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## Balancing on a tightrope: Coping with concurrent institutional logics in project business

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### ABSTRACT

Many firms simultaneously offer tailored projects and standardized equipment, creating a need to balance between two concurrent—and, at times, conflicting—sales logics. While it is known that larger firms may utilize several strategies to cope with sales logics' conflicting demands, prior research has not adequately addressed how smaller firms address this challenge. Building upon earlier research on managing complexity caused by competing institutional logics and drawing on empirical evidence from a qualitative case study focusing on a firm offering security solutions, we scrutinize how sales of both types of offerings are managed under two sales logics. We show that the firm may utilize several segmenting, bridging, and demarcating practices both at the organizational and individual level to cope with the logics' conflicting demands as well as leverage synergistic relationships between them. The results encourage the utilization of synergies across logics through dynamic practices when concurrently selling two offerings.

### 1. Introduction

Prior research has shown that project sales is a highly context-specific process that involves multiple stakeholders from both the customer and supplier sides (Cova et al., 2002; Davies et al., 2007), a great deal of creativity (Crespin-Mazet et al., 2019), and frequently requires several months, if not years, to secure a contract (Kujala et al., 2007; Arto & Kujala, 2008). While less emphasized in extant research, many firms that provide clients with tailored projects are also providers of standardized equipment. For example, a customer of Wärtsilä, a global technology provider for marine and energy markets, may require either the delivery of a fully functional power plant installed on a turnkey basis or a single standardized diesel engine to replace a worn-out engine in its existing power plant. In these two examples, the complexity and amount of interaction that needs to occur between the customer and the provider vary considerably. Whereas the establishment of a power plant project may involve the identification of other stakeholders with the required resources, such as financiers and automation providers, a contract for the delivery of a single engine can sometimes be achieved by a single phone call, possibly followed up by a sales visit.

Playing this dual role, many firms need to find ways to excel at managing both the complexity of selling tailored projects and the

repetitiveness and economies of scale involved in selling standardized equipment. While large firms with a global market presence have often responded to this challenge by separating project and equipment sales into different functions (Davies & Brady, 2000), the situation is more complicated for small and medium-sized firms. This kind of separation might not be possible due to limited resources. In smaller firms, the risks of under- or overutilizing available resources and losing potential equipment or project deals can increase if the nature of the two business logics are not properly understood or the possible synergies leveraged. For example, if sales teams are incentivized based on the number of sales contracts, salespersons may be reluctant to engage in time-consuming negotiations that are required for scoping complex deliveries.

To address this issue, this study draws on institutional theory and, more precisely, the stream of research on institutional logics. This literature addresses how an organization manages under competing or conflicting logics (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Pache & Santos, 2013; Edvardsson et al., 2014) that give rise to institutional complexity (Smith & Tracey, 2016). Institutional logics set the “rules of the game” (Friedland & Alford, 1991) and explain individual behavior in organizations. For example, people working in a charity organization may highlight the so-called social welfare logic (helping those who need help), but simultaneously the organization needs to comply with efficiency-focused market logic to manage funding demands. In the

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same way, when a firm delivers tailored projects as well as standardized equipment, it may employ the different sales logics that are conceptualized here as *project sales logic* and *equipment sales logic*. The employment of different logics for equipment and project sales leads to increased complexity and even conflicts, which need to be managed at both the organizational and individual levels (Smets et al., 2015).

In the research on project organizing, studies have increasingly applied institutional logics in different settings, such as governing institutional complexity in megaprojects (e.g., Qiu et al., 2019; Biesenthal et al., 2018), studying how projects can shape institutions (Matinheikki et al., 2019; Lieftink et al., 2019), and coping with the complexities in an institutional context (Winch & Maytorena-Sanchez, 2020; Uriarte et al., 2019). However, to the best of our knowledge, prior research has not addressed how firms address the challenge of simultaneously selling standardized equipment and tailored projects as a specific business solution at both the organizational and individual levels. It is important to concentrate on individual-level practices, as individuals are expected to behave in accordance with and to be conditioned by the institutional logics present in their industry and their firm (Gonçalves et al., 2019; Smets et al., 2015). We do not know how these two coexisting sales logics relate to each other—are they primarily synergistic or conflicting? For example, successful project sales may lead to further equipment deliveries following the project handover, but it is also not unreasonable to expect that project sales might reserve crucial resources (e.g., salespeople or technology support) at the expense of equipment sales (or vice versa).

To address this gap in knowledge, we explore the following research question: *What practices do firms use to cope with the tensions arising from two parallel and different sales logics?* Our paper draws on an explorative case study focusing on Gatekeeper (pseudonym), a medium-sized firm providing its industrial customers both customized security solutions in the form of projects and standalone standardized security equipment. More specifically, we focus on the sales function and individual salespeople within the firm. We map organizational- and individual-level practices, which we conceptualize as segmenting, bridging, and demarcating practices (based on Smets et al., 2015). We show that several segmenting practices are required to cope with the competing demands of the two sales logics. In addition, the sales logics are also bridged to take advantage of their complementary aspects. Lastly, demarcating practices maintain the separation of logics when serving diverse customer needs.

In addition to discussing the differences between sales of standardized equipment and of tailored projects (Tuli et al., 2007; Ulaga & Loveland, 2014), this study provides further insights regarding the differentiating and the complementary features of the two sales logics and how the two solutions are sold in practice. As individuals have received less attention in the discussion of institutional logics (Smets et al., 2015; Gonçalves et al., 2019; Pache & Santos, 2013), the results of this study show what kind of practices individuals (salespeople) use in parallel with the organization-level practices. Our results indicate that firms are likely to follow distinct sales logics when serving individual clients, but these two businesses may also complement each other, and the synergies can be leveraged in addition to compromising with the conflicts. The results implicate that individual salespeople have an important boundary spanning role when balancing with the competing demands stemming from the two institutional logics. Finally, the results give an encouraging example on how a firm may simultaneously offer solutions under the competing logics by mapping the practices utilized in the sales process.

The article is structured as follows. First, we introduce the literature on project sales and institutional logics and discuss strategies for coping with institutional complexity. We then present the research approach and findings, focusing on different organizational- and individual-level practices between the two sales logics. We conclude by discussing the implications of our findings for research and practice and by suggesting further avenues for research.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Selling tailored solutions as projects

In industrial markets, many firms specialize in the provision of solutions tailored to the unique needs of industrial customers (Tuli et al., 2007; Ulaga & Loveland, 2014). In the literature, such deliveries are often referred to as complex products and systems (CoPS) (Davies & Brady, 2000) or integrated solutions (IS) (Davies, 2004). In this paper, we use the term *tailored solution* to refer to all kinds of project-based deliveries of solutions tailored to meet unique customer needs. Tailored solutions are typically high-value offerings that involve a combination of complex and interdependent technologies. Examples of tailored solutions include power plants, high-speed trains, avionics equipment, and flexible manufacturing systems (Hobday 1998). Tailored solutions are typically purchased by a single user, often an industrial firm or public organization, and their sale and purchase are characterized by the discontinuity of demand, uniqueness of deliveries, and high complexity of both delivered customer solutions and the organizations that need to be established for delivering them (Mandják & Veres, 1998; Artto & Kujala, 2008).

