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Balancing the Pressure from Sales Contests with Ethicality and Customer Orientation

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ABSTRACT:

Sales organizations aim to maximize their profits by conducting regular sales contest to motivate sales personnel to sell more. However, there is evidence that sales contests often negatively affect salespeople's customer orientation. Furthermore, creating too much pressure for sales might cause situations in which the sales personnel have to make tough decisions regarding ethics. The objective of this thesis is to find out how salespeople balance the pressure ensuing from sales contests while remaining true to company's customer orientation and being ethical.

Findings answers to the research question was done by collecting qualitative data via interviews. experienced salespeople in different fields were interviewed. The collected data was analysed with content analysis.

The results of this study show that there are different ways of how salespeople treat the pressure that ensues from sales contests while ethics and customer orientation also have to be considered. For some, ethicality and customer orientation come quite naturally, while others might strive to contact more customers or avoid certain acts in selling. For the sake of clarity and transparency, the different balancing mechanisms that the salespeople of the interviews of this study possess, are compiled.

This study contributes to the literature by demonstrating how different salespeople balance the pressure in above-mentioned situations. This study shows that in order for companies to have their salesforce act accordingly to the strategic objectives of the company, the company has to put emphasis on educating their salespeople what these objectives are. This way, the salesforce will know what these objectives are.

KEYWORDS: sales; contests; ethics; customer orientation

VAASAN YLIOPISTO**Johtamisen yksikkö**

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TIIVISTELMÄ:

Myyntiorganisaatiot pyrkivät maksimoimaan tuottoensa järjestämällä säännöllisiä myyntikilpailuja. On kuitenkin näytetty, että myyntikilpailut vaikuttavat usein negatiivisesti myyjien asiakaslähtöisyyteen. Tämän lisäksi liian paineen luominen myymiselle voi aiheuttaa tilanteita, missä myyjät joutuvat tekemään vaikeita päätöksiä koskien etiikkaa. Tämän tutkimuksen tavoite on selvittää, miten eri myyjät tasapainottelevat myyntikilpailujen aiheuttaman paineen kanssa pysyen samaan aikaan asiakaslähtöisenä ja toimien eettisesti.

Tutkimuskysymyksen etsittiin vastauksia haastattelujen avulla. Viittä myyjää, joilla on kokemusta erilaisissa myynnin aloissa, haastateltiin. Haastatteluista saatuja tietoja analysoitiin sisäl-
töanalyysillä.

Tämän tutkimuksen löydökset näyttävät että myyjillä on erilaisia keinoja tasapainotella myynti-
kilpailuiden aiheuttamien paineiden, etiikan ja asiakaslähtöisyyden välillä. Joillekin eettisyys ja
asiakaslähtöisyys tulee melko luonnollisesti, kun taas toiset pyrkivät muun muassa tavoittamaan
useampia asiakkaita tai välttämään tiettyjä myynnin keinoja. Jotta tämä tutkimus olisi selkeä ja
läpinäkyvä, erilaiset tasapainottelun keinot mitä haastatetuilla myyjillä on, on koottu.

Tämä tutkimus täydentää kirjallisuutta osoittamalla kuinka myyjät tasapainottelevat paineen
kanssa yllä mainituissa tilanteissa. Tämä tutkimus näyttää, että jos yritykset haluavat myyjien
toimivan heidän strategisen linjauksensa mukaisesti, tulee yrityksen painottaa tämän linjauksen
opettamista myyjille, jotta he olisivat tietoisia siitä.

AVAINSANAT: myynti; kilpailut; etiikka; asiakaslähtöisyys

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1 Introduction

Organizations need to maximize their employees' motivation in order to ensure that daily sales performance goals are met (Verbeke, Bagozzi & Belschak, 2016). While there are many different ways to motivate the salesforce, it is estimated that up to 90% of sales firms prefer to conduct regular sales contests (Murphy & Sohi, 1995). It is noteworthy that a rising amount of money is used in sales contests. For example, in the United States the total expenditures on sales contests were reported to be over 26 billion dollars in 2000 (Lim, Ahearne & Ham, 2009), and this number grew to a massive 76,9 billion dollars by 2013 (Poujol, Harfouche & Pezet, 2016). Adding special incentives is most likely going to add motivation and thus increase sales (Gopalakrishna, Garrett, Mantrala & Sridhar, 2015). It has been shown that sales contests also have the potential of having negative impacts, for example harming the customer orientation of salespeople. Recognizing the paucity of studies regarding the impact of contests on customer orientation, Poujol & Tanner (2010) conducted a study, in which they showed that sales contests should only be held occasionally to ensure that they actually motivate, and contests should be well designed to avoid harming customer orientation of the salesforce.

However, the study of Poujol & Tanner (2010) left room for further studies. The writers suggest future research opportunities regarding research on sales contests: "Finally, looking at covariants such as the company's customer orientation, the salesperson's ethics, or the manager's propensity to tolerate unethical behaviors could enrich the literature. Indeed, part of the variance observed in this study may be linked to other variables. Further research should consider the nature of the company's culture, ethical climate, and similar variables." Hence, this study will aim to broaden the knowledge of the relationship between above-mentioned covariants and sales contests. More specifically, this study will examine how salespeople balance the pressure that arises from constant sales contests, while remaining ethical and true to company's customer orientation. Sales contests encourage selling more, which can result in salespeople acting unethical and setting the company's customer orientation aside.

The purpose of this study is to utilize this research opportunity by answering the following research question:

How do salespeople balance the pressure from sales contests with being ethical and remaining true to company's customer orientation?

This question will be answered by studying relevant literature and then conducting interviews with salespeople working in sales companies that utilize regular sales contests. The literature review will contain definitions of key concepts such as ethics, customer orientation and sales contest, and show how they affect each other.

This study contributes to the literature in two ways. First, it broadens the knowledge of the relationship between sales contests, and sales ethics together with customer orientation. This study strengthens the theory of people perceiving ethics in different ways. Second, this study reveals the mechanisms of how different salespeople perceive above-mentioned covariants and how they balance the pressure arising from them. All in all, this study contributes to the literature by adding knowledge to gaps mentioned by Poujol & Tanner (2010).

This thesis is divided into five parts and the structure of the thesis can be seen in Figure 1. Section 1 introduces the thesis subject. Section 2 is the Literature review, which contains the theoretical framework and addresses the key components of the thesis. Section 3 explains the methods of how the empirical part of this study is conducted. Section 4 presents the findings of the empirical interviews. Finally, section 5 concludes this thesis with discussion. Appendices at the end of this thesis provide additional information, namely the interview questions.



Figure 1. Structure of the thesis.

2 Literature review

This literature review consists of two parts. First, sales contests are examined and their different dimensions such as design components are analysed. Additionally, motivation created by the sales contest, will be studied. Second, sales ethicality and its connection with customer orientation is analysed. Lastly, the connection between ethics together with customer orientation, and the competitive atmosphere caused by sales contests, is analysed.

2.1 Sales contests

A sales contest is a short-term incentive program designed to motivate sales personnel to reach various sales objectives. Watson (2014) sees sales contests as a great tool to boost salespeople's motivation. Contests help to refresh otherwise repetitive and banal workdays by creating healthy competitive attitude between employees and thus increasing sales. However, according to Moncrief, Hart & Robertson (1988), held at the wrong time or a planned badly, a sales contest does not boost motivation, and therefore bad contests also do not help to better sales figures at all.

Wotruba & Schoel (1983) state that there are occasions where motivational defects are tried to be cured by managers with a sales contest. However, this is probably not the ideal option in organizing these motivational programs. If long-run motivational problems are tried to be eliminated by temporary incentives, it is common that the problems are only prolonged. Wortuba & Schoel (1983) go as far as stating that these attempts may also generate many negative side effects.

