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EXECUTIVE IN TECHNICAL SALES – WHAT CHALLENGES DOES TECHNICAL SALES POSE AND HOW DO I LEAD MY EMPLOYEES TO SUCCESS?

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- Abstract -

This work serves as a guide for technical sales executives. For this purpose, the technical sales and the function of the executive are described. Initially, the technical sales itself is described and based on this, it is explained which persons are suitable for the technical sales department. With this knowledge, it is about what the executive must master and consider to be successful with the employees. In the first step, this work is divided into leadership styles and sales methods and their evaluation for use in technical sales. It also describes the skills required for a leader in the strategic and analytical sector. With these basics for the executive, a structured and targeted development of the employees by the executive is described and finally a view on the possible change in technical sales is given.

Keywords: Technical Sales, Strategic Direction, Leadership Styles, Sales Methods, Strategy and Analysis Skills, Employee Analysis, Employee Development

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Foreword

The following dissertation was written due to my work in technical sales as an executive and the associated challenges of employee management and development.

Technical sales differ in many aspects und approaches from non-technical sales. As a result, technical sales pose special challenges for the sales staff.

The aim of the dissertation is to explain the special features of technical sales and to show how the sales staff in this area can be prepared and further developed for the task in a targeted and structured manner. Furthermore, the thesis shall present my experiences and the associated structure, so that other executives with similar challenges can participate from this work.

In my professional career as a classic sales representative in technical sales at the start of my career, I was able to experience for myself that technical sales have special requirements. At that time, I started to think about where the differences to non-technical sales were and how I could be successful in the special field of technical sales.

Through my successful work as a sales representative, I have developed further and have moved into sales management. As an executive in the technical sales department, it is my task to prepare my employees in the best possible way for their tasks and to further develop the employees for a successful and efficient design of the work content. This is shown in this dissertation and possible approaches to achieve this goal are presented.

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List of abbreviations

€	Euro
%	Percent
B2B	Business to Business
B2C	Business to Consumer
CCP	Customer Contact Points
Cf.	Confer
CRM	Customer-Relationship-Management
e.g.	exempli gratia – for example
GSM/GSA	Goals – Strategies – Measures/Goals – Strategies – Actions
ROI	Return of investment
UPP/UBP	Unique Purchasing Points/Unique Buying Points
USP	Unique Selling Points

1. Introduction

This dissertation describes technical sales and the function of the executive in it. For this purpose, the technical sales itself is described and based on this, it is explained which persons are suitable for technical sales. With this knowledge, it is about what the executive must master and consider to be successful with the employees. In the first step, the work is divided into leadership styles and sales methods and their evaluation for use in technical sales. It also describes the skills required for an executive in the strategic and analytical sector. With these basics for the executive, a structured and targeted development of the employees by the executive is described and finally a view into the possible change in technical sales is given.

1.1 Initial situation and task definition

In the literature, there are many treatises on specialized topics related to defined topics for sales or in management. This work should unite these elaborations and give a guideline for an executive which skill he must master, what the executive pays attention to and how he leads the employees in technical sales to success.

1.2 Methodology and goal of the work

The aim of the thesis is a guideline for the successful management of the employees in technical sales. For this purpose, the work methodically builds on the previous chapters. Beginning with the requirements and peculiarities in technical sales, the requirements for the executive are discussed and then a development of the technical sales staff is presented. Due to the methodical structure, the desired guideline is guaranteed.

2. Technical Sales – What are the specialties and what are the differences to non-technical sales?

Is sales not always the same? This question is not only an elementary basis for the correct selection of the strategy and the approach to the customer structure or to the customers, but this question defines above all what skills and characteristics the sales staff must have in order to be successful. To be able to present the basic characteristics for the task of the technical sales employee in the later chapters and to present development possibilities based on this, it is essential to first understand the technical sales with its special features.

In technical sales, a deeper knowledge of the products to be offered and their possible applications is a basic requirement. As a result, the technical sales representative must have a technical understanding, which is then specifically expanded based on the product and service portfolio. In order to understand the possible applications and to select the right customers for acquisition, knowledge of the industry must be available. A technical salesperson is always a specialist for his product and his industry. In non-technical sales, this is not always necessary. Non-technical sales often include goods that are used in everyday life. The customer already has an understanding of the product and often already has experience with the product. The non-technical sales department no longer has to explain the product in depth to the customer and the possible applications are also clear and known by the customer. To further simplify this, the basic target groups or customers of non-technical sales are highlighted. The target group of non-technical sales is basically the private individual or the resellers that offers goods for the private individual. This is also called B2C or B2B2C (for the explanation of the terms, see chapter 2.2). As a result, in non-technical sales, it is primarily the quantity in the acquisition and not the quality in the acquisition that is most important. As many customers as possible must be made aware of the product, but the product does not have to be explained to the individual potential buyer. To put it more harshly, this means that the individual customer hardly counts, but the mass of customers is the decisive factor. The focus is also not on building a long-term customer relationship, as the energy is not spent on individual customers. The Brand name and brand awareness are crucial.

Technical sales, on the other hand, consist of products or services aimed at other companies. This basically takes place in the B2B sector. Due to the demanding basis of the technical products for the B2B sector, customers often have no knowledge of the possibilities and the areas of application of the product and are not necessarily looking for a product. In many cases, customers are looking for a solution to their task. In this case, the product itself is not the decisive criterion, but a means to an end and the salesperson must have the described knowledge to fulfill the task. The technical salesperson thus also assumes a consulting function. It does not matter whether it is a non-component-related business, such as services, or a component-related business, such as product selling. These requirements, especially for the time required to generate a new customer, since the product is not applicable for every customer, make a big difference compared to non-technical sales. In technical sales, quality counts more than quantity. A customer relationship must be established, as time has already been invested in the customer in order to be able to offer the technical product in the first place. Technical sales require intensive consulting, and every single customer is important in technical sales.

It is important to mention that the differences between non-technical and technical sales are presented in a very simplified way. Of course, there are also products or corporate strategies in non-technical sales to which the attributes of the described technical sales apply and vice versa. However, this distinction is intended to create an understanding of why a distinction between non-technical and technical sales takes place. In this work, this distinction is used as a basis and possible specific exceptions are not considered.

Due to these differences, not every sales employee is also suitable for technical sales. In addition to sales suitability, the sales staff in technical sales must also have technical suitability and the executive must be able to convey both points for a development. In this chapter, the basics of the strategic orientation of a company, the business relationships and the change in the industry are shown, which is important for the understanding of the other chapters.

2.1 Change in the industry

At this point, the following question naturally arises regarding technical sales: Why is it consulting-intensive at all? Don't the industrial companies themselves have the know-how and the employees to design solutions from products? These questions are quite justified and to answer them the change in the industry in Germany is described in a simplified and exemplarily way.

It is not possible to pinpoint the change in the industry for technical sales based on points in history or the development from Industry 1.0 to Industry 4.0. The industry is constantly changing, and technical sales is developing accordingly. Even though there is no exact point in time, there is an indicator that has changed technical sales in industrialized nations. This indicator is the worldwide secure and fast networking of supply chains. Before it was possible to obtain components and products quickly and easily from anywhere in the world, the companies were positioned differently in many areas. To illustrate this, we will use an example in which the change for technical sales can be presented very well: The production of manufacturing equipment or equipment construction.

In manufacturing companies, there used to be an equipment construction department, which could react quickly to the requirements for its own equipment construction for the main production from stored material. This had the advantage that operating resources were quickly available, and the actual production was not affected by problems with the operating resources. The employment of the appropriate personnel and the provision of the required material was indispensable since operating resources are needed in every company. An external procurement of the finished equipment was too costly and time-consuming. The disadvantages of this approach were manifold. On the one hand, companies needed the appropriate specialist personnel for the equipment construction. This means that personnel were employed who were not involved in the production process in a value-adding way but were only responsible for the periphery around it. Furthermore, the equipment construction needed material to build the periphery. So, the basic material must be stored, otherwise a quick implementation of the equipment construction and the continuous utilization of the specialized employees cannot be guaranteed. This leads to storage costs that have nothing to do with the actual product. Capital is tied up for non-value-added material.

The circumstance of the own equipment construction in the companies had the consequence for the technical sales that there were specialists in the companies who did not need any solutions, since they designed and built them themselves. The specialists only needed materials or finished products that they could use.

Due to the constant change in the industry, especially due to the faster and better availability of goods, there was also a change in the approach of the companies. This change can be understood very well using the example of equipment construction.

The problems of equipment construction in the own company have already been described by two main criteria:

1. Personnel costs for employees who do not participate in the value-adding production process.
2. Costs for material, which must be available, but are not used in the value-adding production process. Accordingly, a capital commitment.

By improving the supply chains and also the possibility of communication between the company and the supplier, the second problem criterion of material provision was improved first. Not only the fast and better availability of the material was a decisive criterion, but above all the development in communication technology and of data bases. The development in communication technology makes it possible today to query an availability within a few minutes and to place an order including the delivery time. This simplicity and security did not exist to this extent in the 2000s. As a result of this development, it was or is no longer necessary for the manufacturing companies to stock material for non-value-adding processes themselves, but to rely on just-in-time material provision from the suppliers. For the technical sales staff, this means that they must be aware of delivery times and also have to keep an eye on the international market whether the required material will be available for their customers in the near future. This is important in order to inform their customers as quickly as possible in the case of unavailability, so as to prevent bottlenecks from occurring in the first place. In summary, companies no longer keep large stocks of materials, but rely on the rapid availability by the suppliers.

However, the first main criterion represents the greater difference for the work of technical sales in recent years. Due to the rapid availability not only of goods, but also of solutions, companies no longer necessarily need the appropriate personnel within their own ranks. The so-called outsourcing has entered the industry. This means that the companies themselves no longer employ the staff for non-value-adding processes. In the manufacturing companies, there are hardly any classic all-rounders left, who can also build a piece of equipment, but rather only specialist personnel for certain tasks. Companies only focus on their own core competencies and everything else is outsourced. This is achieved by the fact that the suppliers can no longer only deliver material quickly, but also required solutions. Through digitization and the possibility to immediately provide digital drawings, the development processes of the required solutions can be reduced to a minimum. This change in the outsourcing of the most solutions has greatly changed technical sales. The technical salesperson must not only have knowledge about the material and availability, but also about the possible applications of its components, because in many cases the companies completely outsource the requirements for the required peripherals to the suppliers. As a result, the demands on technical sales have changed in many areas from the classic salesperson to a consultant and problem solver. The expectations of companies and customers have also changed accordingly about technical sales. A problem solver and consultant is expected and not a simple salesperson.

For the future, the progress in digitization has a very great influence on the change in the industry. Already today, there are many providers who hardly employ any technical sales staff, but instead provide solutions through configurators. The configurators are structured and built in such a way that even a non-specialist with a certain technical knowledge can generate the solution himself. Perhaps these possibilities will completely replace the personal technical sales in the future, but at this point in time, this is not yet the case. Currently, the popular sales saying: "People buy from people" is still mainly valid. This is the basis on which this dissertation exists since it concerns the selection of the right personnel and their development.

2.2 Choice of the business relationship

Two parameters are decisive for the choice of the business relationship:

1. Who sells or distributes?
2. To whom the goods are distributed?

There are clearly defined terms for the type of business relationship, which are listed below:

- B2A = Business-to-Administration: The relationship between a company and authorities or an administration (see also B2G - Business-to-Government). In this business area, special regulatory requirements and applications often apply for companies to establish a business relationship with the public sector. (Cf. [Lif22])
- B2B = Business-to-Business: Companies enter into business relationships with other companies. In addition to B2C (Business-to-Consumer), this is the largest economic sector. In general, the retailer-customer relationship in the B2B sector is often more cooperative, long-term, and complex than in the B2C sector. (Cf. [Lif22])

- B2B2B = Business-to-Business-to-Business The complex relationship involving wholesalers and intermediaries. (Cf. [Lif22])
- B2B2C = Business-to-Business-to-Consumer: The supply chain and relationship that consists of a producer and intermediary, but ultimately delivers products to the end consumer. B2B2C (Business-to-Business-to-Consumer) is thus an e-commerce model in which companies gain access to customers through another company but are able to interact directly with the customers under their own brand. (Cf. [Lif22])
- B2C = Business-to-Consumer: A company offers products or services to individual end users (households, individuals). This can be, for example, a manufacturer of consumer products, but also a craftsman who makes his services available to private households. Another name for business-to-consumer is also business-to-customer. (Cf. [Lif22])
- B2D = Business-to-Distributor: If a company sells its services (not exclusively) directly to its users and customers, distributors often take care of selling the products. Special contracts, conditions and information requirements often apply to the cooperation between distributors and dealers. These are reflected in B2D (Business-to-Distributor). Since two companies interact with each other, B2D is a subset of B2B. (Cf. [Lif22])
- B2E = Business-to-Employee: This term refers primarily to the communication, but also to the business dealings of a company with its employees. Especially in the field of communications, this segment is becoming increasingly crucial, because in global environments based on the division of labor with sometimes uncertain market developments, employees demand more transparency and greater accessibility to internal information. (Cf. [Lif22])
- B2F = Business-to-Finance: The financial sector often has special prerequisites, guidelines and requirements for the solutions used there. Therefore, B2F forms a special business relationship within the B2B sector. (Cf. [Lif22])
- B2G = Business-to-Government: B2G refers to business and communication relationships between companies and governments (or their administrations). Special rules often apply here, e.g., regarding public invitations to tender, justification and places of service provision. B2G is often used synonymously with B2A (Business-to-Administration). (Cf. [Lif22])

- B2H = Business-to-Human: In the B2B sector, not only "companies" interact with each other, but also the people in companies. This also creates the need for more open "human" communication. This aspect is underlined by the idea of B2H, sometimes also called B2P (Business-to-People). (Cf. [Lif22])
- B2I = Business-to-Individual: The individualization of customers is reflected in this term. Thanks to the possibilities of digitization, but also individualized production, many companies are not only aimed at customer groups, but also at individuals. Business-to-individual also requires an institution to treat a distinctive individual with respect in communication. (Cf. [Lif22])
- B2M = Business-to-Machine: The Internet of Things also links machines, for example. This ensures that some transactions run fully automatically between companies and machines. For example, when a machine identifies a defective component, it can automatically order a spare part without the need for human intervention. This relationship is described in Business-to-Machine. (Cf. [Lif22])
- B2R = Business-to-Reseller: When a company sells its products or services through distributors (resellers), B2R describes the relationship between the two. Synonymous with B2P (Business-to-Partner) or also B2D (Business-to-Distributor). (Cf. [Lif22])
- B2S = Business-to-Student: Numerous companies explicitly target students with all or part of their offerings. In addition, more and more companies are specifically addressing students in the course of employee recruitment and long-term brand building. These communication and business relationships fall under the definition of B2S. (Cf. [Lif22])
- B2X = Business to Everyone. B2X is a more "agnostic" approach to whom a product is sold to. For product development and sales, B2X means that a product or service is aimed at many target groups. (Cf. [Lif22])
- C2C = Consumer-to-Consumer: Consumers are also increasingly entering into trade relations with each other (e.g., via online platforms such as Etsy.com). This relationship is called C2C – Consumer-to-Consumer. (Cf. [Lif22])

A company can also combine different business relationships such as B2B and B2C. This means that the seller does not care whether the customer is another company or a private individual. This mixture occurs very often.

This paper is designed for B2B sales. Of course, many points are also applicable to other business relationships, but this is not described in detail in the paper.

2.3 Strategic orientation of the company

For the later chapters, the strategic orientation of the company must be considered and included. In order to further develop the technical sales staff in a targeted manner, the executive must, in addition to selecting his or her own leadership style, teach the employees the appropriate sales methods and, of course, develop the employees individually. In addition to generally applicable criteria for technical sales, many development methods must be adapted to the strategic orientation of the company.

Of course, there are many possibilities and differences in the strategic orientation of companies. For the resulting development strategy of the employees, the corporate strategy is presented in a highly simplified way. However, this is sufficient to choose the appropriate methods and development strategies from the later chapters.

For this purpose, we divide the corporate strategy into

1. offering products at the lowest possible price and in
2. offering the same products for a higher price, which is related to other criteria.

A company must choose one of the two types of strategy, because the type of strategy significantly influences human resources. A mixture of the two strategies does not make sense.

If the company focuses on offering its own product as cheaply as possible compared to the competition, this can be achieved by reduced quality or by fewer or poorer personnel at similar production costs. We only consider the variant of cost savings in terms of personnel, as the products should remain comparable. This means that the corporate strategy provides no or only minimal consultation to customers in order to save personnel costs and sells via the cheap product price. The corporate strategy assumes that the customer deals independently with the product and the technical requirements and chooses the product due to the lower price compared to the competition. The lower price is achieved mainly through personnel savings in the form of fewer technical sales staff, who also take on the consulting activities. The market awareness or visibility of the product is achieved almost exclusively through marketing and digital marketing. There is only a very limited sales department.

In contrast, there is the strategy that the company relies on strong consulting. This means that sufficient technical sales staff are needed to ensure it. The market awareness of the product is realized in this orientation on the one hand through the sales department and on the other hand through marketing. The increased personnel costs are then reflected in the product costs. This strategy assumes that due to the increased customer proximity and service, the price is not the primary decision criterion for the customer.

2.3.1 The technical solution sales and the technical product sales

A distinction between the technical solution and product sales is also necessary for the later selection of the sales methods and the development of the employees. The technical product sales is designed very simple. The company offers ready-made technical products. These products are either directly applicable or must be used by the customer in combination with other products. To illustrate this, we look at two examples from special machine construction:

1. The selling company builds complete special machines and sells them as one product. The customer therefore buys only one product, a complete machine. Which components are used in detail is not relevant for the customer. Only the process capability is decisive.
2. In the other example, our company sells the individual components and not complete machines. The customer uses these and other components to independently build his special machine for his own use or to resell the finished machine.

For technical product sales, both strategic orientations from the previous chapter can be used.

Technical solution sales means that the customer has a problem or a task and needs a solution for it. In this case, the customer cannot simply select a product because there is no product for his task, or the right product is not known by him. Accordingly, the customer is dependent on support or advice to find a solution. Here again, there are two distinctions, which will be explained:

1. Companies offer the terminology of the finished solution by, for example, finding the solution with the help of a configurator. However, this also means that the customer cannot buy a simple product but must first deal with the topic

of designing the finished solution. This is done by the customer himself with the help of the configurator. Considering the strategic orientation of the company, there are also two ways if the customer cannot generate the solution himself with the configurator. Either there is a more advanced stage in which further personal consulting is provided by the seller or the customer must look for another supplier with consulting services. In the variant where the customer cannot call in any further consulting services, a distinction to the mere product sales is not clearly possible. In the end, the company only offers a product for a solution generated by the customer.

2. This is the classic variant of technical solution sales. The customer has a task for which he needs a solution. In order to find the solution, he is dependent on the support or advice of the supplier's technical sales department. The customer and the technical sales department jointly develop a solution for the task, or the supplier develops the solution solely based on the customer's criteria. If this is the case, the strategic orientation of the company is also specified. Personnel is needed who can generate and advise the solution.

Technical companies often have a mix of technical solution and product sales. The product portfolio of the companies offers products that can be used independently, but from which further solutions can also be generated. If this is the case, the technical solution and product sales cannot be clearly separated from each other. However, the companies also differ in this case in the form of the consulting service offered.

2.3.2 USP and UPP/UBP

For the later chapters and for a better understanding, the difference between USP (Unique Selling Points) and UPP/UBP (Unique Purchasing Points/Unique Buying Points) is explained here. This distinction is mainly needed for the selection of the sales method and the development of the employees.

- USP: Unique selling points are the added value of the product or services of the company that stand out from the competition. If the USPs are very convincing, little work is required to convince the customer. It is also said that the product sells itself. In this case, the personnel costs are rather low, since no expensive and experienced employees are needed. The product can also be sold by beginners and employees from outside the industry since it is only about introducing this product to as many customers as possible. If the USPs are not convincing, better staff is required, which can still convince the customers of the product.

- UPP/UBP: Unique Purchasing Points/Unique Buying Points aim to know what the customer needs and where his priorities lie in procurement. The focus here is less on the added value of the company's own products and more on the customer's needs. If the focus is placed on UPP/UBP, the salesperson must have in-depth knowledge of the customer, the customer's processes, the customer's market, and the customer's industry. A focus on UPP/UBP cannot be realized by inexperienced and new employees or new employees have to be trained much more elaborately than in the case of sales via USP.

The choice between sales via USP or UPP/UBP depends mainly on the company´s own products and the competitive situation. Especially with a large product portfolio, both variants will have to be used. Some products have such convincing USPs that they sell themselves, whereas the USPs of other products from the same company require a strong sales department and the use of UPP/UBP for sales.

