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Author(s): Mikko Illi and Salu Ylirisku  
Institutional address: Betonimiehenkuja 5, 02150 Espoo, FINLAND, PL 17700, 00076 Aalto  
Phone number: +358(0) 50-5645331  
E-mail address: [firstname.lastname@aalto.fi](mailto:firstname.lastname@aalto.fi)

## **APPLYING CONCEPTUAL DESIGN TO B2B SALES NEGOTIATIONS**

### **ABSTRACT**

This paper addresses the challenge of perceiving B2B sales negotiation in a manner that would open up new possibilities for the improvement of the practice. B2B sales agents work under high pressure in developing relevant and appealing proposals when negotiating for a deal with a customer. The key problem that will be addressed is the building of understanding of a customer’s current needs and requirements, and then trying to devise an appropriate proposal to match these. The work of the sales agents in B2B sales negotiations is highly complex, as they need to understand both the modular machinery, service, configuration and customisation of the products in their company as well as to develop an apposite understanding of the key values and characteristics of the client organisation.

Based on a design-ethnographical study of real sales practice in lift truck business the paper draws parallels between sales agent’s work practice and collaborative conceptual design work, i.e. innovation design work. This perception provides a means to understand the value that the use of conceptual design tools could possibly provide for sales negotiation work. We also use the notion of boundary object to elaborate on the ways in which design sense making artefacts may drive also B2B sales agents’ work.

Keywords: conceptual design, personal selling, conceptualising, design, boundary object

### **INTRODUCTION**

When we talk about sense making between sales agent and customer in B2B context, we are talking about constructive development of complex understandings with and about each other. Products and services in B2B context are often highly modular and customisable, and therefore, can rarely be sold off the shelf. The offering preparations often demand substantial configuring and tailoring work before the purchase decision, and the level of complexity of the matter has increased during past years (Wright 2004). This pushes high demands on the ability of the sales agent to respond to the evolving situation innovatively. The work of sales agent demands responsive and situated innovativeness to changing needs of the customer (Jayawardhena et al. 2007). The interest for researching B2B sales in general has grown recently, however, actual face-to-face service encounters have not been studied much (Rust and Huang 2014). These encounters have a tremendous impact for the sales success, and hence, should be urgently addressed by research (Jayawardhena et al. 2007).

The existing marketing and management literature sees the value that is created through interaction between a company and customer as either financial value for the company (Grönroos 2008) or value for the customer (Holbrook 2006, Grönroos 2008, Heinonen et al. 2010, Helkkula et al. 2012, Strandvik et al. 2012). These ways to conceptualise the value creation overlook the situated constructive use of resources that are the real substance matter of these negotiations. Moreover, the events between the selling and the buying organisation are often dealt as situations where sacrifices with regards to resources are made in order to receive benefits. Scholars have proposed to see the situations also through the metaphor of ‘sack of resources’ to be shared, instead only seeing the negotiations as opportunities of creating something new and valuable as a result of interaction between two organisations (Day 1990, Woodruff and Gardial 1998, Zeithalm 1998).

There is an urge for developing a more holistic picture of today’s sales activities in order to better support these (Pullins 2015; Kaski 2015). One way to reframe the activity is to see selling situations as events of coaching. Once seen in this way, the sales agent becomes a coach that enables the customer organisation to maximise their performance. The coaching happens in a dialogue where the sales organisation learns about the key abilities, personal characteristics, and the field that the customer organisation is working in. (Kaski 2015.) Pullins (2015) has argued that sales agents may enable customers to reframe their thinking about their needs and their business, and hence enable them to see novel opportunities for developing their complex organisation.

In personal selling the sales agent is in direct interaction with the customer (Wright 2004). In face-to-face situation people communicate with each other through all senses, and they are able to refer to things in a highly responsive manner. Hence, the sales agent needs to have all the necessary resources available in the situation in order to develop shared understanding of the user needs as well as the needs of the customer. The resulting shared understanding increases the likelihood to solve relevant problems and to address real customer needs (Johnston and Marshall 2013.) According to Cespedes (2006, 2),

*“the salesperson is usually at the heart of the company/customer interface, and is therefore what some call a ‘boundary role’ person-i.e., someone at the boundaries of two different organisations and required to respond to the often conflicting rules, procedures and task requirements of each organisation.”*

Such a position of the sales agent puts high pressure on the sales agent’s ability to develop understanding about both organisations, i.e. the producer and the customer (including the users’ point of view). The ability to perform well in the face-to-face situation is one of the keys to successful sales (Cespedes 2006). Johnston and Marshall (2013, 41) list also other essential skills of sales agents: interpersonal and communication skills, solid knowledge of products being sold, ability to discover customer needs and solve their problems, and creativity to show how the customer may solve their problems with a particular product or service.

B2B sales work has numerous similarities with conceptual design work. In the most abstract sense both are initially about the negotiation about *what should be done*. We shall build on recent developments in understanding of conceptual designing, i.e. of the process through which innovative design teams create novel design concepts, see (Ylirisku 2013). Furthermore, we shall view sales work in terms of conceptual designing see (Ylirisku et al.,

in print), where the sales agent functions in the role of the ‘design facilitator’. When seen in this way, the sales event, especially with regards to the process of preparations, can be viewed in terms of collaborative design of a desirable future situation. This enables us to draw upon research about innovation design methods in the realm of co-design.

We also argue that the sales-agent-mediated reframing is most effective and beneficial for all the stakeholders when the sales agent is well informed in a manner that is grounded in the real context of users of the sold items. We propose to employ a design approach to develop sales interaction. Our special focus is on the development of shared understanding between sales agents and customers. It is crucial that the sales agent is able to discover appropriate customer needs and match these with the offering of the company. The discovery of resources from both organisations and matching these to create value determines to a great extent the final outcome, and ultimately, whether the sales agent may get or lose a deal.

The main contribution of the paper is the exploration of the role that conceptual design could play in B2B sales negotiation interactions between sales agent and customer. We shall present an ethnographic study of sales negotiations between a lift truck producer and their customer and investigate the findings through the lens of sense-making and conceptual co-design. We underline the significant similarities between sales work and conceptual designing, and will develop an argument that it is likely that sales work can be enhanced by approaching it as a form of conceptual designing.

The research aims at answering the question:

- What opportunities for enhancing B2B sales negotiation interactions between SA and customer does the conceptual design approach offer?

## RELATED WORK

The present paper studies B2B negotiations through the lens of conceptual designing, however, there are several works within the IMP group related to this. The related works discuss *inter-cognitive representations* (Mouzas and Henneberg 2015), *network pictures* (Henneberg et al. 2004, Öberg et al. 2009), *power of options* (Mouzas and Ford 2003), and sense-making and management in business networks (Henneberg et al. 2009). In the following these topics are presented as alternative frameworks to study and make sense of B2B sales interaction.

Mouzas and Henneberg (2015) have studied sales negotiations in terms of *inter-cognitive representations*. According to them inter-cognitive representations are “organizational artefacts that inscribe shared understandings” and that “*inter-cognitive representations express the knowledge individual actors have about other actors’ knowledge, which is based on interactions between these actors.*” (Mouzas and Henneberg 2015, 5.) By embodying shared understandings of rules that guide interactions the inter-cognitive representations lay an objectified foundation for interactions within a business network. Inter-cognitive representations are close to what Star and Griesemer (1989) have introduced under the label of boundary objects. These are tangible or intangible manifestations of shared understandings that may contribute to the attainment of coherence across practices.