The delivery of tailored solutions has been widely discussed in project marketing and sales research and project marketing can be broadly defined as the “systematic management of customer, supplier, and other network relationships related to the development and management of the supplier’s business and is designed to achieve the company’s desired operational objectives” (Skaates & Tikkanen, 2003). In this paper, we concentrate on project sales, which can be seen as a subset of marketing and understood as a set of activities performed by the sales force aimed at business engagement with a specific prospective buyer (Skaates & Tikkanen, 2003; Viio & Grönroos, 2014). Project sales is described as a process that includes the search, preparation, bidding, negotiation, and implementation of a project (Cova & Hoskins, 1997; Jalkala et al., 2010; Turner et al., 2019). Traditionally, salespeople search for customers through cold calls, visits, sending marketing materials, and contacting buyers through web-based tools or social media, at seminars and exhibitions, or through resellers or other sales partners (Cova et al., 2002; Anderson et al., 2009; Agnihotri et al., 2016). Crucial steps in the project sales process include bidding, preparing the offer, and finally negotiating the deal, which might take from several months to several years (Tikkanen et al., 2007; Kujala et al., 2007; Ryyänen et al., 2013; Kujala et al., 2015). This process not only requires the active participation of salespeople but also heavily relies on other functions of the firm (e.g., management, technology, logistics, and project management) (Artto & Kujala, 2008; Turkulainen et al., 2013).

Project sales research outlines various approaches that firms can utilize when searching for potential customers. The first is a deterministic approach, where the firm actively follows the marketplace and attempts to anticipate project opportunities, which are typically openly announced public tenders (Cova & Hoskins, 1997; Görög, 2016). When the firm identifies an attractive project opportunity, it utilizes its resources and expertise to provide a solution that fulfills the demands of the potential customer and can be profitably delivered by the firm. Essentially, the firm must adapt its key resources to meet the requirements of the customer. When assuming a constructivistic approach, the firm actively creates project opportunities, such as proposing solutions to potential customers, bringing together diverse network actors, and showing how the proposed solutions could contribute to the customers’ business processes and profitability. These two approaches can also be combined, and the choice between the two approaches is dependent on the customer’s purchasing process, the customer’s behavior norms (objectives, culture, position, ethics), and the supplier’s position in relation to the customer (Cova & Hoskins, 1997).

Previous project sales research has concentrated sales process phases (Kujala et al., 2007; Lecoeuvre-Soudain & Deshayes, 2006; Cova et al., 2019; Savolainen & Ahonen, 2015), sales organization (Turkulainen

et al., 2013; Stähle et al., 2019), sales strategies (Cova & Hoskins, 1997; Tikkanen et al., 2007; Turner et al., 2019), and supplier position in the project networks (Lecoeuvre-Soudain et al., 2009; Ahola et al., 2013; Görög, 2016; Haimala, 2008; Crespin-Mazet et al., 2019). Interpersonal relationships and personal contacts between salespeople and potential customers are often highlighted as an important channel for securing new project contracts (Cova & Salle, 2000; Mainela & Ulkuniemi, 2013). In sum, in project sales research, the key issues often relate to how to secure profitable deals with project clients and how salespeople effectively collaborate and share information concerning customer needs and requirements.

## 2.2. Differences of equipment and project sales

Previous research highlights several differences between equipment and project sales (e.g., Ulaga & Reinartz, 2011; Ulaga & Loveland, 2014; Parvinen et al., 2013). These differences relate to the complexity of the sales process, uniqueness of the delivered solution, discontinuity of demand, number of stakeholders involved, and customers' purchasing practices. For example, in equipment sales, the focus is typically on the most effective ways of delivering the equipment and the systematization of the sales process to serve as many customers as possible (Ulaga & Loveland, 2014; Parvinen et al., 2013). The sales process tends to follow the traditional steps of selling and focuses on closing the deal with the customer (Moncrief & Marshall, 2005). In contrast, in project sales the focus is typically on forming long-term customer relationships and serving each customer's unique needs by delivering tailored solutions and offering advanced after-sales services. Project sales thus involves analyzing the customer's business, identifying problems, offering proposals to solve the problem, and coordinating the integration of components into a solution (Davies et al., 2007; Terho et al., 2017; Momeni & Martinsuo, 2019).

Delivering equipment and projects in parallel may lead to conflicts within a firm, as project sales may, for example, bind more technology, management, or sales resources than equipment sales. In response to competing demands, in many firms these two types of sales logics have been separated into their own functions (Davies et al., 2004). From the perspective of individual salespeople, compared to equipment sales, project sales involves a different type of environment and capability requirements, and salespeople's lack of capabilities represents a major hurdle in selling projects (Ulaga & Reinartz, 2011; Terho et al., 2017). For example, salespeople need to have a high degree of flexibility and strong problem-solving abilities (Ulaga & Kohli, 2018; Huikkola & Kohtamäki, 2017). Delivering projects frequently involves several functions within the firm; therefore, effective cross-functional integration is a necessity for many firms (Storbacka, 2011; Momeni & Martinsuo, 2019; Stähle et al., 2019) and especially for salespeople, as sales offices might be separated from the project implementation units (Lampenius, 2006).

Project research has shown that companies may also apply alternative business models to serve different customers (Tikkanen et al., 2007; Kujala et al., 2010; Mutka & Aaltonen, 2013; Wikström et al., 2010; Davies & Brady, 2000). For example, Mutka and Aaltonen (2013) reported a firm that had several business models for different clients, ranging from standardized equipment deliveries utilizing established business models to more complex deliveries utilizing more autonomous, project-level business models.

Despite the differences between equipment and project sales, both sales logics emphasize understanding the customer's problem, solving it by delivering the appropriate equipment or solutions, establishing sales process thinking, and targeting long-term customer relationships. However, because sales situations differ, there is a need to better understand how the two sales logics can work in parallel and how standardized equipment and tailored project sales can benefit from each other. Thus, we argue that medium-sized firms need to have strategies to exploit the possible synergies while efficiently serving multiple

customer needs without causing too much tension within the organization. In addition to organizational-level strategies, the focus needs to be placed on individual practices, in this case those of salespeople.