3. Selecting the right people for technical sales

Before the development of the employees and the skills of the executive for this development are considered in the next chapters, the prerequisites of the employees for technical sales must first be analyzed. Technical sales differ from non-technical sales in several aspects and has special characteristics, which has already been described in the previous chapter. These peculiarities define the qualifications and characteristics of the employees required for technical sales.

According to a Walker study, B2B companies must develop towards a holistic customer-centric culture. The positive customer experience has already replaced price and the actual product as the most important differentiator between brands. Customers are more demanding than ever and want to feel understood and have their needs taken seriously. Reason enough for the sales staff to adapt and rethink their proven sales methods, because the customer wants to be in the center of attention. As a result, more and more companies are moving away from product sales towards solution sales. Customers expect real added value and solutions for their challenges. Customer centricity is the new magic word and increasingly runs through various departments in companies, such as marketing, sales, and service. This new orientation requires a rethinking and also new strategies to inspire the customer for the own products. (Cf. [Wal20])

This creates new roles for the formerly classic salesperson. A pure product sale is therefore hardly possible or not very promising. New and successful sales methods have made their way into the sales teams. Almost all of them have one thing in common: The seller takes over additional functions and becomes the: (Cf. [Wal20])

- Consultant.
- Problem solver.
- Industry expert.
- Mediator.
- Confidant.
- Listener.
- Business partner. (Cf. [Wal20])

These seven functions, which an employee in technical sales must take on and master, show very well in a short summary the requirements for the personnel.

Now the question inevitably arises how the right personnel is selected for these tasks. Unfortunately, there is no universal checklist that shows the right person for the job. However, there are criteria to be considered in the selection process. These criteria are divided into four sub-chapters and will be explained.

3.1 The company's recruitment strategy

In order to be able to correctly interpret or apply the employee-specific criteria, the recruitment strategy of the company must first be clearly defined. New recruitment of employees for any vacancy can be divided into two categories.

1. <u>Recruitment strategy of people with many years of experience or specialists in the field.</u>

   In this strategy, when filling vacancies, value is placed on employees' already having relevant experience in the relevant areas.

   Advantages:

   - The employees already have the required knowledge about the type of job, such as technology, industry knowledge and sales work. Thus, there is no long training period, and the employees perform their tasks very quickly and well.
   - With experienced people, good results can be achieved quickly.
   - These people bring new impulses based on their experience, which can help the company in its general development.
   - Little effort is required by the executive, as the people already work independently.

   Disadvantages:

   - Experienced staff is expensive, as they are in demand on the market. In most cases, it is only possible to poach experienced personnel from another company.
   - The development of the employees can be very difficult, as these people already have relevant experience and are not necessarily open to new approaches. Successful methods from the old job are no longer questioned even when these are not up to date.

2. <u>Recruitment strategy of people without many years of experience.</u>
   This recruitment strategy relies on personnel who have no experience for the vacancy. For example, either career changers or young people who have just completed their education.

   Advantages:
   - Significantly cheaper than experienced staff.
   - Completely open to development possibilities. No previous load from previous jobs.

   Disadvantages:
   - The person's self-discovery is not yet complete, and it may be that the person realizes that the nature of the job is not the right thing after all. This means that all investments in development by the company are lost.
   - Whether the person is suitable for the type of job and can meet the requirements in the long term only becomes apparent much later.
   - Long training period of the employees until the first successes are recorded.
   - Significantly higher requirements and support by the executive is needed.

For the description of the following three criteria, especially the inexperienced employees are considered. When hiring experienced employees from the field, it is assumed that they meet the basic criteria. When hiring this group of people, it's all about whether the person fits into the structure and whether the person can take the company to a higher level.

3.2 Basics and education

Since it is a vacancy in technical sales, the person must have a basic technical understanding. The basic technical understanding does not necessarily have to be based on the industry. A technical education, a technical background or a technical degree should be available. The technical sales representative will be almost exclusively in contact with technical contacts at the customer. Learning the technical basics only during the job is hardly possible. Also, a certain industry knowledge should be available, e.g., through self-interest. It is very difficult to familiarize oneself with a technical product and to identify with it if there is no interest in the technology or the industry.

The technical part in technical sales is very often underestimated in hiring and it is assumed that a good salesperson can already handle the technology. As described at the beginning, however, customers expect consultants and problem solvers in technical sales and not classic sellers.

3.3 Abilities

Sales per se can be seen as self-employment in the employment relationship. Accordingly, the salesperson must have a high degree of independence. This is not only about planning the day and customer appointments independently, but also about taking care of the sales area holistically. Above all, this implies profound analytical skills. The employee must understand difficult issues, be able to combine them and be able to derive strategies from them.

The employee must have the ability to act as the person responsible for his area of responsibility. This also means networking with other departments in the company and the ability to act as a project manager. A technical sales representative is not a lone fighter and must not only be a team player, but also be able to involve other departments in projects and monitor or delegate the progress. The customer sees the technical sales representative as their contact person and project manager.

3.4 Character traits

Sales is based on interaction between people. These interactions take place between the sales representative and the customer and also within the company with other departments. Accordingly, the salesperson must be communicative and to a certain extent extroverted. A salesperson must necessarily be solution-oriented and must not act problem-oriented under any circumstances. The difference between solution-oriented and problem-oriented people is described separately later in chapter 4.4.1, since this also has an influence on the development of the technical sales employees, and they must understand how to classify themselves.

3.5 Conclusion

Technical sales entail clear requirements, which differ from non-technical sales in various aspects. When selecting personnel, it is important, as an executive, to clarify which of the seven previously listed functions in chapter 3 the employee must fulfill and to specifically select the persons on this basis. The employee does not necessarily have to bring all the qualities for the tasks from the outset, but he must have the potential to meet these requirements in the future and the executive must evaluate for himself whether he has the skills to provide the missing knowledge.

4. Executive fundamentals for technical sales

The special requirements in technical sales, which were explained in the previous chapters, lead to special and, above all, broader developments of the technical sales staff. The technical sales representative must not only be trained in sales, but also technically in order to be able to consult the customer holistically. The problem in the development and training of technical sales staff is to ensure the balance between sales work and technical consulting. Many technical sales employees see themselves as technical consultants and focus on this area and neglect classic sales work. To ensure the holistic development of the employees, executives must have the appropriate qualifications, which are described in this chapter.

4.1 Personnel management in technical sales by selecting the appropriate leadership style

In order to be able to develop the employees, the executive must first be clear about his or her own personality and the associated leadership style. Not every personality fits every leadership style. The executive must feel comfortable in his leadership style and, above all, be authentic. An imposed leadership style will quickly lead to the demotivation of the employees, as they do not trust the words of the executive and he or she thus becomes implausible. The executive must also fundamentally commit to his leadership style and only adapt on special occasions. Jumping between leadership styles demonstrates uncertainty on the part of the executive and reduces employees' trust in him and in the given instructions. These factors are the basis for the following analysis, in which the peculiarities of technical sales are taken into account when choosing the right leadership style.

In this subchapter, various classic leadership styles are presented and evaluated for applicability in technical sales.

4.1.1 The different leadership styles

There are many different approaches in the presentation and designation of the different leadership styles. One of the best known and oldest approaches is by Kurt

Lewin from 1930. Kurt Lewin's approach is based on three different leadership styles as shown in Figure 1. (Cf. [Lin21])

- Autocratic Leadership.
- Democratic Leadership.
- Laissez-Faire Leadership.

Figure 1: Leadership Styles by Kurt Lewin, [Blu17].

Although this approach still has its justification as a basis today, a division into only three leadership styles no longer does justice to modern times. Based on Kurt Lewin, sociologist Max Weber has added another four classifications to this approach, with two classifications overlapping. (Cf. [Stu21])

The addition resulted in six different leadership styles, which are sufficient in this analysis for a fundamental consideration of leadership opportunities, as these six possibilities can give a good insight into the diversity of leadership behavior.

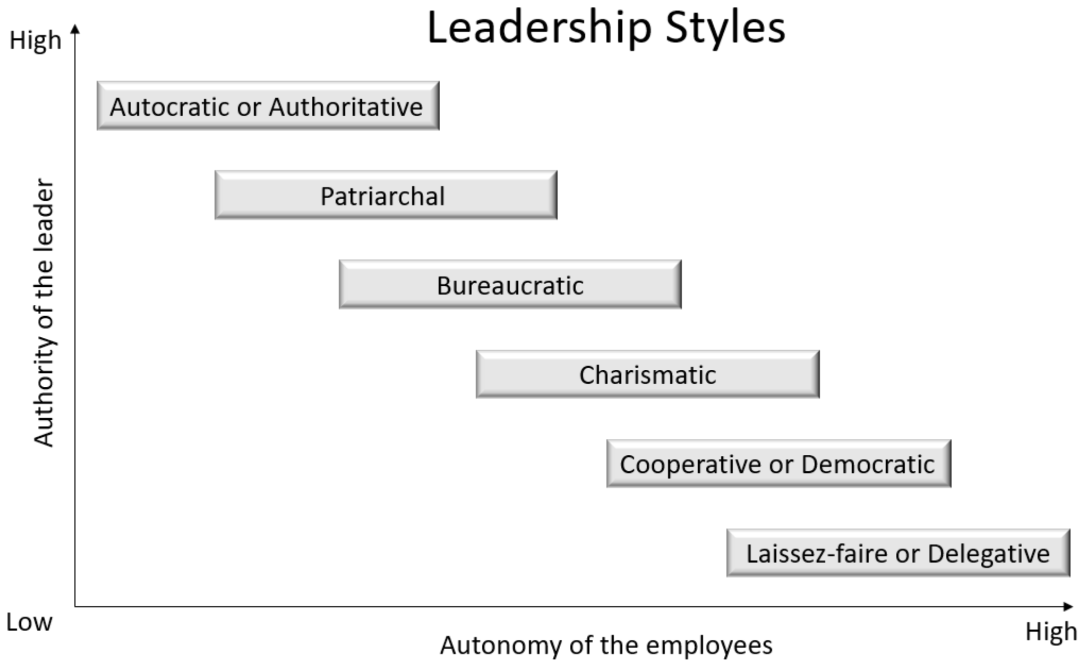

Figure 2: Leadership Styles, (Cf. [Stu21])

In addition to the significantly greater diversity due to the division into six styles, these can be represented in a scheme that evaluates the styles according to the authority of the executive in relation to the autonomy of the employees. (Cf. [Stu21])

For an evaluation of the leadership styles, these are briefly explained, as well as the advantages and disadvantages presented.

4.1.1.1 Autocratic or Authoritative Leadership

In this leadership style, the executive makes all decisions and the employees are not involved in the decision-making process or asked for their opinions and ideas. (Cf. [Stu21])

Advantages:

- Decisions are made quickly.
- Clear instructions and clear hierarchical structures.
- The employees have less responsibility, but only have to fulfill their assigned tasks.
- Responsibilities are clearly defined. (Cf. [Stu21])

Disadvantages:

- Less motivated employees because they cannot contribute.
- Unhealthy working atmosphere.
- Innovative ideas of the employees are lost.
- A lot of work for the executive. (Cf. [Stu21])

Assessment of suitability for technical sales:
This leadership style is not suitable for technical sales. Sales requires a high degree of self-determination of the employees. The employees must take responsibility for their sales area and thus also identify with their sales area. This leadership style restricts employees in the core competence of sales. A creative, flexible, and self-responsible acting is not possible in leadership style.

4.1.1.2 Patriarchal Leadership

The patriarchal leadership style is very similar to the autocratic leadership style. The difference, however, is that the executive sees himself as a father figure in this style and thus feels responsible for the employees. The background is the that executives are often more experienced and older than the employees. (Cf. [Stu21])

Advantages:

- Clear instructions.
- Decisions are made faster.
- The employees have less responsibility, but only have to fulfill their assigned tasks.
- Responsibilities are clearly defined. (Cf. [Stu21])

Disadvantages:

- Innovative ideas of the employees are lost.
- Employees feel less connected to the company. (Cf. [Stu21])

Assessment of suitability for technical sales:

The fundamental difference to autocratic leadership is that in this leadership style, the executive is more approachable and supportive, rather than just giving instructions and then withdrawing. However, this leadership style is also unsuitable for technical sales for the same reasons as for autocratic or authoritative leadership style.

4.1.1.3 Bureaucratic Leadership

In the bureaucratic leadership style, there are clear workflows that are defined by clear rules and procedures. Employees must adhere to them. Even the superiors do not determine these framework conditions themselves and are only managers for a certain period of time until they are replaced. (Cf. [Stu21])

Advantages:

- Clear work instructions and responsibilities.
- Controlled workflows.
- Fewer wrong decisions.
- Decisions are made based on guidelines rather than sympathy, gut feeling, or personal opinions. (Cf. [Stu21])

Disadvantages:

- No room for innovation and new ideas.
- Long decision-making processes and hardly any room for decision-making.
- No flexible structures.
- Demotivated executives and employees. (Cf. [Stu21])

Assessment of suitability for technical sales:

This leadership style is also unsuitable for technical sales. The sales employee is deprived of responsibility, creativity, and flexibility. Long decision-making paths and limited scope for decision-making are also incompatible with technical sales. Long decisions lead to potentially disgruntled customers. The first three leadership styles all have in common that they rely on clear instructions or work procedures without the possibility of self-determination. Such leadership styles and variations of them are generally not recommended for sales. Sales or technical sales naturally have work patterns and procedures, but there must be flexibility in the interpretation of these. This is mainly determined by the goal of the occupational field. The goal is to generate revenue through customer or project acquisition, in short through customer contact. But customers have their own appointments and times and cannot be pushed into the salesperson's workflow. The salesperson must be able to flexibly adapt their procedures and times to the customer. However, these leadership style can be used very well in the productive area, where clear procedures are needed so that the production process functions as smoothly and reliably as possible.

4.1.1.4 Charismatic Leadership

If the executive has the ability to inspire and motivate his employees, he applies the charismatic leadership style. Here is the executive the role model who easily convinces the employees of his ideas and visions. He is confident and communicative. In addition, more responsibility is given to the employees. (Cf. [Stu21])

Advantages:

- High motivation and willingness to perform of the employees.
- Higher employee loyalty to the company and thus a lower turnover rate.
- The employees identify with the goals and visions of the company. (Cf. [Stu21])

Disadvantages:

- Only works if the executive has the appropriate personality.
- Easily persuaded employees are more likely to be exploited. (Cf. [Stu21])

Assessment of suitability for technical sales:

Caution is advised with this style of leadership. There are several reasons for this. The main reason is that a charismatic superior is a subjective feeling. If the superior believes that he or she is charismatic and thus leads the employees, but they do not think so, the cooperation will quickly not achieve the desired results. In this case, the executive finds no approach why the set goals are not achieved and quickly falls into one of the first three hierarchical leadership styles. This results in a poisoned working atmosphere and all the advantages of the charismatic leadership style become disadvantages.

Even if the executive fully meets the requirements for this leadership style and this is also perceived by the employees, there is still a big disadvantage, which is not yet listed. The employees fall into a dependency of the superior and stop thinking for themselves. There are no new ideas or approaches from the staff, as the superior is blindly relied upon. The independent development of the employees then fails to materialize. In case of bad decisions of the executive, these are not questioned, as the executive is usually right, which has a strong impact on the success of the team.

The next problem with this leadership style is when the executive changes. The whole system is based on the charismatic leadership of one person and in this case the team chemistry immediately breaks down. This is more of a problem for the company than for the executive in question. An assessment of whether this leadership style is suitable for technical sales is not so easy to make. A certain charisma, so that the employees follow the superior on their own, distinguishes every good executive. However, the executive must consistently pay attention to the development of the employees and not rest on the voluntary and blind following of them. This requires a high degree of self-discipline and self-criticism of the executive. He or she must constantly encourage the employees to make their own decisions. Since the dangers of this leadership style are not always obvious, the charismatic leadership style should rather be seen as the basis for other leadership styles and should be used in combination with other styles.

4.1.1.5 Cooperative or Democratic Leadership

The cooperative or democratic leadership style is one of the classic leadership styles. It is characterized by the fact that the executive and their employees work together as a team. The team makes the decisions together and everyone has a say. Everyone should express their own ideas, criticism, and opinion. The executives delegate tasks and areas of responsibility to their subordinates so that they can carry them out independently and autonomously. (Cf. [Stu21])

Advantages:

- Reduced workload for executives since they do not make all decisions alone.
- Higher employee motivation.
- Stronger sense of responsibility of the employees.
- Encouragement of initiative, creativity, and innovation.
- Avoidance of wrong decisions.
- Higher employee engagement and commitment. (Cf. [Stu21])

Disadvantages:

- Loss of control and wrong decisions if the superiors cannot assert themselves or lose the overview.
- Longer decision-making processes due to discussions and many different opinions.
- Higher level of competition among the employees. (Cf. [Stu21])

Assessment of suitability for technical sales:

This leadership style is suitable for technical sales. For this, however, the understanding of technical sales must be used again. In sales, the employee is responsible for their sales area. As a result, the advantages of the leadership style are already part of the requirements for the job. Being responsible, initiative, creative and innovative are part of it.

The greatest danger in this leadership style lies in the loss of control if the executive cannot prevail. Because even if the employees have to bring a high degree of personal responsibility, the executive must set the direction and the general strategies. If the employees in this leadership style permanently question the decisions of the executive, a joint goal-oriented work is hardly possible. In this case, the executive must assert himself situationally and have the assertiveness to switch from a democratic leadership style to a hierarchical leadership style on important points without unnerving and demotivating the employees.

This leadership style can be combined very well with the charismatic leadership style. This places high demands on the executive, especially when it comes to deciding when to break the democratic approach. If these requirements are met by the executive, the employees can work independently and responsibly, but when important decisions are made by the executive, they are not questioned.

4.1.1.6 Laissez-faire or Delegative Leadership

If the employees in the company have a very large scope of action, this is referred to as laissez-faire leadership style (French for "*let them do it*"). The employees make the decisions in the team, without the executive approving the decisions, and distribute the tasks independently. The executive only intervenes in case of serious problems. (Cf. [Stu21])

Advantages:

- Promotes innovative ideas and employee creativity.
- Higher employee motivation and willingness to perform. (Cf. [Stu21])

Disadvantages:

- Higher pressure on the employees as they have significantly more responsibility.
- Risk of loss of control.
- Stronger competitive thinking between employees.
- Responsibilities and procedures are not always clearly clarified. (Cf. [Stu21])

Assessment of suitability for technical sales:

This leadership style is also suitable for technical sales depending on the type of employees as described in chapter 3.1. If experienced employees are employed who have their tasks completely under control, the laissez-faire leadership style is a good way to lead. Experienced employees get the necessary freedom in their actions, which above all promotes motivation. Due to the fact that the employees work very independently, the executive himself has a lot of free capacities to take care of superior strategies or a targeted development of the employees, since the day-to-day business is carried almost alone by the employees. However, this leadership style is not suitable for inexperienced employees. They cannot yet know how to approach tasks correctly and are more likely to interpret the freedom offered as being "abandoned by the superior". Also, this leadership style does not achieve success with inexperienced employees, as they definitely still need guidance and leadership at the beginning.

Accordingly, in order to use this style of leadership, the appropriate personnel must be available for it. The great danger is when the composition of the staff is a mixture of experienced persons and inexperienced persons. Here, either a combination with a different leadership style or a different treatment of employees would have to take place. If this should happen, the inexperienced employees still accept at the start that the experienced colleagues enjoy a different treatment or freer work organization. However, this changes after a certain period of time, in which equal treatment is insisted upon, although the inexperienced employee is not yet ready. Different treatments of employees always lead to envy and thus to reduced motivation. If this leadership style is nevertheless applied in a mixed employee composition, the case already described occurs that the inexperienced employees feel left alone. This is where a mentoring program between experienced and inexperienced employees can help.

Of course, with this leadership style, there is a general risk that employees will not perform well, as they make great use of the given freedom. Here again, a combination with the charismatic leadership style is a good possibility. If the combination is possible, employees voluntarily perform for their executive.

Basically, it should be noted that this leadership style involves many risks and is only recommended for a staff composition consisting only of experienced employees.