Inter-cognitive representations are formed in organisational interactions (Mouzas and Henneberg 2015). Both the selling and the buying organisation’s rules and procedures

influence the negotiation and shared understanding. At the same time as the rules create a complex structure to match both end's expectations, they create an organisational frame that guides the interaction and at the same time diminish subjective interpretation. Mandatory rules, such as standards, contribute to establishing shared understandings. "*A shared understanding of rules increases the 'predictability' of group members' behavior and gives expression to a business network's 'central values'*" (Feldman, 1984, cited in Mouzas and Henneberg 2015, 9.) Another set of rules influencing negotiations is the default rules that follow pre-existing agreements and are based on Barnett's (1992a) idea of "*unless otherwise agreed*" (Mouzas and Furnston 2008; Mouzas and Blois 2013; Mouzas and Henneberg; 2015).

Today's organisational interactions take place within complex networks. Henneberg et al. (2004) have argued that these networks are a way to address the ambiguity of the networks in which business is actually conducted. *Network pictures* are managers' subjective mental representations of their relevant business environment (ibid.). These pictures provide a context, and are framing devices, and they function as possible triggers for managerial activities. Network pictures have raised a growing interest amongst researchers in B2B marketing and work as sense-making tools that shape managerial decisions, actions and evaluations, (Henneberg et al. 2004).

This paper links network pictures to a specific purpose of making sense of the deal to be negotiated inside the network of selling and buying organization in order to sell the right products and services for the right purpose. In this approach it is relevant to think of depth and width aspects of network pictures. Depth means the different layers of suppliers needed in constructing the thing to buy as complex and/or modular product. Width considers the relationship between the organisation from the history of services delivered and constructing new ones into the negotiated deal. (Henneberg et al. 2004.) As building blocks of network pictures Henneberg et al. (2004, 39) describe: *boundaries, directionality, power, time/task, environment, focus, actors/activities/resources, centre/periphery*.

One of the approaches to studying network pictures is to represent primary functions in value chain interactions between selling and buying organisation (Anderson et al. 1994; Håkansson and Snehota 1994; Ford 1998). However, network pictures are subjective views for sense-making that ground individual decision making activities and are socially constructed definitions of situation, and may reflect past or shape future, (Gadde et al., 2003; Mattsson 2002a, Henneberg et al. 2004). By studying B2B sales negotiations it is possible help to understand the network, and vice versa, the understanding of the network helps to understand the negotiation (Mouzas and Ford 2003).

Mouzas and Ford (2003) have studied the power of options within business networks. An option is e.g. a particular kind of agreement. Mouzas and Ford (ibid.) suggest that research upon these options must take into account the networked nature of the activities in which the options are proposed, created, and committed to. This position is different from earlier studies that have conceptualised sales negotiations in terms of dyadic inter-personal process of bargaining. This kind of research is typical to game theorists, economists, psychologists and management researchers. (ibid.)

Meso-level analysis takes another lens to the study of business networks (Öberg et al. 2009). The analyses tackle the question of how interactive sense-making artefacts are used in organisations to guide their activities. Micro and macro level understanding of business

networks was used in this research. Micro level understanding deals with individual's cognitive mappings of network environment and what it means for them in terms of including and excluding things, linking these and realising of boundaries, leaving understandings under judgment of importance. Macro level looks at different network pictures and researches them in order to track the longitudinal organisational network development. Meso-level means that we create a link between micro- and macro level for business market analyses and concentrate on individual company and their marketing, manufacturing and service processes. This happens from a new perspective of conceptualising with and for network pictures for building shared sense of what to buy. (Öberg et al. 2009)

This paper studies B2B sales negotiation as a form of *conceptual designing*. Conceptual designing have been presented as the iterative and constructive framing and re-framing approach that both designers and researchers do in an attempt to construct and prototype novel-and-relevant design concepts (Ylirisku et al., in print). We argue that also sales negotiators engage in much alike activities where they collaboratively construct a shared sense of *what should be done*. Understanding of this object of action (i.e. the answer to the question of 'what should be done') is often inscribed into design concept presentations. The process of the collaborative work to generate these objects can be studied through careful analysis of the situated use of semiotic resources Ylirisku (2013).

## RESEARCH METHOD

The data for the present study was collected with the design ethnography approach (Barab 2004; Ylirisku & Buur 2007; Salvador et al. 2010). It is a variation of ethnography, see e.g. (van Maanen 2008), which is tailored for the purposes of product development. According to Salvador et al. (2010) "*Design ethnography focuses on the broad patterns of everyday life that are important and relevant specifically for the conception, design, and development of new products and services.*" Originally ethnography refers to the description of a studied culture in order to explain it to others, i.e. to representatives of another culture. Proper ethnographical studies require researchers to spend substantial amounts of time varying from months to years amongst the studied culture in order to be able to describe it appropriately. On the contrary, design ethnography is conducted in the matter of hours and days.

Design ethnography shares the intent of action research to inform particular human practices in order to contribute to them. The overall aim is to empower the studied communities. Ethnomethodology-informed design practices "may enable designers better to weight the appropriateness of what they are being offered as insights into how people in organisations work," (Szymanski and Whalen 2011, 37). Design ethnography happens over shorter durations. The field studies give a fair understanding of the researched phenomena within days spent in settings rather than results in exhaustive descriptions based on months of field recordings. Ethnographic studies would simply result in too much non-relevant data for design purposes. Design ethnography is good for studying interactions happening 'in the wild' rather than being a method for controlled experiments in laboratory-like conditions (Ylirisku and Buur 2007).

The research was conducted as part of a project called UXUS (User Experience & Usability in complex Systems). The project is organised by the Finnish Metal and Engineering Competence Cluster (FIMECC) that focuses on B2B sector. The presented study builds on earlier interviews at a lift truck producer. These interviews suggested the need to study the

work of sales agents inside dealer organisations. The present study was conducted in Autumn 2013 over the duration of twelve months. This involved in total eight site visits to the producer's facility.

The case is based on design-ethnographic observations in six sales negotiations and five interviews with two sales agents, concepts manager, marketing manager and dealer manager. These observations were conducted by the first author in an unobtrusive manner. He participated in the negotiations only as an observer allowing the workflow to happen naturally, thereafter, revealing as much as possible its original characteristics. The negotiations were documented in a manner that the study subjects found comfortable. And as the events were quite delicate and sometimes tense, only one of the negotiations was allowed to be recorded on video. The other negotiations were only documented on handwritten notes and photographs.

The studied events were face-to-face situations where the sales agent is co-present with the potential customer/client in the same room. A video camera was positioned on the negotiation table to capture the interactions and audio from close range. This setup also enabled the researcher to move the camera to capture what was attended to by the study subjects. This resulted in 50 minutes of video recording which is analysed below. The findings are complemented with findings from the other negotiations that were not videotaped.

The data was analysed throughout the research period and videoed data was reviewed with the sales agents, other participants from the research organisation and the research team during six separate sessions, (Charmaz 2006, Pink 2007). Three different types of reviews took place: preliminary review, substantive review and analytic review. During preliminary review the data was put into a preliminary catalogue by naming occasions, persons, time, date and other relative information. During substantive review the data was put into more focused segments of video and field notes to arise most interesting extracts and fragments for analysis. Analytic review took place after that by first creating candidate instances that have potential in being part of the paper and those were taken to detailed analyses and looked at several times, and discussed by the research team. (Heath et al. 2010.) The tools of interaction were discussed with the sales agents and are listed in Appendices 1. The approach borrows also from the analysis of design articulation (Ylirisku, 2013) in its focus on situated use of semiotic resources collaborative framing of the object of action.