## 2.3. Towards an understanding of institutional logics in equipment and project sales

To frame this study in a broader theoretical discussion, institutional theory—and, more specifically, institutional logics—is utilized. Institutional logics can be broadly defined as a social domain's "organizing principles" or "rules of the game" (Friedland & Alford, 1991). In other words, institutional logics are seen as "socially constructed historical patterns of cultural symbols and material practices, including assumptions, values, and beliefs" (Thornton et al., 2012). Institutional logics conceptualize society as an interinstitutional system consisting of several institutional logics, which change with time and space (Cova et al., 2019). For example, an organizational environment might be characterized by a "market" logic, which emphasizes profit maximization as the primary goal (Smets et al., 2015; Pache & Santos, 2013). Some organizations may follow a "social welfare logic," where the primary aim of the organization is to produce products or services that fulfill the social needs of its customers, typically individual citizens (Pache & Santos, 2013). In firms, institutional logics condition organizational practice, and they can partly explain how individuals behave differently in, for example, public non-profit organizations, which seek social welfare, and private corporations, which seek profit maximization.

Organizations face competing demands posed by their environments. Studying institutional logics can reveal how organizations respond to institutional complexity (Smith & Tracey, 2016). Examples of competing institutional logics include discussions related to transforming from a goods- to service-dominant logic (Skålén & Edvardsson, 2016), tension between permanent organizations and temporary projects (Winch & Maytorena-Sanchez, 2020), and biotechnology companies balancing between science and market logics (Powell & Sandholtz, 2012). Firms respond to institutional complexity with a variety of strategies. Studies have discussed decoupling (separating the logics), compromising (finding the "good-enough" balance between logics), or combining (fitting two logics together) strategies (Pache & Santos, 2013). For example, to resolve institutional complexity, a firm may separate the logics into different units or processes (e.g., Bromley & Powell, 2012). With compromising strategies, firms aim to satisfy external demands by slightly altering their practices to meet the minimum expected standards (e.g., Oliver, 1991). For example, healthcare organizations may conform to the minimum standards of medical care and financial control logics to get both professional and political support (Scott, 1983; Pache & Santos, 2013). Lastly, the aim of combining strategies is to find synergies between the competing demands and therefore obtain endorsements from several actors in the environment (e.g., Greenwood et al., 2011). For instance, a charity organization may combine charity logic with commercial logic to satisfy the needs of those who need help by efficiently organizing its activities based on the logic from the commercial environment.

All strategies have advantages and disadvantages related to their ability to respond to competing demands. Separating might prevent conflicts arising from competing demands, but it might also be difficult to maintain over a longer period, especially if an organization is unsure which practices to follow (Pache & Santos, 2013). Combining competing logics creates opportunities for organizations to draw from the broader repertoire of behaviors and grant access to additional resources (Pache & Santos, 2013; Tracey et al., 2011). However, there is a risk of slipping toward or over-privileging one set of demands over another (Jay et al., 2013).

The majority of research on the strategies discussed above has focused on the organizational level, but individual-level practices are also increasingly receiving attention (Pache & Santos 2013, Smets et al.,

2015; Reay et al., 2017; Andersson & Gadolin, 2020; Brantnell & Baraldi, 2020). It is important to consider individual practices, as individuals enact the underlying logic in a real-life setting and often dynamically alter their behavior depending on situational factors (Smets et al., 2015; Schneider et al., 2020; Andersson & Gadolin, 2020). To highlight the individual perspective (in addition to organization-level strategies), this paper follows Smets et al.'s (2015) categorization of response strategies: *segmenting*, *bridging*, and *demarcating*. Segmenting allows individuals to separate practices governed by different logics. For example, a salesperson might alter the sales pitch depending on the customer, emphasizing, for example, environmental values over economic efficiency. Bridging allows individuals to utilize synergies of coexisting logics by understanding how to act under each logic and how to privilege one or the other in situations that have elements of both. Continuing the example, a salesperson might incorporate both efficiency and environmental elements into the sales presentation and justify why they do not exclude each other. Finally, demarcating refers to practices that protect against logic-blending, slippage, or over-privileging one logic. In our example, this means that a salesperson might incorporate environmental elements into the final presentation, but in the end, market efficiency logic is emphasized for profit-seeking reasons. With this categorization, we may study how a firm can integrate competing logics in a way that acknowledges their contradiction yet exploits their interdependence to sustain competing logics over a long timeframe (Smets et al., 2015). This categorization of practices acknowledges that different logics in an organization are mutually dependent and reveals how individual actors, in addition to organizational-level practices, enact the underlying logics and aim to balance between them in everyday work (Smets et al., 2015; Schneider et al., 2020).

In this study, equipment and projects sales represent two institutional logics within an organization (termed *project sales logic* and *equipment sales logic*). Fig. 1 combines the insights from the reviewed literature on project and equipment sales and on competing institutional logics, presenting the characteristics of the two logics and strategies to address institutional complexity (segmenting, bridging, and demarcating practices).

### 3. Research method

#### 3.1. Research design

Due to the explorative nature of this study, a single case study approach was chosen. This approach enables the formation of a deep understanding through the collection of rich data from several informants involved in the case (Yin, 2009). The present study focuses on *Gatekeeper* (pseudonym), a medium-sized firm operating in the security solutions business. *Gatekeeper* serves the needs of various industries by providing secure access solutions for buildings and other areas. The company's headquarters are located in Northern Europe, and it has more than 100 employees and branches in many other European countries. *Gatekeeper*'s customers are conservative, focusing on the reliability and,

most importantly, security of the delivered solutions. Historically, there have only been a few suppliers in the market, and the business is highly competitive. *Gatekeeper* concentrates solely on the B2B sector.

We concentrate on two logics that guide *Gatekeeper*'s solution sales. With *equipment sales logic*, *Gatekeeper* provides access management systems in which standardized equipment is delivered to customers' premises and then installed and deployed by an external partner. This product category consists mainly of physical elements that allow the user to control access to its premises. The access rights of a given property are programmed remotely and can be dynamically updated as needed. The physical elements of the equipment are largely the same for all customers, and few customized elements are needed.

With *project sales logic*, *Gatekeeper* provides customized security solutions that allow customers to control access to individual premises and spaces using a proprietary technology. Access to all premises can be remotely granted, and multiple sites can be consolidated into one cloud-based software platform. In addition to physical equipment, these solutions include selling customer-dependent tailoring, access management systems, and software services to customers. Considerable customer-specific customization is included. In addition, the solutions must often be integrated into customers' existing security systems.

Considering the research aim, we employed a purposive sampling technique and identified *Gatekeeper* as a representative case (Eisenhardt, 1989; Patton, 2002). This particular case provides new insights on the research phenomenon, and we purposefully selected a case that is informative (Neuman, 2005; Yin, 2009). The company has highly profitable equipment sales while also offering more tailored projects to its customers. As a medium-sized firm, it has limited resources for expanding its sales activities and therefore needs to balance between the two types of logics. As *Gatekeeper* operates internationally, the case provides information regarding whether some of the practices are country dependent, thus increasing the generalizability of the findings to larger samples.