4.1.1.7 The situational leadership style

The situational leadership style is often referred to as one of the modern leadership styles. Here, the strengths and weaknesses of the employees are considered and how long the employee has been with the company is taken into account. Thus, the employee is assigned a so-called maturity level. Depending on the maturity level, the employee is then treated differently and assigned more or less responsibility accordingly. (Cf. [Stu21])

This results in the four levels of situational leadership:

- Maturity Level 1 – Dictation: With an inexperienced employee, the superior gives precise instructions, controls the work processes and the performance. This allows the superior to quickly identify and correct errors due to the lack of expertise. In addition, clear guidelines help an inexperienced employee not to feel lost. (Cf. [Stu21])

- Maturity level 2 – Train: Now the already experienced employee gets the chance to practice the skills they have learned. The superior, therefore gives the employee more freedom to try themself out and act more independently. It can have a very motivating effect on the employee if they notice that they are trusted. Of course, the superior should still stand by the employee and give them the opportunity to clarify questions. (Cf. [Stu21])

- Maturity level 3 – Participate: The employee now has more experience, and his skills are more pronounced. Therefore, his independence continues to grow. That's why the superior can increase their decision-making freedom. The superior now actively motivates the employee to make their own decisions. (Cf. [Stu21])

- Maturity level 4 – Delegate: The employee is technically competent at this level and is very familiar with his work. The executive hardly has to intervene anymore. This allows the superior to hand over the responsibility for decision-making and execution to the employee. (Cf. [Stu21])

Assessment of suitability for technical sales:

The situational leadership style is very suitable for all professions under certain conditions. This leadership style entails clear requirements for the executive and the orientation of the company and can therefore not be used everywhere. First, let's look at the obstacles in the use of this leadership style:

Disadvantages:

- Only suitable for small groups of employees or teams: For the use of this leadership style, the executive must divide each employee into a maturity level. In order to be able to fulfill this, the executive must not only know each individual employee superficially, but he has to analyze them in detail and monitor the progress for the classification into a different maturity level. This is only possible up to a certain number of employees.
- High-capacity load on the executive: The leadership style is designed for the development of employees to get them into maturity level 4. For the development of employees into maturity level 4, however, the executive has to spend many of his capacities on the corresponding development. In this leadership style, the development of the employees comes first, and all other tasks of the executive have only secondary importance. Accordingly, this leadership style must fit the strategy of the company and the executive must have the capacity for the development of the employees.
- Demotivation due to unequal treatment: Similar to the explanation for laissez-faire leadership, there is also a risk of employee dissatisfaction due to unequal treatment. The executive subjectively determines the degree of maturity of the corresponding employee. This can lead to incomprehension among employees and thus to demotivation, as other employees are treated differently or are given more freedom. Especially for employees who have started almost at the same time but are in different maturity levels due to the assessment of the superior, this is quickly met with a lack of understanding by the employees. This can be remedied to a certain extent by a very transparent approach to the maturity levels with a presentation of objective facts.

- High demands on the executive: In this leadership style, the executive takes on different roles. He or she must be able to dictate new employees, i.e., to set clear strategies and measures and to train them. He or she must also have the standing and reputation with the employees in the higher maturity levels that they trust the superior in selective interventions and that they then implement them without questioning every instruction.

Of course, this leadership style also has various advantages, provided that the disadvantages were taken into account during the selection process.

Advantages:

- More effective employees: By deploying the employees based on their level of maturity, employees can achieve the best performance in the relevant area of responsibility. The employees are not over- or under-challenged. This promises the best possible effectiveness of the individual employee.
- Rapid improvement of employees: Through the targeted and structured development of the employees in the maturity levels, they quickly become better in their area of responsibility. The executive prioritizes the development of the employees and thus also the growth of these. Through this targeted growth, the goals are achieved faster and more reliably.
- Strong team: This leadership style is extremely powerful in small teams. If the team size fits the leadership style, the strengths of each individual employee are best utilized. There are clear boundaries of the employees in the maturity levels and each employee can use his strengths in the team according to his abilities.

In summary, this leadership style brings a great advantage for the effectiveness of the team and the individual employee. Employees are evaluated based on their abilities and deployed accordingly. Unfortunately, this leadership style is only applicable to an appropriate number of employees and the executive must be able to implement the leadership style. If these parameters are present, this leadership style is absolutely recommended for technical sales.

4.1.2 Conclusion on the leadership styles

In addition to the leadership styles presented, there are other leadership styles and variations or deepenings of the presented leadership styles. However, the analyzed styles show very well the diversity of leadership styles and form the basis. This selection should provide a good overview for choosing one's own leadership style.

The evaluation of the leadership styles has already shown that there is no style that can be applied universally. The composition of the employees and, above all, the character of the executive must be considered in the selection. However, when selecting a leadership style, the executive must also be aware that he or she will be confronted with other requirements and that the leadership styles cannot be considered independently.

In order for an executive to lead their team well and get the optimal results out of the team, they must take on different roles. Depending on the situation, a different role is in the foreground – it does not matter which of the leadership styles it is. A distinction is made between eight roles: (Cf. [Stu21])

1. Facilitator: The executive concentrates on the collaborative cooperation within the team. He promotes teamwork and tries to resolve conflicts through compromise. (Cf. [Stu21])
2. Mediator: It is not only the working atmosphere within the team that is important. As a mediator, the executive also represents the team externally. He should pay attention to his appearance and try to convey the wishes of his team to the outside world as well. (Cf. [Stu21])
3. Mentor: The executive should not only focus on the workforce of the employees, but also guide them as their mentor and promote their strengths. This includes listening to them, showing empathy and understanding, and encouraging their ideas. In addition, executives usually have more professional experience than their employees. Employees can benefit from this knowledge. (Cf. [Stu21])
4. Producer: Of course, the performance of the employees is also not insignificant. As a producer, the executive is very results oriented. He motivates employees to reach their performance potential and achieve better results. (Cf. [Stu21])

5. Controller: In order to get the best out of the team, it is important to know the strengths and weaknesses of the employees. Therefore, it is also necessary

that the executive regularly monitor the performance. This is the only way to ensure the long-term success of the team and the entire company. (Cf. [Stu21])

6. Coordinator: The executive is also responsible for keeping track of all upcoming tasks and coordinating and organizing the projects. (Cf. [Stu21])
7. Director: As a director, the executive has to plan and manage the division of the tasks. He should also pay attention to the strengths and weaknesses of the employees. He also sets clear goals and discusses his expectations with the employees. (Cf. [Stu21])
8. Innovator: An executive should also bring in new, creative ideas. Because only through change can there be improvements. It also makes everyday work more exciting. (Cf. [Stu21])

Depending on the experience and personality of the employees and the team, the executive must slip into the different roles. Of course, it also depends on the personality and experience of the superior, which of the eight roles works best and is appropriate in the situation. (Cf. [Stu21])

When evaluating the leadership styles for technical sales, similarities can be identified. All leadership styles that are suitable for technical sales require a degree of personal responsibility on the part of the employees and less control by the executive. This corresponds to the nature of the profession of sales in generally. A sales representative must have this personal responsibility, but also must have the opportunity to use it. This unites all leadership styles for technical sales and should always be taken into account.

It is also striking that the recommended leadership styles list the increased competitive thinking of employees as a disadvantage. This is also in line with the nature of the profession of sales and should not be seen as a disadvantage. A good salesperson always wants to achieve the best results and is permanently comparable with other colleagues on the basis of sales figures. Because of this simple and objective comparability, a competitive situation is consistently present in technical sales.

In summary, there is no such thing as a perfect leadership style. The executive must decide on a general direction and choose the appropriate leadership style for himself in order to achieve the goals in the best possible way and implement this leadership style in his daily work. It is important not to jump between the leadership styles unless absolutely necessary in order not to unsettle the employees.

4.2 The sales methods

As explained in the previous chapter, the executive who wants to develop the sales staff must also have the skills to do so. In addition to choosing the right leadership style, it is also much more important that the executive defines and conveys the right methods for the successful sales work. Here, too, jumping between methods and their implementation leads to confusion among the employees and makes it difficult to work with the customers in a targeted manner. If there is no clear methodical approach, there is a risk that the employees will not be able to concentrate on the customer and their own further development but will be confused as to how customers are to be led to place the order in the first place. The sales method defines the path to successful sales and must therefore be chosen carefully.

Analogous to the presentation of the different leadership styles, 14 different methods for sales according to Frank Welsch-Lehmann are presented and evaluated for applicability in technical sales.

4.2.1 Solution Oriented-Selling

Solution selling focuses on solving a customer's problem rather than simply providing a product. The Sales department focuses on the customer's requirements and challenges and offers significantly more service. The task is to find ways to meet the customer´s needs. It is important to know the customers, their restrictions, wishes and needs in detail and to take them into account when offering a solution. For the customer, a complete package of planning, consulting, usage recommendation and regular training or training courses should be created, so that the added value goes beyond the actual product sales. (Cf. [Wel21])

Advantages:

- Long-term and loyal customers.
- Strong customer retention.
- Facilitates the sale of difficult products (Cf. [Wel21])

Disadvantages:

- Long sales process.
- Grueling at times.
- Time-consuming. (Cf. [Wel21])

Assessment of suitability for technical sales:

Solution selling is very well suited for products that require explanation, both in the high-priced and low-priced segments. Ideally, solution selling develops a familiar and intensive business relationship from which both sides benefit. However, it usually does not come to the immediate conclusion of the purchase. This only takes place after some discussions, testing and negotiations. (Cf. [Wel21])

This sales method is very well suited for rather difficult products that require a high degree of explanation and are aimed at solving more complex challenges and problems. (Cf. [Wel21])

Since technical sales generally tends towards the solution business and away from the product business, solution selling is an effective method for many sales organizations in technical sales. From an employee's point of view, solution selling places higher demands on the technical sales staff than other methods. In solution selling, the sales representative must have in-depth knowledge not only of his product, but also of processes (e.g., of manufacturing processes). In order to be able to offer a solution for a task, the entire process must often be considered. For the employee, this means not only knowledge of sales and in-depth product knowledge of the product to be sold, but also extensive technical knowledge in the expected customer structure. From a sales point of view, solution selling also requires increased demands on the employee, since there is no simple or clearly structured flow chart, and the salesperson has to deal with several instances of the customer in finding a solution.

4.2.2 SPIN Selling – Customer relationship through targeted questions

SPIN selling is considered the predecessor of solution selling and provides a communication strategy for the sales pitch and is a method for direct sales. With the right questioning technique, an emotional bond with the interlocutor should be achieved. This increases the exit hurdle from the sales process and sets it as high as possible. In this technique, the questions of the sales pitch follow a clearly defined content and order: (Cf. [Wel21])

1. Situation questions - Clarification of the customer's initial situation.
2. Problem questions - Finding the customer's problems and challenges.
3. Implication questions - Identifying the problem and approaching the solution.

4. Need-payoff-questions - Determining the value of the product for the customer and the benefits of the purchase. (Cf. [Wel21])

Due to the order and the content of the questions, the potential customer gets the impression to control the conversation and to feel understood and taken seriously with his challenges. (Cf. [Wel21])

Advantages:

- Fast, close customer loyalty.
- The customer believes that they provide the solution approach themself. (Cf. [Wel21])

Disadvantages:

- Not every customer is receptive to the method.
- Conversation can quickly change and go in the wrong direction. (Cf. [Wel21])

Assessment of suitability for technical sales:

In the SPIN selling method, the conversation is led in the direction intended by the salesperson without being pushy and thus a bond with the customer is built. If your products or services focus on solving a specific problem that potential customers have rather than the actual product, this method makes sense. It is used in direct sales. (Cf. [Wel21])

SPIN selling is based on the theory of "leading the customer to success by themself". Especially in the solution business, this is easier thought than executed. The customer contacts a technical salesperson or a technical consultant because he is not clear about the solution to his task. Here it is important to find out how far the customer is in finding a solution. If the customer already has a certain idea of the solution and only needs additional information or just a confirmation that the solution works or is the best solution, SPIN selling is one of the best methods, as the customer is confirmed in his own solution and thus gets a very good feeling. In this case, the method increases the customer's own sense of value and ego on an emotional level. The customer is very likely to place the order with the seller, as he feels confirmed and valued by the seller.

However, this is also the great danger of SPIN selling or the self-guidance of the customer to success. There are basically two cases in which SPIN selling is counterproductive.

The first is when the project does not match the customer´s experience. Due to the internal structure, the contact person of the customer has to take care of a project, which does to correspond to the expertise of the contact person. In this case, the customer contacts the technical sales representative to show his task and to be presented with a solution approach. The customer does not want to think deeper into the project and only wants the submitted parameters to be met. Through targeted questions to lead the customer himself to success, the customer does not feel understood. He was looking for a technical consultant to find a solution and not for one to ask him to develop a solution himself. It can also give the impression that the technical consultant himself has no idea about the matter, as he trusts in the solution finding of the customer or tries to bring him there. On an emotional basis, the customer will not be satisfied with the conversation, as he has hoped for something else and may even question the qualification of the salesperson for the project. A positive conclusion is almost impossible in this case.

The second possibility is that the customer has already developed a good solution for himself but strives for another solution approach for comparison without obviously communicating this beforehand. With the consistent application of the SPIN method, no further solution approach is identified, and it appears to the customer as if the salesperson is just telling him what he wants to hear. This does not create confidence in the qualifications of the technical consultant and the customer concludes that he has to get another opinion elsewhere. Even, if in the end the customer's solution is the best, he will place his order with the company that showed him an alternative, because the customer got the feeling on an emotional basis that the other salesperson has really dealt with his project.

Basically, the start of the SPIN process is a very good basis to start a technical project with a customer. Through questions, it must be worked out at the start what the customer imagines and whether the customer already has a solution in mind. After the first questions, the salesperson must then recognize what kind of customer it is and here lies the challenge in the sales aspect for the salesperson.

If the customer is misinterpreted or misread and thus misguided at the beginning, SPIN selling is very likely to result in the loss of the order. Accordingly, SPIN selling only makes sense if it is a customer who is only looking for confirmation of his solution.

As a result, the method is more suitable for experienced technical sales staff who can read the other person at an early stage and adapt the sales method accordingly. This means that the SPIN selling method is not suitable as the only sales method and may only be used in explicit cases. Technical knowledge must also not be neglected when applying the method. Even if the customer himself generates the solution through questioning techniques, the technical salesperson must be able to understand and evaluate it in its entirety. If the solution does not work afterwards or exhibit problems, the offering company is in the dept to fix the issues. An argument that the customer was brought to his own solution is not sufficient since the technical salesman was consulted. The responsibility and liability for the functioning solution still remains with the consulting company.

4.2.3 Conceptual Selling – Strategic Selling

The Miller-Heiman method, also known as conceptual selling, is one of the classics of strategic sales methods. It was developed by Robert B. Miller and Stephen E. Heiman. In essence, the method assumes that only a sales approach is found if the customer is analyzed. The method focuses on the customer. Great importance is attached to attentive listening. In order to be successful with it, it is compellingly necessary to know, who makes the purchase decisions, which drives the customer and which specific needs the customer has. This is the only way to create an individual offer that is tailored to the customer's requirements. The seller acts as a business partner and is therefore the problem solver and first point of contact. (Cf. [Wel21])

The sales cycle is divided into three steps:

1. Obtain information.
2. Conveying information.
3. Deciding cooperation. (Cf. [Wel21])

Advantages:

- Customer- and solution-oriented.
- Intensive and long-term customer relationship. (Cf. [Wel21])

Disadvantages:

- Proposed solutions are not accepted by the customer.

- Investing resources in the customer relationship often pays off late. (Cf. [Wel21])

Assessment of suitability for technical sales:

This method is not a successful sales method when it comes to generating quick sales. Time must be invested in the customer and the final purchase. During this process, the prospect must be supported as a problem solver. If long-term business relationships are sought and an intensive partnership business relationship is to be established, this sales method is a recommended strategy. (Cf. [Wel21])

From the previous paragraph, the problem with this method is already obvious. It takes more time to complete an order or a project than with other methods. Time eats up capacities and costs money and/or reduces the gain. This approach is only applicable if there is a secure monetary basis on which it can be built up. Especially at the start of a new business model, a new sales territory or a new salesperson, this method is not applicable. The method is based on a long-term business relationship that new structures or new employees cannot have at the beginning.

The big advantage of this method is that if the start is overcome and the first long-term business relationships are established, they gain continuous profits without much effort in the follow-up and there are new capacities for building further business relationships. The long-term customers have a low probability of migrating to the competition, since the customer has also invested a lot of time and a lot of capacity in the development of the cooperation.

For the sales representative, this method is also very demanding. The salesperson needs a high level of perseverance in waiting for success and also a certain persistence in order not to lose the customer along the way. The salesperson must have a great foresight, when using this method and must develop and follow a clear long-term strategy. The salesperson must have a plan for himself when and how the efforts will pay off. He must also be much more aware of the use of his capacities in relation to the expected gain in this method than in other methods. In a long-term development of a business relationship, this aspect quickly becomes confusing and can mean no real return even when completed.

It should also be kept in mind that this method alone cannot generate short-term sales and that the loss of a customer weighs very heavily, as the missing sales can only be replaced in the long term. The salesperson must be aware of this at all times.

The use of this method depends strongly on the goods and products of the seller. For services in technical sales such as long-term maintenance, repair or assembly agreements, this method is highly recommended. Since especially in these areas, the executing personnel must be separately employed for the service. This method can also be effective in the area of product or solution sales if the customer needs the solutions or products in long-term, recurring and continuous projects. For example, the customer builds special machines, which he plans with a long-life cycle in his production. These special machines include products from the seller's product portfolio. By concluding a contract for the delivery of the components over a defined period of time, this method, primarily prior calculation of time input to income, is the right choice to ensure long-term success. A use of this method without the possibility of a contract or the goal of contractually fixing this is not recommended, since there is no certainty that the already used capacities will also bring long-term success.

However, this method is completely unsuitable if the corporate strategy or the products are designed for short-term sales. Even larger investments are often one-off projects or projects that are only reproduced to a small extent. This must always be considered, because the time-consuming establishment of a customer relationship for a one-time project rarely justifies the capacity expenditure. Of course, long-term customer relationships are always desirable, but technical sales in many corporate strategies consists of many individual projects and this does not justify the increased time required for a time-intensive development of a deep customer relationship.

This method depends accordingly on the product of the seller and the strategic orientation of the company. If the focus is on less long-term business relationships or many customers with no deep relationship, this method is not recommended. If the product allows it, a combination with other methods is a promising means. A few time-consuming long-term business relationships with high returns and a certain security in combination with several uncertain, lower return but not so time-consuming business relationships increase the flexibility in the customer structure and thus also the chances of success.

4.2.4 MEDDPIC sales method – overview of the entire process

This is a method for decision-making in large projects or complex deals and provides a framework for justifying them with measurement points. MEDDPIC refers to:

- Metrics: How is the success of the solution measured?
- Economic buyer: Who is the decision maker for the project? Who provides the budget?
- Decision criteria: What are the decision criteria?
- Decision process: How does the decision process work?
- Paper process: What are the bureaucratic processes or hurdles?
- Identify pain: Which problem is solved? What factors are responsible for this?
- Champion: Who is the advocate for the solution? What advantages does he or she expect to gain? (Cf. [Wel21])

The specific questions on each point serve as a guideline during the sales process. This ensures an overview and guarantees that no important steps are left out in large sales projects. The MEDDPIC method is an extension of the MEDDIC method and specifically includes the bureaucratic procedures, which can quickly become major challenges. (Cf. [Wel21])

Advantages:

- Overview of the sales process.
- Very structured approach.
- Facilitates key account sales. (Cf. [Wel21])

Disadvantages:

- Very time and labor intensive.
- Regularly new hurdles that can jeopardize the sale. (Cf. [Wel21])

Assessment of suitability for technical sales:

In this method, the customer's processes are deeply analyzed through time-consuming work. An in-depth analysis always entails an increased amount of work. Therefore, according to Welsch-Lehmann, the recommendation is to use the method only for larger sales projects. (Cf. [Wel21])

For example, if several departments or locations of a company are involved. This is even further narrowed down by clearly defining for which large customers this method is suitable. Ultimately, the deal should be suitable for: (Cf. [Wel21])

- A goal of the customer is achieved.
- A problem is solved.
- A need is met. (Cf. [Wel21])

If the product or service does not fulfil any of these three points, further collaboration should be avoided. (Cf. [Wel21])

This evaluation is certainly correct for a general application of the method, but the application of this method is also promising and applicable for smaller customers. In technical solution sales, the questions of the MEDDPIC method form the basis of successful selling. To demonstrate this, the individual points of the MEDDPIC method are analyzed from the point of view of technical solution sales.

