



Tensions Within The Sales Ecosystem: A Multi-Level Examination of the Sales-Marketing Interface

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3 **Purpose:** The study's goal is to understand one portion of the sales ecological system. We focus
4 on the mesolevel or intra-organizational system that includes the sales and marketing functions.
5 We examine distinct tensions at three levels of the firm's hierarchy and examine the mechanisms
6 used to manage the tensions
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11 **Design/methodology/approach:** The authors use a qualitative data collection. A discovery-
12 oriented process is used to understand the interconnections that exist among marketing-sales
13 dyads at three organizational levels across several firms.
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18 **Findings:** We uncover distinct tensions and defenses exhibited by managers at each hierarchical
19 level and we present mechanisms that can be used to reduce the tensions
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24 **Research limitations/implications:** Our multi-level perspective demonstrates the value of
25 examining the intra-organizational aspect of the sales ecosystem. We use a qualitative approach
26 to highlight that sales-marketing tensions are unique to each of the hierarchical levels. We
27 demonstrate that the tensions are a function of the unique roles each sales and marketing
28 executive has within the organization.
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34 **Practical implications:** To make the sales and marketing interface more effective, managers
35 need to view tensions across the sales-marketing interface as complementary versus opposing
36 forces. Managers must balance these tensions, rather than fight them and/or select one of the
37 alternatives over the other. We suggest that paradoxical thinking may be a valued skillset for
38 managers at each level of the organization.
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44 **Originality/value:** Our study utilizes a unique qualitative dataset that examines the sales-
45 marketing interface across three levels of an organizational hierarchy. Through this approach,
46 we delineate specific tensions between marketing and sales within each level of the firm. We
47 also describe mechanisms to manage the tensions common within the sales-marketing interface.
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Introduction

Sales researchers note the dynamic changes occurring within the sales process (Singh et al. 2019). The complexity of sales has increased, including the number of parties involved in purchasing and providing solutions. In effect, the selling process can now be considered an ecosystem of “creating and institutionalizing solutions.” (Singh et al. 2019, p.9).

With the increasing number of disparate parties playing a role within this value creation ecosystem, alignment amongst the parties is critical. Two parties that serve important roles within the sales ecosystem are marketers and sales professionals. Despite the need for coordination and synchronization between these parties, a suboptimal marketing-sales interface continues to plague many firms (Hulland Nenkov, and Barclay 2012), and an emerging body of research captures the perceptual disparities inherent within the relationship of these two critical organizational entities charged with creating and delivering customer value. Often described as the collision of the two functions’ thought worlds (Homburg and Jensen 2007) or their distinctive mindsets (Rouzies et al 2005); these perceptual disparities describe the polarization in perceived worldviews between marketing and sales personnel (Deshpandé and Webster 1989). The literature describes several such distinctions, including that of customer versus product mindsets, personal relationships versus analysis relationships, short-term versus long-term orientations (Rouzies et al. 2005); and barring a few exceptions (Homburg and Jensen 2007), research has demonstrated that these perceived distinctions may serve as antecedents to many problematic issues that interface personnel continually confront and that inhibit the effective functioning of the enterprise.

Existing studies on this topic tend to focus at one hierarchical level of the firm, be it at the executive, mid-manager, or frontline (customer-facing) level, or make no distinctions across

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3 different levels, treating tensions as equivalent. Yet the managerial literature asserts that mid-
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5 level and front-line personnel confront distinct challenges to those faced by senior executives
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7 due to the former's focus on operational planning, communication, and execution and the latter's
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9 concern with broader strategic issues (e.g., Mantere 2008; Huy 2001, Kraut et al 1989). The
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11 theory on ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner 1979) affirms that organizations operate within
12
13 nested and interconnecting structures, and understanding these interactions is of increasing value.
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15 This suggests an opportunity for research at these three distinct levels. A large portion of the
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17 literature focuses on the negative consequences that result from the perceptual disparities within
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19 the interface. However, the potential for positive consequences also may result from tensions
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21 embedded in the interface if managed correctly (Homburg and Jensen 2007).
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27 In this paper, we delve into these less understood areas of the interface and this portion of
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29 the sales ecosystem. We examine an ecological system within the organization. Specifically, our
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31 focus is on three different levels of corporate sales and marketing hierarchies and their
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33 contrasting mindsets. We also explore the emerging implications of this ecological system. We
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35 identify specific defense mechanisms that arise from these tensions along with managerial
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37 practices that may facilitate or inhibit the effectiveness of the marketing strategy process across
38
39 the three levels. This enables us to gain a more nuanced understanding of the interface and
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41 generate useful insights that will guide both scholars and practitioners.
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45 We investigate these phenomena via a discovery-oriented process (Deshpande 1983;
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47 Kohli & Jaworski 1990) that allows us to leverage and significantly expand upon our existing
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49 knowledge of the contradictions within the interface. From a conceptual standpoint, we suggest
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51 that tensions within the interface reveal paradoxes that exist within today's organizations and its
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53 ecological system. A paradox describes the "contradictory yet interrelated elements—elements
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3 that seem logical in isolation but absurd and irrational when appearing simultaneously” (Lewis,
4 2000, p.760). We integrate depth interview data collected from 21 sales-marketing dyads (i.e., 42
5 managers) at different levels within the sales-marketing hierarchy with the theoretical
6 perspectives rooted within the paradox and ecological systems literature to explicate the tensions
7 inherent at different levels in the strategic marketing process, and in turn, offer several
8 contributions to academic and managerial thought.
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11 First, our multi-level data evaluating an intra-organizational sales system allows us to
12 explicate how tensions are distinct at each level. This is unique, as the literature typically
13 describes the tensions in a broad-brush manner without exploring their nuances and
14 manifestations at various organizational levels and the operational ramifications therein. Second,
15 we describe the specific mechanisms used to manage these tensions and each mechanism’s
16 respective effect on the strategic sales and marketing process, be it positive or negative. From a
17 managerial standpoint, our results show that these paradoxical tensions are often inherent within
18 the firm and that today’s marketing and sales personnel must be well-versed in an additional skill
19 set, that of paradox management techniques.
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37 **Literature Review**

38 ***The Marketing – Sales Interface***

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40 Extant literature asserts that both sales and marketing functions play a crucial role in the
41 marketing strategy-making process (e.g., Malshe and Sohi, 2009). Scholars also argue that
42 greater collaboration, integration, and coordination between sales and marketing are necessary
43 for firms to successfully navigate the various challenges inherent within strategy creation and
44 strategy implementation domains in route to delivering superior customer value (Hughes, Le
45 Bon, and Malshe 2012).
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3 In most firms, marketing and sales departments are organized into hierarchies; and people
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5 at different levels within the respective hierarchies possess different authority, have different job
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7 functions, and are tasked with different sets of responsibilities. For example, at senior levels,
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9 marketing (e.g., CMO, VP-Marketing) and sales (e.g., VP-Sales) personnel perform mostly
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11 strategic functions such as outlining broad marketing and sales strategies (Ingram et al 2008). At
12
13 the middle-manager level, marketing and sales personnel serve as the hub in the strategic process
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15 between strategy formation and implementation (Noble and Mokwa 1999), and on the front-line,
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17 they are engaged primarily in operational activities (Ingram et al 2008).
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22 Scholars have highlighted the many differences in sales and marketing's thought worlds,
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24 cultural frames of references, and/or mindsets that drive the two entities apart and lead to lack of
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26 cooperation, collaboration, and integration coupled with a sense of animosity; however, they
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28 have not explored the meaningful differences that may exist across organizational levels. This is
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30 evidenced in the abundance of research that focuses on a single level within the interface as a
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32 unit of analysis (Dawes and Massey, 2005; Massey and Dawes, 2007; Homburg and Jensen
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34 2007; Homburg, Jensen, and Krohmer 2008; Le Meunier FitzHugh, Massey, and Piercy 2011) or
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36 that combines data from sales, marketing, and other functional personnel in the analysis, many
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38 times across multiple organizational hierarchies (Malshe and Sohi 2009a, 2009b; Guenzi and
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40 Troilo 2007; Beverland, Steel, and Dapiran 2006; Dewsnap and Jobber 2009; Le Meunier
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42 FitzHugh and Piercy 2011). As a result, broad-based conclusions have been drawn about the
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44 dysfunctional disparities within the interface, with scant work specifically teasing apart the
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46 distinctions within interface tensions across hierarchical levels and their (potentially) differential
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48 deleterious effects, and/or discriminating which strategies may help mend these differences at
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50 various levels. This represents an important gap in the academic literature.
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3 As such, we examine one element of the organization's ecological system
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5 (Bronfenbrenner 1979), that of the mesosystem, a system of structure and social interactions
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7 among multiple actors within the organization. Our approach is to illustrate the value of studying
8
9 multiple levels to understand the interconnections among the different actors within a multi-level
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11 structure.
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14 ***Paradox***

