

**Doctorate of Business Administration**

# **Entrepreneurial Selling**

**Creating Resilient Small Businesses by  
Developing the Sales Competencies of  
Business Owners in the Netherlands**

**Maurik de Groot**

**Business School Lausanne**



Doctorate of Business Administration

# **Entrepreneurial Selling**

## **Creating Resilient Small Businesses by Developing the Sales Competencies of Business Owners in the Netherlands**

September 2023

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**Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences**

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**Name of Candidate:** Maurik de Groot

**Registration/Reference:** 345142

**Title of Dissertation:** Entrepreneurial Selling – Creating Resilient Small Businesses  
by Developing the Sales Competencies of Business Owners in  
the Netherlands

**Field of Study:** Entrepreneurial Selling

II

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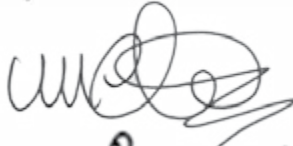
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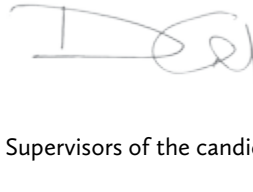
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*“I think the most important thing is to stay dedicated to sales...  
that is the engine of your business.”*

(interview with a business owner)





## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am a runner, and the undertaking of a doctorate felt like I was running a marathon. First, you must prepare by running a lot of kilometers, running when you feel like it, running when you don't feel like it, doing strength exercises, running smaller distance races, getting mentally prepared, and making sure you get plenty of sleep and live a healthy life. Then race day arrives, and it is 42 kilometers and 195 meters. After the first few kilometers you get rid of the worst tension you had and get into an ongoing flow. After 15 kilometers, you think "wow this feels good! I am doing well." From 20 to 25 kilometers, you get more tired, lose a bit of the flow you had, and become more aware of the effort you still have to make. From 25 to 30 kilometers, you start to worry. Am I able to keep up this same pace of running? From 30 km forward, the real fight starts. You start to count every meter and your mind begs you to stop. Every muscle hurts. It is then that what keeps you going are your trainer, family, and friends who are supporting you all the way. Without them, you would have not been able to accomplish the mission and keep performing well. What also helps is your visualization of the reward at the end; a performance you never expected to achieve, a medal, and an ice-cold beer. I passed through all these phases while composing this dissertation.

Without a great doctorate team around me, I would have never been able to come so far. I am very thankful to every member of this team. Professor Ingrid Wakkee, thank you so much for everything you have done. You always found time in your busy schedule to support me with your great academic experience and knowledge. You always backed me up and encouraged me to use my academic abilities.

To Professor Marko Majer, thank you for bringing the practical impacts into my work. You were able to combine your academic and entrepreneurial expertise and translate both into practical adjustments to make my dissertation so much more pragmatic and effective. I am incredibly lucky to have both Ingrid and you as a team because you complement each other perfectly to help me achieve the academic and practical objectives I wanted to give to small businesses in the Netherlands.

My appreciation also goes out to Professor Dominique Bourqui and Professor David Claivaz. You both truly create an inspiring academic environment in Lausanne. It is so wonderful to see how passionate and committed you are to this dream, both individually and as a team, to build this community and combine your strong values for science and practice. You know all the participants so well, and so often, I felt that I was in the pleasant circumstance of having more than two supervisors. The DAW weeks were very inspiring, and indeed felt like coming home.

I also want to thank the people who supported me before the start of this project and helped me initiate this dissertation. The first conversations were with Marlies Sandee, former Educational Manager of the Marketing and Sales Department, and her interim

successor, Theo Joosten. You both challenged my ambition and when you were convinced of my will to succeed, you took care of the resources that made it possible for me to proceed. Janette den Uyl, the supervisor of my teaching team, and Marjolein van Vlaanderen, as current Educational Manager, supported me by giving me the time to work on the dissertation, which is certainly not always self-evident in a busy organization like ours.

My DBA is based on empirical research, and many practitioners have cooperated and shared their wisdom to let me gain a deeper understanding of Entrepreneurial Selling. My heart also goes out to the participating business owners who gave me their time and shared their valuable Entrepreneurial Selling experiences with me, as well as their valued stories about their vulnerable moments of failure. Many thanks to the consultancy and training organizations as well that co-created the design of the practical solutions. I also want to thank the university students for their great interviews that I used for the analysis and creation of the first study for this dissertation.

And, of course, there is Ilse. You are always there when I need you. Our love and trust in each other are my greatest achievement. You not only supported me by reading, listening, and challenging my academic endeavors, but also by taking care of me while I was working on my dissertation. Without you, I would have never been able to accomplish this dissertation, so it will be our shared success. Our long walks with our dog, Arko, gave the endurance I needed to keep going with this task. You are the sparkle of my life! Thanks also go to my mother and father for having given me the confidence to keep following my own path (and as you both know; it has been a long one...) and my parents-in-law for always giving me a warm welcome in your home and taking care of me so well.

To the members of the Dissertation Committee, I thank you for taking the time to read, judge and improve my dissertation.

Last, but certainly not least, in memory of Stefan Dalinghaus, you were the one who hired me at our university and were the first person I told about my doctoral aspirations. You left us too early. I will finish this dissertation in your name.

## ABSTRACT (English)

**Purpose:** Preventing business failure remains a significant challenge for small businesses in the Netherlands. Given their importance for the Dutch economy, understanding the causes of business failure and equipping business owners with strategies for resilience is imperative. This dissertation seeks to address this challenge by examining the sales role of business owners, referred to as 'Entrepreneurial Selling,' within the context of small-scale Dutch businesses. The goal is to identify how business owners can develop effective sales behaviors to mitigate the risk of failure and enhance the long-term viability of their businesses. The research into Entrepreneurial Selling is rising, yet further advancements, including this dissertation, are required to better support business owners in their continuous sales responsibilities. The main research question, therefore, is: *How do small-scale business owners in the Netherlands behave in their Entrepreneurial Selling role and how can they become more effective in their sales behavior?*

**Methods:** To address the research question, a multimethod research approach is utilized. The research design comprises a literature review, three progressively linked studies, and practical applications. The first study (Chapter 4) involves a content re-analysis of 55 interviews to underscore the pivotal nature of Entrepreneurial Selling in preventing business failure. The second study (Chapter 5) conducts 12 semi-structured interviews, employing thematic analysis to categorize business owners' sales behaviors based on their entrepreneurial motivations. In the third study (Chapter 6), quantitative methods are employed (N=276) to explore the relationship between Entrepreneurial Selling Role Orientation (ESRO) and effective sales behavior. These studies provide the foundation for the practical applications developed in collaboration with practitioners (Chapter 7).

**Findings:** The first study found that Entrepreneurial Selling is a crucial activity for preventing business failure and one that business owners recognize. Reasons for underperformance can include business owners allocating inadequate time to selling, deficient sales skills, and procrastination of sales activities. The subsequent studies build on this foundation. The second study introduces an Entrepreneurial Selling typology, linking business owners' motivations with their sales role strategies, offering insights into how motivations influence sales behavior. The third study introduces the concept of ESRO and substantiates its impact on sales behavior. Furthermore, a positive connection is identified between sales training and effective sales practices. The findings of the studies are individually applied to Sarasvathy's Bird-in-Hand principle of Effectuation theory and are synthesized within the Entrepreneurial Selling Matrix.

**Originality/Value:** This dissertation contributes to the Entrepreneurial Selling field by advancing our understanding of the business owners' sales role in enhancing business resilience. It underscores the connection between ineffective sales practices and business failure and delves deeper by investigating the interplay between entrepreneurial motives and ESRO on sales behavior. Additionally, this study bridges the gap between entrepreneurship- and sales research by applying the Bird-in-Hand principle to business owners' sales behavior. In practical terms, the research's outcomes are twofold. First, it refines the Entrepreneurial Selling Matrix, providing a pragmatic typology that aids sales training practitioners in guiding business owners toward aligning sales behaviors with entrepreneurial goals. Second, it introduces an Entrepreneurial Selling Training Program, accompanied by tools, facilitating sales trainers in evaluating and improving current and desired sales behaviors. This practical approach contributes directly to nurturing resilient and thriving businesses.

## ABSTRACT (Dutch)

**Doel:** Het voorkomen van bedrijfsfalen blijft een aanzienlijke uitdaging voor kleine bedrijven in Nederland. Gezien hun belang voor de Nederlandse economie is het begrijpen van de oorzaken van bedrijfsfalen en het ondersteunen van ondernemers met strategieën voor veerkracht cruciaal. Deze dissertatie beoogt deze uitdaging aan te pakken door de verkooprol van ondernemers, genaamd *Entrepreneurial Selling*, te onderzoeken in de context van kleinschalige Nederlandse bedrijven. Het doel is te identificeren hoe ondernemers effectief verkoopgedrag kunnen ontwikkelen om het risico op falen te verminderen en de levensvatbaarheid van hun organisaties op de lange termijn te vergroten. Het onderzoek naar *Entrepreneurial Selling* neemt toe, maar verdere ontwikkelingen, beginnend met deze dissertatie, zijn nodig om ondernemers beter te ondersteunen bij hun verkooprol. De hoofdvraag van het onderzoek luidt dan ook: *Hoe gedragen kleinschalige ondernemers in Nederland zich in hun rol als verkoper en hoe kunnen zij effectiever worden in hun verkoopgedrag?*

**Methoden:** Om de onderzoeksvraag te beantwoorden, is een multi-methodisch onderzoeksontwerp gebruikt. Dit onderzoeksontwerp omvat een literatuuroverzicht, drie gekoppelde en op elkaar voortbouwende studies, en praktische toepassingen. Voor de eerste studie (Hoofdstuk 4) heeft een her-analyse plaatsgevonden van de inhoud van 55 interviews om de cruciale functie van *Entrepreneurial Selling* bij het voorkomen van bedrijfsfalen te onderzoeken. De tweede studie (Hoofdstuk 5) bestaat uit 12 semigestructureerde interviews, waarbij thematische analyse wordt toegepast om het verkoopgedrag van eigenaren te categoriseren op basis van hun motivaties om te ondernemen. In de derde studie (Hoofdstuk 6) worden kwantitatieve methoden ingezet (N=276) om de relatie tussen *Entrepreneurial Selling Role Orientation (ESRO)* en effectief verkoopgedrag te onderzoeken. Deze studies vormen de basis voor de praktische toepassingen die zijn ontwikkeld in samenwerking met deskundigen uit de praktijk (Hoofdstuk 7).

**Resultaten:** De eerste studie toont aan dat *Entrepreneurial Selling* een cruciale activiteit is om bedrijfsfalen te voorkomen en dat ondernemers dit ook erkennen. Oorzaken voor ondermatse prestaties kunnen onder meer zijn dat ondernemers onvoldoende tijd besteden aan verkopen, tekortschietende verkoopvaardigheden en uitstel van verkoopactiviteiten. De daaropvolgende studies bouwen voort op deze resultaten. De tweede studie introduceert een typologie van *Entrepreneurial Selling*, waarbij de motivaties van ondernemers worden gekoppeld aan hun verkoopstrategieën. Hierdoor wordt zichtbaar hoe motivaties verkoopgedrag beïnvloeden. De derde studie introduceert het concept van *ESRO* en onderbouwt de invloed ervan op verkoopgedrag. Bovendien wordt een positieve relatie geïdentificeerd tussen verkooptraining en effectief verkoopgedrag. De bevindingen van de

individuele studies zijn toegepast op Sarasvathy's *Bird-in-Hand-principe* van *Effectuation* en worden samengevat in de *Entrepreneurial Selling Matrix*.

**Originaliteit/Waarde:** Deze dissertatie draagt bij aan het *Entrepreneurial Selling* vakgebied door ons begrip van de verkooprol van ondernemers bij het verbeteren van de veerkracht van kleine bedrijven te vergroten. Het benadrukt de verbinding tussen ineffectieve verkooppraktijken en bedrijfsfalen en gaat dieper in op de wisselwerking tussen motieven van ondernemers en *ESRO* bij verkoopgedrag. Bovendien overbruggt deze studie de kloof tussen ondernemerschaps- en verkooponderzoek door het *Bird-in-Hand-principe* toe te passen op het verkoopgedrag van ondernemers. Voor de praktijk zijn de resultaten van het onderzoek tweeledig. Ten eerste wordt de *Entrepreneurial Selling Matrix* omgezet in een pragmatische typologie die verkooptrainers helpt om ondernemers te begeleiden bij het afstemmen van verkoopgedrag op ondernemingsdoelen. Ten tweede introduceert het een trainingsprogramma voor de verkooprol van ondernemers, vergezeld van hulpmiddelen, waardoor verkooptrainers de huidige en gewenste verkoopactiviteiten van ondernemers kunnen evalueren en verbeteren. Deze praktische aanpak draagt direct bij aan het creëren van veerkrachtige en bloeiende bedrijven.

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## ABBREVIATION LIST

AUAS	Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences
B-to-B	Business-to-Business Industry
B-to-C	Business-to-Consumer Industry
BSL	Business School Lausanne
CRM (System)	Customer Relationship Management (System)
DBA	Doctorate of Business Administration
ESRO	Entrepreneurial Selling Role Orientation
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
SBI	Small Business Index
TNA	Training Needs Analysis



## PUBLICATIONS

### **Derived from Study 1 (Chapter 4) and Study 2 (Chapter 5):**

- de Groot, M., & Wakkee, I. (2023). How ineffective entrepreneurial selling contributes to business failure: an explorative study on business owners of small and medium enterprises in The Netherlands. *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, DOI: 10.1080/08853134.2023.2202857

### **This article is shown in Appendix J:**

- de Groot, M. (2021). Entrepreneurs must reflect on their sales role and get into action! Especially during Covid-19. *European Business Review*, July/August (4), 97-102

# 1 INTRODUCTION

Preventing business failure remains a significant challenge for small businesses in the Netherlands. The year 2022 has witnessed the highest surge in business closures since the financial crisis of 2007 (CBS, 2022). Given their importance for the Dutch economy (Kramer and Noorderhaven, 2020) and vulnerability, understanding the causes of business failure and equipping business owners with strategies for resilience is imperative.

Consequently, this dissertation uncovers the intricate interplay between the sales activities of business owners, denoted as ‘Entrepreneurial Selling,’ and the phenomenon of business failure. This dissertation aims to deliver a practical and theoretical contribution to Entrepreneurial Selling. The ultimate goal is to understand the current sales behavior of small-scale business owners and to identify how they can develop effective sales behaviors to enhance their long-term viability, mitigate the risk of failure and paving the way to success.

In confronting this challenge, a multimethod research design is employed. This research design encompasses a literature review, three interconnected studies, and practical applications. The first study (Chapter 4) involves a content re-analysis of 55 interviews highlighting the crucial role of Entrepreneurial Selling in averting business failure. The second study (Chapter 5) comprises 12 semi-structured interviews, utilizing thematic analysis to classify business owners’ sales behaviors according to their entrepreneurial motivations. The third study (Chapter 6) uses quantitative methods (N=276) with Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to explore the correlation between Entrepreneurial Selling Role Orientation (ESRO) and effective sales behavior. These studies provide the foundation for practical applications developed in collaboration with practitioners (Chapter 7).

This dissertation is written for (future) small-scale business owners, the sales practitioners that support business owners (sales trainers, coaches, and educators-- from here forward noted as sales trainers) and scholars with the aim to study the nexus of entrepreneurship and personal selling. In summary, this dissertation is for anyone who cares about small businesses and wants to help prevent business failure and sustain thriving businesses.

In the remainder of this Chapter is explained which practical (§1.1) and theoretical gap (§1.2) needs to be closed by this dissertation. In section 1.3 the scope of this dissertation is elaborated, section 1.4 describes the research questions and section 1.5 the reading guide of this dissertation.

## 1.1 Business Owners and Selling: A Challenge Witnessed in Practice

As one of the key objectives of this DBA is to contribute to actual practice, it is relevant to discuss how this research journey started in my former business occupation, where I witnessed a gap that I believed deserved more scholarly attention. It is where my interest in the cross-section between personal selling and entrepreneurship derived from and where I determined that the sales role of business owners could be a positive subject for a formal dissertation.

Before my current occupation as a lecturer at AUAS, I have worked for life Insurance companies in the Netherlands for more than a decade, almost the entire time in sales jobs. By working in this industry, I witnessed the challenge that customers, even more in that field than in other industries, never automatically buy your products. Insurance products need to be “pushed” to its customers, which is the reason why insurance companies were early on professionalizing their sales and adopting new personal selling skills to better reach their customers (Anderson *et al.*, 2020). It is also probably why ethical boundaries were crossed which led to a debatable reputation (Friedman, 1998). Commission paid salespeople were the stimulus for them to sell as much as possible, regardless of the fact of whether the provided product was actually a need for the customer. The salespeople benefitted from their advance in knowledge of complicated financial products in contrast to many uninformed customers, who were only convinced by the well-prepared sales pitches of these sales representatives.

Following the financial crisis of 2008, the insurance industry in the Netherlands needed to reinvent itself, especially their sales and marketing activities. The transactional way of selling products did not hold true anymore after the scandals that had damaged the customers’ trust in insurers and financial advisors. In the years I worked in this business (2007-2017), I was trained extensively on personal selling skills that offered solutions for the challenges and problems of Business-to-Business (B-to-B) customers. These skills became a ‘part’ of me; and as a manager I implemented these consultative and strategic personal selling skills in my teams. So why am I, with this ‘classical’ corporate background, interested in connecting my sales experience to small businesses? I have visited independent small business owners thousands of times during my career. I have often noticed that given all the roles these business owners had to perform, they struggled the most with their selling role.

In contrast to the intensive sales training I received, many of these business owners did not seem to get any sales support at all. In general, the business owners of these firms did acknowledge the importance of the sales role and that ineffectively performing this role was preventing them from further growth and even lead to challenges for the survival of their enterprises. I noticed, however, that many did not exceed the incomes of employed financial advisors, which seemed counterintuitive considering the higher personal risk they were taking. The same problem seems to be the case in other industries (Hamilton, 2000, Carree and Verheul, 2012). Thus, I was always wondering what the specific mechanisms were holding back business owners from taking effective actions to tackle this challenge and what I could

do to support them. This dissertation is now an essential part of that journey to achieve that goal. Currently, I am employed by the AUAS as a lecturer in its Sales & Marketing and Entrepreneurship programs. It is where my idea of researching this topic was confirmed. A significant number of students have negative associations with selling (Spillan *et al.*, 2007). When I ask students if they want to chase careers in personal selling, the answer is generally “no.” ‘Manipulative,’ ‘pushy’ and ‘annoying’ are some of the leading associations students offer when asked to define salespeople in my classes. It is certainly remarkable, considering their choice of study, that this group of young adults already considers salespeople as people ‘you should watch out for...’ This negative connotation and association with salespeople seems to be deeply rooted in our society and is generation independent.

In contrast, students in my classes have a more positive association with entrepreneurship and often do see themselves as future business owners. This contrast raised interesting questions, as there are significant commonalities between the characteristics of the two fields, i.e., both the personal selling job and being a business owner have autonomy, rewards linked to personal effort, and the chance to interact with a variety of people (Fogel *et al.*, 2012). The sales function has also been described as inherently entrepreneurial (Morris *et al.*, 1990, Peltola and Vesala, 2013) because, like entrepreneurship, selling involves many activities, tasks done, and decisions taken under elements of uncertainty and the dynamic complexity of frequently changing factors (Walker Jr. *et al.*, 1977).

I wonder from the information I have received during my classes if our future entrepreneurs understand that the personal selling role is a crucial part of the task when they start their own companies? And if they do understand that focus, are they well equipped to perform that role effectively? Even, top-ranked business schools do not pay much attention to teaching sales (Fogel *et al.*, 2012, Matthews *et al.*, 2018). Schools and universities without sales programs have identified a lack of student interest in sales as the most critical issue (Deeter-Schmelz and Kennedy, 2011). Nevertheless, if you want to become a successful business owner, is there really any other choice?

I thus challenged the idea that our (future) entrepreneurs are not well equipped to perform the personal selling role with numerous business owners I have met for educational or personal purposes. During these conversations, I spoke about my dream to start a DBA using the personal selling role of small-scale business owners as the topic. In every instance, although to various degrees, the business owners responded that the way they performed their selling activities was their main challenge. These interactions helped me broaden my scope beyond the Life Insurance Industry. The conversations reinforced my thinking that a dissertation on this specific topic would deliver needed practical value for our (future) business owners, so I started a search to gather the current research on this important and intriguing topic.

## 1.2 Entrepreneurial Selling: A Highly Understudied Phenomenon

Next to the practical objective already mentioned, this dissertation aims to deliver a theoretical contribution to the Entrepreneurial Selling domain. It is a topic that is highly understudied (Matthews *et al.*, 2018), and previous studies of entrepreneurship and personal selling have not dealt with the cross section of the two fields in much detail (Webb *et al.*, 2011, Onyemah *et al.*, 2013, Spillecke and Brettel, 2014, Onyemah and Rivera-Pesquera, 2017, 2021). This lack of research is remarkable as selling is widely acknowledged as a crucial activity for business owners (Block and MacMillan, 1985, Shepherd *et al.*, 2015, Onyemah and Rivera-Pesquera, 2017, Matthews *et al.*, 2018, Onyemah and Rivera-Pesquera, 2021). Selling is the main factor needed to scale a business and is one of the most demanding activities to professionalize (Friar *et al.*, 2021). Entrepreneurial Selling thus needs more academic awareness, also because business owners of small-scale companies are generally passionate about their business and products; however, many of them are struggling with their sales role (Sarasvathy, 2001, Song *et al.*, 2008, Cespedes, 2014, Onyemah and Rivera-Pesquera, 2021).

In the last decade, however, a few scholars have begun to explore the nexus of the two fields and introduced the notion of Entrepreneurial Selling (Deutsch and Wortmann, 2011, Onyemah *et al.*, 2013, Dalecki, 2019). This dissertation builds on their groundwork and adds new insights to the existing literature on Entrepreneurial Selling.

Numerous research prospects lie at the intersection of sales and entrepreneurship (Morris *et al.*, 2002, Ingram *et al.*, 2005), as current personal selling theory and models might be inadequate to solve the sales struggle of business owners. Previous personal selling research is based on assumptions that are different from the actual day-to-day realities faced by business owners (Onyemah *et al.*, 2013, Onyemah and Rivera-Pesquera, 2017, 2021). This contradiction is due to the fact that the selling resources of small businesses are often more limited than those of larger firms. In larger organizations, the professional sales actor is backed by “a plethora of resources, ranging from an established brand to marketing and customer service support...the entrepreneur has none of these to rely on” (Deutsch and Wortmann, 2011, p. 2)

To gain better understanding of the sales behavior of business owners and contribute to it as also to Entrepreneurship as Entrepreneurial Selling theory, a connection here is made with the Bird-in-Hand principle. Bird-in-Hand is one of the five principles that when taken together form one of the core researched Entrepreneurship phenomena of the last two decades: Effectuation (Sarasvathy, 1998, 2001, 2009).

Effectuation offers a thinking frame for and then applied by (future) business owners based on the premise that they can create their own entrepreneurial future by taking action and utilizing their current opportunities (Sarasvathy, 1998, 2001, 2009). Effectuation is a pragmatic approach for starting and operating businesses and its first principle, Bird-in-Hand, consists of three questions, which become the starting point for the business owner involved in the Effectuation process to uncover entrepreneurial opportunities. These questions are ‘who am I?’ ‘what do I know?’, and ‘whom do I know?’. The Bird-in-

Hand principle encourages (potential) business owners to start a business based on what they have readily available, which this perspective defines as *means*, instead of end-goals (Sarasvathy, 1998, 2001, 2009). The Bird-in-Hand questions were the key for developing this dissertation, as they have the potential to mirror current sales behavior, hence the sales *means*, of the business owner, and also serve as a magnifying glass for the researchers. Applying the Bird-in-Hand principle to the context of the business owners' sales role can be done by adapting the basic means questions into Entrepreneurial Selling means questions (see Table 1). These adapted Entrepreneurial Selling sales means questions then can deliver greater in-depth insights into the selling behavior of business owners and become the starting point for the focused research that was conducted for this dissertation.

Bird-in-hand means questions	Adapted Entrepreneurial Selling 'means' questions
Who am I?	(Who) Am I (as) a salesperson?
What do I know?	Do I have sales experience, skills and/or knowledge?
Whom do I know?	Do I have- (or am able to acquire) a network with potential customers?

TABLE 1: The Bird-in-the-Hand Principle (Sarasvathy, 1998, 2001, 2009) Adapted to Address Entrepreneurial Selling Means Questions

### 1.3 The Scope of this Dissertation

As there are many different definitions and disagreements about what entrepreneurship entails (Gartner, 1990), defining the scope of this dissertation should start with a clear understanding of what definition of entrepreneurship was used.

Entrepreneurship in this dissertation is synonymous with a business owner who manages a small business in the B-to-B. Although many external factors (e.g. economic situation, access to resources, culture) do play a role in explaining entrepreneurial behavior of small business owners (Meyer and Zucker, 1989, Smelser and Swedberg, 1994, Zacharakis *et al.*, 1999, McMullen and Shepherd, 2006, Ahmad and Seet, 2009, Khelil, 2016) the focus of this dissertation is on the behavior that is under the control of the individual business owner, hence agency, and how sales training practitioners can support these business owners in developing more effective sales competencies. The small business owner is the core person in the entrepreneurial process and thus the level of analysis for this dissertation. This level of analysis also fits the concept of Effectuation, as using this perspective; business owners create their own future (Sarasvathy, 1998, 2001, 2009).

Small businesses also provide a good starting point for studying entrepreneurship, as they are an “outstanding vehicle for individuals to channel their entrepreneurial ambitions (Wennekers and Thurik, 1999, p. 47).” Of interest for this dissertation are small business

owners who work *at* their own risk and *for* own benefit (Carree *et al.*, 2002, Van Stel *et al.*, 2005, Carree *et al.*, 2007, Carree and Thurik, 2010, Carree and Verheul, 2012), and are in different phases of their life cycles. The scope was deliberately chosen rather than innovational startups which is already a very popular and well-researched topic among scholars (e.g., Centobelli *et al.*, 2017, Santisteban and Mauricio, 2017, Spender *et al.*, 2017, Cantamessa *et al.*, 2018, Chaparro and de Vasconcelos Gomes, 2021, Gupta *et al.*, 2022, Said *et al.*, 2022). In the end, the practical goal of this dissertation is how to better support the *ordinary small business* owners in their struggle for survival.

This choice of business owners also means that employees are excluded from this research. Business ownership and its involved risk leads to a different expected sales dynamics for business owners in their sales role compared to sales employees in larger companies for their sales function. This is why research, next to the personal selling research stream of sales employees, is necessary to gain a specific understanding of the sales role of business owners, and that is done for this dissertation.

Small businesses make the largest contribution to the Dutch economy. In terms of the number of companies (250.000), the percentage of added value (62% of the GDP) for the economy and employment opportunities in the Netherlands; small businesses surpass the large corporations (Kramer and Noorderhaven, 2020). There is not a universally and standardized definition for a small business, but there are quantitative criteria and qualitative characteristics that can define them (Berisha and Pula, 2015). This dissertation follows the criteria of the European Union for its quantitative scope (see Table 2). The smallest firm in the datasets for the three studies had 1 and the largest had 200 employees. Although, according to this quantitative definition, some medium-sized businesses did participate in the studies for this dissertation, by far the main focus is on small businesses, and the results are in general terms based on their experiences.

Company category	Staff headcount	Turnover	or	Balance sheet total
Medium-sized	< 250	≤ € 50 m		≤ € 43 m
Small	< 50	≤ € 10 m		≤ € 10 m
Micro	< 10	≤ € 2 m		≤ € 2 m

TABLE 2: European Commission Recommendation of 6 May 2003 for Definition of Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (European Union, 2003)

Next to these quantitative criteria are two qualitative characteristics used to distinguish small businesses from large organizations, namely, 'personal principle' and 'unity of leadership and capital' (Theile, 1996). 'Personal principle' means the company manager plays a leading role in the business decision-making processes. The manager maintains direct contact with employees, suppliers, and customers (Loecher, 2000). This characteristic

indicates the distinct roles that business owner of a small business has to fulfill. The contact with customers emphasizes the Entrepreneurial Selling role. The principle of unity of leadership and capital means that the company manager and proprietor are one and the same individual. The business owner, in addition to handling leadership duties, takes up all or at least some of the liability risk (Loecher, 2000). Hence, the characteristics of the participants who participated in one of these three studies were to own, manage, and hold the liability risk of that small business.

The choice of B-to-B businesses, therefore, the decision to exclude businesses with solely a Business-to-Consumer (B-to-C) profile, derives from the fact that selling to businesses is more complex than selling to consumers, as it generally involves more stakeholders, longer selling cycles, and higher amounts, which results in separated research fields (Anderson *et al.*, 2020). Table 3 summarizes what is in and out of this dissertation's declared scope.

	Entrepreneurship	Type of Customer	Type of Organization	Actor Level of Analysis
In scope	Risk	B-to-B + combi B-to B/ B-to-C	Small businesses	Business owner
Out of scope	Innovation	Solely B-to-C	Large organizations	Employee

TABLE 3: The Scope of this Dissertation in Terms of Entrepreneurship Definition, Type of Customer, Size of Organization and Actor Level of Analysis

## 1.4 The Research Questions

There is a need to better understand the selling behavior of small-scale business owners. This dissertation aims to support (future) business owners in their selling endeavors and in its scholarship by moving the nexus of entrepreneurship and personal selling, hence Entrepreneurial Selling, forward by connecting selling behavior to the Bird-in-Hand principle of Effectuation.

Based on this Introductory Chapter and the literature review presented in Chapter 2, the following main research question is presented:

***How do small-scale business owners in the Netherlands behave in their Entrepreneurial Selling role and how can they become more effective in their sales behavior?***



To answer this central question, the following (research) sub-questions were developed:

1. ***How do small-scale business owners make sense of their Entrepreneurial Selling behavior before, during, and after a period of failure?*** In practice I witnessed that business owners of small businesses underperformed and even failed due to their selling behavior. This first research question derives from practice. After Chapter 4 elaborates on the theoretical gap in the business failure literature, this study investigates whether the practical claim is valid and, if so, to what extent.

2. ***How does the motive to start and operate a business influence the sales behavior of small-scale business owners?***

The specific literature review in Chapter 5 describes a general influence of the motive to start a business and entrepreneurial behavior. This research question and its study aim to better understand the rationale behind the sales behavior of the business owner and find a connection between the motive to start a company and the selling behavior of the business owners.

3. ***How does the Entrepreneurial Selling Role Orientation (ESRO) of small-scale business owners influence their sales behavior and (expected) financial performance?***

The third research question builds on the first two studies and aims to increase our understanding of how business owners behave in their sales role. This deeper understanding is gained by analyzing how the new introduced construct of Entrepreneurial Selling Role Orientation (ESRO) influences the selling behavior of business owners. The specific literature in Chapter 6 describes the individual concepts underlying the ESRO.

4. ***How can sales trainers better develop the sales competencies of small-scale business owners?***

The three empirical studies together clearly show there is a need to support business owners in their selling endeavors. This question, which leads to the practical application chapter, should enable sales trainers to go through a full training process, specifically developed for business owners, with the goal of enhancing the sales competencies of business owners.

Answering these four research questions delivers a clear and in-depth insight into the (development of effective) sales behavior of small-scale business owners in the Netherlands and, therefore, answers the main research question of this dissertation.

## 1.5 Reading Guide

This dissertation consists of 8 chapters. Its core consists of a Literature Review (Chapter 2), the research philosophy, and design (Chapter 3), three empirical studies (Chapters 4, 5, and 6) with multiple data collection methods presented, and the Entrepreneurial Selling Training Applications (Chapter 7). The specific literature review and a detailed explanation of the methods used for each study has been added to the concerning chapter. Figure 1 presents a visual overview of the coherence between the studies and their practical applications.

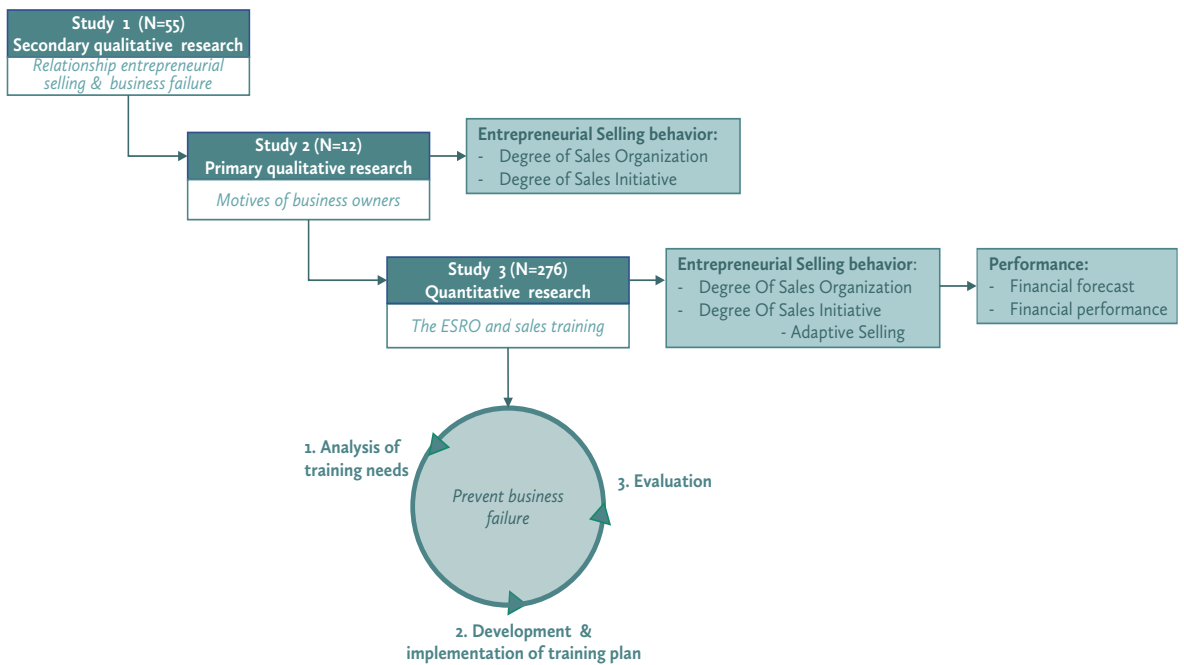


FIGURE 1: An overview of the Three Studies and the Practical Applications Concept

## CHAPTER 2: THE LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents the literature review and lays the foundation for the main research question and the empirical chapters that follow. The different relevant concepts of this dissertation are described, including their meaning in the context of Entrepreneurial Selling and their connection to that topic.

## CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY AND DESIGN

This chapter introduces Pragmatism as a theoretical perspective and explains the rationale behind the multiple research design used for this dissertation.

## CHAPTER 4: THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF INEFFECTIVE ENTREPRENEURIAL SELLING ACTIVITIES TO BUSINESS FAILURE

A content re-analysis was done for this dissertation on an existing qualitative dataset of small-scale business owners (N=55) on business failure. It found a relation between the sales behavior of a business owner and the reason that the business failed. This study is connected to sub-question 1.

## CHAPTER 5: THE ENTREPRENEURIAL SELLING MATRIX – THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE MOTIVES OF BUSINESS OWNERS AND THEIR SALES BEHAVIOR

Twelve in-depth semi-structured interviews with small-scale business owners were conducted to gain a detailed insight on their Entrepreneurial Selling behavior. This research

approach, using thematic analysis, inductively led to the conclusion that the motives for starting an enterprise explains their selling behavior, as described in the introduction of the Entrepreneurial Selling Matrix. This study is connected to sub-question 2.

#### **CHAPTER 6: THE ENTREPRENEURIAL SELLING MATRIX (2) – THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE ENTREPRENEURIAL SELLING ROLE ORIENTATION OF BUSINESS OWNERS AND THEIR SALES BEHAVIOR**

This quantitative study used a survey method (N=276) and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) analysis, which revealed the relationship between the Entrepreneurial Selling Role Orientation (ESRO) of the business owner and their selling behavior and then presents this relationship in the Entrepreneurial Selling Matrix. This particular study is connected to sub-question 3.

#### **CHAPTER 7: ENTREPRENEURIAL SELLING TRAINING APPLICATIONS**

This chapter describes the practical contribution of this dissertation by presenting the Entrepreneurial Selling Training Applications that are based on the results of the three empirical chapters. A pragmatic Entrepreneurial Selling typology is presented, and a training program is specifically developed to improve the selling competencies of business owners. This study is connected to sub-question 4.

#### **CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSIONS OF THIS DISSERTATION**

This dissertation ends with offering its conclusions and the theoretical and practical contributions. Furthermore, this chapter presents positive future research avenues.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review explores the essential theoretical concepts to understand them fully before gaining new knowledge and discovering practical solutions for Entrepreneurial Selling. It lays the foundation for the rest of this dissertation. This chapter starts with the teleological entrepreneurship debate on the sales actor's role in discovering or creating opportunities (§2.1). Then the concepts of entrepreneurial action and its Effectuation are explained as they relate to Entrepreneurial Selling (§2.2). The following section elaborates on the choice to apply the first principle of Effectuation, Bird-in-Hand, to Entrepreneurial Selling (§2.3) and why studying Entrepreneurial Selling (§2.4) is so essential. In addition, this chapter clarifies the scope and the definition of Entrepreneurial Selling for this dissertation (§2.5). The second to last section deals with how the personal selling literature relates to Entrepreneurial Selling (§2.6). The literature review chapter ends with an overview of the relevant training literature for SMEs and sales (§2.7). A visualization of these topics is shown in Figure 2. The search process for producing this literature review is described in Appendix A.

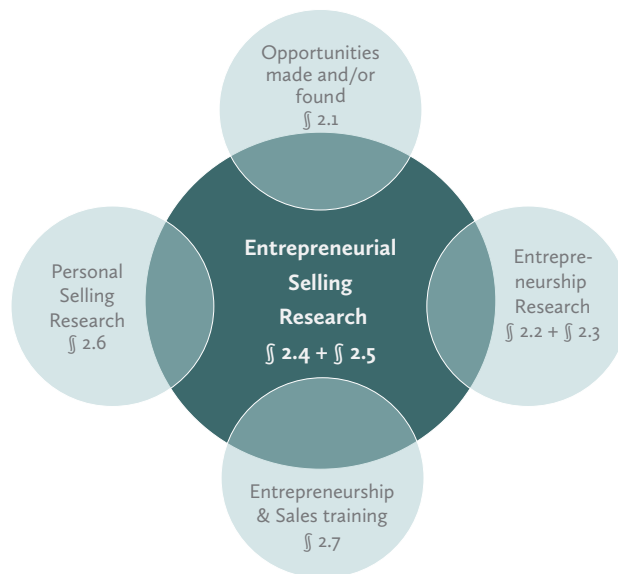


FIGURE 2: An Overview of the Overarching Literature Topics of the Dissertation

## 2.1 Made as Well as Found: The Role of the Sales Actor

Teleological theories of human action explain human behavior in terms of the impacts that behavior have on the ability of individuals to achieve their purposes (Busenitz and Barney, 1997, Alvarez and Barney, 2007). One of the core teleological debates in entrepreneurial scholarship is whether opportunities are discovered (found) or created (made).

Both theories look for the actions that entrepreneurs take before exploiting opportunities (Venkataraman and Shane, 2000, Alvarez and Barney, 2007). The debate involving the existence of entrepreneurial opportunities, however, seems to get stalled in examining the scientific philosophy of whether potential entrepreneurial value is discovered or created, or both occurs (Arend *et al.*, 2015). Barney and Alvarez (2007) described effective entrepreneurial actions in discovery as well as in creation contexts. They describe the differences in actions for leadership, decision-making, human resource practices, strategy, finance, marketing, and sustaining competitive advantages. In this dissertation, it becomes relevant what this debate entails for the sales role of the business owner.

If opportunities are discovered, then opportunities pre-exist in society, and certain individuals recognize the patterns and act on them (Alvarez and Barney, 2007, Martin and Wilson, 2016, Sarasvathy *et al.*, 2020). Entrepreneurship, viewed as the act of generating opportunities, assumes the absence of both demand and supply. Therefore, entrepreneurial actions in the market are necessary to bring about the creation of both demand and supply (Alvarez and Barney, 2007, Martin and Wilson, 2016, Sarasvathy *et al.*, 2020). The main difference is that opportunities as a discovery process are independent of the actions of the actors and is just waiting to be found and exploited. The opportunities are also objective, formed by exogenous shocks in industries or markets. Business owners are like beachcombers looking for washed-up loot on the beach. This focus ensures that successful business owners are different from other individuals in the sense that they show more 'alertness' to seeing and exploiting these opportunities (Kirzner, 1973).

Exploiting these opportunities is more about risk than uncertainty. The perception of risk within this procedure relies on its inherent unpredictability. While the potential future supply is theoretically understandable, the inability to attain absolute knowledge compels individuals to depend on their restricted information. They subsequently formulate subjective probability assessments based on this limited data (Miller, 2007, Dew *et al.*, 2009). When entrepreneurship is seen as a discovery process, this focus actually produces the sales role of business owners. Aligned with Kirzner's (1973) view on entrepreneurship, the Entrepreneurial Selling role mainly takes the form of an *arbitrageur*, connecting the dots as an intermediary between supply and demand. Sales meetings are needed to obtain information and reduce risk. Sales experience and an existing network from previous occupations is also essential. Due to the fact that such information can be obtained, business owners, in theory, are willing to spend a great deal of effort on creating a sales plan and finding the right potential customers. The product or service is created before meeting any

potential customers. Preliminary knowledge of the marketplace is, therefore, absolutely crucial to introducing products successfully. When meeting with potential customers, a well prepared, fixed sales approach will be applied to convince customers to buy. These (potential) customers will mainly arise from an existing network with similar backgrounds with prior knowledge of this existing market, so there is a greater chance of recognizing its opportunities (Upson *et al.*, 2017, Venkataraman, 2019)

In creation theory, opportunities are not seen as unobjective opportunities formed by exogeneous shocks, but as being endogenously created (Alvarez and Barney, 2007, Martin and Wilson, 2016, Sarasvathy *et al.*, 2020). Business owners do not search for opportunities; they act and watch how (potential) customers and markets respond to their actions. This focus means there is a possibility for new industries and markets to emerge. From, this teleological perspective, opportunities do not exist independently from the individual. Business owners are the source of opportunity creation. They create, staying with the metaphor of the beachcombers, the beach. The context in which decisions are made is still uncertain (Knight, 1921, Cantillon, 1931), as opportunities do not exist before they are created. This uncertainty means that searching for information on how decisions will work out is bound to fail as you simply cannot know such outcomes.

Here, the Entrepreneurial Selling role is more one of an *acquirer*. Demand and supply will need to be created by the business owner (Venkataraman, 2003) and the selling role has a crucial role to fulfill in that process. The selling role is necessary to reduce uncertainty, as there is no current customer base. Business owners operating in creation contexts will have potential customers in their networks with more diverse backgrounds compared to their own (Upson *et al.*, 2017). However, customers known from previous activities may be less useful, as knowledge from existing markets and industries is less helpful in creating new markets and industries (March, 1991, Aldrich, 1999, Weick, 2015, Upson *et al.*, 2017). The role contains the acquisition of new network contacts, incremental planning, and iterative learning from each call. The business owner makes a shortlist of potential customers and then directly approaches these leads. New products and services will be discussed in preliminary sales conversations and then further shaped with potential customers.

Cant and Van Heerden (2005, p. 3), define personal selling “as the process of person-to-person communication between a salesperson and a (prospective) customer, in which the former learns about the customer’s needs and seeks to satisfy those needs by offering the customer the opportunity to buy something of value, such as a good or service.” Aligned with discovery theory, this process would mean in practice that there is already a fixed solution (a good and/or service) and it should be matched with an occurring need or problem of a prospective customer. Within creation theory, there is no solution, and perhaps even not a well-defined customer need or problem. The business owner has the core role in the creation process.

Effectuation and its Bird-in-Hand principle are the overarching perspectives of this current dissertation. Effectuation is more closely related to the creation perspective than

it is to the discovery perspective, as an effectual worldview implies that the future is *neither found nor predicted*, but rather *made* (Sarasvathy, 2001, 2009). In practice, business owners switch their sales behavior to reducing uncertainty and risk. Startups with the intention to build a new market should use their sales meetings for creating and experimenting with the aim to reduce uncertainty (Onyemah and Rivera-Pesquera, 2017, 2021).

In conjunction with this thinking, Entrepreneurial Selling scholars, until now, focused mainly on the selling activities before the launch of new propositions, thereby resulting in early customer feedback (Deutsch and Wortmann, 2011, Onyemah *et al.*, 2013, Pitkänen *et al.*, 2014, Lehto, 2015, Onyemah and Rivera-Pesquera, 2017, Dalecki, 2019). The assumption from their research is that the focus on the first stage of business development makes this stage distinctive from other forms of personal selling.

The consequence is that previous studies have not dealt with more mature companies and their Entrepreneurial Selling activities in much detail (Dalecki, 2019). More seasoned enterprises and their business owners have probably acquired more (but probably not perfect) knowledge of an existing market, perhaps after they created an opportunity, and used sales meetings for risk reduction. Switching their behavior in this way moved it from the opportunity perspective to the discovery perspective (Alvarez and Barney, 2007). Business owners in the discovery stage use these sales meetings to understand how their existing propositions fit the challenges of their customers and how much they will need to sell to achieve their predefined goals. If the business owner decides to introduce new products or services, they might switch back to using sales activities to exploit opportunities that are not knowable, a priori, and must be discovered over time. Hence, during the different life cycle stages of the enterprise and its propositions the sales role of the business owner transitions back and forth between an arbitrageur and an acquirer. That also means switching between causal (arbitrageur) and effectual (acquirer) behavior and adjusting the entrepreneurial behavior to the specific circumstances and its environment. To have the company survive and become successful, the business owner needs knowledge and skills of both entrepreneurial behavioral perspectives. Causation and Effectuation are discussed in more detail in the next paragraph.

In conclusion, entrepreneurship, in the context of this dissertation is “Made, as Well as Found” (Sarasvathy *et al.*, 2020). Salespeople are often perceived as fundamentally all performing the same set of activities (Marshall *et al.*, 1999). The reality is that there are great variations across salespeople (Hartmann *et al.*, 2021), that can be partially traced back to the discovery or creation debate. In both world views there is an indispensable task here for business owners in their sales role and their tasks can alternate (from creation to discovery and back again) during a specific life stage of a product or company.

For this dissertation and the main research question, this section sets the foundation at a meta level for further research. The main differences in the discovering and creation selling role are shown below in Table 4.

Entrepreneurial Selling Discovering Role	Entrepreneurial Selling Creation Role
Arbitrageur	Acquirer
The sales role connects supply to demand	The sales role creates supply and demand
Role entails decreasing risk	Role entails decreasing uncertainty
Build on existing network contacts	Focus on new network contacts
Extensive sales plan (causal)	Iterative learning / incremental sales planning (effectual)
More fixed sales approach	More adaptive sales approach
Sales products and services are already created before the sales process	Sales products and services are created with customers during the sales process
Preliminary expertise of customers/markets and products/services is essential	Expertise of customers/markets and products/services is an ongoing process

TABLE 4: Differences between the Entrepreneurial Selling Discovering and Creation Role

## 2.2 Entrepreneurial Action and Effectuation in the Context of Entrepreneurial Selling

It was established in the previous section that for both teleological world views, made and found, there is a need for a meaningful Entrepreneurial Selling role that can alternate easily. To exploit entrepreneurial opportunities, one has to act (McMullen and Shepherd, 2006, Baron, 2007, Shepherd *et al.*, 2015, Lerner *et al.*, 2018). Selling is an essential entrepreneurial activity used to exploit opportunities (Block and MacMillan, 1985), and the sales role cannot exist without related action. This section describes the theoretical foundations behind that entrepreneurial action.

For the last decade, entrepreneurial action has continued to be of considerable interest to researchers (Meek *et al.*, 2010, Mitchell and Shepherd, 2010, McKelvie *et al.*, 2011, Brettel *et al.*, 2012, Autio *et al.*, 2013, Alonso and Kok, 2020, Mitchell *et al.*, 2021). Why do some individuals pursue and take opportunities, while others do not? (Venkataraman and Shane, 2000, Lee and Venkataraman, 2006)

Action orientation is an individual-level construct that captures a business owner's inclination to act (Bird and Schjoedt, 2009). Within these studies, the actual actions are examined in how business owners of firms engage (McKelvie *et al.*, 2011). In the view of Austrian economists, the entrepreneur was commonly regarded as the driving force behind the economy. They linked any stagnation in an economy to a deficiency in entrepreneurial activity (Von Mises, 1949, Kirzner, 1973, Pasour, 1989).

In framing the exploitation of opportunities as action-oriented (de Jong *et al.* 2015), business ownership entails an extensive range of activities, but the field has not (often) included the underlying individual market exchanges between the actors. (Onyemah and



Rivera-Pesquera, 2021). Matthews, Chalmers, and Fraser (2018) questioned the absence of empirical research and theory development of a phenomenon that is so vital to all entrepreneurial endeavors. Bird and Schoedt (2009, p. 379) stated that organizing and entrepreneurial behavior is “anchored in the actions of individuals, as they buy, *sell*, gather and deploy resources, work etc.” Hence, “*selling*” is a core concept for business owners. This dissertation seeks to grasp a deeper understanding of this sales action. The absence of research in this field created the gap that led to starting this dissertation and the willingness to close this gap. Several new theoretical perspectives have emerged to explain the actions and logic of entrepreneurial behavior: Causation, Effectuation (Sarasvathy, 1998, 2001, 2009), Bricolage (Baker and Nelson, 2005, Fisher, 2012) and the Disinhibition approach (Lerner, 2016). These can vary from a thorough analysis of each to those that are impulse driven. A well-known traditional approach to entrepreneurship is the Causation approach. Within this framework, an individual business owner decides on a predetermined goal and then selects between the available means to achieve that goal (Sarasvathy, 2001). The causal view implies the pursuit of opportunity without considering currently controlled resources (Stevenson 1983). Classical economic scholars have assumed that actors have perfect knowledge and use it in the best possible way to achieve their goals (Goldthorpe, 1998). The result of that thinking is that business owners will fully understand and analyze all options, now and in the future, and choose the best option from the alternatives. The criticism of this thought is that even if reality exists where all rational information is available, in the modern complex business world, actors can never make perfect choices based on such information. There is not always enough information for business owners to readily recognize and evaluate opportunities before any exploitation. Individuals thus often undertake actions under uncertain circumstances (McMullen and Shepherd, 2006). Through that development, the alternative theoretical perspectives of Effectuation (Sarasvathy, 2001, 2009, Fisher, 2012), Bricolage, and Disinhibition (Lerner *et al.*, 2018) emerged.

