned with the company's interests by rewards and punishments; others internalize the external regulation and perform activities because they identify with them. However, in either case salespeople comply with external regulations
Selling behavior	Inside-selling and outside-selling	Outside-selling
Stress level	Less stressed since the salesperson can ensure that boundary actions are acceptable to her and consistent with her self-concept	More stressed due to the feeling of being at the mercy of others

Source: based on Ryan and Deci (2000)

1.4 Overview of Methodological Approach

In the following sections, I provide an overview of the qualitative methodological approach of this thesis. First, I argue why I choose a qualitative approach and describe the two perspectives that my approach combines. Second, I present the iterative research and data analysis process. This section finishes with a description of the empirical basis of my research. In Chapters 3 and 4, I present details on the method applied in the empirical studies.

1.4.1 Research Approach

This thesis's theory-building methodology is consistent with the approach used by Bacharach, Bamberger, and McKinney (2000). I present qualitative reports of salespeople which help to illustrate the individual salesperson's perspective. I then contrast empirical observations and existing theory. The goal is to identify new constructs, to further develop existing constructs, and to devise propositions. These research contributions are considered "provisional theory" which should be tested by future research (Edmondson and McManus 2007).

Qualitative methodology has proven to have considerable potential to investigate evaluations and implicit processes of the units of analysis (Nedungadi and Day 1994; Oczan and Eisenhardt 2009). As Gephart (2004, p. 455) puts it, "An important value of qualitative research is description and understanding of the actual human interactions, meanings, and processes that constitute real-life organizational settings". Research on salespeople's boundary spanning initially began with qualitative exploration (Aldrich and Herker 1977; Goolsby 1992).

In this early stage of knowledge generation, the qualitative approach allows the researcher to account for an unaltered salesperson perspective on her job by listening to her statements rather than working with predefined scales and assumptions. By being sincerely interested in the salesperson's perspective, I am able to establish trust and get interviewees to open up (Eisenhardt and Graebner 2007). The methodology allows each salesperson to have her own interpretation of her boundary position (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Suddaby 2006). Thus, the interpretive method assumes socially constructed, multiple realities in contrast to a single, objective, tangible reality (Thompson and Hart 2006).

My research is driven by two particular emphases: a *phenomenological* emphasis and a *theoretical* emphasis. The phenomenological perspective represents my interest in the salesperson herself and her perspective on incidents at the sales boundary. In accordance with

phenomenological tradition, this work thereby “returns to the things themselves” (Merleau-Ponty 1962, p.viii), i.e., salespeople’s perceptions, experiences, and emotions and examines their life at the sales boundary (Ebner and Kadi 2005). By engaging in reflective attentiveness to disclose the individual salesperson’s experiences, this thesis attempts to challenge and advance existing explanatory models instead of affirming what sales research already knows (Rollinger 1999).

The emphasis on theory is a response to the observation by William and Plouffe (2007, p. 414) that existing salesperson research includes “a substantial number of a-theoretical articles”. Theoretical contributions are considered a hallmark of high-quality research (Kilduff 2007; Summers 2001). Coloquitt and Zapata-Phelan (2007, p. 1281) note that “it is difficult to overstate the importance of theory to the scientific endeavor”. This thesis combines both emphases by investigating up-to-date salespeople-related phenomena against the background of challenging and extending theoretical explanatory models.

Prior to the research encounter it is important to know existing literature and theories in order to gain theoretical sensitivity. Theoretical awareness facilitates valuable comparisons of phenomena with each other and with existing explanatory models (McCann and Clark 2003). No new concept is a stand-alone idea without ties to existing theories. This approach is consistent with Suddaby (2006) who questions the common challenge that researchers engaging in grounded theory are expected to “enter a field blank” (p. 634) and ignore prior research and literature. This thesis contributes to sales research by putting results into the context of existing theories and thereby advancing theory on salespeople.

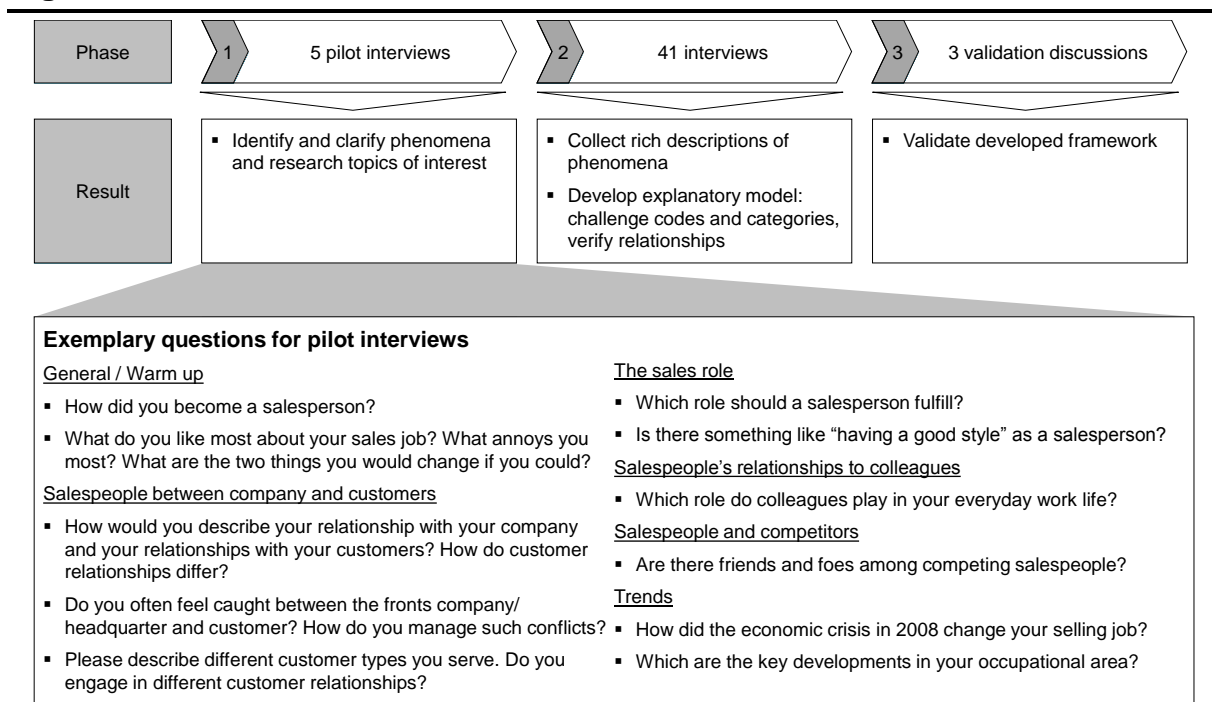
To ensure theoretical sensitivity (theoretical perspective), I start by assessing existing theories in- and outside of salesperson research with regard to their explanatory power for salespeople-related phenomena. In doing so, I build the foundation for in-depth theoretical inquiries in the following empirical studies. The theoretical overview contains the question

that each theory addresses and the systematic statements a theory offers when applied to salespeople. In addition, I briefly review the basis of the theories and the underlying model of man.

1.4.2 Research Process

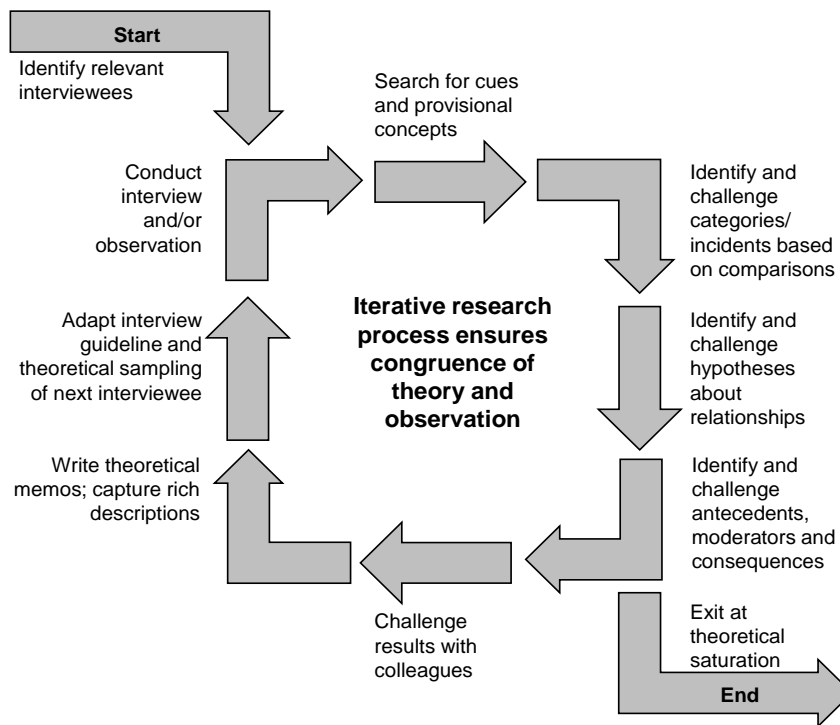
The research process is structured along three phases of data collection. First, I conduct five exploratory interviews to identify relevant salespeople-related phenomena at the sales boundary. In phase 2, I iterate between data collection and data analysis by focusing on the phenomena identified in the pilot interviews. In phase 3, selected practitioners are asked to validate the developed explanatory models (for an overview, see Figure 1-2).

Figure 1-2: Pilot Interviews



The five exploratory interviews are conducted with salespeople who have long-standing job experience in order to collect phenomena central to salespeople's sense-making at the boundary. The guiding principle in the interviews was to get participants to talk about their experiences and challenges at the sales frontline without narrowing the scope of topics and incidents (for exemplary questions, see Figure 1-2). The findings provide the input for the development of a semi-structured interview outline that is the starting point for further data collection in phase 2. Exemplary questions of the semi-structured interview outlines are presented as part of the empirical studies in Chapters 3 and 4.

In accordance with the grounded theory approach (Corbin and Strauss 1990), the research process in phase 2 is iterative in nature (see Figure 1-3). To capture the complexity of how salespeople make sense of the sales boundary, I extend the ideas with each interview, emphasizing and challenging specific ideas and relationships while not pursuing others. Data collection and analysis are interrelated steps. The data analysis procedure is based on continuous comparisons of identified incidents and concepts (Suddaby 2006). I look for the repetition of concepts in order to exclude the subjectivity of interviewees and to categorize the concepts based on similarities and differences. The major categories identified are presented via rich descriptions of narratives and properties. In addition, potential moderators and contingencies are investigated to account for patterns and variation. Based on my findings from prior interviews, I adapt the questions for the next interview to challenge the current explanatory model with fresh data. In this way I am able to ensure congruence of theoretical explanations and reality.

Figure 1-3: Research Process

Source: based on Corbin and Strauss (1990)

In total, I conduct semi-structured interviews with a theoretical sample (Glaser and Strauss 1967) of 41 informants. Each informant is selected based on relevant categories, such as job characteristics, job experience, and expected conceptual relevance, until I reach the point when no new information is collected from additional interviews, which is referred to as “theoretical saturation” (Corbin and Strauss 1990; Glaser and Strauss 1967; Suddaby 2006).

In phase 3, I assure the derived results via member-checking. Following the procedure proposed by Gebhardt, Carpenter, and Sherry (2006), the developed explanatory models are presented to selected participants of the study. The results are confirmed during these exchanges.

1.4.3 Data

As the salesperson is the unit of analysis in this thesis, I examine salespeople and their boundary relationships in B2B sales contexts. In contrast to the B2C context, many B2B sellers are empowered to specify products, negotiate prices, and in some cases even negotiate additional contract terms with their customers, such as guarantees or special terms of delivery. Thus, B2B salespeople have a high degree of freedom to act according to their own interpretations. At the same time, B2B sellers are responsible for a limited number of big customers and naturally develop partnerships with them as the basis for long-term cooperation. The freedom to interpret their boundary role individually and to act upon it as well as the high importance of the relationship with the customer make it especially interesting to study how B2B salespeople interpret their boundary role, how they sell, and what drives them to do so.

To qualify for the study, the interviewee is required to (1) work in a B2B context; (2) to provide a salesperson perspective; (3) to serve customers on a long-term basis; (4) to be employed; and (5) to be empowered to the extent that she is able to influence prices, products, and/ or contract specifications. Potential participants are contacted via the social network Xing. During the selection process, 166 salespeople are selected and 50 interviews are conducted. About 20% of the interviewees proved to misfit the target group. 41 interviews are studied in depth. Table 1-2 offers an overview of the participants. The participants are presented according to their order in the iterative research process. The interviews lasted about one hour on average.

The final sample of B2B salespeople consists of participants from five industries, representing 34 companies. 72 percent of the companies are multinational players, while the remaining 28 percent account for small and medium-sized businesses. No more than two salespeople are interviewed per company. The mix of product and service businesses is

60% : 40%. The sample consists of 20% women and 80% men. I specifically focus on getting participants with significant job experience (40% of the interviewees have more than 10 years of sales job experience) and sales responsibility (more than 50% of the interviewees account for 10 million Euros in sales or more).

In contrast to variations in industry, company, age, or job experience, salespeople's position titles indicate similarity between the informants. The literature provides the following two approaches to describe sales position clusters: an activity-based approach (Moncrief, Marshall, and Lassk 2006) and a mental processing approach (Darmon 1998). In the former case, sales positions are described based on activities and occurrence of specific actions salespeople pursue during their sales job (Moncrief, Marshall, and Lassk 2006). In the latter case, sales positions are distinguished by mental processes salespeople require in order to engage in fulfilling their job, examples of which include information processing and time management (Darmon 1998). According to these clusters, the majority of interviews are conducted with what Moncrief, Marshall, and Lassk (2006) label 'consultative sellers' and 'key account sellers', or what Darmon (1998) calls 'key relationship builders' or 'partnership builders'.

While the categorization described in the paragraph above depicts salespeople's behavioral tendency towards customers, I apply another categorization to the interviewees of the study to capture their behavioral tendency inside of their employing organization. The two profiles of the salesperson as a 'lonely wolf' and the salesperson as a 'team seller' are based on research presented by Dixon and Adamson (2011). According to the authors, "about every B2B sales representative in the world" has one "distinct profile, a specific set of skills and behaviors that define his or her primary mode of interacting with customers" (Dixon and Adamson 2011, p. 41).

Table 1-2: Overview of Participants

Participant code	Participant position title	Company and industry type	Sales position according to Moncrief, Marshall, and Lask (2006)	Sales position according to Darmon (1998)	Sales responsibility in million Euros	Profile based on Dixon and Adamson (2011)	Characteristics of the sales job	Region, scope ¹
ServiceCo1	Sales manager	International logistics provider	Consultative seller	Relationship builder	$1 < x < 5$	Lonely wolf	Salesperson selling logistics services and supply chain solutions to medium-sized companies with a focus on long-term partnerships	R
ServiceCo2	Customer service representative (business clients)	International financial services company	Consultative seller	Relationship builder	$10 < x < 30$	Lonely wolf	Senior sales manager taking care of financial services for medium-sized companies, ranging from investment advisory to granting loans	R
ManufactCo1	Sales engineer	International health care equipment manufacturer	Key account seller	Partnership builder	$1 < x < 5$	Lonely wolf	Salesman selling diagnostic imaging and therapy solutions to clinics and larger practices	R
ManufactCo2	Sales engineer	International health care equipment manufacturer	Key account seller	Partnership builder	$1 < x < 5$	Lonely wolf	Salesman selling diagnostic imaging and therapy solutions to clinics and larger practices	R
ComCo1	Sales representative	Regional IT development company	New business/channel development seller	Adaptive planner	< 0.5	Lonely wolf	Salesperson recommending hardware arrangements and developing software solutions for small business customers	R
ManufactCo3	Sales representative	National car equipment manufacturer	Delivery seller	Mobile informer	< 0.5	Lonely wolf	Vendor offering car equipment to garages by traveling through his territory and making sales calls	R
ComCo2	Sales manager	National publishing house	Consultative seller	Relationship builder	$10 < x < 30$	Lonely wolf	Salesperson developing custom-made publications for business customers, managing the release and selling process	N

1) R = Regional, N = National, EU = Europe

Table 1-2 (continued)

Participant code	Participant position title	Company and industry type	Sales position according to Moncrief, Marshall, and Lassk (2006)	Sales position according to Darmon (1998)	Sales responsibility in million Euros	Profile based on Dixon and Adamson (2011)	Characteristics of the sales job	Region, scope ¹
ServiceCo3	Account manager IT & Engineering	International recruiting company	New business/channel development seller	Adaptive planner	1 < x < 5	Lonely wolf	Seller placing engineers in the mechanical engineering industry, sourcing from a pool of self-employed technical employees	R
ServiceCo4	Customer service rep. (business clients)	International financial services company	Consultative seller	Relationship builder	10 < x < 30	Lonely wolf	Sales manager offering financial services for medium-sized companies, from investment advisory to granting loans	R
ChemCo1	Sales manager	National commodity provider	Consultative seller	Relationship builder	5 < x < 10	Lonely wolf	Sales representative supplying medium-sized manufacturing industries in the automotive industry with steel products	R
ServiceCo5	Sales manager	Regional convention contractor	Consultative seller	Relationship builder	10 < x < 30	Team seller	Sales manager selling accommodation and event services for medium-sized business clients	R
ServiceCo6	Account manager IT & engineering	International recruiting company	New business/channel development seller	Adaptive planner	1 < x < 5	Lonely wolf	Seller placing engineers in the mechanical engineering industry, sourcing from a pool of self-employed technical employees	R
ConGoodCo1	Operation field manager	International consumer goods company	Consultative seller	Relationship builder	10 < x < 30	Team seller	Salesperson selling household and personal care products to a national network of dealers	R
ConGoodCo2	Key account manager	National consumer goods network	Key account seller	Partnership builder	10 < x < 30	Lonely wolf	Key account manager selling services to suppliers of construction, paint, and insulation products	N
ManufactCo4	Sales representative	International electronic and automation manufacturer	Consultative seller	Relationship builder	5 < x < 10	Lonely wolf	Sales engineer supplying industrial customers with products and solutions related to power generation and transmission	R

1) R = Regional, N = National, EU = Europe

Table 1-2 (continued)

Participant code	Participant position title	Company and industry type	Sales position according to Moncrief, Marshall, and Lassk (2006)	Sales position according to Darmon (1998)	Sales responsibility in million Euros	Profile based on Dixon and Adamson (2011)	Characteristics of the sales job	Region, scope ¹
ConGoodCo3	Key Account Manager	International consumer goods company	Key account seller	Partnership builder	> 30	Team seller	Salesperson selling household and personal healthcare products to two key accounts (international dealer network)	N
ComCo3	Key Account Manager	International communications company	Key account seller	Partnership builder	> 30	Lonely wolf	Key account manager providing large companies with information systems and telecommunication technology	N
ChemCo2	Key Account Manager	International agricultural commodity supplier	Consultative seller	Relationship builder	5 < x < 10	Team seller	Sales manager selling fertilizers and nitrogen to agricultural and manufacturing businesses in Europe	EU
ComCo4	Key Account Manager	International IT development company	Consultative seller	Relationship builder	5 < x < 10	Lonely wolf	Sales representative selling hardware, software, and IT-solutions to small- and medium-sized business clients	R
ManufactCo5	Key Account Manager	International building technology company	Consultative seller	Relationship builder	> 30	Lonely wolf	Salesman selling technical infrastructure for electronic security, fire safety, and energy efficiency for buildings and public places to industrial clients	R
ComCo5	Key Account Manager	International IT development company	Key account seller	Partnership builder	10 < x < 30	Lonely wolf	Salesperson selling custom-made IT solutions and educational resources to public institutions	N
ConGoodCo4	Sales Manager	International consumer goods company	New business/channel development seller	Adaptive planner	0.5 < x < 1	Lonely wolf	Salesperson selling hygiene and cleaning products to regional facility managing companies	R

1) R = Regional, N = National, EU = Europe

Table 1-2 (continued)

Participant code	Participant position title	Company and industry type	Sales position according to Moncrief, Marshall, and Lassk (2006)	Sales position according to Darmon (1998)	Sales responsibility in million Euros	Profile based on Dixon and Adamson (2011)	Characteristics of the sales job	Region, scope ¹
ManufactCo6	Key account manager	National manufacturing equipment company	Key account seller	Partnership builder	> 30	Team seller	Sales manager sells measuring and sensor technology to key accounts across Germany	N
ManufactCo7	Key account manager	National electronic and automation manufacturer	Consultative seller	Relationship builder	1 < x < 5	Team seller	Sales rep selling services for automation infrastructures to existing medium-sized business clients	R
ServiceCo7	Key account manager	International logistic provider	Key account seller	Partnership builder	> 30	Team seller	Salesperson selling logistics services and supply chain solutions to key accounts, based on long-term partnerships	N
ManufactCo8	Sales manager	International car manufacturer	Missionary seller	Adaptive seller	5 < x < 10	Lonely wolf	Sales representative selling automobiles to small- and medium-sized businesses as part of a small dealer network	R
ServiceCo8	Sales manager	International insurance company	Missionary seller	Adaptive seller	5 < x < 10	Lonely wolf	Salesperson selling insurance contracts to consumers and small-sized companies	R
ChemCo3	Key account manager	National adhesive producer	Missionary seller	Adaptive seller	1 < x < 5	Lonely wolf	Salesperson selling adhesives primarily to small- and medium-sized production companies	R
ComCo6	Business development manager	National IT development company	Consultative seller	Relationship builder	1 < x < 5	Team seller	Sales manager developing individual IT solutions for work flows of big and medium-sized companies	R
ManufactCo9	Sales manager	International printing unit producer	Consultative seller	Relationship builder	1 < x < 5	Team seller	Sales rep selling printing equipment and corresponding business services	R
ManufactCo10	Key account manager	International engineering contract manufacturer	Key account seller	Partnership builder	> 30	Lonely wolf	Key account manager developing engineering solutions for big corporations and their suppliers, i.e., car manufacturing industry	N

1) R = Regional, N = National, EU = Europe

Table 1-2 (continued)

Participant code	Participant position title	Company and industry type	Sales position according to Moncrief, Marshall, and Laskk (2006)	Sales position according to Darmon (1998)	Sales responsibility in million Euros	Profile based on Dixon and Adamson (2011)	Characteristics of the sales job	Region, scope ¹
ConGoodCo5	Key account manager	International soft drink company	Key account seller	Partnership builder	10 < x < 30	Lonely wolf	Key account manager negotiating master agreements with hotel chains about soft drinks	N
ComCo7	Business development manager	National IT solutions for hospitals	Consultative seller	Relationship builder	1 < x < 5	Lonely wolf	Sales manager selling IT process solutions to hospitals	R
ComCo8	Senior account manager	International IT solutions provider	Consultative seller	Relationship builder	5 < x < 10	Lonely wolf	Key account manager providing small- and medium-sized companies with IT solutions	R
ManufactCo11	Key account manager	International chemical industry	Consultative seller	Relationship builder	10 < x < 30	Lonely wolf	Senior sales manager providing production facilities with belt solutions	N
ComCo9	Key account manager	International service company	Key account seller	Partnership builder	5 < x < 10	Lonely wolf	Key account manager selling IT solutions to the meat production industry	N
ComCo10	Sales consultant	International provider of imaging solutions	New Business/ Channel development seller	Adaptive planner	< 0.5	Team seller	Sales manager selling printing solutions to businesses	R
ManufactCo12	Canvasser	International car manufacturer	New Business/ Channel development seller	Adaptive planner	1 < x < 5	Lonely wolf	Canvasser finding new customers and initiating basic agreements for business car leasing	R
ServiceCo9	Sales manager	National bakery wrapping producer	Consultative seller	Relationship builder	< 0.5	Lonely wolf	Sales manager providing bakeries with wrapping solutions	R
ServiceCo10	Sales manager	National bakery wrapping producer	Consultative seller	Relationship builder	< 0.5	Team seller	Sales manager providing bakeries with wrapping solutions	R
ManufactCo13	Sales engineer	International health care equipment manufacturer	Key account seller	Partnership builder	5 < x < 10	Lonely wolf	Salesman selling diagnostic imaging and therapy solutions to clinics and larger practices	R

1) R = Regional, N = National, EU = Europe

1.5 Outlook on Chapters and Studies

This thesis consists of three main chapters, including a review of what various theoretical approaches contribute to understanding salespeople and two empirical studies on how salespeople make sense of themselves and their vertical boundary relationship. The following sections summarize the theoretical review as well as the two empirical studies.

1.5.1 Theories of Salesperson Behavior

Salesperson research has been criticized as being a-theoretical (Plouffe, Williams, and Wacliner 2008). In Chapter 2, I review possible starting points for more theory-driven salesperson research. I provide an extensive overview of existing intrapersonal and interpersonal theories, structured along the salesperson-related phenomena addressed by the theories. This enables me to identify theories which can be applied to specific salesperson-related phenomena and offer insights on each theory's scope and specificity. This theoretical overview functions as the starting point for further development and evaluation of theories in combination with the empirical data in the upcoming chapters.

1.5.2 Overview of Empirical Results I: The Unstressed Boundary Spanner

The sales job has been referred to as a boundary-spanning position, which requires a salesperson to handle the relationships with the two main role senders, customers and company, simultaneously. Extensive literature covers the salesperson as a role-taker and identifies role stress as a consequence of the boundary position, having severe negative effects on outcomes like performance and job satisfaction. Based on this role stress lens, theoretical role research in sales is dominated by a company-based perspective searching for factors that help the salesperson cope with the negative effects. However, such research falls rather short in explaining why salespeople differ in the extent to which they experience role stress in the first place.

In the qualitative study presented in Chapter 3, I find that salespeople differ tremendously in how they handle their boundary role and deal with it proactively. I enhance existing sales literature in the following three ways. First, I provide a typology of eight different boundary role handling styles. The thesis expands organizational role theory by suggesting that the weighting of three main roles (customer-serving role, company-serving role, role-authoring) determines the salesperson's boundary role handling style. High-performing salespeople tend to engage in role-authoring and create their sales role individually. Second, I develop a framework which covers role-taking and role-making simultaneously. Third, this framework integrates relational and proactive perspectives with role-theoretic arguments on boundary role handling. The consequence of salespeople's different boundary role handling is that some salespeople are less stressed than others.

1.5.3 Overview of Empirical Results II: Outside-Selling Versus Inside-Selling

Working in a boundary sales position often involves challenging situations in which the exchange partners' interests collide and the salesperson has to decide at whom to direct her selling energy. Salespeople who engage in outside-selling direct most of their selling energy at customers and primarily take care of the results for the company. In contrast, salespeople who engage in inside-selling direct more of their selling energy at their own organization than outside sellers in order to help customers make a satisfying purchase decision.

Thus far, sales literature has concentrated on studying effective outside-selling behaviors, the efficient degree of effort, and what motivates salespeople to sell. Sales research focuses on one dominant explanatory model that draws on the principal-agent perspective *to* explain why salespeople engage in different selling behaviors: salespeople (1) want to and (2) have to perform by generating sales. This model assumes that salespeople's selling behavior is predominantly motivated by the goal of effective and efficient selling outcomes. However,

recent research finds that salespeople do not predominantly apply selling behaviors that lead to optimal sales performance (Homburg, Müller, and Klarmann 2011). So far, studies have neglected the (1) direction of effort and (2) the interplay of different motivation dimensions.

The qualitative study presented in Chapter 4 offers an integrative model to explain why and when salespeople deviate from mere performance-efficient selling behaviors. I conceptually map how salespeople make sense of their relationships with their exchange partners and exchange partner's relative behavioral impact on salespeople's selling. The model is based on the concept of duality which accounts for the fact that effects in both relationships take place simultaneously. Thus, their impact can only be understood in relation to each other. The study illustrates the explanatory power of dual psychological contracts and dual identity on the relative dominance of outside-selling behavior.

2 Theories of Salesperson Behavior

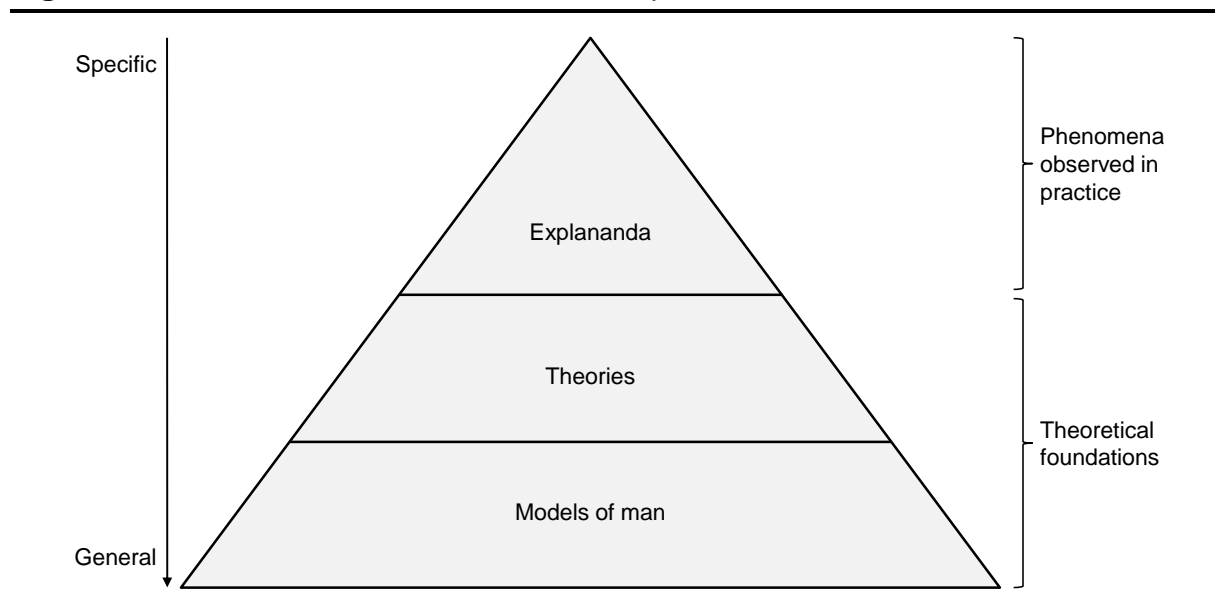
Theoretical contributions are considered a hallmark of high-quality research (Kilduff 2007; Summers 2001). Coloquitt and Zapata-Phelan (2007, p. 1281) point out that „it is difficult to overstate the importance of theory to the scientific endeavor“. According to the content analysis by Williams and Plouffe (2007, p. 414), existing salesperson research includes “a substantial number of a-theoretical articles”. The authors code nearly 50% of sales articles as “a-theoretical”. The lack of theory leads to a decrease of sales-related publications in prestigious journals like the Journal of Marketing or the Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science (Williams and Plouffe 2007). The studies by Williams and Plouffe (2007) and Plouffe, Williams, and Wacliner (2008) refresh the claim already made by Bush and Grant (1994) to improve the theoretical basis of sales research.

The objective of this chapter is to draw attention to existing theories to ensure theoretical sensitivity and to stimulate the discussion of new theoretical foundations of salespeople-related phenomena. The theoretical foundations of a research stream can be enhanced in two ways: The first way is to further apply and test existing theories, especially on phenomena they have not yet been tested on. The second way is to develop new theories (Hunt 1983). This chapter focuses on the first way.

When I speak of theoretical foundations, I refer to theories and models of man which serve to investigate salesperson-related phenomena (see Figure 2-1). Theories of salesperson behavior are explicitly or implicitly based on a specific model of man. Models of man function as “pre-analytic visions” (Dahrendorf 1958) which reduce salesperson behavior to one main concept and core assumptions of human nature (Cohen 1970). Two models of man which have often been applied in the context of salespeople are the *economic model of man* and the *social model of man* (Thaler 2000). They underlie economic and social models of behavior. According to the *homo oeconomicus* model, the salesperson is an independent cost-

benefit calculator who has the ultimate goal to increase her and only her utility (Kahneman and Tversky 1979). She evaluates possible actions based on external and internal constraints and rationally chooses the most utility-promising option (Kahneman, Knetsch, and Thaler 1991). This systematic procedure depicts her as predictable (Kirchgässner 2008). Following the *homo sociologicus* model, the salesperson is a social being and dependent on her relations with others. The salesperson holds different positions and roles in life, in which she has to satisfy the different expectations of role senders (Merton 1957a). Through social education she becomes a social being. Salespeople's behavior can be regarded as socially negotiated results (Merton 1957b). In accordance with Kirchgässner (2008, p. 275), I view both models as complementary and “mutually critical correctives”.

Figure 2-1: Theoretical Foundations of Salesperson Research

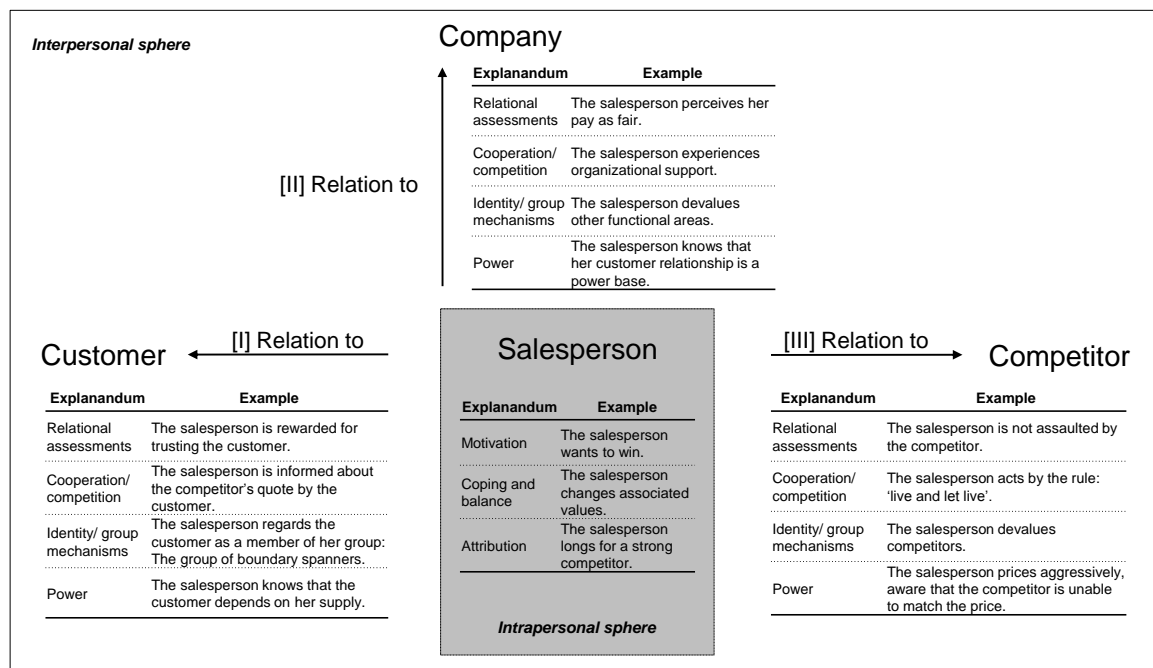


Integrating the phenomenological and theoretical perspective, I structure theories and their contributions around salespeople-related phenomena. Also referred to as salespeople-related explananda, they comprise core topics and questions people face as salespeople. Figure 2-2 shows the salesperson's world, covering self-experiences, key relationships and main explananda. It consists of (1) the inner layer, the *intrapersonal* sphere, concerned with

salespeople's individual internal processes and (2) the outer layer, the *interpersonal* sphere, covering salespeople's three major relationships (Wuyts and Geysken 2005): relations to customers [I], relations to the company [II], and relations to competitors [III]. Sales research so far focuses primarily on the relation of the salesperson to the customer [I] and to the company [II].

Fundamental explananda (Hunt 2002) of the interpersonal sphere are subsumed under four categories: relational assessments, cooperation/ competition, identity/ group mechanisms, and power (for examples, see Figure 2-2). For the intrapersonal sphere of the salesperson, I distinguish three major fundamental explananda: motivation, coping and balance, and attribution.

Figure 2-2: Fundamental Explananda Within the Salesperson's World



Answering this thesis's first research question, the following pages provide an overview of a broad number of theories applicable to intrapersonal and interpersonal salesperson phenomena (see Table 2-1 and Table 2-2). To the best of my knowledge, this compilation is one of the broadest overviews in the literature of theories focusing on the

individual salesperson as the unit of analysis. The theories differ in their scope, specificity and point of departure. Therefore, they account for different angles to look at the individual salesperson. Apart from theoretical sensitivity, the tables motivate new research approaches.

