Key account buying team members' emotional responses awarding multi-million dollar sales contracts

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Abstract:

Key account sales can have a profound impact on firm success. Our research investigates the decision process of members of key account buying teams during the buying decision process of awarding multi-million dollar sales contracts. Much extant key account literature examines what the salesperson and selling organization should do to win these major accounts, studied from the perspective of the selling organization. We examine the decision process of the members of the key account buying team as they determine which of the companies vying to be awarded these large sales proposals should be awarded the contract. We argue that key account buying team decisions are not simply straight-forward, objective, and rational judgements, but instead also incorporate a wide range of strong emotions elicited during the sales process that impact the decisions of the buying team and that therefore impact the decision of which company should be awarded these multi-million dollar contracts. We argue that members of these key account buying teams experience a broad range of emotions that have a definite role in key account proposal selection, that to-date have not been adequately acknowledged in the . These questions are investigated and a conceptual framework and research propositions are offered.

Keywords: key accounts | strategic accounts | emotions | buying teams | sales performance | qualitative research | sales failure

Article:

1. Introduction

Much extent research focuses on the role of key and/or strategic sales processes (e.g. Boles, Johnston, & Gardner, 1999; Capon, Potter, & Schindler, 2006; Tzempelikos & Gounaris, 2015). There is strong interest in key accounts due to the profound impact key accounts can have in determining firm success (Bradford, Challagalla, Hunter, & Moncrief III, 2012; McDonald, Rogers, & Woodburn, 2000). Much of this research stream examines what the sales team and selling organization should do to win these major sales (Jones, Dixon, Chonko, & Cannon, 2005). Additional studies have focused on the procurement process, examined from the buying firms' perspective (Hunter, Bunn, & Perreault Jr, 2006). Other research has examined the role of emotions in different specific relationships that occur between companies and their suppliers (Andersen & Kumar, 2006; Stuart, Verville, & Taskin, 2011; Valtakoski, 2015).

One area, however, that has not received as much research attention in the key/strategic account environment is research examining the customer perspective (Capon & Senn, 2010; Richards & Jones, 2009), and more specifically the emotional responses of buying team members during the selection process of sales proposals. This viewpoint is crucial to developing a better understanding of those factors that initiate strong emotions and influence the final purchase decision. Thus, the factors that influence key/strategic account decision-making buying team members is a very important but still an under-researched area.

While the issue of emotion in the purchasing process has been the subject of extensive research in the final consumer side of sales and marketing (e.g., Babin, Darden, & Griffin, 1994; Lee, Amir, & Ariely, 2009; Richins, 1997), the role of emotions has received less attention in business-to-business settings (B2B) (Anderson & Narus, 1990; Bagozzi, 2006). In social exchange theory and in much of social psychology, emotions have typically been represented as subsidiary and characteristically undertheorized (Lawler, 2001). Even much of existing exchange theory suggests that individuals are self-interested, but unemotional (Lawler, 2001; Lawler & Thye, 1999).

The current study investigates the decision process of the members of the key account buying team involved in awarding the multi-million dollar contracts as well as the emotional responses of the buying team in order to better understand the factors involved in key account sales and theory relating to it. Our sample includes interviews with buying team members that discuss the sales proposal process with both winning and losing companies. Study results explore the range of emotional responses of key/strategic decision makers to sales proposals presented to buying teams by sales teams. Emotions are captured via semi-structured qualitative interviews following the selection of a multi-million dollar sales proposal. We then examine the behaviors and situations that initiated those emotional responses. In so doing, we respond to a call for "context related research and empirical data on the variety of emotions which both buyers and sellers experience" (Tahtinen & Blois, 2011). Richins (1997) indicates that interpretive and phenomenological approaches may be particularly useful in increasing our knowledge of these facets of consumption experiences. Since it has been suggested that more research on the role of emotion in B2B sales is needed (Bagozzi, 2006), our research seeks to address the emotional responses that can arise during major purchases by key account customers. Further, our research questions lend themselves particularly well to qualitative data collection techniques as well as interpretive data analyses.

