

# The Interface Between Marketing and Sales: The State of the Art and a Research Agenda

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Marketing and sales often have to work hand in hand. Therefore, several studies have investigated the drivers and consequences of the quality of cooperation between the two departments. We review empirical research on the effect of the quality of cooperation on business performance and on the drivers of the quality of cooperation, to achieve two objectives. First, we summarize the most important findings on the marketing–sales interface in a compact and structured way to give guidance to managers on how to facilitate high-quality cooperation. Second, we identify the major gaps in the literature and outline a research agenda with suggestions for future research on how to address them.

## 1. Introduction

“Marketing needs sales and sales needs marketing. Unfortunately, ‘need’ does not equate to a ‘successful partnership’ between the two groups.”  
– Moorman (2013)



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For many activities, such as pricing and promotion decisions, new product development (NPD) decisions, decisions on expansions into new geographic markets, distribution strategy decisions, and decisions on advertising, firms need expertise from both marketing and sales (Homburg et al. 1999; Krohmer et al. 2002). For example, jointly developing new products may save time to market, help develop custom-fit products and derive a competitive advantage (Ernst et al. 2010; Rouziès et al. 2005). As an outcome, a high quality of cooperation between marketing and sales could positively affect business performance (Homburg and Jensen 2007; Rouziès et al. 2005). Yet whether personnel of both units cooperate well is not obvious. Indeed, the relationship between marketing and sales is often characterized by conflicts (e.g., Hughes et al. 2012; Kotler et al. 2006).

Marketers have the impression that salespeople are exclusively short-term and tactically oriented, relying more on gut feelings and personal relationships rather than analysis. Salespeople complain that marketers work in an ivory tower and therefore fail to develop appropriate solutions for their customers (Kotler et al. 2006; Moorman 2013; Rouziès et al. 2005). The result is that “sales forces and marketers feud like Capulets and Montagues – with disastrous results” (Kotler et al. 2006, p. 68). At the same time, companies are facing ever-faster market dynamics due to rapid technological progress or increasing competitive pressure, among other things (Kalaichan et al. 2021). Against this background and the strong interdependence of marketing and sales, companies should be alarmed if marketing and sales do not work well together. Thus, senior management must design the marketing-sales interface in a way that facilitates a high quality of cooperation between the two units. But how can it do so? Although quantitative research on the marketing-sales interface has investigated a lot about the effect of the quality of cooperation on business performance and its drivers, a clear and structured overview of this stream of research is lacking and many questions still remain about the management of the interface between the two departments. Therefore, the goals of this paper are twofold: (1) to summarize the state of the art of the quantitative marketing-sales interface literature in a structured way and to provide guidance for managers on how to facilitate cooperation, and (2) to identify gaps in the literature that future research could address.

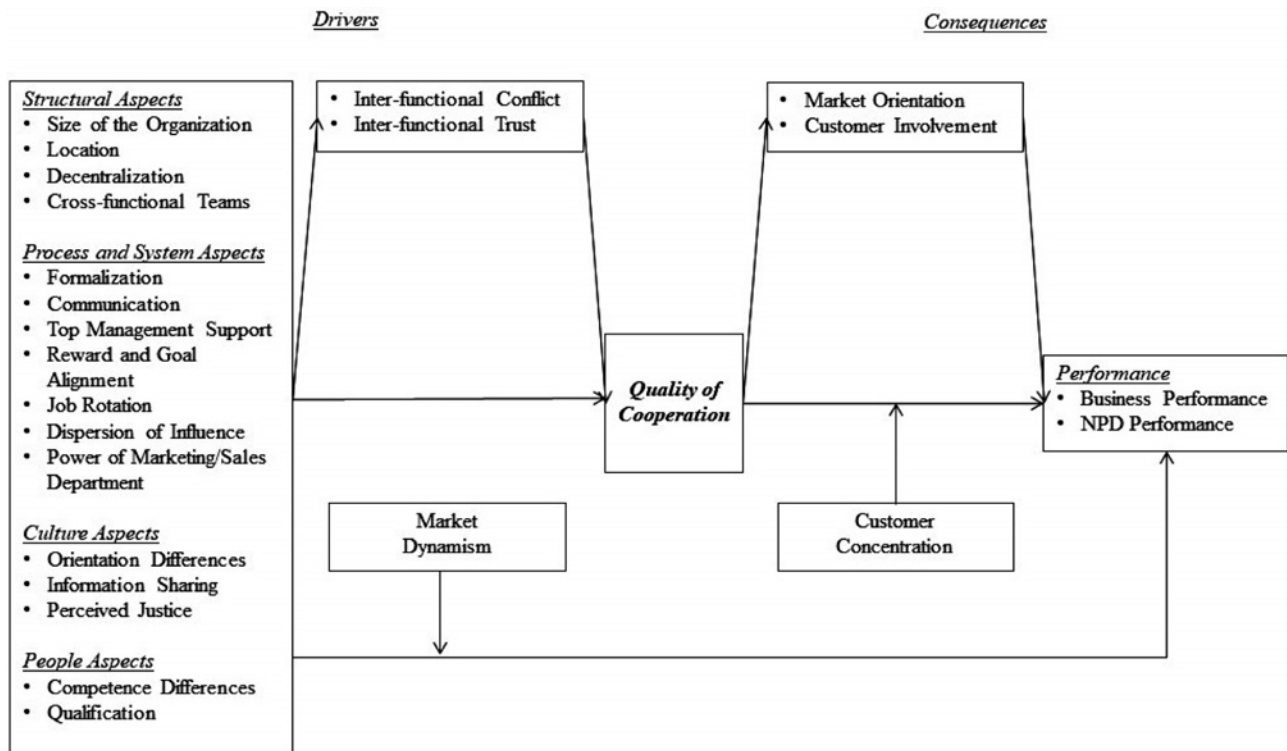


Fig. 1: Conceptual framework

The remainder of this article proceeds as follows: We begin by developing a conceptual framework to structure the relevant research. Then, we present the research approaches of the examined studies and discuss their results. Finally, we discuss theoretical and managerial implications and develop an agenda for future research.