Table 2-1 summarizes 23 theories on salespeople's intrapersonal explananda. It shows the enormous research attention that salespeople's motivation has attracted. *Motivation* theories account for more than 50% of the presented theories. I distinguish between content-based, process-based, and learning-based motivation theories. Content-based motivation theories are concerned with what people strive for. Process-based motivation theories cover several research questions, such as how external forces influence salespeople's motivation (e.g., job characteristics), how motivation processes function (e.g., what role previous knowledge plays for motivation), or how salespeople decide to adopt roles or goals. Volition mechanisms serve as a tool for self-regulation to put motivation into action. Learning-based motivation theories cover how salespeople's motivation stems from the formation of behavioral intentions or from observational learning.

Theories tackling *coping and balance* explananda explain how salespeople deal with self-inconsistencies such as cognitive dissonance and self-discrepancies and how salespeople react to imbalances resulting from feedback of others to the self to restore interpersonal congruency. *Attribution* theories refer to salespeople's perception of the locus of causality. Mostly, the theories suggest that salespeople attribute success to internal factors and failures to external forces.

Table 2-2 presents 17 interpersonal theories. A first set of theories explains *relational assessments* based on reciprocity evaluations and the analysis of rules of exchange. Another perspective offered is based on equity considerations that are input/ output ratios of one exchange partner in comparison to others. The eight theories covering *cooperation and competition* phenomena tackle questions like when do salespeople engage in cooperative or

competitive behavior, how they resolve conflicts, how cooperation works in social networks, and how opinion changes lead to consensus. *Identity and group mechanisms* are covered by five theories analyzing what it means to belong to a group, how groups influence salespeople, how performance is impacted by group contexts, and how social comparison and impression management mechanisms work for salespeople. *Power* theories finally explain the functioning of different power bases and salespeople's power distance enlargement and reduction tendencies.

The empirical studies presented in Chapters 3 and 4 apply different sets of these theories. The study on unstressed boundary spanners in Chapter 3 is based on intra-personal effects. Investigating why some salespeople experience lower levels of role stress than others, I combine role-theoretic arguments with coping, balance and motivational mechanisms such as self-discrepancy theory and self-determination. The investigation of inside-sellers in Chapter 4 focuses on interpersonal effects. The explanatory model explaining why salespeople engage more in inside- or outside-selling is based on the psychological contract theory and social identity mechanisms. Some effects are also predicated on relational assessments following social exchange and equity theory.

Table 2-1: Selected Theories of Intrapersonal Salesperson Explananda

Theory	Research question	Central terms and main concepts	Theory's answer to the research question	Discipline ¹⁾
Motivation - content-based				
Need hierarchy theory (Maslow 1943)		Self-actualization; Self-esteem; Love and belonging; Safety and physiological needs	When inferior needs are satisfied salespeople strive for the next higher level needs.	Industrial/ organizational psychology
ERG theory (Alderfer 1972)	<i>What do salespeople strive for?</i>	Existence needs; Relatedness; Growth needs	<p><i>Frustration hypothesis:</i> A need not yet satisfied becomes dominant.</p> <p><i>Frustration-regression hypothesis:</i> If higher order needs cannot be fulfilled, salespeople regress to lower order needs that appear easier to satisfy.</p> <p><i>Satisfaction-progression hypothesis:</i> If one need is satisfied, the next higher level need becomes relevant.</p> <p><i>Frustration-progression hypothesis:</i> Even if a need cannot be fulfilled, it can influence the development of the salesperson's personality and activate higher order needs.</p>	Industrial/ organizational psychology
Herzberg's motivator-hygiene theory/ Dual structure theory (Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman 1959)		Motivators; Hygiene factors	<i>Hygiene factors</i> need to be fulfilled, otherwise salespeople are dissatisfied. Accomplishing <i>motivators</i> provides salespeople with a surplus of satisfaction.	Industrial/ organizational psychology
Achievement motivation theory (McClelland and Liberman 1949)		Need for achievement	Success is salespeople's main motivation.	Industrial/ organizational psychology
Motivation - process-based				
Re-enforcement theory (Skinner 1974)	<i>How can others influence the motivation of salespeople?</i>	Rewards; Punishments	Salespeople's motivation to engage in specific behaviors can be influenced by controlling for consequences of these behaviors. Rewards and punishment are used to reinforce desired behavior and extinguish unwanted behavior.	Cognitive/ learning psychology

1) Categories based on Williams and Plouffe (2007)

Table 2-1 (continued)

Theory	Research question	Central terms and main concepts	Theory's answer to the research question	Discipline ¹⁾
Motivation - process-based (continued)				
Goal-setting theory (Locke and Latham 1990)	<i>How are salespeople motivated by goals?</i>	Goal difficulty; Goal specificity; Goal acceptance; Goal commitment	Goals focus salespeople's attention and direct efforts towards relevant activities. The importance of goals and their relevance to others enforces salespeople to commit themselves to them. Goals need to be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-targeted (S.M.A.R.T.).	Cognitive/ learning psychology
Self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan 1985)	<i>How do intrinsic and extrinsic motivators motivate salespeople?</i>	<i>Intrinsic motivation:</i> Need for competence; Need for autonomy; Need for relatedness <i>Extrinsic motivation:</i> External regulation; Introjection; Identification; Integration	Extrinsically motivated salespeople aim at attaining a specific outcome. Intrinsically motivated salespeople perform an activity for its inherent satisfaction. Salespeople's innate psychological needs and inherent growth tendencies are the bases for their self-motivation and personality integration: the need for competence, the need for autonomy and the need for relatedness. The different forms of extrinsic motivation function as substitutes for salespeople's intrinsic motivation. However, extrinsic motivations can evolve into intrinsic motivation as the perceived locus of causality switches from external to the salesperson herself.	Cognitive/ learning psychology
Image theory (Beach 1990)	<i>How do salespeople decide which goals and strategies to pursue?</i>	<i>Store of knowledge:</i> Strategic image; Trajectory image; Value image; Compatibility test	Each decision a salesperson makes is assessed against the background of an overall goal she wants to achieve. The overall goal is represented in the salesperson's individual store of knowledge. Salespeople choose goals and strategies based on their compatibility with it. The store of knowledge consists of three images: the strategic image contains plans/ tactics for pursuing the overall goal. The trajectory image contains concrete goals/ intermediary results a salesperson strives for. The value image reflects beliefs/ morals to judge a decision to be right or wrong. Images are schemata of decision-making.	Cognitive/ learning psychology

1) Categories based on Williams and Plouffe (2007)

Table 2-1 (continued)

Theory	Research question	Central terms and main concepts	Theory's answer to the research question	Discipline ¹⁾
Motivation - process-based (continued)				
Self-worth theory (Harter 1990)	<i>How does self-worth influence salespeople's behavior?</i>	Self-worth/ self-esteem; Competence; Self-concept	Self-worth is an affective reaction to and overall opinion of the self. Salespeople try to maintain a positive self-image to experience self-worth. They feel good about themselves by having success (competence). Salespeople reduce the value attached to a domain if they expect to fail or adapt the levels of self-expectations (part of the self-concept).	Cognitive/ learning psychology
Theory of self-regulation (Kuhl 1998)	<i>How do salespeople put their motivation into action?</i>	<i>Volition:</i> Cognitive control; Emotional control; Motivation control; Environmental control; Action-orientation; State-orientation	Volition is the cognitive process based on which salespeople decide on, commit to and realize goals (motivation). First, salespeople create <i>immanent volition</i> by deciding to follow a goal. Second, they put forth a particular act referred to as <i>imperative volitions</i> . A settled state of choice that controls a series of actions is labeled <i>predominant volition</i> . It is an automated process. 'Action-oriented' salespeople are able to overrule conflicting emotions or distractions and continue with volitional actions in contrast to 'state-oriented' salespeople.	Cognitive/ learning psychology
Job characteristics theory (Hackman and Oldham 1980)	<i>How do job characteristics account for salespeople's motivation and outcomes?</i>	<i>Job characteristics:</i> Skill variety; Task identity/ significance; Autonomy <i>Psychological states:</i> Experienced meaningfulness/ responsibility; Knowledge of result <i>Outcomes:</i> Work motivation; Growth/ job satisfaction; Work effectiveness	Via critical psychological states, job characteristics such as skill variety and task significance influence salespeople's motivation and job satisfaction. For example, salespeople who have the possibility to do their job with a high degree of autonomy experience high responsibility and meaningfulness. These psychological states positively influence outcomes like work motivation and work effectiveness.	Cognitive/ learning psychology

1) Categories based on Williams and Plouffe (2007)

Table 2-1 (continued)

Theory	Research question	Central terms and main concepts	Theory's answer to the research question	Discipline ¹⁾
Motivation - process-based (continued)				
Valence-instrumentality-expectancy model (Vroom 1964)	<i>How do salespeople decide if something is worth working for?</i>	Expectancy; Instrumentality; Valence	Salespeople's effort to perform a task depends on three evaluations: expectancy that the effort will lead to the aspired outcome, the belief that success will lead to rewards (instrumentality) and the desirability of these rewards (valence).	Cognitive/ learning psychology
Social production function theory (Lindenberg 1986)	<i>What are the factors salespeople strive for in their life and how do they achieve them?</i>	<i>Ultimate goals:</i> Physical well-being; Social approval <i>Instrumental goals:</i> Stimulation; Comfort; Status; Behavioral confirmation; Affection	Within the constraints salespeople face, they try to produce their well-being by achieving two ultimate goals: physical well-being and social approval. These are described by a single utility function, invariant across salespeople. The systematic difference exists in the way each salesperson tries to achieve the ultimate goals. Five instrumental goals function as intermediary goals. Based on cost-benefit considerations each salesperson chooses for which goals to strive.	Cognitive/ learning psychology
Motivation - learning-based				
Theory of reasoned action (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975)	<i>How do salespeople form behavioral intentions?</i>	Behavioral intentions; Attitude towards the behavior; Social norms	Salespeople's individual behavior is driven by behavioral intentions. Behavioral intentions are a function of salespeople's attitude towards the behavior and respective social norms.	Cognitive/ learning psychology
Theory of planned behavior (Ajzen 1985)		Behavioral intentions; Attitude towards the behavior; Social norms; Perceived behavior control	Salespeople's individual behavior is driven by behavioral intentions. Behavioral intentions are determined by their attitude towards the behavior, social norms and perceived behavioral control.	Cognitive/ learning psychology
Social cognitive theory (Bandura 1971)	<i>How do salespeople acquire behavior patterns? How are they motivated to do so?</i>	Triadic reciprocal determinism; Perceived self-efficacy; Symbolic modeling; Observational learning; (Dis-)inhibition; Social prompting; Environmental enhancement effect; Expectancy	Salespeople learn behaviors via observation of relevant others. They observe others, their behavior, environmental influences and corresponding outcomes. If they engage in these behaviors in similar situations, they expect comparable outcomes. Salespeople are especially motivated to engage in observational learning if they identify with the role model and have high self-efficacy.	Cognitive/ learning psychology

1) Categories based on Williams and Plouffe (2007)

Table 2-1 (continued)

Theory	Research question	Central terms and main concepts	Theory's answer to the research question	Discipline ¹⁾
Coping and balance				
Interpersonal congruency theory (Backman 1985; Secord and Backman 1965)	<i>How is salespeople's behavior influenced by the need for interpersonal congruency?</i>	Self-concept; Congruency by implication/ validation/ comparison; Cognitive restructuring; Selective evaluation; Selective interaction; Response evocation; Self-presentation; Self-creation	Continuity of salespeople's behavior depends on the continuity of their relationships with others. Externally, behaviors are reinforced by norms and roles. Internally, salespeople try to achieve the congruency of their self-concept, behaviors relevant to the self, and relevant behaviors and perceptions of other people. Typical strategies are cognitive restructuring (e.g., misperception of other's behavior), selective evaluation (e.g., alter the affective value of others); selective interaction (e.g., have relationships with those who provide consistency). Salespeople also present and create their selves in interaction with others (e.g., manipulation of cues to create a desired image).	Social psychology
Balance theory (Heider 1958)	<i>How do salespeople manage emotional imbalance in relationships with others?</i>	Psychological balance; Valence (positive, negative)	To establish emotional balance, salespeople try to manage positive and negative valence in relationships with others. They change their attitude by adapting the valence associated with the person or the object of interest. They also attribute inconsistencies to external factors.	Cognitive/ learning psychology
Cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger 1957)	<i>How do salespeople manage cognitive inconsistencies?</i>	Dissonance; Consonance; Irrelevance; Psychological discomfort from inconsistency of beliefs; Attitudes	Salespeople strive for internal consistency. If they experience contradictory beliefs or engage in contradictory actions, they try to reduce the cognitive dissonance by changing, justifying and rationalizing their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors.	Cognitive/ learning psychology
Self-discrepancy theory (Higgins 1989)	<i>How do salespeople manage their self-aspirations and actual behavior?</i>	Self-awareness; Private/ public self-consciousness; Self-presentation	Each salesperson has different types of self-images: e.g., actual self, social self, ideal self. If images are perceived to be at conflict, salespeople experience negative emotions and try to reduce the discrepancy. Discrepancies are evoked by feedback of others or by salespeople's self-perception. Self-presentation aims at altering other's perceptions.	Cognitive/ learning psychology

1) Categories based on Williams and Plouffe (2007)

Table 2-1 (continued)

Theory	Research question	Central terms and main concepts	Theory's answer to the research question	Discipline ¹⁾
Coping and balance (continued)				
Psychological reactance theory (Brehm 1966)	<i>How do salespeople react if their behavioral freedom is threatened?</i>	Reactance; Justification	The salesperson shows psychological reactance to regulations that impinge negative effects upon freedom and autonomy at the sales boundary. The affective reaction is especially intense if the salesperson feels obliged to adopt a specific opinion or behavior. She tries to restore her autonomy by e.g., putting forward the opinion she is willing to adopt. Reactance often implies resistance to persuasion.	Cognitive/ learning psychology
Attribution				
Attribution theory (Kelley 1967)	<i>What or who do salespeople consider to be responsible for results/ events?</i>	Personal vs. situational attribution; Co-variation principle; False-consensus effect; Fundamental attribution error; Actor-observer effect; Locus of causality (internal, external); Illusion of control	Salespeople „attain cognitive mastery of the causal structure of their environment“ (Kelley 1967, p. 193). They want to explain underlying causes of important events and often show biases: other's behavior is attributed to the person herself (fundamental attribution error) whereas one's own behavior is attributed to situational, uncontrollable factors (co-variation principle). Negative outcomes are attributed to external factors.	Cognitive/ learning psychology
Learned helplessness theory (Seligman 1992)	<i>Do salespeople believe that they are able to control events?</i>	Locus of control	Learned helplessness refers to a depressive explanatory style. Salespeople do not believe that they can control important outcomes. They mostly attribute negative events to themselves. As a result, they do not take chances.	Cognitive/ learning psychology

1) Categories based on Williams and Plouffe (2007)

Table 2-2: Selected Theories of Interpersonal Salesperson Explananda

Theory	Research question	Central terms and main concepts	Theory's answer to the research question	Discipline¹⁾
Relational assessment				
Social exchange theory (Blau 1964)	<i>How do salespeople decide to develop and maintain human relationships?</i>	Interdependence; Reciprocity; Rules & norms of exchange; Power-dependence theory; Attachment style; Communal relationship	Salespeople form and maintain relationships as long as they believe and subsequently find it in their interest to do so. Depending on subjective cost-benefit analysis and the consideration of alternatives, relationships grow, develop, and deteriorate or dissolve.	Social psychology
Equity theory (Adams 1963)	<i>When do salespeople perceive a relationship as fair?</i>	Input-output ratio	Salespeople assess the fairness in a relationship based on the input-output ratio of the relationship partners. Salespeople regard a relationship as unfair and are distressed if they perceive inequality. Inequality refers to either their input/ output ratio being less than or greater than the perceived input/ output ratio of other exchange partners. In both cases, salespeople will engage in activities to restore the imbalance.	Social psychology
Cooperation/ competition				
Social network theory (Barnes 1954)	<i>How is the salesperson incorporated in the net of social relations?</i>	Node; Tie; Social network; Social capital	Social network theory regards the salesperson as a node in a network that has strong and weak ties with others. The density and cohesion of a salesperson's network gives her power and support. The relationships/ norms of this network influence her outcomes more than her attributes.	Social psychology
Social judgment theory (Sherif and Hovland 1961)	<i>How do salespeople react to differing arguments offered?</i>	Ego-involvement; Latitude of acceptance; Latitude of non-commitment; Latitude of rejection; Communication messages	Salespeople evaluate arguments by comparing them to current attitudes. As a result, they adopt the new position (latitude of acceptance), reject it (latitude of rejection), or react non-specifically (latitude of non-commitment). The level of ego-involvement affects the size of salespeople's latitudes. To be able to realize only small differences, salespeople distort incoming information to fit their categories. Only moderate differences between the anchor position and the one offered can lead to a change of attitudes.	Social psychology

1) Categories based on Williams and Plouffe (2007)

Table 2-2 (continued)				
Theory	Research question	Central terms and main concepts	Theory's answer to the research question	Discipline¹⁾
Cooperation/ competition (continued)				
Opinion change theory (Kelman 1961)	<i>How and why do salespeople change their opinion?</i>	Types of opinion change: Compliance; Identification; Internalization	Salespeople adopt opinions for three reasons: <i>Compliance:</i> Salespeople abide by the rules and share the other's opinion in order to feel approved or to be rewarded for it. <i>Identification:</i> Salespeople follow other's opinion to have satisfying self-defining relationships. <i>Internalization:</i> Salespeople integrate rationally convincing ideas in their existing beliefs/ values.	Social psychology
Theory of cooperation and competition (Deutsch 1949; Johnson and Johnson 1989)	<i>When do salespeople cooperate or act competitively?</i>	Goal interdependence; Effective vs. bungling actions; Substitutability; Attitude; Inducibility	Salespeople and other players (customer, employer, competitor, etc.) are either related by positive goals (complements) or by negative goals (substitutes). They are willing to cooperate and be helpful to those whose actions are helpful to them (substitutability), but not to those whose actions are harmful (negative inducibility). In the latter case they compete by engaging in harmful actions themselves and by trying to interfere and obstruct the harmful actions of the other players.	Social psychology
Dual-concern theory (Pruitt and Rubin 1986)	<i>How do salespeople resolve conflict situations?</i>	Self-concern; Other-concern; Egoistic motive; Social motive; Integrative outcome	Salespeople's preferred mode of conflict handling is based on two concerns: Self-concern and other-concern. Depending on salespeople's disposition towards pro-self and pro-social goals, they engage in a specific conflict resolution strategy: avoidance (low self/ low social), yielding (low self/ high social), competition (high self/ low social), cooperation (high self/ high social), and compromising (intermediate self/ high social).	Social psychology
Stimulus-value-role theory (Murstein 1970)	<i>With whom do salespeople want to work?</i>	Stimulus stage; Value stage; Role stage	Salespeople assess others via a three-stage model: In the stimulus stage they evaluate others based on attributes like look and status. The value stage is concerned with whether others have similar attitudes/ values. In the role stage they assess if sharing roles/ responsibilities is of interest.	Social psychology

1) Categories based on Williams and Plouffe (2007)

Table 2-2 (continued)				
Theory	Research question	Central terms and main concepts	Theory's answer to the research question	Discipline¹⁾
Cooperation/ competition (continued)				
Agency theory (Jensen and Meckling 1976)	<i>How can tasks be delegated efficiently to the salesperson?</i>	<p><i>Agents:</i> Self-interested; Utility maximizers; Contract; Risk averse; Bounded rationality</p> <p><i>Asymmetry of information:</i> Pre-contractual problem = hidden Information, adverse selection; Post-contractual problem = hidden action, moral hazard</p>	<p>The salesperson acts as an agent for the firm. It depends on her to undertake the selling task on the company's behalf. Two major challenges characterize this relationship: Pre-contractual, the salesperson has the advantage of hidden information, e.g., about selling skills and probability for success. Post-contractual, the company is not able to completely monitor the salesperson. She may engage in hidden actions that are not in line with the company's goals. Efficient delegation of the selling task can only be achieved by contractual structures (control and incentives) motivating salespeople to show goal-conform behavior.</p>	Management theory
Game theory (von Neumann and Morgenstern 1944)	<i>How do salespeople determine optimal behavior in dynamic interactions?</i>	<p>Equilibrium; Zero-sum game; Dominant strategy; Nash equilibrium</p>	<p>A strategy serves as a rule for salespeople to choose actions. Equilibrium strategies imply that salespeople and relevant others cannot improve their outcome by deviating from their current behavior. However, salespeople will continuously search for a relevant other to cooperate with. When both change their strategy they can increase their benefits.</p>	Economics
Identity/ group mechanisms				
Social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 1986)	<i>Who am I? To which group do I belong?</i>	<p>Self-categorization; In-group heterogeneity; Out-group homogeneity; Meta-contrast principle; Self-enhancement; Social dominance orientation; Contact hypothesis; Groupthink</p>	<p>An important part of salespeople's self-perception is their social identity. Social identity refers to the salesperson as a member of a certain social group. Depending on the situation, different memberships can be relevant. As a member of a social group the salesperson is perceived as a typical member of that group, holding its values and attitudes. Group members are evaluated positively whereas outsiders are devalued (meta-contrast principle). Thus, group membership leads to self-enhancement.</p>	Social psychology

1) Categories based on Williams and Plouffe (2007)

Table 2-2 (continued)				
Theory	Research question	Central terms and main concepts	Theory's answer to the research question	Discipline¹⁾
Identity/ group mechanisms (continued)				
Social impact theory (Latané 1981)	<i>Which factors determine the influence of a group on the salesperson?</i>	Group strength and immediacy; Normative pressures; Size of the group; Source/ target person	The social influence of a group on a salesperson depends on its relevance, immediacy and number of members. The group has more influence (conformity, compliance, obedience) the closer the salesperson is to that group and the comparatively weaker the relevant group is the salesperson belongs to.	Social psychology
Social facilitation (Zajonc 1968)	<i>How does a group context affect salespeople's performance?</i>	Self-awareness; Self-presentation; Attentional conflict; Evaluation-apprehension	Salespeople tend to perform well-practiced tasks better if they are watched by others. It creates an atmosphere of evaluation and increases attention. For less familiar tasks, however, salespeople show less performance. Salespeople's performance is also influenced by whether others approve or disapprove their actions.	Social psychology
Social comparison theory (Festinger 1954)	<i>How do salespeople assess themselves?</i>	Downward/ upward social comparison; Relative deprivation	In order to evaluate their own abilities, attitudes and behaviors salespeople compare themselves with others. Downward comparisons are favored since they result in positive evaluations of the self.	Social psychology
Impression management theory (Goffman 1959)	<i>How do salespeople influence the way others perceive them?</i>	Self-concept; Self-verification; Self-monitoring; Reputation; Congruence	Salespeople want to build up a reputation that is consistent with their self-concept. To achieve this, salespeople monitor themselves and their environment for reactions of others to their behavior. If other's reactions are congruent with their self-concept (self-verification) they continue to engage in the same behavior. If not, they apply new behaviors to achieve the desired responses.	Social psychology

1) Categories based on Williams and Plouffe (2007)

Table 2-2 (continued)				
Theory	Research question	Central terms and main concepts	Theory's answer to the research question	Discipline ¹⁾
Power				
Theory of social power (French and Raven 1959)	<i>When do salespeople have power and why?</i>	<i>Power bases:</i> Reward power; Coercive power; Legitimate power; Referent power; Expert power; Information power	Salespeople can have power due to their expert knowledge about products and solutions or due to their information advantage. They can also consciously apply rewards and thereby exert power in selling situations. If applied correctly, these power bases will mostly cause attraction by the recipient, while coercive power will likely cause resistance.	Social psychology
Power theory (Mulder 1977)	<i>How do power positions influence salespeople's behavior?</i>	Power distance enlargement; Power distance reduction	Salespeople's behavior is driven by power management tendencies: Salespeople try to enlarge power distance towards less powerful others and decrease power distance to more powerful others.	Social psychology

1) Categories based on Williams and Plouffe (2007)

3 The Unstressed Boundary Spanner: Role-Making, Not Role-Taking

3.1 Introduction

There are two perspectives on roles: role-taking and role-making. The role-taking perspective pictures the salesperson caught between customers and company. The salesperson is determined by these external forces, the two exchange partners. Their two sets of role expectations are contradictory. The task to fulfill these conflicting expectations leads to role stress. Thus, research on how salespeople take their boundary role is dominated by role stress investigations (Babakus et al. 1999; Bettencourt and Brown 2003; Singh 1993, 1998). In contrast, research on boundary roles outside of sales research (Hornung et al. 2010; Kramer 2009; Wrzesniewski and Dutton 2001; Wrzesniewski, Dutton, and Debebe 2003) pictures organizational members more positive and less stressed. This is the result of individuals making a role. Studies in organizational or socio-psychological literature do not regard the individual only as a passive taker of her role but rather follow a proactive perspective.

In the *role-taking* perspective, numerous studies have shown the negative effects of role stress on salespeople's performance and job satisfaction (Jaramillo, Mulki, and Solomon 2006; Singh 2000). At the same time, research on how salespeople take a role focuses on antecedents of role stress and aims at identifying factors to reduce its negative effects (Lewin and Sager 2008; Paulin, Ferguson, and Bergeron 2006; Srivastava and Sager 1999). Most of these research attempts are primarily driven by a management perspective and investigate how salespeople's performance can be improved (e.g., Homburg, Müller, and Klarmann 2011; Marinova, Ye, and Singh 2008).

In the *role-making* perspective, studies explain how individuals try to change role expectations and thereby develop roles (Nicholson 1984), how expectations can be negotiated (Brett, Shapiro, and Lytle 1998), or how individuals engage in role boundary work (Ashforth, Kreiner, and Fugate 2000) to be less stressed.

Recent studies in sales research have made some efforts with regard to role-making (Heide and Wathne 2006; Plouffe and Barclay 2007). The study by Heide and Wathne (2006), for example, conceptualizes the prototypical roles of a friend and of a business partner which are considered to evolve over time. These roles are the result of the interaction of different organizational actors. However, like most other studies, the authors explain roles by governance mechanisms like socialization, incentives and monitoring. In other words, roles are defined by external role senders. How salespeople themselves actively make sense of the sales boundary and what effects this might have on the sales role and salespeople's behavior remains largely unanswered.

I observe that, first, limited research exists on salespeople's role-making. Most studies view salespeople as rather controllable organizational members. In line, research focuses on how they *take* their role and is dominated by a managerial perspective. Second, to the best of my knowledge, there exists no conceptual framework that combines the two perspectives of taking *and* making a sales role. Third, most studies about salespeople and their role rely heavily on quantitative methods, which capture sales boundary phenomena with discrete construct measurement. However, they are of limited use for in-depth analysis of drivers and sales role mechanisms.

Following the call of Hult (2011) for further theory-based examination of boundary spanning sales role mechanisms, this chapter answers the following research questions:

Research question 2: How does the individual salesperson interpret the expectations associated with her sales position and thereby takes and makes her boundary role?

Research question 3: How does the individual salesperson's way of handling her sales position relate to stress?

My research interests correspond to Child's (1972) idea of 'strategic choice', which refers to an actor's activities within an organizational system to influence structure and processes according to her preferences.

This chapter is organized as follows: First, I conduct a literature review on boundary roles. It starts with a general overview of the development of role theory followed by a review of the role-taking perspective in sales research and an account of role-making concepts outside of sales research. Second, I describe the data analysis applied to the empirical observations. Rich descriptions of observations and interpretations lead to the development of the boundary role handling concept which is presented with corresponding hypotheses along five themes. Finally, I link the boundary role handling model to existing concepts in the literature.

3.2 Literature Review: Boundary Role Research

3.2.1 Role Theory Streams

Role theory, as one of the major sociological theories, is concerned with how individuals interact in a society (for an extended overview of role theory, see Biddle 1979, 1986). Each individual takes several positions within society. Each position is associated with a specific

role, which is defined by the sum of expectations associated with the position (Ebaugh 1988).

Central questions in role theory are:

- How do societies reach agreement about role responsibilities?
- When do people demonstrate behavior in accordance with role expectations?
- How do people deal with conflicting expectations of two or more roles that a person has to fulfill at the same time?

Over the decades, several independent, mainly ‘discipline-related perspectives’ in role theory have emerged, which resulted in a broad range of definitions and constructs (Biddle 1986). The *functional* perspective is mostly concerned with how social systems remain stable through consensus about and conformity to roles (Dierdorff and Morgeson 2007). The *interactionist* perspective focuses on the interplay of the position inhabitant and the senders of role expectations and how they negotiate role definitions (Graen 1976).

The *organizational* perspective explicitly focuses on roles within organizations, such as companies. Organizational role theory (Katz and Kahn 1978) focuses on the different roles associated with a specific job position within a formal and hierarchical organization. According to organizational role theory (ORT), the assigned job roles need to be adopted by each individual employee in order for an organization to function effectively as a social entity. Job roles are defined by normative expectations reflecting official demands of the organization and pressures of relevant others (Biddle 1986).

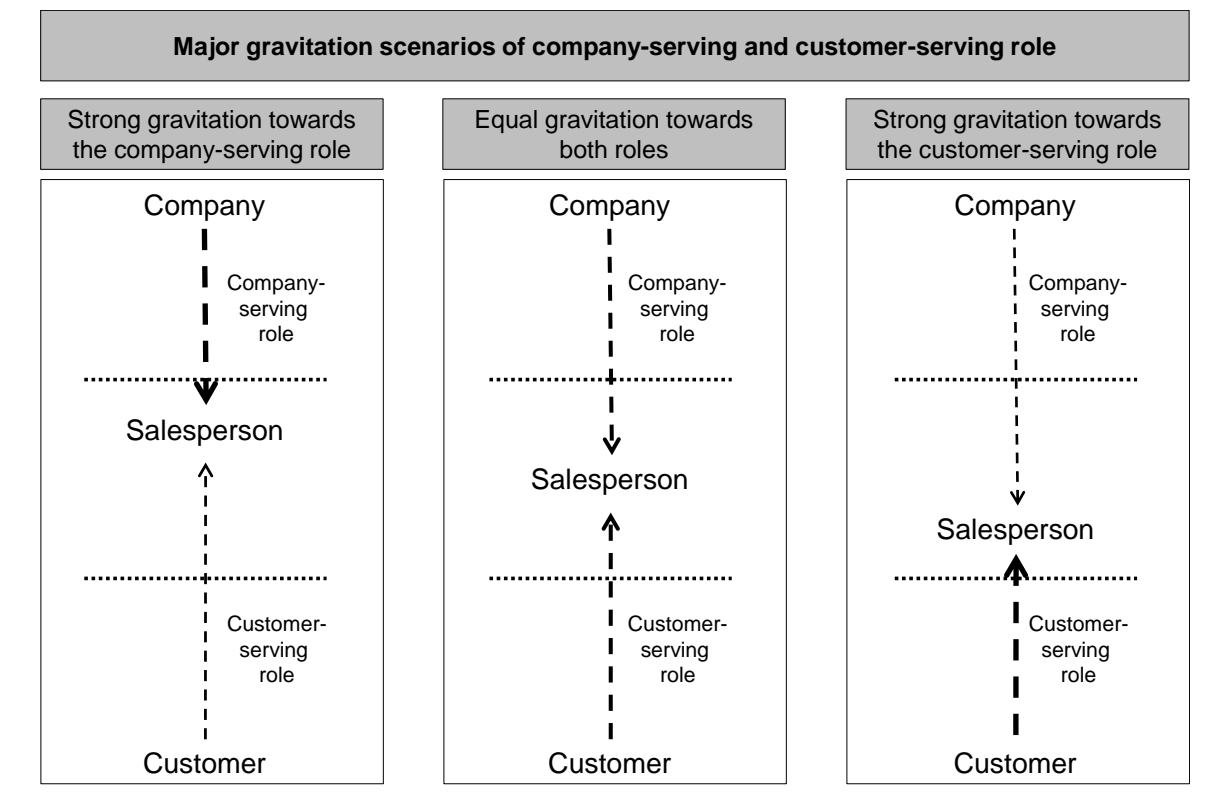
Research on how salespeople interpret their jobs has been dominated by the organizational perspective. The sales role is determined by the expectations of the two main role senders, customers and company (Quick 1979). This puts salespeople in a sandwich position between company and customers. The dominance of the two role senders for the sales job inhabitant refers to the basic idea of organizational role theory, the external definition of job roles. That is why organizational role theory is this chapter’s starting point

for investigating the sales boundary and how a salesperson makes sense of it. To provide a basis for further role-theoretic discussions, I provide an overview of relevant role constructs in sales research.

3.2.2 Role Theory in Sales Research - The Role-Taking Perspective

Role theory in sales research states that the salesperson's role is mainly defined by an external mechanism, that is, the role sender's expectations. A salesperson has a distinct role for each relevant other (role sender) with whom she interacts in that position (Merton 1957a). Thus, the salesperson has to fulfill several roles at the same time, for example, the role as a member of the organization, the role as a subordinate of the sales manager, or the role as a trusted advisor or partner of a specific customer. All roles which are associated with the sales position are referred to as the salesperson's role set. In the course of the analysis, I focus on the vertical roles with customer and company. Other roles, such as the role as a colleague, are not considered.

Following a one-dimensional, vertical perspective on the sales boundary, I refer to the two main roles of the salesperson as the customer-serving role and the company-serving role. Engaging in the customer-serving role refers to fulfilling customer expectations whereas engaging in the company-serving role refers to meeting company expectations. The conflicting company and customer expectations pull the salesperson in both directions at the same time. Determined by these expectations, a salesperson engages more in the company-serving role (strong gravitation towards the company-serving role) or engages more in the customer-serving role (strong gravitation towards the customer-serving role). The dominant perspective in salesperson research is that, if the salesperson engages more in one of the roles, she, at the same time, disengages from the other role (for an overview of the gravitation scenarios, refer to Figure 3-1).

Figure 3-1: The Continuum View of the Salesperson's Boundary

Due to the salesperson's sandwich position between customers and company, the sales position is associated with high levels of role stress. Three conditions are referred to as components of role stress: role conflict, role ambiguity, and role overload.

- To the extent that the salesperson believes role expectations to be incompatible, she experiences *role conflict* (Foo Nin et al. 1997; Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman 1970).
- When a salesperson believes that she lacks information about how to perform her role adequately, she experiences *role ambiguity* (Jackson and Schuler 1985; Singh 1998).
- Some salespeople also experience feelings of *role overload* because they believe that the cumulative role expectations exceed their ability and motivation to perform the task (Bolino and Turnley 2005).

Sales researchers have developed an impressive body of knowledge about role stress (Agarwal and Ramaswami 1993; Arnold et al. 2009a; Babin, Boles, and Robin 2000; Boyd, Lewin, and Sager 2009; Jaramillo, Mulki, and Solomon 2006; Singh 1993). The research is mainly motivated by (1) identifying antecedents of role stress, by (2) identifying factors that enable salespeople to cope with role stress, and by (3) investigating consequences of role stress.

Researchers identify antecedents of role stress from various areas. They can be grouped into *organizational*, *supervisor-related* and *personal* variables (for an overview, see Table 3-1). While most research on supervisor-related variables and organizational variables has taken place in the eighties and nineties, recent studies also focus on personal variables such as self-efficacy and optimism (Crosno et al. 2009; Mulki, Lask, and Jaramillo 2008). The characteristics of individuals start to gain more research attention.

The consequences of role stress remain intensively researched up to the present (for an overview, see Table 3-2). They can be grouped according to *performance*, *psychological* and *behavioral consequences*, such as customer-oriented behavior. The dominance of current studies investigating outcomes of role stress mirrors the dominance of the company perspective in salesperson research. Individual performance (Crosno et al. 2009), job satisfaction (Jaramillo, Mulki, and Solomon 2006), and organizational commitment (Barnes et al. 2006) have attracted the most research attention.

