

Selling actors in multi-actor sales ecosystems: who they are, what they do and why it matters

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Abstract

Purpose - When selling actors start taking over tasks that were formerly performed by salespeople, the distribution of tasks, allocation of responsibilities, and finally the role of the salespeople changes. However, little is known about salespersons' perceptions of selling actors' identities and participation behavior in multi-actor sales ecosystems.

Design/methodology/approach - We conducted a World Café, a new qualitative method to the field of sales research, to obtain first data on selling actor identities in multi-actor sales ecosystems. Salespeople who had the chance to observe and interact with more than 98,000 selling actors disclosed their perceptions of selling actors' participation behavior in a multi-actor sales ecosystem. Four different data sources were analyzed using qualitative content analysis to develop a comprehensive understanding of the topic and to test validity through the convergence of information from different sources.

Findings - Using identity theory, a salesperson-selling actor relationship/behavior typology for multi-actor sales ecosystems was developed. Eight different selling actor identities were identified: Avoider, observer, receptive actor, prepper, expecter, savvy actor, challenger and coworker.

Originality/value - The typology provides researchers and managers with a tool to better understand and evaluate sales ecosystems. This knowledge can be used as a starting point for the reassessment of the knowledge, skills and abilities necessary for salespeople in multi-actor sales ecosystems and improve their training and coaching. The firsthand experiences reported by the participants of the World Café enable salespeople to identify different selling actors faster and prepare fitting approaches for all selling actor identities.

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4 Traditionally, selling refers to (1) a dyadic interaction in which a salesperson attempts
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7 to persuade a customer (2) to agree to a transaction, which represents the value creation
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10 ([Hartmann et al., 2018](#)). In recent years, the landscape of selling has changed due to the increasing
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13 focus on services as well as the availability of information for customers to use during their
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16 purchasing process ([Kaski et al., 2017](#)). Customers have become increasingly knowledgeable
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19 ([Godes and Mayzlin, 2009](#); [Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004](#); [Verhoef et al., 2015](#)) and
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22 empowered ([Bagheri et al., 2019](#)) thereby fundamentally changing the “traditional” sales
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25 process of rapport building, needs discovery, solution presentation, closing the sale and
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28 following up. The way value is co-created and extracted on both the companies and the
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31 customers side has evolved. “Whether intrinsically or extrinsically motivated, guided or
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34 unguided by the firm, customers have become active contributors to a wide variety of [formerly
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37 firm centric] functions (e.g., customer acquisition and retention, product innovation, marketing
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40 communication, merchandising)” ([Harmeling et al., 2017](#)).

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43 The sales literature has acknowledged the necessity of looking beyond the traditional
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46 and transactional buyer-seller dyad, calling for a new definition of selling ([Dixon and Tanner,](#)
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49 [2012](#)). The perception of the value creation process started to change with the introduction of
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52 service-dominant (S-D) logic ([Vargo and Lusch, 2004](#)). S-D logic is based on the foundational
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55 premises that value is always cocreated by multiple actors and that it is never created through
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58 isolated efforts of one individual actor ([Vargo and Lusch, 2017](#)). This led to the development
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4 of the ecosystem perspective of service-dominant logic, which increases the range of activities
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7 and the number of actors considered to be involved in selling (Hartmann et al., 2018).
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10 Ultimately, the perspective redefines “selling in terms of the interaction between actors aimed
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12 at creating and maintaining [...] locations at which service can be efficiently exchanged for
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14 service, through the ongoing alignment of institutional arrangements and the optimization of
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16 relationships” (Hartmann et al., 2018). This implies that all actors actively participating in
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18 exchange within the sales ecosystem, regardless of the term chosen to characterize them (e.g.,
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20 customer, employee), engage in selling and are thus selling actors (Hartmann et al., 2018).
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28 However, when selling actors start taking over tasks formerly performed by salespeople,
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30 the distribution of tasks, allocation of responsibilities, and finally the role of the salespeople
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32 changes. “Tomorrow’s selling processes are likely to be collaborative endeavors wherein
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34 [salespeople] are likely to work hand in hand with multiple [participating sales] ecosystem
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36 partners to orchestrate complex sales solutions” (Singh et al., 2019). However, who are these
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38 partners exactly, what characterizes them, what do they expect and what tasks do they perform
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40 and how do they do perform them? The answers to these questions are directly relevant for the
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42 work of salespeople, since salespeople who are challenged with new tasks, probably also
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44 require a different set of knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs); however, research does not yet
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46 have these answers (Hartmann et al., 2018). Furthermore, an investigation into buyer versus
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48 salesperson expectations for initial sales meetings indicates that there still is a mismatch
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4 between what buyers seek and the salesperson provides, that buyers' expectations are not
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7 reasonably satisfied and that salesperson training needs to be improved (Kaski et al., 2017).
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10 "Empirical studies show that salespeople at most marginally agree that sales training programs
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13 address the skills needed to be successful in their role" (Lassk et al., 2012).
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16 To answer the above stated questions, two important steps have to be taken. First, it is
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18
19 imperative to look beyond what the literature traditionally acknowledges as different types of
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22 customers (Parasuraman, 1997) and focus on the different selling actor identities within these
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25 types. Therefore, additional examination of selling actors' identities and their participation
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28 behavior in multi-actor sales ecosystems is needed to pave the way for a reevaluation of the
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31 relative importance of various salesperson knowledge, skills, and abilities. Whereas research
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34 has already explored customer identities in dyadic interactions (Swan et al., 2001) and surveyed
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37 the perspective of customers' self-assessment with regard to their participation behavior in
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39
40 dyadic interactions (Revilla-Camacho et al., 2015; Singh et al., 2019; Yi and Gong, 2013), little
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42
43 is known about salespersons' perceptions of selling actors' identities and participation behavior
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46 in multi-actor sales ecosystems. "The common finding that salespeople are often dissatisfied
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48
49 with the integration of their feedback regarding the training programs may be a reason why
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51
52 sales representatives often doubt that their training is relevant to their day-to-day work" (Lassk
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55 et al., 2012). Addressing the knowledge gap is important, because without a clear understanding
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58 of the selling actors' behavior in a multi-actor sales ecosystem, identifying the necessary KSAs
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4 that salespeople need will not be possible: the salespeople will neither reach their full potential
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7 nor will they be satisfied with their training, and investment in training and coaching activities
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10 for salespersons will always be inefficient.
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13 Second, it cannot be ruled out that a one-sided focus on interviews as a method of choice
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15 for qualitative sales research has limited researcher's ability to get to the bottom of things so
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17 far. An examination of the types of data sources for qualitative sales research, used in top-
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19 quality journals such as JBIM, JPSSM, JBR, IMM reveals that the vast majority of studies rely
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21 solely on data obtained from interviews (Johnson, 2016). Hence, we propose a new qualitative
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23 method to the field of sales research, the World Café. This method is superior to interviews,
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25 especially, in the exploration of entirely new topics and concepts and when researching groups
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27 (Löhr et al., 2020).
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37 Thus, the purpose of this study is to identify selling actors' identities and investigate
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39 their participation behavior in a multi-actor sales ecosystem from the salesperson perspective.
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41 We follow the reasoning that a qualitative approach is highly appropriate when previous work
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43 on the topic is scant (Drumwright, 1994). Therefore, an exploratory research design was used
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45 to obtain the first qualitative data from the salesperson's perspective. A group of 32 salespeople,
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47 temporarily working as staff at one of the world's largest experiential events, and 8 moderators
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49 participated in this qualitative study. This experiential event is an ideal example of a "relatively
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51 self-contained, self-adjusting system of resource- integrating actors connected by shared
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4 institutional arrangements and mutual value creation through service exchange” (Vargo and
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6 Lusch, 2016). Experiential events are engaging, extraordinary, memorable, socially, interactive
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8 experiences (Brodie et al., 2011; Grewal et al., 2009; Varshneya et al., 2017) and bring multiple
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10 employees and customers together in the same physical environment at the same time
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13 (Harmeling et al., 2017). Two popular examples of successful experiential events are the 2015
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15 Facebook IQ Live experience for B2B customers or the 2020 IKEA-Sleepovers for B2C
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17 customers. We were granted direct access to the salespeople in this sales ecosystem, who had
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19 the chance to observe and/or interact with more than 98,000 selling actors, resulting in a large,
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21 exclusive and unique data set. To enable interested researchers to develop a deeper
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23 understanding of this multi-actor sales ecosystem, images of this ecosystem can be accessed
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25 through the following QR code.
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46 Our research contributes to the existing literature on interactions in multi-actor sales
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48 ecosystems in three ways. First, our study identifies eight different selling actor identities in
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50 multi-actor sales ecosystems. Therefore, we provide managers and researchers with a tool to
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52 better understand and evaluate sales ecosystems. This knowledge can also be used for the
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54 reassessment of salespersons’ necessary KSAs and the development of more effective
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4 salesperson training. Second, we used the descriptions of the identities and developed a
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7 salesperson-selling actor relationship/behavior typology. Similar to [Swan et al., \(2001\)](#) we
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10 employed an identity theory approach. Therefore, our research on identities and participation
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13 behavior in multi-actor sales ecosystems can be directly related and compared to the authors'
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16 findings on dyadic interactions. Thus, we not only identify identities in multi-actor sales
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19 ecosystems and provide a new typology, but we also contribute by highlighting differences and
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22 similarities between actor identities and their behavior in both systems. Third, we introduce a
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25 new qualitative method to the field of sales research, thereby, enabling researchers to better
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28 understand how the sales process changes based on the ways in which selling actors co-create
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31 and/or extract value.

