A? Aalto University School of Business

The role of emotional intelligence in B2B customer relationships
An analysis of a Finnish recruitment company

Marketing

Master's thesis

Mia Simonen

2016

![Aalto University School of Business logo] **A!** **Aalto University School of Business**

Author	Mia Simonen
Title of thesis	The role of emotional intelligence in B2B customer relationships - An analysis of a Finnish recruitment company
Degree	Master of Science in Economics and Business Administration
Degree programme	Marketing
Thesis advisor(s)	Lasse Mitronen & Olli Rusanen
Year of approval 2016	**Number of pages** 90 **Language** English

Abstract

This master's thesis examines the role of emotional intelligence (EI) in business-to-business personal selling in a company that operates in the recruiting industry in Finland. The objective was to discover how EI is manifested and which of its elements are highlighted in the analyzed context. A growing body of research suggests that EI plays a central role in buyer-seller interaction and that it can significantly contribute to sales success, which makes it an important topic to be studied.

This study takes a qualitative perspective and an interpretive approach, which is built on the fundamental idea of a shared, subjective reality. My aim was to gain understanding of how salespeople create meanings and intentions when interacting with their customers. I investigated the sales efforts of the chosen company through four personal in-depth interviews, which were followed by a content analysis of the transcribed material. As the basis of my analysis I selected Goleman's (1998) EI framework, which has continued to be one of the primarily utilized EI models and is most applicable to the organizational context.

The findings revealed strengths and weaknesses of the studied company's salespeople with regard to their use of EI, as well as some differences in their interaction with new, established, and diminished customers. Strengths included the EI competences of self-confidence, self-control, innovation, and service orientation, as well as two competences that were introduced as new additions into Goleman's framework: enthusiasm and the desire to help. Weaknesses comprised emotional awareness, accurate self-assessment, adaptability, building bonds, and reflection, the latter of which was also suggested as a new addition into the framework in the form of an overarching umbrella competence. Other additions include the umbrella competences of authenticity and trust. Reflection and authenticity can be regarded as crucial elements that enable the objective of trust-building to be reached. Lastly, this research also shed light on some potential downsides that may either reside in an EI competence inherently or result from its exaggerated or inefficient utilization.

Acknowledgments

Table of contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

List of Appendices

1. Introduction

This master's thesis examines the role of emotional intelligence in business-to-business personal selling. The objective was to gain insight into how emotional intelligence is manifested in buyer-seller interaction and which of its elements are highlighted in the chosen context. The paper begins with a short overview of the academic discussion that led me to research the topic in more depth, after which I will introduce the specific research context and question. Then I will proceed to presenting the focus areas of the literature review, the structure that this paper will follow, as well as some central terminology related to the topic.

1.1 Background

In recent decades we have shifted from a product-based logic to a service-based and solution-based logic of marketing (see Table 1). Along with this transition the role of the salesforce has become highlighted and thus deserves increased attention in the academic discussion. Times have changed, our culture and the business world has evolved, and consequently the nature of personal selling is different in today's world than it was a few decades ago. Over the years customers have become more empowered and more demanding and the marketplace has become more competitive. Therefore one could say that it takes more in the modern business world for a salesperson to be a successful than it took some decades ago. (Manna & Smith, 2004) In other words, all the same old best practices do not apply anymore that were once considered the golden rules and techniques that every decent salesperson was expected to abide by.

On the other hand, the essence of personal selling still remains the same: it is fundamentally about successful interaction between the seller and the buyer. Business relationships, as all other type of relationships as well, are molded by the interaction and emotions – and often even some drama – that take place in them (Bagozzi, 2006). Nowadays there is general consensus that the role of emotions in the decision-making process is very significant and, in fact, overwhelms the role of rational thinking. Not only are buyers influenced by emotions, but also the behavior and performance of sellers is strongly tied to their sentiment. This has been reflected in the field of selling with focus being shifted from a transactional to a relational perspective and from technical expertise more towards interaction skills (Table 1).

One of the topics that has been raised into the academic discussion in recent years is emotional intelligence (EI[1]). Earlier B2B and sales literature has mostly focused on the behavior-based aspects of inter-organizational business relationships rather than the affective elements (Stanko et al., 2007; see Table 1). During the 1990s and 2000s it became more and more widely realized that EI can significantly contribute to sales success and customer satisfaction, which led to a growing amount of research being conducted on the subject. In addition to the inter-organizational context, EI is indisputably an important issue also in intra-organizational relationships and especially when it comes to leadership skills. EI can often be the crucial factor that determines whether a superior is successful in his/her relationships with subordinates and well-liked among them, or whether he ends up being fired (Goleman, 1998). EI has been dubbed by Harvard Business Review as 'a ground-breaking, paradigm-shifting idea' (Goleman, 2006, p. xii), making it clear that it is a highly relevant concept in the field of business.

Research has shown that EI plays an essential role in the big picture of buyer-seller interaction and customer relationship management. Rationalistic frameworks do not suffice in providing full understanding of the dynamics of interaction and why it is experienced as fulfilling or not (Bagozzi, 2006). Omitting emotional intelligence from the equation means looking at only a part of the whole picture and thus gives you only a part of the comprehensive solution. The best way to serve customers is to always have the head working together with the heart. Since decision-making is always affected by emotions, we must learn to understand and manage our own as well as others' emotions in order to avoid unnecessary failures (Manna & Smith, 2004). Therefore it is essential to study the ways in which salespeople attempt to influence buyers through emotions as well as steer sales situations in a favorable direction by way of emotional intelligence.

---

[1] Oftentimes emotional intelligence has been abbreviated as EQ in line with IQ, the traditional intelligence quotient concept. However, Daniel Goleman, whose EI theory serves as the basis of my analysis, prefers the abbreviation EI (Goleman, 2006), and therefore also I will refer to emotional intelligence as EI rather than EQ in this paper.

Table 1: Summary of central shifts in the field of marketing and sales

	Past	**Now**
Logic of Marketing	Product-based	Solution-based
Focus of selling	Transactional / technical	Relational / Interactional
Focus of B2B & sales literature	Rational / behavior-based aspects	Emotional / affective elements

1.2 Research context & question

This master's thesis belongs to the field of marketing and more specifically to the sub-field of business-to-business (B2B) marketing. The broader subject of my research is sales management and the general phenomenon that I will be studying is personal selling in the B2B context. I am interested in examining B2B sales from a psychological perspective and gaining insight into the role that EI plays in buyer-seller interaction from the viewpoint of sales representatives. My objective is to shed light on how EI is manifested in the communication and interaction of sales representatives and their business customers in a company that operates in the recruiting industry in Finland. More specifically, the focus is on uncovering new insights into which elements of EI are accentuated and/or especially crucial in the buyer-seller interaction in the specified context.

So far there seems to be little existent research on this subject in this specific setting – for example Bagozzi (2006) highlights that there is a need for studying EI in the buyer-seller context. Especially when the recruiting industry and the cultural context of this study are also taken into consideration, previous research on the topic is close to non-existent. Alen (2012), for example, brings out that EI research in Finland has so far been very scarce and should be supplemented. In addition, the majority of earlier EI research has been quantitative by nature and consequently further research employing a qualitative approach is required in order to produce a more penetrating analysis and deeper knowledge of the subject. This study aims to fill in some of the gaps left behind by prior research by generating detailed insight into the manifestation of EI in B2B customer relationships.

I will approach the subject from a qualitative angle by analyzing the sales efforts of the chosen company through in-depth personal interviews with members of the company's sales

team, recruitment team, and administrative team. The study concentrates on company representatives whose daily work includes a significant share of activities related to sales and customer relationship management. Employees who primarily focus on other than sales or customer-related tasks, such as carrying out the actual recruiting process, are omitted from the examination despite the fact that also they may to some extent participate in sales efforts (see section 6.3 Sales process). I will examine the communication and elements of EI employed by the case company's salespeople in their customer interactions. The question that this study aims to answer is the following:

How is emotional intelligence manifested in the business-to-business buyer-seller interaction of a Finnish recruitment company's sales representatives?

Since the company operates only with corporate customers, the focus of this study has been narrowed down to concern solely the B2B context. I will not examine the intra-organizational setting within the company, but instead focus exclusively on the inter-organizational context – more specifically on the relationships between the case company and its customer companies, in which the case company has the role of the seller and the customer companies are the buyers. This paper approaches the subject purely from the viewpoint of salespeople and does not take into account the perspective of buyers.

1.3 Thesis structure & terminology

This paper begins with the theoretical section, which discusses the key contents of my literature review: personal selling in the B2B context, EI, and communication. I will first provide a brief overview of personal B2B selling and discuss three building blocks of B2B customer interaction – relationship selling, adaptive selling, and the attributes of a successful salesperson – which together with EI theory constitute the bedrock for this whole thesis. Then I will continue to examining personality and emotions as the basis of behavior, as well as the concept of EI. I will also discuss the role, significance and manifestation of EI and communication in personal selling, acquiring and developing EI on an individual and an organizational level, and lastly the specific EI dimensions and competences as classified by Goleman in his framework (1998). The core points of the whole literature review are summarized in section 4.

The theoretical section is followed by an empirical section, which begins with a concise review of the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of my study, as well as the research approach that was adopted. This is followed by the data collection, data analysis, and research evaluation subsections. Next the paper continues to introducing the case company, its organizational structure, its sales process, and the customer relationship life cycle categorization that is utilized in this study. Then I will proceed to the findings and present the central themes that arose in the interviews as well as reflect on the connection between theory and my empirical research. Lastly I will finish by summarizing the key points presented in this paper and by providing some concluding remarks on the subject. Table 2 below presents the central terminology that is utilized in this research.

Table 2: Central terminology

Term	Definition
B2B sales	Business-to-business sales; sales activities conducted in an inter-organizational context between two or more companies (e.g. Fill & Fill, 2005)
Emotional intelligence	The capacity to perceive, understand and manage emotional information (e.g. Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Goleman, 1998 & 2006; Kidwell et al., 2011)
Emotional competence	An on-the-job capability that reflects a specific aspect of one's emotional intelligence on a practical level (e.g. Goleman, 1998)
Personality	Each individual's unique set of traits that guides our thoughts, attitudes and behavior (e.g. Dunderfelt, 1998)
Personal selling	Face-to-face communication between two or more individuals (in B2B sales company representatives) intended to share information and knowledge as well as influence the recipient to take action in a desired manner (e.g. Fill & Fill, 2005)
Recruitment industry	A field of business dedicated to reaching and acquiring competent workforce for customer companies (e.g. Holopainen, 2012)

2. Personal selling in the B2B context

This section deals with personal selling with a sole focus on B2B buyer-seller interactions. First the concept of personal selling is explained on a general level, followed by a discussion of the building blocks of B2B customer interaction. These building blocks include two prevailing approaches to B2B selling – relationship selling and adaptive selling – as well as the attributes of a successful salesperson, all of which are linked to the concept of EI. The key points of this section are summarized in Table 9 in section 4.

2.1 Definition, elements & objectives

Personal selling is essentially a dynamic process that revolves around the purpose of influencing the message recipient (Weitz et al., 1986). Personal selling is the primary promotional tool in the B2B context and a vital ingredient in the development of collaborative, deeper relationships. Consequently in recent decades salespeople have increasingly been considered responsible for the development and maintenance of long-term customer relationships – serving merely as a manager of customers is not sufficient. It has been acknowledged that organizations can gain competitive advantage by means of well-conducted personal interaction in buyer-seller situations. Salespeople serve as companies' ambassadors and have an important and responsible role in representing the organization they work for. Salespeople should be aware of the fact that their habitus, conduct, and communication style always have an effect on the perception that customers establish of the whole organization. (Fill & Fill, 2005)

But what defines well-conducted buyer-seller interaction? What does it take for a seller and buyer to form a deeper relationship? Essentially it all comes down to trust; it is a prerequisite and the bedrock for successful, long-term business relationships (Dion et al., 1995; Fill & Fill, 2005). This entails that building trust is a central – or arguably even the most central – objective in personal selling. Nicholson et al. (2001) have explored the important role of liking in the development of the buyer's trust in the sales representative. The results of their study revealed that liking has a major influence on trust and therefore should be paid attention to in buyer-seller relationships. Especially as the relationship matures the buyer tends to allocate increased importance to liking as the basis of trust. Goleman (1998, p. 26) has included trustworthiness as one of the EI competences in his framework (see 3.5.2).

The downside of personal selling is that it is very expensive compared to other forms of marketing. Therefore it is essential for the salesforce to be utilized in an effective manner. There is wide consensus of personal selling having greatest benefits later in the buying/selling process instead of the very early phases, because the beginning is mainly about creating and increasing awareness. Many companies attempt to minimize the time spent by salespeople on other than directly customer-related tasks. (Fill & Fill, 2005, p. 334)

The significance of personal selling is strongly highlighted in business relationships that are fairly or highly complex (Fill & Fill, 2005, p. 339). In the recruiting industry buyer-seller relationships can be considered rather complex since the recruitment of a new employee is typically something that companies want to deliberate thoroughly and there is often several people involved in the recruitment process and decision-making. Furthermore, the service itself is fairly complex by nature since it deals with intangible assets – i.e. the skills and abilities of people and the added value that they could generate in the position they are applying for. Unsuccessful recruitments can end up being very costly in terms of wasted time, money, and other resources, which is why there is great pressure on both the buyer's and seller's side to achieve a successful result.

With all this taken into consideration, the role of personal selling and how it is conducted in the case company's field of business can be considered to be of pivotal importance. The company's customers must be able to trust its expertise in what it does, because if an unfit candidate would be recommended for a job and thereby recruited, it might incur expenses on the customer company for a prolonged period of time. Moreover, if the case company would perform the recruitment process poorly, also the customer company would face the risk of being perceived negatively by the applicants. Thus the case company has a responsible role as an intermediary between companies and jobseekers.

2.2 Building blocks of B2B customer interaction

According to Fill and Fill (2005, p. 342), embracing a customer focus and service orientation as well as being adaptable in one's behavior has a particularly positive influence on the success of salespeople in relational settings. B2B selling includes two approaches that are built around the ideas of a customer/service orientation and adaptability, namely relationship selling and adaptive selling. These two approaches share common ground with each other

and also strongly contribute to the underlying big picture behind the EI ideology, and therefore they serve as an essential prelude into the subject. In addition, another aspect that must be incorporated into the picture of the elements that constitute the foundation for B2B customer interaction is the attributes of a salesperson. Every salesperson's individual set of attributes affects their adaptive selling and relationships selling skills as well as how emotional intelligence is reflected in their behavior and customer interaction. Consequently personal attributes may play a big role in the extent of a salesperson's success; there are some attributes that have been widely recognized as beneficial for salespeople to possess. The following Figure 1 demonstrates the interrelatedness of relationship selling, adaptive selling, the attributes of a successful salesperson, and EI. The first three will be briefly discussed in the following subsections, whereas the concept of EI – as the core interest of this study – will be more elaborately examined in section 3.
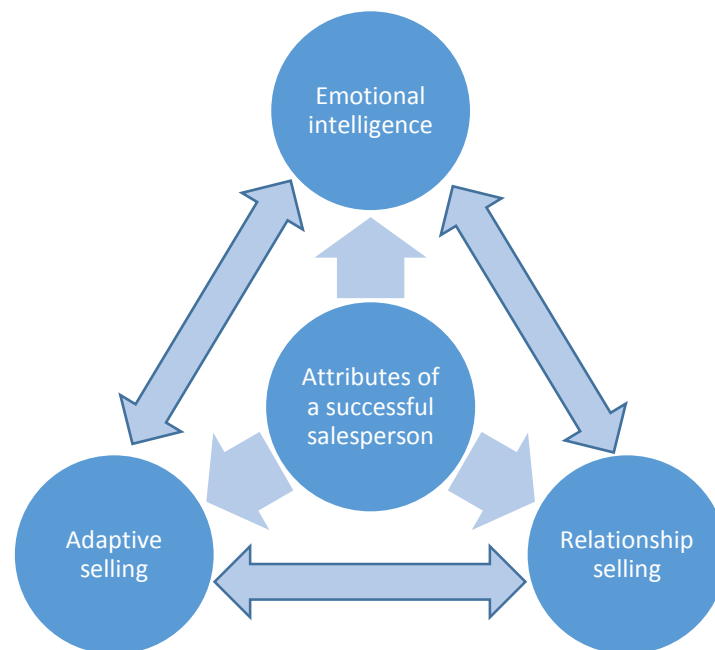
Figure 1: The interrelatedness of EI, relationship selling, adaptive selling & salesperson attributes

2.2.1 Relationship selling

The relationship marketing paradigm has earned widespread acceptance over the last two decades. In the B2B context success is largely dependent on the development and maintenance of good buyer-seller relationships. The underlying principle in relationship marketing is the intention of doing continued business in the future. In other words, focus is

set on the long term with emphasis being placed on cultivating loyalty and commitment by way of high-quality customer service and interaction. The idea is that neither the selling nor the buying company seek to exploit one another but instead reach their objectives in a win-win manner. Increased customer loyalty translates not only into greater profits but also – more importantly – into competitive advantage. (Fill & Fill, 2005, p. 7, 143 & 152)

Related to the idea of relationship selling, Manna and Smith (2004) have emphasized the humanistic and psychological aspects of B2B business. It is widely acknowledged that also in the B2B context purchase intentions and decisions are practically always affected by emotions. In addition, in today's world customers have heightened expectations towards services. Due to these two focal considerations the humanistic side of business relationships has gained importance and received increased attention in recent years.

The conduct of a company's salesforce more or less determines whether its relationship marketing strategy succeeds or not (Weitz & Bradford, 1999). Weitz and Bradford (1999) have highlighted the importance of helping customer companies in their value-creation and focusing on the partnering aspect of the business relationship rather than demonstrating a transactional focus and an overly aggressive sales approach. A softer approach to selling combined with good performance levels can promote trust-building, which constitutes a prerequisite for a close, established relationship (Beverland, 2001).

Relationship selling entails that the salesperson actively keeps contact to customers and meets with them on a regular basis. Beverland (2001) also brings out that it is important to build customer relationships on the company level and not only on a personal level. In today's world people shift at an increasing pace from one job to another and if the relationship is built only between two individuals, it may easily be eroded in the long run when either of the involved individuals has moved on to a different position. In other words, instead of having only one contact in the customer company and only one relationship with the company, the salesperson should have multiple relationships with various representatives from the same company. (ibid)

Simultaneously with the shift towards relationship selling and a strong customer orientation, the role of EI has become increasingly crucial in order for one to excel in the business world (Goleman, 1998, p. 29). The concept of EI with its intra- and interpersonal competencies is

closely linked to relationship selling and should form the basis for developing relationship marketing tactics (Manna & Smith, 2004). Goleman's (1998) categorization of EI dimensions and competencies is discussed in detail in section 3.5.

2.2.2 Adaptive selling

Adaptive selling has been the subject of plentiful research from the 1980s onwards and constitutes another concept that has received wide-spread support in the academic discussion (Kidwell et al., 2007). In personal selling, adaptability refers to accommodating one's sales approach, messages and behaviors to suit the situation and the buyer's style with the purpose of fostering interaction with the buyer (Fill & Fill, 2005, p. 343). The concept is built around the idea that there is no generic best way of conducting sales (Román & Iacobucci, 2010), and therefore the approach should always be adjusted based on what the customer is like with regard to interaction style, values, habitus, and so forth. Personal selling is the only form of sales communication that allows the messages to be adapted according to an individual customer's needs and views (Weitz et al., 1986).

In practice the use of an adaptive selling approach means that salespeople monitor buyers' communication and behavior, attempt to decipher their wants and needs, and then based on the interpretation of the situation develop a solution and adapt their own behavior and communication to match that of the buyer. Adaptability is manifested in listening, probing, questioning and reading the buyer's verbal and non-verbal cues (Fill & Fill, 2005, p. 343). In order to be effective, salespeople should be capable of modifying their approaches both during an individual sales interaction situation as well as across separate sales situations (Weitz et al., 1986).

Adaptive selling has been found to be connected to customer satisfaction through its mediating role between buyers' expectations and sellers' realistic possibilities; it helps bring both parties to the same page, so to speak (Evanschitzky et al., 2012). For instance, a study conducted by Ahearne et al. (2005) showed that the use of an adaptive selling style has a clear effect on how satisfied customers are with sales representatives, because adaptability results in the sales efforts being tailored and better adjusted to the customer's specific needs and wants. Also Román and Iacobucci (2010) have discovered a strong link between the

adaptive selling technique and whether the customer regarded the interaction with the salesperson as likely to continue in future.

Mutual ground and similarity tend to reinforce positive emotions; people have a better feeling about someone with whom they have something in common compared to someone with whom they cannot identify (Andersen & Kumar, 2006). Also buyers are more inclined to buy from salespeople who they perceive as congenial with themselves (Dion et al., 1995). This can be seen as the underlying idea also behind adaptive selling; the salesperson aims to create a sense of similarity between himself and the buyer by making interpretations of the customer and then accommodating his own style to match that of the buyer as well as possible. It would seem logical that also similarity regarding communication and interaction style would promote the creation of positive emotions in the same way as other types of perceived similarities.

In general, adaptive selling is characterized by a strong customer orientation and aims to create a positive attitude towards salespeople among buyers. A positive attitude increases customer satisfaction, which increases the buyer's trust in the salesperson, which, in turn, increases buyer loyalty in the long run. A longer, deeper customer relationship typically translates into increased profits. Therefore salespeople should put more emphasis on the adaptive approach rather than self- and task-orientated approaches (Fill & Fill, 2005, p. 343).