Recognizing these factors, Mocrief et al. (1988) suggest that sales contests should be carefully planned to be held at the most optimal time and place in the company. Watson (2014) agrees to this by stating that when running a sales contest, proper goals must be targeted as well as correct rewards offered.

2.1.1 Motivation

As sales contests are targeted to increase motivation, it is important to understand what motivation is. According to Viitala (2014), people often tend to find meanings and explanations for everything they do. In the event of something not feeling meaningful, there is usually also no motivation. For work to be motivating, it must be challenging but it must also have goals which are reachable. Furthermore, working must be rewarded financially and the working environment must be pleasant. Employees' skills and abilities do not guarantee the wanted result in work if the workers do not care. Motivation is often defined as a system of factors that stimulate and guide one's behavior. Motivation depends on the willingness of the individual to use their own resources to do the job. (Peltonen & Ruohotie 1988). In this thesis, from the various definitions of motivation, sales motivation will be examined the most.

In his article, Fu (2015) introduces three dimensions, or choices, of sales motivation. These three dimensions are direction, intensity, and persistence of sales motivation. Direction of sales motivation arises when the person decides to do a task. The intensity of sales motivation is best described as putting a certain level of effort in the doing. Lastly, the persistence of sales motivation comes from the willingness to continue doing the task. When a sales contest is designed properly, it will affect all three dimensions of sales motivation. However, should there be a badly designed component in the contest, the salesperson might lose some of the sales motivation dimensions. For example, if the award value is too small compared to the length of the contest, a salesperson might lose his/her intensity of motivation. Sales contest design components are analysed more specifically in section 2.1.2.

Viitala (2014) states, that improving and learning new only happens to those, who feel like progressing is meaningful and important. These things have been known to companies already for a couple of decades, and more and more resources are put to increase motivation. All in all, a person is motivated by rewards. Their rewards can be internal feelings or external recognition. The motivation to obtain these rewards are divided to

intrinsic motivation and to extrinsic motivation. Picture 1 highlights the properties of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. In the following sections, these terms are looked at separately.

EXTRINSIC MOTIVATORS

- Praise and recognition from peers, managers or leadership
- Career growth in the form of raises, promotions, or increased responsibility/access
- Employee rewards and incentives

INTRINSIC MOTIVATORS

- Connection to the organization's mission, values and culture
- Learning and development opportunities
- Autonomy and ownership

Picture 1. Extrinsic and intrinsic motivators (Chaney, 2018)

According to Korkala (2018), intrinsic motivation was discovered in 1950 by psychologist Harry Harlow. Harlow experimented this by doing tests with monkeys. He noticed that monkeys kept solving problems that were given to them, even though they did not get any rewards for completion, nor did they get any punishments for failing to solve them. This meant that even monkeys got motivated just for the joy of doing something.

Intrinsic motivation rises when people get motivated from the work itself. A person with a high intrinsic motivation does not necessarily need any external recognition to feel motivated. That is because the work the person is doing, is already making him or her feel satisfied and accomplished. Intrinsic motivation is driven by the desire to improve and realize oneself (Viitala 2014).

Unlike intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation rises from rewards coming from external sources. Viitala (2014) states that on top of salary being one of the most common external sources of motivation, also respect and security play a significant role in increasing a

person's will to work. For example, a routine-like, dull job can still feel rewarding due to co-workers', superiors' and other people's respect.

According to Cherry (2020), extrinsic rewards can be either tangible or psychological. Tangible rewards are money and trophies. Workers do things they do not enjoy but the wage makes them still motivated to do so. On the other hand, athletes go through very heavy workouts but knowing they might win trophies and awards gives them motivation to keep on pushing. Psychological forms of extrinsic motivation are praise and public popularity. A child might clean his/her room to get praised by their parents and actors might perform a role to obtain attention from their audience. Even though tangible and psychological extrinsic rewards are not alike, the unifying thing is that in these cases the motivation comes from outside of the person themselves.

Salespeople can be motivated from extrinsic motivators, intrinsic motivators, or both. This should be taken into account when planning sales contests. On one hand, creating contests with interesting themes and added responsibility can have an effect on a salesperson's intrinsic motivation, as learning and development opportunities and autonomy rises (Chaney, 2018). On the other hand, awarding well succeeded salespeople with praise and recognition, possibly combined with other incentives, affect the extrinsic motivation of a salesperson.

2.1.2 Design components of sales contests

When a company decides to run a sales contest to improve the motivation of the workforce, the task is not simple. As mentioned before, badly planned contests can have a negative effect on motivation. Therefore, managers need to design the contests properly. There are countless variations of different kinds of sales contests, but they all are based on the same design components. Next, different sales contest design components are analysed.

Murphy et al. (2004) state that key components for sales contests are contest goal, competitive format, award type, contest duration, award value and contest theme. When designing sales contests, contest developers need to choose optimal key components to eventually motivate sales force to increase effort, thus boosting sales.



Picture 2. Different Sales Contest Design Components.

In the picture above (Picture 2), different sales contest design components are shown. A few examples have been added to the components to get a clearer picture of the large

number of choices there are to choose from, when the managers are planning sales contests. In the following sections, the sales contest design components are looked at separately.

2.1.2.1 Contest goal

According to Murphy et al. (2004) a contest goal refers to the performance expectation which is required to win. There are three types of contest goals. One of these types is process-based goals, which usually involve keeping track of how the sales personnel succeed in the process of selling. Process goals can be targeted towards extensive product knowledge, being good at selling, or for example demonstrating the product properly. However, keeping track of these factors requires continuous monitoring of workers. In field sales this is especially challenging as field-salespeople usually work alone. However, in other fields of selling, process-based goals can yield excellent results when applied correctly.

Second type of a contest goals are outcome-based. They are a frequently used way to determine winners in sales contests. The winner or winners can be determined by revenue or volume in selling. Also, having contests in improving indices like customer satisfaction scores are considered as outcome-based competitions. Unlike process-based goals, outcome-based competitions do not require much supervisory as the winners are determined by achieving targeted results. (Wotruba & Schoel 1983).

According to Murphy et al. (2004), the third type of contest goal is a mix of both outcome- and process-based competitions. In these competitions both the result and the success of the process is taken into consideration.

2.1.2.2 Competitive format

According to Calvin (2007), there are three types of sales contests. As stated before, rewards are awarded to successful salespeople to increase their motivation. Rewards may

be given to employees as a team, if the team reaches a certain goal set by the company. There are also motivational programs in which salespeople compete against each other individually and at the end of the competition best sellers are rewarded. As the third type of sales contest, Calvin (2007) describes a goal-driven methodology: first person or group of people to reach the set goal wins.

2.1.2.3 Award type

In their study, Murphy et al. (2004) listed common award types available for sales contest design to be cash, merchandise, and travel prizes. Reviewing literature about salespeople's preferences towards different awards, the authors came to a hypothesis that in general, field salespeople will have the highest preference for travel prizes, with merchandise being second and the least motivating award type being cash, even when the prizes are monetarily comparable.

The above-mentioned hypothesis was caused by the assumption that cash prizes only lead to satisfaction of lower order needs, whereas merchandise and travel awards can also provide higher order needs satisfaction. For example, when winning a travel prize, the winner not only gets the face value of the prize but can also receive prestige and recognition from managers. Therefore, the authors suggested that travel awards lead to the highest motivation. However, after the research of Murphy et al. (2004), contradictory findings suggesting a higher preference for cash awards were found.

While the study of Murphy et al. (2004) concluded with evidence of field salespeople preferences towards cash awards, there is other research that highlights the strengths of other award types (Verbeke et al. 2016). According to Verbeke, also non-monetary rewards are an effective way to motivate salespeople.

