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Art of Sales – Dilemmas of Modern Student Education¹

You have to learn the rules of the game, and then you have to play better than anyone else.

Albert Einstein

Introduction

Defining the ways of modern, modern education of students of economics universities is not an easy task. The experience of the author of the article shows that students (especially extramural studies, but also more often full-time) – in a more or less veiled way – demand that the topic of classes refer more strongly to the so-called business practice, best business practices and market case studies. They are interested in the practical aspects of the business on an international scale, which meet in their work – as it often despite the relatively young age are already working, are on employee internships or have contact with people who have already started working.

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The objectives of this chapter are:

- present the results of the survey (234 survey participants, which consisted of 20 questions) conducted among students of 2nd and 3rd year of full-time studies and extramural studies at the faculty of International Economic Relations at the Cracow University of Economics,
- and an attempt to share comments and thoughts on the subject and methodology of teaching in broadly understood international trade issues – with particular emphasis on foreign sales issues.

In university economic education programs we can find many purely theoretical areas, which in the International Economics major means familiarizing students with foreign trade theories, models of international exchange, the theory of economic integration and international economic relations. The survey concerned only one trade direction: sales (mainly export sales, although some questions referred to domestic sales). The author deliberately chose this issue to survey, because in the report of the well-known in Poland site www.pracuj.pl (pracuj.pl, 2019) are research results regarding the number of ads for various types of professionals. In the first half of the year 2019, 295,257 job offers were posted. What's interesting – the most sought specialists from the trade and the sale was – as many as 29% of all ads, or 86,993 jobs. Subsequently, employees were sought for customer service (22% and 64,674 job offers), IT departments (15% and 43,404 job offers) and finance (13% and 38,297 job offers).

This chapter defines the following research hypotheses related to the subject of art of sales:

- H 1 – women and men same often consider selling as art of sales,
- H 2 – extramural students (more often active on the labor market) have more experience related to foreign sales more often consider sales as art of sales,
- H 3 – extramural students (more often active on the labor market) have more experience related to conducting domestic sales more often consider sales as art of sales,
- H 4 – students who want to have more practical classes dedicated to improving practical skills related to sales in foreign markets more often consider sales as art of sales,
- H 5 – students who want to have more practical classes dedicated to improving the practical skills related to sales in the domestic market often consider selling the art of sales,
- H 6 – students who want to have practical classes in the foreign sales teaching process with experienced managers/salespeople more often consider sales as art of sales,
- H 7 – students with experience in foreign sales more often consider selling the art of sales,
- H 8 – students with experience in national sales often consider selling the art of sales,
- H 9 – students who think that a manager should have a commission-based salary are more likely to consider sales as art of sales,

- H 10 – students who are aware of the fact that “everyone lives by selling something” (in the sense of goods, services, work) more often consider sales as art of sales,
- H 11 – students with a higher level of general knowledge about sales (e-commerce, the future of sales, the role of sharing economy, awareness of the importance of the “Insight Selling” method) are more likely to consider sales as art of sales,
- H 12 – students who think that sales can be learned are more likely to consider sales as art of sales,
- H 13 – students who find it difficult to manage sales in foreign markets (exports) are more likely to consider sales as art of sales,
- H 14 – students who find it difficult to manage sales on domestic markets are more likely to consider sales as art of sales.

For the purposes of verifying these research hypotheses, the said survey was conducted on a sample of 234 students. Below are the results of the survey and an attempt to interpret them.

