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EFFECTS OF EDUCATIONAL SELLING IN KNOWLEDGE-INTENSIVE BUSINESS SERVICES (KIBS): VALUE CO-CREATION AND CO-DESTRUCTION APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

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The supply and demand for services has increased in the business-to-business environment. Most of the organizations buy services from an outside service provider at some point. Usually, the services as a part of the business forms a partnership between the service provider and customer organization. In the sales situation the key is cooperation between the salesperson, customer, and their organizations. Possible cooperation models are e.g., outsourcing the whole service, consulting, or something in between them. To reach a profitable partnership for both parties it must create value and value co-creation forms in the interaction between the parties.

The aim of this research was to find a connection between value co-creation and co-destruction and educational functions during the sales process. First the concept of educational selling was formed based on previous research around different fields of study. In this study the definition of educational selling is that it is an iterative process that lasts through the whole relationship. The value is co-created and co-destructed through co-learning between the actors. It is based on an idea of partnership that includes continuous interaction and knowledge sharing between the actors towards a shared goal.

In the empirical part of this study people who has bought or sold KIBS were interviewed (15 salespersons, 11 customers). The research was limited to KIBS because of their interactive nature. In the analysis of the interview data factors that can lead to value co-creation or co-destruction in educational selling were recognized. These factors are continuous cooperation, building trust, mutual interaction, understanding customer's needs, co-learning and providing content. These factors include enablers for both value co-creation and co-destruction.

Based on this research it can be argued that successful educational selling affects to value co-creation. Both parties wished to learn knowledge and skills that helps their business and were ready to share important knowledge with each other's. Educational selling can be used as a part to reach a fruitful and rewarding partnership. On the other hand, based on the results it is possible to recognize value co-destruction factors and avoid negative outcomes.

Keywords: Educational selling, value co-creation, value co-destruction, co-learning, knowledge-intensive business services, KIBS

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Palveluiden kysyntä ja tarjonta on kasvanut huomattavasti yritysten välisessä liiketoiminnassa. Lähes kaikki organisaatiot ostavat jossain vaiheessa palveluita ulkoiselta palveluntarjoajalta. Usein palvelut osana liiketoimintaa muodostavat kumppanuuden palveluntarjoajan ja asiakasorganisaation välille. Myyntitilanteissa sekä myyjän ja asiakkaan, että heidän koko organisaatioiden yhteistyö on avainasemassa. Mahdollisia yhteistyömalleja ovat esimerkiksi palvelun täysi ulkoistaminen, konsultaatio tai jotain siltä väliltä. Jotta kumppanuus jatkuu tuottoisena molemmille osapuolille, sen täytyy tuottaa jatkuvasti arvoa.

Tutkimuksessa pyrittiin löytämään yhteys arvon yhteisluonnille, yhteistuhoamiselle ja opetukselliselle toiminnalle myyntiprosessin aikana. Teoreettisessa osassa määriteltiin opetuksellisen myynnin käsite aiempaa tutkimuskirjallisuutta hyödyntäen. Opetuksellinen myynti käsitetään tässä tutkimuksessa iteratiiviseksi prosessiksi, joka kestää läpi koko asiakassuhteen. Siinä myyjän edustajat ja asiakkaan edustajat luovat ja tuhoavat arvoa yhdessä. Sen tavoitteena on, että vuorovaikutus ja tiedon jakaminen on jatkuvaa ja tähtää yhteistä tavoitetta kohti.

Tutkimuksen empriisessä osassa haastateltiin henkilöitä, jotka olivat myyneet tai ostaneet KIBS palveluita (15 myyjää, 11 asiakasta). Tutkimuksen rajaukseen valittiin KIBS palvelut niiden vuorovaikutteisen luonteen perusteella. Haastatteluaineiston analyysin perusteella tunnistettiin opetuksellisen myynnin aikana esiintyviä tekijöitä, joissa on mahdollisuus sekä arvon yhteisluontiin että yhteistuhoamiseen. Nämä tekijät ovat jatkuva yhteistyö, luottamuksen rakentaminen, molemminpuolinen vuorovaikutus, asiakkaan tarpeen ymmärtäminen, yhteisoppiminen sekä sisällön tarjoaminen. Tekijät sisältävät sekä arvon yhteisluomista että yhteistuhoamista tukevia toimintoja.

Tutkimuksen tulosten perusteella voidaan päätellä, että opetuksellisen myynnin onnistuneella toteutumisella on yhteys arvon yhteisluontiin. Molemmat osapuolet toivoivat oppivansa toimintaansa kehittävää tietotaitoa sekä olivat valmiita jakamaan oleellista informaatiota toisilleen. Opetuksellista myyntiä voidaan käyttää osana yhteisarvonluontia saavuttaakseen hedelmällisen ja palkitsevan kumppanuussuhteen. Tulosten avulla organisaatioiden on mahdollista tunnistaa arvon yhteistuhoamisen tekijöitä, joita minimoimalla voidaan välttää negatiivisia lopputuloksia.

Asiasanat: opetuksellinen myynti, arvon yhteisluonti, arvon yhteistuhoaminen, yhteisoppiminen, tietointensiiviset liiketoiminnan palvelut, KIBS

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SISÄLLYS

1 INTRODUCTION

Buying and selling and supply and demand are the cycles that keep the world going. These transactions are always there and once the cycle ends it starts again in somewhere else. When focusing on a service business rather than tangible goods the continuity and true partnership are perceived to be wanted features for both the service supplier and service user. For the partnership to continue the service provider (i.e., salesperson) and the buyer of the service (i.e., customer) need to give and receive value from the first contact point through the whole partnership. Value as a term is not simple but Grönroos and Voima (2013) state that it is created in the customer experiences. Also, it can mean different things to different people (Zeithaml, 1988). In value co-creation service provider and customer create value in interaction (Grönroos, 2008). Therefore, the value co-creation and co-destruction have a high probability to occur in the interaction between the salesperson and customer.

Some scholars like Nath, Apte and Karmarkar (2020) are even speaking about service industrialization and comparing it to the historical industrialization of manufacturing goods. The demand for services has grown during the recent decades (Schettkat, 2007) and good examples of this are the popularity of services like Netflix and Spotify even though in the business-to-business world it shows a little differently compared to ordinary consumers. Yet, the popularity of software as a service (SaaS) is a good example in the business-to-business world's services as well. According to Miozzo and Grimshaw (2005) outsourcing IT has been popular for decades and outsourcing knowledge-intensive business services (KIBS) (where the emphasis is on IT) is beneficial for the customer organizations and one of the most important aspects for them is the possibility to participate developing the service. The reason behind outsourcing can be e.g., lack of specific skills inside the company that can be easily bought from a third-party provider and in many cases the people who are working in the outsourced service can become "members" of the buyer's team.

Sharing knowledge is an important part of the outsourcing benefits but there is a significant difference between the companies who can receive the information and start to utilize it compared to those who do not and that tells a lot about how successful that will be (Lee, 2001). Strategic partnerships have been an important part of business for decades and exchanging knowledge can occur in the partnerships e.g., in product development and R&D. (Mowery, Oxley & Silverman, 1996). Sometimes it helps to look things from the outside and external viewpoint are extremely valuable. In this study the knowledge sharing is viewed from the sales process point of view and the goal is to find out how sharing the knowledge affects to the cooperation. Value-based selling, consultative selling and solution selling include sharing information and skills, delivering value and interacting in the sales situation, but they are missing the pedagogical viewpoint. In practice sales use a lot of pedagogical methods and this study aims to find out is it necessary to define sales through pedagogical methods is that a new phenomenon or does it already exist in the previous definitions of selling. These concepts together with educational and value related concepts are used to define educational selling.

In addition, the goal of this study is to find out how the service provider organization and customer organization co-creates and co-destructs value by sharing their knowledge both ways in the sales processes of KIBS from the start of the partnership and during it. The positive and negative factors are important to recognize since the aim is that the partnership benefits both parties and that can be extremely fruitful but if the cooperation does not work even if that is unintentional there is a risk that the results do not benefit either. The negative site is important to recognize because that way the risks during the sales process can be minimized and finding out the factors that are used to co-create value can help to achieve the best possible results for both parties.

1.1 Research Objectives and Questions

In educational selling the actors share knowledge and skills using pedagogical methods' help in the sales situation. This study's first goal is to define educational selling profoundly and find out what relation it has with the value co-creation and value co-destruction. Educational selling requires a definition since it is a new concept that needs to be distinguished from other close concepts (i.e., consultative selling, solution selling and value-based selling). Value creation, selling and educational concepts are used to define educational selling. Knowledge-intensive business services (KIBS) are used to limit the topic since otherwise it would be too broad to have reliable results. KIBS were chosen because they have a higher need for supplier-user interaction compared to other information and communication services and because KIBS contains economic functions that support the collection, creation, and distribution of knowledge (Miles et al., 1995). These factors form the theoretical framework of this study.

The second goal in this study is to recognize the value co-creation and co-destruction factors in the educational selling process of KIBS and look at the results though the theoretical framework. Because of the importance of the interaction between the actors this study explores the topic from the customer's and salesperson's point of view to understand better both actors' sides. Understanding this will help both the customers and salespersons to succeed in their collaboration better. With all this in mind the research questions for this study are:

1. *What is the definition of educational selling? And its relation to value co-creation and value co-destruction?*
2. *How do value co-creation and co-destruction emerge in the educational selling of knowledge-intensive business services (KIBS)?*

1.2 Research methods

This research's theoretical part is conducted with a literature review and empirical part is produced using focused interview method for gathering the data and qualitative content analysis method for analyzing the data. The literature review is formed from previous research articles on the topic. In the focused interview method, the results of the interviews are categorized and later categorized and analyzed.

According to Hirsjärvi, Remes and Sajavaara (1997) the literature review goes through previous research which is relevant to the matter. It works as a base for the research and guides the direction of the researcher's own or new study positioned in that field's study. The literature review is used to support the need for new research and to justify the researcher's point of view. Critical thinking is an important part of the whole literature review. (Hirsjärvi et al., 1997, p. 111–112) This method was chosen because this research needs theoretical background from previous studies. There are plenty of previous studies about the topics. Yet, the concept of educational selling is new, and this study aims to map educational selling as a concept in the selling and value creation research field. To define educational selling the literature review was done with the concepts of value, perceived value, service-dominant logic, value co-creation, value co-destruction, selling, value-based selling, teaching, and learning. Linking value creation theory to sales and teaching theories through these concepts forms this literature review. The theoretical framework of this study is formed from these concepts and KIBS.

The qualitative part of this study is conducted using the focused interview method and qualitative content analysis. The focused interview method is a semi-structured interview method that has a conversational nature and aim to understand the bigger picture of the topic (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2014, p. 35, 42, 47). Semi-structured interview method is the most common interview type in qualitative research and its structure is flexible which enables the interviewer to ask questions within the interview (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 78–79). In qualitative content analysis the transcribed interviews are coded and based on the coding subcategories, main categories and unifying concepts are formed (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2004, p. 111). Lastly these categorizations are used to form the analysis where the research questions are answered. The qualitative methods will be presented extensively in the chapter 3.

1.3 Findings and contribution

From the customers perspective five value co-creation and co-destruction factors in educational selling of KIBS were found 1) continuous cooperation, 2) building trust, 3) mutual interaction, 4) understanding customer's needs and 5) co-learning. From the salespersons perspective six value co-creation and co-destruction factors were found 1) continuous cooperation, 2) building trust, 3) mutual interaction, 4) understanding customer's needs, 5) co-learning and 6) providing content. These factors help recognizing where in the educational selling the value can be co-created and co-destructed. This is important because when both the customer and salesperson acknowledge how they can maximize the value that both actors perceive that enables more value co-creation. That can help many sales actors and customer actors to achieve more successful relationship together.

Based on the literature review this study aims to define educational selling through the concepts of value co-creation and co-destruction, co-learning, value-based selling, solution selling, and consultative selling highlighting the continuity of the actors' relationship, and pedagogical aspect to selling. Theoretically, this study is positioned between several research fields. Multidisciplinary research is challenging but at the same time, it is socially important and rewarding. Integrating pedagogical learning theory into business theories is an innovative opening in the information systems field. In the future educational selling has the potential to develop into an interesting new research area where theoretical knowledge and practical applications are developing.

This study is the first to study how educational selling shows in practice and demonstrate that the concept and its relation to value co-creation and co-destruction factors can be identified from the salespersons and customers perspectives. Some of the connections between these concepts were defined in previous studies but this study brought all these concepts together and with the interviews educational selling is recognized in the everyday life of the customer and sales actors. The topic has not been studied much but there are studies that are closely related to the same topic. For example, Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola (2012) identified that value co-creation forms in joint problem solving in KIBS and Kohtamäki and Partanen (2016) studied value co-creation from KIBS and the role of relationship learning.

However, these previous studies are only focusing on the positive outcomes. In this study the topic is researched also from the sales process point of view and value co-destruction is considered. Of course, value and value creation and learning and teaching have been studied extensively in the past (e.g., Grönroos, 2008, Terho et al. 2012). The literature included in this study has been carefully selected, combined, and analyzed to match the purpose of the research questions. At the end of the literature review, the theoretical framework of this study was presented in the end of the theoretical part. In the theoretical framework educational selling is combined with KIBS and the value co-creation and co-destruction factors of educational selling process of KIBS are recognized (see figure 7). This framework can be used as a base for the future studies of this topic.

1.4 Thesis outline

The structure of this thesis is divided into the theoretical background, data collection and methods, findings, discussion, and conclusions. The first part is the theoretical part of this study. This literature review explains all the key concepts, answers to the first research question, and forms the theoretical framework of this study. The second part is the empirical part which includes explaining the chosen methods focused interview method and qualitative content analysis and reasoning behind these choices. Then we present the findings and discussion, where the second research questions are answered. Lastly the conclusions of this study including limitations and suggestions for future study are presented.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This chapter presents the literature review. All the important concepts of this study are defined. First, we explore the origins of value, value creation, and service-dominant logic because these concepts are used to define value co-creation and co-destruction which are key concepts of this study. Next, the steps of the traditional selling process and the concepts of value-based selling, teaching, and customer learning are defined and used as a foundation for the concept of educational selling. Then educational selling is defined based on all previously defined concepts. Then we briefly describe the Knowledge Intensive Business Services (KIBS). We analyze how these concepts are studied together in the previous literature. Finally, at the end of this literature review, we present the theoretical framework of this study.

2.1 Value creation

This chapter presents the concepts of value and perceived value, service-dominant logic, value co-creation, and value co-destruction. Grönroos and Voima (2013) state that the concept of value is not simple but the modern way to think about it implies that value is created in the customer experiences.

Service-dominant (S-D) logic has become a very important concept next to goods-dominant (G-D) logic which sees that the value is in the products (Vargo & Lusch, 2008b). Yet, service-dominant logic offers a more modern way to look at the matter. According to Vargo and Lusch (2008a), their original view of S-D logic was limited to two parties, the customer and the service provider or the firm. They say that this conception is incorrect and that S-D logic and value creation are formed in networks formed by economic and social actors. (Vargo & Lusch, 2008a). According to Vargo et al. (2008) in S-D logic, value is always co-created, and it does not limit to only producers and consumers, that is formed through networks of interaction. This viewpoint is important to all value research.

Cossío-Silva et al. (2016) state that value co-creation and attitudinal loyalty have a remarkable connection and that customer loyalty can benefit the firm or organization a lot which is why they researched it with value co-creation. In value co-creation, the value is created when the customer engages with the provider. According to Plé and Cáceres (2010) value co-destruction occurs in interaction similarly with value co-creation and it can be direct or indirect. Value co-destruction means the negative outcomes of service interaction which weakens the customer wellbeing. (Plé & Cáceres, 2010.) Makkonen and Olkkonen (2017) note that value can also be no-created, meaning it has no positive or negative outcome.

2.1.1 Value and perceived value

The concept of value is not simple but the modern way to think about it implies that value is created in the customer experiences (Grönroos & Voima, 2013). Zeithaml (1988) states that value is not easy to research because the concept of value means many things among the customers. She describes that it can mean low price for example if something is on sale it can be perceived as value. Value can be something wanted from the product, for example, what is good for you or the right size. The third way to describe value is how well the price meets the quality of the product. And finally, value is something you get in return for something you give. For example, how much of the product or how many of them you can get for a certain price. It is called value-in-exchange because the value forms in exchange of recourses. (Zeithaml, 1988.)

Grönroos (2008) presents value-in-use which differs from the value-in-exchange view. Value-in-use recognizes the customer's role in the value creation instead of the value being immersed into goods or services (value-in-exchange). Value-in-use forms when the provided goods or services are combined with other goods, services, and information and the skills how to use them. If there the needed skills do not exist, then the value is lower or completely missing. Value-in-use can be perceived only in the consumption of the service or goods. Because of that value-in-exchange cannot exist without value-in-use, especially over time. (Grönroos, 2008.) Corsaro and Snehota (2010) state that the concept of value is always relative. They indicate that an object does not have value. Instead, value can be described only when through its relation to another actor. (Corsaro & Snehota, 2010.)

According to Woodruff (1997), the term value is used in many different circumstances. For example, value can be defined from the organization’s perspective and the customer's perspective. Customer value is the term that depicts value from the customer's point of view. He says that it can be used to describe how the customer is perceiving something which is based on the exchange of something such as benefits or utilities and of what the customer gives to get it e.g., price. He also criticizes that the term is not defined consistently since it relies on other inadequately explained terms such as benefits, quality, and utility. He points out that customer value can be perceived differently in separate situations for example when the customer is choosing the product or when he or she is using it. (Woodruff, 1997.) Töytäri et al. (2011) note that in addition to benefits customer perceived value can include sacrifices.

Regardless of researchers trying to produce a model for perceived value distinct views of perceived value have evolved. Those can be divided into uni-dimensional and multi-dimensional approaches (Sánchez-Fernández & Iniesta-Bonillo, 2007). According to Zeithaml (1988), many factors affect how perceived value is formed. She presents the Means-End Model (Gutman, 1982) which considers price, quality, and value. In short, perceived quality and perceived value construct from different attributes (e.g., monetary and nonmonetary price) that lead into purchase (Figure 1). (Zeithaml, 1988.)

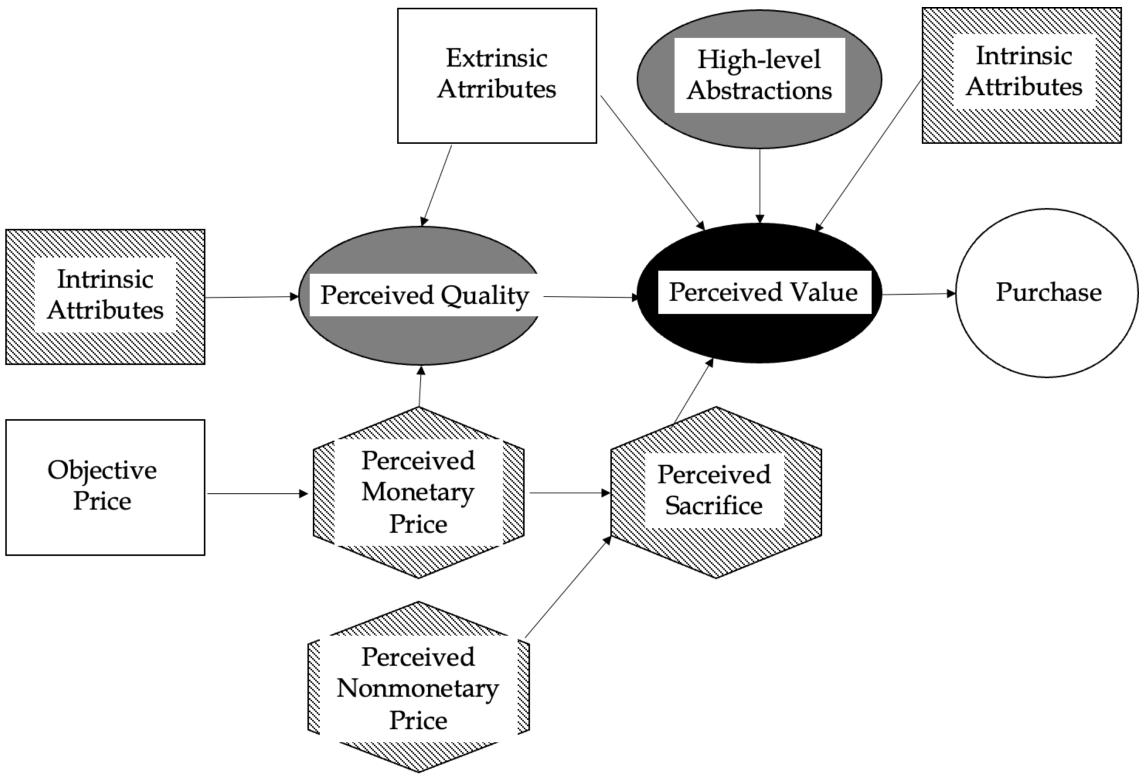

FIGURE 1 A Mean-End Model Relating Price, Quality, and Value (Zeithaml, 1988)

2.1.2 Service-Dominant Logic

According to Vargo and Lusch (2004), the concept of Service-Dominant (S-D) logic originates from a model of exchange in economics. This Goods-Dominant (G-D) logic is built around the idea of the exchange of tangible outputs "goods" (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). After the article was published it stimulated a discussion on how this service perspective can benefit marketing (Grönroos, 2008). Vargo and Lusch (2008b) say that G-D logic has lately focused more on the "product" instead of goods. "Product" includes both tangible goods and intangible services. Lusch and Nambisan (2015) argue that in the goods-centered view the focus is on the (mainly) physical output of how they perform a certain task. The service-centered view instead focuses on the performance of the activities (Lusch &

Nambisan, 2015) G-D logic sees that value is included in the products during the making process (Vargo & Lusch, 2008b).

According to Vargo and Lusch (2004) during the last 100 years marketing has transferred from the G-D view towards the S-D view. In the service-centered view, it is crucial to customize the firm offering by involving consumers in the processes. Consumers can help the firm to understand their needs better by getting involved with being coproducers. In the service-centered view, it is also essential to think of marketing as more than bringing goods into the market. That is helping consumers in value creation and specialization processes because it enables the enlargement of the market. (Vargo & Lusch, 2004.)

According to Lusch and Nambisan (2015), S-D logic highlights that in the value creation process all social and economic actors combine multiple different resources. Vargo and Lusch (2008a) state that their original view of S-D logic was limited to two parties, the customer and the service provider or the firm. They say that this conception is incorrect and that S-D logic and value creation are formed in networks formed by economic and social actors. (Vargo & Lusch, 2008a.) S-D logic proceeds its development through active scientific community (Vargo & Lusch, 2016).

Lusch and Nambisan (2015) present three roles; ideator, designer, and intermediary, that S-D logic recognizes. The role *ideator* signifies that the customers (or other beneficiaries) can develop the functions of the company by presenting information about their needs and in the end how to combine that information to generate new services. This way for instance tacit information can change into explicit. The *designer* role is focused on combining already existing information and resources with each other and that way to create new services. The role *intermediary is* the customers combine information from another ecosystem to another and that way to develop the services. (Lusch & Nambisan, 2015.)