Adaptive selling is linked to EI because the effective use of applicable adaptive selling techniques in each situation and with each type of individual is promoted by the salesperson's ability to perceive emotion, which is at the core of EI. The better salespeople are able to read their customers, the better they can adapt their behavior and communication style accordingly (Rope, 2003, p. 69). A salesperson who is able to effectively interpret the customer's emotions and purchase intention signals can consequently better modify his sales approach and technique to suit the customer's style (Deeter-Schmelz & Sojka, 2007). In other words, the EI ability of perceiving emotions helps salespeople understand buyers' reactions and psychological states better. Thus it contributes to reaching a positive outcome since perceptive salespeople are better equipped to adapt to buyers' emotional states (Kidwell et al., 2007). Advising and training salespeople to focus on recognizing customers' emotional cues can boost their performance. Salespeople with poor skills for perceiving

emotion are less successful in their sales efforts than ones with good skills and may unintentionally even act in a way that is detrimental to the customer relationship (ibid).

2.2.3 Attributes of a successful salesperson

Buyer-seller relationships typically include a problem-solving setting, which is why the fascination for problem-solving can be seen as a factor that generally contributes to sales success. The ambition to find a solution drives the kind of individuals forward who enjoy mental challenges and motivates them to engage in the situation and not give up until they have discovered the answer. Logically in the customer's eyes the salesperson's desire to solve problems translates into the genuine desire of helping the customer. If the salesperson seems highly invested in finding a solution to the customer's problem, i.e. helping him and his business, it will most probably promote trust and liking towards the salesperson. It is especially important that the salesperson comes across as trustworthy, since the customer has to be able to count on his promises holding true. Problem-solvers also tend to utilize logical reasoning and assess specific features instead of conducting a generic, broad evaluation. The specific assessment approach can help a salesperson dissolve a mesh of problems into smaller-scale units that are more easily workable. In addition, a salesperson with a problem-solving ambition may be better than average at matching the sales offering with the customer's needs. A strong problem-solving orientation is also linked to good conflict management abilities, which constitute an important asset in personal selling. (Deeter-Schmelz & Sojka, 2007)

In line with the significance of conflict management skills, also the role of good interaction skills in general is highlighted in the marketing and sales of expert services due to the consultative nature of these kinds of services (Vahvaselkä, 2004, p. 20-21). For example Beverland (2001) argues that people skills play a significant role in personal selling. Of course the salesperson must be knowledgeable about what he is actually selling to the customer, but the most important and most challenging part is how to communicate with the customer (Pekkarinen et al., 2006). When the aim is to find a solution to the customer's problem or to develop the customer's business together, the customer typically favors a salesperson who is not only specialized in the subject at hand, but also empathetic, understanding, helpful, and equipped with good interaction skills (Vahvaselkä, 2004, p. 21).

It is important that the salesperson's verbal and non-verbal delivery is easy and natural, but listening skills are at least equally important as verbal output (Rope, 2003, p. 101 & 111).

Bagozzi (2006) has studied social emotions and suggests that particularly the concept of empathy should be studied in more depth in future, since empathy entails many beneficial functions in interaction. According to Bagozzi (2006), empathy may advance attachment and liking and thus contribute to interpersonal communication. It may also promote the information-processing and, in turn, the decision-making of the individuals involved in the interaction. In addition, empathy motivates individuals to resolve conflicts and repair damaged relationships. Also Rane (2004) has discovered in a literature review concerning the appreciated attributes and temperaments of salespeople that the most important characteristic of a salesperson is empathy, followed by goal-orientation and resiliency, as well as communication skills. However, based on her research, there seems to be an inconsistency between what studies have shown the importance of empathy in personal selling to be, and how important Finnish salespeople themselves consider empathy to be in their job. It might be the case that salespeople are not that well informed about the concept of empathy, that they do not for some reason believe it to be that useful, or that they do not show very high levels of empathy and therefore do not want to regard it as an important quality. Interestingly the results of Rane's study suggest that Finnish salespeople consider the most important attributes to be trustworthiness, honesty, and ethical and moral behavior. All of these can be seen as pertaining to the concept of integrity, which implicates that integrity is a highly valued salesperson attribute in the Finnish context. In line with the participants' thoughts in Rane's study, also Beverland (2001) has emphasized the importance of honesty as an attribute that successful salespeople must possess. This again lends support to the pivotal role of trustworthiness, since honesty is obviously linked to it.

Another attribute – or rather an ability – that Deeter-Schmelz and Sojka (2007) emphasize as beneficial for salespeople is self-monitoring, or self-reflection, which is related to situational sensitivity and discretion and conveyed in accommodating one's behavior on an ad hoc basis. Salespeople who carry out active self-monitoring are better at perceiving external aspects and circumstances and typically also have a better understanding of their audience. Good self-monitoring skills should be reflected in higher adaptability in sales situations, which in turn should logically entail reaching a better performance level. Also Alen (2012) brings out in his study that situational factors and the customer type most

probably influence which salesperson qualities are considered pleasing, since the salesperson should always adapt his style to the situation and the customer's style. A good salesperson has to be able to act appropriately with different kinds of people and personality types.

The skill of monitoring should preferably not be restricted only to oneself but instead also include the active monitoring of others. In order to build strong and profitable customer relationships in the long run, salespeople must appreciate the central role they play in the formation of customer satisfaction (Evanschitzky et al., 2012). They must pay attention to fostering the relationship and monitoring customer satisfaction. An especially noteworthy observation by Evanschitzky et al. (2012) is that customer satisfaction is negatively affected by salesperson dominance in the buyer-seller relationship. This should be taken into account in the recruitment of new salespeople, because the level of dominance in a salesperson is something that cannot be easily modified through training. Thus it is advisable for companies to evaluate the dominance of applicants in order to distinguish those who represent the characteristic within a favorable level.

Furthermore, along with the rise of the relationship selling focus, the stereotypical negative image of salespeople being manipulative and fake has transformed into a more customer-centric view (Schaefer & Pettijohn, 2006). This shift has caused the concept of authenticity in personal selling to gain increased attention. Schaefer and Pettijohn (2006) have studied the relationship of salesperson authenticity to performance and found that the two variables are clearly interlinked among young salespeople who are in the phase of establishing their career. This means that the significance of being perceived as authentic by customers is emphasized in the early stages of a salesperson's career. However, the results showed that authenticity levels were actually the highest among more experienced salespeople, i.e. the oldest age group in the study, which included participants over 35 years of age. This implies that authenticity is strengthened through experience, since solid experience is most probably reflected into professional confidence and salespeople feeling more at ease in their job and not feeling the need to fit into a predetermined mold or adopt a given exterior.

Despite the fact that the aforementioned attributes have been found to be favorable for salespeople, there is no prescribed specific "recipe" for a successful salesperson. Although salespeople are stereotypically thought to be highly sociable, extroverted people, in reality

the profession is, indeed, perfectly suitable for a wide scale of personalities (Schaefer & Pettijohn, 2006). There is no single right type of personality especially well-suited for sales, but instead sales work can be done successfully by many different kinds of people (Rope, 2003, p. 108). The desirable attributes of a salesperson depend on the industry in question, the cultural context as well as the attitudes and behavioral norms related to it (Rane, 2004, p. 43-44).

However, in order to be successful in personal selling, one has to be able to utilize his own strengths and best attributes to their full potential – regardless of what those key attributes specifically are (Rope, 2003, p. 108). Consequently the concept of EI is strongly intertwined with sales success, because tapping into one's own full potential and communicating it successfully to others requires being aware of one's strengths and weaknesses and developing one's interaction skills. Thus, in order to be a top performer, a salesperson must possess a variety of EI competencies. Goleman (1998) states that the EI competencies most clearly linked to excellent sales performance levels include initiative, achievement drive, adaptability, influence, team leadership, political awareness, empathy, self-confidence, and developing others. These competencies are explained in more detail in section 3.5 of this paper.

In a nutshell, the connecting factor between successful salespeople seems to be that they are able to read the situation and the customer but simultaneously display authenticity, i.e. stay true to themselves and make use of their own personas in their sales activities (Rope, 2003, p. 108). This means that a successful salesperson must have good self-knowledge: he should practice reflection to become conscious of his own characteristics and strengths, and to be able to harness them as an advantage in sales situations. A salesperson who understands his own personality and attributes can better adapt his behavior to match the buyer, which can strengthen the buyer's inclination towards making a positive purchase decision (Dion et al., 1995). In addition, it is essential for a salesperson to have good interaction skills, e.g. because they serve as the tool for manifesting empathy, which is also important. Lastly, the salesperson should exhibit a fascination for problem-solving and always act with integrity. Figure 2 below shows a compilation of the key attributes of a successful salesperson.
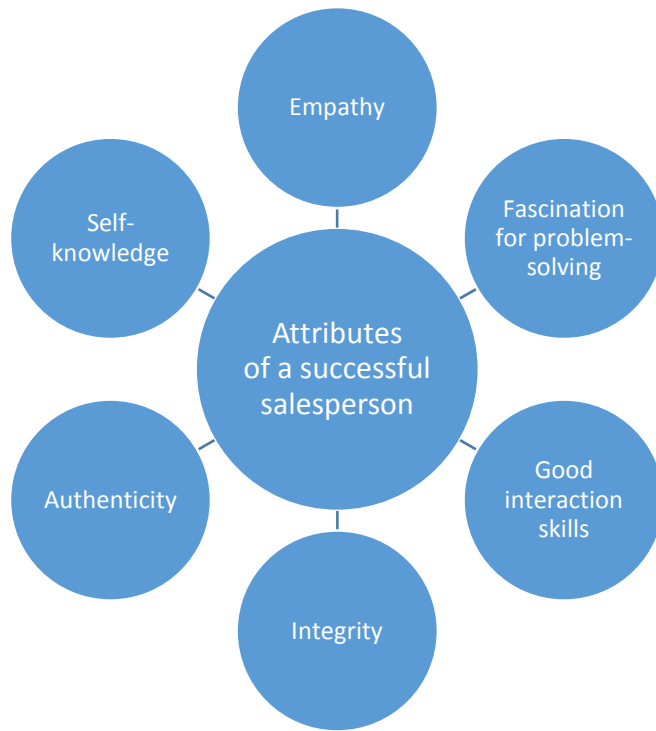
Figure 2: A compilation of key attributes considered favorable for salespeople

3. Emotional intelligence & communication

This section takes a closer look at EI and the ways in which communication is inseparably intertwined with EI skills. The section begins with a glance at the role that personality and emotions play in guiding our behavior. Next the focus is shifted to the concept of EI, which is then tied to the context of personal selling. Then the discussion proceeds to the acquirement and development of EI, and lastly to the EI framework that I utilized as the basis of my analysis. The key points of this section are summarized in Table 10 in section 4.

3.1 Personality & emotions as the basis of behavior

Goleman (2006) dichotomizes that we all have two minds working together: the rational one and the emotional one. Our emotional mind is rooted deep in evolutionary history, whereas the rational mind has evolved later. The sophistication and complexity of our emotional mind can be attributed to our highly developed neocortex, which enables us to, for instance, experience feelings about our own feelings (ibid). Feelings have played an important role in the survival of human beings. Fear makes us cautious and stimulates the urge to flee from threatening situations, whereas anger prepares us for a battle and helps us defend ourselves (Saarinen & Kokkonen, 2003, p. 13-14). Feelings also assist us in directing and prioritizing our actions, as well as guiding our attention and concentration (ibid).

Our individual uniqueness, on the other hand, is typically referred to as personality; every person has his own unique set of inclinations towards certain aspirations, needs, attitudes and behaviors (Hoffman, 2002, p. 8). Personality is a broad umbrella term that encompasses various layers of the self (see Figure 3 on the next page) – all the physiological, social, psychological, and individual functions of a human being. The physical body serves as the foundation for everything, the social self is linked to our community and society, the subconscious upbrought self is a collection of our childhood experiences, and the inner self is the basis of our self-awareness (Dunderfelt, 1998, p. 17 & 22). The inner self is often referred to as individuality or identity, and it is the core of our personality. The inner or core self can also be regarded as the spiritual dimension of personality, because in philosophy the spirituality of a human being is indeed defined as this skill of self-assertion, i.e. the ability to observe one's own psychological functions (ibid).

People experience their core self or identity as something internal and sometimes even as mysterious to themselves (Dunderfelt, 1998, p. 18-19). Personality traits are fundamentally rooted in individuals and represent the deeper levels of the self. Consequently they are very challenging to try to modify compared to observable behaviors (Grant, 2007). The social self – also referred to as the role self – on the other hand, is the so-called outer layer of the self that is visible to others. It is influenced by one's upbringing, education, professional know-how, era, and culture. The encounter and compatibility of different social selves is an important element in interpersonal interaction. (Dunderfelt, 1998, p. 18-19)

The temperament brings the personality alive by adding some "color and spice" to it. A temperament is a set of reaction tendencies towards internal and external stimuli that reflects one's personality. One's temperament and associated reactions are tightly tied to physical structure, biological functions and heredity. The temperament is a more fundamental level of the personality than the upbrought self; it is manifested already in the toddler age. However, the temperament is difficult to try to distinguish from the upbrought self, because the two dimensions are intertwined since early childhood. Together they form an individual's basic character. Each individual's behavior is typically a mix of two or three different temperament styles; in addition to the dominant style there are also some influences from secondary styles. (Dunderfelt, 1998, p. 19-22 & 48-49)
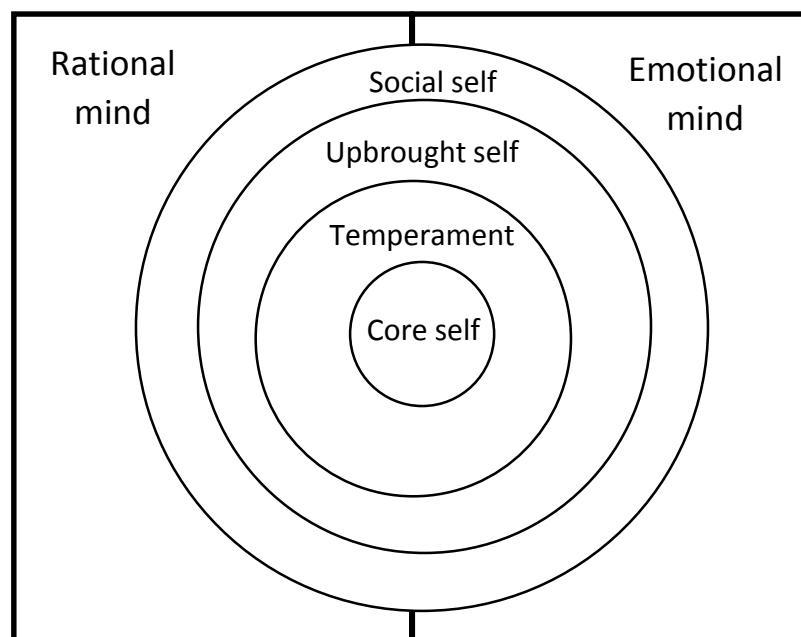
Figure 3: The levels of personality

When it comes to personal selling, understanding and assessing personality traits has gained increased attention within the field (Deeter-Schmelz & Sojka, 2007). One's temperament and personal attributes form the basis for intuitive, natural behavior in customer situations (Kim, 2012). Also EI can be regarded as being interlinked with personality traits (Grant, 2007). Successful interaction is strongly linked to emotions and this is described as personal chemistry (Vahvaselkä, 2004, p. 22). Personal chemistry deals with different kinds of interpersonal reactions that stem from personality types and communication styles (Dunderfelt, 1998, p. 22). Interpersonal emotions have a crucial influence on whether a seller and buyer become united or diverged (Bagozzi, 2006). When two personalities and communication styles match and personal chemistry is strong, cooperation typically feels fluent (Vahvaselkä, 2004, p. 22). On the other hand, business relationships that are afflicted by a lack of positive personal chemistry are challenging to develop and uphold in the long run (Andersen & Kumar, 2006).

3.2 Emotional intelligence as a concept

Emotional intelligence is the capability to collect and implement knowledge from one's own as well as others' emotions with the purpose of achieving favorable outcomes (Kidwell et al., 2011). The concept of EI is still fairly young (Saarinen & Kokkonen, 2003, p. 16); it was originally presented in 1990 by Salovey and Mayer. They then defined EI as 'the subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions' (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Before the concept of EI was put together and introduced, the qualities and abilities that it includes were referred to rather vaguely as e.g. character, personality, soft skills, or competence (Goleman, 1998, p. 4).

EI started to receive more widespread attention in 1995 as the nowadays renowned pioneer in the field, Daniel Goleman (1998; 2006), published his best-selling book titled 'Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ'. Among the multitude of definitions that currently exist for EI, Goleman (1998, p. 317) defines it as the ability 1) to observe emotions in oneself as well as others, 2) to motivate oneself, and 3) to effectively manage both intra- and interpersonal emotions. In other words, EI refers to emotional knowledge and skills related both to oneself, others, and different situations, as well as the courses of action that are taken based on this knowledge and these skills (Saarinen & Kokkonen, 2003, p. 17). The

concept of EI does not deal with traditionally defined intelligence, such as logical reasoning or mathematic skills. One could regard EI as a different form and manifestation of intelligence than the traditional IQ (Goleman, 1998, p. 4).

Today there are three primary EI models that stand out as the most significant amidst the multitude of variations: the ones presented by Salovey and Mayer (1990), Bar-On (1997), and Goleman (1998; 2006). All of these three have different emphasis, which are presented in Table 3. Salovey and Mayer have based their work on the traditional concept of IQ, Bar-On has built his model around well-being, and Goleman's framework focuses on the organizational context (Goleman, 2006). Due to Goleman's focus on the business world and working life, it is the most suitable model to be utilized as the basis of this study. Goleman's EI framework (1998) is further discussed in section 3.5.

Table 3: The three primary models of EI

Researcher	Focus/basis of EI model
Peter Salovey & John D. Mayer	Traditional intelligence / IQ
Reuven Bar-On	Well-being
Daniel Goleman	Organizational context

Goleman has dedicated years of work and effort into proving the role of EI in high performance on the individual level, the team level, as well as the organizational level, and to constructing metrics that allow the value of EI to be quantified. Goleman has linked EI to neuroscience, thus working towards EI being considered more than just a soft, gut feeling type of theory. The skills needed for emotionally intelligent conduct reside in the evolutionarily old parts of our brain, which process emotions, and neuroscience has shown that these parts learn differently than the parts that process rational thinking. This is an important notion that should be taken into account in the business world with regard to training and development. Although there are some differences in EI skills between men and women, as a whole both sexes stand on the same line, with different strengths and weaknesses evening each other out. (Goleman, 1998, p. 5-7)

3.3 Emotional intelligence & communication in personal selling

In conjunction with the rise of relationship marketing as the ruling paradigm in the field, it has been acknowledged that communication skills are a crucial asset in personal selling. Good communication plays a central role in promoting trust, loyalty and commitment between the involved parties. Miscommunication is often the root cause of tension and conflict in inter-organizational relationships, whereas good relationships are characterized by functioning, effective communication. (Fill & Fill, 2005, p. 286)

Also listening skills have received increased attention in the discussion and today they are considered a key asset in sales. Good listening skills are of vital importance in order for the salesperson to reach a good understanding of the customer's problem, needs, and wishes. Listening should not be a passive activity, but instead it should be seen as an active behavior in which the listener does more than just receives information; the listener expresses concentration, engagement, genuine interest and understanding by small gestures, such as note-taking, nodding one's head and keeping eye contact with the speaker. To further promote mutual understanding the listener should also present questions and repeat key messages. (Drollinger & Comer, 2013)

An even more advanced level of listening is defined by Drollinger and Comer (2013) as active empathetic listening (AEL). In AEL the salesperson has to think and make interpretations beyond the explicit, literal message and strive to perceive the emotions of the buyer. When active listening is combined with empathy, it assists the salesperson in compiling a more comprehensive picture of the interaction situation. In addition, it underpins the skills of self-awareness and self-reflection. Drollinger and Comer (ibid) have found that the use of AEL in a sales setting leads to an enhanced perception of trustworthiness, consequently resulting in better relationship quality and higher sales performance. Thus it may promote the development of long-lasting business buyer-seller relationships. Vahvaselkä (2004, p. 134) has found listening skills to be the Achilles' heel among Finnish salespeople in addition to suboptimal question technique.

As in B2C settings, also in B2B personal selling emotions are always an inseparable part of the decision-making process. Technical skills are, in fact, less important than humanistic skills, such as verbal delivery and listening skills, when it comes to reaching a positive sales

outcome (Manna & Smith, 2004). Even if a salesperson is highly knowledgeable and cognitively gifted, but unable to identify the emotions that a customer is displaying, he will most likely not be a top-performer. Therefore the EI of a salesperson can have a significant influence on the outcome of a sales situation (Kidwell et al., 2007; Chen & Jaramillo, 2014). In line with other studies related to socio-psychological drivers in business relationships, Stanko et al. (2007) have found that emotional intensity in buyer-seller relationships plays a central role in the development of commitment. Salespeople who are adept at empathizing with the problems and challenges of their customers may more easily reach a higher level of understanding and better succeed at creating an atmosphere of trust and collaboration (Fill & Fill, 2005, p. 238).