32 33 34 **Background**

35 36 37 *Symbolic interaction and identity*

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40 “The starting point for social analysis is the meaning that actors give to their situation”
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43 ([James, 2015](#)). [Blumer \(1969\)](#) suggested participant observation in the real world, as opposed
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46 to artificial settings or hypothetical situations, as the preferred method for studying interactions.
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49 Symbolic interaction refers “to the peculiar and distinctive character of interaction as it takes
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52 place between human beings” ([Blumer, 1969](#)). “The basic premise of symbolic interaction is
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55 that people attach symbolic meaning to objects, behaviors, themselves, and other people, and
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58 they develop and transmit these meanings through interaction” ([Howard, 2000](#)). Behavior
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4 towards others, or the so-called “response”, is made on the basis of the meaning that the other
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7 person attributes to the actor (Blumer, 1969; Swan et al., 2001). In our case, this means that
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10 salespeople consciously or unconsciously assign identities to other actors in the sales ecosystem
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13 and act according to these assignments. “Identities are thus strategic social constructions created
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16 through [the participation in reciprocal] interaction, with social and material consequences”
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19 (Howard, 2000). We are interested in personal identity: more specifically, the set of meanings
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22 that salespersons attach to other actors in the sales ecosystem based on perceived social,
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25 cultural, personal, and biographical elements (James, 2015; Swan et al., 2001). Therefore, this
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28 article uses the concept of selling actor identity, that is the meaning and characteristics a
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31 salesperson assigns to a selling actor based on the perceived participation behavior of that actor.
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33 34 *Differences between types and identities*

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37 The modern sales literature still distinguishes between four different types of customers,
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40 primarily based on relationship duration (Nguyen et al., 2018). New customers are those with
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43 no prior relationship with the company (Dwyer et al., 1987). Short-term customers have had
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46 first experiences with the company, and salespersons exceeded their expectations, likely
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49 resulting in further development (Jap, 2001). Long-term customers have a longstanding
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52 relationship with the company and are in a position to bargain (Wieseke et al., 2014). Lost
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55 customers have had a prior relationship with the company but switched to competition. While
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58 this framework primarily focuses on dyadic interactions between customers and salespersons,
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4 it is largely based on an actor's relationship with the company and can therefore also be applied
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7 to selling actors in multi-actor sales ecosystems. Hence, there are also four types of selling
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10 actors (salespersons excluded).

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13 In an effort to better understand the dyadic relationships between salespersons and their
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16 customers, [Swan et al. \(2001\)](#) looked beyond the mere relationship duration and focused more
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19 on the behaviors displayed by the customers. The authors interviewed salespeople and
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21
22 identified three categories of customer identities, namely, commercial friends, customer
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25 coworkers and business acquaintances. These customer identities can be distinguished based
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28 on the customers' participation behavior. According to the authors' research, "commercial
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31 friends customers have interactions with salespeople that salespeople experience as close to
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34 personal friendships and incorporate intimacy, sharing casual conversation and joint leisure"
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37 ([Swan et al., 2001](#)). In comparison, interactions with customer coworkers were described "as
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40 more similar to the intimacy found between people at work than the near personal friendships
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43 of commercial friends" ([Swan et al., 2001](#)). The camaraderie between salespersons and
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46 customer coworkers blends both personal and business aspects but is constrained in terms of
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49 intimacy ([Swan et al., 2001](#)). Since then, research has investigated this idea of friendship in the
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52 context of service provider relationships and personal selling on numerous occasions (e.g.
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55 [Heide and Wathne 2006; Rosenbaum 2009; Rosenbaum, Russell-Bennett, and Drennan 2015](#)).

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58 In contrast to commercial friends and customer coworkers, salespeople described relationships
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4 with business acquaintances, as enduring relationships with a particular commitment to and
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7 reliance on each other for economic gain and with little or no interaction outside the context of
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10 the service exchange that would constitute a friendship (Swan et al., 2001). Confusingly, the
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13 authors referred to the identified customer identities also as customer types. However, this study
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16 assumes that it is more accurate to characterize customer identities as subcategories of customer
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19 types. Based on the authors' descriptions as well as their classification schemata, both
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21
22 commercial friends and customer coworkers were considered identities of long-term customers
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25 whereas being a business acquaintance was considered an identity of a short-term customer.
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28 The identities of customers with no prior relationship with the company and the identities of
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31 customers who discontinued the business relationship have remained unexplored.
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34 However, an increasing number of studies have started to recognize the considerable
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37 influence of other actors on the value co-creation process and the necessity to zoom out of the
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40 dyadic relationship between a salesperson and his or her customer. For instance, research on
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43 shopping companions has provided evidence on their influence on other actors in the sales
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46 ecosystem in terms of time spent on value co-creation (Gillison et al., 2015; Hart and Dale,
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48
49 2014). Despite this, researchers do not specify companions in terms of their identity and define
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52 co-shopping as the situation where any kind of a person accompanies a shopper (e.g. Lindsey-
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55 Mullikin and Munger 2011; Hart and Dale 2014; Yim et al. 2014). The work of Swan et al.
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(2001) on actors' identities in dyadic interactions can certainly be used as a starting point for further analysis, as selling actor identities are assumed to be subcategories of selling actor types.