Effectuation is more action driven than the Causation approach (Fisher, 2012). Effectuation suggests that under the condition of uncertainty, business owners will adopt a decision logic that is different from a traditional, more rational model of entrepreneurship (Sarasvathy, 1998, 2001, 2009). Business owners identify opportunities based on the resources under their control. Goals change, are shaped, and constructed over time, and are sometimes formed and revised by change. Part of the Effectuation process is experimenting with different ways to sell and deliver a product or service to customers (Fisher, 2012). At the individual level, effectual behavior includes maneuvering to gain selling knowledge or skills and then engaging with current or potential social networks.

The most extreme sides are the Bricolage (Baker and Nelson, 2005) and the Disinhibition approach (Lerner, 2016, Lerner *et al.*, 2018). The bricoleur would “make do” with the material at hand, which often emerges in resource-poor environments. The Disinhibition approach is impulse driven and not necessarily bound by an economically depressed sit-

uation. As new enterprises emerge, there is not always intended-rational, rule-directed decision-making, and action. The difference with the Effectuation approach is that no well thought out judgment making occurs before undertaking actions (Lerner, 2016, Lerner *et al.*, 2018), which for the selling role implies having direct action with prospective customers without any reflection on why they are being approached.

Traditional professional sales books teach salespeople to make comprehensive, detailed, thus causal strategies and plans for their sales work. This dissertation grasps the offered opportunity to find out how business owners of small-scale companies operationalize their Entrepreneurial Selling activities with the support of Effectuation. This choice derives from the knowledge that Effectuation (Sarasvathy, 1998, 2001, 2009) is a primary theoretical perspective that represents a significant movement in the way entrepreneurship is understood. According to Dalecki (2019), there are great possibilities for studying the cross-section between entrepreneurship and selling with the support of Effectuation. However, Effectuation is not often applied yet to selling research. Intentionally, Effectuation theory has been applied for nascent companies. More recent studies have presented the results of that Effectuation logic in the context of established companies (Matalamaki, 2017). Since, in practice, I saw a gap in business owners of established small companies who seemed unable to carry out their sales activities effectively, these small companies also form the core of this dissertation. Scholars have identified so many published papers that it become justifiable to conclude that Effectuation has now transitioned from a nascent to a more mature state (Read *et al.*, 2009b, Perry *et al.*, 2012, Read *et al.*, 2016).

Despite this development, Arend *et al.* (2015) criticize Effectuation for being ineffective and immeasurable. These scholars claim that Effectuation does not meet all the basic criteria of an established theory. In terms of measurability, Effectuation and its five principles are difficult to measure as a single construct (Chandler *et al.*, 2011). The five principles are Bird-in-Hand, Affordable-Loss, Lemonade-from-Lemons, Patchwork-Quilt, and Pilot-in-the-Plane, and they are explained in Table 5.

Read *et al.* (2016) counters this criticism by stating that Arend *et al.* (2015) unjustifiably assumed that Effectuation is positivistic, whereas initially, it was shaped as a pragmatic theory. In a more recent study, McKelvey *et al.* (2020) confirmed that scholars have provided more than enough empirical insights about Effectuation to consider the phenomenon as a mature academic topic. However, these scholars also indicated that the research on Effectuation is not always consistent and sometimes even fragmented in its assumptions and approaches (McKelvie *et al.*, 2020). Addressing the criticisms of 'positivist' scholars (Chandler *et al.*, 2011, Arend *et al.*, 2015), there are claims that the components of Effectuation are not all positively related. Right or wrong, these doubts and challenges regarding the development of the theory on Effectuation makes it necessary to explicitly make clear what the theoretical basis is for its use in this current dissertation.

What was immediately apparent in the study by Chandler *et al.* (2011), where Causation compares to Effectuation, the Causation items tended to load together, while the Effectu-

ation items did not. The conclusion was that the evidence suggested that Effectuation is a multi-dimensional construct and the defining characteristics of that construct may, therefore, be independent of each other (MacKenzie *et al.*, 2005, Chandler *et al.*, 2011). Following these scholars, Effectuation is difficult to test as a stand-alone conceptualization. It is also problematic to test the “Effectuation construct” through the usual method of gathering a large sample, namely, a survey (Chandler *et al.*, 2011). The counterattack (Read *et al.*, 2016) that this positivistic view does not hold and the theory should be treated pragmatically confirms and allows that it is possible, and perhaps in some cases more worthwhile, to

Effectuation Principles (Sarasvathy, 1998, 2001, 2009)	Explanation (Global Society Advancing Effectual Action, 2023)	Effectual Selling Principles (Dalecki, 2019, p. 117)
<b>Bird-in-Hand</b>	<b>Start with your means instead of your end-goals.</b> Don't wait for the perfect opportunity. Start taking action, based on what you have readily available: who you are, what you know, and who you know.	“When skilled effectual salespeople set out to secure sales, they start with their means: they ask who I am, what do I know, and who do I know? Then, the salesperson imagines the possibilities that originate from his or her personal means.”
<b>Affordable-Loss</b>	<b>“Focus on downside risk, set affordable loss.</b> Evaluate opportunities based on whether the downside is acceptable, rather than on the attractiveness of the predicted upside.”	“Skilled effectual-salespeople limit risk by understanding what they can afford to lose at each step, instead of seeking large all-or-nothing sales opportunities. They choose sales goals and actions where there is an upside even if the downside does end up happening.”
<b>Lemonade-from-Lemons</b>	<b>“Leverage contingencies.</b> Embrace surprises that arise from uncertain situations, thereby remaining flexible rather than tethered to existing goals.”	“Skilled effectual salespeople invite the surprise factor. Instead of making what-if scenarios to deal with worst-case scenarios, experts interpret unwelcome news and surprises as potential clues to use to create new positive sales markets.”
<b>Patchwork-Quilt</b>	<b>“Form partnerships.</b> Form partnerships with people and organizations that are willing to make a real commitment to jointly creating the future—product, firm, market—with you. Don't worry so much about competitive analyses and strategic planning.”	“Skilled effectual salespeople will build partnerships with self-selecting stakeholders. By obtaining pre-commitments from these key partners early on in the sales process, they reduce uncertainty and co-create the new market with its interested participants.”
<b>Pilot-in-the-Plane</b>	<b>“Control the controllable.</b> The four specific principles above represent different ways entrepreneurs interact with their environment to shape it. Of course, not everything can be shaped or controlled, but Effectuation encourages you, as the pilot of your venture, to focus on those aspects of the environment that are, at least to a certain degree, within your control.”	“By focusing on activities within their control, expert effectual salespeople know their actions will result in desired outcomes. An effectual worldview is rooted in the belief that the future is neither found nor predicted, but rather made by taking action.”

TABLE 5: Descriptions of the Effectuation Principles (Sarasvathy, 1998, 2001, 2009) taken from [www.effectuation.org](http://www.effectuation.org) (Global Society Advancing Effectual Action, 2023) and Effectual Selling Principles (Dalecki, 2019, p. 117)

break Effectuation into several parts. This conclusion is the reason this current dissertation aims to in-depth test its premises using only one of the five principles of effectuation: the Bird-in-Hand principle (see next section).

Dalecki (2019) uses Sarasvathy's research on Effectuation to make a direct connection between Effectuation and Entrepreneurial Selling. The business owner does not do extensive market research within the current Entrepreneurial Selling paradigm and makes no extensive sales plan. Instead, the business owner uses sales meetings with prospects as the optimal means of doing that "market research" (Sarasvathy, 2001, Dalecki, 2019). Dalecki (2019) indeed shows us that the five Effectuation principles can be adapted to create effectual selling principles (see Table 5).

## 2.3 The Bird-In-Hand Principle Applied to Entrepreneurial Selling

Underlying Effectuation, the Bird-in-Hand principle is one of the five core principles. The focus on the Bird-in-Hand principle allows this dissertation to test the phenomenon of Entrepreneurial Selling on an effectual proposition and in this way bridge the gap between entrepreneurship and sales research. The Bird-in-Hand principle means that business owners employ an Effectuation process that does not start with a given goal, but with their own means—"Who are they?," "What do they know?," and "Whom do they know?" (Sarasvathy, 1998, 2001, 2009). The core of the Bird-in-Hand principle is the availability of those specific means for business owners to use. Means in the context of Effectuation are what the business owner already has available to put his or her entrepreneurial ambitions into action. These means (e.g., traits, abilities, attributes, expertise, experience, social networks) should be the starting point of Effectuation when business owners start their businesses, in contrast, to Causation, where the end goal of the company is the starting point, and the business owners need to assemble the resources to achieve their objectives (Sarasvathy, 2001, 2009).

It is worthwhile to apply the Bird-in-Hand principle to Entrepreneurial Selling because actions emerge from means (Read and Sarasvathy, 2005). This dissertation's core is thus to understand business owners' entrepreneurial selling actions. The principle is applied in this dissertation as a mirror of the selling behavior of business owners.

The information that business owners provide to the Bird-in-Hand questions are the means and show a relationship with the performance of businesses (Read *et al.*, 2009b). Effectively performing the sales role is crucial for a company's survival (Block and MacMillan, 1985, Shepherd *et al.*, 2015, Onyemah and Rivera-Pesquera, 2017, Matthews *et al.*, 2018, Onyemah and Rivera-Pesquera, 2021). Thus, when the sales mean questions are adapted to deliver information about the specific sales role of business owners, as is done in the Introduction Chapter (§1.2), the answers will provide key information about a company's

chances of survival. In contrast, Arend *et al.* (2015) claim that business owners often do not acknowledge how limited their means are. Business owners are frequently considered self-deceptive (Meza and Southey, 1996, Simon *et al.*, 2000, Hmieleski and Baron, 2009), and such overconfidence often leads to entrepreneurial decisions that fail (Hayward *et al.*, 2006, Lowe and Ziedonis, 2006, Moore *et al.*, 2007, Arend *et al.*, 2015). There thus seems to be an economic inefficiency produced by Effectuation by those who try starting and running a business when they should not. This overestimation of their capabilities and use of them must be considered whenever conducting research based on the Bird-in-Hand principle.

However, by adapting the means questions (Sarasvathy, 1998, 2001, 2009) into Entrepreneurial Selling means questions, they become the starting point of the three individual studies and the practical application chapter of this dissertation. These three questions belong together in the sense that the identity (*Who am I (as) a salesperson?*) is shaped and changed by knowledge (*Do I have sales experience, skills, and knowledge?*) and networks (*Do I have (able to acquire) a network with customers?*). Identity is not a fixed fact (Nielsen and Lassen, 2012). People can develop and change into a different person where the selling role becomes a part of their identity, shapes their preferences toward that role, and supports them in achieving their goals.

The three means questions depend on each other, and if the right set of sales competencies is not yet there, it can be created by developing the sales skills, knowledge, and networks of the business owner. Instead of using the classical approach to understand the means business owners need to have to start new businesses, this dissertation applies this principle, so that business owners with existing companies can reflect on their current sales performance. Hence, business owners can produce an 'inventory' of their selling means. This 'inventory' serves as the starting point for initiating sales actions; list what you have, what you know, and whom you know and put all these assets to work (Sarasvathy and Dew, 2005, Read *et al.*, 2009a). The challenge for Effectuation scholars and (sales) training practitioners is to show how to build a repertoire, so business owners can successfully effectuate (Mirvis, 1998). The practical chapter delivers a part of that repertoire by creating Entrepreneurial Selling applications to support the business owner and identifying the business owner's current sales means and challenges and, when necessary, moving the business owner from 'I cannot' to 'I can' effectively sell circumstance.

As the phenomenon of Entrepreneurial Selling is in its infancy stage, applying the Bird-in-Hand to this phenomenon will deliver greater in-depth insight into the selling behavior of business owners and will enhance both fields: Effectuation and Entrepreneurial Selling. The three empirical studies and the training applications chapter all connect to the Bird-in-Hand principle. Figure 3 offers an overview of the theoretical perspective of this dissertation from Entrepreneurial Action to the core topic of this dissertation: Entrepreneurial Selling.

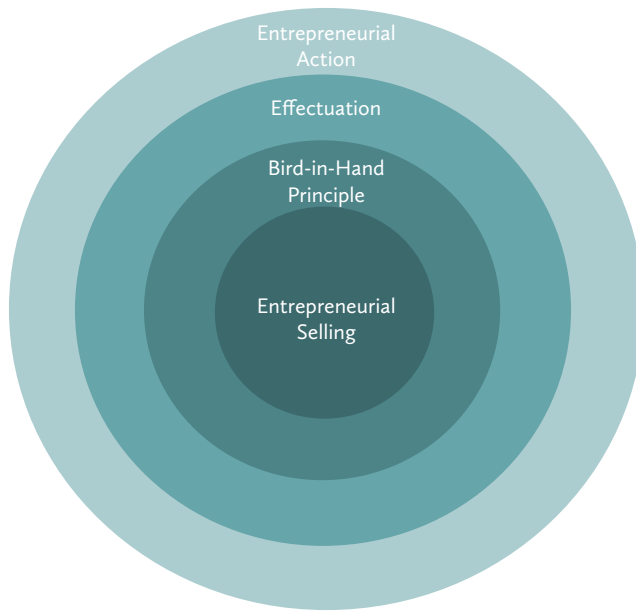


FIGURE 3: An Overview of the Theoretical Perspective

## 2.4 Moving the Domain of Entrepreneurial Selling Forward

Using the support of Effectuation and the Bird-in-Hand principle, this dissertation moves the domain of Entrepreneurial Selling forward. Both in theory and practice. Matthews *et al.* (2018) suggest that there is a serious disconnect between entrepreneurship and personal selling theory. Indeed, until recently, the scholarly debates on the two fields hardly ever overlapped. In fact, business owners have remained largely absent from the selling debate. Even in the yearly overviews of the current personal selling and sales management literature, there is no reference to the specific situation of business owners with small-scale companies (Deeter-Schmelz, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020).

For a long time, academic research on sales was limited, and it lagged behind both entrepreneurship and marketing in depth and visibility. Personal selling was not considered to be an academic discipline (Onyemah and Rivera-Pesquera, 2021). However, in the last 25 years, that landscape changed as interest in sales research started to increase (Onyemah and Rivera-Pesquera, 2021). Still, Personal selling studies concentrate primarily on hired or employed sales agents in large organizations rather than on how small-scale business owners engage in selling. Hence, thus far, selling seems to have been perceived as a job rather than as a role to be performed as part of a successful business.

The late introduction of this phenomenon is surprising, since selling is a fundamental entrepreneurial activity (Block and MacMillan, 1985). Personal selling scholars can now

benefit from the maturity of the entrepreneurship discipline. In turn, entrepreneurship can leverage new insights from entrepreneurship-based sales research to lower the failure rates of small- and medium sized enterprises by supporting business owners with the right attitude, knowledge, and the skills for selling and sales management right from the start and through the different stages of their existence (Onyemah and Rivera-Pesquera, 2021).”

In recent years, the attention on business owners and their selling activities has risen, albeit slowly, in the academic literature (Cespedes, 2014, Dalecki, 2019). A few scholars have begun to explore the cross-section of entrepreneurship and personal selling by introducing the notion of Entrepreneurial Selling (Deutsch and Wortmann, 2011, Onyemah *et al.*,

Title Article	Scholar(s)	Year	Key Points
Sales management as an entrepreneurial activity	M.H. Morris R. Avila E. Teeple	1990	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Entrepreneurship is seen as an innovational mindset and an approach that can be applied in all kinds of organizations.</li> <li>• The findings indicate that factors viewed as most important for success in sales also tend to be associated with entrepreneurship.</li> </ul>
Entrepreneurial Selling	W. Deutsch C. Wortmann	2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Entrepreneurship in this chapter focuses on founders of startups, typically first-time entrepreneurs.</li> <li>• This chapter was probably the first to acknowledge that Entrepreneurial Selling is different than professional sales and that the founder must be the first salesperson.</li> <li>• Entrepreneurs are often unprepared for generating early sales. Get as much feedback and insight from those early customers as possible.</li> <li>• Describes a four-stage Entrepreneurial Selling process.</li> </ul>
2013 – What entrepreneurs get wrong. 2017 – The facts every entrepreneur must know. 2021 – Entrepreneurial Selling	V. Onyemah, M. Rivera-Pesquera	2013, 2017, 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Entrepreneurship can be applied to founders, small established firms, and seasoned serial entrepreneurs offering innovative solutions.</li> <li>• No distinction is made between founders and owners. It remains unclear if sales professionals in established firms can also be seen as entrepreneurial sellers when launching a new product.</li> <li>• Entrepreneurship is not possible without the ability to sell.</li> <li>• Already test the idea with a select group of prospects before creating it.</li> <li>• Describes an 8-step Entrepreneurial Selling model.</li> </ul>
International Entrepreneurial Selling as the construction of international opportunities	I. Lehto	2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Entrepreneurship is an innovational mindset and approach. This chapter focuses on founder-entrepreneurs who introduce (existing) products and/or services in an international context.</li> <li>• Personal networks and agents play a key role when exporting to another country; still entrepreneurs cannot fully outsource the sales role.</li> <li>• Early stage and direct interaction with potential buyers are necessary tactics for gaining customer and contextual understanding.</li> </ul>
Entrepreneurial Selling in context	L. Dalecki	2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides an overview of the existing academic and practitioners’ literature on Entrepreneurial Selling.</li> <li>• Explores the commonalities between the conceptualizations developed by Deutsch and Wortmann against those of Onyemah and Rivera-Pesquera.</li> <li>• First conceptual framework offered on Entrepreneurial Selling.</li> </ul>

TABLE 6: Overview of seven Groundbreaking Articles on Entrepreneurial Selling

2013, Onyemah and Rivera-Pesquera, 2017, Dalecki, 2019, Onyemah and Rivera-Pesquera, 2021). A search for “Entrepreneurial Selling” in scientific databases such as Google Scholar, Business Source Ultimate, and ProQuest, rendered only seven studies, and they are summarized here in Table 6. Dalecki (2019) was the first to provide an overview of the scientific and practical publications on Entrepreneurial Selling. The seven articles offer an overview of the development of Entrepreneurial Selling and describe the current status of Entrepreneurial Selling and the different scope that scholars use to describe the phenomenon. Further still, Lehto (2015) puts Entrepreneurial Selling in an international context.

Given the research on the nexus of personal selling and entrepreneurship, Entrepreneurial Selling, seems to be finally gaining speed (Dalecki, 2019). The phenomenon of Entrepreneurial Selling is discussed in more detail in the next section.

## 2.5 The Scope and Definition of Entrepreneurial Selling

Whenever concepts are introduced into a scientific field, there is often a period of definitional ambiguity. This equivocation is especially common in the social sciences. Over time, however, when the different explanations are examined, a consensus develops around a fixed definition (Alvarez and Barney, 2020). Entrepreneurial Selling is currently in the middle of such development.

Most scholars seem to agree that Entrepreneurial Selling focuses on the selling activities before the launch of new propositions that result in early customer feedback (Deutsch and Wortmann, 2011, Onyemah *et al.*, 2013, Pitkänen *et al.*, 2014, Lehto, 2015, Onyemah and Rivera-Pesquera, 2017, Dalecki, 2019). The assumption is that the focus on this early stage of business development makes this field distinctive from other forms of personal selling. Before the product or service is actually developed, Entrepreneurial Selling within this particular context refers to testing and developing the idea together with prospective customers. From this perspective, Entrepreneurial Selling can be seen as a replacement for extensive marketing research. There is also a shared understanding of who should carry out the personal selling activities in small businesses. The only one who is capable of doing so is the entrepreneur; at least at the start of a new business or the introduction of a new proposition. Entrepreneurs are best positioned, as they are intrinsically motivated and passionate about their propositions (Deutsch and Wortmann, 2011, Onyemah *et al.*, 2013, Onyemah and Rivera-Pesquera, 2017, Dalecki, 2019).

Despite these agreements, studies still differ regarding the boundary of what Entrepreneurial Selling is. For each scholar in every individual study, it becomes necessary to explain in detail what the scholar is trying to understand and then operationalize it (Saravathy *et al.*, 2020). That is the objective of this section.



## Different Views on Entrepreneurship

The different interpretations of Entrepreneurial Selling derive from the fact that there are independent, non-identical definitions of what entrepreneurship includes (Hébert and Link, 1989, Gartner, 1990, Bruyat and Julien, 2001). The scholars who laid down the foundation for entrepreneurial research had different views on entrepreneurship. Schumpeter (1912) focused on innovation, Adam Smith concentrated on the prerequisite of capital and, therefore, viewed entrepreneurs as capitalists. Cantillon's view of entrepreneurs was that of a risk taker, while Von Mises defined entrepreneurship as action (Von Mises, 1962, Lindh de Montoya, 2000). Kirzner (1973) defined entrepreneurship as alertness, where the entrepreneur is seen as an arbitrageur, a term that may also include "boldness, creativity and innovativeness" (Kirzner, 2009, p. 150). Entrepreneurship has also been connected to the creation of new enterprises (Kent *et al.*, 1982) or the action of a risk taker to rescue an existing business (Hébert and Link, 1989, Alonso and Kok, 2020).

Thus, at its very core, entrepreneurship is about the creation or discovery and exploitation of opportunities (Block and MacMillan, 1985, Venkataraman and Shane, 2000, Van der Veen and Wakkee, 2004, Sarasvathy, 2009, Sarasvathy *et al.*, 2020). Wennekers and Van Thurik (1999) stated that such opportunities can range from new products, new production methods, and new organizational schemes to new product-market combinations that are introduced in the market in uncertain circumstances. Hence, entrepreneurial behavior can be shown by introducing innovating products and services, but also by exploring new possibilities for selling already existing products.

Still, entrepreneurship is not always synonymous with small business (Carree and Thurik, 2010). It can also include employees showing entrepreneurial behavior. This is why it is essential to explain why the level of analysis in this dissertation that of the business owner is who owns and manages a small business. Some scholars have argued that salespeople are equal to autonomous business owners by conducting business with limited supervision, even deciding on ways to grow sales volumes (Jones *et al.*, 2000). The main weakness of that claim is that it fails to draw a behavioral distinction between employed actors and actors who act for own risk and benefit. Previous marketing research has already shown that there is a difference between marketing managers and business owners (Read *et al.*, 2009a). The entrepreneurial behavior of employees is excluded from this dissertation because strong differences exist between hired sales agents in terms of their sales *function* compared to business owners who are performing their sales *roles*. First, business owners have, next to selling, other tasks and roles to fulfill and thus cannot perform the sales activities full-time. Second, sales employees in larger organizations are generally supported in their jobs by different departments (Deutsch and Wortmann, 2011), such as marketing and operations.

This support is often lacking for business owners of small-scale companies, as they have fewer resources available than sales agents do in larger companies. Although the conclusion may be that a business owner is primarily a salesperson, the circumstances of employed salespeople studied in the sales research is significantly different than the dynamics faced

by actual business owners (Onyemah and Rivera-Pesquera, 2021). These differences mean we cannot simply apply insights from the research on sales agents to business owners. The sales employee develops and acts as a specialist, becoming more professional and successful by spending all their time and other available resources on this task. This dedication to the selling task is not possible for business owners due to the many roles they must fulfill.

Business owners also have certain advantages over hired sales agents. Since the professional sales function emerged during the Industrial Revolution, salespeople have had to deal with a debatable reputation (Anderson *et al.*, 2020). As entrepreneurship has a more positive connotation than personal selling (Morris *et al.*, 1990), there are strong indications that most buyers prefer to be approached by the business owner. Lehto (2015, p. 277) characterizes business owners “by their personal commitment, passion, and expertise, but also by liabilities, which combined makes it very personal”. Thus, business owners who are positive and enthusiastic about their ideas and innovations tend to be more persuasive when making presentations to potential investors, customers, or employees (Baron, 2007). The assumption is that they are more convincing than their employed professional sales agents. The differences between the business owner and the sales employee are summarized in Table 7. Despite the differences for professional sales actors in larger organizations, there has not been much research on the effect the differences have on the sales behavior of business owners (Matthews *et al.*, 2018).

Characteristics of Actor	Business Owner in Sales Role	Sales Employees of Large Organization
Liability	Own risk (financial investment, personal liability)	Limited risks (lose job)
Role or function	Role	Function
Resources	Limited, especially in small organizations	Backed by marketing and the operations department
Time spent on sales activities	Limited (due to many roles)	Full-time
Former sales experience	Varies, depending on background of business owner	Yes (except junior sales employee)
Affinity with sales	Varies, depending on background and characteristics of business owner	Yes
Entrepreneurial approach	In principle is effectual	In principle is causal

TABLE 7: Differences between Business Owner in Sales Role and Employee in Sales Function

### Different Views on Personal Selling

The same ambiguity, as with entrepreneurship, applies to the definition of personal selling. In practice, salespeople are often perceived as basically all performing the same set of activities, independently of organizational philosophy, type of product/service or industry (Marshall *et al.*, 1999). The reality is that in the sales domain there is the “existence of a

substantial number of sales roles, such as hunter/gatherer, inside/outside, consultative, new business/channel development, missionary, delivery, order taker, technical, trade, support, and key account manager; all point to great variations across salespeople. The various descriptions of salespeople and the activities they perform makes the question relevant for what selling fundamentally is” (Hartmann *et al.*, 2021, p. 10). Selling actors engage in sales activities to ensure that opportunities are created or discovered and exploited. Business owners and sales agents do so in their direct relationship with (potential) customers, leading to exchanging goods and services for money (Darr and Pinch, 2013).

### **What is Entrepreneurial Selling?**

In conclusion, there remains ambiguity about what entrepreneurship and what personal selling exactly entail. Naturally, this haziness also applies to the new domain that emerges from the combined research field of entrepreneurship and personal selling: Entrepreneurial Selling. The indistinctness makes it important to first determine what we mean by Entrepreneurial Selling whenever sharing and interpreting any results.

Current Entrepreneurial Selling scholars differentiate on the scope and definition of Entrepreneurial Selling. Deutsch and Wortmann (2011) have narrowed Entrepreneurial Selling to the founders of startups. In contrast, Morris *et al.* (1990) see Entrepreneurial Selling as a mindset that can be applied to all types and sizes of organizations, not restricting it to just ownership. Onyemah and Rivera Pesquera’s (2017) aim next to startups, also on business owners of small established firms who introduce new propositions and define Entrepreneurial Selling as “the identification and exploitation of opportunities for acquiring, developing, and maintaining value for co-creators such as potential customers, partners, investors, employees, suppliers, banks, board members, mentors, and channels of distribution, to yield multi-way wins for everyone (Onyemah and Rivera-Pesquera, 2021, p. 49).” This study takes a similar view on Entrepreneurial Selling as that of Onyemah and Rivera Pesquera by including the more seasoned business owners of small established firms.

In addition, the scope of Entrepreneurial Selling for this study is broadened by involving business owners that sell already existing propositions. Sales activities and business failures are by no means limited to a specific life-cycle phase. This view derives from the idea that we should expect different behaviors from a (financial) risk taker than someone who is hired as an employee, regardless of the phase (the life cycle) of the business. The choice of focusing on the business owner stems from the fact that the independent, risk-taking character of ownership is the primary indicator between the deviating behavior of business owners and that of employees (Das and Teng, 1998, Kamineni, 2002, Das and Teng, 2020).

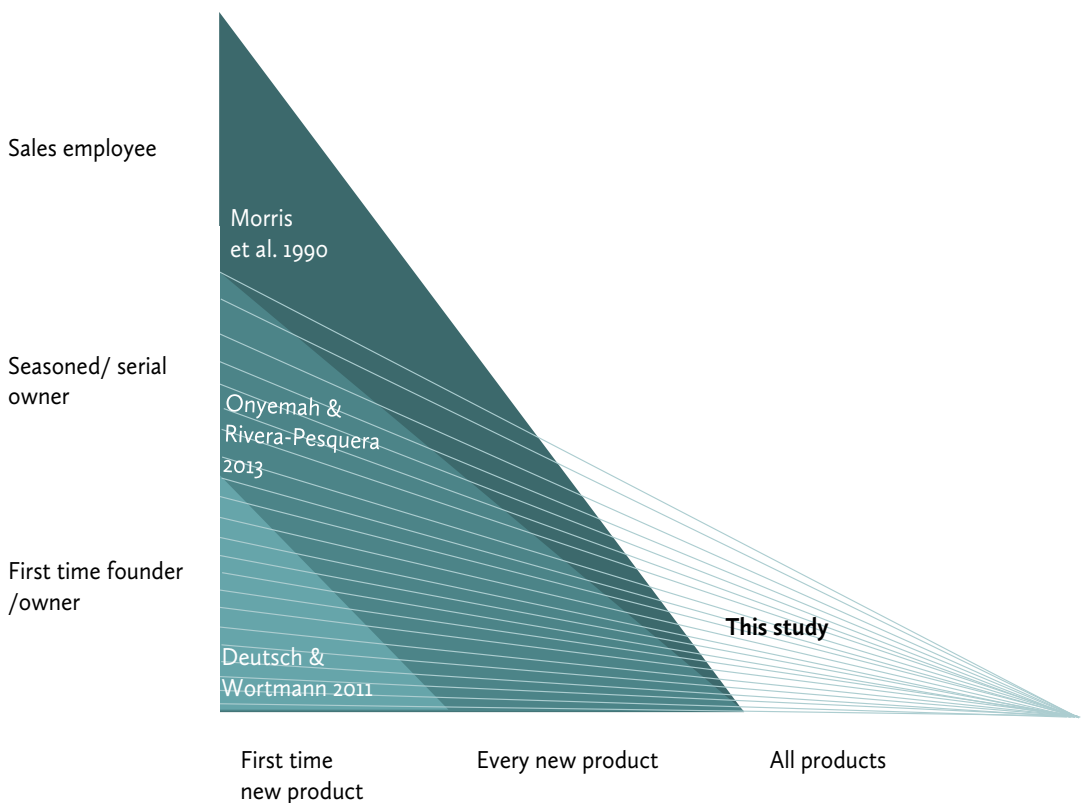
Restricting Entrepreneurial Selling to innovation or to any particular phase would render an incomplete picture of how selling activities may influence the performance of small enterprises. This dissertation also only focuses on business-to-business companies and their selling behavior in relation to the customers and not to other stakeholders. With other stakeholders, research that focuses on innovation instead of risk mainly means in-

vestors. Business owners will only frequently contact investors during earlier stages of the life cycle when they develop innovational propositions, which was only the case for a few business owners who participated in the three studies of this dissertation.

If this position is combined with the definition of personal selling by Cant and Van Heerden (2005, p. 3) and replaces 'salesperson' with 'business owner' the precise definition of Entrepreneurial Selling emerges. Here Entrepreneurial Selling is defined as:

The process of person-to-person(s) communication between a business owner and a (prospective) customer, in which the former learns about the customer's needs and seeks to satisfy those needs by offering the customer the opportunity to buy something of value, such a good or service.

In Figure 4, the different views on Entrepreneurial Selling are compared in a model.



**FIGURE 4: A Comparison of Current Entrepreneurial Selling Definitions, Including the Definition Used Here**

## 2.6 The Connection Between Personal and Entrepreneurial Selling

Onyemah and Rivera-Pesquera (2017) claim that “existing sales models are inadequate for entrepreneurship because they are largely based on presumptions that are different from the realities faced by entrepreneurs.” Deutsch and Wortmann (2011, p. 2) confirm this statement by saying that “Entrepreneurial Selling is different from professional sales with the fact that in larger organizations the professional salesperson is backed by a plethora of resources from an established brand to marketing and customer service support, the entrepreneur has none of these to rely on.”

However, it remains unclear, due to the infant stage of Entrepreneurial Selling (Dalecki, 2019), if this claim contains all personal selling theory or just parts of it; and if so, what parts? An overview offered in this section of the significant developments of the existing B-to-B personal selling research supports future Entrepreneurial Selling scholars' choosing of personal selling theory or models and apply these entities to the situation of the business owner. In this way, entrepreneurial sales scholars can systematically gain clearer understanding of where the similarities and the differences exist between an employed sales agent in a sales function and a business owner in a sales role. This dissertation does not pretend to include all topics on personal selling and instead focuses on the two 'grand' topics-- the sales processes and the sales approaches.

### **The Seven Steps of Selling / Transactional Selling**

Shannahan *et al.* (2013) created an oversight of the early (1977-1982) and a more recent conceptualizations of the personal selling process (1995-2008). Sales research increased in the 1970's and the beginning of the 1980's. Further specification of the personal selling process was at the center of this development. Scholars during this period described personal selling as a process that is divisible. Spiro, Perrault and Reynolds (Spiro *et al.*, 1976) were the first to have made an extensive synthesis of the significant factors in the seller-customer interaction (Shannahan *et al.*, 2013). Dubinsky (1981), however, was the author who presented them for the first time as a complete process. Dubinsky analyzed and described the classic seven steps of selling as 1) Prospecting, 2) Pre-approach, 3) Approach, 4) Presentation, 5) Handling objections, 6) Close, and 7) Follow up) (Dubinsky, 1981).

These seven steps of selling are perhaps the oldest paradigm in the personal selling literature (Moncrief and Marshall, 2005), but they are also no longer applicable for successful sales encounters in the complex B-to-B encounters. The buyer-seller relationship was seen as a sales-oriented, static, linear, and sequential process. The customer was seen as an obstacle to overcome, rather than as an equal actor in the sales process (Shannahan *et al.*, 2013) The applied sales approach was transactional. Transactional Selling occurs when a short- term customer needs to determine the buyer-seller interactions. There is no long-term commitment loyalty involved and this short-term focus, when combined with

perverted incentives for salespeople, damaged the reputation of salespeople and change was thus needed (Anderson *et al.*, 2020).

### **The Evolved Seven Steps of Selling / Adaptive Selling / Relationship Selling**

The purchasing side was professionalized as a reaction to the power of suppliers. Competition grew, and products became one that were faster outdated or replicated. In response, the offerings from manufacturers started to include variable service elements, and these are often difficult to specify (Wise and Baumgartner, 1999, Neu and Brown, 2005, Windahl, 2007, Åge, 2011).

The sales literature started to describe the Adaptive Selling approach. Salespeople had to tailor their sales presentations and demonstrations to connect with customer needs (Anderson *et al.*, 2020). Adaptive sales behavior increased customer trust, performance, satisfaction, and future interaction (Román and Iacobucci, 2010). Although it was more focused on the customer, this sales process was still, largely monadic and seller oriented. The buyer had only a passive role in the process (Moncrief, 2017). As the emphasis on the salesperson did not produce 'fruitful outcomes' in improved reputation and sales quotas, relationship selling then emerged (Arli *et al.*, 2018). The combination of Adaptive Selling and Relationship Selling is probably here to stay and will remain fundamental (Arli *et al.*, 2018). The result of the emergence of Relationship Selling was an increased emphasis on the collaboration between buyer and seller organizations. The sales research thus shifted from monadic (focused on the seller) to dyadic (focused on the relationship between buyer and seller) (Borg and Young, 2014, Arli *et al.*, 2018).

Relationship Selling is defined as a long-term customer-supplier commitment (Sheth and Shah, 2003) by forming, establishing, and maintaining long-term relationships (Johnston and Marshall, 2005, Ahearne *et al.*, 2007) and a desire for a win-win partnerships (Sheth and Shah, 2003, Guenzi *et al.*, 2007) with a loyal, profitable customer (Johnston and Marshall, 2005). Prominent levels of trust and cooperation characterize this mode. Relationship Selling, in theory, offers equal contributions in the selling process for the buyer and the seller (Shannahan *et al.*, 2013, Moncrief, 2017). Relationship Selling became prominent because sales managers analyzed that winning new customers had higher costs than reselling to current customers (Jones and Sasser, 1995, Moncrief, 2017). Salespeople had to become relationship managers; seen as those individuals who were responsible, over the long term, for the end-to-end relationship with customers, including communication, sales, and after-sales service (Davies *et al.*, 2010). Not only did the role of salespeople change. but also the necessary attitudes, competencies, and skills differed from those of traditional salespeople (Shapiro and Moriarty, 1983, McDonald *et al.*, 1997, Weitz and Bradford, 1999, Davies *et al.*, 2010). Relationship Management also was the origin of Customer Relationship Management (CRM). CRM systems were developed in the middle of the 1990s by information technology firms to put the strategic nature of relationship selling into consecutive actions and also record these actions. CRM is also one of the few

topics that entrepreneurship scholars pay attention to in their own rare personal selling endeavors (Matthews *et al.*, 2018).

The evolution of the Seven Steps of Selling paralleled the rise of relationship selling into a philosophy, wherein not all steps are executed during each sales call. This is not a prescriptive sequence of actions that a salesperson is obligated to follow (Åge, 2011, Shannahan *et al.*, 2013), and the process is one of dynamism and, therefore, is both non-linear and non-sequential (Åge, 2011). In the 'old' seven steps process (Dubinsky, 1981) the focus was on prospecting, it now moved toward the retention of customers. The enhancement of the customer relationship instead of the immediate sale became the focus of personal selling endeavors. These Evolved Seven Steps of Selling consisted of: 1) Customer retention and deletion 2) Database and knowledge management 3) Nurturing the relationship 4) Marketing the product 5) Problem solving 6) Adding value / moving needs 7) Customer relationship maintenance (Moncrief and Marshall, 2005).

Different forms of selling derived from Relationship Selling: e.g. Value-Based selling (understanding and proactively improving the customer's business) (Alejandro *et al.*, 2011), Consultative Selling (helping customers make intelligent decisions to achieve their business goals) (Liu and Leach, 2001) and Solution Selling (developing relational capability with a focus on the interaction exchange practices between the firm and its existing and new customers to achieve business goals) (Storbacka *et al.*, 2011).

In conclusion, the B-to-B sales function has changed over the years. Given the more informed and demanding buyers. This change has forced organizations to move toward a more relationship-based, consultative, and solution-oriented approach (Sharma *et al.*, 2008, Paesbrughe *et al.*, 2018) and additional research by Entrepreneurial Selling scholars if this approach is also applicable to the behavior of the business-owners of small businesses.

### **Network analysis / Strategic Selling**

As the B-to-B market increased in complexity, both sides of the buying process typically then involved multiple actors (Weitz and Bradford, 1999, Åge, 2011). Network analysis, instead of the dyadic, became dominant (Arli *et al.*, 2018). In Network Analysis, each individual becomes embedded within a more extensive network of relationships (Wilke and Ritter, 2006, Freytag and Philipsen, 2010, Borg and Young, 2014). Network Analysis also has established a prominent place in the entrepreneurship literature.

Instead of influencing customers, organizations are now trying to respond better to customers' demands and behaviors. The result is a form of co-creation (Shannahan *et al.*, 2013). Strategic alliances and partnerships emerge. Co-creation happens when buyers' and sellers' strategies, goals, and resources become so intertwined that they develop an integrated relationship while still retaining their independent identities (Jones *et al.*, 2003, Rich, 2003, Anderson *et al.*, 2020). The final customer solutions develop only gradually (Crosby *et al.*, 1990, Weitz and Bradford, 1999, Keillor *et al.*, 2000, Delvecchio *et al.*, 2004,

Hunter and Perreault Jr, 2007, Åge, 2011). Key characteristics of this buyer-seller relationship include high levels of commitment, communication, relationship openness, joint problem solving, strategic integration, mutual learning, and deficient levels of opportunistic behavior (Anderson *et al.*, 2020). Managers no longer view customers as active participants, but rather as an extended part of their own company (Sheth and Sisodia, 2002).

In Transactional Selling, the number of sales and the knowledge about the products and competition was the primary objective. It then shifted with Relationship Selling and Strategic Selling toward the quality of the customer relationships and more in-depth knowledge about customer needs (Krishnan *et al.*, 2002). Strategic Selling demands the deployment of many resources from a company. Considering the scarce resources of many small businesses, the question for entrepreneurial scholars then is if and how business-owners can actually apply this sales approach for their companies.

### **A New Paradigm: Organizing, Sensemaking and Maneuvering**

In the last decade, the personal selling literature has shifted toward a more conceptual level. Despite the evolution of the sales process and the novel approaches, the image of the sales professional is still poor. Some even have questioned if the sales force was in the process of becoming obsolete (Jones *et al.*, 2005) or dying (Moncrief, 2017). Other scholars have stated that current sales literature is insufficient for understanding the complex selling processes, and a paradigm shift is necessary, instead of incremental changes based on the current sales literature, in order to better grasp the complexity of today's business processes (Gummesson, 2005, Åge, 2011). This paradigm shift emerges from 'process thinking' toward constructs as Organizing and Sensemaking.

The B-to-B customers are confronted with increasingly complex service offerings, making trust and personal relationships critical and the need for the sales forces to acquire strategic relationship management capabilities (Sharma *et al.*, 2008, Viio and Grönroos, 2016, Paesbrugghe *et al.*, 2018). Organizational members now seek and gather information to maximize opportunity and minimize cost (Weick *et al.*, 2005, Weick, 2012), and they use Sensemaking and Organizing to achieve this objective. In this new paradigm, there are no longer seven simple steps (Borg and Young, 2014). Because the customer is equally involved in the process, it is now more of a customer interpretation system that is concerned with uncertainty reduction during and between every customer-salesperson interaction taking place (Shannahan *et al.*, 2013).

Salespeople and their customers never face situations of perfect information and are thus seeking to reduce uncertainty (Shannahan *et al.*, 2013). Sales actors and (potential customers) have the opportunity to organize and use Sensemaking during each interaction. It is an ongoing cognitive process that yields some form of accomplishment that emerges from the efforts to create order and make retrospective sense of what is occurring. Sensemaking decreases the uncertainty in their environment and is a process of social construction. The social roles (also personal selling) provide the basis for Sensemaking



(Weick, 1993, 1995, Weick *et al.*, 2005, Weick, 2012, Shannahan *et al.*, 2013) and apply to the communication occurring between customers and salespeople. Sensemaking includes activities like listening, noticing, categorizing, and bracketing (i.e. a salesperson focuses on the change and calls the customer to discuss it) (Shannahan *et al.*, 2013). Salespeople and buyers use organizing to decrease the ambiguity these parties encounter through better communicative action. Organizing involves using information from and about the environment to make sense of each given situation (Weick *et al.*, 2005) and to interpret and explain cues coming from their environment. Organizing happens when individuals are involved in the selling process.

Åge (2011) attempts to catch the increasing complexity of personal selling and put it into a conceptual framework called Business Maneuvering. Although Åge does not use the constructs of Sensemaking and Organizing literally, they are strongly related. Business Maneuvering describes a process through which both buying sides are weighing, managing, and balancing each other a little differently each time the encounters and the process of doing business takes place.

### **The Entrepreneurial Selling Process and Approach**

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Because of the still early development of Entrepreneurial Selling research, not many authors have tried to grasp the differences between entrepreneurs and sales professionals and offer a description of the process or the approach. Before describing and weighing the two available processes, it is essential to remember that the scope of their definitions do differ from each other (§2.5) and also from the one that is used for this dissertation.

Deutsch and Wortmann (2011) describe four stages as the Entrepreneurial Selling process: 1) Selecting a target 2) Engaging the prospect 3) Making the match and 4) Doing the deal. Onyemah and Rivera-Pesquera (2017) offer a 12-step existing selling model. In their book, these scholars explain that “Entrepreneurial Selling” first as an eight-step summary of existing traditional personal selling models and why these models are ineffective for launching new propositions. The difference of their offered model compared to the existing personal selling models focuses on preventing the entrepreneur from investing in an idea that will not be profitable and thus lead to failure. The first four steps concentrate on testing the idea and its prototype. Steps 5 to 12 follow the same stages as their summary of the selling process as follows: 1) Share the idea with a select group of prospects; 2) Is the idea’s appeal strong and broad? Yes! 3) Develop and test prototypes with prospects; 4) Obtain conditional commitment; 5) Generate leads from a larger group of prospects; 6) Assess those leads; 7) Identify qualified prospects; 8) Explore the product with the prospects; 9) Address objections; 10) Close deal; 11) deliver product; and 12) Follow up with customers (Onyemah *et al.*, 2013, Onyemah and Rivera-Pesquera, 2017).

The advantage of these two processes is that they are easily understandable and pragmatic. This makes these processes for learning very simply applicable to business owners. The question, however, remains whether, considering the developments in personal

selling research, if a step-by-step process is still feasible in this dynamic world. Deutsch and Wortmann (2011) describe the challenges at each step of the process compared to the professionals. The challenges can revert to the difference in resources to which they both have access. The distinctiveness in the personal selling literature is that the Entrepreneurial Selling approach focuses on getting prospective customer feedback on product prototyping in the initial stages of the process. Furthermore, both insist on not outsourcing or delegating the task of selling during the early stages of the firm (Deutsch and Wortmann, 2011, Onyemah and Rivera-Pesquera, 2017, Dalecki, 2019), as most buyers have as their preference to be approached by the business owner (Onyemah and Rivera-Pesquera, 2017). These early scholars have done significant work to place Entrepreneurial Selling on the academic agenda of entrepreneurship and personal selling scholars. Future academics must now proceed to build on this vital groundwork.

Figure 5 gives an overview of the current personal selling processes (A, B and C) and its approaches (1, 2 and 3). The outstanding question for future researchers is how these personal selling processes and approaches connect to and impact the sales behavior of small-scale business owners. In other words, how does Entrepreneurial Selling differ from personal selling? This dissertation addresses this challenge in Chapter 6 by researching whether Adaptive Selling, as the mother of all modern sales approaches, is now being used by business owners.

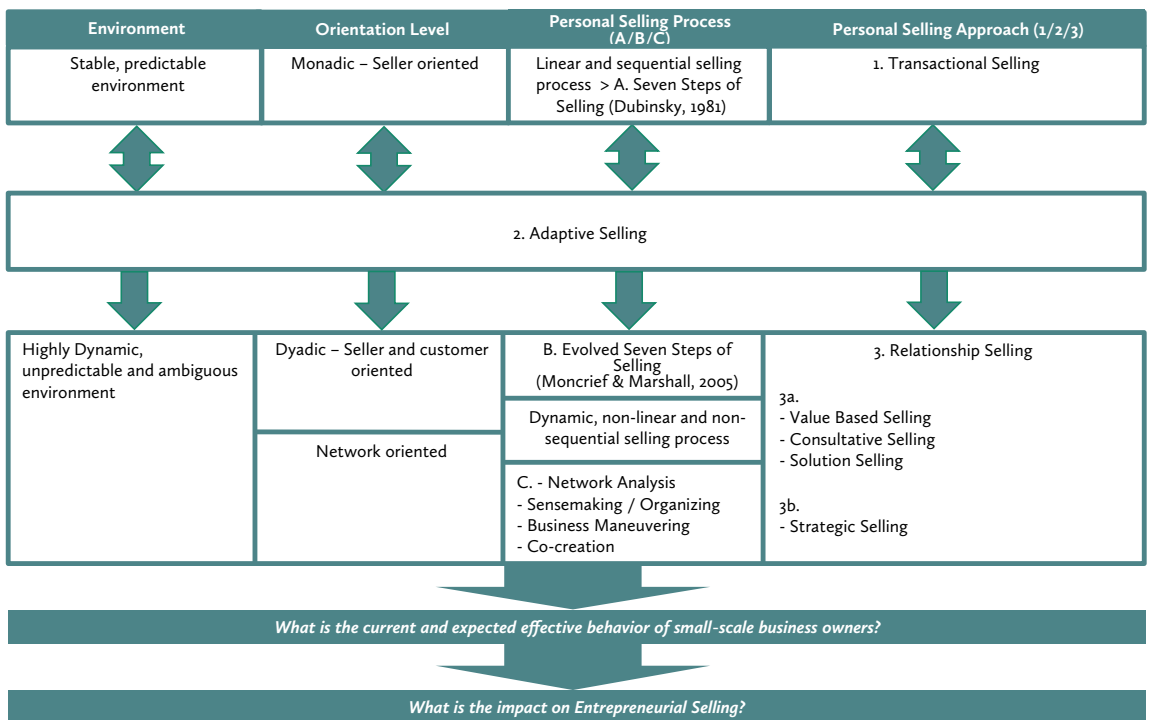


FIGURE 5: Overview of the Current Personal Selling Processes and Their Approaches

## 2.7 Sales Training for Business Owners

A business owner learns in different settings, as through information processing, the range of its potential behavior changes (Huber, 1991). Learning happens during a single customer-salesperson encounter, but it also may occur in a firm's consults with others (Gustafson *et al.*, 2018) or receiving selling education and training (Honeycutt Jr. and Stevenson, 1989, LaForge and Dubinsky, 1996, Roman *et al.*, 2002, Cron *et al.*, 2005, Lassk *et al.*, 2012, Singh *et al.*, 2015). This dissertation focuses on the transfer of skills and knowledge through training.

Offering sales training to business owners has two different purposes. The first is that business owners request external training because there is a need to improve their sales strategies and skills. Second, when business owners are delegating their sales role, they become sales managers with coaching responsibilities. Perhaps, managing salespeople is a role that small-scale business owners, based on their background or current skill sets, cannot perform effectively.

Training is a planned program that endeavors to produce relatively permanent changes in an individual's knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behavior (Singh *et al.*, 2015) which, when the training is carried out effectively, will have a significant impact on the performance and self-efficacy of business owners (Neck *et al.*, 1999, Huang, 2010, Torikka, 2013, Genty *et al.*, 2015, Galvão *et al.*, 2020).