2.1.2.4 Contest duration

When planning a sales contest, the duration of the contest must be decided. Different sales contests may vary from a few days to even over a year. However, the duration of the contest is crucial and if it is too long or too short, it might not create motivation. (Murphy et al. 2004). According to Roberge (2015), sales contests should be used not only to motivate, but also to encourage positive behavior change. Behavior is not easy to change quickly, thus the duration of the competition should not be a daily time frame. He states that a sales contest should last at least a week. However, he does not suggest having 3-month long contests as he feels they would be too long. Therefore, according to Roberge (2015), monthly contests provide the best results.

While there is not much research done on durations of sales contests (Murphy & Dacin 2015), there is some anecdotal evidence suggesting that one sales cycle long contests have strengths compared to shorter contests. The problem with shorter contests is that the salesperson has a limited time to plan and implement strategies for goal attainment. This can result in one's perception of effort-to-performance relationship to weaken (Wotruba & Schoel 1983). The challenge for managers remains to choose a contest duration that is not too long to get forgotten in sales personnel's minds, while also not being too short so that there is not enough time to change behavior.

2.1.2.5 Award value

Award value must also be decided when planning a sales contest. Naturally, the optimal amount of money to be spent on the prize depends on how long the competition lasts. Longer competitions require larger award values to ensure that it influences the salespeople's motivation. However, companies have to fit the additional costs arising from sales contests to their overall budget. Therefore, allocating a sufficient amount of money can be challenging. According to Ruckes (2019), companies should determine the extent of the prize based on the sales results. For example, companies can match the prize

award to be 5-10% of the incremental sales revenue caused by the sales contest. Thus, the sales contest would not strain the budget.

Award value is an important component of sales contests. Too small award value will not be enough to motivate, while too big a value might cause unethical actions from the salesforce (Murphy et al. 2004). This fact will be further analysed in section 2.2.

2.1.2.6 Contest theme

Watson (2014) suggests firms to use gamification as a tool to make contests more appealing. The term refers to making contests to be like games by adding game elements to the contest. This can be done on various platforms online. For example, employees can monitor their sales numbers and goals that they have reached on such a software. According to Watson, gamifying not only increases revenue numbers but also helps team building and self-directed development.

2.1.3 Examples of sales contests

In this section, different types of sales contest are introduced. There are no unambiguous answers to what type of sales contests are the best. It is always dependent on the salesperson, the problem, and the goal. In Edealer's guide (2020), the importance of measurability is stressed. Translated: "What cannot be measured, cannot be led". A motivated salesperson leads to better sales. Edealer (2020) presents examples of sales contests that can increase the motivation of the sales personnel, and therefore the sales.

Another source for sales competition ideas is Nextiva Blog by Jeremy Boudinet (2019). In his article he presents 30 different sales contests that a manager can implement in the team's daily activities. The examples are from a team leader and sales personnel point-of-view. The incentives for winning these competitions could be a bonus in the salary, a Friday bottle, an afternoon off, or for example a gift certificate, depending on the competition.

The first and the simplest type of sales contest is introduced by Boudinet (2019). He calls it the SQL Contest (Sales Qualified Leads). The basic idea is that during a chosen month or quarter, the salesperson who has sold the most or has the biggest monetary value in his/her sales, wins a big price. An option for this, according to Boudinet, could also be to raise the sales commission size tremendously for one day and see what happens. This should be done as a surprise without change to prepare for it. The competitions can be arranged so that the salespersons compete against each other, in teams, against a competitor or against their own past results. It is possible to change according to the size and style of company in question.

One example from Edealer (2020), is when the lack of sales comes from the lack of knowledge about the product. It is hard to sell something from which one knows nothing about. The product manager organizes a contest for the sales personnel. There are first questions about the products, and the contestants gather points from answering correct. To get points, the sales personnel must study the products carefully. These questions can be changed from time to time and in addition to everyone just playing for themselves, the competition can be spread to be also a competition between teams, which will encourage everyone to participate. This results into better communication between the customer and the salesperson and therefore the sales will indirectly grow.

In the second example, Edealer (2020) presents an issue with the personnel not being motivated to call through the old customer (CRM) database in order to find new sales from there. If the managers just order that all the old customers must be contacted, the motivation will remain low, while no statistics are being gathered. In that case, the increase or decrease in sales cannot be measured. Instead of not doing anything, Edealer suggests the following competition to increase motivation: Every salesperson gets 3 to 4 customer accounts every week that he or she must contact. These contacts are documented, and everyone can see their own result and compare it to their co-workers and

other teams. Now the contacts and sales are documented, and the competition and the possible rewards help to keep the motivation high.

A more unique example of a sales contest is “the Poker Sales Contest”. Whenever a salesperson reaches a certain goal, he or she gets a poker card. These cards are being handed out until all 52 cards from the deck have been passed along. After this has happened, the person with the best 5-card hand wins a price.

2.1.4 The advantages and disadvantages of sales contests

Competition among workers is often a good way to positively affect performance as motivation increases. However, this is not always the case. According to Miller (2004), whether competition is a good or a bad thing depends on the personalities of workers. Also, competition is preferred to those working in tasks that suite well to a competitive environment. Therefore, it is a good idea to consider both the pros and cons of creating extra competition, such as running sales contests.

2.1.4.1 Advantages of sales contests

According to Miller (2004), a lot of people are naturally competitive. Therefore, running a sales contest in a way that it appeals to this instinct is an effective way to get people to push themselves. Also, extra competition is a natural way of reducing indifference and laziness. Simply, as there is something to be won that employees would like to have, there is a big probability that workers do not stick to being lazy.

Running a sales contest in a right way can cause a positive environment. Miller (2004) sees competition as a good tool to make work more fun and can be looked forward to. Miller also states that competition often leads to employees getting to a position of more responsibility which also can be motivating. All said, these advantages are never guaranteed unless planned well.

2.1.4.2 Disadvantages of sales contest

According to Miller (2004), some people prefer not to work in a competitive environment. These people do not want to have internal competition and they like being in a stable environment, thus having constantly to adapt to different kinds of competitions could be more frustrating than motivating. Miller also states that constant comparison between workers is eventually stressful and therefore having too frequent competitions is not a good idea.

According to Miller (2004), competitive working environment can cause employees to see each other as competitors causing negative effects on collaboration and teamwork. In some cases, it could go as far as salespeople sabotaging others work in order to help their own changes in the competition, which therefore could lead to fear and lack of trust between workers. This kind of working environment is not motivating.

Van Der Linden (2015) introduces the psychology of competition. In his article he discusses about the fact that a competition can lead a person to do the right thing for the wrong reason. As an example, Van Der Linden talks about the “Do-it-in-the-Dark” campaign held between colleges in the United States. The goal of the competition is to conserve as much energy as possible during the competition period. While the competition has a significant effect in energy usage lowering as soon as the competition ends the electricity usage bumps right back up. The reason for this is that as soon as the extrinsic reward for winning the competition is no longer available, there is no longer motivation to conserve energy.

On top of this, those that had an intrinsic reason to conserve energy (they felt that conserving nature is the right thing to do) might no longer feel the same, as the extrinsic reward in the competition has undermined their intrinsic motivation for good. Van Der Linden introduces this as negative “goal-replacement”. Other examples of negative goal replacement are losing weight and quitting smoking. Van Der Linden (2015) proposes that these are easier goals to achieve when you have intrinsic motivation to do so, rather

than an extrinsic reward being the only reason for trying to succeed. The meaning of this is that while some sales contests achieve great results during the competition period, there is a risk that after the competition ends, people have even less motivation to work than they had before the competition.