- Metrics: The question in the first point aims at the measurability of the success of the solution. In technical solution sales, it is self-explanatory that the solution must be evaluated for success. The solution must fulfill the task. In technical product sales, this may not be possible because the product is part of a larger project and thus the individual product does not make the success of the overall solution measurable. It may therefore be that it is only later discovered that the product does not meet the requirements that arise. A distinction must be made here as to whether it is technical solution or product sales. However, an important aspect of the method is also presented for product sales under the point "identify pain".
- Economic buyer: The question about the decision maker for the project or the budget must always be asked. Without this information, the seller may invest his capacities in the wrong place. This is not about the size of the project or the revenue to be achieved. Every salesperson must be aware of this question as a basis.
- Decision criteria: The question of the decision criteria is also an absolute basis. How do I want to sell something if I don't know what the product has to fulfill?
- Decision process: Of course, it is always an advantage to know the decision process, but it is true to say that an in-depth analysis of the process only makes sense for larger projects. Knowledge of the decision process enables the salesperson to intervene or control the sales process. For this, however, the salesperson needs a profound knowledge of the customer and the corresponding connections at the customer. This can only be achieved through a high investment of time.

- Paper process: The same applies here as for the previous point of the decision process. In order to know the bureaucratic processes or hurdles and, above all, to be able to use them for the benefit of the seller, an in-depth analysis and cooperation with the customer must take place. This takes a lot of time and is not recommended for small projects.
- Identify pain: The customer not only buys a finished product and then uses it, but also needs a solution from the technical sales representative. As already described in the first point, this is a basis of technical solution sales for a satisfied clientele. However, even in technical product sales, this point can be important depending on the type of the technical product. Are the technical products stand-alone and function on their own, or are the technical products part of a larger solution later on? If the products are part of a later solution in which the technical salesperson is not actually involved, it is still advisable to keep an eye on the overall project as to whether your own product really meets the technical requirements. If this is not guaranteed, complaints and angry customers follow later, because the product, due to a lack of advice or analysis, does not meet the criteria. In this case, the customer is lost for later projects or sales.
- Champion: For the evaluation of this point, an approach by Robert B. Miller and Stephen E. Heiman is considered in advance. In the approach, buying influencers are divided into four categories:

    - Decision makers: The decision-makers are the key players in the sales process. They release the budget, and without their approval, the purchase does not happen. That is why it is particularly important to know exactly their attitude to the project and to convince them.
    - Users: Users are directly affected by the potential purchase of the product because they will use it later. It is important to make them aware of the benefits that would result for them and their work processes.
    - Guardians: The so-called guardians must not be ignored under any circumstances. This is because they have the task of carefully examining the potential products, comparing them with regard to the price-performance ratio, company requirements, etc. and then making recommendations or advising against buying. They do not make the final decision, but they can significantly influence the decision-makers.
    - Coach: In contrast to the other roles, this one develops during the sales process. The task of the coach is to guide through the sales process. For

the seller, this contact person is of great importance, as new contacts can be made, and helpful information can be obtained through him. (Cf. [Sma18])

Including this approach, it becomes clear how important it is to know with which contact person of the company to talk to about what. It must always be the goal to win the decision-maker as an advocate and to convince him of the advantages. A coach, user or guardian can or will support the seller in his request, provided that added value arises for the respective category. However, if the decision is ultimately made by someone else in the company and this person has not been shown the added value or has not understood them, a successful conclusion is very unlikely.

With the completion of the analysis of the individual points of the MEDDPIC method, it turns out that it is not only suitable for larger sales projects as recommended by Welsch-Lehmann at the beginning. <u>The points of the MEDDPIC method are to be applied or questioned for each sales closing in technical sales.</u> However, it is true that the difference lies in how much time is spent analyzing the points. Even with a project with a low monetary value, it is not a time requirement to ask your contact person these questions. Only if the contact person is not able or willing to answer these questions it is to be evaluated whether a deeper analysis of the customer justifies the value of the order. And this is not the case with smaller sales projects.

The method is also well applicable for inexperienced salespersons, as the method follows a clear structure and places less demands on the skills and creativity of the salesperson, as they can follow the clear structure.

4.2.5 N.E.A.T. Selling – Modern Sales Roadmap

This sales method was developed by the Harris Consulting Group and Sales Hacker. The acronym of the method can be broken down as follows:

- <u>N</u>eed: What is meant is the concentration on customer needs. This focus should go deep and not just superficially look at problems. You should ask yourself why your product or service is important to the customer and their company.
- <u>E</u>conomic impact: The economic advantage. Refers to the economic question of what financial impact the purchase of your product would have for the

customer and also what would be the consequences of not buying for the customer. Not only the ROI of your product is in the foreground, a fundamental and long-term view is crucial.

- Access to authority: This stands for access to the decision-makers. This can already succeed through an existing good network or intensive research.
- Timeline: Refers to the deadline you set for the customer to make a decision. Not too much pressure should be exerted, because this could jeopardize the deal. Nevertheless, you should definitely point out the negative consequences that come into play if too much time passes until the purchase. (Cf. [Wel21])

Advantages:

- Structured sales roadmap.
- Combines different sales approaches.
- The timeline ensures a timely purchase decision. (Cf. [Wel21])

Disadvantages:

- The Customer can feel pressured and will not buy. (Cf. [Wel21])

Assessment of suitability for technical sales:

Services in the field of sales, such as services of a marketing agency, can be sold well with this method. The advantages and importance of the marketing service can be well highlighted according to the customer's needs. (Cf. [Wel21])

Based on this, comprehensibly emphasize the positive consequences of using the service and address them appropriately to the decision-maker. In addition, the negative consequences, such as loss of customers, stagnation of new customers, lack of growth with too long waiting time with the purchase can be well shown. (Cf. [Wel21])

N.E.A.T. Selling is a proven sales method that very often leads to success because it follows a modern sales schedule. It includes all important points for sales. It is very suitable for services and software products but can also be adapted for other industries. (Cf. [Wel21])

As already evaluated by Welsch-Lehmann, this method is basically well suited for sales and also for technical sales. The relevant sales processes are briefly summarized in the method in the form of the N.E.A.T. Here, however, lies the difficulty in this method. There is a general structure that includes the most important points, but no detailed procedure in the individual points. For a successful application of the method, the technical sales staff must be trained in the individual points in order to be able to use them effectively. The points Need, Economic impact and Access to authority are congruent with many points from other methods and an analysis of these represents the basis of technical sales. New compared to the other methods is the timeline. The timeline is an important selling point, especially in connection with the "mental arson" which is described separately in chapter 5.3. This point can be applied very well to eliminate potential competitors who appear at a later date from the outset. It is important to make the customer aware of the negative effects if the project exceeds the timeline and the advantage of committing to a seller at an early stage in order not to endanger the timeline. Even if the project is withdrawn, i.e., the loss of the order, this cancellation takes place earlier in a clear timeline and the not used capacities can be directed back to other customers.

4.2.6 SNAP Selling – Selling through Decision Steps

This sales method focuses on the customer's decision-making process and aims to influence them positively. The method was developed by Jill Konrath, who was convinced that the principles behind SNAP Selling help the salesperson to reach the right contacts, understand their challenges, and to make the buying process as easy as possible. (Cf. [Wel21])

- Keep it Simple: Keep things simple for your customer.
- Be iNvaluable: Be invaluable to your customer.
- Always Align: Always align solutions with your customer´s goals and needs.
- Raise Priorities: Always set the right priorities for your customer. (Cf. [Wel21])

The four principles mentioned should be taken into account throughout the entire sales cycle. The principles of the SNAP method should be applied in the customer's decision-making process. The process is divided into three decisions: (Cf. [Wel21])

1. The first decision is whether the customer will give the salesperson access to their processes and listen to what the salesperson has to offer.
2. The second decision is whether the customer is willing to change the status quo.
3. The third decision is then ultimately the purchase decision. (Cf. [Wel21])

Advantages:

- Focus on customer decision.
- Sales process is facilitated by interim statuses. (Cf. [Wel21])

Disadvantages:

- Dependence on decision-making steps can jeopardize closing the deal.
- The customer might already decide against the cooperation in the first or second step. (Cf. [Wel21])

Assessment of suitability for technical sales:

In general, the method, with its division into three decision steps, helps to see where the sales cycle currently stands and to classify which steps are important next. However, the method is more suitable for advanced salespeople, as beginners could fail at the first decision step. This method can be done as follows: illuminating the competitive landscape, showing what the advantages and disadvantages of the offer are compared to the competition, preparing to refute any objections raised by the customer. If the customer needs something that cannot be offered, there is no point in proceeding unless a reasonable alternative can be provided. A decision-making scheme can be used to prepare for objections and other eventualities so that potential objections and rejections can be countered. (Cf. [Wel21])

The four fundamentals of the SNAP method are also fundamentals of technical sales and should always be part of a technical salesperson's sales process. Whether this method is the right one is determined by the three decision-making processes from the SNAP method. These aim to be integrated into the customer's processes and to adapt them with the customer. If the customer is willing to do so, a deal is very likely, as the customer will not disclose his processes to several salespeople. This implies a high-capacity commitment of the customer and a disclosure of its internal structure. Here, a high level of trust in the technical salesperson and his abilities to analyze the process and generate added value for the customer is required. For this reason, Welsch-Lehmann also writes that this method is more suitable for experienced salespeople.

With this method, too, a distinction must be made as to whether it is a high-turnover project or rather a small project. In the case of low-turnover projects, this method should be avoided, as the salesperson must plan a large amount of time to analyze, understand and influence the customer's processes. Precautionary preparation is also required at every decision step in order to be able to counteract possible objections immediately or in advance. For high-turnover projects, the time-consuming effort is worthwhile. According to Welsch-Lehmann, one disadvantage is that the customer could decide against the cooperation in the first or second step. However, this is not necessarily a disadvantage in technical sales. An early decision against the cooperation also means freeing up capacities in the offering company for other customers. In technical sales, there are usually many other steps behind the salesperson, such as design, obtaining quotations for material costs for the project and, of course, preparing the offer, etc. If these steps are carried out and it then comes to a non-consideration by the customer, a lot of time and therefore money has already been invested in the project. Here, an early exit is much better than a later one, which can also be seen as an advantage of the method. As a final evaluation of the method, it can be stated that this method is worthwhile for experienced salespeople for larger projects.

4.2.7 Sandler Selling System – Efficient Selling

The Sandler Selling System breaks away from the classic distribution of roles in sales. This system is based on the idea that the seller and the buyer make equal efforts to close the deal. Right at the beginning, possible hurdles and problems are addressed that could prevent the deal. This is because fundamental aspects, such as budget and schedule, are often not identified until shortly before closing and stand in the way of a successful sale when both sides have already invested time and effort. With the Sandler Method, such pain points are discussed directly and cleared out of the way. This allows both sides to assess at an early stage whether further discussions and future cooperation make sense. (Cf. [Wel21])

The Sandler Selling Points:

1. “Bonding and Rapport: Establish good rapport with your prospects from your very first meeting. After all, people tend to do business with people they like and trust.“ [San14]
2. “Up-Front Contracts: Set an Up-Front Contract before every meeting with: (1) time and place, (2) purpose, (3) client´s agenda, (4) your agenda, and (5) the outcome, or what success would „look“ like.“ [San14]

3. “Pain: Uncover your prospect´s pain, which is the gap between where prospects are and where they want to be. After all, you can´t create solutions until you know the full scope of the problem.“ [San14]
4. “Budget: Set an Up-Front Contract in this, the negotation phase, to talk about your prospect´s budget. Find out if money is avaiable for the sale, and how much is available“ [San14]
5. “Decision: Review what´s been covered and start gathering information. Your goal is to either: (1) disqualify the prospect, (2) determine that you need to meet with more people or, (3) qualify the prospect.“ [San14]
6. “Fulfillment: Make your presentation here, late in the sales process, now that you have crucial information. It should focus on the pain you uncovered, meet the budget parameters you identified, and target the real decision makers.“ [San14]
7. “Post-Sell: Seal the deal at this critical phase by: (1) counteracting buyer´s remorse, (2) preventing the loss of the sale to the competition or the incumbent, and (3) setting an Up-Front Contract about next steps.“ [San14]

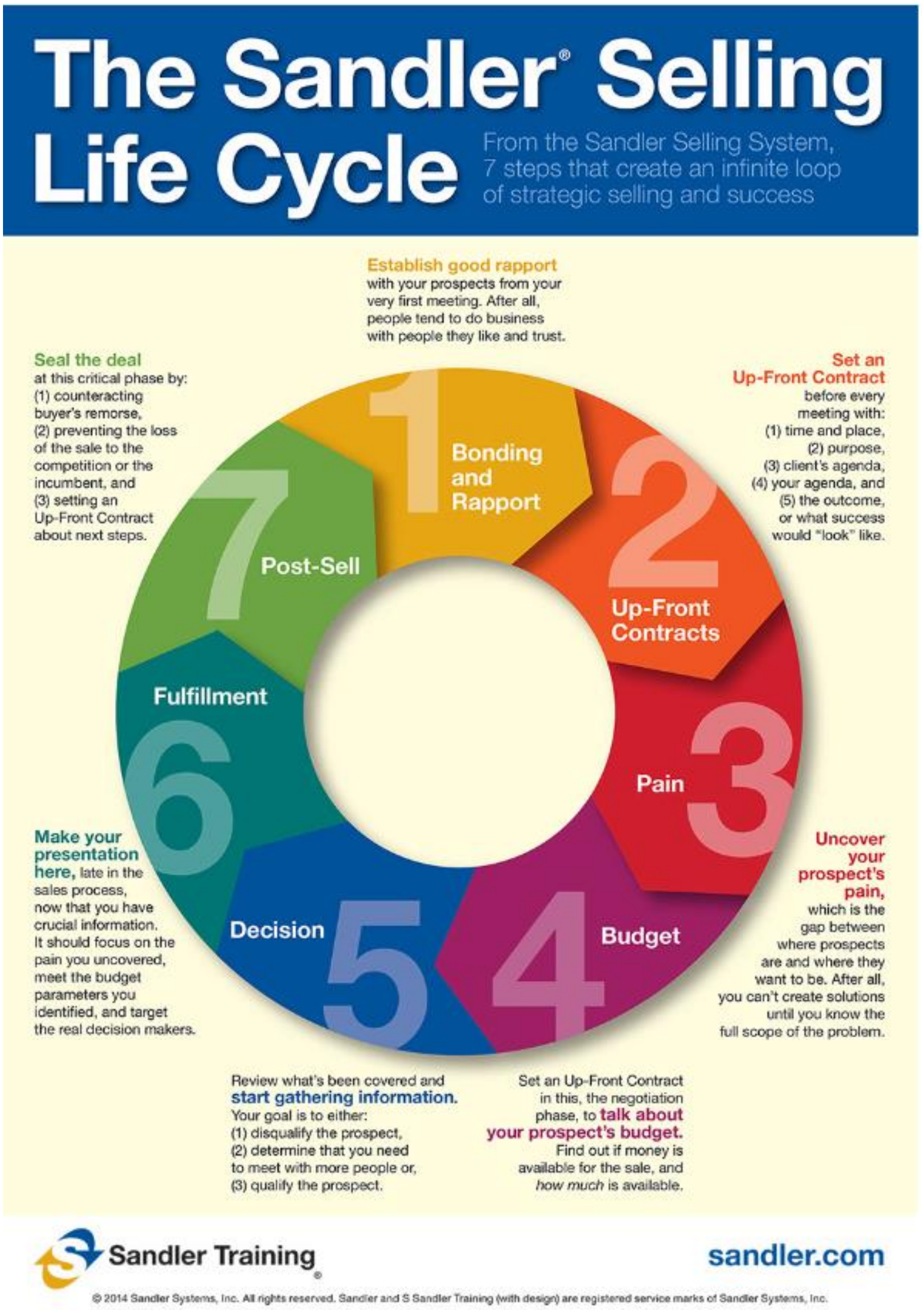

Figure 3: The Sandler Selling Life Cycle, [San14].

Advantages:

- Efficiency.
- Early knowledge of the customer's objections. (Cf. [Wel21])

Disadvantages:

- Possible solutions to the objections and hurdles might fall by the wayside, as the talks are quickly terminated if it does not seem to fit. (Cf. [Wel21])

Assessment of suitability for technical sales:

Already in the first or second conversation, the important questions about the budget, the schedule and other decisive requirements are clarified. In this way, it can be quickly decided whether further sales talks make sense and whether the product or service can also be sold to the interested customer. (Cf. [Wel21])

This proven sales method impresses with its efficiency. As a result, resources are conserved by the seller, and it quickly becomes clear whether a purchase can be concluded. However, it is rather unsuitable for complex products that require explanation and focus on the joint solution of a customer problem. (Cf. [Wel21])

The method aims to evaluate at an early stage on the basis of the parameters of the Sandler method whether it is worthwhile to invest time in the project. The advantage is again obvious. If it is recognized at an early stage that a cooperation will not lead to a deal, capacities can be saved directly, and these can be invested in other projects or customers.

However, this procedure is rarely possible in technical solution sales. Even if the basic goals of the customer and the budget have been determined, the solution for the task must still be analyzed, evaluated, and calculated. It is hardly possible to make an exact statement as to whether the project can be implemented according to the customer requirements with the parameters available at the start. In the technical solutions business, the solution is analyzed and developed piece by piece with the customer and work definitely has to be put into it at the beginning. The customer often does not know what the solution should look like later and often does not set a fixed budget for it, as it must first be seen whether a solution promise added value in the long term. This is only determined during the project based on a cost-benefit analysis. For example, a new solution should reduce the cycle time for manufacturing a product. The customer has previously prepared an amortization calculation at which cycle time reduction the project would be worthwhile. However, only in the design phase of the project can validated statements be made about a cycle time reduction and whether the new machine with the targeted values is then still within budget. Accordingly, this method is not suitable for technical solution sales.

For simple technical product sales, the basic features of this method are well applicable. The customer needs a solution, and the seller can offer a finished product. This allows an immediate evaluation of the parameters and the budget, whether the product fits the applications. Here, this method can be used to determine at an early stage whether the seller and the customer find each other. However, there is also a problem with the method in this case: If it initially turns out that cooperation makes no sense, but the project then changes in various parameters and thus fits the product of the seller again, the seller has already left the procurement process, but this is not the case for other competitors who pursue a different method. Nevertheless, this method is recommended for technical product sales since a capacity assessment is always carried out at an early stage.

Even for an inexperienced technical salesperson, this is an easy-to-use method. There is a clear schedule that can be followed. The risk of getting lost in the sales process and putting too much time into a project that cannot be won is very low. However, care must be taken that the salesperson does not give the impression that he is not interested in cooperation in the first place. If right at the beginning only parameters and an evaluation of whether the project is wanted at all is discussed, the customer can quickly get the impression that there is no real interest in him and his tasks. This danger can be easily eliminated by targeted training, even of new technical salespeople.

4.2.8 Challenger Selling

This sales method is still one of the most popular sales techniques. It was developed by Matthew Dixon and Brent Adamson for B2B sales. The method does not rely on building relationships between customer and seller to reach a common consensus. Rather, the seller, the challenger, opens a new business approach to the customer. He thus openly challenges the customer's business model. (Cf. [Wel21])

The Challenger adapts its way of communicating to the customer, its habits, and expectations. Nevertheless, the seller is not afraid to disagree with the customer. He does not prioritize a harmonious sales pitch and relies on his own expertise and knowledge. To do this, the Challenger does not have to be very familiar with the customer's industry. He convinces the customer of the added value of his product and shows how the customer can also benefit from it. (Cf. [Wel21])

Advantages:

- Customer discovers new needs.
- Innovation and an idea are sold and not the product.

- Provides the customer with a unique perspective on a product that other sales methods struggle to achieve.
- Has a solid understanding of the customer's value drivers.
- Can identify the economic drivers of the customer´s business and opens the doors for comfortable budget discussions. (Cf. [Wel21])

Disadvantages:

- Companies often cling to old ways of thinking and are difficult to convince.
- Can only be used by experienced salespeople or the method works best with high-performing sales representatives.
- Best suited for complex sales approaches as opposed to simple sales cycles.
- More difficult to implement if an employee has only been trained with other methods such as building relationships. (Cf. [Wel21])

Assessment of suitability for technical sales:

This successful sales method is particularly good for innovative and new technologies. The Challenger starts the conversation with the customer by conveying something new, such as a new technology, for example Virtual Reality (VR). But he does not go into the actual product that he wants to sell. In the beginning, it's more about triggering an “aha” moment in the customer. In this way, the Challenger puts the customer's situation in a larger context and reveals needs that the customer was not even aware of. This could be, for example, the display of an exhibition or a trade fair stand with virtual reality. This challenges the customer to think outside the box and consider new business approaches. Only then is your own product, such as VR glasses or a VR platform, brought into play. (Cf. [Wel21])

This method is particularly well suited for selling new technologies and innovations and for creating customized solutions that clearly differentiate themselves from the competition. It is designed for B2B sales. However, it only works if your salespeople have in-depth expertise and can back it up with arguments. (Cf. [Wel21])

The critical core point of the method has already been listed in the disadvantages. The method does not attach importance to the establishment of a customer relationship or the needs of the customer, but the customer is run over by the salesperson with an approach. When applying the method, it depends, above all, on the personality of the customer. Since the customer's needs are not analyzed, but the customer's need for a new product or application is immediately stirred up, the customer must be receptive to this type of selling. On the part of the salesperson, there are two aspects that must be considered in particular: On the one hand, the salesperson must have already invested a lot of time in the research of the customer before contacting them in order to only approach customers with whom a high success rate with the offered idea prevails. The salesperson must design a theoretical scenario for himself in advance, which promises the customer added value. Let's stay with the example of the VR glasses: If the customer has a product, which is particularly convincing by haptic arguments, so it must be touched by the end customer to ensure a successful sale, a virtual environment does not help the customer with his own deal and the customer will not go along with or approve of the idea. The salesperson must therefore be aware of the characteristics of the product of the customer or the customer's production in order to be able to place his own product with added value. On the other hand, there is a strong risk of leaving "scorched earth" with the customer. The salesperson shows up at the customer and dictates to the customer which idea or which product he should use in the future for which case. Since there is no bond with the customer, he may not feel valued, taken seriously or even patronized. In this case, a later sale with other products is also very unlikely since the customer keeps the salesperson in bad memory and does not want to enter into further discussions with the sales representative.