Although training needs for small businesses and their owners have generated considerable scholarly attention (Storey and Westhead, 1997, Huang, 2001, Storey, 2004, Webster *et al.*, 2005, Walker *et al.*, 2007), when compared to employees in large organizations, small business owners participate less often in skill development and training activities (Bartram, 2005). There are two difficulties present when convincing business owners to enter a sales training program: the (perceived) resources (time, money) available to be able to participate (Beresford and Saunders, 2005, Webster *et al.*, 2005, Walker *et al.*, 2007) and the understanding that the training will support them to recover or prevent failure and become successful (the necessity) (Wooden and Baker, 1995, Westhead and Storey, 1996).

Small business owners often claim they are too busy to engage in training and external learning activities and may not see it as valuable (Walker *et al.*, 2007). There is an interest in training for skills development, as long as it is directly pertinent for their business and the training is resource-efficient and well organized. Location, time of day, and length of the course are all essential variables for their decision to participate to occur (Walker *et al.*, 2007).

Training is only effective when business owners transfer their acquired learning to their workplace (Irwin and Ford, 2002, Grossman and Salas, 2011, Ployhart and Hale Jr, 2014) and when the business owners have the appropriate attitudes toward and involvement in the training (Honeycutt Jr. *et al.*, 1993). The degree of choice is vital. It refers to the trainees' freedom to choose a training program (Kodwani and Prashar, 2019). Trainees will try their

best to learn and transfer the acquired knowledge and skills when the training is one of their own choices. Mandatory training produces negative results (Baldwin and Magjuka, 1991, Quinones, 1995). Business owners are perhaps hard to convince to undertake and follow training, but when they finally decide to follow the training, it is their own choice, which leads to higher motivation (Kodwani and Prashar, 2019).

The topic of sales training is one of the most neglected topics in the sales literature (Singh *et al.*, 2015) and even when business owners have received a business education, insufficient attention is too often paid to learning sales skills (Fogel *et al.*, 2012). Top-ranked business schools do not pay much attention to teaching sales (Fogel *et al.*, 2012, Matthews *et al.*, 2018). This issue is particularly true for entrepreneurship courses. Therefore, a focus on selling could significantly enhance the practical relevance of entrepreneurship education and overcome the general lack of interest in selling (Deeter-Schmelz and Kennedy, 2011, Matthews *et al.*, 2018). Because entrepreneurial students lack sales education, paying attention to sales training during their entrepreneurial careers is essential.

Sales training is defined as a “systematic attempt to understand, describe, and transfer ‘good selling practices’ to sales actors (Singh *et al.*, 2015, p. 54).” Research shows that there are positive effects of sales training on organizational and personal results (knowledge, skills, attitude, awareness, and motivation) (Walker Jr. *et al.*, 1977, Hawes and Rich, 1998, Onyemah, 2009, Nguyen *et al.*, 2019). If the training is implemented and aligned with the specific companies and an individual’s needs and objectives, then this sales training can be exceptionally valuable and cost effective (Denby, 2010, Kura and Kaur, 2022).

While the importance of sales training and coaching is clearly increasing, criticism of sales training and its effectiveness is also rising (Honeycutt Jr. *et al.*, 1993, Kodwani and Prashar, 2019). The relationship between sales training and results is, at best, still unclear. This lack of clarity emerges because there are factors other than sales training that can influence the results (Honeycutt Jr. and Stevenson, 1989). Training is often based on ad hoc decisions and the lack of a systematic approach (Taylor and O’Driscoll, 1998, Clarke, 2003).

The effectiveness of this training relies on the accurate implementation of the stages within the sales training process; an analysis of training needs, development and implementation of a solid training plan and its evaluation (Aragón-Sánchez *et al.*, 2003). The central challenge for this dissertation (Chapter 7) is how these steps can be implemented most effectively and thereby prepare (future) business owners for the increased complexity of the selling role without losing sight of their deviated situation compared to that of the personal selling employee.

### **Analysis of Training Needs**

Training needs identify the differences between the business owners’ current performance (“what is”) and the required performance that is valuable for their organizations (“what should be”) (Mager and Pipe, 1984, Semenčenko *et al.*, 2016). When differences exist, the causes and reasons for any gaps are investigated, as well as the methods for bridging them

and their elimination (Clarke, 2003, Ferreira and Abbad, 2013, Kura and Kaur, 2022). Using a Training Needs Analysis (TNA), a sales trainer investigates the individual differences, knowledge, skills, attitudes, and abilities needed to fulfill the role requirements of the business owners (Aragón-Sánchez *et al.*, 2003, Salas *et al.*, 2012, Ferreira *et al.*, 2014).

A complete and full needs assessment also considers the consequences of ignoring the existence of that gap (Semenčenko *et al.*, 2016). The needs analysis is an essential investment of time to establish links between the training and results, as initial decisions are taken on the content of the provided training (Taylor and O'Driscoll, 1998). As there is now a call for more individualized and customized (entrepreneurial) sales training programs (Cron *et al.*, 2005, Sarin *et al.*, 2010), the TNA is the ideal instrument to use to specify the needs of the participants and adapt the training content to those needs.

An effective TNA of the potential participants is the first essential prerequisite to training effectiveness (Moore and Dutton, 1978, Brown, 2002, Gould *et al.*, 2004). Scholars, trainers, and business owners must understand that any training and development must start with a needs assessment (Kura and Kaur, 2022).

### **Development and Implementation of an Adequate Training Plan**

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There is no standard list of 'must have' skills for small-scale business owners. The entrepreneurship courses are mostly based on business sense, business knowledge, and developing the entrepreneurial mindset. Most scholars, however, agree on some combination of competencies that need to be taught to become a successful entrepreneur, "e.g., opportunity recognition, opportunity assessment, risk management/mitigation, idea generation, resource leveraging, value creation, resilience, self-efficacy, building/using networks, self-confidence, independence and passion" (Gonul and Litzky, 2018, p. 92). Building and using networks, opportunity recognition, and opportunity assessment are directly related to personal selling. 'Resource leveraging' in the context of this study should ensure that business owners learn to (create a sales) plan and spend the right amount of time and energy on the sales role. For the Entrepreneurial Selling role specifically, this focus also means when to be your own salesperson and when to delegate the sales activities to an employee, and in the latter case (as the company has grown) how to manage those employees. 'Self-confidence' is also essential as some business owners may be anxious about undertaking the sales role.

For salespeople you must consider the view that long-term, mutually beneficial customer relationships require salespeople who are problem solvers and well-schooled in modern, professional selling practices (Deeter-Schmelz and Kennedy, 2011). Educators and trainers thus need to focus on improving communication skills (Spillan *et al.*, 2007). Presentation skills are essential, but also questioning and empathic listening skills. These skills lead to higher salesperson performance and positive customer orientation (Comer and Drollinger, 1999, Roman *et al.*, 2002). Sales trainers should adapt their training programs and include an emphasis on salesperson attention, interpretation, and response to all customer communication cues (Gustafson *et al.*, 2018). Sales training supports participants and helps them

cope with sales call anxiety (Verbeke and Bagozzi, 2000) which may be especially relevant for business owners without any sales experience or enough educational background. Roleplay and videotaping can play an essential role developing communication skills and for the curriculum of sales courses can be perceived as being more effective than other teaching techniques (Spillan *et al.*, 2007, Deeter-Schmelz and Kennedy, 2011).

Over the past two decades, the importance of training salespeople in how technology can be used to increase the effectiveness of their sales activities has strongly grown (Rayburn *et al.*, 2021). This view started with the introduction of CRM systems (Raman *et al.*, 2006), followed by using social media platforms (e.g. LinkedIn and Twitter) to contact (prospective) customers and e-learning (Lassk *et al.*, 2012). Delivery of training through e-learning now plays an increasing role for SMEs (Tyurina *et al.*, 2021) and professional salespeople (Lassk *et al.*, 2012, Chaudhry, 2021). This technological transformation now enters the age of sales digitization and artificial intelligence technologies (Singh *et al.*, 2019). Although technological advancements support the effectiveness of salespeople performance, these developments are not always (directly) adopted by all salespeople (Rayburn *et al.*, 2021). Technology training has been identified as an essential part of sales training, and it can support the implementation and utilization of technological innovations (Lassk *et al.*, 2012, Luo *et al.*, 2021, Rayburn *et al.*, 2021). Augmented and virtual reality sales training and performance evaluation can also support salespeople and help them become more effective sellers. Last, but certainly not least, as people often view salespeople as manipulative and misleading, business courses should focus more on ethical issues (Spillan *et al.*, 2007).

Hence, this training should support the development of the right sales mindset for small business owners, how to systemize and implement their sales strategies (e.g., sales planning and management), effectively show initiative towards prospective and existing customers (e.g. communication- and problem-solving skills), and how to adapt to modern technology opportunities to optimize both sales performance and sales ethics.

### **Evaluation of the training**

Aragón-Sánchez *et al.* (2003) claim that businesses should evaluate the training properly and thoroughly to determine what its effects are on organizational performance. If training is not professionally evaluated, it is impossible to analyze whether the invested resources in the training are of true value for business owners and their company (Davidove and Schroeder, 1992).

A proper evaluation of business training is sometimes lacking, as it may be considered time-consuming or effective measurement metrics are missing. Most course evaluation measures are simple, but they do not often focus on behavioral and organizational results, (Erffmeyer *et al.*, 1991). Still, training is only effective when the trainees transfer their learning to their workplace. Thus, the effectiveness of this transfer should be the core of the entire evaluation process (Irwin and Ford, 2002, Grossman and Salas, 2011, Ployhart and Hale Jr, 2014).

## 2.8 Conclusions of the Literature Review

Whether entrepreneurship is seen from a made or a found view, selling is considered a crucial entrepreneurial role (Matthews *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, it is surprising that Entrepreneurial Selling research is still in its infancy (Dalecki, 2019).

Within the domain, there remains ambiguity about the scope and definition of what Entrepreneurial Selling actually contains; hence, the definition used in the remainder of this dissertation deviates from the existing Entrepreneurial Selling literature by focusing on small-scale business owners independently of the life cycle stage of their enterprises.

This dissertation seeks to move the nexus of entrepreneurship and sales research, i.e., Entrepreneurial Selling, forward. From the entrepreneurship research perspective, the first principle of Effectuation, Bird-in-Hand, is the overarching theoretical foundation of this dissertation and is applied thusly to gain a deeper understanding of the sales behavior of business owners. From the personal selling research perspective, this chapter revealed that there is still much scholarly work to be done to understand what from the gained sales theories and models applies best to the Entrepreneurial Selling domain and where it still deviates. This chapter also showed what effective sales training for business owners should achieve and what the challenges still are. This foundational literature review serves as a steppingstone for a significant exploration and culminates in the primary research question: ***How do small-scale business owners in the Netherlands behave in their Entrepreneurial Selling role and how can they become more effective in their sales behavior?*** The research sub-questions (§1.4) are derived from the focused literature segments discussed in Chapters 4, 5, and 6. By addressing this crucial inquiry, the aim is to propel entrepreneurial selling into a new realm of comprehension and advancement.

## 3 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY AND DESIGN

Behavioral research in entrepreneurship, described as examining the human behavior involved in creating or finding and exploiting entrepreneurial opportunities (Bird and Schjoedt, 2009, Sarasvathy, 2009), can adopt various philosophical stances and methodologies. This dissertation holds Pragmatism as its 'philosophical' perspective and uses a Methodological Pluralism approach in its presentation.

The following sections justify these choices by connecting the specific characteristics of Entrepreneurial Selling to the underlying perspectives of Ontology, Epistemology, and Methodology. This justification explains the nature of the phenomenon being examined (Ontology), the methods for understanding it (Epistemology), and how knowledge of Entrepreneurial Selling is acquired (Methodology) (Van de Ven, 2007). Combining these three belief systems is the main interpretative framework for this particular research.

### 3.1 Pragmatism and Methodological Pluralism as the Foundation for Studying Entrepreneurial Selling

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The research philosophy applied in a dissertation explains the nature and development of knowledge (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). The chosen research philosophy should thus fit to ensure that the objectives of that particular research project can be achieved (Ritchie *et al.*, 2013). Pragmatism emphasizes a focus on action and problem-solving, which suits the intrinsic aspirations of this type of doctorate: the DBA. In the strictest sense, Pragmatism is not a philosophy, as there is a great diversity of opinions about what it entails (Johnson and Duberley, 2000). Pragmatism is, above all, the idea that research should be validated based on its practical usefulness, application, and effectiveness (Charmaz, 2014). This idea means that for every study undertaken (Chapters 4, 5, and 6), a decision is made to choose a method that will serve best to find the answers to the research questions under investigation in that study (Johnson and Gill, 2010).

The Pragmatism for this dissertation includes having a Realistic Ontology and using a Positivistic Epistemology for Study 1 (Chapter 4) and Study 3 (Chapter 6) and Interpretive Epistemology for Study 2 (Chapter 5). Pragmatism does not oppose the idea that there is a 'real world out there' (Ontology). However, multiple ways still do exist for making sense of this external reality (Epistemology) (Johnson and Duberley, 2000). The research question under investigation is the most important determinant for choosing either a Positivistic or Interpretive Epistemology. The aim of positivistic research is to study patterns and relationships, which can help researchers to make predictions about behavior. Knowledge is revealed from a neutral and measurable (quantifiable) observation of activity, actions



or reactions (Johnson and Duberley, 2000). Study 1 and 3 are deductive and quantitative in nature. The data analysis within these two studies reduces explanations to a limited number of causes and searches for correlations.

Although Studies 1 and 3 are positivistic, this does not mean that no interpretation occurred while analyzing the results. The results from the literature study and my own experience are inextricably linked to the understanding of the data. It is essential to acknowledge the fact that the subject under study is 'theory-laden' (Franklin *et al.*, 1989, Brewer and Lambert, 2001). My own theoretical background (e.g., study and work at university) influences the observations. This influence may be even more substantial, as I was a sales practitioner for more than a decade in the 'real world,' experience that leads to the question of whether the research is not too 'practice laden.' My practical experience may influence the results of my research and is, in general, something that professional doctorates should consider. My awareness, the positivistic approach for study 1 and 3 and the support of supervisors and their scientific peers have ensured that I mitigated that risk of using my theoretical and practical presuppositions too much when acquiring and interpreting the data. This awareness is also why I included myself by using 'I' in both the introduction chapter and this chapter but avoided this reference as much as possible in the literature review and the empirical chapters. In this way, I am trying to distance myself from my observations and interpretations. Sometimes 'we' is also used, meaning that 'we' as an Entrepreneurial Selling community are progressing or understanding more about this particular phenomenon.

Interpretivism considers, in contrast to Positivism, humans different from physical phenomena and uses qualitative methods to gain an empathetic understanding of why people act from their own understanding (Saunders *et al.*, 2009, Alharahsheh and Pius, 2020). Study 2 is a qualitative inductive study where the participants are given extraordinary voice and are seen as knowledgeable agents where the aim is to gain more understanding how business owners interpret their own individual motives, behavior and give meaning to that behavior.

Pragmatism has been critiqued as an 'anything goes' perspective; an extreme spin-off from the post-modernistic era, not addressing the different assumptions of the quantitative and qualitative paradigms (Rossman and Wilson, 1985, Miles and Huberman, 1994, Maarouf, 2019), it perhaps leads to a lack of standard measure (Oberheim and Hoyningen-Huene, 2009). A multi-method approach with a thorough explanation of the used methods, as done in the next section and in the respective chapters (4, 5, and 6), contributes to triangulation and hopefully can overcome the issues of Pragmatism (Olsen *et al.*, 2004, Downward and Mearman, 2007, Modell, 2009).

Hence, philosophy or not, a pragmatic stance toward adopting a pluralistic methodology offers the right-thinking frame for this offered dissertation.

## 3.2 The Multiple Methods Approach Applied to the Three Studies

The methods used in this research follow the theoretical perspective and nature of the research questions (Downward and Mearman, 2007). Pragmatism as a theoretical foundation often leads to a multi-method design; it promotes using quantitative and qualitative methods to solve complex social research questions (Howe, 1988, Bhaskar, 2014, Maarouf, 2019). This pragmatic approach leads to Methodological Pluralism as a methodology for this dissertation. It implies there are no fixed criteria for selecting the one best method to use to study Entrepreneurial Selling. Thus, a plurality of methods is used to gain the most knowledge of this phenomenon. The advantage of a pluralistic method approach is that it can overcome the weaknesses of using either qualitative or quantitative methods (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004, Malina *et al.*, 2011, Creswell and Clark, 2017). Although a multi-method research design can be beneficial for expanding and deepening knowledge in the sales domain, its application to sales research has been sparse (Johnson, 2015a).

This dissertation starts to fill this particular gap. All three studies have their own research strategy for answering each of the research sub-questions, which leads to an overall understanding of the main research question. An underdeveloped phenomenon, like Entrepreneurial Selling, lacks existing theories that can explain the behavior of business owners in their selling role (Johnson, 2015b). A multi-method approach is often used in applied settings (Bazeley, 2008) and is helpful whenever one data approach is insufficient to fully understand a relatively novice domain (Creswell and Clark, 2017), namely, Entrepreneurial Selling.

For the first study (Chapter 4) a content analysis was applied to qualitative data, and it underpins the objective epistemology character of this dissertation. A re-analysis of qualitative data gathered in a previous entrepreneurship research project led to results here on the contribution of sales behavior of business owners to business failure. Content analysis contains a systematic and objective approach that aims to produce quantitative accounts of raw data in terms of categories specified by rules that researchers specify before an analysis begins (Holsti, 1969, Mayring, 2004). This approach aims to determine the frequency of patterns and relationships in and between the answers of business owners (Mayring, 2004). In this dissertation, content analysis was applied to 55 semi-structured interview transcripts.

Study 2 (Chapter 5) has an interpretative qualitative study design, using thematic analysis, and that data was assembled through twelve interviews. A thematic analysis method is structured, but still has flexible guidelines (Braun and Clarke, 2006). From the data, iterative strategies are applied by going back and forth through that data. A thematic analysis offered an open-ended inductive pragmatical approach for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Braun and Clarke, 2006) related to Entrepreneurial Selling. Thematic analysis also fits a research problem when no theory guides the practice (Ivey, 2017). There is no robust research foundation available on how business owners of small businesses apply sales strategies and activities in their businesses. The many unknowns of Entrepreneurial Selling thus make it a powerful and valid decision to

use this method. Entrepreneurial Selling has conceptual richness and is socially complex (Matthews *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, absolute, value-free, and universal truths can be hard to claim. This is why in Study 2 deliberately is chosen to see business owners as knowledgeable agents, who are not value free, but who know what they are trying to achieve and can explain their thoughts, intentions, and actions (Gioia *et al.*, 2013). It also forces me as a researcher to interpret the responds of the participants to the questions. In this type of study, subjective interpretation is involved in the ways that I, as a researcher, and the business owners make sense of the entrepreneurial (selling) activities (Weick, 1995). The objects (participant's perceptions) cannot be adequately described in isolation from the conscious being (the researcher) experiencing it (Crotty, 1998).

Study 3 (Chapter 6) uses a positivistic focused quantitative methodology, including survey methods (N=276). This study tests the main Entrepreneurial Selling results and conclusions from Studies 1 and 2. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was applied to test the hypotheses, using a path model analysis with the support of SPSS and AMOS. Researchers frequently use these two software programs, as they can handle and analyze large amounts of complex data. Detailed descriptions of the methods used can be found in the Methods sections of Chapters 4, 5, and 6.

The entrepreneurial selling training applications were developed based on the foundations of the three studies and in cooperation with sales training practitioners and are presented in the Chapter 7.

Table 8 presents the research philosophy, design, and methodology in a research design matrix based on Choguill (2005). Together, the following chapters work to solve the main research question of this dissertation: ***How do small-scale business owners in the Netherlands behave in their Entrepreneurial Selling role and how can they become more effective in their sales behavior?***

Research Philosophy, Design, and Methodology	Ontology		Realistic
	Epistemology		Positivistic / interpretivist
	Research 'Philosophy'		Pragmatism
	Methodology		Pluralism
Study	Research Sub-question	Data Sources	Techniques of Analysis
<b>Study #1</b> <i>Chapter 4</i>	<b>Foundation:</b> Business failure literature  <b>RSQ1:</b> How do small-scale business owners make sense of their Entrepreneurial Selling behavior before, during, and after a period of failure?	<b>Re-analysis of the Qualitative Data Set</b>  <b>Research Study:</b> "The Contribution of Ineffective Entrepreneurial Selling Activities to Business Failure."  <b>Sample:</b> 55 interview transcripts of interviews with business owners of B-to-B small businesses in different industries.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Content analysis</li> <li>• Qualitative data analysis with coding on the Entrepreneurial Selling role of business owners and how under-performance in this role contributes to failure</li> </ul>
<b>Study #2</b> <i>Chapter 5</i>	<b>Foundation:</b> Entrepreneurial motives literature  <b>RSQ2:</b> How does the motive to start and operate a business influence the sales behavior of small-scale business owners?	<b>Primary Research / Qualitative Data.</b> <b>Research Study:</b> "The Entrepreneurial Selling Matrix – The Relation Between the Motives of Business Owners and Their Sales Behavior."  <b>Sample:</b> 12 Interviews with business owners of B-to-B Small businesses in different industries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thematic analysis</li> <li>• Qualitative data analysis on motives to own and manage an enterprise and Entrepreneurial Selling behavior</li> </ul>
<b>Study #3</b> <i>Chapter 6</i>	<b>Foundation:</b> Sales and entrepreneurial attitude, self-efficacy and experience literature  <b>RSQ3:</b> How does the Entrepreneurial Selling Role Orientation (ESRO) of small-scale business owners influence their sales behaviors and (expected) financial performance?	<b>Primary Research / Quantitative Data</b>  <b>Research Study:</b> The Entrepreneurial Selling Matrix (2) — The Relation Between the Entrepreneurial Selling Role Orientation of Business Owners and Their Sales Behavior  <b>Sample:</b> Survey (N= 276) with Business owners of B-to-B small businesses in different industries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Statistical (with support of SPSS) and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) analysis (with support of AMOS) on the relation between the ESRO of business owners and their selling behavior and performance</li> </ul>
<b>Entrepreneurial Selling Business Transformation applications</b> <i>Chapter 7</i>	<b>SQ4:</b> How can sales trainers better develop the sales competencies of small-scale business owners?	<b>For Practice:</b> The entrepreneurial selling training applications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Based on empirical Chapters 4, 5 and 6</li> <li>• Cooperation with sales training practitioners</li> </ul>

TABLE 8: Dissertation Overview of the Applied Research Design Matrix. Based on Choguill (2005)



# 4 THE CONTRIBUTION OF INEFFECTIVE ENTREPRENEURIAL SELLING ACTIVITIES TO BUSINESS FAILURE

## 4.1 Abstract

**Purpose:** Only recently have scholars begun to explore the cross-section connection of entrepreneurship and personal selling and introduced the notion of Entrepreneurial Selling (Dalecki, 2019). This current study contributes to the emerging debate by addressing the personal selling role of business owners of small businesses in the B-to-B market in the context of failure. It examines how business owners make sense of their entrepreneurial selling activities and how underperformance in this role contributes to failure.

**Methods:** A content re-analysis done on an existing qualitative dataset of small-scale business owners (N=55).

**Findings:** The study found that Entrepreneurial Selling is a crucial activity for preventing business failure and one that business owners do recognize. Reasons for underperformance can include business owners spending too little time on selling, their lack of personal selling skills, and procrastinating their selling activities.

**Originality/Value:** The primary contribution of this study is that the ineffectiveness of the entrepreneurial selling activities is connected to the business failure literature and to the first principle of Effectuation: Bird-in-Hand. Answering the 'Bird-in-Hand sales means' questions can predict either success or failure.

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## 4.2 Introduction

To gain more insight into Entrepreneurial Selling, this study explores how involvement in Entrepreneurial Selling (or lack of it) influences another underexplored area of research, namely, business failure. The reasons for this focus are threefold. First, business failure is widespread (Thornhill and Amit, 2003). Second, due to the emotional impact that failure has on business owners, failure provides a magnifying glass that allows us to see what happens and offers business owners one of the most pronounced opportunities for reflection and learning (McGrath, 1999, Madsen and Desai, 2010, Cantamessa *et al.*, 2018, Alvarado Valenzuela *et al.*, 2020). Business failure can be a solid accelerator for learning, especially when positioned against success (Madsen and Desai, 2010). Third, previous research has shown that most business owners regret that they waited too long to invest time and energy in the selling role (Onyemah and Rivera-Pesquera, 2017), thus suggesting a connection

between sales and failure, and therefore offering the starting point of this chapter which seek to show and understand the mechanisms behind this personal regret.

An exploratory qualitative study, based on a re-examination of data gathered from existing interview transcripts with small business owners, is the basis of this investigation. Focusing on small business owners active in the B2B world, an exploration was done on how business owners reflect on their Entrepreneurial Selling activities and how they influenced a significant failure incident in their business. Given the importance of small businesses for the Dutch economy (Kramer and Noorderhaven, 2020), it is fundamental to gain further insights into if and how personal selling connects to business failure. Indeed, by studying the interplay between sales and business failure, this study contributes to a decrease in both individual and societal costs. On the individual level, business owners need to understand the reasons for failure. Suppose they do not understand that ineffective personal selling activities contribute to underperformance. In that case, they will not act, which may cause these business owners to give up their entrepreneurial careers, result business closures, or even bankruptcy (Shepherd *et al.*, 2000). At the societal level, these failures may result in unpaid debt, loss of jobs and more innovative capacity (Richardson *et al.*, 1994, Carree and Thurik, 2010).

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Business failures can be prevented by making business owners aware and teaching them how the right Entrepreneurial Selling interventions can help move their businesses forward. This goal is why this current work is built on the foundations of Effectuation (Sarasvathy, 1998), probably the most directly connected and widely accepted theory connected to sales in the entrepreneurial context (Dalecki, 2019). Although Effectuation originally focused more on innovation (Sarasvathy, 1998), Effectuation processes are also dominant when distributing existing products or services (Hauser *et al.*, 2020), both were the case for enterprises who participated in this current study.

The remainder of this chapter is organized as follows. First, a brief review of the underlying business failure literature specifically applicable to this study is presented. Then the method of empirical investigation is described in detail, followed by the key findings. This chapter ends with a discussion of the findings and their implications for both theory and practice.

## 4.3 Theoretical Background of Business Failure

### Entrepreneurial Selling in the Context of Business Failure

Like Entrepreneurial Selling, the topic of business failure has remained under-investigated until recently (Gonul and Litzky, 2018, Nikolić *et al.*, 2019). Ucbasaran (2013) was the researcher who assembled some of the core definitions of business failure, and these are described in Table 9 below.

Outcome of Business Failure	Explanation
Bankruptcy	This term is a narrow definition of business failure and emphasizes poor economic performance (Shepherd, 2003, Shepherd and Haynie, 2011). It is an observable recorded event.
Discontinuity of ownership due to insolvency	“Business failure occurs when a fall in revenues and/or rise in expenses are of such a magnitude that the firm becomes insolvent and is unable to attract new debt or equity funding; consequently, it cannot continue to operate under the current ownership or management” (Shepherd, 2003, p. 318).
Discontinuity of ownership due to performance below the threshold.	Entrepreneurs’ expectations represent an important threshold consideration for discontinuity of the company (Cannon and Edmondson, 2001, Ucbasaran <i>et al.</i> , 2010, Ucbasaran <i>et al.</i> , 2013, Gonul and Litzky, 2018). It includes sale or closure because a business has failed to meet the business owners’ expectations, leading to companies that have delayed their exit and are permanently failing (Meyer and Zucker, 1989).

TABLE 9: Definitions of Business Failure and Its Explanations (Ucbasaran *et al.*, 2013)

In this study, business failure refers to those situations where the performance of a business is below threshold (Ucbasaran *et al.*, 2010, Ucbasaran *et al.*, 2013, Gonul and Litzky, 2018). As Gonul *et al.* (2018) emphasized, business owners’ expectations are an important threshold consideration. Business failure is then defined as that performance deviating from either the expected or desired results (Cannon and Edmondson, 2001). The definition involves the sale or closure of an enterprise and also includes companies who have delayed that exit and are permanently failing (Meyer and Zucker, 1989). This broad definition of business failure supports and adds to the full understanding of Entrepreneurial Selling and the current explorative stage of this phenomenon.

Detection of the harmful mechanisms and factors that lead to failure will enable business owners to analyze their business better and avoid ineffective business decisions (Nikolić *et al.*, 2015). In general, the factors contributing to business failure can be deterministic (external factors over which entrepreneurs have little or no control), voluntaristic (actions and decisions of business owners as the fundamental causes of business failure) or emotive (success or failure based on the business owners’ motivation and determination) (Khelil, 2016). In a deterministic paradigm it is generally argued that firms fail because they lack resources (Ahmad and Seet, 2009, Cook *et al.*, 2012). If such is the case, larger firms, in general, should be able to survive; while smaller firms, more limited in their access to resources, should fail more often. Scholars (Watson and Everett, 1996b, 1996a) have revealed there are differences in failure rates between smaller and larger companies. Business owners have to make choices between the many different roles and activities they must perform. Resources are the capacities for action (Kraaijenbrink *et al.*, 2010), and business owners of small-scale companies might have less selling time, striking power, and professional selling knowledge than larger companies. This dissertation focuses on the voluntaristic and emotive factors as an agency perspective. There are also external reasons that contribute to the failure of companies, but we cannot control these particular factors.



The Entrepreneurial Selling effort and success of small-scale companies primarily depend on the intended actions of their business owners.

While previous studies have pointed to a wide variety of often interrelated and co-occurring causes of business failure (Ucbasaran *et al.*, 2013, Nikolić *et al.*, 2015, de Jong, 2018, Nikolić *et al.*, 2019), the selling role is not often researched and indicated as a possible contributor to such failure. Previous research has shown that most entrepreneurs regret that they waited too long to invest time and energy in the sales role (Onyemah *et al.*, 2013, Onyemah and Rivera-Pesquera, 2017). According to Onyemah *et al.* (2017), this oversight might be because they had too little experience in performing sales activities in previous positions. Insufficient experience is perhaps one of the most common mentioned factors related to business failure (Shepherd, 2003). This experience may include prior (entrepreneurial) work experience, former failure, or successful business experience. Early sales research has demonstrated that expert salespeople will hold more sophisticated knowledge structures and, therefore, be more effective than those salespeople with less experience (Sujan *et al.*, 1988). Business owners also often believe their proposition is so superior that it will sell itself and consequently, they do not invest in building and growing sales experience (Onyemah *et al.*, 2013, Onyemah and Rivera-Pesquera, 2017).

If these individual (selling) mistakes occur and they lead to failure, there are costs involved for the business owner. These costs are financial, psychological and social and can be combinations of all three (Ucbasaran *et al.*, 2010). Financial costs are a form of loss or reduction of personal income that the business owner must endure. Psychological costs are negative emotions that are associated with business failure (Shepherd, 2003, Singh *et al.*, 2007, Cope, 2011, Ucbasaran *et al.*, 2013). The social costs involve personal and professional relationships with (former) customers. Maintaining professional relationships is at the core of Entrepreneurial Selling activities, so damage to these relationships leads to social costs. Failing relationship management before, during, and after the business ceases to exist increases these financial costs. The psychological costs may influence the performance of the relationship management activities after the business has failed. Some emotional effects (like guilt) can even lead to social distancing and withdrawal (Singh *et al.*, 2007, Cope, 2011). This issue might become a burden when business owners try to recover after failure, and social distancing hinders their performance on Entrepreneurial Selling activities. The result is that the business owner cannot turn to specific network contacts (Cope, 2011) or create new contacts, which then leads to additional financial costs.

Ucbasaran *et al.* (2013) state that the extant literature has revealed only “the tip of the iceberg” regarding the social costs of business failure for the business owner. There is an opportunity for multi-level research when inter-organizational relationships terminate before, during, and in the aftermath of business failure (Ucbasaran *et al.*, 2013, Borg and Young, 2014). Individuals with highly developed social skills may be more adept at minimizing the social costs and psychological costs of business failure (e.g. through skillful

storytelling and sense giving about the failure). High levels of social skills may actually avoid business failure in the first place (Ucbasaran *et al.*, 2013). Social skills are also a core element of successful salespeople (Verbeke, 1994, Rojell *et al.*, 2006). Small businesses are seen as an important contributor to economic development (Wennekers and Thurik, 1999, Acs, 2006, Carree *et al.*, 2007, Carree and Thurik, 2010), as these individual costs and the related business failure also harm society. Understanding if and why ineffectively performing the personal selling role contributes to business owner failure may decrease these costs. Figure 6 illustrates this conceptual research model for Study 1.

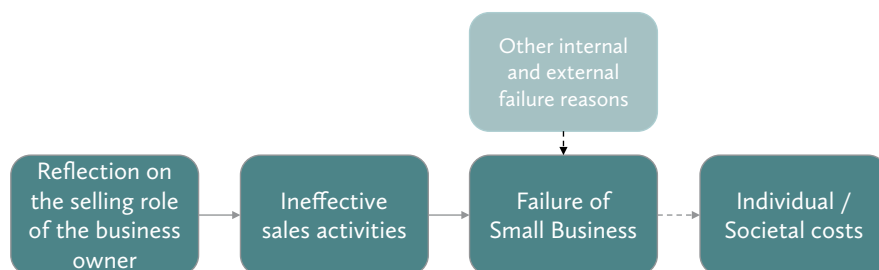


FIGURE 6: Conceptual Research Model (Study 1)

## 4.4 Methods

Qualitative methods were used to develop a deeper understanding of Entrepreneurial Selling in the context of business failure. This methodology is appropriate for an underdeveloped research area (Barr, 2004, Beverland *et al.*, 2015, Johnson, 2015b, Kumar *et al.*, 2016, Chaker *et al.*, 2018, Kadić-Maglajlić *et al.*, 2021), such as Entrepreneurial Selling.

This study has an explorative character and bases its results on a re-analysis of gathered qualitative data. It is part of a more extensive research program, entitled ‘Failure and Recovery,’ of the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences on entrepreneurship and business failure. This project aims to close the gap of understanding in the context of and the decisions that are taken involving a failure and find new ways to learn more and overcome those episodes.

The business owner is the level of analysis for this study, and the data were collected from an existing database of approximately 80 failure stories of business owners of small businesses. The main selection criteria were that these business owners must have lived through periods of severe problems during their entrepreneurial enterprises. It could have been a failed business idea, wrong product placement, bankruptcy or involuntary termination of the company, or workforce reduction. Each story mattered, and all participating business owners were assured that their stories would be exclusively used for research and educational purposes by both parties signing the participant consent form. The protocol

for the students prescribed both the interview topics and explanations regarding confidentiality and interview organization. Sensitive personal details and the company's financial situation were anonymized as much as needed in all the transcripts to protect the business owner and the company.

These failure and recovery stories were gathered through semi-open interviews. The research focused on business owners of small businesses and excluded self-employed types of entrepreneurship. The research project had a broad perspective and did not explicitly focus on the selling role of the business owner. The data were analyzed in qualitative categories combined with the use of quantitative techniques to determine the business owners' behavior patterns.

Upon further inspection of the interviews gathered by the researcher of this study and its specific focus on the selling role of business owners, it turned out that the interviewees brought up the topic of sales in many interviews, making this topic a relevant source of information for exploring the relationship between Entrepreneurial Selling and business failure. Furthermore, the literature study on business failure (§4.3) showed a gap in the relation between the sales role of business owners and business failure. This finding resulted in the following research question as a starting point: *How do small-scale business owners make sense of their Entrepreneurial Selling behavior before, during, and after a period of failure?* This specific chapter seeks to understand if and why ineffective selling actually contributes to business failure.

The business owners who participated in the study are (or were) running companies with between 1 and 174 employees in various industry sectors. The original interviewees were selected using convenience sampling. Convenience sampling is a type of non-probability sampling where members of the target population meet determined applicable criteria, such as easy accessibility, being available within or at the given time, and the willingness to participate (Etikan *et al.*, 2016). This type of sampling was indispensable, as students were the data collectors, and the task of attracting participants needed to be realistic for them within a certain time period. Although generalizability might be a challenge with convenience sampling (Bhardwaj, 2019), the sample size and the number of relevant quotes mitigated that disadvantage, allowing to disregard the qualitatively lower cases where (parts of) the agreed procedure were not (entirely) followed.

Third-year university students in the field of entrepreneurship held the interviews in September of 2019 using an extensive interview protocol (Appendix B) that was designed by the projects' principal (senior) researchers. The students received lectures on qualitative research, practiced interviewing in class, and were supervised by a university Professor. The interviews were held on site and face-to-face with the business owner. The interviews and its process were evaluated in class and transcribed by the students. The students sent the recording of each interview and its transcription to the research group. The researchers checked to see if the transcript was in accordance with the recording and if the proper interview protocol was followed.

The interview format consisted of 49 open-ended questions that covered 7 content sections. There were sections about the background of the business owner and the company, when and how the problems emerged, the current situation, the role of the network in recovering, the role of the financial advisor, and the expected future of the business owner. The participants were acknowledged as being knowledgeable agents. The average interview lasted for approximately 60 minutes.

A re-analysis of the interviews led to a pattern of sales quotes that emerged through line-by-line coding and conducted with the aid of the qualitative analysis tool, MAXQDA. For the purpose of this study, MAXQDA offered key tools for organizing and analyzing qualitative data on the topic of Entrepreneurial Selling in the context of business failure. The following steps for this content analysis were undertaken:

First, all interviews were reviewed manually and categorized concerning either B-to-B (44), B-to-C (25), or a combination of the two (11). As this study concentrates on companies that operate (at least partially) in the B-to-B industry, 55 interviews were selected for further investigation. Next, upon further examination, one interview was dropped because, even though it was approved the first time, it was too short (less than 30 minutes) and of poor quality (doubt was raised based on the transcript whether this person was an actual business owner). The transcripts were analyzed in detail to find any failure related to Entrepreneurial Selling and adding a first set of codes: Failure reason was selling, and failure reason was not selling (Table 10).

Idea / Category	Example Quote	Explanation
Failure reason was selling	"Initially, we just did not know how it worked with potential customers. In the first half year, we did not sell anything. Really nothing at all (1028-3)."	Business owner contributes (at least part) of the business failure experience to the sales activities
Failure reason was not selling	That has been a process of years in which you did not have insight into the financial situation, but we just continued. At a certain point, financially, the problem was so big that you couldn't solve it anymore. (1022-3)	Business failure does not mention anything about selling in the context of the business failure

TABLE 10: Coding Scheme for Study 1

From this first round of coding of the raw data, the conclusion was that the selling role is an important topic, as there were more than 900 references of business owners to selling, even without their being actively probed to discuss it.

Out of the 55 interviews, 30 business owners commented that their selling activities were not optimal and had contributed to the failure. As this research aims to move Entrepreneurial Selling forward, its focus is on this subset of business owners in the remainder

of the chapter. The dataset for these 39 business owners can be found in Appendix C and means that any other possible explanations for business failure were left out of the scope of this research. The numbers cited in the column 'Example Quotes' refer to the interview numbers in the MAXQDA database.

Before the second coding round started, a second coding scheme was developed to diversify the 'failure reason was selling' into more categories and delivered a more detailed insight into what specific sales mechanisms contributed to the failure experience. This coding scheme included the following categories: 'Spending too little time/procrastinating on sales activities' and 'The lack of sales skills'. The data were applied to the data scheme by assigning each text segment to a category in the coding scheme. These categories were quantified and can be found under 'Results' in the following section, where they are also interpreted.

In the third and last coding round, these categories were connected to analyze for whether a pattern could be established between the categories of insufficiently performing the sales activities and the direct selling consequences. These outcomes were labeled as 'low acquisition of new customers,' 'not retaining customers,' and 'lack of market understanding,' which directly contributed to the failure. This scheme can be found in the second part of the following section, where the mechanisms that link inadequate selling to business failure are discussed.

## 4.5 Results

After briefly describing the dataset in demographic terms, the causes of suboptimal Entrepreneurial Selling performance are discussed and these causes were explored for how they contributed to business failure.

The dataset of 55 b-to-b interviews included 51 male and 4 female business owners. Of the 30 sales failure cases, 3 resulted in bankruptcy, 5 in shutting down the business (voluntary liquidation). The remaining 22 cases have been able to make a restart after reorganizing their company or in 2 cases starting a new enterprise.

Most of the companies were active in the business service industry ( $n=17$ ), ranging from Consultancy to IT, Financial Services, Media, Communication, Education, and Training. Eight companies were active in Wholesale, and there were others in Construction, Installation, Agribusiness, Transport, and Leisure & Sports. The size of the companies varied from businesses with only the business owner to businesses with 174 employees. Freelancers were not included. The business owners were between 20 and 65 years of age, and 24 had higher (professional) education. Only two of the business owners identified as being female. Five business owners indicated they had, albeit to a different extent, some level of former sales experience; the others indicated they were novices in this area when they started their company. Appendix C gives an overview of the complete dataset.

## **Causes of Inadequate Entrepreneurial Selling**

The researchers in the field of Entrepreneurial Selling agree that it is vital for the success of an enterprise that the entrepreneur acts as the sales actor and, therefore, not delegate this important task, particularly not in the early stages after launching a business product or service (Deutsch and Wortmann, 2011, Onyemah *et al.*, 2013, Lehto, 2015, Onyemah and Rivera-Pesquera, 2017, Dalecki, 2019). The business owner in the subset of sales connected failures executed, or managed as at least part of, the sales activities. Even though business owners know that they are the ones who need to take responsibility for the sales role, they are not always capable enough to perform well in the sales activities. From these interviews, two main reasons were identified for ineffective selling activities: 1) the business owners spend too little time selling and procrastinate the selling activities and 2) the business owner blames the lack of their own selling skills. In the following sections, these reasons are explored in more detail and supported with quotes from the participating business owners.

### ***Spending too Little Time on Sales and Procrastinating on Doing Selling Activities***

Acquiring new or maintaining existing customers is time consuming and often occurs on top of all other activities that the business owner must accomplish. The result is that business owners do not always spend enough time and energy on actual selling. This group included both those instances where not enough time was spent to meet potential customers before market introduction to obtain preliminary feedback (Deutsch and Wortmann, 2011, Onyemah *et al.*, 2013, Onyemah and Rivera-Pesquera, 2017, Dalecki, 2019, Onyemah and Rivera-Pesquera, 2021) as well as not retaining existing and attracting new customers after market introduction. Even when these business owners employed other people in their company to carry out the selling activities, they still believed they should have allocated more of their own time to managing these sales actors.

The data show that business owners procrastinated their selling activities and had trouble mentally shifting their focus from product development to selling. They cognitively recognized that Entrepreneurial Selling is essential; nevertheless, they were inclined to shift their attention toward developing new propositions rather than selling the current one. While generally, it was a matter of favoring development over sales and a feeling that sales would take time and resources away from creating new propositions; some of the business owners did not like to network or were anxious about engaging in the activity necessary to acquire new customers or contacting existing customers and instead spent their time on product development as a way to avoid selling.

### ***The Lack of Selling Skills***

Next to the lack of time-spent, which contributed to inadequate sales performance, the lack of sales skills was also identified as a contributor to business failure, which could also lead to procrastinating needed selling activities. In those cases, the business owners explained that they had developed too few selling skills. In terms of having a lack of time, it seemed that the

business owners considered themselves responsible, but for sales skills, they were more likely to mention their potential business partners. One indicated their partner's lack of skills was what led to the failure of the company (without referring to his own role in this process) or indicated that the business owners' lack of sales skills was a reason for them to attract a new business partner. These remarks made by our respondents indicated how hard it can be for founders to delegate sales, even when they do not consider themselves suitable for this role. From the responses offered by these business owners, it appears that small businesses can recover from a (near) failure situation by changing their sales behavior and increasing the amount of actual time that the business owner spends on that key practice.

Table 11 shows the idea/category, an example of a quote representing the idea (category), the explanation of that idea, and the number of interviews where it appeared. The five-digit numbers behind the example quotes (2<sup>nd</sup> column) in that table refer to the participants in the dataset and in Appendix C. The interview schedule can be found in Appendix B.

Idea / Category	Example Quote	Explanation	# of Interviews
Spending too little time on selling	"Big companies send sales representatives to potential customers, but I have to do it myself. New customer? Then I have to introduce myself because my attitude, knowledge, and contact make or break success. I know that is my strength, but I do not have time to spend all day on the road. That takes time and money, so I could not keep up with that." (1055- 3)	The business owner is not able to spend enough time on selling activities due to other entrepreneurial activities or disliking doing sales activities. The lack of resources and a negative attitude toward selling contributed to business failure.	6
The lack of selling skills	"..No, I am not 'really' a salesperson...and then you ask yourself, how is it possible that the market looks favorable, and we are still not earning money, or at least not enough...well that has to do with the level of performance on the sales side, so that is something that I need to develop, I need to improve my sales skills...The company is making a loss. Moreover, I work many hours on it, and so do others. Yes, that is starting to put much pressure on the pleasure I get out of it yes... there is also a kind of resistance or something (to selling)" (1042-3).	The business owner reflects that (s)he cannot effectively perform selling activities due to a lack of sales capacities—attitude toward selling plays a role in the sense that there also must be the willingness to learn. The lack of selling skills contributes to business failure.	5
Procrastinate on personal selling activities	"I also blame myself for pushing too much towards product and concept development. I wanted the concept to be perfect. I spent much time on that and started focusing on sales too late. So, if I had focused more on sales, in the beginning, I would have had better revenues and I would have been able to get that financing." (1020-3)	Business owners indicate that they procrastinate on their selling activities due to a lack of selling time and skills.	4

TABLE 11: Sales Reasons for Business Failure per Interviewees

### Mechanisms' Linking Inadequate Selling to Business Failure

When exploring how spending too little time, having a lack of sales skills and procrastinating selling activities or a combination of these factors, three mechanisms were identified that

linked inadequate selling to business failure. These mechanisms are low acquisition of new customers, limited retainment of existing customers, and a lack of market understanding. In the following sections, more detailed examples of these particular mechanisms are provided.

### ***Low Acquisition of New Customers***

Spending too little time on sales, lacking the necessary skills, and/or procrastinating in undertaking selling activities may result in not being able to attract new customers: *“...No, but we should do that (acquire customers) more actively, as we have made huge mistakes with that in the beginning, and we missed opportunities because of that” (1003-3).*

In the sample, the business owners responded that their companies, ranging from start-ups to mature companies, had suffered from poor acquisition levels. As one mentioned: *“... No more new customers came in, and we only had the maintenance contracts of the current customers still running. Otherwise, nothing new came in” (1105-3).* For the more established companies, the business owners seemed to depend extensively on a few large customers for too long, without realizing that they might lose one or more of them. *“I think we have learned that you are vulnerable with large customers. Look, they generate a lot of turnover; contracts are renewed every time and you are doing fine. If suddenly they leave due to external causes, you should actually have a buffer from more smaller customers... I think we have to acquire more small customers with whom we can conclude a contract.” (1113-3).*

When one of these customers did leave, that company ended up in trouble almost right away and then had to let go 30 employees out of a total of 130. In this case, a regular income flow had lured the business owner into spending very little time on sales activities to acquire additional customers and thereby diversify the risk. Consequently, he had to let go of several staff members and close down several locations because of the loss of customers. In the less mature companies, start-ups mentioned that the lack of acquisition may result in time lost to grow to the next stage (see Table 12). Other companies regretted the fact that they did not put enough effort on the acquisition side, as doing so could have avoided problems or developed a process to recover from difficulties: *“maybe, yes...well... ask for more work, be more active on the sales side” (1102-3).*

### ***Not Retaining Customers***

Besides the issue of not attracting new customers, some business owners also indicated their inadequate sales efforts had resulted in losing part of their already existing customer base. Some business owners indicated they could not retain customers sufficiently, even when they had been successful in the past in acquiring new ones (Table 12). Business owners do not always realize they also need to pay sufficient attention to their existing customers. For example, one of the participating companies had to let go of eight employees, and bankruptcy was only barely avoided. Having learned the hard way, he now tries to free up resources in the company to *“maintain contact with the major (potential) customers. With the goal to seize a connection and get a deeper relationship” (1003\_3).*



The complacency this business owner experienced also affected one of the other business owners. That owner indicated: *"We were extremely busy, there were still good offers from (existing) customers, but later we were swept away by our competitors, which we did not understand. What's going on, we had a quote for 140k and then that work went away for 110k, just to name a few. What we said before makes no sense at all. We were full of work; we were not eager."* (1112-3) In this case, the business owner had not recognized that the business circumstances had changed. Due to the impending economic crisis, the competition was becoming more eager and the customers more critical. When the business owner finally realized his mistake, it turned out it was too late to increase the effort on sales and retain sufficient customers.

Not being personally involved enough in sales and the lack of sales knowledge caused another business owner to lose several customers when his main sales employee left the company and took the customers with them: *"...And he (the former employee) actually said he was going to do something different, but in the end, it came down ending up in the same 'fishing' waters. And because he worked before with us in the workplace, he was actually the point of contact for a lot of things...he had three or four customers that chose for him. They eventually went into business with him, and I certainly felt that... And yes customers, if you don't deliver what you have agreed, they will walk away from you. (1059-3)"* In a similar case, this scenario even led to bankruptcy: *"...Those guys (former employees) left, and you immediately saw that certain customers went directly to them. It was not a dormant story. So, within half a year I let the company go bankrupt to limit the damage. I also saw that I was not able to turn the tide, not even with extra financing. It was just unbearable" (1068-3).*

This is a case where customers did not directly relate with the business owner or even to the company, but with a single employee. This dependency makes the company vulnerable. It also shows a lack of insight by the business owner who might have prevented this situation by drawing up (more specific) non-competition agreements with the employees. In this case, it caused him financial and emotional distress: *"Very annoying because you just feel betrayed by someone who has walked and stood next to you for a long time (1059-3)".*

### **Lack of Market Understanding**

A third mechanism linking inadequate sales to business failure and mentioned by business owners concerned the lack of market insight. Several business owners indicated that the lack of sales time and skills resulted in a situation where they had insufficient information about understanding the places where they should offer the product, how the market was changing, and how they should respond adequately. Business owners suggested that this was one of the main reasons that their company ended up in serious trouble. One of them indicated that his lack of sales efforts resulted in a situation where they had brought a product into the market where there was no apparent demand and for which they had no decent insights regarding a potential value proposition.

