



Proposing a sales performance motivational framework for B2B sellers in services firms

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ABSTRACT

This study tests a framework of business-to-business (B2B) sellers' sales performance motivations in services firms. An exploratory-descriptive research design was used and data was collected from 389 respondents working in the services-orientated business sector of Norway. The study's results verify that B2B service sales are complex contexts and situations for B2B seller services firms and their B2B customers to handle. Many elements are required to reach a final deal. Therefore, services firms must maintain seller motivation throughout the B2B services sales process, which is usually hard and may involve psychological wear-out. Consequently, this study examines and verifies an important area of sales performance indicators, namely B2B sellers' motivations in services firms, and explains B2B sellers' intrinsic and extrinsic motivations.

1. Introduction

Since the dawn of the new millennium, sales performance has become an important research area in the business-to-business (B2B) and sales fields (Javalgi et al., 2014; Mai & Liao, 2022; Zallocco et al., 2009). The growing interest in sales performance is largely due to the significant role played by direct selling in the B2B marketing domain Itani et al. (2022). Successful sales individuals make a prominent contribution to the future development of B2B sellers by securing growth in sales numbers as well as the development and management of customer relationships over a long term (Calixto & Ferreira, 2020; Edwards et al., 2022). Consequently, a new school of thought has developed, calling for increased research on sales performance from a seller's perspective in a B2B context (Koponen et al., 2019; Rodriguez et al., 2022; Zallocco et al., 2009). This is particularly relevant considering that salespeople are an inherent part of the service delivery process and the factors influencing their motivation levels impact their service delivery ability to B2B customers (Hartmann & Lussier, 2020; Mullins et al., 2020). The service delivery environment of B2B customers is guided by the evolutionary needs and expectations of industrial customers, which guides how B2B sellers engage with them (Hinterhuber et al., 2021; Kaski et al., 2017).

B2B sellers need to develop an enhanced understanding of the drivers

of salespeople's motivation, since it could increase their overall level of productivity and willingness to remain with the B2B sellers in the future (Kwak et al., 2019; Lyngdoh et al., 2023). By addressing the motivational needs of salespeople, B2B sellers are better enabled to manage salespeople's sales output ability through collaborative sales planning efforts, sales productivity improvements, and stimulating sales personnel's overall enthusiasm level through collaborative performance management expectations (Ahmad, Liu, Akhtar & Siddiqui, 2022). As such, salespeople's motivation is critical to B2B sellers to secure their future sales success (Zheng et al., 2023). Studies (e.g., Rodriguez et al., 2022) highlight that salespeople with increased levels of motivation deliver enhanced levels of service value to customers, which could increase future sales in a B2B context (Ahmed & Ali, 2023; Haghighinasab et al., 2023). Moreover, motivated salespeople could deliver a competitive advantage for B2B sellers due to innovative and professional service delivery to B2B buyers (Good & Schwepker, 2022). Salesperson motivation is acknowledged in B2B literature as an important driver of sales output, which directly influences the overall profitability of B2B sellers in the long term.

Considering the discussion above, scholars (e.g., Høgevold et al., 2022; Schrock et al., 2018; Zallocco et al., 2009) agree that a deeper understanding of the indicators of sales performance is required by sales businesses and sales managers. This is because the future success of a

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business is guided by its overall sales performance in a B2B context (Aydin et al., 2017). However, current research highlights the need for a more in-depth exploration of the drivers of sales performance (Chawla et al., 2020; Rodríguez et al., 2022), especially within the context of services firms, since most studies on sales performance are conducted from a product business perspective (Böhm et al., 2020; Edwards et al., 2022).

In marketing literature, sales performance has been associated with factors like motivation (Buciuniene & Skudiene, 2009; Kuvaas et al., 2016), but no confirmation has been secured on its causation (Verbeke et al., 2011), particularly within a service context. This could be due to how such research has been conducted in the past or the research focus at the time of measurement. Therefore, it should be noted that impartial measurements cannot totally secure an explanation of the sales process and establish the outcomes when the behaviour of salespeople or their outcomes are established, especially considering the difference in sales approach required in a service- or product-orientated B2B environment (Sheth & Sharma, 2008; Ulaga & Loveland, 2014). Consequently, knowledge is needed on the motivational drivers influencing the sales performance motivations of B2B sellers in services firms. As a result, this study explores the different dimensions of motivation in a sales performance context to secure an overall improvement in the sales and service responsiveness of B2B sellers in service firms.

The study is guided by the pioneering works of Churchill et al. (1985) and Verbeke et al. (2011) in the area of sales performance. Verbeke et al. (2011) contextualised sales performance indicators into five categories, with each category being characteristic of multiple dimensions. These categories were also founded on a meta-analysis on the work of Churchill et al. (1985). An in-depth analysis of literature confirms the significance of cognitive choice, goal orientation, and work engagement as elements of salespeople's motivations in strengthening overall sales performance (Chawla et al., 2020; Medhurst & Albrecht, 2016; Verbeke et al., 2011). Hence, this study develops further knowledge on the motivational categories of sale performance by focusing on its six dimensions.

Motivation remains a critical element in determining salespeople's ability to perform their sales tasks (Aydin et al., 2017; Buciuniene & Skudiene, 2009). Based on the meta-analyses of Churchill et al. (1985) and Verbeke et al. (2011), two broad categories should be considered for the further exploration of motivation as a sales performance driver: cognitive choice and work engagement. Scholars (e.g., Buchanan, 1974; Schaufeli et al., 2002) support this argument, validating the importance of rational thinking and a focused approach to work-related matters in strengthening individual performance. In addition, Shannahan et al. (2015) and Spiro and Weitz (1990) argued in favour of including goal orientation to develop an enhanced understanding of the motivational drivers of salespeople in a sales-orientated context.

Considering the discussion above, this study suggests and secures the validation of a framework for the six motivational dimensions as drivers of sales performance in a B2B service context. Various studies – including those by Chawla et al. (2020), Herjanto and Franklin (2019)), and Høgevoid et al. (2022) – argue that the variables suggested by Churchill et al. (1985) and Verbeke et al. (2011) require further exploration in a service context to establish whether they remain relevant in a changing B2B sales environment. Consequently, this study emphasises the motivational aspect driving sales performance through an exploration of six dimensions from a B2B seller perspective in a service context.

Research (e.g., Aydin et al., 2017; Buciuniene & Skudiene, 2009; Rodríguez et al., 2022) has validated the need to develop an enhanced understanding of the factors that influence sellers' sales performance in B2B service context. To address this research gap, an understanding of the six dimensions of motivation is crucial to secure the future survival of sellers in a competitive B2B service setting (Plewa et al., 2015; Roy et al., 2019), since they influence the service delivery ability of sales personnel and the overall sales competitiveness of sellers in a business

environment. Thus, this study considers motivational drivers of sales performance from a seller's service perspective in a B2B environment.

2. Research relevance

Service delivery has become a key differentiator in the competitive B2B environment (De Jong et al., 2021). A critical part of service differentiation in B2B relationships are salespeople, whose ability to engage with B2B customers through service excellence has become a key differentiator (Wirtz & Kowalkowski, 2023). Kaski et al. (2017) concurred, stating that service delivery in the context of B2B sales is mainly secured through human interaction. This is true considering that B2B sellers' engagement with B2B customers is through people engagement, which forms business customers' perceptions of B2B sellers (Good & Schwepker, 2022). Consequently, salespeople's ability to engage with business customers in a professional and supporting manner influences B2B customers' perceptions of the sales service experience received (Nyadzayo et al., 2020). Therefore, it becomes increasingly important for sales management to develop an improved understanding of the role of salespeople in the service delivery process (Hossain & Gilbert, 2021). This understanding must encompass an in-depth exploration of the motivational dimensions of sales performance, considering the critical role played by salespeople in the delivery of services to B2B customers when making a sale (Aydin et al., 2017; Hohenberg & Homburg, 2016).