## 2. Conceptual framework

Traditionally, academic research on marketing organization has combined marketing and sales as one unit, department or function, rather than differentiating between them (Homburg et al. 2008). The need to distinguish between these two units was first highlighted in conceptual work and qualitative research (e.g., Cespedes 1993; Dewsnap and Jobber 2000; Panigyrakis and Veloutsou 1999; Workman et al. 1998). That work argues that marketing and sales need a high quality of cooperation to achieve departmental and company performance and suggests drivers to obtain such quality of cooperation (e.g., Malshe and Sohi 2009; Rouziès et al. 2005). Later, quantitative work on the interface between marketing and sales emerged and analyzed the quality of cooperation using management surveys. We summarize the quantitative work that examines two research questions: (1) the effect of the quality of cooperation on business performance and (2) the drivers of the quality of cooperation between marketing and sales.

To identify the relevant literature, we first conducted an online database search (EBSCO, JSTOR, Science Direct, WISO) using the search terms “marketing” and “sales”

in combination with the terms “interface”, “interaction”, “integration”, “collaboration” and “cooperation”. Next, we reviewed the references cited in these articles and identified other relevant articles using Web of Science TM. In total, this review considers 27 quantitative studies published in academic journals.

To structure the following discussion, we develop a conceptual framework based on the constructs and relationships studied in the relevant literature (see Fig. 1). We integrate and add to existing frameworks from both conceptual work (e.g., Dewsnap and Jobber 2000; Rouziès et al. 2005) and empirical work (e.g., Homburg and Jensen 2007), none of which gives a comprehensive overview of the relevant literature. We build on the basic structure (groups of drivers) of the framework of Rouziès et al. (2005) and expand it with constructs from the quantitative literature. To the best of our knowledge, our framework is the first to fully structure the quantitative marketing-sales interface literature.

The *quality of cooperation* is the core construct of the conceptual framework. In the previous literature, it has been called by different names (e.g., collaboration, integration, relationship effectiveness, encroachment), but the idea is very similar. For example, Rouziès et al. (2005, p. 115) define sales-marketing integration as “the extent to which activities carried out by the two functions [...] are supportive of each other”. Homburg and Jensen (2007, p. 126) define it “as the extent to which there is a state of collaboration between marketing and sales that is characterized by unity of effort”. And Ernst et al. (2010, p. 90) explain cooperation “as the level of involvement

and information sharing” between the two departments. In this paper, we use the term “quality of cooperation” for the marketing–sales interface. We define the quality of cooperation as the extent to which the marketing and sales departments work hand in hand. This is a relatively broad definition of the construct, but we think it best captures the core idea of all the constructs we include in our study, which is the relationship aspect between marketing and sales.

On the left-hand side of *Fig. 1* are the *drivers* of the quality of cooperation and the performance outcome. These drivers have an effect on the quality of cooperation, with some studies (e.g., Homburg and Jensen 2007) also measuring the direct effect on performance. These relationships are mediated as well as moderated by several variables. Building on the conceptual work of Rouziès et al. (2005), we structure the drivers in four groups: *structural aspects*, *process and system aspects*, *culture aspects*, and *people aspects*. The first group includes the basic structural aspects of a company, such as the size of the company or the existence of cross-functional teams (Rouziès et al. 2005). The second group includes mechanisms that serve to control the cooperation in the daily work of the two departments (Rouziès et al. 2005). In addition to these two groups of rather formal elements, the culture aspects represent rather informal elements. Organizational culture refers to the beliefs and norms in the analyzed departments (Rouziès et al. 2005). People aspects relate to the individual skills of the employees in the respective departments (Rouziès et al. 2005). These aspects are the focus of our analysis, as they offer the potential to increase the quality of cooperation and can be controlled by senior management, though changing process and system aspects is likely easier and faster to do than changing culture and people. We explain the aspects within the four groups in detail in section 4. On the right-hand side of *Fig. 1* are the *consequences* of the quality of cooperation between marketing and sales. The respective effects are also mediated and moderated by several variables. The quantitative marketing–sales interface literature addresses two components of *performance*. First, business performance describes the overall performance of a strategic business unit or a firm including market share, profitability, revenue growth and customer satisfaction (Goetz et al. 2013; Homburg and Jensen 2007; Le Meunier-FitzHugh and Piercy 2011). Second, NPD performance captures the overall financial success or, respectively, the market share of product innovations (Ernst et al. 2010; Keszei and Biemans 2016).

Drawing on our framework, we present the research findings in two sections: First, we discuss the relationship between the quality of cooperation and performance. Second, we discuss the influence of the drivers on the quality of cooperation and performance. Before presenting the results, we give a brief overview of the approach of the respective studies.

### 3. Quantitative studies on the marketing–sales interface

All studies we review are based on management surveys. Three data sets were used in more than one study, so that, overall, the 27 studies are based on 17 surveys. [1] All informants within the respective surveys received the same questionnaire, except for one survey, in which the dependent and independent variables were collected from individual respondents (Ernst et al. 2010). The datasets vary by the analyzed country, industries, and respondents’ background. In all, 70 % of the datasets are based on one country, while the rest are international studies. All studies include multiple industries. Specifically, the studies’ researchers interviewed managers from the consumer-packaged goods, automotive and electrical equipment industries as well as telephone and financial services. Three datasets are based on business-to-business (B2B) industries only (Dawes and Massey 2006; Le Meunier-FitzHugh and Piercy 2007; Verhoef and Leeflang 2009), while the other datasets include informants from both B2B and business-to-consumer industries. Twenty of the studies use respondents from both marketing and sales, but they use one pooled sample and do not split personnel between marketing and sales. Three studies consider only respondents from sales departments (Arnett and Wittmann 2014; Dawes and Massey 2005, 2006) and three only respondents from marketing departments (Keszei and Biemans 2016; Massey and Dawes 2007a, 2007b).

The measures of the quality of cooperation vary only slightly and therefore are highly comparable. All studies use reflective multi-item constructs to capture the quality of cooperation, except two, which use a formative multi-item construct (Ernst et al. 2010; Keszei and Biemans 2016). Depending on the study, the constructs comprise between three and twelve items and use Likert scales with five to seven points. The reflective measures ask for agreement with statements such as “Marketing and sales collaborate frictionless/act in concert/coordinate their market-related activities” (Homburg and Jensen 2007, p. 136). “A team spirit pervades sales and marketing/Sales and marketing share the same goals” (Le Meunier-FitzHugh and Massey 2019, p. 1289). “A healthy ‘give and take’ relationship exists between sales and marketing/we always act in the spirit of cooperation” (Rouziès and Hulland 2014, p. 524). The formative constructs measure the extent to which there is cooperation on various tasks, e.g., “Market introduction of the new product (selling, advertising, distribution)/Product training for customers” (Ernst et al. 2010, p. 90). The measures of performance also vary only slightly and all studies use reflective multi-item constructs. The constructs include between four and eight items, depending on the study, and use Likert scales with five to seven points. The extent of customer loyalty and satisfaction, customer acquisition, profits, gain in market share, etc. are measured (e.g., Ernst et al. 2010; Homburg and Jensen 2007; Keszei and Biemans 2016).