1. Art of sales in the economic literature

There are not many studies dedicated to art of sales in the economic literature. We can find a business guides, such as “The art of selling, design success” written by David Mc Corman from the year 1995 (Mc Corman, 1995), the book written by S. Gillespie, M.V. Testa & S. Ramakrishnan “Lean for Sales: Bringing the Science of Lean to the Art of Selling” (Gillespie et al., 2016) or other items of this type (Bednarski, 2012; Tojanowski, 2013; Ciechomski, 2008; Burnett, 2002; Szumilak (ed.), 2004; Schenk, 2006). The issue of art of sales is relatively – interestingly – rarely found in published economic literature. When the Google Scholar search engine was used, popular in the scientific community, after entering the term “art of sales”² we only receive 269 (sic!) search results. However, after entering “export”, we receive 7,440,000 search results. Using the well-known site of the social network of the scientific world – Academia.edu – a place to share and follow research – after entering the word “art of sales” we get 39,977 results Academia Basic Search (search paper titles) and 264,598 results Academia Advanced Search (search paper titles, search full text of papers). However, after entering the word “export” and using Advanced Search, we receive 608,045 papers containing this word.

² Quotation marks were used in the search. For example: searching for ‘wojciech profit’ will give us results as if we combined the words ‘wojciech’ and ‘profit’ with the logical conjunction OR. Query “wojciech profit” (quotation marks) will give us only those results that contain the string “wojciech profit” in any part of the article or metadata.

When the Web of Science was used, which is highly valued in the scientific community, after entering “art of sales” we will receive one (sic!) scientific article from 1992 (UEK, 2019a). However, when we enter the word “export” – we will receive 106,577 publications (UEK, 2019b). In our local database “Achievements” at the Cracow University of Economics, after entering the entry “art of sales” we also receive only one scientific article taking into account this issue, in addition from the year 1989. After entering the entry “export” we will receive a list of 557 scientific articles.

Therefore, it can be concluded – despite a cursory analysis – that the subject of “art of sales” is definitely less popular in scientific research than the issue of export. Despite this, few authors attempt to define this issue. For example: “The art of sales is not a random process with a ‘pitch’ as it may have been described years ago. The art of selling is a process which is taught, learned, and utilized in the field. Therefore, individual sales people and those directly involved in the sales management process today should be appreciated and respected” (Mosca et al., 2010, p. 116) and “The art of sales force management is to influence salespeople’s objectives and activities in the right direction” (Darmon, Martin, 2011). Specific skills are required that come down to building relationships³, raising awareness of the needs, the art of showing that it is possible to meet them with the features of a good or service. This process may be short or very long, depending on the subject of the sale (product specificity), sales channel, cultural differences, national mentality, company strategy (price policy) or market trends. The key skill of the so-called closing sales (Gillespie et al., 2016, p. 2).

As Al Davidson, President of Strategic Sales & Marketing, Inc. & Group Owner of ManageYourLeads writes: “There are a few elements of sales that are more like an art. Good sales people need to have creativity, initiative and drive. Just like artists need to bring something new into the world, starting from nothing, sales people have to start from zero and make things happen. Artists are fueled by passion and self-belief. In the same way, some of the best sales people have a strong spirit of passion and self-confidence – they believe in what they’re doing, and they inspire confidence in the people around them. Being in the presence of a great sales person is like being with an artist – they are charismatic people who make ripples in the universe around them” (<https://www.business2community.com>).

Whereas managers (leaders, managers) of art of sales processes should be characterized by skills such as coaching, followed by collaborating, championing, and customer engaging. A key sales leader behaviors and identify four potential mediating variables (trust, confidence, optimism, and resilience), from which emerges a conceptual framework of sales leader behaviors perceived to enable salesperson performance (Peesker et al., 2019).

Specific competences are necessary to achieve sales tasks and goals. We distinguish between basic (universal, also called soft) and specialist (professional, scientific, related to knowledge – also university; otherwise hard) competences. The soft are: communication skills, organization of work and teamwork, results

³ What is important is the division of a business/transactional and relational sales.

orientation, customer focus, teamwork, leadership, planning and organization, commercial awareness, flexibility, stimulation of other people's development and ability to solve problems (Armstrong, 2000, pp. 241–242).

According to the author of this study art of sales should be based on successive levels of advancement:

- a) customer purchases product,
- b) customer uses purchased product,
- c) customer comes to us again to re-purchase (cross selling, up selling),
- d) customer gives us written recommendations as a reliable supplier,
- e) customer leads us to the next customers, who makes purchases,
- f) customers come from recommended other satisfied customers.