#### 3.2. Data collection and analysis

As the enacted institutional logics for empirical analysis should be derived from the perceptions of actors and defined based on the context of the study (Ocasio et al., 2017), interviews (e.g., Thornton, 2004; Smets et al., 2015) or examination of field documents (e.g., Pache & Santos, 2013; Winch & Maytorena-Sanchez, 2020) can be chosen as the data collection method. Our data were collected through semi-structured interviews within *Gatekeeper*. Altogether, 11 interviews were carried out for the study (see Table 1) between September 2019 and February 2020. The 11 interviewees included the vast majority of the key individuals involved in *Gatekeeper*'s international sales and marketing activities. The interviews were conducted by one of the authors who was engaged in a collaborative project with the firm. Specifically, the author and the firm agreed that the results of the analysis carried out during the approximately six-month collaboration would be used for further development of *Gatekeeper*'s sales practices. Further,

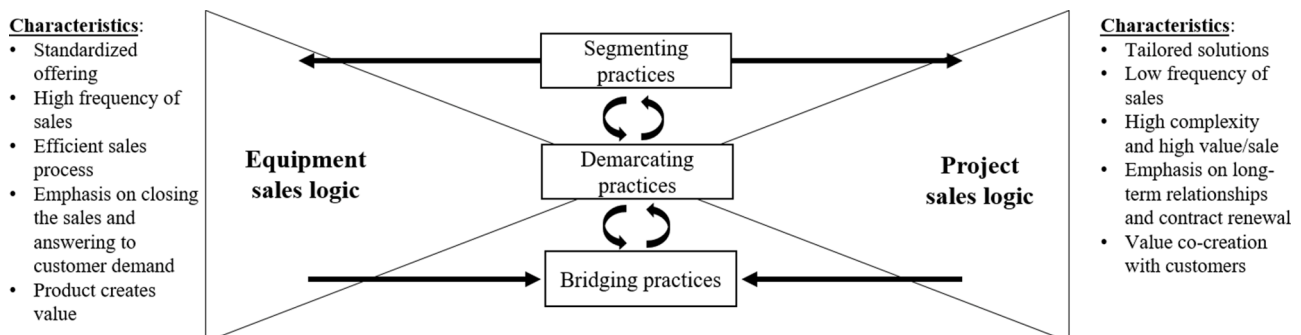


Fig. 1. Two contrasting market logics, their characteristics, and practices to address institutional complexity

**Table 1**  
Background information on interviewees and interviews.

Interviewee	Main emphasis in the interview (ES = equipment sales, PS = project sales)	Duration (min.)
<b>Business manager</b>	Business development (PS)	30
<b>Marketing director</b>	Marketing management and business development (ES + PS)	45
<b>Sales director</b>	Sales and marketing activities concerning North Europe (ES + PS)	70
<b>Key account manager</b>	Sales activities for key accounts concerning North Europe (PS)	110
<b>Group interview: Product and project manager</b>	Project management activities and processes, technology support activities (ES + PS)	84
<b>Sourcing manager</b>	Supply chain management (ES + PS)	71
<b>Key account manager</b>	Sales activities especially in Central Europe (PS)	87
<b>Country manager</b>	Strategic sales management especially in North Europe (ES + PS)	75
<b>Sales manager</b>	Sales activities especially in North Europe (ES)	81
<b>Country manager</b>	Sales activities in Central Europe (PS)	92
<b>Export manager</b>	Global sales activities (ES + PS)	86

Gatekeeper agreed that the data collected during the collaboration could be used in academic publications, benefiting the author as well. All 11 interviews were recorded and transcribed. In addition to the interviews, four meetings, each of which lasted about one hour, were held with the company contact person. In these meetings, the company's objectives for the study were determined, suitable interviewees were identified, and the interview outline was discussed. Extensive notes were taken during each meeting. Table 1 presents detailed information about the interviewees and interviews.

The informants consisted mainly of salespeople and other experts working in the sales function. Individuals working in other areas, such as technology and project management, were also interviewed to get a rich picture of the solution's entire life cycle and the delivery process. The informants were jointly selected by one of the authors and a representative of Gatekeeper based on their organizational positions, the extent of their experience with sales, and their in-depth knowledge of the processes used by the company. An extensive overview of the company processes and sales activities was acquired, and at the end of the interview round the responses began to saturate, indicating an adequately representative sample.

The interview outline consisted of discussing the interviewees' background in the company followed by questions about specific sales activities and marketing in general. Various customers and projects were also discussed as well as what kinds of external stakeholders (e.g., partners) are involved in the sales process. Considerable attention was devoted to gaining a thorough understanding of the sales process, from first contact to closing the deal. The scope of each interview was adapted to match each interviewee's role within Gatekeeper. For example, interviews with sales directors focused more on strategic sales management, whereas interviews with sales managers centered more on detailed sales activities. Additionally, some internal documents were reviewed with the company representative and the interviewees. These documents included sales process descriptions, detailed customer information, and presentation materials. The researchers also utilized publicly available data about the company (e.g., solutions provided, sales approaches, customer groups).

The data analysis proceeded by first exploring the data freely to obtain a holistic understanding of the company's sales function, solutions, and customers. Specifically, documents and publicly available information were analyzed to form a big picture and to complement the main insights acquired from the interviews. The data were analyzed using Atlas.ti, a qualitative data analysis software suite. Subsequently, the more detailed aspects related to sales practices, solution-specific characteristics, and project management procedures were identified.

As the sales practices were highly dependent on the sales manager, the discussions in the interviews were the main source of reliable data and best represented the reality of the sales work.

The analysis proceeded to identify two sales logics and practices utilized in selling the different offerings. Finally, we described the two sales logics and identified segmenting (how sales logics are separated), bridging (how the synergies of the logics are utilized), and demarcating (how to avoid over-privileging one logic or mixing the two) practices at the organizational and individual levels. The categories for the practices were identified based on Smets et al. (2015), but we further grouped them into organization and resources, sales process, and customers and market categories based on the data. Moreover, the data were further coded into organizational-and individual-level practices after grouping them into the correct practices category. The framework of Smets et al. (2015) is useful when studying frontline employees (i.e., salespeople) and the practices used to balance the different logics (Schneider et al., 2020; Anderson & Gadolin, 2020) and thus formed the basis for the analysis of this study. The coding scheme was actively discussed and analyzed by two researchers, and the findings emerged from a collaborative process.

Throughout the text, illustrative quotes were used to establish links between the findings and the empirical evidence. Because the quotations were translated from the interviewees' native language to English (except for the interviews conducted abroad), the expressions were edited slightly to enhance their clarity. The quotations were anonymized to preserve the interviewees' confidentiality. Finally, a presentation session was jointly organized by one of the authors and a Gatekeeper representative, where the results were thoroughly discussed with Gatekeeper personnel. In addition, the meeting was valuable for validating and strengthening the reliability of the results, supporting their implementation at Gatekeeper.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Equipment and project sales logics at Gatekeeper

In this study, we concentrate on two types of logics that guide Gatekeeper's solution sales. Table 2 presents a general comparison of the two logics based on the organization and resources, sales process, and customers and market. These themes stemmed from the factors discussed in the interviews and helped to better structure the findings.