The application of this method is therefore particularly suitable for new products or ideas that have yet to establish themselves on the market. The great advantage of this method lies above all in the time savings of the non-profound customer loyalty, which must result in an added value in relation to the time spend on the previous research on the customers. If this is given, time is saved, and the free capacities can be used for other customers. If the customer can be convinced of the new product and the added value, this method also leads to a quick conclusion. With this method in relation to new products, there is also no competitive situation, which the salesperson has to face, since the customer did not know about the possibilities beforehand and therefore there can be no competition. This also leads to a high closing success rate.

From a sales perspective, this method, as described, is only suitable for experienced salespeople. The salesperson surprises the customer with a new product or idea. Here, the salesperson must present the added value for the customer exactly, in detail and selectively in the shortest possible time, so that the customer immediately recognizes the added value for himself. In addition to a good preparation for the customer, the salesperson must have a deep knowledge of his own product, know the customer's market and be able to rhetorically convince the customer quickly of the added value. With this method, there is only one chance to convince the customer.

For technical sales, this method can only be used to a limited extent. It is a proactive method and the product to be offered is the most important criterion in this method. This method can only be applied with future technologies or new products. This method cannot be used for old products that the customer is already using. Also, the use of the method is only possible in technical product sales, since a problem is required for solution sales, which does not exist in this case. It is not about uncovering problems with the customer and solving them, but about showing the customer something that means added value in an unknown direction and what he has not thought of before. In summary, this is a very good method for new products to bring them to the market, which means that this method can only be used with the appropriate parameters and not generally in technical sales for an existing product portfolio.

4.2.9 Power-Based Selling – Score points with industry knowledge

In power-based selling, the salesperson takes on a consulting role. He convinces with expert knowledge. Of course, experience and expertise of the seller in the respective field is the prerequisite. He must be extremely knowledgeable about the industry. Authenticity is a top priority in this method. To be able to apply the power-based principle, the salesperson must know the customer's target market with all its dynamics and this better than the customer himself. The sales talks are characterized by technically and professionally in-depth knowledge, which the seller incorporates. In this way, he can develop a business strategy with the customer as a consultant and thus makes himself indispensable for the customer. (Cf. [Wel21])

Advantages:

- A long-term and resilient cooperation can develop since the seller makes himself indispensable as a consultant. (Cf. [Wel21])

Disadvantages:

- Time consuming.
- Networking is an important prerequisite for gaining industry knowledge and the contacts must be maintained regularly. (Cf. [Wel21])

Assessment of suitability for technical sales:

In the sales pitch, the customer is shown the benefits of the product and the corresponding added value based on the industry and market expertise and the customer's opportunity to use it to better position and distinguish himself in the market. This can be, for example, new devices for the production with a suitable service contract and a warranty. (Cf. [Wel21])

With appropriate experience and a good network of valuable contacts, this sales principle is well suited to sell the products. However, the corresponding expertise in the field is a basic prerequisite and this must be able to be communicated in a well-founded manner. (Cf. [Wel21])

This method is very well suited for technical sales. Compared to the sale of non-technical products or services, for which no in-depth industry knowledge or product knowledge is required, this is different in technical sales. Technical products always definitely require three points, often even four:

1. Product knowledge: For technical products, the technical salesperson acts not only as a salesperson, but also as a consultant. Technical products are never self-explanatory compared to non-technical products. To illustrate the difference, a short example from non-technical sales in the B2B sector is shown: The seller sells kitchen knives, which are to be included in the reseller's product range. Without going into further detail, the use of kitchen knives is also known to every non-specialist buyer and the product is self-explanatory. The salesperson only has to be able to show the added value (USP) of his own product and possibly the differences to the market competitors. An industry knowledge is also not necessary here, as these are kitchen knives for the normal use. Of course, there are also enough products in non-technical sales that require explanation. The difference to technical sales is simply that in technical sales all products require explanation. In the case of technical components, it cannot be assumed that the customer knows how they work. Nor can it be assumed that the customer will independently identify areas of application for the technical product, instead, the technical salesperson must provide support with a demand analysis. For the technical solutions business, it goes without saying that the salesperson must

have a sound technical knowledge of the products and their application possibilities in order to be able to generate solutions for the customer.

2. Industry knowledge: Industry knowledge must be available in technical sales. Technical products and above all solutions are capital goods and only very rarely merchandise for resellers. The salesperson needs a basic knowledge of the industry in which the customer is located to be able to provide advice. What are the general requirements in the customer's industry? Does the customer have special requirements for the products, e.g., with regard to the surface or sustainability, which are specified by the industry? Is the industry a competitive market and are investments therefore rather difficult or does the customer have market sovereignty? There are many other questions that are important, but the examples should make it clear that without industry knowledge, no targeted advice and thus a sale is possible.

3. Competition: In the method, no reference to competition is made by the author. However, it is inevitable in a method that puts consulting in the foreground to know the competitors in the industry and their possibilities. Already during the first consultation, the salesperson must clearly show the USP compared to the competition in order to make comparability more difficult or, in the best case, to exclude it. In the technical consulting of solutions, comparability is generally more difficult for the customer to realize since the ideas of the technical consultants differ. Also, in technical solution sales consulting, not very many providers are compared with each other, since consulting and joint elaboration of the solution also always means a high capacitive effort for the customer. However, this is not the case in technical product sales. Here, the individual products can be compared quite easily by the customer. Accordingly, the technical salesperson must stand out from the competition as quickly as possible to secure the contract. This is not possible without industry knowledge.
4. Process knowledge: The fourth point in a consulting-based sales method is often underestimated. Process knowledge. In the technical area, the customer usually needs a product or a solution for a process. Here, the technical salesperson can score points if he is able to examine the process with the customer and does not see his product or solution as self-sufficient. As a result, the right idea for the entire

process can be found for the customer, which may differ from a self-sufficient solution. To illustrate this, an example of a manufacturing process: The customer needs advice on a fully automatic production machine, which no longer requires the use of personnel with a specified cycle time. The technical sales representative consults the customer in this regard and the offered machine meets all criteria. However, the whole process is ignored. At first, the solution seems promising. Another technical salesperson asks the customer about the complete process. It turns out that the production machine can only produce one part at a time. Technologically, no matter which provider, this is not otherwise possible. However, the raw parts are always provided to the machine in six batches by logistics. Now the process in the provision has to be changed or an employee has to manually insert only one part from the delivery into the machine. One criterion was that no more personnel deployment is desired. The technical salesperson who can recognize the process uncovers this problem and can search with the customer for a complete solution (e.g., a fully automatic separator in front of the machine). Due to the better and holistic advice, it is very likely that the second salesperson will receive the order, as he has advised the customer holistically. Expertise or process knowledge beyond the actual application creates trust. And trust is the basis of a consulting-based sales method.

In summary, this method is highly recommended for technical sales, with exceptions in technical product sales. There are basically two exceptions. On the one hand, if the technical product has been on the market for so long that it no longer needs explanation. In this case, no consulting on the product is necessary. The other point relates to the basic corporate strategy. If the company focuses on products that are as cheap as possible compared to the competition, which can be achieved by fewer or poorer personnel at similar production costs. Means that the corporate strategy provides no or only minimal consulting to save personnel costs and sells over the favorable product price. In this case, that a consulting-based method for sales is not appropriate. In contrast, this method is highly recommended when the company's strategy is exactly the opposite. The company relies on more and well-qualified personnel, which is also reflected in the product costs in order to offer customers a comprehensive service in consulting.

This method is unreservedly recommended in solution sales. Industry knowledge and consulting are the basics for solution sales. Process knowledge of the technical salesperson in the mentioned industry is also very important here. Without in-depth knowledge or experience in the industry and its specific requirements, suitable solutions can hardly be generated. Of course, this method also has negative properties. On the one hand, this is a very time-consuming method, which cannot aim at a quick conclusion since the consultation is a core of the method. This means that if the deal does not take place, a lot of time has already been invested in the customer. With this method, it is not possible to determine at an early stage or before the consultation whether the advice will also result in a purchase. This method also places high demands on the technical salesperson. He is not only a salesperson, but also a consultant with in-depth industry knowledge. If the corporate strategy is chosen in this way or the product cannot be sold without consulting and industry knowledge, this places high demands on the sales staff. With this method, new and inexperienced technical salespeople must first undergo long term training before they can enter into active customer contact. A quick change of sales personnel is not possible.

4.2.10 Consultative Value Selling – Creating the right added value

This sales method is based on the added value provided to the customer with the product. It is important that as much information as possible about the customer and his business model is researched. The intensive examination with the target customer is enormously important. The core of the method is to ask many questions and thus also get to know the strategic orientation of the customer. Only in this way can the salesperson correctly understand the needs of the customer and find a suitable starting point to place the added value of his own product appropriately and to point out the concrete advantages. Here, too, the seller has more of a consulting function. This sales method is particularly useful when a highly customizable product is sold that can be perfectly tailored to the customer´s needs. This technique also offers a good advantage in price negotiations, since the product and thus also the price can be aligned according to customer needs. (Cf. [Wel21])

The procedure is described below and shown in figure 4.

1. Create a connection to the customer: Before creating the connection, you have to research the customer. Learn more about the prospective business, including competition and growth rate.

2. Understand customer needs: To understand the customer needs you have to ask open-ended questions to better understand goals, needs and changes. While asking the customer pay attention to tone and be an active listener guiding the conversation.
3. Address customer needs: Show how your product/service can solve the lead´s business challenge.
4. Close the sale: To close the sale you have first to determine whether your lead is qualified based on the information you have gathered. If that´s the case the prospect will build a relationship with you and should feel motivated to buy.
5. Establish a sustainable customer relationship: Don't stop at completion but build a long-term customer relationship based on the project. (Cf. [San14] [Luc22])

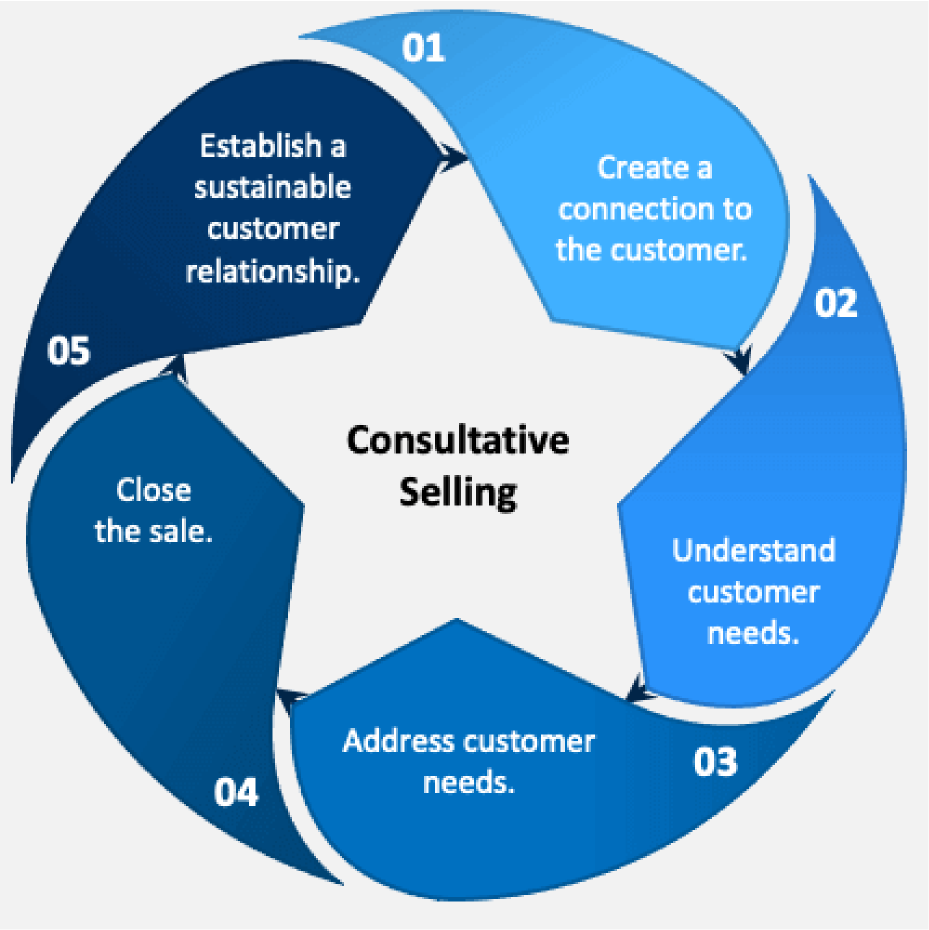

Figure 4: Consultative Sales Process, [San14].

Advantages:

- Detailed knowledge of the customer and his needs.

- Trusting relationship with the customer. (Cf. [Wel21])

Disadvantages:

- The seller must first know the customer very well.
- Time-consuming. (Cf. [Wel21])

Assessment of suitability for technical sales:

Let's assume that food filling equipment is sold. By systematically asking the target customer about the current equipment, it is discovered that the customer is not quite satisfied with the maintenance service and the reliability of the machines, for example. Here the own added value can now be placed and a 24-hour service for the devices can be offered and also the trade-in of the current machines, thus providing the customer with a special offer. (Cf. [Wel21])

This offers the customer real added value, as well as a fast and satisfactory solution. The customer feels understood and does not have the feeling that only a quick sale has been forced. (Cf. [Wel21])

If products are sold that may also impress with additional services and set themselves apart from their competitors through added value, this method certainly makes sense. However, it should be noted that this method is very research-intensive and time-consuming, especially at the beginning. (Cf. [Wel21])

This method represents very well the difference between USP and UPP described in chapter 2.3. In the method purely the customer and/or the customer requirement is considered and accordingly a solution or a product tailor-made on these requirements is offered. As already described, this method is very time-consuming and can only be used in product sales if the product can be adapted to the needs of the customers. The product itself must therefore be very flexible or modifiable. If this is not the case, the method cannot be used for product sales, since many resources are expended at the start, although the product does not meet the requirements at all.

However, this method can be used very well for solution sales. In order to generate a solution for a task of the customer, he and his needs must always be understood.

In summary, this method can be used well if the product portfolio or the product is very flexible and can be adapted to the needs of the customers or if the focus is on the solution business. However, even with this method, as with all other methods that require a deep customer relationship and familiarization with the customer, it must be weighed up whether the time investment is worthwhile. If this is the case and the product or solution is convincing, a relationship of trust with the customer is also built up with this method, which leads to a sustainable customer relationship.

Basically, methods that require a deep product knowledge or solution knowledge and a consulting function of the technical sales employee are more suitable for experienced salespeople. This is not necessarily the case with this method. Due to the clear structure of the procedure in connection with e.g., a questionnaire, even inexperienced salespeople can successfully use this method. For the solution of the customer's task, however, inexperienced salespeople require support in the company, e.g., in the form of a specialized department, which generates a solution based on the collected information and makes it available to the sales representative.

In short: This method is only suitable for experienced salespeople if the entire process is covered by one person. If the salesperson is only the information collector and subsequent departments develop the solution, then this method is also suitable for inexperienced technical salespeople.

4.2.11 Customer Centric Selling – Focus on the customer

This proven selling method is customer-centric selling. The focus is not on the product, but on the customer, according to the motto "The customer is king". (Cf. [Wel21])

The sales method is based on six defined principles of conduct:

1. Dialogue instead of monologue.
2. Ask relevant questions.
3. Focus on problem solving.
4. Promote product benefits and not the product itself.
5. Adapt the sales cycle to the customer's schedule.
6. Designing customer consultation in such a way that the customers can make qualified decisions themselves without persuading them. (Cf. [Wel21])

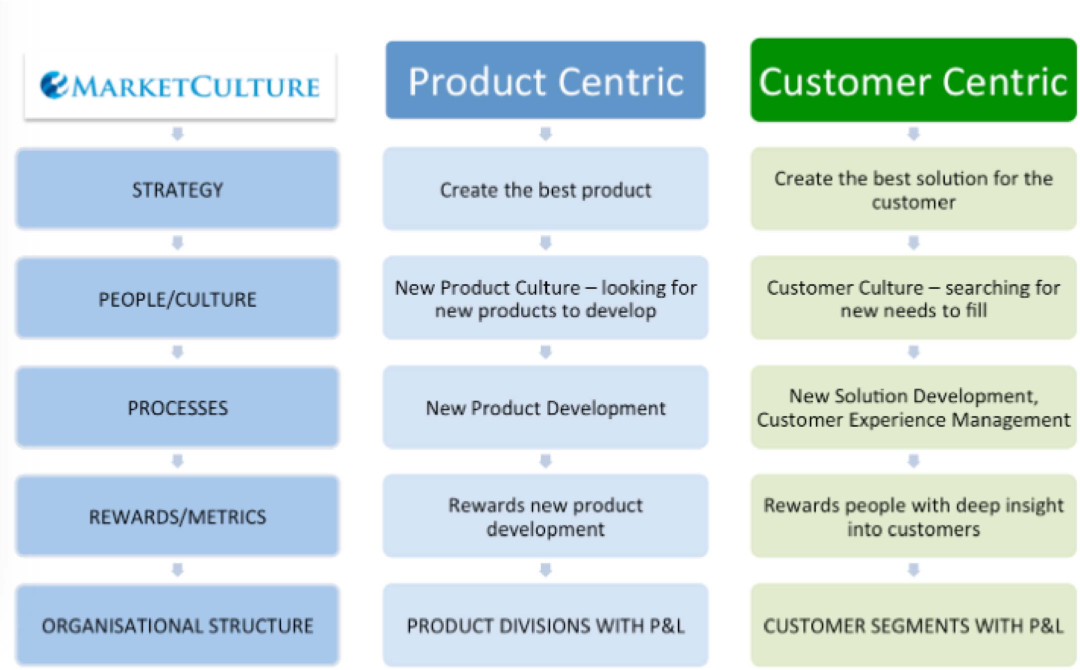

Figure 5: Market Culture vs. Product Centric vs. Customer Centric, [Wel21].

It makes sense to use this method if not only the sales department is customer-centric, but also your product and marketing are customer-centric. As a rule, this method convinces with the overall package that a salesperson delivers with his product and his company and all areas work accordingly with a focus on the customer. (Cf. [Wel21])

Advantages:

- Close customer relationship.
- Loyal customers.
- High recommendation rate. (Cf. [Wel21])

Disadvantages:

- The principle should be part of your business strategy.
- Time consuming.
- "The customer is king" must be adhered to at every point. (Cf. [Wel21])

Assessment of suitability for technical sales:

With this method, it is absolutely essential that the sales process is fully focused on the customer and his needs. Sales must not only be intensively involved with the customer but must also always be interested in finding solutions to the customer's problems. If it concerns, for example, a supplier for raw materials and the customer had so far often problems with the quality or the delivery times of its raw materials, the new products and services must be the optimal alternative on which the customer can rely permanently. (Cf. [Wel21])

If customer centricity is part of the corporate philosophy, then this sales strategy is the optimal complement. However, it should be noted that the promise of customer centricity must also be kept, otherwise customers will become dissatisfied and leave very quickly. (Cf. [Wel21])

This method is clearly designed for the strategy of selling via UPP. The own product moves into the background and the needs of the customer in the foreground. Here, too, the product portfolio or the product must provide this type of procedure, or the corporate strategy is based on solution sales.