Such a lack of market insight is, however, not limited to startups; it also caused trouble for more mature small businesses. One business owner commented on this issue, namely,

that because of a change in government policy, four of its biggest customers cancelled their contracts unilaterally. He failed to understand that more active relationship management might have prevented this situation: “Yes, I think the biggest setback I have had in 1 year was that I have lost four of my biggest customers and then you would think, yes, that has to do with how you function... something must be wrong on our side. But in this case, the government agencies were just unilaterally canceling the contract without any cause because they simply abandoned the concept (1113-3)”. The business owner apparently had not seen this situation coming or had no idea how to respond to it adequately and successfully. Table 12 shows the idea/category, an example of a quote representing the idea (category), the explanation of that idea, and the number of interviews where it appeared.

Idea / Category	Example Quote	Explanation	# of interviews
Low acquisition of new customers	“Initially, we just did not know how it worked with potential customers. In the first half-year, we did not sell anything. Really nothing at all (1028-3).”	A consequence of procrastinating sales activities is a lack of attracting new customers, thereby contributing to business failure.	15
Not retaining customers	“We have lost sight of existing customers because we always focused on other activities. Our goal is to maintain contact with the major (potential) customers. To seize a connection and get a deeper relationship (1003_3).”	Another consequence of procrastinating sales activities is failing to retain existing customers, which contributes to business failure.	11
Lack of market understanding	“...do more market research and especially that you already have a participating customer before you have created the product, because first we have been building the product, and then we thought...who are we building it for? (1115-3)”	A third consequence of procrastinating sales activities is that business owners have too little contact with customers, so they miss the understanding of how their product fits the market.	4

TABLE 12: Consequences of Ineffective Sales Activities

Figure 7 visualizes these results.

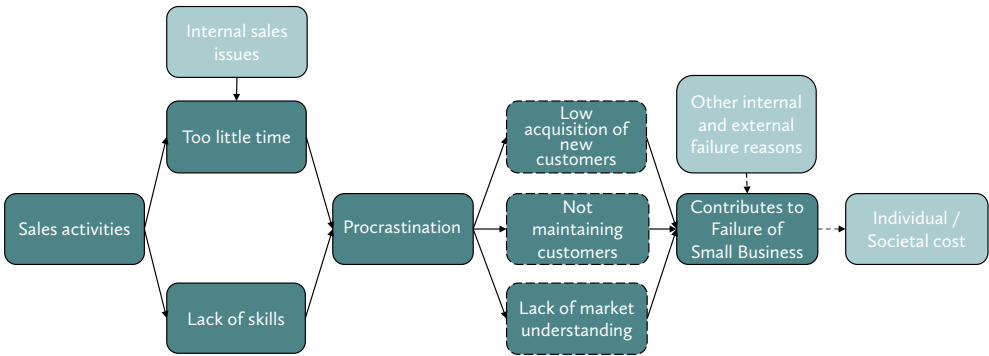


FIGURE 7: Conceptual Model and Summary of Results

## 4.6 Discussion

The idea that personal selling is a crucial activity for entrepreneurs is far from new (Block and MacMillan, 1985). However, previous studies have failed to address the direct relationship of selling and business failure. Although the selling role is essential (Matthews *et al.*, 2018), it remains undisputed that selling is one of the many roles the business owner has to perform. Sales professionals in larger organizations can carry out sales activities full-time and are supported by other departments (Deutsch and Wortmann, 2011). The diversity of roles for the specific situation of business owners may lead to having too little space to develop and undertake needed selling activities.

Authors previously mentioned selling related activities as a reason for failure (Shepherd, 2003, Singh *et al.*, 2007, Cope, 2011, Nikolić *et al.*, 2019) but without delving deeper into the underlying aspects and mechanisms. As such, this exploratory study advances these lines of research and contributes both to the emerging literature on Entrepreneurial Selling and the growing literature on business failure while also linking these streams. In particular, this study advances our understanding of the connections between (inadequate) sales activities and business failure in the context of small-scale companies by adding more detail about which specific elements where the personal selling role was insufficiently performed.

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The findings show that (a combination of) spending too little time on sales, a lack of sales skills, and procrastination of selling activities from the business owner, contributed to the fact that their companies were insufficiently able to acquire new customers, retain existing ones, and gain any deeper insight into the market in which they were operating.

The business owners regret the fact that they started selling too late (Onyemah *et al.*, 2013). This study confirms this finding and states that the procrastination of selling activities is because of having or spending too little time on selling and having insufficient sales skills. The procrastination of selling activities contributes to failure. Scholars claimed that these selling activities should be performed by the business owners, at least at the start of an enterprise or upon the introduction of a new product (Deutsch and Wortmann, 2011, Onyemah *et al.*, 2013, Onyemah and Rivera-Pesquera, 2017, Dalecki, 2019). Whatever the reasons (e.g., not enough time, skills, do not consider yourself suitable, or do not like to pick up the sales role) for why business owners decide to outsource the sales role to other internal actors, the remarks made by our respondents indicate how hard it can be for founders to delegate and manage sales(people).

### **Bird-in-the-Hand Principle as an Indicator of Business Failure**

A possible important indicator for business owners to understand to avoid business failure caused by ineffective selling is to reflect on what the existing Bird-in-the-Hand selling means are before they enter a failure situation or, better before they even start their company. Such effectual means questions and adapting them into sales means questions are included here in the Introduction chapter (1) and the Literature Review (§2.3).

Answering the first question (Who am I (as a salesperson?)) indicates someone's identity as a business owner. Identity is a critical element that determines the level of self-efficacy (Erez and Earley, 1993) and drives that behavior (Murnieks, 2007). The results in this chapter show that the selling role plays a vital role in the prevention of business failure. A reflective question that business owners can ask is if they consider themselves as sales actors and, in this way, determine if they see the selling role as part of their own business identity. As identity drives behavior, answering this question with a 'no' might be an indicator of future failure. Fortunately, identity is not a fixed construct, but is active and changes during the entrepreneurial process (Nielsen and Lassen, 2012). It is also dynamically related to the second and third means questions.

The second means question provides information about the competencies of the business owner (What do I know? Do I have sales experience, skills and/or knowledge?). A lack of experience, skills, and knowledge can contribute to business failure (Fredland and Morris, 1976, Gaskill *et al.*, 1993, Shepherd, 2003, Mayr *et al.*, 2021). The data from this study show that a lack of selling experience might also contribute to failure. Sales experience may have been gained by previous work as a sales employee or by sales activities carried out as a business owner. Suppose a business owner has previously worked in an organization as a sales employee. In that case, the advantage might be that they could have mirrored their performance to sales peers and concluded what their level of performance is. Indicating the level of performance is probably more difficult for a small-scale business owner, as there are not always sales peers present in their surroundings. Sales skills and knowledge, however, can be gained through experience and also come from previous sales education, training, and coaching (Honeycutt Jr. and Stevenson, 1989, LaForge and Dubinsky, 1996, Roman *et al.*, 2002, Cron *et al.*, 2005, Lassk *et al.*, 2012, Singh *et al.*, 2015). Again, answering 'no' to this question might be the second indicator of future business failure.

The third means question (Who do I know? Do I have a network with (potential) customers?) relates to experience. If a business owner has worked as an account manager in the same industry where (s)he starts a business, there is probably a pool of potential customers available. If there is no current network or that network is not supporting the business idea or is in a different industry, the follow-up question becomes is the business owner able to gain a network within a reasonable time? If not, this circumstance is again a potential indicator of business failure.

In conclusion, answering the adapted Bird-in-Hand principle questions are a significant predictor for the future effectiveness of the selling endeavors of business owners. Answering one or more of the adapted Effectuation questions with a 'no' provides a weak foundation for the selling role of the business owner. This foundation leads to business owners not performing the selling role effectively and may contribute to business failure. The following two studies (Chapters 4 and 5) provide a more detailed insight into the behavior of business owners in their sales role and 'who they are as salesperson'.

## 4.7 Directions for Future Research and Limitations

The primary contribution of this study is that the participating business owners often recognized that the ineffectiveness of their Entrepreneurial Selling activities is a reason for business failure and is that failure not limited to startups or the introduction of new propositions. Not only those starting small businesses regret the fact that they waited too long to invest time and energy in the sales role (Onyemah *et al.*, 2013), the more seasoned business owners also believed they might have fallen short on the sales side.

Business owners with failure experiences mentioned that they had a lack of market understanding. A potential solution to create market understanding can be found in the literature on Entrepreneurial Selling, where scholars describe preliminary selling as a replacement for extensive marketing research (Deutsch and Wortmann, 2011, Onyemah *et al.*, 2013, Onyemah and Rivera-Pesquera, 2017, Dalecki, 2019, Onyemah and Rivera-Pesquera, 2021). By doing so, a classical marketing task becomes a sales activity. Practitioners (e.g. educators, consultants, and trainers) can use this information to prevent (future) business owners from failure caused by ineffective personal selling activities. Scholars also have opportunities to give more attention to the (crucial) personal selling role of business owners, especially in small business research, as it is important for the future growth of our economies (Carree and Thurik, 2010, Kramer and Noorderhaven, 2020). When it comes to understanding selling behavior, usually only large enterprises are referred to; however, most firms that exist in this world are small firms (Swedberg, 2000). It is thus more than necessary to assist this important, but sometimes forgotten group. We need to understand how small business owners can mitigate the shortage of resources compared to large companies and, on the other hand, better leverage their goodwill toward their sales employees.

A robust starting point for further deepening our insights about Entrepreneurial Selling is Effectuation. This study adopted Effectuation theory and applied it as one of its leading principles (Bird-in-Hand) to Entrepreneurial Selling. By applying the Bird-in-Hand principle to business owners and their selling role, we have gained key understanding, namely, that a shortage of selling means can lead to failing businesses. If as researchers and practitioners, we discuss the importance of the selling role at an early stage of the business owners' entrepreneurial career and find solutions to solve such selling deficiencies, we can perhaps prevent many businesses from failing. Entrepreneurial Selling scholars indeed will have the opportunity to apply the other four principles of Effectuation (affordable-loss, lemonade-from-lemons, patchwork-quilt, and pilot-in-the-plane) to this phenomenon. This research will provide a positive opportunity for further cooperation between entrepreneurship and sales scholars that will deliver a complete positive and valued overview of the nexus of Effectuation and Entrepreneurial Selling.

This study has an explorative character that fits the current academic status of the Entrepreneurial Selling phenomenon, but it is also subject to several limitations. First, this study is based on the re-analysis of interviews with business owners about business

failure in general. When the interviews were originally conducted, Entrepreneurial Selling and the relation of it to business failure, were not explicitly included as a topic. Consequently, the level of detail of this topic varied across the interviews. This issue makes it uncertain if these findings can be generalized to apply to other entrepreneurial contexts and studies. Then paradoxically, the fact that most of the interviewed business owners brought up selling as an unsolicited theme shows the apparent importance of that topic in connection to business failure. The information they provided in this way offered a first, exploratory insight into the relevance of business owners' involvement and the potential consequences of its absence thereof.

A second limitation is the lack of female business owners in the sample. Within the domain of entrepreneurship, it is widely acknowledged that significant gender differences still persist (Guzman and Kacperczyk, 2019, Brush *et al.*, 2020), and may be further exacerbated by failure (Simmons *et al.*, 2019). How gender differences affect the Entrepreneurial Selling activities of business owners remains unclear and is clearly a valid subject for future research.

The final limitation concerns the emotional relationship between the business owner and the failed business (Shepherd, 2003), which leads to a potential risk of a logical fallacy where business owners attribute business failure to just a single mechanism or the wrong mechanism(s). If several missed sales opportunities happened just before the failure, a post hoc fallacy might develop, where business owners assume that ineffective selling is the only reason for the failure. Previous research has shown that business failure is typically the result of multiple coinciding variables (de Jong, 2018). This potential risk is why the following chapter first investigates how successful business owners attribute their sales role as the basis for their success and thus mitigate the risk of unjustly claimed results.

Future research could also consider intragroup differences in the sales behavior of business owners (starting with the next chapter), how Entrepreneurial Selling develops throughout a business owner's career, and if there is any specific impact of the industry, offering (i.e., service versus product), and stage of enterprise development (i.e., startup versus mature enterprises) in more detail and examine the interplay between the lack or ineffectiveness of Entrepreneurial Selling activities and other causes of business failure.

## 4.8 Conclusions

This study has explored the role of Entrepreneurial Selling in the context of business failure. Through the re-analysis of a series of failure stories of small business owners, there is evidence that effective performance of the sales role by the small business owner is a vital prerequisite for the survival of small businesses.

The evidence suggests that many business owners are struggling as sales actors and that this struggle can contribute to business failure. Based on the findings of this study, Entrepreneurial Selling is seen by business owners as an important topic in relation to business failure and needs an effectual selling approach. The reasons for sales failure are diverse, but it is essential to understand how business owners spend sufficient time in this role, do the *right* sales activities *right*, and prevent their procrastination. The findings show that (future) business owners should develop a realistic image of the importance of their sales activities and that business failure (in some cases) can be prevented. Current and future business owners can learn from the sales decisions and activities of small businesses that performed under the threshold or even worse.

By exploring the business owner sales role in business failure, the foundation is set to investigate Entrepreneurial Selling behavior in more detail. The necessity for further research is apparent, and this journey will start in the following two chapters and gain a more in-depth understanding of this emerging field.

# 5 THE ENTREPRENEURIAL SELLING MATRIX — THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE MOTIVES OF BUSINESS OWNERS AND THEIR SALES BEHAVIOR

## 5.1 Abstract

**Purpose:** The sales role is crucial for the survival of small businesses (See Chapter 4). The research on Entrepreneurial Selling is increasing (Dalecki, 2019), but more research still needs to be done. Beginning with this chapter, the goal is to understand the business owners' behavior in this essential entrepreneurial role (Matthews et al., 2018).

**Methods:** Twelve semi-structured interviews were undertaken with business owners of small businesses on their Entrepreneurial Selling role. A thematic analysis approach to these interviews sought in-depth insight into their Entrepreneurial Selling behavior.

**Findings:** This research led to establishing a relationship between the motive to start a business and the way business owners of small businesses act in their sales role. This study explains how motives influence the sales behavior of business owners and presents an Entrepreneurial Selling typology as a Matrix, resulting from two dimensions-- the Degree of Sales Organization (Systematic vs. Ad Hoc) and the Degree of Sales Initiative (Proactive vs. Reactive). These four different motives lead to four types of Entrepreneurial Selling behavior that differ in how business owners organize their sales activities and initiate contact with (potential) customers.

**Originality/Value:** The insights from this study clearly move the emerging academic field of Entrepreneurial Selling forward. For that practice, the impact of the study is that the awareness of this crucial entrepreneurial role grows and clearly indicates the importance of considering intragroup differences and providing adaptive sales support for the aspirations of business owners.

## 5.2 Introduction

Business owners should prioritize the process for improving their sales activities (Friar et al., 2021). The previous chapter concluded that ineffective selling activities contribute to small business failure. Small businesses are considered essential contributors to economic development (Wennekers and Thurik, 1999, Acs, 2006, Carree et al., 2007, Carree



and Thurik, 2010), and thus, more insight into the critical Entrepreneurial Selling role is needed. To gain that insight, this chapter has two objectives.

As elaborated in the previous chapter, this study first aims to overcome the potential risk of a logical or post hoc fallacy of failed business owners to determine whether the sales role has been correctly identified as a cause for business failure, as claimed in Study 1. This potential misallocation of causes is why the Study 2 analysis first focused on how successful business owners see their sales role as the basis for their success.

This chapter's second objective and core focus is to deepen our knowledge of Entrepreneurial Selling by dealing with the relationship between the motives of individuals who start and manage a business and that influence on their selling behavior. Based on twelve in-depth interviews with business owners of small businesses in the B-to-B in the Netherlands, this focus resulted in an Entrepreneurial Selling typology with two focuses and four categories. There is great diversity among entrepreneurs (Swedberg, 2000), so determining a typology is valuable to be able to study a complex phenomenon like Entrepreneurial Selling, as it can categorize individual business owners into distinct groups and deliver a detailed analysis and intergroup comparison (Rich, 1992) of business owners for their sales roles. That categorization is done in this study by examining how business owners engage in their selling activities and how that activity relates to why they started their businesses in the first place.

The sales behavior of business owners is described with the support of two concepts introduced in this chapter, namely, the Degree of Sales Organization and the Degree of Sales Initiative. Together these concepts render a clearer overview of the Entrepreneurial Selling behavior of business owners. The Degree of Sales Organization is determined by analyzing whether business owners organize their selling activities Systematically (Causation) or Ad Hoc (Effectuation or Disinhibition). The Degree of Sales Initiative is analyzed based on the proactiveness of acting on new opportunities. This initiative can be shown within the selling process by proactively acquiring new customers or taking action to engage in long-lasting, profitable business relationships with existing customers. The opposite process is ad hoc behavior, where business owners wait until selling opportunities actually appear.

## 5.3 Theoretical Background of Entrepreneurial Motives

### **The Influence of Motives on Entrepreneurial Behavior**

Shane, Locke and Collins (2003) claim that the research needs to consider how entrepreneurial motivations impact entrepreneurial decisions. This study tries to grasp why business owners of small businesses have taken up their business (motives), how that decision influences their Entrepreneurial Selling behavior, and what kind of sales effort involves

bringing one's entrepreneurial ambitions into reality. Although there is significant attention paid to the diversity of entrepreneurs in terms of their aspirations for their businesses (Swedberg, 2000, Shane *et al.*, 2003, Hessels *et al.*, 2008, Tang *et al.*, 2008, Verheul and Van Mil, 2011, Hermans *et al.*, 2015, Stephan *et al.*, 2015, Murnieks *et al.*, 2020), no research has yet been conducted on the influence of the motive to become a business owner on their actual selling behavior.

Entrepreneurial behavior is a complex interplay between cognitive factors (including knowledge, skills, and abilities), traits, motives (Gartner, 1990, Gartner *et al.*, 1992, Shane *et al.*, 2003) and external (economic and sociological) factors that can influence the actions of business owners of companies. However, in the context of ownership, even more than in other situations, the individual business owner is the key actor in the opportunity recognition and exploitation process (Shane *et al.*, 2003, Van der Veen and Wakkee, 2004, Alvarez and Barney, 2020). Hence, entrepreneurship involves human agency. Entrepreneurship depends on the decisions and actions that people make about how to undertake the entrepreneurial process. The motive to become a business owner or, in other words, the desire (Locke, 2000) leads to different approaches and actions when pursuing entrepreneurial opportunities. Environmental factors being held constant, the entrepreneurial motive plays a critical role in the entrepreneurial process (Shane *et al.*, 2003). Thus, motives influence the entrepreneurial behavior of business owners.

Why do individuals want to own a firm? For a long time, the dominant thought was that someone became a business owner to gain profit. Murnieks (2007) stated that Knight (1921), Cantillon (1931) Schumpeter (1912), Casson (1982) and Hebert & Link (1989) all referred to utilizing profit as the dominant motive for an individual to become a business owner of an enterprise. It has also become evident that business owners are diverse, and many different types of entrepreneurs exist (Gartner, 1990, Tang *et al.*, 2008). Organizational behavior research thus urges us to go beyond the sole motive of monetary rewards to understand the other reasons for why business owners behave the way they do (Shepherd, 2003).

There are more recent studies about the reasons for starting a firm that are less limited than just the profit view. Researchers at the beginning of the millennium began to classify the motives to start an enterprise as being either opportunity or necessity, also described as 'pull' and 'push' (Raynolds *et al.*, 2001, Acs, 2006, Hessels *et al.*, 2008). With 'pull' motives there is a personal aspiration to start being a business owner, whereas with 'push' factors, one is forced into ownership because there are no other options (Shane *et al.*, 2003, Hessels *et al.*, 2008, Locke and Baum, 2014). Another classification can be opportunity (pull) and necessity (push) (Raynolds *et al.*, 2001, Acs, 2006). These types of studies, being mostly conducted in developed countries, like the Netherlands, where push motives are less prevalent, report on mostly pull motives being next to 'profit' (income and wealth), such as 'autonomy' (independence, freedom), 'challenge', and 'recognition and status' (Cooper *et al.*, 1989, Kolvereid, 1996, Feldman and Bolino, 2000, Carter *et al.*, 2003, Wilson *et al.*, 2004, Hessels *et al.*, 2008). In addition to these known motives, Stephan et

al. (2015) mention family and roles, dissatisfaction with former employment, community, and social motivations.

When people start a business with the prime motive of increasing income, it likely relates positively to their ambitions for growth and innovation (Cassar, 2007).

'Autonomy' or 'independence' is, next to 'financial gain', one of the most cited pull factors for starting a business (Shane *et al.*, 1991, Kolvereid, 1996, Carter *et al.*, 2003, Van Gelderen and Jansen, 2006, Hessels *et al.*, 2008). Business owners for whom autonomy or independence is a dominant motive to start a company (probably) have limited growth ambitions for their business. Ownership of an enterprise is likely to be a vehicle that can serve the freedom-related needs of the individual, as it can enable a lifestyle in which one can decide for the self on goals, methods, and time scheduling (Breugh, 1999, Van Gelderen and Jansen, 2006, Dej and Gorgievski, 2012, Friedman *et al.*, 2012, Stephan *et al.*, 2015). Independence involves taking on the responsibility to use one's judgment as opposed to blindly following the assertions of others. It also involves taking responsibility for one's own life rather than living off the efforts of others. Many investigators have observed that the entrepreneurial role necessitates having independence (Hessels *et al.*, 2008), but desiring independence can also be the primary goal for starting a business.

'Challenge' (Dej and Gorgievski, 2012, Friedman *et al.*, 2012, Stephan *et al.*, 2015) includes the desire for personal development, meaningful work, and building an organization. 'Recognition and status' (Friedman *et al.*, 2012, Aziz *et al.*, 2013, Stephan *et al.*, 2015) captures the desire of a person to get respect from relatives, friends, and perhaps the wider community.

'Family and roles' (Friedman *et al.*, 2012, Aziz *et al.*, 2013, Stephan *et al.*, 2015) has as central objective the continuity of a family tradition or predecessors. 'Dissatisfaction' (Giacomini *et al.*, 2011, Akehurst *et al.*, 2012, Stephan *et al.*, 2015) with a prior job or the will to give something back to community can also be a reason to start a business (Levie and Hart, 2013, Stephan *et al.*, 2015).

The 'community and social motivation' also includes looking after one's employees and being environmentally friendly (Dej and Gorgievski, 2012, Stephan *et al.*, 2015).

If business owners have clear intentions for their companies, then they have to find out how to accomplish their desired goals. To perform, you need a motive that activates or produces task knowledge. "Consciously, one has to ask how will I go about reaching this goal? How does it tie into my other goals? How long will it take? How much effort will be required? Can I do it? What resources will I need? Some of these questions will pull relevant subconscious knowledge into awareness, and some will require more thinking and information search" (Locke, 2000, p. 412). There is a clear relationship between your motive to start a company and how business owners set goals and perform. For purposeful behavior to arise and go forward, a goal that gives direction to the energy of motives needs to be present (Earley *et al.*, 1989, Locke and Latham, 1990).

As there is a need for more research to consider how entrepreneurial motivations impact entrepreneurial decisions (Shane *et al.*, 2003), this chapter addresses this need in

the context of Entrepreneurial Selling behavior and shows how the motive to own and manage a business is reflected in the way that business owners organize and initiate their selling activities.

### ***The Degree of Sales Organization: Systematic or Ad Hoc***

Organizations are systems of coordinated action (March and Simon, 1993). The agents behind these organizations coordinate their actions in order to contribute to declared organizational goals (Puranam *et al.*, 2014). To understand the Entrepreneurial Selling behavior of the business owner, the starting point of this study is to examine how they organize their selling activities.

The Degree of Sales Organization depends on how systematically business owners organize and plan their enterprises for their sales role. If business owners work and plan in a systematic way, they will follow a series of logical ordered steps where each step is analyzed and where work processes, skills, and output are standardized (Mintzberg, 1993, 2007, Lunenburg, 2012). The opposite of systematic is an ad hoc selling organization with no or little sales planning involved. To understand whether business owners systematically structure their selling activities, the terms Causation, Effectuation (Saravathy, 2001, Saravathy *et al.*, 2008, Saravathy, 2009) and Bricolage / Disinhibition approach (Lerner, 2016, Lerner *et al.*, 2018) are utilized (described in §2.2).

In this current study, the understanding of the Degree of Sales Organization is enhanced by researching how detailed business owners write and evaluate a sales plan, a common activity for professional sales agents use to structure their activities and priorities for the coming period (Jobber and Lancaster, 2006, Havlicek and Roubal, 2013). If there is a detailed sales plan, this is a strong indication of a causal approach; if not, this might indicate an Effectuation or even Bricolage/Disinhibition approach. Furthermore, it is important to understand the extent to which owners follow a sales process to build relationships, e.g. from the classic stance, the causal seven steps of selling (Dubinsky, 1981) to a more dynamic, way of 'maneuvering' (Åge, 2011) and continually stepping forward and back; and if they also have and use a Customer Relationship System (CRM) to support this process. A CRM system enables the organization to systematically administer its contacts with (potential) customers and has the potential to contribute to the growth of the entire organization (Rababah *et al.*, 2011). Having and using a CRM system also indicates a more or less causal approach.

### ***The Degree of Sales Initiative: Proactive or Reactive***

Being entrepreneurially competent not only refers to the know-how to write a business plan, set goals, follow a particular entrepreneurial process and, administer this process; it also implies recognizing and acting on opportunities; hence, taking the initiative and acting (Lans *et al.*, 2011). Personal initiative is a work behavior where the degree of proactiveness plays a vital role in overcoming barriers and achieving both personal and or-

ganizational goals (Frese and Fay, 2001). This work behavior is essential in selling, as the core activity of any business is acquiring new customers while maintaining current ones.

Proactive selling behavior can be defined as taking the initiative in selling products, anticipating opportunities rather than threats, and being persistent in the selling process until customers have adopted the products (Pitt *et al.*, 2002, de Jong *et al.*, 2021). Business owners have to be more active than employees (Utsch *et al.*, 1999) to achieve their entrepreneurial goals, as the business owner prepares for future opportunities by assembling resources now (Dimov, 2007). For the selling role. This focus means that a proactive stance will make sure that business owners reach out as early as possible to (prospective) customers to build those relationships and not wait until customers reach out to them (Frese *et al.*, 2016). There is a significant relationship between the Degree of Sales Initiative and the result of sales activities (Pitt *et al.*, 2002) and some scholars even considered it as one of the most powerful behavioral predictors of salesperson performance (Van der Borgh *et al.*, 2019, de Jong *et al.*, 2021). The opposite of proactive are those business owners who are reactive (Frese, 2009). These types of business owners only act when the environment forces them to act.

This study reveals what kinds of proactive behavior are shown by business owners in their Entrepreneurial Selling role, analyzed by their initiative to acquire new customers or by retaining existing customers. The conceptual research model for this study is presented Figure 8.

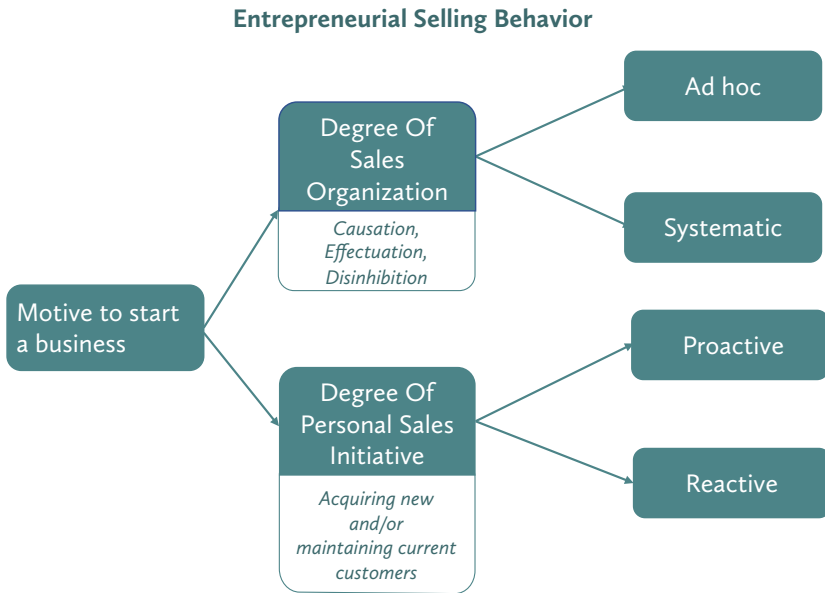


FIGURE 8: Conceptual Research Model (Study 2)

## 5.4 Methods

Similar to the first study, offered in the previous chapter, this study also uses qualitative methods to gain a deeper understanding of the sales behavior of business owners. The difference between the two methods is that the data presented in this chapter was especially collected for this study.

As there is not much Entrepreneurial Selling theory to start from, a thematic analysis based on the general induction principles described by Thomas (2006) was used. Twelve semi-structured interviews were conducted with small-scale business owners in the B-to-B. The survey included a set of entrepreneurial background and behavioral selling questions based on professional sales theory (summarized in §2.6) and the professional sales knowledge of the researcher in this dissertation.

The recruitment of participants was done using an open sampling technique (purposive), utilizing personal connections and the connections of those connections (snowballing). A condition was that the participants, at least partly, should own the company and have sales responsibilities. After each interview, there was a search for a business owner and company with a different background. As a result, a representative sample was seized and fitted to the research stage of Entrepreneurial Selling by actively seeking and finding participants who had contrasting characteristics. This approach was chosen to keep a broad view of the phenomenon instead of focusing on only a particular business owner or industry. This method creates a foundation of general knowledge about Entrepreneurial Selling to gather research from its infancy (Dalecki, 2019) to the next stage going forward.

The Interviews were conducted until the saturation point was reached. As every first data analysis was directly done after the interview, the eleventh and twelfth interviews made clear that no new codes emerged by going back and forth between the data and the analysis.

The anonymity of the participants was guaranteed by their signing a non-disclosure agreement and leaving their names and respective companies out of the published interview participant list in Appendix E. The interviews were held from October 2020 to February 2021. The interview format consisted of 58 open-ended questions that covered 7 sections, and the interviews lasted between 60-75 minutes. Nine interviews were held in the business owners' office, two online because of Covid restrictions, and one at the university. The questions were open-ended, and the participants were approached as being knowledgeable agents, which is why an extraordinary voice was given to them to let them yield informant-centric information. The survey can be found in Appendix D.

In Sections A and B of the questionnaire, the general characteristics, information, and company information were gathered. In Section C, questions were asked about the business owner's view concerning sales activities. Section D is about the organization of the selling organization and its activities. Section E concentrates on whether the business owner contributes any sales activities to business failure experiences, and section F addresses the future of those sales activities.

The interviews were audio recorded, and a professional organization with experience in the academic environment typed the transcripts. The transcripts were then sent to the participants, who could check for any sensitive personal or business information they wanted to have removed from the data. One sentence was removed, but it did not impact the final results.

The same as for Study 1, the coding was conducted using the qualitative analysis tool MAXQDA. Applying the rules of the general inductive approach, the raw data of the 12 interviews were clustered into categories and given a code name in MAXQDA. Through line-by-line coding, the first coding analysis resulted in 60 codes.

As presented in the Introduction, this chapter's results are divided into two parts. This chapter first aims to overcome the potential risk of any logical or post hoc fallacy of business owners with a failure experience in Study 1 (Chapter 4). This potential misallocation of causes is why the second coding round focused on how business owners attribute their selling role to a successful performance or result. Given the fact that the data were collected especially for this dissertation and the Entrepreneurial Selling role, there was now more space to ask detailed questions about the selling role than there was in the study presented in the previous chapter. Within the >60 codes of the first coding round, four categories explicitly stated by business owners showed how important effectively performing the sales activities was for their entrepreneurial success. This data mitigated the risk of logical or post hoc fallacy of the study that was presented in the previous chapter. The outcome of this investigation can be found in the first part of the results section.

The second part and the third coding round delivered the insights that business owners had different motives to start their businesses. A conceptual research model was created and challenged using the existing literature.

The first question in these interviews is on the motive of the business owner to start and operate a business (see Appendix D):

- “What was your motive to start a business?”

Example quote: *“Actually, the strategy was just ‘we want to make money,’ so to speak.”*  
(Motive: Financial)

Because the selling behavior seemed so diverse among the business owners, an idea emerged by analyzing if and how the motive to start a business influenced the sales behavior of the business owner. The first-order theme ‘motive to start as business owner’ was diversified based on the answers of the participants into four motives (Profit, Freedom, Organizing, and Continuity), and their meaning was consulted in the literature to analyze if there was already knowledge about these motives with the same or perhaps different names so as to avoid unneeded semantic discussions by future researchers.

In the literature, ‘Profit’ (income and wealth), ‘Autonomy’ (independence, freedom), ‘Challenge’, and ‘Family and Roles’ showed similarities to the motives gathered from our

data. ‘Profit’ as a first-order category was re-labeled as a second-order theme to ‘Financial’ to cover a broader meaning. ‘Freedom’ was re-labeled to the second-order theme of ‘Autonomy,’ which is the freedom to act independently. ‘Organizing’ stayed as the second-order theme of ‘Organizing;’ ‘Challenge’ contained ‘Building an organization,’ which was recognized in the answers of the participants, but also had two other pillars in its definition (personal development, meaningful work) that could not be assigned to the specific answers from this type of business owner or may apply to other motives. ‘Continuity’ as a second-order concept stayed as ‘Continuity’; as ‘family and roles’ had the same explanation, and the participants who showed this behavior were not necessarily family companies, but also independent successors.

In the coding round, the 59 codes (without the motive code) were rearranged and linked as much as possible to the motives. This step and a subsequent literature review (§5.3) on entrepreneurial motives led to this study’s central research question: *How does the motive to start and operate a business influence the sales behavior of small-scale business owners?*

Hence, each motive was connected to a broad range of selling themes that belong to that specific motive. A fourth round of coding then analyzed which of the 59 categories could be linked to the motive. Following the example of Gioia (2013), this broad range of themes was reorganized into (2013) first-order categories (e.g., ‘creating a sales plan’ and ‘acquiring new customers’). Four second-order themes emerged from these first-order categories (Ad Hoc vs. Systematic and Proactive vs. Reactive). Returning to the existing literature with these themes resulted in two primary constructs: Degree of Sales Organization and Degree of Sales Initiative. Here one can find some questions from the questionnaire and example quotes that indicate the sales behavior of business owners that were connected to the specific motive of a business owner.

Questions on the Degree of Sales Organization:

- What does your sales organization look like?

Example quote: *“We have two account managers...we have a meeting every six weeks. Well, what I said, I keep track of how many appointments in the week.”* (Motive: Organizing)

- Do you have a sales plan? If yes, can you describe this plan for me?

Example quote: *“We always plan to plan. And the plan isn’t there yet. So how do I see the future? In fact, keep doing what we do, only smarter... with a little bit more forecast ...”* (Motive: Freedom)

On the Degree of Sales Initiative:

- How do you acquire new customers? “

Example quote: *“We are passive in sales, and that is discussed internally; we should be a bit more active...our customers come to us...”* (Motive: Continuity)



- What is your approach to maintain customers?  
Sample quote: *“I’m always interested in that piece of new/ else/ next. I have too little attention for my existing customers. That’s what I am learning along the way.* (Motive: Financial)

Connecting to the survey in Appendix D, this study mainly justifies its results after multiple readings and the complete coding process on the data generated from B1 (what was your motive to start a business?) and the connection to the items for the Degree of Sales Organization (D1 and D5) and Degree of Sales Initiative (D6 and D7) of the business owner, which taken together render a picture of the sales behavior of business owners as it connects to their motive to start a business.

The theoretical chapter was written based on the existing research of the exploratory constructs, hence, motives and their relation to organizing: Systematic (from Causation, Effectuation to Disinhibition) and Initiative: (from Proactive to Reactive). The first-order categories measure the Degree of Sales Organization. Affirmative answers showed a more Systematic (Causation) sales approach while dissenting answers showed a more Ad Hoc (Effectuation or Disinhibition) approach. The Degree of Sales Initiative is determined by the degree to which business owners are proactive. Proactiveness can be shown by the actions to acquire ‘new’ or retain ‘existing’ customers. The opposite effect is that business owners act reactively.

Table 13 presents an overview of this study’s first-order categories, second-order themes, explanatory constructs, and their connection to the Interview items in Appendix D.

Interview Item (Appendix D)	First Order Categories	Second Order Themes	Explanatory Constructs
B1	Motive to start as a business owner	Motives: Profit, Freedom, Organizing, Continuity	Motives: Financial, Autonomy, Organizing, Continuity
D1,D5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The use of a CRM system</li> <li>• Creating a sales plan</li> <li>• Sales process</li> </ul>	Systematic vs. Ad hoc: Causation, Effectuation, Bricolage/Disinhibition	Degree of Sales Organization
D6,D7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building long-term relationships</li> <li>• Selling activities</li> <li>• Maintaining existing customers</li> <li>• Acquiring new customers</li> <li>• Carrying out one’s own sales activities or delegating</li> </ul>	Proactiveness vs. Reactiveness	Degree of Sales initiative

**TABLE 13:** Connection Between Interview Items and First Order Categories, Second Order Themes and Explanatory Constructs. Based on Goia (2013)

### Dataset

The business owners in the dataset (N=12) are responsible for companies of between 1 and 200 (average 46) employees, and the sample included two females and ten males, all with truly diverse backgrounds. They were operating in different industries. There were two Technical Installations companies, one Financial Service company, one Hospitality Food supplier, one Storage company, one Coaching firm, one Product Development Consultancy company, one Store Format Designing company, one Employee Satisfaction Survey company, one IT company, one Augmented/Virtual Reality company, and one Recruitment company. The age of the business owners ranged between 28 and 64 years old, with an average age of 45. Seven business owners had earned a master's degree, three have an applied bachelor's degree, one business owner had an Intermediate school degree, and one business owner had no degree.

### Confirmation of the Results of Explorative Study 1 – The Perception of the Sales Role for Successful Business Owners

This section first shows the results of this study to validate the results of Study I (Chapter 4) and to overcome the potential risk of any logical or post hoc fallacy of failed business owners determining whether the sales role had been correctly identified as a cause for failure.

Successful or not, all the participating business owners attributed the sales role as being a fundamental contributor to their company's success or its failure. Successful means that business owners were satisfied with their entrepreneurial performance, and this performance aligned with their entrepreneurial ambitions. Failure was seen as the opposite where business owners are performing below threshold and are considering or delaying their exit and are actually permanently failing. The two failed companies confirmed the view of the first study, namely, that the selling role is a contributor to business failure. As one failed business owner reflected:

*“If I look back now I would spend maybe 75%, 80 or even 85% of my time on sales. You have to do your own sales and not delegate it. And it is just vital, just use the information you get from your customers or your future customers and if they criticize you or your product. They do not criticize you, but of course, the product/service you provide. Then use the comments to improve, or you won't be relevant for them and fail (interview nr. 2)”*

The business owners elaborated further on what kind of good selling practices are needed to become successful. The data indicated that dedication to sales, building long-term relationships, problem-solving (asking open questions, listening, and connecting solutions to challenges of the customers) are core themes and skills that business owners mentioned regarding effective selling behaviors.

The successful business owners also indicated that it is important to receive external training and coaching support in the sales role, especially if you yet have no experience. This support can make an essential contribution to creating a successful business. Table 14 offers an overview of the main drivers of entrepreneurial sales success that were supported by these quotes. It shows the idea/category, an example of a quote representing the idea (category), the explanation of that idea, and the number of interviews where it appeared.

Idea/ Category	Example Quote	Explanation	# of interviews
Dedication is crucial	"I think the most important is to stay dedicated to sales... because that is the engine of your business. Make sure it is properly organized...I think proactively reaching out to customers is the success factor (Interview No. 7)."	Successful business owners agree that staying committed to sales activities is crucial to becoming successful.	12
Long-term relationships are key	"That you are genuinely just interested in a person and want to get to know each other. So, to really build that relationship... a very human approach works best for me...(interview No. 10)."	The main objective of the sales role is to build long-term customer relationships.	12
Problem-solving skills are a necessity	"I would ask very open questions...what is your situation, what do you do, and who are your major competitors? Just a general question, and when that is clearer, I ask again where the pain issues are. Moreover, as soon as I notice that the customer has no pain points that are consistent with my product, I do not try to sell it... I try to listen as much as possible to what that person has as a problem...(Interview No. 1)"	Next to a personal connection, to build a long-lasting relationship, it is essential to have a problem-solving attitude.	12
Training and coaching are needed to develop selling skills	"Fantastic, we did have an excellent training once...which followed the steps of what is your current situation, what is your desired situation, analysis of the gap, which solutions, check the problems with each solution, this is indeed the solution for your problem, okay, next step, next step, closing the deal (Interview No. 12)."	Successful business owners see that salespeople are not born but made. Sales training and coaching can support business owners to get to the next step in developing their sales skills and knowledge.	4

TABLE 14: Effective Sales Activities Essential for Business Success

### The Influence of the Business Owners' Motives on their Sales Behaviors

Business owners have different motives for starting a company. Table 15 shows the four motivations found in this study for starting and managing a business. The first question in the questionnaire was "What was your motive to start a business? After analyzing the data derived from the answers to this question in MaxQda and connecting them to data from the answers on the Degree of Sales Organization (Appendix D – Questions D1 and D5) and Degree of Sales Initiative (Appendix D – questions D6 and D7), it inductively became clear that business owners vary in their reasons to start and run a business, and there is a relationship between the motive and manner in which the sales role is performed.

Business owners with the motive 'Organizing' and 'Continuity' show Systematic sales behavior, while 'Financial' and 'Autonomy' lead to more Ad Hoc sales behavior. The way business owners show initiative also differs. The motives 'Financial and 'Organizing' lead to Proactive and 'Autonomy' and 'Continuity' lead to Reactive sales behavior.

Motive	Example Quote	Explanation
<b>Financial</b> <i>Interview Nos. 2, 4, 7, 8</i>	“Actually, the strategy was just ‘we want to make money’ so to speak.” (Interview No. 7)	The motive ‘financial’ has as its central objective to let the organization grow as fast as possible. The financial gains are the reason for starting their own company. This motive is historically the most dominant scholarly perspective on why individuals start an enterprise (Murnieks, 2007).
<b>Organizing</b> <i>Interview Nos. 1, 5, 6, 12</i>	“The motivation to start a company was because I grew up with the fact that my parents had a company and that they had quite a lot of fun with it; and especially, what I liked best about it, is that you can work with a group of people, can do beautiful things and that it is true that you can also help people on their way, make them happy in the profession we are in.” (interview No. 1)	The motive ‘organizing’ means that business owners enjoy the fact that they are responsible for (building) a team and organization that creates value for customers. Financial gain matters, but the value that is created by the organization for their customers is still the core motive. ‘Organizing’ approaches the definition of Stephen et al (2015); where the motive ‘challenge’ includes building an organization. In the quote we can also see the pillar of this definition being ‘meaningful work,’ but in this study it could also be related to other motives. The pillar of ‘personal alignment’ could also not be directly related solely to this motive.
<b>Autonomy</b> <i>Interview Nos. 10,11</i>	“I think for me what was in it then, and still is, is freedom. So, I think, of course you all have different types of business owners, so it’s not that I’m a business owner now, that I think I should build a company with 50 people or with 100 people and with €80 million turnover. So, for me starting a business was never really the drive to make something really big. It was always about making my own choices, freedom, especially actually organizing my own life or much more, so in that sense, I don’t know if that’s selfish, but it was more like having control over my own life. And I thought, yes, that’s the best thing to do; start a business. Then you are responsible for everything that happens.” (Interview No. 10)	The motive of ‘freedom’ focuses on the personal well-being of you as individual within your entrepreneurial endeavors. Also, it emphasizes that the customer is not sacred, and you don’t always have to dance to the customer’s tune. The findings align with the definition, where starting a business is considered as a way to serve the freedom-related needs of the individual, as it enables a lifestyle in which individuals can make their own decisions on goals, methods, and time scheduling (Breugh, 1999).
<b>Continuity</b> <i>Interview Nos. 3, 9</i>	“I’m not, absolutely not trying to see how much money we can earn. I want to have great assignments, we should earn good money from it, but for me it is much more important to have continuity and good work in the long term.” (Interview No. 9)	‘Continuity’ is the main goal of business owners of organizations by maintaining the status quo (or slow incremental growth), where taking care of the current organization and the people within that organization is the primary objective. There is a strong relationship between our findings and ‘family and roles’ mentioned by Stephan <i>et al.</i> (2015) which has as its central objective the continuity of a family tradition or predecessors.

TABLE 15: Motives for Entrepreneurial Selling Behavior

**Motives of the Business Owner and the Degree of Sales Organization**

Depending on their motive to start their enterprises the sales behavior of business owners differed in the Degree of Sales Organization. Following the data analysis in MAXQDA of the questionnaire (see Appendix D) on items B1 (What was your motive to start a business?) and relating that data to the sales organization items D1 (what does your selling organization look like?) and D5 (Do you have a sales plan?), two main indicators were found that determined if business owners organize their sales activities in a systematically or an ad hoc way.

The first indicator is if business owners carry out a standardized sales process and if they establish this process and, therefore, the needed contacts with the (potential) customers in a CRM system. The second indicator is if business owners develop a sales plan.

In Table 16, the motives are shown in Column 1, and the results are substantiated with quotes and the interpretation of those quotes. The ‘Financial’ and ‘Autonomy’ motives lead to a more ad hoc approach of organizing (4th column). The ‘Autonomy’ and ‘Organizing’ motives lead to a more systematic sales organization (5th column).

Motive	Example Quote	Explanation	Ad hoc	Systematic
<b>Financial</b> <i>Interview</i> Nos. 2, 4, 7, 8	“So, I just went out and told our story... so just brought my product to everyone I know, show it, just telling it...My sales speech in the beginning was actually super simple. The first three months is just enthusiasm and nothing else...”(Interview No. 7)	The selling process is ad hoc and based on getting into immediate action. Enthusiasm plays a vital role during the Disinhibition-based process. There is no structured sales planning available, and activities are ad-hoc executed.		
<b>Autonomy</b> <i>Interview</i> Nos. 10,11	“We always plan to plan. And the plan isn’t there yet. So how do I see the future? In fact, keep doing what we do, only smarter. So, in that sense with a little bit more forecasting so that you what is really coming... (Interview No. 10)	There is no organized sales process or plan in place. These types of business owners like to keep the flexibility to plan and carry out selling activities whenever necessary and use a Disinhibition, laissez faire planning method.		
<b>Organizing</b> <i>Interview</i> Nos. 1, 5, 6, 12	“At the end of the year indeed we create a sales plan for the following year. Yes, that looks like you break down per part what roughly needs to be done. How many visits, what are the themes that we want to discuss with our customer and what are the sales goals --...we have a meeting every six weeks. Well, what I said, I keep track of how many appointments in the week. We keep an eye on courses, so improving their selling knowledge. (Interview No. 1)	The ‘organizing’ motive leads to a more structured sales approach than the other motives do. Still, their sales process is not structured with a causational, but more with an Effectuation way of working. They put emphasis on managing the CRM system, and the administration is done properly. Their sales plan is also created using an Effectuation approach. These types of business owners analyze and plan the sales tasks that need to be performed on short notice, but not for the longer term.		
<b>Continuity</b> <i>Interview</i> Nos. 3, 9	If they (customers) have four suppliers (on their shortlist), they invite two for an interview. Then you explain the offer and ask, is this what you want? Did you understand our proposal? Based on their answers, there are often also some adjustments. Then a new offer must be made...but you have a capacity to a certain extent, and we have a lot of work, and if you have too much work, you’re not getting it done... so we try to develop gradually.” (Interview No. 3)	Business owners with this motive have a structured Effectuation sales process, which they can describe in detail, and it is characterized by having a rational step-by-step process (it is not a Causation approach as they might go back and forth through the steps). This degree of organization also be prompted by the fact that these types of small-scale companies often have to go through formal tender processes. There is also a CRM system in place, but it is more concerned with the current projects than with sales actions. To the contrary, there is not a real sales plan created, activities are structured, but more project based, and sales actions follow the daily operational business.		

TABLE 16: Degree of Sales Organization (in green) of Business Owners

### The Degree of Sales Organization Continuum

The following dimension (Figure 9) is directly derived from the analysis in in the fourth and fifth column of Table 16, which shows that the ‘Financial’ and ‘Autonomy’ motive leads to ad-hoc and ‘organizing’ and ‘continuity’ lead to systematic selling behavior. Furthermore, it shows which interview participants belong to which motive.

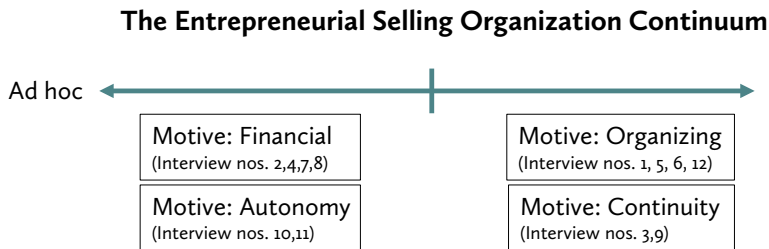


FIGURE 9: Motives Present in the Degree of Sales Organization Continuum

### Motives of the Business Owner and the Degree of Sales Initiative

Following the data analysis done in MAXQDA of the questionnaire (see Appendix D) on the items B1 (What was your motive to start a business?) and relating that data to the sales initiative items D6 (questions about acquisition of new customers) and D7 (questions on existing customers) there are differences in the degree of initiative between business owners based on the reason they started their business. The sales behavior of business owners differs in the Degree of Sales Initiative.

In Table 17, the motives are showed in Column 1, and the results are substantiated with quotes (Column 2) and the interpretation of those quotes (Column 3). The ‘Continuity’ and ‘Autonomy’ motive contributes to the reactive selling behavior (Column 4) and ‘Financial’ and ‘Organizing’ contributes to proactive selling behavior (Column 5). Business owners with the ‘Financial’ motive are more proactive about acquiring new customers, whereas the ‘Organizing’ motive focuses on building relationships with current customers.