At the time you can summarize such stages as good sales – art of sales.

It is worth to add that in the Internet era the model of buying has changed a lot – not only by individual customers, but also by enterprises, so sales models must also change, especially in e-business.

2. Methodical assumptions of the research

The adopted research method was a questionnaire consisting of 20 original assertion in the survey research (see Annex). Each assertion had two possible answers: "I agree" or "I do not agree". In addition, with each answer, the option of assigning a given number of points by digits from 1 to 7 was introduced, i.e. determining how much the person surveyed agrees or disagrees with the essence of a given assertion (the author's intention was to give "weight" to the given answer). The respondent also indicated whether he was a woman or a man and in what mode of study: full-time studies or extramural. The study was anonymous and lasted about a quarter of an hour.

The examined persons studied at the 2nd or 3rd year in the foreign trade specialization in the field of International Economic Relations at the Cracow University of Economics. In total, 241 surveys were carried out, but several authors rejected 7 copies due to incorrect answers (e.g. selecting the option "I agree" and "I do not agree" in the same assertion). 234 correctly completed surveys were classified for the study.

Two research methods were used to analyze the obtained survey results. The statistical system R⁴ (permutation test) was used to verify the H 1, H 2 and H 3 hypotheses and incidentally – Microsoft Excel, and statistical verification was performed using Microsoft Excel to verify the H 4 – H 14 hypotheses.

⁴ The author thanks Prof. S. Śmiech from the Department of Statistics at the Cracow University of Economics for help and consultation on part of the results of statistical calculations.

3. Research results and their interpretation

The first research method was used to examine the first three hypotheses:

- H 1 – women and men same often consider selling as art of sales (in connection with point No. 11 of the survey),
- H 2 – extramural students (more often active on the labor market) have more experience related to foreign sales more often consider sales as art of sales (in connection with point No. 14 of the survey)
- H 3 – extramural students (more often active on the labor market) have more experience related to conducting domestic sales more often consider sales as art of sales (in connection with point No. 15 of the survey).

A permutation test was performed⁵ for the average of the numbers assigned for responses to individual assertions (10,000 permutations. To make such calculations possible (obtaining only one variable with two signs), the numbers next to the answer “I do not agree” have a minus sign “-”. Table 1 presents the results of calculations.

Table 1. Verification of H 1, H 2 and H 3 – results of p-value calculations

hypothesis / name	p_value_women_men	p_value_full-time_extra-mural
H 1	0.01693	not applicable
H 2	not applicable	0.18385
H 3	not applicable	0.70577

Source: calculations made using the R statistical system.

Values below 0.05 mean a significant difference (conventional level of significance $\alpha = 0.05$). Values of α between 0.05 and 0.1 mean that the difference exists, but is smaller. As we can see in the first column (on the first hypothesis) the result 0.01693 means a significant difference, i.e. women and men have different distributions of answers. After additional calculations using Excel, it turned out that in the case of female students 82 people marked “I agree” with a total answer value of 341 points. In the case of students, it was 101 people with a total answer value of 447 points. Therefore, the surveyed men more often consider sales as art of sales than the surveyed women, i.e. H 1 saying that women and men same often recognize sales as art of sales has not been confirmed. According to the author, an in-depth analysis of the literature on the subject is needed, dedicated

⁵ Various statistical tests are used to check that the distributions from which the samples come are the same. A function, called test statistic, is calculated with the arguments given. The result of this function is transformed into p-value, which, when compared with the assumed level of significance, allows us to state the existence or lack of premises to undermine the truth of the hypothesis about equal distribution. Instead of many tests (e.g. Student's t test), the corresponding permutation tests are used, which do not require additional assumptions about the distribution of the compared samples.

to differences in the perception of economic phenomena by both sexes (perhaps in connection with elements of psychology), but going beyond the scope of this chapter.