Also Bagozzi (2006) has found that EI is positively linked to salespeople's relationships with their customers and colleagues; salespeople with high EI scores are able to create better relationships than ones with low EI scores. Kidwell et al. (2011) further support this notion by purporting that in addition to boosting short-term sales, high EI among a company's sales representatives also contributes to long-term customer retention. In addition, Saarinen and Kokkonen (2003, p. 141-142) argue that high EI converts into increased sales, better tolerance for uncertainty at the workplace, and working in the same company for a longer period of time. Thus it can be concluded that EI may provide benefits both in the short and the long run, and both through longer customer relationships as well as longer contracts with salespeople.

3.4 Acquiring & developing emotional intelligence

Earlier section 2.1 brought out that the importance of personal selling grows with the complexity of the job. Conforming to this linkage, also the role of EI becomes more salient as the complexity of the job increases (Goleman, 1998, p. 22). Companies should appreciate the fact that in consultative selling the emotions of salespeople may well affect corporate performance and thus should be taken into account in a concrete manner. It is advisable for companies to promote the metamorphosis of emotions into positive outcomes both on the individual as well as the corporate level by offering salespeople training and support regarding the subject.

In working life, the level of one's performance is strongly dependent on personal abilities linked to EI (Goleman, 1998, p. 4). Therefore the best and most comforting fact about EI is that it is not genetically fixed but instead can be learned and continuously developed throughout one's life (Goleman, 1998, p. 7; Grant, 2007). In layman's terms personal EI development can be dubbed as maturity (Goleman, 1998, p. 7). Anyone can develop their EI regardless of inheritable factors, such as their personality. The development of EI is primarily dependent on personal willingness and enthusiasm (Saarinen & Kokkonen, 2003, p. 17).

Rozell et al. (2004) have proposed that companies should systematically start organizing EI training for their sales force. By doing so, they could foster the development of salespeople's skills in that area and consequently promote customer-oriented sales. However, Grant (2007) highlights that in order to achieve noteworthy results in the development of EI skills, the training should be continued for several weeks instead of being organized as an intensive course of only a couple of days. In addition, the training is most fruitful when carried out in a group setting rather than individually. As a part of their training, it would be recommendable for salespeople to complete personal EI assessments, such as the Emotional Quotient Inventory or shortly EQ-i (Bar-On, 1997). Completing the test requires some self-reflection to be done and thus might help salespeople become more aware of their own strengths and weaknesses regarding EI and sales work.

On a corporate level EI can be acquired through the successful recruitment of new salespeople. Companies can achieve important competitive advantage by recruiting individuals with a temperament and personality well-suited for sales and investing in their appropriate training (Kim, 2012). In addition, recruiting people with a high EI and promoting the development of EI competencies in current employees is reflected in the company achieving better financial results (Goleman, 1998, p. 34). Also Kidwell et al. (2007) have concluded that companies should try to identify and recruit salespeople with high EI levels, because they are more successful in customer-oriented selling. High emotional intelligence assists, for instance, in recognizing personality traits (Manna & Smith, 2004). This is often an advantageous skill when interacting with customers, because it allows the salesperson to more efficiently adapt his own behavior and interaction style to suit the situation. Jokinen (2015) has suggested that companies should pay careful attention to the degree to which job applicants are able to be consciously present and show situational sensitivity during the job

interview. The interviewer should observe whether the interviewee seems e.g. easily approachable, open-minded, compassionate, flexible, self-reflecting, and motivated to develop and create new solutions.

3.5 Framework for analysis

This study utilizes Goleman's (1998, p. 24-25) EI framework as the starting point for analysis, because it is one of three primary EI models in use today and is especially designed for the business context. Goleman has classified EI into five different elements, which are 1) self-awareness, 2) self-regulation, 3) motivation, 4) empathy, and 5) social skills. Each element includes a set of emotional competences, which depict the practical side of EI as on-the-job capabilities. These capabilities reflect one's emotional intelligence and are the key to success and superb performance in working life. EI with its five elements constitutes the foundation for learning these functional competencies – they cannot be successfully adopted without a sufficient level of emotional intelligence in the background. On the other hand, high EI by itself does not automatically translate into being adept at these competences, but merely denotes that a person has great potential to learn them.

Altogether Goleman itemizes 25 emotional competences that are divided into personal competences and social competences. Personal competences cover the EI elements of self-awareness, self-regulation, and motivation, whereas social competences pertain to the elements of empathy and social skills. Based on the emotional competence framework that Goleman presents (1998, p. 26-27), I have compiled Figure 4 that illustrates the elements of EI and the competencies that are linked to each element. The different elements are strongly interconnected and founded on each other in a hierarchical manner, starting from the level of self-awareness and proceeding all the way to the level of social skills. The listed competences are universal in the sense that they pertain widely to a multitude of different types of professions – if not even to almost all jobs (Goleman, 1998, p. 25-28). Next I will discuss these levels and the specific emotional competences that belong to each level in more detail.
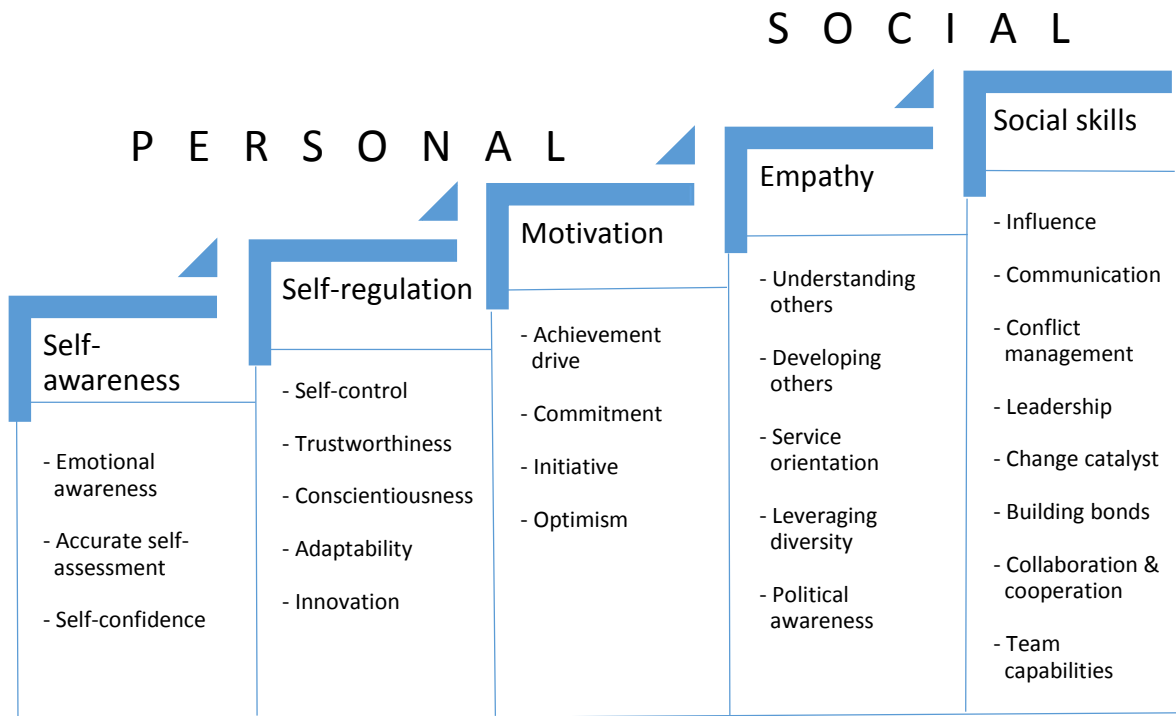
Figure 4: The division of EI elements and competences according to Goleman (1998, p. 26-27)

3.5.1 Self-awareness

The first level in Goleman's EI framework is self-awareness, which includes the competencies of emotional awareness, accurate self-assessment, and self-confidence (1998, p. 54-69). Emotional awareness refers to one's ability to perceive their own emotions and to steer decision-making based on their values. Accurate self-assessment can be described as a truthful view of one's own inner resources, strengths and weaknesses, a perception of what aspects should be developed in oneself, and being able to learn from experience. Self-confidence is about having self-respect and a healthy, positive perception of oneself. More detailed descriptions and specific manifestations of the three self-awareness competences can be found in Table 4 below.

Table 4: EI competences included in the element of self-awareness (based on Goleman, 1998, p. 54-69)

EI competence	Manifestation
Emotional awareness	- Identifying emotions and the reasons that have evoked them - Acknowledging connections between feelings, thoughts, and actions - Seeing the influence that emotions have on performance - Using values and goals as personal guidance
Accurate self-assessment	- The ability to reflect on one's own behavior - Being receptive to feedback, new ideas and viewpoints - Embracing constant learning and self-development - Having a balanced attitude towards oneself and being able to laugh at oneself

	- Believing in one's capabilities, ambitions and values
Self-confidence	- Behaving in an unashamed manner
	- Being determined and decisive
	- Being unafraid of supporting unpopular views

3.5.2 Self-regulation

The second EI level, self-regulation, comprises five competencies: self-control, trustworthiness, conscientiousness, adaptability, and innovation (Goleman, 1998, p. 82-95). Both trustworthiness and conscientiousness relate to integrity, honesty, and taking responsibility. Both adaptability and innovation refer to having an open mind towards different ideas and perspectives as well as handling change and challenges well. The following Table 5 presents a more elaborate itemization of the self-regulation competences.

Table 5: EI competences included in the element of self-regulation (based on Goleman, 1998, p. 82-95)

EI competence	Manifestation
Self-control	- Containing oneself even amidst upsetting emotions - Refraining from impulsive behavior - Maintaining focus even in stressful situations
Trustworthiness	- Following an ethical code of conduct - Being reliable and genuine - Acknowledging one's mistakes - Showing accountability for one's actions and personal performance
Conscientiousness	- Striving to achieve set goals - Being committed to keeping one's promises - Working in a meticulous and coordinated manner
Adaptability	- Being flexible in one's views and conduct - Embracing change - Prioritizing things appropriately based on the situation - Dealing with various issues simultaneously without losing track
Innovation	- Being receptive towards new ideas and information - Presenting creative approaches and solutions - Striving towards out-of-the-box thinking

3.5.3 Motivation

The third level in Goleman's framework is motivation, which includes four competencies: achievement drive, commitment, initiative, and optimism (Goleman, 1998, p. 113-122). Achievement drive depicts the aspiration to accomplish outstanding performance. Commitment relates to adopting the vision and objectives of a group or organization. Initiative and optimism are intertwined competencies that refer to a embodying a proactive approach and a persistent attitude. The manifestations of motivational competences are shown in Table 6.

Table 6: EI competences included in the element of motivation (based on Goleman, 1998, p. 113-122)

EI competence	Manifestation
Achievement drive	- Having ambition in setting one's own objectives and standards - Setting focus on reaching goals - Being motivated by attaining results - Showing an eagerness to learn to develop one's performance
Commitment	- Being willing to make personal sacrifices for the organization's benefit - Being motivated by the group's mission and the "big picture" one is a part of - Basing decisions on the group's core values
Initiative	- Embracing opportunities - Striving to exceed expectations - Being willing to cut corners and disobey rules if the situation requires so - Activating others with resourceful endeavors
Optimism	- Not being discouraged by difficulties and disappointments - Emphasizing and being motivated by the prospect of success - Attributing adversities to circumstances instead of one's personal incapability

3.5.4 Empathy

The fourth EI level, empathy, constitutes the bedrock for all the social competences that are relevant in working life. This level includes five competencies: understanding others, service orientation, developing others, leveraging diversity, and political awareness (Goleman, 1998, p. 138-160). Understanding others relates to perceiving and understanding the feelings and anxieties of other people. Developing others refers to recognizing aspects that should be developed in others and supporting their capabilities. Service orientation is reflected in identifying, forecasting, and fulfilling customers' needs. Leveraging diversity denotes fostering the difference and versatility of people in generating opportunities. Political awareness is the ability to interpret an organization's political and social currents. More comprehensive characterizations of the five empathy competences are displayed in the following Table 7.

Table 7: EI competences included in the element of empathy (based on Goleman, 1998, p. 138-160)

EI competence	Manifestation
Understanding others	- Being a good listener - Being adept at detecting emotional cues - Showing sensitivity towards others' viewpoints - Attempting to help other people according to their situation
Developing others	- Giving credit for people's assets and achievements - Presenting constructive feedback and appreciate people's need for personal development - Serving as a coach and promoting others' learning by giving them challenging assignments
Service orientation	- Forming a picture of customers' needs and think of a solution that fits the picture - Striving for maximum customer satisfaction and loyalty - Being willing to help customers - Aiming to be a trusted consultant for the customer

Leveraging diversity	- Appreciating diverse backgrounds and ideologies - Regarding diversity as a positive thing that creates opportunities - Defying prejudice and bigotry
Political awareness	- Apprehending focal power relationships - Distinguishing central social networks - Comprehending how the opinions and behaviors of customers and competitors are formed - Being skillful at perceiving organizational and external realities

3.5.5 Social skills

Lastly, the fifth and most advanced level in Goleman's (1998) framework is social skills, which concerns the discreet management of other people's feelings. The social skills level includes a total of eight competencies: influence, communication, conflict management, leadership, change catalyst, building bonds, collaboration and cooperation, and team capabilities (Goleman, 1998, p. 169-216). Influence is reflected in persuasiveness and the skillful use of tactics aimed at winning the opponent over. The competence of communication includes open listening and delivering explicit, unambiguous and credible messages. Conflict management pertains to constructively discussing and mediating disagreements. Leadership as an EI competence refers to motivating, encouraging and directing others – both as individuals and in groups. The change catalyst competence is manifested in launching, advancing and coordinating change. Building bonds translates into cherishing conducive relationship. Collaboration and cooperation refers to striving towards mutual objectives. Team capabilities concern working to achieve shared goals while establishing and cherishing group synergy. These eight social skills competences are explained more closely in Table 8.

Table 8: EI competences included in the element of social skills (based on Goleman, 1998, p. 169-216)

EI competence	Manifestation
Influence	- Being convincing - Modifying one's messages according to the listener - Utilizing cultivated approaches to create rapport and agreement - Exaggerating and dramatizing if necessary in order to get a point or idea clearly across to others
Communication	- Fostering reciprocity, active listening and mutual understanding - Recognizing emotional cues and adjusting one's messages based on them - Not shirking discussions about difficult issues or hearing unpleasant news - Supporting information sharing and open communication
Conflict management	- Being courteous and discreet towards other people - Detecting possible disagreements - Taking a proactive approach to handling conflicts and striving to neutralize the situation - Promoting open discussion and debate - Aiming to find a win-win resolution

Leadership	- Being able to make others feel inspired by joint goals and aspirations - Taking responsibility for one's leader status - Supporting others' performance without assuming excessive control - Striving to act as an example to others
Change catalyst	- Questioning the status quo and acknowledging when change is needed - Striving to eliminate obstacles - Promoting change and engaging also others in pursuing it - Exhibiting the change that is asked from others
Building bonds	- Developing and upholding large unofficial networks - Searching for mutually useful and propitious relationships - Promoting affinity and agreement and keeping others updated - Becoming personal friends with one's colleagues
Collaboration and cooperation	- Being able to simultaneously take into account relationships with others while focusing on getting a task completed - Fostering information and resource sharing - Identifying and utilizing cooperation possibilities - Developing a companionable and reciprocal atmosphere
Team capabilities	- Displaying appreciation, providing assistance and giving credit and recognition - Encouraging mutual effort and engaging the team members in contributing to reaching the objective - Bolstering team identity and commitment - Defending the group reputation and honor

4. Summary of literature review

Due to the objective of this study, it was important for the literature review not to be restricted solely to the concept of EI, but instead to link EI to the wider context of personal B2B selling. Therefore the literature review started in section 2 with a discussion of personal selling in the B2B context and illuminated how the building blocks of B2B customer interactions are also related to the concept of EI. The key contents of the literature surrounding these topics have been summarized in Table 9 below.

Table 9: Summary of personal selling literature review

Theme	Author	Year	Key points & findings
Overview of personal selling	Weitz, B. A. et al.	1986	Personal selling is a dynamic process that aims to influence the message recipient. It is the only form of sales communication that allows the adaptation of messages on the individual level.
	Fill, C. & Fill, K. E.	2005	Organizations can gain competitive advantage through well-conducted personal interaction in buyer-seller situations and the development and maintenance of good buyer-seller relationships.
Trust & liking	Dion, P. et al.	1995	Trust is a necessity for successful, long-term business relationships. A sense of similarity between a buyer and a salesperson promotes purchase willingness.
	Nicholson, C. et al.	2001	Liking plays an important role in the development of buyer-seller trust and therefore should be paid attention to in buyer-seller relationships. The importance of liking as the basis of trust increases as the relationship matures.
Relationship selling	Weitz, B. A & Bradford, K. D.	1999	The conduct of a company's salesforce is crucial to the success of its relationship marketing strategy. Salespeople should help their customers in their value-creation and focus on the partnering aspect of the business relationship instead of a transactional focus and an overly aggressive sales approach.
	Beverland, M.	2001	A softer approach to selling combined with good performance levels can promote trust-building, which is required for a close, established relationship. Customer relationships should be built on the company level, not only on a personal level.
Adaptive selling	Weitz, B. A. et al.	1986	Salespeople should be capable of modifying their approaches both during an individual sales interaction situation as well as across separate sales situations.
	Rope, T.	2003	The better salespeople are able to read their customers, the better they can adapt their behavior and communication style accordingly.
	Ahearne, M. et al.	2005	Adaptive selling has a clear effect on how satisfied customers are with sales representatives, because adaptability results in the sales efforts being tailored and better adjusted to the customer's specific needs and wants.
	Fill, C. & Fill, K. E.	2005	Adaptability in personal selling refers to accommodating one's sales approach, messages and behaviors to suit the situation and the buyer's style with the purpose of fostering interaction with the buyer.

	Román, S. & Iacobucci, D.	2010	There is a strong link between the adaptive selling technique and whether the customer considered the interaction with the salesperson likely to continue in future.
	Evanschitzky, H. et al.	2012	Adaptive selling promotes customer satisfaction because it helps bring the buyer and seller to the same page by mediating buyers' expectations and sellers' realistic possibilities.
Attributes of a successful salesperson	Dion, P. et al.	1995	A successful salesperson must have good self-knowledge. A salesperson who understands his own personality and attributes can better adapt his behavior to match the buyer, which can strengthen the buyer's inclination towards making a positive purchase decision.
	Rope, T.	2003	Listening skills are at least equally important for a salesperson as verbal output. Success in sales requires the ability to utilize one's own strengths and best attributes to their full potential, which, in turn, requires EI skills. Successful salespeople are able to read the situation and customer and display authenticity.
	Rane, P.	2004	The most important characteristics of a salesperson are empathy, goal-orientation, resiliency, and communication skills. Finnish salespeople emphasize the importance of integrity, including trustworthiness, honesty, and ethical and moral behavior.
	Bagozzi, R. P.	2006	Being empathetic is a beneficial attribute for a salesperson, because empathy may advance attachment and liking and thus contribute to interpersonal communication. It may also promote decision-making and motivate individuals to resolve conflicts and repair damaged relationships.
	Schaefer, A.D. & Pettijohn, C.E.	2006	Salesperson authenticity is clearly linked to performance among young salespeople who are in the phase of establishing their career. Authenticity seems to be strengthened through experience
	Deeter-Schmelz, D. R. & Sojka, J. Z.	2007	The fascination for problem-solving can be seen as a factor that generally contributes to sales success, because translates into the genuine desire of helping the customer. A strong problem-solving orientation is also linked to the skill of matching the sales offering with the customer's needs, as well as good conflict management abilities, both of which constitute important assets in personal selling.
	Alen, K.	2012	Situational factors and the customer type most probably influence which salesperson qualities are considered pleasing, since the salesperson should always adapt his style to the situation and the customer's style.
	Evanschitzky, H. et al.	2012	Customer satisfaction is negatively affected by salesperson dominance in the buyer-seller relationship. This should be taken into account in the recruitment of new salespeople, because salesperson dominance cannot be easily modified through training.

Next, in section 3, the literature review proceeded to reviewing the concept of EI more closely, discussing its role in personal selling as well as how companies can increase their EI, and presenting the EI framework that formed the initial coding frame in my content analysis. The key points of the literature discussed in section 3 have been summarized in Table 10 below.

Table 10: Summary of emotional intelligence literature review

Theme	Author	Year	Key points & findings
Personality & personal chemistry	Dunderfelt, T.	1998	Personality encompasses various layers of the self. The encounter and compatibility of different social selves is an important element in interpersonal interaction. Each individual's behavior is a mix of dominant and secondary temperament styles. Personal chemistry stems from personality types and communication styles.
	Hoffman, E.	2002	Personality translates into individual uniqueness; every person has his own unique set of inclinations towards certain aspirations, needs, attitudes and behaviors.
	Vahvaselkä, I	2004	Successful interaction is strongly linked to emotions in the form of personal chemistry. Matching personalities, communication styles and personal chemistry promote the fluency of cooperation. Inadequate listening skills and question technique are weaknesses among Finnish salespeople.
	Andersen, P. H. & Kumar, R.	2006	Business relationships that are afflicted by a lack of positive personal chemistry are challenging to develop and uphold in the long run.
	Grant, A. M.	2007	EI can be regarded as being interlinked with personality traits. Personality traits are very challenging to try to modify compared to observable behaviors.
	Kim, S. H.	2012	One's temperament and personal attributes form the basis for intuitive, natural behavior in customer situations.
EI as a concept	Salovey, P. & Mayer, J. D.	1990	Introduced the concept of EI and defined it as 'the subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions'.
	Bar-On, R.	1997	Creator of an EI model built around well-being. Sales organizations should have their employees complete personal EI assessments, such as the Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i).
	Saarinen, M. & Kokkonen, M.	2003	EI refers to emotional knowledge and skills related both to oneself, others, and different situations, as well as the courses of action that are taken based on this knowledge and these skills.
	Goleman, D.	2006	Has presented a framework of EI focusing on the organizational context. Due to Goleman's focus on the business world and working life, his EI model is the most suitable one to be utilized as the basis of this study.
	Kidwell, B. et al.	2011	EI is the capability to collect and implement knowledge from one's own as well as others' emotions with the purpose of achieving favorable outcomes.
EI in personal selling	Saarinen, M. & Kokkonen, M.	2003	High EI converts into increased sales, better tolerance for uncertainty at the workplace, and working in the same company for a longer period of time.
	Manna, D. R. & Smith, A. D.	2004	Technical skills are less important than humanistic skills (e.g. verbal delivery and listening skills) in reaching a positive sales outcome. High emotional intelligence assists in recognizing personality traits, which is of advantage in sales.
	Kidwell, B. et al.	2007	The EI of a salesperson can have a significant influence on the outcome of a sales situation.