Publication	Moderator	Mediator	Success measures	Result
Guenzi and Troilo 2007		Market orientation: +	Business performance	+
Homburg and Jensen 2007			Business performance	+
Le Meunier-FitzHugh and Piercy 2007			Business performance	+
Homburg et al. 2008			Business performance	+
Le Meunier-FitzHugh and Lane 2009		Market orientation: +	Business performance	+
Le Meunier-FitzHugh and Piercy 2009			Business performance	+
Troilo et al. 2009		Market orientation: +	Business performance	n.a.
Le Meunier-FitzHugh and Piercy 2011		Market orientation: +	Business performance	+
Rouziès and Hlland 2014	Customer concentration: +/-		Business performance	+
Le Meunier-FitzHugh and Massey 2019			Business performance	+
Sleep et al. 2018			Business performance	+
Arnett and Wittmann 2014			Business performance	+
Ernst et al. 2010			NPD performance (overall)	+/n.s./+
Ernst et al. 2010			NPD performance (market share)	+/+n.s.
Keszey and Biemans 2016		Customer involvement: +	NPD performance	+

Notes: Independent variable is quality of cooperation. The mediator sign indicates the indirect effect of the quality of cooperation on performance through the mediator. n.a. = not available. n.s. = not significant.

Tab. 1: Relationship between quality of cooperation and performance

To prevent common method bias, four studies also incorporate objective performance data (i.e., EBITDA), in addition to self-reported performance measures (Goetz et al. 2013; Homburg and Jensen 2007; Homburg et al. 2008; Homburg et al. 2012). Ernst et al. (2010) use a matched sample, collecting independent and dependent variables from individual respondents within the respective firm.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. Consequences of the quality of cooperation

Drawing on our conceptual framework, we discuss the relationship between the quality of cooperation and performance. Tab. 1 presents the respective publication, the success measure and the results of the analyzed studies.

Fifteen quantitative studies analyse the relationship between the quality of cooperation and performance. The most researched variable is business performance, which, as noted previously, describes the overall performance of a strategic business unit or firm. All studies find a positive effect of quality of cooperation on performance. Thus, the better the relationship between marketing and sales, the better are the outcomes of their work. As mentioned, the quality of cooperation of the marketing–sales interface and business performance as analyzed in this study consists of slightly different conceptualizations and measures. Regardless of the underlying conceptualization or measure, however, the positive effects of the quality of cooperation are robust.

Two studies analyse the relationship between the quality of cooperation and NPD performance and find that the former is a significant driver of the latter (Ernst et al. 2010; Keszey and Biemans 2016). Ernst et al. (2010) distinguish between three stages for the task of new product development (concept development, product development, and implementation) and measure the overall NPD performance and the subsequent market share of the respective product innovation. Collaboration not only between marketing and R&D but also between marketing and sales is important for product innovation success, especially in the concept development stage, as salespeople know customers best and can ensure that product innovations meet their needs (Ernst et al. 2010).

The respective studies consider two mediators and one moderator. The mediator *market orientation* reflects the extent to which a firm focuses on customers' needs (Guenzi and Troilo 2007). A high quality of cooperation facilitates market orientation, which in turn has a positive impact on business performance. Keszey and Biemans (2016) find that *customer involvement*, which reflects the degree to which sales managers actively integrate customers in the process of NPD, mediates the relationship between the quality of cooperation and NPD performance. A high quality of cooperation facilitates customer involvement, which in turn leads to higher NPD performance. Again, this finding highlights the importance of integrating sales in the NPD process, as the sales unit deals with the customers on the front lines. Regarding the moderator, *customer concentration* is high when only a few customers are responsible for the majority of a



firm's revenue. Rouziès and Hulland (2014) find an effect of customer concentration on the relationship between the quality of cooperation and business performance: When customer concentration is high, a high quality of cooperation has a positive impact on performance with regard to a firms' major customers. However, marketing and sales may both concentrate too much on these customers because of their high quality of cooperation and miss out on other market opportunities (Rouziès and Hulland 2014). Thus, when customer concentration is high, the quality of cooperation has a negative impact on performance with regard to the rest of the market.

As a first result, we conclude that a high quality of cooperation is important for a company's success. Therefore, it is important to get an overview of the drivers influencing the quality of cooperation. In the next section, we discuss how companies should manage the marketing–sales interface to achieve a high quality of cooperation.

## 4.2. Drivers of the quality of cooperation and performance

### 4.2.1. Structural aspects

Drawing on our conceptual framework, we discuss the four groups of drivers separately. As Tab. 2 shows, the structural aspects include *size of the organization*, *location*, *decentralization* and *cross-functional teams*.

*Size of the organization* captures whether the marketing and sales departments are part of a large corporation in terms of revenue and has a positive effect on the quality of cooperation (Dawes and Massey 2005). The results are not completely intuitive in this regard, but Dawes and Massey (2005) argue that employees in large corporations tend to engage less in conflicts because of company-conformist behavior. One might also expect that the larger the organization, the stronger the tendency towards functional silos (Rouziès et al. 2005). This could then lead to more conflicts between departments. However, although this aspect is an interesting finding, it does not offer any practical relevance for improving collaboration between marketing and sales, as the size of the company is given.