Vargo and Lusch (2008a) note that the S-D logic of marketing has received plenty of positive feedback, but some of its specific aspects have also raised doubts or even been criticized. The authors comment on some of the issues already in the 2008b article (Vargo & Lusch, 2008a). Although as Vargo and Lusch (2016, 2008a) state a wide range of them has occurred due to misunderstanding of the concepts and the first articles not being clear enough. Yet i.e., O'Shaughnessy and Jackson O'Shaughnessy (2011) express their concern about S-D logic saying that it " is unlikely to be practically fruitful while remaining theoretically limited”.

2.1.3 Value co-creation

Vargo, Maglio, and Akaka (2008) point out that according to S-D logic value is always co-created and it does not limit to only producers and consumers. Instead of that, it is formed through networks of interaction. (Vargo et al., 2008.) Grönroos (2008) explains that in value-co creation the value is formed in the interaction between the customer and service provider. There the customer and service provider have different roles. He also states that the organization creates value through the services and products they offer. Value creation cannot occur directly, without them. Service logic can be used to guide the value creation process since it helps the organization's interaction with the customers. (Grönroos, 2008.)

Grönroos and Voima (2013) state that in the value creation process the value is always co-created by the customer and service provider. They also state that it is important to notice the difference between value creation and value co-creation. The term value creation should be used when we want to discuss the value-in-use that the customers create. While co-creation forms in the interaction of two parties. The interaction can be direct or indirect and that affects whether it is value creation or value co-creation. The knowledge of that enables the understanding of exploiting value-in-use but also how value co-creation can be utilized. (Grönroos & Voima, 2013.)

According to Leclercq, Hammedi, and Poncin (2016) value co-creation has three essential components; created values, involved actors, and engagement platforms. They define value co-creation as: "a joint process during which value is reciprocally created for each actor (individuals, organizations, or networks). These actors engage in the process by interacting and exchanging their resources with one another. The interactions occur on an engagement interface where each actor shares its own resources, integrates the resources provided by others, and potentially develops new resources through a learning process." (Leclercq et al., 2016.)

Jaakkola and Alexander (2014) note that marketing and service research has recently shown that the line between firms and customers is fading. In their study, they recognize four customer engagement behavior types and the value outcomes of multiple stakeholders. They suggest that customer engagement behavior correlates with value co-creation. That is because the customers influence the firm or other stakeholders and then they add and/or modify the product and that leads to influencing other stakeholders and their perceptions, expectations, and/or actions about the product. They also state that it is possible to achieve more comprehensive value co-creation with the help of organically emerging systems and interactive resources should be focused on more. (Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014.)

According to Cossío-Silva et al. (2016), value co-creation and attitudinal loyalty have a remarkable connection. Attitudinal loyalty influences greatly behavioral loyalty. Customer loyalty can benefit the firm/organization a lot which is why they researched it with value co-creation. They state in the results that value co-creation does not correlate directly with loyalty to a certain firm. They speculate that it is because many factors affect the process such as personal character and the level of satisfaction. They also point out that when a certain market has a lot of competition the firms need to compete with the others. In that case, value co-creation might help. (Cossío-Silva et al., 2016.)

Merz, Zarantonello, and Grappi (2018) have developed a Customer Co-Creation Value (CCCV) measurement scale. They recognize that CCCV has multiple dimensions and two main factors and seven dimensions. The first main factor they present is customer-owned resources that include brand knowledge, brand skills, brand creativity, and brand connectedness. The second factor is customer motivation which includes comprising brand passion, brand trust, and brand commitment. With the CCCV framework, it is possible to understand how much the customers create value for the brand in the co-creation process and how customers can participate in the firm's brand value co-creation. (Merz et al., 2018.)

Leclercq et al. (2016) identify four core processes inside the value co-creation process (Figure 2). The first process is interactions across actors where resources are shared with both parties and combined with their own recourses. That way the company and actors are constantly reflecting their own practices which can affect their ways to work. Thus, they are learning from each other. The second process of value co-creation is resource integration. In short, this process contains different kinds of interaction between actors that can be e.g., customer and companies or customer to customer. The interaction between these actors can be physical, virtual, or mental. The third core process they recognized is the engagement that can happen through technologies and infrastructures. It is challenging to maintain the connection with customers and the result of these actions is not always value co-creation. Engagement can be voluntary processes in which the customer can participate such as word-of-mouth generation, innovation processes, or providing feedback. The last process is the learning process. (Leclercq et al., 2016.) The mutual learning and exchanging knowledge between the customer and organization enables the value co-creation activities to emerge (Payne, Storbacka & Frow, 2008).

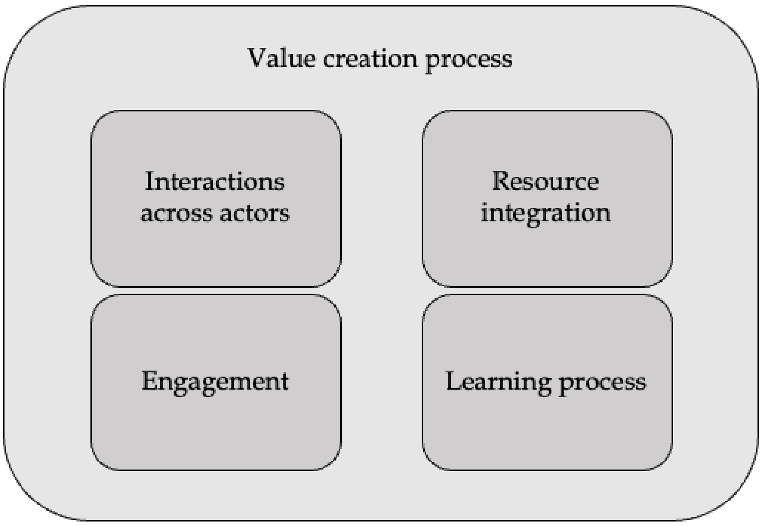

FIGURE 2 Underlying processes inside the value creation process (according to Leclercq et al., 2016)

2.1.4 Value co-destruction

According to Plé and Cáceres (2010) value co-destruction occurs in interaction similarly with value co-creation. In the value co-destruction process the interaction can occur either person-to-person (directly) or through appliances (indirectly). Before their study, some prior research had pointed in the direction that negative outcomes were also possible in the interaction of value co-creation. Yet their study was the first to define value co-destruction. According to them when value co-destruction is thought through value co-creation, the same things that can be used for positive purposes can also be used negatively. As an example of that, they present a scenario where a customer buys a certain product but decide not to maintain them, they are destroying the products value. Yet, if they blame the company for the product not working properly, they are also destroying value for the firm. (Plé & Cáceres, 2010.)

According to Chowdhury, Gruber, and Zolkiewski (2016) value co-creation has also negative aspects and they have recognized them in the b2b business network contexts. They call it the dark or hidden side of value co-creation. Yet the parts of value co-creation that stay unseen and are seen as "dark" might have a positive side and it can also cover some of the "bright" side of co-creation. They observe that previous value co-creation research has focused on the positive aspects of value co-creation. (Chowdhury, Gruber & Zolkiewski, 2016.) Plé (2017) state that because the word "value" implies to positive outcome the value co-creation research has been biased. That is why it is very important to also study the possibility of value co-destruction. (Plé, 2017.)

In Chowdhury, Gruber, and Zolkiewski's (2016) study they asked managers how they perceived the results of value co-creation, and their answers were positive. Only when they were asked directly about any difficulties, they answered negative outcomes such as role stress and opportunism. Conflicts in roles were found for example in managerial interactions between clients and agencies or third parties. For example, opportunistic behavior occurs when the business and agency have a good relationship and it has lasted a long time. Then the agency might not deliver projects on time, or the modifications are done too late. That leads the firm to accept the situation because otherwise value co-creation with their customers would suffer. (Chowdhury et al., 2016.)

Järvi, Kähkönen, and Torvinen (2018) state that value co-destruction can occur due to many reasons. It is possible to result in collaboration between consumers, businesses, and the public. In their study, they recognize eight reasons why value co-destruction occurs. They study the reasons behind value co-destruction that can appear during the interaction or before or after that. It can also happen in different relationship types. When the reasons are understood it gives important knowledge to managers who then can use that to make customer engagement better. The eight reasons they discovered are "absence of information, an insufficient level of trust, mistakes, an inability to serve, an inability to change, the absence of clear expectations, customer misbehavior and blaming." Järvi et al., 2018.)

According to Järvi et al. (2018) absence of information can occur when the information given is not correct but also when the customer does not know how to process the information, or the customer does not provide information e.g., if the product is not working properly. Secondly, without trust, the right information cannot be shared and that undermines value co-creation. Mistakes can cause a lot of value co-destruction. For example, wrong assumptions or if the customer buys the wrong product, then the value might co-destruct. Inability to serve can show when the price or otherwise the product does not match the expectations or if the customers must wait too long for example the firm responds to messages or deliveries due to the provider's processes. (Järvi et al., 2018.)

The next reason Järvi et al. (2018) present is the inability to change that can result from both the customer and the provider. For example, when new services don't get to the market by the provider, or the customer doesn't adapt to new practices value co-destruction can arise. In the sixth reason absence of clear expectations value co-destruction can occur e.g., if the customer doesn't know what they want or cannot explain it properly then the provider suggests a solution that is not the best option and that weakens the value. The seventh reason customer misbehavior can occur for example when the customer doesn't store or use the product correctly. Finally, blaming can emerge for example when dissatisfied customers complain publicly e.g., on social media. (Järvi et al., 2018.)

2.1.5 Value no-creation

Makkonen and Olkkonen (2017) present that value in relationships can be co-created, co-destructed, or no-created which means neutral nor positive or negative outcome. It means that even when the two parties would like to co-create value, they can notice that it does not create value for anyone. If that won't be noticed on time, then the value might be co-destructed. (Makkonen & Olkkonen, 2017.) This concept is still relatively new in the value creation literature, and it has started to emerge in the research in the past years. Yet, many scholars have referred to Makkonen and Olkkonen (2017) study (Sthapit & Björk, 2018, Brozovic & Tregua, 2022). This study is focusing on value co-creation and co-destruction factors and therefore the value no-creation perspective is not studied but the existence of neutral outcome is good to acknowledge.

2.1.6 Value creation summary

To sum up it is important to know all these different value concepts and understand their differences and similarities (Table 1). In this study these concepts and the connection between them are important to realize because the concepts of value, value-in-exchange, value-in-use, perceived value, and G-D and S-D logic are used to define value co-creation and co-destruction. Yet, all these concepts describe different things so the differences must be acknowledged. Also, it is essential to realize that there is no universal way to define value, thus the definitions may vary through individuals' experiences and context. Yet, understanding how value can be formed and perceived through different actions is important when we are researching this later in the educational selling and KIBS context and the empirical part of this study. There are different views to value related concepts e.g., Saha, Goyal and Jebarajakirthy (2022) state that co-production, co-design, and co-innovation are also closely related concepts to value co-creation but they are more value-in-exchange than value co-creation.

TABLE 1 Value concepts overview

Concept	Definition 1	Definition 2	Definition 3
Value	The concept of value can vary between customers (Zeithaml, 1988)	Term value can be defined from the customer's and organization's perspective (Woodruff, 1997)	Value is created in the customer experiences (Grönroos & Voima, 2013)
Value-in-exchange	The value forms in exchange of recourses (goods and services) (Zeithaml, 1998)		
Value-in-use	In addition to provided goods and services value-in-use recognizes the customer's role (the usage and skills) in value creation (Grönroos, 2008)		
Perceived value	Means-End Model (Gutman, 1982) which considers price, quality, and value. (Zeithaml, 1988)	There is no generally accepted definition. Different definitions can be divided into uni- and multi-dimensional approaches. (Sánchez-Fernández & Iniesta-Bonillo, 2007)	
G-D Logic	G-D logic is built around the idea of the exchange of tangible outputs “goods” (Vargo & Lusch, 2004)	G-D logic sees that value is included in the products during the making process. (Vargo & Lusch, 2008b)	
S-D Logic	S-D logic and value creation are formed in networks formed by economic and social actors. (Vargo & Lusch, 2008a)	S-D logic highlights that in the value creation process all social and economic actors combine multiple different resources. (Lusch & Nambisan, 2015)	According to S-D logic, value is always co-created and it does not limit to only producers and consumers. Instead of that, it is formed through networks of interaction. (Vargo et al., 2008)

Value co-creation	In value-co creation, the value is formed in the interaction between the customer and service provider. (Grönroos, 2008)	In the value creation process, the value is always co-created by the customer and service provider. All value creation is not value co-creation. (Grönroos & Voima, 2008)	A shared process where individuals, organizations, or networks as actors interact and share their recourses and possibly create new recourses through learning processes. (Leclerc et al., 2016)
Value co-destruction	Value co-destruction occurs in interaction similarly with value co-creation. In the value co-destruction process the interaction can occur either person-to-person (directly) or through appliances (indirectly). (Plé & Caceres, 2010)	This can occur because of the "absence of information, an insufficient level of trust, mistakes, an inability to serve, an inability to change, the absence of clear expectations, customer misbehavior and blaming" (Järvi et al., 2018)	In the value co-creation process the "dark side" can stay unseen and override co-creation (Chowdhury, Gruber & Zolkiewski, 2016)
Value no-creation	Neutral (not a positive or negative outcome of the value creation process. (Makkonen & Olkkonen, 2017)		

2.2 Educational selling

In this chapter, we define the concept of educational selling. First, we briefly describe the conceptual background of selling and value-based selling. Then we cover the concept of knowledge sharing through teaching. We also define the concept of teaching. Finally based on these chapters we analyze the results and conceptualize educational selling.

Most of the time teaching and learning occur hand in hand. This happens in the educational selling process as co-learning. At the center of educational selling is the mutual teaching and learning between the salesperson and the customer. The salesperson teaches about the product and reciprocally the customer teaches about their business goals and problems thus they both learn from each other. As in any selling process, the goal of both parties is to help the customer company in their needs but also benefit the salesperson's company. The aim is to co-create value during and after the selling process, but it is good to keep in mind that when there is a possibility to create value co-destructing it is also a possibility.

2.2.1 Background of selling

Selling and its processes have been a popular topic among researchers for decades. In this chapter, we will briefly go through the general definition of selling. Selling including the salesperson and the sales discipline has evolved and changed through history (Moncrief & Marshall, 2005). According to Hartman, Wieland, and Vargo (2018), selling is interaction and relationship between parties where the service can be traded with service. According to Arli, Bauer, and Palmatier (2018), two of the key approaches of relational selling are *buying center* and *adaptive selling*. In the buying center approach the buyer-seller exchanges are ongoing relationships instead of separate events because there is hard competition and engaged interaction and collaboration between buyers and sellers helps to keep costs lower and quality higher. The adaptive selling approach focuses on finding the customer's needs and wants. (Arli et al., 2018.)

Wilson (1995) emphasize that the buyer and seller relationships were born when people started trading different goods and service. These relationships are an essential part of business-to-business strategies, and their nature is more strategic compared to the friendship- and trust-based relationships in the past. (Wilson, 1995.) Dubinsky (1981) presents the seven steps of selling: (1) prospecting, (2) preapproach, (3) approach, (4) presentation, (5) overcoming objections, (6) close, and (7) follow-up. This can be considered as a base for modern selling, and it is widely accepted dictate in the sales field (Moncrief & Marshall, 2005).

In short, during the prospecting phase, the salesperson is looking for new potential customers. Preapproach is the step between prospecting and meeting with the customer. The salesperson searches information about the customer and prepares the materials needed for the meeting. Then in the approach step, they approach customers. This step is relatively short and can contain e.g., small talk and opening the conversation, a handshake, and making a good first impression. In the presentation step, it is important to know the needs of the customer. It may need more than one meeting with the customer before moving forward. After the presentation, there might be objections. Then for some reason, the customer can hesitate to make the decision. Nowadays proceeding after strong objections can be seen as a sign to stop the selling process since the product is not covering the needs of the customer. If the process continues, then the next step is closing the sale. After the sale, there is the final step, follow-up. This step is important because in most cases the work starts after the deal is done. That is why it is crucial to ensure that the customer is content, and promises are fulfilled e.g., via email or call. (Moncrief & Marshall, 2005.)

2.2.2 Value-based selling

In this chapter, we describe the main characteristics of value-based selling. Terho et al. (2012) note that research about value co-creation activities in salespersons and selling level is still lacking. Töytäri et al. (2011) support this view and state that there is not enough research on the practical activities associated with value-based selling. Terho et al. (2012) identify three dimensions of value-based selling:"

(1) understanding the customer's business model, (2) crafting the value proposition, and (3) communicating customer value." According to their study value research has been divided into three viewpoints (figure 3). The seller perspective concentrates on how to grow profits by creating, adding, and capturing value. The customer perspective focuses on the value customers receive from tangible and intangible products. Dyadic value exploits both viewpoints i.e., considers both the customer and seller as parts of the value creation. (Terho et al., 2012.) It is good to notice that value covers more than the "economic value" that according to Corsaro and Snehota (2010) is referred often to in management practice, marketing, and purchase decisions.

Value		
Seller Perspective ("Value to the firm")	**Mutual Perspective** ("Dyadic value")	**Customer Perspective** ("Value to the customer")
• Value chain • Customer's value to the firm • Creating shareholder value	• Creating and delivering superior customer value • Value distribution • Relationship value • Value co-creation	• Product-related value • Customer-perceived value

FIGURE 3 The firm, customer, and mixed perspectives of value research (Terho et al., 2012)

Töytäri et al. (2011) acknowledge that the salesperson has a significant role in delivering value successfully for the customer. Salesperson must understand customer's business and needs and can recognize the need for improvements. Also, it is important for the salesman to know what the alternative option for their proposal would be. That is because the customer compares the option to the second-best option and the gap between the proposals affects their experience of the value. It is good to consider that the salesman performing value-based sales may need different skills than traditional salesmen. (Töytäri et al., 2011.)

According to Töytäri et al. (2011) in the center of value-based selling is to understand what the customers including what they keep in value and quickly adapt to environmental changes with the customer and keep their service creating value. Töytäri and Rajala (2015) identify 12 key capabilities for value-based selling that they divide into three main stages: planning, implementation, and leverage. In the planning stage target segments and stakeholder groups are identified. This is important because in most cases the value propositions are developed for these target and stakeholder groups and if so then the value creation potential is maximized. The planning stage contains also processes for analyzing the value in which e.g., regular customer workshops can be used. The next step is to develop the value proposition i.a., based on the analysis results. The final step is to use, develop and implement sales tools that support value-based selling. (Töytäri & Rajala, 2015.)

The first step of the implementation phase is to select customers and identify stakeholders. That is crucial since segment-specific value propositions are used. If the customer is not receptive to the message, then using value-based selling can be less efficient or even inefficient. The next step is to create trust and credibility. That is important since without trust the customers may not share all the information needed for value-based selling to succeed. Credibility can be built e.g., with reference stories. The third step is called value proposition communication where the main goal is to alter the value proposition suitable for the current sales event. After that is to make sure the vision of solution building is shared with the provider and customer. In this step, the salesperson can affect the customer's vision of the results. In most cases, value creation and value proposition implementation may not occur if the salesperson does not sell their solution vision. In the value quantification step the modified value proposition is analyzed compared to the customer's situation. Finally, the co-created value and profitability are measured and analyzed. (Töytäri & Rajala, 2015.)

The leverage phase begins with verification of the created value. Companies that have more experience in value-based business are more likely to commit to the value. In the value verification step, the value is documented systematically with different tools and processes. It is good to notice that not all companies perform this step which can affect their ability for value capturing and value-based pricing that some companies develop after presenting the results with the customer. Finally, the last step is to have a case repository where the company collects feedback from its customers. The collected information can be used in future sales with new and current customers. (Töytäri & Rajala, 2015.) Jaakkola, Frösén, and Tikkanen (2015) argue that value-based selling practices vary depending on the firm e.g., some have shorter sales cycles, and some may have more complexity and therefore need more time.

Liu and Zhao (2021) present six key processes of value-based selling where also the value co-creation perspective is noticed. The key processes are 1) identifying potential customers, 2) understanding the customer's business, 3) crafting solutions, 4) quantifying offerings value, 5) communicating customer value and 6) verifying value-in-use. (Liu & Zhao, 2021.) Kienzler, Kindström and Brashear-Alejandro (2019) have identified the connection between learning and value-based selling. According to them the learning orientation of the salesperson has a significant affect to the use of value-based selling. They also state that value-based selling helps the sales performance to be better. (Kienzler et al., 2019.)

While value-based selling is the key concept it is important to understand concepts of solution selling and consultative selling that add a slightly different perspective to selling than value-based selling. Böhm et al. (2020) state that in solution selling sales management has an important role. In addition, that requires certain requirements for the salesperson that can help in solution selling such as first impressions about the attitudes, competencies, and behavior. It has been recognized that the salesperson has an important role identifying the value opportunities at the early stages of solution selling. (Böhm et al., 2020.) Accoding to Tienken, Classen & Friedli (2023) in digital solution selling it is crucial to understand that it is complex, and the sales cycles might take time therefore this is not necessarily the best sales method for all. Also, the managers should offer trainings and knowledge related to the solutions and value selling (Tienken et al., 2023).

According to Smith and Lunsford (2007) consultative selling can be also named as "value added selling", "professional selling" and "need satisfaction selling" even though they all have slightly different tone. Key things are that the focus is on the customer's needs, salesperson chooses the right services and the importance of value. Understanding the customer's needs include also that the customer is aware of their needs and the salesperson can help with that. the salesperson needs to be able to create a personalized suggestion of the services for the customer, but it is not likely that the salesperson knows every product perfectly. It can create difficulties e.g., they might focus on the services that they know better. The focus on value is shown when the salesperson tells what benefits the business of the customer will get from using this service and explaining that e.g., with the help of return of investment (ROI). (Smith & Lunsford, 2007.) In consultative selling the aim is to provide customer with information that helps them to make the right decisions to better succeed in their business objectives (Liu & Leach, 2001).

2.2.3 Knowledge sharing through teaching

According to Goldenberg (1993) for over 1500 years educators and philosophers have discussed that teaching is not only delivering skills and knowledge but includes also assisting the students to think, reflect, and understand important ideas. Similarly, in the moment of sale, it is vital to understand that even if you deliver the skills and knowledge the opposite party must be able to reflect what that would mean for them.

Goldenberg (1993) states that instructional conversations help students learn better since it engages them to participate more even if the discussion's focus develops into a different direction. The elements of instructional conversations (figure 4) can be divided into two parts called instructional elements and conversational elements. The conversation forms around a certain topic leaning on previous knowledge but also new information is provided when needed. Additionally, the teacher challenges students thinking with questions like "How do you know" or "what makes you think that?" (Instructional elements). The questions might not have the right answers or there could be multiple correct answers. Discussion is encouraged with responsiveness to students' statements, supporting discourse, and creating a pleasant environment where the teacher emboldens general participation (conversational elements). (Goldenberg, 1993.) Saunders, Goldenberg, and Hamann (1992) note that instructional conversations are not always teacher-student relations but can also appear in interaction with someone with relatively more knowledge and skills and someone relatively less skilled.