Thus, this research utilizes qualitative and naturalistic methods to collect and analyze our data, which is appropriate for several reasons. First, the topic of specific buying team emotions in major account sales is an area that has been under-researched. There is little data to indicate what role emotions play in big-ticket B2B sales proposal purchases. There is also insufficient extant research to justify choosing among various existing scales to quantitatively model the role of emotion in major B2B purchases. Although there are scales that measure emotional constructs such as affective commitments, affective trust, friendship and, so on, in this project we explore the range of self-identified emotions of the buying team members as they progress through the buying process. Thus, these existing scales are not appropriate for the purposes of this research project.

Finally, this research will provide a framework illustrating the key account decision process. We explain how important and prevalent emotional reactions are in key and strategic account decision-making and how they served in the research as indicators of illustrative behaviors, initiating decisions in the buying team. While the impetus for these involuntary emotional reactions may lie in specific behaviors of the key account selling teams they alert us and focus our attention on the importance of emotions in the B2B buying decision process and thus, the cognitive analysis of business purchasers making very large organizational purchases. Lastly, we will also examine the antecedent selling behaviors that initiate these different emotions from purchasing teams while in the process of selecting these sales proposals. We believe that this is important research since there are many differences between selling to purchasing managers and selling to final consumers, due in part to the importance of buying teams in sales awards, making multi-million dollar B2B sales more complicated and nuanced than many sales to the final consumer.

2. Literature review

2.1. Emotions

Emotions are defined in this research as a valanced affective reaction to perceptions of a situation (Clore, Ortony, & Foss, 1987). Emotions have been readily accepted as part of business-to-consumer (b-2-c) selling, where researchers suggest that both decision making, as well as actions, result from emotional responses, and as such the three cannot be meaningfully separated (Tahtinen & Blois, 2011). Business to business sales literature has also examined emotions in many specific areas. Ganesan, Brown, Mariadoss, and Dixon (2010) for example, explore the role of emotions and affective commitment and Dowell, Morrison, Hefferman et al. (2015) examine the role of trust in business relationships. Dwyer, Schurr and Oh (1987), in their seminal paper, examine the role of emotions in developing and maintaining business relationships. However, emotions in the multi-million dollar B2B key accounts area has not received as much research attention.

We cannot ignore the high level of risk involved in many of these big-ticket purchases (McDonald et al., 2000). Thus, purchasing managers often use tools to reduce the emotional tenor of their decisions, employing tools like the multi-attribute model to attempt to objectively compare bids and to reduce or eliminate subjective or emotional decisions. With major purchases the large price of failure makes it imperative that all details of the deal are examined prior to making a decision (Harmon, Conrad, & Brown, 1997; Samli, Grewal, & Mathur, 1988; Sheth, 1973). The issue of risk – which firms typically try to minimize by developing very detailed analyses – involves fear, a very strong emotion. With the large price tag attached to many of these B2B purchase decisions these purchase determinations should be expected to ratchet up the risk and, in turn, the emotional tenor, especially when these buying decisions will almost certainly reflect on the buying team members, and could significantly affect their careers. Since it is acknowledged that emotions are an inseparable component of the B2B purchasing team process, the range of emotions involved should be recognized as such if key/strategic account sales teams are to be given complete information to increase their potential for success (Schmitz, 1995). It is also important to note that emotions are involuntary, and as such, can be strong indictors of the effectiveness of specific behaviors and statements made during the bidding process.