	Stanko, M. A. et al.	2007	Emotional intensity in buyer-seller relationships plays a central role in the development of commitment.
	Kidwell, B. et al.	2011	In addition to boosting short-term sales, high EI among a company's sales representatives also contributes to long-term customer retention.
	Drollinger, T. & Comer, L.B.	2013	Good listening skills are very important for a salesperson to reach a good understanding of the customer's problem, needs, and wishes. Listening should be an active behavior in which the listener expresses concentration, engagement, genuine interest and understanding by small gestures, as well as presenting questions and repeating key messages.
Acquiring & developing EI	Saarinen, M. & Kokkonen, M.	2003	The development of EI is primarily dependent on personal willingness and enthusiasm.
	Rozell, E. J. et al.	2004	Companies should organize systematical EI training for their sales force in order to foster the development of salespeople's skills in that area and consequently promote customer-oriented sales.
	Grant, A. M.	2007	EI can be learned and continuously developed throughout one's life. EI training should be carried out in a group setting over a time-span of many weeks.
	Kidwell, B. et al.	2007	Companies should try to identify and recruit salespeople with high EI levels, because they are more successful in customer-oriented selling.
	Kim, S. H.	2012	Companies can achieve important competitive advantage by recruiting individuals with a temperament and personality well-suited for sales and investing in their appropriate training.
	Jokinen, T.	2015	Companies should pay careful attention to how consciously present and situationally sensitive job applicants are able to be during the job interview. The interviewer should observe whether the interviewee seems e.g. easily approachable, open-minded, compassionate, flexible, self-reflecting, and motivated to develop and create new solutions.
Framework for analysis	Goleman, D.	1998	The EI framework includes five different elements, which are 1) self-awareness, 2) self-regulation, 3) motivation, 4) empathy, and 5) social skills. These elements are further divided into altogether 25 emotional competences, which depict the practical side of EI as on-the-job capabilities that reflect one's EI and are the key to success in working life. The five EI elements and 25 competences constituted the initial coding frame in my content analysis.

5. Methodology

In this section I will first succinctly discuss the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of my study, as well as the research approach that was adopted. Then I will explain how the data for the purposes of this research was collected and analyzed, and lastly how the research was evaluated.

5.1 Ontology, epistemology & research approach

Ontology refers to how reality, existence, and the world is viewed and understood. One central facet of ontology that has to do with how reality is perceived is the classification of objectivism versus subjectivism. According to objectivism, there exists an independent reality outside of individuals and their subjective interpretations. The subjective view, on the other hand, suggests that reality is entirely constructed from personal perceptions and experiences, and consequently it is different for everyone. In addition, in subjectivism these perceptions of reality are considered dynamic, i.e. evolving over time and from one context to another. The term subjectivism is often substituted with constructivism when describing a reality that is constructed through subjective and shared interpretations and meanings. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008)

Another theoretical dimension to be considered when defining the starting point for research is epistemology, which deals with the nature, sources, production and extent of knowledge. The division between an objectivist and subjectivist view also applies to epistemology with regard to whether reality is inherently tied to individual interpretations or, in fact, exists also neutrally in isolation from individual perceptions. In the context of epistemology, the subjectivist view regards the production of knowledge as occurring through social actors. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008)

The ontological and epistemological underpinnings that this study reflects are subjectivist by nature. More specifically, this research applies an interpretive approach, which is often the most suitable approach when studying individuals. Interpretivism and constructivism have their background in hermeneutics and encompass various different forms, all of which share the fundamental idea of a shared, subjective reality and the role of interpretation and understanding in all qualitative research (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). The interpretive

approach was the appropriate choice for my study, since my research has a focus on personal meaning and sense-making in a specific context; my aim is to gain understanding of how salespeople create meanings and intentions when interacting with their customers.

5.2 Data collection

In subjectivist research, interviews are regarded as gateways to the genuine experiences of individuals; they allow the researcher to gain insight into how something is experienced by the interviewees (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Therefore the interview questions should be aimed towards soliciting interviewees' impressions, feelings, opinions, and so forth. I collected the empirical data for this study by conducting one-on-one, semi-structured, in-depth interviews with case company employees. Semi-structured interviews utilize a guiding interview outline that is prepared beforehand, but allow for deviations from the outline based on what emerges as interesting or noteworthy during the interview (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). This interview approach offers a functional balance between flexibility and structure. The approach is well-suited for the purposes of my research, since it is not too adrift so as to generate information that answers my research question, yet not too rigid to allow a fairly free flow of thoughts and ideas within the topic. In order to obtain as rich data as possible, all of the interviews conducted for this study primarily consisted of open-ended questions that enabled the interviewees to express their answers in a non-confined manner, as elaborately as they wished. The interview outline is included at the end of this thesis as Appendix 1.

The interviewees were chosen with a purposeful sampling method. Qualitative research typically calls for purposeful – or non-random – sampling due to its in-depth focus on small samples (Patton, 2002). In this study it was a necessary requirement for all of the participants to have sufficient experience of working in the company and developing customer relationships. The criteria that was utilized as the basis of selecting the interviewees can be summarized as the following three points: 1) at the time of the interviews, all interviewees had been working in the case company for at least 1.5 years with their average amount of work hours exceeding 20 hours per week, 2) all interviewees had managed customer relationships in all three life cycle stages categorized in this study (i.e. new, existing, and diminished) and 3) together the interviewees comprehensively represent the variety of positions in the case company in which one is responsible for sales activities and customer

account management. I compiled a list including all of the company's employees and scrutinized which ones fulfill the determined criteria.

The final group of interviewees included altogether four individuals: three members of the company's sales team and one member of the administrative team. One of the interviewed sales team members works as a Key Account Manager and another one as a Sales Director. The third interviewed sales team member is also a part of the case company's recruitment team due to her hybrid role as a Recruitment Consultant, who is responsible for her own commissions from start to finish, including the actual recruitment process in addition to the sales process. The interviewee from the administrative team is the company's CEO and she was chosen to be interviewed because she is responsible for sales activities and CRM as well, and manages several of the company's longest and most profitable customer relationships. The interviewees were between 24 and 30 years of age. A summary of the interviewees is presented in Table 11.

Table 11: Summary of interviewees

Interviewee number	Gender	Age	Position	Sales experience
1	Female	24	Recruitment Consultant	1.75 years
2	Male	26	Key Account Manager	2.5 years
3	Male	27	Sales Director	2.25 years
4	Female	30	CEO	4 years

The interviews were conducted in fall 2015 over the span of 1.5 months. Three interviews took place in the case company's premises in a small meeting room, which was booked in advance to avoid any external disturbance during the interview sessions. In addition, one interview took place in a nearby café, because on that day all of the private spaces in the company's premises were unavailable. The interview was held during a quiet time of the day in a remote corner of the café. All of the interviews were carried out in the participants' native language, Finnish, and the tone was fairly conversational and informal in order to make the interviewees feel at ease. All interviews were tape-recorded and lasted from 43 to 59 minutes. I ensured that the interviewees understood the concept of EI by providing them with a definition and briefly explaining Goleman's framework, as well as encouraging them

to ask for further clarification if necessary. Already during these four interviews there emerged a noticeable similarity in the answers given by different respondents. Since the respondents brought out and emphasized similar things, and additional interviews were not anticipated to produce significantly differing data or important additions, I came to the conclusion that a saturation point had been reached and additional interviews were thus not deemed necessary.

5.3 Data analysis

This study was carried out as a thematic content analysis, which is a method intended for deriving meanings and interpretations from qualitative data. The basic features of content analysis are that it is a systematic and flexible method that offers a way to reduce data. The method directs the researcher's focus to the themes in the data that are linked to the research question. All relevant parts in the data, i.e. parts that have anything to do with the research question, must be thoroughly examined. The flexibility of the method is manifested in the fact that it can be applied to a broad spectrum of materials, and the coding frame is accommodated to the acquired material so that it includes both concept-driven and data-driven categories. The content analysis process progresses through the following sequence of steps: 1) formulating the research question, 2) selecting the material, 3) determining the coding frame, 4) segmenting the material, 5) performing trial coding, 6) assessing the coding frame and making necessary alterations, 7) conducting the main analysis, and lastly 8) drawing interpretations from the findings. (Schreier, 2014)

I transcribed all interviews verbatim in their entirety, including my own questions and comments. I did not include descriptions of paralinguistic features, such as intonations and the speed and volume of speech, since content analysis does not necessitate for these aspects of speech to be examined. The focus in content analysis is on what was said rather than how it was said. I elaborately examined all of the transcribed material using a combination of a priori coding and emergent coding in order to detect themes that arose from the data. An a priori coding approach was the appropriate starting point for my analysis because prior theory has a central role in this study, and the approach fits logically together with semi-structured interviews.

I utilized Goleman's (1998) EI framework with its five dimensions as the preliminary theme categorization, and the 25 different competences as subthemes. My objective was to identify which themes were reflected in the data and in which ways, as well as which ones were not. I was also interested in analyzing whether the importance of different themes seemed to change according to the customer relationship life cycle stage, i.e. whether different EI elements are highlighted with new versus established versus diminished customers. Lastly, one of my central objectives was to probe whether the framework is in need of some new additions or alterations, such as components of EI that have not been adequately taken into consideration in the model before – and these were indeed found (see e.g. summarizing table in section 7.5.).

5.4 Research evaluation

Evaluating quality is an essential step in the research process for inferring judgments about the credibility of the work. Due to the nature of qualitative research, however, ensuring and assessing its quality is not as straightforward as with quantitative research. There is no strictly delineated formula for converting qualitative data into meaningful findings, and this dependence on the researcher's subjective interpretations makes qualitative analysis somewhat controversial (Patton, 2002). In any case, the prerequisite for assessing quality is to specify a set of criteria (ibid), but the traditional evaluation criteria used in quantitative research – including the concepts of reliability, validity and generalizability – cannot always be applied to qualitative research (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Therefore Patton (2002) has categorized five different sets of criteria that are applicable to qualitative research depending on the research topic and approach: 1) traditional scientific research criteria, 2) social construction and constructivist criteria, 3) artistic and evocative criteria, 4) critical change criteria, and 5) pragmatic utilitarianism.

The most applicable criteria for this study is the social construction and constructivist set, which includes the concepts of trustworthiness, triangulation, authenticity, reflexivity, acknowledged subjectivity, praxis, particularity, increased understanding and input for discussion (Patton, 2002). Trustworthiness, or dependability, refers to systematically following a predetermined process, which was fulfilled in this study through the 8-step sequence presented in section 5.3. The gathered data was analyzed thoroughly with no parts of the transcriptions being left unexamined, and a collection of meaningful pieces of the data

are presented in this paper as direct quotations that have been translated from Finnish to English as accurately as possible.

The concept of triangulation refers to bringing out an array of perspectives instead of attempting to provide a singular, universal answer to the researched topic, and along similar lines, particularity pertains to setting focus on a specific context with the purpose of gaining in-depth understanding, instead of presenting hypotheses about generalizations (ibid). In accordance with these criteria, this research was carried out in a specific context and its purpose is to offer viewpoints into the studied topic – the theoretical generalizability and transferability of the produced findings is intentionally limited. I acknowledged the risk of making selective interpretations – in other words, "cherry-picking" pieces of content (Barbour, 2014), and avoided it by striving to pay equal attention to all respondents' contributions, not overemphasizing any individual respondent's views at the expense of the others. I put effort into creating a balanced interpretation of the data that includes contrasting viewpoints.

Authenticity, reflexivity and praxis are linked to acknowledging one's subjectivity and appreciating the integration and influence of one's own background and experiences in the knowledge production process by discussing and taking into consideration possible biases (Patton, 2002; Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). For this purpose I will shed a bit of light on my own background. I am a 26-year-old marketing student from Helsinki, Finland, on the brink of graduating as a Master of Economic Sciences. As my minor subject I have studied communication both in the Bachelor's and Master's phase of my studies. I currently work in the field of B2B sales, in which communication, psychology, and social skills play a central part. I became interested in learning more about those topics within the context of personal selling and consequently encountered the concept of EI, which touches upon all of the three aspects. I personally am an advocate of soft skills in working life and very interested in the dynamics of person-to-person interaction, because I believe they carry tremendous significance and power. However, during the interviews I carried out for this study I strived to remain as neutral as possible and not to influence the respondents' thoughts in any way.

Continuing about the concept of reflexivity, it is also interlinked with the term circularity, which is described by Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) as the constant reconsideration and revision of the research idea, research design, and even the research question throughout the

research process. Qualitative research rarely proceeds in a straightforward manner from start to finish, but instead by turns takes some steps forward, then pauses to reflect the process so far, and then revisits and modifies some previous steps based on what has been found. In accordance with the principle of circularity, both the research question, the applied analysis method, and the coding scheme in this study found their final form following a series of reconsideration and consequent changes.

Lastly, the use of a non-random sampling method – which was utilized in this study – involves potential issues related to bias, but qualitative research typically necessitates sampling decisions to be made with a focus on particular people or situations that provide a specific information-rich viewpoint and thus enable the researcher to gain in-depth understanding (Patton, 2002). The sampling for this study was done in a deliberative and rigorous manner in order to ensure that the participants had the necessary experience to discuss the topic and that the different levels of the sales team were represented. All of the interviewees participated in the study voluntarily – they were in no way required of forced to participate but did so from their own free will. In addition, conforming to the ethical principle of protecting the privacy of research subjects (ibid), the acquired data was treated confidentially and anonymously without disclosing the names of the interviewees or the company they work for.

6. The case company

This section introduces the company that served as the subject of examination and analysis in this study. I will first give an overview of the Finnish recruitment industry and then move on to the specific recruitment agency in question. I will also provide a closer look at the company's organizational structure and the sales team as well as go through the typical sales process. Lastly I will briefly present the categorization of the customer relationship life cycle that is utilized with regard to identifying differences in the interviewees' approach to new, established, and diminished customers.

6.1 Overview

The recruitment industry in Finland encompasses dozens of service providers ranging from big international companies to small domestic recruitment agencies (Holopainen, 2012). Among the players are ones with totally different focus areas and ones with either partially or entirely overlapping target groups. Some recruitment companies only offer employee leasing services while others provide assistance in all parts of the recruitment process from start to finish. Many of the service providers have also extended their offerings to include employer branding related services in addition to the traditional search-and-hire, employee leasing and headhunting services. The role of employer branding in reaching and attracting the best possible candidates has been widely understood in recent years and the concept has become a sort of buzzword in the business world. (Case company internal materials, 2015)

The outlook for the industry seems positive in spite of the current challenging economic situation in Finland; for example Holopainen (2012) purports in her study that the recruitment industry in Finland will continue to grow in future. Since many companies strive to keep their processes as efficient as possible and want to focus on their core activities, recruitment processes are often outsourced in order for the companies to avoid having to go through a myriad of application documents and various steps of the recruitment process themselves. Often it may also prove challenging for companies to find suitable candidates with specific know-how from their own networks or channels and therefore they must expand their reach through recruitment companies. Holopainen (2012) suggests that the number of recruitment service providers will see an increase and competition in the industry

will intensify. Thus the significance of positioning and differentiation strategies in the industry are likely to become highlighted.

The case company in this study is a Finnish recruitment agency that belongs to the sector of service providers focusing on academically educated workforce. The company is specialized in finding and reaching new talents from the fields of business and technology. The operating philosophy is to promote the professional development and advancement of highly educated young adults in Finland, as well as to help companies utilize the know-how of students and recent graduates. The company attempts to put strong emphasis on consultative selling, which entails that the communication and interaction skills of the salespeople serve as crucial assets for the business. During the last few years the company has managed to triple its turnover and the yearly number of recruitments completed for customer companies. This rapid growth has also been reflected on the staff headcount, which has risen by almost 50 percent during the year 2015. Particularly strong emphasis has been put on growing the sales team. (Case company internal materials, 2015)

6.2 Organizational structure & the sales team

The company's own personnel represents the same demographic group that constitutes its target group: young, highly educated people from the fields of business and technology. All of the employees are studying in or have graduated from a university or some other higher education school in Finland. Furthermore, the age range within the employees is rather narrow: all of the company's employees are between 21 and 32 years of age. The personnel is divided into the administrative team, the recruiting team, and the sales team (see Figure 5). The recruiting team and sales team work closely together on commissions, with the Account Managers handling the sales process and contracts, and the Recruitment Managers delivering the actual service, i.e. the recruitment process. (Case company internal materials, 2015)
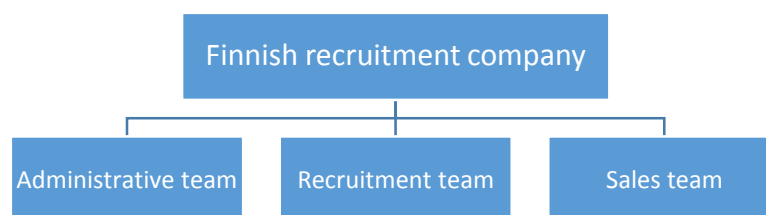
Figure 5: The organizational structure of the case company

Currently the sales team consists of 13 employees and is led by a Sales Director, who is in charge of all sales operations. The sales team comprises 8 Account Managers, who are responsible for developing and maintaining customer relationships, and 3 Sales Coordinators, who do cold calling and book meetings with new customers for Account Managers. In addition, the team has two Recruitment Consultants, who do both sales and recruitment work and are responsible for their own commissions from start to finish. This means that they carry out the whole service process themselves without the input of a Recruitment Manager. (Case company internal materials, 2015)

Almost all of the case company's salespeople are students somewhere between their second and seventh year of studies. This means that especially for many of the Sales Coordinators the job in the company is their first job within B2B sales. Also the Account Managers have so far been fairly inexperienced when they start in their job, because the company wants to give a chance to young, motivated future talents also in its own recruitments. Furthermore, the majority of the salesforce has not studied sales or corporate communication, but instead some other subject(s) within the field of business. This combination of practical inexperience and theoretical unawareness entails that the company's salesforce might not be adequately educated about favorable and/or effective communication and selling styles in the B2B context. Therefore training can be regarded as playing a crucial role in how well the salespeople are able to perform in their job. (Case company internal materials, 2015)

6.3 Sales process

The sales process of the case company basically follows the five consecutive stages as presented by Rope (2003, p. 59). According to Rope, the sales process proceeds from the first, preparatory stage to the sales meeting stage, followed by the offer stage and deal closing stage, and ending in the follow-up stage. These five stages are illustrated in Figure 6 below.

| Preparation stage | Sales meeting stage | Offer stage | Deal closing stage | Follow-up stage |

Figure 6: The progression of the sales process (based on Rope, 2003, p. 59)

In Table 12 I have specified the responsibility areas of each type of employee regarding the case company's sales process. I have included also the recruitment team members' and CEO's roles in the table in order to provide a more comprehensive view on the company's service process and the division of responsibilities. The table shows a modified version of the five-stage sales process by Rope (2003, p. 59). The preparatory stage has been supplemented with the activities of prospecting and cold calling, since they constitute noteworthy elements in the case company's own sales process. In addition, the offer and deal closing stages have been merged in the table for the sake of simplicity, because the same employees are responsible for both stages. As the fourth stage in the table I have added the delivery of the service, i.e. the recruitment cooperation stage.