### The Degree of Sales Initiative Continuum

The following dimension (Figure 10) is directly derived from the analysis in in the fourth and fifth columns of Table 17, which show that the ‘Continuity’ and ‘Autonomy’ motives lead to reactive and the ‘Organizing’ and ‘Financial’ ones lead to proactive sales behavior.

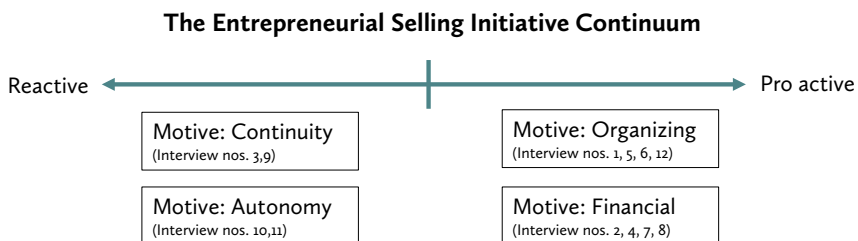


FIGURE 10: Motives Present in the Degree of Sales Initiative Continuum

Motive	Example Quote	Explanation	Reactive	Proactive
<b>Continuity</b> <i>Interview Nos. 3, 9</i>	"We are passive in sales and that is discussed internally, so we should be a bit more active...our customers come to us...but I am convinced that our work is also interesting for other customers... so you miss that. If you are more active, you can also bring in more customers, of course... but that also has to do with the fact that you just only have a limited amount of time, so you can't do everything, that is the split we are in." (Interview No. 3)	These types of business owners do not approach their (potential) customers often on their own initiative. Their specialism and reliability is thus distinctive from the competition in that customers often approach them. There seems to be no direct need to be more proactive for the survival of the business; still the interviewees with this motive were aware that there may be room for improvement. If new orders or assignments come in, it is from existing customers. They are seen as the backbone. There is barely any acquisition of new customers, as this acquisition may also lead to challenges for how to keep the service level at the right level.		
<b>Autonomy</b> <i>Interview Nos. 10,11</i>	"So, they (customers) are often (business) relationships that I have had now, for four, five years and that do not deliver work every year, but they will come back to me and say 'oh yes, we had worked so well back then...'; that's why it works, it's kind of very passive, but it does work... I don't 'cold call' anyone... So, it's a luxury, in the sense that you can be like that...I am actually running my business in a rather reactive way (Interview No. 10)."	They often start their proactive selling activities when the current assignments are almost finished. They try to balance their Entrepreneurial Selling effort with the will to have sufficient, but not too much, work. The business owners do not want to be occupied with their work for more than they need; they want to keep enough free time for activities that they value in life. They love what they do for their customers and seem to gain enough business from their existing network to achieve their goals.		
<b>Organizing</b> <i>Interview Nos. 1, 5, 6, 12</i>	"Then I would try to build a lasting relationship with people and not focus on 'getting it' right away...personal contact with your customers remains, of course, the most important item. The trust that we have developed together with the customers and that they have in our company." (Interview No. 6)	Business owners are proactive and focus mainly on contacts to enhance the relationship with and getting business from existing customers. They do not focus on acquiring new customers.		
<b>Financial</b> <i>Interview Nos. 2, 4, 7, 8</i>	"I'm always interested in that piece of new/ else/ next. I have too little attention for my existing customers. That's what I am learning along the way. And that's a real pitfall for me...this is also why customers went away...also because the aftersales was not done well." (Interview No. 2)	The focus of the business owners with the financial motive is on acquiring new customers. The consequence could be that they risk forgetting that building long- term relationships is crucial for the survival and growth in the later stages of their company.		

TABLE 17: Degree of Sales Initiative (in green) of Business Owners

## The Entrepreneurial Selling Matrix

In Figure 11, the continuums, 'Degree of Sales Organization and Degree of Sales Initiative', are brought together in the Entrepreneurial Selling matrix to render a complete picture of the sales behavior of business owners. The motive of a business owner to own and manage a company influences that particular owner's sales behavior. The Entrepreneurial Selling Matrix shows a typology and categorizes the sales behavior of business owners accordingly for their motive and in the way they organize and show initiative in their selling activities. The following chapters will build and elaborate further on the Entrepreneurial Selling Matrix.

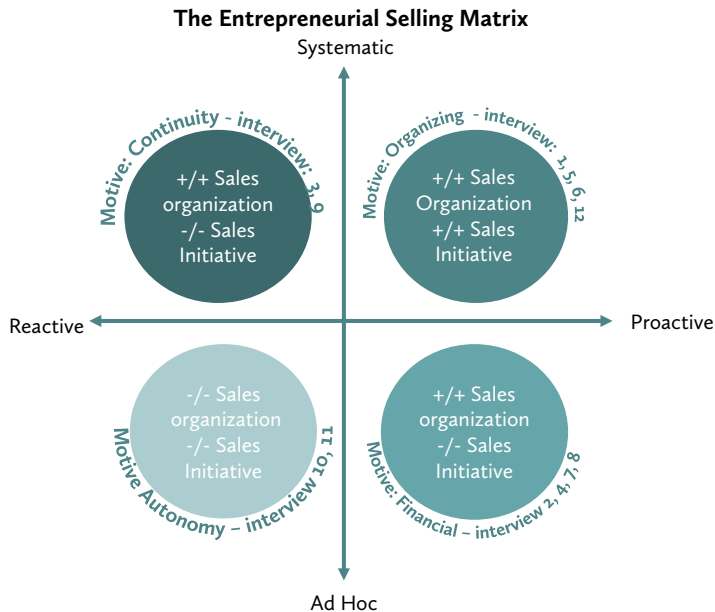


FIGURE 11: Entrepreneurial Selling Matrix Including the Relations to Motives of Business Owners

## 5.6 Discussion

Researchers should look beyond just a financial motive to understand why business owners behave like they do (Shepherd, 2003). This study confirmed that business owners have different motives for starting a company and shows that impact on their sales behavior. Business owners and sales trainers who support them should be aware that their motives will influence their selling behavior as effective sales behavior does contribute to achieving one's overall entrepreneurial ambitions.

The Entrepreneurial Selling typology, visualized as a Matrix, supports the development of the Entrepreneurial Selling domain, as it categorizes individual business owners into distinct groups, which then delivers an analysis and intergroup comparison (Rich, 1992) of business owners in their selling role.



## **The Influence of Motives on the Degree of Sales Organization**

The motive of a business owners to start a business influences the degree to which they organize their sales organization (Systematic vs. Ad Hoc). In general, business owners of small businesses use the Effectuation, not the Causation, approach to organize their sales activities (Dalecki, 2019). This study confirms that such sales organization ranges in different degrees from an adequately managed Effectuation process (the motives being ‘Organizing’ and ‘Continuity’) to a more unorganized variant of Effectuation (the motives being ‘Financial’ and ‘Autonomy’), which can be expressed as the Disinhibition approach (Lerner, 2016) and leading to a more impulse-driven, limited organized selling behavior.

Overall, the sales process of business owners is often not static, linear, and sequential, but has more maneuvering characteristics (Åge, 2011), which means that business owners in general do not always follow a step-by-step rational process, but instead decide based on the last provided information in client meetings and unprompted for what their following action will be. Still, there are differences in the extent to which business owners will go through a standardized sales process with potential customers. Business owners who apply ‘Continuity’ and ‘Organizing’ (try to) use a planned selling process with the support of a CRM system. They acknowledge that this system supports achieving long-term relationships with customers. The interviews for this study revealed that business owners are sometimes forced to demonstrate a systemized selling process as they go through certain formal tender processes.

In contrast, business owners with ‘Financial’ and ‘Autonomy’ motives are more ad hoc and only try to estimate what is requested at a specific time. The data shows they have no CRM system available, and if they do have one, they cannot manage the system effectively. Sometimes these business owners have simple, administration tools they built themselves (e.g., Excel or Word documents) to track their customer contacts.

Summarized, business owners with a ‘Financial’ and ‘Autonomy’ motive need to be more organized in their selling behavior than do business owners with a ‘Continuity’ and ‘Organizing’ motive. This insight will deliver value for the business owners when they understand that there are several ways to organize sales activities and when they reflect on whether they are organizing their selling activities to the extent that they can achieve those motives and goals. Sales trainers who support business owners with their sales activities should be able to provide this same insight during personal coaching sessions and training sessions with the business owners.

## **The Influence of Motives on the Degree of Sales Initiative**

When ‘Financial’ and ‘Organizing’ motives are the leading indicators for business owners, they are likely to show a proactive Entrepreneurial Selling behavior. This proactivity supports acquiring new and/or maintaining current customers; the personal initiative is essential to carrying out selling activities and is the main factor in scaling a business (Friar *et al.*, 2021), and there is also a significant relationship between proactivity and sales results

(Pitt *et al.*, 2002). The study participants understood that their wish for financial gain or to let the organization flourish should be connected to proactivity in their sales endeavors. The difference between these two motives is that the business owners with 'Financial' motives focus on acquiring new customers, while the 'Organizers' are more long-term oriented in their relationship with current customers.

Not every business owner has the objective of scaling the business. If growth is not the main ambition of entrepreneurial endeavors, that view contributes to producing a different selling behavior. Business owners for whom 'Autonomy' is the dominant motive for becoming self-employed (probably) have limited growth ambitions for their business (Breugh, 1999, Van Gelderen and Jansen, 2006, Dej and Gorgievski, 2012, Friedman *et al.*, 2012, Stephan *et al.*, 2015). The same view applies to business owners with a 'Continuity' motive. In these cases, there is not always the need to scale the business through proactive sales efforts. These business owners will often wait until current or potential customers approach them. Too much proactiveness can even lead them to experience the threat when achieving the core motive. Too much work can threaten business owners' freedom (e.g., taking time off) with an 'Autonomy' motive and endanger the stable situation of a business owner with a 'Continuity' motive. This aspect leads, in general, to more reactive selling behavior than that of business owners with a 'Financial' or 'Organizing' motive.

To conclude, when giving support to business owners in their sales role, it is essential to note that their current and future sales behavior depends on the motive and that any support should adapt to the entrepreneurial aspirations of the specific business owner.

### **Bird-in-Hand Principle and the Motive of the Business Owner**

There are many types of business owners (Gartner, 1990, Tang *et al.*, 2008). When connecting the results of this chapter to the Bird-in-Hand selling principle (Saravathy, 1998, 2001, 2009) presented in §1.2, one concludes that there is not just one answer to the question of the first means (who is the business owner as a salesperson?) and that the answer to that query strongly depends on what motive the business owner has originally to start and operate a small business. The business owners on the left side of the Entrepreneurial Selling Matrix (motive: 'Continuity' and 'Autonomy') identify less with the sales role and have fewer sales competencies (Do I have sales experience, skills, and/or knowledge?) or do not utilize these skills as much as the business owners on the right side do (motive: 'Financial' and 'Organizing'). These business owners are also less willing to invest (time and money) in acquiring sales competencies.

Consequently, the right side of the matrix will be more able and more active to acquire a network (Do I have a – or able to acquire – a network?) and act proactively to let their business grow. These outcomes are not necessarily a problem for the business owners on the left side, as business growth is not a core objective for them, or even not an objective at all. The starting point thus must be the motive of the business owner to determine whether it is necessary to develop their sales competencies and increase their sales 'means'

However, just as identity is not a fixed fact (Nielsen and Lassen, 2012), motives as part of our identity (Williams and Shepherd, 2016, Murnieks *et al.*, 2020) can change based on events happening over time and, consequently also the sales support that will be needed.

### **Extending the Definition of Business Failure**

In addition to the discussion in the previous chapter, this study also contributes to the literature on business failure by connecting the insights of this study to the existing literature on this topic. Ucbasaran (2013) mentioned bankruptcy, discontinuity of ownership due to insolvency, or performance below the threshold as possible definitions of business failure. Creating additional insights into how different motives lead to different sales behavior can also shed a different light on what we, as scholars and practitioners, perceive as either success or failure for a small business.

Until now, success and failure have been mostly related to financial gain and organizational growth. One insight of this dissertation is that business owners fail when their behavior does not align with their motives. ‘Failing’ in this case means acting differently than someone might expect them to act based on their motive. None of the described categories, however, can be considered right or wrong sales behavior. It might become wrong when internal decisions or external causes force business owners to behave differently than their entrepreneurial aspirations. For example, one business owner (Study 2, Interview No. 8) took over a startup. This business owner had ‘Continuity’ as the motive to run a business. However, due to this takeover, it (also) must show proactive sales behavior, for which the business owner needed the right background, capabilities, or mindset. More attention should thus be paid to not achieving entrepreneurial aspirations being seen as a form of business failure.

## **5.7 Directions for Future Research and Limitations**

This study moves the field of Entrepreneurial Selling forward and offers promising opportunities for further research. The study has an explorative character that fits the current academic status of the Entrepreneurial Selling phenomenon. This research bases its conclusions on twelve interviews with a broad, representative group of participants, but that focus is also subject to several limitations.

In the first place, although the business owners mentioned one motive in the interviews to clarify their entrepreneurial ambitions, in reality, there can sometimes be several interests competing for precedence.

Second, the way business owners behave in their Entrepreneurial Selling role depends, next to their motives and goals for that business, on many other factors (Shane *et al.*, 2003). These factors range from the (sales) experience business owners have, the number of years

the company has existed, the industry in which the company operates (e.g., highly technical projects vs. product supplier), and the niche (e.g., specific with low competition vs. more general with heavy competition) where they are active, their attitude toward selling, and perhaps even gender (underrepresented in the sample). Future research can investigate the connections between these different concepts and actual Entrepreneurial Selling behavior and deliver more detailed insight into the relationship between motives and Entrepreneurial Selling behavior and identify other factors and how those other factors influence the sales activities of the business owner. In addition, there may be contextual characteristics of the Dutch industry that might not always be the case in other countries.

Another research opportunity is to engage in quantitative-based studies to capture a further understanding of Entrepreneurial Selling and the differences in behavior between business owners. For organizational studies to fulfill their full potential for description, explanation, and prescription, it is first necessary to discover and identify the relevant concepts for theory building that can guide the creation and validation of constructs. In other words, concepts are always forerunners of constructs in our ambition and desire to understand corporate worlds (Gioia *et al.*, 2013). Future quantitative research can enhance the robustness and generalizability of findings. In the next chapter, a quantitative study is undertaken to gain a deeper understanding of entrepreneurial selling behavior by researching the concepts, 'Degree of Sales Initiative' and 'Degree of Sales Organization'.

Hence, there is still much to be learned about Entrepreneurial Selling. This study is another 'brick in the wall' to enhance our complete understanding of this phenomenon.

## 5.8 Conclusions

This study aimed to understand how the motive to become a business owner influences the Entrepreneurial Selling role. Based on twelve interviews, the conclusion is that no overall Entrepreneurial Selling behavior applies to all business owners. The motives of business owners are diverse; thus, so is their Entrepreneurial Selling behavior. The Entrepreneurial Matrix indeed shows a 2x2 typology that ranges from 'Ad Hoc' to 'Systematic' and 'Proactive' to 'Reactive' sales behavior.

For the sales trainers of business owners, it is crucial to understand that the reason for starting a business influences their sales behavior. If you want to coach, train, or educate (future) business owners, success depends on understanding their motives, needs, and willingness to choose the right path for their selling development and activities. In this way, business owners can be positively supported in achieving their entrepreneurial aspirations. Hence, an adaptive attitude is necessary in order to support business owners and lead them in the right direction.

Further still, there is a misalignment between the causal way of selling taught at business schools and how business owners prefer to act in reality. Business schools should consider whether a more effective way of teaching sales skills and knowledge is more helpful for business owners. The following chapter builds on the research results presented in this chapter by quantitatively testing the identified concepts of Degree of Sales Organization and Degree of Sales Initiative described in this chapter.

# 6 THE ENTREPRENEURIAL SELLING MATRIX (2)– THE RELATION BETWEEN THE ENTREPRENEURIAL SELLING ROLE ORIENTATION OF BUSINESS OWNERS AND THEIR SALES BEHAVIOR

## 6.1 Abstract

**Purpose:** In the search to understand business owners' behavior in their selling role, this chapter introduces the concept of Entrepreneurial Selling Role Orientation (ESRO) and examines its influence on sales behavior. ESRO defines an individual-level construct that captures a business owner's inclination to engage in sales activities. This inclination to act is based on the sales attitude, self-efficacy, and experience of business owners and has the ability to explain and predict the sales behavior of those business owners.

**Methods:** Based on a sample of N=276 small-scale business owners, this quantitative study applied Structural Equation Modelling to analyze the connection between ESRO and sales behavior.

**Findings:** The results show, as displayed in the Entrepreneurial Selling Matrix, that most business owners have a high ESRO, leading to more systematic, proactive and adaptive sales behavior. Sales training can improve ESRO as well as the sales behavior of business owners, but only a significant minority of business owners have followed such sales training earlier and the question remains if business owners are overestimating their sales competencies. Business owners with a high ESRO also have more confidence in the expected financial results of the business for the near future. Although it can be cautiously assumed that a high ESRO leads to better financial results, further research on this possible connection still needs to be done.

**Originality/Value:** This study supports the development of the Entrepreneurial Selling field by showing the importance of determining the ESRO of a business owner to predict and explain the sales behavior of that business owner. Further still, this study shows that ESRO and effective sales behavior can be developed, when necessary, through sales training and that sales trainers can support business owners by offering them customized Entrepreneurial Selling courses.

## 6.2 Introduction

From the previous studies offered in the last two chapters, we have gained an understanding that failing business owners often struggle with their selling role (Chapter 4) and that sales behavior depends on the motive of business owners for starting a company (Chapter 5).

This quantitative study, based on a sample with N=276 small-scale business owners, combines the results of Chapters 4 and 5 and tests these results using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). This chapter thus aims to further bridge the gap between entrepreneurship and sales research by exploring the relationship between Entrepreneurial Sales Role Orientation (ESRO) and actual selling behavior. The central research question for this study thus is: *How does the Entrepreneurial Selling Role Orientation (ESRO) of small-scale business owners influence their sales behavior and (expected) financial performance?*

Derived from Bird and Schjoedts's (2009) definition of action orientation, in this chapter, the Entrepreneurial Selling Role Orientation (ESRO) defines as an individual-level construct that captures a business owner's inclination to engage in sales activities. This inclination to act is based on the sales attitude, self-efficacy, and experience of these business owners. The results of Study 1 (Chapter 4) show that business owners with failure experiences indicated that they procrastinated on their sales activities because they did not like selling (negative attitude) or that they lacked the right skills/experience (low self-efficacy) to perform their sales activities effectively. These findings suggest that the extent to which small-scale business owners, like selling and have both confidence and experience, might affect their firm's performance. The theoretical foundation for the three concepts leading up to the ESRO is in §6.3. Following the outcomes from Study 2 (Chapter 5), this chapter argues and tests whether ESRO influences how business owners organize their sales activities (structured or ad hoc) and how much initiative they do take (proactive vs reactive). The ESRO will be displayed in the Entrepreneurial Selling Matrix and the effect of sales behavior on financial indicators is also measured.

Next to the influence of the ESRO on sales behavior and (expected) financial performance, this chapter shows what interest business owners have in following the learning from sales courses. Training is vital for business owners to gain crucial practical competencies (Huang, 2001, Walker *et al.*, 2007). Large companies are highly interested and will invest heavily in sales training for sales professionals, as they believe that training leads to better sales performance (Tan and Newman, 2013, Singh *et al.*, 2015). The results of this chapter reveal whether this is also the case for small business owners and examines how sales training affects their ESRO and sales behaviors.

This study thus adds to the existing entrepreneurial selling literature by investigating the influence of ESRO on sales behavior and financial performance in small businesses. It contributes to practice by elaborating on whether and if so, how business owners participate in sales training and the impact that training has on the sales behavior of those

business owners. This study indeed opens new research opportunities for scholars to study the ESRO of business owners in different contexts. New research avenues can be found to study the influence of the ESRO of business owners on their sales role in specific industries and countries. For Entrepreneurial Selling scholars, it might also be interesting to test the ESRO on the success or failure of innovations. Further still, scholars outside the sales field can use the ESRO to test its influence on other organizational roles of the business owner.

## 6.3 Theoretical Background of ESRO and Hypotheses

### **The Effect of a Positive ESRO on Sales Behavior**

Many factors play a role in explaining the entrepreneurial behavior of small business owners. There is a wide range of internal (e.g., traits, motivations, competencies, organizational dynamics) and external factors that impact the way business owners behave (e.g., economic situation, access to resources, and culture) (Meyer and Zucker, 1989, Smelser and Swedberg, 1994, Zacharakis *et al.*, 1999, McMullen and Shepherd, 2006, Ahmad and Seet, 2009, Khelil, 2016). This dissertation focuses on the influence of internal and individual factors, hence agency, on the sales behavior of business owners, and therefore, the ESRO is introduced.

As there is no previous research on the ESRO and its relationship with sales behavior to guide this effort, there needs to be an understanding of the research on the individual components of the ESRO to predict whether a hypothesis will be accepted or rejected. Three specific internal and individual factors (sales attitude, self-efficacy, and experience) were derived from the results of Study 1 (Chapter 4), which showed that a considerable number of business owners struggle as sales actors, and contributes their business failure to a negative attitude (do not like Selling), toward or the lack of self-efficacy in selling (not enough skills/experience). This chapter builds on these results by combining these individual components into a single concept, the ESRO, and the influence of this concept on the overall sales behavior of business owners.

Research showed that a positive attitude, which is defined for this study as the degree of the positive or negative effect of the business owner toward the sales role (Schlenker, 1978, Chaiklin, 2011), relates to the intention to show specific behavior. There are other individual prerequisites that range from intention to actual behavior, such as self-efficacy, which is the second component of the ESRO. Business owners are more likely to move from intention to behavior when they feel they can successfully enact a certain behavior (Boyd and Vozikis, 1994, Chen *et al.*, 1998, Drnovšek *et al.*, 2010). Early sales research has shown that individuals (who feel) capable of performing sales tasks tend to carry them out more effectively (Barling and Beattie, 1983). The third component, a business owner's previous experience, is an essential driver of entrepreneurial self-efficacy (Chandler and



Jansen, 1997). Combining these components, one might then expect that a high ESRO does influence sales behavior.

To analyze the influence of the ESRO on sales behavior, the previous chapter introduced two concepts, Degree of Sales Organization, and the Degree of Sales Initiative. These concepts are used to explain the sales behavior of business owners. The Degree of Sales Organization in the context of this dissertation depends on how systematically business owners plan and carry out their selling activities. The Degree of Sales Initiative indicates whether business owners are proactive or reactive in acquiring or maintaining new customers.

Considering the results of Study I and the previous research on the individual components of the ESRO, the assumption is that a high ESRO leads to more effective sales behavior. If such is not the case, then other internal or external factors are likely more dominant for explaining the sales behavior of business owners. Hence, the hypothesis here is that business owners with a higher ESRO are more structured and proactive in their sales approach than are those business owners with a lower ESRO. Thus, two hypotheses are offered below:

**H1a** Business owners with a higher ESRO organize their sales activities more systematically.

**H1b** Business owners with a higher ESRO are more proactive in their sales activities.

### **ESRO and Adaptive Selling**

When a business owner takes the initiative toward (prospective) customers, the question still remains about the actual nature of that sales approach. Therefore, underlying the Degree of Sales Initiative, Adaptive Selling is applied to the specific situation of business owners. As elaborated in Section 2.6, small-scale business owners have to deal with different circumstances than do professional sales employees of large companies (Deutsch and Wortmann, 2011). Therefore, more research needs to be done on what aspects of personal selling theory does and does not apply to business owners. As the survivor of all modern sales approaches, the Adaptive Selling approach is applied in this chapter as a natural starting point and encouragement for future entrepreneurial selling research to better understand what aspects apply from contemporary personal selling research to the specific situation of business owners.

Adaptive Selling means altering sales behavior during and across customer interactions based on each situation's demands (Weitz *et al.*, 1986). In practice, business owners should gather and use information about prospective and current customers to customize their sales approach and connect with individual customer needs and preferences (Franke and

Park, 2006, Anderson *et al.*, 2020) as this focus will increase customer trust, satisfaction, future interactions (Levy and Sharma, 1994, Román and Iacobucci, 2010) and actual sales performance (Weitz *et al.*, 1986, Spiro and Weitz, 1990, Levy and Sharma, 1994, Franke and Park, 2006, Román and Iacobucci, 2010).

As Adaptive Selling will remain fundamental for building long-term relationships and sales performance (Arli *et al.*, 2018), testing this concept in Entrepreneurial Selling is paramount. When considering their sales expertise, the expectation is that business owners with a high ESRO will demonstrate more adaptive selling behavior. Thus, the following hypothesis is offered.

**H1C** Business owners with a higher ESRO are more adaptive in their sales approach.

### **ESRO and (Expected) Financial Performance**

As sales is a crucial activity for the survival and success of a company (Matthews *et al.*, 2018), one might expect that when the ESRO leads to more effective sales behavior, that outcomes will directly contribute to a positive (expected) financial performance. Previous research, however, is lacking on the influence of the ESRO on (expected) financial performance. This is why, similar to Hypotheses 1a and b, support is sought from the individual components that are underlying the ESRO.

Scholars have found that business owners with a positive attitude, high self-efficacy, and more experience also tend to challenge themselves with higher goals and persist in reaching them, even under challenging conditions (Bandura *et al.*, 1999, Miao *et al.*, 2017, Newman *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, the supposition is that business owners with a higher ESRO are more optimistic about their expected financial performance, as these business owners assume that they can influence these results in positive ways.

Next, this study aims to understand the relationship between the ESRO and actual financial results. Scholars have found a relationship between attitude (Koys, 2001) and the level of self-efficacy (Baum *et al.*, 2001, Baum and Locke, 2004, Miao *et al.*, 2017) and higher financial performance. Miao (2017) showed there was a limit to the relation between self-efficacy and financial outcomes, as a high level of self-efficacy might lead to self-overestimation and ineffective business decisions. A lack of experience is also mentioned as a reason for business failure (Shepherd, 2003) and as an essential contributor to gaining success (Jo and Lee, 1996, Ucbasaran *et al.*, 2010, Sarasvathy *et al.*, 2013, Hopp and Sonderegger, 2015), so one might assume that experienced sellers will achieve better financial results than agents without any sales experience.

Considering the previous research on the individual components of the ESRO, the expectation is that a higher ESRO does contribute to higher (expected) financial results. Thus, the following hypotheses are offered:

**H2a.** Business owners with a higher ESRO will have a higher expected financial performance.

**H2b.** Business owners with a higher ESRO will achieve better financial results.

### **Effects of Sales Training on ESRO and Sales Behavior**

This dissertation aims to enhance the knowledge about how Business owners behave in their Entrepreneurial Selling role and how sales trainers can develop the sales competencies of business owners. Therefore, the hypotheses 3a, 3b and 3c were developed to understand how sales training influences the ESRO and also supports the development of effective sales behavior of business owners.

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Previous research has shown that training significantly impacts business owners' behavior, performance, and self-efficacy (Neck *et al.*, 1999, Huang, 2010, Torikka, 2013, Genty *et al.*, 2015, Galvão *et al.*, 2020). Sales training also positively affects sales professionals' organizational and personal sales results (knowledge, skills, attitude, awareness, and motivation) (Walker Jr. *et al.*, 1977, Hawes and Rich, 1998, Onyemah, 2009, Nguyen *et al.*, 2019). In contrast, there is a poor relationship in actual practice between small business owners and training. Compared to managers in large organizations, small business owners participate less in skill development and training activities (Bartram, 2005).

In the context of this study, the aim is to understand the effect of sales training on the ESRO of business owners and the behavioral constructs of the Degree of Sales Organization and Degree of Sales Initiative. Based on the literature review on the training topic in §2.7 and the information provided above, the expectancy is that there is a positive relationship between business owners who have followed sales training on their ESRO and the effectiveness of those business owners' sales behavior. Thus, the following hypotheses are offered:

**H3a** Business owners who have followed sales training have a more positive ESRO.

**H3b** Business owners who have followed sales training organize their sales activities more systematically.

**H3c** Business owners who have followed sales training are more proactive in their sales activities.

Figure 12 illustrates the conceptual research model for this study. The numbers of the different hypotheses are included and marked to show their relationships.

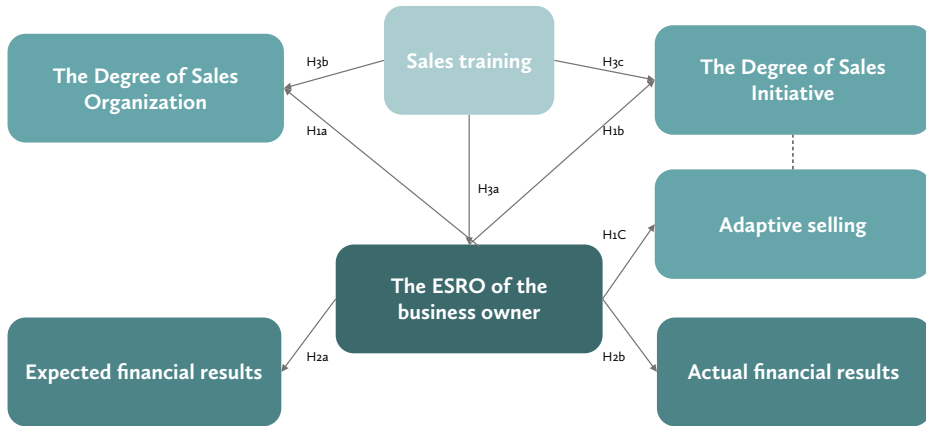


FIGURE 12: Conceptual Research Model Including Hypotheses (Study 3)

## 6.4 Methods

### Small Business Index

The data collection for this chapter was conducted with the support of the Small Business Index (SBI). The SBI is a quarterly performed survey that researches self-employed and small businesses in the Netherlands. The SBI was created in 2020 and is a joint initiative of the organization called ‘Qredits’ (which supports business owners to start or invest in their companies), ‘ONL’ (an association for business owners in the Netherlands), the association called ‘Culture+Entrepreneurship’ (a knowledge platform for entrepreneurship in the cultural and creative sector), and the ‘University of Applied Sciences Utrecht’ (Appendix F).

These four organizations bundled their resources and started this initiative. Every quarter, the SBI survey is conducted with a standard list of items and, per each quarter, a specific theme. After a presentation given by the writer of this dissertation at the Global Entrepreneurship Week (November 2021, AUAS) about Entrepreneurial Selling, Professor Lex van Teeffelen (University of Applied Sciences Utrecht), as responsible principal researcher of the SBI, requested if the specific theme for The fourth quarter in 2021 (the fifth edition of the SBI) could be Entrepreneurial Selling.

The panel for the fourth quarter in 2021 included 9500 business owners. An extra 1000 business owners came from ‘Culture + Entrepreneurship’ compared to those in previous rounds. The questionnaire was completed between January 20th and February 10<sup>th</sup> in 2022. 1547 respondents completed the questionnaire, a response rate of 16%.

The complete (English translation of the) survey can be found here in Appendix G. This questionnaire starts with 14 demographic questions about the business owner and the

characteristics of the company. Questions 15-30 are about the financial indicators of the company, except for one (27) which is about the motive of the business owner to start that company. Questions 31-37 are about the sales behavior of the business owner, including items of two constructs used to measure sales behavior: Degree of Sales Organization and Degree of Sales Initiative. The last question (38) is about the stress level of the business owners. This questionnaire complies with all GDPR guidelines. No names, addresses, telephone numbers, IP addresses, or e-mail addresses are requested or were stored.

Before the questionnaire was finalized, the Entrepreneurial Selling questions and answering options were tested among seven business owners to gain their feedback about the clarity of the questions. All of these seven business owners unanimously approved the questionnaire.

**Operationalization of the Variables**

Four constructs were created to gain a deeper understanding of the Entrepreneurial Selling Behavior of the business owner: 1) Entrepreneurial Sales Role Orientation (ESRO); 2) Degree of Sales Organization; 3) Degree of Sales Initiative; and 4) Adaptive Selling. The following steps were undertaken to operationalize these variables.

First, the constructs were created from independent items. The ESRO construct was created based on the research results gathered from Study 1 (Chapter 4) and included three items (like selling, good at selling, selling experienced) and these are shown Table 18 of the survey in Appendix G (Question 33).

Construction of The Entrepreneurial Sales Role Orientation (5-point Likert scale)
I like to carry out selling activities
I am good at selling
I see myself as an experienced salesperson

TABLE 18: Items of the ESRO Construct

The Degree of Sales Organization was measured by six items, and four of these were based on earlier research (Cravens *et al.*, 1993, Piercy *et al.*, 1999). Two items were added based on the practical experience of the researcher of this dissertation as good indicators of organizational selling behavior. The items for the Degree of Sales Initiative can be found in Table 19 and in the survey items of Number 35 (Appendix G).

Degree of Sales organization (5-point Likert scale)	Source	Loadings of previous research
My organization plans the selling activities	Based on (Piercy <i>et al.</i> , 1999)	0.84
My organization creates a sales plan for each customer	Based on (Piercy <i>et al.</i> , 1999)	0.84
My organization evaluates the number of sales meetings	Based on (Piercy <i>et al.</i> , 1999)	0.84
My organization evaluates the quality of sales meetings	Based on (Piercy <i>et al.</i> , 1999)	0.86
We evaluate whether our sales results are in line with the expectations	Novel item	Novel item
We register our contacts with the customer	Novel item	Novel item

TABLE 19: Background of the Items on the Degree of Sales Organization

The Degree of Sales Initiative was measured by six items. Four items were based on earlier research (Pitt *et al.*, 2002, Murphy and Coughlan, 2018) and two items were added. The four existing items were based on how actors proactively behave in day-to-day life with the assumption that they will also show this behavior in their sales roles. For this study, the choice was made to rewrite the items to presume more sales-specific behavior. Two items were added based on the practical experience of the researcher of this dissertation as good indicators of initiating selling behavior. The items for the Degree of Sales Initiative can be found in Table 20 and in the survey under the items for Number 36 (Appendix G).

Degree of Sales Initiative (5-point Likert scale)	Source	Loadings of previous research
If I see something in our sales process I don't like, I improve it.	Based on (Pitt <i>et al.</i> , 2002, Murphy and Coughlan, 2018)	0.786
When it comes to sales, if I believe in something, I make it happen.	Based on (Pitt <i>et al.</i> , 2002, Murphy and Coughlan, 2018)	0.767
I excel at identifying sales opportunities.	Based on (Pitt <i>et al.</i> , 2002, Murphy and Coughlan, 2018)	0.784
I am always looking for better ways to perform sales activities.	Based on (Pitt <i>et al.</i> , 2002, Murphy and Coughlan, 2018)	0.858
I am constantly looking for new customers	Novel item	Novel item
I often have contact with my current customers about new sales opportunities	Novel item	Novel item

TABLE 20: Background of the Items on the Degree of Sales Initiative

The construct, Adaptive Selling, was measured using four items (Table 21). Spiro and Weitz (Spiro and Weitz, 1990) were the first to develop an adaptive selling scale (called: ADAPTS). This scale was adjusted to a shortened version by Robinson *et al.* (2002) (called: ADAPTS-

SV). The items used for this study are based on the latter one. The items of the Degree of Sales Initiative can be found in the survey items for Number 37 (Appendix G).

Adaptive Selling (5-point Likert scale)	Source	Loadings of previous research
I am experimenting with different sales approaches	(Spiro and Weitz, 1990, Robinson Jr et al., 2002)	0.552
I am flexible in the selling approaches used.	(Spiro and Weitz, 1990, Robinson Jr et al., 2002)	0.745
I am adapting selling approaches from one customer to another.	(Spiro and Weitz, 1990, Robinson Jr et al., 2002)	0.722
I am varying the sales style from situation to situation.	(Spiro and Weitz, 1990, Robinson Jr et al., 2002)	0.777

TABLE 21: Background of Items on Adaptive Selling

Second, a correlation analysis was done with the support of SPSS on the underlying items of each construct (ESRO / Selling Organization / Selling Initiative) to analyze whether there was no negative correlation between any of the items. That was not the case.

The third step was to measure the Cronbach Alpha of each construct in SPSS (Table 22). The Cronbach alpha measures the internal consistency of the underlying items. A rating of 0.8 or higher indicates a good internal consistency (Cortina, 1993) The Cronbach alphas for each of the key constructs were above 0.8, which shows a high alignment between the questions that were underlying the constructs. The reliability of the constructs is shown in Table 22. The number of items for selling organization was reduced from six to five due to the results of the exploratory factor analysis (EFA).

Construct	Cronbach alpha	No. of items	Original Source
ESRO	0.891	3	New
Sales Organization	0.880	5	(Cravens <i>et al.</i> , 1993, Piercy <i>et al.</i> , 1999)
Sales Initiative	0.871	6	(Pitt <i>et al.</i> , 2002, Murphy and Coughlan, 2018)
Adaptive Selling	0.850	4	(Spiro and Weitz, 1990, Robinson Jr <i>et al.</i> , 2002)

TABLE 22: The Cronbach Alpha of the Constructs

The EFA is used to analyze the underlying structure and relationships of a relatively large set of variables (Mulaik, 1987, Thompson, 2004, Henson and Roberts, 2006).

Varimax rotation was used to show the sum of the squared loadings in the factor column divided by the number of items. An acceptable variance is one above 60% (Hair, 2011), which occurred for all four constructs (shown in Table 23). When all the underlying items were analyzed together, the principle component analysis showed four individual components.

One issue popped up when taking a closer look at the loadings of the individual items. The first item of the Degree of Sales Organization construct had a higher loading on one of the other constructs and was, therefore, removed from the analysis. Thus, the construct used to measure the Degree of Sales Organization had five items remaining.

Construct	Sums of Squared Variance
ESRO	82,368
Sales Organization	67,857
Sales Initiative	61,716
Adaptive Selling	70,392

TABLE 23: Sums of the Squared Variance of the Constructs

The last step of the correlation between the constructs was analyzed. That correlation can fall between  $-1$  and  $1$ . The Pearson correlation coefficient supports predicting the evolution of the linear relationship between variables and provides a global overview of the strength and direction of the relationship between the constructs. A correlation below .29 is considered weak, up to .50 is seen moderate, and above .50 is strong (Zou *et al.*, 2003, Kader and Franklin, 2008, Knofczynski and Mundfrom, 2008).

Table 24 shows the Pearson correlation matrix. There are only positive relations between the constructs, and the relations between the constructs ranges from moderate (ESRO and Selling Organization) to strong (1) Sales Organization and Sales Initiative and (2) Sales Initiative and Adaptive Selling.

Correlations	Means	St. Dev.	ESRO	SO	SI	AS
ESRO	3,8444	,84747	1			
Sales Organization	2,5493	,70292	,283**	1		
Sales Initiative	3,6774	,75038	,403**	,621**	1	
Adaptive Selling	3,6603	,78427	,394**	,506**	,776	1

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2 tailed).

TABLE 24: Correlation Matrix Entrepreneurial Selling Constructs and Their Items



### Structural Equation Modelling

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was applied to test the hypotheses. By using a path model analysis with the support of AMOS. ESRO was tested for the sales behavior (Degree of Sales Organization – items under 36 – Degree of Sales Initiative – items under 37 and Adaptive Selling – items under 38) of the business owners. Further, the influence of ESRO was measured for the business owner’s future expected financial results (next quarter – Item 18 – and half year – Item 13) and the actual financial performance (increase in revenue and comparison between 2021 and 2019). The increase in revenue provides information on the current financial performance (Item 16) and the comparison between 2021 and 2019 on the difference between current and the past performance (Item 17). The Entrepreneurial Selling items used for the constructs in the survey were asked using a five-point Likert scale anchored by totally disagree – disagree – not agree/disagree – agree – fully agree. As a moderator, one item, ‘Sales Training,’ was assessed on the first three constructs. Figure 13 shows the path model for this study directly derived from AMOS. The arrows indicate the independent and dependent variables. The e1 to e8 boxes show the residual error or error variance that causes response variation in observed variables. The (Un)Standardized Estimates, which are usually above the arrows in these visuals, can be found in the Results section.



FIGURE 13: Path Model for Study 3

In Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), it is essential to understand whether the hypothesized model fits the data well or does not. The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), and the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) are all important in this context. RMSEA (Steiger and Lind, 1980) is an absolute fit index; it assesses how far a hypothesized model is from being a perfect model. On the contrary, the CFI offers incremental fit indices that compare the fit of a hypothesized model to that of a baseline model

(i.e., a model with the worst fit) (Xia and Yang, 2019). An RMSEA  $< 0.05$  suggests a close fit. An 0,000 result shows a perfect fit between the data and the underlying model. A CFI above 0.9 indicates an acceptable fit (Bentler and Bonett, 1980). The CFI in this case was 1,0 (Table 25).

Index	Scores
RMSEA	,000
CFI	1,000

TABLE 25: Scores for the SEM Indexes

### Acceptance of the Hypotheses

A historical and intuitive cut-off that rejects the null hypothesis is a probability  $< 0.05$  (Jafari and Ansari-Pour, 2019). In some cases, for complex phenomena, like entrepreneurial selling,  $< 0.1$  is also used (Kim and Choi, 2021). This probability level is used in order to conclude whether a hypothesis is significant or is not. A probability lower than 0.05 meant Hypothesis 1 was accepted. The estimates show the strength of the relationship between the independent and the dependent variables. These estimates indicate the amount of increase (or decrease) of the dependent variable by a 1 unit increase of the independent variable. The higher the estimates were, the stronger would be the effect (Sykes, 1993).

## 6.5 Results

In January of 2022, the questionnaire was sent to 1547 business owners. 376 of the respondents were solely b-to-b, 574 were a mix of b-to-b and b-to-c, and 594 were b-to-c enterprises. Only companies (partly) active in the B2B industry were included in this study. From this dataset, the self-employed without any employees were left out of the dataset. The reason was to avoid those participants who have longer-term projects with client organizations, which then creates fewer or at least different selling dynamics. That selection left 276 business owners from different industries for further analysis. As Entrepreneurial Selling is in an early stage of development, there was a deliberate choice to include as many industries as possible.

Some characteristics of the sample group were the following: 83,7% of the participants indicated as male, 15,9% as female, and 0,4% as non-binary. 29,3% of the participants were between 25 and 40 years, 44,9% were between 41 and 55 years and 23,2% were between 56 and 70 years (2,5% were older or younger than these particular age groups). 91,3% of the enterprises had fewer than 10 employees, 8,3% had 10-49 employees and one enterprise had more than 50 employees. The largest group of participating business owners (24,3%) has owned

a business for more than 21 years. 14,1% of the business owners has owned a business for fewer than three years. The largest group (53,3%) had an intermediate vocational level that included higher general secondary education. And 35,1% of the participants had a bachelor's or master's degree. 93% of the business owners carried out, at least partially, their companies' selling activities and did not delegate the selling role to employees or business partners. These background characteristics of the dataset are visually displayed in Appendix H.

The average ESRO of the participating business owners was high (3.84 out of five). 62,6% of the Business owners had an ESRO of 4 or higher out of 5. Figure 14 presents an overview of business owners and their ESRO levels.

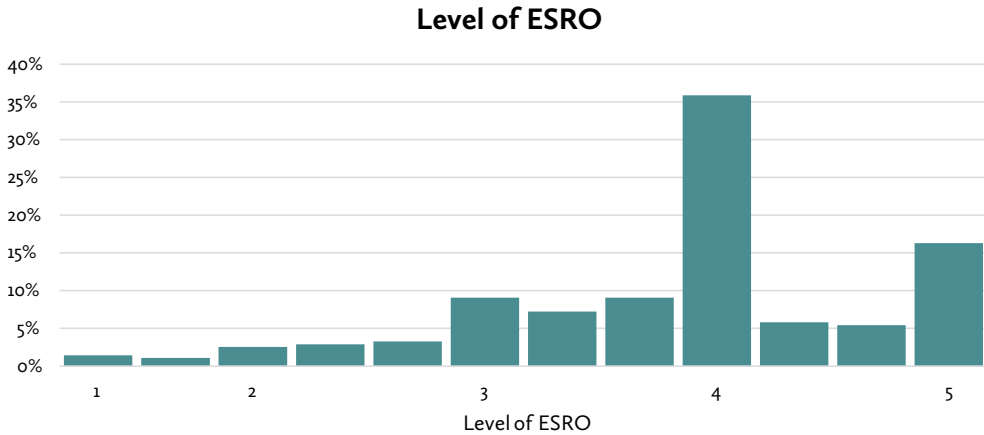


FIGURE 14: The Level of ESRO for the Business Owners Surveyed

64% Of the business owners had never had a sales course or training before or during their entrepreneurial careers (Figure 15).

### Followed sales courses

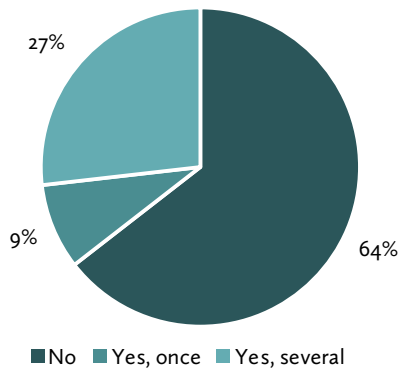


FIGURE 15: Sales Courses Taken by the Business Owners Surveyed

Table 26 shows the results of the influence of the ESRO on the business owners' sales behavior, as measured by the constructs Degree of Sales Organization, Degree of Sales Initiative (H1a and H1b), and Adaptive Selling (H1c). These results also indicate how the ESRO influences the financial expectations in the near future for business owners (H2a) and the actual financial results (H2b). Lastly, the results reveal the relation between sales training, the ESRO, and the sales behavior of the business owners (H3a, H3b, and H3c).

The first column shows the Hypotheses. The second column, P label, shows the metric to decide whether to accept or reject the hypothesis. The P-value tells us how likely the observed data would occur under the null hypothesis. The cut-off for the P-value is often 0.05, but for social science, 0.1 is also acceptable (Kim and Choi, 2021). Based on this outcome, the third column decides whether to accept the hypothesis or not. The last column, Standardized Estimates, predicts the change in the response variable – in standard deviations – for one standard deviation of change in the explanatory variable (Collier, 2020). The higher the absolute value (max. 1.0), the stronger the effect. When the ESRO increases, the strongest (relative) impact is on the adaptive sales behavior of business owners. The most substantial effect of sales training is on the Degree of Sales Organization. The results are explained further in the following sections.

Hypotheses			P label	Accepted	St. Estimates
<b>H1a ESRO</b>	>	<b>Degree of Sales Organization</b>	***	Yes	,210
<b>H1b ESRO</b>	>	<b>Degree of Sales Initiative</b>	***	Yes	,369
<b>H1c ESRO</b>	>	<b>Adaptive Selling</b>	***	Yes	,400
H2a (1) ESRO	>	Next quarter	,797	No	,016
<b>H2a (2) ESRO</b>	>	<b>Next half year</b>	***	Yes	-,211
<b>H2b (1) ESRO</b>	>	<b>Average revenue per month</b>	,088	Yes	,103
H2b (2) ESRO	>	Comparison 2021-2019	,711	No	,022
<b>H3a Sales training</b>	>	<b>ESRO</b>	***	Yes	,279
<b>H3b Sales training</b>	>	<b>Degree of Sales Organization</b>	***	Yes	,319
<b>H3c Sales training</b>	>	<b>Degree of Sales Initiative</b>	,022	Yes	,131

TABLE 26: Hypotheses with Significant Results in Bold.

**A higher ESRO leads to a systematically organized sales organization**

A higher ESRO influences the way business owners carry out their sales activities. Business owners organize their selling activities more systematically (H1a) and show more initiative (H1b). Based on the items on the questionnaire, business owners with a lower ESRO were less organized and show less initiative in their sales activities. Based on the underlying items, the Degree of Sales Organization indicated that the business owner with a higher

ESRO is likely to plan sales activities carefully, and an account plan is created for each customer. The contacts with the customer are also monitored and registered. Furthermore, these business owners evaluate the number and quality of sales meetings and also evaluate if the sales results are in line with expectations or are not.

**The Degree of Sales Organization Continuum**

Based on the continuum presented in Chapter 5, Figure 16 visually shows the impact of the ESRO on the Degree of Sales Organization.

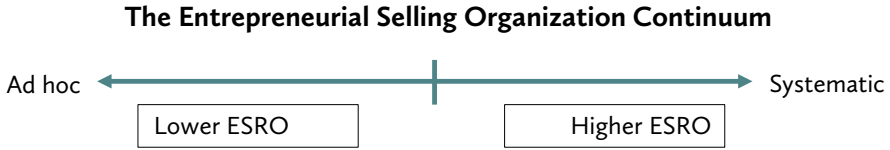


FIGURE 16: ESRO showing the Degree of Sales Organization as a Continuum

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**A Higher ESRO Leads to More Sales Proactivity**

Business owners with a higher ESRO tend to be more proactive about constantly looking for new customers. Derived from the items in the questionnaire, this finding means these owners excel in spotting new sales opportunities and when they do spot one, they tend to chase this opportunity. They also often initiate interactions with their current customers and monitor daily how they can better perform their sales activities. If business owners with a high ESRO see something in the sales process, they do not like; they will try to improve it immediately.

**The Degree of Sales Initiative Continuum**

Based on the continuum that was first presented in Chapter 5, Figure 17 visually shows the degree of impact of the ESRO on the Degree of Sales Initiative.



FIGURE 17: ESRO showing the Degree of Sales Initiative as a Continuum

**A Higher ESRO Leads to Taking an Adaptive Selling Approach**

When taking the initiative toward (potential) customers, business owners with a high ESRO show more adaptive selling behavior (H1c). Based on the items in the questionnaire, this result means that the business owner is experimenting during customer encounters

and flexible about using different sales approaches. These owners also tend to adapt their sales approach from customer to customer and from situation to situation.