2.2. Key and strategic accounts

Considerable attention has been focused on sales performance as business managers and academe alike strive to better understand how to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the selling process (e.g. Ahearne, MacKenzie, Podsakoff, Mathieu, & Lam, 2010; Friend, Curasi, Boles, & Bellenger, 2014; Roberts, Lapidus, & Chonko, 1994). This is especially true with regards to the critical role buying teams play in contributing to sales volume, profits, and customer satisfaction, and in particular, as they relate to national accounts (Baldauf & Cravens, 2002; Boles, Barksdale Jr., & Johnson, 1996). Many factors have been identified as predicting sales performance success (Churchill Jr, Ford, Hartley, & Walker Jr, 1985; Verbeke, Dietz, & Verwaal, 2011), including: role stress, cognitive aptitude, adaptive selling behaviors, sales-related knowledge, and work engagement. While these findings are based on a meta-analysis, much of the data was drawn from the perspective of the selling firm – not from the individuals actually selecting the winning sales proposal.

Multiple approaches have been suggested and implemented for effective management of very large and important accounts. Some of these focus on selling activities including: asking the correct person the correct questions, identifying various role-players in the buying center, providing clear and exceptional value relative to the competition, adapting to client-specific needs, and, delivering account service beyond customer expectations (Capon et al., 2006; Miller, Heiman, & Tuleja, 1998; Rackham, 1989). Other approaches focus on the organization of the key account management process (Joles, Pilling & Goodwyn 1994; Jones et al., 2005; Tzempelikos & Gounaris, 2015).

2.3. Emotions and sales effectiveness

There is some attention in the B2B literature regarding the potential role that a buyer's emotional reactions and responses can play in determining the outcome of a sales effort. Schmitz (1995) reviewed the circumstances where an industrial buyer would utilize central processing compared to peripheral processing of information utilizing the elaboration likelihood model. Andersen and Kumar (2006) also provide a conceptual review of the role affect could play in B2B sales settings. Tahtinen and Blois (2011) examined the role of emotions in problematic business relationships, and establish the importance of emotions in these troubled on-going B2B partnerships. However, the first two of these papers were conceptual rather than data driven, and the third is does not examine the role of emotions in a sales proposal context. While the role of emotion in interpersonal interaction has been widely recognized (Kumar, 1997; Lawler, 2001), it is less evident in the B2B literature with a few exceptions (i.e., Tahtinen & Blois, 2011; Wood, Boles, & Babin, 2008).

2.4. Emotions and consumption experiences

Emotions are an important component of consumer consumption experiences and of consumer consumption responses (Cohen & Areni, 1991), with their importance firmly established in the consumer behavior literature (Havlena & Holbrook, 1986; Holbrook, Chestnut, Oliva, & Greenleaf, 1984; Richins, 1997). Emotions are also important in B2B consumption experiences. There are, however, substantial differences between the emotions elicited in b-2-c and in those elicited in the B2B environment.

Researchers have found that emotions are context specific so that the emotions that are likely to be felt in one context might not be elicited in another (Richins, 1997). Thus, scales used to measure affective responses to advertising are very different from scales used to assess consumer responses to in-store stimuli (Aaker, Stayman, & Vezina, 1988; Mehrabian & Russell, 1974; Richins, 1997). This suggests that previous emotion measures may be inappropriate when researchers' goal is to better understand the emotions experienced during a specific consumption experience if extant theory offers little in the way of a priori information about the variety and kinds of emotional states that may be relevant to the specific context under investigation (Richins, 1997).

The emotions described in this research are not intended to be a blanket coverage of the emotions elicited during all large sales proposal processes. Instead this research is intended to be a starting point to understand which emotions were elicited from members of the buying teams in the sales contract bidding process and to uncover the antecedent actions and behaviors that seem to generate these feelings and their respective behaviors. This research is also developed to increase the discussion of the role of emotions in B2B sales and to better develop our understanding of the more human side of B2B sales in the key accounts/strategic sales arena.

3. Research method: exploring emotions in key account sales

Purchasing professionals are often described as having technological expertise in the products they have responsibility for purchasing. Corporate purchasing professionals are often depicted as being knowledgeable, professional, rational and methodical in their purchase decisions (Ingram, LaForge, Avila, Schwepker Jr., & Williams, 2015). This seems to indicate that business buyers are for the most part, more technical, totally objective, and thus, unemotional in their purchasing decisions – suggesting that buyers are unemotional and dispassionate while carrying out their professional duties.