Figure1: The research setting during the sales negotiation

#### THE CASE - 'THE USER-CENTRED LIFT TRUCK PRODUCER'

Lift trucks are used for material handling to either load material to a warehouse or to pick up ordered goods for transport. Some of the machines feature a human driver who may work inside or outside the vehicle. With the outside-operated vehicles the driver walks next to the machine. There are also fully automated warehouse trucks that are called Automatically Guided Vehicles (AGV). Many of the machine models are modular and feature high configurability. They can be equipped with an extensive range of different kinds of equipment to be attached to the main body of the machine. In addition to this multiple services can be included from maintenance of the machines to logistic development services. The configurability of the machines and their services for various kinds of contexts of use create a rather complex environment for the sales agents to manage. In many cases this requires substantial effort in order for the sales agent to create shared understanding about which products and services would fulfil a customer's needs.

There are four types of different sales activities in the studied lift truck organisation. The first one is *direct sales*. Direct sales address typically only a small amount of machines varying from one to ten machines. In direct sales the agent most often works alone, only occasionally being accompanied by a technical sales support person or another sales agent. Direct sales negotiations take from few days to few months from the initial contact to deal. The direct sales agents' work includes serving multiple customers in parallel. This calls for planning of the visits at customers, as an agent may visit multiple customers per day.

The second sales activity is called *solution sales*. Solution sales deals are about high volumes of machines the amounts varying from ten to thousands of machines. The negotiation times are rather long, taking from few months to over a year. Solution sales process always involves a sales team taking care of the progression. The negotiations involve several different specialists from both the selling organisation as well as from the buying organisation. These deals are so important for the organisations that they require the full support of an organisation and cannot be left upon the personal relationship of one single sales agent.

The third type of sales activity is *key customer sales*. The sales organisation has some key customers, who are taken care of by dedicated key customer managers. It is their responsibility to find out the most important customers' needs and manage the sales to meet these. Key customer sales bear a strong resemblance with solution sales as an activity. The central differences of these activities stem from the longer and more established relationship between the organisations and people. Having a history of trusted partnership makes negotiations different as both parties have previous experiences of each other to build on.

The fourth type of sales activity is *AGV sales*. These sales are technically very demanding and require substantial personal skills from the sales agent as well as dedicated sales activities that centralise on technological aspects of the deal. Sales agents are only exceptionally other than educated automation engineers as substantial calculations are made during sales processes. Key sales argument in AGV sales is the payback time.

This paper concentrates on direct sales and tackles the fast moving sales agents' work relying heavily on personal human interaction skills and ability to quickly respond to the customer demands.

User experience is implemented in the studied lift truck company's strategy as one of the key drivers resulting the sold machines being of high end in quality and price. The strength of these products has previously been noticed in testing situations that usually leads to where customer preferred their trucks to the competitors', if they are affordable.

#### The studied interactions

The following excerpts are from real face-to-face interactions of Sales Agent (SA) from the selling organisation, and Purchaser (P) and Warehouse Manager (WM) from the buying organisation. The participants are discussing about the purchase of three high pick order trucks and one reach truck. The deal has already been discussed for a couple of months and SA thinks he can close the deal in this negotiation. However, he is let to know on a very short notice before the meeting that the professional purchaser (P) is joining the negotiation instead of just WM. P is new to on-going the negotiation process and has not met SA before.

The first excerpt addresses the realisation of the competitive situation that has emerged. The customer reveals that they are already in negotiations and tests with a competing vendor. The excerpt shows some of the rhetoric tricks that the sales agent uses in order to make room for the discovery of a novel angle that could establish a new competitive edge. This discussion serves as a kind of groundwork to frame the discussion in a particular manner, so that all the members of the situation have a sense of 'the rules of the game' that is being played at the scene.

The negotiation started with a chat between SA and WM about the age of the existing machines. P entered the room and a presentation was given about the seller's company by SA. This was done as a slide show with an iPad to inform P who is new to the negotiation group. The following exchange took place once the sales agent has placed an offer that has been prepared earlier alongside with a brochure showing the discussed machines on the table.

#### Realisation of the competitive situation (Excerpt 1)



*SA: Let's go to the actual agenda what we had. It's about those that I made the offer ((SA shows a brochure of trucks)). PHX 10 model that is the high order picker truck. It looks like this. Familiar thingamajigs.*

*WM: What there have been changed to that PHL. Does it have any?*

*SA: It's a completely new machine [WM: Yeah]. So there is no... there is an integral mast that is new, there is a new cabin, there is a new use control [WM: Yeah. ((nodding))]. use device so there is nothing same ((WM nodding)). Except it does the same thing but these days it is important the machine is fast and uses less energy and that is what we have aimed for.*

*WM: The controls, have they changed a lot?*

*SA: There is now yeaah.. it's the whole display unit and the cocking panel is different, there is nothing same.. that there this induction operated 'fat detector' we say that you put your hand into when driving inside corridor. But you are not taking induction drive?*

Note: Until here SA gives a sales pitch on the new model of machine by developing arguments towards the values of novelty, speed and energy efficiency and by promoting new features.

*WM: No, we can't make it.*

*SA: It moves in free space. But renewing that ((meaning the high pick order trucks)) was what we started to break down with.. and what is at the moment, I heard that a Friend has more affordable (('Friend' means a competitor)).*

Note: The negative response by WM makes SA to steer the conversation towards exploring the competitive situation, apparently having heard rumours about it. Talking about a competitor is a delicate matter and SA seems to avoid talking straight forward about it by calling competitor a 'Friend'.

*P: So we talked a little bit and as you said.. or actually grounded that the.. Pricing is often the decisive factor when you talk about a device that is suitable for the purpose of use. First is that it is suitable for purpose of use what we want and then we start calculating, calculating the overall expenses..[SA: Yeeah] so, very, in that sense it is very simple. ..[SA: Yeah].*

Note: P makes a clear statement that he is only interested in the pricing, once being sure that the device is appropriate for the purpose. Talking about machine being suitable for purpose reflects requirements that stem from use, and talking about price puts less emphasis on detailed quality. There is also something to the tone of voice P uses that sounds like seeing quality only as a secondary matter. Now P is pulling the discourse toward price competition, by first mentioning purpose and then price after that. There are no clear definitions of key requirements and SA needs to follow P's lead.

*SA: What comes to me when we talk about affordable.. Of course, the Friend wants to come in just like we do the same way.. Get into some company. So price negotiation is what it starts with and testing the machine. Do perhap-.. Do you have a possibility to test the other*

*machine ((Friend's)) for which you had the offer? I'm just thinking that this is, however, a special machine.*

Note: SA takes on P's argument about pricing by using the term 'affordable' and then progresses to probe more about the machines that Friend has offered. In terms of the sales arguments SA quickly moves from fit for purpose to price, and then towards usability/user experience. By doing this SA counter positions P's words that gives an opposite direction to the discussion from price-to-testing that is closer to words user or usability. By taking the conversation to testing the competitor's machine, SA creates an allusion about quality competition between them and Friend by indirectly drawing the conversation around that. Quality competition through testing is usually where SA's company succeeds. The explanation for the English word, allude or allusion: suggest or call attention to indirectly; hint at. SA later promotes the tailoring of their machine by using the term 'special' as a new sales argument. SA also seems to believe that offering a tailored solution is how they will differentiate from the Friend.