As can be seen in the third column of the Table (verification of the second and third hypotheses), the results obtained 0.18385 and 0.70577 mean that there are no significant differences (the same distribution of answers). Thus, extramural students (more often active on the labor market) have more experience related to foreign sales more often recognize sales as art of sales and extramural students (more often active on the labor market) have more experience related to domestic sales more often consider sales art of sales. H 2 and H 3 hypotheses have been positively verified.

In order to verify the H 4 – H 14 hypotheses, calculations were made using an Excel spreadsheet. Table 2 presents the results of calculations, which consisted in the fact that:

- 1) an appropriate survey assertion has been assigned to each hypothesis,
- 2) the sum of points has been calculated and compared (options from 1 to 7) for the answers “I agree” or “I do not agree” with the appropriate assertion from the survey,
- 3) the number of people who answered “I agree” or “I do not agree” with the appropriate survey assertion was calculated and compared,
- 4) the sum of points was calculated and compared (option from 1 to 7) for the answers “I agree” or “I do not agree” with assertion No. 11, which referred to “art of sales”,
- 5) the number of persons was calculated and compared (option from 1 to 7) for the responses “I agree” or “I do not agree” for assertion No.11, which referred to “art of sales”.

Then, the results obtained were subjected to a logical analysis and assessment whether a given hypothesis was verified positively or negatively.

As we can see from 11 hypotheses, as many as 10 were positively verified (they were H 4, H 5, H 6, H 8, H 9, H 10, H 11, H 12, H 13 and H 14), and only 1 negative (it was H 7). So students who:

- want to have more practical classes dedicated to improving practical skills related to sales in foreign markets,
- want to have more practical classes dedicated to improving practical skills related to sales on the domestic market,
- want to have practical classes in the foreign sales teaching process with experienced managers/sales people who have experience in domestic sales,
- believe that the manager should have a commission-based remuneration more often they consider sales as art of sales (in connection with point No. 16 of the survey),
- are aware of the fact that “everyone lives by selling something”,
- have a higher level of general knowledge about sales (e-commerce, the future of sales, the role of sharing economy, awareness of the importance of the “Insight Selling” method),

Table 2. Verification of H 4 – H 14 – calculation results

Hypothesis number	The serial number of the assertion in the survey	Total points for “agree” on the next issue number versus “disagree”	The number of people who answered “I agree” versus “I do not agree” on the next assertion number	Total points for “I agree” versus “I do not agree” assertion 11 – “Selling is an art (a unique skill) – art of sales”	Number of people who answered “I agree” versus “I do not agree” at assertion 11 – “Selling is an art (a unique skill) – art of sales”	Hypothesis verification (positive or negative)
H 4	6	1,329 v. 33	226 v. 8	1,025 v. 11	208 v. 2	positive
H 5	7	1,293 v. 32	225 v. 9	1,012 v. 0	205 v. 0	positive
H 6	19	1,380 v. 22	228 v. 6	1,034 v. 12	210 v. 2	positive
H 7	14	323 v. 818	82 v. 152	394 v. 50	76 v. 13	negative
H 8	15	614 v. 469	140 v. 94	643 v. 21	129 v. 8	positive
H 9	16	1,067 v. 56	213 v. 21	973 v. 18	198 v. 4	positive
H 10	5	1,217 v. 84	211 v. 23	977 v. 21	196 v. 5	positive
H 11 *	17, 18 i 20	1,285+532+387 (2,204) v. 20+363+741 (1,124)	228+137+87 (452) v. 6+97+147 (247)	1,031+647+423 (2,101) v. 4+39+41 (84)	209+129+81 (419) v. 1+10+13 (24)	positive
H 12	10	1,157 v. 47	220 v. 14	976 v. 0	200 v. 0	positive
H 13	8	956 v. 108	202 v. 32	919 v. 31	189 v. 7	positive
H 14	9	753 v. 203	184 v. 50	835 v. 32	171 v. 8	positive

Source: calculations made using Microsoft Excel.