The two studies that investigate the effect of *location* (marketing and sales units are located in the same build-

ing or not) do not find an effect on the quality of cooperation. Physical distance does not seem to be an issue, or in other words, physical proximity is not sufficient to improve the quality of cooperation. *Decentralization* means that marketing and sales report to the same director/senior manager; centralization means that the two departments are coordinated at board level (Rouziès et al. 2005). Conceptual work expects a positive relationship between decentralization and the quality of cooperation, as the joint director of marketing and sales could play an integrative role (Rouziès et al. 2005). The results are mixed in this regard: Le Meunier-FitzHugh and Massey (2019) find a small but positive relationship, whereas Le Meunier-FitzHugh and Piercy (2008) and Dawes and Massey (2005) do not. Le Meunier-FitzHugh and Massey (2019) use the same sample, but while Le Meunier-FitzHugh and Piercy (2008) do a t-test between the groups of companies with decentralized and centralized marketing and sales departments, Le Meunier-FitzHugh and Massey (2019) estimate a PLS model and integrate further variables into the model. However, contrary to expectations, decentralization does not seem to have a considerable influence on the quality of cooperation. Through the existence of *cross-functional teams*, cooperation between marketing and sales is regulated, for example, in the form of a fixed cross-functional meeting structure or in the form of project teams (Le Meunier-FitzHugh and Massey 2019). All studies find a positive effect on the quality of cooperation between marketing and sales. Setting up cross-functional meetings or delegating certain tasks to cross-functional project teams, which is easy to implement, can ensure that marketing and sales personnel get to know each other well, share their opinions, discuss critical topics and make decisions together in a structured format (Arnett and Wittmann 2014; Le Meunier-FitzHugh and Massey 2019). The results for the structural aspects indicate that physical and departmental proximity is not particularly helpful for the quality of cooperation. Rather, people need to come together through teamwork.

### 4.2.2. Process and system aspects

The second group of drivers in the conceptual framework is related to processes and systems. These drivers include

Structural aspects	Publication	Effect on	
		QoC	BP
Size of the organization	Dawes and Massey 2005	+	
Location (identical vs. separate building)	Le Meunier-FitzHugh and Piercy 2008	n.s.	
	Le Meunier-FitzHugh and Massey 2019	n.s.	
Decentralization	Dawes and Massey 2005	n.s.	
	Le Meunier-FitzHugh and Piercy 2008	n.s.	n.s.
	Le Meunier-FitzHugh and Massey 2019	+	
Cross-functional teams	Homburg et al. 2008	+	+
	Le Meunier-FitzHugh and Massey 2019	+	

Notes: QoC = quality of cooperation. BP = business performance. n.s. = not significant.

Tab. 2: Relationship between structural aspects and the quality of cooperation and performance

Process/system aspects	Publication	Mediator	Moderator	Effect on	
				QoC	BP
Formalization	Dawes and Massey 2005			+	
	Homburg et al. 2008			+	+
	Arnett and Wittmann 2014			+	
	Keszey and Biemans 2016			+	
Communication frequency	Dawes and Massey 2005			-	
	Massey and Dawes 2007a			n.s.	
Communication quality	Le Meunier-FitzHugh and Piercy 2007			+	
	Massey and Dawes 2007a			+	
	Hulland et al. 2012			+	
	Arnett and Wittmann 2014			+	
Communication bidirectionality	Keszey and Biemans 2016			+	
	Dawes and Massey 2005			+	
Top management support	Massey and Dawes 2007a			+	
	Le Meunier-FitzHugh and Piercy 2007	Inter-functional conflict: +		n.a.	
	Le Meunier-FitzHugh and Lane 2009			+	
	Le Meunier-FitzHugh and Piercy 2009			+	
Reward and goal alignment	Le Meunier-FitzHugh and Piercy 2011	Inter-functional conflict: +		+	
	Arnett and Wittmann 2014			+	
	Homburg et al. 2008			+	+
	Le Meunier-FitzHugh et al. 2011	Inter-functional conflict: n.s.		+	
Job rotation	Rouziès and Hulland 2014			+	
	Sleep et al. 2018			+	
Dispersion of influence (between marketing and sales)	Le Meunier-FitzHugh and Massey 2019	Inter-functional conflict: +		+	
	Troilo et al. 2009			+	
Dispersion of influence (within the firm)	Rouziès and Hulland 2014			+	
	Krohmer et al. 2002		Market dynamism: -		+
Power of marketing department	Homburg et al. 2012		Market dynamism: +		+
	Dawes and Massey 2006			+	
	Verhoef and Leeftang 2009	Market orientation: +			n.s.
	Verhoef et al. 2011				+
Power of sales department	Goetz et al. 2013		Market orientation: +		-
	Homburg et al. 2015				+
	Homburg et al. 2008			-	-
	Goetz et al. 2013		Market orientation: -		n.s.
	Homburg et al. 2015				n.s.

Notes: The mediator sign indicates the indirect effect of the driver on the quality of cooperation/business performance through the mediator. The moderator sign indicates the interaction effect. QoC = quality of cooperation. BP = business performance. n.s. = not significant. n.a. = not available.

Tab. 3: Relationship between process/system aspects and the quality of cooperation and performance

the variables *formalization*, *communication*, *top management support*, *reward and goal alignment*, *job rotation*, *dispersion of influence* and *power of marketing and sales department* (see Tab. 3).

*Formalization* is the degree to which formal rules and procedures govern decisions and the working relationship between the marketing and sales department (Kes-

zey and Biemans 2016). The results indicate that these tight structural linkages between the two departments improve the quality of cooperation and have a positive direct effect on performance.

With respect to communication, researchers have examined the *frequency*, *quality* and *bidirectionality*. Communication has been identified as an important driver of the

quality of cooperation. However, simply increasing the frequency is not enough to achieve better cooperation, as this alone can potentially lead to more conflict (Dawes and Massey 2005). In addition, too much communication (high frequency) may be an indicator that communication between the two departments is inefficient. If both departments are only concerned with communication, other tasks suffer (Rouziès et al. 2005). Massey and Dawes (2007a) find no relationship between frequency and the quality of cooperation, but a positive impact of frequency on the communication quality. This in turn has a positive effect on the quality of cooperation in all analyzed studies. Thus, the quality, not quantity, of communication is crucial. Moreover, communication should be bidirectional. Communication bidirectionality has a positive effect on the quality of cooperation and is defined as “the degree to which communication between marketing managers and sales managers is a two-way process” (Massey and Dawes 2007a, p. 1120). These findings are in line with the findings for cross-functional teams as they are a highly formalized way to ensure bidirectional communication.