As can be seen, arranging sales contests blindly can have many negative effects. In addition to the previous examples, sales contests can affect salespeople's ethics and customer orientation in many ways. These themes are analysed next.

2.2 Ethics in sales and customer orientation

In this section, ethics of sales and customer orientation are analysed. Also, examples of unethical behavior during sales will be presented. Lastly, the link between them and sales contests is studied. This section will conclude the theoretical part of this study.

2.2.1 Ethics in sales

While sales companies are trying to maximize their profits by having their salespeople sell as much as possible, the sales personnel has to obey ethics. *Ethics* can be defined to be "moral principles that control or influence a person's behaviour" (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, 2021). While the case-by-case definition varies, according to Pasztor (2015), people tend to speak about ethics as if there is an all-inclusive definition about it. However, ethics are not black and white, but they rather vary depending on the culture in the society and how people have been influenced. While ethics are often thought to be a set of rules that define what is allowed and what is not, ethics are also something that people have to constantly work on as the world evolves.

Being ethical is crucial to ensure the happiness of as many as possible. However, this does not always happen in sales. As an example, Pasztor (2015) presents a situation in which an advisor closes a big sale. This sales nets money for the company, the advisor and his/her family, while the client might have made a sub-optimal decision due to the

pressure from the advisor. While this event produces happiness for some, it does not necessarily produce happiness for everybody. The example of Pasztor (2015) provides insight to the dilemma which this paper is trying to solve. Pursuing maximal sales results can often result in unethical behaviour. Also, while unethical sales might boost sales in the short-term, their effect on long-term sales can end up being negative, as customers might switch to other companies as they feel that they are not being treated well.

According to McConnachie (2017), there are many examples of what unethical behavior during sales precisely means. For example, if in order to close a sales, a salesperson makes promises that cannot realistically be met, this can be considered as unethical behavior. Promises could be given regarding the price, delivery date, product volume or service capability. Furthermore, not giving enough necessary information about a product or service is considered unethical. This can also lead customers to make decisions without understanding important factors of the product. On the other hand, misrepresenting products or services is also unethical. Lastly, simply being too pushy and constantly provoking a customer to buy is also unethical. There are several more ways to unethically sell products/services, and therefore some companies are creating code of ethics in order to have their salesforce act correctly ethically.

In business world, people working in different positions must follow their company's code of ethics in order for the company to be true to its words. This is also true for salespeople. However, most sales departments do not have a specialized code of ethics nor training for ethics. (Ferrell, Johnston, Marshall & Ferrell, 2019). As it is not always clear what is considered ethical and what is not, some scenarios can be defined as lying in the "gray area" of ethics. Ethicality in the gray area is opinion dependent. Because of this, salespeople can find themselves in situations where it is up to their judgement whether pushing sales is considered acceptable or not. Different salespeople can have different views of a similar situation.

As mentioned before, acting “as ethical as possible” can negatively affect short-term sales numbers. On the other hand, treating customer’s with respect and being ethical can lead to more sales in the future. The importance of ethics has led to various studies regarding both individual and organizational perspective sales ethics investigations. (Ferrell et al. 2019).

2.2.2 Customer orientation

According to Poujol & Tanner (2010), the definition of customer orientation is “the application of relational marketing by the sales force in companies where the maintenance and development of lasting relationships are sought”. In other words, customer orientation can be thought as a business philosophy that sets the customer’s needs over the needs of the business.

According to Homburg, Müller & Klarmann (2011), customer orientation positively affects different outcomes, such as employee performance, customer satisfaction and customer trust. While the customer orientation of a company is an important part of their image, there is evidence that sales contests often negatively affect salespeople’s customer orientation (Gopalakrishna et al. 2015). Like ethics and sales contests, also customer orientation and sales contests are “oppositely proportional”. The meaning of this for companies is that if they utilize a lot of sales contests with attractive prizes, their salesforce might not obey the principles of customer orientation that the company has set. In a situation like this, the salespeople are faced with difficult decisions. On one hand, they want to sell as much as possible to ensure that they succeed in the contest. On the other hand, they might have to make unethical choices and refrain from customer orientation to reach this goal.



Picture 3. A salesperson is being pressured. (adapted from Hassan, 2021).

According to Li & Murphy (2012), in a sales contest, "a recurrent unethical behavior is when salespersons try to sell as much as they can without answering customers' needs and without trying to satisfy those needs". The situation, in which a salesperson has to make decisions regarding ethics and personal sales goals, brings up the research question of this thesis. Picture 3 demonstrates the difficulty of that situation, as the salesperson gets pressured from many directions.

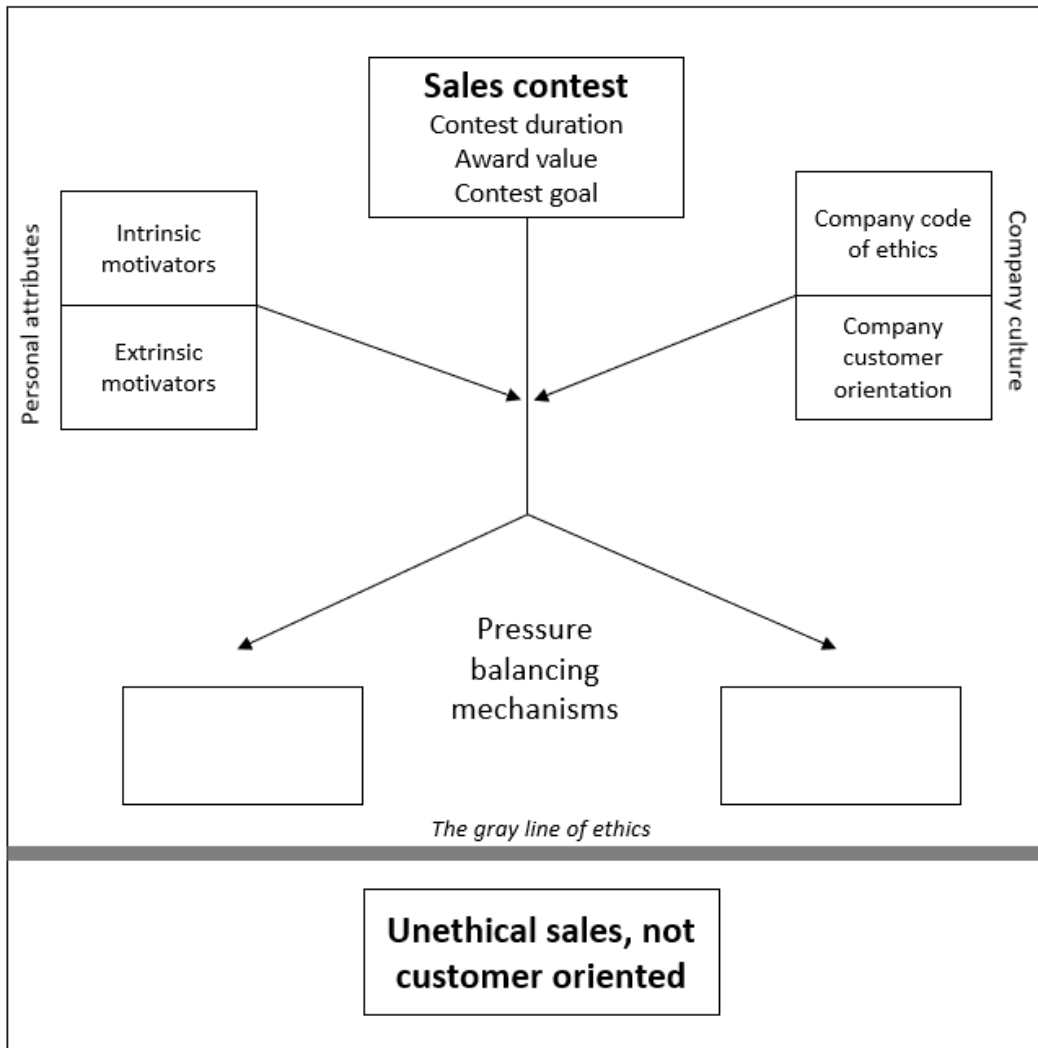


Figure 2. Theoretical framework.