The advantages of this method are already very well described and are the main criterion for this method. Since the customer is the absolute focus and all wishes are fulfilled as far as possible, he naturally feels very well cared of. A loss of the customer, as long as the customer centricity works, is almost impossible. However, this is also the main disadvantage of the method, in addition to its time-consuming nature. There is an absolute dependence of the condition of the customer. The customer does not buy because of the added value of the products, but because he feels comfortable with the supplier. This method must be always guaranteed by the entire company. It is difficult to change the company's strategy when this strategy is used. Especially in economically difficult times of the customer, this method is not sustainable. If your own company is in a crisis, the added value of the product outweighs the added value of personal bond and well-being in cooperation with the supplier.

Since this method is dictated by the company's strategy, an evaluation alone does not make sense for technical sales. In Chapter 2.3, business strategies were divided into two types. This method is only applicable when using the second corporate strategy, namely, to offer its own products for a higher price, since this strategy includes a high level of customer service, which is important for the method.

The requirements for the technical sales department cannot be divided into experienced and inexperienced salespeople with this method. The method is less about the absolute expertise of the salespeople, but about the clear customer centric mindset. This requires charismatic salespeople who are authentic and can give the customer a good feeling. As the first point of contact for the customer, the salesperson is the face of his company and if the salesperson does not radiate charismatic customer centricity, the customer will not transfer this to the selling company either.

4.2.12 Target Account Selling (TAS method) – Success with major customers

In the target account selling method, large projects are managed by sales teams. The offer is created based on a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, risks), in which the customer is carefully analyzed. (Cf. [Wel21])

The TAS method requires the sales team to recognize its key customers. Since these customers account for a large part of the sales, a great deal of effort is made for them. The success of this method lies in the focused and good preparation for key customers. (Cf. [Wel21])

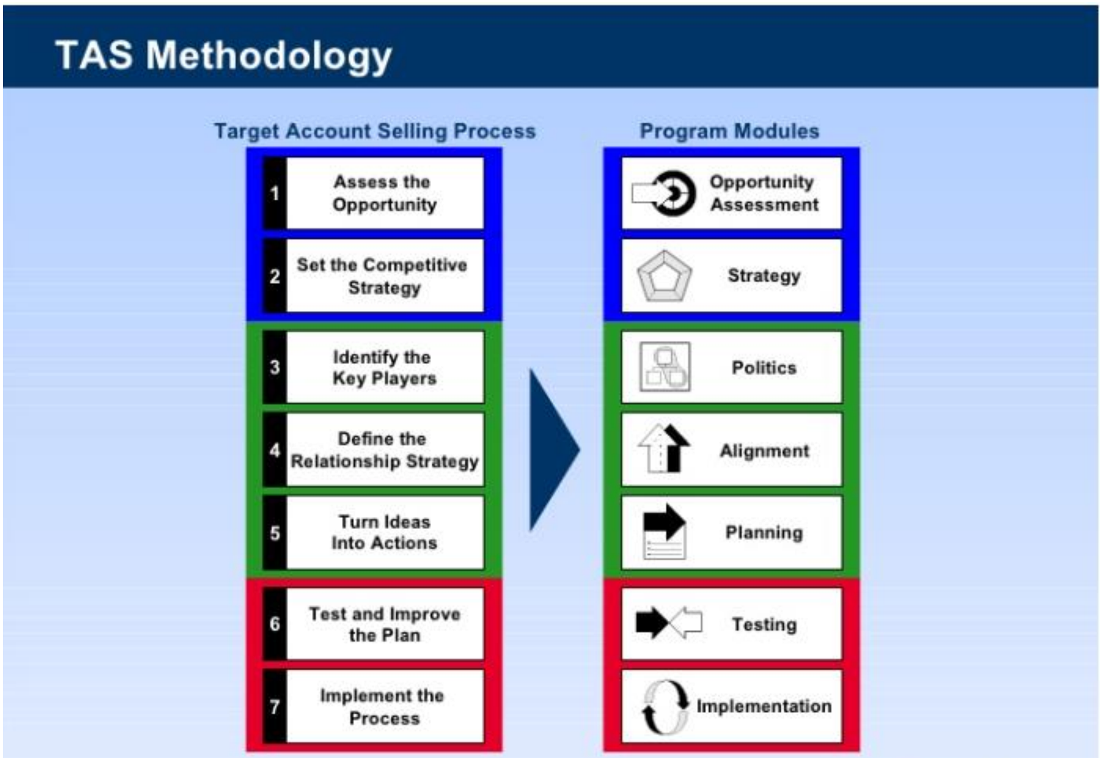

Figure 6: TAS Methodology, [Wel21].

Advantages:

- Effective customer service.
- Long-term business relationship. (Cf. [Wel21])

Disadvantages:

- Dependence on a few large customers. (Cf. [Wel21])

Assessment of suitability for technical sales:

This sales method is based on the pareto principle, also known as the 80/20 rule. This means that 80% of sales are generated by 20% of the customers. Key customers must be identified and analyzed. Because only if they are known well enough and their needs are known, the sales team can convince them with suitable solutions. If it can be ensured that the large key customers can be generated, who account for 80% of the sales and also value is placed on intensive customer care and this can be guaranteed, this proven sales method is suitable for the company It is to be considered however that with the TAS method always a high risk resonates, if only one customer is lost. (Cf. [Wel21])

Again, this method depends heavily on the company's strategy and products. If the products and the production system of the selling company are primarily designed for series production for specific areas, this method may be the only really applicable method. This means that niche products that are produced in large quantities have only a few large customers as target customers. However, this is a special case.

Most companies in the B2B sector have a mixed customer structure because the products make this possible. That is, 20% of the customers stand out for 80% of the sales. These companies usually divide the technical sales department into the so-called key account management (taking care of major customers) and the area sales (taking care of the rest of the customers). The selection of a method for the two types of customer structures differs from each other. While the large customers require separate and more intensive support, this is not profitable for the smaller customers. If the customer structure has these large customers, this is a good method for technical sales. The great danger in the distribution of sales according to the pareto system is that if a major customer breaks away, it cannot be absorbed in the short term. Special care must be provided for these major customers so that a loss of these is as unlikely as possible.

As a basis for the explanation of the TAS method, it is assumed that entire sales teams take care of the major customers separately. In this case, it does not matter whether the technical salesperson is experienced or inexperienced because a whole team is available for the customer. In reality, however, this is rarely the case. Most companies operate with central departments behind the sales representatives, i.e., the employees from the other departments, such as design or order processing, are not assigned to one customer. In this case, the technical sales representative or here also called Key Account Manager is the actual supporting figure in dealing with the major customer. Due to the importance of the major customer for the company, almost exclusively experienced salespeople are considered for this position.

4.2.13 Neuro-Selling – Selling through targeted stimuli

Emotionality and the targeted use of sales triggers play an important role in neuro-selling. Studies have shown at the end of the nineties that decisions very often arise in the limbic system of the brain, which is responsible for emotionality and the subconscious. For this sales method, this means that not only hard facts and the price are decisive for the customer's purchase decision. Trust in the seller, sympathy, brand awareness and emotional triggers are more decisive. (Cf. [Wel21])

Advantages:

- The emotional bond creates a strong and resilient business relationship.
- Low emigration of the customers. (Cf. [Wel21])

Disadvantages:

- If the trust is broken, the business relationship can no longer be saved. (Cf. [Wel21])

Assessment of suitability for technical sales:

In addition to the arguments about the benefit of the product, it is important that the wishes and concerns of the customer are taken into account. It is necessary to identify which emotional type of the customer is:

- Security-loving and opinionated.
- Curious and success oriented. (Cf. [Wel21])

Then emotional commonalities must be created, and these must be highlighted with targeted triggers. If, for example, both the customer and the sales department are family businesses, this commonality could provide the decisive factor for the conclusion of the purchase. (Cf. [Wel21])

Neuro-selling requires a certain sensitivity and a good knowledge of human nature. If the salesperson can score points with it and the customer is willing to enter into a business relationship on an emotional level, this is the best sales method for a company. (Cf. [Wel21])

The evaluation of Welsch-Lehmann from the last paragraph, that this can be the best sales method, is to be viewed very critically. The customer relationship is based only on the foundation of the emotional level. The added value of the supplier or the product is only of very minor importance here. This emotional foundation can disintegrate very quickly with small differences. Also, the foundation is based almost solely on the relationship between the salesperson and the customer. In this case, if the salesperson leaves the company and migrates to the competition, he takes the customers with him. This represents a very big risk for the company and an enormously strong bargaining chip for the salesperson for salary negotiations.

Target-oriented sales work is also not really possible with this method. The business relationships and the establishment of these are based on an emotional basis between the salesperson and the customer. There is no analysis that can show whether a business relationship is possible on an emotional basis. A targeted acquisition strategy for new customers is not possible with this method.

Also, the method does not entail a systematic approach to acquisition. The success of the method depends solely on the salesperson. The method again requires charismatic and authentic salespeople, but the level of experience does not matter.

With reference to the example of Welsch-Lehmann with family businesses, this method can be promising. If the salesperson is also a shareholder or the owner of the selling company, there is no risk that he will leave the company and take the customers with him. In this case, the salesperson represents the entire company and a personal bond with the customer also gives the customer a good feeling, as he knows that every statement of the salesperson also reflects the opinion of the company.

In summary, this method is not recommended for technical sales, as the method is not structured and not targeted applicable and relies too much on the uncertainty factor of an emotional bond. However, it can be said that the basis of this method is used in every sale. In a previous chapter, it was already mentioned that "people buy from people". If the sales representative is completely unsympathetic to the customer and there are no points of intersection, a sale is very difficult even with a convincing product.

4.2.14 Be.Smart – A holistic approach

This sales method combines many of the sales methods mentioned so far. It was developed by ec4u expert Consulting AG in cooperation with St. Gallen Business School. By combining different methods, it provides a holistic approach that covers the entire sales process. A unique selling point of this successful sales method is the smart WIZARD, which can also be implemented in a CRM system. The smart WIZARD contains eleven criteria: (Cf. [Wel21])

1. Order estimation.
2. Probability of occurrence.
3. Time of occurrence.
4. Customer status.
5. Strategic importance.
6. Resource utilization.
7. Degree of utilization.
8. Competitive situation.
9. Product complexity.
10. Performance type.
11. Risk assessment. (Cf. [Wel21])

These criteria must be evaluated individually, resulting in different focal points for the further procedure in the sales process. The smart WIZARD provides a recommendation for each sales phase. (Cf. [Wel21])

Advantages:

- Quantitative and qualitative measurability.
- Easy to use.
- Increased efficiency. (Cf. [Wel21])

Disadvantages:

- Possibilities of the smart WIZARD could remain unused and not be fully exploited. (Cf. [Wel21])

Assessment of suitability for technical sales:

Especially for large sales projects, this method is optimal. Due to the analysis and the detailed documentation of the results, you can ideally handle complex orders for the customer. In addition, this type of project management allows you to make individual adjustments and necessary optimizations in the sales process. The standardized individualization of order processing ensures more effective work that is less prone to errors. The salespeople can concentrate on the essentials in complex sales projects. If standardization in sales processes is important and the focus is on large and complex projects, this method should be implemented. It will increase the efficiency of the employees in the long term and ease sales cycles. (Cf. [Wel21])

The Be.Smart method relies on a structured approach to projects. This is exactly where the field of application and thus the weakness of the method lies. The structured, but elaborate development of the method is purely suitable for the project business. However, if the company strategy is designed for many small projects or for the rapid and quantitative sale of technical products, this method is not recommended, since the collection of the necessary information for the WIZARD and the evaluation of this does not justify the effort for the expected return.

What is completely missing in the method is the reference to the actual salesperson. This method does not provide any information about how the closing should be done. If the last point, the risk assessment, indicates that the project should be implemented, this is only from the point of view of the offering company. This is followed by the complete sales work in order to convince the customer that he should place the project with the offering company. Accordingly, this method is not applicable alone, but can only be seen as a good support in the sales process. As a support, this method can be used accordingly for larger projects. Due to the clear structure, this method can also be carried out by inexperienced or even employees outside the industry. No specialists are needed to get the required information from the customer and enter it into the tool. For the closing, another sales method is then additionally required and the appropriate personnel to the chosen method.

4.2.15 Conclusion on the sales methods

The most successful sales methods have one thing in common: the customer and his needs and problems are the focus and you as a salesperson act as a problem solver.

You are not just selling a product or service but an added value for the customer. Which of the proven sales methods is used depends on the one hand on the offer of the company and on the other hand on the target group. There are several ways to align sales. It's the whole package that counts. (Cf. [Wel21])

When choosing the sales method, the executive must analyze which methods fit the corporate strategy and the products or services to be offered. It is not necessary to commit to one method, but methods can also be combined to achieve the best possible result for the sales strategy. It can also happen that the chosen method does not deliver the desired results or that changes in the market make another method more promising. A change of method can therefore take place but should only be carried out if there is noticeable added value. Based on the selection of the method, the technical sales staff is hired and developed. In the event of a change, capacities already invested in the training of the employees on the used method can be lost or important employees cannot identify with the new method and are thus demotivated.

In addition, the executive must be aware of his own abilities and skills. Even if a method fits the corporate strategy and the product, the executive must also be able to master or convey it himself. It cannot be assumed that a method is selected, and the technical sales staff can easily implement it by themselves. This requires training and development by the executive.

In summary, choosing the right sales method is one of the most important or perhaps even the most important criteria to operate successfully. This selection must be made carefully, and the method must be used to align the strategies, personnel and the development of the staff. Choosing the wrong sales method has far-reaching consequences for the success.

4.3 The importance of goals, strategies and measures for employees

Although sales itself and accordingly also technical sales entails a proven degree of freedom in the fulfillment of tasks compared to many other professions, certain framework conditions must be specified by the executive. Without these framework conditions, a goal-oriented work of the employees is not possible. It is also not possible to develop the employees since the direction in which the employees are to be developed is missing from the outset.

Basically, in technical sales, a Goals – Strategies – Measures Matrix (GSM matrix for short) is preferred as an orientation under the SMART aspect (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Smart Goals Explained, [Tho23].

The goal is derived from the corporate goal and, depending on the sales structure, is supplemented by personal goals of the employees. The goal is always represented by a number such as sales growth. How the goal is defined in detail is no longer relevant for the consideration. The important thing is that the technical sales staff need a clearly defined goal towards which they can work and against which success is measured. The goal must be specified.

There are three ways to define the strategy(s) to achieve the goal:

1. The strategies are completely defined by the company or the executive: This has the advantage that the employees know exactly what to do and a monitoring of the strategies is easily possible. The disadvantage is that good ideas or strategies of the employees are not taken into account.
2. The strategies are created completely by the employees: The advantage here lies in the mass of different strategies and thus the increased probability that very good strategies are included. The disadvantage is that the work of the employees is hardly monitorable and if the strategies do not work, the employee is solely to blame, which means a great responsibility for the employees.
3. A mixture of predefined strategies of the company, also called core strategies, and the employee's own strategies: This is the most popular variant, as it combines the advantages of the other two variants. The disadvantage is to

make it clear to the employee that while their strategies are important, they must primarily address the company's core strategies.

For option number 1 and number 3, the following core strategies should always be specified:

- The number of customer contacts to be reached by the technical salespersons. This can be divided into customer visits in presence, digital appointments with the customer, phone calls, emails, etc. The specification of this strategy is important so that the sales staff have a guideline on how many customers need to be contacted in a year and so a weekly or daily routine can be generated from it.
- Another important strategy is illustrated in the Ansoff matrix (Figure 8). The company must determine which markets with which products should be in the fundamental focus. This basic core strategy can then be refined into further strategies and measures.

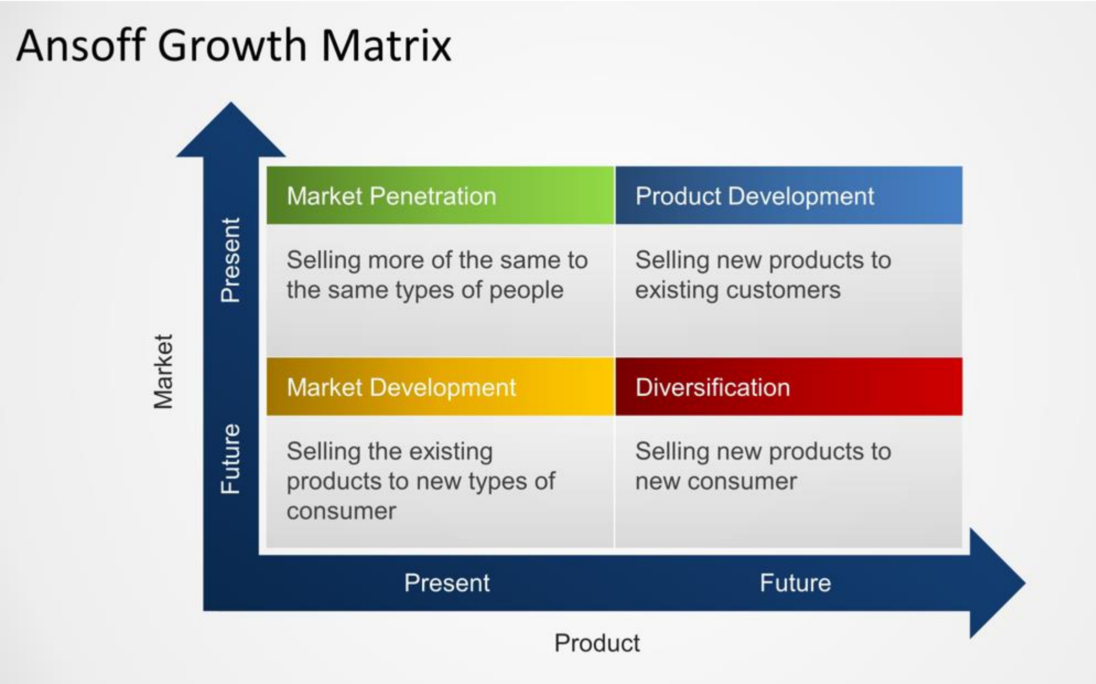

Figure 8: Ansoff Growth Matrix, [Ele20].

In the next step, the measures are derived from the strategies. The measures build on the strategies and can also be divided into three options:

1. The measures are completely specified by the company or the executive: This has the advantage that the employees know exactly what to do and the monitoring of the measures is easily possible. The disadvantage is that this

means a lot of work for the executive and deprives the employee of any freedom in the design of the work and leaves no room for creativity.

2. The measures are created entirely by the employees: In contrast to the strategies, this is the most widely used type of measure planning. The employees plan their own measures based on the strategies. The advantage lies in the distribution of the work to the employees and that the employees retain a certain degree of freedom. The disadvantage is that the measures of the employees may not be goal-prominent adapted to the strategies and thus less promising.
3. A mixture of predefined measures of the company and the employee's own measures: The advantage of this variant is that the employees are given the measures that are important from the company's point of view, and they must therefore implement them. The disadvantage is again an increased workload for the executive, and that the employee also understands that the predefined measures are prioritized and not their own.

To illustrate the interplay between goals, strategies and measures, here is an example:

- The company's goal of 20% sales growth is applied to the individual sales territories and sales representatives.
- One strategy to achieve this goal is 300 customer contacts in the form of customer visits per year.
- The measure is that the salesperson analyzes his area and/or his customer structure and plans for himself that he has to carry out x customer visits per week to achieve the target of the strategy. Based on the analysis, he determines which customers he wants to visit.

This is a rough insight into the topic of goals, strategies, and measures for the understanding. As mentioned at the beginning, however, this topic represents a basis for developing employees, as employees have to be developed differently due to the chosen ways of dealing with strategies and measures. If the company or the executive decides that all strategies and measures are given, little capacity must be invested in the development of the employees. The employees receive a clear guideline that they can and must follow and the single employee can therefore be easily replaced. The more responsibility and initiative of the employees is required, the more important is the development of the employees so that they can meet the requirements in the best possible way. In any case, it is important that employees are shown a path that they can follow.

The sales method must also be adapted to the selection of the strategy and measure approach. If the method is based on a high level of personal responsibility on the part of the employees, but the strategies and measures do not allow this, the interaction is counterproductive.

4.3.1 Impulse vs. Strategy

It is important for every executive to understand the difference between an impulse and a strategy. If the two approaches are not clearly separated, there will be disagreements between the executive and the employees. If this differentiation is not properly understood, there is also an unnecessary burden on the work resources of the employees.

An impulse is subordinate to a strategy. In the case of an impulse, the executive gives the employees an idea where sales can possibly acutely be generated. However, the executive has not analyzed this in depth and hopes for opinions and experiences from his team through the impulse. The executive isn´t sure if this impulse will lead to success and so he does not build any tasks on it. He explains to the sales staff the possible added value of the impulse and relies on the personal responsibility of the individual person, whether he or she also sees this as added value. Example: In the media there are reports of an acutely successful industry. On the surface, it is not clear whether the product and service portfolio is suitable for this industry. The executive sets the impulse that this industry is currently flourishing and that the employees should keep this in mind without an instruction to tackle the industry directly. Every employee can deal with the impulse as he sees fit. It is important that it is clearly communicated that it is an impulse.