Elements of the instructional conversation

Instructional elements

1. *Thematic focus*. The teacher selects a theme or idea to serve as a starting point for focusing the discussion and has a general plan how the theme will unfold, including how to "chunk" the text to permit optimal exploration of the theme.
2. *Activation and use of background and relevant schemata*. The teacher either "hooks into" or provides students with pertinent background knowledge and relevant schemata necessary for understanding a text. Background knowledge and schemata are then woven into the discussion that follows.
3. *Direct teaching*. When necessary, the teacher provides direct teaching of a skill or concept.
4. *Promotion of more complex language and expression*. The teacher elicits more extended student contributions by using a variety of elicitation techniques-invitations to expand (e.g., "tell me more about that"), question (e.g., "What do you mean?"), restatements (e.g., "in other words–"), and pauses.
5. *Elicitation of bases for statements of positions*. The teacher promotes students' use of text, pictures, and reasoning to support an argument or position. Without overwhelming students, the teacher probes for the bases of students' statements–e.g., "How do you know?" "What makes you think that?" "Show us where it says ___."

Conversational elements

6. *Fewer "known-answer" questions*. Much of the discussion centers on questions and answers for which there might be more than one correct answer.
7. Responsivity to student contributions. While having an initial plan and maintaining the focus and coherence of the discussion, the teacher is also responsive to students' statements and the opportunities they provide.
8. *Connected discourse*. The discussion is characterized by multiple, interactive, connected turns; succeeding utterances build upon and extend previous ones.
9. *A challenging, but nonthreatening atmosphere*. The teacher creates a "zone of proximal development, "where a challenging atmosphere is balanced by a positive affective climate. The teacher is more collaborator than evaluator and creates an atmosphere that challenges students and allows them to negotiate and construct the meaning of the text.
10. *General participation including self-selected turns*. The teacher encourages general participation among students. The teacher does not hold exclusive right to determine who talks, and students are encouraged to volunteer or otherwise influence the selection of speaking turns.

FIGURE 4 Elements of the instructional conversation (Goldberg, 1993)

Shulman (1986) states that there are three different categories of content knowledge: subject matter content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge and curricular knowledge. Content knowledge indicates the quantity of the knowledge and how it is structured in the mind of the teacher. Obviously, the teachers must know the accepted truths, basic concepts, and principles of the discipline but they also need to be able to explain why the matter should be known and how it relates to other matters. It is assumed that the teacher does not only know what something is but also can justify why that is and why it is important. Pedagogical content knowledge contains shaping and representing the topic in a way others will understand it as well. There are various ways to do that such as examples, demonstrations, and explanations. One important aspect of pedagogical content knowledge is to recognize the knowledge level of the students i.e., if the topic is easy or difficult for the target audience. (Shulman, 1986.)

It is safe to assume that in business-to-business sales participants from both parties are considered as adults. Therefore, some of the best practices differ in teaching children. Mahan and Stain (2014) state that when teaching adults, it is good to notice that the goal is to help them gain information and advantage from their experience as well as assist them to use and test new ideas and information in practice. Adult learners are typically active learners, but it is good to notice that every adult learner might not act that way in every situation. The authors present seven key premises and best practices for teaching adults. One of the key practices is to present a problem and develop activities that need problem-solving skills and cooperation. Because adults like to implement immediately what they have learned it is good to suggest ways to use the knowledge. Additionally, a positive learning environment and feelings (e.g., the content and teacher) encourage learning. On the other hand, negative feelings discourage learning. (Mahan & Stain, 2014.)

2.2.4 Learning and customer learning

According to Levey (2021), Universal Design for Learning (UDL) considers that the learning of the students varies inside the classrooms due to factors such as experience and language. Also, the type of learning affects this variability. Others learn through visuality, and others are more auditory learners. In the UDL framework, there are three main principles. The first principle covers the different ways people can adopt information. All different styles to learn should be paid attention to. For example, combining verbal and visual representation to guarantee to learn for as many different learners as possible. The second principle is focusing on the multiple different ways students can indicate what they have learned. For instance, some prefer speaking and others like to communicate through written text. This principle also notices that some people can have difficulties with movement or cognition, or they might not want to speak in front of an audience. In the third principle, the aspect where we focus is the different ways of being motivated to learn. (Levey, 2021.)

Trongtorsak, Saraubon, and Nilsook (2021) state that technology and the skills needed to use it are essential when we are looking at things from the 21st-century business perspective. Technology will have an even greater role in the future business world and that way its impact reaches into education and learning which are fundamental for a country's economic and social growth. Learning is important because with it people can develop their skills e.g., in creative thinking, decision-making, and problem-solving. In collaborative learning, the learning process occurs when pairs or groups of people interact with each other and share their thoughts and information. New technology has changed learning easier through different channels, strategies, and content. (Trongtorsak et al., 2021.)

Computer-supported collaborative learning (CSCL), according to Muñoz-Carril et. al (2021) is a learning method that combines learning and an online environment. In CSCL people can create new solutions and solve problems through teamwork and as a result they can create for example new prototypes, designs, or projects. Learning does not happen without technological, pedagogical, and social factors, they are all needed in the process. When the criteria of these factors occur the results of learning are great. In their study, they found out that attitude, perceived usefulness, and enjoyment affect how great the students think their learning process has occurred online cooperation status. (Muñoz-Carril et. al, 2021.) Since many of today's customer meetings and webinars are held online it is essential to understand technology's role in the learning process.

According to Hibbert, Wiklhofer, and Temerak (2012) in customer learning the customers can learn how to be effective resource integrators for example in internet videos, advertisements, or seminars provided by companies. The concept of customer learning has been recognized long ago as an important part of successful marketing. In customer learning, both the customer and the company are active participants. Customer learning affects how the customer experiences the service. The authors say that to learn the customers must use their operant (e. g. imagination) and operand (e. g. technological devices) resources and the operant and operand resources provided by the organization. To that the concept of self-directed learning projects (SDLPs) is important. SDLP's are the actions you do to make a change in some way or obtain a specific knowledge or skill. They see the customer SDLPs as customer learning resource integration. That means "any self-initiated or self-directed set of activities in which customers integrate learning resources afforded by organizations and other network actors with their operant and operand resources with the primary purpose of learning to increase their effectiveness in other resource integration processes." (Hibbert et al., 2012.)

According to Kim and Yim (2020) nowadays the customer's role is seen as value co-creators instead of passive users and that is why it is fundamental to understand that customer learning is a part of the customer experience when it comes to using services or products. In their study, they found out that the customer experience is improved by customer learning. (Kim & Yim, 2020.) Monnot (2019) explains that to make the customers' learning easier the organization should assist the users' search for information and tailor the assistance tools in line with the users' learning trajectories. Some users are satisfied with user manuals, hotlines, etc. basic tools. To assist the users more in the use of their product the company may use assistance such as chatbots, video tutorials, or augmented reality. (Monnot, 2019.)

Monnot (2019) also says that helping with the use of the product post-purchasing is important. Examples of that are courses or classes where they teach how to use them and share advice. In conclusion, the company should pay attention to providing all needed solutions and media to guarantee access for the users to the information. The company should test the learning methods they want with a test group that includes different types of learners. The company could also follow the users' learning path with technology solutions. That would enable the company to e.g., help with their problems and present specific tools to them according to their learning process. (Monnot, 2019.)

Chiang et al. (2017) note that in positive customer engagement behaviour it is important to have learning motivation and collaborative learning. These are important because they affect the demand for knowledge and social interaction characteristics. They are also the two central parts of customer learning. Chiang et al. (2017) define customer learning as a “transformative process of a customer’s psychological state that is triggered by the need for knowledge, skills or experiences, which in turn might influence customer behaviors”. When the salesperson has experience it effects positively to the comprehension (Kienzler et al., 2019).

Learning theories has been defined by theorists in different ways and concepts. According Weegar and Pacis (2012) there is two extremes of the theories which are the behaviorist and constructivist view of learning. Behaviorists think that learning is based on an external stimulus by changes in environment while constructivists see learning as a search for meaning. (Weegar & Pacis, 2012.)

The constructivist understanding of learning has gained a solid foundation. It includes many different types and versions. In science, theories and concepts have recognizable differences (see Vianna & Stetsenko, 2006), but on a practical level, the constructivism has lost its distinctiveness. The common understanding is that learning is defined as a process of active knowledge construction instead of the adaption of existing knowledge. (Miettinen, 2000.) Fosnot (2005) argue likewise this difference so that relationship between learning and teaching is not only changes in behavior and learning by heart, but more like constructed knowledge in interaction which leads to development (Ershler & Stabile, 2015).

In general, there has been a shift from cognitive constructionism towards social constructivism (Miettinen, 2000). The social constructivist understanding of learning gained dominance in learning in the 1990s (Järvinen, 2011). According to Allen (2005) one pioneering work behind the development of social constructivism's understanding of learning is Luckmann's and Berger's (1966) Social Construction of Reality. Social constructionism is based on four assumptions: 1) we should be suspicious of how we understand or assume we understand the world and ourselves, 2) knowledge is connected to history and culture, 3) social processes contain and increase knowledge and 4) social actions and knowledge are interconnected. (Allen, 2005.)

According to Tynjälä (1999), constructivist teaching that best promotes learning includes the following issues: 1) supports the student's knowledge construction process and activity, 2) is based on shared social interaction, 3) maintains dialogue throughout the learning process, 4) is based on competence in thinking skills and cooperation and communication skills, and to motivation. Figure 5 illustrates the main elements of the social constructivism. The individual constructs information in and from his environment. The development of language and thinking precedes and follows learning in social interaction. (Järvinen, 2011.)

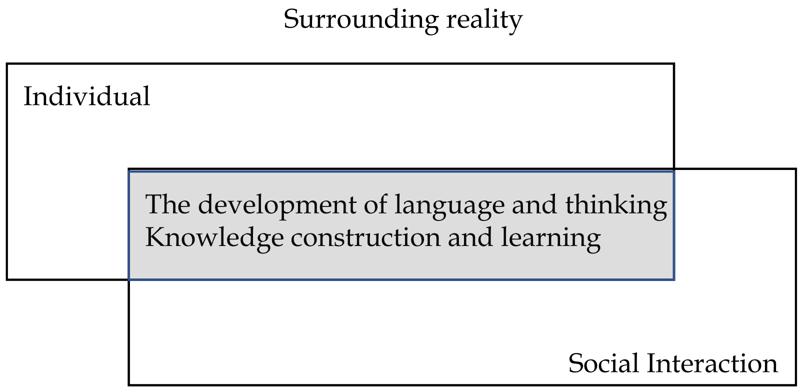

FIGURE 5 Main elements of the constructivist learning concept (Järvinen, 2011)

In summary, social constructivism is a continuous social process in which engaged learner achieve the main goal in learning together with others negotiating, discussing, exchange of interpretations and meanings, using language and thinking and building knowledge based on previous knowledge and beliefs. Learning acts in an important role of the service provider-customer relationship.

2.2.5 Educational selling definition

In this study, we define the key factors of the educational selling process (figure 6). The figure 6 is derived from figure 5. They both contain the main elements of constructivist learning concept i.e., individual level, interaction and learning between them. Yet the figure 6 includes value co-creation and co-destruction more clearly and shows how learning forms in the interaction in sales situation.

At the center of educational selling is the mutual interaction between the salesperson and the customer. Teaching is more than just sharing knowledge and learning has a significant role in educational selling. Co-learning occurs during the sales process (including meetings, emails, or other messages and calls). So, there is interaction between individuals and learning and knowledge construction occurs between them. Along the steps of educational selling, the salesperson and customer provide each other with relevant information and simultaneously gather more knowledge. In short educational selling in this study is defined as co-learning during the selling process aiming at positive results. The key is to share knowledge and use it to benefit both parties. It is good to remember that value is not always co-created but can also be co-destructed and therefore value co-destruction is possible between the two parties. The definition of educational selling being as follows.

Educational selling is an iterative process that lasts through the whole customer relationship. The value is co-created and co-destructed through co-learning between the sales actors and customer actors. It is based on the idea of partnership that includes continuous interaction and knowledge sharing between the actors towards a shared goal.

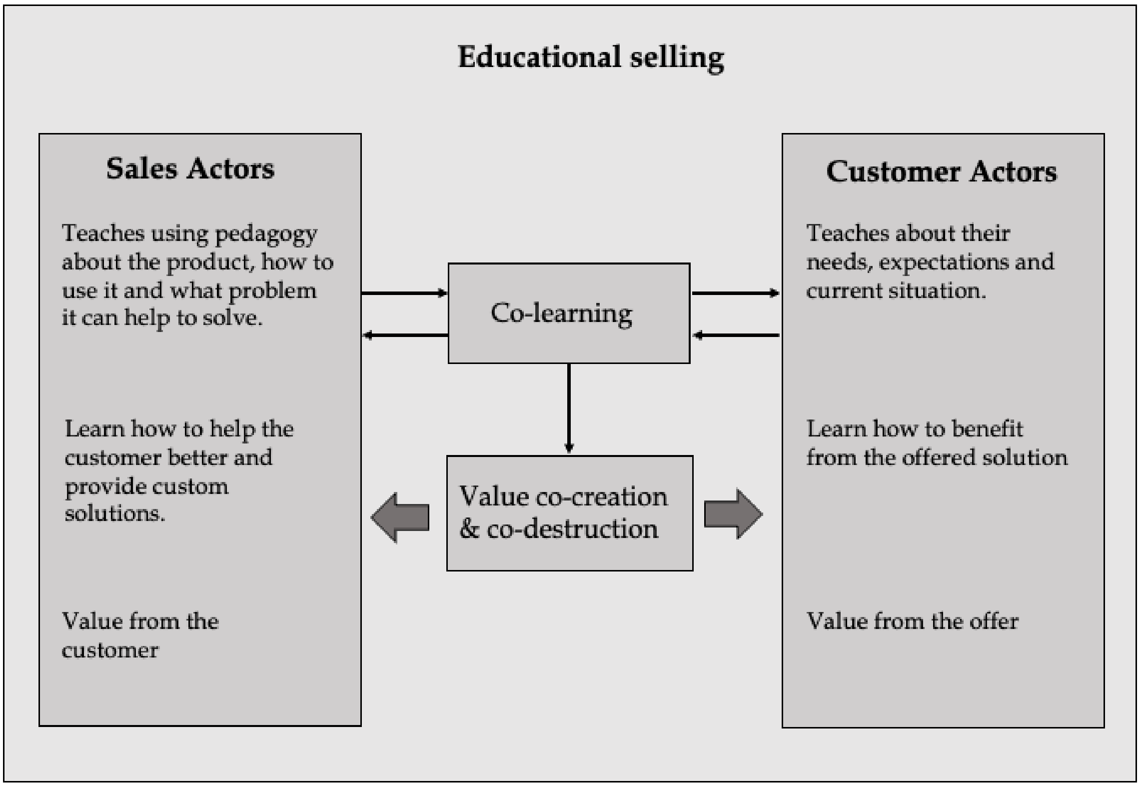

FIGURE 6 Educational selling building blocks

Terho et al. (2012) state that creating better customer value is crucial for the firm to survive and grow long-term. Yet, at the sales force level, there is not enough knowledge about how to fulfill a firm's value orientation efficiently. (Terho et al., 2012.) The concept of educational selling is lacking scientific research. It is also important to differentiate educational selling from consultative selling even though they share some qualities. According to Hartman et al. (2018) in consultative selling "salespeople provide buyers with information, help buyers discover and understand needs, determine and provide a solution, and involve other relevant actors from the selling firm." The aim is to create a win-win situation and to deliver value to the customer. (Hartman et al., 2018)

A win-win outcome is the purpose of educational selling as well. As Saunders et al. (1992) state teaching through instructional conversations does not always require a teacher but someone with more knowledge and skills than the opponent. The selling process is based on buyer and seller relationships (Wilson, 1995, Hartman et al., 2018) and interaction between the parties (Hartman et al., 2018). In most cases, the sales meetings between salesperson and customer resemble instructional conversations. Therefore, you could easily think that during the sale the salesperson acts as a teacher and tells the customer about the product or service and what problem can be solved with that. As a result, the customer learns how to benefit from the offered solution. That is correct but that is not the whole truth as the customer also teaches the salesperson about their internal processes, goals, and problems. Simultaneously the salesperson learns how to help the customer better by defining what features of the product would suit the best for their specific needs. In summary, the salesperson and customer share valuable knowledge and skills with each other.

Like Mahan and Stain (2014) express it is important to notice certain characteristics in teaching when teaching adults. For adults, it is important to be able to acknowledge that they have past experiences that they and the teacher can advantage of. (Mahan & Stain, 2014.) In a business-to-business environment the salesperson and customer are both experts in their own area. Therefore, they both have some previous work-related experience but also experiences outside of work that can be helpful. It is good to remember that there are not two people with completely similar backgrounds since we all experience things differently. Because of that, it is important to understand the opponent's level of knowledge. Moreover, adults like to implement new information quickly into practice (Mahan & Stain, 2014). That could be seen e.g., when the salesperson learns something new about the customer and later use that information in the selling or when the customer learns ways to benefit from the service on sale and want to purchase that to help their business.

Leclercq et al. (2016) recognize that learning is a part of the value co-creation process. The ways of learning differ between people as some people are more visual learners and some learn better by listening. To ensure learning it is important to notice different learners. That can happen e.g., by combining verbal and visual representation (Levey, 2021). In many sales situations, these exist. It is common for the salesperson to demo the service while explaining and teaching how the service works. Understanding technology is fundamental for modern learning (Trongtosak et al., 2021). In many cases also the customer presents their current situation and company in general and that can be supported with a slideshow. Hibbert et al. (2012) note that in customer learning both the representative of the company and the customer are active participants. In the context of this study, the company representative is the salesperson. When customers are learning they use their and the company's operant (e.g., imagination) and operand (e.g., technological devices) resources (Hibbert et al., 2012). Optimally both the salesperson and the customer learn from each other and therefore co-learning occurs. According to Brantmeier (2013), co-learning includes teaching and learning alternately. In co-learning there are no roles of teacher and student but rather some that are going together towards the same goal to gather knowledge and wisdom. (Brantmeier, 2013.) In sales they share the same goal since the customer and salesperson aim to seek a solution that satisfies both parties thus co-learning is a good method to achieve that.

Despite all mentioned above a win-win situation might not always be the outcome even if that is the initial goal. Although teaching and learning occur hand in hand in co-learning it does not mean that the result is positive. The result can be positive, negative, or neutral. It needs to be acknowledged that everyone does not experience value the same way (Zeithaml, 1988). Therefore, even when the customer and salesperson try to create value it is possible that the opponent does not appreciate the same factor. Like any selling process also educational selling process can end during the process. If the process does not come to an end the agreement is not closed and value can be co-destructed. Järvi et al. (2018) present possible reasons for value co-destruction can be wrong assumptions, lack of trust, inability to change, unclear expectations, or customer misbehavior.

Value can also be no-created in the selling process. For this to happen it needs to be noticed in time that value cannot be created for either party or otherwise the value might be co-destructed (Makkonen & Olkkonen, 2017). This can happen at the beginning of the educational selling process when the salesperson is prospecting possible customers and e.g., calls a potential customer and they mutually decide that their interests do not cross. Of course, it depends on how you look at the situation since spending time calling a non-fitted customer can be seen as destruction of the value but on the other hand, early detection of a "bad" customer can save a lot of time from both parties thus creating value. This viewpoint is important to acknowledge however this study does not study the appearance of value no-creation in educational selling further.

Based on Terho et al. (2012) three value-based selling dimensions, Dubinsky's (1981; Moncrief and Marshall, 2005) seven steps of selling, Töytäri and Rajala's (2015) value-based selling stages and key capabilities and Leclercq et al. (2016) four underlying value co-creation actors, the steps and phases of educational selling are defined (figure 7). This shows more clearly what occurs inside the sales actors' and customer actors' interaction depicted in the figure 6. From the beginning of the process, it is crucial to understand the customer's business model and needs as those will serve as a base for the whole educational selling process. The first step is to search for new potential customers and study these customers more closely or in other words learn about the customer. Based on the collected information the company crafts a value proposition. The first steps can also start if the customer recognizes that they have a need for certain service. In this case the customer searches information about different service providers and compares them. Then the customer contacts the service provider and only after that the service provider starts to investigate the customer organization further.

The interaction between the salesperson and the customer starts when the salesperson is approaching the customer or the other way around. At this point, the aim is to co-create value throughout the steps keeping in mind that co-destruction of value is also a possible outcome. In the next step, the salesperson presents the service, tailored value proposition, and teaches the customer how to utilize the service. At the same time, the customer learns ways to benefit from the service and tells more about their business to the salesperson. This step can include multiple meetings. At the same time, it is central to create credibility and trust (Töytäri & Rajala, 2015.) since without trust it is very hard to create value.

If everything goes perfectly the fifth step overcoming objections might be skipped although in many cases the customer will not do the decision immediately so further discussion is needed. Possible objections can be e.g., too high price, the service does not cover all the needs, or some other part of the proposition is not good enough for the customer. This is a good step to co-learn more and deepen the cooperation. When both parties are content the sale can be closed. Yet the process does not end there. It is important to be in contact with the customer after the sale as well and make sure the customer is content and everything is going on as promised otherwise value could be co-destructed. As Strandvik, Holmlund, and Edvarsson (2012) note the seller's value proposition and the customer's value requirements do not always share the same goal. Also, in this step is good to co-learn about the current situation since new needs and suggestions for improvements can emerge. There is a possibility for upselling and therefore creating more value. If these kinds of possibilities are discovered the sales cycle can start again only this time the parties are familiar thus it facilitates the start of the process.

Creating trust and credibility is a part of every step of the educational selling process. Without mutual trust and credibility, it would be difficult to build valuable partnerships and collaboration. Those are part of every step because it is not enough e.g., that there is trust only in the beginning then later without trust it would be very hard to work together. Creating trust and credibility is a continuous process and that needs to take into consideration in every step.