Figure 2 represents the theoretical framework of this study. Various types of sales contests are regularly created to motivate the salesforce to sell more. In addition to this, intrinsic and extrinsic motivators as well as other variables in the company culture affect the decision making of the salesforce. If the pressure grows too much the salespeople might cross the so called “gray line of ethics” and behave unethically and disregard customer orientation when trying to sell as much as possible. The pressure balancing mechanisms are not known, and this study aims fill this gap in knowledge by finding out how salespeople balance the pressure. In the following section, the methods for answering the research question are showed and then in section 4, the findings are represented.

3 Methods

This section is devoted to analyzing and explaining the empirical research part of this study. The research approach and strategy will be presented and discussed. Furthermore, this section will explain how the data was collected for the study, what was the data sample and how the data was analysed. Lastly, the quality of the data will be assessed.

3.1 Research approach

A research approach can be defined to be a plan or a procedure that is made of the steps of broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection, interpretation, and analysis. The research approach is based on the nature of the research problem. A research approach can be divided into two categories. These categories are the approach of data collection and the approach of data analysis. (Chetty, 2016).

In this study, the research approach was chosen as qualitative data collection by interviews and as the data analysing method inductive data analysing was chosen. Due to the complexity of the research question, seeking answers by collecting data through quantitative research methods was not seen as best. The choice of the research approach is highlighted in red, in figure 3. This study was conducted with interviews, which were then partially transcribed in order to analyse the content of the data. Interviewing was selected as the research method, as verbally discussing with the salespeople was seen as the most efficient way to receive genuine answers to the research question. As the research subject is partially sensitive, interviewees were seen more likely to share their personal experiences in a one-to-one setting.

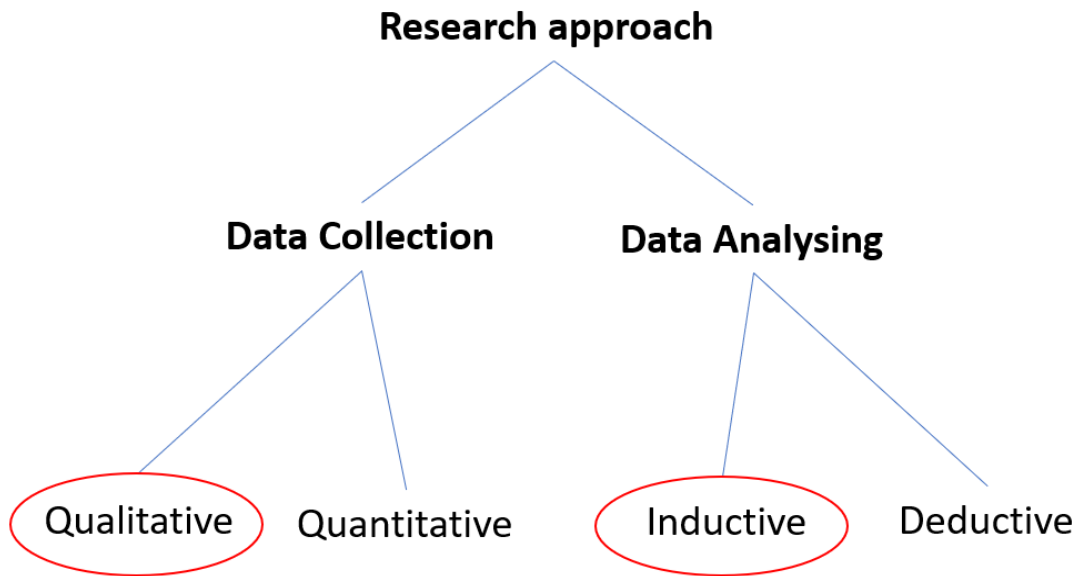


Figure 3. Components of Research Approach. (Chetty, 2016).

3.2 The sample

This study was conducted by interviewing five different salespeople working in different fields of sales. Three of the interviewees have experience in field sales. More specifically, they have worked in a home security service company, selling services door-to-door. The two other interviewees have experience in store sales and stand sales in different companies in the telemarketing industry. Age of the interviewees ranged between 25 to 35 years. All interviewees were men.

As this study deals with sensitive subjects, such as unethical selling, and the interviewees talked about their experienced in the “gray area” of selling, the identity of the interviewees will be kept anonymous. Furthermore, due to the sensitivity, no companies will be named. However, the field of these companies will be named. Keeping the interviews anonymous ensured that the interviewees felt comfortable sharing all their experiences regarding the subject, as they got assurance that their names would not be mentioned.

3.3 Data collection

The data for this study was collected by interviewing salespeople working in different fields of sales. The interviews were held in Finnish, as this made exchanging information more fluid. The nationality of the interviewees is Finnish. Due to the ongoing world-wide pandemic, in order to ensure proper social distancing, all interviews were conducted via remote connection, online. Different online services were used to conduct the interviewees, namely 'Skype', 'Discord' and 'Microsoft Teams'. In four out of five of the interviews, video cameras were used to replicate face to face experience.

All of the interviews were recorded with permission from the interviewees, utilizing recording program 'OBS Studio' or 'Microsoft Teams'. The recordings of the interviews will not be published. The interviews were conducted from September 3rd to September 8th, 2021. The average length of the interviews was 25 minutes. The 18 interview questions are listed in English in Appendix 1.

3.4 Data analysis

In order to analyse the data from the interviews, the contents of the interviews were partially transcribed. This helped the researcher to summarize main points of the interviewee's and recognize similarities as well as deviations between the views of the interviewees. As themes and patterns were found from the interviews, they were further analysed. Recognizing the themes of the answers that were given by the interviewees, enabled the researcher to form a comprehensive understanding of the subject and also deliver it to the reader. Some of the answers were similar by all the interviewees, which resulted in inductive reasoning yielding findings.

During the analysis, many differences between field salespeople and store salespeople were found. As there also were differences between their balancing mechanisms, the data will also be analysed comparatively.

3.5 The assessment of the quality of the data

The assessment of the quality of the data of this thesis will be analysed by looking at two variants: validity and reliability of the study. After analysing these issues, the thesis will continue with the findings of the study.

The definition of validity is “The extent to which data collection method or methods accurately measure what they were intended to measure” or “The extent to which research findings are really about what they profess to be about” (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2009, p.614). In this study, the validity depends on how well the interviewees’ experiences and views are interpreted to findings. All of the interviewees were asked the same questions with the same interview structure. Also, the participants were given a rough idea about what the questions are about a couple days before the interview to give time to think about the subject. At the end of the interviews the interviewees were given a chance to talk about any additional information they had about the subject if they felt that something important was missing. This way, all of the interviewees had similar experiences and had same opportunities to share their experiences. This improved the chances of creating as valid a study as possible.

Reliability of a qualitative study can be defined in many ways: “The extent to which data collection technique or techniques will yield consistent findings, similar observations would be made, or conclusions reached by other researchers or there is a transparency in how sense was made from the raw data” (Saunders et al. 2007: p.609). As researching by oneself can create observer errors, getting reliable and consistent findings are not guaranteed. However, in this thesis, the chances of such errors were diminished by recording the interviews and by listening to them multiple times. Direct quotations in the findings section are aimed to improve the transparency of the findings and the interview questions being listed makes it possible to simulate similar research conditions in future studies. During the interviews, the interviewees did most of the talking. This ensured that the researcher did not lead the participants to think in certain directions. While the

researcher was asking the questions, a neutral tone and approach was used to further avoid possible biases.