All other process and system aspects, except for power of sales, are also positively related to the quality of cooperation. This finding offers several opportunities for senior management to enhance the quality of cooperation, given the relative ease with which process and system aspects can be adjusted. It also helps if *top management supports* the marketing and sales department by ensuring that the activities are well coordinated (Le Meunier-Fitz-Hugh and Piercy 2011). Another driver is *adjusting goals and offering rewards* for joint performance rather than departmental performance (Homburg et al. 2008). Having the opportunity to change positions between the marketing and sales department also has a positive effect on the quality of cooperation. Thus, *job rotation* may be an effective way to better understand the challenges and perspectives of each area (Le Meunier-Fitz-Hugh and Massey 2019). Some studies take into account *inter-functional conflict* (conflict between marketing and sales) as a mediator. The results are intuitive and consistent: Top management support and job rotation are important drivers because they reduce conflicts between marketing and sales, which in turn positively affects the quality of cooperation.

*Dispersion of influence* is the “relative distribution of decision making power between marketing and sales units over market-related decisions” (Troilo et al. 2009, p. 872). Troilo et al. (2009) and Rouziès and Hulland (2014) focus on the dispersion of influence between the two departments and find a positive effect on the quality of cooperation. Krohmer et al. (2002) investigate the effect of dispersion of influence of marketing activities on business performance in general and Homburg et al. (2012) the effect of dispersion of pricing authority in particular. Both studies find a positive main effect of dispersion of influence. In rapidly changing markets (when market dynamism is high), only dispersion of pricing au-

thority still has a positive impact (Homburg et al. 2012; Krohmer et al. 2002). A close concept is the *power of marketing department/power of sales department*. If one department has more power than the other, influence may not be dispersed. In their study, Dawes and Massey (2006) investigate the effect of power of marketing on the quality of cooperation and find a positive relationship. Four studies find a positive effect of power of marketing on business performance. Goetz et al. (2013) show that this positive influence holds only for market-oriented companies. By contrast, other studies find a negative effect of a powerful sales department on the quality of cooperation (Homburg et al. 2008) and a negative effect or no effect on business performance. Thus, balanced power between marketing and sales seems to be the best option for the quality of cooperation. Again, this highlights the importance of top management support, teamwork and aligned goals, all of which help balance power between the departments. With respect to business performance, companies should also try to balance power. However, the exact configuration should also depend heavily on the industry or competitive environment of a particular company (Goetz et al. 2013).

The results for process and system aspects again show the importance of bringing people together, for example, through good communication between the two departments and dispersion of influence.

#### 4.2.3. Culture aspects

The third group of aspects in the conceptual framework is culture. Organizational culture, or the beliefs and norms in the analyzed departments (Rouziès et al. 2005), includes *orientation differences*, *information sharing* and *justice* (see Tab. 4).

*Orientation differences* indicate that the marketing department is more product and long-term oriented and the sales department more customer and short-term-oriented (Homburg and Jensen 2007). The greater the differences, the worse is the quality of cooperation. Notably, orientation differences have a positive direct effect on business performance. Homburg and Jensen (2007) indicate a positive effect if one department focuses on the product and long-term success and the other department focuses on the customer and short-term success. This mechanism even outweighs the indirect effect through quality of cooperation. The authors argue that, in principle, a high quality of cooperation should be aimed for. However, the just mentioned differences between the two departments in terms of orientation are of importance for performance, even though they negatively influence the quality of cooperation. It is therefore apparently a successful strategy if one department at a time advocates the corresponding orientation and thus the right balance can be found between, for example, short-term and long-term perspectives (Homburg and Jensen 2007). Dawes and Massey’s (2005) and Massey and Dawes’s (2007b) results indicate the same effect on quality of cooperation.

Culture aspects	Publication	Mediator	Moderator	Effect on	
				QoC	BP
Orientation differences	Dawes and Massey 2005	Inter-functional trust: -		-	
	Homburg and Jensen 2007			-	+
	Massey and Dawes 2007b			n.a.	
	Le Meunier-FitzHugh and Piercy 2007			+	
Information sharing	Homburg et al. 2008			+	+
	Le Meunier-FitzHugh and Lane 2009			+	
	Le Meunier-FitzHugh and Piercy 2009			+	
Justice	Hulland et al. 2012		Communication quality: +	+	
	Rouziès and Hulland 2014			+	

Notes: The mediator sign indicates the indirect effect of the driver on the quality of cooperation through the mediator. The moderator sign indicates the interaction effect. QoC = quality of cooperation. BP = business performance.

Tab. 4: Relationship between culture aspects and the quality of cooperation and performance

Orientation differences reduce trust between the two departments, which in turn leads to a lower quality of cooperation (Massey and Dawes 2007b).

The second culture aspect is *information sharing*. Companies that establish a culture of sharing information about customers and markets between marketing and sales achieve a higher quality of cooperation. This finding aligns with the findings for cross-functional teams and communication. A third aspect of culture is perceived *justice*. Hulland et al. (2012) define the construct of justice as consisting of distributive justice (fairness of organizational decision outcomes), procedural justice (fairness of organizational policies and procedures) and interactional justice (interpersonal treatment received from employees). They discover that justice is an important driver of the quality of cooperation between the two departments. Thus, managers who treat each other fairly often have a positive working relationship, and if communication quality is high, the effect is even stronger.

#### 4.2.4. People aspects

The fourth group of drivers is people (see Tab. 5). *Competence differences* refer to an unequal distribution of market knowledge, product knowledge and interpersonal skills between marketing and sales personnel (Homburg and Jensen 2007). The greater the differences, the worse

are the quality of cooperation and business performance. *Qualification* incorporates the level of education of managers and their experience in the respective other department. The higher the education of sales managers, the higher is the quality of cooperation (Dawes and Massey 2005). Marketing managers' education shows no significant influence, but it is higher on average and has less variation than that of sales managers (Dawes and Massey 2005; Massey and Dawes 2007b). Experience in the respective other department shows no significant impact. This is unexpected because job rotation has a positive effect on the quality of cooperation and is conceptually close to the variable *experience*. We would expect experience to have a positive effect on the quality of cooperation, as it can help understand the challenges of each department (Rouziès et al. 2005). Formalization, cross-functional teamwork, communication, aligned goals and information sharing may help close knowledge gaps. Nevertheless, these variables highlight the importance of hiring competent personnel.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. Theoretical implications

The management of the marketing–sales interface is an important determinant of company performance. All ex-

People aspects	Publication	Mediator	Effect on	
			QoC	BP
Competence differences	Homburg and Jensen 2007		-	-
	Homburg et al. 2008		-	-
Qualification (college education)	Dawes and Massey 2005	Inter-functional trust: n.s.	+	
	Massey and Dawes 2007b		n.a.	
Qualification (experience)	Dawes and Massey 2005	Inter-functional trust: n.s.	n.s.	
	Massey and Dawes 2007b		n.a.	