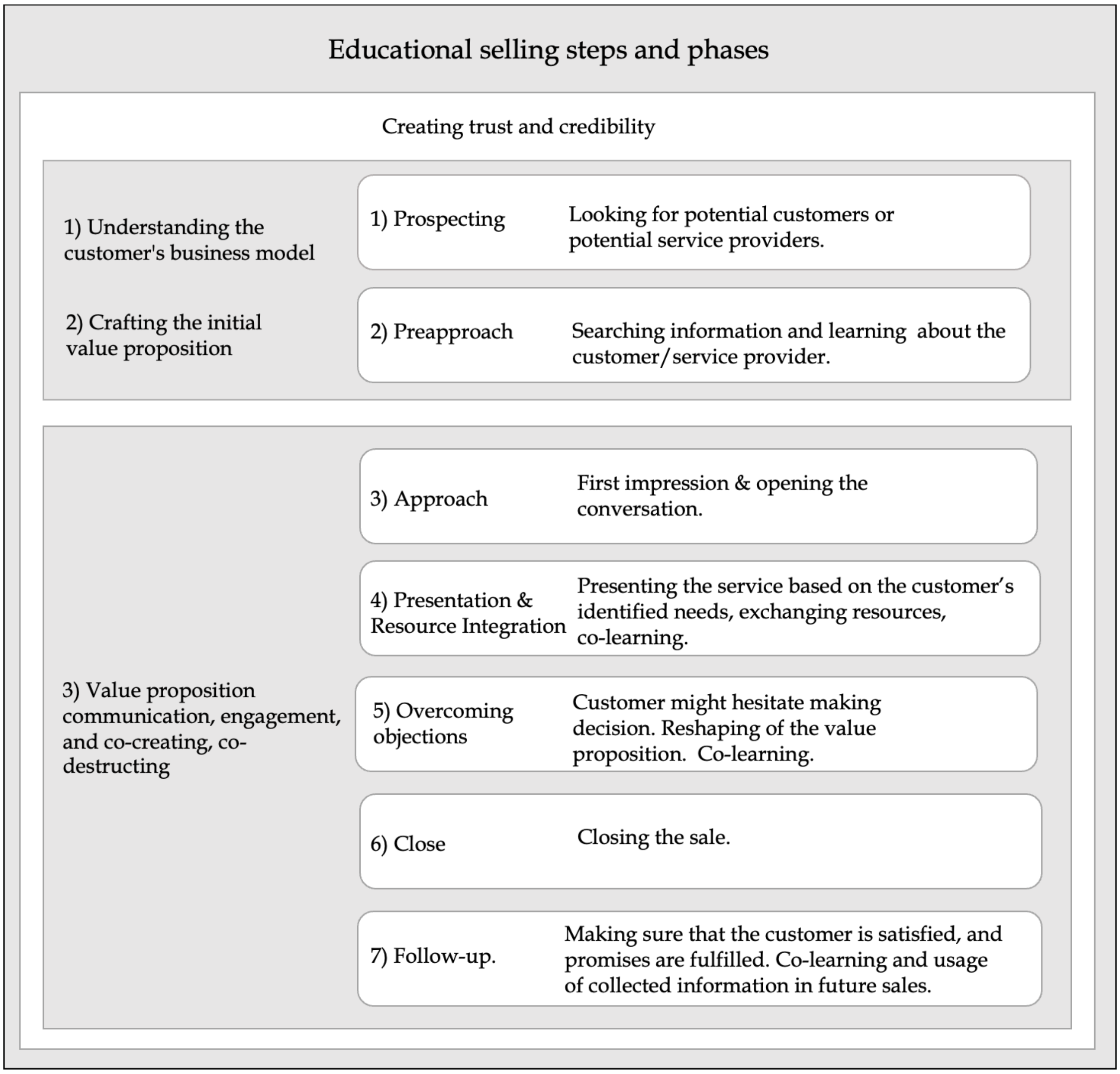

FIGURE 7 Educational selling steps and phases (adapted from Terho et al., 2012, Töytäri & Rajala, 2015, Dubinsky, 1981; Moncrief & Marshall, 2005, and Leclercq et al., 2016)

2.3 Knowledge-intensive business services (KIBS)

According to Miles et al. (1995) in Knowledge Intensive Business Services (KIBS), the need for supplier-user interaction is higher than other information and communications services. Since their study more research around KIBS has emerged. Hu, Lin, and Chang (2011) state that although KIBS does not have a universal definition some characteristics can be recognized. The topic has been studied for decades and it has been an important topic empirically and conceptually (Muller & Doloreux, 2009). Miles (2005) notes that because there are so many different areas of knowledge there are almost as many different KIBS. That leads to a large variety of their use, structure, and development. (Miles, 2005.)

KIBS impact customer's innovative processes directly or indirectly with their service (Hu et a. 2011). KIBS includes economic functions that support knowledge creation, collection, and distribution (Miles et al., 1995). Muller (2012) describes KIBS as follows "KIBS can be described as firms performing, mainly for other firms, services encompassing a high intellectual value-added". He indicates that it can also mean "consultancy services". (Muller, 2012, p. 2.) Muller and Zenker (2001) specify that the consulting function can also be seen as a problem-solving function. They also state that the client-related and interactive nature of KIBS are important qualities of the service. (Muller & Zenker, 2001.)

Miles et al. (1995) describe that "KIBS involve learning through networking, rather than networking alone". The authors state that KIBS can be divided into two categories. The first category covers traditional professional services such as marketing and advertising, accounting and book-keeping, and legal services. The second category is called new technology based KIBS which covers e.g., computer networks, some telecommunications, software, other computer-related services and R&D consultancy, and high-tech boutiques. (Miles et al., 1995.) According to Wood (2002) KIBS contain "many forms of technical, including computer, and management consultancy and diverse types of specialists—for example, in financial management, marketing and advertising, staff recruitment and development, property acquisition and management, trade promotion or distribution logistics."

KIBS are not always in the role of enabler but can also be in the role of innovator and help create new services and use knowledge (Camacho & Rodriguez, 2008). That means they support their clients' innovation and provide their own internal innovation activities as well (Hu et al., 2011). According to Muller and Zenker (2001), usually, knowledge processing in KIBS use external knowledge, for instance, they can offer assistance for client firms' needs by acquiring available knowledge related to the problem. Miles (2005) states that KIBS' influences reach not only to their client organizations but also implicate for the whole economy. Miozzo and Grimshaw (2011) state that KIBS firms can either be IT solutions that meet the client organization's needs, develop complex engineering or something between, or like Miles et al. (1995) say also focus on R&D and consultancy.

Miles (2005) state that outsourcing can act as a driver for KIBS growth, but it is not the only reason for that. Another important driver for KIBS is a need for different types of new knowledge, especially computer and information technology services. IT services can i.e., write software or design web pages and some of them give advice for IT strategies or implement and run facilities for clients. (Miles, 2005.) Wood (2002) state that the growth nowadays is mostly demand-driven and affected by changes and core activities in the manufacturing clients and large public and private sector service.

According to Kohtamäki and Partanens (2016) findings "the relationship between KIBS offerings and sales performance is linear, with a moderating role of relationship learning." They suggest that relationship learning is a key to KIBS value co-creation. Relationship learning can be i.e., joint sense-making or knowledge sharing. (Kohtamäki & Partanen, 2016.) Gallouj and Weinstein (1997) state that especially when talking about knowledge intensive services the client's active role is important. They refer to the link between service provider and customer as co-production of the service (Gallouj & Weinstein, 1997.). Cabigiosu and Campagnolo (2018) state that even though customization and clients as a source of knowledge are essential for KIBS firms there could be negative effects as well. For example, it can be hard to foresee which client relationships are more valuable than others or KIBS firms can focus too much on the client and forget to benefit from other information sources. They note that even if the KIBS firm has a deep relationship with its customers but is not customizing its services it can cause them to lose the collaboration. (Cabigiosu & Campagnolo, 2018.) Consequently, when utilizing co-learning we should always attempt to minimize value co-destruction by recognizing the possible risks in every step of the educational selling process i.e., remember to control the risks.

2.4 Theoretical framework

This chapter presents the theoretical framework of this study based on the main findings of the theoretical background section of this study. This depicts more specific frame for value co-creation and co-destruction factors in educational selling especially in KIBS. The framework is based on the educational selling of KIBS and value co-creation and co-destruction. According to the literature review, there are multiple possibilities for value co-creation and value co-destruction to occur during the educational selling process of KIBS. Figure 8 presents value co-creation and co-destruction factors in the educational selling of KIBS. It is good to remember that value can mean different things to different customers (Zeithaml, 1988) and that is one reason why it is not simple to define what value means (Grönroos, 2008).

Co-learning is a part of many internal processes of the educational selling process. When teaching someone new knowledge and skills the aim is to create value. In educational selling, the two parties customer and the salesperson aim to co-create value. As Grönroos and Voima (2008) state value co-creation is formed between the service provider (represented by the salesperson) and the customer, but all value creation is not value co-creation. It is possible that in some activity the value is created only for the salesperson or customer if the criteria for value co-creation is not fulfilled. Since in co-learning there are no teacher and student but rather a shared goal that is reached together with shared knowledge and skills (Brantmeier, 2013) there is a great possibility for value co-creation but also value co-destruction or value creation can occur. Leclerq et al. (2016) defines the learning process as one of the value co-creation core processes. Common knowledge and delivering the knowledge between the salesperson and customer is one of the key factors of value co-creation and is closely attached to co-learning as the aim is to share relevant knowledge and learn essential skills and information. Lack of information and lack of clear expectations can lead to value co-destruction (Järvi et al., 2018).

When the salesperson understands the customer's business model, they can offer a suitable value proposition for the customer. It enables value-in-use and therefore is one of the base elements for enabling value co-creation. (Terho et al., 2012.) With customization, the salesperson can show the customer that they understand their business model and that they want to help the customer with their problems. One important task before meeting the customer is to collect the needed information so that the salesperson can customize their proposition and later with more information gathered use that to customize the service even better based on the needs and wants of the customer. Cabigiosu and Campagnolo (2018) note that although KIBS firms need to have a deep relationship with the customer and gather knowledge and customize the service together they must be careful not to forget other information sources. Otherwise, that could have a negative effect since it is hard to see beforehand which relationships are valuable and which might not be. (Cabigiosu & Campagnolo, 2018.)

In customer meetings, there is always a possibility for co-creating value but also co-destruction of value. If the meeting goes well, value co-creation likely occurs. The salesperson has an important role in delivering value well for the customer since they can recognize the needs of the customer and compare their proposal with the competitor's option (Töytäri et al., 2011). After the proposal has been presented the customer can have objections (Moncrief & Marshall, 2005) such as too high price or a tight schedule. The objections can even be so strong that it can be better to stop the selling process at that point (Moncrief & Marshall, 2005). In that case, value co-creation does not occur, and value co-destruction takes place. Misunderstandings that can result e.g., lack of information, mistakes, or customer misbehavior (Järvi et al., 2018) destructs value and can co-destruct value e.g., if the customer does not keep the product they have bought and then blames the company that the product is not working correctly it destructs the value of the company, customer, and product (Plé & Cáceres, 2010).

The Follow-up phase of the educational selling process is usually the step where the actual work is done (Moncrief & Marshall, 2005) and that is a great chance for value co-creation. In the educational selling of KIBS, the relationship between the salesperson and customer is good to maintain even after closing the deal. One important part of the follow-up is to collect information and feedback and use that to continue co-creating value and therefore maintaining a beneficial long-term relationship that can lead to new selling processes based on the customer's needs and wishes and the salesperson's suggestions based on their observations.

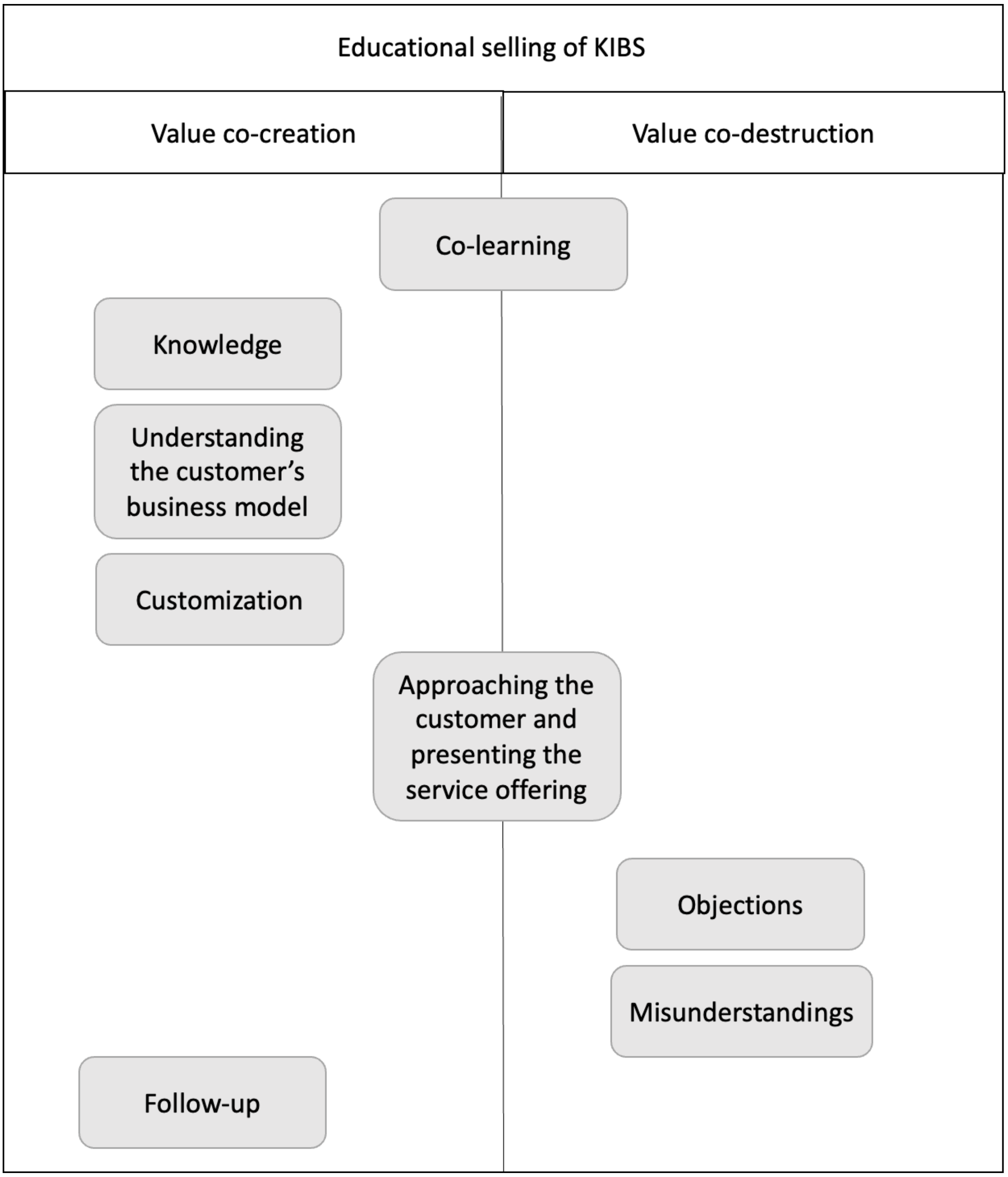

FIGURE 8 Value co-creation and co-destruction factors in educational selling of KIBS

3 DATA COLLECTION AND DATA ANALYSIS

In this chapter first the empirical study methods and conducting the empirical part of this study are presented for better understanding of the research process. First the concepts of qualitative research, focused interview method and qualitative content analysis method are described. This chapter includes the arguments on why these methods were chosen for this study. Next the collaboration between this study and certain doctoral study, gathering of participants, overview of the participants and implementations of the methods are explained throughout.

3.1 Empirical study methods

The following subchapters describe the study methods used in the empirical part of this study. Firstly, the qualitative research and reasoning behind choosing qualitative methods are presented in brief. Next, we delve into the focused interview method and why the interviews of this study are executed using this specific method. Lastly the content analysis used to analyze the data collected from the interviews is presented and reasoned.

3.1.1 Qualitative research

Qualitative methods were chosen for this study since the aim is to explore how educational selling is experienced in the sales situations from both the salespersons and customers point of view. This cannot be done with a literature review only since there is not enough previous literature and more detailed information is needed. According to Myers (1997) the purpose of qualitative research is to assist the researcher to understand the individuals in their social and cultural environments. Kiviniemi (2018) state that the reality that qualitative material deliver is always open to interpretation. The researchers themselves are active in the delineation of the research assignment where they choose the key issue they want to study further. (Kiviniemi, 2018, p. 76). In this study as a qualitative research method the people are interviewed and later analyzed.

As Myers (1997) say interviews are one of the qualitative data sources and that is the main data source of the empirical part of this study. Also, the researcher's impressions and reactions, fieldwork, documents, text, and questionnaires can act as qualitative data sources. According to Eskola (2019) the role of the material is to accelerate the researchers reasoning to find something new. Qualitative research is not just answering to the question that is set up in advance, but the material open researchers thinking to see what else could be found in the material. (Eskola, 2019, p. 212.) That is one of the reasons the focused interview method was chosen for this study. According to Koskinen, Alasuutari & Peltonen (2005, p. 256-258) reliability of qualitative research includes using multiple methods, peer review during the research, noticing exceptions, detailed description of research object, documenting the whole process in a way that other researchers can evaluate that. Also, the possibility to repeat the results based on the researcher's analysis and interpretation (Koskinen et al., 2005).

3.1.2 Focused interview method

Focused interview method (teemahaastattelu) is chosen for this study's interview method. As Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2014, p. 35) says interviewing is great choice of research method e.g., when the aim is to position the interviewees speech in a larger picture, knowledge and information about the topic need to be deepened and/or clarified or when the researcher wants to highlight the persons role as subjects since they have an active role that creates meanings. These criteria apply into this study as well so the best research results can be reached with interviews. Other choice would be to use a questionnaire but with interviewing the research is more flexible since it permits the researcher to e.g., change the order of questions, gather great examples and it gives the interviewee more freedom to interpret the questions (Hirsjärvi and Hurme, 2014, p. 36). Also Neha (2021) recommends interviews in exploratory qualitative research as a data collection tool when the main goal is to find new insights.

This is important especially when to some questions there is not strictly right or wrong answers the interviewee can reflect their own experience into the answers. On the other hand, without different choices like in a questionnaire the interviewer has the responsibility to ensure they answer the question they are meant to answer. Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2014, p. 41) divides research interviews into two categories; direct and indirect. This study uses the direct research interviews since the questions asked are directly about the interviewees believes, experiences and valuation instead of e.g., interpreting a drawing (indirect). (Hirsjärvi and Hurme, 2014, p. 41). A competent interviewer asks the questions in a way that makes interviewees willing to answer them and truly listen to what they have to say (Patton, 2015, p. 427).

As Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2014, p. 42) state the interview is a discussion between the parties, and both affect to each other, but a research interview is targeted to gather certain knowledge and therefore it has a previously set goal.

Patton (2015) support this view by saying that "an interview is an interaction, a relation". He also highlights that in the interview the observation goes into both ways e.g., the interviewee observes the interviewer if they are trustworthy or not. In addition to previously mentioned means this trustworthiness can be created with being clear, asking follow-up questions, being neutral and emphatic and preparing for surprises. (Patton, 2015, p. 427-428.) Following these guidelines during the interview will help achieving high quality knowledge.

According to Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2014) focused interview method is a semi-structured interview method which means that at least one aspect of the interviews is the same for all the participants. That can be for example the topic area or theme. The focused interview method is more flexible compared to other semi-structured interviews e.g., since in some semi-structured interviews the questions can be the same with every participant and it is possible that the question formulation is not changed at all. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2014, p. 47–48.) Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2004, p. 78) note that in focused interviews the range of how predetermined or intuitive the questions are varies based on the research framework and questions in the themes.

Other options for the interview type would have been non-structured interview and structured interview. The structured interview follows the pre-set of questions the responses are usually short and can be classified by categories defined in advance (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 78, Patton, 2015, p. 348, Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2014, p. 45). Unstructured interviews on the other hand use open questions, the nature is conversational, and the questions form in the moment of the interview (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2014, p. 45, Patton, 2015, p. 348). For this study the best option was to have some structure but to have the flexibility to make changes in the interview because that way it is possible to collect certain pre-defined information but also seek more in-depth knowledge related to the topics of this study. Otherwise, important knowledge could be missed.

Braun and Clarke (2013) note that the semi-structured interview method is the most used interview type in qualitative research. This method gives freedom for the researcher which can be helpful but also challenging. In this study the flexible interviewing structure offers opportunities to ask more questions if something interesting comes up. (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 78–79.) Roller and Lavrakas (2015, p. 53) state that semi structured interviews have a conversational nature which means that the interviewer modifies the questions based on what the answer is. According to Patton (2015, p. 439) one of the strengths of this method is that the interviewer can use their own judgement how to best use the time reserved for the interview. In this study the estimated time of the interviews were 30 minutes which means that depending on how long answers the interviewees give the less time is left for questions outside of the interview framework.

Berg and Lune (2012) describe semi-structured interviews as an interview which structure is something between structured and unstructured interview. According to them the interview questions and themes are normally asked in the same order for every interviewee but the there is a possibility or even a requirement for the interviewer to ask further questions. For example, if the interviewees answer with a simple "yes" or "no" or otherwise too shortly the interviewer can ask them to tell a bit more or justify their answer. They also state that the questions need to be in a form that is understandable i.e., the words and subjects need to be known to the interviewee. (Berg & Lune, 2012, p. 112–114.) This is an important observation since the interviewees are experts in their area, but this study is a new kind of perspective to the topic and therefore might require clarifications.

Patton (2015, p. 438) note that if the working of questions is not the same with every participant it can lead to different answers and therefore the responses are not so easy to compare with other's responses. This is good to keep in mind also in this study but since this study has a question framework of the questions or topics that should be covered during the interviews this might not be a problem. Even though in the semi-structured interviews, the wording and order of the questions can be decided and changed during the interview (Patton, 2015, p. 438). Berg and Lune (2012, p. 112) say the order is usually the same with every interview. Just because this method gives the opportunities of changes to the interviewer it does not mean that the interviewer should use that. The flexibility is meant for getting better more in-depth answers and the researcher holds the responsibility to guarantee the quality of the interviews.

An interview by video calling is the closest option to face-to-face interaction when compared with other ways of conducting an interview face-to-face, e-mail or phone. An interview with a video connection is better than speaking through the phone since the cameras were on and the participants can see each other's. Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2014) note that non-verbal communication has an important part in the interviews. Gestures and facial expressions can tell more than just the words e.g., tone of voice and nodding are good to notice when interviewing. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2014, p. 119–121.) Though non-verbal communication through technology is not the same as face-to-face in the same room and both have their own pros and cons. Most facial expressions can be seen through video connection but some of the gestures e.g., hand gestures can remain unnoticed.

Braun and Clarke (2013) state that virtual interviews (phone, email, and online interviews) are not as good as face-to face interviews. However, their perception of online and email interview is the same and that consists of written text not video contact. (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 79–80.) Berg and Lune (2012) presents computer assisted personal interviewing which is a face-to-face interview conducted through computer. This method enables the interviewer to record the sessions and thus the non-verbal cues that would disappear normally can now be restored. (Berg & Lune, 2012, p. 132.) This can be useful later since the researcher can check the facial expression and body language of the interviewee e.g., if it is unclear whether they mean what they say or could they be using sarcasm for example.

3.1.3 Qualitative content analysis method

According to Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2004) qualitative content analysis can be understood as a method or loose theoretical framework. They also state that many different qualitative analysis methods are based on the qualitative content analysis. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2004, p. 93.) Patton (2015) state that external rules do not guide the qualitative analysis, but it is instead guided by analytical principles. He says that in the qualitative research analysis the interest is in the details and if they form important models or entities. (Patton, 2015, p. 47.) In qualitative content analysis the data is collected with qualitative research methods e.g., interviews that are transcribed (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015, p. 231). The data collected with s focused interview method are typically wide, but all the data do not necessarily need to be used for the study (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2014, p. 135).