In marketing literature, the differentiation between services and products has been clearly argued (Anderson et al., 1997; Biemans & Griffin, 2018). Within the context of sales performance, selling a service is not the same as selling a product, considering that services are intangible and that the salesperson is more directly involved in the sale of a service (Ballantyne & Aitken, 2007; Melander & Arvidsson, 2021). The delivery of exceptional services in a competitive B2B market has become a unique differentiator for B2B sellers (Roy et al., 2019). This is true since service excellence provided by salespeople to B2B customers is an important differentiator considering future relational intention (Pomirleanu et al., 2016). As such, exploring the motivational factors that drive individual sales performance is required. In addition, such an understanding is needed from a seller service firm perspective within a B2B context to enhance a competitive advantage for these sellers in a cut-throat industry environment.

B2B literature states that B2B customers perceive the service experience while engaging with B2B sellers as imperative when making B2B buying decisions (Pandey & Mookerjee, 2018). Part of such a service experience is the role of salespeople when engaging with B2B buyers (Grewal et al., 2015; Steward et al., 2019). As such, the management of sales individuals in the overall service delivery process requires further knowledge (Mullins et al., 2020).

Therefore, this study makes numerous contributions. First, it develops in-depth knowledge of the different dimensions of motivation as a sales performance driver from the perspective of B2B seller service firms. Second, it proposes and validates a six-dimensional framework – aligned to a meta-analysis of the work of Churchill et al. (1985) and Verbeke et al. (2011) (refer to Fig. 1) – on motivational indicators in sales performance from a seller service firm perspective for sales managers in a B2B environment. To the authors' knowledge, no previous studies on services firms have considered B2B sellers' motivations in the context of sales performance.

3. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework discussion provides an overview of the importance of services in a B2B seller-buyer relationship, the framing of motivation as a sales performance driver as well as the different constructs of motivation and its respective dimensions.

Cognitive choice		Goal orientation		Work engagement	
(i) Spending time on planning	(ii) Salesperson's intrinsic motivations	(iii) Performance goal orientation	(iv) Salesperson's output productivity	(v) Enthusiasm	(vi) Job Involvement

Fig. 1. B2B sellers' motivations in sales performance – six-dimensional framework.

3.1. Managing multifaceted B2B seller-buyer relationships through service differentiation

In marketing literature, the prominent role played by salespeople in the sales process has been widely acknowledged (Boles et al., 2000; Oakley et al., 2021). Salespeople are perceived as a vital element in the service delivery process and their direct engagement with B2B buyers influences the overall service delivery ability of the B2B seller to its customer base (Ahmad, Liu, Asif et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2019). Furthermore, B2B sellers' profitability is influenced by the total number of sales made (Gupta et al., 2019; Ojiaku et al., 2022).

Nevertheless, a new school of thought is emerging that argues for the importance of service differentiation in the sales process (Almeida et al., 2017; De Jong et al., 2021). Consequently, this study centres more on the role of the salesperson, who is an inherent element of the service delivery capability of the B2B seller when engaging with business customers (Gao et al., 2022; Mullins et al., 2020).

Scholars (e.g., McColl et al., 2019; Pathak et al., 2022) have emphasised that due to the changing B2B landscape, service differentiation has become a competitive tool in a highly cut-throat B2B environment. Increasingly, B2B buyers' decision-making is guided by their service experiences with B2B sellers (Pomirleanu et al., 2016; Zou et al., 2021). Such an experience is influenced by salespeople's ability to remain professional, knowledgeable, and service-driven in their engagement with B2B buyers (Kaski et al., 2017). As a result, salespeople's motivations in the sales delivery process are crucial in the B2B sales service delivery process (Kaski et al., 2018).

In a B2B context, an understanding of B2B buyers' service needs is becoming increasingly valuable. This understanding guides sales management's ability to deliver on the service expectations of salespeople within a sale context. Furthermore, the management of B2B seller-buyer relationships implies a deeper understanding of the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that influence a salesperson's ability to perform (St. Clair et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2012). By exploring these factors, the salesperson's performance ability can be enhanced, thereby stimulating future service delivery ability (Good, Hughes, Kirca & McGrath, 2022). This is important when considering that the salesperson's interpersonal service delivery ability affects the B2B seller's potential to build a long-term relationship with a business customer (Alnakhli et al., 2021; DeLeon & Chatterjee, 2017). Consequently, the motivational state of the salesperson influences such ability, which impacts the B2B customer's service value perception (Mullins et al., 2020).

Numerous scholars have argued that B2B customers value relationship building that is founded on the principles of service value (Falkenreck & Wagner, 2022; McColl et al., 2019; Sharma, 2022). B2B buyers want to feel included in the relationship-building process, where service delivery supports the sales function in a professional and value-adding manner (Casidy & Nyadzayo, 2019; Nyadzayo et al., 2020; Steward et al., 2019). As a result, B2B buyers' willingness to continue a relationship with B2B sellers is influenced by the level of service received from the salespeople, the B2B sellers' friendliness and engaging behaviour, and the salespeople's ability to understand and deliver the B2B customers' service needs (Amor, 2019; Rodríguez et al., 2022). This stimulates a future relational intention that is influenced by the service

ability of the B2B sellers through salespeople support (Almomani, 2019).

3.2. Framing B2B salesperson motivation in a B2B sales performance context

The importance of salespeople in the B2B environment has been widely explored (Mullins et al., 2020; Shannahan et al., 2017). Salespeople are integral to the sales process and their ability to remain committed to their role is guided by their level of motivation (Buciuniene & Skudiene, 2009; Good, Hughes, Kirca & McGrath, 2022). Furthermore, salespeople are validated in sales management literature as a key element influencing the future sales performance of B2B sellers (Anaza et al., 2018; Nguyen et al., 2022). The seminal work of Anderson and Oliver (1987) describes sales performance as a comparison assessment of salespeople's ability (potential sales outcomes) versus actual sales outcome (what is being delivered) in a sales context. Gao et al. (2022) concurred, validating the importance of salespeople in driving B2B seller profitability.

Walker et al. (1977) explored the various drivers of sales performance more than four decades ago. They identified four elements that are imperative to sales performance, namely individual, interpersonal, organisational, and environmental. The research work of Churchill et al. (1985) builds on the seminal study of Walker et al. (1977), where 409 citations from 63 journals were explored. From this research work, Churchill et al. (1985) identified six drivers of sales performance, namely personal variables, skill variables, role variables, aptitude variables, motivational variables, and organisational/environmental variables (refer to Table 1). More than two decades later, Verbeke et al. (2011) conducted a meta-analysis on sales performance, resulting in the exploration of 389 studies published between 1982 and 2008. This meta-analysis encompassed the works of Churchill et al. (1985) and identified five different categories of sales performance: selling-related knowledge, degree of adaptiveness, role ambiguity, cognitive aptitude, and work engagement. Table 1 reflects on the meta-analyses of the works of Churchill et al. (1985), Verbeke et al. (2011), and Walker et al. (1977).

Although B2B literature has broadly explored motivation as an important element in sales performance, very few studies have explored the categories and dimensions of motivation and how it relates to sales performance in a B2B context. As a result, a deeper understanding of the motivational factors that influence a salesperson's performance requires greater exploration.