Participation behavior

In line with [Hartmann, Wieland, and Vargo \(2018\)](#), this study considers "selling" in terms of the interaction between actors aimed at creating and maintaining locations at which service can be efficiently exchanged for service. "All actors participate in exchange by receiving and applying knowledge and forming mutually beneficial relationships" ([Hartmann et al., 2018](#)). In contrast to dyadic customer-employee interactions, selling actors' participation behavior in multi-actor sales ecosystems has been neglected by research so far. From research on customer participation behavior, it is known that information seeking, information sharing, responsible behavior and personal interaction are necessary for successful value co-creation in dyadic interactions ([Delpechitre et al., 2018](#); [Revilla-Camacho et al., 2015](#); [Singh et al., 2019](#); [Yi and Gong, 2013](#)). However, this study argues that these four elements for successful value co-creation, i.e., service-for-service exchange, are a sort of a "minimum requirement" ([Randall Brandt, 1988](#)) for any value co-creation process and therefore apply not only to dyads but also to triads or complex sales ecosystems.

For clarification purposes, like customers in a dyad, selling actors need information (information-seeking behavior) about how to perform their tasks as value co-creators as well as information on what they are expected to do and how they are expected to perform during a

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4 service-for-service exchange (Yi and Gong, 2013). Selling actors need to share information
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7 (information-sharing behavior) with other actors in the ecosystem. If a selling actor fails to
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10 provide accurate information, the quality of the service exchange will be low. Furthermore, for
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13 successful value co-creation between two or more actors, the actors need to be cooperative,
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16 observe rules (Bettencourt, 1997) and recognize their responsibilities (responsible behavior)
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19 within the value co-creation process. Personal interaction refers to the interpersonal relations
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22 between value co-creating actors (Yi and Gong, 2013). It has been argued that service-for
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25 service exchange takes place in a social setting and that the more pleasant, congenial, and
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28 positive the social environment is, the more likely it is that the actors will engage in value co-
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31 creation (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2000). Consequently, personal interaction should be at least as
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34 important in multi-actor sales ecosystems as it is in dyadic interactions. Hence, the necessary
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37 elements for successful value co-creation in dyads, i.e., participation behavior, also apply to
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40 selling actors in multi-actor sales ecosystems.

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43 As indicated above, different identities display different participation behavior in
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46 interactions with salespeople and can therefore be differentiated based on their information-
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49 seeking behavior, information-sharing behavior and responsible behavior in a personal
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52 interaction with the salespeople. In conclusion, the main questions of this exploratory study
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55 must be based on these four elements of participation behavior.
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Method

World Café method

In the spirit of zooming out beyond the dyadic interactions (between customer and salesperson), we applied the World Café methodology, as a creative methodology for hosting authentic conversations with multiple salespeople simultaneously (Brown and Isaacs, 2005). This exploratory research design was used to obtain the first qualitative data from the salesperson's perspective. The World Café has been developed as a qualitative research tool aimed at gaining insights, sharing knowledge and finding answers through collaborative conversations involving a large number of people (Brown and Isaacs, 2005). The World Café harnesses the energy of small groups' discussions to develop insights and shared learning regarding a topic of interest. The basic assumption of the World Café is that the participants have within them the creativity, knowledge and problem solving skills that are needed for solving all kinds of problems (Lagrosen, 2019). „The style of discussion is appreciative inquiry, which draws on discussing issues more than once, encouraging members to share their personal perspectives, and listening to others to discover the context and deep problem of multiple perspectives” (Chang and Chen, 2015). World Cafés are superior to the conventional focus group approach because of the built-in iterations, in which participants discuss and evaluate the outcomes of their peers from the previous discussions, leading to increased robustness of the World Café's outcomes (Pulles et al., 2016). The method has proven to be particularly effective

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4 in dealing with issues that require collective wisdom and discussion (Chang and Chen, 2015).

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7 Varying group constellations ensure rich data collection and reduce bias (Fouché and Light,
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10 2011).

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13 Typically, the World Café setup and process is as follows: Over the course of several
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16 (at least three) rounds of conversation, each lasting between 20 and 30 minutes, the participants
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19 in the World Café discuss the topic, previously assigned to each individual table, before they
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22 switch to the next table/topic (Lagrosen, 2019). The number of tables/topics is equal to the
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25 number of rounds of conversation, therefore, every participant discusses every topic. One
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28 moderator stays at each table for the entire time of the discussion rounds, acts as the host,
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31 welcomes new guests and summarizes the previous discussion (Lagrosen, 2019). Shortening
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34 the discussion rounds in the World Café is common, because the groups use the findings
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37 formulated by prior groups. Writable tablecloth on each table allows participants to note
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40 opinions and ideas and to catch up on and relate to the findings of prior groups. A rotation
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43 schedule can be used to ensure the smooth transition of participants and to ensure that every
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46 participant discusses every topic. After the discussion rounds, moderators and participants
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48
49 come together in a plenary session for a summary and discussion of all findings.
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51 ***Sample descriptions***

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55 The study was conducted at the IFA, the leading experiential event for consumer
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58 electronics and home appliances in Berlin (Germany). The participants of the World Café
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4 worked for one of the biggest telecommunications companies in the world. The company is the
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7 leading provider within Europe and the number of competitors (or alternatives) in the market
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10 is very limited. A group of 32 salespeople, temporarily working as staff at one of the world's
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13 largest experiential events, and 8 moderators participated in this qualitative study. All of the
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16 participants were able to communicate fluently in English and German. Based on the results of
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19 electronic and manual visitor frequency counting and a network of high-precision 3D sensors
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22 mounted on the ceiling, by the time the study was conducted, this experiential event had brought
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25 together more than 98,000 resources integrating selling actors and salespeople from all over the
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28 world and all ages, which were connected by shared institutional arrangements and who
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31 engaged in mutual value co-creation through service-for-service exchange. The main criteria
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34 for selecting the participants in this qualitative study involved selecting a representative sample
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37 from all company exhibits and a balanced mix regarding age, gender and career level.
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40 Furthermore, we ensured the inclusion of salespersons with varying degrees of customer
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43 interaction frequency in their daily jobs. This means that while all participants were salespeople
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46 for the six days of the experiential event, their "regular" job might not have been in sales and/or
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49 service, which in our opinion added unique perspectives and enriched the data collection.
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52 Sample characteristics are displayed in Table 1.

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Conversation topics and rotation schedule

Following the research proposition, the main questions for the conversations were based on the four elements of participation behavior (see chapter 2.3). In order to foster the free flow of ideas and the collaborative conversations between participants, we tried to minimize the external input and influence of the moderators. However, we also considered the possibility that the participants might misunderstand or misinterpret questions. To this end, all moderators were briefed beforehand. A general guideline for all question was to “help” as much as necessary and as little as possible. Typically, the moderators started the discussions by asking the participants if the question is clear and asked how exactly they understand the question. If this initial discussion drifted off course the moderators carefully adjusted the course by shifting the participants focus on abovementioned aspects. Regarding the questions, the moderators were advised to ensure that the participants of the World Café focused on the behaviors of actors i.e. anyone external to the own organization, they deemed as relevant for the value co-creation process and who had an observable goal or motive within the sales ecosystem environment. Furthermore, the moderators had to ensure that the discussions on information-seeking behavior encompassed the range of ways employed by actors in searching, discovering and accessing information (sources) (Savolainen, 2019), while the discussions on information-sharing behavior had to be about the activities of providing information to others and confirming that

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4 the information has been received and understood (Sonnenwald, 2006). Moderators ensured
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7 that the discussion on the actors' responsible behavior focused on whether actors recognized
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10 their relevance, duties and responsibilities for the value co-creation process and behaved
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13 accordingly (Ennew and Binks, 1999). Moderators were briefed that the discussions about the
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16 personal interaction with the actors, had to focus on the interpersonal relations between the
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19 actors in the multi-actor sales ecosystem, including aspects such as courtesy, friendliness and
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22 respect.