*WM: Yesterday I tested X's ((competitor's name)) machine in Gothenburg, got a sort of intuition, but otherwise no.*

Note: WM has only a brief experience on Friend's machine, but many years of experiences on the seller's older machines.

*P: It is actually.. let's say that with the other.. hrr.. I say straight that two options is what we have.. [SA: yeah, yeah] So that the other is already strongly participating in our operations anyway. [SA: yea, yea] So in that sense there nothing revolutionary new [SA: yea]. And as NN ((WM's name)) said that there in Gothenburg's end has come.. come to the new unit the equipment from them ((refers to 'Friend')) [SA: yea] And and, as such a familiar partner as well [SA: nyeea] And then comes in the.. the.. pricing strongly. And partly because of that I have started to talk rather about the whole package.. This we have talked about many other things than just this renewing. So, comes.. Ok, the machine. [SA: mm] Then comes those existing machines' SV ((meaning Salvage Value)), then comes those three machines with expiring rental time.. their redemption. So, I would sort of weave all these straight away together, because it's easier to look at it as a whole. [SA: ((quietly)) °Yes it is.°]*

Note: P responds to testing by revealing that the Friend is already in the company "participating in our operations" and that pricing plays an important role now in organisational activities. He also changes SA's term renewing into a wider term talking about "whole package" and brings up the issue of longer term value "salvage value".

#### Findings from Excerpt 1

The Excerpt 1 shows how the situation changes in terms of how the participants of the situation make sense of the key values where the sales arguments are grounded. First SA begins to promote novelty, speed and energy efficiency and new features. However, as soon as the competitive situation becomes addressed, the values are replaced by price, purposefulness, and testing. The initial presentation is driven by SA from the sales organisation, whereas the change of the values is driven by P from the customer's side. A noticed element in the discussion is drawing it to different directions between SA addressing quality and usability and P addressing use of purpose and price.

In addition to the changes of key values that serve as the ground for articulating sales arguments, the idea of the thing-to-be-sold becomes blurred. The deal becomes ultimately re-framed in terms of a 'whole' including the salvage value and redemption of old machines, rather than only being about a set of individual trucks to be changed. Once the discussion moves towards more specific aspects the buyer needs to reveal aspects of their process that they might want to keep as their own. These are made in order to communicate to the seller the details that will enable them to answer with a realistic alternative to the updated situation. It is the small revelations, such as "P: I say straight that two options is what we have" and "P: we have talked about many other things than just this renewing" that set the grounds for a whole new way to perceive the sales situation.

The following situation in Excerpt 2 is taken from a moment that took place only a few minutes after Excerpt 1. It displays an exchange where the idea of the thing to be sold is completely changed. The original negotiations were based on an assumption of more expensive special machinery, which is specified and built particularly for the customer, but it becomes apparent that the customer would actually be satisfied with a standard model.

#### From special to a standard machine (Excerpt 2)

*SA: Well, of course here we go to this our machine to back up so that you have quite good experiences of our machines here, also the functionality of service. The ((reason)) why our machine is very clearly more valuable than Friend's machine, is that it is specked to your use, we didn't go and make compromises, so that this is specialised exactly to similar use what you have at the moment, there is no possibility to lift.. Then I talked with our R&D and factory about that we can build it just a standard machine, just like Friend offers. That [P: I don't know] where we put..*

*P: Just to that standard that it is specked the same way.*

Note: SA first starts building the argument for the value of the special machines and reinforces the value by telling that, even though it is a special machine, it can be sold as a standard machine according to R&D and production. But then P addresses the competitive situation with Friend by mentioning that their 'standard machine' is also special as being tailored too. This works to build increasing pressure for SA to come up with better arguments.

*SA: Are the ergolifts taken away from these then?*

*WM: Then this means so that it.. [SA: So, because as standard ((moves hand up and down and points to the brochure of the truck)) in these PHX machines also the fork goes up.] WM: Yeah, I.. Actually, for the first time yesterday I explored that and in the end it is actually pretty good.*

*SA: So that it lifts up?*

*WM: Yes, and not necessarily with those pick order 'billy goats' what we have, but generally so, but I don't know have they taken it away, but anyway, I think in that in the offer it had that the steering wheel was changed to the other side and so on.*

Note: This is where SA learns from WM that they do not need a special machine. WM explains by using the term ‘billy goat’ that leaving the ergolift on older machines was not a workable solution, but with Friend’s new machine this nevertheless felt feasible.

*SA: That is not an expensive investment ((changing the wheel to the other side)) [WM: yeah]. Closest what affects our rental price is so that when ergolift is taken away, so it has no more market after that ((SA looks at the others, smiles and everyone nods heads)). It is basically a left over machine, and that is seen absolutely in the rental price.*

Note: As soon as SA learned about the possibility to leave ergolift in place he reframes the whole offering that he starts selling. Now, instead of suggesting a special machine as the key solution, he turns towards suggesting a standard machine as the key solution. SA knows that this solution has much higher salvage value, and he uses his knowledge about the matter to promote the reframed idea of what to sell. SA is amongst the best sales agents in the selling organisation and he has won several internal selling competitions. His experience is also visible in how quickly SA is able to completely reframe the situation here.

*P: Yes I would almost say that what in that conversation few high order pickers have elsewhere ((seen)), so it is little bit same it is with.. At Friend’s, as said, the machines are specked almost always for a unit [WM: yeah] ((nodding to P)) where they remain. And to them ((trucks)) modifications are always made. And when they have to return ((those)), or to make for someone else, so it cannot be very big, very big the change or the expense goes up. It is not worth it.*

Note: P makes another statement saying that Friend is just as good as the seller. Then he quickly returns to the salvage value in case ergolift remains in the machines. He considers Friend’s capability to customise for different needs and also brings up the possible problems that arise with more substantial modifications. Here, for the first time, P is revealing matters that enable SA to start building new arguments.

*SA: Yes, exactly that ((SA nodding to P))*

*WM: I think it has just always gone with the first machine that the ergolift has been left out.*

*SA: Yeah.*

*WM: Practically, I think we do not need to leave it out.*

*SA: Because it clearly affects the salvage value.*

*WM: Yes, yes. That I really tested yesterday, I mean, for the first time.*

*SA: That eases a lot at us because.. these prices that have been calculated on this offer, these rental prices, these have practically been calculated so that these machines are yours after this. They have a totally minimal salvage value.*

In the beginning SA is apparently building the earlier idea of a ‘whole’ that P had introduced in Excerpt 1, since he talks about the whole of the machines, service, and personalisation. This becomes, however, counteracted by P who argues that Friend delivers also similar value. It leads into SA questioning an important detail (ergolift) about the modifications to the trucks. Since he is very well aware of the kind of business that customer is in, he knows the significance of the ergolift option for the trucks. Here WM joins the discourse and reveals his very recent realisation that the ergolift option could actually be useful “WM: Actually, for the first time yesterday I explored that and in the end it is actually pretty good.”

This is a significant revelation, and as soon as SA realises that the standard ergolift option could be utilised, he completely reframes the idea of what should be sold. This happens in a matter of a second, and he is able to respond with a reframed idea of what to sell already in the next turn in talk. Now, SA is not anymore pushing the customised special machine, but moves to develop arguments about the value of the standard model with ergolift. He goes on to develop points about the salvage value, and P eventually moves to support the idea of the standard machine by revealing some possible problems with substantial customisations.

The situation has changed quite dramatically from where it began in Excerpt 1. There P was clearly driving the discussion towards his ends, and SA had to desperately seek for alternative ways to make sense of the opportunities for developing new grounds for sales arguments. In the Excerpt 2 the interactions start to resemble collaborative work to develop a real alternative together.