4 Findings

This section is focused on describing the key findings of the interview data.

4.1 Findings

The goal of the interviews and this study was to find an answer to the research question:

“How do salespeople balance the pressure from sales contests with being ethical and remaining true to company’s customer orientation?”

The five interviews conducted gave a lot of insight to this question. Different salespeople had different ways of balancing the pressure. At the end of this section, the answers to the final question (research question) of the interview are cited directly in order to provide transparency regarding this study. However, other questions in the interview also yielded interesting answers that contribute closely with the theme of the study.

All interviewees excluding interviewee 2 felt that sales contests have some positive effect on motivation. Interviewee 2 still felt that competition amongst co-workers caused motivation, albeit sales contests in particular not having a big part in motivation. For him, it was more important to succeed compared to other salespeople, than actually win contests. All in all, every interviewee had a competitive mindset in their work.

One of the biggest findings of this study was that there were notable differences between the pressure balancing mechanisms of field salespeople compared to salespeople working in stores. There is a fundamental difference in these selling methods. Field salespeople go out and find their customers by knocking on people’s doors, whereas store salespeople work inside, waiting for the customers to approach them. While all interviewees shared views regarding some questions, other questions provided mixed opinions between the two sales types. Therefore, while also analyzing the results in general, the differences between field sales and walk in sales will be analysed.

First notable difference between field salespeople and store salespeople appeared when they were asked more specifically about how sales contests affect their motivation. Store salespeople viewed sales contests as being a great motivator and did not see them causing them high pressures to sell more. Field salespeople, however, had mixed opinions. Interviewee 1 viewed contests as being positive, but also causing pressure. Interviewee 2 did not think that sales contest necessarily add motivation at all. Interviewee 3 considered sales contests as a positive thing, but also felt that this added motivation disappears quickly if chances of winning decrease.

Interestingly, when asked the seventh question (If you are doing well in a sales contest, do you “throttle back”, namely sell less actively?), the answers were also dependent on the sales type of the interviewee. All field sales representatives revealed that success in the early stages of a contest led to them selling less actively.

“When I was one of the best sellers on a given day and others had long ways to catch up, I lost the feeling of needing to succeed in sales.”

-Interviewee 2

A complete opposite was true for store salesmen. Their attitude was that it is important to “strike while the iron is hot”. As mentioned, one of the main differences between field sales and store sales is that in field sales the salespeople go to the customers’ homes, while in store sales salespeople are limited to the amount of people that come into the store. However, working in a store means that brakes are not possible when new customers come in. Therefore, it is also easier to keep making sales. In field sales success might bring justification for a break, as new customers are only met when approached. This implicates that while planning sales contests, managers need to take this into consideration.

Another interesting find happened when asking the interviewees about their views of whether their company is customer orientated or not. While the store salespeople easily agreed that their company emphasizes customer orientation a lot, security service field salespeople had divergent answers. It is noteworthy that they have experience working in the same company and also in the same position. Despite this, one of the answerers told that there is no customer orientation at all in the company, while the other told that the company has a lot of emphasis on customer orientation. Third interviewee gave a variable answer but also leaned towards a no. When asked extra questions, it became prominent that the views were based on personal experiences and beliefs of the company.

The interviews provided evidence that it is easier to be customer orientated when the customers come to the store. The customer often arrives to the store for a specific reason, wanting to buy a product or a service and to seek for help. If the salesperson is successful in fulfilling these needs, the customer feels that their wishes have been given priority. Thus, the customer might be inclined to listen to what other products the company has to offer. On top of this, customer orientation can be emphasized by filling the store with ads that highlight the importance of the customer for the company.

Unfortunately, delivering a customer orientated approach in fields sales can be more challenging. According to the interviewees, some people do not like when their homes are approached without separate notification. Also, the portfolio of products and services can often be narrower in field sales. Hence, prioritizing the customer's need can be challenging. Also, there is no added benefit of an atmosphere of customer importance that a store might provide. For these reasons, balancing the pressure of sales with customer orientation can be more challenging for field salespeople compared to walk in sales.

While store salespeople agreed that their company had certain guidelines for ethicality, the field salespeople had divergent opinions whether their company has guidelines for

ethical selling at all. Not knowing what the company policy is means that some decisions have to be made solely by personal views of ethics. If there are different views and information regarding the customer orientation and ethical guidelines of a company, it can make it harder for salespeople to know how to proceed in a sales situation. Furthermore, this can make balancing the pressure completely different for separate individuals.

Once again, store sales appears to be a more beneficial environment to implement the company's views when compared to field sales. Recognizing several differences between the sales types, Table 1 highlights some of the key differences between field work sales and walk in sales regarding pressure balancing mechanisms.

Table 1. Differences between Field sales and Walk in sales

	Field work sales	Walk in sales
Sales contests' effect on motivation	Neutral or positive, can cause pressure	Positive, does not usually cause pressure
Throttling back when scoring high	Yes	No
View on company being customer orientated	Varying views	Interviewees considered the company as customer orientated
View on company having guidelines for ethics	Varying views	Interviewees considered that the company has certain guidelines for ethics
Pressure balancing mechanisms	Divergent mechanisms, can be challenging	Similar mechanisms, relatively easy

While there was divergent information about the company policies regarding ethics, all interviewees still felt that ethics are important in their work. Despite this, three of five interviewees told that they have sold in the gray area of ethics. For two of them, sales contest has played a role in inducing such actions. From this, it can be seen that sales contests play a significant role in the decision-making of some salespeople and balancing the pressure between ethics, customer orientation and sales contests truly is a problem that some of salespeople have to face.

Next, summarized answers to the final question, namely the research question, will be analysed.

How do you balance the pressures of ethical sales, adherence to a company's customer orientation, and sales contests encouraging to sell more?

The question was not easy to answer to, as many interviewees took quite some time to figure out their answers. This fact highlights how challenging the whole theme of ethics and customer orientation is, when it is compared to the pressure that arises from sales contests.

"For me, balancing happens by thinking in advance: Am I going to think back on this sale proudly or am I going to regret doing it? Conscience is good to keep in mind when selling."

-Interviewee 1

Interviewee 1 tries to pre-emptively assess whether he is going to regret a given sales or not. However, his views of ethicality and customer orientation might differ from the views of the company or the views of the customer. This way of balancing has similarities with interviewee 2, who has developed personal boundaries that he follows.

"There are certain boundaries that I always follow. I do not give false information about the product or the service that I am selling. I do not sell to people that are too old to understand or otherwise not capable of understanding. Sometimes the pressure can lead to selling in the gray area, but I always aim to not do it consciously."

-Interviewee 2

While interviewee 2 is ethical in that he does not provide false information about the service and he does not sell the service to incapacitated people, he also admits that

sometimes the pressure of getting more sales might cause him to make other unethical decisions unconsciously.

While interviewees 1 and 2 have similarities in balancing the pressure in that they base their balancing strategy on their personal beliefs, interviewee 3 has a different approach.

I balance the pressure of selling and ethics by doing more. Contacting more people, halving lunch time, coffee breaks to minimum, doing more, and doing faster. The basics of the work remain the same, and I do not have to think about the ethical questions when I use time to find the right people for the service.”