Gatekeeper has sales managers in each country where the company is present. Sales managers seek out market opportunities, make customer visits, deliver presentations, and aim to close the deals. However, due to the differences between the two types of offerings, dedicated salespeople are responsible for project sales, while the rest of the sales force concentrates on equipment sales. Experienced sales managers with a long history in the security solutions business are assigned to equipment sales, as they can efficiently close sales within their customer groups. For projects, sales managers outside the business have been hired since the experienced ones are not accustomed to selling projects. Gatekeeper also involves partners in the sales process. Specifically, the partners consist of small or medium-sized companies, which may represent several security equipment manufacturers in addition to Gatekeeper. The partners receive a discount/compensation on the systems sold to the customers and are often motivated to sell the systems due to the maintenance business opportunities that may arise during the use phase.

Equipment sales is an established process that usually lasts one to four months, from initial contact to equipment delivery. Gatekeeper provides this offering to a wide variety of customers, whose properties include residential properties, schools, public facilities, hospitals, and office buildings. Regarding project sales, the sales and customer cases are treated as projects, and the sales process can last one to two years. The main customer segments include large industrial companies in the energy sector (e.g., water and electricity) and the utilities industry as well as telecommunications and data centers.

**Table 2**  
Comparison of the main features of the two sales logics at Gatekeeper.

Underlying logic in Gatekeeper's solution sales	Equipment sales logic <i>Sales of standardized security equipment with digitally managed physical components</i>	Project sales logic <i>Sales of tailored security solutions as projects with digital and integration features</i>
Organization and resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Several of Gatekeeper's own sales managers</li> <li>• In addition, a wide partner network is utilized</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A few dedicated sales managers concentrate on project sales</li> <li>• In addition, a wide partner network is utilized</li> </ul>
Sales process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Established sales process with which Gatekeeper has long-term experience</li> <li>• Sales time typically between one and four months</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evolving sales process that varies somewhat depending on the customer</li> <li>• Sales time typically between one and two years</li> </ul>
Customers and market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A wide variety of organizations, including:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ owners of residential properties</li> <li>◦ schools and public facilities</li> <li>◦ hospitals</li> <li>◦ office properties</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Customer needs are well known; emphasis on cost-savings and price of the solution</li> <li>• High competition in the market that emphasizes volume</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Large firms in the following sectors:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ telecommunications</li> <li>◦ energy</li> <li>◦ data centers</li> <li>◦ utilities industry</li> </ul> </li> <li>• More complex customer needs and requirements; emphasis on long-term value and functionality of the solution</li> <li>• Solutions are sold as projects</li> </ul>

4.2. Balancing between the two logics

Table 3 summarizes the findings, categorized based on the segmenting, bridging, and demarcating practices (Smets at al., 2015). Next, approaches for balancing between the two logics are discussed in more detail.

**Table 3**  
Practices for balancing with different logics.

Characteristic / Factor	Segmenting	Bridging	Demarcating
<b>Organization and resources</b> <i>Organizational level</i> <i>Individual level</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sales managers are divided based on the geographic region</li> <li>• Involvement of the project delivery function in project sales</li> <li>• More sales resources are assigned to each project sales case compared to the equipment sales case</li> <li>• Key account management activities are established for project sales</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Entire sales force is organized under a single sales function</li> <li>• Joint meetings and training events are organized for all salespeople</li> <li>• Shared marketing, technology, production, and resources support both equipment and project sales</li> <li>• Same partners are utilized in equipment and project sales</li> <li>• Salespeople regularly visit partners to promote the offerings of the firm and collect feedback</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With some project customers, different partners are sought</li> </ul>
<b>Sales process</b> <i>Organizational level</i> <i>Individual level</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In equipment sales, the management emphasizes high sales frequency, efficient sales processes, and maintaining existing customer relationships</li> <li>• In project sales, management emphasizes finding new customers and creating long-term value</li> <li>• For most project customers, test runs are organized for the solutions as part of the sales process</li> <li>• In project sales, salespeople actively collaborate with internal functions of the firm and with broader and more complex external stakeholder networks during the sales process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shared databases and marketing materials are used when marketing both types of offerings and screening the market</li> <li>• Customer cases are used as references for both equipment and project sales</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In project sales, salespeople emphasize the need to collaborate with external partners providing complementary capabilities</li> <li>• Equipment and project sales are divided so that the sales processes can be better managed</li> </ul>
<b>Customers and market</b> <i>Organizational level</i> <i>Individual level</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equipment sales concentrates on local markets; project sales focuses on national markets</li> <li>• In equipment sales, salespeople draw on experience from traditional security business</li> <li>• In project sales, salespeople draw on experience from the project business</li> <li>• In project sales, salespeople attempt to build a deep understanding of the customer's business, needs, and requirements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some steps, especially at the beginning of the sales process (screening and bidding phase), are very similar to each other</li> <li>• Salespeople present the firm first (to establish credibility with the customers) and identify opportunities for both equipment and project sales</li> <li>• Salespeople follow up with the customers and ask them if they can be used as references</li> <li>• Joint meetings are organized between equipment and project salespeople and management to share customer information</li> <li>• Salespeople teach each other the characteristics of the two businesses</li> <li>• Sales managers aim to solve customers' problems regardless of whether they can be filled by equipment or project sales</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sales managers share leads between project and equipment sales</li> <li>• Customer information and account responsibilities are recorded in a specific IT system to follow up on sales activities and reserving accounts</li> <li>• Sales managers discuss and agree informally about customer account responsibilities to avoid overlaps</li> </ul>

equipment or projects sales. Consequently, dedicated people can then concentrate on project sales instead of selling all the possible products. As equipment sales managers tend to have a long history in the company and in the business, equipment sales can be performed efficiently with this arrangement, while sales managers, who have a history and experience in project sales, concentrate on selling complex solutions.

“We have split the equipment and project sales. In the beginning, they overlapped a lot, but we noticed that selling equipment through the partner was more straightforward than project sales. It requires a lot of resources to sell projects, and we noticed that a sales manager does not have time and resources to handle them both.”

(Sales director)

When selling projects, Gatekeeper involves a project manager who is responsible for technology-based customer issues. Often, the sales managers need to interact with the project manager to resolve technological issues regarding the solutions to be offered. This means that more people need to be involved to solve specific customer challenges, especially those related to systems integration.

“We have created the idea that this key account manager (for projects) sells them, a project manager handles the delivery and helps with the project management, and technological support function gives training, technological support, and answers to questions from customers.”