Table 3-1: Selected Antecedents of Role Stress Constructs in Sales Research

Antecedents	Effect on...			Supporting authors
	Role conflict ¹⁾	Role ambiguity ¹⁾	Role overload ¹⁾	
Organizational variables				
Autonomy	-	+/-	+/-	Agarwal and Ramaswami (1993); Brief and Aldag (1976); De Ruyter, Wetzels, and Feinberg (2001); Singh (1998); Teas (1983)
Participation	-	-	+/-	Agarwal and Ramaswami (1993); Teas (1983)
Ethical work climate	-	-	-	Babin, Boles, and Robin (2000); Jaramillo, Mulki, and Solomon (2006); Schwepker, Ferrell, and Ingram (1997)
Task variety	-	+	-	Agarwal and Ramaswami (1993); Singh (1998)
Task identity	-	-	n.a.	Agarwal and Ramaswami (1993); Brief and Aldag (1976)
Value congruity	-	-	n.a.	Barnes et al. (2006); Flaherty, Dahlstrom, and Skinner (1999); Román and Iacobucci (2010)
Degree of boundary spanning	+	n.a.	+	Lyonski (1985)
Formalization	-	+/-	n.a.	Agarwal and Ramaswami (1993); Michaels et al. (1988); Nicholson and Goh (1983); Michaels, Day, and Joachimsthaler (1987)
Supervisor-related variables				
Consideration	-	-	n.a.	Agarwal and Ramaswami (1993); Sager and Menon (1994); Teas (1983)
Feedback	-	+/-	n.a.	Agarwal and Ramaswami (1993); Singh (1998); Teas (1983)
Participation	-	-	+	Behrman and Perreault (1984); Bolino and Turnley (2005)
Initiation of structure	-	-	n.a.	
Closeness of supervision	n.a.	-	n.a.	Behrman and Perreault (1984); Walker, Churchill, and Ford (1975)
Leader-member exchange quality	-	-	-	Russo, Melroy, and Wilks (2000); Tanner, Dunn, and Chonko (1993)
Training	-	-	n.a.	
Personal variables				
Cognitive moral development	+	+	n.a.	Foo Nin et al. (1997)
Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation	-	-	n.a.	Keaveney and Nelson (1993); Miao, Evans, and Shaoming (2007)
Time congruity	-	-	n.a.	Weeks and Fournier (2010)
Self-efficacy	-	-	-	Mulki, Lassk, and Jaramillo (2008)
Optimism	-	-	n.a.	Crosno et al. (2009)
Personality variables	+/-	+/-	n.a.	Latack (1981)

1) "+" = positive effect; "-" = negative effect; "+/-" = inconclusive; "n.a." = not applicable, no effect

Table 3-2: Selected Consequences of Role Stress Constructs in Sales Research

Consequences	Effect of...			Supporting authors
	Role conflict ¹⁾	Role ambiguity ¹⁾	Role overload ¹⁾	
Performance consequences				
Individual performance	+/-	+/-	+/-	Crosno et al. (2009); Jaramillo, Mulki, and Solomon (2006); MacKenzie, Podsakoff, and Ahearne (1998); Miao and Evans (2007); Michaels and Dixon (1994); Mulki, Lassk, and Jaramillo (2008); Onyemah (2008); Singh (1998); Singh (2000); Brown, Jones, and Leigh (2005)
Turnover intention/ Propensity to leave	+	+	+/-	Jaramillo, Mulki, and Solomon (2006); MacKenzie, Podsakoff, and Ahearne (1998)
Psychological consequences				
Job satisfaction	-	-	-	Arnold et al. (2009b); Barnes et al. (2006); Bettencourt and Brown (2003); Boles, Wood, and Johnson (2003); Jaramillo, Mulki, and Solomon (2006); Michaels and Dixon (1994); Weeks and Fournier (2010)
Job tension	+	+	+	MacKenzie, Podsakoff, and Ahearne (1998); Netemeyer, Brashear, and Boles (2004)
Job anxiety	+	+	+	
Job stress	+	+	+	
Organizational commitment	-	-	+	Barnes et al. (2006); Bettencourt and Brown (2003); Jaramillo, Mulki, and Solomon (2006); MacKenzie, Podsakoff, and Ahearne (1998)
Emotional exhaustion	+	+	+	Boles, Johnston, and Hair (1997)
Burnout/ Psychological withdrawal	+	+	+	Goolsby (1992); Keaveney and Nelson (1993)
Intrinsic/ extrinsic motivation	-	-	+	Tyagi (1985)
Job efficacy	n.a.	-	+/-	Arnold et al. (2009b); Lindberg, Wincent, and Örtqvist (2013); Brown, Jones, and Leigh (2005)
Behavioral consequences				
Internal influence behaviors	+	n.a.	n.a.	Bettencourt and Brown (2003)
Customer orientation/ Adaptive selling behavior	n.a.	-	n.a.	Román and Iacobucci (2010)
Coping styles:				
Emotion-focused coping	+	n.a.	n.a.	Boyd, Lewin, and Sager (2009)
Problem-focused coping	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	

1) "+" = positive effect; "-" = negative effect; "+/-" = inconclusive; "n.a." = not applicable, no effect

Despite the amount of research on role stress, Bettencourt et al. (2005) point to the difficulty of identifying all effects with regard to role stress. Even though several key antecedents have been identified, studies fall comparatively short to, for example, investigate why salespeople react differently to factors inducing role stress. The source of role stress (company or customer) as well as salespeople's individual characteristics are considered valuable starting points for future research (Bettencourt and Brown 2003).

In conclusion, the impressive research on salespeople based on role-theoretic frameworks has generated extensive knowledge about how salespeople *take* the sales role (Keaveney and Nelson 1993). Sales research has mostly pictured the salesperson as torn between the two main role senders. As a reaction to role stress, salespeople are likely to perform less and psychologically withdraw from the job and the role. However, only little is known about salespeople *making* the sales role.

3.2.3 Role Theory Outside of Sales Research - The Role-Making Perspective

Taking a role describes an employee's behavior that is in accordance with role sender's expectations and organizational procedures (*role conformity*). In contrast, *making a role* refers to the attempt to define (change, if necessary) role expectations and the ways how the job is to be done (*role innovation*). Role-taking and role-making have been plotted on a continuum termed *role orientation* (Allen and Meyer 1990). It describes "the manner in which individuals perform their roles and adjust to task requirements" (Jones 1986, p. 263). The fit between the role sender's expectations and the actual behavior of a person is described by *role congruence*, *role conformity* or *role enactment* (Quick 1979). Even though studies outside of sales research have developed many constructs along this continuum, most of these constructs have not been applied in sales research so far. For a structured overview of constructs along the role orientation continuum, refer to Figure 3-2. For definitions of major constructs, refer to Table 3-3.

Two groups of concepts along the continuum of role orientation can be distinguished (Biddle 1986):

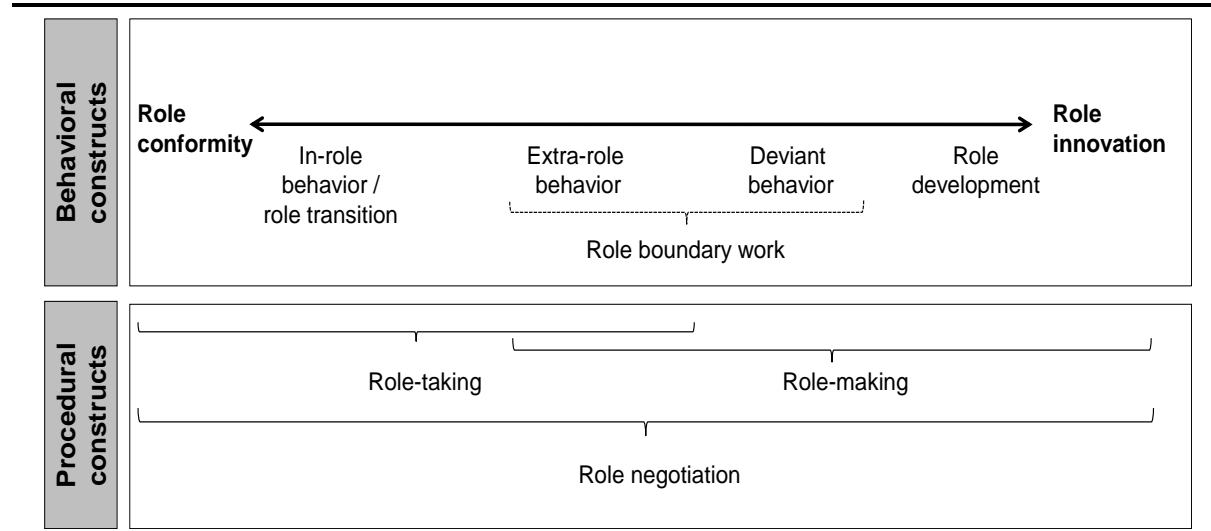
- *Behavioral constructs* refer to actual behavior or characteristics of behavior. They have their roots in the sociological research tradition. Among these are in-role behavior, extra-role behavior and deviant behavior.
- *Procedural constructs* conceptualize processes and have been developed in the context of the interactionist perspective following the psychological research tradition. Among these are role-making, role-taking and role negotiation.

Several behavioral constructs are used to describe behavior between role conformity and role innovation: Behavior that conforms to a role is described as *in-role behavior* (MacKenzie, Podsakoff, and Ahearne 1998). In contrast, *extra-role behavior* or *deviant behavior* refers to behaviors that “are not included in the statement of work or are not related to the employee’s position or role in the organization” (Zhu 2013, p. 23). “Employees contravene organizational norms” (Ferris et al. 2009, p. 1345). Extra-role and deviant behavior can be considered the first step towards role innovation. They are typical of an organizational perspective since such behaviors “can enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of an organization” (Zhu 2013, p. 24). *Role development* instead is mostly applied when the individual’s perspective is investigated. It describes how people try to change role requirements to achieve a better fit of the role with their own identity and needs (Nicholson 1984). Role development leads to role innovation.

Investigating how individuals handle the interplay of roles, Ashforth, Kreiner, and Fugate (2000) introduce the concepts of *role transition* and *role boundary work* (see Table 3-3). Roles are either segmented, meaning distinct from one another, or integrated, in which case they overlap in values, beliefs or in the membership of their role senders. If roles are clearly segmented, individuals tend to engage in role transition, psychologically switching

between roles and enacting them (Ashforth, Kreiner, and Fugate 2000; Ashforth, Kulik, and Tomiuk 2008; Clegg and Spencer 2007). Role transition can be considered a behavior conform to a role since the roles themselves are not changed. In the case of integrated roles, individuals are often required to enact these blurred roles simultaneously while roles compete for attention and primacy. The resulting challenge is to create and maintain boundaries between these roles. Thus, an individual constantly engages in individual role boundary work.

Figure 3-2: Overview of Role Orientation Constructs



Role boundary work refers to all strategies and practices that an individual uses to create and maintain role boundaries or even modify categories and expectations (Nippert-Eng 1996). Role boundary work may change roles and can lead to role innovation. Both concepts have been developed in the context of work roles versus family roles. They have not been applied specifically to job role sets themselves or in the sales context.

Procedural constructs along the role orientation continuum are role-taking and role-making. Both refer to the process of how role occupants either take or make their role and thereby (1) adapt to role expectations (Cialdini and Goldstein 2004) to enact the role in congruence with role expectations or (2) define the role individually to engage in *role innovation* (Kahn et al. 1964). Encompassing both role-taking and role-making, role

occupants have been described as *negotiating roles*. On the one hand, individuals make sense of their roles by negotiating internally with themselves about what they want and what they are willing to offer. On the other hand, people engage in external negotiations with role senders, in which they try to convince the other party to accept their understanding of the role (Brett, Shapiro, and Lytle 1998). Negotiating roles is a dynamic process, which is characterized by individual trade-offs. In this context, Solomon et al. (1985, p. 102) expand the understanding of a role and define it as a “cluster of social cues that guide and direct an individual's behavior in a given setting”.

Whether a role inhabitant shows role conformity or engages in role innovation depends mostly on the individual's identification with her role. Identification occurs if the role is compatible with her self-concept (Sluss and Ashforth 2008). Consistent with Zinkhan and Hong (1991), I define *self-concept* as the individual's subjective thoughts towards herself containing perceptions about the real self and ideas about an idealized self. To the degree to which the self-concept is incompatible with the role, the probability rises that the individual engages in role innovation to make external job role expectations compatible with her self-expectations (Nicholson 1984; Pratt 2000). As noted earlier, even though these concepts are established in organizational research, they are rarely applied in the context of salespeople.

The need for an individual to identify with her occupational life has expanded the idea of employees actively making their role beyond role-theoretic research (Grant and Parker 2009). Researchers in job design research, for example, have identified two major challenges placing the individual at the center of their analysis: (1) How to handle the interdependence with other social actors and (2) how to deal with the uncertainty in handling the job (Griffin, Neal, and Parker 2007). They call for further investigation of the individual to understand how she proactively shapes her job.

Table 3-3: Definitions of Role-Theoretic Constructs				
Construct	Definition	Type of construct	Role activity	Research perspective
Continuum				
Role orientation	Role orientation is “the manner in which individuals perform their roles and adjust to task requirements. It refers to a continuum with conformity to established roles/ procedures at one end and innovation in defining/ enacting roles at the other“. (Jones 1986, p. 263)	Characteristic of behavior	Ways to perform a role	Social constructivist
Behavioral constructs				
Role conformity	Role conformity is the “compliance to some pattern of behavior” expected by the role sender of a role. (Biddle 1986, p. 86)	Characteristic of behavior	Is geared to role	Sociological
Role congruence	Role congruence “refers to the degree to which the employee’s expected and enacted roles converge. When this occurs, the employee’s actual role behaviors are the same as the behavior expected by various role senders“. (Quick 1979, p. 369)	Characteristic of behavior	Adapt to role	Sociological
Role development	“The person tries to change role requirements so that they better match his or her needs, abilities, and identity. This strategy, which can be labeled role development, is implicitly an incipient form of organization development“. (Nicholson 1984, p. 175)	Behavior	Change role requirements	Organizational research
Role innovation	Role innovation is the “behavior done to redefine the major premises concerning missions followed by the majority of the role occupants” (Schein 1979, p. 229). In an organizational context it refers to the “initiation of changes in task objectives, methods, materials, scheduling, and in the interpersonal relationships integral to task performance“. (Nicholson 1984, p. 175)	Behavior	Invent the role in a new way	Sociological
Role transition	Role transition is the “psychological (and, if relevant, physical) movement between roles, including the disengagement from one role and engagement in another“. (Ashforth, Kreiner, and Fugate 2000, p. 472)	Behavior	Switch roles	Organizational research
Role boundary work	Role boundary work relates to engaging in strategies, principles, and practices to create, maintain, and modify role identities. (based on Nippert-Eng 1996)	Behavior	Clarify roles	Sociological

Table 3-3 (continued)				
Construct	Definition	Type of construct	Role activity	Research perspective
Procedural constructs				
Role-taking	Role-taking is a tentative process in which role occupants adapt to the expectations others hold. (Turner 2001)	Process	Adapting to roles	Developmental psychology
Role-making	Role-making is the process of defining, clarifying, and enacting organizational roles. (Kahn et al. 1964)	Process	Cooperatively redefining roles	Interactionist
Role negotiation	Individuals develop their identities during role negotiations through sense-making. "This process includes internal negotiations, deciding what they want the other side to offer, and external negotiations, getting the other party to offer or accept what is wanted". (Brett, Shapiro, and Lyle 1998, p. 414)	Process	Negotiating role content with role senders	Interactionist

Recent concepts developed in the area of job design research are job crafting (Berg, Wrzesniewski, and Dutton 2010; Lyons 2008; Wrzesniewski, Dutton, and Debebe 2003) and idiosyncratic deals (Hornung et al. 2010; Rousseau, Ho, and Greenberg 2006). *Job crafting* describes the active role that employees play in shaping actual work practice (Grant and Ashforth 2008). The concept is defined as “the physical and cognitive changes individuals make in the task or relational boundaries of their work” (Wrzesniewski and Dutton 2001, p. 179). It refers to the individual’s effort to adapt the job to the employee’s abilities and preferences (Leana, Appelbaum, and Shevchuk 2009). These efforts are informal behaviors and are often not recognized by management (Lyons 2008). In recent research, job crafting has been refined to a socially embedded process, which refers to the interplay of an employee’s proactivity and adaptivity (Berg, Wrzesniewski, and Dutton 2010).

So far, most research on job crafting has emerged outside of the profit-driven organizational context, investigating child care educators (Leana, Appelbaum, and Shevchuk 2009), special education teachers (Ghitulescu 2006), nurses (Caza 2007), and a non-profit political advocacy (Berg, Wrzesniewski, and Dutton 2010). Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) started this new proactive individual research perspective in job design research. While the definition of job crafting is accepted, more empirical evidence on the concept, its characteristics and motivation is needed.

The only study investigating job crafting in the sales context is conducted by Lyons (2008). The study concentrates on individual salespeople’s characteristics, such as positive self-image, work control and readiness to change, that motivate them to engage in job crafting. Lyons (2008) identifies five categories of job crafting activities: personal skill development, task function, advancing relationships, tactics choices, and maintaining relationships. However, the study is limited to sales representatives of one consumer-product company whose work processes are mainly characterized by routines. These salespeople do

not have the same freedom as the empowered B2B sellers in this study. The study by Berg, Wrzesniewski, and Dutton (2010) also shows considerable differences in job crafting between highly empowered employees, such as salespeople, and lower-rank employees. Therefore, the five categories of job crafting identified by Lyons do not embrace the special challenges strongly empowered salespeople face.

Task-related *idiosyncratic deals* refer to “arrangements that individuals negotiate to create or alter their own job content” (Hornung et al. 2010, p. 188). In contrast to the bottom-up perspective that job crafting represents, idiosyncratic deals combine both bottom-up and top-down job design approaches by integrating authority and acceptance. Speaking in terms of role theory, idiosyncratic deals most likely correspond to the results of role negotiations. Employees engaging in job crafting have the primary goal to satisfy personal needs whereas individuals making idiosyncratic deals aim at a broad mutual benefit. Since the primary research interest of this thesis is the perspective of the individual salesperson, job crafting is of higher relevance than idiosyncratic deals.

The literature review above shows three main limitations of *sales research* on how salespeople handle their role:

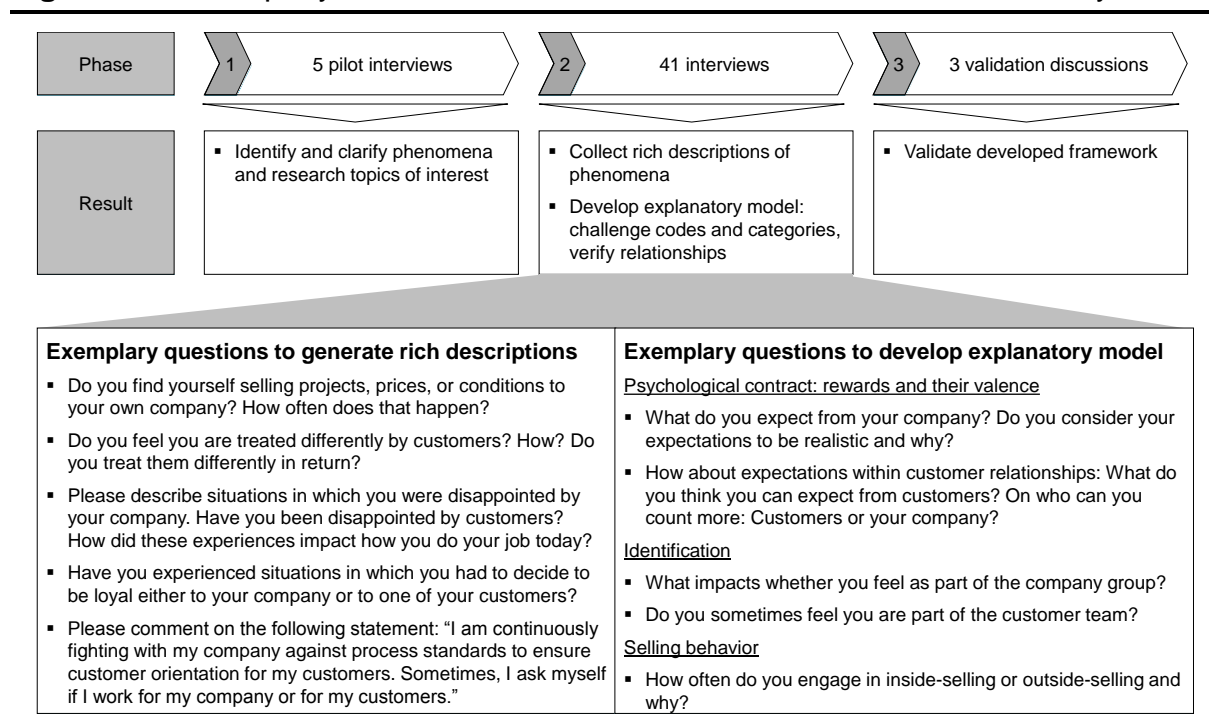
- Sales research focuses strongly on how salespeople *take* their role and how they can be influenced.
- Sales research pays insufficient attention to salespeople’s *role-making*.
- There exists no concept in sales research that integrates role-taking and role-making of salespeople.

Sales research has not yet drawn on the full potential of role-theoretic constructs to explain sales role phenomena. A broad range of role-making ideas and constructs which have been developed outside of sales research await integration in salesperson research.

3.3 Method

To answer the research questions I aim at better understanding the underlying attitudinal and psychological processes of salespeople with regard to their role. As described in Chapter 1.4, this study follows a qualitative approach. The data collection is based on a semi-structured interview outline that sheds light on salespeople's internal processes (see Figure 3-3).

Figure 3-3: Exemplary Questions of Semi-Structured Interviews: Focus Study I



The data analysis process mainly revolves around coding and categorization of relevant role-related constructs and different types of salespeople's sense-making at the sales boundary. The process of data coding and analysis follows a two-level approach (van Maanen 1979). The first level of data analysis is the systematic mapping of stories, experiences and behaviors salespeople report, in other words, the presentation of *observed phenomena*. The 'thick descriptions' of events and perceptions are situation-driven, historic and biographical interpretations. They are presented as they have been told and function as representations of the individual's salesperson perspective. The second level of data analysis refers to the identification of relationships and patterns based on the 'thick descriptions'. The interplay of

theory and phenomena observed leads to a new explanatory model and corresponding *hypotheses*. Both levels are central empirical elements.

As part of the first level of data analysis, I follow a data-driven approach to identify topics from different text passages (Brady and Cronin 2001; Humphreys 2010) to generate rich descriptions of what I call salespeople's boundary role handling styles. In the further course of the analysis, I apply the constant comparative method which facilitates rich descriptions of social phenomena (Bacharach, Bamberger, and McKinney 2000; Corbin and Strauss 1990; Glaser and Strauss 1967).

As part of the second level of data analysis, observations of how salespeople handle their boundary role are classified based on the critical incident technique (CIT) to make them useful for theory building. This method has also been successfully applied by Bitner, Booms, and Mohr (1994) and Bitner, Booms, and Tetreault (1990) for analyzing sales encounters. CIT differs from other methods of classification (e.g., cluster analysis, factor analysis and multidimensional scaling) in that it assigns each incident or participant to a specific category based on content analysis techniques instead of using quantitative methods (Hunt 1983). The content analysis technique allows to categorize memories and opinions that are "likely representative of the underlying [memory] structure with respect to both content and organization and may well influence future behavior" (Flint, Woodruff, and Fisher Gardial 2002, p. 216). They are viewed as expressing existential themes by which a person's self-identity and behavioral motivation is revealed (Braun-LaTour, LaTour, and Zinkhan 2007).

To avoid interviewer biases I carefully look for counter evidence throughout interviews and category development. Furthermore, two independent coders process the interview results to identify and categorize concepts and ideas and to allocate the interviewees to the boundary role handling styles. Both coders have a good command of qualitative research methods and code the data based on a developed coding schedule. To challenge

identified categories I find it helpful that only one coder is familiar with the relevant sales literature. The coders discuss the few disagreements intensively. After consulting a third coder and relevant literature I am able to ensure high reliability of coding.

All data is coded and analyzed with MAXQDA, a commercially available software package, specifically designed for generating theory from qualitative data. MAXQDA allows for the analysis of the interaction of codes and cross-category comparisons. Based on continuous redefinition of categories I develop the final framework of eight boundary role handling styles. Based on this framework I review the literature of related theoretical concepts and develop corresponding hypotheses, especially with regard to role stress.

3.4 Field Results on Salespeople's Boundary Role Handling

Throughout the interviews salespeople are generally concerned with how they understand their role and how they should understand their role (that is how others expect them to do the job and how they can be successful). When I ask them how they understand their job, most of them start to splutter. As one salesperson puts it:

“Of course I need to make sure that I do right by my customers. On the other hand, I also need to ensure that I do not go against process standards or other rules of my company because, in the end, it is my company that pays my salary. Certainly, I want to achieve a good result for my customers, but there are also tough specific restrictions that we are subject to, as an American stock company. Then, I also need to ensure that I comply with these processes and abide by the rules of the game, that I report the opportunity value correctly, illustrate the customer value correctly and don't do anything that violates business ethics or processes. [Ich muss natürlich irgendwo gucken, dass ich dem Kunden gerecht werde, auf der anderen Seite muss ich auch schauen, dass ich nicht gegen die Prozesse und gegen die Grundsätze des eigenen Unternehmens verstoße, denn letztendlich ist es ja das Unternehmen, das mir das Gehalt zahlt. Natürlich möchte ich auch was für den Kunden erreichen, aber es gibt eben auch andere, härtere Spielregeln, denen wir als Firma, als amerikanische Aktiengesellschaft, unterliegen. Insofern muss ich natürlich auch schauen, dass ich mich an diese Prozesse und die Spielregeln halte, den Opportunity-Wert richtig darstelle, den Kundenwert abbilde und nicht irgendwelche Sachen mache, die gegen die Business Ethik und gegen diese Prozesse verstoßen.]” (ComCo4)

Some salespeople also report that their firms try to increasingly control salespeople's activities and expect salespeople to fully support the sales measures developed.

“That means, we are remotely controlled more and more. We are expected to use more reporting tools, so that our head office knows what we are doing out here in the field. Gone are the times when a sales engineer could be on the road and could do as he pleases. Achieving the numbers is all that counts. How? In principle, nobody gives a damn. More and more is being remotely

controlled. We are forced to perform activities; they tell us what we are supposed to do and how we are supposed to do it. [Das heißt wir werden immer mehr ferngesteuert. Wir müssen immer mehr Tools ausfüllen, damit die Zentrale weiß, was wir hier draußen treiben. Es ist nicht mehr so, dass man als Vertriebsingenieur draußen rum rennt und schalten und walten kann wie man will. Hauptsache, man bringt die Zahlen. Wie, ist an sich scheißegal. Es wird immer mehr ferngesteuert. Dass wir gezwungen werden Maßnahmen durchzuführen, dass uns gesagt wird, was wir machen sollen, wie wir es machen sollen.]“ (ManufactCo2)

Salespeople are continuously trying and forced to understand firm and customer role expectations and to make sense of how to do the sales job. Many salespeople seem to feel the need to define their way of handling things in order to be successful at the sales boundary.

Another salesperson explains that “salespeople need to define their own style, only then can they be authentic. And only if the customer perceives them to be authentic, he is willing to trust them [...man muss seinen eigenen Stil finden, nur dann ist man authentisch. Und nur, wenn man authentisch beim Kunden rüberkommt, vertraut der einem auch.]“ (ManufactCo2)

Some salespeople tell me that a lot of situations do not stress them anymore because they simply have their own beliefs about the job. Concluding, salespeople feel the continuous need to make sense of job obligations and engage in their own way of handling their sales role in order to ‘survive’ and be successful at the boundary. This need is not reflected in the research attention salespeople’s boundary role handling has attracted so far.

The observations and the hypothesis development presented below are structured along five themes. I start by reporting observations and making interpretations about salespeople having different boundary role handling styles. The second, third and fourth theme evolve around salespeople being stressed doing their sales job. However, some are less stressed than others. The final theme focuses on the impact of boundary role handling styles on role stress antecedents and consequences identified in the sales literature.

3.4.1 Theme No. 1: The Customer-Serving Role and the Company-Serving Role are Two Independent Dimensions

Observations

Even though salespeople are continuously concerned with how to handle their job, they differ tremendously in their sense-making. The sales literature pictures a rather clear and often homogeneous view of salespeople as role-takers and customer-oriented sellers at the sales boundary (Miao and Evans 2007; Plouffe, Hulland, and Wachner 2009). The interviews, however, indicate a high degree of variability and multifaceted views. Some salespeople seem constantly concerned with their company's strategy and process standards.

“I am under the impression that our head office engages more and more in micro-management and that is often a difficulty. They want to have a say in business on such a detailed level that I need to invest more time in providing them with the necessary information than I am able to meet my customers to say, hey, what is on the agenda, what are you currently working on and so on. But it is this time that I need to engage with customers and it's simply cut short. [Ich habe den Eindruck, dass die Zentrale immer mehr zu einem Mikro-Management übergeht und das ist häufig die Problematik. Die wollen so sehr in der Detailtiefe mit im Geschäft mitsprechen, dass ich mich mehr damit beschäftigen muss, denen alle Informationen zu geben, als dass ich mich mit dem Kunden treffen kann und sagen kann „Mensch, was steht denn an, woran arbeitet ihr gerade“ etc. Das ist einfach Zeit, die Sie sich für Kunden nehmen müssen und die wird einfach beschnitten an der Stelle.]“ (ManufactCo7)

“The more flexible the company, the easier it is [for salespeople] to carry out their own plans. The bigger the company, the more processes are simply predetermined and boundaries are set for my actions. Well, the saying “too many cooks spoil the broth” applies quite well. [Je flexibler das Unternehmen, desto leichter kann man seine Pläne durchsetzen. Je größer das Unternehmen, desto mehr Prozesse kriege ich einfach vorgegeben, in denen ich mich bewegen muss. Und ich sage mal, der Spruch "Viele Köche verderben den Brei" trifft da schon mal ganz gut zu.]“ (ComCo5)

Other salespeople speak mainly about customer interactions and what trouble customers face these days in dealing with large enterprises. One salesperson explains:

“About 3 months ago, I had another typical case where the customer had agreed in the framework contract concluded 2 years previously that he would accept certain devices within the next 4 years. And now the customer's situation has changed, and so he simply wants to switch to another product, but ... our people won't budge on that. [Da hatte ich vor ca. 3 Monaten wieder so einen klassischen Fall, der Kunde hat innerhalb eines vor 2 Jahren abgeschlossenen Rahmenvertrages sich verpflichtet, gewisse Geräte innerhalb der nächsten 4 Jahre abzunehmen. Und jetzt hat sich bei denen die Lage geändert und der Kunde will einfach nur auf ein anderes Produkt umsteigen, aber...da stellen sich unsere stur.]“ (ManufactCo13)

Another interviewee tells me that if customer demands do not match her company's sales strategy, it happens that the salesperson becomes the customer's advocate.

“I still hold to the opinion that I won’t sell the customer anything that would be bad for him. I just won’t do it. There are situations, in which the customer tells me that he wants a product with certain specifications...then I try to sell him product A. Simply because in this situation, product A is the product for which our company receives the highest commission, makes the highest profit. However, in this situation, my customer has no disadvantage from buying that product. But I would not sell a product to a customer when I am aware that that specific product is not the right one for him. But to be able to assume such an attitude, I believe, you need a certain – how shall I put it – a certain clout in your company to be able to say to your boss “You know, I am not going to sell this product. It doesn’t fit and that’s it. [Ich stehe immer noch auf dem Standpunkt, ich werde meinem Kunden nichts verkaufen, was für diesen Kunden schlecht ist. Das mache ich nicht. Es gibt Situationen, in denen der Kunde mir sagt, er möchte ein bestimmtes Produkt haben, dann würde ich in dieser Situation dem Kunden auch versuchen, das Produkt A schmackhaft zu machen. Also weil einfach in dieser Konstellation das das Produkt ist, wo wir als [Unternehmen] die höhere Provision, den höheren Ertrag haben. In dieser Konstellation hat mein Kunde aber keinen Nachteil daraus, dass er das gekauft hat. Aber ich würde jetzt einem Kunden kein Produkt verkaufen, wo mir bewusst ist, dass das für den Kunden nicht das Richtige ist. Aber um diese Haltung annehmen zu können - glaube ich - muss man auch ein gewisses - wie soll man das sagen? Ein gewisses Standing in seinem Laden haben, um eben auch seinem Vorgesetzten gegenüber mal sagen zu können: Wissen Sie was, das Produkt verkaufe ich nicht. Das passt nicht und damit fertig.]“ (ServiceCo2)

Most of the time salespeople think of themselves *in relation* to their customers and company instead of concentrating on process standards and procedures. The relationships to both role senders seem to be essential for salespeople’s role interpretations. Some salespeople emphasize their relationships with their customers:

“When I became a general agent, I received one of these nomination certificates, and the chairman openly recognized my care for our customers. I just replied, “this is wrong, these are MY customers”. Then he said – he’s a very nice person, also a very sincere person – “My boy,” he said to me, “you are right, morally speaking, but legally speaking they’re OUR customers”. That means, you sail a boat that isn’t yours in the end, but only satisfied customers are good customers and customer relationships on which we can expand. I do everything for my customers. (...) Money is not always everything. That is my personal opinion. [Als ich Generalagent wurde, bekam ich eine dieser Urkunden und der Vorstandsvorsitzende sprach mir die Anerkennung für die Betreuung unserer Kunden aus. Ich sagte nur „falsch, das sind ja meine Kunden“. Dann sagte er, ein sehr netter Mensch, ein sehr seriöser Mensch auch, "Junge" sagte er zu mir "da hast du recht moralisch, aber rechtlich sind das unsere Kunden". D.h. sie gehen eigentlich mit einem Boot um was ihnen gar nicht gehört letztendlich, aber nur zufriedene Kunden sind gute Kunden und ausbaufähige Kundenverbindungen. Ich tue für meine Kunden alles. (...) Es ist nicht immer alles mit Geld aufzuwiegen. Das ist so meine persönliche Einstellung dazu.]“ (ServiceCo8)

Others demonstrate the importance of their relationship to their company:

“Yes, well, the company that I work for... it feeds me, it provides for me. Beyond that, it should also be fun for me to work, of course. It should be there for me in good and in bad times, and it is. And that’s why the relationship is so important to me. [Na gut, das Unternehmen, für das ich arbeite, das ernährt mich, das versorgt mich. Darüber hinaus soll es mir natürlich noch Spaß machen, zu arbeiten. Es soll mich in guten und schlechten Zeiten unterstützen und das macht es. Und deshalb ist mir das Verhältnis sehr wichtig.]“ (ComCo9)

The high degree of freedom how to perform their job and the empowerment to make decisions in customer interactions (Aldrich and Herker 1977) enable B2B salespeople to place

varying emphasis on their roles. Based on salespeople's attitude towards and experiences with each role sender and their expectations, salespeople intend to espouse or reject a role sender's role. This intention is guided by whether salespeople 'feel closer to' customers or 'feel closer to' the company. 'Closeness' comes along with higher relevance, agreement and acceptance of the role sender's expectations. One interviewee tells me, for example, the following:

"I'm always on the customer's side because I want to keep the customer satisfied over the long haul. And, well, I can't really give a precise reason why, but perhaps it has to do with the fact that I worked on the customer side for quite some time and truly understand the customer much, much better than my colleagues do, who haven't been so intensively involved with the particular situation. But that's the statement that I clearly make also internally, I advocate the customer. [Ich stehe grundsätzlich auf der Seite des Kunden, weil ich den Kunden ja langfristig zufrieden halten will. Und ja warum, kann ich eigentlich gar nicht so genau begründen, aber vielleicht liegt das daran, dass ich auch lange auf der anderen Seite gearbeitet habe und somit auch die, ja den Kunden viel, viel besser verstehe, als vielleicht die eigenen Leute, die noch nie in so einem Umfeld gearbeitet haben. Aber die Aussage, die treffe ich auch bei uns intern ganz klar, dass ich mich mehr für den Kunden einsetze.]" (ComCo9)

In some cases it is a challenge to figure out whether a salesperson is more concerned with her relation towards customers or places more emphasis on her relation with her company. Salespeople get caught up in contradictions about their attitude towards both role senders. In one moment interviewees talk about their commitment to their company but stress the rights of the customer in the next. In the subsequent statement they then again admit to provoke stress in the company in the name of the customer. Within one interview, for example, I find the following statements (presented in their original order):

"Well, I think that it's always important to try to honor the customer's interests. True, you naturally can't go beyond what the company is capable of, but you really should try to take advantage of the company's whole gamut of possibilities in the best interest of the customer and not simply say, "Okay, it's not possible in my department, so that's that". [Also ich denke mal, es ist immer wichtig zu versuchen die Kundeninteressen zu wahren, klar, natürlich kann man nicht über die Möglichkeiten des Unternehmens hinaus gehen, aber man sollte schon versuchen, im Interesse des Kunden auch im Unternehmen alle Möglichkeiten auszuschöpfen, und nicht zu sagen: Okay, bei mir in der Abteilung habe ich die Möglichkeit nicht, dann war es das.]"