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25 To ensure the highest quality and quantity of the results, each of the four elements was
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28 permanently assigned to two specific rooms and discussed in parallel sessions. Hence, eight
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31 different tables were simultaneously used. The participants were asked to answer the following
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34 questions:

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37 Table 1/1b: How would you describe the actor's information-seeking behavior?

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40 Table 2/2b: How would you describe the actor's information-sharing behavior?

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43 Table 3/3b: How would you describe the actor's responsible behavior?

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46 Table 4/4b: How would you describe the personal interaction with the actors?

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49 Over the course of 4 rounds, participants switched rooms in accordance with a schedule. The
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52 numbers in figure 2 illustrate that the participants should mix when rotating between the tables
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55 to maximize knowledge exchange (Prewitt, 2011).
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Place Figure 2 about here

Every participant received a detailed schedule of his/her individual rotation order. The session started with an introduction to the World Café method by one of the moderators. Afterwards, the participants and the moderators went to their rooms, and the discussions began. While the participants moved after each round, the moderators remained at their tables. At the beginning of each new round, each participant and moderator briefly introduced his/herself to the discussion group before the moderator summed up the findings of the previous group(s). Varying groups explored the selling actors' participation behavior based on their own observations and interactions with the, by that time, approximately 98,000 actors that they had encountered. The four rounds lasted 30 minutes, 25 minutes, 20 minutes and 20 minutes.

Data recording and analysis

The moderators' notes, writable tablecloth, and audio recordings ensured that all the generated results were captured and available for analysis. After the four discussion rounds, moderators and participants came together in a plenary session for a final discussion of all findings. In the first step, the audiotaped discussion rounds were transcribed. To ensure the highest quality, two researchers independently transcribed the approximately 760 minutes of discussions. A native speaker was employed to ensure the accuracy of translation. The 760 minutes of discussions translated into more than 102,000 words.

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4 Subsequently, the material was analyzed using the method of qualitative content
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6
7 analysis, which is a systematic and rule-bound procedure (Mayring, 2015). We used inductive
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10 category formation to arrive directly at summarizing categories coming from the material itself,
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13 as this has been proven very fruitful for qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2015). The
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16 process of inductive category formation dictates that at first, the level or theme of categories to
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19 be developed must be defined and that there has to be a criterion for the selection process in
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21
22 category formation, which is established through theoretical considerations about the subject
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24
25 matter and the aims of analysis (Mayring, 2015). Furthermore, the establishment of the
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28 abstraction level is imperative for inductive category formation. Based on the aim of our
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31 qualitative approach, we included all material covering selling actors' information-seeking,
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34 information-sharing and responsible behavior. In addition, we provided descriptions of personal
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37 interactions, types and identities of selling actors within the sales ecosystem. We used
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40 qualitative data analysis software (MaxQDA) and handled all interview transcripts carefully.
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43 Two coders analyzed the data separately, following the procedures developed for the inductive
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46 category formation technique of qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2015). This included a
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49 revision of the emerging categories after approximately 50% of the content analysis, resulting
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52 in only minor changes. Finally, the codings of the researchers were merged based on a thorough
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55 discussion. Additionally, the final codings were presented to and approved by the moderators
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58 of the World Café.
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Classification Schemata

One important goal of this research is that the identities and participation behavior in multi-actor sales ecosystems can be directly related and compared to the findings on dyadic interactions. Therefore, using and refining the typology of [Swan et al. \(2001\)](#), i.e., their classification schemata, is not only efficient but also necessary. For instance, we have already pointed out that selling actor identities are assumed to be only subcategories of selling actor types; hence, investigating this additional layer in the framework is necessary. Within their traditional framework, identities are differentiated based on a set of four behavioral elements, that is, intimacy, sharing casual conversation, engaging in leisure activities and becoming a spokesperson for the company, and on a second set of behaviors and perceptions: exchange of benefits and business information, time frame, account responsibility, mutual self-disclosure, and tension in the relationship ([Swan et al., 2001](#)). In the following analysis, we make use of the same two sets.

Findings

Overview of identities in multi-actor sales ecosystems

We followed the example of [Swan et al. \(2001\)](#) and engaged in a subjective rating of the behaviors of set 1 and the behaviors and perceptions of set 2 to expand upon their classification schemata. The analysis of the intense discussion rounds between the participants revealed eight different selling actor identities, two for each selling actor type. The participants

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4 described that type 1 selling actors, who (in their opinion) have had prior experiences with the
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7 company and are currently the customers of a competitor, displayed either the identity of the
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10 “avoider” or the “observer”. Type 2 selling actors, who (presumably) had no prior experiences
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13 with the company but who are currently looking for new representation, displayed either the
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16 identity of the “receptive” actor or the “prepper”. Furthermore, the participants described that
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19 type 3 selling actors who had first experiences with the company and who are already customers
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21
22 displayed either the identity of the “expecter” or the “savvy” actor. Type 4 selling actors with
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24
25 a longstanding relationship with the company displayed either the identity of the “challenger”
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27
28 or the “coworker”. The process of reduction through simplification, as suggested by [Barton](#)
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30
31 ([1955](#)), confirmed our assumption that selling actor identities can in fact be understood as
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34 subcategories of selling actor types. Fig. 3 gives a detailed overview of all selling actor types
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37 and identities as well as their characteristics.
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Place Figure 3 about here

Selling actor: Type 1

“The Avoider”

This actor is part of the multi-actor sales ecosystem but tries to avoid any contact with salespeople. The avoider is not interested in building rapport with the salespeople/company or in disclosing his product and service needs, nor in listening to possible solutions. Value co-creation with this actor is not possible since this selling actor refuses to take part in any part of the sales process. As Monica summarized, *“not everyone with a negative attitude wants to make themselves familiar with [the] topic. Some of them just pass [by], and if you talk to them, they tell you that everything is bad and that you should leave them be and go on”*.

Since these actors avoided interaction with the salespeople, information on the relations with the company can only be assumed. It was suspected that these selling actors have had prior experience with the company but are currently customers of the competition.

“The Observer”

The participants described selling actors with an observer identity as shy and afraid but also curious. These actors fear personal interaction and that they might be approached by salespeople, which makes rapport building very difficult. They do not like to engage in conversation because they do not like to share information or disclose information about their needs. However, the actors are interested in the offerings and display signs of information-seeking behavior. Hence, there is opportunity for solution presentation. An observer positions

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4 himself or herself at a safe distance from salespeople to avoid being talked to. Participants
5
6
7 noticed that there is an actual information-seeking behavior in contrast to the avoider.
8
9
10 Christopher described, *“while the [avoider] just goes with the flow and rummages or something*
11
12 *like that, he [the observer] stays in the hall and maybe does not enter the experience area”*.
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14
15
16 David added, *“he is trying to conduct his search from the outside. Without entering by himself,*
17
18 *so to say, if he can get the information that he is looking for from the outside. It probably costs*
19
20 *a lot of willpower, as we have said, to enter, to address someone”*.
21
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24

25 The participants agreed that a selling actor with an observer identity is very difficult to
26
27 connect with. They have to be treated with extreme caution and even then, meaningful exchange
28
29 of business information, self-disclosure and responsible behavior is rarely achieved by
30
31 salespeople. Lisa summarized the only thing that seems to work on this occasion: “[The
32
33 observer wants] to be treated like a child, to be taken by the hand”.