(Marketing director)

**4.2.1.2. Sales process.** The sales managers responsible for selling equipment and those responsible for selling projects follow a different path, especially due to the temporal differences between equipment and project sales. After an agreement has been reached regarding which type of offering will be sold to the customer, there are two different processes for closing the sales. Equipment sales follow an established process, whereas the process for project sales is more dynamic. In contrast to equipment customers, project customers often want to test suggested security solutions before making a purchase decision to determine whether they meet their expectations. Depending on the customer, these test runs can last from six months to a full calendar year, resulting in a significant difference in sales time compared with equipment sales. Sometimes, the customer may also test competitors' products simultaneously for comparison.

“Depending on the customer, the duration of the trial period usually lasts for some months. At minimum, it takes three months, but for some customers, it can take up to one year. This is not a busy man's business, so to speak.”

(Key account manager)

Gatekeeper has noticed that sales managers responsible for selling projects require specific capabilities (e.g., long-term approach to sales and value creation and better understanding of the project-based environment). Sales managers selling equipment are accustomed to sales periods of about two months and higher sales volumes (in terms of the quantity of customers) and often lack some of the capabilities required for selling projects.

“In equipment sales, after the sales manager has engaged in discussion with and managed to convince the customer, the process goes onwards rather automatically. However, with projects, each customer is totally different, the background work needs to be done more carefully, and it takes remarkably longer to close the sales.”

(Sales manager)

“If you are impatient and want to close a lot of sales, this is not the business [project type] for you. This is not the kind of business where you close sales immediately; it takes longer. In our company, not everyone necessarily understands that if we want to go into project business, then the timeframe is often from several months to several years.”

(Key account manager)

**4.2.1.3. Customers and market.** Gatekeeper has several years of experience in selling equipment and a thorough knowledge of customers' needs and requirements. The experience of equipment sales is from the traditional security business. However, in project sales, the needs and requirements of the customers are deeper and more complex in nature. It is particularly important to communicate customer value when selling projects due to the novelty and disruptive nature of the solution. In practice, the salespeople draw their experiences from project business rather than equipment sales. At Gatekeeper, equipment sales is concentrated on local markets and project sales on national markets.

“It requires that a sales manager is enough open and is able to think outside the box when selling projects... They need to understand the customer's business environment and what kind of solutions can be offered, what problems can be removed and how we deliver added value and lower expenses. That is a big deal in project sales.”

(Country manager)

From the customer perspective, more stakeholders, including consultants, software companies, and security partners, might be involved in the process in project sales. Therefore, the entire network can be rather complex, and more work is required to understand the relevant stakeholder environment. New types of stakeholders, such as software companies or partners responsible for integration issues, may need to be involved.

“For example, in the telecommunications sector, it is sometimes hard to define who is the final customer we need to discuss the offering with. There can be an operator, their supplier of the physical cabinets, and possibly a supplier's supplier. We need to better understand the bigger picture of who does what and with whom we are signing the contract.”

(Sourcing manager)

To conclude, the identified segmenting practices keep the equipment and project sales logics separate. Furthermore, segmenting practices are used at both the organizational and individual levels to serve separate customer groups and avoid conflict between sales managers.

#### 4.2.2. Bridging the sales logics

**4.2.2.4. Organization and resources.** Bridging reconnects segmented practices and imports aspects of one logic into situations dominated by the other to reap the benefits of working with both. Even though separate sales managers are hired to sell equipment and projects, sales are managed under the same function. The interviewees mentioned that joint meetings are organized regularly to share information about both businesses, so all salespeople can learn from each other. Many internal resources, including marketing, technology, production, and support functions, are shared across project and equipment sales.

“We have meetings twice a month when we discuss issues, follow what happens in the market, and collect feedback from the field. We also have specific face-to-face sales meetings four times a year. I [director] have also implemented with the sales managers one-to-one discussions to discuss the current status of the market and our

personal goals... The sales managers, of course, talk and seek support from each other, and I also try to support them as much as needed.”

(Sales director)

“We have a support phone line that our partners can call. We have a couple of technology people and all the sales managers answering the phone. All are professionals, and all of them want to serve customers.”

(Sales manager)

In addition, Gatekeeper utilizes a single partner network to deliver both types of offerings. The partners are needed due to Gatekeeper’s limited resources, as the company has no technicians to perform the installation work. The partner negotiates the price and installation details with the customer. In some cases, the partner can even manage the sales process without Gatekeeper’s involvement, especially in equipment sales. In the case of large customers, the customer sometimes assumes the responsibility of performing the installation and deployment work, with support provided by Gatekeeper. After the installation, the main customer contact remains primarily on the partner side, which aims to develop additional business with the customer (e.g., by selling maintenance services).

“The partner is more involved after the installation than we are because the partner can make additional business when they go to the customer to update, repair, or sell something more. The partner benefits from it.”

(Project manager)

**4.2.2.5. Sales process.** The responsibilities of sales managers in equipment and sales processes are quite similar. Gatekeeper utilizes a variety of methods to scan the market for potential customers, including cold calls, personal contacts, publicly available information, exhibitions and seminars, and partners. In many cases, Gatekeeper proactively contacts the customers and offers solutions rather than waiting for customers to make the first contact. After the customer has been found and the deal has been closed, the process moves on to installation followed by the use phase. As a bridging practice, both sales logics seem to share established sales process thinking that stems from equipment sales and is now utilized to some extent in project sales as well. Many sales managers highlighted that they have the freedom to choose how they want to organize their work and approach customers:

“Of course, we have our own systems to monitor the sales and production... But we have much freedom to choose how we work. Of course, we need to communicate openly what we are doing and also what we need to do better.”

(Sales manager)

Customer cases are utilized as references to promote the company to potential customers. Some sales managers like to follow up with the customer after the handover to identify any problems with the installation or usage. Sometimes, Gatekeeper asks for the customer’s permission to use the customer case as a public reference. Many salespeople also emphasized that as the company is not well known everywhere, they need to first sell the company to potential customers before discussing which type of solution could be suitable for them.

“If you call from Gatekeeper, you need to first sell the company to the customer... It is only a positive challenge, but you need to survive the first question before you can start selling the actual offering.”

(Key account manager)

**4.2.2.6. Customers and market.** Customer leads are actively shared

within Gatekeeper, and the targeted customer groups are informed of all the options offered. Thus, although a customer’s interest might be in purchasing equipment, the customer might ultimately purchase a more technologically advanced project (or vice versa). While the customer segments are divided between sales managers and on a country-by-country basis, there are still some customer groups that might buy either equipment or a more complex solution as a project. Therefore, it is important to actively share customer information between different sales managers to understand customers’ needs and requirements so that the correct solution can be presented and offered.

“We have many solutions; therefore, there is no need to present all of them to a customer who understands very little about them and, as a result, could become very confused. We aim to present the exact solution that best suits them and what they really want. As we have many product families, it is important not to present more complex solutions if the customer’s needs are more concerned with equipment or vice versa.”