...

"(laughs) Well, with us – I would say – the ratio [of inside- and outside-selling effort] is, yes, about sixty, sixty-five percent inside, and the rest is outside. So it's easier to sell the customer something than to achieve something on the inside. [(lacht) Also bei uns würde ich einschätzen, ist das Verhältnis [von internem und externem Verkaufen] intern, ja, so sechzig, fünfundsechzig Prozent und der Rest ist extern. Also es ist leichter, dem Kunden was zu verkaufen, als was bei uns intern etwas durchzusetzen.]"

...

“Yes, well, I naturally tend to be on the side of the company, since, after all, that’s where I get my check at the end of every month – from the company and not from the customer. [Ja, gut, ich stehe natürlich eher beim Unternehmen, weil da bekomme ich eben am Monatsende meinen Scheck, vom Unternehmen und nicht vom Kunden.]“

...

“With us our company’s motto is clearly ‘Customer first!’ In the end, you know, we all get our livelihood from the customer, and without customers we don’t sell anything, and then nothing else would matter anyway, and so that’s why, as far as I would say, the customer always has the top priority. [Bei uns ist das ganz klare Motto, dass wir sagen ‚Kunde zuerst‘, also wir leben alle vom Kunden und wenn wir die Kunden nicht haben verkaufen wir nichts und dann können wir alles andere sowieso vergessen und von daher, denke ich mal, hat der Kunde immer die Priorität 1.]“
(CongoodCo5)

An in-depth analysis of the structure of each interview shows that salespeople often demonstrate a learned attitude. One salesman explains he often demonstrates a “trained face” that is how he mainly acts towards customers and superiors. This face involves the consideration of both role sender’s expectations and relationships at the same time. Interviews show that it is difficult for salespeople to let go of this ‘trained face’. However, during the course of the interview and the trustful exchange salespeople reveal their own perspective on the sales job by placing emphasis on role relationships and expectations or stressing certain statements and beliefs. Applying a predefined coding schedule the two coders are able to identify salespeople’s individual perspective, attitude and role definition (for the final coding schedule, please refer to the Appendix).

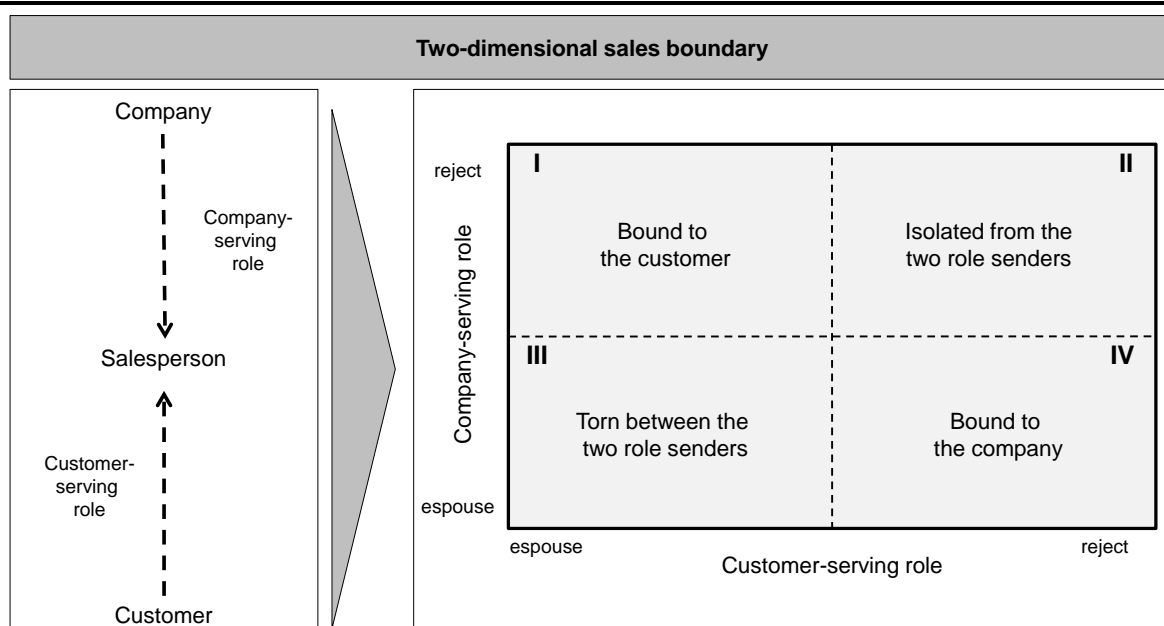
Interpretations

The interviews reaffirm that the customers and the company are the two most important role senders for salespeople. Consistent with role theory, some salespeople are torn between customers and company, i.e. they feel obliged to both role senders’ conflicting role expectations. However, the observations also indicate ideas beyond existing research. Instead of being torn in the middle between customers and company, I often find salespeople favoring one role sender group. Some salespeople appear to decide to act in favor of one role sender, independent of whether the customer’s or the company’s expectations are in conflict or not. A few interviewees describe themselves also as isolated from both role senders. Unable to cope

with the conflicting expectations they purposely establish distance to both role sender groups. Based on the observed role sender relationships, I conceptualize a two-dimensional sales boundary (see Figure 3-4) in contrast to the continuum view in the sales literature. Whether salespeople decide to act in favor of one of the main role senders is independent of the decision to act in favor of the other main role sender. In other words, espousing one role-sender-serving role does not necessarily mean to reject the other. In the graphic illustration this means that the salesperson can freely move between both role senders and their expectations (referring to the left part of Figure 3-4). Customer's and company's expectations are subject to the salesperson's interpretation.

Having identified the customer-serving role (espouse vs. reject) and the company-serving role (espouse vs. reject) as two dimensions of the sales boundary, I derive four boundary role handling styles (see Figure 3-4). A boundary role handling style refers to a salesperson's individual role definition that is based on the salesperson's decision to adopt or not adopt the role sender's expectations.

Figure 3-4: The Two-Dimensional Conceptualization of the Sales Boundary



Style No. I 'Bound to the customer' refers to the espousal of the customer-serving role. The salesperson feels more obliged to the customer than to the company. The salesperson engaging in *Style No. II* 'Isolated from the two role senders' is isolated between customer and company and has no established relationship to either of them. She is neither able to commit to one of the two role senders' expectations nor able to satisfy them. This style reflects the typical candidate for turnover or withdrawal (Jaramillo, Mulki, and Solomon 2006). The salesperson acting according to *Style No. III* 'Torn between the two role senders' espouses both the customer-serving role and the company-serving role. The sales literature suggests that these salespeople experience high levels of role stress since they feel bound to both role senders at the same time (Bettencourt, Brown, and Mackenzie 2005). A salesperson engaging in *Style No. IV* 'Bound to the company' espouses mainly the company-serving role and tends to evaluate situations from and in favor of the company perspective.

P₁: The company-serving role and the customer-serving role are two independent dimensions. Salespeople's boundary role handling can be distinguished into four boundary role handling styles. The specific boundary role handling style is determined by the espousal or rejection of the company-serving role and the espousal or rejection of the customer-serving role.

3.4.2 Theme No. 2: Not Knowing Where to Belong Leads to Stress

Consistent with sales research, the interviews reveal that most salespeople engaging in boundary role handling *Styles No. II and No. III* show high levels of role stress. However, salespeople engaging in the two boundary role handling *Styles No. I and No. IV* show significantly less role stress (for an overview of exemplary interviewees, refer to Figure 3-5). In the following sections, I first present interview data consistent with established effects in

role stress research (*Styles No. II and No. III*) followed by interview data providing new insights on salespeople's role stress effects (*Styles No. I and No. IV*).

Observations

Salespeople spanning the sales boundary are prototypically described in sales research as torn between the role expectations of customers and employing company (Stamper and Johlke 2003). This view corresponds to salespeople engaging in boundary role handling *Style No. III*, 'Torn between two loyalties'. Salespeople try to live up equally to the conflicting expectations of customer and company.

"No, I really feel caught in the middle, since – as a general rule – I can't take a stand against the company, not even tend in that direction. Nor would I do that. I simply think too economically for that. At the same time, I can't oppose the customer, since, in the end (laughs), I would destroy my source of work by doing that. [Nee, ich empfinde mich wirklich dazwischen, weil ich kann mich nicht gegen das Unternehmen positionieren oder nicht grundsätzlich oder auch nicht tendenziell. Das würde ich auch nicht machen. Dazu denke ich glaube ich einfach zu wirtschaftlich. Und ich kann mich aber auch nicht gegen den Kunden stellen, weil damit würde ich mir letztendlich (lacht) meine Arbeitsquelle kaputt machen.]" (ManufactCo8)

The interviews show that being caught between company and customer expectations with the intention to fulfill both at the same time, *Style No. III* salespeople show high levels of role stress, especially role conflict.

Similar, most salespeople engaging in boundary role handling *Style No. II* also experience considerable levels of role conflict, especially role ambiguity due to the uncertainty of how to live up to role sender's expectations. They feel isolated and unable to fulfill the role expectations.

"(I was) frustrated to such an extent, I have to say, not only by the customers, but also simply by what was going on internally within the team. The tough targets communicated by the boss, how they treated us, all that frustrated me so so much. (...) Hmm, well, how are you supposed to react? (laughs) Anyway, there is, I think, a time in the beginning where you say, 'Okay, now I have to try a little harder,' since you know yourself, you have a certain self-assessment, after all, right? And you can say, 'Okay, I can still do more; I can do more.' So, then there's a time when you say, 'Well, now I've really hit a barrier.' Yeah, so maybe I give it another shot, and in the end I simply said, 'Well, I can go no further.' Then it's not fun anymore and it becomes downright hard and annoying. [(Ich war) von diesem Job dermaßen frustriert, muss ich ganz ehrlich sagen, nicht nur kundenseitig, sondern eben dann auch einfach wie es so teamintern ablief, was waren so die Vorgaben der Chefs und wie sind die mit uns umgegangen. Das hat mich also so was von frustriert (...) Tja, wie soll man da reagieren? (lacht) Also es gibt da glaube ich so eine Phase so am Anfang, wo man sagt, so, jetzt muss ich mich aber noch mal anstrengen, weil man weiß ja selber, man kann sich ja selbst so ein bisschen einschätzen, ja, und kann sagen, okay, ich kann noch mehr,

ich kann noch mehr machen. So. Dann gab es so eine Phase, wo man gesagt hat, na ja, also jetzt bin ich hier schon ganz schön am Limit, ja, hat sich vielleicht noch ein bisschen angestrengt und am Schluss habe ich dann einfach gesagt, also ich bin an der Grenze. Und dann geht der Spaß verloren und dann wird es richtig, richtig anstrengend und nervig.]“ (ServiceCo6)

In contrast, salespeople engaging in boundary role handling *Style No. I and Style No. IV* have a clear understanding of the sales role in favor of one particular role sender. Such a commitment to one of the role senders leads to less stress experiences in selling situations since salespeople know what to do and what to aim for. One *Style No. I* salesperson explains that she has learned to only sell products that really fit customers.

“If new products are available on the market which are expected to be sold, and which promise higher commissions for us, younger colleagues tend to simply start selling them, even when they are not quite appropriate. I believe that is the case because they may not yet have experienced in their professional career what a pleasure it is, to have to talk to customers when something has gone wrong. Such interactions are not fun, for sure. And if you’ve ever experienced that, you automatically become more careful. [Jüngere Kollegen, wenn es dann neue Produkte gibt, die eben verkauft werden sollen, die einen hohen Provisionszufluss für uns bedeuten, marschieren dann eben los und verkaufen vielleicht eher dieses Produkt, auch wenn es nicht so angebracht ist. Ich glaube, das liegt auch daran, dass die vielleicht in ihrer bisherigen beruflichen Erfahrung noch nicht miterlebt haben, wie angenehm das ist, wenn man anschließend mit dem Kunden darüber zu sprechen hat, wenn das in die Hose gegangen ist. Diese Gespräche sind nämlich weiß Gott nicht angenehm. Und wenn man das schon mal erlebt hat, dann wird man automatisch vorsichtiger.]“ (ServiceCo2)

Interviewees engaging in boundary role handling *Style No. IV* describe their clear commitment to company goals and indicate reduced stress levels.

“You do not experience this kind of stress if you show a professional attitude and preserve a distance in your relationships (with customers). Because then, you offer them a product and stand aside, knowing that you are offering something to the customer; he checks it out and if he wants to buy it, well, then he wants to buy it. He has the...it is not like he is being betrayed. I mean, the conditions are stated, so he knows what he is doing. [Wenn du einfach eine ganz professionelle Arbeitsweise an den Tag legst und eine distanzierte Beziehung (zum Kunden) wahrst, hast du diesen Stress nicht. Weil dann bietest du dem ein Produkt an und kannst dich auf die Seite stellen, ich habe dem Kunden was angeboten, er guckt sich das an und wenn er das kaufen möchte, ja gut, dann möchte er es kaufen. Er hatte ja die/ es ist ja nicht so, dass man ihn betrügt. Ich meine, die Bedingungen stehen ja drin, also er weiß ja, was er tut.]“ (ComCo2)

“The strategic decisions and actions are determined by headquarters and sales just implements them. (...) It is not part of a salesperson’s job to be an in-house consultant. [Die strategischen Entscheidungen und Aktionen werden eben in der Zentrale entschieden und der Vertrieb setzt das um. (...) Der Vertriebler ist nicht dazu eingestellt interner Berater zu spielen.]“ (CongoodCo1)

Interpretations

In line with role-theoretic sales research, salespeople engaging in boundary role handling *Style No. III* are classically torn between both role senders, customers and company. They tend to experience high levels of role conflict and thereby role stress due to their sandwich position. In line with literature on job satisfaction and turnover intentions (Babakus et al. 1999; Chandrashekar, McNeilley, and Russ 2000; Lewin and Sager 2008), boundary role handling *Style No. II* refers to a typical exit situation with low job satisfaction, and high propensity to leave. Most salespeople who are isolated from the two role senders have lost attachment to customers and company. These interviewees often tell me they feel frustrated and lost. They are desperate since they have no idea how to be successful in the sales job fulfilling all role expectations at the same time. Most interviewees engaging in boundary role handling *Style No. II* quit their job during the time of my study or plan to do so in the near future. I propose:

P_{2a}: Most salespeople who espouse both the customer- and the company-serving role (boundary role handling Style No. III), experience high levels of role conflict and thereby high levels of role stress.

P_{2b}: Most salespeople who reject both the customer- and the company-serving role (boundary role handling Style No. II), experience high levels of role ambiguity and thereby high levels of role stress.

Despite of differences in role stress levels influenced by organizational or personal variables, the boundary situation itself is expected to automatically lead to a considerable level of role stress (Bettencourt and Brown 2003). Following these existing arguments, one could expect similar role stress levels for salespeople who engage in boundary role handling *Styles No. I and No. IV*. However, as an anomaly in comparison to existing role stress

research salespeople who pursue the boundary role handlings *Style No. I and Style No. IV* report lower levels of role stress. They talk less about stressful incidents but rather describe their relationships to both role senders. Salespeople appear rather relaxed confronted with usual role stress consequences of their boundary position. These salespeople engaging in boundary role handling *Styles No. I and No. IV* show limited intention to fulfill both role senders' expectations. Because they do not necessarily aim at fulfilling both role senders' expectations to the same extent, they experience less role conflict. Awareness of conflicting role expectations and the possibility to handle them through priority setting also reduces salespeople's uncertainty how to handle the job role and thus reduces role ambiguity. The above discussion of the observations presented suggests that:

P_{2c}: Most salespeople who espouse boundary role handling Style No. I, tend to experience low levels of role ambiguity, role conflict and thereby role stress.

P_{2d}: Most salespeople who espouse boundary role handling Style No. IV, tend to experience low levels of role ambiguity, role conflict and thereby role stress.

In contrast to the research emphases placed on *Styles No. II and No. III, Styles No. I and No. IV* make up about 70% of the interviews conducted during this study. *Style No. I* salespeople account for almost 40%, *Style No. IV* salespeople make up 30% of the interviewees. Boundary role handling *Styles No. II and No. III* together only account for 30% of the interviewees. This distribution of boundary role handling styles in the data set challenges the one-sided research attention *Styles No. II and No. III* have gained so far. The distribution of role stress clues of salespeople engaging in the different boundary role handling styles is illustrated in Figure 3-5.

Similarly, a salesperson engaging in *Style No. I* states:

“And, in the end, I see myself as a one-man-army. I am the architect of my own fortune and I don’t really expect to be treated fairly by anybody. If I do someone a favor today, I don’t expect him to return the favor tomorrow. I just do not assume it. I don’t expect fair treatment. [Und ich bin zu guter Letzt, ich betrachte mich als Ein-Mann-Armee. Ich bin meines eigenen Glückes Schmied und Fairness verlange ich eigentlich insofern von niemandem. Wenn ich heute jemandem einen Gefallen getan habe, gehe ich nicht davon aus, dass er mir den Gefallen morgen wieder zurückgibt. Da gehe ich einfach von vorneherein nicht von aus. Ich erwarte keine Fairness.]” (ServiceCo9)

Another salesperson describes that the sales job is her favorite job because of the fun she experiences from creatively developing solutions. She considers stress only as a side effect at a certain point in time:

“If you like to work creatively instead of performing the same tasks each day and, yes, you like to plunge yourself into certain matters and love challenges, then this is naturally a very diversified task. Of course, it can also be a little stressful, well, but stress can be understood positively or negatively. Sometimes you have the feeling that certain things overburden you or you become a little tired in some regards. But if you remind yourself again that you have enormous flexibility in handling things and you can preserve that, then it is indeed a wonderful job. [Wenn sie gerne kreativ arbeiten, nicht gerne jeden Tag das Gleiche machen, sich gerne in Sachen reinfuchsen und Herausforderungen lieben, dann ist das natürlich eine extrem abwechslungsreiche Aufgabe. Kann natürlich auch ein bisschen stressig sein, wobei Stress ist auch immer positiv wie negativ zu verstehen. Manchmal hat man das Gefühl, dass einen gewisse Sachen mal überfordern oder dass man so ein bisschen müde wird in mancherlei Hinsicht. Nur wenn man sich wieder gedanklich hervorruft, dass man eine extrem hohe Flexibilität hat in seiner Schaffensweise und sich diese bewahrt, dann ist das eigentlich schon ein Traumjob.]“ (ComCo8)

Even some interviewees engaging in *Style No. II* or *Style No. III* - styles typically associated with high levels of role stress - are less stressed than other interviewees engaging in these styles. One interviewee describes that she is not easily influenced by anyone:

“To be honest about it, I am the one who has to look after myself. Not the company or the customer, it is me who is most important. (...) Because, as I said, I am a seller. You know what I am talking about: all is fair in love and war. I believe the same is true for selling. [Wenn Sie es genau nehmen, bin immer ich mir der Nächste (lacht). Das heißt nicht das Unternehmen oder der Kunde, sondern ich bin am wichtigsten. (...) Denn, wie gesagt: Ich bin Verkäufer. Sie kennen das: In der Liebe und im Krieg ist Alles erlaubt. Ich glaube, auch im Verkauf ist letzten Endes Alles erlaubt.]” (ManufactCo11)

Another salesperson evaluates situations with higher stress levels positively since such situations offer the opportunity to grow personally:

“Especially those situations with high levels of stress or situations that offer exceptional challenges, in which, let’s say, regardless of level, very unexpected circumstances arise - whether on the level of emotional stress, when a board member, for example, becomes antagonistic and is aiming below the belt or when other decision makers make claims that are almost impertinent - this is in some way part of a learning process. And, I can claim that I have risen to the challenge, especially in these situations. [Gerade diese Streßsituationen oder diese Situationen der besonderen

Herausforderung, in denen, ich sag mal, sehr unerwartete Situationen entstanden sind, - egal auf welcher Ebene, ob es auf der emotionalen Stressebene ist, dass ein Vorstand beispielsweise wirklich sehr polemisch fast unter die Gürtellinie geht, oder andere Entscheider dann Forderungen stellen, die schon fast unverschämt sind - dienen aber auf einer anderen Art und Weise einem Lernprozess. Und da behaupte ich, da bin ich dran gewachsen, gerade an diesen Situationen.]" (ComCo3)

Interpretations

Across all boundary role handling styles there seems to be a mechanism at work that enables salespeople to avoid role stress effects and be above stress-triggering experiences. I propose:

P₃: Across all boundary role handling styles, there exists a variable that additionally reduces salespeople's level of role stress.

This finding calls for further investigation of what those salespeople who generally experience less role stress have in common.

3.4.4 Theme No. 4: Salespeople Who Engage in Role-Authoring Are Least Stressed

Observations

An in-depth analysis of all salespeople reporting low role stress reveals one common characteristic: Strong individual beliefs about the sales role.

"Every salesperson is a little chief who has his... has a certain vision as to how he wants to work with the customer, what he wants to realize with the customer, what he aims to achieve. [Jeder Vertriebler ist ja ein kleiner Fürst, der seine...der eine gewisse Vision hat, wie er mit dem Kunden arbeiten will, was er mit dem Kunden gemeinsam umsetzen will, was er bei dem Kunden erreichen will.]" (ComCo5)

In most interviews I observe that salespeople answer questions by elaborating on their beliefs about their role. One participant, for example, explains to me that to secure future business opportunities salespeople should invest in customer relationships, for example, by engaging in honest consulting activities.

"And that is honesty and openness - not always needing to sell everything to push the envelope, stating clearly to customers, you need that, but you don't need this. (...) And there are other - let's say - philosophies, right? There are many customers and salespeople out there, who believe they need to go a step further, but the customer becomes quickly aware of that. And if you - across all daily selling activities - take a more relaxed view on things - then you are able to establish a solid relationship, because the customer is willing to pay x Euros more at times because he knows that next time, he will not be taken advantage of. [Und das ist die Ehrlichkeit und Offenheit - nicht

alles immer verkaufen müssen, sondern auch dem Kunden klar sagen, das brauchst du, aber das brauchst du nicht. (...) Und da gibt es schon andere - ich sage mal - Philosophien, ja? Da gibt es genug Kunden oder auch Vertriebsleute, die meinen, sie müssen da noch eins draufsetzen, aber das bekommt der Kunde sehr schnell mit. Und wenn Sie im gesamten Tagesgeschäft die 5 mal eine gerade Zahl sein lassen, dann pendelt sich das in eine gute Beziehung ein, weil der Kunde mal bereit ist, x Euro mehr zu bezahlen, weil er weiß, beim nächsten Mal wird er nicht übers Ohr gehauen.]“ (ManufactCo7)

I find these beliefs to play a role across all four boundary role handling styles. A participant engaging in boundary role handling *Style No. I*, for example, describes her beliefs as follows:

“You try to level the path somehow. If necessary, you ask someone higher in the hierarchy for support, but you know upfront that leads to nothing, so you try to do it yourself, which certainly oversteps some boundaries at times. (...) You have to ensure that the customer is not lost out of sight, so you take care of it yourself. As mentioned earlier, you can only get things rolling on the frontline, nowhere else. [Man versucht, sich irgendwie einen Weg zu ebnet. Wenn es notwendig ist, wird jemand von der oberen Ebene gefragt, aber man weiß im vorhinein, da kommt sowieso nichts bei rum, also versucht man es auf eigene Faust, was sicherlich manchmal über die Grenzen hinaus geht. (...) Man muss gucken, dass der Kunde nicht aus den Augen verloren wird, also kümmert man sich selber darum. Wie gesagt, an der Front, da kann man was bewegen, sonst gar nicht.]“ (ManufactCo4)

Her belief appears to be very important to her and more worth talking about than the stress she experiences acting according to it. To follow her beliefs this interviewee is willing to accept strain with others in her company.

The individual beliefs seem to guide salespeople’s perceptions, thoughts and behavior. Salespeople describe how they integrate their own beliefs into the understanding of the sales job and try to make external expectations compatible with their own values. As one salesperson explains:

“I try to be sensible when serving any customer that gets in touch with me, just the way I learned. In doing so, I sometimes rub my colleagues or even my supervisor the wrong way, but I’ve noticed that this way I can at least serve the customer as a competent contact person. [Ich versuche, wenn ein Kunde sich mit mir in Verbindung setzt, ihn vernünftig zu betreuen, so wie ich es gelernt habe, falle manchmal bei Kollegen oder auch bei meinen Vorgesetzten damit nicht besonders gut auf, aber ich habe halt gemerkt, dass ich damit zumindest als kompetenter Ansprechpartner dem Kunden gegenüber dienen kann.]” (ManufactCo4)

A salesperson engaging in boundary role handling *Style No. IV* describes her strong beliefs as follows:

“I favor a neutral and professional way of interacting [with customers] over being sympathetic. Because sometimes, for example, I have to sell products I am not convinced of myself. And if I like a customer, selling this product would gnaw at my conscience. But if I engage on a neutral,

professional level, it all comes down to business. And I don't get such a bad conscience if I sell something, which I know, well, I don't really believe that it will help him, but I simply want to sell it. [Ich finde eigentlich eine neutrale, professionelle Umgangsweise [mit dem Kunden] fast besser als eine sympathisierende. Weil ich zum Beispiel manchmal ja auch Produkte verkaufen muss, die ich selber gar nicht so toll finde. Und wenn ich denjenigen gerne mag, hat man da ja schnell ein schlechtes Gewissen, während wenn du mit dem eine neutrale, professionelle Ebene pflegst, geht es ums Geschäft und da hat man dann auch nicht so ein schlechtes Gewissen, wenn man dem mal was verkauft, von dem man weiß, na, ob das jetzt wirklich so dem hilft, weiß ich nicht so richtig, aber ich will es halt verkaufen.]“ (ComCo2)

Also salespeople engaging in boundary role handling *Style No. II* report strong beliefs.

In the following statement the interviewee explains that he is above all things. He adapts to customers to sell but overall he remains distant from all role senders and does his 'thing':

“No. I do my 'thing' which means always adapting to the customer. In that regard I'm a chameleon. In my personal life I'm completely uncompromising, very, very hard, and critical. If you'd get to know me personally and then on the job, you wouldn't recognize me. Even so, I'm authentic. Therefore: I don't simply go along with anything. I wouldn't pay attention if my company were to say, 'Listen, you have to behave in such and such a way.' I would answer, 'Up my you know what! I won't do that - I'm the way I am. This is the way I was when you hired me, so don't try to change me. That would only make my performance worse. [Nein. Ich mache mein „Ding“, das heißt, sich immer auf den Kunden einzustellen. Ich bin - was das angeht - ein Chamäleon. Privat bin ich völlig bedingungslos, sehr, sehr hart und kritisch. Wenn Sie mich privat erleben würden und im Job - Sie würden mich nicht wiedererkennen. Trotzdem bin ich authentisch. Deswegen: Ich verfolge dabei gar Nichts. Ich nehme das auch nicht auf, wenn mein Unternehmen sagen würde: „Pass auf, du musst dich so und so verhalten.“ Ich würde antworten: „Ihr könnt mich ... Das mache ich nicht - ich bin so, wie ich bin. So habt ihr mich eingestellt, versucht nicht, mich zu ändern, denn dann werde ich wohl nur schlechter in meinen Leistungen sein.]“ (ManufactCo11)

Interestingly, one salesperson engaging in *Style No. II* who does not show strong beliefs herself admirably describes other salespeople with strong beliefs who engage in a proper selling style, love their job and are more confident and relaxed.

“And there was this one boss I had. (...) He really had style. He was relaxed, he knew what it comes down to, what he is capable of, and he enjoyed sharing it. Yes, he lived for the job. You noticed that this man really did his job because he loved it. And he did it with flair. He had...he was fair in a certain way, must be said. Well, I personally believe that all of it belongs together. (...) He was indeed able to admit at some point “Yes, I am clueless about that, so what are we going to do? Let's have a look and see how we can find a solution.” Yes, that is also style for me. [Und dann hatte ich den Chef, (...) der hatte für mich Stil. Der war relaxed, der wusste, was er kann, hat das auch sehr gern weitergegeben, ja, und hat dafür gelebt. Also man hat gemerkt, dieser Mann macht das, weil er das wirklich liebt. Und hat das eben auch mit Stil gemacht. Der hatte eben/ war eben dann doch auf eine gewisse Art und Weise auch wieder fair. Das muss man eben dazu sagen. Also ich finde, das gehört immer alles zusammen. (...) Der kann eben auch mal zugeben: „Ja, da habe ich keine Ahnung von. Aber was machen wir denn jetzt? Dann gucken wir mal, wie wir das hinkriegen“. Ja, das ist für mich auch Stil.]“ (ServiceCo6)

Interpretations

For reasons of self-consistency (Weik 1995) and satisfaction with their job, salespeople strive to identify with their sales role (Ashforth and Mael 1989). Identification occurs if the role is compatible with the salesperson's beliefs (Ashforth, Kulik, and Tomiuk 2008). By integrating their beliefs into their definition of the job role, salespeople try to make external job role expectations compatible with the beliefs about themselves.

Each salesperson, independent of which boundary role handling style she engages in, can have strong individual beliefs about her role. Thereby salespeople make their sales role and engage in what I call *role-authoring*. I define salespeople's role-authoring as proactively integrating own individual beliefs into the sales role. Thereby salespeople redefine and adapt the role set predefined by the external role senders, customer and company. Role-authoring thus might result in role development (Nicholson 1984), which refers to a form of organizational development. Salespeople try to change role requirements so that they better match their needs, abilities and identity instead of adapting to them.

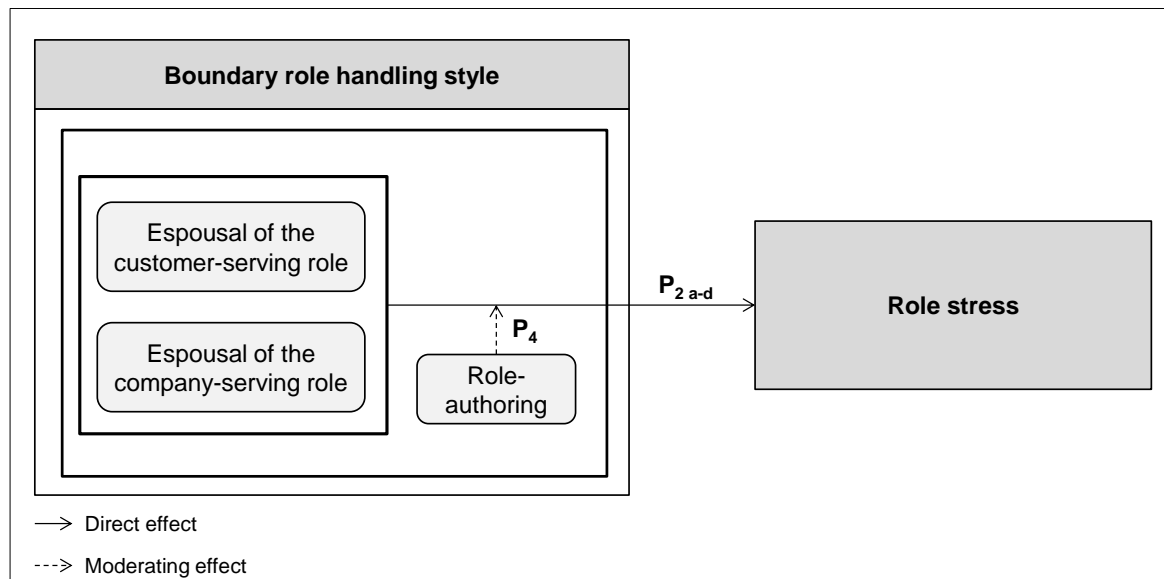
Across all boundary role handling styles, interviewees with a high level of role-authoring report lower levels of role stress than those with a low level of role-authoring. Thus, salespeople who have developed their individual code of conduct find it easier to cope with role stress than those without strong individual beliefs. Following this logic, salespeople abide to their own standards and their own role expectations and are not easily influenced by external role senders.

Concluding, when salespeople engage in role-authoring, role stress has less impact on the salesperson's well-being than sales literature suggests. Role-authoring is mostly based on a salesperson's own success-proven philosophy about 'how to do the job' and therefore also reduces role ambiguity.

I propose (for an overview, refer to Figure 3-6):

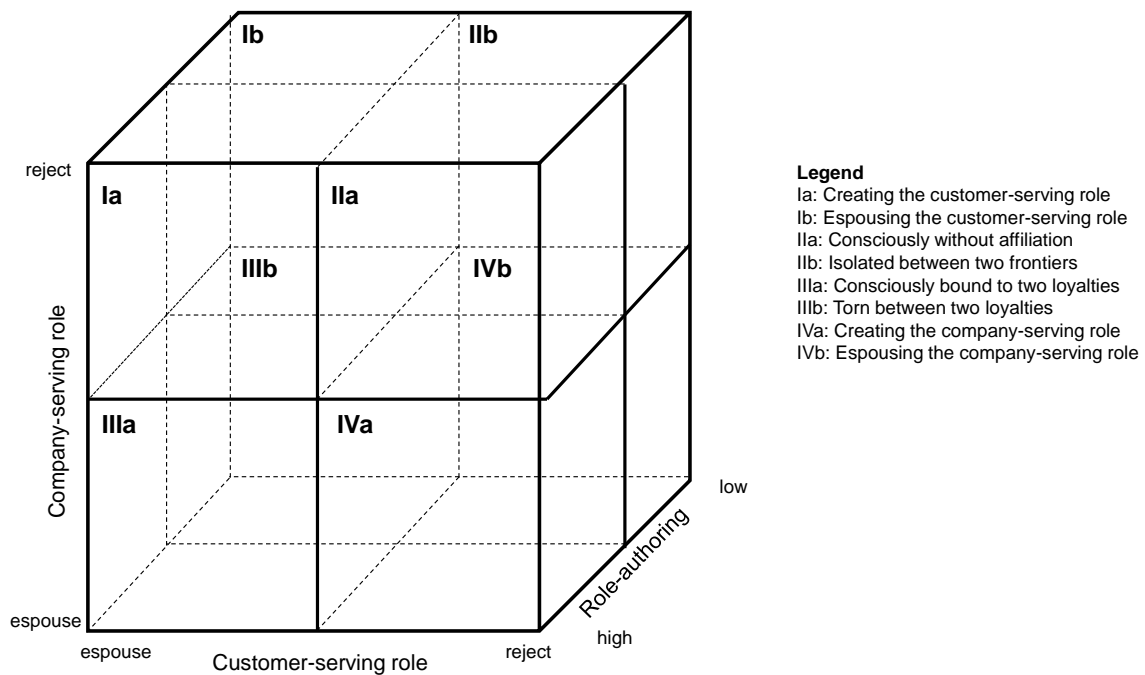
P₄: Role-authoring negatively moderates the effects that the espousal of the customer-serving role and the espousal of the company-serving role have on role stress.

Figure 3-6: Conceptual Framework of Unstressed Salespeople



The set of four boundary role handling styles developed in Section 3.4.1 is now expanded by introducing the third dimension, role-authoring, resulting in eight boundary role handling styles (see Figure 3-7). A salesperson's boundary role handling style is based on the individual's role definition, which I define as the mix of self-expectations and external expectations. This mix refers to the relative emphasis of the three dimensions:

- the extent to which salespeople espouse the customer-serving role (external expectations),
- the extent to which salespeople espouse the company-serving role (external expectations), and
- the extent to which salespeople proactively engage in role-authoring (internal expectations).