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37 Hence, value co-creation with these selling actors, let alone selling something to them,
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39 is next to impossible. These selling actors have had a prior relationship with the company in
40
41 the past but are currently engaged with the competition. This explains their curiosity as well as
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43 their restraint.
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4 ***Selling actor: Type 2***
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7 ***“The Receptive” actor***
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10 This selling actor approaches salespeople proactively, making it easy for salespeople to
11 build rapport. He or she actively searches for personal interaction and someone who is able to
12 provide information. The receptive selling actor typically has a negative or neutral attitude
13 towards the company; therefore, there is no intimacy to be expected, but this actor is open to
14 engaging in casual conversation and even mutual self-disclosure. However, this actor has an
15 open-mind and sometimes wants to be convinced by the salespeople. As Lydia explained, “*they*
16 *approach you with their negative attitude and actually want to be convinced*”.
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31 The receptive actor often is a (former) customer of a competitor. These selling actors
32 are not satisfied with their (former) representation, however, that is rarely openly admitted by
33 the actor and must be discovered by the salesperson in the “needs-discovery phase” of the
34 process. One participant recollected hearing something like the following: “*I am currently [a*
35 *customer of XY] and you now have to convince me to switch to you*”.
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46 The participant reasoned that: “*Competitor customers do not come with, “I know I am with a*
47 *bad provider and you are in fact a premium provider*”. *Competitor customers are always*
48 *extremely dominant and say “I am [a customer of XY]” (Monica).*
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55 The participants in the World Café agreed that the receptive selling actor makes for a
56 good prospective customer. This actor is unsatisfied with his or her current representation, open
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4 to a presentation of solutions i.e. switching the service provider and even accepting the
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7 proposal. Participants also reported examples of successful emotional approaches towards
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9
10 receptive selling actors, indicating that the open-mindedness might go beyond the business
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12
13 context.

14 15 16 ***“The Prepper”***

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19 Furthermore, the discussions revealed the identity of a selling actor with unmatched
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21
22 levels of preparation for interaction with salespeople. Building rapport with these actors is easy
23
24
25 for salespeople, as these actors approach salespeople directly and proactively. These actors seek
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27
28 information and are aware of the fact that salespeople need information about their needs in a
29
30
31 certain quality and quantity to service them appropriately. The prepper trusts salespeople and
32
33
34 reveals any information necessary for the value co-creation process. This also includes
35
36
37 disclosing more personal or intimate information and engaging in casual conversation. Felix
38
39
40 described, *“they are open and give information. Like I said, if I ask, I get an answer. Other*
41
42
43 *participants added, “they are more open to sharing because they are focused on a solution”*
44
45
46 *(Tom), “he [the prepper] comes straight out with the information” (Beatrice) and “[they]*
47
48
49 *approach us very often and tell us which provider they use, how much they pay and so on,*
50
51
52 *because they actually have an issue and are looking for help. I think that is the reason they are*
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55 *ready to share information. They show us their phones, how much data they have or how fast*
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57
58 *the connection is, and they hope to get a solution that way” (Joe).*
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4 Tom concluded, *“with us, they’re pretty open with giving information, like the customer*
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7 *number or phone number and name, because it’s about something concrete, there’s a*
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10 *disturbance, or an issue or they’d like a new product, and then they give this information very*
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12
13 *readily. Because they know that without this info, I can’t offer any help, or with errors, for*
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15
16 *example”*. This actor wants to be offered a possible solution.

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19 The prepper typically has had no personal experience with the company but is currently
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21
22 an unsatisfied (former) customer of the competition. The prepper has learned his or her lesson,
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24
25 so to speak. Based on the negative experience with the former service provider and the good
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28 reputation of the new provider, a level of trust and confidence in the new company starts to
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31 build. For salespeople, closing a sale on the spot is certainly possible.

32 33 34 ***Selling actor: Type 3***

35 36 37 ***“The Expecter”***

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40 Salespeople described selling actors with an expecter identity as cautious and even
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42
43 slightly insecure. These actors intentionally choose to position themselves in proximity to a
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46 salesperson but still maintain a distance, due to a lack of intimacy. The actors expect to be
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48
49 approached proactively by a salesperson, hence the name expecter. One participant described,
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51
52 *“you have to actively approach the people. I don’t know, they are shy”* (Lisa) and Christopher
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54
55 *added “I don’t think that they come to us directly and say „okay, I want to know this, this and*
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57
58 *that”. But they idle around a bit, look around a bit and wait to be addressed. They don’t come*
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4 *to you and say oh hi, do you work here, can you tell me something. But they stand there and*
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6
7 *wait to be addressed”*. Hence, salespeople must engage proactively to build rapport.
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10 After the salespeople approach the expecter and engage in dialogue, the relationship
11
12 deepens, and trust builds. Typically, the expecter lowers his or her guard and even engages in
13
14 casual conversation. Some descriptions of this include the following: *“The customers open up*
15
16 *when they have spoken two, three sentences. And it all relaxes a bit. Then they open up and*
17
18 *reveal a lot more about themselves as well” (Jonathan) or “I was just about to write that down*
19
20 *here, the clients open up after a short while” (Lisa).*
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28 Nevertheless, the interaction is certainly more of a business relationship than a
29
30 friendship. The selling actor wants to be approached to talk about business. He or she is
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32 searching for information and wants to be taken care off. He or she is aware of his or her role,
33
34 responsibilities, voluntarily discloses needs and shares items such as self-disclosure,
35
36 information and benefits but also has high expectations of the salespeople. The participants
37
38 described, *“when the [selling actor] connects with an employee, the expectation is that he [the*
39
40 *employee] will answer all the questions” (Jonathan) and that “what happened quite often to*
41
42 *me is that the people, once they are in a conversation, would like to resolve everything at once*
43
44 *with an employee” (Christopher).*
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54 It is likely that the expecter has had first experiences with the company and that the salespersons
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56 exceeded his or her expectations, which makes this actor susceptible for the presentation of
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offerings. Jonathan explained as follows: *“The expecter] will never actively address the employee, so you have to address [this selling actor] and activate them first and then, ... Often then, you end up with the same results as with the actors who come directly to you”*. There is a good chance that an interaction between a salesperson and an expecter leads to successful sale.

The descriptions of the expecter identity in the multi-actor sales ecosystem show similarities to the business acquaintance identity, as described by [Swan et al. \(2001\)](#).