The following Excerpt 3 is from a moment that took place about ten minutes after the situation displayed in Excerpt 2. It shows how SA begins to spontaneously utilise available resources in building novel arguments for extra value that is brought into life through a service report’s functionality.

#### Visualised service report as extra value (Excerpt 3)

*SA: But of course we want to continue the good relationship, so I would need the play cards that I may use for presenting further, so that we can go ahead to make a deal.*

Note: Here SA is explicitly asking for the requirements ‘the play cards’ from WM and P about what have been decided in the meeting.

*P: It, I would kinda evaluate that it requires, kinda I stated that basically now you and your most significant competitors in Finland are on the same line in many regards. And, and and, I don’t think that the quality has, well, awfully.. Did WM still have a comment on the service thing? Apparently you are closer to it and..*

*WM: Yea, Yea. Well, just that, I have been thinking about the need for maybe a bit more accurate report about what to fix, and what was... Sometimes I feel that that.. as if there happens fixing of something that does not even exist. That kind of feeling I have had, because, let’s say. My own technical knowledge is not enough.*

*SA: Exactly the same here. Needing the pro guy.*

Note: Once SA requests for the final statements for the take-away points from the negotiation, P simply re-states the tight competition and gives the floor to WM with the framing of the 'service thing'. WM takes this as a hint and tells about his experiences of the impossibility to actually know if the maintenance professionals are billing for matters that are not actually required, or even done, in the first place.

*SA: Well, have you received these? Or, I might then have actually sent you that fixing report with that itemisation. Didn't it come, this our?*

*P: I need to check.*

*SA: I think I sent you a kind of annual report that shows these machine-specific, where is...*

*P: Do you have any hunch of when was it? Yes I suppose I have all the reports stored there. No problem.*

*SA: Let's take a little look. It is in its way quite a good report. It is so wonderful these days as you have this hiipod ((sales agent's personal iPad)).*

Note: SA sieges the moment and retrieves an example report from his iPad. It is an example of spontaneous use of available resources that make a difference to the discussion. It enables SA to be specific as to the features of the service reporting functionality.

*WM: One point about that is that partly the machines are old. Our oldest high picker, it never had anything, it is 89 machine. It is just so slow and so on.*

*P: Bitten by the tooth of time.*

*WM: Yep. Not at all on the same technical level.*

*SA: On the 30<sup>th</sup> of October I have sent this. This is, by the way, certainly.. This actually was not delivered to you.*

*P: Well, typically I have.*

*WM: Well, I've gotten it.*

*SA: Here we can see these ((shows on the iPad screen)), well, miss-usage reports and fixing. There are the ones stayed for a long time. There's a fault fix. Well it is just these. Let's see what machine this is... F14. That's the old.*

*WM: That is likely exactly the 98. It is what is parked there. Out of usage.*

Note: What is happening here is interesting as SA is using data about the customer's own machines. The communication becomes highly personal, specific, and yet constructed with such resources that all the participants of the situation are familiar with. Also, P and WM can easily identify with the data and recognise the value of the report, since the items in it are familiar to them.

*SA: Here are then the high pickers. Here is TTS. There is also little bit [WM: yeah, and it is now sort of increased]. So, it is very clearly, you can see that with age comes more fixing.*

*WM: Then that reacher has been in heavy usage at us.*

*SA: Reacher has been fixed almost with four thousands. What there exactly is, that [P: That was the one now parked?] [WM: Isn't it the TTS? And then the 98 high picker in the park?]*

*SA: TTS is fixed with 1300€. The high picker expenses are quite ok. It stays around two grand which is about as much as what comes in use with an old machine. Then there is that newest machine. Well, there is only a grand of fixing costs. So it goes just like.. With us it is this fact that is extremely important. This is one of the reasons. We can give real facts on what the expenses are. And even though this fact belongs to you as a customer it is not however free. So all this is included in those machine prices and others.*

Note: SA uses the reporting functionality as an additional value that is embedded into the prices of the whole. This is a rhetoric trick that he uses to promote another reason to pay a little bit extra for the seller's machines.

*SA: And then it is still.. Let's see if we can see here monthly, billing monthly.. It appears to be that... In August you have had some hassle. Do you have 'summer-Johns' ((summer workers)) at work? Of course, as you have [WM: Yees] during summer all [WM: the high season is then], well, then those happen the most.*

Note: The machine specific maintenance tracking report seems to effectively ground the discussion of SA and WM as they consider each machines' maintenance. Later SA even extracts information about summer workers from WM by looking at increasing maintenance times. Everyone looks at the report on iPad and the visualisations help to follow different data in an orderly fashion. This gives the opportunity for SA for to lead the discussion at the crucial steps in the sales negotiation. SA has taken facts in use as a new service related sales argument.

### Findings from Excerpt 3

In Excerpt 3 SA has gained the leading role in the discussion, which was primed by his realisation that the thing-to-be-sold is not a custom machine but a standard model with the ergolift. SA drives the situation further with his initial request for requirements from the client, i.e. the 'play cards' that he could use to take things further. P is not anymore attacking SA's proposals with statements about what Friend is capable of delivering, but appears now to appreciate SA's proposal stating that they are in the 'same line' with their competitors. P then gives floor for WM to infuse more details about the service, which gives SA an excellent opportunity to develop a new sales argument based on the service reporting functionality.

Later (after what is described in Excerpt 3) the discussion reveals that neither, WM or P knew about this report. Many branching discussions were held around services and lots of time is used in explaining those. At some point SA says that services are actually their biggest business. There are not any marketing materials in use that display services or help making sense out of them, only price lists and the click view report itself.

Excerpt 4 begins after a long and branching discussion about maintenance services. The atmosphere is rather positive and SA has broadly explained about the speed they have with the maintenance. SA is tapping things to iPad as while receiving information from WM and P. The following exchange takes place ten minutes after the situation presented in Excerpt 3.

#### Explicating the detailed requirements (Excerpt 4)

*SA: How many pieces of machines would there be?*

*P: So, these new ones?*

*SA: Yes.*

*P: Well, we are talking about one now.*

*WM: The other is the change of the TTS to a reacher here, kinda [P: Yees].*

*SA: What is the lifting height?*

*WM: That is the 5900 that the old ones have. Isn't it? It is. I think it was it?*

*SA: Yeah it was the same, that F14.*

*WM: Or, wait a minute. Or was it 5700? It was 5900, might have been, the reacher ((WM is looking around the table and kind of wondering)). Are they.. They probably were there [SA: It is shown here in the report. Let's see] But, all the same, anyway. Well, what is on these..? It is actually less. It is 5400 actually with that that...*

*SA: 5900 is that reacher.*

*WM: Yes the reacher is, but the order pickers. Order picker.. It is trev 54 ((another way to say 5400)).*

*SA: Would it be 54 then, the new reacher?*

*WM: Umm, the reacher is five-nine. The same as, same as the new one*

*SA: Would you accept a little bit used one?*

((The discussion branches to leasing services for a while and comes back to core customer needs. This part is omitted.))

*SA: We have quite critical the spaces. As I think, we have seven-meter reachers. They cannot fit to move there. The structural height comes at face. You had a three meter gap there?*

*WM: It is exactly three meter. Yes. It is, I think, just according to.. what we have as the, as the item sizes.*

#### Findings from Excerpt 4



Excerpt 4 was about detailed requirements that SA asked from P and WM. These requirements are essential for SA in his attempt to create a proposal that could competitively meet these. It is notable that a fair amount of confusion is displayed while talking about these. The discussion resembles an interview where SA asks and WM mainly answers. P is also now contributing with increasingly constructive facts for SA instead of hiding details, as was visible earlier in regard to Friend.