Salespeople's motivations directly influence the overall B2B sellers' sales performance through productivity and effort applied (Nowlin et al., 2018). Additionally, salespeople's relationship-building approach to B2B buyers is influenced by their ability to be customer-centric in their sales approach (Habel et al., 2020; Singh & Venugopal, 2015). In this regard, sales management needs to develop a deeper understanding of salespeople's motivational drivers, since both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors can impact future sales performance (Good, Hughes, Kirca & McGrath, 2022). This influence is essential to driving a positive sales performance ability in the future (Ohiomah et al., 2020).

A new school of thought confirms the need to explore motivation as a

Table 1
Meta-analysis literature reviews.

Source	Approach	Outcome
Walker et al. (1977)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Classifies a number of individual, interpersonal, organisational, and environmental factors that can impact the overall motivation and job performance of a salesperson	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Offers a proposed outline of integrated factors that in the past have been perceived as being independent in its influence on salesperson performance in sales management literature.Motivation components, such as “straight salary” and “commission”, are studied in detail.Focuses on psychological mechanisms, which work to motivate sales effort and performance. Expectancy theories of motivation.
Churchill et al. (1985)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Articles assessed between 1918and 1982409 citations from 63 journals116 studies covered sufficient knowledge to be counted in the meta-analysisIn total: 1 653 observationsDeterminants of salespeople’s performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Determinants rank (ordered amount correlation): (i) personal factors, (ii) skill, (iii) role variables, (iv) aptitude, (v) motivation, and (vi) organisational/environmental factors.Strength of the relationship between the major determinants and salespeople’s performance is influenced by the category of products salespeople put up for sale
Verbeke et al. (2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Synthesises empirical evidence from 1982 to 2008389 studies121 research works were disregardedApproximations of both the prognostic authenticity of the Walker et al. (1977) subcategories and the impact of a range of moderators on determinant-sales performance relationships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Five subcategories demonstrate significant relationships with sales performance: (i) selling-related knowledge, (ii) degree of adaptiveness, (iii) role ambiguity, (iv) cognitive aptitude, and (v) work engagement.Subcategories are moderated by measurement method, research context, and sales type variables.

critical sales performance driver in a B2B context (Bothe, 2019; Inyang & Jaramillo, 2020; Itani et al., 2022; Khusainova, 2018). These scholars inform the need to better understand the factors that influence salespeople’s motivations and sales performance. Edwards et al. (2022) and Guenther and Guenther (2020) explored various sales performance drivers, but a focus on motivation as a critical driver of sales performance from a B2B seller perspective is not extensively explored in extant B2B literature. Furthermore, most studies (Buciuniene & Skudiene, 2009; Inyang & Jaramillo, 2020; Mai & Liao, 2022; Zeiss & Chapman, 2021) on sales performance and salesperson motivation are from a product-orientated firm perspective, and not a service-orientated firm perspective. Consequently, research on the different motivational factors and their dimensions is required within the context of service firms. Hence, this study aimed to test a framework of B2B sellers’ sales performance motivation in services firms. The framework of B2B sellers’ motivations is supported by the dual findings presented in the two meta-analyses by Churchill et al. (1985) and Verbeke et al. (2011). Therefore, this study empirically tested a research framework of the categories and dimensions that B2B sellers need to consider in improving the overall sales performance of salespeople. Through such an approach, the B2B sellers are also enabled to improve the salespeople’s individual ability to increase the service value offered to B2B customers. The study refers to three categories of motivation with the purpose of assisting sales management to better understand how to motivate salespeople and improve their sales performance levels. These motivational categories include (i) cognitive choice, (ii) goal orientation, and (iii) work engagement, and are illustrated in Fig. 1.

Against the background provided above, the meta-analysis on sales performance reflected in Table 1 signifies the importance of motivational indicators of sales performance in the B2B relational process. Published research in the field of sales management has explored sales performance predominantly from a buyer’s and a product perspective (Diba et al., 2019; Mai & Liao, 2022; Schmitz et al., 2022), while this study focuses on a seller’s and a service perspective of sales performance in a B2B context. Therefore, this study emphasised the importance of a service focus in the management of sales performance as well as the critical role played by sellers in a B2B relationship (Krishna & Singh, 2018).

Multiple scholars have called for further research on B2B sales, but from the perspective of the seller (Enyinda et al., 2021; Høgevold et al., 2022; Nunan et al., 2018). Furthermore, Koponen et al. (2019) and Rodríguez et al. (2022) confirmed that B2B sellers are crucial in a sales context, since their service delivery ability influences future sales directly. Accordingly, it should be noted that salespeople operating in a B2B environment liaise directly with B2B customers through their

service deliverables. Consequently, salespeople’s service skills guide their service ability, which impacts B2B customers’ overall perceptions of the sales experience. Hence, salespeople are critical to the sales process through their overall service deliverables to B2B customers, influencing the latter’s service engagement perception (Gao et al., 2022; Itani et al., 2022; Nyadzayo et al., 2020).

Considering that B2B customers want to receive beneficial value from a sale, B2B sellers need to develop an enhanced understanding of the service expectations of B2B customers before making a sale (Steward et al., 2019). As a result, salespeople need to have an in-depth understanding of such service needs expectations and apply their service deliverables to B2B buyers in a manner that will strengthen sales performance in the long term (Gao et al., 2022). This is especially true considering that salespeople’s motivations drive their willingness to deliver more successfully on B2B customers’ service needs (Ahmad et al., 2021). Therefore, greater exploration is required of the different dimensions that influence salespeople’s sales performance, since such dimensions are vital to the overall sales performance ability of the salespeople of the B2B sellers. In addition, salespeople are directly accountable for managing their B2B customers in a professional manner, thus an understanding of the motivational drivers of salespeople is required to empower them in their ability to service the needs of B2B customers. Consequently, the following selected motivational categories are discussed in more detail, exploring its importance in a B2B service context.

3.3. Cognitive choice

Cognitive choice is a vital element of motivation in driving future sales performance (Alnakhli et al., 2020; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). It is based on the idea that selling is guided by rational decision-making, which influences the behavioural actions of the sellers and the customers in the sales process (Oliveira et al., 2023; Susanti et al., 2020). Specifically, rational decision-making encompasses choices grounded on cerebral reasoning that guide the final decision-making of the sellers and the customers (Balmer et al., 2020; Hinterhuber, 2015). Scholars (e.g., Shannahan et al., 2015; Spiro & Weitz, 1990) have stated that cognitive choice entails two core components: spending time on planning and a salesperson’s intrinsic motivation. Accordingly, B2B sellers who conduct comprehensive planning towards sales activities and stimulate intrinsic motivation to drive overall sales performance will be in a better position to adapt their sales strategy to customer expectations (Alqhaiwi, 2023; Hartmann & Lussier, 2020).

Scholars (e.g., Rangarajan et al., 2021) have validated the significance of planning as a strategic tool in stimulating future sales

performance. De Jong et al. (2021) and McDonald (2016) stated that service delivery has become an important element in sales strategy planning to secure a differential advantage for B2B sellers. By including service delivery as a customer engagement tool, salespeople are empowered to support customers' expectations through service innovation (Classen & Friedli, 2019; Kaski et al., 2017). Service innovation tools – for instance, salesperson after-hours service support, service engagement through multiple platforms that provides easy access to the customer, 24/7 online access through technology platforms and artificial intelligence tools (e.g., chatbots), and salesperson mobility to secure transformational service support on an ongoing basis – should be built into sales strategy planning as key elements towards customer management through service differentiation (Chong, Van Dyne et al., 2021; Mullins et al., 2020; Riikinen et al., 2018).