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17 Our approach is grounded in the theoretical foundation of paradox. A paradox describes
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19 a "situation where two apparently contradictory tensions appear to be simultaneously credible
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21 and where resolution is pursued in a non-exclusionary way" (O'Driscoll 2008, page 96). As
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23 such, these contradictions "can simultaneously exist, or at least can be potentiated, in the same
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25 thing" (Mick and Fournier, 1998, p.124). Within marketing, the notion of paradox has been
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27 evoked in a range of areas including that of consumer behavior (Mick and Fournier 1998; Otnes
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29 et al. 1997); new product development (Atuahene Gima 2005); marketing capabilities (Slotegraaf
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31 and Dickson 2004); and learning within alliances (Mohr and Sengupta 2002).
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36 In application to the marketing-sales interface context, a paradox occurs when actors
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38 perceive certain elements within the organization, its process, and/or policies as opposing.
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40 Often, the individual tends to focus on the differences rather than the potential overlapping
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42 opportunity. By focusing on the differences, the actors increase their own perceived value of the
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44 chosen option or perception, leading them to further uphold and endorse the option. This creates
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46 a cycle that effectively results in greater polarization and a reduction in critical outcomes such as
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48 learning, collaboration, and cohesion (Rouzies et al., 2005; Ingram 2004).
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52 We argue that the theory of paradox is particularly appropriate to study the sales-
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54 marketing interface for five reasons. First, paradox appears to describe the contradictory tensions
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3 within the interface literature. For example, Rouziès et al. (2005) outline a number of interface
4 tensions, including a) sales is customer-focused versus marketing is brand focused; b) sales is
5 personal relationship-oriented while marketing is analysis-oriented; c) sales is continuous, daily
6 activity-oriented while marketing is sporadic project-oriented; e) sales is results-oriented, while
7 marketing is process-oriented; and f) sales is short-term oriented, while marketing is long-term
8 oriented. Second, like a paradox, these tensions are purely perception-based, ascribed to
9 marketers and the sales force by their interactions with one another. The perceptual nature of
10 these tensions is supported by the management literature (Weick 1969) and the distinctions made
11 by marketing scholars as to the perceptual nature of mindsets and thought worlds (Beverland,
12 Steel, and Dapiran 2006; Homburg & Jensen 2007). These divisions are established and become
13 reinforced over time, allowing actors to believe in their existence and validity. Third, research
14 on paradox reveals that the actors may use several defense mechanisms in addressing the
15 tensions such as relative functional identification (Rouziès et al., 2005), reduced flexibility and
16 accommodativeness toward the other function (Malshe, 2011), or reduced interface
17 communication and lack of information sharing (Dewsnap and Jobber, 2000). In using these
18 defense mechanisms, actors' views often become even more rooted or polarized. Fourth, the
19 paradox literature suggests that managing the tensions is critical to navigating the complexity of
20 the paradoxes embedded within the firm. These managerial practices may range from behavior
21 modification to confrontation (Lewis 2000) or from levels of acceptance, to choosing one side
22 over another for the time being, to resolving the matter (Poole and Van de Ven, 1989; Smith and
23 Lewis 2011). Hence theory suggests that mechanisms exist to positively confront and handle
24 paradoxes, and these mechanisms may generate positive versus negative outcomes. Finally,
25 paradox broadens our approach to examining the marketing-sales interface. The theory of
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1 paradox is distinct from other theoretical approaches, as it suggests that seemingly opposing
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3 options can co-exist. For instance, several theories suggest opposing, rather than commensurable
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5 options. Transaction cost economics suggests a binary choice of either internal or external means
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7 of activities (Rindfleisch and Heide, 1997), and organizational control theories prescribe either
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9 behavioral or output controls (Ahearne et al 2010, Ouchi 1979). In contrast, paradox theory does
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11 not assume the alternatives are distinct poles on a spectrum (Barnes 1981). Instead, paradox
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13 theory champions the existence and adoption of multiple alternatives, such as the mutual
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15 existence of sales' short-term orientation and marketing's long-term orientation.
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22 Overall, the interface literature has treated sales and marketing as monolithic entities. As
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24 a result, current theoretical insights (a) fail to capture how different levels within sales and
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26 marketing hierarchy may experience differential tensions, and (b) ignore their nuances and
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28 manifestations at various organizational levels as well as the operational ramifications therein.
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30 From a theoretical perspective, the inherent tensions within the interface are paradoxical since
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32 sales and marketing personnel perceive certain elements within the organization, its process,
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34 and/or policies as opposing and tend to focus on the differences rather than the potential
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36 overlapping opportunity. In this study, we employ the paradox framework and use multi-level
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38 qualitative data to contribute to theory regarding these differential tensions, explore their
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40 operational ramifications, and suggest management strategies.
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45 **Methodology**

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47 We employed the Grounded Theory method in this study. We inductively develop theory
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49 from a rigorous and systematic analysis of data relevant to the problem of interest. Before
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51 discussing the details of our methodology, we highlight three reasons why grounded theory is an
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53 appropriate approach to take in examining these phenomena.
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3 First, there is a paucity of extant theoretical frameworks that highlight the distinct nature
4 of tensions faced by interface personnel at different levels within the firm face. Given this
5 limitation, the grounded theory approach is more appropriate compared to ones that rely on
6 deductive reasoning because the former is exploratory, inductive, and aims to develop theory that
7 is missing. Second, in a grounded theory approach, the views of the informants shape the
8 emergent theoretical framework (Strauss and Corbin 1990; 1997; 1998) since this methodology
9 allows the informants to “tell their stories” unencumbered by what we expect to find (Creswell
10 2007, p 40). Last, since the “organizational reality is essentially socially constructed” (Gioia et
11 al. 1994; p.367), methodological approaches such as grounded theory that allow researchers to
12 “tap into the processes used to fashion understanding [of that reality] by the participants” are
13 valuable. As such, a grounded theory approach allows the researchers to understand the context
14 within which different interface tensions are played out, thus leading to a deeper understanding
15 of the phenomena. Overall, we believe that the grounded theory approach allows us to represent
16 the experience of our informants, free of any bias from the extant theoretical views that might
17 not be appropriate for their context (Gioia et al. 1994; Creswell, 2007). We emphasize here that
18 although we present our informants’ subjective understanding of the phenomenon as
19 recommended by the grounded theory method, our findings are not mere representations of
20 whatever our informants said at face value. Rather, they emanate from a rigorous analysis of our
21 data.

22 ***Sample and Data Collection***

23 Given our interest in investigating interface tensions at different levels within the firm, we
24 collected multi-level data from within the sales and marketing organizations of several
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3 companies. Specifically, we collected dyadic data from sales and marketing personnel at three
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5 levels (senior, middle, and frontline) across multiple firms for the final sample size of 42.
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8 We used *theoretical sampling* to recruit our informants (Kohli and Jaworski 1990; Tuli,
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10 Kohli and Bharadwaj 2007). This is a non-random sampling method, which focuses on selecting
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12 informants based on their ability to provide an understanding of the phenomenon. Further, this
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14 technique allows researchers to gain a deeper understanding of a phenomenon and develop
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16 theory rather than provide generalizability (Corbin and Strauss 2008, ch.7). Also, by selecting a
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18 diverse set of theoretically relevant informants, the researcher can see the conditions under which
19
20 the emergent categories hold true (Creswell 2007, pp. 240-241). Since job titles can be
21
22 misleading, we did *not* deduce the *level* of our informants based on their job titles alone. Instead,
23
24 we used two additional parameters to ascertain the informant “level”. First, we asked our
25
26 informants what they considered their hierarchical position to be within their firms. Second, we
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28 asked them to tell us their job responsibilities, whether (and how many) people reported to them
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30 and who they reported to, and whether they had any decision-making/spending authority. We
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32 triangulated the information from these sources to assess the informant level and confirm that we
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34 were selecting sales and marketing individuals at three different levels within a given firm.
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41 [Table 1 and 1A about here]
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44 We started informant recruitment using personal contacts (e.g., Tuli, Kohli and
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46 Bharadwaj 2007) followed by referrals and using snowballing techniques. We approached a total
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48 of 48 individuals with interview requests and were able to collect data from 42 informants. Our
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50 sample is spread across a variety of industries such as healthcare, financial and legal services,
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52 information technology, and publishing. We ensured that each firm within our sample had a
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54 distinct sales and marketing department and that each of our informants was in his/her job for at
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3 least 2 years. Our informant companies are comparable in size and annual sales. The depth-
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5 interviews were discovery-oriented (Deshpande 1983), lasting an average of 50 minutes. The
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7 interviews were conducted at the informants' convenience, and over 80% of the interviews were
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9 done in person. We started our interviews with casual questions about informants' work
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11 responsibilities and current projects. Once they were comfortable, we launched into the "grand
12
13 tour" questions that focused on each informant's phenomenological interpretations (Glaser and
14
15 Strauss 1967) of the strategy processes within their firms and inherent challenges. Although we
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17 used a structured set of questions for the interviews related to how their firms handled strategy
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19 development processes that focused on issues such as challenges inherent in strategy processes,
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21 the role each function plays in these processes, or the nature of the interaction between sales and
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23 marketing during the strategy process to name a few; the interviewee was in charge of guiding
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25 the flow and content of the discussion. The interviewer encouraged informants to offer
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27 anecdotes, all the while ensuring that there was no interviewer-induced bias (McCracken 1988).
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29 After conducting 42 interviews, we realized that the themes were repeating themselves- an
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31 indicator of *theoretical saturation* (Strauss and Corbin 1998). At this point, we stopped the data
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33 collection process.
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39 ***Data Analysis***

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42 We audiotaped the interviews and transcribed the data, which were managed and
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44 analyzed using QSR International's NVivo software. Consistent with the grounded theory
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46 approach, we reviewed the interview transcripts as the data collection progressed. This practice
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48 helped us identify emergent themes from our data, which provided guidance to subsequent data
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50 collection.
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3 We coded our data using *open* and *axial coding* methods (Strauss and Corbin 1998).
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5 Specifically, we started with open coding that requires the researcher to focus on *in-vivo codes*
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7 (i.e. informants' ideas in their own words/language). After identifying the in-vivo codes, we
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9 grouped them into higher-level concepts (*first-order categories*) based on underlying similarities
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11 among the codes. In the next step, we used *axial coding*. We searched for relationships among
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13 the first-order categories and grouped these into *second-order themes*, which helped us
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15 comprehend the emergent framework. Our data analysis process was non-linear and we
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17 continued this process we had exhausted all the possible data relationships. During our analytical
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19 process, we were mindful not to force emergent patterns into preconceived categories
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21 (Gummesson 2003). In Table 2, we present the in-vivo codes, first-order categories, the second-
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23 order themes, and the three-stage framework that emerged from our data. Table 3 shows
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25 representative informant quotes for specific in-vivo codes.
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31 [Tables 2 and 3 about here]
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34 ***Reliability and Validity of Analysis***

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36 To ensure the analytical rigor and trustworthiness of our findings, we took multiple steps
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38 following the suggestions made by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Silverman and Marvasti
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40 (2008). First, we maintained meticulous records of our informant contacts, interview audio files
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42 and transcripts, and any other documents related to our project. Second, we asked an
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44 experienced, outside researcher to audit our research material and empirical process to ensure the
45
46 dependability of our data as well as the plausibility of our findings (Corley and Gioia 2004).
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48 Third, we randomly selected 10 interviews (five dyads) and asked an independent judge, who is
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50 familiar with qualitative research but not connected with our project, to evaluate our coding. We
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52 compared the two sets of coding to ascertain the judge's agreement or disagreement with each of
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our codes in these interviews. The *proportional reduction in loss* because of this comparison was above the 0.70 cut-off level recommended for exploratory research (Rust and Cooil 1994).