### Negotiation aftermath and customer's decision

The option for “next day service” that speeds critical maintenance services became included into the offer sketch by SA between Excerpts 3 and 4. Details about critical constraints were added during Excerpt 4. The offer was sent to the customer later during the same week.

Later, however, it turned out that something important remained missing from the critical customer requirements. While SA had earlier visited one of the two customer spaces that the machines are placed in, he had missed the one of the warehouses that featured a critically small space that conflicted the understandings that were displayed in the event of negotiations. This unfortunate detail resulted in the seller's machines as well as the whole proposal to become obsolete in serving the client. This detail was absolutely critical, and the deal was lost for the competitor (Friend).

### KEY FINDINGS

We shall promote several key discoveries from the above-analyses of sales interactions that require further attention. These discoveries are such that may become decisive for the success of the sales agent to get the deal. The most central key finding is the explication of the sales agent's ability to quickly and credibly reframe the idea about the thing-to-be-sold.

The above-studied practice exposes a particular pattern in the practice of the sales agent. Firstly, the presence of the new person, the Purchaser (P), resulted in a new kind of delicate and tense atmosphere for the beginning of the negotiation. Instead of being collaborative construction activity to make sense of the opportunities the initial discussion was a revelation that the situation is actually highly competitive. This also led into the realisation that the earlier framing of the offer (i.e. thing-to-be-sold) was not anymore appropriate in the new situation. P approached the situation by promoting how well the competitor was doing, hence putting more stress on the ability of SA to find relevant novel sales arguments. Through the progression of the negotiation the customer representatives Purchaser (P) and the Warehouse Manager (WM) revealed important new details about their own conception of what is suitable for the targeted work practice where the purchased machines would be placed.

Secondly, the Sales Agent (SA) is able to blur the idea of the thing-to-be-sold on the basis of his appreciation of the details that P and WM bring up in order for him to develop a new more competitive response. The initial lead towards the reframing of the thing-to-be-sold is actually given by P, who states (end of Excerpt 1): “P: I have started to talk rather about the whole package. [...] I would sort of weave all these [...] together, because it's easier to look at it *as a whole*.” Once SA learns that instead of individual items the discussion is about a ‘whole,’ he seems to take the lead to construct an articulation of a particular kind of ‘whole’

(in the start of Excerpt 2): “SA: our machines here, also the functionality of *service*.” In Excerpt 3, he clearly combines machines and service as a whole, hence, blurring the idea of what the thing-to-be-sold actually is as maintenance report “is included into the machine prices and other things”. By this he plays time and gives him the opportunity to reframe the idea according to his own understanding of what the producer company could actually offer.

Thirdly, SA uses personal experiences in quickly building a new grounding for developing the thing-to-be-sold on the basis of discovering details about WM’s experiences about the competing company’s (referred to as ‘Friend’) products. WM on his part enables the constructive action by verbally articulating his conception of the suitability of standard machines for the practice instead of more expensive customised machines. SA knows about the significance of the item called ‘ergolift’ for the price of the trucks including the longer term salvage value. It was later revealed that SA has previously made research in R&D and production to find out that the special machine can be sold as a standard machine. This may have enabled him to quickly change the idea completely. These ‘thinking resources’ he already possesses due to his experience in the sales business at the producer, and he is very quickly able to resort to these resources in articulating a new proposal of the thing-to-be-sold.

Fourthly, SA uses explicit questioning to let the customer representatives to articulate their understandings of the key requirements for the thing-to-be-sold. He stated (beginning of Excerpt 3) “SA: I would need the play cards that I may use for presenting further, so that we can go ahead to make a deal.” This question leads into the realisation that neither, P or WM had recognised the service reporting facility related to the offering. This gives SA the chance to elaborate on the value of their service in detail. Having the actual reports available as collaboratively perceptible resource enables SA to address details in a highly personalised manner, using in the talk the actual data from the customer.

Fifthly, the sales agent whether explicitly or implicitly addresses several key ideas in the construction of the conception of what to sell. These could be called as the ‘sales arguments,’ such as usability, quality, personal customization, novelty, speed, price, service, and energy efficiency. During the negotiation SA e.g. switches from promoting customisation for service with standard tools once SA learns about WM’s experiences with their competitor’s machines.

Sixthly, the decisive factor that leads into SA loosing the deal remains, however, hidden in the negotiation. SA uses explicit questions to ask about the details for required dimensions for the machinery. In this both P and WM resort to their memories both about the machines as well as about the spaces at their facility. Here they nevertheless fail to recall all the crucial details, and this leads into faulty final understanding for SA about the requirements. This subsequently leads into the construction of an offer that fails to meet the actual requirements of the target practice.

In the following we shall reflect on these discoveries and build argument towards possible ways to address the uncovered challenges.

## DISCUSSION: B2B SALES AS CONCEPTUAL DESIGNING

We have identified significant resemblance between sales agent’s work to that of the work of conceptual designer. Ylirisku et al. (in print) outline conceptual designing as the iterative

framing and re-framing approach that both designers and researchers do in an attempt to construct and prototype novel-and-relevant design concepts. The sales agent is clearly conducting iterative framing and re-framing in his construction of an appropriate conception of the thing-to-be-sold. Particular to the sales practice appears to be the remarkable speed in which the sales agent is able to reframe the idea. It happened in terms of one conversational turn in contrast to product concept design projects, where the framing of the key idea may take even over a year.

Nevertheless, appreciating face-to-face sales negotiation practice through the lens of conceptual designing, as particular form of sense making, enables us to draw on some of the strategies that have been proved to work well in conceptual design practice. Ylirisku (2013) argues that the construction of the things-to-deal-with is a fruitful way to study the practice. Based on the above is clear that the sales agent interactively constructs a sense of the thing-to-be-sold. Ylirisku (ibid.) have discovered that the use of questions and the use of pre-made templates for thinking are effective in driving the development further. Furthermore, concept design typically results in several alternative key ideas to be considered. In the sales negotiation the sales agent needs to use his existing understandings of possible key ideas, and then map the characteristics of those to the situation that they are collaboratively making sense of.

Conceptual designing is typically collaborative, and the development of sales practice could benefit of a review of the ideas and practices presented in so-called co-design literature. In co-design the focus is on enabling the contribution of also non-designers to the activity, see e.g. (Sanders & Stappers 2012). This requires that the design facilitator, or here the sales agent, should be able to express the substance matter in a way the people coming from different backgrounds could understand what the discussion addresses and, furthermore, that they can effectively contribute. So, one way of looking at the negotiation between SA, WM and P is to see it as a conceptual co-design session where they are designing a machine from already existing components such as ergolift and the truck. In the negotiation they address the key principles that form the basis of decision-making, such as going for custom or standard machines.

In conceptual designing designers typically utilise graphical materials. These are an effective means to perceive how things are related. They also establish a shared means to refer to particular meanings. Star and Griesemer (1989) developed the notion of ‘boundary object’ to talk about such entities that enable collaborative interpretations across people from different backgrounds. Boundary objects become effective when people with different backgrounds share views about the same topic and work towards building a shared sense about complex issues. A key quality of boundary objects may be understood as ‘interpretative flexibility’ (Star 2010), and “boundary objects are both adaptable to different viewpoints and robust enough to maintain identity across them,” (Star and Griesemer 1989, p.387). The graphs and information from the report displayed by SA to WM and P joined these three professionals directly around certain machines’ maintenance history related aspects. It enabled new understandings to be articulated, which is visible e.g. on how SA was able to point out the influence of summer workers from the report.