According to De Jong et al. (2021), B2B sellers need to individualise their sales strategies towards a customer, where they can differentiate their customer approach through individualised service delivery. This way, salespeople can plan a sales call around the availability of customers and plan their visits to their respective customer segments within a time frame that is convenient to the latter (Rangarajan et al., 2021). Saura et al. (2020) concurred, stating that sales strategy planning should be done inclusive of both seller and business customer needs, which can stimulate cognitive choice in a positive manner. Consequently, B2B sellers need to become more understanding of the role played by professional service delivery in sales planning. They can ensure this using training and development to strengthen awareness of service innovation in sales strategy planning or recruit salespeople with a strong service-focused approach towards customer management (Johnson et al., 2021). By embracing such an approach, the role of service delivery and its importance in strengthening cognitive choice in the sales process is enhanced (Kaski et al., 2017).

Conversely, intrinsic motivation relates to aspects that stimulate a salesperson's willingness to stimulate individual performance (Gottfried et al., 2017). Intrinsic motivation guides cognitive choice through internal stimulation, internal awareness creation, and internal assessment (St. Clair et al., 2018). Consequently, sales management's understanding of intrinsic motivation as a motivational factor that influences sales performance is crucial in a B2B context (Kimura et al., 2019). In addition, salespeople engage with business customers directly and their role as service providers to business customers becomes increasingly important to explore (Alamäki & Kaski, 2015). Considering this, B2B sellers need to enhance salesperson service delivery to their customer base by strengthening intrinsic benefits for superior service delivery (Mullins et al., 2020). In a B2B seller-customer context, the cognitive choice of a salesperson can be positively stimulated by applying various techniques. These techniques include, first, creating financial incentives when delivering exceptional services to customers; second, developing individual performance management plans that encompass service deliverables as outcomes; and third, creating a service-orientated work culture that is founded on service-driven teamwork, training, and development (Høgevoid et al., 2022; Nordin et al., 2013; Ohiomah et al., 2020).

Scholars (e.g., Bande et al., 2016; Conde et al., 2022; Ramarajan et al., 2017) concur, stating that the stimulation of intrinsic motivation is a key element of cognitive choice that drives future sales performance. Within the context of sales, planning and intrinsic motivation are key drivers of motivation that can result in the stimulation of future sales (Mallin & Ragland, 2017). Furthermore, sales management needs to develop a deeper understanding of service delivery and service performance as key elements of sales strategy planning and salesperson incentivisation (Ahmad, Liu, Akhtar & Siddiqui, 2022). In a B2B context, the management of customer expectations needs to be incorporated into individual salesperson task planning, and should also become an inherent part of a salesperson's rational decision-making process (Lynch & De Chernatony, 2007; Siguaw et al., 2003). This will strengthen the

salespeople's individual willingness to deliver on service expectations with the required professionalism and desire, thereby strengthening the overall service experience of the customers and their own sales performance (Guenther & Guenther, 2019; Nyadzayo et al., 2020). As a result, enhancing the cognitive choice aptitude of salespeople towards service delivery through service innovation can improve sellers' ability to increase their sales performance (Salunke et al., 2013; Sok & O'Cass, 2015).

3.4. Goal orientation

Scholars, such as Amenuvor et al. (2023) and Rajabi et al. (2018), have confirmed the importance of goal orientation in influencing future sales performance. When an individual is goal-orientated, a deeper understanding is developed towards the final outcome to be achieved (Domingues et al., 2017).

Friend et al. (2020) stated that the development of a service-orientated approach towards sales is critical in driving sales performance, especially since service delivery is an imperative part of the sales process that empowers B2B sellers in securing a successful sale (Nezami et al., 2018). Consequently, B2B sellers need to develop a service orientation towards the management of business customers that is guided by services goals (Enyinda et al., 2021). These goals need to align with the salespeople's sales performance objectives, providing service support to their sales performance actions (Wang et al., 2019).

Kaski et al. (2017) and Rodríguez et al. (2022) asserted that the service delivery strategy of a B2B seller needs to include salespeople with a friendly, caring, and engaging approach towards customers. Therefore, a professional service-orientated approach towards customer engagement should be guided by goal development that encompasses service-driven goals (Ulaga & Loveland, 2014). For example, the ability of salespeople to deliver on the service expectations of business customers should be supported through their individual willingness to become more service-orientated, the corporate culture of B2B sellers that encourages a service-orientated approach towards customer engagement, service support delivery benefits available to salespeople through incentives, and the development of a sales performance management system that includes services support goals as measurable outcomes (Biemans & Griffin, 2018; Hamzah et al., 2020; Hossain & Gilbert, 2021).

In a competitive business environment, such as the B2B industry, the development of salesperson goals that align with service-driven actions can provide salespeople with benchmarks against which their individual sales performance can be measured (Kindström & Kowalkowski, 2009). Such benchmarks need to be reasonable and attainable to stimulate salespeople's psychological mindset towards the setting of goals in the context of work performance (Agnihotri & Zhang, 2021). This is especially true in terms of the critical role played by service delivery in the customer management process, where salespeople, through direct engagement with a business customer can stimulate positive feelings (e.g., joy and contentment) through high-quality service delivery to customers (Siadou-Martin et al., 2017). Through a deeper understanding of the importance of service delivery in the customer engagement process, sales managers also become increasingly aware of the application of services to secure competitive differentiation (Kaski et al., 2017). Consequently, sales management needs to secure a more inclusive approach to salespeople's goal-setting, where both parties understand the importance of service application as a competitive differentiator (Itani et al., 2022). Through such an inclusive approach, salespeople will be inspired to drive their individual sales performance in a positive manner through high-quality service differentiation (Hossain & Gilbert, 2021). For this study, goal-setting relates to performance goal orientation and salesperson's outcome productivity (Dwyer et al., 2000; Van deWalle et al., 2000). Performance goal orientation can be described as the judgement made by a salesperson in terms of probable capability

versus real performance. Instead, outcome productivity refers to a salesperson's actual number of sales delivered within a specific period (Pettijohn et al., 2000).

Against the background provided above, it becomes increasingly important for B2B sellers to encompass a service-orientated approach in the goal formulation of salespeople towards their individual sales performance measurement (Uлага & Loveland, 2014). Furthermore, B2B sellers need to develop the individual willingness of salespeople to improve their sales performance through enhanced service delivery (Itani et al., 2023). This can be attained by providing focused goal preparation workshops to salespeople, which can assist them in the development of their individual goals. Through these workshops, the positive role played by service provision to enhance the overall experience of the business customer through service innovation and support needs to be emphasised (Paesbrugghe et al., 2020). Giovannetti et al. (2021) and Kindström et al. (2015) agreed, stating that goal-setting, through the inclusion of a service-orientated approach, needs to be beneficial to both the B2B seller and the business customer, where the offering of professional service delivery secures a competitive advantage for all parties concerned. Therefore, if there is a financial advantage for the B2B seller to drive a service-orientated approach when engaging with customers, it can stimulate overall sales performance in the long term (Oakley et al., 2021). Contrastingly, a customer management strategy characterised by professional service engagement and support can strengthen future business customer faithfulness, resulting in repeat sales due to service satisfaction experiences (Agnihotri et al., 2017; Roy et al., 2019; Sharma, 2022).

3.5. Work engagement

Work engagement has been well documented in management literature as an important element for strengthening service performance (Al-Dmour et al., 2019; Wut et al., 2022). Work engagement is directly influenced by aspects including employees' level of job contentment and level of involvement with their job (Medhurst & Albrecht, 2016). Therefore, work engagement encompasses an employee's direct involvement in job performance (including aspects like service delivery) through planning and actions (Kuok & Taormina, 2017).