Table 12: Division of responsibility areas in the case company according to position

	Prospecting, Cold Calling & Preparation Stage	Sales Meeting Stage	Offer & Deal Closing Stage	Service Delivery Stage	Follow-up Stage
Sales Coordinator	X	X			
Account Manager	X	X	X		X
Sales Director		X	X		X
Recruitment Consultant	X	X	X	X	X
Recruitment Intern				X	
Recruitment Coordinator				X	
Recruitment Manager		X		X	X
Recruitment Director		X	X	X	X
CEO		X	X		X

The sales process begins with the activities of prospecting and cold calling, which are done by Sales Coordinators and to some extent also by Account Managers and Recruitment Consultants. The objective in the cold calling phase is to book a meeting with the person who is in charge of recruitment matters in the contacted company. The sales meetings are carried out primarily by Account Managers, Recruitment Consultants, the Sales Director,

and the CEO, but also Sales Coordinators, Recruitment Managers, and the Recruitment Director participate to some extent. Typically when there is no specific recruitment need at the moment – or the need has not yet been discovered by the case company – the meeting is attended only by a sales team member, or by the CEO when it comes to important customers. When there is a specific recruitment need in sight, the meeting is attended both by a sales team member and a recruitment team member. (Case company internal materials, 2015)

The desired result of the sales meeting stage is a request for an offer. In the best case scenario the offer is presented and accepted verbally already in the sales meeting, which means that the sales meeting stage and the offer and deal closing stage merge into one, allowing the process to continue directly into the service delivery stage. However, in most cases customers want some time to deliberate and ask to receive an offer afterwards by email. Depending on the case the offer can take the form of a PowerPoint presentation, a simple email message, or a combination of an offer and a contract in order to make the process faster and more effortless for the customer. (Case company internal materials, 2015)

After the offer has been accepted, the process is in the service delivery stage, which means carrying out the actual recruitment process for the customer. This phase is primarily managed by the recruitment team, but often some effort is needed also from sales team members to contact customers who are difficult to reach. This phase includes drafting and publishing the job advertisement, screening the applicants, conducting interviews, presenting the top candidates to the customer, checking references, providing feedback, and communicating with the applicants and the customer throughout the process. (Case company internal materials, 2015)

Lastly the sales process includes the follow-up stage, which is completed regardless of the outcome of the cooperation. This is typically done by the sales team, but sometimes also by the recruitment team – in some cases even by both. If the cooperation was successful, the salesperson and/or recruiter enquires about the suitability and performance of the new employee and how he/she has adopted the new role. If the cooperation was unsuccessful in the sense that it did not lead to the recruitment of an employee, the salesperson and/or recruiter asks whether the customer has managed to find a suitable person for the position elsewhere and whether the customer has some feedback in mind, for example suggestions for improvement in the case company's service process. In both cases the best outcome is to

45

succeed in booking a face-to-face follow-up meeting, which simultaneously serves as the next sales meeting and thus begins a new sales process cycle. With established customers the sales process often becomes more simplified and the sales meeting and offer stages may be skipped, with the process revolving mainly around the cooperation and follow-up stages. (Case company internal materials, 2015)

6.4 Customer relationship life cycle

Over time customer relationships progress through different stages. Fill & Fill (2005, p. 154) divide the relationship life cycle into four stages: customer acquisition, customer development, customer retention, and customer decline (see Figure 7). The acquisition stage includes the search for a suitable business partner, getting to know each other, and finally getting the first sale. In the development stage the seller attempts to generate more sales and probes whether there is potential for a deeper, long-lasting business relationship. During the retention stage the objective is to maintain the relationship and promote mutual commitment. In the decline stage the relationship is deteriorating and contact is less frequent than before.

Customer acquisition	Customer development	Customer retention	Customer decline

Figure 7: Customer relationship life cycle stages (based on Fill & Fill, 2005, p. 154)

For the purposes of this paper I will further simplify the above presented customer relationship life cycle model by combining the customer acquisition and development stages into one: customer cultivation. Thus I will examine the customer relationships of the case company based on a categorization into only three stages, which are customer cultivation, customer retention, and customer decline. These stages are translated into customer types as new customers, established customers and diminished customers respectively (see Figure 8).
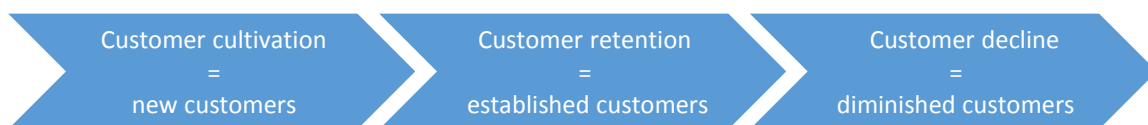
Customer cultivation = new customers	Customer retention = established customers	Customer decline = diminished customers

Figure 8: A modified categorization of customer relationship life cycle stages

46

7. Findings

In this section I will present and discuss the central themes and thoughts that arose in my interviews. The findings have been organized according to the classification of five different EI dimensions that Goleman (1998) has presented. However, the dimensions of empathy and social skills have been combined in the same subsection 7.4, because they proved to be tightly interlinked in the interview materials, thus making it a more natural choice to discuss them together instead of separately.

The interviews included comments concerning all five EI dimensions, but not all 25 individual competences were reflected in the thoughts that the interviewees expressed. Due to the specific context that was examined in this study the competences of developing others, leveraging diversity, political awareness, leadership, change catalyst and team capabilities were not reflected in the interviews and thus will not be discussed any further in this section. These competences might be highlighted in an intrafirm or managerial setting, in which the focus would be on analyzing the relationships and interaction between colleagues as well as managers and their subordinates.

7.1 Self-awareness

Rather surprisingly, all of the interviewees recognized self-awareness as a challenging area in which their skills are deficient and they should pursue personal development. Both the emotional awareness and accurate self-assessment competences were considered by the interviewees as inadequate. Self-confidence was the only competence in the self-awareness skillset that was not highlighted as a necessary target for development. This is an interesting finding because it is opposed to what EI tests in Finland have shown to be the typical strengths and weaknesses; generally the skills of self-awareness and acknowledging emotions have been strengths among Finns (Saarinen & Kokkonen, 2003, p. 142-143). The interviewees in this study, on the other hand, regarded the whole self-awareness dimension largely as an inbuilt construct that one is not very conscious of and hardly ever reflects upon.

> *"Self-awareness is definitely not my biggest strength. When it comes to confidence I think that I'm very close to the upper limit – any more would only be annoying. But emotional awareness is not something that… I pretty much never think about what kind of a spirit I'm having today."*
> *- Interviewee 3*

During the discussions the interviewees realized that they had not previously done much of conscious examination of their own feelings, strengths and weaknesses, nor had they deliberately tried to project a certain kind of impression of themselves. The fact that according to their own words the interviewees had not really given this topic active thought before or done any deeper, extensive self-reflection made it somewhat difficult for them to express their thoughts regarding it.

> *"I'm not aware of my own feelings. It's like… maybe after meetings I might feel like this didn't go that well or I might be mad at myself for not realizing or focusing on something, but then it passes. - - Those are difficult things because they are so internal or such that you aren't aware of them. - - I have never even thought about that, like what I'm thinking or am I trying to create a certain kind of image somehow. It's more like I just go to the meeting and try to be myself and then something either happens or doesn't happen yet."*
> *- Interviewee 1*

The interviewees told that during their sales meetings they tend to act intuitively. Beforehand and afterwards they might analyze and reflect on their own performance, the outcome, and the reasons behind it. However, self-reflection was done mainly if the meeting had not measured up to expectations and the outcome had been unsatisfactory, or if the meeting had in some way been special. Only one of the interviewees reported occasionally doing semi-conscious analysis during the sales meetings, e.g. by observing the customer's position and conforming to that.

> *"I reflect mainly beforehand and afterwards. When I'm getting ready for the meeting I'll throw a guess about what kind of a person the customer is and what is important to him and so forth. There has already been some kind of a contact, for example a phone call that gives you some kind of a hunch. My head doesn't work fast enough for me to be able to engage in meaningful conversations and at the same time analyze a person's decision-making, so… it comes intuitively in the situation and sometimes you stop to ponder afterwards."*
> *- Interviewee 3*

It would be important for the case company salespeople to acknowledge the power that is incorporated in the messages that they subconsciously send. For instance, the attitude that the salesperson demonstrates in the customer meeting may have a crucial impact on the end result (Hämäläinen et al., 2014). When meeting a new customer the salesperson should also pay close attention to the first impression that is conveyed, because the first impression is created in a matter of seconds and may be very challenging to change afterwards (ibid).

The ability to reflect amidst situations instead of beforehand or afterwards is a demanding, dynamic form of reflection. It requires an individual to be able to evaluate and fine-tune his behavior in the present and to be aware of the effects of behavior instantly as they appear (Jokinen, 2015). By striving to be consciously present in the situation a salesperson may be able to sense if the situation is progressing in an undesirable direction and manage to alter the course by subtly guiding the interaction (ibid). The skill of reflecting amidst situations, in the present moment, is a point that could be seen as a target of development in the case company. In addition to self-reflection it would be important for salespeople to be skilled at reflecting on others' feelings, thoughts and concerns. Reflection should be a continuous background activity, because it constitutes a prerequisite for personal development and modifying one's behavior based on feedback – especially in the case of indirect, nonverbal feedback. The act of reflecting is necessary with regard to all five EI dimensions and therefore it can be considered an overarching "umbrella competence" that forms a new addition to Goleman's EI framework.

However, an interesting point that arose in the discussions was the view that strong self-awareness can also entail a pitfall in itself. Many of the interviewees emphasized the importance of authenticity, as in being yourself and behaving in sales situations in a way that feels natural. Being excessively self-conscious and striving to manage situations by the book, so to speak, may be reflected into coming across as unnatural and thus, in fact, turn against itself, since unnaturalness may quite easily translate into untrustworthiness and unlikeability. This finding about the significance of authenticity lends support to section 2.2.3 of this paper, which discussed authenticity as an essential attribute for the success of a salesperson.

All in all, being aware of your own emotions, strengths and weaknesses was seen by the interviewees as an important ability that influences one's own development, identity-building, as well as the fostering of long-term customer relationships. The majority of the interviewees stated during the discussion that self-awareness is an area that they will have to and want to put more effort in and develop in future.

> *"It's good that you asked, because I realized that damn, I should reflect so much more on why I do certain things and what has affected my success and failure."*
> *- Interviewee 4*

7.2 Self-regulation

7.2.1 Self-control

The interviewees saw self-control as an inherent competence that does not usually require any active effort. Exceptions may include situations when the customer is difficult to contact during the cooperation and/or unable to make decisions, which causes the process to be stretched and in worst case scenarios the top candidates to be recruited elsewhere while waiting for the customer to respond. This, in turn, may lead to having to repeat the whole recruitment process again, which is naturally a frustrating and disappointing situation for all parties that are involved. One of the interviewees admitted that in these situations she has sometimes had to count to ten in order to avoid being rude to the customer, but otherwise self-control seems to be effortlessly integrated into the interviewees' behavior.

> *"For me all kind of self-regulation feels fairly natural, self-control and all else. I argue that compared to many other people it's very hard to detect if I'm having a bad day."*
> *- Interviewee 3*

In order for self-control to be functional for the customer relationship, it is essential for it to be accompanied by a customer-orientation that is manifested e.g. in the practice of adaptive selling (see section 2.2.2). If a salesperson has strong self-control but does not express a strong customer focus through his behavior, he may be perceived as unempathetic and uninterested in helping the customer (Chen & Jaramillo, 2014). This is another reason why it would be important for the case company sales representatives to embrace an adaptive approach to selling.

7.2.2 Trustworthiness

The concept of trust was repeatedly voiced in the interviewees' answers. In Goleman's (1998, p. 26-27) EI competence framework trustworthiness belongs to the self-regulation category, but based on my interviews trust should be perceived in a broader sense and can be regarded as being linked to other EI dimensions as well. The interviewees' comments implied that trust is a wide concept that encompasses or is connected to several different EI competences and could even be considered the single most crucial element in the formation of long-lasting customer relationships. The personal competence of trustworthiness is naturally a prerequisite for trust to be established between the buyer and the seller, but the

development of mutual trust, on the other hand, is strongly linked to the social competences of understanding others, building bonds, collaboration and cooperation, as well as communication. Furthermore, in order to be perceived as trustworthy, one must express a certain level of various personal competences, such as self-confidence, self-control, and commitment. Due to the overarching role of trust that essentially reaches across all EI elements and competences, it can be regarded as another so-called umbrella competence in the EI framework. One of the interviewees stated that basically everything that he does in his customer interaction revolves around the goal of building trust.

> *"It's about very ordinary things, like you do everything as agreed even if the customer doesn't. You stay on schedule, are not late, and if you've promised to send something or be in contact, then you are."*
> *- Interviewee 3*

According to the interviewees trust can be promoted by taking the relationship somehow to a more personal level so that the customer sees that you are genuinely interested in him and his company and that you want to help the customer (see section 7.4.2 for discussion on the desire to help). Being knowledgeable of the customer's business and being able to make some kind of a connection between yourself and the customer, or your companies, assists in the development of trust. In this sense trust is also connected to the competences of conscientiousness and achievement drive; the better the salesperson is prepared for the meeting and the better he has done his background research, the higher are his chances of achieving fruitful discussions with the customer.

> *"[I] try to build trust as a person and not necessarily by piling up a bunch of facts on the table."*
> *- Interviewee 1*

> *(Can you think of situations in which the customer has clearly made the decision based on something else than just facts or prices? What do you think caused the positive outcome?) "I'd say that it's almost without exception the customer's trust in me being there to benefit him in some way. - - It's the trust in me and my colleague having a shared agenda, and also me and the customer having a shared agenda, which is to cross the finishing line in a sustainable way and not just temporarily. If you can get the customer to trust in that then he absolutely won't be interested in whether the service costs half as much or twice as much compared to your competitors."*
> *- Interviewee 3*

One of the interviewees also brought out that when developing a relationship with a bigger company, the salesperson often has to show that he is willing to invest time and effort in

meeting several people from different positions in the customer company. It is typically not sufficient to build a relationship and achieve mutual trust with only one representative from within the organization.

> *"This recruitment business has quite a lot of competition going on so of course customers want to see a lot of different service providers. Often at some point bureaucracy comes into the picture – you have to meet people from many levels and reassure them that we would be the right partner for them also in the long run. This is done in order to promote trust."*
> *- Interviewee 2*

Another factor that has a significant impact on how easy it is to achieve mutual trust is the compatibility of personality types, i.e. personal chemistry (see also sections 3.1, 7.4.1 and 7.4.3). The interviewees regarded trust-building as being difficult if they are not compatible with the other person on an emotional level or if the customer does not seem to be engaged in the conversation. On the other hand, the interviewees found trust-building easy with open-minded people who are concentrated and present in the situation and who their personality and sales approach matches with.

> *"In some meetings I have clearly noticed that the personal chemistry works and we are on the same page. Then it's also easier to chat and it's clear that we have a shared goal that we are thinking about. So the interaction is not based only on rational things but things are clicking also on an emotional level, which has helped in getting things to move forward."*
> *- Interviewee 2*

> *"It's difficult to build trust if the other person is someone who you are just not in sync with:"*
> *- Interviewee 1*

Lastly, an essential ingredient in the formation of trust is the salesperson's perceived authenticity. As Schaefer and Pettijohn (2006) have found, the significance of being perceived as authentic by customers is emphasized in the early stages of a salesperson's career (see section 2.2.3). This makes the concept of authenticity particularly relevant for the case company, since all of the salespeople are young and have a limited number of working years behind them. The interviewees seemed to be well aware of the importance of coming across as genuine; authenticity was either directly or indirectly mentioned multiple times. Since authenticity is a prerequisite for trust, which, in turn, is a prerequisite for the development of a long-term customer relationship, it is essential for authenticity to be reflected in all customer interactions and congruently also in all the different EI dimensions.

Therefore authenticity can be considered an umbrella competence similarly to reflection and trust.

> *"I act intuitively. I don't think that by learning some kind of sitting positions you can build any trust with anyone. Of course I've run into all kinds of guides about how you should position your hands and how much material do you have on the table in each kind of situation and what kind of tone of voice you should preferably use but… I think that naturalness outweighs all of these on the priority list."*
> *- Interviewee 3*

7.2.3 Conscientiousness

In B2B sales the competence of conscientiousness, i.e. taking responsibility for personal performance, is highlighted in the sales meeting stage. This point was also brought out by the interviewees; they do acknowledge that being well-prepared for a meeting and knowledgeable about the customer and his business can often be a critical factor in winning the sale. Appropriate preparation includes finding out basic information about the customer, compiling the sales materials, reserving enough time for the meeting, and planning one's negotiation tactics beforehand (Rope, 2003, p. 60). Proper preparation assists the salesperson in validating himself in the eyes of the customer; it demonstrates that the salesperson has familiarized himself with the customer, which reflects interest and appreciation towards the client as well as promotes the salesperson's professionalism (Deeter-Schmelz & Sojka, 2007). Expertise combined with genuine interest, then again, leads to strengthened feelings of trust (see previous section 7.2.2). The importance of coming across as an expert becomes less important as the customer relationship matures, because the salesperson has already established trust in his own and the company's expertise.

However, sometimes salespeople unfortunately do not have the possibility to prepare themselves for a sales meeting. The interviews revealed that in some cases they may even deliberately neglect this duty regardless of the obvious drawbacks of doing so. Based on their comments some of the salespeople at the case company are indeed aware of the fact that they occasionally fail to prepare themselves adequately for a meeting, which in turn has led to the failure of the whole sales situation. In order to avoid a negative outcome despite having prepared oneself insufficiently, it would be important for salespeople to also possess the ability to improvise, i.e. to quickly and smoothly adapt themselves according to the situation and the customer's needs (Deeter-Schmelz & Sojka, 2007; see also section 2.2.2).

> *"There are those kinds of meetings after which you notice that they were quite bland, that maybe I should have prepared myself better. For example if it's a very different kind of business or some company that does something specific, I should have familiarized myself with it much more so that I would have been able to give the most out of [our company]. So maybe those are failures that you just haven't prepared yourself well enough, because you've been busy and for example had seven meetings during the same week, so then you've just run from one meeting to another and haven't thought of them as individuals or focused on what could be the best thing for this one. So after those kinds of meetings I have gotten the feeling that f***, I should've familiarized myself better."*
> *- Interviewee 1*

Moreover, it is not sufficient for a salesperson to be an expert only in his own field – in order for him to be successful in his job he should also have an understanding of the customer's industry, be able to recognize potential bottlenecks and issues in need of development, as well as take a proactive, consultative approach in suggesting some solutions or at least provide the customer with some food for thought. In the recruiting business the importance of having wide-spread knowledge about various different industries is highlighted, which some of the interviewees mentioned as a challenge.

> *(What do you find especially difficult in this kind of sales work?) "That you have to be knowledgeable about so many things. That you kind of should be an expert of all fields, that you should in some way have a basic understanding of them all, like different consulting companies and startups and IT houses and what else... some investment companies. It's like you should have enough understanding of them all to be able to chat with the customer in order to build trust."*
> *- Interviewee 1*

Paradoxically, trying to come across too strongly as an expert in the customer's field of business may also backfire. There is a fine line between challenging the customer in a constructive, successful way and seeming arrogant and omniscient. Therefore it is important for the salesperson to always retain a certain level of humbleness in order to avoid making the customer feel like the salesperson thinks he has a better understanding of the customer's business than the customer himself. This is highlighted particularly when the salesperson is young and in the beginning of his career – as all the salespeople in the case company are – and the customer, on the other hand, is very experienced in his own field.

Some of the interviewees felt that they can to some extent compensate for inadequate knowledge of the customer's business by having a good general outline that can be utilized in nearly all first-time sales meetings – at least as a back-up plan if the meeting does not seem to progress in any specific direction otherwise. The interviewees told that by following

the basic outline and asking a certain set of probing questions they are in most cases able to generate meaningful discussion and make the meeting useful even though they are not familiar with the customer's industry. However, even the preparatory concept for the meeting should always be adapted according to the situation and context in order for it to be functional.

Lastly, the competence of conscientiousness is also reflected in being systematic in one's work. A systematic and organized working style is an essential skill in today's business world that is characterized by a hectic pace and constant multi-tasking. Its importance is further emphasized when dealing with customers and especially with corporate customers.

> *"My strength is at least that I am very organized and as I said that we have to have very many things under control in this job, I feel like I am able to do it. There are customers and cases in different stages, some of which require a follow-up call and others cold calling. I am able to keep the whole package under control in an organized manner without losing track of things."*
> *- Interviewee 1*

This aspect of conscientiousness was regarded as a strength by some of the interviewees; they felt that they are skilled at being systematic and organized, handling many different things simultaneously, and keeping a fragmented ensemble under control. These skills also share mutual ground with the competence of adaptability, which includes smoothly handling multiple demands, shifting priorities, and changing rapidly from one thing to another.

7.2.4 Adaptability

Based on their self-assessment the interviewees' sales approaches seemed to differ substantially, with both ends of the "friend vs. expert" spectrum being represented among them, as well as the middle ground. Two interviewees served as clear examples of salespeople who utilize a more informal, friend-like approach, whereas one interviewee exemplified the very other end of the spectrum by embodying the expert approach. The fourth interviewee expressed preferences towards both ends and represented a combination of both the friend and the expert approach. All interviewees did see the nature of individual customer relationships, the interaction taking place in them, and their own approach changing over the course of the customer life cycle.

"I'm pretty much a friend. We have quite different types of salespeople in our company. - - [name removed] is like an expert and very much like that he knows what he is talking about. I'm maybe not like that, because I acknowledge that I am quite a young girl and… like 'What are you doing here telling us about anything?' So I'm more of a friend and listen a lot and also ask a lot and by doing that I try to build trust."
- Interviewee 1

"I'm probably more from the matter-of-fact end of the spectrum. I focus quite strongly on arguing value and also on us being able to produce the value that we promise and so forth. I probably get to the casual joking around level slower than others."
- Interviewee 3

As pointed out in in this paper, the salesperson's personality, communication style and sales approach have a significant influence on the way in which EI is manifested and what the nature of the interaction becomes like. Although everyone has a primary interaction style and probably all salespeople have a certain approach that feels most natural to themselves, it would be important for a salesperson to bear in mind the principles of adaptive selling (see section 2.2.2) in order to achieve as successful outcomes as possible. The salesperson should strive to figure out the buyer's way of thinking and communicating and based on this assessment adapt his own behavior accordingly. The interviewees expressed that they find this occasionally rather challenging to do, which is unsurprising since the interviewees told that they do not practice much of conscious reflection (see section 7.1). Creating a picture of the buyer's type with regard to personality, interaction, and way of conducting business would demand for active reflection to be done on the salesperson's part. Only two of the interviewees mentioned that they strive to somehow sense the spirit and tone of the customer and the situation and use that information as the basis of deciding what kind of an approach is most suitable to employ. The other two interviewees did not bring out adapting their sales approach according to the customer when it comes to new customers.