### **Higher Levels of ESRO Lead to Better-than-Expected Financial Results**

Business owners with a higher ESRO experience better short-term growth expectations for their company than do business owners with a lower ESRO (H2a). Based on the survey results, these business owners will not see an improvement for the next quarter in financial performance, but they do see it for the coming half year. These results indicate that business owners with a high ESRO tend to think their businesses will strongly grow within the next half year. It is also important to note is that when the survey was conducted, Dutch society was reopening after the COVID pandemic. Derived from these results, one might conclude that business owners with a higher ESRO believed they influenced their future sales results with their sales attitude and competencies, but that those results will only become visible after three months. Business owners with a lower ESRO were more pessimistic about their influence on short-term financial results and growth expectations.

Business owners with a higher ESRO (H2b – 1) achieved more revenues than those with a lower ESRO. The hypothesis for the impact of the ESRO on revenues is slightly above 0.05, which, as stated before, is an acceptable cut-off ( $P < 0.1$ ) for social sciences research (Kim and Choi, 2021).

In contrast, based on the other financial indicator (H2b – 2) one cannot conclude that a higher ESRO leads to better financial performance compared to that performance two years ago. Again, this indicator must be taken carefully, as the data is based on a particular economic situation related to the COVID pandemic. Hence, business owners with a higher ESRO had not achieved better financial results than business owners with a lower ESRO during the COVID epidemic. This finding might indicate that the strength of the selling attitude and those related competencies must match the impacts of the pandemic.

### **Sales Training Positively Influences the ESRO and the Sales Behavior of Business Owners**

Business owners who have followed sales training in the past have a higher ESRO (H3a), work more systematically (H3b) and show more initiative (H3c) than do business owners who have not followed any sales training.

These results indicate that sales training improves the Degree of Sales Organization by developing the skills in these business owners to be able to plan sales activities and create an account plan. Furthermore, these business owners can improve the quality of their sales meetings and the importance of registering these meetings for future encounters with potential customers. They can also evaluate whether the sales results are in line with expectations.

Because sales training also improves business owners' Degree of Sales Initiative, they will learn the importance of proactive behavior toward (prospective) customers. They will

increase their efforts to spot sales opportunities and know how to act upon these opportunities when they do emerge. They learn to initiate relationship-building interactions with their current customers, the importance of them, and how to evaluate the ways to perform their sales activities more effectively.

### Adding the ESRO and Sales Training to the Entrepreneurial Selling Matrix

The Entrepreneurial Selling Matrix, first presented in Chapter 5, is further extended by the impact of the ESRO and sales training (Figure 18). A high ESRO and participation in sales training will lead to more systematic and proactive sales behavior. The following chapter will build and elaborate further on the Entrepreneurial Selling Matrix.

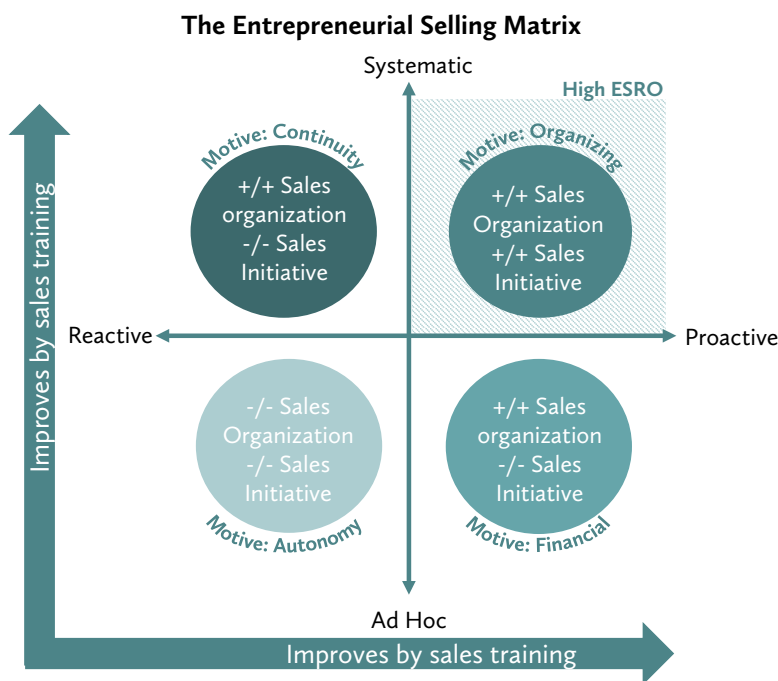


FIGURE 18: Entrepreneurial Selling Matrix Showing, next to Motives, the Added ESRO of the Business Owners and the Impact of Sales Training

## 6.6 Discussion

The Entrepreneurial Selling Role Orientation (ESRO) is an individual-level construct that captures a business owner's inclination to sell. This construct positively influences the sales behavior of that business owner by improving the Degree of Sales Organization and the Degree of Sales Initiative.

Study 1 (Chapter 4) showed that business owners with major failure experiences perceive the sales role as an essential role to undertake for the survival of their businesses. They regularly blame their sales expertise as a contributor to failure, next to a lack of sales experience and the fact that they do not like selling. The results from this chapter lead to the assumption that the ESRO is an important indicator to be able to understand business failure.

Study 2 (Chapter 5) delivered further insights into the selling behavior of business owners by discovering how the motive to start a business impacted the Degree of Sales Organization and the Degree of Sales Initiative, hence the sales behavior of the business owner. This chapter shows that ESRO and sales training will also impact the sales behavior of business owners

A substantial number (almost one-third) of business owners have a low ESRO. That means that one out of three small business owners do not feel they are capable of performing this task so essential for the survival of their business (Matthews *et al.*, 2018). They do not work systematically on their sales activities, or they show little sales initiative, which might indicate a higher risk for business failure. On the upside, more than two-thirds of the business owners perceived themselves as good, experienced sellers with a positive attitude toward sales activities. This combination of characteristics will lead to more systematic and proactive sales behavior.

### **The Influence of ESRO on the Degree of Sales Organization**

Organizations are systems of coordinated action (March and Simon, 1993) and agents, behind these organizations, coordinate the necessary actions in order to contribute to organizational goals (Puranam *et al.*, 2014). For sales actions in specific, this means that business owners with a high ESRO use a systematic approach to organize their sales activities. Within this context, it is important to state that the systematic behavior for small business owners is still mostly effectuated in nature and not causal, as one might expect in larger organizations (Sarasvathy, 2001, Sarasvathy *et al.*, 2008, Sarasvathy, 2009). In practice, this means that business owners, for example, do not write extensive strategic sales plans, but hold an action list for the next week or month. Another example might be that business owners have no access to a CRM system, but rather built their own Excel sheet to keep track of customer information. Also, strongly organizing small business owners will depend on the limitations of their own resources.

### **The Influence of ESRO on the Degree of Sales Initiative**

To carry out sales activities, personal initiative is essential in order to achieve entrepreneurial goals (Frese and Fay, 2001). Most business owners show initiative in their selling endeavors by proactively acquiring new customers and also engaging with current customers. Previous research has shown that effective professional salespeople will show adaptive selling behavior (Weitz *et al.*, 1986, Spiro and Weitz, 1990, Levy and Sharma, 1994, Robinson



Jr *et al.*, 2002, Delvecchio *et al.*, 2004, Franke and Park, 2006, Guenzi *et al.*, 2007, Román and Iacobucci, 2010). The literature review (§2.6) showed that there are many research opportunities for studying what personal selling theory is applied by business owners and what theory is not. This current study started this journey with the topic Adaptive Selling and determined that, despite the different circumstances business owners have compared sales employees (Deutsch and Wortmann, 2011), when taking the initiative, business owners with a high ESRO will show more adaptive selling behavior.

### **The Bird-in-Hand Principle and the ESRO of the Business Owner**

The results show that most business owners have a high ESRO. When we connect these results to the Bird-in-Hand sales means questions (Sarasvathy, 1998, 2001, 2009), presented in §1.2, it can be determined that these business owners see themselves as competent salespersons (Who am I as a salesperson?) with the right set of sales competencies and experience (Do I have sales experience, skills and/or knowledge?) and have or can gain a network to achieve their sales results (Do I have a network that has potential customers?).

At first glance, this result appears to be a positive outcome, but then as noted in the literature review (§2.3) Arend *et al.* (2015) questioned the confidence of business owners' assessments of their personal effectual means (in the context of this dissertation: sales competencies and networking). Business owners are repeatedly accused of overestimating their possibilities (Meza and Southey, 1996, Simon *et al.*, 2000, Hmieleski and Baron, 2009), showing more hubris than non-entrepreneurs do (Chen *et al.*, 1998, Arend *et al.*, 2015) and not acknowledging how limited their means to achieve their goals truly are (Arend *et al.*, 2015).

Do business owners overestimate their selling skills? In contrast to the many business owners who are confident about their selling skills, a minority of business owners have undertaken sales training during their professional careers. The questions thus emerge how business owners reflect on their own selling endeavors, how do they know what the selling role entails, and how do they compare themselves to peers or professional account managers? Therefore, there is reason to believe that the claim of Arend *et al.* (2015) that business owners tend to overestimate their own means does contain a kernel of truth, at least for their selling competencies. However, when business owners are not made personally aware of their actual sales performance, then sales knowledge and competencies (or means) cannot be created. One way to do that is through sales training.

This study revealed that sales training improves the ESRO and the sales behavior of business owners. Previous studies have shown that entrepreneurship (Neck *et al.*, 1999, Huang, 2010, Torikka, 2013, Genty *et al.*, 2015, Galvão *et al.*, 2020) and sales training (Walker Jr. *et al.*, 1977, Hawes and Rich, 1998, Comer and Drollinger, 1999, Verbeke and Bagozzi, 2000, Onyemah, 2009, Nguyen *et al.*, 2019) affects a business owners' or salespersons' performance. This knowledge might be a solution for those business owners with a low ESRO (almost one -third of them!) and thus might have a higher risk for business failure.

In addition, sales training might be a solution for those business owners who overestimate their current selling competencies and those business owners who want to further strengthen their sales skills and knowledge to achieve their entrepreneurial aspirations.

### **The Willingness of Business Owners to Follow Sales Training**

In contrast to sales employees where the motivation to receive sales training is very high, business owners are not easily persuaded to undertake and follow sales training (Lambert, 2010). 64% of the business owners in the dataset have never taken any sales training. Hence there is a huge opportunity for sales trainers to enhance the sales attitude and the sales competencies of business owners. Larger organizations invest a lot into sales training and coaching for their salespeople (Lassk *et al.*, 2012). Unlike sales professionals, however, business owners fall behind in getting sales support for this crucial role. Small-scale companies often lack the resources (money and time) that larger organizations have (Billett, 2001, Bartram, 2005, Walker *et al.*, 2007) or might not see the urgency to search for that support (Walker *et al.*, 2007) due an already overestimation of their abilities or just not recognizing what sales training can do for them. It is up to sales training practitioners to take on this gauntlet and improve the sales behavior of business owners by offering innovative training and coaching solutions.

Sales training and coaching can help the business owner to deliver the mirror of reflection and to expand the sales competencies of business owners. Although scholars might have a case that business owners overestimate their (selling) means (Meza and Southey, 1996, Busenitz and Barney, 1997, Simon *et al.*, 2000, Hmieleski and Baron, 2009, Arend *et al.*, 2015), this discrepancy can be overcome by allowing business owners to reflect deeply on their selling performance and teach, if the necessity is there, them more effective sales behavior with the aim to avoid business failure and become successful.

## **6.7 Directions for Future Research and Limitations**

This research has several limitations, and they lead to future research avenues.

First, the SBI is a standard list of questions that is sent out every quarter. Every edition adds a unique theme to the inquiry. In January 2022, this theme was Entrepreneurial Selling. Since there was already a standard list of questions, there was limited space to add new items to the list. That means that thoughtful choices had to be made on what questions to ask about Entrepreneurial Selling, and there was only a maximum number of items per construct. Entrepreneurial Selling is a research field still in early development, so the decision was made to research several constructs for a more generic overview instead of focusing on just one topic. These choices leave plenty of research opportunities open for scholars to find new pathways to study Entrepreneurial Selling in more detail.

These pathways are not limited to just the constructs chosen for this current research. Entrepreneurial Selling scholars might want to test ESRO on the success or failure of innovations or other sales approaches than just Adaptive Selling, such as Consultative or Strategic Selling. Scholars outside the sales field can also use the ESRO construct to test its premises on other organizational roles of the business owner.

Second, the business owners participating in the Survey are all Dutch Entrepreneurship Organization ONL members. Although this Survey has a relatively large sample (The panel included 9500 business owners, 1547 respondents completed the questionnaire), there may be questions if this group represents the Dutch business owner in general. The data show that business owners from many industries participated, differentiated in years of entrepreneurial experience, and that the age of the business owners had a normal distribution. In contrast, women are (far) under-represented in the sample (15,9%). As already acknowledged in Study 1 (Chapter 4) and 2 (Chapter 5) in the domain of entrepreneurship, it is widely recognized that significant gender differences persist (e.g., more males become business owners than females) (Guzman and Kacperczyk, 2019, Brush *et al.*, 2020). How gender differences affect the Entrepreneurial Selling activities of business owners is a subject for future research. Of course, it is also interesting to understand if the ESRO and sales training impact also applies to other countries and cultural contexts than the Netherlands.

Third, the timing for when the SBI was conducted was, as it turned out later, at the end of the most severe period of the COVID epidemic and corresponding government measures. The Covid epidemic has indeed influenced the future growth expectations and performance of business owners (Cowling *et al.*, 2020, Klyver and Nielsen, 2021, Miocevic, 2021). This knowledge leads to the justified related question of how valuable the relation is between selling behavior and the financial data gathered from this questionnaire. The COVID crisis also makes it more challenging to control the external variables and their influence on the selected Entrepreneurial Selling constructs. Future researchers should thus initiate longitudinal research to understand the Impacts of ESRO, the Degree of Sales Organization, the Degree of Sales Initiative, and the impacts of Training on Financial Results. Although it will always be hard, or perhaps even impossible, to control all variables, researchers can start by measuring more frequently to gain greater and precise insights into the influence of Entrepreneurial Selling behavior on financial outcomes.

Lastly, a company often has multiple business owners working in teams. Future research may examine how business partners divide the sales activities within their teams and how this influences the results. Perhaps, not every business owner needs to have a high ESRO and sales competencies for their companies to become successful.

## 6.8 Conclusions

This study has generated new insights on how business owners act in their Entrepreneurial Selling role by quantitatively researching the relation between the concept of ESRO and the sales behavior of business owners. A higher ESRO leads to more systematic sales behavior, more (adaptive) sales initiative, positive financial growth expectations, and, most probably, better results. Sales training improves the ESRO, the Degree of Sales Organization, and the Degree of Sales Initiative. Sales training can also play a vital role in avoiding business failure and becoming successful.

Approximately thirty percent of business owners see themselves as incapable of the sales role in their organizations. This significant group needs sales support, as Study 1 (chapter 4) showed that ineffective selling contributes to business failure. Most business owners have a high ESRO, but how they evaluate their performance remains unclear. Sales training can serve as a mirror for business owners to understand their level of selling effectiveness.

Business owners have different sales learning needs than sales employees who have been self-selected for the sales profession, have a commercial background, and are steered by their employers to sell to boost future revenues. Furthermore, business owners of small businesses often do not have the resources (time and money) to invest (or the willingness) in extensive sales training like major companies and their sales professionals do. Attracting business owners to sales training might be even more difficult if those business owners overestimate their selling competencies, as they might not realize that they need that support. As entrepreneurship or sales researchers and trainers, we can and should do more to support business owners to reflect on their selling competencies, so as to avoid business failure due to ineffective selling. The next chapter provides specifically designed sales training applications to help attract business owners to sales training, give them more precise insight into their current sales behavior, and develop their sales competencies to achieve their entrepreneurial aspirations.



# 7 THE ENTREPRENEURIAL SELLING TRAINING APPLICATIONS

## 7.1 Abstract

**Purpose:** This chapter aims to provide solutions that support sales trainers in developing the necessary sales attitude and competencies of business owners, both aspiring and established, to prevent business failure and build successful companies.

**Methods:** The chapter combines insights from the literature study, three empirical studies conducted in previous chapters, and collaboration with sales scholars and sales training practitioners.

**Findings:** Bridging the gap between theory and practice, this chapter introduces a pragmatic typology by adapting the Entrepreneurial Selling Matrix into four categories: 'Go and Grow,' 'Think and Go,' 'Free and Balanced,' and 'Continuity.' These categories serve as effective tools for sales trainers, coaches, and educators to discuss and improve the current and expected sales behaviors of business owners. Additionally, a comprehensive Entrepreneurial Sales Training Program, along with its accompanying applications, is developed to support sales trainers in enhancing the sales skills of business owners. This support includes Pre-Training Needs Analysis Tools, an Entrepreneurial Selling Training Program, and Evaluation Tools. Modern techniques such as Artificial Intelligence and Virtual Reality are also utilized to enhance the effectiveness of business owners' sales behavior.

**Originality/Value:** This Entrepreneurial Selling Training Program and its Applications are unique in their empirical research-based approach, specifically tailored to address the distinct challenges faced by business owners in their selling roles.

## 7.2 Introduction

This chapter bridges the gap between theory and practice and uses the theoretical insights gained from the previous chapters to support business owners in developing more practical sales competencies.

The several outcomes of the three empirical studies discussed earlier are the foundation for the developed tools offered in this chapter. Study 1 (Chapter 4) showed that a negative attitude, a lack of sales skills and sales experience, or a combination of these factors does contribute to business failure. In Study 2 (Chapter 5) successful business owners claimed that training is essential to becoming an effective seller. Sales training and

coaching supported them in getting to the next step in developing their sales skills. Previous research has also shown that training has positive effects on improving individual competencies and positively influences organizational results (Walker Jr. *et al.*, 1977, Hawes and Rich, 1998, Onyemah, 2009, Nguyen *et al.*, 2019). Study 3 (Chapter 6) confirmed this statement and specified that training improves Entrepreneurial Selling Role Orientation, the Degree of Sales Organization, and the Degree of Sales Initiative. However, Study 3 also showed important challenges, namely, that only a minority of the business owners have followed sales training, that it is hard to attract business owners to sales training, and that business owners differ from professional sales employees in their specific need and desire for taking such a program. These insights led to the following research question: *How can sales trainers better develop the sales competencies of small-scale business owners?* This chapter focuses on how to attract business owners to sales training and presents a customized Entrepreneurial Selling Training Program.

The chapter has three parts. In the first part (§7.3) of this chapter, a practical entrepreneurial selling typology emerges, which shows the diversity in sales behavior and can be used before and during a sales training program to let business owners reflect and understand which type of business owner they are and how their style shows in their sales behavior.

In the second part (§7.4) a comparison between business owners in their sales role and professional sales employees in their sales function is supplemented (that foundation can be found in §2.5) using the insights of this dissertation. This overview of differences leads to the need for designing a specific entrepreneurial selling training program for business owners.

The last part of the chapter (§7.5-§7.8) presents and explains a complete Entrepreneurial Selling Training Program that will support sales trainers in developing the right set of sales competencies for (aspiring) business owners to prevent business failure and build a successful company.

### 7.3 Moving Toward an Entrepreneurial Selling Typology for Actual Practice

The results of the previous two chapters show the influence of the motive to start a business and the impacts of ESRO on the ‘Degree of Sales Organization’ and the ‘Degree of Sales Initiative’ and then presented a 2x2 typology matrix with four behavioral categories of Entrepreneurial Selling behavior. To put this typology into practice these four categories are given labels that reflect the selling behaviors of diverse types of business owners. The categories are easily understandable and clearly usable for Entrepreneurial Selling researchers, but in practice also usable for sales educators and trainers. This typology will

support trainers in their meetings with business owners and lets business owners reflect on their own unique sales behavior.

These four categories show that the selling behavior of business owners varies and depends on both the entrepreneurial motive and the ESRO of the business owner. The dimension called 'Degree of Sales Organization' ranges from 'Ad Hoc' to 'Systematic' and the 'Dimension of Sales Initiative' ranges from 'Reactive' to 'Proactive.' The four categories that emerge are thus 'Go and Grow,' 'Think and Go,' 'Free and Balanced,' and 'Slow and Steady.' The following graph (Figure 19) and sections, based on the results of Study 2 and Study 3, show, and describe the four categories of Entrepreneurial Selling behavior.

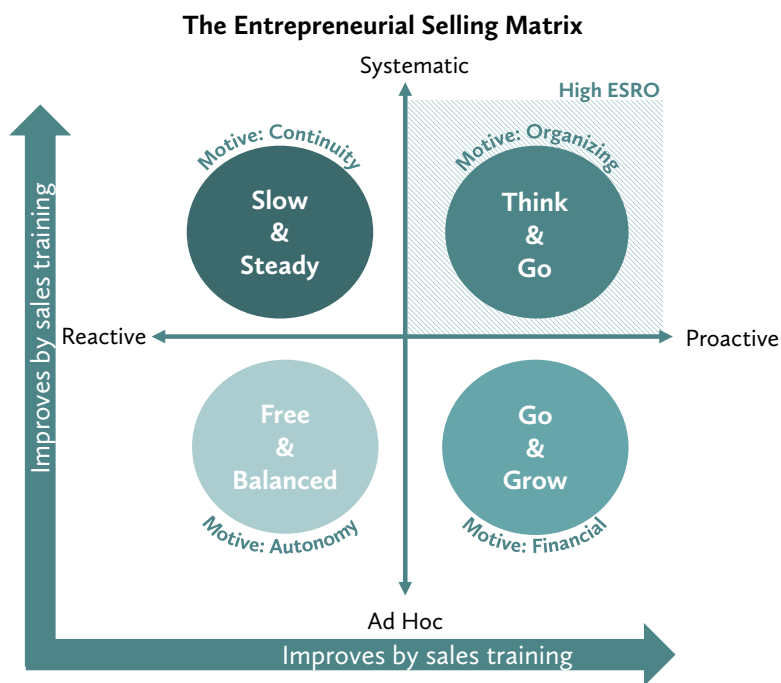


FIGURE 19: The Entrepreneurial Selling Matrix and the Practical Typology

### Go and Grow

The 'Go and Grow' Entrepreneurial Selling behavior (Study 2: Interviews 2, 4, 7, 8) is shown by those business owners with start-up characteristics. The main objective of this business owner is to increase the revenues and profit of the company. There is often no (extensive) existing network available, and the business owners are also often at the start of their entrepreneurial careers or just introducing a new product or service into the market. They understand that acquisition is vital for their survival. The business owner is also action-oriented and dives right into the process. Sales trainers thus need to consider that their pitfall might be that they are only short-term minded. This focus hinders them in building long-term relationships and designing a structured plan that may help them reach their



goals. Hence, their selling organization is very ad hoc (disinhibited), and their personal selling initiative is proactive on acquiring new customers. Business owners with a 'Go and Grow' profile, however, tend to have a higher ESRO than business owners who are on the left side of the matrix.

*"So, I just went, I just found out that I had to tell the story... so just brought my product to everyone I know, show it, tell it. Tell the story. My sales speech in the beginning was actually super simple. I went to someone, I just explained literally what you know. And it wasn't like I learned that from a book or anything, I just went there, and I said that story...the first three months is just enthusiasm." (Interview No. 7)*

### **Think and Go**

The 'Think and Go' Entrepreneurial Selling behavior (Study 2: Interview 1, 5, 6, 12) has a more planned approach than 'Go and Grow'. Its plans are thought out, but agile, have more Effectuation than Causation, and change regularly. Although financial growth is an objective, it is not as central an objective as with 'Go and Grow' and uses a more step-by-step approach (effectuation). There is often a network available, which has the primary attention of the business owner when scanning for business opportunities. Acquisition of new customers is done, but rarely outside the network (e.g., no cold calling) and more on referral or through online and social (media) action. Sales trainers should be aware when training business owners with this profile that when circumstances force these business owners to be more proactive about acquiring new customers, it might become a challenge. The Entrepreneurial Selling role of the 'Think and Go' business owner is relatively intensive. Their Selling Organization is systematic, their Selling Initiative is proactive, and their ESRO is high.

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*"I think the most important thing is to stay dedicated on sales... because that is definitely the engine of your company. Make sure it is properly organized...not every customer should get the same pitch, but every customer should get the same selling process... CRM is the beating heart of the organization, so there is 100% management effort on that." (Interview No. 12)*

### **Free and Balanced**

The 'Free and Balanced' (Study 2: Interviews 10, 11) Entrepreneurial Selling behavior is shown by business owners who do not see financial growth as the primary goal to meet to become successful. The business owners in this category have started their company to use ownership as an instrument to enjoy life to the fullest. This goal can, in their opinion, only be achieved by becoming a business owner of a small company instead of being an employee of a different company. They have no intention to grow more than is necessary to achieve their personal life goals. This intention affects their selling behavior. Their sales

initiative is only reactive. 'Free and Balanced' business owners start their selling activities when current work dries up and the sales funnel is almost empty. When they wait too long for opportunities to pop up, that delay may jeopardize the achievement of their intended motive. Sales trainers can support these 'Free and Balanced' business owners to be aware of this aspect and act in time. The Selling Organization is Ad Hoc. There is no fixed process or plan in place, these owners just act when and as necessary. This category of business owners has a low ESRO.

*"...but also, much more trust your gut feeling. So also, in sales activities, when things don't feel right don't do it. I just think...if you're a jerk, then I don't work with you...I don't tell "I think you're a jerk" but then I'm too busy or something like that... I really only want to work with nice people who give me energy, who I can trust...but what I often see is that people say; where do you want to be in three or in five years? that is all sales-oriented... while I've turned it around... much more of where I want to be in my life... and what sort of company fits that 'way of life.'"* (Interview No. 10)

### **Slow and Steady**

These 'slow and steady' business owners often have small businesses in traditional, slow moving (technical) industries. Their companies exist for quite some time and are well known in their industries for their expertise. Their expertise is the basis for their success, not their selling qualities. The 'Slow and Steady' Entrepreneurial Selling behavior (Study 2: interviews 3, 9) is less action-oriented than 'Go and Grow' and 'Think and Go'. They act as reactively as the 'Free and Balanced' business owners do. Customers often 'find' them instead of them finding the customers. They do very few acquisition activities. They are structured, but more project-based than sales-based (e.g. utilize a project system instead of the CRM system). Company growth is an objective, but it has to be incremental, as their concern is that their operations cannot keep up with the inflow of new work. Slow and Steady business owners tend to have a lower ESRO than business owners on the right side of the matrix, so sales trainers should be aware that these business owners might depend too much on only one or a few major buyers and support these business owners in diversifying their sales risk.

*"I've grown from being a techie, and I am still a techie, and I've had to add the sales part to it because it's part of the job... You have some capacity, internally, and you have a lot of work and if you have too much work, you're not going to handle that... so we try to develop gradually...The customers come to us...that is part of our kind of business, and yes we could be a little more active, visit them more, so I generally wait for the visits, if they call me, I will go there...we should be a bit more active under the existing customers."* (Interview No. 3)

## 7.4 The Need of Having Specific Sales Training for Business Owners

Teaching the sales role to business owners using effective training starts with the assumption that their needs differ from those of sales employees. Sales employees have more resources than business owners do, and business owners might have a non-selling background, but still lack a good foundation in sales competencies.

Sales behavior varies, depending on the business owners' characteristics and background (e.g., motives and ESRO). Professional salespeople in larger organizations will differentiate less in their behavior as generally they will aim to gather as many profitable revenues as possible and ensure the best organizational growth for their organizations. This results in the fact that sales employees often will show 'Go & Grow' or, in a later life stage of the company, 'Think & Go' behavior. In contrast, business owners might have different motives other than just profit. As we have seen in the Entrepreneurial Selling ma-

Already Known / New	Difference	Business owner	Sales Employee
Literature Research <i>Chapter 3</i>	<b>Liability</b>	Own risk (financial investment, personal liability)	Limited risks (lose job)
Literature Research <i>Chapter 3</i>	<b>Role or function</b>	Role	Function
Literature Research <i>Chapter 3</i>	<b>Resources</b>	Limited, especially in small organizations	Backed by marketing and the operations department
Literature Research <i>Chapter 3</i>	<b>Time spent on sales activities</b>	Limited (due to many roles)	Full-time
Literature Research <i>Chapter 3</i>	<b>Former sales experience</b>	Varies, depending on the background business owner	Yes (except for junior sales employee)
Literature Research <i>Chapter 3</i>	<b>Affinity with sales</b>	Varies, depending on background and characteristics of business owner	Yes
Literature Research <i>Chapter 3</i>	<b>Entrepreneurial approach</b>	In principle is (more) effectual	In principle is (more) causal
Empirical Study 2 <i>Chapter 5</i>	<b>Financial growth is the central objective</b>	In the case of 'Go and Grow' and to a lesser extent 'Think and Go', yes; in the case of the other two typologies, no.	Yes
Empirical Study 3 <i>Chapter 6</i>	<b>Attending sales coaching/training and courses</b>	70% never followed the sales training	Regularly

TABLE 27: (Additional) Differences Between Business Owner in Sales Role and Employee in Sales Function

trix, this different point of view can lead to more diversified sales behavior, also impacting the training support given to business owners. Sales trainers/coaches thus need to adapt their training approach to the specific situation of each business owner.

Considering the differences between business owners and selling employees, the effectiveness of Entrepreneurial Selling training will increase when sales employees are excluded, and sales training is exclusively offered to the business owners of small businesses. Table 27 in the last two rows shows the other differences derived from the empirical studies, compared to the overview presented here in the Literature chapter in Section 2.5.

## 7.5 The Entrepreneurial Selling Training Program

The success of sales training depends on the effective execution of the steps in that sales training process: 1) Pre-training: Analysis of training needs; 2) Training: Development and implementation of an adequate training plan; and 3) After Training: Evaluation (Honeycutt Jr. et al., 1993, LaForge and Dubinsky, 1996, Aragón-Sánchez et al., 2003). These three steps will be applied here to design an effective sales training program for business owners. The three stages are also connected to the theoretical foundation of this dissertation-- the Bird-in-Hand principle (Sarasvathy, 2001, 2009).

The three selling means questions can affect each step and are not stand-alone constructs. The three questions belong together in the sense that identity (Who I am?) is shaped and changed by knowledge (What I know?) and the networks (Whom I know?). Identity is not a fixed fact (Nielsen and Lassen, 2012). People can develop and change into a person where the selling role becomes part of their identity, shapes their preferences toward that role, and supports them in achieving their desired goals. Through sales training, the selling means to gain these skills and knowledge (Do I have sales experience, skills, and/or knowledge?) are improved. This extension of means affects both attitude and self-efficacy (Who Am I as a salesperson?) of the business owner and how they build and maintain their network (Do I have – or am I able to acquire – a network with (potential) customers?).

The pre-training stage consists of two steps and four tools. The first pre-training step creates an urgency for business owners, communicating that there is a need for them to follow sales training and develop their Entrepreneurial Selling skills. The Entrepreneurial Selling Training Introduction Presentation is what creates this urgency. This presentation can be given at all types of meetings designed for business owners (e.g., meetings of business associations or government support programs). The second step reflects with the business owner on their current sales behavior and their desired sales behavior in the future. The application tools to achieve this step include the Entrepreneurial Selling Checklist, the Entrepreneurial Selling Interview, and the Entrepreneurial Selling Factsheet. At

the end of this stage, there is a clearer understanding of the adapted Entrepreneurial Selling ‘means’ question: Who I am as a salesperson?

The training stage includes the Entrepreneurial Selling Training Program that is specifically designed for business owners. This program consists of a two and half day blended (online and offline) program in which the gap is closed between the current sales behavior and the desired situation. In addition, this stage introduces a Virtual Reality Sales Training Tool that business owners can use on their own time and at their own pace to develop the specific sales skills they desire. This stage is connected to the second Bird-in-Hand sales means question (Do I have sales experience, skills, and/or knowledge?) as at the end of this stage, the sales competencies of the business owners are now improved.

The third stage is the evaluation stage. A specific interview format is developed to determine whether the benefits of training are of enough value in practice. Is an increase in effectiveness and efficiency visible in actually acquiring and maintaining customers? This analysis can be done using the Entrepreneurial Selling Factsheet. The last tool presented in this chapter is an Artificial Intelligence tool: Conversation Analytics. Using this tool, business owners’ meetings with (potential) customers can be analyzed and thus further improved. The evaluation stage is connected to the third Bird-in-Hand question (Do I have – or am I able to acquire – a network with (potential) customers), which further clearly indicates how well-developed the customer base is for business owners.

Figure 20 and Table 28 are overviews of the Sales Training Application tools and their relationship with the Bird-in-Hand principle. Table 28 also shows what success factors are considered using the Sales Training literature (§2.7).



**FIGURE 20:** The Entrepreneurial Selling Training Program and Its Applications

<p>Bird-in-Hand 'means' questions (Sarasvathy, 1998, 2001, 2009)</p>	<p>Adapted Entrepreneurial Selling 'means' questions</p>	<p><i>Training stages</i> (Honeycutt Jr. et al., 1993, LaForge and Dubinsky, 1996, Aragón-Sánchez et al., 2003)</p>	<p>Success factors established via literature research (Section 2.7)</p>	<p>Sales Training Application Tools</p>
<p>Who am I?</p>	<p>(Who) Am I (as) a salesperson?</p>	<p>Pre-training: Analysis of Entrepreneurial Selling training needs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uses the first essential prerequisite for effective training. (Moore and Dutton, 1978; Brown, 2002, Gould et al., 2004)</li> <li>• Investigates the current performance and future needs (Gap analysis). (Mager and Pipe, 1984, Semenčenko et al., 2016)</li> <li>• Analyzes the specific needs of individual participants (Aragón-Sánchez et al., 2003, Salas et al., 2012, Ferreira et al., 2014)</li> <li>• Establishes the methods to close the gap (Clarke, 2003, Ferreira and Abbad, 2013, Kura and Kaur, 2022)</li> <li>• Analyzes the consequences when the gap is ignored (Semenčenko et al., 2016).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Entrepreneurial Selling Training Introduction</li> <li>• Entrepreneurial Selling Checklist</li> <li>• Entrepreneurial Selling Pre-Training Interview</li> <li>• Entrepreneurial Selling Factsheet</li> </ul>
<p>What do I know?</p>	<p>Do I have sales experience, skills and/or knowledge of sales?</p>	<p>Training: Development and implementation of an adequate and effective Entrepreneurial Selling training plan</p>	<p><b>Degree of Sales Organization:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• opportunity assessment (sales plan) and resource leveraging</li> <li>• (Gonul and Litzky, 2018)</li> <li>• CRM (Comer and Drollinger, 1999, Roman et al., 2002)</li> </ul> <p><b>Degree of Sales Initiative:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunity recognition</li> <li>• Building and using networks</li> <li>• Modern professional selling practices (e.g. problem solving) (Deeter-Schmelz and Kennedy, 2011)</li> <li>• Improving communication skills (Spillan et al., 2007)</li> <li>• Social media (Lassk et al., 2012)</li> <li>• Roleplay, audio, and video analysis (Spillan et al., 2007, Deeter-Schmelz and Kennedy, 2011)</li> <li>• Training using AI, AR, VR (Singh et al., 2019)</li> </ul> <p><b>ESRO</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coping with sales anxiety (Verbeke and Bagozzi, 2000)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Entrepreneurial Selling Training Program (2.5 days)</li> <li>• Entrepreneurial Selling Virtual Reality Sales Training Tool</li> </ul>

Bird-in-Hand 'means' questions (Sarasvathy, 1998, 2001, 2009)	Adapted Entre- preneurial Selling 'means' questions	<i>Training stages</i> (Honeycutt Jr. et al., 1993, LaForge and Dubinsky, 1996, Aragón-Sánchez et al., 2003)	Success factors established via literature research (Section 2.7)	Sales Training Applica- tion Tools
Bird-in-Hand 'means' questions (Sarasvathy, 1998, 2001, 2009)	Adapted Entre- preneurial Selling 'means' questions	<i>Training stages</i> (Honeycutt Jr. et al., 1993, LaForge and Dubinsky, 1996, Aragón-Sánchez et al., 2003)	Success factors established via literature research (Section 2.7)	Sales Training Applica- tion Tools
Who do I know?	Do I have (or able to acquire) a network with potential cus- tomers? (adapted to this evaluation stage: Has my network expanded compared to the pre-training stage)	After the training: Entrepreneurial Selling training evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Measure to determine the Entrepreneurial Selling training effects on organization and the business owner (Erffmeyer et al., 1991, Davidove and Schroeder, 1992, Aragón-Sánchez et al., 2003)</li> <li>• Transfer the training to the workplace (Irwin and Ford, 2002, Grossman and Salas, 2011, Ployhart and Hale Jr, 2014)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Entrepreneurial Selling Evaluation, Checklist, and Interview</li> <li>• The Entrepreneurial Selling Factsheet</li> <li>• Augmented reality tool: Conversation Analytics</li> </ul>

TABLE 2.8: Connection Between the Bird-in-Hand Principle (Sarasvathy, 1998, 2001, 2009) and the Entrepreneurial Selling Training Program

## 7.6 The Pre-Training Stage: Who Am I as Salesperson?

### **Entrepreneurial Selling Training Introduction Presentation**

Small business owners participate less in skill development and training activities than do managers of larger organizations (Bartram, 2005). The results of Study 3 here (Chapter 6) show that only a significant minority of business owners have ever followed sales training. There are three problems when letting business owners enter a sales training program: The (perceived) available resources (time and money) to participate (Beresford and Saunders, 2005, Webster *et al.*, 2005, Walker *et al.*, 2007) and a clear enough understanding that it will support them to recover or prevent failure and become successful (the necessity) (Wooden and Baker, 1995, Westhead and Storey, 1996).

Since sales training affects sales performance, there is always an urgency to create ways to attract more business owners to take these sales courses. One way to do that is to give a presentation to business owners in which urgency is created for them to participate in a sales course. Based on the results of this dissertation, an effective presentation has been developed to convince the business owner of the usefulness of undertaking this training.

Figure 21 offers a complete overview of the content of this presentation. The visualizations are created in cooperation with Mrs. Harriët Robijn (Appendix I). The presentation can be given to individual business owners and also to entrepreneurial organizations. The objective is to discuss the identify the sales challenges of business owners. The presentation follows the same flow as this dissertation:

1. What makes business owners different in their sales role compared to sales employees in their sales function?
2. Explains how ineffective sales activities contribute to business failure.
3. Discusses with the business owners how the motive to start a business affects their sales behavior and performance.
4. Elaborates on the ESRO of business owners and its effect on sales behavior and performance.
5. Discusses with the business owners how only a minority of business owners have followed sales training and how sales training can support them in successfully developing their sales training competencies.
6. Challenges business owners on the need to reflect on their sales performance and their willingness to invest in this sales training.

When delivering this presentation, it is vital not to make it a one-sided story directed only toward the business owners, but also to start a discussion on how these owners perceive the sales challenges in their organization. When business owners are convinced that something needs to be done about their sales behavior and performance, the next step then becomes how to create detailed self-insights on the gap between their current and their desired sales behavior.





FIGURE 21: An Overview of the Entrepreneurial Selling Training Introduction Presentation (Mrs. Harriët Robijn)

### The Entrepreneurial Selling Training Needed Application Tools

Once the business owner is aware that improvement of the sales competencies is necessary to survive and become successful, the next step is to increase the self-understanding of sales skills and individualize the training approach for these business owners. The gap between ‘what is’ and ‘what should be’ needs to be analyzed with the sales trainer. The practical sales training application tools designed for the second step of this pre-training stage includes an individual ‘Training Needs Analysis’ (TNA), which background is described in §2.7. The foundation of these TNA tools is the interview questionnaire used for Study 2 and the survey used for Study 3. The TNA can then gather a complete picture of the participant. The presented pre-training TNA tools will support sales trainers and business owners and have them analyze their sales resources and diversify the training needs of business owners of the sales employees and each other. The developed applications allow them to determine individual needs and deploy what is still needed to enable the business owners to perform better in their sales roles. Sales trainers can use the descriptions of the four Entrepreneurial Selling categories (§7.2) to individualize their Entrepreneurial Selling Training Program.

Before starting a sales training program, it is necessary to let the business owners reflect on how they are currently performing in their sales endeavors. Study 3 showed that business owners who have already received sales training indicated that they organize their selling activities more effectively and show more initiative than do those owners without training. Therefore, the following TNA tools were developed.

The three TNA applications are The Entrepreneurial Selling Assessment Checklist, The Entrepreneurial Selling Factsheet, and a half-structured in-depth Entrepreneurial Selling

Pre-Training Interview. To better understand both individual aspirations and how these sales activities can support achieving their aspirations, the sales trainer needs to determine the current behavior of the business owner with the support of the two TNA tools. They will serve as reflection tools for the business owners. These TNA tools will consider the differences between business owners (§7.2), employees, and business owners (§7.3) and check on whether there is good coherence between the motive and the ESRO of business owners and their sales behaviors.

These two tools also provide excellent insight into the gap that exists in the desired sales situation and will generate detailed information on how to close that gap. Relating this focus to the Bird-in-Hand principle, a business owner might underestimate/overestimate their own 'selling means' when answering the three core questions; however, the trainer is there to provide more accurate insight into the actual means together with the business owner.

Sales trainers can use the following TNA tools to let business owners reflect on their sales behavior by filling in the Entrepreneurial Selling Assessment Checklist and analyzing those results on the Entrepreneurial Selling Factsheet. In addition, a semi-structured one-on-one Entrepreneurial Selling Interview should be conducted to have a complete overview of the current sales behavior of the business owner.

### ***TNA Tool 1 – The Entrepreneurial Selling Assessment Checklist***

A checklist is developed to understand what kind of support the business owners need to analyze how they perceive themselves in their current sales role by analyzing the ESRO (Figure 22; Items 4-6). The other two parts of the checklist, taken together, examine the Entrepreneurial Selling behavior: the Degree of Sales Organization (ad hoc or structured per Items 7-11) and the Degree of Sales Initiative (reactive or proactive per Items 12-16). The combined answers to the items in this checklist are the entrepreneurial selling means of the business owner. These items derive from the survey (Study 3) and those underlying constructs/items were used. The questions are also strongly connected to the Bird-in-Hand principle and provide more detail about the current perceived selling means of business owners.

The output of this checklist becomes the foundation for the Entrepreneurial Selling support of the business owner. The working method for sales trainers then is as follows. First, let business owners fill in the checklist. Second, count the score for the Degree of Sales Organization and Sales Initiative. Third, put the scores in the Entrepreneurial Selling Factsheet (Figure 23)

## THE ENTREPRENEURIAL SELLING ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

<b>Company</b>						
<b>Name</b>						
<b>General entrepreneurial selling questions</b>						
1	As a business owner, I carry out the sales activities myself	Yes	No	sometimes		
2	I have followed sales courses in the past	Yes	No	sometimes		
3	The average number of hours per week spend on sales activities					
		<i>strongly disagree</i>			<i>Strongly agree</i>	
<b>Entrepreneurial Selling Role Orientation</b>						
		1	2	3	4	5
4	I like to sell					
5	I am good at selling					
6	I see myself as an experienced seller					
		<i>strongly disagree</i>			<i>Strongly agree</i>	
<b>Degree of sales organization*</b>						
		1	2	3	4	5
7	My company is evaluating whether our sales results are in line with expectations					
8	My company registers the contacts with the customer					
9	My company plans the sales activities					
10	My company creates a sales plan per customer					
11	My company evaluates the quality of the sales calls					
<b>Higher total &gt; higher degree of sales organization</b>						
		<i>strongly disagree</i>			<i>Strongly agree</i>	
<b>Degree of initiative**</b>						
		1	2	3	4	5
12	I am constantly looking for new customers					
13	I often interact with my current customers about new sales opportunities					
14	I'm always looking for ways to do my sales better					
15	If I see an sales opportunity, I go for it					
16	I excel at spotting sales opportunities					
<b>Higher total &gt; higher degree of proactiveness</b>						

\* Based on (Piercy et al., 1999, Cravens et al., 1993)  
 \*\* Based on (Pitt et al., 2002, Murphy and Coughlan, 2018)

FIGURE 22: The Entrepreneurial Selling Assessment Checklist

### TNA Tool 2 – The Entrepreneurial Selling Assessment Factsheet

The information from the questionnaire can thus be filled in on the Entrepreneurial Selling Factsheet shown in Figure 23. The Entrepreneurial Selling Factsheet gathers essential information in one overview and is the primary starting point for discussing both sales behavior and training needs with the business owners. On the left side, next to the position in the Entrepreneurial Selling Matrix, both motive and the ESRO of the business owner can be found. On the right side is the number of hours on average, the business owner has spent on sales activities. Further still, on the right side, at the bottom, the sales funnel is displayed where the actual numbers on sales activities are presented (ranging from e-mails to the number of contracts achieved). If the business owner cannot indicate these figures, then this issue needs to be discussed in the next step. From here, an assignment can be given to keep detailed track of this circumstance.

**THE ENTREPRENEURIAL SELLING FACT SHEET**

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

**SALES BEHAVIOUR**

1 Motive

Continuity     Financial  
 Organizing     Autonomy

2 ESRO\*  
Before training \_\_\_\_\_  
Current \_\_\_\_\_

3 Entrepreneurial selling matrix

**SALES PLAN & PROCESS**

4 Hours spent on sales per week (average) \_\_\_\_\_

5 Sales activities

	existing customer	acquisition
1 Nr of e-mails / LinkedIn		
2 Nr of telephone calls		
3 Nr of meetings		
4 Nr of tenders		
5 Nr of new contracts		
6 Revenue €		

\* Entrepreneurial selling role orientation

FIGURE 23: The Entrepreneurial Selling Fact Sheet

**TNA Tool 3 – An Entrepreneurial Selling Pre-Training Interview**

In the last tool of the pre-training stage, the sales trainer discusses the answers on the checklist and the factsheet during a one-on-one semi-structured in-depth Entrepreneurial Selling interview session (Table 29) with the business owner (60-75 minutes). This discussion should deliver in-depth information about the current selling behavior of the business owner and the desired selling behavior as well that can achieve the business owners' aspirations and organizational goals. Open questions to discuss are related to the Bird-in-the-hand presented in §1.3. The third column of Table 29 shows the relation between these questions and the adapted Entrepreneurial Selling means questions presented in the Introduction Chapter (§1.2): 1. (Who) am I as a salesperson, 2. Do I have sales experience, skills and/or knowledge, 3. Do I have (or am able to acquire) a network with potential customer.

The open questions in the Interview are developed using the checklist (TNA tool 1) and the interview questions for Study 2 ( Appendix D). Some additional questions emerged from the interviews in Study 2. The fourth column indicates where each question originated. The number refers to the number of that question in the checklist.

Using this session, a deeper understanding emerges about the sales behavior of the business owner. The working method for sales trainers then proceeds as follows. The sales trainer asks open questions about how the business owner behaves as a sales actor and how this behavior may differ from the results of the assessment checklist. Further, the trainer then analyzes if the motive to start as a business owner aligns well with the current sales behavior. The gain here is that business owners reflect on the results of the Entrepreneurial Selling Checklist and Factsheet by looking closely at the sales trainer's presented

‘mirror.’ Using this questionnaire and its follow-up discussion as a useful foundation, the sales trainer can ask follow-up questions depending on the results shown in the factsheet for the business owner. The result is a realistic view of the business owner’s current sales means and performance, the gap with the desired selling behavior, and a starting point for closing this gap using sales training. After conducting the interview, concrete selling development agreements can be confirmed for the training and coaching process for the business owner that will take place.

A	Introduction	Relationship with Bird-in-Hand	Checklist / interview
1	Can you tell me your motivation to start and manage a company? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial motive: e.g. What is your financial performance (e.g., revenue, profit) at this moment and what do you want to achieve?</li> <li>• Autonomy motive: e.g. How is your work-life balance proceeding at this moment and what do you want to achieve?</li> <li>• Continuity motive: e.g. How will you ensure that this organization still exists in 10 years' time?</li> </ul> Organization motive: e.g. If you can outline your ideal future dream for your organization, what does it look like?	Who I am?	Interview
2	Where do you want to be with your company a year from now? What's stopping you from achieving that goal? What is stopping you on the sales side?	Discrepancy between current and future means	Additional question
3	If we look at the results of your checklist, you have an ESRO of (xx) and are in this particular quadrant <trainer explains>. Tell me, do you think this summary is a good rendition of your selling behavior?	Who I am as a salesperson?	Results of reviewing the Checklist
<b>B</b>	<b>Background of Business Owner</b>		
4	Can you tell me about your work experience and education before you started your business?	What do I know?	Interview
5	Do you have any sales experience? Can you tell me more about it?	What do I know as a salesperson?	4
6	When I look at the results of the Entrepreneurial Selling Checklist, I see that you have received (no) training or coaching before. If that is true, please tell me more about those training experiences. If you have no training, what is your reason for discussing this aspect now?	What do I know as a salesperson?	5 and interview
<b>C</b>	<b>Type of Company / Industry</b>		
7	Can you tell me more about the background of your company? Can you describe your organization (e.g., the. # of people / your organization chart)?	Who I am?	Interview
8	What kind of product or service do you offer as a company	Who I am?	Interview
9	How do you distinguish yourself from your competition?	Who I am? What do I know?	Interview

D View on the Sales Role and Salespeople and their efforts			
10	What is your view on salespeople?	Who I am?	Interview
11	What is your description of a good salesperson or good account manager? Can you describe one as an example? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What characteristics are involved?</li> <li>• To which extent do you personally have these characteristics?</li> </ul>	Who I am? What do I know as a salesperson?	Interview
12	What according to you is the most crucial development in the sales profession?	What do I know as a salesperson?	Interview
E Degree of Sales Organization and Degree of Sales Initiative			
13	What does your sales organization look like? How does it work?	Who I am as a salesperson?	Degree of Sales Organization
14	What is your role in these sales activities? What role does sales play in your daytime/weekly schedule?	Who I am as a salesperson?	1
15	You say you choose to carry out the sales activities within your organization. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why this choice?</li> <li>• How much time do you spend on sales activities each week?</li> </ul> If the business owner chooses to delegate, then ask. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why do you choose to let somebody else perform these sales activities?</li> <li>• How do you manage your sales employees?</li> </ul>	Who I am as a salesperson?	1
16	When I look at the results of the Entrepreneurial Selling Checklist, you think selling is (not) enjoyable. What are for you both the 'pros' and 'cons' of the sales role? Can you give me some examples of the key tasks within the selling role that you either like or (dis)like to perform?	Who I am as a salesperson?	2
17	You do consider yourself (or do not) as a 'good' seller. Can you please indicate why you think so? What are your strongest and weakest points in the selling role? Give me some concrete examples.	What do I know as a salesperson?	3
18	What do you think are your most important areas for development in the sales role? What are the main sales challenges for your company?	What do I know as a salesperson?	12
19	Do you have a sales plan? Can you describe it for me?	What do I know as a salesperson?	8
20	How do you plan and prepare your customer meetings?	What do I know as a salesperson?	7
21	How do you keep track of your customer contacts (e.g., CRM system)? Based on this information: what are your specific metrics (# of mails / calls / online meetings / face-to-face meetings / deals)	What do I know as a salesperson?	6
22	A few questions about customer acquisition <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How many new customers do you acquire each year?</li> <li>• What is your approach to acquiring new customers?</li> <li>• What role/s does your professional network play in acquiring new customers?</li> </ul>	Who do I know as a salesperson?	Degree of initiative 10,12,13 and 14
23	When you visit a (potential) customer in his/her office for the first time, tell me in detail your personal sales approach.	What do I know as a salesperson?	Additional

24	A few questions on returning/existing customers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How often do you visit returning/existing customers?</li> <li>• What is your approach to retaining customers?</li> </ul>	Who do I know as a salesperson?	Degree of initiative 11,12,13,14
25	How is social media (social selling) used to reach out to new customers? And to reach existing customers?	Who do I know as a salesperson?	10,11 and interview
26	How urgent is it for you to change your sales behavior? / What happens to your company if you don't change your sales behavior	Who I am as a salesperson?	Additional
<b>F</b>	<b>Expectations of the sales training process</b>		
27	What do you expect from the training process	Discrepancies between current and future means	Additional
28	When will you be satisfied with the result of this training process?	Discrepancies between current and future means	Additional

TABLE 29: A Half-Structured One-on-One, In-Depth Entrepreneurial Selling Interview

## 7.7 The Training Stage: The Development of Entrepreneurial Selling Skills and New Knowledge

The Entrepreneurial Selling Training Program is the core part of the training process and its goal is to close the gap between the current and desired sales behavior of business owners. The program is specifically designed for business owners and excludes sales employees. This choice of focus was made in order to give full attention to the specific situation that is the selling role of business owners.