We ensured validity by following five techniques proposed by Silverman and Marvasti (2008: pgs. 257-270) that have been used by marketing scholars before (Malshe and Sohi, 2009). The first technique, *respondent validation*, is often referred to as member checks (Creswell 2007, pg. 208). To do this, we asked 18 participants (9 dyads) to examine our data interpretations and assess the credibility of the findings. *Refutability*, the second technique, requires that researchers actively seek to refute the assumed relationships among the various variables. In this regard, we examined whether our findings emerging from one industry context could be refuted in another and determined that our emergent findings were consistent across industry contexts. The third technique, *constant comparison*, requires that the researchers find additional cases to validate emergent findings. Consistently, we started our data analysis with a relatively small dataset. Further, we conducted our interviews in a recursive manner to allow constant comparison and expand the repertoire of emergent categories/findings. Additional interviews helped validate and check for the refutability of emergent findings. *Comprehensive data treatment* is a fourth recommended technique that requires the researcher to examine the data comprehensively before drawing conclusions. This was possible since all our interviews were transcribed, readily available in the NVivo software. Last, we performed a *deviant case analysis* to determine whether any cases offer substantially different findings and assess the underlying reasons. In our data, we did not find any deviant cases.

To protect the identity of our informants as well as their firms, we denote them by a code number in our findings. For example, Informant # 1C is a 39-year-old, female, mid-level

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3 marketing executive from a device manufacturing firm in the healthcare industry. Table 1
4 provides the reader with greater information regarding our coding scheme.
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7 8 **Paradoxes at the senior executive level** 9

10 First, we examine the tensions at the senior executive level. As outlined in Table 1A,
11 senior sales and marketing leaders are entrusted with macro-level tasks such as developing
12 overall marketing and sales management strategies, resource allocations and providing the
13 overarching vision and direction to their respective teams. Our data highlight that executives at
14 this level encounter two specific paradoxical tensions: *strategic closure versus strategic fluency*
15 and *counterpart's resource commitment*.
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24 ***Strategic closure versus fluency*** 25

26 We name our first tension “strategic closure versus strategic fluency¹.” This tension
27 occurs when senior marketing executives perceive the strategy process as a close-ended process
28 with a definitive completion date. In contrast, senior sales executives perceive the strategy
29 process as a continual, open-ended process, without a definitive completion date.
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36 *Senior marketing executives.* Our data indicate that senior marketing executives perceive
37 that they are responsible for the development and completion of the major strategic tenets,
38 including that of overall marketing objectives and initiatives and a comprehensive framework.
39 Senior marketing executives expressed that the major areas of the strategic process included the
40 articulation of strategic and operational boundaries. Our data indicate that senior marketers strive
41 for strategic consistency, i.e., alignment among objectives, allocations, and major marketing mix
42 tenets. Our respondents communicated the need for rigor in examining multiple environmental
43 and internal dynamics during the strategic process. This rigor ensured a relatively comprehensive
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56 ¹ We thank an anonymous reviewer for this insight.
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3 strategic process that enabled emerging plans to be immediately implemented with minimal need
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5 for further modification. In summary, our senior marketing informants communicated that the
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7 strategic marketing process: a) is comprised of a rigorous internal examination led primarily by
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9 marketers; b) enables consistency across marketing elements and in direction to the sales force;
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12 c) possesses a definitive starting and end-points.
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15 As you develop strategy, you have a look at market opportunities from different
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17 angles...you also have to look at the existing and future competitive threats and see if
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19 you get into the market, what kind of competition are you going to anticipate? You also
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21 have anticipated that the potential competitive responses to your market entry. Based on
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23 this overall assessment, you come up with a solid strategy and also a robust tactical plan
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25 so that the salespeople in the field can actually deal with the market realities in a
26
27 consistent manner. And since we have a sense of the broader market, we are able to
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29 provide that guidance. [2A]

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31 *Senior sales executives.* Sales executives consistently expressed the belief that the
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33 strategic process is an ongoing fluent, negotiated process. As such, our informants viewed the
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35 strategic process as a continual process rather than a close-ended process. In their opinions, these
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37 negotiated, fluent processes help create dynamic strategies. Contrary to senior marketing
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39 executives, senior sales executives expressed a belief that a close-ended framework is not in the
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41 best interests of the firm. That is, their perception is that a strategic framework cannot solely be
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43 developed in the corporate hierarchy in a vacuum. Our senior sales executives insisted that a
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45 continual, fluent strategic process is not only valuable but imperative, as the sales organization
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47 “has to live with it [the strategy]” for the entire strategy lifecycle and confront customer
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49 reactions in case of ineffective strategies.

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51 Sales executives consistently expressed their perceptions of an ever-changing
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53 marketplace. As such, they believe strategic proposals should be vetted through their sales
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55 organization. In the senior sales executives’ minds, the initial strategic framework should be
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57 presented to their lieutenants within the sales organization to ensure the merits and feasibility of
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3 the major tenets of the marketing strategy, including the strategic objectives and approximate
4 financial and human resource allocations. Our respondents were very emphatic when expressing
5 their beliefs that the major strategic objectives and proposals be confronted with the reality of the
6 marketplace and be modified as needed before they make a commitment to senior leadership
7 (e.g., CEOs). As one senior sales executive noted:

15 First step is hearing the strategy marketing proposes. So, strategy is their perspective
16 about how things should be done in the marketplace...again, that is just the marketing's
17 perspective...it is not necessarily always the right strategy for the market conditions, and
18 it is not necessary that what they suggest would be implemented [sternness in her voice].
19 I must note here that it is just a proposal...and not the final thing. [1B]

22 In sum, the tension "strategic closure versus fluency" describes the competing
23 perspectives of sales and marketing executives regarding the development and the completion of
24 the strategic process.

31 ***Counterpart's resource commitment***

34 We named the second tension that emerged in our data the *counterpart's resource commitment*.
35 Senior sales and marketing executives are charged with the allocation of resources, be they
36 financial or human resources. Our research finds that marketing and sales executives consistently
37 emphasize it is critical for their *counterpart* to fully commit their resources to major strategic
38 initiatives. At the same time, senior executives emphasize their hesitancy to fully commit their
39 resources to the same strategic initiatives. The following quotation provides an example of the
40 tension, *the counterpart's resource commitment*. In the quotation, please note how one senior
41 sales executive believes that the senior marketing executive needs to commit marketing's full
42 resources to the major strategic tenets. However, at the same time, the senior sales executive
43 describes his/her relative hesitancy in committing personal sales resources to the strategy.

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3 Marketing is telling us to put more field resources into this strategy...and their argument
4 is that they have done the legwork and it is our time now to reciprocate...well, isn't that
5 what marketing is supposed to do...be fully committed to their strategy and have all the
6 support ready? On the field, it is a different story- we may incrementally increase our
7 commitment to a specific strategy depending on how the response is... I cannot put all
8 my eggs in one basket. [7B]
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11 We now provide further explanation of this tension, as described by the senior sales executives
12 and then the senior marketing executives.
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17 *Senior sales executives.* In terms of the counterpart's resource commitment, senior sales
18 executives described the importance of their marketing colleagues marshaling and fully
19 committing the required financial, strategic, and operational resources behind the marketing
20 strategy. According to our senior sales informants, the financial commitment by the marketing
21 executive served as a signal and communicated the importance of the strategy to the sales force.
22 The senior marketing executives' financial commitment was also perceived by the senior sales
23 executives as a proxy indicator that would guarantee marketing's strategic support for salesforce
24 throughout a definitive period during which the strategy will be in place. As one senior executive
25 noted, senior marketing executives' significant investment behind the major strategic tenets
26 demonstrates that they will "Not pull the plug...especially for a new product when the old one is
27 not selling like hotcakes." Another sales informant discusses the importance of ongoing
28 operational and field activity support from marketing:
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44 We want marketing to show leadership and line up the resources we need to support
45 strategy. It is one thing to complain that salespeople do not implement strategies
46 correctly...but how about resources and ongoing support? Many times, when we roll out
47 the product, my people in the field may not have all the marketing materials available.
48 That's very frustrating for sales because then they don't have the tools they need in order
49 to go out and do a good job when they go out to sell the product [3B].
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53 Similarly, sales executives wanted to maintain flexibility in terms of the allocation of human
54 resources when deploying strategies. In particular, hesitancy was expressed in two critical
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3 areas: 1) the commitment of financial budgets to support and incent the sales force in executing
4 strategic initiatives; b) the commitment of allocating human resources and their time toward
5
6 specific strategic initiatives.
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10 Marketing does not understand the field realities, because once they come up with these
11 potential numbers, they want our commitment from an operational and tactical standpoint
12 such as how many salespeople will be implementing strategies and what the specific
13 incentive plans will be. At my end, I don't want to commit my people to something that I
14 am not really sure is actually going to work. Marketing is just in a hurry to report to the
15 top management and impress them by saying that this is where we could be. [5B]
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18 *Senior marketing executives.* Senior marketing executives mentioned how crucial it is for
19 their sales counterparts to commit their financial and human resources to the major strategic
20 tenets. Senior marketing executives described the importance of the sales executive's
21 commitment to budget and sales force allocation to the strategy, as any partial commitment
22 would result in the failure of the marketing strategies. A quote below from senior marketing
23 executives bring forth this idea.
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32 If sales do not show complete commitment to what we [marketing] are trying to achieve
33 in the market, then it is a no-brainer that strategy is not going to succeed. It is Marketing
34 101. And when I say commitment, I mean their manpower, field activities, their
35 resources...everything needs to be there. We need their full firepower. There is no room
36 for tentativeness in what sales must do. [4a]
37
38