(Country manager)

“... In some cases, it is hard to draw the line between the offerings ... we have some customers that might have a clear need for a more complex solution but at the same time, they might need some equipment. In practice, this means that we need to be ready to present and offer both solutions.”

(Export manager)

As indicated by the previous quote, all the sales managers (both equipment and projects) need to adapt to various sales situations and have the flexibility to change their sales strategy and offer depending on customer needs. Therefore, both logics share a so-called consultative type of sales strategy, where the main goal is to help a customer find the correct solution for their business environment. As Gatekeeper has a long history in the traditional security business, its project sales managers have learned from equipment sales managers about this business environment. This type of bridging practice supports Gatekeeper in offering its customers what they need.

#### 4.2.3. Demarcating the sales logics

**4.2.3.7. Organization and resources.** Demarcating can be defined as any activity that protects against logic blending or slippage. This means that the boundaries of different logics are acknowledged, and when bridging the logics and reaping the benefits of complementary practices, the logics are not compromised by each other. In Gatekeeper’s case, although the sales managers are organized under the same function, all have their own responsibilities. The different natures of the sales logics are acknowledged, and sales managers do not “cross the bridge” to selling solutions that are not their responsibility, even though all of them are able to present all the solutions the company offers. From the management side, the time invested for a potential customer is monitored so as not to require too much effort from a single sales manager.

“Before going to the customer, I figure out the exact need. I primarily sell and present complex solutions, but I’m ready to talk about the equipment as well... However, I go there focused on projects and present equipment [only] if necessary. If it turns out that the needs of the customer are more on the equipment side, then I don’t even visit. I transfer responsibility to a colleague. I aim to stick to project sales all the time.”

(Key account manager)

One challenge that the company has noted is the use of partners, especially when selling projects. Though sales is largely managed by the sales managers, the final offer and contract are also negotiated with a partner involved in the sales case. This has proven to be a challenge

because project customers are often large industrial operators used to working directly with the supplier and are very aware of security issues. For example, if the customer is from the telecommunications sector, security and access management issues are crucial, and the customer may have strict policies regarding who can install the solutions on customer premises. Accordingly, Gatekeeper carefully selects and discerns the capabilities of potential partners, as finding a capable partner is crucial for determining which solution can be offered to customers.

“When we talk about some bigger global customers, such as from the telecommunications sector, they want to do business directly with us without involving anyone external in between. In our case, this means partners. The customers might quickly lose interest in our solutions in this kind of a situation ... It needs to be remembered that we do business between people and that we’re creating personal relationships between ourselves and a customer.”

(Marketing director)

**4.2.3.8. Sales process.** As with segmenting practices, separate sales processes were identified for equipment sales and projects sales. This is a demarcating practice because, due to differences in the logics and businesses, there is a need to manage the sales processes differently. The project management practices and ways of organizing the more complex solution deliveries differentiate the two logics, ensuring that simpler deliveries are not managed more heavily than necessary.

“By nature, equipment sales and project sales are very different because there are more complex customer needs. Then, these cases take a longer time to finish, and we don’t want a single bigger case, which can be attractive, to take too much attention from a sales manager because that time is taken from the sales of other solutions.”

(Sales director)

**4.2.3.9. Customers and market.** Before visiting with customers, the sales managers attempt to anticipate their needs to offer the correct solution. At this stage, it sometimes becomes evident that simpler equipment delivery rather than more complex project delivery is what the customer really needs. However, the equipment sales managers might notice that a customer requires a more complex solution instead, and the responsibility for the customer contact then shifts to the salespeople dedicated to projects. When customers are visited and contacted, the customer leads are registered in a customer relationship management system so that all sales managers know who has contacted which customers. This prevents the sales leads from being mixed up, and the customer responsibilities are more clearly defined. Demarcating the responsibilities in this way is also crucial, as the required sales manager capabilities are also different with different customers.

“Every time a sales manager visits the customer, they record the details about potential cases in the CRM system. We also started to record sales leads in the system so that we could follow up on how they are progressing. Sales managers follow up on opportunities and their level of maturity and update the details so that we have data about what’s in the pipeline.”

(Country manager)

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. Coping with concurrent sales logics

During the past decade, the value of institutional theory has been acknowledged as an important theoretical lens in project management studies (Biesenthal et al., 2018; Laurila & Ahola, 2021). Accordingly,

firms delivering projects need to consider the institutional field in which they are embedded (Winch & Maytorena-Sanchez, 2020; Cova et al., 2019) and somehow cope with competing demands originating from several stakeholders. Specifically, earlier studies have examined mega-project governance (Qiu et al., 2019; Biesenthal et al., 2018), project work practices (Uriarte et al., 2019), and how projects can shape institutions (Matinheikki et al., 2019; Winch and Maytorena-Sanchez, 2020). Competing institutional logics increase complexity and may lead to conflicts within an organization. However, less attention has been put to identifying practices on how organizations simultaneously manage the tensions arising from concurrent institutional logics especially at the individual employee level. Solely focusing on either organization-level practices (e.g., Pache and Santos, 2013) or individual responses (e.g., Smets et al., 2015; Minbaeva et al., 2020) highlights only a part of a phenomenon that spans multiple levels.

Previous research on project marketing and sales (Cova et al., 2002; Görög, 2016; Turner et al., 2019) and solution business (Ulaga & Kohli, 2018; Terho et al., 2017) has highlighted the differences between project and equipment sales that we refer to as project sales logic and equipment sales logic. In this explorative study, we examined how a medium-sized firm addresses the challenge of simultaneously selling tailored projects and standardised equipment. This study answered to the following research question: *What practices do firms use to cope with the tensions arising from two parallel and different sales logics?* We focused especially on the sales function of the firm as salespeople have been widely acknowledged as being important boundary spanners who connect customers’ needs and requirements to the supplier company’s offering (Ulaga & Kohli, 2018; Terho et al., 2017; Kienzler et al., 2019). This study highlights how project and equipment sales are kept separate but also how the synergies between the logics are utilized so that individual workers can concentrate on their main responsibilities, allowing the firm to effectively serve various customer needs.

As a result, a comprehensive understanding on the case company’s segmenting, bridging, and demarcating practices was obtained. The main sources of complexities and tensions arising between individuals and organizational units in the case company were related to resources, process and temporal matters and customer responsibilities. At the organizational level, practices included for example separating the salespeople between different offerings, arranging joint meetings between different salespeople and sharing the marketing and technology resources across project and equipment sales. At the individual level, practices included targeting different customer groups, active collaboration between individual salespeople, lead sharing and avoiding crossing from project sales to equipment sales and vice versa. Even though the bridging practices bring the two sales logics closer to each other, there seems to be a need to separate them due to resourcing, capabilities, customer needs, and management considerations. Selling different solutions requires different capabilities from the sales managers, such as the ability to deeply understand the business of the final customer, the value delivered, and the more complex stakeholder and technology environment. The identified response practices at the organizational and individual levels mirror the reality of managing in a situation in which competing logics exist, especially in firms that have limited resources at their disposal.