Figure 3-7: The Three-Dimensional Typology of Boundary Role Handling Styles

The findings are consistent with career stage research which states that salespeople start off to establish a professional self-image. During their career they establish reputation and tend to be more comfortable with their roles (Cron and Slocum 1986). What they achieve has often been called a “comfort zone”. Interview data indicates that this “comfort zone” is linked to the idea of strong individual beliefs about the sales role and a corresponding boundary role handling style. Therefore it is not surprising that the strongest individual beliefs about the sales role and the highest level of role-authoring are found in interviews with more experienced salespeople. Counterintuitive to experienced employees normally being risk averse (Flaherty and Pappas 2002), these salespeople are often willing to engage in conflicts to follow their individual credo.

However, it is important to mention that every interviewee reports some level of role stress. As argued earlier in this section, this is consistent with existing research on boundary positions and role stress. Boundary spanning positions like sales jobs come along naturally with at least some level of role stress (Behrman and Perreault 1984). Researchers agree that

role stress in boundary positions can never be completely eliminated, but only be reduced (Sager and Menon 1994; Singh 1998).

3.4.5 Theme No. 5: The Salesperson's Individual Boundary Role Handling Style Moderates Role Stress Effects

Interpretations

As I have shown in the review of the sales literature on role stress in Section 3.2.2, studies have identified numerous antecedents and consequences of role stress. In addition to the so far proposed direct effects on the level of role stress, the interviews suggest that the strength and the direction (positive or negative effect) of the antecedents' effects on role stress or role stress' effects on consequential behavior or psychological states may vary according to the salesperson's boundary role handling style.

As an example for the possible moderating effect of boundary role handling styles on antecedents' effects on role stress, I find that salespeople's tolerance towards role stressors induced by the role sender they identify with is much higher than towards role stressors induced by the other role sender. Salespeople who are bound to their company (*Style No. IV*) appraise customer-induced role stressors more negatively than company-induced stressors. In contrast, salespeople bound to customers (*Style No. I*) appraise company-induced role stressors more negatively than customer-induced role stressors. This effect might answer the research call by Bettencourt and Brown (2003, p. 406) for investigating if "it is possible that boundary-spanning employees may respond constructively to role conflict introduced by customers but psychologically and behaviorally withdraw from role conflict created by the supervisors or policies of the organization". In this context, Rodell and Judge (2009) make an important contribution outside of sales research by applying affective events theory to differentiate challenge and hindrance stressors for employees of various specializations.

Based on affective reactions to workplace events people appraise stressors and react either favorably (challenge stressors) or counterproductive (hindrance stressors). The typology of boundary role handling styles might offer an explanation why salespeople appraise stressors as challenge or hindrance stressors.

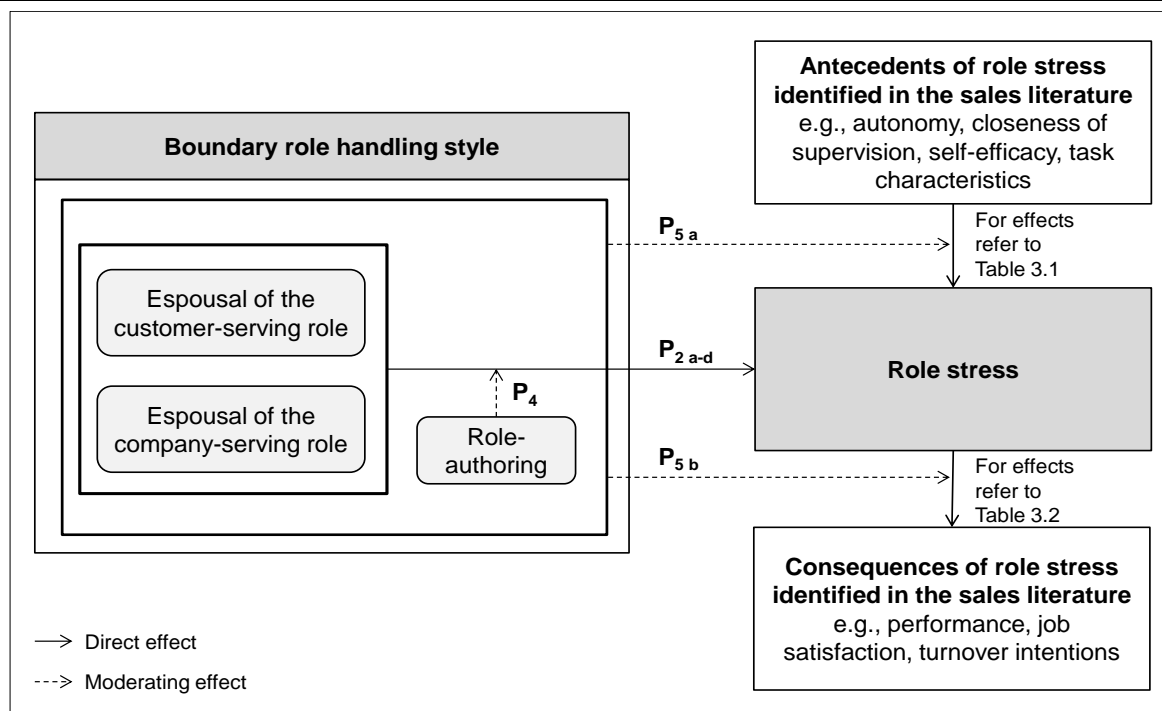
Boundary role handling styles might also moderate outcome effects of role stress on specific behaviors and psychological states. On the one hand, interview data suggests that *Style No. I* salespeople engage more in customer-oriented behaviors like internal influence behaviors or service delivery (Bettencourt and Brown 2003) as a reaction to role stress than *Style No. IV* salespeople. On the other hand, salespeople engaging in boundary role handling *Style No. IV* seem to show less psychological reactions to role stress such as reduced organizational commitment than *Style No. I* salespeople do.

The salesperson's individual boundary role handling style might be able to explain individual differences in role stress effects as called for by Bettencourt, Brown, and Mackenzie (2005). Previous role stress research is mostly conducted based on quantitative methods which do not control for effects on the individual level. Studies rather describe overall or average effects of the data collected. By integrating the boundary role handling style of each individual in the equation the salesperson's individual perspective gains weight. I propose (see Figure 3-8):

P_{5a}: A salesperson's individual boundary role handling style (I, II, III, or IV) moderates the effects of antecedent variables on the salesperson's level of role stress.

P_{5b}: A salesperson's individual boundary role handling style (I, II, III, or IV) moderates the effects of role stress on consequence variables, such as performance or job satisfaction.

However, these effects need to be investigated in more detail by future research.

Figure 3-8: Boundary Role Handling Styles and Their Moderating Effects

3.5 Discussion

After summarizing the main contributions of this study, I compare and distinguish the developed sales boundary role handling model from other related concepts in the area of role-making outside of sales research (3.5.1). Then I derive implications of this study for academic research (3.5.2) and for managerial practice (3.5.3). Finally, limitations and future research opportunities are presented (3.5.4).

This study draws attention to two anomalies to existing sales theory. First, I show that not all salespeople feel caught between customers and company as sales literature suggests. Second, I find that some salespeople feel rather unstressed despite their sales boundary position, which is typically associated with high levels of role stress. I explain these anomalies by introducing boundary role handling styles and the concept of role-authoring. The role definition is based on the degree to which each salesperson engages in the customer-

serving role, in the company-serving role and in role-authoring. I propose different role stress effects for the resulting eight boundary role handling styles.

Salespeople's different boundary role handling styles are highly performance relevant. Following the existing literature (Singh 2000), I am able to derive a positive performance effect by proposing lower levels of role stress for specific boundary role handling styles. The mix of role-taking and role-making has been identified as a considerable performance driver, especially for employees in high autonomy jobs such as salespeople (Griffin, Neal, and Parker 2007).

3.5.1 Linking Boundary Role Handling to Related Concepts

As shown in the literature review (3.2) the idea that *employees* proactively engage in sense-making about how to perform their job is not entirely new. Studies describe that employees try to make sense of their job (Weik 1995), try to influence their tasks (Staw and Boettger 1990) as well as obligations and boundaries (Wrzesniewski and Dutton 2001) to adapt to the role or to adapt the role to their own preferences (Allen and Meyer 1990; Berg, Wrzesniewski, and Dutton 2010; Nicholson 1984). However, these useful concepts have not been applied to *salespeople* so far. This study shows that salespeople proactively make sense of their sales role by engaging in role-making and corresponding behaviors. It draws attention to the relevance of the individual's perspective in sales research.

To avoid confusion about the concepts developed in this study and existing concepts in the literature, it is essential to compare them and set the scope of the different constructs. The boundary role handling model is sales-specific but in line with research outside of sales research. Outside of sales research, role-making concepts are mainly investigated from a social perspective. Studies are concerned with how role definition and consensus about roles develop within groups or organizations over time. I discuss three conceptual perspectives

from outside of sales research on how individual employees make sense of their job focusing on how the boundary role handling model differs from each.

3.5.1.1 Role Orientation

Role theorists have developed several constructs along the continuum of role orientation (as presented in the literature review in Section 3.2). Only few studies apply the concept of role orientation, understood as the overall continuum from role conformity to role innovation, in the organizational context. Role orientation is mostly applied in gender studies (Judge and Livingston 2008; Scherer and Petrick 2001). Gender role orientation is defined as the beliefs that individuals hold about the proper roles for men and women at work and at home (Fortin 2005).

Boundary role handling styles relate to role orientation in that they illustrate how salespeople engage in the whole spectrum of role-taking and role-making. Whereas the degree of espousing the customer-serving role and the degree of espousing the company-serving role mirrors salespeople's role-taking, role-authoring covers salespeople's role-making opportunities. Based on her boundary role handling style, each salesperson can be located along the continuum of role orientation, closer to role conformity or closer to role innovation. However, role-authoring will rarely result in innovation of roles. Unlike role innovators, according to Schein (1979), salespeople do not "reject the norms which govern the practice of the profession" in order to change society (Schein 1979, p. 4).

3.5.1.2 Role Negotiation

Following an interactionist perspective people make sense of their roles through interactions and negotiations with other role senders (as presented in the literature review in Section 3.2). Role negotiation is an iterative process of role-taking, in which role occupants are informed about expected role behaviors, and role-making, in which individuals modify these expected behaviors (Katz and Kahn 1978; Kramer 2009). The interactions can be formal or informal,

task-related or of relational nature (Brett, Northcraft, and Pinkley 1999). The definitions and descriptions show the broadness of the concept of role negotiation. It is conceptualized as an ongoing emerging process (Miller, Joseph, and Apker 2000), in which nearly every interaction between a role occupant and a role sender can be considered a role negotiation (interactionist perspective).

This study's goal and set-up allows no profound statement on how boundary role handling styles develop. I am particularly interested in the perspective of the individual salesperson and do not study dyads, groups or their conversations. The individual salesperson is my unit of analysis. Therefore, the collected data mainly covers a salesperson's internal negotiations with regard to the role definition underlying her boundary role handling style.

However, I argue that boundary role handling styles are the result of role negotiations. Experiences with external role senders play an important part in developing preferences for customer- and/ or company-serving role and also in developing individual beliefs. Enacting the individual sales role definition and adapting or not adapting to feedback of relevant others is a dynamic process. However, once salespeople have defined their individual boundary role handling style, they do not easily switch or change it. External role negotiations will then mostly concern specific daily business topics.

3.5.1.3 Job Crafting

Job crafting refers to individual's task-related and relational role boundary work (as presented in the literature review in Section 3.2). These informal behaviors aim at integrating personal preferences and needs into the job content. The concept has been developed in the context of bottom-up job design research and has been applied mostly outside of profit-driven organizational contexts.

Both the boundary role handling model and the job crafting concept picture the individual salesperson as a proactive shaper of the sales boundary. Thereby both concepts

belong to a rather new research tradition that draws attention to the individual perspective of employees and their shaping of job worlds. However, the boundary role handling model differs from the job crafting concept in several ways:

First, job crafting has its origin in job design research which has a broad scope covering all types of jobs whereas the boundary role handling model is first of all sales-specific. The sales role is inherently characterized by the interplay of the two role senders customer and company and comes along with high levels of role stress (Arnold et al. 2009b). Boundary role handling styles are the result of the analysis how highly empowered salespeople deal with this specific role set at the sales boundary. The styles are based on role-theoretic arguments which dominate the view on the sales boundary role in sales research, extending existing role theory. Whether the boundary role handling model can also be applied to roles outside of the sales-context needs to be investigated in future studies.

Second, instead of “unguided re-crafting processes” which are associated with job crafting (Lyons 2008, p. 25), boundary role handling styles show that salespeople pursue certain strategies based on predispositions, experiences, and attitudes. Salespeople’s boundary role handling styles are based on individual characteristics and long-term attitudes and appear neither unguided nor spontaneous.

Third, job crafting is expected to lead to a permanent change of the job (Wrzesniewski and Dutton 2001). The empirical data collected in this study shows that each individual salesperson’s role definition has only an impact for the time he or she carries out the job. Since boundary role handling is often informal I find no evidence that it translates, at least not one to one, into job descriptions or directly impacts other salespeople’s behavior in the future.

3.5.2 Implications for Academic Research

Following Yadav's (2010) classification of theory development strategies, this chapter makes four fundamental conceptual contributions in the area of 'initiating theory development' and 'assessing and enhancing theory': First, this chapter *reviews a focal theory*. I review role theory with its constructs along the role orientation continuum and provide an extensive literature review on role theory applied to salespeople. I also assess, compare and structure role-theoretic concepts from different research perspectives, such as organizational and interactionist perspectives. Based on this extensive review, I structure and develop a comprehensive role-theoretic network of constructs applicable to the sales position.

Second, I *identify and address gaps in the existing conceptualization* of role theory for the sales context. Following the empirical data I introduce the concept of boundary role handling styles and the new dimension of role-authoring, covering salespeople's tendency to integrate personal beliefs into their sales role definition.

Third, *using analogies* I compare concepts from the sales domain on how salespeople make sense of their job with models outside the organizational context, where prior knowledge exists. I integrate role theory with relationship research and proactive perspectives from job design research and form the boundary role handling model to explain behavior in the sales position. Subsequently, I distinguish the boundary role handling model from three related concepts to demonstrate this study's conceptual contributions.

Fourth, I develop *theoretical enhancements to address mixed and ambiguous evidence* in role stress research. Even though research on salespeople has identified numerous antecedents and moderators for the occurrence of role stress, studies reveal mixed results, for example, of autonomy and feedback. The boundary role handling model offers a comprehensive explanation of why salespeople experience different levels of role stress and why some salespeople are less stressed than others.

3.5.3 Implications for Managerial Practice

Salespeople's boundary role handling styles matter to sales organizations. In times where salespeople are expected to find proactive solutions and engage in creativity to satisfy increasingly complex customer demands (Román and Iacobucci 2010), sales managers rely on salespeople's role-making activities. The boundary role handling model shows that the power of formal incentive systems and expectations of role senders to influence salespeople in doing their sales job is limited. Salespeople's boundary role handling styles call for the appraisal of the salesperson's individual perspective and adaptive leadership behavior.

Sales managers should not view the different boundary role handling styles as a weak or strong deviation from the company's expectations but regard the salesperson's individual boundary role handling style as a valuable asset in two regards: First, the individual boundary role handling style, especially if the salesperson engages in role-authoring, is able to reduce the role stress of the salesperson. Lower levels of role stress are known to have numerous positive effects, for example, on salespeople's job satisfaction and reduced turnover intentions (Singh 1998). Second, role-authoring can enable creativity and authenticity in selling situations. Creative salespeople are able to secure customer satisfaction and competitive advantage by adapting or designing new solutions to customer problems (Agnihotri et al. 2014). Salespeople who behave authentically establish interpersonal closeness with customers. This closeness increases the chance to establish customer trust and a resilient customer relationship (Yagil and Medler-Liraz 2013). Sales managers can benefit from supporting salespeople in applying their own perspective on the sales boundary to find creative solutions and establish close customer relationships. They should openly communicate with salespeople about how they see the job and how they assess specific customer situations. In addition, sales managers can engage in a valuable exchange with salespeople on what they value and what not.

Differentiating the sales force according to boundary role handling styles enables an organization to set up a more effective incentive and sales control system. Sales managers are able to better assess the salesperson's behavior and reactions to specific arguments and incentives. Thus, individual boundary role handling styles call for more individualized incentive systems. Sales managers should be enabled to choose from a set of available incentives and control mechanisms to ensure the best fit with the salesperson.

Sales managers should also take salespeople's boundary role handling styles into consideration when forming selling teams. Salespeople with different boundary role handling styles in one selling team can ensure the consideration of different expectations. However, consensus has been identified as a critical prerequisite for the success of selling teams (Ahearne et al. 2010). Salespeople should not differ extensively in their boundary role handling to avoid lower performance due to unresolved conflicts or less helping behaviors.

3.5.4 Limitations and Future Research Opportunities

A balanced view on the empirical study presented includes the consideration of its limitations. First, all data analyzed is non-longitudinal and report only the salesperson's beliefs and role-handling in one moment of time. For most interviewees, the empirical data indicates that salespeople's boundary role handling styles are stable over time. However, some salespeople switch between boundary role handling styles. For those, boundary role handling styles might ebb and flow over the course of a career. Switching a boundary role handling style could be a strategy to reduce role stress. Future research could investigate how boundary role handling styles develop and how they change over time.

A second limitation of the study concerns the investigation of contextual and outcome variables. The boundary role handling model identifies different boundary role handling styles based on the experiences salespeople make in their job life. However, it only touches upon

why salespeople apply a specific boundary role handling style. The investigation of a relevant set of antecedents of boundary role handling styles is left to future research. The model also shows the effects of the different boundary role handling styles on salespeople's role stress perceptions. However, it is up to future research to investigate how boundary role handling styles affect other outcome variables like selling behavior.

A third limitation refers to the unit of analysis and the data sources used. Consistent with my approach to let the salesperson 'have a word', I interview only salespeople. I do not control for individual biases by engaging in triangulation and integrating other sources. It might be interesting for future research to study, for example, if sales managers allocate their salespeople to the same boundary role handling style that salespeople reveal to the researcher.

The data discussed above and the theoretical framework derived suggests that greater attention is to be paid to the individual perspective of salespeople in future research. Many organizations try to remain in control of their sales force by streamlining processes and incentives while facing uncertainty, increasing network structures at the boundary and growing need for customized solutions. To ensure future effectiveness of salespeople's boundary spanning, understanding and managing the typology of sales boundary role handling offers new access to salespeople's creativity and to micro logics that determine sales success.

4 Outside-Selling Versus Inside-Selling

The Effect of Dual Psychological Contract and Dual Identity

4.1 Introduction

From the salesperson's perspective, working in a boundary position between the employing company and customers (Bettencourt and Brown 2003) often involves a collision of interests between the exchange partners (Arnold et al. 2009a; Babin, Boles, and Robin 2000; Barnes et al. 2006). A collision occurs, for example, when the employing company promotes high-priced products or slow sellers which provide limited value for customers. The employing firm wants the salesperson to sell these products to customers. In these situations the salesperson can exert effort in selling these products to customers or exert effort in discussing with and explaining to relevant players inside the employing firm why these products cannot be sold for the suggested terms. In other words, the salesperson has to decide at whom to direct her selling energy.

Salespeople engaging strongly in *outside-selling* direct most of their *selling energy* at *customers*. They take primarily care of the results for the company. Outside-selling activities involve selling-oriented behaviors and customer-oriented behaviors (Saxe and Weitz 1982; Thomas, Soutar, and Ryan 2001) since these are expected to lead to high sales success (Franke and Park 2006). Prominent activities are adapting to specific customer needs (Boorum, Goolsby, and Ramsey 1998; Román and Iacobucci 2010), presenting products in a way that they satisfy customer's needs (Bradford, Crant, and Phillips 2009; Hartline, Maxham, and McKee 2000; Martin and Bush 2006; Plouffe, Hlland, and Wachner 2009), defending prices (Joseph 2001), being able to say "no" to customers (Jones and Keppler 2008), and stretching the truth or making biased recommendations in sales presentations (Chakrabarty, Brown, and Widing 2010).

In comparison, salespeople engaging strongly in *inside-selling* place less emphasis on company results and focus on helping the customer make satisfactory purchase decisions. They direct more of their *selling energy* at their own *organization* to influence internal processes or standards in favor of the customer (Bettencourt and Brown 2003; Bettencourt, Brown, and Mackenzie 2005; Marrone, Tesluk, and Carson 2007; Plouffe and Barclay 2007). In extreme cases, salespeople even sell the strategic value of a sales project or necessary discounts to their own management instead of selling products and prices to customers (Joseph 2001).

Salespeople's decision to engage to different degrees in outside-selling and inside-selling behaviors is of great importance to both exchange partners: the customers and the employing company. The latter traditionally wants salespeople to direct their selling energy at customers to realize the highest possible sales result with the least effort and disturbance of internal processes. However, inside-selling activities imply that not all salespeople are perfectly aligned with company objectives as incentive systems in place may suggest. Customers become more and more powerful (Fogel et al. 2012) and want salespeople to direct their selling energy at the firm to create the most customized solution possible (Anderson and Onyemah 2006).

This chapter investigates at which exchange partner salespeople direct more selling energy and why salespeople engage more in inside-selling or in outside-selling. It seeks to answer the following research questions:

Research question 4: In which exchange partner do salespeople invest more selling energy?

Research question 5: Why do salespeople engage more in inside-selling or more in outside-selling?

Instead of focusing only on incentive-based transactional factors as explanatory variables, I am especially interested in salespeople's perceptions of their exchange partners, their relationships and their resulting *relative* behavioral impact. To capture the effects of salespeople's relationships with both company and customers, I introduce the idea of duality of relationship effects. Duality refers to effects taking place in both relationships. Their behavioral impact can only be understood in relation to each other.

4.2 Literature Review

This section is based on the large body of conceptual and empirical literature on salespeople's selling behavior, its characteristics and its motivation. The literature review focuses on the individual salesperson's selling behavior rather than on team selling or the organizational selling process. It is structured in two parts. First, I present an overview of the extensively researched outside-selling behaviors and the few existing concepts related to inside-selling behaviors. Second, I review the sales literature with regard to factors that influence salespeople's degree of outside- and inside-selling orientation. So far, research mainly concentrates on outside-selling behaviors and their - mainly extrinsic - motivational mechanisms rooted in the relationship with the employing company.

4.2.1 References to Inside-Selling and Outside-Selling Behaviors

The individual salesperson's customer-oriented or outside-selling behavior is the number one topic of published articles in sales research (Plouffe, Williams, and Wacliner 2008). The focus of most of the studies is to identify outside-selling behaviors which promise to be most successful with respect to company performance (Franke and Park 2006; Jaramillo et al. 2009; Kidwell et al. 2011; Martin and Bush 2006; Plouffe, Hlland, and Wachner 2009). Thus, research has identified selling behaviors concerning what customers value and need (Bradford, Crant, and Phillips 2009; Hartline, Maxham, and McKee 2000; Plouffe, Hlland,

and Wachner 2009; Singh and Koshy 2011a), how to build effective customer relationships (Boles, Johnson, and Barksdale 2000; Bradford and Weitz 2009; Guenzi, Georges, and Pardo 2009; Weitz and Bradford 1999), the role service behaviors play (Ahearne, Jelinek, and Jones 2007; Johnson and Ashforth 2008), and how to adapt to specific customers (Boorum, Goolsby, and Ramsey 1998; Giacobbe et al. 2006; Román and Iacobucci 2010; Weitz, Sujan, and Sujan 1986). As a result of this intense research attention, sales literature identified a variety of outside-selling behaviors.

The abundance of behaviors investigated is not surprising, taking into account the broad understanding of outside-selling which “can be viewed as the practice of the marketing concept at the level of the individual salesperson and customer” (Saxe and Weitz 1982, p. 343). The number of selling behavior concepts increases continuously as authors extend existing selling behavior constructs or define new ones (Bradford, Crant, and Phillips 2009; Simon, Menguc, and Stefani 2004). Thereby they provide more detailed insights on specific behaviors into which the individual salesperson translates her customer orientation. Examples for rather new concepts are customer-directed extra-role behaviors (Jaramillo et al. 2009) and helping behaviors (Bradford, Crant, and Phillips 2009). Most outside-selling behaviors have mainly been researched independently of one another (Franke and Park 2006; Schwepker 2003). However, Plouffe, Hulland, and Wachner (2009) show that the simultaneous consideration of effects of different selling behaviors is key to increasing the explanatory power in selling contexts.

One prominent approach to structure outside-selling activities is the SOCO continuum, defined by *selling orientation* and *customer orientation* (Guenzi, de Luca, and Troilo 2011). For an overview of selected articles, see Table 4-1. Customer-oriented selling behaviors aim at satisfying customers in the long-run by helping customers to correctly assess demands and by deciding for the best product. Selling orientation on the contrary refers to salespeople

sacrificing customer interests in order to increase the probability of an immediate sale (Saxe and Weitz 1982). It describes salespeople's short-term orientation, setting priorities on company results. Customer orientation is a means to achieve desirable results for the company while still being concerned with customer satisfaction. Thus, customer orientation includes a more balanced view of both customers and company interests.

Even though the two constructs were developed as independent concepts (Saxe and Weitz 1982) they have rarely been treated separately in the literature (Jaramillo et al. 2007a). They are mostly used as opposites of one continuum (Periatt, LeMay, and Chakrabarty 2004). Recently however, this combined use has been questioned by Guenzi, de Luca, and Troilo (2011) who find different effects of organizational antecedents on salespeople's customer orientation and selling orientation. Following this separate view of both concepts, it is noticeable that selling orientation has attracted far less research attention than customer orientation.

As argued above, sales research focuses mainly on outside-selling. A few studies, however, identify behaviors of salespeople directing their energy at their own organization, engaging in inside-selling activities. Porter (1981, p. 111) defines such behaviors as "attempts to influence someone higher in the formal hierarchy in the organization". In the context of coping with role conflict, salespeople try to gain more control over selling situations (Nonis, Sager, and Kumar 1996) by applying so called *upward influence tactics* which can be considered inside-selling behaviors. Prominent examples are *upward appeal*, salespeople bypassing their immediate superior (employing company) to appeal to higher authorities for support, and *coalition building*, salespeople seeking the support of others (within the employing company) to get sales specifics approved by their superior (Nonis, Sager, and Kumar 1996).

Table 4-1: Selected Publications on Salespeople's Outside-Selling Behavior

Authors	Customer-directed behavior	Antecedents	Performance effect	Context investigated	Method
Bradford, Crant, and Phillips (2009)	Customer-focused helping behaviors	Perceived customer importance	Job satisfaction (+)	Salespeople and their customers in manufacturing and technology companies	SEM
Franke and Park (2006)	Customer orientation	Gender; Experience	Selling effectiveness (-)	Different contexts	Meta-analysis
Guenzi, de Luca, and Troilo (2011)	Customer orientation; Sales orientation	Company culture; Role clarity; Long-term orientation; Marketing-sales interaction	Superior customer value creation (+)	Sales managers from different industries in Europe	Regression
Guenzi, Georges, and Pardo (2009)	Customer orientation; Selling orientation; Team selling	None	Role performance (+)	Strategic account managers from various industries in Italy	SEM
Homburg, Müller, and Klarman (2011)	Customer orientation in sales encounters	None	Sales performance (+)	Sales units and their customers from different industry-based companies	SEM
Jaramillo et al. (2009)	Customer orientation; Customer-directed behavior; Extra-role behavior	Sales manager's servant leadership	Sales performance (+)	Salespeople from different industries in the U.S.	SEM
Johnson and Ashforth (2008)	Customer-oriented service behaviors	Organizational identification; Customer identification; Long- vs. short-term employment contracts	None	Canadian service organization	HMR
Kidwell et al. (2011)	Customer orientation	Relational intelligence	Sales performance (++)	Real estate agents	Deductive
Martin and Bush (2006)	Salespeople's customer-oriented selling	Sales manager's leadership style; Sales rep empowerment; Sales rep psychological climate	Sales performance (+)	Salespeople in U.S.-based sales organizations	SEM
Simon, Menguc, and Stefani (2004)	Commitment to customer service	Organizational support; Supervisory support; Customer complaints	Sales performance (+)	Retail organization	HRM
Singh and Koshy (2011b)	Customer orientation; Selling orientation	None	Value creation (++) Customer satisfaction (++)	U.S. business customers; Small companies in India	SEM
Wieseke et al. (2007)	Customer orientation	Organizational identification	Market success (+)	Travel agencies in Germany	HLM

1) "-" = $-0.2 < \text{effect} < 0$; "+" = $0 < \text{effect} < 0.2$; "++" = $0.2 \leq \text{effect} < 0.4$; "+++" = $0.4 \leq \text{effect}$;

2) SEM = Structural Equation Modeling; HMR = Hierarchical Multiple Regression; HLM = Hierarchical Linear Modeling

Another inside-selling behavior, *salesperson navigation*, is introduced by Plouffe and Barclay (2007, p. 523) and relates to actions within the organization by which salespeople try to understand the organization's functioning and try to influence processes "to move specific sales opportunities close to closure". They conclude that salespeople's internal interactions with co-workers, support staff, selling peers and management critically impact salespeople's selling behaviors (Plouffe, Sridharan, and Barclay 2010).

Very few studies examine inside-selling behaviors in relation to outside-selling behaviors. Bettencourt and colleagues model salespeople's *customer-oriented boundary spanning behaviors* containing two types of outside-selling behavior and one type of inside-selling behavior (Bettencourt and Brown 2003; Bettencourt, Brown, and Mackenzie 2005): as outside-selling behavior they consider (1) *external representation*, the salesperson acts as an advocate of the organization and its products, and (2) *service delivery*. As company-directed or inside-selling behavior they include (3) the concept of *internal influence*, according to which salespeople try to influence internal processes to improve service delivery processes. This three-fold conceptualization integrates both directions of selling energy and maps a more complex set of salespeople's actions in the area of extra-role behavior directed at the company (Bettencourt and Brown 2003). Unfortunately, the authors make no statement about the relative importance of the three behaviors and how salespeople weight them.

The understanding of the balance of salespeople's inside- and outside-selling orientation in sales research is limited. Studies investigate only selected inside-selling activities, applying a micro-level perspective on salespeople's selling behaviors. This micro-perspective is useful to gain detailed knowledge in order to select activities for sales trainings. However, a more macro-level perspective allows for investigation of the relation and interaction of salespeople's inside- and outside-selling orientation in order to develop a more comprehensive model of salespeople selling behaviors. In line, Singh and Koshy (2011b) call

for a wider understanding of salespeople's selling behaviors which simultaneously encompasses all activities that are observed at the sales boundary. Antecedents and consequences of salespeople directing selling energy at customers and of salespeople directing selling energy at their employing firm need to be investigated.

4.2.2 References to Influencing Salespeople's Inside-Selling and Outside-Selling

Orientation

Research on salespeople's motivation to engage in specific selling behaviors is limited to one dominant explanatory model: Salespeople (1) want to and (2) need to perform in terms of generating sales (Miao, Evans, and Shaoming 2007). Following the idea of intrinsic motivation, Jeff Schmitt (2010, p. 2) states that salespeople want to be successful because they "live for the chase, craving that euphoric validation from the close" (see also Badovick, Hadaway, and Kaminski 1992). In line, Clotaire Rapaille (2006) identifies salespeople as "happy losers". They accept to lose most of the time because they are so excited by the outside chance of winning. In addition, the company's incentive system motivates salespeople to sell successfully (Beltramini and Evans 1988; Darmon 1987; Lo, Ghosh, and Lafontaine 2011). Successful salespeople are in line with the company's performance goals, earn more and are highly valued and accepted within the company. Thus, the literature mainly argues that salespeople engage in specific selling behaviors because they expect them to generate the highest sales performance (Sujan, Weitz, and Kumar 1994; Weitz, Sujan, and Sujan 1986).

Since outside-selling behaviors are considered to be *the* desirable type of behavior to generate the highest performance (Román and Iacobucci 2010), research on salespeople's motivation concentrates on factors that drive the level of selling effort instead of focusing on factors that influence the *direction of* salespeople's *selling effort*. Sales research identifies the employing company as the primary party that influences salespeople's selling behavior

(Brown and Peterson 1994). Consequently, the main body of sales research focuses on how the employing company can incentivize the salesperson to exert high levels of selling effort in outside-selling behaviors.

The level of selling effort

Studies often investigate the “overall amount of effort salespeople devote to their work”

(Sujan, Weitz, and Kumar 1994, p. 40). The level of effort is the central construct by which

sales researchers capture the “amount of time and energy salespeople spend on their selling

tasks” (Krishnan, Netemeyer, and Boles 2002, p. 288). Selling effort is mostly regarded as an

amount of *undirected* energy. A list of definitions of selling effort is provided in Table 4-2.

Thus, it reflects a quantitative illustration of salespeople’s input and does not cover the quality of their actions.

Table 4-2: Selected Definitions of Selling Effort

Authors	Definition – Selling effort is...
Badrinarayanan and Laverie (2011, p. 125)	...“conceptualized as the intensity of activities targeted toward actively selling, recommending, and supporting a specific brand as compared to other brands”
Brown and Peterson (1994, p. 71)	...“the force, energy, or activity, by which work is accomplished” “Using an input-output framework, effort can be viewed as an input to the selling job with sales performance as its outcome”
Campbell and Pritchard (1976, p. 82)	...“both the duration of time spent working and the intensity of work activities”
Christen, Iyer, and Soberman (2006, p. 141)	...“the amount of energy and time an employee puts into the job”
Jaramillo and Mulki (2008, p. 38)	...“the input to work”
Katerberg and Blau (1983, p. 250)	...the “level of effort” concerns the “persistency and intensity” of the energy employed on “job tasks”
Krishnan, Netemeyer, and Boles (2002, p. 88)	...“the amount of time and energy a salesperson devotes to the selling task”
Locke and Latham (1990, p. 261)	...“a primary mediating mechanism by which goals actually affect performance”
Naylor, Pritchard, and Ilgen (1980, p. 6)	...“the mechanism by which motivation is translated into accomplished work” ...“the amount of energy 'spent' on [an] act per unit of time”
Rangarajan, Jones, and Chin (2005, p. 347)	...“the amount of time and energy” allocated to job tasks
Sujan, Weitz, and Kumar (1994, p. 40)	...“the overall amount of effort salespeople devote to their work” (working hard)
VandeWalle et al. (1999, p. 251)	...“a means for activating the current ability for task achievement and a means for developing the ability needed for future task mastery”

The consensus notion that high levels of effort will lead to superior performance (Fang, Palmatier, and Evans 2004; Jaramillo et al. 2007a; Jaramillo and Mulki 2008; Sujan, Weitz, and Kumar 1994) explains the attention that is paid to selling effort. Brown and Peterson (1994) show in their meta-analysis that effort is a key predictor of salespeople's performance (see also Krishnan, Netemeyer, and Boles 2002; Sparks and Schenk 2001). Increasing the number of sales calls and face time with customers is expected to improve sales results (Weitz, Sujan, and Sujan 1986).

As a key predictor of sales performance, selling effort has been identified as an appropriate basis for sales control mechanisms. Companies expect salespeople to allocate their selling effort such that they maximize their commission payments, whereas the company adopts commission rates which maximize profits (Tapiero and Farley 1975). Salespeople are expected to adopt selling behaviors as an instrument to achieve their extrinsically desirable goals (Dubinsky and Skinner 2002). They continuously pursue the improvement of their sales performance as their first level outcome. Based on this model of a salesperson, most studies aim at optimizing extrinsically motivating variables such as pay, commissions or organizational climate to control for salespeople's selling efforts (Joseph and Kalwani 1998). Because of their high correlation, many researchers seem to equate effort and job performance (Christen, Iyer, and Soberman 2006). This understanding represents primarily a company perspective.

Extrinsic motivators build on the instrumentality of selling behavior which is modeled by expectancy and goal-setting theory (Locke 1991; Vroom, Porter, and Lawler 2005). Extrinsic motivators emphasize "the value an individual places on the results of an action and the individual's assessment of the probability of realizing the results" (Ingram, Lee, and Skinner 1989, p. 26). Salespeople engage in specific selling behaviors as a means to an end rather than for the sake of the behavior itself (Pullins 2001; Vallerand and Blssonnette 1992).

They show exactly that level of effort with which they expect to reach the desired goals (Vroom 1964; Walker, Churchill, and Ford 1977).