* in the case of hypothesis 11, the sum of points and the number of people were counted in views 17, 18 and 20

- think that sales can be learned,
- think that managing sales on foreign markets (exports) is difficult,
- consider sales management on domestic markets difficult;
- more often consider sales as art of sales.

At the same time, students with experience in foreign sales often do not recognize sales as art of sales. This is an interesting result of the study and, according to the author of the chapter, it may be due to the fact that the respondents were relatively young, so their experience on foreign markets could be small and in positions not directly related to sales.

4. Summary and recommendations

After presenting the results of surveys and verifying hypotheses, it's time to try to share comments and thoughts on the subject and methodology of teaching classes in the broadly understood problems of international trade – with particular emphasis on foreign sales issues. For this purpose, the answers given in relation to assertions 1, 2, 3, 4 and 12 and 13 of the survey will be analyzed. These were the following issues:

- in the process of education at the Cracow University of Economics I received knowledge and skills enabling me to do business on an international scale,
- in the process of education at the Cracow University of Economics I received knowledge and skills enabling foreign sales (exports),
- there were enough practical elements of conducting export sales during classes at the Cracow University of Economics,
- there were too many theories in the educational process at the Cracow University of Economics at the expense of practical elements,
- that is, regarding a kind of assessment of the current didactic process and subsequent ones regarding future education:
- I have a need to learn how to manage foreign sales (exports),
- I need to learn how to manage sales in the domestic market.

Table 3 presents the results of calculations, which consisted in the fact that the number of people who answered “I agree” or “I do not agree” with the appropriate view from the survey was calculated and compared and the sum of points was calculated and compared (option from 1 to 7) for the answers “I agree” or “I do not agree” – which will help to determine the “weight” of given responses.

As we can see in the table above, the respondents confirmed that in the education process at the Cracow University of Economics they received knowledge and skills enabling them to do business on an international scale (185 people from 234 and 796 points), they also received knowledge and skills that allowed them to conduct foreign sales (201 people from 234 and 856 points). To the preview of the fact that there were enough practical elements for conducting export sales during

Table 3. Results of calculations related to assertions 1, 2, 3, 4 and 12 and 13 of the survey

Assertion number in the survey	Total points for “I agree” on the next assertion number versus “I do not agree”	The number of people who answered “I agree” versus “I do not agree” on the next assertion number
1	796 v. 194	185 v. 49
2	856 v. 122	201 v. 33
3	515 v. 421	129 v. 105
4	1,027 v. 110	209 v. 25
12	969 v. 89	199 v. 35
13	965 v. 71	208 v. 26

Source: calculations made using Microsoft Excel.

classes at the Cracow University of Economics, the answers are even – only 129 people out of 234 confirmed, 515 points versus 421 against 105 people who did not confirm this view. However, with the view that there were too many theories in the process of education at the Cracow University of Economics, at the expense of practical elements, we can observe a definite advantage of those who agree with this thesis (209 people out of 234 and up to 1,027 points). This clearly means that students in the didactic process lacked practical knowledge of foreign trade, including certainly issues related to foreign sales. This is confirmed by the results of the last two surveyed views, as many as 199 people out of 234 have the need to learn foreign sales management (969 points), and 208 people out of 234 have the need to learn sales management on the domestic market (965 points). To sum up, it is worth saying that, according to the author of this chapter, universities in Poland may soon face a very important dilemma: university or vocational school?

The realization of student expectations can mean the interpenetration of university general education assumptions based on critical thinking skills, searching for the truth about the world, guaranteeing freedom of thinking and preparing graduates to serve society and elements of so-called “Corporate culture” based on the preparation of professionals (even in sales). It should be emphasized, however, that despite such clearly defined expectations of students, universities should not transform into an entity focused on strictly professional education of graduates and the erosion of the traditionally understood idea of the university will not continue, on the contrary – it will retain its identity and mission (Zysk, 2017).