### 5.2. Implications for research

Our findings contribute to the current understanding of managing the sales of standardized equipment and tailored projects in parallel, particularly in small and medium-sized firms. As an important contribution to project research, we show how a firm may cope with competing institutional logics through different organizational- and individual-level practices instead of solely highlighting the differences in the sales logics, which are already well elaborated (e.g., Tuli et al., 2007; Ulaga & Loveland, 2014; Kujala et al., 2010). This study illustrates how institutional logics condition the practices at both individual and

organizational levels, which adds to the discussion on institutional logics from an industrial sales management perspective (Smets et al., 2015, Cova et al., 2019). Earlier studies on responses to institutional complexity tend to focus either on organizational level (Greenwood et al., 2011; Smets et al., 2015; Brantnell & Baraldi, 2020) or individual level (Minbaeva et al., 2020; Gonçalves et al., 2019) practices but this study focused on both levels at the same time. Our study implies that the responses to institutional complexity interact between different organizational levels in addition to interacting with each other.

This study further contributes to the discussion on project marketing and sales by revealing that there can be several types of sales logics in action in parallel and these logics do not exist in isolation from each other. As project and equipment sales are inherently different (Ulaga & Loveland, 2014; Terho et al., 2017), they may conflict with each other. For example, both sales processes are likely to call for the best resources available, resulting in inter-process competition for the most valuable resources (e.g., experienced sales managers). Prioritizing these conflicting aims requires a link to the firm's business strategy, similar to the project portfolio function (Jerbrant & Gustavsson, 2013; Martinsuo and Geraldi, 2020) established in many project-based firms to manage the portfolios of their delivery projects. However, this study showed how these two businesses may also complement each other and how the synergies can be leveraged, for example by sharing resources and learnings across the businesses. It is crucial to consider how different sales logics affect each other (e.g., whether they conflict or complement each other) at the general marketing strategy or individual salesperson level. Delivering equipment and projects in parallel is a collaborative effort guided by apparent institutional logics, management decisions and individual considerations.

Our study highlights the role of salespeople as important boundary spanners in finding the balance across business logics in addition to between the company and the customer (Cova et al., 2002; Kienzler et al., 2019) or different functions inside the firm (Turkulainen et al., 2013; Stähle et al., 2019). In addition to managing the complexity by different organizational practices, this study revealed that the salespeople respond to institutional complexity through various dynamic and independent practices. For example, even though sales of equipment and projects are separated from the organizational perspective, individual sales managers are often independent and need to flexibly change the approach from equipment sales logic to project sales logic or vice versa. This type of "fluid" approach is also suggested by Minbaeva et al., (2020) in their study on multinational setting where managers need to balance between market and community logic. Our study indicates that salespeople require an ability to adapt to the competing institutional logics as a specific skill when equipment and project are sold in parallel.

### 5.3. Implications for practice

The challenge of managing two parallel and sometimes competing sales logics is not a new phenomenon. However, it remains a constant challenge, especially for smaller firms which are more limited in their resources. Our study has a number of implications for practitioners responsible for sales activities in such firms. First, this study gives practical examples of how to manage between two competing sales logics and, possibly, overcome some of the challenges. The descriptions of the apparent logics in the business environment and their conflicting demands are helpful for any firms who are delivering projects and equipment in parallel. According to our observations concerning the salient features of equipment and project sales, standardized equipment sales practices should not be directly transferred to project sales or vice versa. However, there are considerable synergies that can be leveraged by allowing the two sales processes to share resources (e.g., sales managers and customer leads).

Second, Table 3 can be used as a starting point to identify how the apparent logics differ (segmenting), their similarities (bridging), and the extent to which they should be separated while leveraging their

synergies (demarcating). Firms would benefit from an increased understanding regarding how the two logics condition the organizational- and individual-level practices and how these practices affect each other. Practices for utilizing the synergies and managing the conflicts should be mapped and described at the organizational and individual levels. Firms may then utilize the most suitable practices that fit to their environment.

Lastly, our results have implications to the work of an individual salespeople. Salespeople may utilize the results of this study to improve and develop their own ways of working. For example, when there are significant differences in the sales time and resources required to complete the sales, the ways of approaching potential customers or closing the sales are different. The organization may manage the situation with certain practices (e.g., separating the salespeople) but individuals have their own practices (e.g., dynamic sales approaches and collaboration with other salespeople) to respond to the complexity caused by two or more institutional logics. For example, our informants discussed numerous examples in which an equipment sales process turned into a project sales process when the sales manager discovered that the customer needs were broader than anticipated. It is crucial to share the learnings across the whole sales organization to leverage the synergies of the logics and avoid unnecessary conflicts between salespeople.

### 5.4. Limitations and ideas for further research

Importantly, the findings are limited to a single-company setting. In addition, this study examined a security solutions business, which is a unique business with its own regulations and characteristics (e.g., conservative customers, high system switching costs, few dominant market players). This limits the generalizability of the findings to other contexts; therefore, more empirical evidence is needed from other businesses and contexts to validate the current findings. Furthermore, respondent bias could not be completely eliminated. The interviews were limited to employees of the firm, and partners, customers, or other stakeholders outside the focal company were not interviewed. Such interviews would have introduced an external and possibly more comprehensive view of the sales activities of the company.

As we examined both organizational- and individual-level practices for responding to institutional complexity, further studies could investigate the possible conflicts between the two levels. It would be interesting to study what kinds of roles and responsibilities salespeople will have in the future as customer requirements and behaviors change and new types of sales tools and technologies emerge (Cuevas, 2018; Ritter & Pedersen, 2020). For example, are the two types of sales logics more strongly divided, or do they become more similar as sales processes are increasingly automatized?

### 5.5. Conclusions

This study chose institutional logics (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Thornton et al., 2012) as a perspective for studying sales practices in a firm that delivers both standardized equipment and tailored projects for their customers. This type of sales work and how a firm balance between two concurrent sales logics has not received broad attention in the ongoing academic discussion on project and solution sales. This study describes in detail how a firm may balance between the logics and manage equipment and project sales in parallel. As such, it responds to recent calls for more empirical studies on sales activities at the front end of projects (Cova et al., 2019; Momeni & Martinsuo, 2019) and on the capabilities needed to move beyond product-centric business models (Ulaga & Kohli, 2018). The main results of this study concentrated to describing two competing sales logics, their salient features and complexities they cause and what kind of practices the firm utilizes in managing and balancing with the complexity. Especially, the results discuss the practices both at the individual and organizational level and separating them into different segmenting, bridging and demarcating practices. Thus, this study sheds additional light on the practices that

firms and individual salespeople utilize at the front-end of projects to complete the sales and leverage the opportunities in the market. Rather than being a rigid process, the firms need to constantly find balance and utilize diverse practices to respond to the institutional complexity caused by the competing logics.

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