Research on extrinsic motivators for selling effort level focuses on transactional motivators. Popular concepts of extrinsic motivation are compensation seeking (Chonko, Tanner, and Weeks 1992; Cron, Dubinsky, and Michaels 1988) and recognition seeking (Amabile et al. 1994), referred to as status-striving by Barrick, Stewart, and Piotrowski (2002). First-level outcomes like job performance are mediators for desired goals and second-level outcomes like monetary rewards and promotions (Tyagi 1982). Salespeople who are money-driven allocate higher levels of effort to those selling activities they expect to enhance their probability of larger paychecks (Silver, Dwyer, and Alford 2006).

However, the results of recent studies question if salespeople are mainly motivated by the idea of performance-efficient selling. Homburg, Müller, and Klarmann (2011) determine the optimal level of salespeople's selling effort for financial sales performance based on the law of diminishing returns of customer orientation and based on trade-offs between benefits and costs of customer-directed selling behaviors. The study finds that most salespeople's selling behaviors deviate from the optimal level of customer orientation (lower or higher): "The number of salespeople with customer orientation levels beyond the optimum may be quite high" (Homburg, Müller, and Klarmann 2011, p. 68). The findings are backed by inconclusive results on sales performance effects of selling behaviors in the meta-analytic study by Franke and Park (2006).

These observations intertwine with research on intrinsic motivators that finds salespeople to deploy particularly high levels of selling effort when activities are intrinsically satisfying (Baldauf and Cravens 1999; Jaramillo and Spector 2004). Thus, sales performance is not necessarily the overall prioritized goal, as effort does not only lead to job satisfaction via sales performance, but also impacts job satisfaction directly (Jaramillo and Mulki 2008).

Especially self-set goals, the personal fit between oneself and the values of the job, as well as the belief in one's self-efficacy intrinsically drive salespeople's selling effort (Bandura 1991; Krishnan, Netemeyer, and Boles 2002). This demonstrates the 'terminal value' or the 'psychological value' of work itself (Brown and Peterson 1994) and questions again if salespeople follow a mere performance-optimal agenda when choosing their level of selling effort.

The direction of selling effort

As argued above, sales research finds salespeople mainly directing their selling effort at customers in order to achieve the highest possible sales performance. Why salespeople allocate selling *energy* to inside-selling receives only limited attention. Few studies in role stress literature argue that salespeople try to influence internal processes in order to reduce role stress, especially role conflict (Bettencourt and Brown 2003). Other studies regard inside-selling as an expression of exaggerated customer-orientation (Homburg, Müller, and Klarmann 2011). Despite the considerable body of research on salespeople's motivational mechanisms and corresponding selling behaviors, sales research does not provide an explanatory model for salespeople's inside-selling or the interplay of salespeople's inside- and outside-selling orientation.

I review the antecedents of outside-selling behaviors (for an exemplary overview, see column 'antecedents' in Table 4-1), reasoning that the factors why salespeople engage less in outside-selling might be a point of departure for investigating factors that drive salespeople's inside-selling. I specifically focus on who or the relationship with whom influences salespeople's selling behavior. The antecedents can be grouped in three broad categories:

- Category I: Variables derived from the salesperson-company relationship, such as sales manager's leadership style and support for salespeople (Jaramillo et al. 2009), organizational commitment and organizational identification (Pettijohn,

Pettijohn, and Taylor 2002; Wieseke et al. 2012), interpersonal identification (Ahearne et al. 2013), and regulative mechanisms, such as bonus systems (Ahearne, Jelinek, and Jones 2007);

- Category II: Variables referring to characteristics and competencies of the salesperson, for example, selling skills (Giacobbe et al. 2006; Pelham 2009), communication abilities (Boorom, Goolsby, and Ramsey 1998; Kidwell et al. 2011), or work attitudes (Marrone, Tesluk, and Carson 2007; Sujana, Weitz, and Kumar 1994);
- Category III: Variables with respect to the salesperson-customer relationship such as relationship quality (Boles, Johnson, and Barksdale 2000) and customer identification (Johnson and Ashforth 2008; Wieseke et al. 2007).

I make three observations with regard to the antecedents of salespeople's outside-selling behaviors: First, in line with research on extrinsic motivators of salespeople's selling behavior, the most research attention is paid to variables from category one. Variables from the area of the salesperson-customer relationship (category three) have received the least research attention. Furthermore, only very few studies investigate the simultaneous effects of both relationships and their interplay on salespeople's selling behavior.

Second, many antecedents belong to relational or so called 'soft' categories. Whereas, according to current sales research, the *level of effort* is mainly driven by transactional factors and regulative systems (Joseph and Thevaranjan 1998), the *direction of effort* appears to be stronger influenced by relational factors.

Third, research assumes that both the salesperson's relationship with the company *and* the salesperson's relationship with the customer pull salespeople's selling energy into the same direction - towards the customer (Plouffe, Hulland, and Wachner 2009). Salespeople who identify and share high quality relationships with customers are expected to engage

highly in customer orientation (Crosby, Evans, and Cowles 1990; Franke and Park 2006). At the same time, Wieseke et al. (2007) find that the more salespeople identify with their organization, the more they engage in customer-oriented selling. By identifying with the company, salespeople take over the company's values according to which salespeople are supposed to be customer-oriented and act accordingly. The same effect has been found for salespeople relationally identifying with their sales managers (Ahearne et al. 2013). Even group peers 'hand over' their identification with the company via organizational identity diffusion and thereby support customer-oriented selling activities (Kraus et al. 2012).

Motivators rooted in salespeople's exchange relationships especially have the power to appeal to salespeople's personality and are therefore expected to be of great importance for salespeople's selling effort and selling behavior. In line, self-determination theory (Gagné and Deci 2005) argues that salespeople's selling effort can exceptionally be influenced by those extrinsic motivators which salespeople are willing to integrate into their personality. The need for relatedness, competence and autonomy drive the integration of extrinsic motivators.

In conclusion, salespeople's motivation to exert selling effort in a specific direction is a complex mechanism, resulting from the intertwined roles of the company, the customer, and the salesperson herself (Dubinsky and Skinner 2002; Jaramillo and Mulki 2008). Despite huge research efforts on salespeople's motivation and selling behavior, there exists no integrative framework which simultaneously models different types of drivers for salespeople's direction of selling and comprehensively explains why salespeople direct their selling energy at their customers and/ or their company (Guenzi, de Luca, and Troilo 2011).

In line, Evans et al. (2012) identify two under-researched areas in sales performance research which refer to the balance of salespeople's inside-and outside-selling behaviors:

- First, the authors draw attention to the increasing importance of interactional dynamics between salespeople and customers which call for salespeople influencing informal networks within the employing firm via inside-selling.
- Second, the authors argue that sales research needs to investigate the rules governing sales interactions of salespeople and buyers in more detail. As such, mechanisms of credibility, identification and reward power are expected to significantly influence inside- and outside-selling behaviors of salespeople.

4.3 Method

As described in Chapter 1.4, this study follows a qualitative approach. The data collection is based on a specific semi-structured interview outline that sheds light on how the relationships with customers and their company shape salespeople's selling behaviors. The data analysis mainly revolves around coding and categorization of relevant constructs and their relationships.

The questions of the interviews evolve around two goals: First, I try to get interviewees to open up and share experiences and views to identify relevant phenomena and to collect rich descriptions of them. These descriptions allow understanding more details of the individual's motivation to direct selling energy and provide input for data coding and relationship hypotheses. Second, identified constructs and their relationships are challenged and further developed. For an overview of exemplary questions, please refer to Figure 4-1.

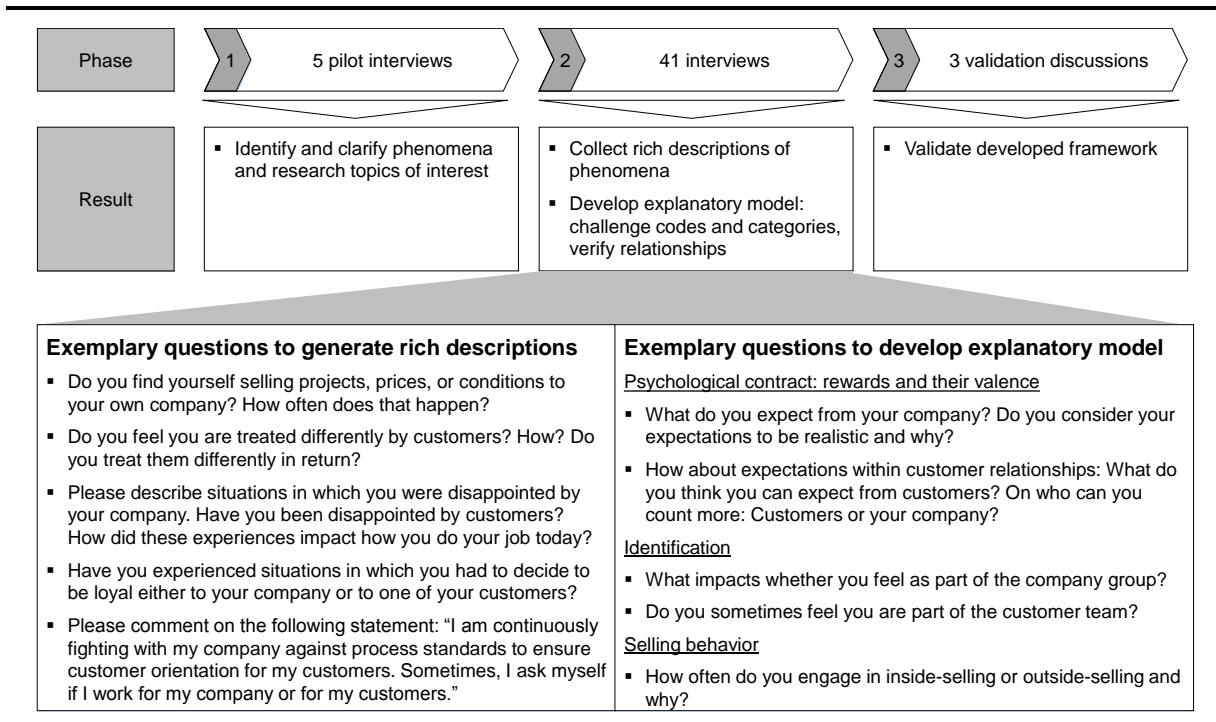
Every interview is unique since the collaboration of interviewer and interviewee results in a unique set of questions and answers with each interview placing emphasis on different topics and statements. However, interviews often develop in a similar manner: As I aim to understand why salespeople engage more in inside-selling or more in outside-selling, I

am particularly interested in how the interviewee experiences her relationship with her company and her relationship with customers against the background of her own selling behavior. Salespeople's interpretation patterns of their relational environment play an important role in this context.

I begin the interview by asking her to describe the relationship with her company and with customers. These topics function as icebreaker questions to get salespeople talking. This often leads to the discussion of different customer relationships and how the salesperson treats them differently in return. Elaborating on these differences I ask her to describe inside-selling versus outside-selling behaviors. In the attempt to define both behaviors salespeople often describe exemplary situations. Thereby I collect *rich descriptions* of (a) selling situations which have shaped her attitude towards selling and (b) anecdotes of situations, in which she engages in outside-selling or in inside-selling behaviors.

The second part of the interview focuses on verifying the relevance and interplay of specific constructs and theoretical arguments to develop the *explanatory model*. I ask the salesperson to describe her expectations towards her company and customers and how these might have changed over the years. To get information about the relationship to the company, I explicitly ask for situations in which she has been disappointed by her company. These reports often lead to a discussion of situations in which she finds herself exerting selling effort towards her company. Next, I ask the salesperson - if she had to decide - would she choose to be part of the company team or to be part of the customer team and why. These reports usually provide natural transition to the description of situations in which she behaves as a member of the company group and situations in which she behaves as a member of the customer group.

Figure 4-1: Exemplary Questions of Semi-Structured Interviews: Focus Study II



Consistent with the approach by van Maanen (1979), the process of data coding and analysis follows a two-level approach. The first level of data analysis is the systematic mapping of salespeople’s stories and observations according to themes (see Chapter 4.4). The ‘thick descriptions’ of phenomena function as representations of the individual salesperson’s perspective. The second level of data analysis refers to the identification of relationships and patterns based on the ‘thick descriptions’. The interplay of theory and phenomena observed leads to an explanatory model and corresponding hypotheses (see Chapter 4.5). Both levels are central empirical work results.

As part of the first level of data analysis, I follow a data-driven approach to identify topics from different text passages (Brady and Cronin 2001; Humphreys 2010) to generate rich descriptions of inside-selling and outside-selling motives. In the further course of the analysis I apply the constant comparative method which facilitates rich descriptions of social phenomena (Bacharach, Bamberger, and McKinney 2000; Corbin and Strauss 1990; Glaser and Strauss 1967).

As part of the second level of data analysis, observations of why salespeople engage in inside- and outside-selling activities are classified based on the critical incident technique (CIT) to make them useful for theory building. This method has also successfully been applied by Bitner, Booms, and Mohr (1994) and Bitner, Booms, and Tetreault (1990) for analyzing service encounters. CIT differs from other methods of classification (e.g., cluster analysis, factor analysis and multidimensional scaling) in that it assigns each motive to a specific category based on content analysis techniques instead of using quantitative methods.

The content analysis technique allows to categorize memories and opinions that are “likely representative of the underlying [memory] structure with respect to both content and organization and may well influence future behavior” (Flint, Woodruff, and Fisher Gardial 2002, p. 216). They are viewed as expressing existential themes by which a person’s self-identity and behavioral motivation is revealed (Braun-LaTour, LaTour, and Zinkhan 2007).

To avoid interviewer biases I carefully look for counter evidence throughout interviews and category development. Furthermore, two independent coders process the interview results to identify and categorize concepts and ideas. Both coders have a good command of qualitative research methods and code the data based on a developed coding schedule. The coders discuss the few disagreements intensively. After consulting a third coder and relevant literature I am able to ensure high reliability of coding.

All data coded is analyzed with MAXQDA, a commercially available software package, specifically designed for generating theory from qualitative data. MAXQDA supports the categorization of statements and identification of themes. This categorization results in observations as presented in Chapter 4.4 below. MAXQDA also allows for analysis of the interaction of codes and cross-category comparisons. Based on continuous redefinition of categories in accordance with existing theoretical perspectives and literature, I develop an integrative framework to explain why salespeople engage in inside-selling or outside-selling.

4.4 Empirical Observations on the Direction of Salespeople's Selling Behavior and Their Motivation

On the following pages, I present the four main themes observed in the interviews. All four themes are concerned with salespeople and their duality of relationships with their employing firm and customers:

- Theme No. 1 states that some salespeople feel more obliged to their customers than to their employing company.
- According to Theme No. 2, many salespeople talk about relational rewards within these relationships.
- Theme No. 3 reports that salespeople engage in dual psychological contracts with both customers and the employing firm.
- Theme No. 4 describes that salespeople especially appreciate positive experiences that exceed expectations.

These four themes are selected for two reasons: their recurring description by the interviewees and their high degree of emotional emphasis given by salespeople.

4.4.1 Theme No. 1: Some Salespeople Feel More Obligated to Customers Than to Their Company

Salespeople are aware of their boundary sales position and the interplay of both their relations with their company and customers. The interviews indicate that most salespeople assign themselves to one of two groups: Either they feel (1) more obliged to customers or (2) more obliged to their employer. Feeling obliged to one group refers to a general stance of a salesperson. Feeling obliged to their customers pictures salespeople as 'advocates' of their customers. Feeling obliged to the company refers to salespeople as 'serving agents' of their company.

Salespeople feeling strongly obliged to their customers “cross their boundaries” in order to help and satisfy customers. Some even speak of themselves as “fighters” which have to “make use of all weapons at their hand”:

“Actually, I see myself as a link between the customer and the company. True, I have to make a sale, but I also have to represent the interests of the customer to my company (...) sometimes I do have to fight [internally] - in such cases you have to be, yes, give it all you got, you know? With the entire arsenal that’s available. (laughs) [Ich sehe mich eigentlich als Bindeglied zwischen Kunde und Firma. Ich muss zwar verkaufen, aber muss ja auch die Kundeninteressen meiner Firma gegenüber vertreten. (...) [Da] musst du teilweise [intern] schon kämpfen, da musst du dir dann also schon, ja, mit allen möglichen Mitteln, ne? Mit allen Waffen, die es gibt. (lacht)]” (ChemCo01)

Another salesperson explains that she almost feels like the salesperson on behalf of her customer instead of being the salesperson of her own company.

“You’re in charge of yourself, to a large extent. When it comes to the head office, that’s a kind of friend/ foe relationship. The more you become a so-called key account manager, the more you’re adrift between worlds. In other words, you feel a little bit like the salesman on behalf of your customer, as if you’re representing this customer at the head office. That’s because, as a key account manager, it’s your job to draw out the best resources from your company to benefit your key account. In a way, you’re sort of changing sides. The head office is, yeah, it’s kind of a negative relationship, if I need to speak in terms of plus/ minus. In a way it’s a negative relationship, since, as a salesman, you also have to fight for resources. After all, you’re competing with others, and you’re competing with headquarters’ perspective, and you’re always trying to point out the fact that, ‘You know, I have a project here.’ You absolutely need to have a specific person on such and such a day and the head office can only send out the guy to one project. The head office has to then decide whether this guy should go to you or to your colleague. That’s why (in such a case) you’re always fighting to get the best for yourself and your customer. [Man steuert sich in hohem Maße selber. Die Zentrale, also das ist so eine Art Freund-Feind-Beziehung. Je mehr Sie ein sogenannter Key-Account-Manager sind, desto mehr sind Sie ein Wanderer zwischen den Welten. Das heißt, Sie fühlen sich ein bisschen wie der Vertriebler Ihres Kunden, als der Vertreter des Kunden gegenüber der Zentrale. Denn als Key-Account-Manager ist es ja Ihre Aufgabe, für Ihren Schlüsselaccount die besten Ressourcen aus Ihrer Firma zu bekommen. Da wechselt man so ein bisschen die Seiten. Die Zentrale ist, ja es ist teilweise eine Negativbeziehung, wenn ich das Mal plus/ minus setzen muss. Es ist teilweise eine Negativbeziehung, weil als Vertriebler kämpfen Sie ja auch um Ressourcen. Sie konkurrieren mit anderen und Sie konkurrieren mit den Gedanken in der Zentrale und Sie probieren ja immer zu sagen, ich habe da ein Projekt. Ich brauche jetzt den Mann an dem und dem Tag und die Zentrale kann den Mann nicht vierteilen. Die Zentrale muss dann entscheiden, dieser Mann kommt zu dir oder zu deinem Kollegen. Und deshalb kämpfen Sie da immer darum, das Beste für den Kunden, Klammer auf, in dem Fall für sich, dann herauszuholen.]“ (ComCo6)

Interviewees also tell me that they need to find creative solutions for customers, also by bypassing existing company regulations to make their sales. Salespeople’s energy to creatively find solutions can thus not only be directed at the customer, but also at the company. A salesperson feeling obliged to the customer engrosses her customers. She perceives them as *her* customers and is convinced that she is the main reason why the

customers are clients of her company. For further statements of salespeople feeling obliged to their customers, please refer to Table 4-3.

In contrast, salespeople feeling more obliged to their company base their feelings of obligation on the employment relationship with their company. As employed sales agents they perceive it to be their duty to sell and not to consult. They care less whether a customer makes the right buying decision or not. These salespeople try hard to pull their customers in their direction of interest and are only grudgingly willing to accept deviating customer decisions. Many of the salespeople feeling obliged to their company see no reason to serve as a 'super hero' for customers and strongly focus on achieving internal sales goals. Some also reason that because of their company's good market positioning, there is simply no need to offer consulting to customers. Table 4-3 also provides more statements of salespeople feeling obliged to the company.

After having identified these two directions of perceived obligations, the interviews concentrate on why salespeople perceive these obligations.

Table 4-3: Statements on Salespeople’s Perceived Obligations

Feeling obliged to the customer	Feeling obliged to the company
<p>“Quite often too far in the customer’s direction. That’s not always good, doesn’t really promote the business very much or let’s say..., I tend more towards the opinion that a company should in fact be moving in the direction of helping the customer with specific issues. Even if that means: Who pays for that? But you have to do that to gain a loyal customer, after all. In actual fact, I tend more in the direction of the customer. [Oftmals leider zu sehr Richtung Kunde. Das ist nicht immer gut, nicht unbedingt sehr betriebsfördernd oder sagen wir mal so, ich bin dann eher so unterwegs, der ein Unternehmen dann mehr dazu hinbewegt, dem Kunden dann doch bei bestimmten Problemstellungen zu helfen. Auch wenn es dann heißt: Wer bezahlt das? Aber das muss man machen, um die Kunden eben zu binden. Ich gehe dann tatsächlich in die Richtung mehr Kunde.]” (ManufactCo9)</p>	<p>“I mainly sell outside the company. Percentage-wise, because that’s the way I see it, I would say 95% outside-selling. I rarely engage in inside-selling. (...) Our obligations lie with the company 100%, of course. It’s totally obvious that you want to sell your company’s product. [(Ich verkaufe mehr) nach außen. Ja, prozentual, das sehe ich schon so, so 95% nach außen. Nach innen verkauft man verhältnismäßig wenig. Eindeutig. (...) Dem Unternehmen sind wir natürlich zu 100 % verpflichtet, ist ja ganz klar, man will das Produkt des Unternehmens verkaufen.]” (ComCo7)</p>
<p>“I’m always on the customer’s side because I want to keep the customer satisfied over the long haul. And, well, I can’t really give a precise reason why, but perhaps it has to do with the fact that I worked on the customer side for quite some time and truly understand the customer much, much better than my colleagues do, who haven’t been so intensively involved with the particular situation. But that’s the statement that I clearly make also internally, I advocate the customer. [Ich stehe grundsätzlich auf der Seite des Kunden, weil ich den Kunden ja langfristig zufrieden halten will. Und ja warum, kann ich eigentlich gar nicht so genau begründen, aber vielleicht liegt das daran, dass ich auch lange auf der anderen Seite gearbeitet habe und somit auch die, ja den Kunden viel, viel besser verstehe, als vielleicht die eigenen Leute, die noch nie in so einem Umfeld gearbeitet haben. Aber die Aussage, die treffe ich auch bei uns intern ganz klar, dass ich mich mehr für den Kunden einsetze.]“ (ComCo9)</p>	<p>“I mean, at the end of the day, I would always accept such [against the purchase] a decision from the customer, but naturally I do really try to pull him in our direction a bit, so that I, you know, may reach my company quotas. [Ich meine, ich würde es auch immer akzeptieren, wenn die Entscheidung des Kunden am Ende des Tages so lautet, aber natürlich versuche ich schon, den auch ein bisschen auf unseren Weg zu ziehen, damit ich halt eben auch meine Zahlen intern schaffe.]” (ComCo10)</p>
<p>“Well, personally I feel closer to the customer, but that’s just my own position and the attitude that I myself have. So I’m very... so I try to be very customer-oriented. Whether I’m truer to the customer or my company... naturally, I have to follow company policy and be loyal to my employer. However, on site there are always situations where I have to bend certain rules and come up with a clever solution to satisfy the customer. [Also ich selbst fühle mich schon näher beim Kunden, aber das ist auch eine Sache, wie ich mich selber organisiere und welche Einstellung ich habe. Also ich bin sehr, also ich versuche immer, sehr kundenorientiert zu sein. Wem ich jetzt mehr gerecht werde, Kunden oder meiner Firma, natürlich muss ich Firmenvorschriften einhalten und loyal sein gegenüber meinem Unternehmen. Aber es gibt vor Ort immer Situationen, wo ich mit gewissen Dingen umgehen muss, mir, um den Kunden zufriedenzustellen, was einfallen lassen muss.]” (CongoodCo4)</p>	<p>„You do not experience stress, if you exhibit a professional mode and preserve a distanced relationship (with customers). Because then you offer him a product and take the side that you offer something to the customer, he looks at it and if he wants to buy it, well, then he wants to buy it. He knows the/ it is not like he is betrayed. I mean, the conditions are stated, so he knows what he is doing. But of course, you would consult him differently, but I am not a consultant in this case, I am a seller. [Wenn du einfach eine ganz professionelle Arbeitsweise an den Tag legst und eine distanzierte Beziehung (zum Kunden) wahrst, hast du diesen Stress nicht. Weil dann bietest du dem ein Produkt an und kannst dich auf die Seite stellen, ich habe dem Kunden was angeboten, er guckt sich das an und wenn er das kaufen möchte, ja gut, dann möchte er es kaufen. Er hatte ja die/ es ist ja nicht so, dass man ihn betrügt. Ich meine, die Bedingungen stehen ja drin, also er weiß ja, was er tut. Aber natürlich würdest du ihn anders beraten, ich bin ja kein Berater dann in dem Fall, sondern ich bin Verkäufer.]“ (ComCo2)</p>

Table 4-3 (continued)

Feeling obliged to the customer

“We have... I have customers that have been buying for 20 years and more, that is, not just from me, but also from other colleagues beforehand. And this is one thing I don't want to lose sight of. What I mean is, the interest of the customer is of course the absolute highest priority. I want him to be buying from me for the next ten years. What that means is ... if someone actually says: 'I have a problem there, please solve it for me,' then I give it my all to try to solve it. No matter whether that involves prices, delivery dates, or an item that can be found nowhere else, I make it my top priority to attempt to solve this problem. And when I do, I pull out all the stops. [Wir haben, ich habe Kunden, die kaufen 20 Jahre und mehr, also jetzt nicht nur bei mir sondern auch schon bei Kollegen davor. Und das will ich mir erhalten. Das heißt also, Kundeninteresse steht für mich natürlich in allererster Linie im Vordergrund. Der soll auch die nächsten zehn Jahre bei mir kaufen. Das heißt also, wenn mir jemand wirklich sagt: „Ich habe da eine Problematik, bitte löse die für mich.“ Dann versuche ich, die mit aller Konsequenz zu lösen. Ob das jetzt ein preisliches Problem ist, ein Lieferterminproblem oder ein Artikel, den es sonst nirgendwo gibt, ich versuche in allererster Linie dieses Problem zu lösen. Und da ziehe ich auch alle Register.]” (ServiceCo9)

“I have to help the customers, and then it's no longer the price – how I can make a few more euros – that's in the foreground, but rather that you also have to set aside bureaucracy at times in order to help the customer and be his partner. And my experience shows that this usually pays off in the long run. [Ich muss den Kunden auch mal helfen und dann steht nicht nur der Preis, mit dem ich gerade mal ein paar Euro mehr Umsatz mache, im Vordergrund, sondern dem Kunden muss man auch mal unbürokratisch helfen und als Partner da sein. Und ich habe die Erfahrung gemacht, dass sich das in den meisten Fällen auf Dauer dann auszahlt.]” (ChemCo1)

Feeling obliged to the company

“Yeah, of course you lean more towards the customer, since you sell more to the customer than inside the company; otherwise we'd really be in dire straits (laughs), and I'd have twice the work – that would be the upshot of such a situation. Well, percentagewise in about 10-15% cases one indeed sometimes has difficulty selling a certain project or matter in the company, getting people on board with it so that they go along with it wholeheartedly. And the other aspect is always keeping the customer in focus, since in the end the whole thing works like an arrow or a spear, and if the people behind it don't thrust forward with all of their might, then they can't hit the target. [Ja, es ist natürlich mehr in Richtung Kunde, dass man mehr in Richtung Kunde verkauft wie intern, denn sonst wären wir sicherlich extrem schlecht aufgestellt (lacht), sonst hätte ich auch doppelte Arbeit, das bringt die Sache so mit sich. Also prozentual haben sie vielleicht in 10-15% der Fälle die Herausforderung doch ein Problem, ein gewisses Projekt oder eine Sache intern auch zu verkaufen, dass sie dort die Leute für sich begeistern, dass sie mit Leidenschaft mitgehen. Auf der anderen Seite steht natürlich immer der Kunde im Fokus, denn das Ganze funktioniert ja letztendlich wie ein Pfeil oder ein Speer und wenn die Leute hintendran nicht mit ganzer Kraft mit stoßen, dann können sie nicht das Ziel treffen.]” (ComCo8)

4.4.2 Theme No. 2: Many Salespeople Talk About Relational Rewards

Experiences with others continuously shape the sales job. Therefore, it is not surprising that relational experiences play an important role regarding how salespeople make sense of their job. One salesperson regards the “continuously varying challenges, permanently changing situations and in addition, the permanent...how shall I put it...the permanent confrontation with different characters and individuals [ständig wechselnde Herausforderungen, ständig wechselnde Situationen und natürlich der permanente... ja, wie will ich es sagen, die permanente Konfrontation mit unterschiedlichen Charakteren und Individuen]“ to be a central part of her job (ComCo5). Another salesperson explains: „Well, a detached salesperson with no emotions at all, no, that is not going to work because sales without emotions – it doesn’t work that way. [Der abgeklärte Vertriebsmann, der dann so gar keine Emotionen hat, nee, das funktioniert auch nicht, weil Vertrieb ohne Emotionen, das geht nicht.]“ (ComCo3)

Salespeople classify relational experiences based on whether they interact with customers or navigate within their company. This classification is driven by associated emotional biases. In some salespeople, interactions with customers evoke mainly positive associations. For others, interactions with the company promise positive experiences and less stress. Few salespeople regard interactions with both exchange partners as equally appealing and show no emotional preference.

Some salespeople like to talk about the positive experiences they have made with their company. They have built up a positive emotional bias towards their company and feel bound, committed and obliged. For example, one salesperson tells me that her company gave her the chance to grow into this job despite the fact that she had no relevant qualification before:

“I have a very good relationship with my company. I feel very much supported since I got the chance via advanced training to switch to sales, even though I wasn’t recruited for such a position in the first place. But I underwent an evolution and also had mentors who really supported me by allowing me to participate in our academy where I received training. I had a very easy start, I could accompany the salesperson who was in charge of this sales territory before for one whole year because he was about to retire and I could tag along without sales or success pressure. I was

able to get to know all the customers, come to terms with the job and then take over from the best starting point when he left. I am really grateful for how this has been handled. [Also ich habe eine sehr gute Beziehung zu meinem Unternehmen, ich fühle mich sehr gefördert, halt eben auch durch die Weiterentwicklung, dass ich die Chance bekommen habe, in den Außendienst zu wechseln, wobei ich dafür ja ursprünglich gar nicht eingestellt worden bin. Ich habe eine Entwicklung durchgemacht und hatte Mentoren, die das wirklich gefördert haben, dass ich an unserer Akademie teilnehmen durfte, wo ich entsprechend ausgebildet wurde. Ich bin extrem weich ich den Sattel hineingehoben worden, durfte den Verkäufer, der das Gebiet vorher betreut hat, fast ein ganzes Jahr lang begleiten, weil der in den Ruhestand ging. Ich konnte ein Jahr lang ohne irgendeinen Umsatz- oder Erfolgsdruck nebenher laufen, konnte die Kunden alle kennenlernen, mich da hineinfinden und aus allerbesten Position dann übernehmen, als er ging. Ich bin dem Unternehmen auch sehr dankbar dafür, dass das so gelaufen ist.]“ (ComCo10)

Another interviewee remembers that her company has supported her even in difficult economic times. She is able to rely on her company and feels as an appreciated and respected member. Other salespeople state that belonging to their company is important for them since they want to avoid standing alone and ‘at the edge’.

“Naturally, I identify more with the company. I have to do that; that’s patently obvious. I’m indebted to this company, and it makes no sense at all to be 100% on the side of the customer, since then I’m no longer part of this company, and then I’m somewhere on the outside. (...) You always have to, you always need to know where you belong and that is with your company. [Natürlich stehe ich näher am Unternehmen. Das muss ich, das ist ganz klar. Ich bin diesem Unternehmen verpflichtet und es macht keinen Sinn, sich also zu 100 % auf die Seite des Kunden zu stellen, weil dann bin ich nicht mehr Teil dieses Unternehmens und dann stehe ich irgendwo ganz außen vor. (...) Sie sind immer, Sie müssen immer wissen, wo Sie stehen und das ist in Ihrem Unternehmen.]“ (ManufactCo10)

“There is a tendency, especially after the economic crisis (...), of following the musketeer principle, ‘one for all, all for one’, we are sitting in the same boat and we support each other in daily business. [Da gibt es eher die Tendenz, dass man sagt, gerade nach der Wirtschaftskrise (...) so nach dem Musketierprinzip "einer für alle, alle für einen", wir sitzen alle im gleichen Boot und dass man auch praktisch sich gegenseitig unterstützt.]“ (ServiceCo7)

In contrast, other salespeople feel as members of the customer group. They offer the following explanation: Their job demands to be as close as possible to their customers. Most of their interactions take place within the customer group, and most of the time, they act on behalf of the customer group when interacting with their employing company. In particular, many salespeople feel the only opportunity for them to actually make a difference is to engage with customers. One salesperson notes:

“You have to ensure that the customer is not lost out of sight, so you take care of it yourself. As mentioned earlier, you can only get things rolling on the frontline, nowhere else. [Also muss man gucken, dass der Kunde nicht aus dem Auge verloren wird, also kümmert man sich selber darum. Wie gesagt, an der Front, da kann man was bewegen, sonst gar nicht.]“ (ManufactCo4)

In addition, these salespeople experience true positive relational experiences with customers. One salesperson experiences customer interactions as a timeout of communicating with their own company. He really feels happy during customer interactions:

“Then I get upset... I get really upset and even say, for instance, to my in-house colleague (her first name is C.)... I say, ‘No C., let’s not discuss that anymore; just see to it that it works and let me know when everything is all set. Just let’s not talk about it anymore.’ And then I go in to see my next customer and say, ‘Well, hello Mr. M.! Man, do you have new glasses.’ And then he says, ‘Great!’ And then I’m... I’m in a good mood again. So it’s with the customer contacts – I honestly have to say – that I get my energy to go on. And then I forget all about the earlier phone conversation as well until I’m back in the car (laughs) and have to make the next phone call. [Ich ärgere mich dann, ich ärgere mich dann wirklich und sage, zum Beispiel auch in Bezug auf meine Innendienstlerin, die heißt C. mit Vornamen, dann sage ich: „Nein C., lasse uns jetzt nicht darüber diskutieren, sieh bitte zu, dass das funktioniert, informiere mich dann, wenn alles in Ordnung ist, aber lass uns jetzt nicht mehr darüber reden.“ Und dann gehe ich zum nächsten Kunden rein und sage: „Ach, hallo Herr M., Menschenskinder, haben Sie eine neue Brille.“ Und dann sagt er: „Toll.“ Und dann bin ich, dann bin ich auch wieder glücklich. Also, im Kundenkontakt, muss ich ehrlich sagen, hole ich mir die nächste Energie. Und dann vergesse ich auch das Telefonat von vorher, bis ich dann halt (lacht) wieder im Auto bin und das nächste Telefonat führen muss.]” (ServiceCo9)

Another salesperson engaging in inside-selling explains that solving problems together with customers and celebrating the success afterwards is what he really aims for in his job.

“The colleagues [at the head office] always say, you always make such a fuss about the customer, it is absolutely not necessary. (...) I have so much fun solving problems in collaboration with customers, with potential customers. That is, well, the icing on the cake, let’s say. I have so much fun talking to people and also listening to their problems. Listening to see how I might be able to help. And afterwards in the aftermath, once the problems are solved, to conclude, ‘we did a great job’ and to celebrate the success. [Die [in der Zentrale] sagen immer, was du immer für einen Wind machst um den Kunden, das brauchst du überhaupt nicht. (...) Mir macht das unwahrscheinlich viel Spaß, mit Kunden/ Interessenten Probleme zu lösen, gemeinsam zu lösen. Das ist eigentlich, also, das Salz in der Suppe, sage ich mal. Mir macht das sehr viel Spaß, mit den Menschen zu sprechen und auch deren Probleme zu hören. Zu hören, wo kann ich da vielleicht helfen? Hinterher, wenn die Probleme gelöst wurden, einfach gemeinsam zu sagen, boah, prima, wie toll wir das geschafft haben. Einfach auch Erfolge feiern.]” (ManufactCo4)

Several salespeople take pride in customer satisfaction and consider it their true reward of the sales job. More statements on salespeople’s relational rewards that make them feel obliged to customers or company are shown in Table 4-4.