39 In another example, senior marketing executives were hesitant to commit a specific
40 amount of marketing dollars behind a strategy at the outset or giving concrete deadlines for new
41 product launches. Two quotes below bring home this idea.
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46 When customers made demands for some features in our products, our salespeople would
47 just casually say, "Yes, we can do that." But in marketing, we were unsure if that feature
48 could actually be built into the product. So, we would just stay fuzzy on the features and
49 also launch dates because so many things could go wrong during the product
50 development process. For the salespeople that became a real challenge because at one
51 point, we got to be three years delayed in the next generation of the product and the sales
52 force had been out there selling the next generation of the product for more than 18
53 months before. So, it came down to the marketing function to try and figure out ways to
54 help the sales force live up to the promises. [3A]
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4 Sales folks need to understand that we can not flip a switch and make resources available.
5 And with sales, things are always evolving, which makes it difficult for us to make any
6 concrete promises...because who knows, their needs may change tomorrow and so, we
7 find it better to take a tentative approach with them. [1A]
8
9

10 In summary, the counterpart resource commitment tension reflects that neither a senior
11 marketing nor a senior sales executive was willing to make a concrete commitment of resources
12 under their control but expected an unflinching, long-term commitment from the other function.
13 Hence, each senior executive required his/her counterpart to fully commit their resources; they
14 wanted to retain the flexibility around the deployment of their personal resources.
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22 **Paradoxes at the middle manager level**

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24 Middle managers play a unique role in the strategic process. While the senior executives
25 decide the overall strategic direction and objectives; the middle-level managers aid in the
26 articulation and development of the strategy by developing the details of the strategy. For
27 example, if marketing and sales leadership determine to enter a new market segment and aim to
28 achieve segment leadership in 2 years, it falls upon middle-level marketing and sales managers
29 to work out the details such as developing targeted marketing and sales programs for the new
30 segments, building marketing mix around the new product, or developing customer coverage
31 plans.
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43 Furthermore, as their level within the organization suggests, middle managers are caught
44 in the middle. On the one hand, they must follow their senior executives' directives. On the other
45 hand, they are also responsible for translating strategy into actionable programs that would be
46 consistent with the broader strategic directives, implementable within the field, and help the firm
47 achieve marketing as well as sales objectives. Further, middle managers are responsible for
48 providing specific guidelines to the lower levels in sales and marketing hierarchy.
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3 Table 1A highlights some key tasks mid-marketers and mid-sales personnel perform. As
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5 such, mid-level marketers are focused on clearly communicating the strategic and operational
6
7 boundaries of the marketing plan for the field/trade marketing function and the broader field
8
9 force. Further, they strive to offer unambiguous and detailed directives to their sales
10
11 counterparts. Middle marketing managers constantly try to ensure that (a) the specifics of
12
13 operations embody strategic tenets and there are no loose ends, and (b) marketing strategies and
14
15 tactics are closely aligned with the marketing plan. Our marketing middle managers consistently
16
17 discussed the value of alignment to the plan to ensure the sanctity of strategy.
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22 Sales managers at this level have unique challenges and concerns. Not being able to
23
24 foresee every possible uncertainty and peculiarity in each of their markets, sales managers are
25
26 focused on ensuring that their sales personnel have the autonomy to tweak certain elements of
27
28 targeting and/or marketing mix, and/or how the strategy may be implemented in the marketplace.
29
30 Therefore, instead of possessing an overriding responsibility to the marketing plan, sales
31
32 managers described their primary responsibility lies in ensuring their salespeople are successful.
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36 These divergent foci lead to a collection of tensions that we characterize as “*strategic*
37
38 *alignment and operational flexibility*.” Our analysis indicates that at the middle-manager level,
39
40 marketing personnel seek to tightly define operational boundaries around their strategic
41
42 initiatives as they perceive a responsibility to upholding the marketing plan. Interestingly, sales
43
44 managers look for opportunities for greater autonomy as they perceive an immediate
45
46 responsibility for their sales personnel. This tension is very distinct from the senior executive
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48 level. Whereas at the senior executive level, the strategic closure versus fluency process focuses
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50 on the objective setting and resource allocation, the mid-manager level tension focuses on the (a)
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operational elements of strategy and implementation, and (b) a distinct perception of to what or to whom they are primarily responsible

Marketing middle managers. The findings that emerge at this level suggest that middle-level marketing managers attempt to tightly define the confines around their major strategic initiatives. Marketing middle managers expressed a need for strategic alignment and consistency. That is, marketing managers emphasized the development of strategies that aligned with meeting strategic objectives and maintained consistency across all elements of the marketing mix. Marketing managers perceive this alignment and consistency to increase productivity, efficiency, and effectiveness. They equate ill-defined, loose operational boundaries with a lack of strategic control and an imprudent means to ensure strategic outcomes. Our respondents consistently discussed the value of a collective responsibility to work within the marketing plan. As the following quotations reflect, marketing managers express the need for marketing strategy alignment with strategic objectives and consistency of activities across the entire marketing mix.

I am constantly working with our sales team to show them the strategic ideas and tactical plans, to show them where they fit in, how their actions affect the success of a marketing campaign or the company...but we have not made much headway. From a sales side, there is a complete lack of focus on their targeted accounts...they just get in there and try to sell something entirely different. When we direct them in the right direction, they usually don't like that. At times, they may stick to the plan for a little while and then they will move on with what they want to do. [2C]

The frustration really centers around...you put a lot of time and effort in getting the marketing mix in place...we try to center efforts around building and maintaining a brand presence in the market with a specific position...during the sales meeting, sales managers seem to agree with you. But during actual execution, you just never know what they're actually going to be doing once it's out there. So frustration comes in when the product is moving slow and when you speak with sales...you hear it's not the right product, it's not the right price point...so, they want to have a price concession or a special deal for select customers...and they do not like any checks and balances [4C].

Sales middle managers. Our sales middle managers consistently expressed the need for operational autonomy. Sales middle managers insist on maintaining autonomy, which is borne

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2
3 out of their belief that no single strategy can be effective in all situations/markets and it's
4
5 important as a manager to enable their salesforce. In their perception, such flexibility is critical
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7 for responsiveness to the market, specific customers, and their sales force.
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10 Sales middle manager perceptions appear to be driven by empathy toward frontline sales
11
12 personnel and the need to maintain strong relationships with the sales force. First, the majority
13
14 of the sales middle managers were promoted from the ranks of sales representatives. As a result,
15
16 they appreciate the complex and dynamic environments salespeople operate in every day. They
17
18 often believe that their salespeople must have the autonomy to implement the “right now plan” –
19
20 that is, things they can do with their customers on the go, to deal with challenging sales
21
22 situations. If such plans do not align with marketers' suggested action programs, the marketing
23
24 middle managers perceive it as inconsistent and unaligned while sales middle managers consider
25
26 it adaptive behavior, a skill valued in the sales discipline (Franke and Park 2006). A quote below
27
28 from a mid-level sales manager highlights how they yearn for autonomy when it comes to
29
30 executing strategies in the field.
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35 You have to understand that we deal with fluid situations in the market...and if they
36
37 [marketers] want us to do justice to their plans, then we need to have the the flexibility
38
39 we need operationally to implement the plans.

40 Second, sales middle managers expressed that it is critical to preserve their relationships
41
42 with their sales team members (their direct reports) who they depend upon to accomplish sales
43
44 team performance objectives. Sales managers relayed the importance of ensuring their
45
46 salesforce is set-up for success.
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49 I have 35 members in my team, and that puts a lot of onus on me as a team leader. You
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51 take a tremendous responsibility when you agree to implement any marketing strategy on
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53 behalf of the sales team. [5D]
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Hence, sales middle managers noted that it is important that the aim of alignment and consistency does not result in work overload or negatively impact customer relationships or sales force compensation. For example, our data bring forth examples where middle-level sales managers resisted implementation of certain field activities such as CRM data entry by salespeople, collecting market intelligence, or use of specific promotional materials since they deemed it to be infeasible, impractical, time-consuming, ineffective, or unlikely to produce a positive cost-benefit ratio. The vignettes below reflect a consistent belief among our sales middle managers regarding the need for autonomy in order for the salesforce to be successful.

How can someone from marketing possibly understand what my region is and how can they set pricing and communication for me? It is like trying to fit every territory in a single box. It is never going to work. [5D]

Marketing hardly understands what it takes to implement strategies. On the field, we are never 100% sure in advance what it will take to implement specific programs...you can never anticipate what customers may want...we have buyer groups and they change their requirements quite often...so we need to remain flexible and we want programs that are flexible. Try telling this to marketing [laughs]; obviously, they have no clue how much time, efforts, and resources it takes for a salesperson just to be in the right alignment with the target customers. Our world is not static as their...it is very fluid. [3D].

Paradoxes at the frontline

At the frontline level, sales and marketing personnel are tasked with carrying out various tactical (sales) and support (marketing) activities that ensure proper execution/implementation of strategy as outlined in Table 1A. Our data suggest that these activities give rise to two kinds of tensions at this level as discussed below: 1) *Activity arrays versus activities sequences*, and 2) *Internal versus external accountability (or firm versus non-firm accountability)*

Activity arrays versus activity sequences

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3 We named the first tension that emerged at this level as activity arrays versus activity
4 sequences. This tension describes the contradictory approaches by sales and marketers in
5
6 undertaking field activities.
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10 *Frontline field marketers.* Frontline field marketers describe their approach to activities
11 as a balancing act. Our marketing respondents described that their performance objectives are
12 tied to the success of the entire product portfolio and often multiple brands. Therefore, frontline
13 field marketing personnel tend to manage multiple priorities concurrently. The balancing of
14 activities is based on two areas of priority. First, they closely align their activity agendas with
15 the directives received from mid-level marketing managers, and second, they integrate their
16 activities with their territory or specific area of responsibility. As one informant puts it, it is a
17 challenging task.
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20 I am responsible for the entire brand portfolio...I cannot choose favorites. It is not easy to
21 have salespeople on-board with my thinking since they do not look at the portfolio the
22 way I do. They mostly tend to cherry-pick based on some criteria that we in marketing do
23 not like. I am constantly struggling to get my field force to have a broad focus. [5E]
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35 *Frontline sales personnel.* In contrast, frontline sales personnel described their approach
36 as simplifying their activities into sequential order. Our respondents described an array of tasks
37 and projects that demanded their attention. This included a large range of products to sell,
38 dealing with customers, monitoring competitive activity, satisfying customers, and meeting sales
39 quotas. When confronted with the implementation of multiple marketing strategies, the
40 respondents described a rank-ordering process based on four criteria. The activities that received
41 greater prioritization were expressed as those activities that have the greatest: a) impact on their
42 personal compensation plans; b) strategic benefit to the customer; c) ease and feasibility of
43 execution; and d) opportunity cost of trying to enact multiple strategies.
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3 Basically, you get sound bites from marketing, and you pick up on it based on your
4 priority list. With all the different things on our agenda, we prioritize which strategies to
5 give more attention to and which ones to neglect... and so getting on our priority list is
6 important. My approach has been ...I look for something only when I need it. I simply
7 ignore what was being thrown at me, because there is so much that comes your way. So
8 basically we salespeople screen and pick up things that we feel we need to succeed. [6F]
9