-Interviewee 3

Like interviewees 1 and 2, Interviewee 3 is a field salesman. Interviewee 3 utilizes the opportunities that field sales give, that are not possible in some other settings: contacting more and more people. He minimizes his time on breaks and focuses on contacting new customers, and as long as he finds people that are truly willing to buy the service, he can succeed in sales contests without crossing ethical boundaries. Customer orientation is also likely to happen, as the service is only sold to people that truly are interested. The thought pattern of interviewee 3 differs from interviewees 1 and 2.

Interviewees 4 and 5 have experience in selling telemarketing services in stores. While they cannot necessarily affect the amount of people they contact on a daily basis, balancing ethicality has to happen in different ways.

“For me, balancing the pressure of sales contests is easy because I do not prioritize winning contests over being ethical and customer orientated. When the basics of my selling functions well, I believe it is enough to perform well in contests.”

-Interviewee 4

In the earlier part of the interview, interviewee 4 noted that sales contests had a bigger effect on him in the early stages of his career. Nowadays their role has changed to mere added bonuses, which makes it easier for him to focus on being ethical and customer orientated. Furthermore, interviewee 4 believes that ethical sales and customer orientated sales attitude can positively affect sales results, when utilized properly by a talented salesperson.

“If I know for certain that the customer does not want the service, I must respect that. However, if the customer says no while not being sure about it, then I might pressure them a bit. This skill is important for salespeople to master, if the company wants to create long-term customer relationships and a good brand.”

-Interviewee 5

Interviewee 5 puts a great emphasis on respecting the customer. He will not push sales if he is certain that the customer does not want the product/service. However, he recognizes that sometimes people use the word “no” lightly. In these situations, he might ask the customer to explain why they do not want the product. Sometimes when the customers do not find an answer to this question, they might realize that they actually want it. This way, sales is made ethically, and customer orientation is also taken into consideration.

As can be seen from the quotes, different interviewees had different ways of balancing the pressure from sales contests with being ethical and true to company’s customer orientation. It is noteworthy that many of the respondents had not thought about this problem during their careers, but they have still managed to develop personal habits that help to avoid crossing too many borders. Table 2 summarizes some of the key questions and answers of the interviews and emphasizes the complicity of the answers to the research.

Table 2. Summary of the interview answers.

Interviewee	1	2	3	4	5
Experience	6 months	3 months	3,5 years	4,5 years	4 years
Sales type	Field sales	Field sales	Field sales	Store sales & stand sales	Store sales
Industry	Security services	Security services	Security services	Telemarketing	Telemarketing
View on amount of contests	Some	Few	Many	Many	Many
Contests' effect on motivation	Positive, but also causes pressure.	Neutral	Positive at the beginning of a contest. If scoring low, neutral.	Positive, especially at the beginning of the career.	Positive
Throttling back when scoring high	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
View on company being customer orientated	Yes, usually	No	Some, but no	Yes	Yes
Does the company have guidelines for ethical sales	Yes	No	No. Sales more important than customer orientation	Yes	Yes
Does the company monitor ethicality in sales	Yes	No	No anticipatory monitoring	Yes	Yes
Has sold at the gray line of ethics	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Contests have affected the selling at the gray line	No	Yes	No, but would, if the prize was big enough	Yes	No
Balancing	Thinking and planning in advance.	Personal boundaries.	Contacting more customers and doing more.	With not prioritizing winning the contest.	Understanding that a no is a no.

4.2 Summary of findings and revised framework

The objective of this thesis was to study how different salespeople balance the pressure from sales contests with ethicality and remain true to company's customer orientation.

The findings were that respondents had different ways of balancing the pressure, while

many of them had developed these means without specifically thinking about the problem before. Differences in balancing ways were dependent on the sales type of the salesperson and the personal views of ethics and customer orientation. As there were clear differences between the balancing mechanisms of field salespeople compared to store salespeople, they have been listed separately.

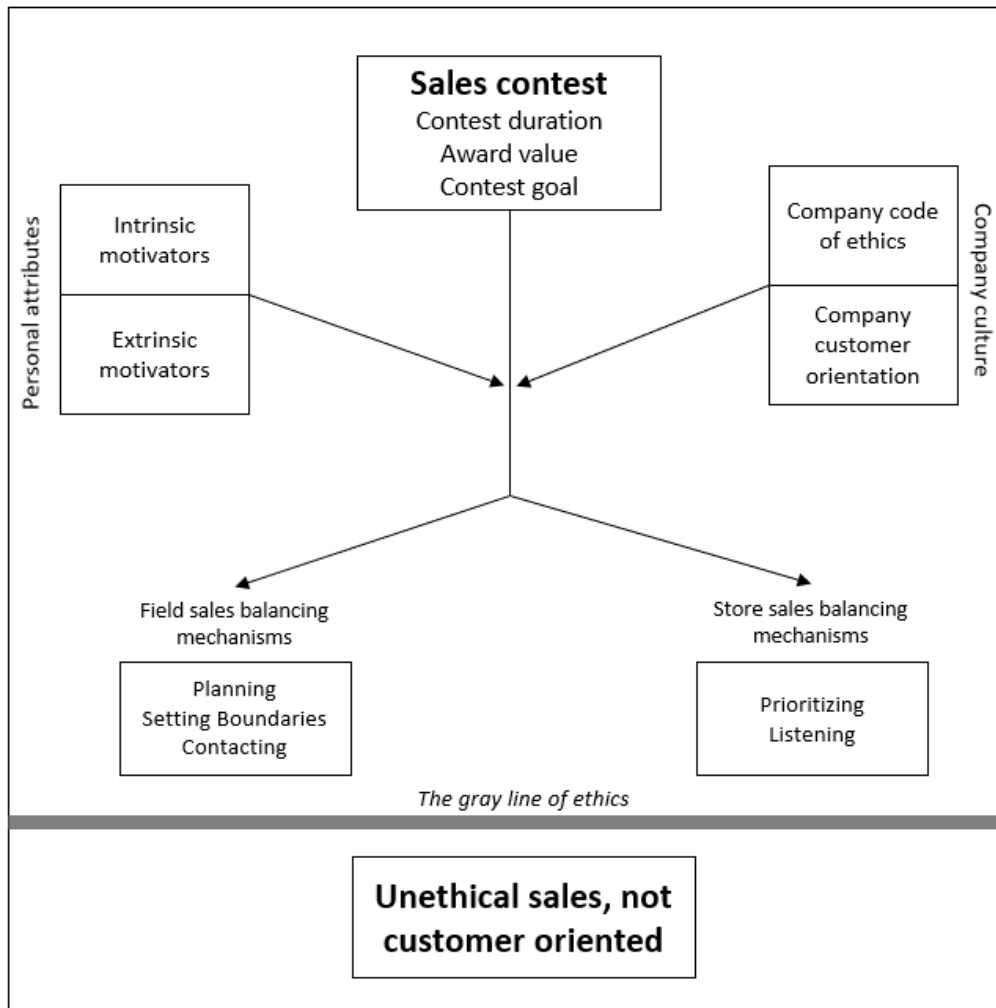


Figure 4. Revised theoretical framework.

Figure 4 represent the revised theoretical framework of this study. The findings show that balancing the pressure of sales contests, ethics and customer orientation can be done at least in five different ways. Next, they are analysed and sorted by the sales type: field sales and store sales.

Field sales:*1. Planning*

Balancing can happen by planning ahead. This can be done by learning which decisions make one proud and which decisions create remorse and planning how to stay on the right track.

2. Setting boundaries

Setting personal boundaries, such as never giving false information or never selling to mentally limited people, is one way of balancing the pressure and helps to avoid crossing the gray line of ethics.

3. Contacting

Contacting as many customers as possible in order to find the ones that are truly willing to buy the product/service, instead of forcing sales on those that are not, is an effective way to balance pressure of getting more sales while remaining ethical. It is noteworthy that this method is better suited for field salespeople, as salespeople working in walk in sales often cannot influence the number of people visiting the store.