Scholars, such as Hamzah et al. (2016), argue that the service orientation of a salesperson is guided by the service culture within which the salesperson operates. This implies that salespeople's ability to deliver a professional and service-focused experience to B2B customers is influenced by how they are managed, trained, and developed (Popli & Rizvi, 2017). Fehel et al. (2023) concurred, stating that when an employee (e.g., a salesperson) experiences a feeling of belonging to an employee brand where acknowledgement for performance and participation in a team is validated, enhanced levels of employee motivation can be secured. Through this approach, salespeople can experience elevated levels of enthusiasm and vigour in their job, thereby strengthening feelings of pride in the job performed (Good et al., 2021; Valenzuela-Fernández et al., 2020). As a result, such enhanced levels of motivation can stimulate salespeople's ability to provide business customers with elevated levels of service support when making a sale (Mallin et al., 2017).

Scholars in the management field have confirmed the significance of work engagement as a stimulant to sales performance (Chong, Yu et al., 2021; Khwaja & Yang, 2014; Wahlberg-Järvenkylä, 2017). The salesperson's overall service performance is guided by numerous factors, such as financial remuneration, financial and non-financial incentives, being part of a team that is focused on high-quality service delivery, a personal motivation to deliver on customer service expectations, and training and development on professional service delivery received (Herjanto & Franklin, 2019; Huang et al., 2019; Piercy et al., 1997). Considering this, B2B sellers should develop a service-orientated culture through their management of salespeople, encompassing the service inputs of employees (e.g., salespeople who provide B2B sellers with

feedback on business customer service expectations), added value to both the salesperson and the business customer when professional service delivery is secured, the development of a customer service strategy that serves as a foundation towards expected service deliverables, and regular team work engagement to share service experiences that can stimulate service innovation thinking (Alnakhlī et al., 2021; Rodríguez et al., 2022).

An extensive review of literature affirms that salespeople who are content with their work environment and feel part of a team are more willing to deliver on customers' service expectations (Huntley, 2006; Kaski et al., 2017; Mullins et al., 2020; Paesbrugghe et al., 2020). Furthermore, these employees are more inclined to illustrate service innovation in the planning and execution of their sales performance actions, making them more understanding of their customers' service needs (Ahmad Liu, Akhtar & Siddiqi, 2022; Paesbrugghe et al., 2020). This can result in employees having a more customer-centric approach towards customers, driven by service-orientated principles, such as salesperson friendliness, sensitivity towards customer service needs when directly engaging with business customers, after-sales service support initiatives, the application of professional service failure recovery if needed, and open communication with a customer through platforms and within time frames suitable to the business customers (Delpchitre et al., 2019; Fergusson et al., 2021). Consequently, salespeople need to understand that improved overall sales performance is also guided by enhanced service performance levels, driven by a focused work engagement strategy (Ahmad, Liu, Asif et al., 2022; Alnakhlī et al., 2021).

4. Methodology

4.1. Dimensions and items

The B2B sellers' motivations framework of the present study originates from the findings in two meta-analyses on sales performance by Churchill et al. (1985) and Verbeke et al. (2011). These meta-analyses structure a six-dimensional framework in the context of sales performance in services firms. The dimensions and multi-item measures used in the questionnaire to test the framework B2B sellers' motivations in services firms in the context of sales performance originate from multiple studies. All multi-item measures of B2B sellers' motivations used in the study were borrowed and adapted from previous studies as follows:

- Cognitive choice:
 - Spending time on planning (Shannahan et al., 2015)
 - Salesperson's intrinsic motivation (Spiro & Weitz, 1990)
- Goal orientation:
 - Performance goal orientation (VandeWalle et al., 2000)
 - Salesperson's outcome productivity (Dwyer et al., 2000)
- Work engagement:
 - Enthusiasm (Schaufeli et al., 2002)
 - Job involvement (Buchanan, 1974)

Five-point Likert-type scales were used for each multi-item measure per motivation dimension, where 5 = "strongly agree" and 1 = "strongly disagree". The multi-item measures are communicated in Table 2.

4.2. Sample and context

The methodology is founded on a questionnaire survey based on a deductive approach. In total, 732 services firms were selected to participate in the study to represent a range of companies from different industries and corporate sizes of the services-orientated business sector of Norway. The services firms were identified based on the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC 2007). Key informants were contacted and provided with a questionnaire through LinkedIn. A non-probability purposive sampling technique informed the selection of the sample. A

Table 2
Multi-item measures of motivation dimensions.

Cognitive choice – spending time on planning
a) I plan each sales call.
b) I plan sales strategies for each customer.
c) I plan how to cover my assigned territory.
Cognitive choice – salesperson’s intrinsic motivation
a) I find trying to sell to new customers fun.
b) I find getting new customers stimulating.
c) I feel pretty good when I make a sale.
Goal orientation – performance goal orientation
a) It is important that others know I am a good seller.
b) It is important for me to prove I am better than others in the sales department.
c) I like to prove my ability to others.
Goal orientation – salesperson’s outcome productivity
a) I generate sales from current customers.
b) I achieve high sales.
c) I earn high sales commissions.
Work engagement – enthusiasm
a) I feel vigorous in my work.
b) I am enthusiastic about my work.
c) I get carried away by my work.
Work engagement – job involvement
a) I have warm feelings towards this organisation as a place to work.
b) I feel a sense of pride in working for this organisation.
c) I feel as if this organisation’s problems are my problems.

Qualtrics link to the questionnaire and an introductory letter (including information on the research team, such as contact details) were provided to respondents.

The informants who were approached included sellers, team leaders, sales managers, key account managers, and regional managers. The key criteria used to select key informants to the study were: (i) they had to be a salesperson with a budget responsibility and measured against this budget; and (ii) their main responsibility consisted of being actively involved in selling, not managing others to sell. The researchers engaged with sales directors and singled out services firms that indicated a willingness to contribute to the study. We asked key informants to participate in the study and e-mail reminders were sent or telephone calls were made to motivate them to fill in the questionnaire if they had not done so within seven days of the initial request. This process was replicated two and three weeks after the first request was sent to respondents, if the questionnaires had still not been returned. In total, 389 out of 732 questionnaires were returned, generating a response rate of 53.1 %.

The study attempted to address endogeneity using various approaches. First, the selected constructs in the study were founded on theoretical grounding and their relevance contextualised by theoretical validation. Second, respondents completed self-administered questionnaires online. Given that responses did not go directly through to the researchers after completion, response bias could be more successfully managed. This was because respondents felt more comfortable answering questions honestly and their anonymity could be maintained, as no identification or personal information was required. Third, the items used in the study were phrased in a manner that satisfied the research objectives and were based on previously tested research, limiting the biased nature of the application of clear and unbiased questions to retrieve as much information from the respondents as possible. Finally, the questionnaire was short and simple, making it clear to respondents what was required from each question. Moreover, respondents were given an orientation letter (and a Qualtrics link to the questionnaire) explaining the purpose of the study and how to complete the questionnaire online. Furthermore, follow-up e-mails were sent and calls were made to respondents to ensure they completed the questionnaire through the link provided to them via LinkedIn. Once the questionnaire was completed, an e-mail was sent to the respondents, thanking them for their time.

In terms of common method variance, scholars (e.g., Hair et al., 2006) argue that convergent validity implies the extent to which

constructs share variation. We appraised this in this study by considering the variance extracted for each construct. In addition, the guidelines for social sciences proposed by Podsakoff et al. (2012) were followed in this study to lower common method bias and prevent threatening the validity of the results regarding the constructs measured. Additionally, the study applied procedural statistical solutions. In particular, the questionnaire had to be completed by respondents who were knowledgeable sales managers and who were possibly professionally focused about this study. The questionnaire was designed to secure easy completion and to reduce sales managers’ prerequisites to complete the questionnaire. In conclusion, the Harman single-factor test was applied to check for possible common bias. The number of factors were reduced to one, resulting in the explained variance being 23.9 %, thereby indicating that common method bias was of no concern in this study.