Notes: The mediator sign indicates the indirect effect of the driver on the quality of cooperation through the mediator. QoC = quality of cooperation. BP = business performance.

Tab. 5: Relationship between people aspects and the quality of cooperation and performance



amined studies indicate that a working relationship between marketing and sales drives performance. This highlights the importance of creating a high quality of cooperation between marketing and sales. Several studies identify drivers of the quality of cooperation and business performance. We build on the basic structure of the framework of Rouziès et al. (2005) to structure the findings since research followed the proposed framework and investigated a large part of the proposed relationships. In summary, the proposed organization design elements improve the quality of cooperation (e.g., cross-functional teams, reward and goal alignment, and information sharing). At the same time, further drivers have been suggested which complement the framework and show the expected effect (e.g., formalization, top management support, dispersion of influence, and orientation and competence differences). Nevertheless, relationships also remain unclear, such as the effect of location, decentralization, job rotation, and experience of personnel and the role of integrators (Rouziès et al. 2005). The effect of suggested moderators (e.g., environment) also remains unclear (Rouziès et al. 2005). We note that studies generally examine linear relationships, although in some cases more complex relationships seem likely. For example, Rouziès et al. (2005) propose an inverted u-shaped relationship between the amount of communication and quality of cooperation and call for a distinction between formal and informal communication. In addition, complementary effects between the individual drivers are not considered and existing research does not use a consistent theoretical perspective. Thus, we see much room for future research, into areas in which the nature of relationships is less straightforward. In section 6, we therefore develop an agenda to guide future research.

## 5.2. Managerial implications

Managers need to know what they can do to improve the quality of cooperation, and thus this article identifies several drivers. Managers can improve the structure of the working relationship between marketing and sales. While physical and departmental proximity is not particularly helpful in increasing the quality of cooperation, managers should make an effort to get people together through cross-functional teams. This means that senior management should give the communication between marketing and sales a clear structure to enhance its quality and, thus, the quality of cooperation. Doing so can improve information exchange and mutual understanding and reduce conflicts.

The results of the drivers from the process and system aspects also offer several possibilities to enhance the quality of cooperation. The results suggest that formalizing the workflows between marketing and sales leads to better quality of cooperation. Managers can facilitate interaction through good communication between the departments. Care should be taken to ensure that communication is bidirectional, so that, for example, the marketing department does not overwhelm the sales department

with reports and materials while the latter does not respond to them. Also, the right amount of communication should be taken. Too much communication is perhaps a sign of inefficient communication. Working together without conflicts may also be more likely if marketing and sales share the same goals. Managers should consider implementing aligned rewards across the two groups. Targets and incentive systems must therefore be designed in such a way that they encourage cooperation. If marketing and sales can only achieve goals together, it will bring them closer together. Dispersion of influence between marketing and sales managers in terms of making decisions also has a positive impact on the quality of cooperation. In addition, job rotation may help marketing and sales personnel gain a better understanding of the other department's challenges.

The culture of the organization and the competencies of employees also play an important role. Managers should strive to establish a culture of sharing information and fair treatment of colleagues to enhance the quality of cooperation. Changing culture aspects may not be possible or may be more complicated to do in the short run than structural and process and system aspects. However, interdependencies may exist between these groups of aspects. For example, aligned goals and rewards make information sharing more likely, as the two departments can jointly reach goals. Changing the system of cooperation (e.g., adjusting the dispersion of influence, coordinating the communication between the two departments) may also help managers perceive fairness and discuss orientation differences. In the long run, changes of structural and process and system aspects may also change the culture. Competence differences have a negative impact on the quality of cooperation; however, a high quality of cooperation does not mean full integration of the two departments, as differences may also help. For example, orientation differences between the two departments have a positive impact on business performance.

Which mechanisms should managers aiming to improve the quality of cooperation prioritise? Although all are interdependent in some way, we suggest that managers work to change structural and process and system aspects first, as they are easy to implement and have the power to increase quality in short run. The final design and its impact will of course always depend on the unique conditions of an individual company. Nevertheless, the research results so far provide good starting points for improving the quality of cooperation.

## 6. Future research agenda

Despite the findings to date, many questions remain about the organization of the interface between marketing and sales. In this chapter, we set out an agenda for future research. In doing so, we aim to encourage further research in this important area. In our agenda, we distinguish between substantive topics, theory-based topics

and methodological topics. Since much of the research to date has followed the proposed framework by Rouziès et al. (2005), but at the same time some of the relationships described have been neglected and the framework can be reasonably supplemented by further relationships, it also forms the organization of our agenda.

### 6.1. Substantive topics

First, with regard to the drivers of the quality of cooperation, questions remain open. Further studies could clarify the influence of location, job rotation and the experience of personnel in the respective departments, as this was examined only in a relatively small sample of UK-based B2B firms (Le Meunier-FitzHugh and Piercy 2008). Only one of the empirical studies analyzed job rotation, though other studies propose that it is a good mechanism to facilitate cooperation quality (Dewsnap and Jobber 2000; Homburg et al. 2008). Hierarchy and centralization constructs, which are important aspects for other interfaces (e.g., Gupta et al. 1985; Olson et al. 2005), have received scant attention. With regard to communication, studies do not distinguish between formal communication (e.g., regular reports) and informal communication (e.g., unplanned conversations between individual employees). Since these types of communication serve different functions, future studies should distinguish between them (Rouziès et al. 2005).

In addition, we propose further drivers that we consider relevant. We suggest that future research takes a social capital perspective, focusing on social networks within the company and the role of integrators. Besides organization design elements, informal social networks between marketing and sales personnel could also play an important role for the quality of cooperation (Malshe 2011). These networks may form a system of interaction alongside the hierarchical reporting lines and the “official” interfaces between departments. Research could investigate how these networks affect the quality of cooperation. Do they have a greater influence than formal rules of cooperation, if applicable, and can these networks be promoted by management? Integrators are staff members who are specifically assigned to the interface between the two departments (Rouziès et al. 2005). They can have a special role, as they foster contact with another department on the one hand, and on the other hand ensure that information is passed on in their own department, for example. Gonzales and Claro (2019) show how salespeople, as integrators, create links with the marketing department and how this affects their own sales performance. Thus, the quality of the cooperation between the two departments could strongly depend on the integrating role of individual staff members. Research may investigate how integrators can contribute to the quality of cooperation. What qualifications do they need to have (Gonzales and Claro 2019)?