"It's difficult to... there's so different types of people, so that you could sort of recognize what kind of a person there is on the other side. There are of course different types of people and personalities and some make emotionally based decisions and some rationally based, or between these in percentages so to say. Identifying these kinds of things is not always that easy. Customers may act very differently in terms of what kind of things affect their decisions at the end of the day."
– Interviewee 2

The significance of active reflecting is emphasized with new customers, since the customers' preferences, views, values, and working style are still unfamiliar to the salesperson.

Consequently the salesperson must actively sense and interpret what kind of a sales approach, communication and offerings the customer appreciates, what the customer wants and needs and what is the best way to help the customer. The development of a new customer relationship is a sensitive process that requires the salesperson to do constant monitoring and make adjustments based on his observations and interpretations. If it is, indeed, the case that the case company salespeople are not that well aware of the principles of adaptive selling and these principles are not very widely reflected in the behavior of the salespeople, then this could be seen as one point for development that should preferably be addressed in the company's sales training.

However, a noteworthy point – or potential downside – to consider regarding adaptability is that if similarity and compatibility with the customer's style is somewhat fabricated by way of chameleon-like adaptation done by the salesperson, could it possibly in some cases reduce the perceived authenticity of the salesperson and consequently backfire to some extent? Authenticity is an essential attribute for a salesperson and e.g. Chen and Jaramillo (2014) have emphasized that also the use of EI must be built on authenticity and passion – not utilitarianism. Affectation and falsity may easily be detected by customers and lead to a negative outcome. Therefore adaptability should perhaps not be practiced too excessively, because it is important that the salesperson stays true to himself and comes across as genuine.

7.2.5 Innovation

The competence of innovation was manifested in the discussion with all the interviewees. All four seemed to acknowledge that the ability to innovate is a key competence in consultative selling and that it is important that the salesperson aims to provide the customer with new viewpoints, thoughts, ideas, and a tailored solution. Innovation can be considered analogous to problem-solving, which was presented in section 2.2.3 as a beneficial attribute for salespeople to possess. Indeed, for example Vahvaselkä (2004, p. 134) has stated that sales is primarily about problem-solving, which lends support to the significance of the innovation competence. It would seem recommendable for consultative sales to be done by individuals who have an intrinsic aspiration towards innovation and problem-solving, since this trait may be perceived positively by the customer as the genuine desire to help (see section 7.4.2). All of the interviewees in some way expressed having this kind of aspiration.

> *"You should combine a lot of different pieces and experiences – both your own as well as the company's earlier cases – from which you can create the right kind of a solution."*
> *- Interviewee 2*

Exhibiting the competence of innovation necessitates daring to question the customer's thoughts and established ways. The interviewees felt that a practical approach to challenging the status quo without being too directly criticizing is to ask the customer about the rationale behind doing things in the current way. By asking the customer to explain his logic and views simultaneously the salesperson might succeed in making the customer redeliberate some of his earlier choices and decisions. It is often recommendable to try to guide the customer towards realizing the solution himself, because generally customers are more inclined to buy if they feel like they have discovered the solution themselves rather than having been imposed a solution by someone else. Also the salesperson should nevertheless give active input into the conversation by voicing opinions and ideas.

Interviewee 3 stated that he always tries to think about what other options the customer has and whether they are better ones. He told that he quite often presents the customer with different options and scenarios, including ones that would not result in the customer cooperating with the case company. This kind of an approach most probably increases the customer's trust in the salesperson, since the salesperson does not come across as only interested in his own agenda and selling just for the sake of short-term gain. Another type of manifestation of innovation and tailored problem-solving was voiced by interviewee 4, who told that she aims to sell preliminary ideas and concept outlines that will then be planned and polished in cooperation with the customer. This highly collaborative approach can be seen as transforming the traditional buyer-seller relationship into a value co-creation relationship.

> *"I try to find an angle that works for the customer, like that 'you have had these kinds of areas of interest as well, so could this be modified to suit your needs'. - - I rarely sell anything that is already finished, like 'we have this kind of a thing and I can tell you the good and bad sides', but instead more like 'we have this thing in progress that we are developing'. There's the thought that the customer himself can influence and join the process and then we can develop it forward according to their perspective."*
> *- Interviewee 4*

7.3 Motivation

7.3.1 Achievement drive, commitment & initiative

Whether a salesperson becomes successful or not depends strongly on his own fervor, diligence and persistence, which have to be underpinned by high motivation (Vahvaselkä, 2004, p. 16). Expertise alone is not sufficient in making sales work fruitful – in addition, a consultative salesperson must have determination and ambition, a goal- and result-orientation, greed for making profitable deals, as well as persistence in building long-term customer relationships (Vahvaselkä, 2004, p. 19.). It is essential that a salesperson enjoys working in sales and wants to sell. Sales work is rather demanding in practice and one must have a strong motivation towards it in order to cope in the long run (Rope, 2003, p. 109).

The pivotal importance of motivation was also acknowledged by the interviewees; all four repeatedly brought out aspects related to motivation. Some of the interviewees considered motivation to be reflected into practicing self-leadership – a salesperson must keep himself motivated, because a lack of motivation will quickly translate into decreased salary. The ideal situation and goal according to the interviewees is to have customers in all stages of the sales process at all times.

> *"Motivating yourself and also motivating others, or in a sense just getting the motivation, whether it's about yourself or others, is purely everything in our job. It's 99% proactive and it's easy not to do it properly. It's very easy to just hang out and only get done what you absolutely had to today… So that's definitely the thing that separates those who are really good from those who are average at the most."*
> *– Interviewee 3*

The interviewees stressed the importance of a proactive approach – or initiative – which encompasses staying abreast of the customers' situation and updated about the business as well as seizing arising opportunities. In addition, a proactive approach requires keeping regular contact even without a specific agenda. Based on the findings the significance of initiative is highlighted especially with diminished customers. Most of the interviewees pointed out that they find interacting with old, diminished customers difficult, because reviving diminished customer relationships requires an analysis of what has happened before that has caused the current situation and what would be the best approach for re-establishing the relationship. In order to succeed in reviving the relationship, the interviewees considered

a careful factual and rational deliberation to be necessary, which in turn raises the threshold to actually start the process of reviving the relationship, since it requires quite a lot of effort.

> *"Old accounts that have already become a bit cold are really hard to contact again, because there's this some kind of a wall that makes it very hard to try to warm up the relationship again. So maybe it's easier to build something that hasn't existed yet, because at least I find myself thinking about why the relationship has become cold and why the account has been forgotten and why they have forgotten us."*
> *– Interviewee 1*

7.3.2 Optimism & enthusiasm

It is important for a salesperson to express a positive attitude, because positive energy appeals to others and promotes liking, whereas negative energy repels others (Rope, 2003, p. 103). Customers typically do not want to do business with someone who seems to have a negative attitude. The significance of optimism was also highlighted among the interviewees. For example Interviewee 1 considered it essential that the salesperson manages to maintain a positive attitude and active approach towards his work even in times when customers are disagreeable and progress is replaced by obstacles. Resilience is a prerequisite in the field of sales – especially in B2B sales, since the decision-making processes are slower and more complex than in B2C sales. Without sufficient resilience and the ability to embrace optimism in one's work, a B2B salesperson will most probably not be a top-performer in the long run. Hämäläinen et al. (2014) highlight that it is possible to deliberately foster a positive and optimistic attitude regardless of whether one's natural inclination is towards positivity or negativity. This means that optimism and pessimism are not fixed traits that cannot be developed but instead can, indeed, be influenced through personal endeavor.

One specific manifestation of motivation and an optimistic attitude that several interviewees voiced was enthusiasm. The interviewees implied that it is important for a salesperson to demonstrate some level of excitement about the product or service that he is offering, because it simultaneously signals that he himself believes in the benefits it provides. A lack of enthusiasm may easily show in the customer interaction, particularly in face-to-face situations as well as over the telephone, which can cause the customer to be less eager to cooperate. If the salesperson himself does not seem enthusiastic about what he is selling, why would the customer be interested either?

> *"Of course sometimes it's important to be enthusiastic about your own thing, and every now and then I do get genuinely enthusiastic when I get the chance to do something that is like a win-win-win thing, that everyone wins when we do this."*
> *- Interviewee 3*

The interviewees considered the enthusiasm that they express towards their own work to be a strength not only on a personal level but also on the company level. Over the years, as various individual employees have conveyed zeal and passion about the business and the company they are working in as well as the services that are offered, the notion of an enthusiastic attitude has been applied to the whole company and nowadays seems to constitute a source of added value to the customers. The interviewees told that several of the case company's customers have given positive feedback about the enthusiastic attitude that the company embodies.

> *"Another positive factor I've been told is that it immediately shows that we do our work enthusiastically and that we're also ready to listen to the modifications suggested by the customer and are able to react to them quite flexibly, and then we take things forward pertly and with an efficient schedule. - - At least I myself am very enthusiastic about all new things and it's probably my style that I try to transmit a part of my own enthusiasm to the customer, like hey, this thing has been working really well and we have achieved these and these kinds of results with it."*
> *- Interviewee 4*

Enthusiasm, zeal and passion are closely related to the four motivational competences that Goleman (1998) presents in his framework: achievement drive, commitment, initiative, and optimism. However, the essence of enthusiasm is not really encompassed comprehensively in any of these four competences, and thus should be added into the EI framework as a fifth competence to complement the dimension of motivation.

7.4 Empathy & social skills

7.4.1 Understanding others & communication

Empathy and social skills emerged as prominent dimensions in the interviews. They proved to be strongly interlinked in the answers and thus are difficult to view and discuss separately. The high importance of empathy was especially reflected in trying to understand customers, including their feelings, viewpoints, and concerns. Empathy and understanding others naturally go hand in hand with communication and especially listening skills, which belong to the social skills dimension in Goleman's (1998) framework. The importance of listening

was unanimously brought out by the interviewees in accordance with e.g. Vahvaselkä (2004, p. 134), Rope (2003, p. 101 & 111), and Drollinger and Comer (2013), who have all stressed the role of listening in sales work (see sections 2.2.3 and 3.3).

> *(If you would summarize the reason why you believe you have succeeded in sales situations, what do you think has led to the positive outcome?) "It's most certainly due to listening to the customer as well as genuine understanding."*
> *– Interviewee 2*

In the recruitment industry the significance of good communication skills is also further highlighted because the salesperson can never guarantee a successful end result for the cooperation. Sometimes despite great efforts a suitable person cannot be found for the position that the customer company is offering, and in these cases smooth and effective communication undoubtedly assists in leaving a good impression to the customer regardless of the failed recruitment process.

> *"Already just the fluency of interaction and communication with the customer might be much more important – of course the end result should be good – but we have many good relationships with customers even though we haven't been able to find a suitable person for the job. So despite that the customer is still very satisfied with us because the process and communication has been pleasant and smooth."*
> *– Interviewee 4*

All of the aforementioned competences – showing empathy, striving to understand others, as well as communicating and listening – are also linked to trust-building, which forms the bedrock of all successful buyer-seller relationships, since without trust basically no business relationship will last. As interviewee 3 explains in the following extract, a salesperson can promote the development of trust by placing oneself in the customer's shoes, so to say.

> *"Perhaps my biggest personal successes typically come through the ability of putting myself in the other person's thinking process. Surely I'm good at explaining why our services are good, but I'm also pretty good at guessing what might be troubling about them to the customer and what other options he is considering, and sort of raising those things into the conversation. In that way you can pretty often build quite a lot more trust than by only telling about your own things."*
> *– Interviewee 3*

Furthermore, according to Rope (2003, p. 71) it is essential in the sales meeting stage to strive to map the customer's needs comprehensively. This requires the salesperson to present a variety of questions to the buyer – preferably open-ended ones in order to encourage the

buyer to talk plentifully (Jobber & Lancaster, 2003, p. 121). Interviewee 4 highlighted the importance of question technique in achieving the desired outcome in a sales meeting; she felt that one or two apposite questions presented at the right time have often accounted for her reaching a successful outcome.

During the customer meeting and other interaction situations the salesperson should also try to piece together what drives the customer's decision-making and write notes about not only factual things but also the customer's emotional responses et cetera. Note-taking – and more importantly entering the notes into the CRM system - is crucial in the case company, because the salespeople have such wide customer portfolios that without comprehensive notes they will undoubtedly not be able to remember the essentials of each customer. In addition, since the employee turnover is high in the sales team and customer accounts are often reallocated between salespeople (Case company internal materials, 2015), the importance of diligent note-taking and CRM system utilization for developing the customer relationships is further highlighted. This aspect of gaining understanding of the customers is clearly linked to the competence of conscientiousness (see section 7.2.3).

Lastly, another interesting point brought out by interviewee 4 was the downside of empathy, which is linked to being "too soft" for the nature of the business world. This has also been acknowledged by Goleman (1998, p. 143), who has brought out that in order to perform well and get business done effectively, one may need to intentionally restrain the expressed level of empathy. In line with Goleman (ibid), interviewee 4 suggested that it is recommendable to show a moderate amount of empathy, but a high amount may prove to be detrimental. The interviewee described herself as an empathetic person and stated resenting the need to sometimes harden herself in sales negotiations and thus having to act against her own personality when dealing with customers in order to avoid being overridden. Also Saarinen and Kokkonen (2003, p. 103) have argued that strong feelings of empathy – and fighting against those feelings – may easily result in distress, which can be mentally very straining for an individual especially if it takes place continuously over a prolonged period of time. All in all, the principle of "the more the better" does not seem to hold true regarding a salesperson's level of empathy, but instead the nature of the profession requires an optimal middle way to be found between two extremes – i.e. showing no empathy and showing excessive empathy.

"I know that in my personal characteristics I'm a pretty empathetic human being, but I don't know, maybe it's been useful in the sense that so many of our customer companies have had for example employee cooperation negotiations and people have been like a bit more shaken up there than normally, so a reasonable pinch of empathy is good, but otherwise I don't know if it's maybe even more of a disadvantage sometimes. Because in this job you have to work quite a lot with – I wouldn't want to cultivate stereotypes – but people in procurement can sometimes be a bit difficult and not necessarily in a pleasant way. They don't have the need to play a role so to say in the cooperation, so if empathy is shown in for example being a sensitive person, then you might have to even act against your own personality and on some level toughen yourself up. You have to be much more assertive and at some point even a bit harsher than you would normally be based on your own personality. - - It has been challenging [to try to do]. - - I don't get any kind of good vibes out of it, it's like very much against my normal character, so you have to go into a territory that isn't natural for you, and you can do it but you kind of feel like your violating yourself and you get this nasty feeling about why do you have to act this way in the business world."
- Interviewee 4

7.4.2 Service orientation

All of the interviewees commented various times that they genuinely want to be able to help the customer in some way and that they are motivated by seeing a satisfied customer who is really happy about the end result of the cooperation. The majority of the interviewees told that they originally became interested in doing personal selling in the recruiting industry because they enjoy helping others and solving customers' problems. Vahvaselkä (2004, p. 134) has stated that sales is, in essence, about helping the customer, and similarly Pekkarinen et al. (2006) have stressed the importance of showing a service-oriented attitude. Thus it is clear that the desire to help a key competence in the profession. The recruiting industry offers especially good opportunities to help others, since you are not only helping the customers, but also the job seekers.

The feeling of being able to help others typically translates into meaningfulness, which can serve as an important motivator for many employees. The idea of doing important and meaningful work that has a real impact on many people's lives creates a sense of a deeper, more profound purpose for the job. One of the interviewees stated that he believes expressing a genuine desire to help the customer typically assists in achieving a positive outcome in a sales situation and encourages the customer to make decisions based on other aspects than costs.

"You don't just try to sell your own product but think about whether there are some other things that are clearly like maybe problematic for the customer, that can you somehow give pro bono help or consulting in those… like these kinds of small favors that you can offer surely affect the development of the customer relationship in the long run. Information sharing and things that the customer is interested in, can you discuss those or help outline some small problem or like… as a conversation partner help to overcome it."
– Interviewee 2

"Maybe some common characteristics in good salespeople are that they are genuinely interested in helping the customer and if at the same time there is this little bit of healthy commercial greed, which doesn't mean that you would be ready to cheat, but if that greed drives you to brainstorm a bit more bravely what could be done together, then it is a very good attribute."
– Interviewee 3

The desire to help can be primarily interpreted as service orientation, but it also reflects the competencies of understanding others and caring about their concerns, communication, building bonds, as well as collaboration and cooperation. Interviewee 1 expressed more than once during the interview that she has developed a motherly feeling towards her customers. This is a strong metaphor that clearly signals empathy and caring. Also in a study conducted by Alen (2012) on the significance of EI in personal selling the business relationship between a seller and a buyer was compared to a mother-child relationship.

"The feeling that you get in the end when the customer is so very happy that everything went great... - - it's like, there comes this helping or that you want to help your own customers and maybe that's why I have gotten a sort of motherly feeling towards my customers, because I have been with them throughout the whole process and I have gotten to know them in a totally different way than… it doesn't on my part with the contract being signed, but instead I'm the one taking it forward, so… - - It's a really motivating feeling when the customer is so very happy or very not happy about the end result, so of course you always strive to find someone [for the job] that is as good as possible."
– Interviewee 1

Furthermore, a genuine desire to help others can be seen as also having a strong connection to trust-building and commitment. All in all the desire to help seems to not only be linked to the empathy and social skills dimensions but also to the self-regulation and motivation dimensions of the EI framework. Thus it can be regarded as another so-called umbrella competence that encompasses various EI competences. Neither service orientation nor any other individual EI competence by itself sufficiently covers the essence of the desire to help, which can be seen as a limitation in Goleman's (1998) framework.

The act of helping does not always have to be linked to a business problem in the big picture, but it can also be done on a very practical, down to earth level, for example by adjusting the use of time in a sales meeting based on how busy the customer seems to be at the moment. This requires situational sensitivity from the salesperson.

> *"If you think of an actual customer meeting so that… you can pretty often see and interpret whether the customer is having a really hectic and stressful time at work, so do you suggest right away that hey, should we do this like really efficiently or should we go through these and these as well, would you like to hear some new things. So you're trying to sense what is the other person's agenda and how can you help his day. It's not just about how you can help in future, but in that moment specifically. Does he want to get something really quickly done so that it eases his own workload or does he want to get some new ideas, inspiration, something else, so that the meeting can also in that sense be pleasant and motivating also to the customer, on a very practical level."*
> *- Interviewee 4*

The interviews also shed light on a downside that the desire to help may entail: exploitation. Some customers may unfortunately rather shamelessly welcome all possible help that they can get without paying anything and then disappear. There is always the risk that the salesperson invests his own (and possibly also some colleague's) time and effort into a customer without ever receiving anything in return.

> *"Especially if there's a really sales-oriented person on the other side, who looks closely at costs and unyieldingly tries to press them down a lot, which in the long run… like why would we want to offer good quality from our part if it's basically not sensible considering our use of time? There have been some cases in which the customer may have exploited us pretty much until the end, listened to what kind of offerings we have and such, but then in the end the cooperation doesn't cross the finish line and that of course creates a bad feeling."*
> *- Interviewee 2*

> *"There are these situations where the customer has been really difficult and done things that are against the contract, or has tried to make us do things that we have agreed to do otherwise, like asking us to a lot of extra without any compensation and coming up with additional demands and other stuff like that, and also behaving like, communicating very rudely or something else. Then also you have had to be very strict and in fact the customer has waiting for it and the customer himself revels in the chance to wring out with you."*
> *- Interviewee 4*

In order to avoid being ruthlessly exploited the salesperson must assess the situation and the customer in terms of his potential, enthusiasm and commitment, and then use these evaluations to decide the extent to which help and assistance are offered to the customer. In

other words, although it is recommendable for a salesperson to have an innate desire to help, this desire should not be blindly carried out, but instead situation-specific deliberation is required in order to avoid exploitation.

7.4.3 Building bonds, collaboration & cooperation

Building a bond to the customer was seen by all interviewees as an essential objective in buyer-seller interaction. The interviewees agreed that there are differences in how they interact with new, established, and old customers. All interviewees regarded customer relationships as becoming more relaxed and less rigidly businesslike over time. With established customers the relationship is more casual, the communication is less formal and includes also humor, and sales are often generated by simply asking the customer how he/she is doing. The interviewees considered these types of customer relationships easy and relatively effortless to manage, despite the fact that they require active upkeep and regular interaction.

> *"The relationship definitely changes but I think it changes in the same way as in almost any interaction with another person when you're getting to know each other. At first you're more factual and try to sniff what's important to this person and do we have common interests and then the interaction of course becomes more casual, friendly, humoristic… but I have never tried to specify it in the sense that it would be that different in sales than in some other context when you're just getting to know people."*
> *(Yeah. So you don't consciously take a different kind of approach?) "No, I have never thought about that."*
> *- Interviewee 3*

The success or failure in building a bond with the customer is to great extent dependent on liking, i.e. personal chemistry, in which the salesperson's own personality plays a central role. In consultative selling the significance and influence of personality is accentuated, and in the case company even more so, due to the fact that the employees serve as examples of the target group that the company pursues and consequently the customers may make rather strong associations based on the sales representatives' presence, habitus, and behavior.