According to Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2004, p. 110) qualitative content analysis can be divided into eight steps (figure 9) however three main steps 1) simplifying the material 2) clustering and 3) forming the theoretical concepts can be recognized. Braun and Clarke (2013) divide the qualitative content analysis roughly into three parts as well. According to them the steps are "familiarisation and coding, identifying patterns across data and analyzing and interpreting patterns across data". (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 201, 223, 248.) The division varies, but it holds the same steps of the qualitative analysis behind them.

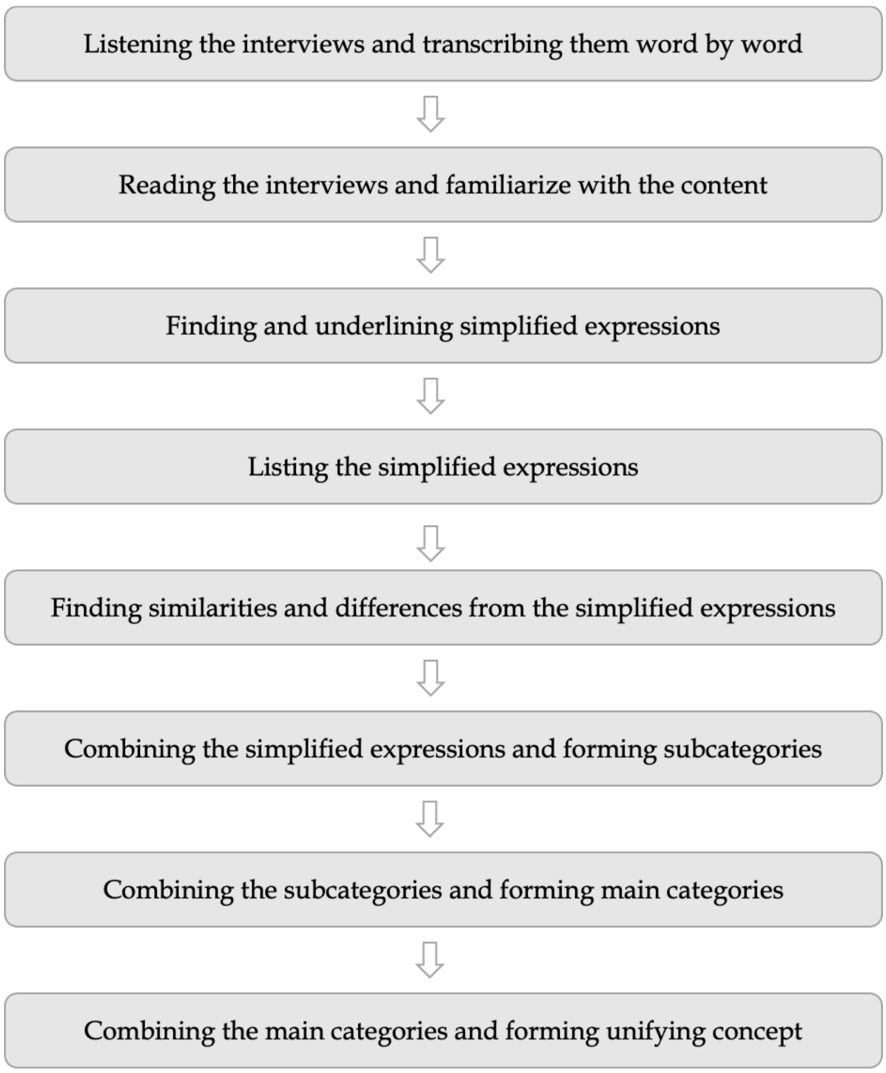

FIGURE 9 The process of qualitative content analysis (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2004, p. 111)

According to Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2004) at the beginning of the analysis the data in this study the transcribed interviews are simplified i.e., getting rid of the unnecessary information by summarizing or breaking the information into smaller sections. All interesting material from the research point of view is separated and other material will stay outside of the research. Even if there would be multiple interesting topics in the material the researcher must remember to keep working on the topic, they have chosen that is also visible in the research questions. One way to simplify the material is to underline the relative parts from the material and then collect all the underlined phrases in to one place. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2004, p. 94, 111–112.) Braun and Clarke (2013, p. 201–204) emphasize reading, re-reading and overall getting to know the transcribed data and picking up potentially interesting matters. Even though in while transcribing the researcher reads the data through many times in this study also transcriptions made by others are used and therefore those must be read through even more carefully. Braun and Clarke (2013, p. 205) note that the first things researcher observes from the material are either obvious easily noticeable things or they are personally interesting for the researcher. That is also why it is good to go through the data several times.

Next step of the process is coding where from the research point of view the relevant and interesting instances are identified and later these codes form the "building blocks" of the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 206–207). At this point the unit of analysis which can be a word, phrase or several sentences is determined (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2004, p. 112). According to Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2014, p. 147) in the coding the researcher compares different parts of the data to each other which requires reasoning. According to Roller and Lavrakas (2015) "each code should be a) clearly defined and b) unique and independent (i.e., mutually exclusive) from the other codes". They also emphasize the meaning of coding also the context in other words also read the bigger picture to capture the true meaning. (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015, p. 236–237.)

According to Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2004) the similarities and differences found in the coding are found in the clustering. Then the codes are combined into a category or theme and named with a simplified expression of the issue. Later these expressions are combined into subcategories and then into main categories. Lastly the main categories are further linked into unifying concepts. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2004, p. 112–113.) Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2014, p. 149) note that even though the aim is to find recurring aspects from the data exceptions can be found. The goal is to find the answers to the research question (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2004, p. 115). Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2014) note that the data can be interpreted in many ways and perspectives, so it is important to present the interpretation in a way that enables the reader to see where these interpretations are coming even if they do not share the same opinion. They also note that it is good to consider there is a possibility to have many equal interpretations or if one of them is better. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2014, p. 151.)

3.2 Conducting the empirical study

This subchapter describes how the empirical part of this study is implemented. First the research collaboration with a doctoral researcher Antti Lähtevänoja is explained, and the responsibilities of both researchers are specified. Next the process of gathering the participants for the interviews that are acquired for this study is reviewed and an overview of the whole material used in this study is introduced. Lastly, the implementation of the research method in practice is presented in detail.

3.2.1 Collaboration between studies explained

The interview framework (appendix 1) is provided for this study from a doctoral researcher Antti Lähtevänoja with whom I share a supervisor Jani Holopainen with. His doctoral study focuses on the same topic as this thesis, so it is natural to collaborate in the empirical part of the study. The collected interview data is also shared between the researchers which makes the data larger and therefore more reliable to make conclusions with. Lähtevänoja and his team provided part of the interviews and I conduct a part of the interviews. Holopainen as a supervisor of this study advised to interview 5 salespersons and 15 customers so in total 20 new interviews for this thesis using the interview framework provided by Lähtevänoja. Lähtevänoja and his team provided 6 salespersons interviews to balance the number of interviewees. To sum up, the total number of interviews used in this study is 26.

All the collected interview data including the interview recordings, transcribes and interviewees are collected into the same folders and shared with the researchers in Microsoft Sharepoint. The communication between researchers is carried out by WhatsApp and e-mail. The collaboration is implemented only in the empirical part of the study more specifically collecting the interview data and both researchers form their theory and analysis based on the collected data independently.

3.2.2 Gathering of participants

At first this chapter is focusing on to the process of collecting the participants for this thesis by the author excluding the participants collected by other researchers that are used to enrichen the data and ease the analysis and conclusions. In the next chapter the whole group of participants whom interviews are used in this study are presented and explained.

For this thesis the participants were collected from the authors own networks and their networks. First step was to think who would be suitable for the interviews based on the need for five salespersons who sell KIBS services and 15 customers who have bought KIBS services what makes 20 interviews in total. The contacts who were discovered to be possible interviewees were approached by e-mail or messaging on LinkedIn or other instant messaging apps (WhatsApp and Slack). Because at first the number of possible interviewees were not enough the messages included a request to inform if their company or others, they know would be possible suitable and willing to attend to the interviews. That way brought some participants that were approached by messaging them via e-mail. Also, some of them forwarded the message for their contacts and added me to the email. This way they were approached by someone they knew, and it is possible that it was easier for them to agree for the interview.

At the beginning of the interviewing process when all the interviewees were not found yet the interviewees were asked at the end of the interview if they know someone who would be able to attend to the same interview. This also helped to recruit more participants. Some interviewees were also found when discussed about the thesis with my network and they told names form their own contacts that could be suitable for interviews. This way was also successful when gathering the participants. They were also contacted directly on LinkedIn. In addition to that a LinkedIn post with a short description and video was published to gather participants. That did not work but from the start this way to collect the participants was unlikely to succeed.

What was a bit tricky at some cases was that the interviewees could fit into both categories i.e., be interviewed as both the salespersons and customers role. So, it needed to be decided which questions they will answer. Also, it is good to notice that all the people contacted were not able to help or were not answering at all. Table 2 shows the channels where the participants were contacted. Most of the conversation were held on LinkedIn chat that worked well with both existing and completely new contacts. Instant messages were used only with existing contacts. E-mails were successful way to connect when there was a link between the participants. IT is good to acknowledge that the messages send were not answered or the recipients were unable to attend to the interview.

Some of the interviewees were familiar to the interviewer before the interviews. According to Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2014, p. 72) the interviewee should not be acquaintance with the interviewer. However, within the questions of this research framework since they are not very personal and the level of acquaintance with the interviewees it is believed that this has no effect to the results of this study.

TABLE 2 Different ways to gather participants

	Contacted with e-mail	Contacted in LinkedIn	Contacted in WhatsApp or Slack
Participants from researchers own network	0	5	5
Participants gathered with networks help	6	4	0

3.2.3 Implementation of the methods

After the interviews were scheduled and the invitations were sent everything was ready for the interviews. The video interviews were held on Microsoft Teams meetings and the interviews were recorded with the applications recording feature to mp4 form. This allowed the interviewer to focus on the interaction and in general conducting the interview meaning that the interviewer did not need to go somewhere to make the interviews or worry about writing everything down since the interviews were recorded on video. All the interviewees were experts on their own area. Alastalo, Åkerman and Vaittinen (2017, p. 218) state that when interviewing specialist or experts the aim is to find out information that they are expected to possess yet it is important to acknowledge that one person expert or not cannot distinguish all the motives. That is why it is important to interview several experts. The experts are usually used to work with video technology in their daily work (Alastalo et al., 2017, p. 229). This facilitated the interview process since the interviewees most likely were familiar with Teams or other similar video conferencing tools since there were no questions asked when the invitations were sent or problems during the interviews.

In the interview depending on whether the interviewee was interviewed on a customer's role or salesperson's role the correct question framework was chosen. Because the interviews were conducted using focused interview method no interview was the same as the other. Some participants answered longer and more detailed and others were more compact with their responses. The interviews followed the interview framework mostly but based on their answers this method enabled to ask further questions or ad completely new questions in addition to the interview frameworks questions. Sometimes it helps if also the researcher is in the role of an expert but sometimes appearing unaware of the topic can help gathering the information (Alastalo et al., 2017, p. 230). In this study the interviewers had quite a lot of expertise about the topic but in this context, it would be seen as an advantage since knowing the field makes it easier to ask additional questions. Still keeping in mind to give the interviewee enough space to answer the questions.

Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2014) note that in the interviews there is room for mistakes and especially beginners can make mistakes for example if the interviewer does not give the interviewee enough time to answer and instead asks more questions at once or overall proceeds to talk too much even though the main speaker should be the interviewee. Possible mistakes are also if the interviewer does not listen carefully the answers or if they present the questions in a form that is biased i.e., they answer the question by themselves before giving the interviewees an opportunity to think. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2014, p. 124–125.) It can be assumed that the interviews were not conducted perfectly and therefore some of these mistakes were made in some of the interviews. The more interviews were made the better-quality interviews were conducted since the process allowed the interviewer to recognize similarities in their answers which made it easier to ask more detailed information if needed. Also, it is good to acknowledge that there were several people making the interviews and therefore the quality can vary between the interviews. Yet to keep in mind that also the interviewee and the whole interview situation affect a lot to the quality.

The interviews transcribed for this were transcribed using Microsoft Words transcribing feature. It works by uploading the video recording to word and it automatically writes the lines of the interviewer and interviewee into a document. The transcripts then had to be red trough carefully to fix grammar errors and inaccuracies with the help of the recordings. Ruusuvuori and Nikander (2017) note that transcribing the interviews cannot be perfect even if there is video recordings and notes. Transcription is important first step of the analysis and when making the analysis it would be good to check the original recordings of the interviews since the transcription acts only as notes from the actual event. It is also important to keep in mind that the researcher has done some interpretation already in the transcription process. They emphasize that the researcher's job is to pay attention to how precise the transcriptions are to maintain them reliable as possible. (Ruusuvuori & Nikander, 2017, p. 437–438.) The aim was to do this step as accurate as possible also because the same transcriptions were then uploaded to Lähtevänojas research materials with the video recordings. As Ruusuvuori and Nikander (2017, p. 438) note transcription programs can help a lot in the transcription process but the transcriptions can also be bought from outsourced service provider. For the interviews I conducted the Microsoft Word helped a lot. Lähtevänojas transcripts of the interviews were outsourced.

Ruusuvuori and Nikander (2017, p. 438) state that the data is anonymized in the transcription process. That means that the information that could be used to identify the participants e.g., name, job and street names are changed. Although in this study the company names were not included in the study the information about their job titles and industries of the companies were used to describe the backgrounds of the interviewees. This step was important to do since otherwise the answers from the interviewees might not have been so comprehensive as the interviewees are more willing to answer without their or their company names. According to Ruusuvuori and Nikander (2017, p. 437) it is not possible to make a perfect translation of the transcriptions from one language to another. Most of the interviews and transcriptions were originally in Finnish and then after the analysis was done the results were translated to English. That way the analysis was more reliable since it was done with the original language of the interviews and therefore the possibility of chances in meanings was minimized.

First the transcriptions from the customers interviews were analyzed. To complete the work ATLAS.ti 22 version 22.2.5.0 was used. The coding process was completed in three rounds. After about half of the data were coded many new codes were not added. Already in midway of the first coding where the simplified expressions were found, it could be seen that some of the initial codes could be irrelevant or unnecessary when answering to the research questions. Some of the initial codes were picked based on one single quote but most of them were repeated in many interviews. When combining the subcategories, it was clear that a few of the codes were irrelevant and therefore those were deleted. Also, when forming the subcategories and main categories some of their names were changed into more descriptive names. One bigger change along the process was when at first the salespersons competence was a main category at first but then moved under the co-learning as a subcategory. Salespersons data coding followed the same strategy. At first the initial coding was found from the transcribed data and then the codes were categorized. Some changes were done along the process for example the main category of providing content was detached from the co-learning category. After the coding process the figures of the findings were drawn and the findings were written.

4 FINDINGS

This chapter includes a short overview of the interviewees and presents the findings of the empirical part of this study answering to the second research question. The results are divided into findings from the customers interviews, salespersons interviews and lastly combined the two as a summary of the findings.

4.1 An overview of the interviewees

This chapter covers background information of all the 26 interviews and interviewees whose transcribed interviews are used in the qualitative research of this study. Some of the information is divided by the role of salesperson and customer because then we can see if the groups include people from similar background or not or if there is something that should be taken into consideration in the results. This also gives an overall view of the interviewed people and can increase reliability of this study since KIBS include a lot of variation, it is important to understand what is behind of the results and where the data is collected.

The industries (Table 3) are divided based on the current employer of the interviewees and therefore it does not consider the possible experiences that the interviewees have gained before. More specifically the industries where we divide the interviewees employer firms are IT solutions and services, coaching and consultation services, stationery and other office supplies, restaurant, party and spa services, manufacturing of lifting and moving equipment, construction and renovation services, car dealership, marketing service and forest industry. Most of the participants work on a company that takes place in the IT field in fact 16 of the 26 interviewees are IT firms which means that 10 interviewees work in other fields. Also, when looking at the salespersons and customers separately we can see that IT solutions and services are the majority.

TABLE 3 Industries of the firms where the interviewees work

	Salespersons	Customers
IT solutions and services	8	8
Coaching & consultation services		2
Stationery and other office supplies		2
Restaurant, party, and spa services		1
Manufacturing of lifting and moving equipment		1
Construction and renovation services		1
Car dealership services	1	
Forest industry	2	

Overall, the interviewees positions were high in the companies they work meaning they are in a lead position and/or specialists in their own area. Their roles included CEO, COO, CFO or Account Executive, Head of IT Services, Head of Sales or Sales Manager, Vice President, Head of Marketing or Marketing Manager, Restaurant Manager, Partner, Business Development Manager or Business Manager, Entrepreneur, Founder, Head of Product and Forest Specialist (Table 4). Some of them had more than one role but the table includes only one role per interviewee. If there was more than one option, then the more relevant role based on a) what the interviewee said their role is more or b) what role suits the best to the role of "salesman" or "customer" is chosen. Some of the categories are combined because the roles are similar, so it is easier to interpret different positions and the background of all the interviewees. Although the purpose of this is only to provide an overview so it is good to keep in mind that even though the roles are categorized the salespersons will probably have similar tasks with each other and similarly despite the job titles also the customers most likely share similar tasks with other customers because they are either selling or buying KIBS.

TABLE 4 Positions of the interviewees

	Salespersons	Customers
CEO	3	1
COO		1
CFO or Account Executive	1	1
Head of IT services		1
Head of Sales or Sales Manager	2	2
Vice President		1
Head of marketing or marketing manager		3
Restaurant Manager		1
Partner	2	
Business Development Manager or Business Manager	1	2
Entrepreneur		1
Founder		1
Forest Specialist	2	

The services that the interviewees are either selling or buying had differences. The interviewees were selling e-commerce solutions, marketing services, IT-systems (CRM, data platform) and business consultation. The interviewees were buying different IT-services, marketing services, and consultation. Naturally these are connected to their firm's industry and/or their positions. Some of them had contacts to many different services especially in the group of buyers they had bought multiple services that in some cases were completely different services but sometimes similar services to for example change the service provider or get extra help. Some of the sellers were also selling different services but usually they were concentrating on one service or different service packages around the main service.

The duration of the interviews varied from 10 minutes to 38 minutes. The estimated duration was about 30 min. 20 of the interviews were under 30 min and 6 of them over. The average duration of the salespersons' interviews was 25.5 minutes, and the average of customers' interviews was 24.8 minutes. The names of the interviewees are anonymized and therefore the customers are named with the letter "C" and a number from 1-15 (e.g., C2) and the salespersons are named with the letter "S" and a number from 1-11 (e.g., S2).

4.2 Findings of customers' data analysis

In this subchapter se go through the findings of the customer data analysis. The results were coded from the customers interview data. The results are depicted in the figure 10. In the left the unifying concept that combines all the second and third level categories is value co-creation and co-destruction factors in the educational selling meaning that the following main categories and subcategories are the factors that can enable value co-creation or co-destruction based on the interviews. The five main categories found are 1) continuous cooperation, 2) building trust, 3) mutual interaction, 4) understanding customer's needs and 5) co-learning. Each main category has its own cluster of subcategories that were formed based on the simplified expressions of the quotes from the transcriptions.

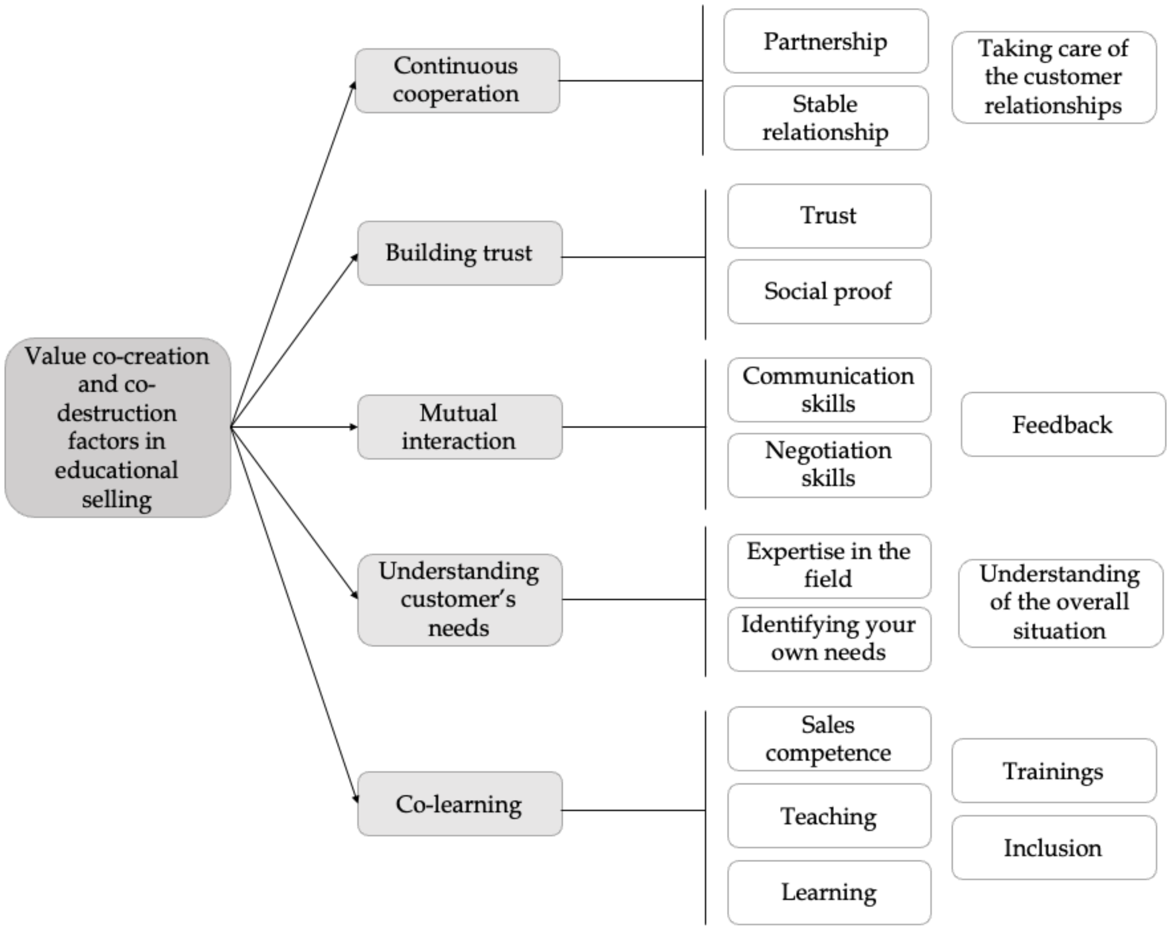

FIGURE 10 Findings of the customer's data analysis

4.2.1 Continuous cooperation: Customer's perspective

The main category continuous cooperation includes three subcategories 1) partnership, 2) stable relationship and. 3) takin care of the customer relationships. Partnership is an important part of the cooperation between the salesperson and customer. The partnership is something that does not necessarily form between the actors but is something that if functioning well would benefit both. When creating partnerships, it is important that the parties get along well.