Notable in the studied situation was the very limited use of visualisations or other such presentation that could have become adopted in the negotiation practice as boundary objects. We argue that visual materials could be especially helpful in constructing a better sense of the thing-to-be-sold so that also the crucial requirements become covered. This is especially

relevant in regard to the discovery of the low gap for machines to go through that caused the competitor to get the deal. Despite of the explicit discussion of the dimensions and facts between SA and WM, they nevertheless, failed to address the most important detail about the spaces. Identifying this well up front could have certainly saved a lot of time in terms of negotiations, and on the contrary, could have led into a yet new and more apposite framing of the thing-to-be-sold.

The materials that become assigned the boundary role may be either abstract or concrete, see (Star and Griesemer 1989, Arias 2000, Carlile 2002, Koskinen 2005, Toikka and Aramo-Immonen 2013). We have realised that especially discussions on services often branch into lengthy explanations by the sales agent. The power of the availability of the report was evident in the analysed situation. It enabled turning a difficult moment in the negotiation to another track that served to change it into a constructive mode, i.e. it brought the participants together to accurately discuss specific topics and reflect their thoughts on those. Visualising services more effectively may have considerable potential in improving interaction in sales negotiations.

Existing marketing materials in lift truck business are typically presented in one of the two forms: (A) they take the form of documents created during product development and they are mainly targeted at engineers; (B) they are made for the purposes of brand image building through well-polished illustrations and animations. The “engineering based” product catalogues contain almost all the possible measurements of the truck and its parts, whereas only few of such measures are actually meaningful for the customer.

Based on these insights we would recommend developing new kinds of visual representations that would contain only the most essential aspects. The next steps that we shall be exploring relate to developing such visualisations as shown in Figure 2 (C), which would serve this aim. The Figure 2 (C) is an exploratory visualisation that was co-created by the first author and lift truck organisation. It displays aspects that relate to typical critical customer needs inside the warehouse environment. This visualisation is intended to attract the customer to make markings on it, and hence better plan new purchases around the current needs. This prototype visualisation will be taken further in differing marketing contexts, and possibly other supporting materials, possibly in digital and easily accessible form, will be developed to complement it.

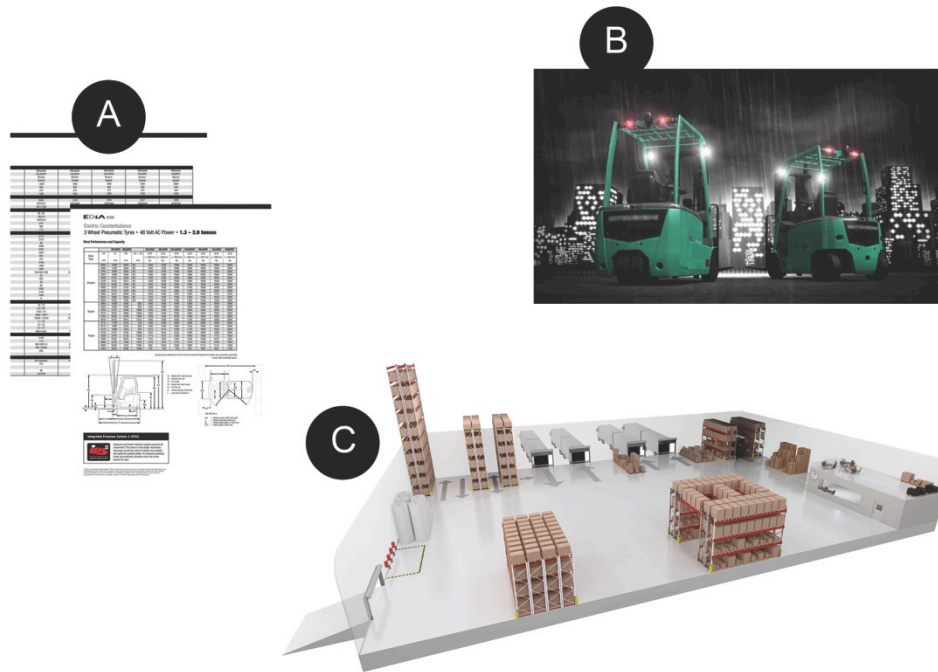


Figure 2: Boundary object visualisation of customer needs (C)

We also recognised that the sales agent, purchaser and warehouse manager were challenged by the difficulties in describing how exactly the trucks would function. In studies of collaborative designing tangible ways of working have been explored, see e.g. (Vaajakallio 2012, Lübbe 2011). Designers have used physical props to facilitate the collaborative sense making even on such abstract entities as business models, see Tangible Business Process Modelling (Lübbe 2011). The ability to touch, move, and discuss may greatly enhance the speed and accuracy of the development of a shared sense of the thing-to-be-sold. This might also help to ease the tensions of the situation and let the participants to focus on constructing the sense of what the demands are, probably surfacing some hidden operational aspects.

#### Contribution to studies of sales negotiation studies in B2B context

The studied activity could be explained in terms of development of an inter-cognitive representation, i.e. that of sales contract. The analysis, however, does little in actually elaborate on what the inter-cognitive representation, the contract itself, contains or how it appears. The focus was on how the shared sense of what should be done was established in socio-material interaction with the semiotic resources, such as the service chart on iPad, that have resulted from earlier work. Mouzas and Henneberg (2015) emphasise the role of inter-cognitive representations for what happens as the result of these (i.e. the outcomes). Conceptual design approach focuses on action, or more accurately, on articulation. And the focus is laid on both what happens before and after the generation of a new representation. Conceptual design sees the work to device new representations in terms of articulation. In articulation the actors utilise resources (such as representations) that are the result of earlier work as well as they produce new ones. Both of these kinds of representations (existing and new) have a role in how the interaction takes place, what options become conceived, and how the interaction unfolds.

In regards to network pictures (Henneberg et al. 2004) the conceptual design approach differs in its explicit focus on collaborative constructive action rather than on managerial conception. Analysis of sales activity in terms of conceptual design, however, shares with network pictures analysis the appreciation of power that the actors' conceptions of the context function as framing devices and they may trigger particular kinds of managerial action. A good example of this is the analysis of what happened when the sales agent realises that the deal needs to be negotiated in terms of cheap bulk machinery and service offer instead of expensive custom machinery. The framing analysis of conceptual design creates interpretations of the actors' conceptions on the basis of the analysis of real empirical data on situated socio-material interaction. The intent to understand the conceptions of situations in the point of view of those participating in the situation is similar to the approach to study business in terms of network pictures.

When studied through the lens of inter-cognitive representations the focus is turned at the artefacts (or objects) through which the sales negotiators attain agreements, make contracts, present industry standards, and share business regulations. Mouzas and Henneberg (2015) see representations as reductions generated in a manner that carries within the complexity of business affairs. Unlike Mouzas and Henneberg (2015) our approach through design ethnography of the detailed analysis of situated interaction addresses deal crafting from the naturally occurring interaction perspective. This provides a view often absent in systems based models of sales work.

Mouzas and Ford (2003) proposed a three stage model for how options are created in networked interactions: *initiating options*, *infusing options* and *realising wise trades*. The current investigation illustrates how quickly the transitions between the phases may take place in actual business interactions. Moreover, their framework is not explicit on greater changes of proposals, such as what happened in the studied interactions. In the studied interactions the reframing of the offer happened as a matter of a second.