At the end of the questionnaire, a pair of screening questions assessed the targeted business executives’ competence regarding their: (i) total years of sales experience; and (ii) total years of sales experience in the current company. Campbell (1955) contended that this is a way to safeguard that the experience and competence of respondents in a survey study are sufficient to properly fill in the questionnaire in relation to the subject matter. The findings of the screening questions showed that the mean value of key informants’ total sales experience was 18.1 years, with a median of 17 years. Additionally, the mean for key informants’ total sales experience in the current company was 9.9 years, with a median of 7 years. Univariate and multivariate statistical techniques were used to analyse the data collected during the empirical phase of the study. The empirical findings are discussed in Section 5.

5. Empirical findings

5.1. Sample characteristics

This study’s sample of targeted sales executives who returned a filled-in questionnaire contained a spectrum of Norwegian service-orientated businesses in B2B settings regarding industrial belonging, size of full-time employee equivalent, and annual turnover. The service-orientated businesses included in the study primarily operated in the wholesale and retail trade; transport and storage; accommodation and food service; information and communication; financial and insurance; real estate; professional, scientific, and technical activities; and administrative and support services sectors of the Norwegian economy. The number of employees working for these businesses varied from 1 to over 1 000, with an annual turnover of between 0 and 250 million euros. As

Table 3
Nature of services firms.

Nature of business	Count	Full-time employee equivalent	Count	Annual turnover (euro)	Count
Wholesale and retail trade	63	1–9	11	0–9.9 millions	19
Transport and storage	39	10–19	10	10–49.9 million	31
Accommodation and food service	20	20–49	12	50–99.9 million	38
Information and communication	47	50–99	21	100–249 million	126
Financial and insurance	103	100–249	77	250+ million	175
Real estate	2	250 – 999	96	Total	389
Professional, scientific, and technical activities	54	1 000+	162		
Administrative and support services	45	Total	389		
Other services	16				
Total	389				

Table 4
Dimensions of B2B sellers' motivations in services firms – univariate statistics.

Dimension	Item	N	Mean	Standard deviation
<i>Cognitive choice</i> – spending time on planning	a)	388	3.43	1.07
	b)	387	3.74	0.95
	c)	388	4.03	0.80
<i>Cognitive choice</i> – salesperson's intrinsic motivation	a)	389	4.54	0.70
	b)	389	4.65	0.61
	c)	388	4.85	0.40
<i>Goal orientation</i> – performance goal orientation	a)	388	3.51	1.04
	b)	388	2.66	1.18
	c)	388	2.83	1.14
<i>Goal orientation</i> – salesperson's outcome productivity	a)	389	4.28	0.87
	b)	388	3.87	0.84
	c)	389	3.94	0.78
<i>Work engagement</i> – enthusiasm	a)	389	4.19	0.65
	b)	389	4.30	0.70
	c)	389	4.13	0.80
<i>Work engagement</i> – job involvement	a)	382	4.05	0.79
	b)	382	3.25	0.99
	c)	381	3.80	0.89

such, this study is reflective of a large and diverse sample of service-orientated businesses in Norway that represent the country's core service industries (refer to Table 3).

Table 4 communicates the univariate statistics of this study. Each dimension of B2B sellers' motivations in the studied services firms demonstrates almost a non-existent internal non-response bias. Moreover, Table 4 shows the mean values and standard deviations for each dimension of B2B sellers' motivations and related items, providing coherent high-quality responses from the targeted sales executives in services firms.

5.2. Factor analysis

The six-dimensional framework of B2B sellers' motivations in services firms is tested in an exploratory factor analysis (Norušis, 1993, 1994). The factor analysis contained 18 items (three items per

dimension), as communicated in Table 2. Accordingly, no items in Table 2 were excluded in subsequent factor analysis. The principal component method was applied to test the framework of motivation dimensions in services firms, which are communicated in the factor solution. An orthogonal approach (varimax rotation) was applied to rotate the factor solution.

5.3. Factor solution

Table 5 presents the factor solution, which is satisfactory (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin/overall measure of sampling adequacy (MSA) = 0.751; Bartlett's test: approx. chi-square = 1584.390; df = 1153; Sig = 0.000). According to Table 5, the MSA spanned 0.65 to 0.88, the communalities ranged from 0.48 to 0.83 with a total explained variance of 70.0 %, and the Cronbach's alpha for the six factors were 0.68–0.83. As per Table 5, all six factors in the factor solution of B2B sellers' motivations in services firms indicate acceptable convergent, discriminant and nomological validity, as well as acceptable reliability of each dimension.

6. Discussion

The findings in this study based on B2B sellers' motivations in the context of sales performance in services firms are satisfactory, providing empirical support that the dimensions tested – originating from the meta-analyses by Churchill et al. (1985) and Verbeke et al. (2011) – are valid and reliable in a B2B sales setting in services firms. The dimensions of B2B sellers' motivations applied in this research justified from previous studies included: (i) cognitive choice – spending time on planning (Shannahan et al., 2015) and salesperson's intrinsic motivation (Spiro & Weitz, 1990); goal orientation – performance goal orientation (Vande-Walle et al., 2000) and salesperson's outcome productivity (Dwyer et al., 2000); and work engagement – enthusiasm (Schaufeli et al., 2002) and job involvement (Buchanan, 1974).

The study's findings confirm the importance of cognitive choice, goal orientation, and work engagement as key drivers of salesperson motivation in a B2B service context. The results validate that through an enhanced focus on the development of B2B salespeople's cognitive

Table 5
Multivariate statistics.

Dimension and item	Factor(s)							*	**
		1	2	3	4	5	6		
<i>Goal orientation</i> – performance goal orientation 1	b)		0.862	0.003	−0.002	−0.038	0.042	0.061	0.700
	c)		0.859	0.045	−0.030	0.057	0.078	−0.018	0.702
	a)		0.781	0.077	0.067	0.133	0.077	0.125	0.788
<i>Work engagement</i> – enthusiasm 1	a)		0.110	0.809	0.106	0.156	0.010	0.062	0.869
	b)		−0.028	0.750	0.053	0.172	0.329	0.135	0.722
	c)		0.041	0.740	0.039	0.128	0.325	0.101	0.847
<i>Cognitive choice</i> – spending time on planning 1	b)		−0.041	0.082	0.853	0.052	0.040	0.074	0.648
	a)		0.051	0.027	0.815	0.150	0.067	0.031	0.672
	c)		0.024	0.075	0.778	0.019	0.094	0.031	0.806
<i>Cognitive choice</i> – salesperson's intrinsic motivation 2	b)		0.045	0.098	0.072	0.896	0.135	0.024	0.676
	a)		0.054	0.117	0.065	0.856	0.087	0.036	0.706
	c)		0.072	0.367	0.137	0.590	−0.054	0.178	0.878
<i>Work engagement</i> – job involvement 2	c)		−0.006	0.032	0.107	0.124	0.819	0.164	0.812
	a)		0.015	0.331	0.063	0.021	0.698	0.155	0.810
	b)		0.229	0.176	0.052	0.029	0.506	−0.062	0.791
<i>Goal orientation</i> – outcome productivity 2	c)		0.202	0.030	0.085	0.169	0.761	0.659	0.757
	b)		0.203	0.201	0.066	0.106	0.138	0.729	0.794
	a)		−0.168	0.057	0.001	−0.065	0.062	0.669	0.674
*** (%)		12.7	11.8	11.5	11.5	9.5	9.5		
**** (%)		12.7	24.5	36	47.5	57	66.5		
*****		0.81	0.78	0.76	0.76	0.64	0.60		

Notes.