However, it is worth including more aspects of business practice in academic youth syllabuses, including sales sales teaching as specialist knowledge. It would be interesting to conduct similar research at other economic universities in Poland; perhaps it would be worth conducting similar surveys at economics universities in Europe and in the world.

Importantly, the professional competences of the future have become the topic of debate at the latest World Economic Forum in Davos. Participants distinguished then: comprehensive problem solving, critical thinking, creativity, people management, cooperation with others, emotional intelligence, reasoning

and decision making, service orientation, negotiation and cognitive flexibility (<https://www.weforum.org>). It is worth considering this list when designing the subject of teaching at universities.

In the document of the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education entitled “Program for the development of higher education and science for the years 2015–2030” we can read that: “The development of practical, widely available, specialized and highly embedded studies in the realities of the labor market will be of key importance. Therefore, investment is needed in staff with a different profile: proficient in technology and in areas covered by education, experts and innovators, leaders who can infect passion and reliable “craftsmen” in the scope requiring specialist knowledge and skills” (<http://www.bip.nauka.gov.pl>). Such statements may mean the aspirations of the ministerial and university authorities – especially after the recently implemented reform – to develop students’ professional skills, matching the goals and quality of education to the needs of the developing and increasingly internationalizing Polish economy, i.e. directly to the our labor market.

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Annex

Questionnaire

Man/Woman, full-time studies or extramural studies

1. In the education process at the Cracow University of Economics, I received knowledge and skills enabling me to do business on an international scale

I agree											I do not agree						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7					1	2	3	4	5	6	7

2. In the education process at the Cracow University of Economics, I received knowledge and skills allowing me to conduct foreign sales (exports)

I agree											I do not agree						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7					1	2	3	4	5	6	7

3. There were enough practical elements of conducting export sales during classes at the Cracow University of Economics

I agree											I do not agree						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7					1	2	3	4	5	6	7

4. There were too many theories in the educational process at the Cracow University of Economics at the expense of practical elements

I agree											I do not agree						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7					1	2	3	4	5	6	7

5. Each one “lives by selling something” (in the sense of goods, services, work)

I agree											I do not agree						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7					1	2	3	4	5	6	7

6. I would like have more practical classes dedicated to improving the practical skills related to sales in foreign markets

I agree											I do not agree						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7					1	2	3	4	5	6	7

7. I would like to have more practical classes dedicated to improving the practical skills related to sales in the domestic market

I agree											I do not agree						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7					1	2	3	4	5	6	7

8. It is difficult to manage sales on foreign markets (exports)

I agree											I do not agree						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7					1	2	3	4	5	6	7

9. It is difficult to manage sales on domestic markets

I agree											I do not agree						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7					1	2	3	4	5	6	7

10. Effective selling can be learned

I agree											I do not agree						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7					1	2	3	4	5	6	7

11. Selling is an art (a unique skill) – Art of sales

I agree											I do not agree						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7					1	2	3	4	5	6	7

12. I have a need to learn how to manage foreign sales (exports)

I agree											I do not agree						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7					1	2	3	4	5	6	7

13. I have a need to learn how to manage sales in the domestic market

I agree											I do not agree						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7					1	2	3	4	5	6	7

14. I have experience related to foreign sales

I agree											I do not agree						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7					1	2	3	4	5	6	7

15. I have experience in conducting domestic sales

I agree											I do not agree						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7					1	2	3	4	5	6	7

16. The person managing sales / the seller should be rewarded with the effects of activities (commission related to the level of performance of sales targets)

I agree											I do not agree						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7					1	2	3	4	5	6	7

17. The future of sales is e-commerce

I agree											I do not agree						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7					1	2	3	4	5	6	7

18. Sharing economy can harm sales processes

I agree											I do not agree						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7					1	2	3	4	5	6	7

19. In the process of teaching foreign sales, I would like to have practical classes with experienced managers / sales representatives

I agree											I do not agree						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7					1	2	3	4	5	6	7

20. I have already heard about the "Insight Selling" method

I agree											I do not agree						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7					1	2	3	4	5	6	7