“The Savvy” actor

The discussions also revealed the identity of a selling actor with expert-level knowledge. This selling actor has a specific, business-related interest and wants to address the issue directly. Generally, building rapport can be challenging because this actor has low motivation to engage in a casual conversation and to develop a personal connection or a level of intimacy with the salespeople. However, when the salespeople are deemed “worthy”, in the sense that they are perceived as competent enough, the savvy actor likes to engage in conversation. A savvy actor is well aware of his or her responsibilities in the value co-creation process, and he or she approaches salespeople directly and engages in information exchange in order to demand very specific information from the salesperson. His or her expert-level knowledge makes him or her a demanding and challenging interlocutor for the salespeople. As the participants summarized, *“they already know everything. They have made themselves familiar with the topic so deeply that they also want to obtain very detailed answers (Jennifer)*

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4 and “they mostly come with specific information that they want me to show and explain. That
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7 is how I feel it is. This is mostly a pro, who knows what is available and what he is looking for
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10 [...] additional information” (Beatrice). Solution presentation rarely leads to a successful sale.
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12
13 These selling actors were already short-term customers of the company. However, as
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15
16 these customers are often interested in the latest technology in products and services, they are
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18
19 not the most loyal customers and display very rational behavior.
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21 22 ***Selling actor: Type 4***

23 24 25 ***“The Challenger”***

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28 The selling actor with the “challenger” identity was described as highly active and
29
30
31 participative in the value co-creation process. The challenger is typically not interested in
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33
34 deepening the relationship with the salespeople. This selling actor has a predetermined goal and
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36
37 engages in personal interaction and casual conversation with salespeople to achieve this goal.
38

39
40 While these actors proactively approach salespeople, it is difficult for salespeople to build
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43 rapport because these selling actors also tend to set the topic for the conversation. As the
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46 participants explained, “from my point of view, [they] are in the role of the driver of [the]
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49 conversation” (Harry) and “they display an active demanding expectation role, cancelling
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52 [their] contract. [The] customer expects a new offer, expects a new solution and is very specific
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55 in his requests” (David).
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4 The challengers are totally aware of their position and power in the business
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7 relationship. The challenger displays his business needs and is willing to pressure salespeople
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10 to obtain what he or she wants. The participants gave three examples of what they regularly
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12
13 hear from a selling actor with a challenger identity: *"Hey, I have this and that, but it will be*
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16 *cancelled" (Sarah) or something like "I will cancel my [...] contract and now I will get a nice,*
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18
19 *new offer or get an up-to-date tariff" (Sarah). Harry added the example, "if I cancel, I will get*
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22 *a better offer".*

23
24
25 These selling actors already mostly have a longer relationship with the company and
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28 understand that they are in a position to bargain. Although these actors do not seem to be
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31 interested in ending the business relationship, they threaten to do so to obtain a better deal. The
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34 discussions revealed that interaction with these selling actors almost always results in the
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37 salespeople making the best possible offer and the selling actors taking them up on that offer.
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40 This is a power game rather than a two-way relationship. The challenger will return as soon as
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42
43 he feels that they could get a new (better) offer. Hence, salespeople do not have to worry about
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46 following up.

47 48 49 ***"The Coworker "*** 50

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52 Similar to the findings of [Swan et al. \(2001\)](#), salespeople described a type of selling
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55 actor identity with whom they shared a certain intimacy and casual conversations and who even
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58 acted as an advocate for the company. Building rapport comes almost naturally. As Finn
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4 explained, *“they identify themselves with us, I would say. [They feel like] I am customer, so I*
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7 *will stop by. I get to feel that I have value here. If we have customers who have been with us for*
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10 *a while, then they are proud to highlight this fact and not because they expect something, just*
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13 *because they are proud”.*

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16 Furthermore, selling actors with a coworker identity actively participate in the value co-
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19 creation process. The actors exchange the necessary information, behave responsibly and
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22 frequently engage in mutual self- disclosure. They are interested in being offered a solution to
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25 their specific needs. As Dominik explained, *“they are actually looking for something; they also*
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28 *approach our booth directly when they find it or just say, “hey I already have [...] Who can*
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31 *give me some advice?” They come to us directly and look for the answer to their question. In*
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34 *this case, you can help them. If they have a specific question, they approach you directly and*
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37 *find our model displays; if they do not, they look for help and let themselves be taken to us”.*

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40 This selling actor is aware of his or her role for the successful value co-creation and
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43 often already has a long-standing relationship with the company. However, similar to the
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46 findings on the coworker identity in dyads, the relationship is constrained in terms of intimacy,
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49 as the focus is on the relationship between selling actor and company rather than on the
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52 relationship with the salespeople. Rhonda summarized, *“they have been with us for thirty years*
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55 *and like to form a friendship with us”.*

Discussion

The aim of this study was to take a closer look at selling actors' identities and participation behavior in a multi-actor sales ecosystem, from the salesperson perspective. We used an exploratory research design to obtain the first qualitative data from the salesperson's perspective. The participants' descriptions provided more clarity and precision as the World Café progressed, indicating that the participants were able to use the built-in iterations in which the participants discussed and evaluated the outcomes of their peers from the previous discussions to their advantage. Therefore, applying the World Café method turned out to be an excellent choice. The discussions revealed that the perceived participation behavior in fact differs, depending on the actor's selling type and identity with whom the salespeople interacted.

The findings of our exploratory study support the following conclusions:

First, the results suggest that selling actor identities exist. The findings show that salespeople assign different meanings and characteristics to eight selling actors' identities, based on the perceived participation behavior of these actors. "The avoider" is suspected to be a former customer who is currently lost to the competition and who is neither interested in a relationship with the salespeople/company nor in the offered products and services. "The observer" is also a former customer who has had a prior relationship with the company. While he or she is shy and afraid of being talked to, he or she also is curious and interested in the offerings and displays signs of information-seeking behavior. "The receptive" actor on the other

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4 hand, is both unsatisfied with his or her current representation and is open to a new service
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7 provider. He or she is actively searching for personal interaction and approaches salespeople
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10 proactively. “The prepper” has had no personal experience with the company but is currently
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13 an unsatisfied (former) customer of the competition. The prepper engages in personal
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16 interaction with salespeople proactively, is highly prepared, trusts salespeople and reveals any
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19 information necessary. “The expecter” has had first experiences with the company, and the
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22 salespersons exceeded the expectations, which makes him or her receptive to offerings. He or
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25 she is cautious and insecure and expects to be approached proactively by a salesperson. “The
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28 savvy” actor is already a short-term customer of the company and has expert-level knowledge
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31 and high expectations of salespeople, which makes him or her a demanding and challenging
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34 interlocutor. “The challenger” has a longer relationship with the company and understands his
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37 or her strong negotiation position. The challenger is willing to pressure salespeople in order to
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40 obtain what he or she wants. “The coworker” is also a long-term customer. However, in contrast
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43 to the challenger, he or she shares a certain intimacy and casual conversations with the
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46 salespeople and even acts as an advocate for the company.
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49 Second, we related our findings from a multi-actor sales ecosystem to the findings of
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51 [Swan et al. \(2001\)](#) regarding dyadic interactions and developed a salesperson-selling actor
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53 relationship/behavior typology. While we were able to validate the authors’ identification of
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55 the coworker and the expecter (also known as “business acquaintance”) identities, we were
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4 unable to identify the identity referred to as “commercial friends”. However, this can be
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7 explained by the pure business to business (B2B) sample that [Swan et al. \(2001\)](#) used. The
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10 salespeople in their study referred to customers as their “accounts”, indicating that they were
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13 responsible account managers. It seems reasonable to assume that in the context of long-lasting
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16 relationships with frequent interactions and exchange of information, where both parties are
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19 reliant on each other, friendships are more likely to occur than in infrequent business to
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22 customer (B2C) interactions. The fact that we identified six additional identities by also
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24
25 including type 1 and type 2 selling actors in the investigation, in contrast to [Swan et al. \(2001\)](#),
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27
28 who limited their investigation to type 3 and type 4 selling actors, confirms our decision to
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31 investigate the identities of actors beyond the traditional customer-salesperson dyad.
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34 Third, the World Café can be a valuable tool for qualitative sales research. Based on the
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37 moderator and participant feedback we have received right after the World Café but also after
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40 sorting through the enormous amount of data generated, we see several advantages in
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43 comparison to interviews. One of the biggest strengths of this method is that directly after the
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45
46 World Café, a first summary of results is available. In our case, each of the moderators was able
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49 to present a structured and redundancy free overview of the results, which already has been
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52 validated over several rounds of discussions by all of the 32 participants. Furthermore, in
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55 contrast to interviews, there is no interviewer bias because the moderators only facilitate the
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58 discussions while the participants are responsible for the content of the discussions. Lastly, the
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4 variety of data sources (audio recordings, moderators' notes, writable tablecloth, plenary
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7 session) enable researchers to develop a comprehensive understanding of the topic and to test
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10 validity through the convergence of information from different sources.
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13 **Theoretical implications**