> *"If there are for example two similar service providers that offer a fairly similar set, the customer will always choose the one with whom it's nice to work with. And often if you are somehow able to take into account not just the product but like really the relationship that you have with the client, you will succeed better than someone who has a strictly professional focus and who with an engineer-like belief thinks that our product is just so damn good that it talks for itself and I'm just the interpreter who tells its best features. So if you are able to achieve the right kind of interaction, it has*

all the impact on the business. But there are probably differences depending on the business that you're in. With us especially since we recruit people and people's knowhow and their potential skills, they are quite abstract things, so it largely culminates in the way you bring it out and represent it yourself. We as salespeople represent the same target group that we are selling, so your influence as a personality and individual is even more highlighted."
– Interviewee 4

The interviews revealed also a downside to building bonds caused by employee turnover. Vahvaselkä (2004, p. 16) has argued that it is generally important for the customer that the communication and cooperation is managed by one contact person from the sales organization. Additional contacts should be included only when necessary. Following this logic, it is unfavorable if the contact person in the sales organization is constantly changed into a new one that is unfamiliar to the customer. Every time the contact person changes, also the bond to the customer has to be built again to some extent. This naturally delays the development of the customer relationship and cooperation – not only due to the fact that it always takes some time for a relationship and a bond to be formed, but also because the new contact person may not consider it a priority or may not be as motivated to start building a bond as the original contact person was. In the case company this downside to building bonds is an especially burning issue since the sales team is characterized by rather high employee turnover, and thus can be considered a weakness.

"We have the challenge that you can't create a very personal relationship because we have such a high employee turnover rate in our sales team. So it's not very positive for [the case company] if salespeople create very personal relationships, because when the salesperson leaves the relationship will fall through or then it has to be built again. - - I also remember myself when some of our salespeople have left and then you have gotten for example 15 new prospects and… they're not important to me in the same way, because I haven't been in contact with them and when you should call them then it's like I don't really know anything about this. - - I have been thinking about what will happen to the customers with whom I've created a very deep relationship once I leave, because the relationship hasn't been created so much to [the case company] as to myself. Especially now that I have done also the recruitment processes myself, it's been like, I have been selling my own expertise. Yes, I represent our company, but still…"
– Interviewee 1

The case company's challenging situation regarding the shortness of contracts is to some extent explained by the fact that the vast majority of the sales team members are still students, who typically sooner or later decide to prioritize their studies in order to graduate and consequently resign from the job. Another explanation that surfaced is that many of the

hired salespeople view the position as a stepping stone in their career – only as an intermediate stopping point that assists them in reaching their long-term goal, which is something else than sales. To some degree the case company seems to have created this challenging situation deliberately by constantly deciding to hire students with no long-term intention of staying in the position. This decision is most probably linked to the company's underlying ideological principle of striving to promote the employment and professional development of young adults. It is indeed respectable that the case company seeks to "practice what it preaches" in the recruitment of its own employees, but nevertheless should also appreciate the pitfall in this approach.

7.4.4 Influence

The competence of influence, as in the use of persuasion tactics, is essential in performing consultative personal selling successfully; the salesperson should be able to guide the buyer's thinking into a favorable direction and towards a co-operational outcome. This competence was acknowledged by all of the interviewees as important in personal selling, but received varied opinions and comments in terms of the interviewees' personal skill level. Some respondents regarded influence as their personal strength, whereas others saw it as an area in need of personal development. For instance, interviewee 1 pointed out that especially in situations when the customer has been deliberating only between two options and has eventually opted for the other recruitment company, she has felt like she has failed in clearly and convincingly articulating the benefits of cooperating with the case company. She saw this as a personal weakness that she should address in future.

> *"It's easy to justify why you should try our services at least once. I find it easy when you have for the first time gotten an hour of the customer's time. So argumentation is maybe something that feels easy to me."*
> *– Interviewee 3*

> *" I haven't been able to bring out the relevant things regarding why the customer should now pay almost double the price that they may have maybe earlier paid. So that's something I may have felt like having failed at, that I haven't been able to explain with relevant arguments why you should now pay this much more - -"*
> *– Interviewee 2*

The interviews revealed that the so-called expert approach, as in strongly utilizing factual argumentation and highlighting the competence of your company and yourself, gains central foothold with new customers. This finding is consistent with Vahvaselkä (2004, p. 153), who

has stated that with new customers the sales speech plays an especially noteworthy role, because the salesperson has to first 'sell himself' and his own professionalism and thus achieve the customer's trust. Therefore it is important to plan the sales speech well beforehand. The interviewees told that they typically tend to emphasize their professionalism and explain things in much more detail backed up with strong argumentation when interacting with new customers. The role of factual argumentation as the primary form of influence subsides as the customer relationship becomes stronger and closer. Along with the progression of the relationship from the customer cultivation to the customer retention phase of the life cycle, the interaction becomes more firmly based on the emotional side and less on the factual and rational side of communication.

Furthermore, in line with various other EI competences, also influence was considered having its potential pitfall. The excessive or inappropriate use of persuasion tactics may lead to the customer regarding the salesperson as being overly aggressive and assertive. This impression would most probably result in the customer becoming irritated and frustrated, which might consequently cause the customer to withdraw from the situation and the whole relationship. It is important that the customer does not feel like he is being strongly pushed towards making a purchase decision.

> *"I can remember that especially when I started I may have tried to push something forward too enthusiastically, like in the sense that I have realized that this would be really good for the customer but the customer himself hasn't quite bought it at any point. I have tried too eagerly to move forward, for example made an offer or something else. So the customer may have gotten the feeling that does she really understand what I need. Maybe the customer would have indeed needed it but if he himself doesn't realize it then I may have failed in trying to push something too far."*
> *– Interviewee 4*

Since my findings imply that the skill levels regarding persuasion tactics and convincing argumentation seem to vary substantially among the case company salespeople, it would be recommendable for the company to pay particular attention to the competence of influence in their sales training. A consistently good level of influence skills throughout the salesforce would serve as a considerable asset for the company in advancing its overall sales performance.

7.4.5 Conflict management

Similarly to building bonds with customers, also the competence of managing conflicts is particularly important in the recruiting industry since there is always the possibility of the cooperation being unsuccessful in terms of the recruitment outcome. The salesperson's responsibility of what has been sold to the customer is highlighted in the follow-up stage (Kidwell et al., 2007). This last stage of the sales process is typically important to the customer because they may have some feelings of uncertainty or questions and comments that they want to present (Jobber & Lancaster, 2003, p. 137). A follow-up call – preferably accompanied later by a follow-up meeting – reflects a service orientation and genuine interest in the customer, and therefore it can be crucial in ensuring customer satisfaction and a positive service experience (Rope, 2003, p. 85), and consequently in preventing future conflict situations. The objective in personal selling is always to achieve a continued customer relationship by way of high customer satisfaction (ibid). Interviewee 2 states that the role of EI and conflict management skills are highlighted in situations when something has not gone as initially hoped.

> *"The significance of emotional intelligence is emphasized when you have to deal with difficult things. Have you made too big promises or has something not gone as planned? Then emotions are surely much more on the surface also on the customer's side and they might be a bit snappier about why these things haven't been dealt with. Then you have to think about the emotional side and be on the listening side even more than in some sales setting, like when you go to sell something for the first time. You just being present often already means a lot."*
> *– Interviewee 2*

In addition, the significance of conflict management skills is accentuated when interacting with diminished customers. Being adept at handling somewhat tense situations and unwelcoming responses is essential for a salesperson trying to revive a formerly active customer relationship that has been neglected for some reason. The interviewees rather unanimously considered contacting diminished customers difficult and unpleasant, which reflects a tendency to avoid potential conflict situations instead of facing them proactively.

> *"Diminished customers are, in fact, really hard, because with them you are out of your comfort zone and you have to ask what is the deal here, what has gone wrong or what could have we done better. And if the customer has a sort of feeling that well yeah, I wouldn't care to cooperate with those guys again, then it's really difficult to get it honestly uncovered what has happened and why we're not cooperating so closely anymore."*
> *- Interviewee 4*

An especially interesting thought that one of the interviewees pointed out with regard to the competence of conflict management is that in a sense it is necessary to even ignite conflict in order to produce maximum added value to the customer. She felt that by daring to question and challenge the customer's views she can provide the customer with some food for thought and make a bigger contribution than by echoing the customer's own thoughts and opinions. Indeed, also Weitz and Bradford (1999) have found that conflict can have a beneficial influence on relationship outcomes if managed skillfully. There is, nevertheless, a fine line between the end result of this tactic being positive or negative, which is why the salesperson should be equipped with appropriate situational sensitivity.

> *"I don't accept everything the customer says, like if I feel that something is different than how we at [our company] think or how I think, then I will say it. I believe that the customer wants to work with a person who brings them added value, or with a company that brings added value. A person that accepts everything and says yes, yes, ok, absolutely, to everything… that doesn't bring any added value - you could easily be without such a person."*
> *– Interviewee 1*

7.5 Summary of findings

Table 13 below presents in a nutshell the findings derived from my interviews regarding how the different EI elements are reflected in the studied context. The table shows which EI competences were identified as strengths and weaknesses, which ones were seen as especially important, and which ones are highlighted in the interaction with new, established, and diminished customers. In addition, it includes five new additions into Goleman's (1998) framework: the motivational competence of enthusiasm and the overarching competences – i.e. umbrella competences – of the desire to help, reflection, authenticity, and trust.

Table 13: Summary of findings

EI competence	Findings	Empirical evidence
Self-awareness		
Emotional awareness	Weakness	"I'm not aware of my own feelings." – Interviewee 1
Accurate self-assessment	Weakness	"I should think more about what are my strengths and weaknesses, I mean like reflect on the things I have learned through experience. So self-knowledge is definitely an area in need of development." – Interviewee 2
Self-confidence	Strength	"When it comes to confidence I think that I'm very close to the upper limit – any more would only be annoying." – Interviewee 3

Self-regulation		
Self-control	Strength	"For me all kind of self-regulation feels fairly natural, self-control and all else." – Interviewee 3
Trustworthiness	Important	"- - you do everything as agreed even if the customer doesn't. You stay on schedule, are not late, and if you've promised to send something or be in contact, then you are." – Interviewee 3
Conscientiousness	Both strength & weakness, highlighted with new customers	"- - those are failures that you just haven't prepared yourself well enough, because you've been busy - -" – Interviewee 1 "- - we have to have very many things under control in this job, I feel like I am able to do it." – Interviewee 1
Adaptability	Important, weakness, highlighted with new customers	"It's difficult to... there's so different types of people, so that you could sort of recognize what kind of a person there is on the other side." – Interviewee 2
Innovation	Important, strength	"I rarely sell anything that is already finished - - but instead more like 'we have this thing in progress that we are developing'. There's the thought that the customer himself can influence and join the process - -" – Interviewee 4
Motivation		
Achievement drive	Important	"Motivating yourself and also motivating others - - is purely everything in our job." – Interviewee 3
Commitment	Highlighted with established customers	"It's important that both parties are committed and understand that this requires time, that we might not get it right the first time, but it's a process of constant development." – Interviewee 2
Initiative	Highlighted with diminished customers	"Old accounts that have already become a bit cold are really hard to contact again" – Interviewee 1
Optimism	Important	"It's important to have a positive attitude. Even if some day everyone you call hangs up on you, you still have the energy to continue and try again the next day." – Interviewee 1
Enthusiasm	New addition to framework, strength, highlighted with established customers	"Another positive factor I've been told is that it immediately shows that we do our work enthusiastically - - I try to transmit a part of my own enthusiasm to the customer - -" – Interviewee 4
Empathy		
Understanding others	Important, highlighted with established customers	"[My success in sales situations is] most certainly due to listening to the customer as well as genuine understanding." – Interviewee 2 "Perhaps my biggest personal successes typically come through the ability of putting myself in the other person's thinking process." – Interviewee 3
Developing others	Not reflected in the data	N/A
Service orientation	Important, strength	"You don't just try to sell your own product but think about whether there are some other things that are clearly like maybe problematic for the customer, that can you somehow give pro bono help or consulting in those." – Interviewee 2
Leveraging diversity	Not reflected in the data	N/A
Political awareness	Not reflected in the data	N/A

Social skills		
Influence	Strength & weakness, highlighted with new customers	"It's easy to justify why you should try our services at least once." – Interviewee 3 "I haven't been able to explain with relevant arguments why you should now pay this much more, even though a few years back you paid only that much." – Interviewee 2
Communication	Important	"So despite that [an unsuccessful end result] the customer is still very satisfied with us because the process and communication has been pleasant and smooth." – Interviewee 4
Conflict management	Highlighted with diminished customers	"Diminished customers are, in fact, really hard, because with them you are out of your comfort zone and you have to ask what is the deal here, what has gone wrong or what could have we done better." – Interviewee 4
Leadership	Not reflected in the data	N/A
Change catalyst	Not reflected in the data	N/A
Building bonds	Weakness, highlighted with established customers	"We have the challenge that you can't create a very personal relationship because we have such a high employee turnover rate in our sales team." – Interviewee 1
Collaboration & cooperation	Important	"- - the customer will always choose the one with whom it's nice to work with. - - So if you are able to achieve the right kind of interaction, it has all the impact on the business." – Interviewee 4
Team capabilities	Not reflected in the data	N/A
Umbrella competencies		
Desire to help	New addition to framework, Strength, Reflected in the EI dimensions of self-regulation, motivation, empathy & social skills	"Maybe some common characteristics in good salespeople are that they are genuinely interested in helping the customer - -" – Interviewee 3
Reflection	New addition to framework, Important, Weakness, Reflected across all five EI dimensions	"I should reflect so much more on why I do certain things and what has affected my success and failure." – Interviewee 4
Authenticity	New addition to framework, Reflected across all five EI dimensions	"I've run into all kinds of guides about how you should position your hands - - and what kind of tone of voice you should preferably use but… I think that naturalness outweighs all of these on the priority list." – Interviewee 3
Trust	New addition to framework, Important, Reflected across all five EI dimensions	"Building trust is pretty much all I do." – Interviewee 3 "I'd say that [the reason behind a positive outcome is] almost without exception the customer's trust in me being there to benefit him in some way. - - It's the trust in - - me and the customer having a shared agenda, which is to cross the finishing line in a sustainable way and not just temporarily. If you can get the customer to trust in that then he absolutely won't be interested in whether the service costs half as much or twice as much compared to your competitors." – Interviewee 3

Lastly, this study also brought to light some potential downsides of EI competences, which are presented in the following Table 14. These downsides refer to undesirable outcomes that may either reside in an EI competence inherently or result from its exaggerated or inefficient utilization.

Table 14: Potential downsides of EI competences

EI element/competence	Potential downside
Self-awareness	Unnaturalness, untrustworthiness, unlikeability
Conscientiousness	Bringing out one's expertise excessively and consequently seeming arrogant and "know-it-all"
Empathy	Feelings of distress because of the necessity to harden oneself and to act against one's personality, weakened credibility and negotiating power
Desire to help	Exploitation of pro bono favors
Building bonds	Disadvantages linked to employee turnover
Influence	Risk of seeming overly aggressive and assertive
Adaptability	Decreased authenticity

8. Discussion

Prior research has found that key attributes of salespeople include the fascination for problem-solving, good interaction skills, integrity, authenticity, self-knowledge, and empathy (Dion et al., 1995; Beverland, 2001; Rope, 2003; Vahvaselkä, 2004; Bagozzi, 2006; Pekkarinen et al., 2006; Schaefer and Pettijohn, 2006; Deeter-Schmelz & Sojka, 2007). Fill and Fill (2005) have emphasized the need for salespeople to acknowledge that their habitus, conduct, and communication style always influences the perception that customers establish of the whole organization. In addition, they have brought out that embracing a customer and service orientation as well as being adaptable in one's behavior has a positive impact on the outcomes of sales situations. Embodying an adaptive selling approach requires self-awareness and reflection, both of which are related to the above-mentioned key attribute of self-knowledge. All of the interviewees in this study considered self-awareness and reflection to be essential skills in personal selling. Reflection was added into Goleman's original EI framework as a new overarching umbrella competence, because the act of reflecting can be considered necessary with regard to all five EI dimensions.

Despite acknowledging the importance of self-awareness and reflection, the interviewees simultaneously recognized them as a challenging area in which they should strive to develop their skillset. The interviewees told that they had not previously done much conscious reflection on their feelings, strengths and weaknesses, or the image that they project of themselves in sales situations. This lack of self-awareness among the interviewees is a noteworthy finding that the case company should take into account and act upon in their sales training, because self-awareness is the fundamental level of EI and serves as the bedrock for other EI elements and the competences related to them, as well as for the ability to practice adaptive selling skillfully.

Another weakness that the interviews revealed is related to the competence of building bonds. The sales team of the case company has a rather high employee turnover, which means that the contact persons for customers are changed fairly often. This is unfavorable for the case company, since the bonds with customers suffer each time the contact person changes, and thus the effort that has been put into nurturing the customer relationships at least partially goes to waste quite frequently. Therefore it would be recommendable for the

case company to take this into account in their own recruitments and strive to hire salespeople who express the willingness towards a longer-term commitment to the job.

When it comes to the strengths in the case company, one of the aspects that Fill and Fill (2005) have highlighted, i.e. embracing a customer/service orientation, emerged strongly in the interviews and can be seen as a strength. All of the interviewees repeatedly stated that they genuinely want to help their customers, which is a clear indication of a customer/service orientation. However, the desire to help is also related to other competences in Goleman's framework, such as understanding others. In fact, none of the individual EI competences by themselves sufficiently cover its essence, and therefore in this paper also the desire to help was added into the EI framework as an umbrella competence that pertains to various EI competences.

In addition, the competence of innovation constitutes another strength for the case company. All interviewees acknowledged that innovation is an important competence in consultative selling and expressed that they try to present customers with new ideas and tailored solutions. Innovation is linked to problem-solving, which was listed in section 2.2.3 as a vital attribute for a salesperson. For example Vahvaselkä (2004, p. 134) has argued that sales is essentially about problem-solving, which underlines the significance of the innovation competence.

Also self-control and enthusiasm can be regarded as strengths among the interviewees. Self-control was seen as an inherent competence that does not typically require any active effort. Enthusiasm, on the other hand, is linked to motivation, the pivotal importance of which was well acknowledged by the interviewees. The answers of all four interviewees clearly reflected motivational aspects and the interviewees demonstrated a strong motivation and high enthusiasm towards their jobs. Enthusiasm can be regarded as a specific manifestation of a motivated and optimistic attitude that Goleman has not acknowledged in his EI framework. Thus enthusiasm was added as a fifth motivational competence to complement the elements of achievement drive, commitment, initiative, and optimism.

Furthermore, in accordance with Dion et al. (1995) and Fill and Fill (2005), who have argued that trust is a prerequisite and the bedrock for successful, long-term business relationships, also the findings of this study support the notion of trust being in a key position in buyer-seller interaction and the development of lasting customer relationships. Trust is linked to

the afore-mentioned key attribute of integrity. Trust arose in the interviews as a salient theme and a wide concept that is connected to many EI dimensions and competences rather than being just an individual EI competence among others. The interviewees supported the thought that from the salesperson's viewpoint trust can even be seen as the ultimate goal in all communication, behavior, and activities that take place in relation to customers. Consequently trust was added into the EI framework as the third new umbrella competence. An important element that has a significant impact on how easy it is for sellers and buyers to achieve trust is the compatibility of personality types (Dunderfelt, 1998, p. 18-19). The success of interaction and trust-building is influenced by personal chemistry (Vahvaselkä, 2004, p. 22), which implies that interpersonal emotions have a crucial influence on the development of a buyer-seller relationship (Bagozzi, 2006). Compatibility may be promoted by utilizing an adaptive selling approach. However, it is highly important for the salesperson to remain authentic and not lose himself amidst the constant adapting. Personal selling and the use of EI should be built on authenticity (Chen & Jaramillo, 2014), because it is vital in building trust. Authenticity was introduced as the fourth new umbrella competence addition into Goleman's EI framework.

This paper also shed light on whether there are differences in which EI competences are highlighted with customers in different life cycle stages, i.e. new emerging customers versus current established customers versus old diminished customers. The results of this study suggest that with new customers the role of expertise, professionalism, and factual argumentation is emphasized. With current customers, on the other hand, the emotional side of communication is highlighted in the interaction. The focus is on building bonds, understanding others, as well as showing commitment and enthusiasm. In addition, a more informal communication style is utilized. When it comes to diminished customers, from the salesperson's viewpoint the relationship is somewhat characterized by a feeling of discomfort and avoidance. Since the salespeople have a high threshold to interact with diminished customers, the importance of initiative and conflict management are highlighted in these situations.

Lastly, an especially interesting theme that arose in my findings was the downsides of EI competences. Regarding self-awareness, for example, many of the interviewees emphasized the importance of being yourself and behaving in sales situations in a way that feels natural. Excessive self-consciousness may be reflected into unnaturalness, which can lead to coming

across as untrustworthy and unlikeable. Therefore it may, indeed, be detrimental for the interaction if the salesperson is overly immersed in the dimension of self-awareness. Also adaptability may entail the risk of the salesperson's perceived authenticity decreasing, if the salesperson tries to excessively fabricate similarity and compatibility with the customer. The downside of conscientiousness, on the other hand, is incorporated in the paradox that in the recruiting business the salesperson should have wide-spread knowledge about various different industries, but presenting oneself too strongly as an expert in the customer's field of business may also backfire. There is a fine line between challenging the customer in a constructive, successful way and seeming arrogant and omniscient. The downside that empathy entails is the necessity for a highly empathetic person to sometimes harden oneself in sales negotiations and act against one's own personality when dealing with customers, which may cause feelings of distress. Showing strong empathy towards customers may, in fact, in some sense weaken the salesperson's credibility and negotiating power. When it comes to the desire to help, the possible downside is exploitation, and with building bonds the downside is linked to employee turnover, which was already discussed above as the case company's weakness. Also influence was considered having its potential pitfall: the excessive or inappropriate use of persuasion tactics may lead to the customer regarding the salesperson as being overly aggressive and assertive.