In addition, many companies, especially consumer packaged-goods companies, have established a trade market-

ing function and/or a category management function. These functions act at the interface between marketing and sales, as they provide the sales department with sales materials and key information, for example. Thus, they could have a significant influence on the quality of cooperation between the two departments (Dewsnap and Jobber 2000; Dewsnap and Jobber 2009). We call for quantitative papers that investigate the influence of these functions. Do they improve cooperation and enhance performance or does this kind of intermediary function lead to a greater distance between the core functions of the two departments?

We also see digitalization and new technologies as having consequences for the cooperation between marketing and sales, as this can change the boundaries of the competences of the two departments (Germann et al. 2013). Traditionally, the sales department had unique customer insight. Through e-commerce, among other things, huge amounts of data are available to marketing today, which can be made usable with marketing analytics (Wedel and Kannan 2016). For example, unstructured data such as customer reviews can be analyzed using text mining (Berger et al. 2020).

Marketing is therefore less dependent on sales in this respect. At the same time, two different views on customers can arise, which may lead to conflicts. Future research could therefore investigate how marketing analytics affects collaboration. However, we suppose that the cooperation between marketing and sales alone can also have a decisive influence on the successful use of new technologies. Marketing automation is a significant example. It is defined as “a technology leveraged to improve the effectiveness and efficacy of marketing operations via automated, personalized and analytics-driven activities” (Mero et al. 2020, p. 213). Initial qualitative results indicate that in order to realise the potential of such a technology, collaboration between marketing and sales plays an important role (Mero et al. 2020). Future studies on the introduction of new technologies should include the aspect of cooperation between departments. In principle, this could also lead to new conflicts between the departments, e.g., if one department is overburdened by the other using new technologies. The example of the sales lead black hole shows that organizational control mechanisms are necessary (Sabnis et al. 2013; Van der Borgh et al. 2020).

Due to the corona pandemic, work life as a whole is currently undergoing a change that will probably also have an impact on working after the end of the pandemic. A large proportion of employees work from home, business trips are limited, working hours are becoming more flexible and new digital forms of collaboration are being used. This applies to working life in general, but also specifically to the interface between departments. Some companies may also move to rethink the office in the future, for example by using it only for mandatory face-to-face meetings, but carrying out other activities remotely

and making digital collaboration tools the standard. The impact of such a change on the collaboration between marketing and sales is an interesting starting point for future research.

Second, based on the conceptual framework, the construct of quality of collaboration is the key mediator. We think that research should move beyond the dyadic relationship and also include further mediators. We think that marketing agility should be considered in this context. Nowadays, various developments, such as technological developments or rapidly changing purchasing behavior, make it necessary for companies to adapt more quickly to new market conditions (Kalaighnam et al. 2021). Marketing agility is supposed to make this possible and is defined as “the extent to which an entity rapidly iterates between making sense of the market and executing marketing decisions to adapt to the market” (Kalaighnam et al. 2021, p. 36). Marketing agility therefore introduces a completely new way of working in marketing, which also involves cooperation with other departments. In their research agenda, Kalaighnam et al. (2021) emphasise that flexible structures with a high degree of task-based working in cross-functional teams as well as a high degree of communication between these teams are crucial for marketing agility at the organizational level. Thus, we want to add, that in companies introducing marketing agility, the importance of the quality of cooperation between marketing and sales could become even more important. We call for papers that examine the connection between the quality of cooperation between marketing and sales and the success of marketing agility. How must cooperation be regulated in this new way of working? What are the influencing factors for success? How do you organise an interface between two departments, where marketing works in an agile way and sales in a “classic” way (Kalaighnam et al. 2021)? In some cases, a purely task-based way of working is being considered in this context, in which departmental boundaries almost disappear (Homburg et al. 2020). This also offers approaches for future research.

We also consider it promising to broaden the focus on the marketing–sales interface and to include other departments. This can help to better understand specific phenomena (Ernst et al. 2010). In particular, the inclusion of the IT department seems to make sense to us. The work of marketing and sales is changing due to the technical development towards an ever-greater use of information technologies (IT) (Glazer 1997; Nakata et al. 2011). The use of new tools such as marketing analytics for example can have a positive impact on performance (Germann et al. 2013). In this context, the interface between marketing, sales and IT is also gaining in importance. Results at the c-level suggest that the interface can have an impact on performance and that moderators such as industry and company strategy are important (Nath and Bharadwaj 2020). We suggest that future studies could investigate the extent to which the successful introduction and use of new tools depends on the quality of collaboration be-

tween the three departments. At which levels and in which tasks does cooperation play a crucial role?

Third, Rouziès et al. (2005) proposed moderators, which have received scant research attention. One study analyzes customers (Keszei and Biemans 2016), but environment, competitors and company have not yet been investigated. Especially the role of the environment is an important avenue for future research. Does the quality of cooperation play a role when companies are required to be able to adapt quickly to new market and environmental conditions? Future studies could also systematically compare different industries with each other, as different industries could be important for the marketing–sales interface. For example, consumer packaged goods firms operate their marketing and sales activities fundamentally differently than B2B firms do. However, a systematic test of these differences is necessary to derive implications for industry. In addition, future research could test whether marketing and sales personnel assess the quality of cooperation systematically differently.

We also want to encourage future research to study joint effects between the different groups of drivers. Are complementary effects between groups of drivers to be expected? More precisely, does a culture of shared values and beliefs, which represents a rather informal governance mechanism, complement rather formal governance mechanisms, such as formalization (Vomberg et al. 2020)? Alternatively, one could expect tensions between different groups of drivers, for example because a culture that promotes cooperation makes other governance mechanisms redundant and a combination of both may be detrimental (Schepers et al. 2012). Research on such joint effects in other areas provides evidence for both, which is why we consider this a very interesting avenue for future research (Schepers et al. 2012; Vomberg et al. 2020).