> And one thing you must remember is that me as a buyer I do not buy the company AB... or when I was a salesperson the customer did not buy the company, they bought me because the trust is formed between the people not the companies. (C4)

> It is almost the same than recruiting people when choosing the partner... Nowadays the goal is to have long term customer relationships that lasts years or even decades. (C6)

Stable and continuous relationship creates the value for both. Both parties but especially the salesperson must think ahead and show how the cooperation could be continued after the first purchase or when a project coming to an end. The cooperation can continue e.g., weekly, or monthly meetings. When the relationship is built, and one project is finished then it gets easier to sell more services.

> The salesperson sparks the interest and shows commitment to long-term and not just selling one service but selling more after that and by that creating a logical continuum for working together. (C12)

Taking care of the customer relationships means that the cooperation continues even after the implementation which is usually the most intensive phase for cooperation. This usually includes named contact person from the service provider who takes care of that everything goes well in the cooperation. When a whole function is outsourced the importance of cooperation is emphasized.

> If the communication is continuing e.g., monthly or every other month and they keep conveniently close then I feel it is not annoying repetition but instead, they have something important to say when being in touch. (C9)

4.2.2 Building trust: Customer's perspective

This main category is called building trust. It includes two subcategories trust and social proof. Trust between the parties is an essential part of the partnerships between the salesperson and customer.

> Of course, the most important thing is to have a trustworthy provider so that we could work as partners. (C3)

To get the trust of a customer requires continuous work and the sales situation needs the trust to succeed. The customer might not buy the whole service at once. They can buy the simplest version first but when they see it works, they might buy more modules. If the salesperson does not communicate transparently the trust can be weakened. One of the most important aspects to gain trust is that the salesperson is honest.

> I am usually quite alone with the service provider so the commitment and trust must be built. (C15)

> Let's say the more open they tell about the topic or things the more trustful image the customer gets. (C10)

> We have one partner who told the reality right from the start what cannot be done and what to focus on the most. They have been transparent and realistic which means that the collaboration starts the best way possible. (C6)

The other important thing that helps building the trust is social proof. The customer wants to know what similar problems the service provider has helped with and the experiences of other customers of the same provider. The customers wish that the salesperson would offer a reference case as close as possible to what they need.

> Whatever service you are buying the results are interesting, what advantage we can get. In this kind of cases, it helps a lot if the salesperson can tell what they have done in different cases for their current customers, what benefits they have gained? (C11)

> Well of course one good is social proof i.e., reference because with that they can proof that this is trusted and working service what they are selling and that this and this customer has bought the same service from us. (C13)

4.2.3 Mutual interaction: Customer's perspective

This main category is called mutual interaction and it contains three subcategories 1) communication skills, 2) negotiation skills and 3) feedback. The communication in the educational selling goes both ways e.g., it is not just the salesperson making the sales speech.

Clear, open, and continuous communication is the base for successful interaction. The communication can occur through different ways for example messages and meetings. If the communication is not clear enough there can be misunderstandings that can co-destruct value. It is also good to remember who you are communicating with e.g., some customers might want to go straight to the point and some like to get to know each other more before starting.

> We have continuous messaging through a platform, and I write there things and they comment them so it is very communicative. They say do this or this could work well in this way. (C4)

> Yeah communication. There have been some mistakes that we have assumed that some things are included into that and then for our surprise they have not been there. (C6)

Negotiation skills are an important part of the interaction. The parties must negotiate a result that satisfies both parties. For example, the price must be correct when compared to the content of the contract.

> To buy you need negotiation skills. You must be able to negotiate the prices and contracts. (C3)

Giving and reacting to feedback is a part of the mutual interaction. The customer can have requests or ideas that could help them, and it is possible that the service provider will make the changes especially if the customer organization is an important customer. Then value is co-created but it is also possible that they will not make the improvements and the customer needs to change the service. Then value can be co-destructed.

> We have this one product we have been using for 2 years and we asked the provider certain extra features...and they did not want to implement them. Then we decided to change the provider. (C6)

4.2.4 Understanding the customers' needs: Customer's perspective

The importance of understanding the customers' needs showed clearly in the materials. This main category includes three subcategories 1) expertise in the field, 2) identifying your own needs and 3) understanding of the overall situation.

The first subcategory of the cluster is expertise in the field what means that in addition to their own business and the need the customer must know what they are going to buy and how it fits into their company and needs. The customer needs to have the skills that enables them to understand their needs and to compare different suppliers to finds the right one for their needs. When both the customer and the salesperson are on the same page it gives favorable conditions for value co-creation, and it is more likely that the customer makes the right decision of the service they are purchasing.

> Knowledge of the industry is needed so that you can compare with different suppliers, or operators to make purchases, and know what they offer and under what conditions. (C3)

> All those in my team who evaluate the suppliers need diverse skills in ICT... holistic understanding of different business areas is needed. (C6)

> Own vision and content knowledge of that what we are purchasing, and we must be able to ask competitive things… You must be very skillful substantively and know the same area as the service supplier to succeed in utilizing it. (C7)

> I strongly believe that the more you know about what you're buying, the better service you'll get for that matter (C8)

> You must have enough knowhow for the service to really help with your work. (C11)

If the customer does not understand the service that they are buying, then value co-creation can occur. For example, in this customer's story if they would not have understood what is included into good search engine optimization (SEO) there would have been a possibility that the end results would have included co-destruction of the value.

> I was buying SEO services for us from an external service provider to help us in organic search engine discoverability... for example, they offered easy quick profits to get backlinks quickly, but in practice, if it's done according to good principles, it's white hat SEO optimization, so this could have turned into a negative thing. You might get quick results from that, but it's not a long-term solution. (C9)

Although the same level knowledge is not always necessary when outsourcing services, it helps making the decision and understanding and identifying possible risks. The required level of knowledge depends on the service that is being purchased although this does not exclude that it would be beneficial for both parties to understand what is going on. The most important thing is to understand the matter at an adequate level and separate the important knowledge that is going to help with the right purchase decision.

> For example, if we are speaking about technical work and there is an external actor who does everything on their own good competence in guiding that and understanding its risks can be helpful... Outsourcing the things where you can trust the partner's competence you can have less expertise in that area. Of course, there are similar cases, but it is very difficult to generalize or say that everyone must always know the content in the same way that the provider does. But it really depends on that what are you buying. (C7)

> I would argue that it is perhaps the most difficult thing here, as with these systems, that no one can be informed about all the possibilities of the systems. So, the most difficult thing in a way is what your own understanding of that matter is and what information the decisions you make are based on. (C2)

The next subcategory identifying your own needs covers the fact that the customer must understand what they need. It is not enough that they can identify the right service for them, but they also must know what purpose it should do for them. It is not enough that the customer identifies the problem they have but they also need to understand what type of a solution would be suitable for the problem. Otherwise, there is a possibility that the cooperation will not be as helpful as it could be. Of course, there might have to be compromises but the need should be understood so well that the service covers the large majority of the wanted outcome. It also helps to understand the quality of the service and the skills of the provider who they are cooperating with.

> Everything starts with identifying the need that we need outside expertise or service. (C11)

> Well, perhaps the most common skill, which I think is related to buying all services, is that you know exactly what you want to buy, and in a way, you can't go like "we don't know what we're doing, can you do this for us", then it's pretty bad situation. It should be more like "We need help now with this kind of thing"... so that you yourself know what you're buying, because if you don't know what you're buying, then the service provider will take advantage of it... If you don't have enough expertise to question it, then something completely pointless that doesn't necessarily lead in the right direction. (C14)

> Well, of course, it's probably a bit the same everywhere, that first you need to know what really and for what need it is being sought, what the real need is there, because no one wants to pay for something that is not useful, so that's the efficiency it has to be quite clear, i.e. the need and the benefit, then when they meet at least 80 percent so... then it's worth it, then it's worth it to start the cooperation. (C4)

> I personally feel that you need to know, in a way, what your own problems are in that topic and understand, why that service has been acquired... It generally helps to analyze what kind of level and quality of service we get at that stage and what kind of results we can expect. (C9)

When the customer understands their own needs well, they can communicate them effectively for the service provider. That helps the salesperson to answer the need and understand the customers situation better. Though it is not said that the salesperson cannot help the customer to understand their needs better.

> What I personally do is that I make this kind of request for proposal document where the requirements are described and in a sense that gives the instructions for the service provider to make the answer. It tells what things are important and it gives as clear outlines as possible for the provider for them to do a good offer. (C7)

The third subcategory is understanding the overall situation. This subcategory focuses on to the importance that the salesperson understands what the customer needs during the whole educational selling process. It includes the importance of the right pricing, customer's purchase process and mapping the customers needs. When the purchases are smaller the process is usually quite fast and straight forward but if the purchase more expensive the process lasts longer and involves more people from the customer's site. The salesperson should understand the customers current stage but also see where they could be in the future to optimize their service offering. There are also salespeople who have not studied the company they are selling for.

> The salesperson needs to get to know the customer's business and identify the factors that make the customer want to change the system... To offer continuity to the customer... Identifying what stage they are now and where they could be in 3 years. (C1)

> Every day there are salespeople who are trying to sell me all kinds of things through email and phone... They are trying the ice with a stick and some of them have studied our backgrounds... but there are also many foreign sellers who do not necessarily know what we do. (C3)

The budget should be discussed on since it benefits both parties to know in what price range they are. There is a need to understand the customer's overall situation because it affects to the way customers can implement the new mode of operation. The service provides must understand the bigger picture to know at which point all the matters are good to go through. Also, they need to understand the day-to-day problems the customer is fighting for first and only after that they can start to build new into the organization.

> The first thing is that knowledge cannot be transferred into the customers' heads at once. It must be done in steps. (C6)

> The customer's purchase process needs to be understood well, how they are doing their decisions, and at what stage can be delivered the most value. (C8)

4.2.5 Co-learning: Customer's perspective

This main category is named co-learning and it includes five subcategories 1) sales competence, 2) teaching, 3) learning, 4) trainings and 5) inclusion. For co-learning to succeed the salesperson must be competent enough to tell what they are offering and why. The salesperson must lead the cooperation and take more control over it. At the same time, they must read the customers readiness and not to rush too far ahead even though it is good if the salesperson is more ahead than the customer. The salesperson is responsible for clear instructions of what is going to happen and what the customer is paying for. Customers also wish that the salesperson would be proactive and offer the solutions to the problems they have noticed. The salesperson should keep in mind that the customer might think they know what they need but in fact it is not the best solution.

> What might be forgot by the companies is the timeline. The salesperson might already be going here but the customer is only here. (C4)

> That you have the best practices and tips these kinds of things are very valuable. (C7)

In most cases teaching how to use the service in a demo or training is a part of the service and the customers experience that positively since if they do not know how to use them it takes time and created frustration. Also, the level of what to teach and at what stage of the educational selling is crucial. If the salesperson gives the customer all the answers before the purchase decision, then they no longer have the reason to buy the service.

> ...that the customer is taught at the same time the concrete things are made... I do not want to outsource but I want that they teach me. (C4)

It is important that the trainings are high quality and that the ones participating would also listen. The teaching should happen in several separate trainings since the customer will not be able to remember all if there is too much new information at once. Some service providers and customer organizations have online learning environment where the customer can do different trainings. The materials that the customer gets after the trainings are important.

> Good trainings can go to waste... These things should implement into people's daily work... really create the steps of what to do and how. (C4)

It is important that the customer learns to benefit from the services as much as possible. The customer organization must be open to change and develop their routines. The organization should learn how to utilize the services as much as possible since usually only some functionalities are used, and many useful functionalities stay unused. If the customer does not learn the benefit, it is possible that they do not continue using that. When learning succeeds both parties benefit from that. They co-innovate and design the service package to fit into the customer's needs.

> The learning journey when we are decided to go for it that demands patience from the team because they must learn new things all the time. (C2)

> In growth companies, learning is in the DNA one way or another. If learning is not a part of the business, they will not make it. (C5)

Inclusion contains including other people from the service provider organization and customer organization in addition to the salesperson and customers representative. The customer representative takes other people from their organization to the planning and trainings when they think it would benefit them. The salesperson should also consult and use the knowledge of the specialists in the trainings and service design.

> The service provider could also include several people because I notice that in many cases the salesperson is a different person than the one who implements that in practice. E.g., a workshop where the service providers specialists would attend and more people from our organization could be included that way the results would be even better.

> In many cases the consultative ones who are providing or selling the service are salespersons and then it will stay too much on the surface level to find the real benefit from there. (C10)

4.3 Findings of salespersons data analysis

In this subchapter we go through the results of the salespersons data analysis. The results are shown in the figure 11. From left to right the unifying concept is the value co-creation and co-destruction factors in educational selling. Six main categories 1) continuous cooperation, 2) building trust, 3) mutual interaction, 4) understanding customer's needs, 5) co-learning, and 6) providing content were found. Each main category has two to five subcategories that were found from the simplified expressions of the salespersons transcribed interviews.

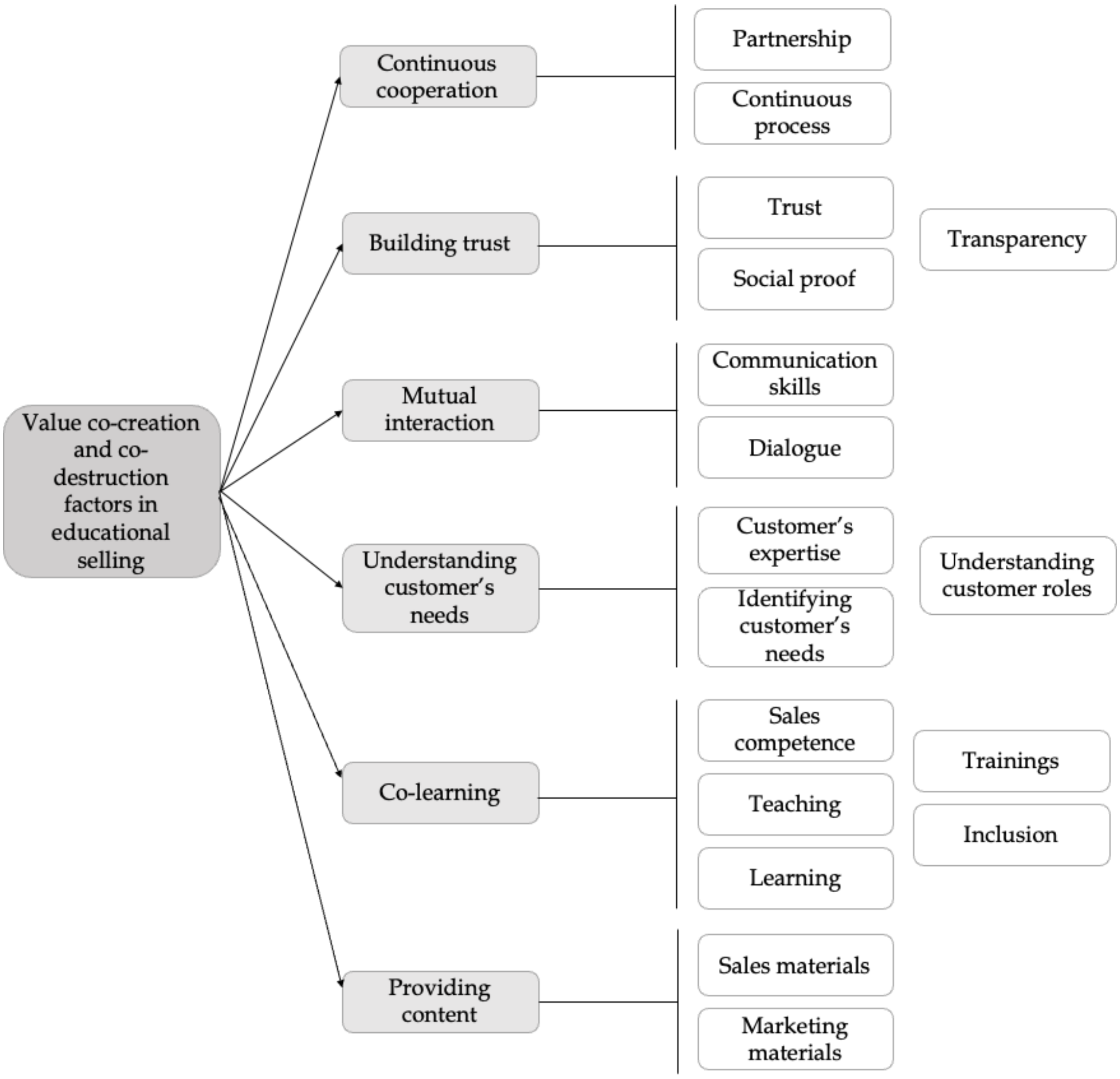

FIGURE 11 Findings of the salesperson's data analysis

4.3.1 Continuous cooperation: Salesperson's perspective

The main category continuous cooperation includes two subcategories 1) partnership and 2) continuous process. Partnership is experienced as an important part of the cooperation. Business partnership, further development and going alongside with the customer has a big role in the cooperation. It is not enough that the problem or need is defined and then the solution is implemented and then some training sessions are kept. They are acquiring new customers, but the focus is also on the existing customers helping them and upselling and cross selling services. Partnership is seen as a goal that the salesperson wants to reach. It is also important for the customer to understand the role of the partner.

> Yes, and the educational selling, if you think about it, we have customers with whom we have worked for several years, so in a way it is a continuous process, it does not end there when the customer buys the technology, but we aim to teach how to use it... more efficiently, what else could be done...

> optimize licenses and try to help the customer in many ways to understand the world where they have entered, what path they have taken, that it is long cooperation better said a partnership, than just a customer-supplier relationship. (S3)

> We must create value so that the customer does not want to let go of us and that is the ideal situation. (S2)

The salesperson's goal is to grow the knowledge and skills of the customer during the partnership and to create the cooperation to be a continuous process that builds on top of the past. This means that after the meetings or purchases there is a follow-up where the salesperson is in contact with the customer.

> ...(customer) notices that this was beneficial for them, creating a more stable commercial relationship. (S7)

> ...we can show that now we did these things and changes and that is how much the key metrics improved and that these 10 things should be improved as well and ask if should we fix them too. (S2)

4.3.2 Building trust: Salesperson's perspective

The main category building trust is formed from three subcategories 1) trust, 2) social proof and 3) transparency. Trust is an essential part of working together and to enable educational selling. Both parties must trust each other's, and it is important that the customer feels comfortable enough to share their thoughts. Only after that the customer can be taught. Trust is hard to measure, and one interviewee did question that how we know if the customer's trust is increasing buy teaching.

> ...the customer has the money and the need and we have to get them to trust that we are the right choice to fix their problems... (C3)

> When we can teach the customer and give them an understanding of what are the business benefits then most likely they trust us more and the probability of purchase is growing. (C3)

> Yes, in one way it is also educating and then the trust is created in us when we say that this is the model to do these things and you can get this outcome and you can trust that we have the path where we can create the next development projects. (S2)

> ...in all sales building trust is the key to success. (S3)

If the trust is not formed or it is destroyed, then it is possible that the customer does not continue the cooperation.

> Yes, you can get a better deal by fooling them, but will there be another deal I do not think so. (S7)

Social proof from the cases that the service providing organization has done previously is important tool for the salesperson when building trust with the customer. It shows what results they have reached with other similar customer organizations or how they have fixed similar problems.

> And the case references or stories where it is told what we did for the customer and what the benefits were... when we are approaching a new prospect to have a case or point of view that is resonating for them and tell that in their field we have done these things and reached these results can we discuss more about these. (S4)

Transparency in the cooperation helps to build trust between the actors.

> A good customer who is buying pursues to tell the salesperson the truth about their situation and problems so that it is fast to do the matching if we can add value for them. (S11)

4.3.3 Mutual interaction: Salesperson's perspective

The main category of mutual interaction includes two subcategories 1) communication skills and 2) dialogue. Good communication skills are the base for mutual interaction. The salesperson's communication skills include listening to the customer, visualizing the subject, adapting to the situation, and considering their individual needs. During the interaction the salespersons can find errors in the customers thoughts.

> ...How you listen to people and notice their individual needs...to put it simply the way and ability to communicate with people. (S10)

> First of all, it is asking questions and understanding and kind of the synthesis from that. (S4)

Dialogues and discussions between the actors are important part of the interaction. Some of the customers are more willing to participate in the dialogue and others like to compare two options and decide to purchase the one that is more budget friendly or sounds better instead of having the conversations and learn about finding solutions and how to do things.

> In this model where we operate, we discuss a lot with the customers. (S2)

> At its best, it is conversational the customer may have questions but if we know how it is done then we can find more things that should be answered. (S1)

> This is the dialogue and situational intelligence and realization about what are the best wordings. (S2)

4.3.4 Understanding customer's needs: Salesperson's perspective

The main category of understanding customer's needs includes three subcategories 1) customer's expertise, 2) identifying customer's needs, and 3) understanding customer roles. Understanding the level of customer's expertise is important aspect of understanding what kind of help the customer needs and how to proceed working together. It is also said that the knowledge of the customer is not that essential but more important is that they have some kind of idea of their need. It depends on the customer organization of how skilled the contact person there is. The salespersons have identified that there are roughly three categories of customers those who do not know the basics, those who know something and the ones who think they know everything. It is easier to work and proceed the sales with the customer who already knows something about the solution or topic. The customers that know more than the average will affect to their needs.

> A simple thing that for me is an everyday concept can be (for the customer) a completely new thing. (S7)

> The understanding of their own business must be there. (S5)

> Yes (the customer) needs to know a little about the topic in advance at least the direction where we are going. I would emphasize that all the responsibility cannot be moved to another but even if you buy a certain service you need to have a vision or thought about it. (S1)

> ...Especially if the customer knows much then investigating the details systematically is highlighted extraordinarily. (S1)

Identifying customer's needs is important since they can vary a lot between different customers. Others need more support than the others e.g., if they need to do internal selling in the customer organization. To identify the customer's needs well the salesperson should have some knowledge of the customers business field. It is crucial to understand the needs well so that the next targets for development can be identified. By giving the customer's answers and ideas that correspond their needs the customer gets value. The thing that creates value for the customer can be found in the conversations.

> Every meeting teaches and broadens the understanding... this is strongly human-to-human business even though we are b2b but there are people, and you must understand that every business is different, every company is different, and every team is different. There are different cultures. (S4)

> Of course, product knowledge and market intelligence (are important) ... of what the customers are doing, who are you selling to. (S10)

> The key thing is that we understand the customer's business is especially effective (in sales). (S1)

> ... Providing value for the customer. If the customer leaves every meeting or discussion with the feeling, they learned something new and there were good points compared to that "I do not get anything from this". (S1)

The role of the customer actor's representative is good to notice when trying to understand the customer's needs. For the salesperson it is important to know who makes the decision in the customer organization and how the service can be presented in a way that the person in charge understands the need as well. Also, the need to explain things differently between different customer profiles e.g., in general the marketing specialists and IT-specialists understand different things in different levels, so it is important to fit the service proposition to serve their needs. In addition, it is crucial to identify who are going to buy and who are just coming to listen the tips.