* Communalities per item.

** MSA per item).

*** Total explained variance per factor.

**** Cumulative explained total variance.

***** Cronbach's alpha.

ability, the emphasis is on critical skills, such as the ability to plan a sales call, empowerment to plan sales strategies for each customer, and knowledge on how to cover an assigned territory. Furthermore, the study purports that through a deeper understanding of salespeople's intrinsic motivation, sales organisations can be better enabled to create a work environment for salespeople, where they perceive their daily task to be relevant and exciting.

In addition, the study proves that by focusing on the development of salespeople's performance goal orientation, their overall level of motivation can be strengthened. As such, B2B sellers need to develop an enhanced understanding of the psychological needs of their sales personnel. For example, B2B sellers need to be aware that salespeople are also human beings with emotions, feelings, and needs. Accordingly, a deeper awareness of sales personnel's desire to be recognised by their employers through performance acknowledgement, sales performance development through training and exposure, as well as engaging leadership that is founded on inclusivity is imperative to strengthening their motivational levels. Therefore, salespeople's outcome productivity can be stimulated, which positively impacts B2B sellers' overall sales volume. This is important to note, as B2B literature (discussed in this article's comprehensive literature review) confirms that highly motivated salespeople are able to deliver on B2B buyers' service expectations, with the intent to increase future B2B sales. Moreover, highly motivated B2B salespeople are better enabled to provide B2B buyers with an engaging, supportive, and friendly service experience characterised by professionalism.

Conclusively, the study's results further establish that a B2B motivational framework that centres on work engagement through a deeper understanding of salesperson enthusiasm and job involvement stimulants can positively impact sales force motivation. It is proposed that B2B sellers secure an improved understanding of the work engagement factors that stimulate salesperson motivation. For example, when salespeople feel vigorous in their work, are enthusiastic about their work, develop warm feelings towards B2B sellers as their employers as a place to work, and develop a sense of pride in working for the B2B seller, their overall level of motivation is positively stimulated. Hence, salesperson motivation is deemed to be an important stimulant of sales output, which directly influences the profitability of B2B sellers in the long term.

This study's findings align with previous research on the drivers of sales performance in a B2B context. B2B scholars, such as Schrock et al. (2021), confirm the importance of cognitive choice in stimulating the motivational levels of salespeople in a B2B context. They argue that overall sales performance is stimulated by a salesperson's ability to plan sales activities or to be empowered through training on how to strategically plan and manage sales activities. Good et al. (2021) further confirmed that a salesperson's intrinsic motivation is a strong driver of sales performance. As such, cognitive choice is a critical factor that impacts the motivational level of salespeople, which could influence their future productivity.

This study also confirms goal orientation as an important element to be included in a motivational framework for stimulating B2B salesperson performance. Thus, scholars (e.g., Brown et al., 2022) argue that when salespeople are aware of their sales targets, and when such targets are developed and agreed upon between the salespeople and their line managers in an engaging manner, a greater willingness to achieve such goals is secured. Terho et al. (2022) concurred, stating that through the development of sales performance goals that are mutually developed and agreed upon by salespeople and their line managers, higher levels of productivity can be secured from salespeople's performance.

Finally, through transformational leadership, salespeople can be managed in an inclusive manner, where decision-making and performance planning are secured *with* the salespeople, and not *for* the salespeople. Such an approach stimulates salespeople's interest in the sales job and increases enthusiasm, which enhances their overall productivity levels over the medium to long term (Mustaffa et al., 2022; Van der Berg

et al., 2022). Accordingly, employee motivation is enhanced through employee participation in job specifications, the creation of open communication channels for employees (e.g., salespeople) to interact with leadership through multiple channels in a supportive working environment, and the establishment of a working environment that is supportive of employee needs and expectations. Such an approach can stimulate employee pride in the job, developing feelings of attachment to B2B sellers through association (Epler et al., 2023; Gao et al., 2020; Rodríguez et al., 2022).

The findings communicated in this study open options for further research on B2B sellers in services firms. Additional studies may centre on the tested six-dimensional framework of B2B sellers' motivations in relation to their objective and subjective performance. The findings of the six-dimensional framework can also be considered in the context of B2B sellers in services firms in relation to economic and non-economic satisfaction. Another research option is to test the connections and relations between the B2B sellers' motivation dimensions on the one side with the other sales performance indicators (i.e., sellers' skill level, sellers' role perception, and sellers' aptitude as well as the influence of organisational and environmental indicators on B2B sellers) on the other side, structured in the meta-analyses by Churchill et al. (1985) and Verbeke et al. (2011).

7. Research implications

7.1. Theoretical and managerial implications

This study makes multiple theoretical contributions to the B2B marketing field. These theoretical contributions reflect on the importance of cognitive choice, goal orientation, and work engagement as drivers of sales force motivation through the promulgation of a proposed motivational framework.

7.1.1. Understanding cognitive choice as a motivational driver of B2B salesperson performance

The study's findings validate the importance of cognitive choice as a driver of sales force motivation in a B2B context. It confirms that the motivation of salespeople through engaging and supportive leadership is imperative to stimulate individual motivation. As such, when transformational leadership is developmental in its focus, guiding salespeople towards a structured and planned approach when managing day-to-day B2B customer management responsibilities, increased attention is paid to salespeople's planning activities (Nguyen et al., 2023). The study confirms that by training and mentoring salespeople in aspects including planning, organising, and systematic application, their cognitive choices can be stimulated, strengthening motivational intent towards the task to be performed (Schwepker & Good, 2022). Therefore, the current findings confirm the need to include cognitive choice in a motivational framework for B2B salespeople, since its inclusion stimulates awareness of the need to plan sales activities in a structured and formative manner to secure success (Good, Hughes & Wang, 2022). By applying a rational approach towards sales activation, salespeople will be better empowered with knowledge on how much time to spend on planning a sales call, strategising an approach to reach B2B customers successfully, and how to secure a productive geographical coverage of B2B customers through efficient time management (Good et al., 2021). This understanding can stimulate the overall motivational level of B2B salespeople, leading to enhanced feelings of intrinsic motivation.

7.1.2. A perspective on goal orientation as a motivational driver of B2B salespeople

The study's results validate the relevance of goal orientation as a key dimension of salesperson motivation. The findings purport that to better enable the leadership of B2B sellers to enhance salesperson motivation, a deeper understanding of goal orientation is required. This implies that the management of B2B sellers needs to develop knowledge of the

factors that drive individual performance goal orientation and the overall productivity levels of salespeople in an organisation. An inclusive approach towards leadership that embraces engagement, open communication, and mutual dependence that is fostered by trust allows salespeople to develop feelings of attachment to their employers (Rodríguez et al., 2023). Through such a transformational leadership approach towards the management of salespeople, individual salespeople are motivated to believe more in their own abilities (Gao et al., 2020). A feeling of belonging enhances salespeople's self-awareness ability and stimulates an intention to perform (Good, Hughes & Wang, 2022). As such, their self-motivation drives a personal desire to deliver over and above the stipulated goals agreed upon with management (Singh et al., 2022). Consequently, there is a desire to deliver on the service expectations of B2B buyers (as customer) with greater intent and to manage customer segments with the increased knowledge and professionalism required (Nyadzayo et al., 2020). Therefore, B2B salespeople's sales productivity is improved due to increased levels of motivation achieved. Scholars concur, stating that through enhanced motivational levels, sales personnel are more inclined to increase their overall productivity levels, which stimulates future sales volume for B2B sellers (Good, Hughes, Kirca & McGrath, 2022).