10
11 In sum, the *activity balancing versus sequential prioritizing* describes the action orientation of
12 personnel in the respective functions. Differences in how frontline sales and marketing
13 personnel evaluate the importance of specific activities, and how they sequence and prioritize
14 their accompanying actions, lead to the development of tensions.
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20 ***Internal versus external accountability (or firm versus non-firm accountability)***

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23 The second tension that emerged at the field level is that of accountability. This tension
24 describes the entity to which the sales and marketing personnel perceive will hold them
25 answerable for their actions.
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30 *Frontline field marketing.* Our frontline field marketing respondents expressed a strong,
31 consistent focus on the firm-based responsibilities, with a strong underlying tone on metrics.
32 Hence, they tend to focus on parameters such as awareness levels, the number of customers
33 reached through promotion, the number of leads generated, the number of trade events
34 participated in, or the number of marketing activities such as customer meetings, webinars
35 carried out in the field to judge their activity effectiveness. The marketing respondents described
36 a focus on internal areas, such as preserving financial bottom lines, ensuring consistency in
37 messaging and price points within the market, or monitoring whether or not the brand
38 positioning is being compromised.
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51 In field marketing, I am tied to a field sales office with the responsibility of doing the
52 traditional demand generation role. I am responsible for generating demand pipeline for
53 the 5 states here in the Midwest. My role is to help full the sales pipeline with new
54 opportunities. That could be with existing customers or customers that currently aren't
55 doing very much business with us. I also keep a track of pricing in the field and ensure
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3 that the messaging stays true to our brand promise. So, I am marketing's extended arm in
4 the field to ensure marketing objectives are achieved. [3E]
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7 *Frontline sales.* Our frontline sales personnel consistently reported a range of entities to
8 which they felt accountable. Primarily the focus was on their customers, but it also included the
9 members of their sales teams, and themselves. Interestingly, marketing and brands were
10 conspicuously absent from the list of top three entities. The respondents described their
11 accountability and loyalty toward their customers and expressed this area of accountability as
12 requiring them to advocate for their customers within the firm, ensuring they maintain high
13 levels of customer service, or creating greater customer value by offering pricing discounts or
14 special deals. As a result, they go out of their way to seek special deals for customers so that
15 their team and they personally benefit through incentives; although it may mean that they are
16 sacrificing the firm's bottom line. Ultimately, the divergent accountability foci drive strategy
17 implementation in the field.
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32 Salespeople have multiple masters...customers, dealers...and to some extent, marketing
33 as well...and so, they are trying to work through it all the time. They will have a
34 customer who has a specific want or desire and they then think, 'well, that isn't exactly
35 the way marketing has developed this product or want me to promote it'. So they're
36 sitting there thinking, 'How am I going to work these 2 things together? So, a savvy
37 salesperson is going to solve this puzzle by placing the customer at the top and giving her
38 what she wants. If that means deviating from the plan, so be it. [3F]
39
40

41 I will give you an example. It was ugly [rolls eyes]. I was working with a large buyer and
42 a salesperson...and I knew the customer, too. When the salesperson was communicating
43 to the buyer, I would be copied on everything, so I was brought in to the loop very
44 visibly. When there was something that we, as a company, had decided not to do, that
45 was not in the wishes of the buyer, it was almost like the salesperson was on the buyer's
46 side and e-mailing me, asking me to send it to our CMO to get a reversal on the decision.
47 That is a fascinating example of how the salesperson kind of crosses the line and
48 becomes more of accountable to the external customer than the internal. [5C]
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51 In summary, we witness several distinct tensions between and within levels. Our research
52 suggests that at the senior-level, tensions arise based on the varied perceptions of the strategic
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process and the need for resource commitment. Interestingly, we find a unique distinction between these tensions and those at the middle manager level. At the middle manager level, the tension is based on the managers' charge. For mid-level marketing managers, they perceive an obligation to adhere to the marketing plan. Conversely, the mid-level sales manager perceives their obligation is their sales personnel, and hence yearn for operational flexibility. Hence, the distinction is one of focus and the object of focus. Finally, the sales-marketing interface asserts two critical tensions at the frontline level—that of the approach to implementation and their responsibility. For the frontline marketer, their responsibility is to the firm (i.e. internal), primarily through attaining an assortment of metrics. Conversely, for the frontline salesperson, their responsibility lies primarily externally, (i.e. their customer).

Paralyzing defense mechanisms

The paradox literature suggests that managing paradoxical tensions is critical to navigating the complexity of the paradoxes embedded within the firm (Lewis 2000). In effect, one party cannot atomize and create further divisions. However, it appears common that those who encounter paradoxes often employ defense mechanisms. That is, the actors resort to actions and processes that suppress the relatedness of contradictions, prevent addressing the root cause of the contradiction, and maintain a false appearance of order.

As the actors singularly focus on their perceptions and reinforce the contradictory tension, it may also create a range of unforeseen effects, often which may be negative (Lewis 2000). The literature is full of examples of creating further divisions, rather than pluralistically managing tensions (Rouzies et al. 2005; Homburg and Jensen 2007). For instance, the literature has described relative functional identification (Fisher, Maltz, Jaworski 1997), the degree to which managers "feel a sense of connection with their function compared with the organization

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2
3 as a whole,” (page 56). Functional identification reinforces an in-group/out-group mentality that
4
5 aligns the individual with functional interests and that may, in turn, affect organizational
6
7 relationships and outcomes. Within the context of the interface and marketing strategy process,
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10 our respondents also described several defense mechanisms. Below, we examine the prominent
11
12 defense mechanisms that are activated at each of the three levels. In Table 3, we offer some
13
14 examples from our data on how these mechanisms negatively affect the strategic process.
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17 *Senior level*

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19 We describe the predominant defense mechanism that emerged at the senior level as
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21 pulling rank. Pulling rank describes the actions of a senior executive when one of the senior
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23 executives uses his or her position in the organizational hierarchy (often shaped by their
24
25 backgrounds and experiences) to garner support and dictate the firm’s overall approach to
26
27 marketing strategy development and resource commitment.
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31 Our data indicate that this defense mechanism creates winners and losers at the senior
32
33 levels. Interestingly, the losing executive, having no other recourse, prima facie, accepts the
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35 process and resource commitment championed by the winning executive. However, the losing
36
37 executive builds an internal line of defense by sharing the predicament with his/her deputies and
38
39 implicitly conveys their lack of support to the proposed strategy. Such instances foster an in-
40
41 group/out-group mentality that significantly minimizes opportunities for current and future
42
43 interface cooperation within strategic processes. Thus, the overall outcome of this defense
44
45 mechanism is that the strategy loses one of its two legs right at the top. As a result, subsequent
46
47 events may complicate the already suboptimal rapport between the two functions at the top and
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49 have deleterious downstream effects on current and future strategies. In sum, the rank pulling
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3 defense mechanism may increase the potential for a perpetual cycle of paradoxical tensions and
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5 defense mechanisms.
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8 Showing someone down and getting your way through never works. And if this happens
9 at the senior levels where one executive gets their way and the others are left to bite the
10 dust in their power tussle, it can trigger an unfortunate set of events that can have wider
11 ramifications across the entire team...much beyond the senior level. And in many cases,
12 strategic processes may be affected by these events. [5B]
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17 ***Middle level***

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19 In response to the paradoxical tensions they experience, middle managers are prone to
20 resort to a defense mechanism we term *Reactance and Regression*. In this defense mechanism,
21 both sales and marketing personnel vehemently disregard the other party's perspectives,
22 suggestions, and counsel. Overall, both sales and marketing personnel revert to the deeply held
23 attitudes and beliefs about the other function in a much stronger way.
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31 Today, we work as if we are two separate organizations. Sales has a revenue number that
32 they are supposed to hit and marketing's goals are nowhere on their radar. There is no
33 connection whatsoever. [6C]

34 As the preceding quotation illustrates, the defense mechanism strengthens each entity's
35 stereotypical viewpoint of their counterparts. Several stereotypes have surfaced in research,
36 including marketing managers believing that sales personnel are short-term oriented and
37 reactionary while sales managers characterize their marketing counterparts as inflexible,
38 impractical, and out of touch with the market (Homburg and Jensen 2007; Rouzies et al 2005).
39 If unresolved, the repeated encountering of such tensions may lead to alienation and functional
40 identification (splitting). That is, each function strengthens their commitment to the immediate
41 functional goals and objectives, often at the cost of the other function's goals and objectives.
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52 The ill-effects of the abovementioned defense mechanisms are evident in the field.