> We must identify how fast the customer actor is able to make the decisions is he the one who identifies (the problem) and gets excited but does not have the power to make the purchase... or is he in a role... to make quick decisions. (S2)

> Often it can be that in the firm e.g., the sales director does not see the need for anything... and then some other employee... can think the opposite. (S4)

4.3.5 Co-learning: Salesperson's perspective

The main category co-learning is formed by five subcategories that are 1) sales competence, 2) teaching, 3) learning, 4) trainings and 5) inclusion. The salesperson needs to have good sales competence to be able to respond the needs of the customer. It is the salespersons responsibility to offer the best solution to the problem or need of the customer. The salesperson must have the ability to perform and lead the situation e.g., calm the customer and move the focus on the essential matters. The salesperson must have also the knowledge about their service so that they can sell more services but as essential is that they acknowledge their limits and do not tell a single customer how to run their business and notice when they need help from someone else.

> I claim that one of the most important elements to succeed is that I can make complicated things simple. (S1)

> Not just who does the selling but also who enables it. (S2)

> ...Educational selling process demands more from the salesperson. They must have a strong level of knowledge compared to the traditional model. (S6)

Teaching the customer has an important role in the salespersons work. They teach the customer to help them understand what investments should be done first. Educational role of the salesperson is significant since they are helping the customer to develop their business. Salespersons do not see themselves fully as teachers but acknowledge the educational role and elements in their sales work.

> There (In the meetings) you can teach the customer things that create value even unselfishly and share the knowledge, so I think that situation has an extremely big effect on the success. (S1)

> Typically, 9 points out of 10 can be done better and the one thing requires the kind of information where we must teach the customer also about what it means that it must be compromised. (S1)

> Maybe the most important thing is that we teach the customer how to spend money smartly. (S1)

Learning and teaching goes both ways. The customers who do not have a lot of knowledge about the topic before the sales process need more time and meetings to fully understand it and be able to present it within their organization. Salespersons learn from each customer case and ideally after every meeting they get something new. The salesperson's motivation affects to how much they are willing to make effort in developing their skills.

> Although we discuss with the customer every other day so who is teaching who? I feel like it goes both ways ... in the same conversation, we must be behind the teacher's desk and the pupil's desk. (S2)

> Every customer has some small and unique things that work and in my opinion in good sales work every time you hear that kind of thing that should be added to your own toolbox so that when there will be another similar case you have a suggestion ready. (S1)

There are trainings about the service for the customer. The trainings can be for example demonstrations or workshops. When the customer is starting to use the service, the trainings are very important because if they don't understand e.g., how to use it the implementation will fail.

> Usually, we try to make a demo that shows how their challenge is solved... we have our own demo environment that is shown to the customer but also there you must be careful because they can focus on unessential things like wrong colors. (S3)

> I claim that the (customers) will remember 10 times better the one who has invested to the training and visualization than that who sends an email or pdf decks. (S1)

Including other people from the customer organization is beneficial. When you have a more complex service it requires multiple people to understand it. Also, the customer actor is a part of creating the solution together with the sales actor. Usually, the customer actor is involving 2-3 people from their organization to make the decisions.

> I think it (educational selling) works the best, if the solution that you're selling is a little bit more complex, it's not as easy to implement, or requires

> larger group of people who are going to use it or get benefit from it and value from it. (S8)

> We have used these kinds of coworking or collaboration tools... to get the customer to participate in creating the solution and that is very effective. (S1)

4.3.6 Providing content for the customer

The sixth main category that was found is providing content. It includes two subcategories 1) sales materials and 2) marketing materials. This main category was found only in the salesperson's materials. Sales materials include the materials that the salesperson provides for the customer as a part of the sales process. The salesperson needs materials to support the sales situation and usually these materials are shared with the customer after the meeting to help them remember what they talked about and make the decision making easier.

> If you do educational selling, meaning that you are teaching your prospect buyer about certain subject, you need to have a good-quality content available… It's not enough if you just talk about something, you need to have something that you can show. (S8)

Marketing materials include all the other materials that the service providing organization has available for the customer to support their decision. These can be for example the company blog, webinars, case studies, and social media posts. These materials are usually related to marketing. The purpose is to train and share the knowledge with people who can relate to the topics that are presented in the materials and get information about the solutions for free. Creating the content can also be a challenge for the service provider organization but it is important since the prospects can find the materials by themselves.

> …Webinars are mostly related to, let's say, either awareness of the problem and the solution or teaching the participants something that they don't know yet. (S8)

> Yeah, that is teaching the blogs are sharing the knowledge it is sharing our information and competence for free to the people. (S4)

> ... We can do educational material, selling, webinars, podcasts, and others where we tell and interview the people... who have had similar big problems and how they have started to solve them, and that way we can train the big mass with very relatable problem cases. (S11)

4.4 Summary of the findings

In the findings of the salespersons and customers interview data there were many similarities and differences. The figure 12 shows in the white all the categories that were found from both the customers and salespersons data, in dark grey the categories that were found only from the salespersons data and in light gray the categories that were found only from the customers data. There was variation mainly in the subcategories. Five of the main categories found were the same but the main category providing content was found only from the salespersons data. These results are further discussed in the next chapter.

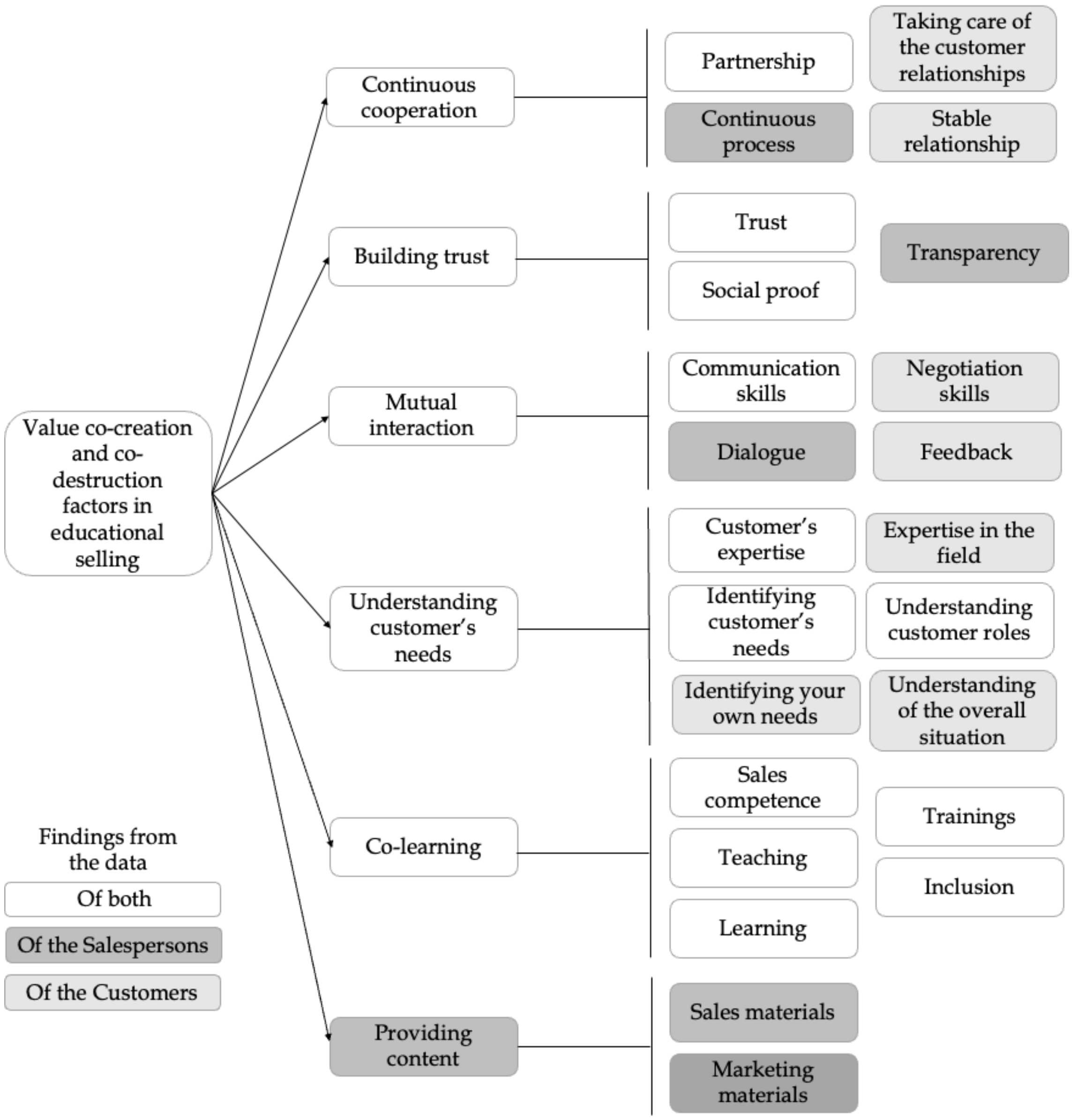

FIGURE 12 Summary of the findings

5 DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the answers to both research questions and reviews the results with the literature. The relation to previous research and implications for research and practice are covered.

5.1 Discussion of educational selling and its relation to value co-creation and co-destruction

This subchapter considers the results of the first research question and its reliability and validity by grounding the results with the theory. The research question is the following.

1. *What is the definition of educational selling? And its relation to value co-creation and value co-destruction?*

As a result, the following definition was formed.

Educational selling is an iterative process that lasts through the whole customer relationship. The value is co-created and co-destructed through co-learning between the sales actors and customer actors. It is based on the idea of partnership that includes continuous interaction and knowledge sharing between the actors towards a shared goal.

This answers to both parts of the question. In this definition value co-creation and co-destruction are essential factors in educational selling. To define educational selling literature from different research fields was combined and analyzed. This creates certain challenges since there is a lot of previous literature where the main points must be recognized. In all these definitions of different concepts common and shared factors were constantly searched and at the end they were found.

When starting to form the theory and definition of the concept at first it was not clear what relation educational selling has with value co-creation and co-destruction. Quickly it became clear that value is crucial part of the customer's and firms' relation. Even though the concept of value quite complicated it is created in the customer experiences (Grönroos & Voima, 2013) and it can be viewed from the organization's and customer's perspectives (Woodruff, 1997). Yet value creation can be one sided, so value co-creation was studied further. In addition, value co-destruction was added to the study because even if the goal was to co-create value negative results are possible (Plé & Cáceres, 2010).

To define educational selling, it needed to be viewed in two parts, first to define what selling means and then the concepts that form educational. One of the key takeaways of selling was that in relational selling two important aspects are to create ongoing buyer-seller relationship and to find out what the customer's needs and wants are (Arli et al., 2018). Also understanding the steps of a selling process is important because in all the steps where the interaction occurs between the actors there is a possibility for value co-creation or co-destruction. One clear link between value creation and selling was the concept of value-based selling. There the mutual perspective of value where the customer's and salesperson's perspective to value was considered (Terho et al., 2012).

What comes to the educational part it was studied through teaching and learning. Teaching includes delivering skills and knowledge and making the opponent to think, understand and reflect the important ideas (Goldenberd, 1993). This is important aspect of teaching since if the salesperson shares knowledge or skills and the customer does not understand or be able to reflect it then the knowledge is not shared in the right level, or they should assist them to think more the matter and what it offers to them. This also goes the other way around if the customer shares something and the salesperson is unable to reflect that to the overall situation then it would need more teaching. This is important because e.g., absence of information and clear expectations are reasons why value co-destruction can occur (Järvi et al., 2018).

Instructional conversations are a form of conversations where the conversations form around a certain topic in an interaction between someone relatively more skilled who possesses more knowledge and someone with relatively less skilled (Goldenbers & Hamann, 1992, Goldenberg, 1993). This is important because many interactions between a salesperson and customer includes meetings where the knowledge is shared in both ways. It can be assumed that in most cases the salesperson knows more about the service, but the customer knows more about their business field and organizational functions. Just as important as teaching is the other side which is learning. There is no point of teaching things is the opponent does not get anything of it.

That is why co-learning is one of the key factors of educational selling. In co-learning teaching and learning occur hand in hand and the key is that the parties are going towards the same goal that the knowledge and wisdom collected supports (Brantmeier, 2013). In a partnership they share a common goal and reaching the goal co-crates value. An important link between the educational part of the concept and value was that the learning process is a part of a value creation process (Leclerq et al., 2016). This strengthens the connection between teaching, learning, and creating value. Co-learning and instructional conversations bring the interaction into the equation and that is one key factor of enabling value co-creation or co-destruction.

The definition is partially based on the main elements of constructivist learning depicted in the figure 5 (Järvinen, 2011). This view crystallizes the importance of mutual interaction between individuals in learning. It is in the center of the definition of educational selling because without the interaction co-learning, value co-creation or co-destruction cannot form. The figures 6 and 7 depicts the process in more detail and highlights the key steps and factors of educational selling. There the importance of value co-creation and co-destruction and co-learning are shown. Even though the figure 7 depict the process in steps and phases that happen one after the other the process could also be seen as cycles. That is because the interaction lasts though the relationship and during that they learn and gather knowledge.

There can be several educational selling processes going at the same time between the same actors e.g., if they are buying two different services from the same service provider. When the deal is closed, and everything goes on well then, the cycle starts over again. This time since they are already familiar with each other some steps can be skipped. It is also possible to go steps backwards if that is necessary. Also depending on the partnership these cycles after the first one might take time. However, it is good to remember that if the goal is to have a long-term partnership it is possible that there will be a need for more services or modifying the current service model.

In the end the relation between value co-creation and co-destruction and educational selling is linked straight to the definition of educational selling since in the result value co-creation and co-destruction are part of it. In the definition salesperson was changed to sales actors and customer to customer actors (figure 6). This is because there might be several people participating in the educational selling from both customer and service providing organizations. The interaction where value is co-created and co-destructed forms between these actors since the people in the actors represent one of the two sides of co-learning in educational selling.

Compared to the previously defined selling concepts value-based selling, consultative selling and solution selling, educational selling offers a slightly more extensive perspective for selling where value creation and knowledge sharing are in the center. Therefore, educational selling can be seen as an umbrella term for the other selling concepts mentioned. Overall, the definition of educational selling supports the previously known connections between these concepts and adds a new level to the selling concepts meaning that educational selling contains the main characteristics of value-based selling, consultative selling and solution selling. Because in the modern business world long partnerships, value, and sharing knowledge are the key it would be beneficial to utilize educational selling to achieve the maximal benefits for both actors.

5.2 Value co-creation and co-destruction factors in educational selling

This subchapter discusses the results of the second research question and its reliability and validity by binding the results with the theory. The research question is the following.

2. *How do value co-creation and co-destruction emerge in the educational selling of knowledge-intensive business services (KIBS)?*

Once the concept of educational selling was formed it was studied in the context of KIBS from the customers perspective and salespersons perspective. First KIBS was defined and what is interesting for this study is that a part of the nature of KIBS is that they need more interaction between the service provider and customer than other services (Miles et al., 1995). The importance of knowledge (e.g., Miles et al. 1995, Camacho & Rodriguez, 2008) and learning in the relationships has been recognized as an important part of KIBS (Kohtamäki & Partanen, 2016). Relationship learning is also one value co-creation enabler (Kohtamäki & Partanen, 2016) and it is essential that also the customer has an active role (Gallouj & Weinstein, 1997).

Findings of the customers perspective recognized that 1) continuous cooperation, 2) building trust, 3) mutual interaction, 4) understanding customer's needs and 5) co-learning are factors where value co-creation or co-destruction can occur in educational selling. From the salespersons perspective the same five value co-creation and co-destruction factors were found 1) continuous cooperation, 2) building trust, 3) mutual interaction, 4) understanding customer's needs and 5) co-learning and lastly 6) providing content that was only found from the salespersons data. Depending on the perspective these factors include a variety of elements that form the factors (see figure 23).

Cooperation is seen as an important part of learning for adults (Mahan & Stain, 2014). Firstly, inside the continuous cooperation, a partnership was identified as an enabler for value co-creation and co-destruction from both the salesperson's and customer's perspective. Buyer and seller relationships have been a part of business since trading different goods and services started (Wilson, 1995). Partnership is seen as something that creates value for both parties and they both actively participate in the cooperation. Strategic partnerships where the knowledge can be exchanged have been an important part of business for decades (Mowery et al., 1996) and partners must provide value throughout the relationship. Because of that partnerships are seen more valuable than regular service provider customer relationship. Strategic relationships are an essential part of the business-to-business relationships (Wilson, 1995). Working partnership and cooperation should be a win-win situation for both actors but of course the partnership status is not reached in every cooperation which can destruct the possible value. The collaboration between KIBS and manufacturing firms is beneficial and can be described as symbiotic relationship (Liu et al., 2019).

The subcategories stable relationship and taking care of the customer relationship that were found from the customer's data and continuous process from the salespersons data have many similarities. The key point of these is that the cooperation is continuous and does not stop right after the purchase. It is essential because with regular e.g., monthly meetings both actors can continue creating value. This means that the customer cannot be forgotten after they have made their purchase. Both actors walk the path together. Value co-creation is built in joint processes between actors (Leclercq et al., 2016). The concept of educational selling in this study is seen as a continuous process and therefore continuity between the actors is essential part of the value co-creation and co-destruction in it.

Also, it takes time to build the relationship and learn from each other so when the cooperation continues for a longer period the knowledge of both parties is increasing and that makes working together easier. This might also create negative effects. In good long-lasting relationships opportunistic behavior where the service provider is not delivering the service on time may occur (Chowdhury, Gruber & Zolkiewski, 2016). Yet if this happens the cooperation is not working ideally and therefore it can be assumed that this is not the desired outcome for a long-term cooperation. Still, it is important to acknowledge that when the cooperation continues for a long time and the actors are familiar with each other it does not mean that the relationship could be taken for granted or that it would be less worthy of an attention than some newer partners.

Without trust it is hard to create a relationship where value co-creation occurs. Brand trust is a part of customer motivation which can lead to value co-creation (Merz et al., 2018). Especially for customers it was important to have social proof that show that their services are trusted by other customers as well. That was perceived as an important tool of creating trust also for the salespersons. The trust of a customer must be earned and once the trust is gained the customer is more likely to buy more services. Trust is a key factor for service providers since they sell promises and not tangible goods (Séto-Pamies, 2012). Reference stories help to build credibility (Töytäri & Rajala, 2015).

In the salespersons materials transparency was highlighted but the customers mentioned that as well. When they speak the truth both ways and do not hide things even if they were unpleasant, it will create trust and in the long run that will enable value co-creation. On the other hand, if the other party is not trusted enough to share the knowledge the value can be co-destructed. In the selling process creating trust is essential since otherwise the customer might not share all the information that will benefit both later (Töytäri & Rajala, 2015). If there is not enough information or it is missing it can lead to value co-destruction (Järvi et al., 2018). In the findings it was noted that trust is not formed between the companies it is the people who create the trust between them. This is good viewpoint to look at building trust since the sales actors are usually the first people who are in contact with the customer.

Insufficient level of trust is recognized as a reason for value co-destruction to occur since without it affect to sharing the right information (Järvi et al., 2018). Sharing the right knowledge (i.e., teaching and learning) is experienced to have a positive impact to forming trust and on the other hand e.g., lying or not telling the whole truth can co-destruct the value. The customers experienced that honesty is important factor when creating trust. Wilson (1995) state that trust-based relationships are not as common in the business-to-business world where they tend to be more strategic. Though that does not mean that trust would not be an important part of the strategic relationships.

From the customers data three themes communication skills, negotiating skills and feedback surfaced and was combined under mutual interaction. The salespersons point of view was slightly different and in addition to communication skills dialogue was found to be another part of mutual interaction. Good communication skills are a requirement in successful interaction. Interaction is important when the value proposition is formed since in most cases both parties affect to that (Töytäri & Rajala, 2015). In the findings it was recognized that if the communication does not work it can destruct the value. Misunderstandings can result to value co-destruction (Järvi et al., 2018). It is important to have good communication skills to avoid unnecessary negative outcomes. With clear communication where both are aware what is happening now and, in the future, and why value co-creation can occur.

In value co-creation the value forms in the networks of interaction (Vargo et al., 2008) and between a customer and service provider (Grönroos, 2008) though the line between customer and service provider is fading (Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014). Yet from value co-creation perspective in educational selling the differences between roles are little. Grönroos and Voima (2013) supports the view that value is co-created in the interaction of two parties. This means that mutual interaction has an important role in value co-creation and co-destruction in business. Also value co-destruction occurs in the interactions (Plé & Cáceres, 2010). Though value co-destruction can happen in the interactions it can also occur before or after the interaction (Järvi et al., 2018).

Selling can be defined as interaction and relationship of the parties where the service can be traded for service (Hartman et al., 2018). Engaged interaction is a part of the buying centered approach of selling (Arli et al., 2018). Instructional conversations occur in the interaction of someone relatively more skilled and knowing and someone relatively less skilled (Goldenberg & Hamann, 1992). It contains instructional and conversational elements (Goldenberg, 1993) like the meeting lead by the salesperson. Collaborative learning occurs in the interaction of pairs or groups where they share knowledge (Trongtorsak et al., 2021).

That is why negotiation skills, giving and reacting to feedback and dialogue are important parts of mutual interaction. With good negotiation skills it is possible to end up with a deal that benefits both parties. This is important because e.g., the price is usually something that is negotiated. Price affects to how value is perceived (Zeithaml, 1988). When the customer gives feedback for the service provider e.g., request for new functionalities that happens through interaction.

The way the service provider answers to that feedback determines whether the value is co-created or not. The existence of dialogue is essential part of mutual interaction since without the actual conversations that enables the parties to hear the other party's thoughts the value would be difficult to co-create.

Understanding what the customer needs enables value co-creation. It is important to know and recognize what the customer needs (e.g., Arli et al., 2018, Moncrief & Marshall, 2005). The salespersons responsibility is also to recognize if there is room for improvements (Töytäri et al., 2011). From the customers perspective understanding the customer's need includes the salesperson's expertise in their own business are and customer's business area, customers' ability to recognize their own need and that both parties understand the overall situation of what the need is, how it is solved, and why they chose that certain plan. If the customer does not know what is happening in their own business, it is difficult for the salesperson to try to understand how they can help the customer. The salesperson must have enough knowledge and skills to answer the needs of the customer or else value co-creation can be very difficult.

It is good to notice that the salespersons who consider value need different skills than in the traditional selling (Töytäri et al., 2011). In the educational selling model, the pedagogy is placed into the sales actor's side of the process since the salesperson even though the salesperson generally has more knowledge, and they lead the selling. A part of pedagogical content knowledge is that the person who is teaching understands the knowledge level of the other party and explains the things at a suitable level (Shulman, 1986). Yet it is theoretically possible that the customer is more skilled. If it is like that there is a bigger change for value co-destruction since the assumption usually is that the salesperson has more knowledge about the topic. From the salesperson's perspective it is crucial to understand how skilled the customer is to communicate and plan the service in a way that suits for the customer. It might also be easier to proceed with the customer that already knows the context well. The salesperson must know what the customer needs (Töytäri et al., 2011).