7.1.3. Exploring work engagement as a critical dimension of B2B salesperson motivation

The importance of work engagement as a motivational driver in B2B studies has rarely been explored from a B2B seller perspective. To our knowledge, studies have not explored work engagement with a specific focus on salesperson enthusiasm and job involvement in a B2B seller context. As such, this study's findings confirm the critical importance of work engagement as a driver of salesperson motivation in a B2B context. This outcome agrees with the study by Itani et al. (2022), emphasising the role of work engagement in stimulating future motivational intent. By securing enhanced knowledge of salespeople's individual career needs and through a deeper understanding of the different driving force stimulants salespeople, B2B seller leadership is better enabled to create a working environment for salespeople that is supportive of their work (Van der Berg et al., 2022). Consequently, the results of this study validate that through an in-depth understanding of the psychological and emotional needs of sales employees, and the development of an engaging corporate culture that is supportive of such needs, leadership can strengthen individual salesperson enthusiasm and interest in the job performed, as well as develop a positive mindset amongst salespeople. Scholars (e.g., Westbrook & Peterson, 2022) confirm that by creating an engaging and inclusive working environment, employees' attitudes towards employers (e.g., a B2B seller) are improved, stimulating salespeople's sense of belonging to an organisation and their willingness to work harder in the future.

Against the discussion provided above, the importance of cognitive choice, goal orientation, and work engagement as dimensions of a proposed motivational framework is validated. Furthermore, B2B seller leadership can consider the proposed motivational framework to potentially positively impact salespeople's future sales productivity. By applying the proposed motivational framework, B2B seller leadership is also enabled to develop increased knowledge on how to assist salespeople to improve their sales planning initiatives and how to guide them towards improved external goal orientation through a deeper awareness of intrinsic motivational stimulants. Finally, the proposed framework can also empower management by providing knowledge on how to create a supportive and engaging working environment for salespeople through a transformative approach towards leadership that is characterised by inclusiveness, participation, open communications, mutual respect, and confidence.

8. Managerial implications

B2B service sales are complex contexts and complicated situations

for services firms and their B2B sellers to handle. Many elements are required to reach a final deal. It is necessary for services firms to maintain the sellers' motivations along the whole B2B services sales process, which is usually hard and may involve psychological wear-out.

Services firms may implement different incentives and continuous training for sellers to keep them motivated. However, B2B sellers usually need support to perform well. Therefore, it is vital to organise regular meetings to follow up on the services sales situation and to collect information from B2B sellers. Furthermore, sales managers may act as mentors for B2B sellers, offering them continuous support in each stage of the services sales processes. It is also fundamental to work on the relationships with the B2B sellers, as this support will increase B2B sellers' loyalty and engagement with the company. Moreover, B2B sellers' intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are crucial to their sales performance. Part of this support is orientated to prioritise B2B sellers' goals, focusing on what is really important and to avoid unnecessary stress.

Part of the work engagement is that the seller feels good. Services sales processes usually require long-term dedication. There may be friction between sellers and buyers, causing the sellers to get negative impressions. Services firms need to make sellers understand that this is part of the services sales process assisting their sellers. Sellers should be able and encouraged to talk about buyers' negative impressions as well as be understood and supported by sales managers. Sales managers may remind their B2B sellers of their past sales successes or previsualise a future success as part of the motivation B2B sellers to help with their intrinsic motivations.

Furthermore, B2B sellers need to become increasingly aware of cognitive choice, goal orientation, and work engagement as critical factors that enhance B2B salespeople's overall sales performance. It is increasingly necessary for B2B sellers to align salespeople's intrinsic motivations with the overall goals of their organisations. For example, sales leadership in B2B seller organisations needs to become more internally focused on organisational needs assessment. Through such an approach, a deeper understanding of B2B salespeople's financial, recognition, or personal growth needs can be established, which can enable line management to tailor sales targets and incentives to align with individual motivations. This could include the provision of bonuses for exceeding sales goals or recognition for high achievers.

Moreover, B2B sellers need to empower salespeople to develop their sales planning skills by providing training and development opportunities to facilitate the development of effective planning skills among salespeople. Such training could emphasise strategies on how to allocate time for planning. The salesperson can be empowered through a training and development programme (that can be offered in-house or by an external training provider) on aspects including how to do market research in a B2B sales context, prospect profiling, strategising before client interactions, customer management skills required to engage with B2B buyers in a professional and supportive manner, and how to secure access to market insights.

Sales leadership should also become increasingly aware of the need to develop sales performance measures *with* salespeople and not *for* salespeople. The development of sales performance goals should be done in consultation with salespeople. Such goals should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART). Moreover, sales leadership should regularly assess and adjust goals (maybe on a term basis) in response to market dynamics, ensuring that salespeople remain motivated and attainable. Another strategy that sales leadership can consider is to secure the implementation of key performance indicators that track sales output productivity, such as conversion rates, sales cycle length, and revenue generated per customer. To ensure an engaging relationship where performance measurement is based on a mutually inclusive approach, feedback and coaching on these metrics should be provided, helping salespeople identify areas for improvement.

In addition, B2B sellers need to foster a positive work environment, where salespeople feel engaged and enthusiastic about their roles. It

becomes increasingly important for line managers (working in a B2B seller setting) to acknowledge and commemorate salespeople's successes. This acknowledgement is crucial to stimulate a feeling of belonging among salespeople, thus stimulating enjoyment of the task performed. Sales leadership can also encourage team collaboration, knowledge sharing, and skill development to keep salespeople engaged and invested in their work. Furthermore, offering ongoing training programmes to enhance sales skills, product knowledge, and industry awareness is critical to ensure salespeople remain focused on their tasks and the outcomes. Moreover, through training and development initiatives offered to salespeople, B2B sellers can support the self-improvement of salespeople by providing resources for personal and professional development. Technology can be leveraged for this purpose. For example, sales technology can be used to streamline routine tasks, allowing salespeople to focus on higher-value activities. B2B sellers can also invest in artificial intelligence-driven tools for lead scoring, predictive analytics, and customer relationship management to enhance decision-making.

Furthermore, the promotion of a work-life balance has become increasingly important in the workplace. Consequently, it is imperative for B2B sellers to encourage a healthy work-life balance to prevent burnout and maintain high levels of work engagement. B2B sellers can consider flexible work arrangements and policies that support employee well-being. Additionally, since salespeople are human beings with emotions and feelings, B2B sellers should recognise and reward exceptional performance, for instance, by implementing a reward system. This could include financial incentives, awards, or career advancement opportunities. Hence, sales leadership should acknowledge and appreciate the efforts of salespeople, which can boost morale and motivation.

Conclusively, it is recommended that B2B sellers regularly review and adapt strategies. B2B sellers should continuously monitor the effectiveness of the strategies implemented and be willing to adapt to changing market conditions and the evolving needs of the sales team. By incorporating these recommendations in their B2B sales organisations, employers can optimise cognitive choice, goal orientation, and work engagement, leading to improved sales performance and better outcomes for their companies.

9. Conclusions, limitations, and suggestions for further studies

This study examined and verified an important area of sales performance indicators, namely B2B sellers' motivations in services firms, and explained B2B sellers' intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. Furthermore, this study verified the relevance of B2B sellers' motivations, such as cognitive choice (spending time on planning and salesperson's intrinsic motivation), goal orientation (performance goal orientation and salesperson's outcome productivity), and work engagement (enthusiasm and job involvement).

Based on the empirical findings reported, we contend that the framework of B2B sellers' motivations appear to be valid and reliable in the context of sales performance in services firms. Nevertheless, verifying the findings in other samples of services firms is necessary to test the framework's validity and reliability across B2B services settings and through time. The framework may also be verified in other B2B settings and countries. It would be particularly interesting to verify it in non-Western B2B services settings, such as Asia and Africa.

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