
Epilogue

As the reader set out to read this book, he may well have asked himself the following questions: “What is the current level of excellence in our company’s sales division? And how are we doing compared to other companies?”. Some readers, when faced with the numerous problematic areas we have outlined in the book, may argue that actual practice “simply can’t be as bad as all that”.

While our wish would be, of course, for every company to have as high a level of sales professionalism as possible, our experiences in many practical projects have been on the sobering side. However, in order not to have to rely on our “gut feeling” or individual case studies for our judgments, we conducted a cross-sector empirical study in mid-2001. In this study, more than 260 high-ranking managers with sales responsibilities (sales managers and/or boards of directors/managing directors) critically examined their companies with respect to their sales professionalism (see Homburg et al. 2002). Table E.1 summarizes the results of over 260 Sales Excellence self-assessments.

Although the figures quoted in Table E.1 should be interpreted with caution since they concern subjective self-assessments, they allow a number of general tendencies to be derived. It is generally clear that the managers surveyed have a very skeptical view of their company’s sales professionalism.

An analysis of sales professionalism at the *cross-sector level* reveals that, on average, no Excellence scores of significantly above 70 are achieved in any Sales Ex dimension. Considering the importance that Sales Excellence has on company success (see Sect. 1.5), enormous potential is arguably still being left unexploited here. The scores in the information management (58.4) and customer relationship management (57.1) dimensions are particularly low. While Sect. 1.5 pointed out that, above a certain Excellence level, additional increases in professionalism in these dimensions can only make a slight improvement to company success, the Excellence scores of below 60 provide food for thought.

An analysis *differentiated by sector* indicates, first of all, that the performance of the IT/telecommunications sector, in particular, is above average in all dimensions, while financial service providers (i.e. banks and insurance agencies) and mechanical engineering companies tend to assess themselves as weak in virtually all dimensions. For example, financial service providers have the lowest Excellence score in sales strategy. This is understandable if you analyze the segmentation approaches which are rarely behavior-oriented, the sometimes only rudimentary

Table E.1 Summary of the results of over 260 Sales Excellence self-assessments (Average Excellence scores)

Dimension	Sector						Overall
	Financial services	IT/Telecom munications	Mechanical engineering	Chemicals industry	Auto motive	Consumer goods	
Sales strategy	65.0	70.4	67.2	68.7	66.6	69.1	67.5
Sales management	65.4	71.8	70.0	72.6	70.7	70.3	69.7
Information management	59.0	59.1	57.2	61.0	58.2	59.2	58.4
Customer relationship management	57.7	62.9	55.2	60.4	52.6	57.2	57.1
Overall Sales Ex score	61.8	66.0	62.4	65.7	62.0	63.9	63.2

customer retention concepts or the relatively unproductive price strategies in retail banking. Financial service providers also have the lowest score in sales management. In view of our numerous discussions with managers from this area, who kept pointing to shortcomings in structural and process organization, personnel management, and sales culture, we can fully understand why this should be the case. The assessments in the information management dimension are critical throughout. It may something come as a surprise to find that the chemicals industry is “a nose ahead” here. We attribute this result to the fact that the business relationships between chemicals companies and their customers are often long-standing and close. The intensive exchange of information that is part of such relationships generally lets suppliers gain a fairly accurate picture of the respective customers, competitors and developments in the market. In contrast, the fact that the IT/telecommunications sector should have the leading position in the area of customer relationship management is relatively unsurprising. After all, it is particularly suppliers from this area that have long been using tools such as call centers, the Internet, complaint management or relationship modeling for customer retention.

Successful sales management has to be systematic – this is one of the core messages of the book. Nevertheless, the findings presented here illustrate how little systematicity many companies have in practice. This book provides a guide to systematic professionalization of sales activities. In view of the range of the topics addressed –from sales channels, e-commerce, performance assessment systems, corporate cultures, customer information systems up to key account management – some readers may well wonder where to begin. Faced by such breadth, some may even be overwhelmed.

We recommend a healthy dose of pragmatism in this connection: Practice shows that the Sales Ex approach is not applied in its full scope in many cases. It is perfectly sensible for a company to first turn its attention to those facets that are presumed to have the most serious deficits. An “analytical overkill” should be avoided at all costs. The adage “It’s better to have an 80% solution in the hand than two 100% solutions in the bush” strikes the core of this philosophy.

Pragmatism is also an important principle when it comes to applying this approach. The Sales Ex approach should supplement the intuition that exists in many companies' sales divisions, but not replace it. It is our hope that the approach, if used in this sense, will help many companies and managers professionalize their sales activities and thus make them future-proof.

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