Customers also need to understand the service that they are buying in a certain level meaning that they do not have to be experts in that but to understand how it is going to help them. It also helps a lot if the customer recognizes their need, then it is possible to communicate the exact need to the service provider and that will ease the process. On the other hand, the recognition of the need can come first from the salesperson but nonetheless it is important that the customer recognizes that as well. The salespersons need to understand the customers overall situation because that can affect e.g., to how long it takes for the customer to make the purchase decision. It is good to notice that if the customer needs to be taught a lot it can take time for them to process the new information. It is good to notice that identifying the customer's needs can take many meetings (Moncrief & Marshall, 2005).

From the salesperson's perspective the salespersons responsibility to identify and understand the role of the customer in the customer organization was an important point of view. In most cases people working in different positions need to be approached in a slightly different way. That is e.g., because sometimes the customer actor representative who is participating in the sales meeting might not have the authority to make the purchase decision. Therefore, the customer might need different things from the salesperson depending on what role they are in. So even though the problem or challenge is the same as another customer's the way how they proceed to solve it can be different.

Learning and teaching can occur in both ways in the customer salesperson relationship meaning that co-learning like value co-creation takes place in the interactions. In co-learning sales competence, teaching, learning, trainings, and inclusion were identified from both the salespersons and customers data. The salesperson must have enough knowledge of the service they are selling and skills that are needed in the sales situation e.g., performing skills and situational awareness. They must provide clear instructions or otherwise the absence of information can co-destruct the value (Järvi et al., 2018). Positive environment and feelings encourage learning and negative feelings do the opposite (Mahan & Stain, 2014). This supports the view that value co-creation and learning has a connection but also value co-destruction and negative feelings correlate. When both get value from new knowledge or skills the circumstances for learning are better.

Teaching can occur in many ways e.g., in demos, workshops or other trainings. Examples, demonstrations and explanations are ways to show how the topic understandably (Shulman, 1986). Different trainings are an essential part of teaching the customer. It helps them to understand how the service works. With teaching knowledge and skills are distributed but it also helps the other party to understand, reflect and think the topic (Goldenberg, 1993). Even though the salespersons do not see themselves as teachers they acknowledge that they do teach as a part of their role. When teaching it is good to notice that the opponent's level of knowledge may vary. Sometimes it can even be unclear who is teaching who but then they probably both share new knowledge with each other. Combining verbal and visual presentation supports learning (Levey, 2021). It is important to help the other party to gain information that they can use in practice together with their already existing experience (Mahan & Stain, 2014). The teaching should focus on the things the other party can benefit related to the service they are selling or buying.

Modern way to look at the customers role is that they are value co-creators and because of that customer learning as a part of the customer experience is extremely important (Kim & Yim, 2020). Like in a classroom also the customers can be different learners (Levey, 2021) and that should be taken into consideration when teaching them. The findings present that in educational selling both actors learn from each other's. Collaborative learning occurs when pairs or groups share knowledge in interaction with each other (Trongtorsak et al., 2021). Customers need to learn how they should change their ways. Sometimes a new service does not need a lot of changes but when new whether it is new information or service is implemented into the organization, they need to be open to learn and change their ways of working. Otherwise, the full value cannot be reached, and it can even lead to value co-destruction. To learn it is essential to have the motivation to learn and collaborative learning (Chiang et al., 2017). Learning is seen as an active knowledge construction more than adapting the current knowledge (Miettinen, 2000).

Co-learning between other members of the customer and sales actor's organizations is something that should be noted. In co-learning the two actors are going together towards the same goal with teaching and learning alternately (Brantmeier, 2013). In many cases along the process there will be other people involved from their teams or other teams if they need help explaining or sharing some specific knowledge or if they need someone to learn something. Then the "extra" people will be involved to the educational selling that is ongoing between the actors. This involving can create a possibility for value co-creation but there is always also the risk for value co-destruction when more people are involved. That is why the people who are involved should have a purpose why they are participating. Otherwise, the risk for value co-destruction increases since the possibility for e.g., mistakes and insufficient information grows.

The value co-creation and co-destruction factor providing content was found from the salesperson's materials. The same topics were mentioned in the customer's materials as well, but they did not stand out so clearly. This covers the materials that the salesperson and their organization is providing. It is divided into sales materials and marketing materials since they are used slightly differently even though their purpose is similar. Visual representation is recognized as an important part of the customers learning (Levey, 2021). The prepared materials that are needed in the sales meeting are an important part of the sales process (Moncrief & Marshall, 2005). Sales materials covers the materials that are the materials that are directly used in the sales situations and usually personalized for the needs of the customer. Marketing materials on the other hand covers all the general informative materials that are directed to potential customers e.g., blogs, webinars, podcasts, and social media posts. The customers can initiate or direct the learning activities by themselves and use the recourses provided to them (Hibbert et al., 2012).

To sum up these six factors answer to the question how value co-creation and co-destruction emerge in educational selling but also guide how value can be co-created or co-destructed. The factors describe the important aspects of the selling process form both the customers and salespersons perspective where the value can be co-created or co-destructed. The factors include multiple enablers for value co-creation and co-destruction to occur in the educational selling process. Table 5 summarize the value co-creation and co-destruction factors that were found from the empirical part of the study supported by the previous studies. This table shows how value co-creation and co-destruction can be formed inside the recognized value co-creation and co-destruction factors. Figure 12 specifies the factors explained in this table. However, these factors all are individual observations but in terms of the overall picture it is important to promote all of these in educational selling.

TABLE 5 The factors that enable value co-creation and co-destruction in educational selling

The factors	Value co-creation	Value co-destruction
Continuous co-operation	Strategic long-term partnerships	Opportunistic behavior (Chowdhury et al., 2016)
	Collaboration continues after the purchase	It takes time to build the relationship
	Regular meetings	Cooperation stops
Building trust	Social proof of the service	Breaking the trust
	Transparency and telling the truth	Insufficient level of trust
Mutual interaction	Informative and clear communication, conversations, and dialogue	Misunderstandings and unclear communication
	Successful negotiation and feedback	Not reacting to other actor's wishes or questions
Understanding customer's needs	Salesperson and customer understand what the best service or solution for the issue is	Without knowing the field, it is hard to understand the need and that can lead to wrong solution
	Both parties must understand the topic/business area at least in some level	Without mutual understanding the service might not meet the needs
Co-learning	Both learn from each other	Lack of information
Providing content	Customer can learn from the sales and marketing materials on their own time and share them with their organization	From the freely accessible materials customer can compare their problem and solution with others who do not share the same situation

These new elements and factors were studies exploratorily. Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2019) state that exploratory research is suitable when the phenomenon is not sufficiently known, or the problem is not clearly defined. It is a flexible research method where, as new information and understanding increases, new interpretations and directions can be made. They say that "Exploratory study is research that aims to seek new insights into phenomena, to ask questions, and assess the phenomena in a new light." (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 187, 806.)

5.3 Relation to previous research

The concept of educational selling is new and has not been defined before this study so in that respect this study provides new perspective that combines multiple concepts from different fields of study. The concepts and theory that is used to define educational selling and support the results is based on previous literature. Therefore, the previous literature has a major role as background for this study to have something to build on. Some of the phenomenon that are part of this study have found in previous literature as well.

Value from different perspectives has been popular topic among researchers. Value, perceived value and value co-creation and co-destruction is frequently researched from business perspective where the roles of the service provider and customer are reviewed. Value research has identified the roles of customers and organizations as different viewpoint to look at it (Woodruff, 1997). There are many recognized factors which affects to perceived value such as price and quality (Zeithaml, 1988). Especially the concept of value co-creation has an important role in this study. That is because value co-creation is based on the interaction between customers, service providers Grönroos & Voima, 2013), and networks (Leclercq et al., 2016). The connections between value co-creation and customer engagement (Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014, Leclercq et al., 2016) and customer loyalty (Cossío-Silva et al., 2016) have been studied and recognized before.

Saha, Goyal and Jebarajakirthy (2022) have differentiated value co-creation and closely related concepts that are according to them co-production, co-design, and co-innovation. They state that value co-creation is based on value-in-use and there both actors are responsible of the value creation. Co-production, co-design, and co-innovation instead are said to be more value-in-exchange and the responsibility is more on the service provider. (Saha et al., 2022.) Similar division between roles is found in this study as well however in this study co-production, co-design, and co-innovation regardless that the service provider has more responsibility are considered enablers for value co-creation since both actors are participating on the value creation.

The value research has moved from G-D logic to S-D logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2008b) which supports the choice of KIBS since the importance of services compared to products has grown. Leclercq et al. (2016) identified learning process as an underlying process of value co-creation process. It is said that though the reciprocal learning i.e., learning loop the value co-creation opportunities can emerge (Payne et al., 2008). This study supports this view of value co-creation and adds the negative possibility i.e., value co-destruction under discussion. Value co-destruction has not been focused on in the value research as much as value co-creation since value is perceived to be more about the positive outcomes

(Plé, 2017). However, value co-destruction can be viewed through value co-creation since the same things that can be used in a positive light can be used negatively (Plé & Cáceres, 2010).

The connection between learning and value co-creation and co-destruction is researched in previous literature. The customer has an active role in value creation and the value is created for them when there is enough information and skills of how to use the service (Grönroos, 2008). Learning orientation of the salesperson influences greatly to value-based selling (Kienzler et al., 2019). Alnakhli, Inyag and Itani (2021) recognize the role of the salesperson in value co-creation and how it affects to sales performance. According to them the way the salesperson works e.g., how they adapt to the situations and communicate with the customers are enablers for the value co-creation (Alnakhli et al., 2021).

Different theories related to learning and teaching have been studied for decades. For this study one of the key theories was social construction. Edvardsson, Tronvoll, and Gruber (2011) have studied value co-creation from a social construction perspective and suggest that value should be seen as value-in-social-context. In KIBS the supplier-user relationship is important (Miles et al., 1995). Sole and Carlucci (2010) note that compared to manufacturing sectors KIBS and value has not studied enough. KIBS research has identified value co-creation in the processes between the actors (Lessard, 2014). The connection between KIBS, learning and value co-creation has been demonstrated in previous literature. Kallio and Lappalainen (2014) identify learning insights of the service provider and customer interaction in KIBS. They state that the collaboration between the actors creates value and that for the customer iterative collaboration was the best way to create value. They also noted the importance of new skills and competence. (Kallio & Lappalainen, 2014.)

Consultative selling and value-based selling are close concepts to educational selling and have been used in the definition of educational selling. Yet the concepts have differences between them. Educational selling covers both consultative selling and value-based selling since it is wider concept. In consultative selling the salesperson provides information and helps the customer to understand the matter (Hartman et al., 2018). Value-based selling the value creation has identified as a part of sales process (e.g., Terho et al., 2012, Töytäri et al., 2011). Educational selling combines these concepts and even more since there is a difference between consulting and co-learning. The main difference and new point of view compared to consultative selling and value-based selling is that the process last through the whole relationship and that it is based on a reciprocal interaction where value is co-created and co-destructed.

When compared to the theoretical framework (figure 8) table 5 presents more value co-creation and co-destruction factors in educational selling of KIBS. Therefore, the empirical part of this study gives more insight of the factors. Co-learning is mentioned in both figure 8 and table 5. Other factors are slightly different but when looking more closely the table 5 includes more profound view of the factors and includes all the factors presented in figure 8. For example, understanding customers' needs is more than understanding their business model you must understand the field and the salesperson must understand their services well enough to offer the right solution. In addition, table 5 presents possible co-creation and co-destruction factors of value in each factor.

To sum up many connections between the concepts had already been recognized in previous studies and therefore this study supports the previous research of the topics. Considering the history of value literature, teaching and learning, service provider and customer relationships and the world turning towards services over tangible products this study is built on top of the modern conception of these topics. Since the development and change does not stop this study can be seen as one step forward from the previous literature its concepts and research fields unifying nature.

5.4 Implications for research

With the definition of educational selling and the value co-creation and co-destruction factors found, this study provides a description of a phenomenon that is reproducible for future research on this topic. Also, the framework presented in the theoretical part of the study will support future studies of this topic. Overall, this study provides a baseline of the topic that can be beneficial to future studies. It enables that there is something to compare the results for. This study makes it easier to build the further studies and develop, deepen, and widen the research among this topic. Even though educational selling and the value aspect leans towards the business field more understanding of the educational elements in business is needed.

This topic as it is presented in this study has not been researched before. The definition of the concept of educational selling gives a new viewpoint to the relationship between the service provider and customer. This study combines different research fields and creates correlation between different concepts. On their own these concepts value, perceived value, value co-creation and co-destruction, selling, value-based selling, teaching, and learning have been studied a lot. Understanding the importance of educational factors together with the value aspect in the selling process creates a research area that needs to be studied further. It also shows that the co-existence of the factors is real and ongoing process in many service provider-customer relationships.

Educational selling can be seen as an umbrella term for value-based selling, consultative selling and solution selling since it combines features of them and adds more clearly teaching and pedagogy as a tool for knowledge sharing and focuses on the co-created value noticing value co-destruction. Since this concept is broader than the previous it views selling more extensively. That gives the future research around this topic a new concept and framework that can help discovering what modern selling processes of services need.

This study provides a cross section of educational selling in the context of KIBS. The results bridge the research gap between these concepts since before this study some connections between the concepts had been done but no study that would combine these all was found. The results of the empirical part of the study provides a solid base of the topic for further research. The results demonstrate that educational selling occurs in the interaction between the actors. It proofs that the concept can be found in the real interactions and shows what are the factors that enable value co-creation and value co-destruction.

5.5 Implications for practice

The value co-creation and co-destruction factors found in this study helps the actors communicate and build their interaction and partnerships better. Profitability is closely related to co-creating value i.e., value co-creation helps building lasting relationships between actors. Because the interaction happens in business-to-business environments profitability is one of the key aspects and especially important is to understand what factors affect to that. Every organization will pursue good economical state to continue working and make better profit. By understanding what creates value for both will help the customer actor and sales actor helps to create long term partnerships which will increase the co-created value even more.

The educational viewpoint in selling offers multiple aspects that both parties should consider. For example, it should be noticed that both learning and teaching are reciprocal and not that the salesperson just lectures about their service and why it is the best and the customer is trying to learn about it. The interaction is an important part of the whole partnership. Though in many cases the salesperson has more experience and knowledge about the service and how to utilize it the best and that is why they usually lead the interaction. This is important to acknowledge also because if the communication is not working and they do not listen to each other, or someone thinks they know something but in reality do not know then the value can be co-destructed.

The results of this study in practice gives guidelines for both the sales actor and customer actor to use in sales situations. It is important that both actors understand the situation of the other and what are the factors that can affect to that. Without mutual understanding it is hard to create trust into the relationship and without trust the collaboration is not working or it does not even begin. With these guidelines the actors can enable creating trust and on the other hand it makes it easier to focus on the things that could prevent the creation of trust and therefore co-destruct the value. Acknowledging that when poorly managed these value co-creation and co-destruction factors can lead to value co-destruction can help to focus on those and therefore improve value co-creation.

Even though the results might seem obvious or simple for some it is good to remember that when all the basics are implemented well in the cooperation it usually generates results. The results provide valuable knowledge for customer actors and sales actors. It is in the advantage of both to know how to co-create value and reach the best results in their partnership. In a way it is also risk management of the selling process since it helps recognizing the value co-destruction factors. The results can be implemented straight into practice but as in everything that is related to value it is important to acknowledge that every situation is unique and every individual inside the actors is different so the perception of value can change after that. That will create a challenge in practice, but the guidelines provided in the study will help to get everyone's point of view in consideration.

6 CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to define the concept of educational selling and find out what its relation to value co-creation and co-destruction is. That was the first research question. It was chosen because educational selling does not have previous definition and because understanding how value is forming between the service provider and customer is essential in today’s service economy. The goal was to understand the phenomenon of educational selling better and differ it from its close concepts value-based selling, consultative selling and solution selling. In fact, it could be argued that educational selling is an umbrella term that includes these value related selling concepts and adds the pedagogical aspect to these concepts. That is because consultative selling does include helping the other party to understand things better and sharing important information (Hartman et al., 2018) and value-based selling the key is to understand what the customers value (Töytäri et al., 2011) and the connection between learning and value-based selling has been discovered (Kienzler et al., 2019). So, combining these concepts with value and education research the concept was defined.

The connection was found from the previous research and eventually value co-creation and co-destruction formed an important part of the concept of educational selling. The definition of educational selling is based on the interaction between the actors where they teach and learn from each other and simultaneously co-create value. The interaction and co-learning during that takes time and developing a business is an ongoing process and therefore educational selling does not stop after the first deal of the service but is aiming towards a long-term partnership. So, by constantly learning from each other it is possible to understand the actions and goals better and achieve better results. Of course, the service that is sold or bought can affect a lot to the whole relationship. To study the co-created value, it was important that interaction between the service provider and customer existed. That is why KIBS was chosen for further research from the educational selling perspective, trying to discover value co-creation and co-destruction factors that occur in the parties' interaction.

In the empirical part of this study the data from 15 customer and 11 salespersons interviews who were either buying or selling KIBS were analyzed to answer the second research question. As a result, 5 value co-creation and co-destruction factors were found in the customers data and 6 factors were found in the salespersons data. Five of the factors found were same continuous cooperation, building trust, mutual interaction, understanding customer's needs and co-learning. One factor, providing content, was found in the salesperson's content analysis. All these six factors are important parts of educational selling for both actors and within these factors either value co-creation or value co-destruction can occur. The aim is to co-create value and by recognizing these factors it is possible to use them to benefit the partnership. Also, by recognizing what the possible co-destruction enablers in these factors are the actors can minimize the negative effects and focus on co-creating the value instead.

6.1 Limitations

The definition of educational selling was made entirely based on the literature though also the empirical material could have used to help defining the concept. Even though the selection of references is wide and carefully selected reliable research it includes and combines literature of many topics and research fields. Therefore, experts of each field should evaluate the validity of the definition by studying it further. This creates a challenge, and the theory should be looked critically because in the limits of this master's thesis the topic could be researched more closely. Also, time created a limitation since there is a limited time resources that are allocated for a master's thesis it was not possible to go through every study and theory that could have been useful for the topic.

In this study the sampling size was 26 quantitative focus interviews and therefore generalizations of the value co-create, and co-destruct factors of educational selling cannot be made. In some of the interviews the definition of KIBS was not clear for the interviewees even though it had been presented already when recruiting the participants to find out if they have sold our bought them. There were some misconceptions especially in the category of IT-services since many IT-services indeed are KIBS but many such as email is not considered as KIBS. Fortunately, it did not affect a lot to the results since they were also giving examples of KIBS.

Value research is highly depended on how the researcher and research subjects perceive value. What generates value for one might not do the same for others, it depends on the situation. That is one reason why the findings from this study do not tell the absolute truth but instead act as guidelines that can help the actors form more fruitful relationship. Also, the research methods qualitative interviews and content analysis are relying on the researcher's perspective and opinions about the data and skills to interview the experts and connect the themes that stand out from the data. Because personal perspectives affect to the results this topic needs to be studied more with different researchers and interviewees.

The interview framework could have been adapted to fit better into the research problems of this study. Because the interview framework was not specifically made for this study some essential factors might have been unnoticed. There were no direct questions related to value, so it was the interviewer's responsibility to make sure that the collected data was answering to the research question. This might have affected the most for the salespersons data because there six of the 11 interviews were conducted by another interviewee. Therefore, even though the main questions were the same they were not trying to find out the exact same things and that is why the value perspective was not as strong in those interviews.

The duration of the interviews was relatively short. Some interviewees probably would have had more to say about the topic but because the interviewees were busy and interviewed during their workdays the interviews had to be conducted in the booked time slot. Because of this some important information could have been lost. In addition, the backgrounds and business fields of the interviewees affected to the quality of collected data. Because of the exploratory nature of this study further research is needed.

6.2 Suggestions for future research

In the future this topic needs to be studied more. The concept of educational selling should be defined more specifically and specially to highlight its difference from consultative selling and value-based selling and position as a concept of its own. The educational selling cycles and length would also be great topics to research further. How it starts e.g., is it more likely that the customer searches services that could answer their needs and contacts the service provider or does the service provider contact the customer first? At what point the educational elements become a part of the relationship? For example, if they read a blog or see a social media post at first or is the first step usually a demo of the service.

Also, the educational methods that are used in educational selling could be studied further. When they are fully identified the different ways and their results in the relationship should be studied more. For example, the study could be narrowed down to one specific educational method like workshops or webinars. The chosen method would be studied further from the viewpoint of educational selling. That could be for example, how workshops are utilized as a part of educational selling or how workshops can help value co-creation or cause value co-destruction in educational selling.

Since this study focuses on the educational selling of KIBS and the factors that enables value creation the topic could be researched from the perspective of another type of service. This would be important since KIBS includes many different types of services the results of this study are not so specific. Possible topics for future research within KIBS would be e.g., educational selling of online stores or marketing services. Marketing services could be divided to more smaller topics such as educational selling of SEO or paid social media advertising. Another way to narrow the topic could be the perspective of specific type of IT-services e.g., SaaS or CRM's. Also, other type of services like streaming services or even services without technology like haircuts or massages could be possible ways to narrow the topic. In addition, future research should include quantitative research of the topic e.g., what are the most important factors that create value in educational selling.

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APPENDIX 1 THE INTERVIEW FRAMEWORK

This interview framework has been translated from Finnish.

Salesperson's Eduselling Questions:

1. What is your position in the company? How does it relate to sales?
2. What do your customers need to know or what skills do they need when they buy from you or use your services? Why?
3. Do you ever teach anything to your customers? What? When? Why? How has teaching affected the customer?
4. Do you use teaching methods in your work, such as seminars, workshops, tutorials, or certificates? If yes, what, when, with whom, and why?
5. How does selling to a customer who knows a lot about the product differ from selling to a customer who knows very little about it?
6. Does the job title "teacher" describe your work as a salesperson? Do you identify with that title?
7. Does your company benefit if a customer does NOT know or can NOT do something that your company knows or can do?
8. In your opinion:
   a) What does educational selling require from a salesperson?
   b) What does educational selling require from a customer?
   c) When does educational selling work best?
   d) What are the challenges associated with educational selling?

Buyer's Eduselling Questions:

1. What is your position in the company? How does it relate to buying XX services? (XX = IT services, marketing services, legal services, consulting services, etc. -> Choose a specific industry from which the interviewee buys or has bought KIBS services.)
2. Can you describe your company's procurement processes for these services?
3. What do you and your organization need to know and what skills do you need to buy and use these services?
4. Have companies selling these services invested in teaching information or skills related to the use of the service? What examples come to mind?
5. If yes, how has teaching been carried out? What teaching methods have been used? (Training days, workshops, tutorials, seminars, certificates, etc.?)
6. Have you personally acquired training services for using these services? If yes, what kind?

7. How has learning affected your organization's operations or use of services? What is the significance of good knowledge or skills for using the services?
8. Have you ever encountered a situation where a selling company does not want the customer to know something about the service, or where the salesperson tries to take advantage of the customer's weaker knowledge or skills?
9. In your opinion, how can a salesperson best carry out "educational selling"? What are your expectations as a customer for the salesperson's educational activities?