Table 4-4: Statements on Salespeople’s Relational Rewards

Relational Rewards that Make Salespeople Feel Obligated to the Customer	Relational Rewards that Make Salespeople Feel Obligated to the Company
<p>“I try to be sensible when serving any customer that gets in touch with me, just the way I learned. In doing so, I sometimes rub my colleagues or even my supervisor the wrong way, but I’ve noticed that this way I can at least serve the customer as a competent contact person. [Ich versuche, wenn ein Kunde sich mit mir in Verbindung setzt, ihn vernünftig zu betreuen, so wie ich es gelernt habe, falle manchmal bei Kollegen oder auch bei meinen Vorgesetzten damit nicht besonders gut auf, aber ich habe halt gemerkt, dass ich damit zumindest als kompetenter Ansprechpartner dem Kunden gegenüber dienen kann.]” (ManufactCo4)</p>	<p>“In my company, (...) salespeople are not only the interface between the customers and their employing firm, they also represent the firm. That means that the salesperson does not only sell products but reflects the image of the firm to the outside. Therefore, the salesperson has two personal responsibilities: of course he needs to strengthen the company’s reputation and the company’s image. But at the same time, he needs to be a successful seller and sell products to customers in a trustworthy manner. It is indeed a demanding position. [Für mein Unternehmen (...) ist der Vertriebler nicht nur eine Schnittstelle zwischen Kunden und eigener Firma, sondern auch ein Repräsentant der Firma, das heißt, er vertreibt ja nicht nur irgendwelche Produkte, sondern bildet auch das Spiegelbild der Firma wieder nach außen ab und von daher hat er auch eine doppelte persönliche Verantwortung, er muss natürlich die Reputation stärken oder das Image der Firma mit stärken und muss gleichzeitig auch erfolgreich sein und glaubwürdig dem Kunden gegenüber die Ware verkaufen. Also ist schon eine verantwortungsvolle Position.]” (ChemCo2)</p>
<p>Being trusted and respected by customers</p>	<p>Being trusted by the company</p>
<p>“And I’m of the opinion that it’s better to agree with the customer not to go through with a business deal and - yes, well - in the process increase your consulting competency or the perceived consulting competency so that the customer knows he can trust what you’ve promised, rather than push a sale through at any price with only an eye on short-term success. [Und da vertrete ich die Auffassung, lieber einmal ein Geschäft nicht realisieren mit dem Kunden gemeinsam und die - ja - Beratungskompetenz oder die wahrgenommene Beratungskompetenz an der Stelle gesteigert zu haben, dass der Kunde weiß, er kann einem bezüglich der abgemachten Aussagen vertrauen, als ein Geschäft um jeden Preis zu machen und den kurzfristigen Erfolg nur zu sehen.]” (ManufactCo1)</p>	<p>In good times and in bad times</p> <p>“Yes, well, the company that I work for... it feeds me, it provides for me. Beyond that, it should also be fun for me to work, of course. It should be there for me in good and in bad times, and it is. And that’s why the relationship is so important to me. [Na gut, das Unternehmen, für das ich arbeite, das ernährt mich, das versorgt mich. Darüber hinaus soll es mir natürlich noch Spaß machen, zu arbeiten. Es soll mich in guten und schlechten Zeiten unterstützen und das macht es. Und deshalb ist mir das Verhältnis sehr wichtig.]” (ComCo9)</p>

Salespeople identify with the customer group to different extents. It is not only the amount of contact that drives salespeople's self-categorization and identification with customers. The observations show that salespeople especially search for ways to satisfy their need for belonging and ways to up-value themselves. These needs play a very important role in determining whether salespeople identify more with the customer group or with the company group.

In addition to relational rewards salespeople also name transactional rewards explaining why they feel obliged to one of the groups. Many salespeople see the employing company as a guarantor for promising transactional exchange and as their source of income. However, in contrast to existing sales literature depicting the company as the number one player that has the power to use transactional rewards to motivate salespeople (Krafft, Albers, and Lal 2004), I find that transactional rewards can also function in favor of the customer group. Some salespeople perceive the customer group to be in charge of their income via direct influence on variable pay results and therefore feel more obliged to their customers.

"The customer pays my salary, not the company. He pays it through his orders. Naturally, I represent the company to the customer, but in the end, if the customer has a wish that's not absurd, I'm always on his side and take up the matter with the company, since he's the one paying for everything from the turnover he provides, when all is said and done. After all, we might as well close up shop without the customer; we wouldn't make a single penny. [Der Kunde bezahlt mein Gehalt, nicht die Firma. Der Kunde bezahlt das von seinen Aufträgen. Natürlich, ich vertrete das Unternehmen dem Kunden gegenüber aber letztendlich, wenn der Kunde einen Wunsch hat, der jetzt nicht absurd ist, dann stehe ich immer auf seiner Seite und versuche das gegenüber dem Unternehmen auch so darzustellen, weil letztendlich der ja alles bezahlt durch seine Umsätze. Weil ohne den Kunden könnten wir ja zu machen, da könnten wir ja keinen Pfennig Geld verdienen.]" (ChemCo3)

General person characteristics also seem to play a decisive part for the effect of relational and transactional rewards on salespeople. Salespeople tend to hold strong individual pre-existing beliefs about collaborative work relationships and human interactions. Such pre-existing beliefs determine an individual's general preference for and reaction to transactional and/ or relational rewards.

One salesperson specifically motivated by relational rewards explains:

“In the end, and that is most important to me, I always sell myself. (...) I try to achieve customer loyalty to myself via face-to-face contact and through my personal appearance. Customers will in the end buy from me and say: ‘No, I will go for him, A, because I feel that I am well looked after, and B, because I believe that he will actually take care of every problem that might come up’. Last but not least, it is all about mutual trust. [Aber zu guter Letzt, und das ist für mich das Entscheidende, verkaufe ich immer mich selbst. (...) Ich versuche durch persönlichen Kontakt, durch mein persönliches Auftreten, die Kunden an mich zu binden und die sollen zu guter Letzt bei mir kaufen und sagen: Nein, ich mache das bei dem, A weil ich mich da richtig gut aufgehoben fühle, B weil ich glaube, der kümmert sich wirklich um alles das, was an Problemen aufkommt. Zu guter Letzt ist einfach nur das Vertrauensverhältnis entscheidend.]“ (ServiceCo9)

Another salesperson is specifically motivated by transactional rewards:

“If you talk about ‘style’ in selling, that cannot be correct. That can’t be true, because every salesperson wants to sell. If you are a real seller, with all your heart, you don’t care about ‘style’, because you only want to sell. When I realize that a customer wants exactly what I like to avoid and say ‘Oh that is not really my style’, but the customer wants it, then I do it. Then I ignore my feelings in order to sell to him. Because as I said: I am a seller. You know what I am talking about: all is fair in love and war. I also believe that, in the end, everything is allowed when it comes to sales. (...) The major goal of a salesperson is to sell – or am I wrong? If one is paid based on it, and (as a salesperson) you are mostly paid based on your sales performance, then you need to sell. Then you cannot consider yourself too good for something. [Wenn Sie im Vertrieb von „Stil“ sprechen, kann das nicht korrekt sein. Das kann nicht wahr sein, denn jeder will verkaufen. Wenn ich ein wirklicher Verkäufer und mit dem Herzen dabei bin, ist mir der „Stil“ egal, denn ich will nur verkaufen. Wenn ich merke, dass ein Kunde genau das haben will, wogegen ich mich scheue, und sage: „Oh, das ist aber nicht unbedingt meine Art,“ er das aber will – dann mache ich das. Dann übergehe ich meine eigenen Gefühle, um ihm etwas zu verkaufen. Denn, wie gesagt: Ich bin Verkäufer. Sie kennen das: In der Liebe und im Krieg ist alles erlaubt. Ich glaube, auch im Verkauf ist letzten Endes alles erlaubt. (...) Das oberste Ziel eines Verkäufers ist das Verkaufen – oder täusche ich mich da? Wenn Sie danach bezahlt werden, und Sie werden ja nun mal nach Verkauf bezahlt, dann müssen Sie verkaufen. Dann darf Ihnen nichts zu schade sein.]” (ManufactCo11)

To sum up, both, relational and transactional rewards have the power to attach salespeople to either company or customers and to make them feel obliged. However, interviewees talk more about relational than transactional rewards. Thus, relational rewards are at least as - if not more - important for salespeople compared to transactional rewards.

The third theme of observations describes how salespeople evaluate relational and transactional rewards as part of their relationships with both exchange partners.

4.4.3 Theme No. 3: Salespeople Are Engaged in Dual Psychological Contracts

Following salespeople’s reports, relational and transactional rewards are embedded in a net of individual agreements between a salesperson and her exchange partners. These agreements are the foundation of salespeople’s exchange relationships. As an example, one salesperson

tells me that her boss and colleagues promise him full support when it comes to offers he makes to customers. Another salesperson offers support to her manager to advocate a strategic project within the company. In return, she expects more freedom in handling key accounts internationally.

However, the examples show that salespeople talk about subjectively *perceived* agreements. When one party promises to engage in a specific behavior, the other party develops expectations about it. It remains to be seen in hindsight if promises and expectations are in balance. As one salesperson puts it:

“Oh well, I hope that it comes out as we have agreed (laughs). You know, you never talk about it in real detail. In other words, there is nothing you can rely on afterwards. [Nun, ich hoffe mal, dass das auch so läuft wie wir es besprochen haben (lacht). So richtig bespricht man so was ja nicht, also es gibt natürlich nichts worauf man sich da beziehen könnte oder so.]“ (ServiceCo10)

Another salesperson explains that promises in business relationships are generally especially important for salespeople:

“As commonly accepted between businessmen, a word is practically a contract. Even in the code of civil law, a word is a contract and I believe that is very important. The most important aspect in business is to be trustworthy. That you should not make promises you cannot keep, or even worse, don't want to keep in the first place. So, if I promise something, now I am coming to the point, if I were to make a promise that I wouldn't even want to keep, that is not only borderline - that is unacceptable. [Wie unter Kaufleuten ja auch üblich, ein Wort ist genauso gut wie ein Vertrag. Selbst im BGB ist es ja so, ein Wort ist ein Vertrag und das ist, glaube ich, wichtig. Das Wichtigste im Geschäft ist, dass man authentisch ist. Das man nichts verspricht was man nicht halten kann oder, noch schlimmer, nicht halten will. Also wenn ich was verspreche, jetzt komme ich gerade auf den Kern, wenn ich was versprechen würde, was ich nicht halten will, dass ist, dass ist nicht nur grenzwertig, das geht nicht. Das ist inakzeptabel.]” (ComCo3)

Not only relational behavior such as support and appreciation but also transactional rewards can be subject of these perceived agreements. Some salespeople tell me that they have made unwritten arrangements with their bosses and teams about a certain amount of home office days per month. Even financial incentives can be a part of a deal between the salesperson and other members of the organization:

“Due to the historical development of our sales areas, there are unfortunately a few instances where customer responsibilities overlap. We have a special deal within our firm: If we assist customers in areas that do not belong to us, then we give away the commissions. While that's not been officially laid down in writing, that's been everyone's practice so far. Even if a few do profit more from it than others, quite obviously. [Aufgrund der historischen Entwicklung unserer Vertriebsgebiete gibt es bei uns leider noch einige Überschneidungen in der Kundenverantwortung.

Wir haben einen speziellen Deal innerhalb der Firma: Wenn wir Kunden in fremden Gebieten betreuen, dann geben wir die Provisionen ab. Das ist zwar nirgendwo festgeschrieben, aber bis jetzt hat sich jeder dran gehalten. Auch wenn ein paar davon mehr profitieren als andere, ganz klar.]“ (ManufactCo13)

However, the majority of perceived agreements, in which salespeople engage, concern relational rewards like trust, empowerment, support, and how they treat each other in daily business.

The phenomena described so far are not entirely new. Company regulations, process standards and sales incentives seem to leave almost as many gaps to be filled as they are able to close. A vast amount of literature on how employees fill these gaps has developed rich theory on phenomena and the concept of psychological contracts (Guest 1998; Herriot and Pemberton 1996; Meckler, Drake, and Levinson 2003; Rousseau 1989, 1995, 2001; Tekleab and Taylor 2003). Following the literature, psychological contracts take place between the salesperson and the company. Both parties indicate future behavior and make promises about such issues as how one is dealing with specific situations and demands (Morrison and Robinson 1997).

Interestingly, I observe that salespeople tell similar stories to describe psychological contracts with customers. One salesperson perceives offering considerable care-taking in return for customer loyalty:

“And there are customers who expect a high level of care-taking and consulting activities. They really want to be taken care of very well. You have to show up on a regularly basis and always need to put in extra effort. But they are also very, very loyal. This is the type of customer I like best. They require considerable effort, but they are loyal. [Und das sind Kunden, die sind sehr beratungsintensiv oder betreuungsintensiv, also sie wollen sehr gut betreut werden, und da muss man sich auch regelmäßig blicken lassen und muss immer bemüht sein. Aber die sind natürlich sehr, sehr treu. Also so ein Kundentyp ist mir eigentlich am liebsten. Die machen natürlich etwas mehr Arbeit, aber die sind loyal.]“ (CongoodCo4)

What salespeople value in psychological contracts with customers is that they know from the beginning how things will turn out. Certain negotiation rituals are being performed and the salesperson knows, depending on the customer, in what areas the customer trusts him and where he needs to perform outstandingly. In the end, the customer can be sure that he will

not be tricked and the salesperson can expect a not too difficult sale. That seems often to work to the advantage of both sides.

Another salesperson offers insights on how psychological contracts complete written sales contracts:

“With certain customers, you can simply say what’s on your mind. For example, if there’s a product switch, then I first have them sign a contract on the discontinued model. And when – surprise, surprise! – the new model comes (I’m not actually supposed to tell the customer about it beforehand), then I’ll work to get the contract revised for the new model. That’s when you really have to be a bully within the company, but then it also works out. [Mit bestimmten Kunden kann man dann auch einfach mal offen reden. Sprich, wenn es dann Produktwechsel gibt, dann unterschreiben die bei mir erst mal einen Vertrag über das auslaufende Modell. Und wenn das überraschenderweise (eigentlich soll ich den Kunden das vorher ja nicht sagen) das neue Modell kommt, dann werde ich mich dafür einsetzen, dass der Vertrag auf das neue Modell umgeschrieben wird. Dann muss man halt mal richtig intern Aufstand machen, aber dann funktioniert das auch.]” (CongoodCo2)

Since psychological contracts mirror perceived promises and developed expectations, salespeople have the power to consciously handle promises to and expectations of the other side. In this context, one salesperson points out that in order to be able to hold promises made one has to know one’s possible scope of actions first:

“I believe, what salespeople need to understand very, very clearly before approaching customers in any way, is what their own limitations are. What can I manage to do and what is not feasible. And only if that is understood, can you make your customers understand how far you can go as their advocate. And, I believe this is a problem that many do not fully grasp in sales. [Was man glaube ich im Vertrieb ganz, ganz klar, bevor man überhaupt irgendwie mal zum Kunden geht, verstehen muss, ist, wo die eigenen Grenzen sind. Was kann man machen, was ist nicht machbar und nur dann, wenn man das verstanden hat, kann man auch glaubwürdig dem Kunden zu verstehen geben, wie weit man eben als sein Anwalt agieren kann. Und ich glaube, das ist ein Problem, was viele im Vertrieb falsch verstehen.]“ (ChemCo2)

The statements reported so far indicate that it is necessary to be aware and in control of promises made and expectations aroused since salespeople’s psychological contracts with customers and with their employing company can generally be in conflict with each other. Such conflicts may lead salespeople to breach one contract. If the company or the customer breaches a psychological contract with the salesperson by not living up to promised behaviors, salespeople show immediate disappointment and distancing from that group.

In line, salespeople report psychological contract breaches within the salesperson-firm relationship. One salesperson reports that his company provides him with competitor

information labeled as highly valuable to support him in customer interactions. The salesperson trusts the information and applies it in customer interactions. However, this information proves often to be useless or even counterproductive. Because customers have a different perspective and even more detailed knowledge, the salesperson makes a fool of himself. As a result, the salesperson is very upset and frustrated and does not trust information coming from central units anymore. Another salesperson explains:

“I remember quite well that, after years, one major customer of mine decided to buy a specific software solution. In an unspoken consensual understanding with our team at the head office – and against the process regulations of the company – we approached the customer with our local team to win the tender. And that was very important, since the customer only trusted people he knew. That was the only reason why we actually won the race. However, after the contract was signed, head office didn’t remember the role of our local team anymore and withdrew them. Instead, they sent some unknown colleagues from Austria to install the ordered system. They asked stupid questions and whatnot. The customer was furious and I was too. That really endangered the whole customer relationship. That time, I was really at war with our head office, believe me. That was such a breach of trust. [Ich erinnere mich noch sehr gut, als einer meiner wichtigsten Kunden sich nach Jahren endlich dazu durchgerungen hatte eine bestimmte Software Lösung zu kaufen. Entgegen der Prozessrichtlinie sind wir dann in stillschweigendem Einvernehmen mit dem Vor-ort Team dort aufgelaufen um den Auftrag zu holen. Und das war enorm wichtig, weil der Kunde nur den bekannten Gesichtern vertraut hat. Nur deshalb haben wir es sogar geschafft. Nach Auftragserteilung aber wollte unsere Zentrale dann aber nichts mehr davon wissen, hat unsere Leute vor Ort aus dem Projekt abgezogen und irgendwelche unwissenden Kollegen aus Österreich zur Abwicklung hingeschickt. Die haben dumme Fragen gestellt und weiß Gott nicht alles. Der Kunde war stinksauer und ich war es auch. Da war Krieg, das können Sie mir glauben. Das war wirklich ein absoluter Vertrauensbruch.]” (ManufactCo13)

Two salespeople also report the psychological contract breaches by customers in a similar fashion:

“I always try to see the best in customers, but unfortunately there is always a small number of them who disappoints me and all others suffer the consequences. Because I also have to justify myself in front of my director, if something goes awry, I cannot say: ‘Well, she was so nice on the phone, I simply couldn’t help it’. (...) If a customer disappoints me once, twice, then that’s it for me. Then he only gets it the way I decide to give it to him. And if he’s not happy with that, then he just has to buy somewhere else. [Man versucht immer, das Gute im Kunden zu sehen und dummerweise enttäuscht immer eine kleine Anzahl von Kunden einen und alle anderen müssen darunter leiden. Weil ich muss ja meinem Geschäftsführer auch irgendwann Rede und Antwort stehen, wenn da was in die Hose geht und dann kann ich ja nicht sagen: Ja, die war so nett am Telefon, da konnte ich einfach nicht [anders.] (...) Wenn ich ein-, zweimal vom Kunden enttäuscht wurde, dann ist es das für mich, dann kriegt er das nur noch so, wie ich das möchte. Und wenn ihm das nicht passt, soll er woanders kaufen.]“ (ChemCo3)

“If such situations occur, then the bond of trust, which is the basis, has been weakened, so that, if I remain stubborn and definitely say ‘There is no room left for negotiations’, then it often means, that I have been previously taken for a ride at some point. For instance, pieces of information have not been shared or have not been disclosed completely which would have given us the chance to judge the situation differently. In such cases, you are quickly done with it, because people who want to trick you, they aren’t negotiating partners, they aren’t business partners. [Wenn diese

Situationen eintreten, dann ist meistens das Vertrauensverhältnis, das ist eigentlich die Grundlage, das Vertrauensverhältnis ist so zerrüttet, ja, dass man, wenn ich wirklich auf stur schalte und absolut sage, hier ist kein Verhandlungsspielraum mehr, dann heißt das meistens, also dass man irgendwo schon vorher betückt wurde, also sprich, dass Informationen nicht gegeben wurden oder nicht vollständig gegeben wurden, die uns eine andere Beurteilung ermöglichen würden und dann ist es, also dann ist man relativ schnell auch gedanklich damit fertig, weil Leute, die einen verarschen wollen, das sind keine Verhandlungspartner, sind keine Geschäftspartner.]“ (ServiceCo4)

Another salesperson provides insights into her deep reaction to a psychological contract breach of a customer:

“I still think about what happened. That’s the way I deal with it. I am someone who takes criticism to heart. This is not yet over for me, just because the customer was wrong (...) because it simply hurts me very much. [Ich denke immer noch drüber nach. So gehe ich damit um. Also ich bin jemand, ich nehme mir Kritik sehr zu Herzen. Das ist für mich nicht dadurch abgehakt, dass der Kunde in dem Fall Unrecht hatte, (...) weil es mich persönlich einfach sehr kränkt.]” (ManufactCo8)

Again another salesperson reports that if customers who have been in a long-term customer relationship with firms decide to buy from a competitor, salespeople sanction them by “withdrawing affection”. (ManufactCo9)

The considerable consequences of a contract breach are described for both psychological contracts. The reactions appear to be rather emotional and permanent and not easy to be put aside.

To summarize, I make three observations: First, salespeople do not only engage in a psychological contract with their employer, but also with their customers at the same time. Second, the content of the psychological contracts - specifically relational rewards - play an important role for salespeople feeling obliged to customers or company. Third, salespeople try to actively handle the content and associated expectations of the psychological contracts.

4.4.4 Theme No. 4: Salespeople Especially Appreciate Positive Experiences That Exceed Their Expectations

When I ask salespeople to describe situations and experiences that have sustainably shaped their attitude and behavior towards the company group or customer group, they mostly report somewhat unexpected treatments or other experiences that left a lasting impression.

Especially, salespeople remember support or special treatment in exceptionally challenging situations. One salesperson reports the enormous internal support he experienced during a difficult phase of a new product release:

“As they say, through both good and bad. And in good times everything is wonderful. When you make a sale you have a lot of friends, you are praised and you have considerably fewer obstacles and problems internally than when things go bad. But only then do you see how your employer deals with such situations. In our case, it was the first year that a media company was expected to sell software to the meat processing industry. That sounds totally ridiculous in the first place and has met major resistance internally. But my managing directors, they had my back. (...) That is very important and you don't forget it so quickly, when someone has your back in such a situation. They said ‘Don't worry, go ahead and concentrate on your work. We believe in you.’ [Man sagt ja in guten und in schlechten Zeiten. Und in guten Zeiten ist ja alles wunderbar. Wenn sie einen Auftrag machen, dann haben sie viele Freunde, werden gelobt und sie haben intern wesentlich weniger Hürden und Schwierigkeiten, als wenn es mal schlecht geht. Und dann zeigt sich ja, wie ihr Arbeitgeber damit umgeht. Und bei uns war es so, es war das erste Jahr, dass ein Medienunternehmen jetzt Software für Fleisch verarbeitende Betriebe verkaufen sollte. Das hört sich ja erst mal total bekloppt an und das ist intern auch auf relativ großen Widerstand gestoßen. Aber meine Geschäftsführer, die standen da voll und ganz hinter mir. (...) Das ist sehr wichtig und das vergisst man dann auch nicht so schnell, wenn man in so einer Situation Rückendeckung hat und die sagen, ja mach man, konzentriere dich auf deine Arbeit. Wir stehen hinter dir.]” (ComCo9)

Another salesperson shares that she gets considerable recognition even from customers during challenging negotiations:

“For me, my customers are not just a number, and I believe that's why I can't be replaced as their contact person either. On the contrary, there is a kind of mutual esteem and respect. Naturally, we negotiate, and sometimes things get downright intense. However, you always have to earn respect. I have to earn it as well so that people trust me. And – it's actually quite interesting (laughs) – you really get a whole lot more recognition from your customers than you'd expect as a salesman. Those times are really cool. [Für mich sind meine Kunden keine beliebige Nummer und ich glaube das führt auch dazu, dass ich als Ansprechpartner für sie auch nicht austauschbar bin. Im Gegenteil es gibt so etwas wie gegenseitige Wertschätzung und Respekt. Natürlich verhandeln wir und da geht es dann auch mitunter mal richtig zur Sache. Aber Respekt muss man sich auch verdienen. Ich muss es mir auch verdienen, dass jemand mir vertraut. Und – es ist eigentlich ganz interessant (lacht) – man erfährt doch viel mehr Anerkennung von Kunden als man als Vertriebsmann eigentlich erwartet. Das sind schon wirklich tolle Momente.]” (ServiceCo10)

These gratifications exceed existing expectations and therefore attain considerable attention by salespeople. Specifically these gratifications seem to have the power to influence salespeople's attitude towards a group and cause a change in behavior.

The empirical observations on salespeople's inside- and outside-selling behavior and their corresponding motivations can be summed up as follows: Most salespeople feel more obliged to either customers or company. Reasons and motivations seem to be primarily relational-driven and are reflected in psychological contracts with customers and company. In

addition, the customers and the company appear to have the ability to influence salespeople's tendencies to feel obliged to one of the groups by granting gratifications exceeding salespeople's expectations. Based on these observations, I develop an integrative theoretical framework of dual psychological contract and dual identity salience.

4.5 Development of an Integrative Framework

This section translates the empirical observations into an identity-based selling framework, considering the impact of dual psychological contracts. I develop the framework from the top down, starting with an overview of the framework and its main constructs followed by the development of corresponding hypotheses.

4.5.1 Overview of the Integrative Framework and Constructs

The core concept of the integrative framework is the idea of duality. Duality results from salespeople being embedded (a) in the sphere of their own company and (b) in the sphere of their customers at the same time. It refers to the two-fold nature of the salesperson's perceptions, feelings and behavior. The duality perspective is applied to all three construct levels of the framework: (1) salespeople's psychological contracts, (2) salespeople's identity, and (3) salespeople's selling behavior. By introducing the idea of duality, I am able to model salespeople's multilateral relationships and explain why some engage more in outside-selling and others more in inside-selling. Figure 4-2 provides an overview of the integrative framework.

The constructs and the idea of duality are the result of qualitative coding and re-categorization. For example, I start off with rather broad coding categories such as salespeople's closeness to and distance from the customer and the company. Analyzing relevant statements in more detail, I find that salespeople feeling close to one of the role senders often feel obliged to that particular role sender. In the next step I take a closer look

into salespeople's relationships with role senders to identify why salespeople feel obliged to one particular role sender. I find that salespeople talk mostly about relational rewards when they explain why they value a specific relationship. I also find that most of the rewards are seen as an integral part of the relationship, as part of a perceived agreement with that role sender. Thus, through several re-categorizations, I refine the coding of statements from 'closeness to a role sender' to, for example, 'psychological contract' with a role sender. Interestingly, these categories can be found in descriptions of salespeople's relationships with their company and also in descriptions of salespeople's relationships with their customers. That observation leads to the introduction of duality of effects. Thus, through continuous re-categorization, I am able to identify more details of the mechanisms at work. An overview of the final coding schedule is provided in the Appendix of this thesis.

The basic tenet of the model is that salespeople set the two spheres' often contrasting effects in relation to each other. To depict this process, I introduce three corresponding relative constructs which model salespeople's simultaneous consideration of effects in the company sphere as well as in the customer sphere: (1) relative evaluation of the psychological contract with the company, (2) relative company identity salience, and (3) relative dominance of outside-selling behavior (for definitions, refer to Table 4-5). The customer's sphere effect is modeled as a percentage of the company's sphere effect. Thus, a relative value above one indicates superiority of the effect of the customer's sphere and a relative value below one refers to superiority of the effect of the company's sphere (see column 'interpretation' in Table 4-5). I consider this relative link of salespeople's experiences in both spheres as the key added value compared to previous studies. Literature so far has mostly studied the phenomena independently within one of the spheres.

Figure 4-2: The Integrative Framework of Dual Psychological Contract and Identity Salience

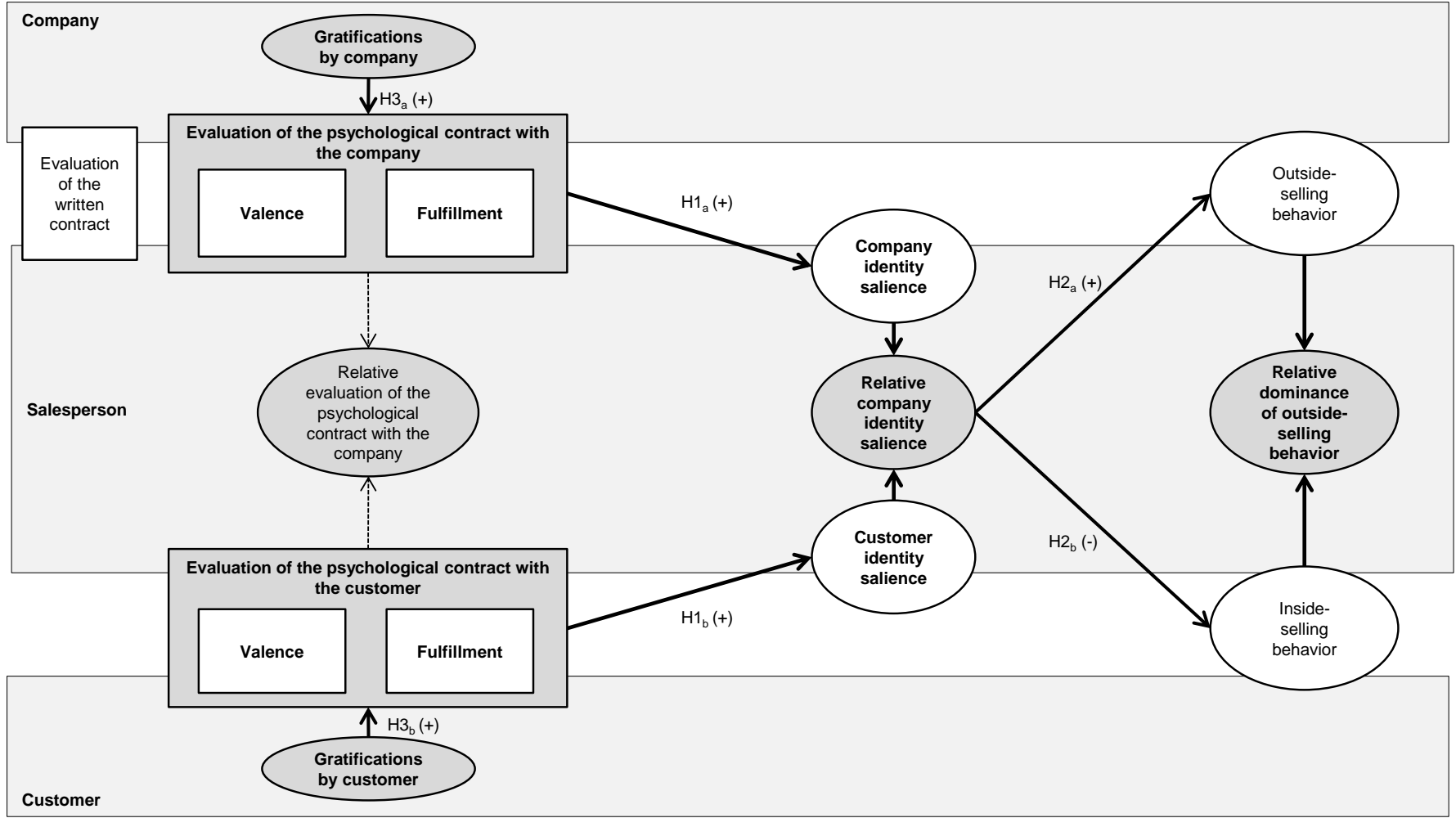


Table 4-5: Components of the Integrated Framework

Concept	Definition	Expression	Interpretation
Psychological contract constructs			
Psychological contract	The psychological contract refers to the salesperson's perceptions of the other party's promise to exchange relational and transactional rewards (based on Bunderson 2001; Robinson and Rousseau 1994).	Psychological contract (PC)= expectations (promised exchange of relational rewards) + expectations (promised exchange of transactional rewards)	= 0 : no psychological contract > 0 : psychological contract content
Relational psychological subcontract	The relational psychological subcontract refers to the degree to which the salesperson perceives the promise of exchanging personal, socio-emotional, and intangible economic resources (based on Conway and Briner 2002).	Relational psychological contract (RPC)= expectations (promised exchange of relational rewards)	= 0 : no relational psychological contract > 0 : relational psychological contract content
Transactional psychological subcontract	The transactional psychological subcontract refers to the degree to which the salesperson perceives the promise of exchanging economic resources and other transactional rewards (based on Conway and Briner 2002).	Transactional psychological contract (TPC) = expectations (promised exchange of transactional rewards)	= 0 : no transactional psychological contract > 0 : transactional psychological contract content
Gratifications	Gratifications are relational and/ or transactional rewards that exceed the promises made as part of the psychological contract.	Gratifications (GR) = Exchange of relational and transactional rewards - psychological contract (PC)	= 0 : no gratifications > 0 : gratifications
Psychological contract: Valence constructs			
Valence of the psychological contract with the customer ¹⁾	The valence of the psychological contract with the customer refers to the product of the instrumentality of the perceived promised rewards for the satisfaction of the salesperson's needs and the valence of the rewards. The valence of the psychological contract with the customer is higher the more rewards the customer promises and the more positive these are perceived by the salesperson (based on Vroom, Porter, and Lawler 2005).	Valence of psychological contract (val PC _{cust}) with the customer = instrumentality (of rewards for needs) x valence (of rewards)	Valence of promised rewards > 0
Valence of the psychological contract with the company ¹⁾	The valence of the psychological contract with the company refers to the product of the instrumentality of the perceived promised rewards for the satisfaction of the salesperson's needs and the valence of the rewards. The valence of the psychological contract with the company is higher the more rewards the company promises and the more positive these are perceived by the salesperson (based on Vroom, Porter, and Lawler 2005).	Valence of psychological contract (val PC _{com}) with the company = instrumentality (of rewards for needs) x valence (of rewards)	Valence of promised rewards > 0
Relative valence of the psychological contract with the company ¹⁾	The relative valence of the psychological contract with the company refers to the valence of the psychological contract with the company in comparison to the valence of the psychological contract with the customer.	Relative val PC _{com} = val PC _{com} / val PC _{cust}	< 1 : PC _{cust} higher valence = 1 : equal valence of both contracts > 1 : PC _{com} higher valence

1) New construct developed as part of the integrative framework

Table 4-5 (continued)

Concept	Definition	Expression	Interpretation
Psychological contract: Fulfillment constructs			
Fulfillment of the psychological contract by the customer	The fulfillment of the psychological contract by the customer refers to the degree to which the salesperson perceives the customer to have delivered on the promised rewards (based on Robinson and Rousseau 1994).	Fulfillment of $PC_{cust} = \frac{rewards_{cust}}{exp_{salesp}(rewards_{cust})}$	< 1 : non-fulfilled = breach = 1 : fulfilled > 1 : over-fulfilled
Fulfillment of the psychological contract by the company	The fulfillment of the psychological contract with the company refers to the degree to which the salesperson perceives the company to have delivered on the promised rewards (based on Robinson and Rousseau 1994).	Fulfillment of $PC_{com} = \frac{rewards_{com}}{exp_{salesp}(rewards_{com})}$	< 1 : non-fulfilled = breach = 1 : fulfilled > 1 : over-fulfilled
Relative fulfillment of the psychological contract by the company ¹⁾	The relative fulfillment of the psychological contract with the company refers to the salesperson's individual perception of the relative fulfillment of the psychological contract with the company in comparison to the psychological contract with the customer.	Relative fulfillment of $PC_{com} = \frac{\text{fulfillment of } PC_{com}}{\text{fulfillment of } PC_{cust}}$	< 1 : PC_{cust} more fulfilled than PC_{com} = 1 : both psychological contracts are equally fulfilled > 1 : PC_{com} more fulfilled than PC_{cust}
Psychological contract: Evaluation constructs			
Evaluation of the psychological contract with the customer	The evaluation of the psychological contract with the customer refers to salespeople assessing the level of valence and the degree of fulfillment of the psychological contract based on comparative judgments of actual experience and contract contents (based on Rousseau and Tijoriwala 1998).	Eval $PC_{cust} = Val PC_{cust} \times \text{Fulfillment of } PC_{cust}$	< 0 : negative evaluation of the psychological contract = 0 : neutral evaluation of the psychological contract > 0 : positive evaluation of the psychological contract
Evaluation of the psychological contract with the company	The evaluation of the psychological contract with the company refers to salespeople assessing the level of valence and the degree of fulfillment of the psychological contract based on comparative judgments of actual experience and contract contents (based on Rousseau and Tijoriwala 1998).	Eval $PC_{com} = Val PC_{com} \times \text{Fulfillment of } PC_{com}$	< 0 : negative evaluation of the psychological contract = 0 : neutral evaluation of the psychological contract > 0 : positive evaluation of the psychological contract
Relative evaluation of the psychological contract with the company ¹⁾	Relative evaluation of the psychological contract with the company refers to the relation of the evaluation of the psychological contract with the company and the evaluation of the psychological contract with the customer.	Relative eval $PC_{com} = \frac{eval PC_{com}}{eval PC_{cust}}$	< 1 : PC_{cust} is higher valued = 1 : equal evaluation of both psychological contracts > 1 : PC_{com} is higher valued

1) New construct developed as part of the integrative framework

Table 4-5 (continued)			
Concept	Definition	Expression	Interpretation
Identity constructs			
Customer identity salience	Customer identity salience refers to the probability that salespeople perceive themselves in selling situations as members of the customer group and act accordingly (based on Ashforth and Johnson 2001).	$\text{Ident sal}_{\text{cust}} = \frac{\text{relevance ident}_{\text{cust}}}{\text{relevance ident}_{\text{other}}}$ ²⁾	Relevance of customer identity compared to other identities (in %)
Company identity salience	Company identity salience refers to the probability that salespeople perceive themselves in selling situations as members of the company group and act accordingly (based on Ashforth and Johnson 2001).	$\text{Ident sal}_{\text{com}} = \frac{\text{relevance ident}_{\text{com}}}{\text{relevance ident}_{\text{other}}}$ ²⁾	Relevance of company identity compared to other identities (in %)
Relative company identity salience ¹⁾	Relative company identity salience refers to the relation of the company and the customer group identity salience based on the salespeople's salience hierarchy. It reflects the identity's subjective importance and relevance for salespeople in selling situations (based on Ashforth and Johnson 2001).	$\text{Relative ident sal}_{\text{com}} = \frac{\text{ident sal}_{\text{com}}}{\text{ident sal}_{\text{cust}}}$	< 1 : higher relevance of customer identity = 1 : equal relevance of both identities > 1 : higher relevance of company identity
Selling behavior constructs			
Outside-selling behavior	Outside-selling behavior refers to salespeople's selling activities directed at the customer in order to convince customers to buy the product at the highest possible price in combination with the highest possible volume.	Outside-selling behavior = \sum (salespeople's selling activities directed at the customer)	Outside-selling behaviors > 0
Inside-selling behavior	Inside-selling behavior refers to salespeople's selling activities directed at the own organization in order to convince its members to satisfy customer demands such as lower prices or higher service for the same price.	Inside-selling behavior = \sum (salespeople's selling activities directed at the own organization)	Inside-selling behaviors > 0
Relative dominance of outside-selling behavior ¹⁾	Relative dominance of outside-selling behavior refers to the extent to which a salesperson engages in outside-selling behaviors in relation to inside-selling behaviors.	Relative outside-selling = $\frac{\text{outside-selling}}{\text{inside-selling}}$	< 1 : more inside-selling > 1 : more outside-selling = 1 : same degree of outside- and inside-selling

1) New construct developed as part of the integrative framework

2) "Other" refers to all other group identities available in selling situations

4.5.2 Hypotheses Development

The integrative framework postulates a causal chain starting with salespeople's dual psychological contract with customer and company leading to salespeople's inside- and outside-selling behaviors. I first present hypotheses on how salespeople's dual psychological contracts influence salespeople's relative company identity salience. The effect is based on (1) the assessment of the value of both contracts for the individual salesperson and (2) the perception of the fulfillment of the two psychological contracts. Second, I present the effect of salespeople's relative company identity salience on salespeople's selling behaviors. Finally, the hypotheses about the role of gratifications employed by customers and the company are presented.