The executive must make clear in his communication when it is a newly emerging strategy. This is the case, for example, if the acutely flourishing industry fits the company's product or service portfolio. In this case, quick action is required to stay ahead of the competition. The management must then draw up a strategy and measure plan at short notice. Here it is important that the strategy and measure plans are specified by the management so that the sales staff can act quickly.

In summary, the executive must be able to distinguish between an impulse and a strategy and be able to communicate this.

4.3.2 Define customer and time management for the employees

In technical sales, efficient and targeted work by the employees is crucial for success. As already described, a certain direction must be given. Two things are particularly important in technical sales, which the executive must both convey and define.

In sales, the art is to acquire and support the right customers in the available working hours. This is not always easy to implement with the abundance of existing customers and potential customers. On the one hand, it helps if the executive can convey the Eisenhauer matrix (Figure 9) to the employees.

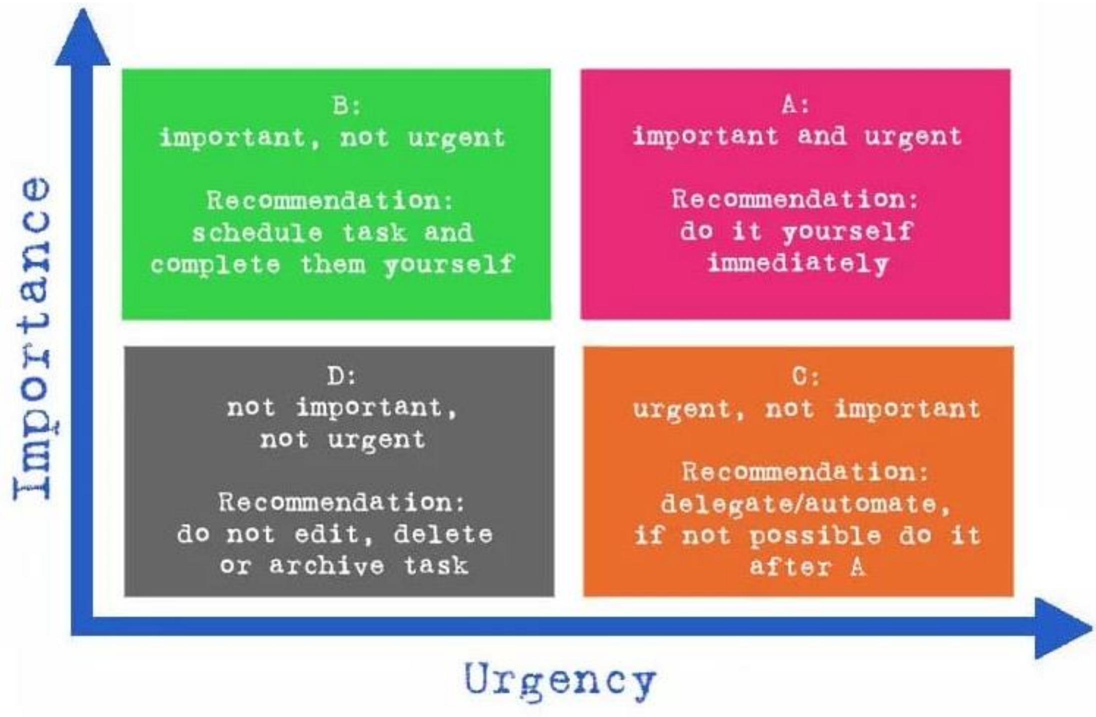

Figure 9: Eisenhauer matrix, [T2i23].

The matrix represents very simply that importance is placed before urgency. Even if this is logical, this procedure is very important in sales and is not taken into account by new employees. The executive must set an example and give the employees the security of being able to put important things in the foreground. The executive must give the employees the confidence to set priorities for themselves and encourage them to do so, even if the priorities are sometimes set incorrectly.

The second important point is based on a detailing of the Eisenhauer matrix in relation to the customers. The company or the executive must specify a customer contact rate on which the employees can orient themselves, so that the employees do not neglect the support and acquisition of customers in the day-to-day business. The customer contact is therefore classified as important, and the customer contact rate is a tool to ensure this.

The customer contact rate can consist of visits to the customer, digital appointments, telephone calls, emails, product presentations, seminars at the customer and much more. The selection of points for the customer contact rate depends on the company and the executive. The choice should give the employee a certain freedom as to which means he uses to meet the customer contact rate, but should definitely be structured according to the SMART principle.

To illustrate this, here is an example of how to build a customer contact rate matrix:

The company sets 500 customer contact points (short CCP) as a target for the technical sales representative. So that he can use his strengths correctly, there are points for different types of customer contact. To illustrate the example simply, only three types of customer contacts are selected and assigned points. There is 1 point for a customer visit, 0.5 points for a digital appointment and 0.25 points for a phone call. At this point, two approaches separate. Either the employees are now given the freedom to reach the 500 points like they want to, which can mean that the points are achieved but not with the right customers. Or the customer contact points are specialized on customer groups. This can be arbitrarily detailed, and a simple example is chosen again, which gives the employee a certain freedom, but has a clearer target cascading.

The 500 points are converted from one year to one week. Due to vacation, illness, holidays, etc. it is assumed that the employee has 37 weeks per year for fulfillment. 500 CCP : 37 weeks = 13.5 CCP/week. This means that the employee must fulfill 13.5 CCP per week to reach the goal. This simple calculation makes it much easier for the employee to plan the week. However, in this step, only the annual target was converted to a weekly target and no sorting by customer was done yet. For this purpose, the company or the executive determines in which customer groups the customer contact points should be invested for sustainable success. In the example, customers are divided into the following groups:

- Potential customers: Potential customers are those who have not yet had any contact with the company but are suitable as customers based on an analysis. Cold calling is used to acquire these customers.
- Prospects: Also known as leads. Customers who have already shown interest in the company's products but have not yet generated any sales.
- Passive customers: These are customers who have already generated sales, but for some reason have not generated any more sales over a certain period of time. It is about a customer reactivation.
- Regular customers: Are the customers who are already generating sales. Depending on the customer, the goal is to maintain or to increase the sales.

In the next step, these customer groups are assigned a percentage reference value in relation to the customer contact points. In the example, potential customers are assigned 20%, prospects also 20%, passive customers 10% and regular customers the remaining 50%. This is now combined with the customer contact points. Whether this is done and monitored on an annual, monthly, or weekly basis is up to the executive. For the example, the weekly basis is chosen. It follows that the employee should spend 13.5 CCP x 50% = 6.75 CCP for the regular customers, etc.

This detailed control of the time spent on the different customer groups still gives the employee the freedom to choose which customers he approaches in detail, but the direction of the company is given. The subdivision of the customer groups and the percentage distribution depends on the corporate strategy and the target customers. The example only shows one possible approach. However, this approach is recommended to ensure sustainable success. It should also be mentioned that it must be possible to monitor and control this by the executive. If the systems cannot map such an approach, it does not make sense to specify something that cannot be tracked.

4.4 Analysis of the employees

In order to be able to guarantee the development of the employees in a targeted manner, the executive must first analyze the employees and set up the appropriate development strategy. Of course, the development strategy must fit the corporate strategy and chosen sales method, but now the employees are considered.

When analyzing the employees, the degree of experience of these must first be considered. If absolute specialists in the field are already employed with in-depth industry knowledge, they only need to be developed selectively. A general development strategy costs too much capacity of the employees and is not necessary at all. In the case of inexperienced employees, the basic knowledge must first be trained during the development before selective development makes sense.

In the analysis, the character traits of the employee must be considered to ensure the correct handling of the employee and to keep the motivation high. This is especially important for the choice of the employee's degree of freedom in his work. If the employee needs a lot of freedom to develop his potential, the executive must be aware of this and act accordingly. In contrast, there are also employees who need significantly less freedom to work efficiently.

The executive must analyze and evaluate the potential of the employee. If the employee has no more potential to improve, no development capacities should be spent on the employee. For employees who do not perform their tasks efficiently and well, but have a great potential for improvement, more development capacities must be spent.

Analyzing your employees and deriving the right conclusions and development strategies from this is not easy and also requires a certain amount of experience from the executive. However, this is important to improve the employees and thus the success in a targeted manner and must be ensured by the executive.

The next two chapters serve to support this analysis.

4.4.1 Solution- and problem-oriented employees

An easy-to-recognize criterion in the evaluation of the employees is a division of the employees into solution-oriented people and problem-oriented people. People cannot change their orientation because this is deeply rooted in the personality. For a successful team, both types of people are needed, but they must be used in the right places. First, an explanation of the two orientations:

- Solution-oriented: These people only look at the problem briefly and try to find a solution as quickly as possible. The problem is not dealt with in detail, but the solution approach is in the focus.
- Problem-oriented: These people deal with the actual problem in detail. The problem is analyzed and broken down to the smallest detail. In this case, finding a solution to the problem is not in the focus.

Now, at first glance, the choice of solution-oriented people for technical sales seems to be the right one. For the technical salesperson, who is in the main contact with the customer, this is correct. These people must be solution-oriented people! The customer is not interested in having his problem analyzed further and further. The customer has contacted the technical sales department because he needs a solution to his problem, and he needs it as soon as possible. The solution-oriented employee presents possible solutions at very short notice and the customer is satisfied. Here, however, is a risk that the problem has not been properly analyzed by the salesperson and the solution only superficially solves the problem. For this it is important to have problem-oriented employees in the team, who have a different approach in such cases and support the salesperson. The problem-oriented employees analyze the problem in detail and find approaches why the solution does not work. Based on this, the solution-oriented employee again develops a new solution. Through this interaction, the customer is helped quickly and appropriately. While solution-oriented employees are the first point of contact for the customer, problem-oriented employees should never be the first or the main contact person for the customer, but act in the background.

The interaction of these two types of people and the appropriate composition of the sales team is essential for successful work. The executive must therefore ensure this balance when putting together the team.

4.4.2 Classification of the sales representatives into stages

Another recommended way to develop your employees in a targeted manner is to divide them into stages based on the analysis. Already in the situational leadership style in chapter 4.1.1.7, this possibility was taken up in the form of the division of the employees into maturity levels. Explicitly for technical sales in terms of customer support, a different division of employees into 3 levels is very helpful to classify the employees regardless of the sales method selected. The levels build on each other and a salesperson from a higher level already mastered the previous level.

Salesperson Level 1: Serve demand

In the first stage, there are technical salespeople who are able to serve the needs of the customer. This means that the sales representatives are familiar with their own product and service portfolio and can meet the customer's registered needs. The customer approaches the salesperson, and he only fulfills the requirements.

Salesperson Level 2: Recognize demand

The customer is aware of his needs for the future. However, this is currently not a priority and is not addressed by the customer. The salesperson recognizes the future demand based on his knowledge or clever questions and brings himself into the play at an early stage. In this way, he gains an advantage over the competition by uncovering solutions for future projects at an early stage.

Salesperson Level 3: Incite demand

The customer himself does not yet know that he has acute or future needs, because he lacks e.g., the understanding of the possibilities, the future, improvements, or further developments. However, the salesperson recognizes the possibilities and leads the customer to recognize the demand himself. In this case, the salesperson has an immense competitive advantage, as he already offers solutions to problems that the customer was not even aware of.

5. Development of technical sales staff

With the awareness of the corporate strategy, the selection of the right sales employees, the leadership style, the appropriate sales method and the analysis of the employees, the foundations for the development of a successful sales are laid. In the next step, the executive must train and develop his employees in a targeted manner in order to ensure long-term success.

For the development of employees, the point of the degrees of freedom of the sales employees must be examined in general in addition to the points already described. More freedom and more personal responsibility strengthen the motivation and creativity of the employees but can also lead to employees not following the most successful path. For the degree of freedom, there is no right or wrong, but it depends purely on the executive and the employees. The right balance between freedom and controlling of the employees in technical sales is one of the biggest challenges for executive.

Here are two examples that every executive should think about when it comes to the question of personal responsibility and freedom of his employees:

1. Efficiency of the employees
   Is it more efficient to give the employees a lot of personal responsibility and let them make 3 wrong decisions out of 10 decisions, which then require rework or is it more efficient if the employees have to consolidate the executive for each decision, so that 10 out of 10 decisions are correct?
2. How many lanes does the road have?
   As an executive, do I prefer my employees to drive on a single-lane road and follow my instructions exactly, as they cannot turn left or right, including the risk of demotivation and loss of ideas and creativity of my employees?
   Or do I prefer as an executive if my employees drive on a multi-lane road and can swerve left and right from the middle lane (the given guideline by the executive) and thus the executive promotes motivation and creativity, but there is also the risk that the instructions will not be fulfilled to the executive’s satisfaction?

With all the basics that the executive has defined for himself, he or she can now build up a structured development of the employees. For the development structure, the executive still has to decide which type of development he takes over himself and which is outsourced to other departments (e.g., technical training) or external trainers (e.g., basics of questioning techniques in sales). The basics of sales work are not discussed further here. The basics of sales work and coaching is expected of the executive in technical sales and can additionally be read in the literature. The following works from the bibliography can be recommended for the basics: [Dör22] ; [Fra19] ; [Wei22] ; [Maa12].

In the following four chapters, development points are described, which, in the opinion of the author, must be conveyed directly by the executive.

5.1 Development matrix

In the previous chapters, the wording of targeted employee development was often used. Some leadership styles and sales methods already provide information about development strategies, but they are not specifically designed for individual employees. A development matrix can be created for this. The construction and implementation of the development matrix which was developed and applied by the author is presented. The development matrix is divided into several stages:

1. Selection of the criteria for the development matrix by the executive. The criteria are chosen based on the skills required in technical sales and the peculiarities of the company.
2. Defining the point range of the individual criteria (e.g., 0 – 10) for an evaluation of the criteria.
3. Creation and presentation of the criteria in tabular and graphical form.
4. Preparation of a development matrix sheet for entering the points with a possibility to justify the assigned score and with the possibility to document ideas of improvement of the criteria.
5. Start of the development matrix by an independent evaluation of the criteria by the employee with explanations of the self-assessment and independent ideas for improvements in the development matrix sheet.
6. Joint evaluation of the criteria by the executive in a transparent discussion with the employee. The executive also documents ideas for improvement and the score in the development matrix sheet.
7. Transfer of the points into the actual development matrix.
8. After evaluating the individual criteria, the SMART principle is used to determine with the employee which criteria are the focus of personal development.

9. Creation of a development guide for targeted development based on the evaluation of the criteria by the executive according to the SMART principle.
10. After a defined period of time (recommendation one year), the entire development matrix is reassessed. It is evaluated whether the selected criteria have improved, the measures for improvement were chosen correctly and how other criteria that were not in the focus have developed during the period.
11. The development matrix will be continued, and the results of the individual years will be presented for comparability in order to ensure continuous development.

To illustrate the structure and implementation of the development matrix, the development matrix built up and carried out by the author is presented as an example and supplemented with information on the individual stages. For the construction of the development matrix, the main criteria determined by the executive (stage 1) are first selected, which are shown in figure 10 under development point. These main criteria were used in the example according to technical knowledge, handling of the company's systems, personal skills, sales-relevant skills, and customer service skills. Each main category has been assigned a maximum score (max score) for the evaluation (stage 2).

Development point	max score	Total 2021	Total 2022	Degree of fullfillment 2021	Degree of fullfillment 2022
Technical understanding	80	39	44	49%	55%
Quotations products	50	30	34	60%	68%
Quotations solutions	70	32	38	46%	54%
Homepage / Onlineshop	80	59	61	74%	76%
Configurators	70	32	43	46%	61%
Databases	40	23	24	58%	60%
Negotiation skills	110	45	53	41%	48%
Self-organization / time management	40	32	33	80%	83%
Level of experience SAP system	130	78	83	60%	64%
Level of experience CRM system	160	111	120	69%	75%
Promotional tools / activities	60	18	26	30%	43%
Visit agreement / appointments	30	15	17	50%	57%
Commercial knowledge	80	42	43	53%	54%
Soft Skills	110	80	84	73%	76%
Reporting	30	19	22	63%	73%
Partner network	50	17	22	34%	44%
Creativity	30	13	13	43%	43%
Key Account Management	50	9	14	18%	28%
Inter-territorial / International	50	8	13	16%	26%
Presentation technique	50	29	30	58%	60%
Total overview	**1370**	731	817	51%	57%

Figure 10: Development matrix tabular representation total overview.

In order to better illustrate the criteria, they are displayed graphically (Figure 11) in addition to the tabular form (stage 3).

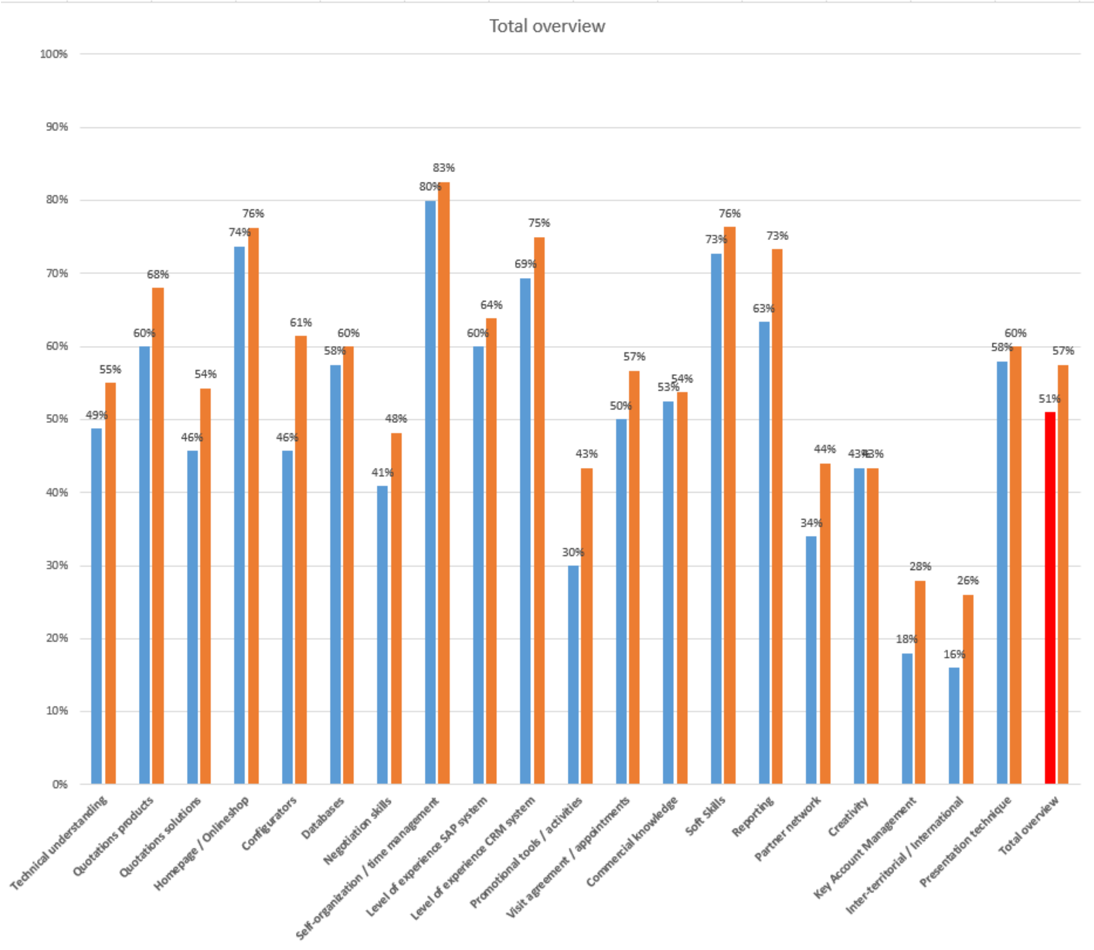

Figure 11: Development matrix graphical representation total overview.

Each main criterion is divided into sub-criteria and presented in both tabular and graphical form. Here is the example of negotiation skills (Figure 12).