The training design of a 2.5-day Blended (Online and Onsite) Entrepreneurial Selling Training Program (Table 30) will improve business owners' sales knowledge and skills, so they can better meet their entrepreneurial aspirations. In the training design, one can clearly see how the Degree of Sales Organization or the Degree of Sales Initiative is developed to deliver the learning objective. This training design is based on the knowledge gained from the literature and the empirical chapters. This training design is thus the blueprint for a complete program, but it should of course be adjusted in length and content (for each part) to the specific size of the group, needs and resources of the participating small business owners in the B-to-B Industry.

This entrepreneurial selling training program has been submitted to three professional sales training organizations (Appendix I – one organization wished to remain anonymous) in the Netherlands for them to discuss the validity of its content. All three organizations agreed on the necessity for having such a program and its content. Furthermore, this program was presented to the management of the faculty of Business and Economics of the AUAS and the Program Director of 'lifelong learning', a project specially set up to design programs for professionals. The goal is to add this course to related faculty curricula.

## Training Tool 1 – The Entrepreneurial Selling Training Program

### Day 1: On site

Timetable	Theme	Method	Content	Learning Objective
9:30-10:00	Welcome and introduction to all business owners	Explanation and introduction of participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explain why there is a need for a specific sales program for business owners. All business owners also introduce themselves.</li> <li>Present the objectives of this training and the timetable.</li> </ul>	Understanding of what we are going to do.
10:00-11:00	The sales role of business owners	Explanation and discussion	<p>Discuss the challenges of the sales role for business owners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What are the experienced challenges in this group?</li> <li>What are the business owners' own perceptions of salespeople?</li> <li>What are the main Sales trends?</li> <li>What are the key factors needed to become successful in sales?</li> <li>What are different sales approaches, and which one is your current approach?</li> <li>What can we learn and use from the methods professional account managers use? And what makes that choice different?</li> <li>Do you delegate your sales activities or not? Why?</li> </ul>	Overview of the sales environment and theory. Insights on the specific situation of these business owners in their sales role and their involvement in it.
11:00-11:15			Coffee Break	
11:15-11:45	Entrepreneurial motive analysis	Assignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participants write on a flip over and present their current selling behavior: Go and Grow, Free &amp; Balanced, Slow &amp; Steady or Think &amp; Go.</li> <li>Discuss the Entrepreneurial Selling typology.</li> <li>Discuss each other's entrepreneurial aspirations.</li> <li>Explain their current sales behavior (ESRO, Degree of Sales Organization and Initiative) and their desired sales behavior (based on the TNA tools).</li> <li>What is their main goal for participating in this sales course and how to close any of their own gaps?</li> </ul>	To get to know and learn from each other. An overview of each participant and what needs to be done to close any gaps.
11:45-12:30	Acquisition of new customers	Explanation and assignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explanation of the sales process (the sales- and buying cycle).</li> <li>Create the sales process for your own business.</li> <li>How do you use your current network to get to new customers?</li> <li>What are other ways for you to use to acquire new customers?</li> <li>Presenting and feedback from group on own sales process.</li> </ul>	<b>Degree of Sales Organization</b> Knowledge of the sales process and development of a customized sales process.
12:30-13:15			Lunch Break	



Timetable	Theme	Method	Content	Learning Objective
13:15-14:00	Telephone call	Explanation & assignment given	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How to make a phone call during an acquisition process?</li> <li>What are the do's and the don'ts of a telephone call?</li> <li>Create a telephone script for an actual case per business owner.</li> <li>Practice before the group and also one-on-one using actual cases of these business owners.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Degree of Sales Initiative:</b> Learn via experience how to get into contact with a potential customer.</p> <p><b>Degree of Sales Initiative</b> Experience the preparation and opening stages of a sales meeting. Learn from each other and determine what the most important insight is for each participant.</p>
14:00-15:00	Face-to-face sales meeting	Explanation & Assignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Overview of a sales meeting.</li> <li>How to prepare a sales meeting?</li> <li>How to start that sales meeting?</li> <li>Practice before the group (one-on-one) with actual cases of these business owners.</li> </ul>	
15:00-15:15			Coffee break	
15:15-16:00	Analyze your sales network	Explanation and assignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What are the criteria for business owners to evaluate the importance and the strength of the sales relationship?</li> <li>Make a list of the top 10 of customers and evaluate these customers using that criterion.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Degree of Sales Organization</b> Insight on the relationship and its strength with the business's most important customers.</p>
16:00-16:45	Sales- and account Plan	Explanation & Assignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How to design a pragmatic, applicable sales- and account plan (based on the ground rules for Effectuation).</li> <li>Define the sales goals and sales key performance indicators (KPIs) for your own business.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Degree of Sales Organization</b> Learn and then create a small-scale business Sales- and Account Plan.</p>
16:45-17:00	Closing of the training	Actual Closing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recap of the training.</li> <li>Questions?</li> <li>What do you plan to take with you from this training session to your business?</li> <li><i>Homework: Create a Sales- and Account Plan for your company and evaluate yourself at least three telephone calls (tops and tips) and three openings of sales meetings (tops and tips) on today's learnings.</i></li> </ul>	

## Day 2: Online

Timetable	Theme	Method	Content	Learning Objective
9:30-10:00	Welcome and introduction of all business owners		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What have you implemented in your own business and sales behavior (so far)? What went well and what are the points for more improvement? Plenary discussion of homework.</li> <li>Status of the KPIs from the Sales- and Account Plan.</li> </ul>	Reflecting on sales performance and understanding of what we are going to do today.
10:00- 10:30	Selling online (e.g., Teams / Zoom) platforms	Explanation & Assignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The difference in approach between having a sales meeting online and actual face-to-face selling. Breakout sessions in small groups where participants can discuss experiences with online sales meetings with each other.</li> </ul>	<b>Degree of Sales Initiative:</b> Understanding, experiencing, and learning from each other the specifics of selling through online platforms.
10:30 -11:00	Winning sales tenders	Explanation & assignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explanation for how to write / make a winning offer / tender</li> <li>One-on-one breakout sessions. Evaluate your own offers / tenders by comparing the current offers / tenders to the other participant and these 'winning' conditions.</li> </ul>	Learning to create a winning offer/tender.
11:00-11:15			Coffee Break	
11:15-12:15	Social media selling	Explanation & assignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Which social media should one use?</li> <li>How to effectively profile yourself as business owner on social media</li> <li>How to use social media on an individual level to acquire and maintain successful business relationships.</li> <li>Create a specific personal LinkedIn message for a (potential) customer.</li> </ul>	<b>Degree of Sales Initiative</b> Understand how important your social media profile is and how you can use it to acquire new business.
12:15-12:50	Artificial Intelligence	Explanation & assignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Development of Artificial Intelligence in the context of sales for small businesses.</li> <li>How to use artificial intelligence tools (e.g., what probes to ask CHAT GPT to become a better seller).</li> <li>Explanation of artificial intelligence training tools and their usefulness.</li> </ul>	<b>Degree of Sales Organization:</b> Insight on the developments of Artificial Intelligence and understand its impacts and opportunities for a small business.
12:50-13:00	Closing of the training	Actual Closing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recap of the training.</li> <li>Questions?</li> <li>What do you plan to take with you from this training session to your business?</li> <li><i>Homework: Create at least three social media messages for potential or existing customers and take these messages with you to the next training.</i></li> </ul>	

### Day 3 – On site

Timetable	Theme	Method	Content	Learning Objective
9:30-10:00	Welcome and introduction Day 3	Discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Summary of Day 1.5.</li> <li>What have you implemented in your business and sales behavior? What went well and what are the points for more improvement?</li> <li>Status of the KPI's from the sales- and account management plan.</li> <li>Plenary discussion of homework (social media messages).</li> </ul>	Reflecting on sales performance and understanding of what we are going to do today.
10:00-11:00	Face-to-face sales meeting (2)	Explanation & assignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recap overview of a sales meeting.</li> <li>Assessing customer needs.</li> <li>Asking open question and discussing listening skills</li> <li>Practice before the group and one-on-one using actual cases of the business owners.</li> </ul>	<b>Degree of Sales Initiative:</b> Learn and experience how to better assess customer needs. Special attention on verbal and non-verbal communication.
11:00-11:15			Coffee Break	
11:15-12:15	Face-to-face sales meeting (3)	Explanation & assignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Connecting customer needs to your solutions.</li> <li>How to handle objections.</li> <li>Practice before the group and one-on-one using actual cases of the business owners.</li> </ul>	<b>Degree of Sales Initiative</b> Learn and experience how better to connect the solution of the business owner's company to its needs. Special attention given to handling objections.
12:15-12:30	Customer Relationship Management	Discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How can CRM better support you in keeping track of customer information and analyzing your sales process and performance?</li> <li>What types of CRM systems do these business owners use?</li> <li>What are their advantages and disadvantages.</li> </ul>	<b>Degree of Sales Organization</b> Understanding the possible benefits of CRM systems by analyzing your sales performance.
12:30-13:15	Opening		Lunch break	
13:15-14:00	Time management	Discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How much time is spent on sales?</li> <li>How to keep all the roles and tasks you have as business owner in positive balance?</li> <li>How do the different roles affect each other?</li> <li>How to plan your sales activities for success.</li> <li>Make a plan for the next working week.</li> </ul>	<b>Degree of Sales Organization</b> The importance and application of good time management.

Timetable	Theme	Method	Content	Learning Objective
14:00-15:00	Sales ethics	Discussion & assignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Discuss the development and importance of ethical awareness in contemporary selling.</li> <li>Theses offered on sales ethics.</li> </ul>	Reflecting on one's own and each other's ethical standards.
15:00-15:15			Coffee Break	
15-15-15:45	Face-to-face sales meeting (4)	Explanation & assignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Closing the meeting.</li> <li>Follow-up process explained.</li> <li>Practice before the group and also one-on-one with actual cases of these business owners.</li> </ul>	<b>Degree of Sales Initiative</b> Learn and experience how to effectively close a sales meeting and find agreement on the next best steps to take.
15-45-16:15	Managing sales-people	Explanation & discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What happens when your organization grows, and you need to delegate sales activities to salespeople.</li> <li>How do you currently manage sales professionals? How should you?</li> <li>What are the different views on managing sales professionals expressed by the group?</li> </ul>	<b>Degree of Sales Organization</b> Insights into when to delegate sales activities and knowledge for how to manage sales professionals successfully.
16:15-16:45	Introducing new products into the market	Explanation and discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How can key developed sales skills support you when introducing new innovations into the market?</li> <li>How do you involve (potential) customers when you want to introduce innovations.</li> </ul>	<b>Degree of Sales Organization and Sales Initiative</b> Awareness that innovations need to be created in consultation with the customer and insights on how to use the developed sales skills to do so.
16:45-17:00	Closing of the training	Discussion & closing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recap.</li> <li>Questions?</li> <li>Did this training support you to close the gap between current and desired sales behavior?</li> <li>What do you plan to take with you to your business? Optional: Plan individual coaching sessions.</li> <li><i>Homework: Evaluate at least three sales meetings on today's learnings (tips and tips), fill in the Entrepreneurial Selling Assessment Checklist. Take this information with you to the individual coaching session.</i></li> </ul>	

TABLE 30: Entrepreneurial Selling Training Program

## Training Tool 2 – Entrepreneurial Selling Virtual Reality Training tools

VR Training Tools are not a replacement for physical training sessions, but rather an addition to them (Upadhyay and Khandelwal, 2018) as they deliver additional exercises to enhance the selling abilities of salespeople. VR trains sales skills in an artificial environment that is experienced through sensory stimuli provided by a computer and in which the business owners’ actions partially determine what happens in the actual real scenario (Upadhyay and Khandelwal, 2018). VR can also benefit business owners who lack the resources to invest in an entire face-to-face training program. Although VR cannot fully imitate complex B-to-B selling situations, specific essential skills can be learned with the support of VR.

With this thought in mind, in the first quarter of 2023, an investigation was launched by the company VR Expert, Bodyswaps (Appendix I), and the AUAS to analyze what com-

VR Product Component	Description	To learn	Adapted ‘Entrepreneurial Selling’ Scenario
The sales meeting: Clear communication, active listening, and prompt handling of objections	Involves a set of techniques that will support the business owner in building better relationships with customers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask open questions</li> <li>• Set a clear goal</li> <li>• Use open body language</li> <li>• Don't solicited solutions</li> <li>• Be aware of emotions</li> <li>• Avoid talking about yourself and focus on customer</li> <li>• Avoid getting into a discussion</li> <li>• Avoid interruptions</li> <li>• Avoid using filler words and jargon</li> <li>• Avoid hesitations and showing any lack of conviction</li> <li>• Avoid Judgemental statements</li> <li>• Summarise and then close the meeting</li> </ul>	You (business owner) are in a meeting with a potential customer ‘Dave/Amy.’ Your first task is to open the meeting and set the goal. Then you need to ask the right open questions and listen carefully to the ‘buying motives’ of this customer. The final task is to summarize the customer’s needs and connect your solutions to the buying motives of that customer. In the final stage, you can practice handling the objections of the customer and close the meeting in a proper positive way
Public Speaking and Presentation Skills	A beginner-level program providing general guidance on the basics of public speaking, with an introduction to simple anxiety management, verbal, and non-verbal skills, connecting with an audience and having an effective method for structuring content for both clarity and engagement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learn how to manage stage fright.</li> <li>• Learn how slight changes to body language can affect an audience’s response.</li> <li>• Practice using vocalising to warm up and train your voice for better public speaking performances.</li> <li>• Experience how simply adjusting your volume, intonation and inflection can affect how clearly people understand your message.</li> </ul>	Give a sales pitch or a full presentation about your proposition and receive feedback.

TABLE 31: Script for the Entrepreneurial Selling Virtual Reality Training Tool

ponents of their product portfolio could be used to strengthen the sales skills of business owners. Until now, this software developer (Body Swaps) concentrated on employer-employee situations. New scenarios, as presented in Table 31 here, need to be developed for training on the specific sales situation between the business owner and any (prospective) customer. The investigation concluded that certain components effectively train business owners in their sales skills.

Table 31 lists and describes which two tools can be developed based on the current possibilities and beneficiaries for the full development of the Entrepreneurial Selling skills of business owners. These components can be developed and tested with second year AUAS students to analyze whether or not students actually show an increase in essential sales skills before developing them for practice.

## 7.8 After the Training: Evaluation of the Expansion of the Sales Network

In the final stage of the training cycle, the effectiveness of the sales training on the business owner's sales behavior and performance is evaluated. The central question is if the gap between the behavior before the training started and the desired behavior has closed and if that change leads to visible results.

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### **Evaluation Tool 1 – Revisiting the Entrepreneurial Selling Assessment Checklist and Factsheet**

The start of the evaluation process lets business owners fill in the Entrepreneurial Selling Assessment Checklist and Factsheet again. The sales trainer then compares the results of this checklist and factsheet after the training with the results gathered at the pre-training stage. This comparison provides an overview of the development of the ESRO, the Degree of Sales Organization, and the Degree of Sales Initiative. The trainer and the business owner can then conclude if the sales performance of the business owner has improved. The output of this checklist becomes the foundation for the Entrepreneurial Selling Training Evaluation Interview presented in the next step. An example of a completed factsheet can be found in Figure 24.

The evaluation procedure is intended to compare this result with the pre-training result: Has the ESRO increased? Is there a different position in the Entrepreneurial Selling Matrix? Has the number of hours spent on sales per week increased, and did the ratios from the sales funnel now result in additional revenue?

**THE ENTREPRENEURIAL SELLING FACT SHEET**

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

**SALES BEHAVIOUR**

1 Motive  
 Continuity     Financial  
 Organizing     Autonomy

2 ESRO\*  
 Before training: 6  
 Current: 12

3 Entrepreneurial selling matrix

**SALES PLAN & PROCESS**

4 Hours spent on sales per week (average) 8

5 Sales activities

	existing customer	acquisition
1 Nr of e-mails / LinkedIn	30	15
2 Nr of telephone calls	20	8
3 Nr of meetings	10	4
4 Nr of tenders	5	2
5 Nr of new contracts	2	1
6 Revenue €	10.000,-	2.000,-

\* Entrepreneurial selling role orientation

**FIGURE 24: A Completed Entrepreneurial Selling Fact Sheet to Determine the Progress of the Business Owner**

**Evaluation Tool 2 – An Entrepreneurial Selling Training Evaluation Interview**

In this step, the sales trainer discusses the answers to the Entrepreneurial Selling Checklist and Factsheet in a one-on-one Entrepreneurial Selling Training Evaluation Interview (Table 32) with the business owner (35-45 minutes). This interview will deliver in-depth information about whether the gap has closed between the current selling behavior of the business owner and the desired sales behavior. Furthermore, it shows whether the business owner achieves his or her aspirations and organizational goals and precisely where there is room for still further development.

A	General Evaluation Questions	Relation to Bird-in-Hand	Checklist / Interview
1	When you look back on the sales training how did it meet your expectations?	Who am I?	Interview
2	If we look at the results of your checklist. You scored on 'Entrepreneurial Sales Role Orientation' (xx) and are in this quadrant (xx) <trainer explains>. This result means that you have a <i>higher ESRO*</i> and <i>show more systematic*</i> and <i>proactive*</i> selling behavior. Have you expected this difference as your result? *Depending on outcome Checklist / Factsheet	Who am I as a salesperson?	Result of Checklist
3	You had a specific motive for starting your company (xx), How does this <i>improved*</i> sales behavior support you in achieving your entrepreneurial aspirations? *Depending on outcome Checklist / Factsheet	Who I am now as a salesperson?	Result of Checklist

4	The goal for your company was to reach (xx) a year from now? How do you plan to use your developed sales knowledge and skills to achieve these goals? Have your financial results (Return On Investment) improved since this training?	Discrepancy between current and future means	Additional details
5	Has the sales training changed your view on salespeople? If yes, explain what has changed.	Who I am now?	Interview
<b>B</b>	<b>Improvements in the Degree of Selling Organization and Degree of Selling Initiative</b>		
6	What changes did you make to your selling organization?	Who am I now as a salesperson?	Degree of Sales Organization
7	Has your role changed in these sales activities? What role does sales now play in your daytime/weekly schedule?	Who am I now as a salesperson?	1
8	When I look at the results of the Entrepreneurial Selling Checklist, you like selling more than before the training*. What do you believe the main changes compared to your situation before the training? Can you give me examples of tasks within the selling role that you like now and want to perform? Are there are still selling tasks that you still dislike performing? *Depending on outcome Checklist / Factsheet	Who I am as a salesperson?	2
9	You (still) do (not) consider yourself as a 'good' seller*. Can you please indicate why you think so? What are your strong points now? and what specific weak points in the selling role do you still have? Ask for concrete examples. *Depending on outcome Checklist / Factsheet	What do I know as a salesperson?	3
10	How confident are you about applying the acquired sales skills in practice? What challenges do you still face?	What do I know now as a salesperson?	3
11	What are the main sales challenges you have solved for your company since the training? What challenges are still there (or have since emerged)?	What do I know now as a salesperson?	12
12	Have you created a sales plan since the sales training? Can you show/ describe it for me?	What do I know now as a salesperson?	8
13	Has the way you prepare your sales meetings changed?	What do I know now as a salesperson?	7
14	Have you changed/improved the way you keep track of your customer contacts (e.g., implemented a CRM system)? Based on this information: what is the current situation of your KPI's (# of mails / calls / online meetings / face-to-face meetings / deals) after this training?	What do I know now as a salesperson?	6
15	A few questions on acquisition <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How many new customers have you acquired since the training?</li> <li>• What is your approach now and which of your acquired skills better support you to find new customers?</li> <li>• How have you expanded your professional network since the training? &lt;Concrete numbers&gt;</li> </ul>	Who do I now know as a salesperson?	Degree of initiative 10,12,13 and 14
16	You visit a (potential) customer in his/her office for the first time. Please tell me what you do now that is different compared to the way you acted before the training. What is the effect on your relationship with these potential customers? Do you witness actual improvement in the sales results?	Who do I know now as a salesperson?	Additional



17	A few questions on returning/existing customers: How often do you visit returning/existing customers now? (more than you did before training?) What is your approach to retaining customers look like now? What is the effect of this training approach on the relationship with these customers? Have you witnessed improvement in the sales results?	Who do I know now as a salesperson?	Degree of initiative 11,12,13,14
18	How have you used social media (social selling) since the training for reaching new customers? And also for existing customers?	Who do I know now as a salesperson?	10,11 and interview
<b>C</b>	<b>Future Sales Development</b>		
19	Are there skills and/or knowledge that you still need or want to acquire to become more effective in selling? How do you plan to develop these competencies?	Discrepancies between current and future means	Additional
<b>D</b>	<b>Feedback on Sales Training</b>		
20	Do you recommend this sales training program to other business owners?		Additional
21	Are there any outstanding points about the training that you would like to discuss?		Additional

TABLE 32: Entrepreneurial Selling Training Evaluation Interview

### Evaluation Tool 3 – Conversation Analytics: Artificial Intelligence-Based Entrepreneurial Selling Evaluation Tool<sup>1</sup>

An important trend for developing this tool is the rise of AI and the possibility of analyzing conversation dynamics (Adam *et al.*, 2021). Following this trend, the Conversation Analytics Tool is the third and last evaluation tool presented in this dissertation to use in the (near) future to support the analysis and development of business owners’ sales skills. Sales trainers can use this tool to analyze the role-play exercises of the business owner or real-life recorded sales-customer interactions (with consent, of course) and discuss the outcomes with the business owner. Based on these outcomes, The trainer can create a development plan with the business owner to become a more effective salesperson.

In March of 2023, new cooperation started between the company Customerlytics (see Appendix I), owned by Emeritus Professor Sales- and Account Management Willem Verbeke, and the author of this dissertation, representing the AUAS. The goal was to learn how to analyze conversations between salespeople and (potential) customers with the support of an Artificial Intelligence tool that aims to improve communication skills. This tool was assessed in a pilot with four participating classes (approximately 90 students) who followed a sales training course. This course included four sales training sessions and an assessment. The role play exercises (telephone call and face-to-face meeting) of these students were

<sup>1</sup> This section is written in collaboration with Willem Verbeke (Emeritus Professor Erasmus University, Rotterdam, The Netherlands) and Dr. Amita Sharma (Assistant Professor Institute of Agri-Business Management, Bikaner, India).

recorded using a telephone app to see if and how the sales skills developed during the training process and how such this new tool can be used in practice (e.g., business owners in their sales role. The recorded dialogues were saved in the Cloud for analysis, after which that analysis was generated in reports.

The pilot showed that the Conversation Analytics Tool has the capability to analyze how conversations between business owners and salespeople unfold. This analysis of such conversations can be of great significance for the development of business owners and their sales competencies and sales performance. For instance, when customers are satisfied with the answers that business owners give to their questions during their sales meetings, customers' loyalty to the company increases and these customers are willing to recommend them to other potential customers in their social network (Palmatier *et al.*, 2007, Brexendorf *et al.*, 2010)

This tool is also used to analyze the sales behavior of business owners and specifically how business owners talk to customers to solve a customer's problem. Three assumptions were made when the development of this tool started: 1) Engaging in conversation requires a grasp of conversational techniques, as this activity belongs to the business owner sales role; 2) conversation skills can be trained and 3) given that that the background and characteristics (e.g., internal: motive, ESRO external: industry, culture) of the business owner are likely to affect how people undertake or enact their roles, these traits will also affect how they engage in conversation.

One outcome of the analysis was that there is no interest in speech as such, e.g., giving a presentation. Speech-making comes down to sending or communicating information. Conversations in sales encounters are dialogues, and they create conversation dynamics. As these dynamics are self-reinforcing, they may lead to the emergence of more complex dynamics. From this perspective, conversation skills are conceived as ways in which people use words, prosody (acoustic cues that convey emotions) or manage conversational features (e.g., silence or turn-taking patterns) to manage the conversation dynamics. All these dimensions of words, prosody, and conversation features are labeled "conversation features" and can be analyzed with the support of this new tool.

Conversational dynamic analysis is a field that studies the interpersonal processes underlying the dialogue between people. These interpersonal processes are one aspect of how changing the mode of communication can impact productive versus less productive conversational dynamics (Fusaroli and Tylén, 2016). This impact means that conversational features may affect interpersonal processes, and in turn, interpersonal processes may affect the use of conversational features. Examples of such interpersonal processes are the emergence of specific emotions like anger or envy, or competitive behavior, or the development of friendship or trust; all of which may occur both during and after a sales meeting.

This tool applies both language analysis and conversation dynamics analysis. Language analysis mostly focuses on the words used in the conversation (Tausczik and Pennebaker, 2010). An analysis of conversation dynamics implies that people co-create the dynamics of

the conversation (Rothschild and Yalcin, 2017). Therefore, in addition to language analysis, we also focus on conversational features, such as turn-taking, pitch, duration of speaking, the ability to allow silences, and general comprehension of what is being said.

Language analysis is what people say, but conversation dynamics analysis is more complex and entails analyzing how people use words, prosody, or communication features to manage their interpersonal processes in such a way that the conversation creates value for the sales performance of the business. When analyzing conversations and coaching based on these analyses, it is always important to consider that context matters. For instance, do the parties know each other, do they have the same socio-economic background, and where are they in the sales process?

AI allows us to predict which conversational features are typical of productive or good dialogue, whether these conversational features are being used in the first minutes of dialogue and can predict what happens later (first impression bias). AI can also predict which features cause a conversation to escalate from calm sentiments to intensely negative sentiments (e.g., anger). These insights can provide useful input for sales training and its evaluation.

The following visuals present an example of the analysis of the performance of an individual participant. Figure 25 is based on an algorithm that analyzes whether the used conversation time of the potential customer (orange) was shorter or longer than that of the business owner (blue). In practice, the general rule is that the conversation time is usually 20%/80% in favor of the customer. The sales trainer can discuss this rule with the business owner to make the business owner more aware of the amount of conversation time they use and how they are using it.

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FIGURE 25: Conversation on Time Between (Potential) Customer and Business Owner

The second visual (Figure 26) analyzes the speed of speaking for the customer and the business owner during various stages of the conversation. On the vertical axis, the number of words per 10 seconds is spoken by the business owner and the customer. This visual can extract the dynamics of the conversation to show enthusiasm and confidence, but also any 'overselling' behavior. The business owner speaks mostly later in the meeting, which can be a good sign, as the salesperson should first ask questions to find out what problems/challenges the (potential) customer encounters and then listen to the customer. The business owner should still control the pace of the sales meeting to stay in the lead during the meeting.

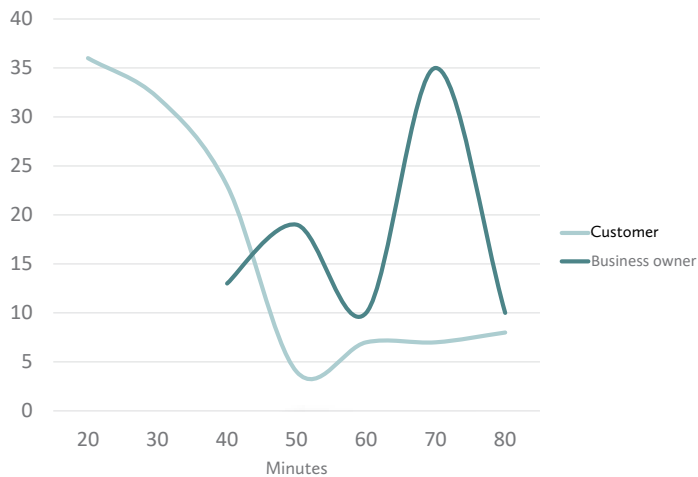


FIGURE 26: Dynamics of Conversation Between Business Owner and (Potential) Customer

The third visual shows a word cloud (in Dutch). Figure 27 indicates which words are being used during the conversation. The larger and bolder the word, the more often it is used. The word ‘solutions’ (in Dutch: oplossingen) indicates the business owner’s positive consultative selling behavior (discussed in §2.6) as that person tries to discuss a solution for an analyzed problem/challenge during the first part of the meeting. The Business owner uses the word “I” (In Dutch: Ik) often during the conversation. The word “I” may indicate that the seller is too focused on the self instead of on a joint solution. The word ‘Yes’ (Ja), the most commonly used word on the customer side, may refer to the fact that the customer has already agreed to the solutions of the business owner.



FIGURE 27: Word Cloud Business Owner and (Potential) Customer Interaction

As the AI tools, training, and subsequent practice continue, we will use CL reports or performance evaluations by experts to detect which corrections actually affect the outcome of conversations. This project will continue in the coming years to collect a large data set for two key purposes: 1. More data (i.e., more dialogues in the data set) produces superior statistical results (avoiding an underpowered study) and 2. Machine learning requires a large data set in order to train the AI system or algorithm. This effort will lead to a more sophisticated sales Artificial Intelligence Entrepreneurial Selling Evaluation Tool that can improve the sales behavior and performance of business owners.



## 8 CONCLUSIONS OF THIS DISSERTATION

This dissertation sought to move the domain of Entrepreneurial Selling forward in both theory and practice. Although selling is a crucial entrepreneurial activity for small-scale business owners, it is still a highly understudied phenomenon (Matthews *et al.*, 2018). This dissertation supports the development of the Entrepreneurial Selling domain by answering the main research question:

***How do small-scale business owners in the Netherlands behave in their Entrepreneurial Selling role and how can they become more effective in their sales behavior?***

The development of this domain is accomplished through undertaking a literature study in Chapter 2 and three, independent but connected studies presented in Chapters 4, 5, and 6. Further, this dissertation delivers a practical contribution by introducing specifically designed Entrepreneurial Selling Training Applications that were presented in Chapter 7.

### 8.1 Theoretical Contributions of this Dissertation

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This core theoretical contribution of this dissertation is that it has pushed the phenomenon of Entrepreneurial Selling in another direction than earlier entrepreneurial selling research (Chapter 3). This direction is formed by limiting the scope of Entrepreneurial Selling by excluding employees and, in contrast, broadening that scope by including, next to innovations, existing propositions. Hence, this dissertation supports the ‘average’ small-scale business owners, who do business for their own risk and return. This scope of Entrepreneurial Selling creates new scholarly opportunities for researching this emerging field still further going forward.

Next to changing the direction of Entrepreneurial Selling, the contribution of this dissertation to theory is sixfold. First, due to this dissertation, ineffective entrepreneurial selling is added to the existing business failure literature as a contributor to business failure (Chapter 4). The results of this study delivered answers to the first research Sub-question: *How do small-scale business owners make sense of their Entrepreneurial Selling behavior before, during, and after a period of failure?*

Successful people often say they have learned the most from their failures (e.g., Thomas Edison, Albert Einstein, Winston Churchill, Richard Branson, Paul Coelho). The examples and stories of these failures must be used more often in entrepreneurship and sales textbooks, education, training, and coaching.

By deliberately using business failure and not the more obvious choice of success as the underlying starting point for moving the domain of Entrepreneurial Selling forward,

there is a new foundation that creates urgency for more self-reflection by business owners. The evidence offered herein suggests that business owners of small-scale companies are often struggling as sales actors, and their struggle can contribute to business failure. The reasons for sales failure are diverse, but it is essential to understand how business owners can spend sufficient time in this role and how to prevent them from procrastinating and do the *right* personal selling activities *right*.

Second, a bridge has been built in this dissertation between entrepreneurship and personal selling research by applying the first principle of effectuation, Bird-in-Hand (Sarasvathy, 2001, Sarasvathy *et al.*, 2008, Sarasvathy, 2009), to the sales role of business owners (Chapter 4). Sarasvathy's three means questions, which define what the business owner has readily under personal control to start and manage a business, are herein adapted to sales means questions (Who am I as a salesperson, Do I have sales experience, skills and/or knowledge? Do I have a network with potential customers?) and thereby serve as a mirror for business owners to use to reflect on their own current sales behavior, competencies, and opportunities.

The third theoretical contribution of this dissertation is adding the Entrepreneurial Selling Matrix to the existing entrepreneurial selling literature to describe the sales behavior of small-scale business owners (Chapter 5). There is not one type of sales behavior. The sales behaviors of business owners differ and are diversified in this dissertation into four categories based on their Degree of Sales Organization and Degree of Sales Initiative.

Fourth, the motive for starting and operating a small business influences the sales behavior of that business owner (Chapter 5). This study connects to the second research sub-question: *How does the motive to start and operate a business influence the sales behavior of small-scale business owners?*

Business owners' motives (Financial, Organizing, Autonomy, or Continuity) are diverse. That motive influences their sales behavior by acting differently when organizing and taking the initiative toward finding and acquiring (potential) customers.

Fifth, this dissertation introduces the concept of Entrepreneurial Selling Role Orientation, which like motivation, also influences the behavior of business owners (Chapter 6). This study answers the third research sub-question: *How does the Entrepreneurial Selling Role Orientation (ESRO) of small-scale business owners influence their sales behavior and (expected) financial performance?*

The ESRO defines an individual-level construct that captures a business owner's inclination to engage in sales activities. This inclination to act is based on the sales attitude, self-efficacy, and experience of the business owner. A higher ESRO leads to more systematic, proactive and adaptive sales behavior, positive financial growth expectations, and (most probably) results.

Lastly, sales training is one of the most neglected topics in the literature (Singh *et al.*, 2015). This dissertation demonstrates the importance of undertaking more research on this topic and specifically in the direction of sales training for business owners of small compa-

nies (Chapter 6). Sales training improves the effectiveness of the sales behavior of business owners and can play an essential role in avoiding business failure and becoming successful.

Future entrepreneurial scholars can also enhance our understanding of Entrepreneurial Selling, following the example of this dissertation, by starting the research avenues mentioned in the three empirical chapters.

## 8.2 The Practical Contributions of this Dissertation

This dissertation also delivers several significant contributions to actual practice (Chapter 7). The practical sub-question for this dissertation is: *How can sales trainers better develop the sales competencies of small-scale business owners?*

The core contribution and first step is to create more awareness among business owners that ineffective sales activities can prevent business owners from achieving their entrepreneurial aspirations.

Second, the Entrepreneurial Selling Matrix and its four categories are adapted into a pragmatic typology that sales trainers, coaches, and educators can use to discuss business owners' current and expected sales behaviors. The categories 'Go and Grow', 'Think and Go', 'Free and Balanced' and 'Continuity' can easily apply during sales training and coaching encounters.

Third, this dissertation bridges the gap between business owners' current and expected sales behavior. Almost one-third of the business owners participating in the third Study reflect and conclude they are incompetent sellers. From the business owners that consider themselves competent, the question remains about how many overestimate their sales skills. Therefore, a complete Entrepreneurial Sales Training Program and its accompanying Applications are developed to support sales trainers in their endeavors to build the sales competencies of business owners. This support ranges from Pre-Training Needs Analysis Tools, an Entrepreneurial Selling Training Program to Evaluation Tools. Modern Artificial Intelligence and Virtual Reality techniques are also applied to increase the effectiveness of business owners' sales behavior.

## 8.3 Positive Directions for Future Research

Based on the results and limitations presented in the previous chapters, this dissertation serves as an invitation to entrepreneurial selling scholars to build upon its findings and further enrich our understanding of this domain. Researchers are encouraged to explore whether the absence of interest or competence in selling hinders experienced small-scale



business owners from introducing innovations. By delving into this aspect, we can gain valuable insights into the potential barriers and challenges faced by entrepreneurs in leveraging their selling abilities to drive innovation within their businesses. This line of inquiry has the potential to shed light on the interplay between selling skills, the adoption of innovative practices and entrepreneurial success.

By investigating the interconnection between innovation and risk within the realm of entrepreneurial selling, researchers have the opportunity to bridge the two distinct foundations outlined in the literature review (§2.5). Prior studies, such as those by Deutsch and Wortmann (2011), Onyemah and Rivera-Pesquera (Onyemah and Rivera-Pesquera, 2017, 2021), have explored the significance of innovation in Entrepreneurial Selling. Concurrently, this dissertation has focused on the role of risk.

By combining these two perspectives, researchers can delve deeper into how innovation and risk interact in the context of entrepreneurial selling. This exploration can uncover valuable insights into how entrepreneurs navigate the inherent uncertainties and challenges associated with introducing innovations into the market. Understanding the intricate relationship between innovation and risk will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics and complexities of entrepreneurial selling, enriching the existing body of knowledge in this field.

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Furthermore, an interesting research avenue to explore would be to investigate the applicability of the Entrepreneurial Selling Matrix and its Typology in diverse countries and cultures (Ritchie and Brindley, 2005, Kreiser *et al.*, 2010, Castaño *et al.*, 2015). In addition to cultural impact, understanding how various external factors, such as the economy and social factors (Aldrich, 1999, Castaño *et al.*, 2015), and internal factors like skills, knowledge, years of experience (Fredland and Morris, 1976, Gaskill *et al.*, 1993, Shepherd, 2003, Battistella *et al.*, 2017, Mayr *et al.*, 2021), gender (Guzman and Kacperczyk, 2019, Simmons *et al.*, 2019, Brush *et al.*, 2020), as well as the stage of the company or products in their life cycle (Anderson and Zeithaml, 1984, Dodge *et al.*, 1994, Matalamäki, 2017), influence the sales behavior of small-scale business owners could provide valuable insights. Additionally, it would be worthwhile to examine whether a similar typology can be identified for other roles performed by business owners, such as marketing, finance, human resources, and operations. This comprehensive exploration would contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities and variations within entrepreneurial endeavors across different dimensions and functional areas.

For practice, this dissertation will encourage training practitioners to develop and use new, innovative training methodologies to ensure that business failures due to business owners' lack of sales competencies decrease and chances for success increase. These practitioners have a massive opportunity to prevent business owners from leaving their entrepreneurial careers, thereby supporting them to become effective ongoing sellers of flourishing businesses.

As a personal note, I have a specific research interest in the role of selling in the uprising development of Social Entrepreneurship in our society. Social Entrepreneurship aims to

benefit society rather than merely maximize individual profits. It promises an altruistic form of capitalism that does not assess all human activities in business ratios (Tan *et al.*, 2005). This concept can bridge the gap between enterprise and benevolence (Roberts and Woods, 2005). Within this context, for many people, it will sound contractionary that sales activities, with its debatable reputation (Friedman, 1998, Anderson *et al.*, 2020) of egocentric behavior focusing on increasing profits in a capitalistic world, are necessary to launch successful social enterprises. What if increasing the yield for the salesperson (Transactional Selling), the customer, or both (Consultative Selling and Strategic Selling) is no longer central but the yield for society? What does a sales approach look like, then? The combination of Social Entrepreneurship and sales might need and deliver a whole new sales approach, which may be called *Societal Selling*. This development offers an exciting avenue that I would like to research, and I invite other researchers to support this development.

To end with, in the final stage of my dissertation, the field of Artificial Intelligence has experienced a significant breakthrough, thanks to the emergence of tools like Chat GPT, Bard AI and Bing AI. Over the last six months, the impact on research and education has become increasingly evident. I am likely to be one of the last generation of doctoral researchers who did not have the support of these innovative technological tools.<sup>2</sup>

Undoubtedly, the influence of AI on research, education, and our daily lives will continue to grow. Nonetheless, this dissertation also serves as an encouragement to educators and researchers, urging them not to solely focus on the development of technology, but to persist in exploring the distinctive qualities that set humans apart from artificial intelligence. The realm of sales and negotiations, with its intricate dynamics and creative aspects of interpersonal communication within complex environments, provides an exceptional opportunity to delve into these differences. Despite the increasing influence of technology, it is crucial to recognize that in the coming decade, students and professionals in sales roles will continue to have valuable prospects for meaningful employment and significant contributions to our society. It will be my personal goal to contribute to that.

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2 However, I did utilize tools such as Grammarly ([www.Grammarly.com](http://www.Grammarly.com)) to enhance my English writing skills and Synthesia ([www.Synthesia.io](http://www.Synthesia.io)) to create avatars that explained the various behavioral categories of the Entrepreneurial Selling Matrix during my defense.



## APPENDICES

## Appendix A – The Literature Review Approach for this Dissertation

The outcomes of the literature review can be found in Chapter 3. This literature evaluation was conducted based on the phenomenon of Entrepreneurial Selling and all the related themes in this study. The objective was to understand the current status of the field and its relationship with other domains.

The literature specifically used for the individual empirical studies can be found in that corresponding chapter.

Some difficulties emerged during the literature review, however, that do need to be addressed. As pointed out in the Introduction chapter, there remains ambiguity about what the topic of entrepreneurship contains (Gartner, 1990). This dissertation used as its starting point the business owner who acts on its own risk and benefits. This stance leads to articles being interpreted with key attention being paid to the viewpoint of the concerning scholar, with the objective of avoiding information in studies offering a different perspective on entrepreneurship. For example, scholars who note innovation as the underlying assumption for entrepreneurship might include employees from larger organizations, which I disbar in my own studies.

The databases that were used here were Google Scholar, Business Source Ultimate, JSTOR and ProQuest. Entrepreneurship and selling research started to flourish in the mid-1970's (Matthews *et al.*, 2018, Anderson *et al.*, 2020). Thus, the period between 1975 and (mid) 2022 was searched for this work. Table 33 describes the main research domains and keywords (not exclusively). Based on the findings using these keywords, further literature research was conducted using more specific references. That quest delivered 460 sources for this current dissertation.

Research Domain	Keywords
Personal selling research	Sell* OR Sale* (Entrepren OR SME OR "Small Business" OR "Small Business" OR "Small Medium Enterprise*") AND (Sell* OR Sale*) AND (B-to-B OR "business to business")
Entrepreneurship research	Entrepren*
Small Business research	(SME OR "Small Business" OR "Small Business" "Small Medium Enterprise*")
Failure and recovery research	Fail* AND (Entrepren* OR SME OR "Small Business" OR "Small Business") Fail* AND (Sell* OR Sale*)
Entrepreneurial Selling research	Entrepreneurial Selling (SME OR "Small Business" OR "Small Business" OR "Small Medium Enterprise Sell*")
Personal Selling training and Coaching research	(Train* OR Coach* OR Educat*) AND (Sell* OR Sale*) AND (SME OR "Small Business" OR "Small Business" OR "Small Medium Enterprise*")

TABLE 33: Research Domain and Keywords Used in Literature Review in this Dissertation

## Appendix B – Interview Guide (Study 1 – Chapter 4)

### Participant Consent Form

Principal Investigator: \_\_\_\_\_ [Student Name] \_\_\_\_\_

*please tick or initial where applicable*

- I have carefully read and understood the Participant Information Sheet.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study, and I have received satisfactory answers.
- I understand I am free to withdraw from the study at any time, without having to give a reason for withdrawing, and without prejudice.
- I agree to take part in this study.
- I understand that by taking part in this study I may be exposed to situations that may generate some psychological distress that may become apparent during and/or after the study has finished. I accept the small risk of experiencing psychological distress as part of this research
- I also consent to the retention of this data under the condition that any subsequent use also be restricted to use on research projects that have gained ethical approval from the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences.

Signature of Participant ..... Date .....

(NAME IN BLOCK LETTERS) .....

Signature of Student Researcher ..... Date .....

(NAME IN BLOCK LETTERS) .....

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### Section A: Personal information (Fill in before the Interview as far ahead as Possible)

A1 Name

A2 Sex

A3 Date of Birth

A4 Telephone Number

A5 E-mail address

A6 Name of Company

A7 Start Work Date for the Company  
(month/year)

A8 Location of the Company

## Section B: Interview Questions: General Information about the Entrepreneur

In Section B you want to gather background and general information about the entrepreneurs and their former company

**Tip:** The questionnaire consists of main questions and sub-questions.

Make sure the entrepreneur answers the main questions, and if the answer is too short, please use the sub-questions to elicit more of the story.

	Questions	Notes
	<b>How did you become an entrepreneur?</b>	
B1	What was your motive for becoming an entrepreneur?	
B2	What characterizes you as an entrepreneur?	
B3	What personality traits characterize you as an entrepreneur?	
	<b>Could you tell me something about your background?</b>	
B4	Did you work as a paid employee before you started your company? Could you tell me something about those experiences?	
B5	Could you tell me something about your work experience and education?	
B6	Is this the first company you started?	

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	In which sector are (or were) you active?	
B7	What type of company did you have?	
B8	What kind of product or service does/did you have?	
B9	What kind of service does/did your company have?	
B10	How innovative were/are your products or service?	
B11	What has changed over the course of time?	

## Section C: Interview Questions: Company History

In Section C you will discuss the history of the company.

**Tip:** Ask about the beginning of the company, the expectations, and the business plan or idea that was thought out/conceived. Which plans did the entrepreneur have and which of those have been realised?

	Questions	Notes
	<b>What is the history of the company?</b>	
C1	Is the company a family business?	
C2	What is/was your role within the company?	
C3	Did you collaborate with family members within your company? If so, please describe how.	
C4	Did you grow up with entrepreneurs around you? (For example, family members or close friends)	
C5	What do the people around you think of you as an entrepreneur?	
	<b>How is/was your company organized?</b>	
C6	What did you do in the company? Can you describe a normal day of work?	
C7	Can you describe the relationships between you and your employees?	
C8	Can you say something about the size of your company and the way it was organized?	
	<b>What did you learn from being an entrepreneur?</b>	
C9	What lessons did you take away from being an entrepreneur?	



## Section D: Interview Questions: To Signal Problems while Being an Entrepreneur

In Section D you discussed the problems that the entrepreneur faced.

**Tip:** Ask the entrepreneur how he/she took care of the problems and what this process meant emotionally for him or her. Ask for more detail about the process of emotional and financial recovery.

	Questions	Notes
	<b>How did the problems in this company arise?</b>	
D1	When and why did the problems in the company appear?	
D2	How did you notice the company's performance had started to decrease? Or did the situation go very hard and rapidly?	
D3	What would you have done differently? <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• to avoid the problems?</li><li>• to change course faster?</li><li>• to mitigate the negative consequences?</li></ul>	
D4	What did the (possible) discontinuation of the company mean to you financially? What did it mean to you personally?	
D5	Did the problems lead to negative reactions of the people around you?	
	<b>What is the current situation of your company?</b>	
D6	Has there been a moment where you started seeing opportunities again?	
D7	When was that moment? What opportunities did you see?	
D8	Did you consider a restart of the company? If so, what was the reasoning behind it?	

## Section E: Interview Questions: Network Effects

**In Section E you discuss the network. A network can be a source of knowledge and help, which can be helpful when going through hardships.**

**Tip:** Ask for the reaction of the people who have been involved in an individual and business way. Ask how the entrepreneur met or got to know these people, how these people helped and what their relationship is currently like now.

	Questions	Notes
	<b>How did your network help you?</b>	
E1	Did you talk about your company with other people?	
E2	With whom did you share the problems first?	
E3	Who offered help or support?	
E4	What were the reactions of your personal and business contacts?	
E5	Was there a negative influence from employees or external parties?	

## Section F: Interview Questions: The Role of the Financial Advisor

In Section F, the role of the financial advisor during different phases is discussed.

A financial advisor is defined as a 1) accountant 2) tax advisor 3) bank, or 4) independent financial advisor who is not an accountant, tax advisor, or bank. If multiple financial advisors were involved, please specify which advisor/s you are discussing.

**Tip:** Ask the entrepreneur which advisor(s) was/were involved in which phase. and which topics were advised by which advisor.

	Questions	Notes
	<b>What role did your advisor have when there were no problems yet?</b>	
F1	Who was/were your financial advisor(s) during your entrepreneurship? Give a brief description of each type of advisor.	
F2	How many times did you speak to your financial advisor during the good times?	
F3	What subjects did you speak about with your financial advisor?	
	<b>What role did your financial advisor have during the time when the company suffered hardship?</b>	
F4	What role did the financial advisor play to signal that there were problems in your company?	
F5	What advice did the financial advisor give you to mitigate the problems?	
F6	How did the financial advisor help you to solve the problems?	
F7	Did the financial advisor refer to any other parties? If yes, which ones? And did you also go to them for advice?	
F8	What advice did these parties give and did it help?	
	<b>What role did your financial advisor play when the company results started to improve again?</b>	
F9	Did the relationship with your financial advisor change? If so, could you indicate what has changed and why?	
F10	In case you switched to a different financial advisor, how did you make that choice?	