4.5.2.1 *Dual Psychological Contract Evaluation and Identity Salience*

Based on the data presented, I argue that salespeople engage in psychological contracts with the company and customers. Consistent with the literature, I find that a psychological contract can refer to two types of content categories: relational and transactional (Bunderson 2001; Robinson and Rousseau 1994). According to the two content categories, I speak of a relational and a transactional subcontract (see Table 4-5). Salespeople report relational matters that follow a long-term perspective and often evolve around the idea of caring, including phenomena like trust, honest interactions or personal support. Transactional matters, as illustrated above, refer to instrumental material exchanges and stand for a short-term perspective. Since a psychological contract contains matters beyond the written agreement, the psychological contract refers to relational and transactional *rewards*.

However, I observe that it is rarely the mere existence of two psychological contracts that influence salespeople, but rather how salespeople *evaluate* them. The data confirms that salespeople evaluate their psychological contracts against the background of two criteria: (1) 'fulfillment of the psychological contract' referring to if the respective exchange partner

delivers on the promises made and (2) ‘valence of the psychological contract’ referring to how salespeople value the content of each psychological contract. Since the psychological contract is based on perceived promises, the salesperson’s subjective perception is at the heart of the evaluation.

Relationships such as the relationship between a salesperson and her employing company or the relationship between a salesperson and her customers require frequent contact, become progressively personalized, and lead to detailed psychological contracts (Hendry and Pettigrew 1986; Meckler, Drake, and Levinson 2003). In line, I find especially salespeople with significant job experience and company affiliation to talk about psychological contracts. The example of the key account manager becoming the salesperson of the key account (see Section 4.4.1) shows that salespeople increasingly adopt the perspective of the exchange partner they have frequent contact with, confusing own values with the partner’s values (Aron and McLaughlin-Volpe 2001; Gardner, Gabriel, and Hochschild 2002). The more contract details exchange partners agree upon, the more a salesperson tends to perceive increased similarity, interpersonal attraction, and develops positive affect (Miller 2002). The two parties also tend to discriminate less between oneself and the other when allocating resources (Rousseau 2004).

Salespeople evaluate whether the exchange partner *fulfills the psychological contract* or not against their perception if the other side lives up to the promises made and the corresponding obligations. A psychological contract breach occurs if that is not the case. Due to subjective interpretations it is possible that the salesperson and the exchange partner are not consistent in their perceptions of their psychological contract (Wellin 2007). Overall, some deviance is likely, since the contract partners never talk explicitly about their expectations. The majority of salespeople experiences small breaches on a weekly basis. Some even report major psychological contract breaches.

The fulfillment of a psychological contract is a hygiene factor for salespeople's positive evaluation of a psychological contract (Coyle-Shapiro and Conway 2005). Salespeople do not immediately regard little deviance from promises made as a broken or unfulfilled contract. However, from a certain degree on, breaches are considered remarkable. The observations indicate that especially when salespeople miss backup in challenging situations or feel aggrieved severe psychological contract breaches can occur. A major breach of a psychological contract results in negative reactions, varying from psychological distancing to a serious disruption of the relationship with the exchange partner (Conway and Briner 2002).

The *valence* a salesperson attributes to the contents of a psychological contract is based on whether the contents match the salesperson's values, beliefs and goals (Herriot, Manning, and Kidd 1997). Salespeople especially value those promised behaviors that apply most to their needs, reflect their (job) world view and correspond to their identity. As the data shows, salespeople specifically appreciate relational rewards offered as part of a psychological contract. Promised behaviors in psychological contracts such as support and acknowledgement indicate to salespeople that they are valued and appreciated. Among other self-related motives salespeople appreciate these opportunities for self-enhancement and well-being (Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail 1994; Hogg 2001). By offering valuable relational rewards, psychological contracts motivate salespeople to attach themselves to exchange partners by the foresight of satisfaction of needs such as belongingness and affiliation (Pratt 1998). Psychological contracts influence salespeople's self-categorization to the customer group or the company group.

To which group salespeople feel attached is reflected in the concept of salespeople's identity salience. Following identity theory (Stryker 1980), identity salience is conceptualized as the likelihood that a given identity will be invoked in a specific situation (Hogg, Terry, and

White 1995). “Multiple identities can be ranked in a ‘salience hierarchy’ according to their relative salience” for selling situations (Ashforth and Johnson 2001, p. 32). The subjective importance of identities for salespeople is rather stable. If a specific identity is salient, salespeople will think, feel, and act in accordance with that identity (Arnett, German, and Hunt 2003).

Based on the evaluation of the psychological contract with an exchange partner salespeople adapt their relational attachments resulting in the respective level of identity salience. Accordingly, I propose:

P_{1a}: The positive evaluation of the psychological contract with the company positively influences the salesperson’s company identity salience.

P_{1b}: The positive evaluation of the psychological contract with the customer positively influences the salesperson’s customer identity salience.

4.5.2.2 Relative Company Identity Salience and Selling Behavior

As argued above, salespeople experience separate effects of each psychological contract on the salience of the respective group identity. In the interviews, I observe that salespeople simplify the phenomenon of two separate identity effects by combining both into one single relative perception. To capture this phenomenon, I define ‘relative company identity salience’ as the relation of the company and the customer group identity salience based on the salesperson’s salience hierarchy (see Table 4-5). This construct reflects the identity’s relative subjective importance and relevance for salespeople in selling situations (based on Ashforth and Johnson 2001).

How people act in a given organizational context is based on how they situate themselves and others (Ashforth and Johnson 2001). Relative company identity salience is the result of such situating by which salespeople derive meaningful answers to questions such as

“Who am I” and “What do I stand for in my job”. Thus, ‘relative company identity salience’ refers to self-definitional and relational experiences a salesperson makes which motivate her to act to a certain degree on behalf of the group of the company. Salespeople who identify with their organization or with their customers engage in “processes of self-stereotyping. Their behavior is oriented towards and structured by the content of that group’s defining characteristics, norms and values, resulting in an internalization of particular group identity” (Haslam, Postmes, and Ellemers 2003, p. 360). The more salespeople identify with a group, the more they integrate its goals and take over external motives for their actions (Gagné and Deci 2005). Relative company identity salience thus reveals whose identity the salesperson acts upon.

In selling situations, salespeople interact based on the prototype of the most salient group (Ashforth and Humphrey 1997; Hogg and Terry 2000). For salespeople with a relative company identity salience greater than one, the company identity is salient. Scholars have shown in numerous studies that employee-company identification leads individuals to act on behalf of the organization (Celsi and Gilly 2010; Dukerich, Golden, and Shortell 2002; Larson et al. 2008; Olkkonen and Lipponen 2006). Thus, if the company identity is predominantly salient for a salesperson, she rather pursues organizational goals than personal and customer goals, engages in cooperation with organizational members, interprets issues and events from the company perspective and experiences positive emotions from the company membership (van Knippenberg and van Schie 2000). She demonstrates increased selling efforts and extra-role performance in the name of the company (Ahearne, Bhattacharya, and Gruen 2005). To act on behalf of the company means to engage to a high degree in outside-selling behaviors.

For salespeople with a relative company identity salience below one, the customer identity is salient. Similar to lower order-identity arguments (Wieseke et al. 2012), I argue

that group members can refuse to act in favor of their institutional group when they think that it threatens another of their identities. Salespeople for whom the customer identity is predominantly salient, experience positive emotions, acceptance and receive rewards from customers as members of the customer group. They are involved on the customer's behalf, perceive events from the customer's point of view and adopt values and goals of customers. Customers are mainly interested in transparent product characteristics and price display, honest sales consulting and a reliable partner who remains competent and engaged after the sale. These customer goals require inside-selling behaviors.

To summarize, depending on the salesperson's relative company identity salience, the salesperson engages more in outside-selling or more in inside-selling activities. I propose:

P_{2a}: Relative company identity salience positively influences the degree to which a salesperson engages in outside-selling behavior.

P_{2b}: Relative company identity salience negatively influences the degree to which a salesperson engages in inside-selling behavior.

Similar to the idea of relative company identity salience, I introduce 'relative outside-selling behavior' as a construct to capture the degree to which salespeople engage in outside-selling behaviors compared to inside-selling behaviors (see Table 4-5).

4.5.2.3 Gratifications and Dual Psychological Contracts

The phenomena observed (see Section 4.4.4) show that salespeople especially remember situations in which they receive gratifications from customers or company that exceed existing expectations. I define gratifications as relational and transactional rewards employed by the company or by customers that exceed the promises contained in the psychological contract (see Table 4-5). Gratifications are unexpected, gain considerable attention by salespeople and have a sustainable impact (Conway and Briner 2002).

Companies and customers can considerably impact salespeople's evaluations of the psychological contracts by employing gratifications. Similar to cognitive shifts in perceptions (Gaertner et al. 2002; Gardner, Gabriel, and Hochschild 2002; Kark and Shamir 2002; Pratt and Rafaeli 2001), shifts in the evaluation of the psychological contract can be primed by cues such as gratifications. Exchange partners can use transactional or relational gratifications to compensate, for example, for the negative consequences of their psychological contract breach (Deery, Iverson, and Walsh 2006).

The salesperson's individual preference for relational or transactional rewards determines the relative importance of relational and transactional gratifications. Psychological contracts compete especially on the type of rewards which are most important to the salesperson. For example, salespeople that score high on business attachment are able and willing to rely on an exchange partner and desire personal bonds with them (Paulssen 2009). For those salespeople, the two psychological contracts compete strongly on the level of relational rewards. In this case, relational gratifications are expected to serve best as cues for shifts in the evaluation of a psychological contract. I propose:

P_{3a}: Gratifications induced by the company positively influence the salesperson's evaluation of the psychological contract with the company.

P_{3b}: Gratifications induced by customers positively influence the salesperson's evaluation of the psychological contract with the customer.

Following the proposed chain of effects described by the integrative framework, company and customer are both able to influence and guide the individual salesperson's selling activities by promising transactional and especially relational rewards.

4.6 Discussion

So far, I have developed the integrative framework based on my observations. Now I put the conceptual framework into the context of the status quo of the theoretical approaches. To do so, I review the theories the framework is based upon and explain how this thesis further develops the applied theories. The two theoretical pillars used to explain salespeople's direction of selling activities are (1) salespeople's dual psychological contracts and their evaluation and (2) the salespeople's dual identity salience and associated group membership with the company group *and* with the customer group. The two pillars are theoretically based on the psychological contract theory and the identity perspective (Ahearne, Bhattacharya, and Gruen 2005; Johnson and Ashforth 2008; Wieseke et al. 2007). For an overview, please refer to Table 4-6.

4.6.1 Identity Perspective

Sales literature focuses on salespeople's identity engagements with their company (Richter et al. 2006). It is an established idea that the salesperson as an employee of the organization is a member of the company group and adopts the values associated with that group. Thereby the company group influences the salesperson's behavior in customer interactions (Johnson and Ashforth 2008).

Customer orientation is modeled as a goal, norm, and cultural value of the company. Customer orientation is incorporated in the organization's identity and is stringently disseminated top-down throughout the organization (Wieseke et al. 2007). Customer contact employees identify with their organization, the organization's identity and its values. That way, customer orientation becomes self-defining (Pratt 1998) for customer contact employees and influences their treatment of customers. Several studies show the positive effect of company identification on customer orientation (Harris, Mowen, and Brown 2005; Pelham

2009). Consistently, variables investigated to explain the level of customer orientation mostly stem from the company sphere.

To the best of my knowledge, only one article combines variables from company and customer sphere to explain customer orientation. Webber (2011) introduces the effect of 'dual identification' and shows that project managers who are located within the customer organization increasingly identify with that customer organization. In terms of effects, the study models project manager's organizational identification with the client organization, an effect within the customer sphere, as a moderator of the effect of project manager's company identification on customer satisfaction. The more project managers identify with *both* the customer organization and their employing organization, the higher is the customer satisfaction they achieve.

This thesis offers valuable additional insights since the results of Webber's study may not be easily transferred to the sales context. His model accounts for the possibility that a project manager identifies with both his employing company and the client organization. Project managers work within one customer organization for a longer period of time. In addition, the specific focus of the study is cooperation in a project team setting. Project team settings are characterized by the common interest of the project team members to achieve the defined project goal. In contrast, selling situations include less permanent contact, asymmetry of information, and most likely competing objectives of salespeople and customer. The project setting also does not consider the challenge of dealing with different customer organizations at the same time.

Generally, the integrative framework presented in this chapter draws on existing knowledge within identity-based sales literature. However, this study draws attention to two effects extending existing identity-based sales literature: First, salespeople experience group and identity mechanisms with both the customer group and the company group. Second, this

study finds considerable inter-dynamics of variables from the company sphere with variables from the customer sphere influencing salespeople's identification and their selling behavior. Thus, the proposed framework is based on the competition of customer identification and company identification.

Recently, identity-based research follows similar approaches in terms of modeling different identification processes competing for salespeople's identity and corresponding effects. These studies, however, focus on internal identification processes and do not span the sales boundary that is so important to make sense of the sales job. For instance, Wieseke et al. (2012) investigate 'work team identity' as another group identity competing with the company identity. The two identities do not necessarily share similar beliefs and codes of behavior and are often negatively correlated. Drawing on social information processing, Kraus et al. (2012) show that sales managers and peers function as competing interpersonal influencers. Via downward and lateral transmission salespeople 'take over' the level of organizational identification from sales managers and peers. With time, the effect of lateral transmissions from peers dominates sales managers as role models for organizational identification. Ahearne et al. (2013) study how salespeople and sales managers identify with each other and how this 'interpersonal identification' dominates the behavior of salespeople. Especially if salespeople and their sales managers identify with each other to a similar extent, the sales manager becomes the primary role model and mentor for the salesperson. Thus, via interpersonal identification, sales managers have stronger effects on how salespeople make sense of their sales job than other collective identities like work group or company. These studies might suggest a shift of explanatory power from collective identities to interpersonal identification processes. To the best of my knowledge, there is no study that investigates similar effects with respect to identification processes with players in the customer organization.

Generally, salespeople tend to switch their employing company every 4.5 years on average (Sullivan 1999). Many individuals adopt a free agent identity and develop skills and customer relationships that can be taken from the current employer to the next (Arthur and Rousseau 1996). This has weakened the dominance of the company identity and enhanced the possibility for other identities, such as the customer identity, to become more salient.

4.6.2 Psychological Contract Perspective

The psychological contract has so far only been conceptualized between the salesperson and the employing company. A psychological contract between a salesperson and her employing company is understood as an unwritten contract which fills the gaps a written contract has left (Deery, Iverson, and Walsh 2006; Herriot and Pemberton 1996; Rousseau 2001; Wellin 2007). Written contracts usually contain job descriptions and performance goals and thereby outline salespeople's job duties and context. However, detailed rules of exchange and cooperation, for example, on how the job is exactly to be done or how the exchange partners interact with each other on a daily basis, are not covered in the written contract and thus left to interpretation and negotiation. According to existing research, such subjective perceptions of one's own duties and the promised behaviors of others are matters of the psychological contract with the company.

Similar to how an employment contract between a salesperson and her company is complemented by the psychological contract of the salesperson with the company, sales contracts can be complemented by the psychological contract between the salesperson and the customer. This is especially the case if the exchange partners engage in a long-term business relationship, having exchanges on a regularly basis. The psychological contract between a salesperson and a customer fills the gap the sales contract leaves for the definition of this partnership. In addition to relational rewards, transactional rewards, such as the customer's

promise to buy or the promise to deliver relevant information about the buying process, are reported in the interviews.

By introducing the idea of duality of psychological contracts, I extend the psychological contract perspective beyond the sphere of the company. Like customer and company identification effects are in competition, also the psychological contract with the company and the psychological contract with the customer compete for the salesperson's attention, attitude, and behavior. Thus, the employing company competes with customers on rewards and gratifications for salespeople's favorableness.

Table 4-6: Overview of Applied Theoretical Approaches

Main contributors	Central concepts - Main actors	Selected conceptual and empirical studies in the sales context	Central idea	Bilateral and multilateral relations	Relational and transactional rewards	Behavioral outcomes
Identity theory						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Albert and Whetten (1985) ▪ Ashforth and Johnson (2001) ▪ Ashforth and Mael (1989) ▪ Cardador and Pratt (2006) ▪ Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail (1994) ▪ Meyer, Becker, and van Dick (2006) ▪ Tajfel and Turner (1979) 	Self-categorization; In-group heterogeneity; Out-group homogeneity; Self-enhancement; Identity; Identification ----- Individual = salesperson; Group = the company or customers	Conceptual: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Johnson and Ashforth (2008) ▪ Sluss and Ashforth (2007) Empirical: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ahearne, Bhattacharya, and Gruen (2005) ▪ DeConinck (2011) ▪ Hughes and Ahearne (2010) ▪ Wieseke et al. (2007) 	Salespeople's beliefs of who they are (identity) are shaped by their group memberships. As a group member, the salesperson identifies with the group's values, norms and rules and behaves accordingly. Identification determines salespeople's self-concept and influences how they understand their job. The group membership that influences the salesperson's behavior depends on its salience in the specific situation.	Dual or multiple identities refer to different entities which are simultaneously important to the salesperson's identity formation. Both customer and company identity offer guidance for salespeople's beliefs and behavior.	Memberships in social groups offer salespeople orientation and satisfaction for the need of belonging, self-consistency and self-enhancement. Thus, a group offers relational rewards via membership.	Salespeople take on the group's values and code of conduct and act/sell accordingly. Literature has shown that the level of customer orientation depends on the level of organizational identification.
Psychological contract theory						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Conway and Briner (2002) ▪ Coyle-Shapiro and Conway (2005) ▪ Robinson and Rousseau (1994) ▪ Robinson and Morrison (1995) ▪ Rousseau (1995) ▪ Rousseau (2001) ▪ Schein (1980) 	Psychological contract ----- Employer = company Employee = salesperson	Conceptual: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Deery, Iverson, and Walsh (2006) ▪ Guest (2004) ▪ Robinson and Morrison (1995) Empirical: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Bordia et al. (2010) ▪ Hao et al. (2007) ▪ Wilkens and Nermerich (2011) 	The psychological contract is an implicit contract between employer and employee. It complements the written employment contract and refers to beliefs of the salesperson about what to expect from the company, e.g., support in selling situations. The employee acts according to her perception of this psychological contract. If one partner perceives a contract to be broken, negative emotional reactions and opportunistic behaviors are the result.	The psychological contract refers to the bilateral relationship between company and salesperson.	The psychological contract integrates emotional and transactional rewards. Financial rewards are rarely part of psychological contracts.	The salesperson is expected to act according to her subjectively perceived psychological contract. This may include a specific selling behavior in exchange for career advancements.

4.7 Implications

Sections 4.5 and 4.6 present the integrative conceptual framework and discuss its relation to theoretical approaches in the literature. In the final section of this chapter, I summarize central contributions to academic research, implications for managerial practice and future research opportunities.

4.7.1 Implications for Academic Research

This study contributes to sales research in several ways: First, it draws attention to the dichotomy of salespeople's selling behavior based on the direction of selling energy. Existing sales research focuses on outside-selling, which is expected to lead to high sales performance. This study shows that next to outside-selling, salespeople considerably engage in inside-selling.

Second, the presented framework combines so far isolated research streams (see Figure 4-3). A *first* literature stream investigates antecedents of customer-directed selling, or outside-selling, rooted in the relationship of the salesperson with her company. Independently, studies in a *second* literature stream, investigate antecedents of customer-directed selling rooted in the relationship of the salesperson with her customers. As shown in the literature review in Section 4.2, sales research is unable to fully explain why salespeople engage in inside-selling or outside-selling behaviors. The integrative and relative perspective developed in this chapter allows the simultaneous consideration of effects in both relationships. It offers an integrative theory that models multilateral relationships simultaneously.

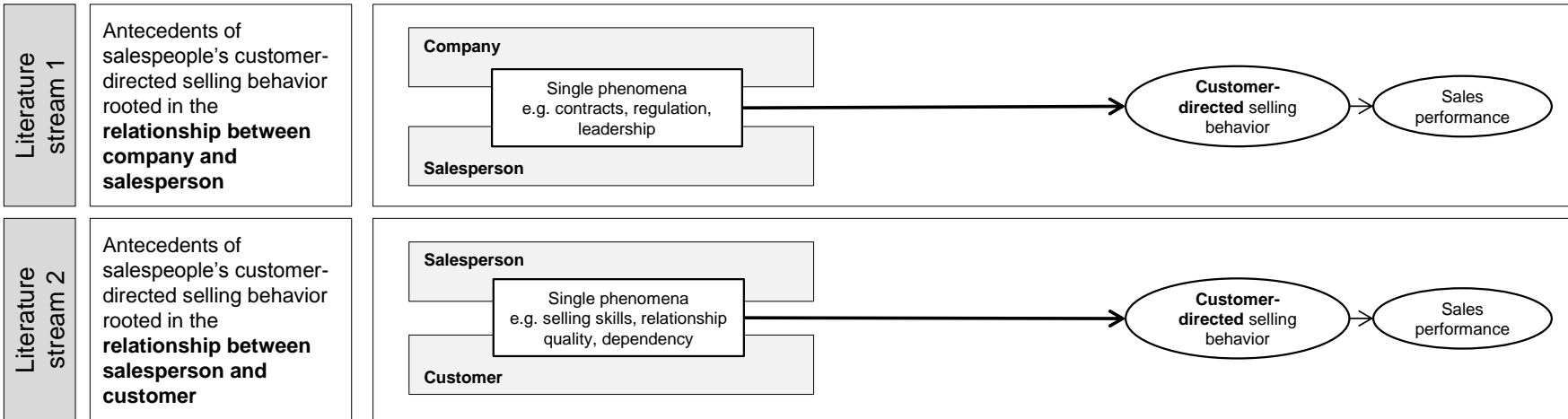
Third, the framework considers that both company and customers deploy relational and transactional rewards. Existing literature ascribes transactional rewards as a means to influence salespeople merely to the employing company. This study shows that also customers are able to draw on transactional rewards to influence salespeople.

Fourth, company and customers compete for the direction of salespeople's selling behavior. However, the salesperson is not a passive taker of what is offered. She individually evaluates the rewards associated with both exchange partners and actively manages and adapts her selling behavior.

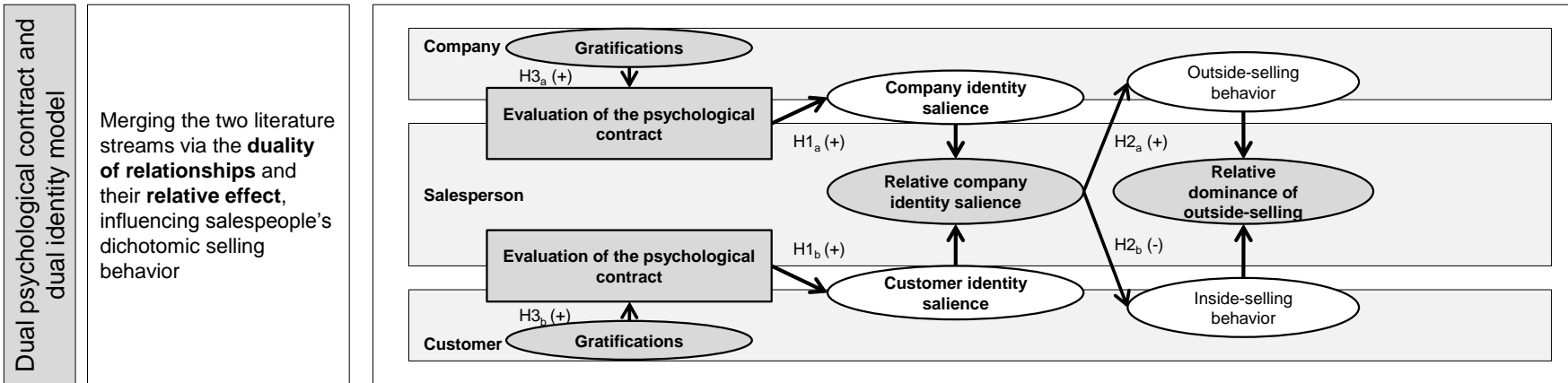
In the words of MacInnis (2011, p. 139), this study's approach is closest to the "beginner mind". The explanation why salespeople direct their energy at customers or at the company questions previous assumptions in sales research. I transform my observations (envision) into a proposed conceptual and integrative model (explicate). Furthermore, I put the theoretical framework into the context of existing theoretical approaches (relate).

Figure 4-3: The Integrative Value of the Relative Perspective

Literature View



Thesis view



4.7.2 Implications for Managerial Practice

This work provides several implications for salespeople and those who manage them. A first set of implications surrounds the utility of company's rewards and gratifications for influencing salespeople. Sales managers need to be aware of reciprocal obligations and promises in addition to performance controlling tools. From the company's point of view, it is important (1) to know the individual valences salespeople place on specific issues such as fairness, support or reciprocity, (2) to be consciously aware of what one promises and how it is perceived, and (3) to keep promises.

A second set of implications emerging from this work concerns the idea of customers 'managing' salespeople. Buyers are aware of ways to influence salespeople to get lower prices and better deals. They impose pressure on them or reduce the transparency of their decision process. Buyers thereby naturally consider themselves in a superior position since they believe that the salesperson wants something from them. However, few can be expected to be aware of the idea of managing a psychological contract. But, buyers may benefit from actively managing and engaging in a psychological contract with a salesperson.

It is not sufficient for companies and sales managers to only be aware of one's own psychological contract with the salesperson. They also need to monitor the psychological contract of salespeople with their customers to be able to influence the competitive mechanism between the two psychological contracts. With regard to salespeople, the customer group can function as an identity threat (Ravasi and Schultz 2006) to the organizational identity. Thus, the company needs to manage the dynamic interplay of salespeople's psychological contracts with company and customers and the resulting relative identity salience.

4.7.3 Limitations and Future Research Opportunities

A balanced view on the empirical study presented includes the consideration of its limitations. One such limitation pertains to the nature of a qualitative study. Since I have no quantitative estimation of the proposed effects, I am not able to model the size of the effects. I can only hypothesize the direction. More research is needed to test the framework presented and assess customers' ability to influence salespeople's selling behavior via rewards and gratifications. In addition, the model contains several dynamics and relative perceptions which should also be investigated based on longitudinal data to show the stability of effects.

A second limitation is that I observe salespeople's actual selling behavior only in a limited number of cases. I mainly base my observations on salespeople's reports and self-perceptions. This is consistent with the goal to describe salespeople's individual point of view and their motivation. However, it might be interesting for future research to match these self-perceptions with others' perceptions, for example, which those of customers or sales managers (triangulation).

Third, from a company's perspective, the question remains whether outside-selling is more favorable than inside-selling in terms of sales results. Future research should investigate the performance effects of relative outside-selling behavior.

5 Summarizing Thoughts

Table 5-1 depicts the research questions introduced in Chapter 1.2 and the corresponding research results. The research findings and main messages are the result of the in-depth conceptual analysis of the relevant sales literature and theoretical approaches both inside and outside of sales research in combination with the qualitative empirical analysis.

Table 5-1: Overview of Research Questions and Research Results

Chapter	Research question	Research results	Main message
Chapter 2	How do existing intrapersonal and interpersonal theories contribute to explaining salespeople-related phenomena?	Detailed overview of intrapersonal and interpersonal theories with the salesperson as the unit of analysis. The theories are structured along the research questions they address	Sales research has often been identified as a-theoretical. This extensive overview provides multiple starting points for the application of theoretical concepts in salesperson research Different theories shed different light on salesperson explananda. The extensive overview of theoretical lenses ensures a broad range of perspectives on the empirical data collected
Chapter 3	How does the individual salesperson interpret the expectations associated with her sales position and thereby takes and makes her boundary role? How does the individual salesperson's way of handling her sales position relate to stress?	Identification of eight different boundary role handling styles Some salespeople proactively engage in role-authoring Salespeople applying different boundary role handling styles differ in their degree of role stress	Salespeople are more actively involved in defining the sales role than existing theoretical concepts suggest: role-taking and role-making take place simultaneously The combination of relational and proactive perspectives with role-theoretic arguments to explain salespeople's boundary role handling promises high explanatory power
Chapter 4	In which exchange partner do salespeople invest more selling energy? Why do salespeople engage more in inside- or more in outside-selling?	Development of an integrative model capturing the <i>relative</i> impact of customers and employing company on salespeople's outside- vs. inside-selling behaviors Introduction and description of dual psychological contract and dual identity as motivational mechanisms for directing selling energy	Salespeople engage more often in inside-selling than sales research acknowledges The employing company <i>and</i> customers can proactively influence salespeople's selling behavior by 'managing' psychological contracts Both relational and transactional contents can be part of psychological contracts with the customer and the company The simultaneous consideration of psychological contracts and the resulting relative identity effects explain why salespeople do not always choose the most sales-result-promising selling behaviors

More than half of all sales research has been labeled as a-theoretical (Williams and Plouffe 2007). Chapter 2 develops theoretical sensitivity by providing an overview of possible theoretical foundations for research inquiries on salespeople. This theoretical starting point is merged with qualitative empirical data in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 to explain contrary effects identified in the sales literature for salespeople's role stress and selling behavior. The

extension of role, identity, and psychological contract theory allows shedding light on salesperson phenomena identified during data collection and data analysis.

While the role stress literature draws a picture of constantly stressed salespeople who are passively at the mercy of the expectations of others (Bettencourt, Brown, and Mackenzie 2005), I find that salespeople differ considerably in their stress levels (see Chapter 3). Quite a few salespeople are in fact even almost unstressed doing their sales job. Empirical data shows that salespeople engage in different boundary role handling styles based on the degree to which they espouse the customer- and the company-serving role. The emphasis on the expectations of one role sender reduces the level of role stress experienced. In addition, some salespeople show a strong individual understanding of how parties to the exchange should interact at the boundary and what their respective roles should be. This proactive approach places salespeople at the center of interpreting their sales boundary. They engage in role-authoring and experience limited role stress.

Salespeople differ tremendously in the degree to which they engage in inside- and outside-selling behaviors (see Chapter 1.1). Literature on salespeople's selling behavior concentrates on investigating customer-directed selling behaviors since these are expected to lead to high sales performance. While few studies recognize inside-selling behaviors as a small portion of salespeople's everyday activities, this thesis shows the importance of inside-selling activities. Some salespeople do not even seem to be working for their companies anymore, but appear to be working for their customers instead. The empirical data shows that salespeople's selling behavior is the result of the interplay of effects with the customer and with the employing company. The salesperson engages in dual psychological contracts with both exchange partners simultaneously, evaluates these contracts and shows considerable identity effects in response to the relative evaluation. The resulting commitment to exchange partners influences salespeople's direction of selling energy. The developed integrative

framework covers these relative mechanisms. Consistent with the results on unstressed boundary spanners (Chapter 3), salespeople individually shape the sales boundary by perceiving and evaluating psychological contracts and account for a considerable portion of variance in the explanatory model.

The domain of sales and sales research is changing which calls for “researchers to develop a sensitivity towards salespeople’s ways of doing and being” (Geiger and Kelly 2014, p. 223). In this regard, sales research needs to expand the research agenda by incorporating, first, a more self-determined view on the salesperson as she might be a key driver of boundary spanning phenomena and, second, a less organizational, boundary-driven view on salespeople and their tasks. The conceptual developments in this thesis may hopefully function as a starting point for enhancing marketers’ understanding of these changing sales mechanisms and their key drivers.

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Appendix

Final coding schedule

General coding schedule	
Code No.	Code
	Characteristics of interviewee and sales job
1	Size of company
2	Industry (product vs. service business)
3	Gender of interviewee
4	Job experience as a seller
5	Sales responsibility (in million Euros)
6	Sales position; based on Darmon (1998) and Moncrief, Marshall, and Lassk (2006)
7	Seller profile; based on Dixon and Adamson (2011)
8	Regional scope of sales responsibility

Coding schedule for Chapter 3: The Unstressed Boundary Spanner	
Code No.	Code
	Salespeople's espousal of 'role sender'-serving roles
9	Espousal of the customer-serving role
10	Espousal of the company-serving role
	Salespeople's role-authoring
11	Individual beliefs about the sales role
	Salespeople's role stress
12	High role stress cues
13	Low role stress cues

Coding schedule for Chapter 4: Outside-Selling Versus Inside-Selling	
Code No.	Code
	Salespeople's selling behavior
14	Outside-selling
15	Inside-selling
	Salespeople feeling obliged to role senders
16	Feeling obliged to company
17	Feeling obliged to customer
	Salespeople's rewards from the relationships with role senders
18	Relational rewards from company
19	Transactional rewards from company
20	Relational rewards from customers
21	Transactional rewards from customers
	Salespeople's identification with role senders
22	Identification with company
23	Identification with customer
	Salespeople engaging in psychological contracts with role senders
24	Psychological contract with company
25	Psychological contract with customer
26	Breach of psychological contract with company
27	Breach of psychological contract with customer