Is this an accurate picture of individuals in this position? Do buying teams become emotional when working with suppliers during the bidding process? And, if purchasing team members become emotional at times during the process of selecting a supplier, what emotions do they experience? If they embody a range of emotional responses, what are the emotions they display and what are their activities during the process of responding to multi-million dollar sales proposals that initiate these feelings? What behaviors of sales professionals can elicit the positive emotions and behaviors, and what sales person behaviors should be avoided? Thus, we entered this research project with two research questions. First, we wanted to understand whether buying team members awarding multi-million dollar contracts were in fact, unemotional and objective in the buying process. To understand this, we wanted to understand the range of emotions they described as this process unfolded. And, second, we wanted to also understand the behaviors that occurred during the bidding process that seemed to initiate the feelings of the buying team members.

3.1. The sample

Our exploratory investigation examines emotions described by purchasing professionals (members of their buying teams) employed by 20 different firms as they discuss multi-million dollar sales proposals that were recently presented to them and their firms by Fortune 500 companies who were selling these multi-million dollar contracts and who also sponsored this research. Thus, the selling firms participating in this research are Fortune 500 companies. The purchasing firms are typically large companies, but vary in size and industry type. The range of emotions discussed by these professionals and the sales professionals' behaviors associated with these affective responses form the basis of our analysis. This research examines the success or failure of multi-million-dollar sales proposals during the selection process and looks for consistent patterns in that data associated with sales successes and sales failures of the sales proposals.

Our investigation is derived from a large, rich qualitative data set comprised of interviews with key corporate purchasing decision makers. Multiple key account decision makers within each firm were interviewed to develop a better understanding of consistent factors that determined if the team decided to accept a specific and recent multi-million dollar sales proposal. Informants were probed in-depth to learn what factors played a role in their decision to accept the recent proposal or to accept that of a competitive company instead, and what activities and behaviors seemed to initiate strong emotional responses. At the time of the interviews, that is, the time of the data collection for this research, the sales proposals had been awarded. Although our data set was collected from potential customers of Fortune 500 companies, the organizations bidding on these contracts against the Fortune 500 firms varied in size. Our data set is unique in that it is based on the feelings and experiences of members of buying centers making multi-million dollar decisions. Differing from much of the extant sales literature, our data allows us to understand the nuanced decision-making process of those individuals determining which proposal to accept since our data was collected from these key buying team members and not from the sales people selling these large contracts.

The goals of this exploratory study are consistent with those of naturalistic inquiry, as we are seeking to learn of emergent themes and to better understand the processes involved in the buying decisions of purchasing professionals from key/strategic accounts. Our research provides a novel and advantageous perspective since we examine sales proposal selection from the perspective of the purchasing company, and not from the selling firm's perspective.

3.2. Data collection

All company interviews were conducted individually and over a three-month period. Multiple members of each buying center were interviewed so that we would be able to understand each RFP purchase from the perspectives of multiple buying team members. Each interview was unique, and individuated based on the responses of other members of each buying team, and the specific comments and replies of each individual during the interview. A template of the interview questions is provided. (See Exhibit 1 in Appendix A.) Interviews began with a grand tour question (McCracken, 1988) and the individual specifics of each interview directed relevant follow-up questions and probes.

All interviews were recorded and verbatim transcripts were prepared. The names of the organizations employing both the buying team members as well as the selling team members are identified with pseudonyms to preserve the anonymity of the actual companies and individuals participating in this investigation. Suffice to say, the selling firms involved in this research are well-know, household names, as are many of the companies purchasing these contracts. We greatly appreciate their participation and we steadfastly respect their desire to maintain this information as confidential and proprietary.