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55 When marketers adhere stringently to their prescribed strategic guidelines and monitor sales
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3 personnel's activity closely for any deviations, it makes salespeople's jobs difficult. Our sales
4
5 informants talked about how their requests for operational flexibility (e.g., extra product samples,
6
7 or special pricing requests) were met with stringent/sharp criticism from marketing. In response,
8
9 marketing controlled the resources, which made it difficult for sales personnel to adapt strategies
10
11 based on specific environmental conditions. When faced with such circumstances, a reactive
12
13 field force went about operationalizing the strategy notwithstanding marketing's counsel.
14
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17 The disparity between what is prescribed and what is being implemented may lead to
18
19 sub-optimal, non-specific market feedback, and a cumulative understanding of strategy's
20
21 progress versus strategic aims. The following quote captures this aspect appropriately.
22
23

24 They constantly filter and translate market feedback when I ask questions...what I hear
25
26 most often is that the competitors have better pricing and functionality in their
27
28 products...and they really take great pains to emphasize this. But the reality of it is that
29
30 when you talk to customers and do follow-up on your own, you find out that often times,
31
32 customers didn't understand the value proposition or the benefit of purchasing the
33
34 product. So, it was not the pricing issue as sales would put it but it was sub-optimal
35
36 strategy implementation. It makes my job difficult since I do not know, based on the sales
37
38 feedback I receive, whether my strategy is actually working or not. [4C]
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42 Further, the inherent communication gaps within the interface lead to these two groups
43
44 taking little initiative to understand the rationale offered by their counterpart function.
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47 Out of the half-hour that we were in a meeting, for about 25 or so minutes, people were
48
49 just talking past one another. No one seemed to be willing to take a step back and listen
50
51 to what the other function had to say. [6D]
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54 ***Frontline level***

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56 As noted earlier, these tensions arise when marketers' insistence on activity balancing is
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58 juxtaposed with salespeople's approach to prioritizing and simplifying.
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At the field level, although field marketers are implementing HQ marketers' agenda, their
physical proximity to field conditions and the personal relationships they forge with salespeople

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3 create an interesting dynamic. When field marketers and sales personnel encounter paradoxical
4 tensions related to activity balancing and accountability, they begin to stay isolated from one
5 another - that is they reduce the level of interaction with the other party to avoid unpleasant
6 conversations that will require them to confront the paradox head-on. Such isolation makes it
7 easier for them to disregard the other party's suggestions (since they are less likely to have in-
8 person encounters/conversations around why they deviated from the suggestions).
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17 There are occasions when salespeople are happy to take us into their accounts and talk to
18 customers...however, in areas where we differ; we do not get invited to meetings with
19 customers. They choose to not have us there. [7E]
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21
22 Strategies suffer because of this sub-optimal handling of paradoxes at field-level. For
23 example, our field marketing informants noted that although they supported multiple strategies in
24 the field, in many cases salespeople did not have the necessary level of commitment built within
25 the client base for certain strategies. Since salespeople remained isolated and disconnected, field
26 marketers were not able to resolve this tension, which led to action and resource misalignment
27 and wastage, and subsequent strategy failure. For example, field marketers developed multiple
28 leads that salespeople did not follow up on. On the other hand, salespeople spent time on
29 developing certain accounts for easy to sell, non-priority products but did not receive any support
30 from field marketing in servicing these accounts. Other instances included salespeople giving lip
31 service to marketers, subverting suggested strategy, moving forward with its own action
32 sequence, and when called upon for feedback, attempting to find a means to articulate their
33 actions within the strategy.
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49 **Paradox management**

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51 Research suggests that the key to managing paradoxical tensions is to adopt a pluralistic
52 approach rather than focus on one singular approach (O'Driscoll 2008). Hence, a pluralistic
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3 approach is required to manage the tensions. Our data show (Table 4) that when paradoxes are
4 managed optimally, it can have a beneficial effect on strategy at multiple levels. We highlight
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6 key findings below in this regard.
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11 *Senior Level*

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14 Our data indicate that, at the senior executive level, paradox management often requires
15 an explicit intervention to force the tensions to be balanced. Our respondents indicate that their
16 use of the term, “balanced” suggests some form of potential compromise rather than a winner-
17 take-all perspective. Our data indicate that the firm’s leadership (e.g., CEO or other senior
18 executives) often intervenes to force such balance by holding a frank discussion with the
19 functional leaders by facilitating workout sessions with the functional leaders or requiring the
20 two parties to explicitly describe their differences, the root causes, and perpetuating mechanisms.
21 Further, our informants note that senior leaders in their firms have used various techniques such
22 as coaxing, directing, or in some cases explicitly ordering them to set their differences aside and
23 work together. As the senior leader attempts to manage the paradox, we found that it is critical
24 that the leader adopts a non-partisan, objective approach while counseling sales and marketing
25 personnel. This provides both senior marketers and senior sales leaders with a perceived belief of
26 some level of procedural justice in the paradox management process.
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44 If the upper management sets the tone so that we need to run our ideas by our
45 counterparts, then it helps sidestep the power things...for example, a simple question
46 such as “have you talked to marketing,” or “are you including sales in this initiative”
47 helps set the tone, and at times forces us to have an open dialog with our counterpart.
48 [1A]
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51 The second paradox management technique discovered in our data was a senior leader’s
52 use of a strategic mantra of cooperation. This strategic mantra is in effect, a superordinate goal,
53 which is intended to transcend the inherent power dynamics. Our data suggest that executives
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3 facilitate this by focusing on strategic platforms and ideas that unify both functions. This
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5 approach helps redirect the sales and marketing executives' inherent energies toward larger,
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7 common goals thus helping them avoid getting into the trap of pulling rank, or one-upmanship.
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9 Overall, our data suggest that, at the senior interface level, paradox management is facilitated by
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11 senior leadership. This intervention, at some level, forces the sales-marketing interface to open
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13 communication lines to avoid pulling rank or one-upmanship. Similarly, senior executives often
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15 champion superordinate goals of cooperation that redirect focus toward larger, common goals
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17 that may free up the communication lines at the top that may in turn help avoid future such
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19 gridlocks.
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24 ***Middle management***

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26 For the middle management level of the marketing-sales interface, one major effective
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28 paradox management approach emerged from our data. We refer to this strategy as a process
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30 called linking appreciation-to-empathy. In contrast to the senior level interface, the middle-
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32 management interface sets aside time periods during bi-weekly or monthly meetings or
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34 conference calls to openly confront the interface tensions and integrate strategic and operational
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36 analysis into their conversations. Hence, middle-management attempts to manage these tensions,
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38 instead of requiring an internal third-party to intervene. The quote below highlights this notion:
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42 I think it is a bit easier at middle levels to manage differences with marketing than what
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44 my boss may have to deal with. While egos exist, they may not be as paralyzing as they
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46 can be at the leadership levels...what also makes a difference is we just maintain open
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48 lines of communication...and hash out our differences. We may not end up agreeing on
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50 much...but our differences are out in the open and we talk about them often. I think that
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52 is healthy...and over time, it can bring functions closer since you understand the other
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54 party a bit more. [2D]

55 Some of our informants note that their conversations with counterparts are like the "idea
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57 generation sessions" during the new product development process where no opinion/idea is
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3 prematurely criticized or rejected. The forums help inject realism and a greater level of overall
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5 appreciation and enhanced business understanding of both parties' challenges and goals.
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8 It is easy to brush aside sales objections but that does not do any good. Last year, I started
9 visiting the branch offices...and I was on calls with salespeople myself...if they had a
10 problem, I heard about it. So, during all our phone calls, I reserved some time to have
11 frank discussion...and then I got a ton of complaints directed at my team [6C].
12

13 I'd get hammered by our district manager selling against a really strong local company in
14 [a region] saying "I am being eaten alive and I can't do this," or I would hear that my
15 team members are disconnected, and less concerned about their plight. Over time, as we
16 became comfortable with the frankness, our conversations became more productive. [3C]
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19 Our informants note that empathy tends to gradually emerge from the scheduled
20 meetings. These open conversations allow both sales and marketing managers to gain an
21 appreciation and a sense of empathy for one another's role and responsibilities over time and
22 internalize their counterparts' points of view, which in turn facilitates perspective-taking and
23 reduces the potential for reactance and regression to their previously polarized perceptions.
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30 As a result, both parties become more open toward experimentation, that is, allowing
31 field-level experimentation with proposed strategies that allow for multiple approaches and
32 fitting. It is crucial that such experiments are evaluated in the end and the learning stored within
33 the interface knowledge stores.
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40 If you are truly open and listen to what the other party is saying with sincerity for a long
41 time, a time comes when you are willing to give their [counterparts'] opinions some
42 credence. I have defied the norm a few times in my region and allowed the sales team to
43 tweak our pricing structure to fit their customer needs. I struggled with our CMO to get
44 this request through...but in the end, it sent a very positive signal to my sales team that I
45 am open and willing to experiment. We had a reasonably good success with our tweaking
46 and it was a win-win for both sales and marketing. [7C]
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49 ***Frontline Level***

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51 At the frontline level, we found a major approach emerged in managing paradox. The
52 technique is named selective compromises. At this level, both parties are faced with an
53 enhanced sense of urgency for execution and implementation. Hence, the management of
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3 paradox is driven by necessity, rather than borne from a gradual process of empathy as discussed
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5 in the middle management level.
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8 We found multiple approaches using this technique. In some instances, both functions
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10 agree upon the common set of accountabilities they must meet (e.g., sales targets and bottom
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12 line) leaving operational details (e.g., customer contact frequency, marketing messages)
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14 malleable. In other cases, the two parties may reach a selective compromise on how to align
15
16 multiple initiatives from marketers while creating a sequential order of presentation to the
17
18 customer. Our data indicate that such compromises require extensive conversations between
19
20 frontline sales and marketing personnel. Further, these compromises are made selectively
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22 depending on what is at stake. For example, for large deals, both marketers and sales personnel
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24 work out a compromise instead of locking horns and preventing the entire strategy from
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26 derailing.
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31 When the competition is so intense, we cannot afford to lose business from our key
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33 customers when the account is up for renewal. So, at times, we have to become very
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35 realistic and assess what is at stake. Last year, we had a \$36 MM deal coming up for
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37 renewal. When we realized that our [sales and marketing] differences may jeopardize the
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39 deal and allow the competitor the foot in the door; we sat across the table and said, “We
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41 need to keep our differences aside and ensure that we do not lose this business at any
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43 cost.” It required a lot of give and take on both sides to arrive at a compromise...but in
44
45 the end, we allowed salespeople the freedom to customize the message and tweak
46
47 payment terms while ensuring that the bottom line was not affected. [2F]