## Section G: Interview Questions: The Future

In Section G you asked the entrepreneur how he/she looks at the future. You also ask him/her for tips to help future entrepreneurs. What tips or recommendations do you received?

**Tip:** Pay attention to how the entrepreneur expresses him or herself and try to grasp what he or she means. Use yourself as an example for whose advice could be most relevant.

	Questions	Notes
	What does your future look like (as an entrepreneur)?	
G1	What are your plans for the future of your company?	
G2	What are you most proud of?	
G3	What do you do differently now based on the lessons learned in response to the problems?	
G4	What would you never do again?	
	What advice would you give to future entrepreneurs?	
G5	What would you say to advise the coming generation of entrepreneurs about preparing for tough times?	
G6	What would you like to share with me that I haven't asked about?	

## Appendix C – Interview Participants (Study 1 – Chapter 4)

Code	Gender	Age	Education	Type of Industry	Bankrupt	After Failure
1003	Male	40	University or Higher	Financial Service	No	Continued
1008	Male	61	University or Higher	Financial Service	No	Continued
1017	Male	50	University or Higher	IT, Media and Communication	No	Continued
1019	Male	53	Higher Professional	Technical Industry	No	Continued
1012	Male	58	Unknown	Wholesale	Yes	New comp.
1020	Male	35	University or Higher	Wholesale	No	Stopped
1027	Male	65	Elementary	Wholesale	No	Continued
1021	Male	56	University or Higher	Education and Training	No	Continued
1028	Male	20	Unknown	Consultancy	No	Continued
1041	Male	56	University or Higher	Wholesale	No	Stopped
1042	Male	40	Higher Professional	Education and Training	No	Continued
1044	Male	43	Higher Professional	Wholesale	No	Continued
1045	Male	43	University or Higher	Financial service	No	Continued
1046	Male	45	Higher Professional	Wholesale	No	New comp.
1052	Male	56	University or Higher	Financial service	No	Continued
1053	Male	53	Higher Professional	IT, Media and Communication	No	Continued
1055	Female	53	Higher Professional	IT, Media and Communication	No	Stopped
1056	Female	21	University or Higher	IT, Media and Communication	No	Stopped
1057	Male	60	Higher Professional	IT, Media and Communication	Yes	Stopped
1059	Male	36	Higher Professional	Hospitality	No	Continued
1064	Male	34	University or Higher	Wholesale	No	Continued
1068	Male	52	Higher Professional	Transport, Post, and Storage	Yes	Stopped
1102	Male	52	Secondary Vocational	Consultancy	No	Continued
1103	Male	54	Higher Professional	Installation	No	Continued
1104	Male	35	Higher Professional	Agribusiness	No	Continued
1105	Male	22	Higher Professional	IT, Media, and Communication	No	Continued
1106	Male	53	Secondary Vocational	Wholesale	No	Stopped
1112	Male	56	Secondary Vocational	Construction	No	Continued
1113	Male	54	Higher Professional	Leisure and Sport	No	Continued
1115	Male	22	University or Higher	IT, Media, and Communication	No	Continued

TABLE 34: Details on the Interview Participants (Study 1)

## Appendix D – Interview Guide (Study 2 – Chapter 5)

### Section A: Personal Information

A1 Name

A2 Gender

A3 Date of Birth

A4 Telephone

A5 E-mail address

A6 Name of Company

A7 Start date of the Company  
(Month / Year)

A8 Location of the Company

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**In Section B, you want to gather general information about the entrepreneur, his/her background and his/her product or service.**

	Start with a general introduction round. Total interview time will be 1:30 hours	<b>Reasons for asking these questions from the perspective of the literature research and theoretical framework for this study</b>
<b>2 min</b>	<b>How did you become a business owner?</b>	
B1	What was your motive to start a business?	Introduction and background question
B2	Is this your first company? If not, how many enterprises have you started and how many do you have now?	Lack of experience is a common cause for failure (Shepherd, 2003)
<b>3 min</b>	<b>Could you tell us something about your background?</b>	
B3	Can you tell us something about your work experience role and education before you started as an entrepreneur?	Lack of experience is a common cause for failure (Shepherd, 2003)
B4	Do you have sales experience? Or have you gained sales skills and/or knowledge via your education?	Lack of experience is a common cause for failure (Shepherd, 2003)

3 min	In which industry were you or are you still active?	
B5	<i>What kind of company is it (what industry and # employees do/did you have? Is it a family company?)</i>	Background question
B6	<i>What kind of product or service do you offer / was offered by your company?</i>	Background question
B7	<i>How do/did you distinguish yourself from the competition?</i>	Background question to understand if and how the entrepreneur evaluates his/her distinctiveness against the competition, as this is an important task for a sales and account- manager to address, analyze, and communicate.

**In Section C you go into detail about the view of the entrepreneur regarding sales activities.**

	Questions	Explanation of reasons for asking these questions from the perspective of the literature research and theoretical framework of the study
12 min	<b>What is your view of sales activities? And what is the view received your salespeople?</b>	
C1	What is your view on salespeople?	A positive or negative view in general on salespeople may influence their personal entrepreneurial effort in their selling role
C2	What is your description of a good Sales- or Account manager? Can you offer and describe an example? What characteristics are involved? To which extent do you also have these characteristics?	Does the entrepreneur actively engage in thinking about the selling profession and how to perform it well? Does he/she learn from examples?
C3	What according to you is the most important development for the sales profession?	Does the entrepreneur actively engage in thinking about the selling profession and gather and follow the latest developments in the profession? Does that think fit the developments described by sales scholars?
C4	What is your definition of sales? Where is the border between Marketing- and Sales activities?	Where does the entrepreneur draw the line between personal selling and marketing? It is important to understand if the described personal selling activities are on the same page as the definition noted in the doctoral dissertation.

**In Section D you will gain more understanding about what the organization looks like and how sales fits in it. Furthermore, you will ask about his/her own sales role.**

	Questions	Explanation for asking these questions from the perspective of the literature research and theoretical framework of the research
25 min	(sales)organisatie en eigen salesrol	
D1	What does your selling organization look like?	Personal selling is a fundamental entrepreneurial activity (Matthews <i>et al.</i> , 2018) and thus, it is important to understand how the entrepreneur organizes and bring structure to his/her sales activities
D2	What is your role in the sales activities? What does a normal working day look like for you? What role does sales play in your daytime schedule?	Scholars (Onyemah <i>et al.</i> , 2013, Onyemah and Rivera-Pesquera, 2017) claim that entrepreneurs should be their first salesperson, at least directly after launching the product. What is the opinion of the entrepreneur on this statement and view?
D3	What are the (dis)advantages of doing sales activities yourself?	Understanding how entrepreneurs on the one hand think about the advantages that scholars see in performing one's own personal selling task (Onyemah <i>et al.</i> , 2013, Onyemah and Rivera-Pesquera, 2017) and on the other hand the struggles for the resources that we see from reviewing the Entrepreneurial Selling literature (Deutsch and Wortmann, 2011, Onyemah <i>et al.</i> , 2013, Onyemah and Rivera-Pesquera, 2017)
D4	You choose to carry out the sales activities within your organization yourself. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why did you make this choice?</li> <li>• How much time do you spend on sales activities each week?</li> </ul> If the entrepreneurs choose to delegate. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why do you choose to let somebody else perform the sales activities?</li> <li>• How do you manage the sales employees?</li> </ul>	How much priority does the entrepreneur give to this fundamental entrepreneurial activity (Matthews <i>et al.</i> , 2018)? It is important to understand if the entrepreneur makes conscious choices about personal selling or does not.
D5	Do you have a sales plan? Can you describe it for me?	Understand whether the choice is made to use Causational, Effectuation, or a Disinhibition approach toward Entrepreneurial Selling and if this choice is deliberately being made.
D6	A few questions about acquisition: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you get new customers?</li> <li>• What does your approach for acquiring new customers look like?</li> <li>• What role does your professional network play to acquire new customers?</li> </ul>	Understand what personal selling concepts are used by the entrepreneur to acquire new customers: Transactional, relationship, or strategic selling or one of the subcategories. Or is that concept distinctive from current personal selling literature. This question aligns with the following research question: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do personal selling activities differ for entrepreneurs in their sales role compared to sales employees and their role?</li> </ul>
D7	A few questions about returning/existing customers:           How often do you visit returning/existing customers?           What does your approach to retain customers look like?	Understand what personal selling concepts are used by the entrepreneur to retain customers: Transactional, relationship or strategic selling or one of the subcategories. Or is yours distinctive from current personal selling literature. This question is aligned with the following research question: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do personal selling activities differ for entrepreneurs in their sales role compared to those of sales employees?</li> </ul>



D8	How is social media (social selling) used for new customers?	B2B salespeople have begun for a few years now to utilize social media in their professional endeavors (Moore <i>et al.</i> , 2013). With this question, we are trying to understand how the entrepreneur has used social media selling.
D9	Do you get advice and training on commercial activities? If yes, how? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have you had some advice in the past about personal selling?</li> <li>• Did you follow any of that training or educational program with regard to sales?</li> </ul>	Many entrepreneurs have a financial advisor, so the focus of this question is if such is also the case for this “fundamental entrepreneurial activity”(Matthews <i>et al.</i> , 2018). Training can be an important way to transfer knowledge about sales to salespeople. This question also aligns with the following research question. How can we teach, train, and coach (future) entrepreneurs to perform their personal selling roles most effectively?
D10	When was the last time you launched a new product on the market? How did the development process go and in what ways were your potential customers involved?	Is their alignment with the literature where co-production is an important strategic personal selling activity, do entrepreneurs actively engage in this type of selling?

**In Section E, the failure experience is discussed. The objective here is to determine what role that sales activities have within the company and how they are carried out before, during, and after failure.**

	Questions	Explanation/The goal for asking these questions is to use the perspective of the literature research and theoretical framework
25 min	<b>The failure experience and the role of sales before, during, and after a period of failure.</b>	
E1	I understand that you had to deal with a major setback (if you know what that setback was, you can also explicitly mention it, i.e., a bankruptcy, firing employees, voluntary cancellation) by asking a few questions about this setback: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What setback did you have within your company?</li> <li>• If you know what setback, say” I understand that some while ago x happened. Could you tell me more about it?”</li> <li>• What signals did you see before the problems appeared?</li> <li>• What role did the sales activities have in connection to the problems?</li> </ul>	This E1 question helps us better understand how the entrepreneurs makes sense of their periods of failure in the context of personal selling. Therefore, there are core questions. E1 directly leads to the following research questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In which ways does personal selling play a role <b>before</b>, during and after a period of business failure of an entrepreneur in a small enterprise? And what can we learn from it?</li> <li>• How does the entrepreneur make sense of personal selling behavior before, during and after a period of failure?</li> </ul>
E2	And about the potential recovery from the setback: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What happened then?</li> <li>• How did you recover, and what did the potential restart look like?</li> <li>• Where does your company currently stand?</li> <li>• What role did the sales activities play in the (potential) recovery of the company?</li> </ul>	This question also leads to the following research questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In which ways does personal selling play a role before, <b>during</b>, and <b>after</b> a period of business failure of an entrepreneur of a small enterprise? What can we learn from understanding it?</li> <li>• How does the entrepreneur make sense of his/her personal selling behavior before, <b>during</b>, and <b>after</b> a period of failure?</li> </ul>

E3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A few questions about your business network:</li> <li>• How did you deal with your business network during this period? Have you notified your business network of the setback? If so, how?</li> <li>• What were the reactions of your business network?</li> <li>• Did you use your business network to recover? If yes, how?</li> </ul>	<p>This question also leads to specific research questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In what way does personal selling play a role before, <b>during</b>, and after a period of business failure of an entrepreneur of a small enterprise? And what can we learn from it?</li> <li>• How does the entrepreneur make sense of his/her personal selling behavior before, <b>during</b>, and after a period of failure?</li> </ul>
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**Section F discusses how the entrepreneur sees his/her future and what future role of sales activities.**

	Questions	Explanation for asking these questions from the perspective of the literature research and theoretical framework
15 min	The future and those sales activities	
F1	<p>A few questions on the potential changes in the sales activities after the setback:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did you approach sales activities differently after the setback? Why did you make this choice? If so, how did you make it?</li> <li>• And did you also change your approach toward returning/existing customers? If yes, how?</li> </ul> <p>(This question also applies to a negative answer, i.e., “if no, why not?”)</p>	<p>The F questions are important because we like to understand if the perception and the practical activities on personal selling have changed after a failure. This focus directly leads to the research question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does the entrepreneur make sense of his/her personal selling behavior before, during, and <b>after</b> a period of failure?</li> </ul> <p>Further, we try to understand if they have changed their approach because of the pain they suffered from the failure. For instance, do they now take a more consultative or even a strategic approach and is it distinctive from that is the current personal selling literature?</p>
F2	<p>A few questions about your future as an entrepreneur in relation to future sales:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you see your future as an entrepreneur?</li> <li>• What kind of adjustments do you want to make even more in the future in the sales area?</li> <li>• If we look at COVID, have you changed your Sales approach after this period of crisis?</li> <li>• How do you want to develop yourself or your employees in the area of sales?</li> </ul>	<p>F2 adds more information to the answers for F1, about whether the entrepreneur had or did not change t right now but is still considering change for the future. This focus leads directly to the research question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does the entrepreneur make sense of his/her personal selling behavior before, during, and <b>after</b> a period of failure?</li> </ul> <p>Furthermore, we want to understand if and how the entrepreneur is willing to learn in his/her sales role. This answer directly leads to the research questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can we make (future) entrepreneurs aware of the importance of their personal selling role for the future success of their enterprise?</li> <li>• How can we teach, train, and coach (future) entrepreneurs to perform their personal selling role the most effectively?</li> </ul>

F3	<p>Advice for future entrepreneurs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What advice would you like to give to the future generation of entrepreneurs?</li><li>• And what advice specifically, on their sales activities?</li></ul>	<p>With this question we try to understand how we can help future entrepreneurs avoid making mistakes in their sales role. This answer directly leads to the research questions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How can we make (future) entrepreneurs more aware of the importance of their personal selling role for the future success of their enterprise?</li><li>• How can we teach, train, and coach (future) entrepreneurs to perform their personal selling role more effectively?</li></ul>
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## Appendix E – Interview Participants (Study 2 – Chapter 5)

No.	Date	Gender	Age	Education	Relation to Interviewer	# of People	Type of Industry	Existing #years	Family Business	Former Sales Experience
1	okt-20	Male	45	Intermediate school degree	Yes, coaching sessions	15	Financial Services	>30	Yes	Yes
2	okt-20	Male	28	Master's, not graduated	Yes, assignment for AUAS	1	Food	2	Just started	No
3	nov-20	Male	64	Bachelor's degree	No, via friend	48	Technical Installations	74	No	No
4	nov-20	Male	43	Bachelor's degree	No, connected via neighbor	4	Storage	11	No	No
5	nov-20	Male	48	Master's degree	No, via wife	3	Store Format Designer	8	No	No
6	nov-20	Male	60	Master's degree	No, via former colleague	90	Secondment / Recruitment	29	No	Yes
7	nov-20	Male	27	Master's degree	No, via student	35	AR/VR Technology	5	No	No
8	dec-20	Male	53	Master's degree	yes, family related	15	IT	30 / 13	No	No
9	dec-20	Male	56	Bachelor's degree	No, via friend	135	Technical Installations	74	Yes	No
10	dec-20	Female	34	Master's degree	No, via colleague	1	Product Development Consultancy	4	No	Yes
11	feb-21	Female	35	Master's degree	Yes, colleague	1	Coaching	6	No	Yes
12	feb-21	Male	52	Master's degree	Yes, former side job (<15Y)	200	Employee Satisfaction Surveys	24	No	Yes

TABLE 35: Details on the Interview Participants (Study 2)

## Appendix F – Collaborating Organizations for the Small Business Index

### **University of Applied Sciences Utrecht**

Contact: Lex van Teeffelen

Website: [www.hu.nl/vakgebieden/economie-en-management.nl](http://www.hu.nl/vakgebieden/economie-en-management.nl)

### **Qredits**

Website: [www.qcredits.nl](http://www.qcredits.nl)

### **ONL voor Ondernemers**

Website: [www.onl.nl](http://www.onl.nl)

## Appendix G – Questionnaire (Translated from the Dutch) with Referencing the Bird-In-Hand Principle (Study 3)

The Small Business Index was created in 2020 and is an initiative of 'Qredits' in collaboration with 'ONL' and the 'University of Applied Sciences Utrecht'. Small businesses are by far the largest group of companies in the Netherlands, and together they form the engine of the Dutch economy. All of those small business owners and the self-employed are also essential in keeping the Dutch business climate healthy and innovative. Given that key impact, we think it is important to know and measure how small businesses are doing. This questionnaire starts with a number of profile questions. Then 24 questions are asked about their company for successful completion. This questionnaire complies with all GDPR guidelines. No names, addresses, telephone numbers, IP addresses, or e-mail addresses are requested or were stored.

In italics below the item, you can read the relationship between the first principle of Effectuation of Bird-in-Hand and the question. This connection can be the original means question and/or the sales means question as presented in §1.2.

### 1. What is your gender?

*(Who am I?)*

- Man
- Female
- Otherwise

### 2. What's your age?

*(Who am I?)*

- Under 25
- 25 to 40 years
- 41 to 55 years
- 56 to 70 years
- Older than 70

### 3. How long have you been a business owner?

*(What do I know?)*

- Less than 3 years
- 3 to 5 years
- 6 to 10 years
- 11 to 20 years
- More than 20 years

### 4. As a business owner, do you meet the hours' criterion of the Tax Authorities (1,225 hours)?

*(In the Netherlands, it is possible to use several advantageous tax deductions in a sole proprietorship. The business owners need to meet the hour criterion to benefit from these tax deductions.)*

*(Who am I?)*

- Yes
- No

**5. In which sector are you active?***(Who am I?)*

- Catering industry
- Healthcare and Well-being
- (Retail) Trade
- Automotive
- Business Services
- Transport and Logistics
- Recreation and Events
- ICT
- Engineering, Production, and Construction
- Justice, Security, and Public Administration
- Agriculture, Nature, and Fishing
- Media and Communication
- Culture
- Other

**6. In which province is your company located?***(Who am I?)*

- North-Holland
- South-Holland
- Flevoland
- Utrecht
- Gelderland
- Overijssel
- Friesland
- Groningen
- Drenthe
- Zeeland
- North-Brabant
- Limburg

**7. Where is your company located?***(Who am I?)*

- In a village or small municipality (less than 25,000 inhabitants)
- In a small town (up to 50,000 inhabitants)
- In a medium-sized city (up to 100,000 inhabitants)
- In a large city (up to 250,000 inhabitants)
- In the largest cities (more than 250,000 inhabitants)

**8. Do you employ staff?***(Who am I?)*

- No
- Yes, 1 person
- Yes, 2 to 4 people
- Yes, 5 to 9 people
- Yes, 10 to 49 people
- More than 50 people

**9. What is the highest level of education you have completed?**

*(What do I know?)*

- Primary school
- Lower vocational education
- MBO, Mavo, Havo
- Pre-university education
- HBO/Uni Bachelor
- HBO/Uni Master

**10. Is your company a family business?**

*(Who am I?)*

- Yes
- No

**11. I started my current company because I saw an opportunity in the market.**

*(Who am I?)*

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

**12. I started my current company because I couldn't find a job.**

*(Who am I?)*

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

**13. How do you see the half year ahead of you?**

*(Who I am? What do I know?)*

- My company will grow (significantly) in turnover
- Maybe will not be growing, but it's going in the right direction
- My company will have less revenue, but I can live off it
- I will have to cease and/or look for another job

**14. I mainly serve my customers:**

*(Who am I? Whom do I know? Do I have a current network with potential customers?)*

- Local
- Regional
- National
- International



**15. To continue my business, I do have / need:**

*(Who am I? What do I know?)*

Yes or No

- Sufficient private or company resources available
- More government support
- Additional capital or loans
- A longer tax deferral

**16. What was your turnover in the fourth quarter of 2021?**

*(Who am I?)*

- Less than 1000 euros per month
- Between 1000 and 1500 euros per month
- Between 1500 and 2500 euros per month
- Between 2500 and 5000 euros per month
- Between 5000 and 10000 euros per month
- More than 10000 euros per month

**17. If you compare your revenue in the fourth quarter of 2021 to the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2019, did your revenue increase or decrease?**

*(Who am I?)*

- Decreased sharply (more than 30%)
- Decreased (16% – 30%)
- Stabilized (-15% to +15%)
- Increased (16% – 30%)
- Strongly increased (more than 30%)
- My company was not active in 2019

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**18. What do you think you will earn in the first quarter of 2022?**

*(Who am I?)*

- Much less (30% or less) than in Q1.2020
- Less (10% -30% less) than in Q1.2020
- About the same (between -10% and +10%)
- More (10% – 30% more) than in Q1.2020
- Much more (30% or more) than in Q1.2020

**19. How much money did you withdraw for yourself as salary in the fourth quarter of 2021?**

*(Who am I?)*

- Less than 1250 euros per month
- Between 1250 – 1700 euros per month
- Between 1700 and 2500 euros per month
- Between 2500 and 3500 euros per month
- More than 3500 euros per month

**20. Is that amount more or less than the average withdrawn in 2019?**

*(Who am I?)*

- Much less than in 2019 (30% or less)
- Less than in 2019 (15%-30% less)
- Same as in 2019 (between -15% and +15%)
- More than in 2019 (15% – 30% more)
- Much more than in 2019 (30% or more)
- My company was not active in 2019

**21. As a business owner, are you the only one with an income?**

*(Who am I?)*

- Yes
- No, I have a partner with an income
- No, my partner is also a business owner
- Otherwise

**22. I earn (together with my partner) enough to pay all fixed costs**

*(Who am I?)*

- More than enough
- Just enough
- Not enough

**23. When you employed staff, did you employ more or fewer staff in the fourth quarter than you did before?**

*(Who am I?)*

- I do not employ any staff
- Decreased/fewer staff
- Stayed the same
- Increased/more staff

**24. What was your net margin in the fourth quarter (turnover minus all (wage) costs, except your own wage)?**

*(Who am I?)*

- Less than 5%
- Between 5% and 10%
- Between 11% and 20%
- Between 21% and 30%
- More than 30%

**25. What percentage of your turnover did you invest in the business in the fourth quarter (marketing, ICT, machines, renovation, etc.)?**

*(Who am I?)*

- Less than 5%
- Between 5% and 10%
- Between 11% and 15%
- Between 16% and 25%
- More than 25%

**26. Do you think you will invest more in the first quarter of 2022?**

*(Who am I?)*

- Much less
- A bit less
- Same
- A bit more
- Much more

**27. How important are the following motivations for you to remain an entrepreneur?**

*(Who am I?) (Each item can be answered from very unimportant to very important)*

- The freedom to organize your own time
  - High degree of flexibility for myself and/or family
  - Have better and more exciting work
  - Using my knowledge and skills
  - Challenging myself
  - Making a personal vision come true
  - Achieve something and getting recognition for it
  - Making a positive contribution to the environment and society
  - Getting a better position in society
  - Financial security
  - Earning a better income
  - Increasing the chance of getting rich
  - Building a business that can be continued
  - Follow in the footsteps of my predecessor
  - Continuing a family tradition
- Very unimportant
- Unimportant
- Neither unimportant nor important
- Important
- Very important

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**28. What was your solvency (equity/total capital) in the fourth quarter?**

*(Who am I?)*

- I have negative equity
- 0 to 10%
- 10% to 20%
- 21% to 30%
- 31% to 40%
- 41% or more
- I do not know

**29. Did you have enough money to pay the bills on time in the fourth quarter of 2021?**

*(Who am I?)*

- No, it did not always go well
- Sometimes yes and sometimes no
- Yes, that almost always went well

**30. Do you expect payment on time to improve in the first quarter of 2022?**

*(Who am I?)*

- No, worse
- Same
- Yes, it will get better

**31. My customers are**

*(Who am I? Whom do I know?)*

- Mainly or exclusively consumers (B2C)
- A mix of consumers and businesses
- Mainly or exclusively companies (B2B)

**32. As a business owner, I carry out the sales activities myself**

*(Who am I (as salesperson)?)*

- Barely
- Sometimes yes, sometimes no
- Usually or always

**33. To what extent do you agree with the following statements?**

*(Who am I (as salesperson)? What do I know? Do I have sales experience, skills and/or knowledge?)*

- I see myself as an experienced seller
  - I'm good at selling
  - I like to sell
- Strongly disagree
  - Disagree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Agree
  - Strongly agree and thus,

**34. Have you participated in one or several sales training courses in the past?**

*(What do I know? Do I have sales experience, skills and/or knowledge?)*

- No
- Yes, one course
- Yes, several courses

**To what extent do you agree with the following statements?**

**35. To what extent do you agree with the following statements?**

**Construct – Selling organization**

*(Who am I (as salesperson)? What do I know? Do I have sales experience, skills, and/or knowledge? Each item can be answered from very unimportant to very important)*

- My company evaluates whether our sales results are in line with expectations
  - My company registers customer contacts
  - My company plans the sales activities
  - My company creates a sales plan per each customer
  - My company evaluates the sales calls
  - My company evaluates the quality of these sales calls
- Very unimportant
  - Unimportant
  - Neither unimportant nor important
  - Important
  - Very important

**36. To what extent do you agree with the following statements?**

**Construct – Selling initiative**

*(Who am I (as salesperson)? What do I know? Do I have sales experience, skills and/or knowledge? Who do I know? Do I have a network with potential customers? Each item below can be answered from very unimportant to very important)*

- I am constantly looking for new customers
  - I often interact with my current customers about new sales opportunities
  - I'm always looking for ways to do my sales better
  - If I see an opportunity, I go for it
  - If I see something in our sales process that I don't like, I'll tackle it
  - I excel at spotting sales opportunities
- Very unimportant
- Unimportant
- Neither unimportant nor important
- Important
- Very important

**37. To what extent do you agree with the following statements?**

**Construct – Adaptive selling**

*(Who am I (as salesperson)? What do I know? Do I have sales experience, skills, and/or knowledge? Each item can be answered from very unimportant to very important)*

- I like to experiment with different sales approaches
  - I am flexible in the sales approach I use
  - I adjust my sales approach per customer
  - I vary my sales approach depending on the situation
- Very unimportant
- Unimportant
- Neither unimportant nor important
- Important
- Very important

**38. Have you experienced any stress on a scale of 1-100?**

- 1
- 50
- 100

## Appendix H – The Characteristics of the Dataset of Study 3

Industry	Frequency	Percent
Hospitality	51	18,5
Care	15	5,4
Retail	37	13,4
Automotive	11	4,0
Business Services	44	15,9
Transport	17	6,2
Leisure / Events	11	4,0
IT	10	3,6
Technical, Production, Construction	33	12,0
Justice, Safety, Public Administration	1	0,4
Agriculture, Nature, Fishing	10	3,6
Media, Communication	6	2,2
Culture	6	2,2
Other	24	8,7
<b>Total</b>	<b>276</b>	<b>100,0</b>

TABLE 36: Overview of Different Industries of Participating Business Owners

83,7% of the participants indicated as male, 15,9% indicated as female, and 0,4% indicated as non-binary (Figure 28).

### Gender of business owner

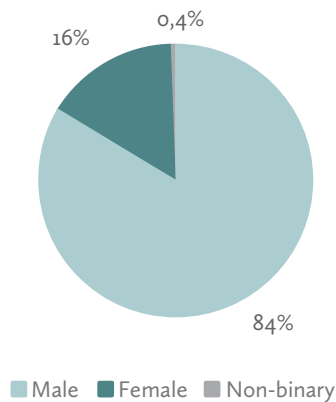


FIGURE 28: Genders of Business Owners

29,3% of the participants were between 25 and 40 years in age, 44,9% were between 41 and 55 years, and 23,2% were between 56 and 70 years (2.5% were older or younger than these noted age groups) (Figure 29).

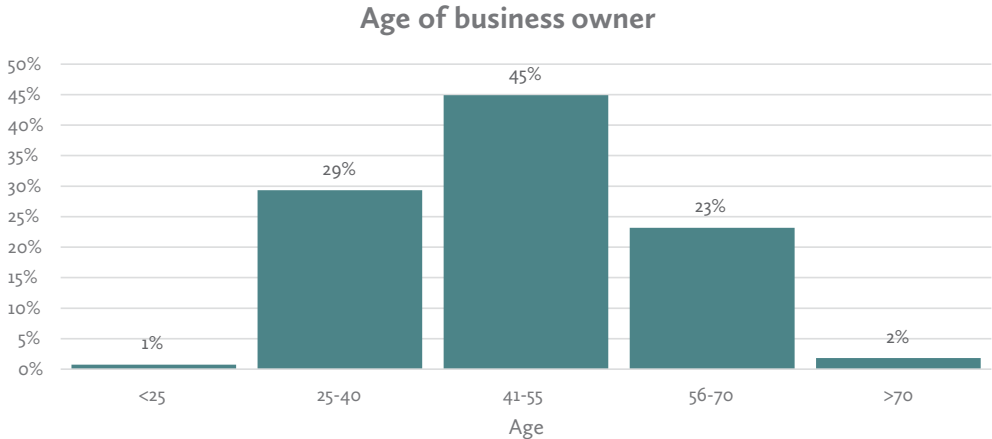


FIGURE 29: Age of Business Owners

91,3% of the enterprises had fewer than ten employees, 8,3% has 10-49 employees and one had more than 50 employees (Figure 30)

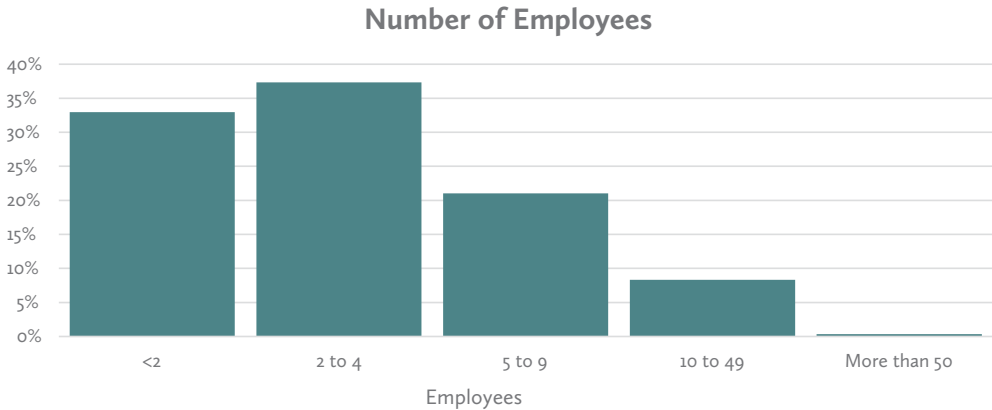
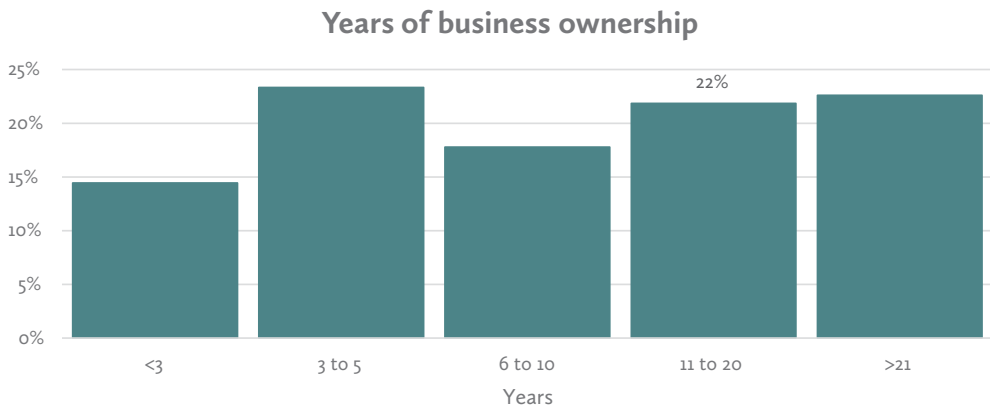


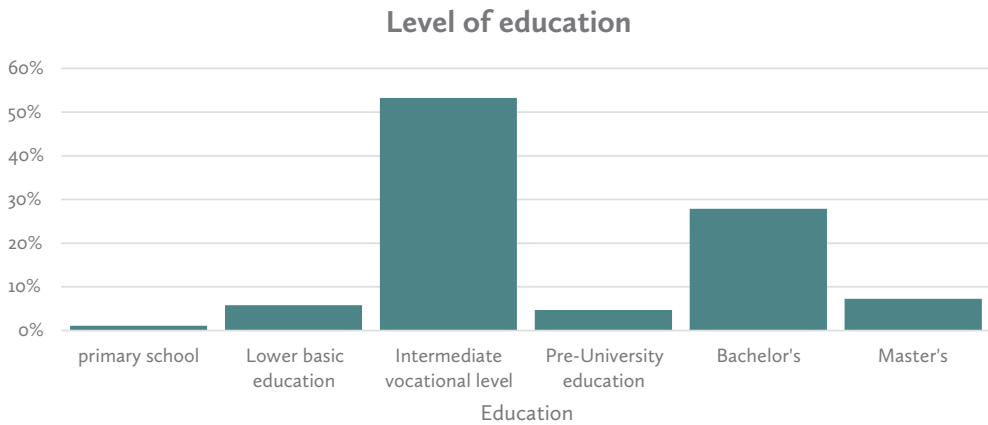
FIGURE 30: Number of Employees

The largest group of participating business owners (24,3%) have owned a business for more than 21 years; 14,1% of the business owners had owned a business for less than three years (Figure 31).



**FIGURE 31: Years of Business Ownership**

The largest group (53,3%) have an intermediate vocational level that includes higher general secondary education. 35,1% of the participants have a bachelor's or master's degree (See Figure 32).



**FIGURE 32: Education Level of Business Owners**



69% of the business owners in the dataset carry out their sales activities and do not delegate this (frequently) to an employee or business partner. 24% sometimes carry out sales activities for their companies, and 7% do not execute sales activities at all (Figure 33).

### Delegate selling or not

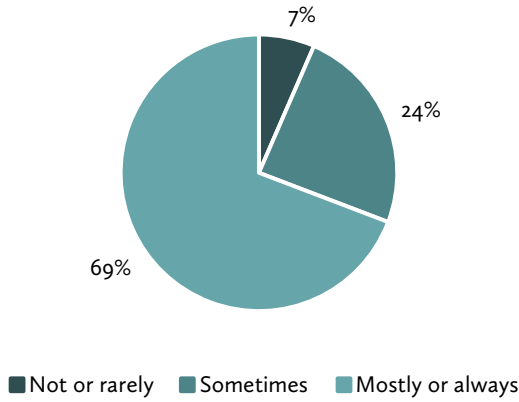


FIGURE 33: Business Owners' Carrying Out Their Own Sales Activities

More than three-quarters (76%) of the business owners have a positive attitude toward doing selling activities, almost three-quarters consider themselves as good (72%) and experienced sellers (71%) (Figure 34).

### Sales attitude, self-efficacy, and experience

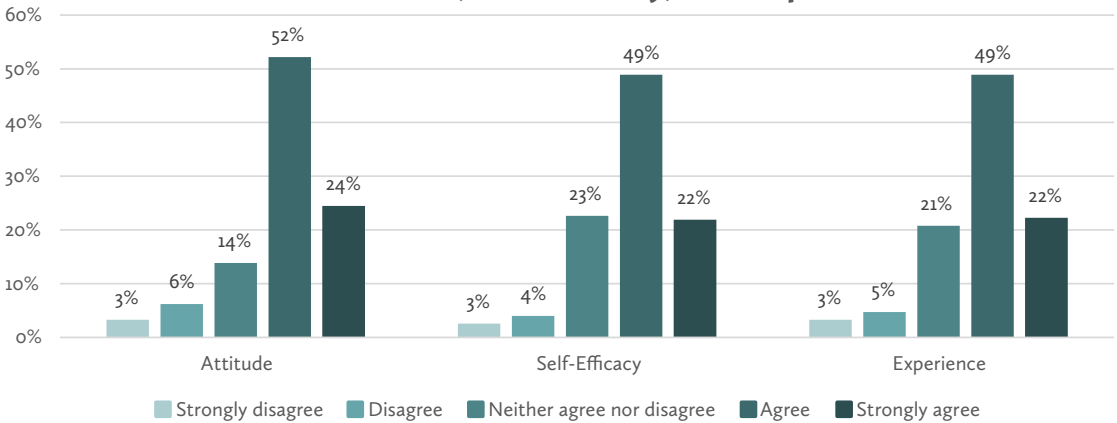


FIGURE 34: Sales Attitude and Self-Efficacy Level of Business Owners

## Appendix I – Collaborating Organizations for the Sales Training Program and Its Applications

### **Visual Facilitator:**

#### **De Kern In Beeld**

Contact: Harriët Robijn

Website: [www.harrietrobijn.nl](http://www.harrietrobijn.nl)

### **Professional Sales Training Organizations:**

#### **Flight Business Development**

Contact: Bart van Beek

Website: [www.flightdevelopment.nl](http://www.flightdevelopment.nl)

#### **Sellingnet**

Ronald Swensson

Website: [www.sellingnet.nl](http://www.sellingnet.nl)

One sales training organization wished to remain anonymous.

### **Artificial Intelligence / Virtual Reality Organizations:**

#### **VR Expert**

Contact: Alex Janmaat

Website: [www.vr-expert.nl](http://www.vr-expert.nl)

#### **Bodyswaps**

Contact: See VR Expert

Website: [www.bodyswaps.co](http://www.bodyswaps.co)

#### **CustomerLytics**

Contact: Willem Verbeke

Website: [www.customerlytics.eu](http://www.customerlytics.eu)

## Appendix J – Entrepreneurs Must Reflect on Their Sales Role and Get in Action! Especially During Covid-19

*This article was derived from the literature study, the twelve interviews of Study 2, and my practical experience. It was accepted by the European Business Review and published in the July/August 2021 magazine edition (de Groot, 2021). Entrepreneurs are synonymous with business owners in this article. This article presents seven sales actions to business owners of small businesses about what they should do on the sales side to get their companies and customers through the crisis. The overarching theme is not to wait but to get into action!*

To have your business survive the COVID-19 epidemic, you must be a true friend to your loyal customers. Covid-19 has hit hard on our society. And to say the least, small businesses worldwide are not spared (Cowling *et al.*, 2020). Although governments in Western societies are financially supporting small business, business failures are unavoidable during the coming months and even after the epidemic. How quickly and to what extent business owners will overcome this crisis is influenced by their attitude and behavior toward the personal selling role. They need to engage with their customers proactively.

Interestingly enough, business owners do not tend to reflect on this vital role right after the start of a crisis. Consequently, they do not always increase their sales effort or adjust their sales approach to influence the outcome. In-depth interviews with ten business owners of small-scale companies active in several B2B markets in the Netherlands revealed that seven just sat down and waited for what would happen. If they do not belong to the lucky ones who automatically benefited from the crisis because of client companies' online needs, they should and must act on their sales if they have the will and desire to survive.

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### **The Selling Behavior of Entrepreneurs After COVID**

Of course, there was one major adjustment that entrepreneurs involuntarily needed to make. They had to replace face-to-face contacts at the office with online meetings on, for example, Zoom or Teams. Entrepreneurs believed this development seemed to be permanent to some extent, even after COVID is under control:

*“Online communication is here to stay, by the way. We have so much turnover from online meetings now, that’s great...also group meetings with customers, of which you always thought, that it is not possible... continue without any problems.”*

But other than that aspect, most of the business owners did not try to influence the outcomes by increasing their sales efforts or changing their sales approach. Some business owners did take actions in other fields to mitigate the pain. For instance, they phased out the flexible shell; spread operational work over a more extended period or discontinued a business unit to lower the costs. However, no deliberate sales actions were rolled out to keep revenues going consistently.

On the acquisition side, we can all imagine that it is hard to acquire new customers in times of great uncertainty. What is more remarkable, however, is that they also did not plan encounters with their current customers. The business world is getting increasingly complex and building long-lasting relations is crucial to protect your company against fierce competition (Sheth and Shah, 2003, Johnston and Marshall, 2005, Ahearne *et al.*, 2007). Within this context, you would expect the first thing you would do is call your loyal customers to understand what their thoughts are on handling the crisis. More and more, you would see suppliers and buyers co-create final solutions and work strategically together.

It is surprising, therefore, that when the need on both sides is the greatest in times of crisis, there are so few deliberate actions to find joint solutions. Relationship selling, the mother of all modern sales approaches intended to create win-win partnerships (Sheth and Shah, 2003, Guenzi *et al.*, 2007), applies in times of great prosperity and is maybe even more critical in times of trouble. In difficult times you get to know your real friends. The same applies to the supplier-buyer relationship. What is striking is that none of these participating business owners created a specific action plan after the start of the pandemic. One of the business owners even believed that there was no value in doing so:

*“I think that it is hard to write a plan on COVID because it will be temporary. Then we will fall back to the old way of doing things (Interview nr. 4).”*

### **The Sales Role Is Indeed Crucial**

The sales role is a crucial role to take on to become successful. A famous business saying is ‘nothing happens until somebody starts selling’<sup>3</sup>. Research shows that the business owner must carry out the sales role even before launching the product. In this way, the entrepreneur gains early feedback and has more clarity on what to build and how to build it. We also know that entrepreneurs should be their own account manager, at least in the company’s early stages, and should not delegate this critical task to an employee (Deutsch and Wortmann, 2011, Onyemah and Rivera-Pesquera, 2017, Dalecki, 2019).

### **Why Don’t Entrepreneurs Act?**

As the selling role is clearly essential for a company, how is it possible that entrepreneurs do not see the necessity to reflect on their selling behavior when an external crisis hits them? Or when they do see it, why are they not able to change?

### **The Many Faces Entrepreneurs Must Show**

One of the answers is that business owners of small businesses have many roles to fulfill for their companies. They are often heavily involved in and responsible for operational activities for product development, marketing, human resources, finance, operations, and sales. The result is that compared to specialized sales departments within larger organizations, the business owner has less time available to perform all these roles adequately (Deutsch and Wortmann, 2011, Onyemah *et al.*, 2013, Onyemah and Rivera-Pesquera, 2017).

### **Entrepreneurs Do Not like sales or They Don’t Know How to Sell**

Another reason is that the sales role is not the favorite role for business owners to perform. They have no affection for it, nor the skills to sell effectively. As one business owner explained:

*“Sales, I knew nothing about it. Now a bit more of course, but still, I am not good at it, and I don’t like it either.”*

The result is that when other urgent daily matters pop up, the business owner is likely to skip the necessary sales tasks:

*“I have 40 things to do, and then I do cherry-picking... If I have nothing to do, I do sales, but I don’t like it that much.”*

### **Entrepreneurs Do Not Think It Is Appropriate to ‘Bother’ Customers in Times of Crisis.**

At the core, it is not a matter of reluctance, but more a feeling of whether this is the right moment to ‘bother’ my customers? ‘they’ probably have other things on their mind. Entrepreneurs do not see, perhaps because of insecurity, the added value they have for customers and how that value fits the modern relationship selling perspective of acting right now:

*“After COVID, I carried out too little sales activities, we are just in a peculiar time, and that makes you think, ‘am I going to call people now?’ It does not feel right to bother them. “*

### **What Should Entrepreneurs Do on the Selling Side in Times of Crisis?**

Based on experience, literature, and qualitative research, an entrepreneur should carry out seven actions on the sales side during times of crisis:

1 – Call your most essential customers today
2 – Brainstorm with your employees (and customers)
3 – Make a short-term crisis sales plan
4 – Plan a fixed weekly sales day in your schedule

3 Attributed to many people: e.g., Henry Ford, Peter Drucker, Thomas Watson, Arthur Motley, and others.

5 – Create supporting content
6 – Keep on acquiring new customers
7 – Invest in sales training and coaching

### **1. Call your most essential customers today**

Make a list of your most important and loyal customers. Call them directly. Be a true friend and concentrate on learning how they are. One participant called his major accounts directly after the lockdown just to show interest in their well-being:

*"I think I just called, and they said, 'Hi, why are you calling me?' And I answered, 'well, I just think it's a super tough time for everyone....'"*

It is no coincidence that this entrepreneur has recovered long before the crisis is over. This calling is part of an active attitude towards sales activities. Using this attitude he built long-term relationships:

*"I think part is customer relationships. Just keep actively approaching people...I think it is part of, for eight years now, delivering reliable, high-quality work."*

Another objective of the telephone call is to make a future appointment. The topic is 'how do we help each other through the crisis'. Do not focus on the transaction but focus on how the advantages originating from collaborating with you benefits your customer to recover from the crisis. Now more than ever. If entrepreneurs show their heart is with the customer during the epidemic, the chances then increase that the customer stays loyal during better times when they occur.

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### **2. Brainstorm with your employees (and customers)**

Entrepreneurs should engage their employees in ongoing brainstorms to gain ideas on what possible various products and service solutions can help (potential) customers through the crisis. They do not have to do it alone! It should be a common challenge. Discuss how employees in other functions than sales can support selling activities. However, everyone in the organization has to feel the urgency and want to contribute.

One business owner did directly act and called his sales team together:

*"On March 10 or so... the team virtually gathered and went through the newspaper together and what is happening in the world and what meaning does this have."*

There also must be an agenda item in the meetings with the customers. The entrepreneur does not have to create all the solutions for customers; they just need to facilitate the thinking process. Just ask customers how they can support their companies to gain new business opportunities.

For one business, the payoff of this brainstorm session was that they changed their business model, which helped them to recover and directly increased their revenues:

*"The new business after the start of COVID, we just had a dramatic second and, actually, third quarter... we have now switched to a subscription model, and that subscription model is perfect for the value of the company."*

### **3. Make a short-term crisis sales plan**

Even in 'normal' circumstances, entrepreneurs do not always work systematically and create a sales plan.

*"We always have the plan to make a plan. And the plan is not there yet..."*

Entrepreneurs should spend a day creating an action-oriented sales plan of 2-3 pages. In short, it should describe the current situation, what the urgency is specifically, and when they will be satisfied—putting these ideas on paper in bullet points about what to do, when, and by whom. They can use this input from the brainstorm session to present during an official internal meeting and share this document with the involved employees. Entrepreneurs can also add backward planning, which shows how many emails, calls, (online) visits still need to be done to fill the gap between the current and the desired future business situation.

**4. Plan a fixed weekly sales day in your schedule**

Entrepreneurs must prioritize their sales activities by choosing one or two fixed (half)days per week to focus solely on selling activities. Nothing may intervene with this plan. Start by making a shortlist and who you want to encounter. Then just do it. The entrepreneur then analyzes and concludes if the steps of the sales plan were carried out that week. In addition, the entrepreneur can plan and schedule fixed moments for the employees to undertake sales activities together. One example is to have a joint acquisition day where everyone must contact at least fifty sales leads.

**5. Create supporting content**

Entrepreneurs should send customers regular (social media) content on how to get through this crisis successfully. The brainstorming sessions can help generate this content. Entrepreneurs can make a personalized presentation or use other input (chapters, academic papers, blogs, vlogs, etc.) on the crisis. These items give added value to those customers who are the most appreciated or the ones who can become very valuable. Entrepreneurs can use the content to profile themselves as being a helping hand to customers on social media and also as useful input for the next sales meetings.

This entrepreneur acted very fast:

*“So, after that first week (of the lockdown) we immediately thought ‘hey, you know, how do you do that online with your team and what tips or tricks do you use, I made a kind of two pager out of it with what do you need to be successful...and I shared it widely on LinkedIn and with my customers”*

**6. Keep on acquiring new customers**

It is obviously not easy to gain new customers during a crisis. Still, the entrepreneur must act. No matter how hard you try to help your customers, not all client companies will survive the crisis. At the very least, you must lay down a clear foundation for new customers in the future. Here, the entrepreneur should not focus on direct transactions, but rather work to build trust. For most entrepreneurs, getting cold acquisitions is a challenging and often unsatisfying job. The entrepreneur needs to set the goal for the number of potentials they will approach every week. Furthermore, the business owner needs to analyze whether they can discover more (luke)warm potential in their surroundings, with network organizations, sports clubs, family members of employees, and connections on social media.

**7. Invest in sales training and coaching**

Sales training and coaching may not be the first thing entrepreneurs think of when things are going badly. Still, entrepreneurs should reflect on whether they have enough competencies to conduct their sales activities effectively. If not, training may even become the first step in this process. Selling is a profession that needs skills that entrepreneurs can acquire, and many entrepreneurs do not realize that truth well enough. Most of the interviewed business owners have never received training or coaching for this crucial role. Entrepreneurs should not be pennywise pound-foolish, but instead invest in their own and their employee’s sales development. Business owners who have done so in the past know it pays off:

*“Fantastic, we did have a very good training once...which followed the steps of what is your current situation, what is your desired situation, analysis of the gap, which solutions do we have, check the problems with each solution, this is indeed the solution for your problem, okay, next step, next step, closing the deal.”*

Another business owners added: *“And then came < the sales trainer>. I still remember his statement; he said sales is just a military organization. We had three sessions. So, the sales funnel was introduced. And the sales pitch. Oh yeah, and then how to sell. That pulled the switch that I was not doing it right.”*

If there is no money, entrepreneurs must look to see if there is someone with sales experience in their network and ask that individual for support.

**Increasing the opportunity to survive and succeed**

Some things just happen to you in life. COVID-19 is a good example. Ultimately, we have to deal with the cards that are dealt us. Most companies have received bad cards because of the epidemic. Entrepreneurs cannot mitigate all risks of course, but they will increase their opportunity to survive by playing their given sales cards well. To limit the damage, business owners must pick up their sales role right now and act on the seven steps!



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