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16 At the beginning of this paper, we claimed that when selling-actors start taking over
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18 tasks, formerly performed by salespeople that the distribution of tasks and allocation of
19
20 responsibilities changes. We assumed that salespeople challenged with new tasks also probably
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22 require a different set of knowledge, skills and abilities. Based on the thorough analysis of the
23
24 World Café discussions, we can support this statement. The participants in our study revealed
25
26 how they perceive and define the identity of a selling actor and how the identity determines
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28 how the participants interact with and adapt to these selling actors. This is highly relevant to
29
30 the field of sales management for several reasons.
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40 First, it is of utmost importance for sales research on selling actor-salesperson topics
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42 (e.g., behavior, performance, relationship) to be as precise as possible in the description of the
43
44 types of selling actors and their identities. When sales literature fails to specify these, then the
45
46 results and findings of a study are neither verifiable nor comparable. For example, two studies
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48 on salesperson performance in an identical scenario can show fundamentally different results
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50 if, in one case, the salespeople mainly deal with the avoider, observer or receptive actor
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4 identities and, if in the other case, there are primarily prepper, expecter and/or coworker
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7 identities; meanwhile the study only refers to customers/selling actors.
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10 Second, rather than merely confirming the findings of [Swan et al. \(2001\)](#), we identified
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12 six additional identities, and we thereby offer a critical refinement of their classification
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14 schemata. This fact highlights the importance of zooming out of the dyad and taking a more
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16 holistic perspective.
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22 Third, this is the first time that a World Café approach was used in the context of
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24 investigating personal selling and the selling actor-salesperson interaction. In our opinion, the
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26 quality and quantity of the findings more than justify the complex and expensive setup. Our
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28 hope is that other researchers will follow our lead by applying this method across a variety of
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30 other selling and sales related topics.
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37 **Managerial implications**

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40 The results reveal that the displayed participation behavior by the selling actors varies
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42 widely depending on identity. While some selling actors approach salespersons directly and
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44 proactively (e.g., the receptive actor, the prepper, the savvy actor, the challenger, the coworker)
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46 others tend to wait to be approached (e.g., the observer, the expecter) or even try to avoid any
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48 interaction (e.g., the avoider) with a salesperson. Furthermore, some selling actors tend to share
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50 information voluntarily (e.g., the expecter, the coworker) and in detail (e.g., the prepper, the
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52 savvy actor, the challenger), whereas others are cautions (e.g., the observer) or even reluctant
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(e.g. the avoider). Some actors expect a rather personal approach (e.g., the coworker), while other actors are more concerned with the professional expertise of the salesperson (e.g., the savvy actor). The salesperson-selling actor relationship/behavior typology and the firsthand experiences reported by participants of the World Café will be useful to salespeople for two reasons. First, the examples of cues to look for when interacting with selling actors enable salespeople to identify them faster. Second, salespeople can use the knowledge about selling actors expectations and behaviors regarding the sales process in order to prepare fitting approaches for all selling actor identities. We follow the reasoning of [Swan et al. \(2001\)](#) that it “is likely that salespeople who misjudge the type of relationship that a [selling actor] desires will experience difficulty in establishing effective” relationship. Thus, it is important that salespeople possess the necessary skills to identify a selling actor identity correctly, the knowledge on how to best engage with that actor and the ability to do all of this instantly. Management needs to be aware of these requirements and invest in training and coaching activities. Furthermore, managers need to recognize that there are considerable differences between selling actors and that salesperson performance management must take that into account. For example, while both the expecter and the savvy actor already have a short-term relationship with the company and an interaction between these selling actors and a salesperson might take the same amount of time, there is a large difference in what could be considered a “successful outcome”. An expecter is likely to intensify the relationship and might even act

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4 upon offerings (up/cross-selling) made by the salesperson, while the interaction with a savvy
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7 selling actor could already be considered a success if that selling actor does not leave the
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10 company for another company. However, traditional performance evaluation would suggest
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13 that only one of these interactions was a success. Therefore, we see an opportunity for
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16 improvement. From an efficiency standpoint, the identified selling actor identities could also
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19 be used for a targeted approach. For example, if the primary goal of a certain sales activity were
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22 to (quickly) boost revenue, focusing on selling actors with the prepper and/or the expecter
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25 identity would probably be more efficient than focusing on interactions with the coworker or
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28 the challenger identity. In conclusion, practitioners can greatly benefit from the identified
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31 selling actor identities reported in this article.
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34 **Limitations and future research**