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49 On the field level, we observed many benefits of these management strategies. We
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51 observed that despite divergent field activities, strategies have a better chance of succeeding
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53 since salespeople are allowed selective freedom of execution. This openness may also facilitate
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55 greater, open dialog between marketing and sales, which in turn may allow marketers to collect
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57 real-time feedback from sales that can be passed back to marketing. This process reduces the
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59 perception of disconnection and isolation within the interface.
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3 From our research, we are able to discern the multiple approaches through which
4 paradoxes are managed between the levels of the organization. At the senior-executive level, a
5 degree of compromise and cooperation was utilized. Interestingly, at the middle-management
6 level, the resolution forms from open communication leading to perspective-taking and, at some
7 level, an acceptance of the other party's stance. Finally, at the frontline level, we see a much
8 greater extent of compromise and accommodation by each party.
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16 [Table 4 about here]
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19 Discussion 20 21

22 Due to the increasing utilization of multiple parties working together in the sales ecosystem,
23 we use multi-level data to offer a unique perspective to analyze the marketing-sales interface and
24 the strategic sales and marketing process. Our results show that each managerial level within the
25 marketing-sales interface confronts distinct tensions that may trigger specific defense
26 mechanisms from marketing and sales personnel. Our research further demonstrates how these
27 defenses may affect strategy at a specific level. For instance, senior-level marketing and sales
28 executives confront tensions regarding resource commitment and the potential end-point of the
29 strategic process. In contrast, at the field level, the charge is for action and implementation, with
30 tensions emanating from approaches to activities and accountability. As such, the mechanisms
31 for managing these differential tensions are truly distinct across different levels of the sales-
32 marketing hierarchy. Below we discuss related implications and contributions to both theory and
33 practice, while also identifying future areas of research that might further develop this topic.
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49 [Figure 1 about here]
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Academic Implications/Contributions

Due to the dynamic transition of sales, the literature notes the value of multiple entities and actors playing a key role in both selling and purchasing organizations (Singh et al., 2019). Despite the recognition of this dynamic, few studies have recognized the value of understanding the internal dimensions and systems within sales (Plouffe 2018). As noted by Plouffe (2018), the “importance of the “intraorganizational” aspect of the sales role is now extremely persuasive and almost impossible to ignore.” (p. 241). As such, our study provides insight into one area of this intraorganizational ecosystem, the sales-marketing interface.

Extant research has outlined the distinction between marketing and sales mindsets, often characterizing it as interface animosity that leads to negative effects within strategic and operational domains (e.g., Beverland et al., 2006; Hulland, Nenkov, and Barclay 2012; Dawes and Massey, 2005). Further, past interface research has treated “sales” and “marketing” as monolithic entities within an organization and no attempts have been made to inquire whether the often-noted sales-marketing tensions are universal or unique to a specific level within the organizational hierarchy (e.g., Guenzi and Troilo 2007; Dewsnap and Jobber 2009; Le Meunier FitzHugh and Piercy 2011). With this backdrop, our first contribution is that we show that sales-marketing differences are indeed unique to each of the hierarchical levels. Further, our analysis suggests that the differential nature of these tensions is a function of the unique roles each sales and marketing executive has in the organization. Thus, our findings provide a multi-level perspective and illustrate the uniqueness of taking an ecosystem perspective. Hence, our research challenges scholars to renew their focus on examining interface tensions and provide a qualitative, descriptive analysis of the distinct tensions within each hierarchical level of the marketing-strategy interface.

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3 Our second contribution is to provide an interesting perspective on the firm's ecological
4 system as it pertains to sales and marketing. In comparison to previous research that focuses on
5 one level, our research uses a multi-level view that shows the series of social interactions and
6 connections across multiple levels. As such, we illustrate the increasing complexity of the
7 marketing-sales interface and provide insight into the firm's ecological system.
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11 Our third contribution is the use of the theory of paradox to expand our collective
12 understanding of the marketing-sales interface. Previous research suggests that "paradox theory
13 offers a timely perspective on tensions" (Schad and Bansal, 2018, p. 1492); and our research
14 results seemingly align with this perspective. This theory argues that contradictions are an
15 inherent condition of today's firm. Using this perspective, we suggest that contrary to the
16 prevailing view that these tensions tend to be debilitating and counterproductive (Rouzies et al.,
17 2005; Montgomery and Webster, 1997), scholars may examine these tensions more holistically,
18 since they also possess the potential to trigger positive outcomes if managed appropriately.
19 Lacking intervention, our findings indicate that when interface personnel perceive certain
20 organizational processes and policies as opposing, they increase their own perceived value of the
21 chosen option or perception, often leading them to further uphold and endorse the option. This
22 finding aligns with paradox research that suggests that tensions within a paradox context may
23 create a variety of responses, both positive and negative (Schad et al. 2016).
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26 For our fourth contribution, we highlight how managers at each level of strategy are
27 prone to engage in unique (paralyzing) defense mechanisms, i.e., actions that suppress the
28 relatedness of contradictions, prevent addressing the root cause, and maintain a false appearance
29 of order. The extant perspective on marketing strategy making (Malshe and Sohi, 2009a;
30 Menon, Bharadwaj, and Howell, 1999) exhorts marketing and sales personnel to work closely in
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3 developing and implementing marketing strategies. As such, the path we plot offers a nuanced
4 view of how marketing strategy making may get affected (at a specific level) because of parties
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6 taking refuge into a series of paralyzing defenses.
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10 Fifth, we highlight that when managers appreciate that these competing tensions can exist
11 simultaneously, resist the temptation of engaging in defense mechanisms, and manage these
12 tensions appropriately, it has positive effects on strategy. Therefore, it is critical to balance these
13 tensions, rather than fighting them and/or selecting one of the alternatives over the other. This
14 perspective is missing from the current interface literature. As such, our results challenge
15 scholars to adopt the notion of coping (Lewis 2000), which requires, “openly and critically
16 examining their polarized perceptions, “ which may, “enable more dramatic changes in their
17 understandings and behaviors.” (Lewis 2000, p.764).
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28 Sixth, our analysis provides unique insights into the outcomes when the competing
29 tensions are not managed. In doing so, we reframe the discussion of marketing-sales integration.
30 Prior to our examination, the literature describes marketing-sales integration “as the extent to
31 which activities carried out by the two functions are supportive of each other” (Rouziès et al.,
32 2005). We suggest that the ability to realize such integration and collaboration may be specific
33 to the level of the interface (i.e. senior-level or front-line). As such, scholars may choose to
34 pause and reflect on the uniqueness of each paradoxical tension and examine the specific
35 facilitating mechanisms that must be employed depending on the level.
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47 ***Managerial Implications/Contributions***

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49 For managers, our study provides several useful applications. First, our literature review
50 combined with our analysis argues that the interface is naturally embedded within opposing
51 tensions. As such, the key lies in recognizing the paradoxical nature of these tensions; and that
52 the opposing perspectives of marketing and sales personnel can indeed be complementary.
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3 Additionally, the results describe the distinct effects at each level. Therefore, it is wise for sales
4 and marketing managers to consider that the specific types of tensions that exist at their level
5 may not confront those above or below them.
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10 Our second contribution is a challenge to managers. We suggest that paradoxical
11 thinking should be seen as a valued skillset for managers at each level of the organization. As
12 managers transition upward in the corporate hierarchy, they will be consistently confronted with
13 a nature of distinct tensions in the strategic process. By describing the paradoxes at each level,
14 our results suggest that managers need to comprehend and be familiar with the forms of paradox
15 that emerge at each level and be well versed in their ability to manage each paradox. This may
16 call for a unique type of training, the training of understanding paradoxes. This training may
17 reduce the inherent conflict and defenses, such as in-group/out-group (relative functional
18 identification) that has been often noted within a range of marketing interfaces, and equip
19 managers with an understanding of paradox management at multiple levels.
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33 Third, our findings also impose an additional responsibility upon marketing and sales
34 managers. They must effectively help their deputies navigate these contradictory tensions. As
35 marketers and sales personnel continue to operate in increasingly complex times, the ability to
36 cope is critical. Building defense mechanisms within the interface is no longer an effective
37 option. Instead of setting the marketing and the sales perspective as adversarial, managers must
38 aid their deputies in understanding the value of the perspectives as co-existing. This means that
39 managers must be able to not only appreciate the other function, they must be able to effectively
40 appreciate that this tension may always exist. Formal job rotation programs, with an aim
41 towards cross-fertilization of sales and marketing disciplines as a requirement for career
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3 advancement, may provide managers with the broadened perspective needed to transcend
4 cultural biases and paradoxical tensions existing at the various organizational levels.
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7 ***Limitations and Directions for Future Research***

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10 A limitation of our study is the use of interview data collected at a point in time. It is
11 plausible that accompanying managers over time and collecting data at different time intervals
12 during the strategy creation and implementation process may have offered us deeper insights into
13 the nature of evolving tensions and how they are managed on an ongoing basis. Second, our
14 sample size of 42, drawn from seven firms, may not be entirely representative of the population.
15 We wish to highlight, however, that our sample size is not only greater than the minimum (20-
16 30) recommended for reaching theoretical saturation (Creswell 2007, pp. 66–67), but also
17 consists of dyadic data from across three levels within each organization. Further, the intent of
18 this paper is theory building and not providing generalizations. Third, while examining a
19 functional level phenomenon using personal interviews is a well-accepted practice in qualitative
20 strategy research (Kohli and Jaworski 1990; Tuli et al. 2007), and although we validated our
21 findings through member checks, additional studies using other research methodologies could be
22 useful in extending our research and further exploring these phenomena.
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40 As ours is the first study to delineate marketing-sales interface tensions across
41 organizational levels, there are several future research opportunities in this area. For example,
42 scholars may collect data from sales and marketing managers over the life of a strategy and
43 identify additional paradoxical tensions. Such an approach may help identify whether/how new
44 tensions emerge as strategy making progresses, what their effects on strategy process are, and
45 how such emergent tensions may be managed. One may compare whether the nature of tensions
46 changes across industries given the differential sales-marketing configurations, roles, and
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responsibility of marketing and sales personnel, industry structure, and/or nature of demand.

Scholars may also examine whether specific moderating conditions such as economic uncertainty, intense competition, market fragmentation, and commoditization of the firm's offerings may affect the paradoxical tensions and its resolution.