It is important for sales organizations to acknowledge the pitfalls of EI and take them into account in the coaching and training of salespeople. In order for the case company to effectively harness EI as a sales tool in their consultative B2B selling, the managers should acquaint themselves with the concept of EI and then construct and implement a training scheme – including personal EI assessments, such as Bar-On's EQ-i (1997) – for all employees who take part in sales activities.

9. Conclusion

EI has been defined by Goleman (1998, p. 317) as the ability to observe emotions in oneself as well as others, to motivate oneself, and to effectively manage both intra- and interpersonal emotions. Today the EI models presented by Salovey and Mayer (1990), Bar-on (1997), and Goleman (1998; 2006) are considered the most significant ones amidst dozens of variations. Goleman's (1998) model focuses on the organizational context and therefore it was chosen to be utilized as the basis of this study. Goleman has classified EI into five different elements – self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills – each of which comprise a number of emotional competences. These altogether 25 on-the-job capabilities reflect one's EI on a practical level and considered vital for success and superb performance in working life, because successful interaction is strongly linked to emotions and interpersonal emotions have a pivotal effect on whether a buyer-seller relationship thrives or not. All in all, research has shown that EI plays an essential role in the big picture of buyer-seller interaction and customer relationship management. Therefore it is essential to study the ways in which EI is manifested in salespeople's behavior and which EI competences are particularly highlighted in the B2B personal selling context.

This thesis focused on uncovering how EI is exhibited in the B2B buyer-seller interaction of a Finnish recruitment company's sales representatives. The findings of this study provided in-depth insight into the topic through one-on-one interviews and supported the notion that the underlying fundamental purpose of manifesting EI is to build trust. The interviews and content analysis shed light on the strengths and weaknesses of the case company's salespeople with regard to the use of EI, as well as the differences in their interaction with new, established, and diminished customers. This study also brought out noteworthy points about the potential downsides of EI competences. Most interestingly, however, the findings revealed some overarching central themes that this paper presents as additions into Goleman's (1998) EI framework. The overarching EI competences include reflection, authenticity, trust, and the desire to help. Reflection and authenticity can be regarded as crucial elements that enable the objective of trust-building to be reached. These three umbrella competences pertain to all five different EI dimensions: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. The fourth umbrella competence, the desire to help, also relates to four out of five EI dimensions. In addition to the overarching competences, also one new individual competence – enthusiasm – was added into the

motivation element of Goleman's EI framework. The following Table 15 presents a summary of the key findings of this research as well as their implications.

Table 15: Summary of key findings

Key finding	Explanation
Competence of enthusiasm	New addition to the motivation element that emerged as a strength in the case company
Umbrella competences	Trust, reflection, authenticity, and the desire to help constitute overarching EI competences that are necessary in B2B personal selling with regard to various EI elements
Downsides of EI competences	Numerous EI competences encompass potential pitfalls that companies should take into account in the coaching and training of salespeople

9.1 Limitations & further research

This paper is limited in the sense that all empirical data has been collected from the salesperson's side, consequently leaving the buyer's perspective completely outside the scope of the study. In addition, this paper relies on the interviewees' own subjective opinions, perceptions and assessment, which also includes some shortcomings in terms of reliability. According to Saarinen (2002, 130) it has been acknowledged in EI assessments that intrapersonal factors, such as emotions and impulses, are easier for oneself to evaluate reliably, whereas interpersonal factors, such as empathy and interaction skills, are more challenging for individuals to evaluate objectively themselves. Therefore it would be essential for future research to focus on expanding the scope of analysis to cover both the sellers' and buyers' viewpoints and experiences by utilizing dyadic data. The analysis of buyer-seller dyads is necessary in order to discover possible gaps in perceptions of EI competences, their role, importance, and manifestations, as well as to discover how the EI of a salesperson is experienced by the buyer and how it affects the buyer's behavioral intentions.

Further research is also needed to generate insight into the ability of salespeople to identify customers' emotions in sales situations and interaction. In addition, future research could analyze buyer-seller relationships in terms of the self-management techniques that are utilized by both parties in order to promote functional emotions and avoid dysfunctional

emotions. Lastly, I would recommend for further research to focus on connecting the concept of EI more closely to a bigger picture in order to build a more holistic view of the subject. There is a need for research that does not focus exclusively on the concept of EI as a separate unit of analysis, but also includes other elements and combines these as a joint unity. For example, EI theory could be analyzed in relation to mindset theory (see e.g. the publications of Carol S. Dweck regarding growth versus fixed mindset), since the two concepts are interlinked and complement each other. Also the interrelation of EI and personality, temperament, and attachment styles constitutes an interesting area for future research. Abundant research is still needed in order to discover how mindsets, personality, temperament, attachment styles, and EI affect each other and how is the joint effect of these elements reflected into buyer-seller relationships.

References

Ahearne, M.; Mathieu, J. & Rapp, A. (2005). To Empower or Not to Empower Your Sales Force? An Empirical Examination of the Influence of Leadership Empowerment Behavior on Customer Satisfaction and Performance. *Journal of Applied Psychology*. Vol. 90, No. 5, p. 945-955.

Alen, K. (2012). *Tunneälyn merkitys henkilökohtaisen myyntityön myyntiprosessin eri myynnin vaiheissa – Case Sampo Pankki Oyj*. Master's Thesis, Aalto University School of Business.

Andersen, P. H. & Kumar, R. (2006). Emotions, trust and relationship development in business relationships: A conceptual model for buyer–seller dyads. *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 35, No. 4, p. 522-535.

Bagozzi, R. P. (2006). The Role of Social and Self-Conscious Emotions in the Regulation of Business-to-Business Relationships in Salesperson–Customer Interactions. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*. Vol. 21, No. 7, p. 453-457.

Bar-On, R. (1997). *The Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i): Technical manual*. Multi-Health Systems, Toronto.

Beverland, M. (2001). Contextual Influences and the Adoption and Practice of Relationship Selling in a Business-to-business Setting: An Exploratory Study. Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management, Vol. 21, No. 3, p. 207-215.

Case company internal materials (2015)

Deeter-Schmelz, D. R. & Sojka, J. Z. (2007). Personality traits and sales performance: Exploring differential effects of need for cognition and self-monitoring. *Journal of Marketing Theory & Practice*, Vol. 15, No. 2, p. 145-157.

Dion, P.; Easterling, D. & Miller, S. J. (1995). What is really necessary in successful buyer/seller relationships?. *Journal of Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 24, No.1, p. 1-9.

Drollinger, T. & Comer, L.B. (2013). Salesperson's listening ability as an antecedent to relationship selling. *The Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*. Vol. 28, No. 1, p. 50-59.

Dunderfelt, T. (1998). *Henkilökemia – Yhteistyö erilaisten ihmisten välillä*. WSOY, Juva.

Eriksson, P. & Kovalainen, A. (2008). *Qualitative Methods in Business Research*. SAGE Publications Ltd, London.

Evanschitzky, H.; Sharma, A. & Prykop, C. (2012). The role of the sales employee in securing customer satisfaction. *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 46, No. 3, p. 489-508.

Fill, C. & Fill, K. E. (2005). *Business-to-business marketing: relationships, systems and communications*. Financial Time Prentice Hall, Harlow, New York.

Goleman, D. (2006). *Emotional Intelligence*. Bantam 10th Anniversary Reissue Edition. Bantam Dell, New York.

Goleman, D. (1998). *Working with Emotional Intelligence.* Bantam Books, New York.

Grant, A. M. (2007). Enhancing coaching skills and emotional intelligence through training. *Journal of Industrial and Commercial Training*. Vol. 39, No. 5, p. 257-266.

Hoffman, E. (2002). *Psychological testing at work: how to use, interpret and get the most out of the newest tests in personality, learning style, aptitudes, interests and more!*. McGraw-Hill, New York.

Holopainen, M. (2012). *Muutoksia rekrytointialalla tulevaisuudessa*. Thesis, Laurea University of Applied Sciences.

Hämäläinen, R. P.; Jones, R. & Saarinen, E. (2014). *Being better better: living with systems intelligence*. Aalto University Publications, Nord Print, Helsinki.

Jobber, D. & Lancaster, G. (2003). *Selling and sales management*. Pearson Education, Harlow.

Jokinen, T. (2015). *Systeemiäly myyntityössä*. Master's Thesis, Aalto University School of Engineering.

Kidwell, B. & McFarland, R. G. & Avila, R. A. (2007). Perceiving emotion in the buyer-seller interchange: The moderated impact on performance. *Journal of Personal selling & Sales Management*, Vol. 27, No. 2, p.119-132.

Kidwell, B.; Hardesty, D. M.; Murtha, B. R. & Sheng, S. (2011) Emotional intelligence in marketing exchanges. *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 75, p. 78-95.

Kim, S. H. (2012). The relationship between salespeople's attachment styles and regulation strategies for negative emotions. *African Journal of Business Management*. Vol. 6, No. 4, p. 1721-1732.

Manna, D. R. & Smith, A. D. (2004). Exploring the need for emotional intelligence and awareness among sales representatives. *Journal of Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, Vol. 22, No. 1, p. 66-75.

Nicholson, C.; Compeau, L. D. & Sethi, R. (2001). The Role of Interpersonal Liking in Building Trust in Long-Term Channel Relationships. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*. Vol. 29, No. 1, p. 3-15.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). Two Decades of Developments in Qualitative Inquiry: A Personal, Experiential Perspective. *Qualitative Social Work*. Vol. 1, No. 3, p. 261–283.

Pekkarinen, U.; Pekkarinen, E. & Vornanen, J. (2006). *Menestyvän myyjän käsikirja*, WSOY, Helsinki.

Rane, P. (2004). *Myyjän ominaisuudet ja temperamentti.* Master's Thesis, Helsinki School of Economics.

Román, S. & Iacobucci, D. (2010). Antecedents and Consequences of Adaptive Selling Confidence and Behavior: A Dyadic Analysis of Salespeople and their Customers. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*. Vol. 38, No. 3, p. 363-382.

Rope, T. (2003). *Onnistu myynnissä*. WSOY, Helsinki

Rozell, E. J.; Pettijohn, C. E. & Parker, R. S. (2004). Customer-oriented selling: exploring the roles of emotional intelligence and organizational commitment. *Journal of Psychology & Marketing*, Vol. 21, No. 6, p. 405-424.

Saarinen, M. & Kokkonen, M. (2003). *Tunneäly: Kohti KOKOnaista elämää*. WSOY, Helsinki.

Salovey, P. & Mayer, J. D. (1990). Emotional Intelligence. *Imagination, Cognition and Personality*. Vol. 9, p. 185-211.

Schaefer, A. D. & Pettijohn, C. E. (2006). The relevance of authenticity in personal selling: is genuineness an asset or liability?. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*. Vol. 14, No. 1, p. 25-35.

Schreier, M. (2014). Qualitative Content Analysis. In U. Flick (Ed.) *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis*. London, England: SAGE Publications, p. 170–183.

Stanko, M. A.; Bonner, J. M. & Calantone, R. J. (2007). Building commitment in buyer-seller relationships: A tie strength perspective. *Industrial Marketing Management*. Vol. 36, No. 8, p. 1094-1103.

Vahvaselkä, I. (2004). *Asiantuntijan myyntitaito: onnistuneen markkinoinnin ja myyntityön perusteita*. Oy Finn Lectura Ab, Helsinki

Weitz, B. A & Bradford, K. D. (1999). Personal selling and sales management: A relationship marketing perspective. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*. Vol. 27, No. 2, p. 241-254.

Weitz, B. A.; Sujan, H. & Sujan, M. (1986). Knowledge, Motivation, and Adaptive Behavior: A Framework for Improving Selling Effectiveness. *Journal of Marketing*. Vol. 50, No. 4, p. 174-191.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview outline

What is your age and education?
Could you tell a bit about yourself and your background?
How long have you been working in personal selling altogether?
When did you start working at [the case company]? Have you worked in the company also in other positions than your current one?
Why did you become interested in applying for the job?
Could you describe your job and tell about what you do?
How would you describe yourself as a salesperson and when dealing with customers in general?
In your opinion, what is a good salesperson like?
Could you tell about some situations in which you have succeeded in personal selling? What do you think was the reason for your success?
How about situations in which you have failed with regard to personal selling and the reasons behind the failure?
What do you regard as difficult in personal selling and especially in customer interaction? And easy?
[Present the elements of EI from Goleman's framework]
What do you consider your own strengths in customer work and managing customer relationships? What about weaknesses?
What kind of thoughts and experiences do you have about the role and significance of emotional intelligence in personal selling?
In which kind of situations do you feel that the role of emotional intelligence is highlighted?
Can you think of situations in which the customer's purchase decision was clearly based on something else than just prices/facts? What do you think caused the positive outcome in these situations?
How do you feel that the elements of emotional intelligence are highlighted during the sales process and customer life cycle?
Do you have any additional thoughts that you would like to bring out?
What did you think about the interview?

Appendix 2: Chronological table of the articles reviewed in this paper

Author	Year	Title	Research question	Research method	Key findings
Weitz, B. A.; Sujan, H. & Sujan, M.	1986	Knowledge, Motivation, and Adaptive Behavior: A Framework for Improving Selling Effectiveness	What is adaptive selling and which capabilities does it require?	Literature review.	Knowledge of customer types and sales strategies as well as the motivation to modify one's behavior affect adaptive selling.
Salovey, P. & Mayer, J. D.	1990	Emotional Intelligence	What are the skills that contribute to exhibiting EI?	Literature review.	A framework for EI.
Dion, P.; Easterling, D. & Miller, S. J.	1995	What is really necessary in successful buyer/seller relationships?.	What effect do personality traits/types and trust have on sales outcomes between B2B buyers and sellers?	Self-report questionnaire. Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) personality classification. Correlation and regression analysis.	The majority of B2B buyers and sellers represent a small number of personality types. Perceived similarities are linked to buyer-seller trust and sales performance.
Weitz, B. A & Bradford, K. D.	1999	Personal selling and sales management: A relationship marketing perspective	How is personal selling and sales management changing along with a long-term buyer-seller relationship focus and what are the implications?	Literature review.	The partnering role for salespeople causes 1) focus to move away from influencing buyer behavior towards managing the built-in conflict of buyer-seller relationships, and 2) the recruitment, training, assessment and compensation of salespeople to change accordingly.
Beverland, M.	2001	Contextual Influences and the Adoption and Practice of Relationship Selling in a Business-to-Business Setting: An Exploratory Study	In which circumstances is a relationship selling approach applicable?	Case study, in-depth interviews with salespeople	Customer relationships develop through a two-stage process in which the short-term and long-term focus is harmonized.
Nicholson, C.; Compeau, L. D. & Sethi, R.	2001	The Role of Interpersonal Liking in Building Trust in Long-Term Channel Relationships	How does liking affect the buyer's trust in the salesperson?	Nationwide mail survey. Factor analysis.	Liking plays a significant mediating role in the development of trust. As the relationship matures, the importance of liking grows.
Manna, D. R. & Smith, A. D.	2004	Exploring the need for emotional intelligence and awareness among sales representatives	Is EI training necessary for salespeople to be successful?	Survey to salespeople. Regression analysis and factor analysis.	EI, communication skills, negotiating skills, presentation skills, and comprehending personality types is important for salespeople.

Rozell, E. J.; Pettijohn, C. E. & Parker, R. S.	2004	Customer-oriented selling: exploring the roles of emotional intelligence and organizational commitment	What are the relationships between customer-oriented selling, EI, and organizational commitment?	Mail survey with several self-report scales. Correlation analysis.	Customer-orientation is strongly linked to EI. Companies should think of recruiting emotionally intelligent salespeople.
Ahearne, M.; Mathieu, J. & Rapp, A.	2005	To Empower or Not to Empower Your Sales Force? An Empirical Examination of the Influence of Leadership Empowerment Behavior on Customer Satisfaction and Performance	How does the self-efficacy and adaptability of a salesperson mediate the effect of leadership empowerment behavior on customer service satisfaction and sales performance?	Survey to salespeople in the pharmaceutical industry.	Empowering leadership behaviors have highest benefits for salespeople with low product/industry knowledge level and low experience. Salespeople with high knowledge and experience level do not obtain apparent benefits.
Andersen, P. H. & Kumar, R.	2006	Emotions, trust and relationship development in business relationships: A conceptual model for buyer–seller dyads	How do buyer-seller relationships develop over time and how do emotions influence the development?	Literature review.	A conceptual model and a set of propositions highlighting the impact of emotions on interpersonal relationships.
Bagozzi, R. P.	2006	The Role of Social and Self-Conscious Emotions in the Regulation of Business-to-Business Relationships in Salesperson-Customer Interactions	What is the role of positive and negative social and self-conscious emotions in buyer-seller interactions?	Literature review	Cultural values moderate the effects of social emotions on salesperson performance and their relations to others. The social emotions framework should complement the economic rational framework in understanding salesperson–customer relationships.
Schaefer, A. D. & Pettijohn, C. E.	2006	The relevance of authenticity in personal selling: is genuineness an asset or liability?	What is the effect of salesperson authenticity on performance, professional commitment, and intention to stay in the profession?	Questionnaire to salespeople. Factor analysis.	Salesperson authenticity is strongly related to sales performance in the career establishment stage, as well as professional commitment.
Deeter-Schmelz, D. R. & Sojka, J. Z.	2007	Personality traits and sales performance: Exploring differential effects of need for cognition and self-monitoring	Do the traits of self-monitoring and need for cognition affect sales performance?	Survey to salespeople. 956 qualified responses. Variance analysis.	The need for cognition and self-monitoring are linked to sales performance level.
Grant, A. M.	2007	Enhancing coaching skills and emotional intelligence through training	Is there a difference between the effect of a short- and long-term training program on coaching skills and EI?	Experimental study with 43 participants. Self-report measures and paired t-tests.	Both training courses were positively linked to goal-focused coaching skills. The 13-week course was also linked to higher EI.

Kidwell, B.; McFarland, R. G. & Avila, R. A.	2007	Perceiving Emotion In The Buyer-Seller Interchange: The Moderated Impact On Performance	How can the emotional competency of salespeople influence interactions with customers through effective use of adaptive selling and customer-oriented selling techniques?	Quantitative web-based questionnaire to 15 different B2B companies, expert scoring method	A low ability of perceiving emotion may decrease the use or effectiveness of customer-oriented selling and hinder performance. Good skills in perceiving emotions are linked to increased effectiveness when using customer-oriented behaviors and adaptive selling. Sales-people should be encouraged to be aware of customers' emotional expressions.
Stanko, M. A.; Bonner, J. M. & Calantone, R. J.	2007	Building commitment in buyer-seller relationships: A tie strength perspective	What are the effects of tie strength on the buyer firm's commitment to the selling firm? What is the impact of commitment on favorable buyer behavior?	A survey of 119 buyer organizations. Factor analysis, SEM analysis.	3/4 identified properties of tie strength (reciprocal services, mutual confiding and emotional intensity) are positively related to buyer commitment to the selling organization
Román, S. & Iacobucci, D.	2010	Antecedents and Consequences of Adaptive Selling Confidence and Behavior: A Dyadic Analysis of Salespeople and their Customers	What are the primary antecedents and consequences of adaptive selling?	210 salesperson-customer dyads in the financial services industry. Factor analysis.	The salesperson's adaptive selling confidence, role ambiguity, intrinsic motivation and customer-qualification skills mediate the effect between the perception of the company's customer orientation and adaptive selling behavior.
Kidwell, B.; Hardesty, D. M.; Murtha, B. R. & Sheng, S	2011	Emotional Intelligence in Marketing Exchanges	How do salespeople use emotions to promote positive outcomes for their companies, themselves, and customers?	Three field studies with 110 real estate and insurance agents. EIME measure. Factor analysis.	EI has a positive correlation with salesperson performance, regarding both revenue level and customer retention.
Evanschitzky, H.; Sharma, A. & Prykop, C	2012	The role of the sales employee in securing customer satisfaction	How does salespeople's satisfaction, adaptive selling, and dominance influence customer satisfaction?	Multilevel regression analysis using dyadic data. Aggregate sample size of 206 people.	Salesperson satisfaction and adaptive selling are positively and dominance is negatively connected to customer satisfaction.
Kim, S. H.	2012	The relationship between salespeople's attachment styles and regulation strategies for negative emotions	What are the effects of attachment styles and regulation strategies on customer-oriented selling behavior and regulation strategies for negative emotions during salespeople's interactions with customers?	In-depth interviews with 11 B2C salespeople. Survey with 423 respondents. Structural equation modeling (SEM) method.	Attachment style had considerable influence on salespeople's regulation strategies for negative emotions as well as on their customer-oriented selling behavior.
Drollinger, T. & Comer, L.B.	2013	Salesperson's listening ability as an antecedent to relationship selling	Does communication, relationship quality and trust moderate the relationship between active empathetic listening and sales performance?	Survey to salespeople with 175 qualified respondents. Structural equation modeling.	AEL is positively related to communication skills, relationship quality and trust. The proposed moderators of communication and trust received support when predicting sales performance.