Fourth, previous studies generally examine the relationship between the interface between marketing and sales and performance at the level of the entire department. They do not distinguish between specific tasks (e.g., promotion, branding, market research, sales forecasting) or specific functions (e.g., product management, key account management, market research) within the respective departments. We call for papers that take a closer look at the link between cooperation and performance, such as the study by Ernst et al. (2010). They show at which stage of the new product development process the quality of cooperation between marketing and sales is particularly important for performance. This offers especially valuable starting points for managers to improve the quality of cooperation and performance. So what is the importance of cooperation in other tasks such as developing advertising campaigns and planning promotions? What is the impact of the quality of cooperation between certain functions, e.g., between product management and key account management? We think that such a focus on areas beyond the main effect of quality



of cooperation on performance can generate insightful results.

Research to date has concentrated on the benefits of cooperation and has produced corresponding suggestions for a better organization of the interface. However, little consideration has been given to the costs and effort of such arrangements. Due to a high degree of formalization and many cross-functional meetings, less time is available for the actual core tasks of the employees. Initiating a cultural change between departments or in the entire company requires a lot of effort and can only be realized in the long term. We call for papers that examine this trade-off between costs and benefits.

Fifth, we think an analysis of the boundary conditions and nonlinearities can further advance research on the interface between marketing and sales. For several drivers, studies test for and find linear effects (e.g., more formalization is better, more cross-functional teamwork is better). However, they do not test for limitations or inversions of these results. For example, at some point the departments may fulfil only formal rules without getting anything else done. So what are the limits of formalization in terms of quality of cooperation? What is the right level of cross-functional teamwork? Dawes and Massey (2005), who show that too much communication can lead to potential for conflict, provide a starting point. This would have negative consequences for the quality of cooperation. So what is the right amount of communication? Is there an inverted U-shaped relationship (Rouziès et al. 2005)?

## 6.2. Theory-based topics

We also suggest a theory-based view of the interface between marketing and sales for future studies, as this can generate new research questions. In this section, we propose agency theory and stewardship theory as starting points.

Agency theory examines relationships between a principal and an agent with asymmetric information distribution between the contracting parties (Jensen and Meckling 1976). The agent carries out tasks on behalf of the principal. Due to information asymmetries, the agent can take advantage of the lack of control and behave opportunistically by trying to maximise his own benefit, which is called moral hazard. Extensions of the theory deal with multiple agency relationships (for an overview see Hønen and Kostova 2015). In this case, uncooperative behavior of the marketing and sales employees (agents) would contradict the given goal of the employer (principal) to achieve the best possible business performance. There are numerous agency relationships in the hierarchy of the organization (e.g., senior managers as principals – middle managers as agents, middle managers as principals – lower managers as agents). Given a lack of cooperative behavior, research on the design of agency relations within a company could include the aspect of cooperation between departments. At which level should se-

nior managers strive for marketing and sales cooperation and take appropriate action? Which goal and incentive systems are appropriate for middle managers so that in their dual function (principal and agent) they act as multipliers for cooperation between the departments? Are there conflicts of goals at the level of the principals that stand in the way of promoting cooperative behavior in their own department?

In contrast, there is stewardship theory. The basic assumption of this theory is that organizational participants are intrinsically motivated to achieve their tasks in a pro-organizational manner even without external incentives (Davis et al. 1997). The stewards put collective behavior and cooperation over individualistic, self-interested behavior, even in the case of a choice (Davis et al. 1997). Hernandez (2012) develops a framework that identifies structural factors that promote stewardship behavior, e.g., shared leadership practices, collective responsibility, intrinsic benefit from working, and self-efficacy through employee development. These ideas offer starting points for future studies. Researchers could explore how these factors can be applied to the interface between marketing and sales. Does stewardship make formal rules for cooperation between marketing and sales redundant?

## 6.3. Methodological topics

Only three studies collected objective performance data, and one study used multiple informants to check whether the self-reported performance measures are biased or not (see section 3). Common method bias is a major bias in management studies (MacKenzie and Podsakoff 2012; Malhotra et al. 2017). Future studies could also test for this by collecting independent and dependent variables from different sources. Ernst et al. (2010) show in their study that cooperation effects show different results depending on the performance measure. They measure overall NPD performance, which is a more subjective measure, and market share, which is a more objective measure. This again highlights the importance of the choice of performance measure.

Also, only one study addresses endogeneity, which is a topic of high relevance in research and in practice (Ebbes et al. 2016). Goetz et al. (2013) use a two-stage least squares approach to test for endogeneity problems with regard to reverse causality in the relationship between the power of marketing and market orientation. Some studies claim a causal impact of the quality of cooperation on performance. The quality of cooperation and performance may be influenced by an unobserved variable (e.g., quality of personnel). Successful firms are more attractive and therefore can recruit better managers who may display more cooperative behaviors towards colleagues and generate better business results. The quality of personnel influences both the quality of cooperation and performance. This may also hold for the relationship between communication and the quality of cooperation. Other firm characteristics such as general beliefs or firm



culture also likely affect both drivers and quality of cooperation and thus should be examined in future studies.

## 7. Conclusion

The quality of cooperation between marketing and sales has a significant impact on company performance. This requires good management of the interface between the two departments. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first structured overview of the drivers of the quality of cooperation and business performance. Academic research has identified several drivers of the quality of cooperation, most notably communication quality, formalization, cross-functional teams, reward and goal alignment and orientation and competence differences. At the same time, there are still many open questions regarding the interface between marketing and sales. We develop the conceptual framework of Rouziès et al. (2005) further and identify topics for future research. We hope our research agenda will lead to further studies in this important area.

## Notes

- [1] The three following groups of papers use the same data sets. Group 1: Le Meunier-FitzHugh & Piercy 2007, Le Meunier-FitzHugh & Piercy 2008, Le Meunier-FitzHugh & Lane 2009, Le Meunier-FitzHugh & Piercy 2009, Le Meunier-FitzHugh & Piercy 2011, Le Meunier-FitzHugh et al. 2011 and Le Meunier-FitzHugh & Massey 2019; Group 2: Massey & Dawes 2007a, Massey & Dawes 2007b; Group 3: Hulland et al. 2012, Rouziès & Hulland 2014 and Sleep et al. 2018.

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## Keywords

Marketing–Sales Interface, Marketing–Sales Cooperation, Marketing Organization, Marketing Performance, Business Performance.