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37 This study is the first to make an effort to identify selling actors' identities and investigate their
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40 participation behavior in a multi-actor sales ecosystem from the salesperson perspective. Using
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43 identity theory, eight different selling actor identities were identified. While the study succeeds
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46 in answering the questions of who the selling actors in multi-actor sales ecosystems are, what
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49 characterizes them, what tasks they perform and how they do these, our study is not without
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52 limitations, implicating opportunities for future research.
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55 The company is the leading provider within Europe and the number of competitors (or
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58 alternatives) in the market is very limited. Therefore, the company and their employees in
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4 extension, have considerable bargaining power both in terms of buying and selling of services.
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7 It cannot be ruled out that the companies' size and/or its' position in the industry has in
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9 influence both on the selling actor's behavior and on the participants perceptions of that
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11 behavior. Hence, one important next step for future research is to validate the identified selling
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13 actor identities in other multi-actor sales ecosystems, industries as well as for companies with
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15 a different position within the market (e.g. follower, challenger).
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22 Furthermore, we consciously decided against conducting the World Café solely with
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24 "professional" salespeople. From our point of view, the advantages of having a diverse group
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26 of participants (with different skills, knowledge, professional backgrounds, level of education
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28 etc.) outweighed the disadvantages of not having solely professional salespeople. In addition,
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30 we made sure that in each discussion round, at least one participant had a professional/full-time
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32 sales background. We believe that through the built-in iterations, in which participants
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34 discussed and evaluated the outcomes of their peers from the previous discussions as well as
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36 the open discourse between the participants, professional/full-time salespeople would have
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38 intervened at some point if the results had not reflected their opinion. Nevertheless, we cannot
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40 rule out that a sample solely consisting of professional salespeople might have generated
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42 additional and/or different results.
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4 Additionally, we tried our best to deduce as much actionable intelligence for managers
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7 as possible. However, temporal and/or budgetary limitations might make it very difficult to
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10 implement certain suggestions, especially in cases of small and medium-sized firms.
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13 As this study was the first to zoom out of the dyad and investigate selling actor identities
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16 instead of customer identities, we aimed to directly compare prior findings on the dyad with
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19 our findings. To achieve this goal, we based the salesperson-selling actor relationship/behavior
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22 typology on the classification schema of prior researchers; however, as suggested by [Swan et](#)
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25 [al. \(2001\)](#), the classification schema might not be exhaustive. Therefore, we would like for
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28 future research to refine the proposed selling actor identities in dept and to expand upon our
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31 typology. More detailed information about the selling actors will help salespeople to identify
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34 identities even faster and craft their approaches accordingly.
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37 Furthermore, it cannot be excluded that the customers self-assessment differs from the
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40 salesperson's assessment. Hence, future research is invited to check if both assessments match
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43 each other. Finally, the classification was developed based on the subjective judgment of the
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46 authors. While member checking indicated the high quality of our classification, future research
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49 should also aim for a quantitative confirmation.
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No.	Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Sales experience (in years)	Job title (reg. job)	Direct Customer Contact (reg. job)	Job function (temporarily)
1	Christopher	M	36	5	Senior Referent Marketing	little	Team Leader
2	Jonathan	M	20	2	Junior Customer Manager	daily	Product/Service Specialist
3	Lisa	F	30	2	Senior Product Manager	none	Product Specialist
4	Steven	M	31	4	Commercial Manager	little	Product/Service Specialist
5	Thomas	M	25	2	Commercial Manager	little	Product/Service Specialist
6	Mark	M	22	3	Junior Manager CX Design	daily	Product/Service Specialist
7	Hannah	F	29	8	Senior Customer Manager	daily	Team Leader
8	Maria	F	20	1	Trainee Launch Management	none	Product Specialist
9	Tom	M	49	14	Training and Development officer	daily	Service Specialist
10	Felix	M	26	8	Customer Manager	daily	Welcome Manager
11	Beatrice	F	48	16	Senior Customer Manager	daily	Demonstrator
12	Joe	M	21	2	Junior Customer Manager	daily	Customer Concerns Specialist
13	Nadine	F	40	2	Senior Expert Strategy	none	Service Specialist
14	Michael	M	20	1	Junior Customer Manager	daily	Welcome Manager
15	William	M	46	9	Customer Manager	daily	Customer Concerns Specialist
16	Jennifer	F	29	6	Customer Experience Designer	daily	Demonstrator
17	David	M	46	7	Senior Incident Manager	little	Customer Concerns Specialist
18	Harry	M	38	12	Customer Manager	daily	Product/Service Specialist
19	Sarah	F	40	6	Senior Referent PM	none	Team Leader
20	Rachel	F	21	2	Junior Customer Manager	daily	Customer Concerns Specialist
21	Daniela	F	47	3	Service Process Manager	none	Team Leader
22	Claire	F	27	2	Senior Launch Manager	little	Product/Service Specialist
23	Tobias	M	37	7	Expert Service Management	daily	Team Leader
24	Finn	M	20	1	Junior Customer Manager	daily	Customer Concerns Specialist
25	Maurice	M	21	3	Junior Customer Manager	daily	Customer Concerns Specialist
26	Monica	F	26	1	Senior Referent PM	none	Product/Service Specialist
27	Lydia	F	37	14	Customer Manager	daily	Customer Concerns Specialist
28	Bob	M	40	16	Senior Incident Manager	daily	Service Specialist
29	Rhonda	F	26	2	Senior Incident Manager	little	Product/Service Specialist
30	Dominik	M	46	10	Commercial Manager	little	Product/Service Specialist
31	Melanie	F	21	2	Junior Customer Manager	daily	Service Specialist
32	Daniel	M	36	16	Key Account Manager	daily	Product/Service Specialist

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Figure 1. QR code for accessing images of the multi-actor sales ecosystem.

796x796mm (72 x 72 DPI)

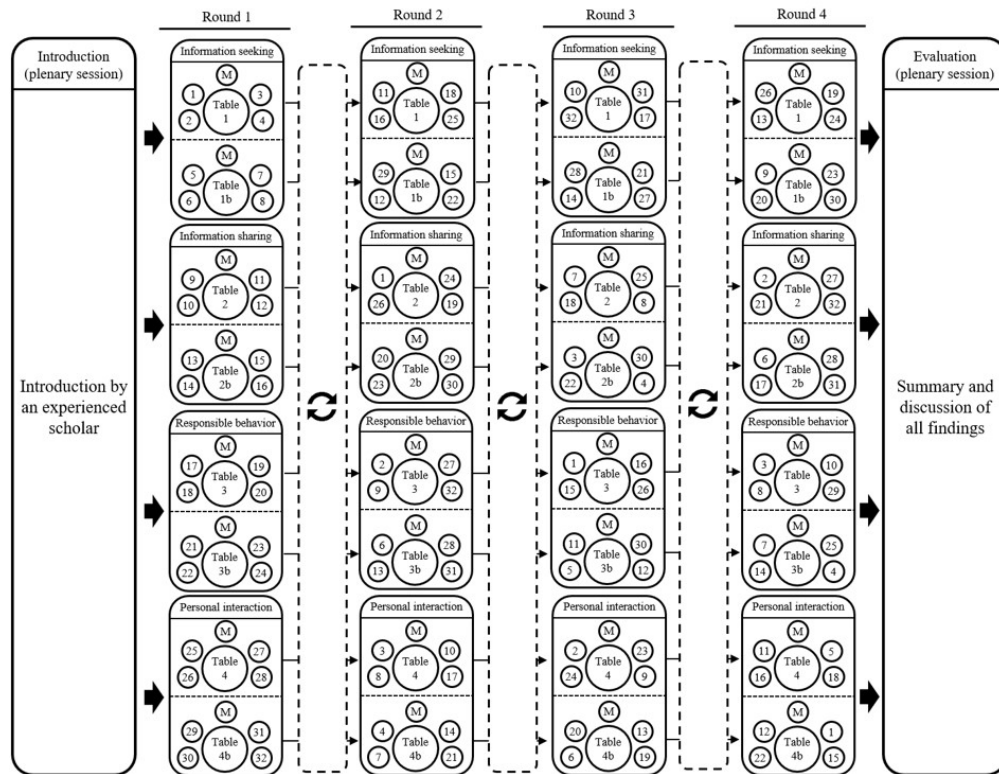


Figure 2. Schematic overview of the World Café session.

159x124mm (150 x 150 DPI)

Selling Actor Type		Type 1 (lost customer)		Type 2 (first time customer)		Type 3 (short-term customer)		Type 4 (long-term customer)	
Selling Actor Identity		The Avoider	The Observer	The Receptive	The Prepper	The Expecter	The Savvy	The Challenger	The Coworker
Set I	Intimacy	None	None	None	Low	Low	Low	Medium	High
	Shares Casual Conversation	None	Rarely	Very Low	Low	Low	Medium	Medium	High
	Shares Leisure Activities	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Set II	Acts as Spokesperson	Unlikely	Unlikely	Unlikely	Possibly	Possibly	Possibly	Possibly	Voiced
	Exchange of Benefits	None	None	Limited	Narrow	Narrow	Narrow	Narrow	Broad
	Time Frame for Exchange of Benefits	-	-	Unclear	Unclear	Short Term	Short Term	Long Term	Long Term
	Exchange of Business Information	None	Limited	Narrow	Narrow	Narrow	Broad	Broad	Broad
	Account Responsibility	None	None	Outsider	Outsider	Outsider	Outsider	Insider	Insider
	Mutual Self-Disclosure	None	Rarely	Limited	Limited	Limited	Limited	Limited	Frequent
Tension Between Economic and Friendship Norms	Absent	Absent	Absent	Absent	Absent	Absent	Absent	Present	
Felt Need to Limit Self-Disclosure	Present	Present	Present	Present	Present	Present	Present	Present	

Figure 3. Salesperson-selling actor relationship/behavior typology.

159x61mm (150 x 150 DPI)