The present study was conducted on a micro-level where interactions are investigated on a turn-by-turn basis much alike in conversation analysis, see e.g. (Peräkylä and Ruusuvuori, 2006). This may appear quite different from the meso-level studies as suggested by Öberg et al. (2009) However, the research unit on meso-level being companies' network pictures offers a perspective of design ethnographic research on personal level of interaction resulting with tools to make interaction happen, and unfold the underlying organisational network activities meaningful to the negotiating partners.

The main characteristics of the conceptual design analysis to study B2B negotiations are these:

- 1) Conceptual design analysis attends on situated articulation, sense-making and participation of various semiotic resources in this.
- 2) Conceptual designing focuses on the constructive action of framing, i.e. on the development of an overall conceptual view of a situation and possibilities to act within it.
- 3) A major undertaking in conceptual designing is that of re-framing. This is where the thing under consideration is radically re-thought, re-structured, or the situation in which the planning happens is re-structured.

Finally, seeing sales work as a form of conceptual design, gives us the ability to investigate how to develop the practice on the basis of the existing findings on what works for

conceptual designing outside business negotiations. This analysis was partly done above in the key findings section, however, this work need to be continued in future.

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This paper studied face-to-face sales negotiations in the B2B context. Through a detailed analysis of the talk and use of various communicative artefacts in the interaction, we revealed how the sales negotiation may traverse across a conceptual space of different alternatives. The sales agent needs to quickly make sense of the situation in order to pursue for better sales arguments to win the deal. The analysis showed, how the presence of new persons may add tension and introduce novel and unexpected requirements for the offer. It also showed what kinds of strategies that the customer as well the sales agent uses in order to develop their own share of the agreement.

Based on the analysis an opportunity for supporting the sales practice with sense making tools was outlined. When seeing sales negotiations as being very fast-paced conceptual design work, where much of the ideas of the potential key ideas exist ready-made in the back of the mind of the sales agent, new ways of seeing the possibilities for supporting the work open up. Design research is familiar with various kinds of sense making tools and physical artefacts that may play significant role in sense making. We propose that B2B sales negotiations could also benefit from the use of these. For example, a visual report was employed in the studied case as boundary object enabling the collaborative attention on constructive details rather than on competitive tensions or on controversies upon issues of price and quality.

Boundary object visualisations may also provide much needed assistance for sales agents to point out critical elements for understanding the restricting elements of the negotiated offer. Failing to communicate these matters at the time of the negotiation may result as loosing the deal. We also suggest that boundary object like visualisations may bring a substantial impact on discussions of service related matters. With concrete materials on which the discussions could be grounded, the discussions would likely to proceed less as long, branching and demanding monologues, and instead become dialogue supporting the constructing of accurate sense of what the thing-to-be-sold should be.

We also found further similarity between designing and sales negotiation. As in design team work the participants of the studied situations also use verbal expressions in face-to-face interaction to debate between the value of different elements stemming from their background, intuition and existing knowledge. In sales negotiation the debating, however, happened in sales terms such as price, suitability for use, speed, novelty, energy efficiency, customisation, usability and service experience. We would suggest further research to address similar approach also to other sales types such as solution sales in order to gain a broader perspective on the generality of the discovered issues.

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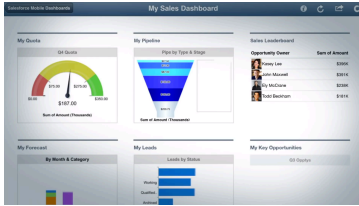
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## APPENDICES

### Appendice 1: sales agent's tools of interaction

#### Sales agent's tools for interaction



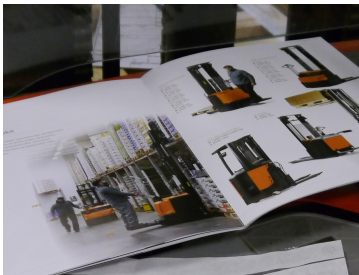
Salesforce software, shared information customers, negotiations, etc.



iPAD



Mobile phone



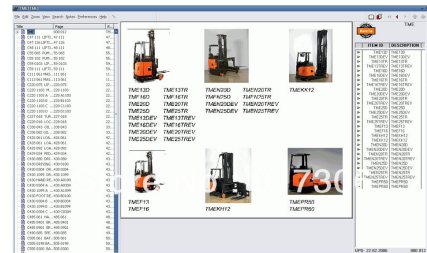
Basic sales brochure, all truck models briefly

CHRYSLER FINANCIAL SERVICES

Not this but looked similar

MODEL	PRICE	MODEL	PRICE
RAM 1500	25,000	RAM 2500	35,000
RAM 3500	45,000	RAM 5500	55,000
RAM 6500	65,000	RAM 7500	75,000
RAM 8500	85,000	RAM 9500	95,000
RAM 10500	105,000	RAM 11500	115,000
RAM 12500	125,000	RAM 13500	135,000
RAM 14500	145,000	RAM 15500	155,000
RAM 16500	165,000	RAM 17500	175,000
RAM 18500	185,000	RAM 19500	195,000
RAM 20500	205,000	RAM 21500	215,000
RAM 22500	225,000	RAM 23500	235,000
RAM 24500	245,000	RAM 25500	255,000
RAM 26500	265,000	RAM 27500	275,000
RAM 28500	285,000	RAM 29500	295,000
RAM 30500	305,000	RAM 31500	315,000
RAM 32500	325,000	RAM 33500	335,000
RAM 34500	345,000	RAM 35500	355,000
RAM 36500	365,000	RAM 37500	375,000
RAM 38500	385,000	RAM 39500	395,000
RAM 40500	405,000	RAM 41500	415,000
RAM 42500	425,000	RAM 43500	435,000
RAM 44500	445,000	RAM 45500	455,000
RAM 46500	465,000	RAM 47500	475,000
RAM 48500	485,000	RAM 49500	495,000
RAM 50500	505,000	RAM 51500	515,000
RAM 52500	525,000	RAM 53500	535,000
RAM 54500	545,000	RAM 55500	555,000
RAM 56500	565,000	RAM 57500	575,000
RAM 58500	585,000	RAM 59500	595,000
RAM 60500	605,000	RAM 61500	615,000
RAM 62500	625,000	RAM 63500	635,000
RAM 64500	645,000	RAM 65500	655,000
RAM 66500	665,000	RAM 67500	675,000
RAM 68500	685,000	RAM 69500	695,000
RAM 70500	705,000	RAM 71500	715,000
RAM 72500	725,000	RAM 73500	735,000
RAM 74500	745,000	RAM 75500	755,000
RAM 76500	765,000	RAM 77500	775,000
RAM 78500	785,000	RAM 79500	795,000
RAM 80500	805,000	RAM 81500	815,000
RAM 82500	825,000	RAM 83500	835,000
RAM 84500	845,000	RAM 85500	855,000
RAM 86500	865,000	RAM 87500	875,000
RAM 88500	885,000	RAM 89500	895,000
RAM 90500	905,000	RAM 91500	915,000
RAM 92500	925,000	RAM 93500	935,000
RAM 94500	945,000	RAM 95500	955,000
RAM 96500	965,000	RAM 97500	975,000
RAM 98500	985,000	RAM 99500	995,000
RAM 100500	1,005,000		

Price lists, e.g. Service prices



Qoolio, company's own database with machines and equipment