Store sales:*4. Prioritizing*

Not prioritizing sales contests and their prizes over being ethical and customer orientated is one way of balancing the pressure. Being ethical and customer orientated can also be used as a mean to achieve more sales.

5. Listening

Learning to listen and to understand the customer is another way of balancing the pressure. Understanding that pushing sales in not acceptable if the customer shows strong signs of not wanting to buy the product/service, helps the salesperson in balancing.

In the next section, there will be discussion about theoretical contribution, managerial implications, and limitations of this study. Lastly, suggestions of further research opportunities are given.

5 Discussion

The aim of this study was to find out how different salespeople deal with the pressure of regular sales contest pushing them to sell more, while remaining ethical and true to company's customer orientation. In this section, the thesis is concluded by discussing the theoretical and managerial implications, as well as stating possibilities for future research and recognizing the limitations of this study.

5.1 Theoretical contribution

In this section, the findings of this study will be compared to the existing knowledge in literature. In their study, Poujol et al. (2016) concluded that if the management wants to limit the problematic behaviours of salespeople, the sales contest rules must be aligned with the company's strategic objectives. The results of this study are aligned with the results of Poujol et al. (2016). According to many of the interviewees, sales contests that are poorly designed, especially those with too big of a prize, tend to increase the probability of unethical behaviour. Additionally, this study adds to this knowledge by showing that aligning company's strategic objectives with sales contests is not enough, if the salesforce is not fully aware of what these strategic objectives are.

Ameer & Halinen (2019) suggest that sales ethics scholars should concentrate on studying unethical behaviour in a broader context of sales. They propose that the activities of salespeople should be linked to other actors in the sales environment. This study has generated more information in the broad context by focusing on analysing salespeople pressure balancing mechanisms while also taking the sales environment into consideration. In particular, the focus has been on comparing the sales settings of field sales, where salespeople actively contact customers, with store sales, where the customers come to the salespeople. Ameer & Halinen (2019) suggest that management should cautiously monitor unethical practices of the salesforce. This study has shown that salespeople working in field sales can be more likely to behave unethically. The reason for this

might be connected to the challenges in monitoring field sales, as salespeople usually work alone and monitoring them is harder than in a store setting.

The interviewees of this study have many years of experience in different sales companies. However, the sales contests held in their companies are mainly quantitative based. This means that the winners of the contests are decided by sales numbers only. In their study, Poujol & Tanner (2010) suggested that future research should be done on how the nature of the measurement (quantitative or qualitative) affects salespeople's behaviour during sales contests. This study adds knowledge to this gap, showing that quantitative measurement of sales contest is more likely to result in unethical behaviour and disregarding customer orientation. For example, interviewee 2 stated that not having sold in a while will eventually force unconscious unethicality, as there is a strong feeling that results should be made quickly. This feeling would not show up, if the nature of the contest was qualitative, and the rewards would be given based on the quality of the sales.

This study contributes to the existing literature by adding knowledge to the relationship between sales contests, ethics in sales, and customer orientation. Moreover, this study focuses on how individual salespeople deal with different kinds of pressures in tough decision-making situations that companies put them in. This study adds evidence to the matter that salespeople perceive ethicality in different ways, and they also value sales contests differently.

5.2 Managerial implications

The findings of this study bring up several managerial implications. While the scope of this study was relatively narrow, it highlighted that there are big differences in pressure balancing mechanisms between salespeople. Furthermore, many of the balancing mechanisms are related to the structure of the contests and culture of the company. Managers can intensify the efficiency of their salesforce without compromising customer orientation and ethics by utilizing the three suggestions, that are presented next.

This study revealed that if company policies regarding ethics and customer orientation are not clear, salespeople will have a hard time realizing when they are crossing boundaries and when they are not. If company policies are non-existent or not known, personal views of the salespeople will be the deciding factor regarding where the boundaries lie. Hence, suggestion number 1: sales companies aiming to have a consistent alignment regarding ethics and customer orientation should emphasize educating their salesforce about their policies. Companies should create a code of ethics and monitor that their salesforce acts as desired. Hence, balancing the sales pressure becomes easier for the salesforce, as they are always aware what is allowed and what is not.

The interviewees of this study shared a common view: the bigger the award value is in a sales contest, the more likely they are to cross ethical boundaries and disregard customer orientation. Suggestion 2: creating sales contests with oversized award values ought to be avoided. Instead, managers should create sales contests with reasonable award values, which are proportional to the additional sales generated by the contests. For example, a one-month-long contest winner could be awarded with an award value of three days salary.

Recognizing that creating a sales contest with an optimal award value can be challenging, managers should also consider suggestion number 3: creating contests with themes that focus on rewarding ethical behaviour and being customer orientated. When trying to enhance the customer orientation and ethics of the sales, awards can be granted based on positive customer feedback. Managers can instruct the salesforce to separately ask for feedback after every successful sales. When the contest ends, the salesperson with the biggest number of sales that also have positive feedback from the customer, is declared the winner. This type of contest will encourage ethical and customer orientated behaviour, and the salespeople will have less problems balancing the pressure between sales contests and customer orientation together with ethics.

5.3 Limitations and further research

As most researches do, also this study had its limitations. As discussed in the theory section, people perceive ethicality in different ways. Some participants might have more exacting definition for what acting ethical is and therefore balancing ethics is different to others. Defining key terms to the interviewees could have improved the uniformity. Second, the data of this study consist of five interviews. Several other salespeople were contacted, but unfortunately, they did not reply. A bigger number of interviewees could have brought even more insight to the research question. Furthermore, the interviewees were all Finnish, men, and their age ranged between 25 to 35 years. Having had interviewees of both sexes and from a broader range of age and nationalities could have yielded more generalizable findings.

This study leaves room for further research. First, research could be redone in a bigger setting. Having more interviewees from different nationalities, age groups and genders could give more generalizable results. Second, collecting a bigger sample of how different salespeople manage to balance the pressure, could yield general guidelines for companies to give their salesforce.

In different types of sales, pressure balancing mechanisms may vary. This study was focused on salespeople working in security service and telemarketing companies. In these companies, the sales process and purchasing decisions happen relatively quickly, ranging from a few minutes to a couple of weeks. However, in companies where the sales process takes much longer, salespeople might have different pressure and balancing mechanisms. Sales processes can take years in certain business-to-business sectors, such as sales of power plants and sales of information and communication technology projects. Balancing mechanisms in such long-lasting sales processes should be further studied.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Interview questions

1. What kind of sales work have you done?
2. How long have you worked as a salesperson?
3. What kind of sales contests did your company organize, and what were the prizes?
4. How do sales contests affect your work? Do they add motivation, or do they rather create stress?
5. What is the role of the colleagues in your work? What is their role in sales contests? Do you compete with them or against yourself?
6. How much more effort do you put to selling during sales contests compared to normal?
7. If you are doing well in a sales contest, do you “throttle back”, namely sell less actively?
8. How much does your company emphasize customer orientation?
9. What do you think is customer-oriented sales?
10. After a successful sale, have you wondered if the product / service was definitely the right one for that customer? Do you often think about this already during the sale?
11. Do you believe in the products / services you sell? How much does your faith affect sales?
12. Does your company have guidelines for ethical sales?
13. Does your company monitor the ethicality of the sales?
14. What is ethical sales work, according to you?
15. How important is ethics in selling to you?
16. Have you sold at the gray line of ethics? Have sales contests contributed to this happening?
17. Have you not sold just because you thought the buyer did not fully understand if they needed the product?
18. How do you balance the pressures of ethical sales, adherence to a company’s customer orientation, and sales contests encouraging to sell more?