Development point	Employee 2021	Employee 2022	Executive 2021	Executive 2022
Objection- / pretence treatment	3	3	3	5
Questioning techniques (open, closed, etc.)	6	4	4	5
Golden Bridge (application - addes value)	6	4	3	5
Sale of company additional values	7	7	6	7
Read the other person´s psychology	2	2	2	2
Apply psychology independently	3	3	3	3
Acting	3	3	3	3
Mental arson	4	5	4	5
Sales closing skills	5	5	5	5
Total basics	**39**	**36**	**33**	**40**
Rhetoric in words	6	5	4	5
Rhetoric in writing	8	8	8	8
Total rhetoric	**14**	**13**	**12**	**13**
Total negotiation skills	**53**	**49**	**45**	**53**

Figure 12: Development matrix tabular presentation criterion negotiation skills.

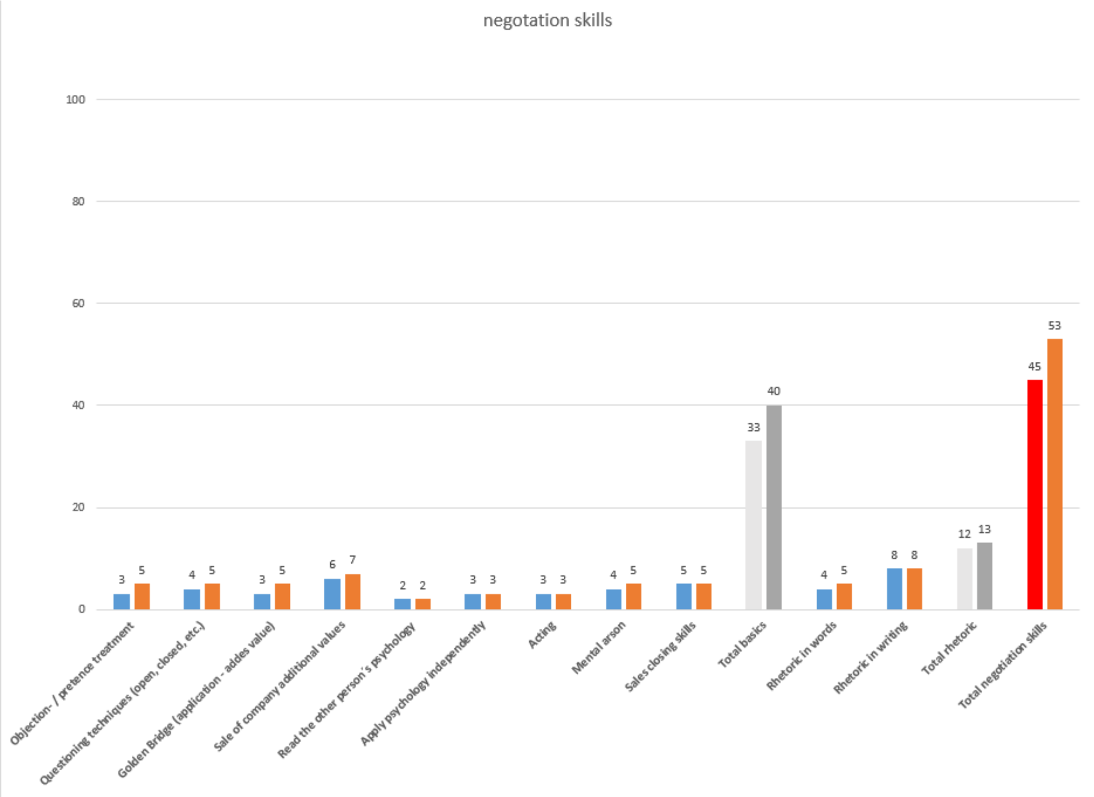

Figure 13: Development matrix graphical representation criterion negotiation skills.

For the other stages in the development matrix process, a development matrix sheet is also created, which is used to enter the points, the reason why the score was chosen by the employee and the executive with ideas for improvement from both sides (stage 4). It is important that the development matrix sheet is as simple as possible so that the evaluation of the criteria does not take up too much time and work capacity.

The development matrix sheet (Figure 14) is made available to the employee and the employee fills in the fields independently and alone (stage 5). This step is particularly important because, in addition to the development, it is also about self-reflection on the part of the employee. The employee is forced to be aware of where his strengths and weaknesses are. Through this simple sheet, the self-image of the employees is trained. Through the task of thinking about possibilities for improvement, the employee is also encouraged to deal with himself and the topic and not only to rely on the executive for personal development.

Sales closing skills

2021: Self assessment: 5

2022: Self assessment: 5

2021: Assessment executive: 4

2022: Assessment executive: 5

Reason for self assessment:

2021: So far, only a few customers have been specifically brought to conclusion by reasoning. However, I am sure that I am asking the right questions in the interview.

2022: 50% of the offers are brought to a conclusion.

Opportunities for improvement:

2021 Employee: Targeted sales closing training with the executive.

2022 Employee: Putting one's own focus in the customer conversation on closing the deal and constantly evaluating oneself.

2021 Executive: Implementation of joint trainings. Create liabilities with the customer through binding retention. We have already done the groundwork by developing the project. Now it's the customer's turn.

2022 Executive: Explicitly continue to work on the sales closing skills. Every project that is not brought to completion uses labor capacity. These are wasted if the project is not completed. Continuing the joint trainings with the executive.

Figure 14: Development matrix sheet representation of the main criterion negotiation skills with the sub criterion sales closing skills.

When the employee has completed the sheet, an appointment with the executive follows (stage 6). At this meeting, the criteria of the sheet are reviewed together, and the employee's assessment and score are discussed. The executive also evaluates the employee based on his assessment and the discussion with the employee and enters his score in the sheet. It is important that this is done jointly and transparently. The employee must understand why the executive assesses the employee in the criteria in this way. Through the joint evaluation and the discussion about it, the employee feels involved in the process and not just subjectively evaluated by the superior. The acceptance of the employee increases with a joint evaluation. The executive also contributes ideas on how the employee can improve in the criteria. The points are transferred to the development matrix, which is already shown in the figure 12 under Employee 2021/2022 and Executive 2021/2022 (stage 7). The points awarded by the executive are used for the evaluation and the graphics.

With the evaluation of the individual criteria, a development strategy is created together with the employee (stage 8). An improvement of all criteria at the same time is not possible and also not targeted. Here, the opinion of the employee must first be obtained, in which criteria he wants to improve as a focus. A person basically develops best in areas that they have chosen themself and in which they want to improve. The executive compares the criteria with the criteria he has selected. It is the task of the executive to sort the criteria according to importance. If, for example, the technical sales employee has severe deficiencies in the technical area but would like to improve in the area of (software) tools, the executive must convince the employee that a focus on another area is better suited for success at this point.

With the selection of the criteria to be developed, a development guide is created (stage 9). This is the responsibility of the executive, who must, on the one hand, arrange this in terms of time, but above all must evaluate which criteria can be improved by the employee on his or her own responsibility, which can be developed by the executive, and which criteria would be better taught by other departments or external trainers. Based on this, the targeted development of the selected criteria takes place. The executive must ensure that the schedules are adhered to and that the employees do not lose focus on the selected development points.

After a predefined period of time, the improvements of the set focus points are evaluated, and the entire development matrix is re-evaluated according to the same principle (stage 10). At this stage, several points have to be considered and analyzed:

- The employee has not developed further in the focus points and also not in other criteria: An analysis must be carried out to find out why no development has arisen. Based on this analysis, the measures must be critically questioned and changed.
- The employee has developed further in other criteria, but not in the focus points: Here, it must be analyzed above all whether the focus points have been assigned the right measures or whether the employee has shifted his focus on his own.
- The employee has greatly improved in the focus points and also in other criteria: Analysis of what the employee has done and how it could come to the further improvement. Evaluation of whether this is transferable to other employees.
- The employee has improved in the focus points, but fundamentally deteriorated in other criteria: Here it must be analyzed whether the focus

on the selected criteria was too strong and thus the other criteria were affected. The goal of the development matrix is a targeted and fundamental improvement of employees. The other criteria must not deteriorate because of the focus points.

- The employee has deteriorated in the focus points and in the other criteria: This case shows either a significant overload or a demotivation of the employee. Both variants are to be evaluated as very critical and here the executive is immediately responsible for analyzing the problems of the employee and for reducing or eliminating them.

The goal of the development matrix is a continuous improvement of the employees (stage 11). For this purpose, the development matrix is continued, and the results are presented in tabular and graphical form over the years. This is already shown in the figures 10 to 13. As a result, a development of the employee is quickly apparent and the employee immediately sees his development success, which motivates him to continue to improve.

5.2 Train the employees' analysis skills

To be able to develop their sales area in a targeted manner and to achieve the defined goals, the technical sales representatives must be able to analyze their sales area and customer structure. Since a proper analysis depends on the company's strategies and on the product and service portfolio, the analysis skills must be developed by the executive. Fundamentals of analytical skills can be trained by external trainers, but not the specific analyses associated with the company.

In order to provide the employees with a guide to analysis skills, the Goals – Strategies – Measures Matrix can be chosen as very good support. The goal is provided by the company. However, the analysis skills of the employees can already be trained in a simple way during the strategies. It does not matter whether the strategy is given or chosen by the employee. This is illustrated in an example:

The example is presented in a very simplified way but conveys the procedure to train the employees in the analysis. For the example, a goal is first required, which is defined. The goal is a 10% increase in sales to the achieved sales value of the previous year. For the sake of simplification, it is assumed that last year's customers will generate the same sales again this year without any action needed by the sales representative. For our scenario, this results in sales growth of €200,000 to achieve the goal. For this goal achievement, different strategies are defined, of which we will take a closer look at one strategy. The strategy is to win back passive customers. This is the only information that the technical salesperson has at the start of the analysis. The executive now guides the employee through the next steps, but the employee has to think about the numerical values himself. In the first step, the employee must distribute the €200,000 among the strategies to achieve the goal. He estimates an increase in sales of € 30,000 with passive customers as realistic and enters this into his GSM matrix. In the next step, the employee has to think about how much revenue he considers realistic on average with one regained passive customer. This value is set at €10,000. Now the employee has to determine a percentage probability of how he estimates the reactivation of the individual customer. This is set at 25%. This results in a simple mathematical evaluation. The salesperson must therefore reactivate 3 passive customers to reach his goal of €30,000. With a probability of 25%, this means that the salesperson has to tackle 12 passive customers to achieve the target of this strategy.

With this analysis and the resulting calculation, the employee continues the analysis in the measures. He now knows he has to tackle 12 passive customers. Based on the databases or his general knowledge of his sales area, he searches for 12 corresponding customers and enters them, for example, in a table according to the SMART principle. So, the employee knows exactly which customers he needs to approach to fulfill this strategy. Through simple means and, above all, making people aware of what is needed to achieve the goal, the employee was able to carry out an independent analysis. To simplify this, a chronological sequence of the procedure:

- Determine the value to achieve the goal: €200,000
- Select a strategy and assign a value: €30,000
- Set average sales with one customer: €10,000
- Set the percentage probability of winning the customer: 25%
- Calculate how many customers need to be won:
  30.000€ : 10.000€ = 3 customers
- Calculate how many customers have to be approached to achieve the target: 3 customers x 100% : 25% = 12 customers
- Select the customers to be approached and define them as a measure according to the SMART principle

Once the measures were carried out or during the execution, they should then be evaluated together with the executive in order to find out which strategies and measures have worked well, and which have not. The analysis of what worked and why it worked and vice versa is an important part of an improvement. This is something that the executive needs to teach the employees. Using the example shown in figure 15, it is easy to create an analysis overview.

Achieved turnover	Target turnover	Target achievement in %	CCP (is)	CCP (should)	Target achievement in %	Comment
17.000,00 €	30.000,00 €	57%	8	10	80%	
14.000,00 €	20.000,00 €	70%	8	8	100%	
49.000,00 €	40.000,00 €	123%	5	8	63%	
20.100,00 €	30.000,00 €	67%	7	12	58%	
22.140,00 €	50.000,00 €	44%	50,75	50	102%	
4.095,00 €	10.000,00 €	41%	2	2	100%	
19.000,00 €	20.000,00 €	95%	2	4	50%	

Total sales achieved	Sales target
145.335,00 €	200.000,00 €

Sales still missing
54.665,00 €

Figure 15: Analysis overview strategies and measures.

In the overview, the achieved sales of the individual strategies are shown in the first column. This column also shows the total sales achieved so far from the strategies, as well as the missing sales. The second column shows the target sales of the individual strategies and the total target sales. Based on the values, the third column considers a percentage fulfillment of the sales of the individual strategies. Columns four to five are structured accordingly, except that this is the consideration of the customer contact points, which were explained in chapter 4.3.2. At this point, it can be seen how many customers have already been approached in the strategy and how many customers need to be approached for the strategy. Finally, there is a comment field for possible explanations. Using such a simple table, the employee can quickly analyze whether he is pursuing the strategies with the set targets in a sustainable manner and whether the strategy can also achieve the desired targets.

In technical sales, analysis skills are very important to work towards targeted success. However, it cannot be expected that every employee has in-depth analysis skills. The task of the executive is to teach the analysis skills and to show the employee simple ways to analyze his area and how to work in a targeted manner. For this, a simple example was chosen, and a possible analysis guide was shown.

5.3 Rhetoric and (sales)psychology

The teaching of rhetoric and psychology must also be a part of the executive's skill portfolio. The basics for this can be very well trained externally by specialized trainers. However, in the field of rhetoric or psychology, a one-time training is not enough. The salesperson must be able to apply the basics of rhetoric and sales psychology to the customer without thinking about it. The salesperson must concentrate on the customer in order to convince the customer of himself and his products and to recognize even more needs. If the salesperson has to think about what and how to say it and about how to interpret the customer's attitude during the conversation, then he cannot concentrate on selling his product. For a salesperson to become confident in these areas, continuous training is essential. The basics must be trained at regular intervals. This is hardly possible externally and here the executive must have the appropriate skills to ensure continuous training and development in the area.

To truly develop employees in this area, the executive must be aware that not only the basic knowledge in these areas is sufficient. Topics such as the art of questioning, the pretext/objection handling, or adding specific value are not enough to bring the employees to another level in this area. Here are three short examples of what an executive need to master, which show that teaching the basics in sales is not enough:

1. Positive and negative wording: In positive wording, explicit attention is paid to the choice of words when conveying statements. For example, instead of the word discount, the word purchasing advantage is used. The psychological effect is that the customer associates the negotiation with an advantage for himself and not with a discount at the weekly market. The own statements are presented as positively as possible only by a different choice of words and the customer is not burdened with false statements. When it comes to the competition, negative wording is used without directly making the competition bad. This would not cast a good light on the salesperson. For example, the price of the competition is called cheap, which is to associate that it is a cheap (poorly processed) product. The positive wording would be e.g., low cost or good value here. This can be taught in general terms by external trainers. For an effective use, however, the positive and negative wording must fit the company's product and service portfolio and the possibilities of the competition. And this cannot be achieved by an external trainer, but only by the executive in the company.

2. Associating or painting pictures in the mind: This is a popular psychological sales tactic. By associating the product with something, the customer keeps it better in his mind. Here, too, the basics can be taught by external trainers, but it is up to the executive to train his employees to associate their own products with something positive, so that the employees can apply this to the customer. A negative association leads accordingly to the opposite result and is used to describe the competition.
3. Mental arson: Mental arson is used when the probability of the contract diminishes. As an example, a much cheaper but unknown competition is chosen by the customer. The customer wants to place the order at the competition based on the price. Using the mental arson, the customer is stirred up by the fear that the unknown competition will not be able to keep its delivery promise or deliver reduced quality. The customer is associated with what consequences this would have for his project and that he, although the higher price, enjoys a guaranteed security with the other salesperson and his company if he chooses them. This must also be trained by the executive, so that the employees do not choose the wrong bases in the mental arson and make false promises. An example is the ability to deliver. The salesperson applies the mental arson in relation to the ability of the competition to deliver and promises in return a delivery capability within four weeks. On the order confirmation, however, a delivery time of eight weeks is stated. In this case, the cooperation with the customer would be damaged in the long term.

5.4 Project management and partner acquisition

The technical sales representative is responsible for his sales area. He represents the company to the customer and manages the customer's requirements within the own company. Accordingly, the salesperson also acts as a project manager for the customer in his own company. Project management includes many facets such as the creation of specifications and requirements, adherence to time frames, setting milestones and delegating tasks. It cannot be assumed that the employees have the knowledge and experience in project management. However, the executive must have these skills so that the projects can be successfully completed. At the start, the executive still supports the sales representatives in project management or even takes over them. The aim must be to develop the sales representatives into full project managers so that they can carry this out independently. This aspect is often neglected in the development of salespeople, as this is not obviously assigned to technical sales.

For a successful development of the employee towards an independent and complete technical sales employee, this development by the executive is essential. When developing in project management, the executive can refer to well-known basic knowledge in project management but must convey to the employees why this is important for the job.

A further development of project management explicitly for technical sales is the establishment of an own partner network by the salesperson. Customers will always have projects that do not fit 100% to the company of the salesperson. This can have different reasons like e.g., the vertical range of manufacture is not given, the necessary know-how for the realization of the project is missing in the company or there are simply not enough manufacturing capacities for the solution. All reasons have in common that many components of the project are components that the company offers. However, the customer wants to purchase a complete solution and is not interested in the individual components in the solution. If the project is cancelled, there is a risk that the other supplier of the solution will purchase its components from the competition. Building your own partner network, which complements the weak points of your own company, can be very successful here. Instead of rejecting the project, it is handed over to a partner who purchases the components from the company of the salesperson and specializes in the solution. Through such a partner network, you can also expand your own competencies without your own company needing the appropriate personnel. The company's own efficiency also increases, as new capacities are freed up by handing over the projects. So, the advantages are obvious. The operation of a partner network also brings disadvantages or dangers with it. Especially at the start, a lot of the sales representative's capacities have to be spent on setting up this network. In addition to the difficulties of finding the right partners, a lot of time must be invested by both sides in order to evaluate whether a partnership means added value for both sides and to build up the necessary trust for a partnership. The salesperson lacks these capacities in the day-to-day business in the support of his customers and the increase in sales.

The risk of handing over projects to partners can be divided into two points. On the one hand, if the partner does not solve the customer's project to the customer's satisfaction or even falls out with the customer, this always falls back on the salesperson, since he has brought the partner into the project. This can severely disrupt the cooperation with the customer. On the other hand, the greatest danger is a rift in the partnership. The partner was placed within the company's own customer to implement projects with the products of the company. In the event of a disagreement and a departure of the partner to the competition, the salesperson himself has placed the competition within his customer.

The topic of the partner network must be conveyed by the executive and the employees must be trained on which partners are basically suitable for their own company. Dealing with partners is also different from dealing with customers and this must also be trained. If the company or the executive supports the strategy of cooperation with partner companies, the executive must also have the appropriate skills in the topic to be able to guide and coach in the acquisition and cooperation with the partners.

6. Summary and outlook

The executive's task already begins with the selection of the right technical sales staff. From choosing the right leadership style and defining sales methods and strategies to developing employees, the executive in technical sales must have many skills. This work shows the challenges for the executive and offers support in each chapter how the challenges can be met. In addition to the procedure to be successful with the employees, it is particularly clear that the tasks of an executive in technical sales are very extensive. It becomes clear that the executive must have a defined structure in his own work to be able to lead and develop the employees in a structured way. With the help of this work, executives can assess whether they meet the requirements and, if necessary, educate themselves in various points.

The outlook is the possible change through advancing digitization. Even though there is already talk of Industry 4.0, technical sales is currently mainly carried out classically by salespeople who are in personal contact with the customers. At present, the guiding principle "people buy from people" still applies to the greatest possible extent. However, variations of these procedures are already apparent. In addition to visiting the customer and making a telephone call, the sales representatives have the option of making digital appointments. Digital appointments are in the middle between personal visits and telephone calls. Although you do not sit face-to-face at a digital appointment, a certain personality is created using image transmission and the possibility to share complex facts via the used digital program in real time with the other person. If this type of sales increases even more in the future, the type of people who are interested in sales will also change. For people who like to be on the road and like to communicate personally with other people, i.e., the current group of people who choose sales as a profession, this type of tasks will no longer be fulfilling. Depending on the direction in which digitization progresses and how the acceptance among customers turns out, a complete elimination of the sales employee is conceivable. There are already companies that no longer employ salespeople and rely on the customer's own initiative. As support, configurators are offered, which guide the customer through the solution and purchase process and support him extensively. The elimination of sales personnel saves costs, which are then reflected in the actual products. This system is still operated only by a few companies and often in combination with the classic sales staff. However, it is already clear that the ongoing digitization will bring changes to the profession of technical sales representative

A. Appendices

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A.2 Statutory declaration

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I hereby declare that I have authored this dissertation independently, that I have not used other than the declared sources / resources, and that I have explicitly marked all material which has been quoted either literally or by content from the used sources.

Hannover, 07.03.2023	S. Holthus
Place, Date	Stephan Holthus