Conclusion

In summary, our paper provides a new lens through which to view the interface. Our analysis suggests that the contradictory mindsets of marketing and sales personnel represent the competing tensions within the interface and that these tensions and their manifestations differ across organizational levels. Our findings suggest it is critical to actively manage these tensions by viewing these opposing forces as complementary. That is, these opposing forces create a paradox in which the tensions possess the potential to produce positive results. The key lies in recognizing the paradoxical nature of the tensions that these forces create and the common defense mechanisms that they trigger, and then proactively managing them such that the strategic marketing process becomes more effective.

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Table 1: Informant characteristics

Industry	Firm (Code#)	Firm/division details -# of employees (range) -Annual sales	Informant level	Marketing (Gender, age)	Sales (Gender, age)
Healthcare (Device Mfg)	1	- 150-200 -\$200-250MM	Senior	A (Male, 48)	B (Female, 50)
			Middle	C (Female, 39)	D (Female, 50)
			Frontline	E (Female, 44)	F (Male, 52)
Healthcare (Device Mfg)	2	-200-250 -\$300-330MM	Senior	A (Male, 58)	B (Male, 60)
			Middle	C (Male, 29)	D (Female, 26)
			Frontline	E (Female, 33)	F (Male, 32)
Healthcare (Pharmaceuticals)	3	-200-250 -\$250MM	Senior	A (Male, 49)	B (Female, 55)
			Middle	C (Male, 55)	D (Female, 40)
			Frontline	E (Female, 29)	F (Male, 59)
Financial services	4	-250-400 -\$400MM	Senior	A (Male, 46)	B (Female, 45)
			Middle	C (Female, 41)	D (Male, 39)
			Frontline	E (Female, 40)	F (Female, 26)
IT	5	-200-250 -\$150-175MM	Senior	A (Female, 50)	B (Male, 44)
			Middle	C (Male, 53)	D (Male, 51)
			Frontline	E (Male, 38)	F (Male, 50)
Legal services	6	-150-200 -\$200MM	Senior	A (Male, 42)	B (Female, 49)
			Middle	C (Male, 25)	D (Male, 37)
			Frontline	E (Female, 27)	F (Female, 26)
Publishing	7	-250-400 -\$350-370MM	Senior	A (Male, 55)	B (Male, 60)
			Middle	C (Male, 33)	D (Female, 31)
			Frontline	E (Female, 33)	F (Female, 26)

Table 1A: Job titles, specific responsibilities

Marketing		Sales	
Job titles	Major responsibilities (not an exhaustive list)	Job titles	Specific responsibilities (not an exhaustive list)
Senior -CMO -General Manager (Marketing)	Developing product or market development and/or portfolio management strategies, developing major initiatives around large customer segments /verticals, identifying resource requirements, and creating a framework for resource allocation	Senior -VP-Sales -General Manager (Sales)	Sales force management, garnering and allocating resources for the field force, developing frameworks for field-level deployment of marketing strategies/initiatives, developing field compensation plans, insuring that field resources are optimized and duly wasted or burdened, insuring that the field members remain motivated
Middle -Product marketing manager -Group product manager -Brand manager	Developing marketing plans and related action programs to (a) support product, portfolio, and/or segment/vertical-level strategies, (b) increase penetration in specific growth markets/blue oceans, and (c) strengthen brand equity	Middle -Regional sales managers -District managers	Setting strategy implementation /operational agenda and sales targets for various regions/territories, leading the overall, field-level implementation of the strategy
Frontline -Field marketing manager -Field marketing support manager -Trade marketing executive	Provide field-level marketing support to sales teams in specific regions, act as a liaison between the field and HQ marketing; lead generation, marketing communication, and sales training (in some cases) in specific territories	Frontline -Sales executive -Sales person -Sales representative	Meet with customers, dealers, and distributors, promote portfolios of products and services to different customer segments, secure sales orders and insure its timely fulfillment, meet sales targets

Table 2: In-vivo codes; first and second order categories and paradoxes

	In-vivo	First order	Second order	Paradox
<i>Senior managers</i>	<p>Sales</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Strategy is just a proposal -Strategy must be an ongoing negotiation -Marketers cannot fine-tune strategy details -Bottom up creation and evaluation of strategy <p>Marketing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Strategy must be well-defined -Tight strategic boundaries -Strategy helps create deliberate action patterns -Strategy as a time-bound, close-ended entity 	<p>Strategy as proposal Openness to negotiation</p> <p>Strategy has defined parameters Strategy as a time-bound entity</p>	<p>Negotiable and open-ended versus deliberate and closed-ended</p>	<p>Strategic closure versus strategic fluency</p>
	<p>Sales</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Marketers must commit \$ to a strategy -Marketing's ongoing support is crucial -Marketing's philosophical investment into strategy paramount -Difficult to fully commit our resources -We will deploy our resources as and when needed <p>Marketing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Sales leadership must commit sales force's time and loyalty to strategy -We will support sale force on a need basis 	<p>Ongoing versus as and when resource deployment</p> <p>Committed versus need-based support</p>	<p>Resource commitment versus flexibility</p>	<p>Counterpart's Resource Commitment</p>

<p><i>Middle managers</i></p>	<p>Sales -Flexibility -Operational adaptability -Tweaking pricing and communication -Field activities are emergent</p> <p>Marketing -Well-defined activity parameters -Strategy as a guiding principle for field activities -Tight control and consistency -Strategic and operational consistency -Monitoring and consistency</p>	<p>Consistency versus flexibility in action</p> <p>Controlled versus emergent process</p>	<p>Staying within boundaries versus pushing boundaries</p>	<p>Strategic Alignment versus Operational Flexibility</p>
<p><i>Front line executives</i></p>	<p>Sales -We cannot devote equal attention to multiple initiatives -trying to find order within chaos -Activity overload requires that we pick and choose</p> <p>Marketing -All strategies are equally important -Sales must have a balanced approach -Sales must learn to focus on multiple strategies simultaneously</p>	<p>Sequencing Prioritizing</p> <p>Balance Equal attention and importance</p>	<p>Balance versus prioritization</p>	<p>Activity arrays versus activity sequences</p>
<p><i>Front line executives</i></p>	<p>Sales -Salespeople have multiple masters; customers, sales managers, and themselves -How is my customer benefitting? -What is in it for me and my customers?</p> <p>Marketing -Strategy and product success -Ares sales activities consistent with strategy? -Accountability to strategies and bottom-line</p>	<p>Accountability for customer Accountability for self and sales team</p> <p>Accountability for -Strategic outcomes -Maintaining strategy sanctity</p>	<p>Mismatched accountability foci</p>	<p>Internal versus external accountability</p>

Table 3: Paralyzing defenses and examples of their ill effects on strategy

Level -Tension	Paralyzing defense	Ill-effects on strategy
Senior - Strategic closure versus strategic fluency -Resource commitment versus flexibility	-Pulling rank: More powerful function has the last word; power derived from org. structure and reporting lines -Internal line of defense: No open disagreement; communicating internal line of defense within to deputies -Offering evasive, insincere, non-specific resource pledges	- <i>Repressed</i> VP of Sales shared his predicament with his/her deputies, who interpreted it as a lack of enthusiasm toward the strategy -A non-committal sales function did not provide timely, optimal field-level support to marketers' proposed strategy
Middle Strategic Alignment -Operational flexibility	-Reactance and regression: Disregarding other party's perspectives and reverting to deeply held attitudes and belief in a much stronger way.	-Marketers' stringent requirements to adhere to strategic guidelines made it difficult for sales function to have any operational flexibility -Salespeople did not have the freedom to adapt strategies based on specific environmental conditions -A reactive field force held their cards close, and went about operationalizing the strategy the way they deemed appropriate, often contradicting marketing's counsel -The nature and extent of feedback and cumulative understanding of strategy's progress vs. strategic aims declined dramatically -No matter which course the above takes, there is negative signaling downward
Front line - Activity arrays versus sequence -Internal versus external accountability	-Disconnectedness: Disregarding other party's suggestions -Isolation: Reducing the level of interaction with the other party	-Salespeople gave <i>lip service</i> to marketers, subverted suggested strategy, moved forward with its own action sequence and when called upon for feedback, attempted to find a means to articulate their actions within the strategy - Marketers provide resource support of multiple initiatives, while sales does not have commitment built within client base; this led to action and resource misalignment, wastage, and strategy failure

Table 4: Examples of effective paradox management and how it may benefit strategy

	Paradox management	Strategic benefit (mostly foundational and futuristic) Paradox management strategies build/create long-term opportunities for future strategies/ there is a cumulative effect
Senior -Strategic closure versus strategic fluency -Resource commitment versus flexibility	-Senior leadership intervention and strategic mantra of cooperation: Often by the chief executive officer or by someone to whom both functions report	Strategy not killed at the top; folks may remain neutral and find ways to hide negativity/conceal negative signaling They may instruct the troupes to toe the line and perform their duties An intervention/dialog may open up future avenues for conversation and to find ways to avoid such gridlocks Ideas about how to internally position strategy so that it has hierarchical buy-in may come forward may be generated
Middle -Strategic Alignment -Operational Flexibility	-Linking appreciation to empathy: Designating specific times and venues to openly confront differences and integrate strategic and operational analysis; helps inject realism and greater level of overall business understanding in the discussion; development of empathy toward the other function over time	Sets the stage for greater understanding/ builds foundation Initiates the process of orientation harmonization Provides forums to explicitly practice the process of listening to and internalizing their counterparts' points of views Helps generate some level of perspective taking thereby helping reduce the extent of functional identification Helps middle managers gain an appreciation and a sense of empathy for one another's role and responsibilities over time
Field -Activity arrays versus sequence -Internal versus external accountability	Selective compromises: Agreeing over common accountabilities to be met leaving others malleable; selective agreement how to align multiple initiatives while creating a sequential order of presentation to customer	Despite divergent field activities, strategies have better chance of succeeding in the market since SP are allowed selective freedom of execution Facilitates greater, open dialog between marketing and sales Marketers may be able to collect real-time feedback from sales that can be passed back to marketing

Figure 1