3.3. Data analysis

We employ an interpretive procedure in which the transcripts were read carefully, first to develop an impressionistic understanding of each individual company situation described in each interview, and to also create a survey of the emotions and themes that emerged from each transcript (Price, Arnould & Curasi 2000). Transcripts were then re-examined using narrative analysis to develop an understanding of the patterns and themes that emerged across transcripts and across companies that could help structure our understanding of the phenomenon and help us to develop a conceptual framework and associated typology of emotions and initiating behaviors (Curasi, Price, & Arnould, 2004). Our qualitative data can convey richness – describing the contexts and settings for multi-million dollar sales proposals, illustrating the questions and concerns of members of the buying teams during the RFP process in depth, and with a level of understanding not possible with quantitative data. This data can be employed synergistically as an additional level of nuanced understanding when read with associated quantitative research findings.

The transcripts comprising the data set in this investigation were entered into QSR NVivo, a qualitative research software program allowing the research team to search for key themes and ideas, as well as to code, organize, store and structure the data consistent with themes and developing hypotheses as they became evident in the data. Our investigation is a naturalistic research project, permitting our respondents and the emerging themes and patterns to shape and dictate the direction of this investigation. Extent relevant literature streams were explored as topical themes became evident in the data and as patterns emerged. Our research team used standard rigorous qualitative techniques to demonstrate trustworthiness, the equivalent of reliability in quantitative research investigations, as well as employing established techniques explained and widely accepted by naturalistic researchers (Hohenschwert & Geiger, 2015; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Our findings allow our respondents to tell their own stories, employing representative quotes from multiple informants to describe her/his situations and feelings as our results unfold, and our informants illustrate our findings (Beverland & Lindgreen, 2010).

As we reviewed each interview transcript a list of the emotional states identified by informants was complied, and 'Nodes,' or categories summarizing those emotions were developed. Data were captured to both list the emotions initiated, and associated sales team behaviors that generated these emotions from buying teams during the bidding process. As additional informants identified new emotions, additional categorical nodes were added to our maturing list along with the behaviors associated with those emotions.

Additional interview transcripts were then examined for these as well as other emergent emotions. Emotions mentioned that were synonymous with previously listed emotions were grouped together. These emotions were compared with the Consumer Emotion Scale (CSE), grouped together as prepared in previous research (Richins, 1997), and shown in Table 1, listing the nodes of each emotion discussed in the transcripts. Once the emotions from the buying centers of the 20 organizations were documented, the transcripts were then examined for the behaviors that initiated these feelings from the buying teams. Only the self-identified emotions of the buying team members were included in the list of elicited emotions, thus, researcher speculations of the emotional states of the sales team are not included in this research. Interestingly, the conclusions of the bidding companies and the emotions revealed were relatively consistent among the members of each corporate buying team. Our hypotheses are then explained, highlighting where they arose in the findings. And, finally, we offer a conceptual framework of the selection process of these large sales contracts.

Table 1. PROJECT: Key account sales; REPORT ON NODES.

(1)	Buying Company
(1 1)	Buying Company/Purchasing Manager Emotions
(1 1 1)	Buying Company/Purchasing Manager Emotions/Impressed
(1 1 2)	Buying Company/Purchasing Manager Emotions/Shocked
(1 1 3)	Buying Company/Purchasing Manager Emotions/Disappointed
(1 1 4)	Buying Company/Purchasing Manager Emotions/Surprised
(1 1 5)	Buying Company/Purchasing Manager Emotions/Happy
(1 1 6)	Buying Company/Purchasing Manager Emotions/Uncertainty
(1 1 7)	/Buying Company/Purchasing Manager Emotions/Offended
(1 1 8)	/Buying Company/Purchasing Manager Emotions/Frustrated
(1 1 9)	Buying Company/Purchasing Manager Emotions/Confident
(1 1 10)	Buying Company/Purchasing Manager Emotions/Concern
(1 1 11)	Buying Company/Purchasing Manager Emotions/Positive Affect
(1 1 12)	Buying Company/Purchasing Manager Emotions/Values
(1 1 13)	Buying Company/Purchasing Manager Emotions/High Expectations
(1 1 14)	Buying Company/Purchasing Manager Emotions/Stress/Anxiety
(1 1 15)	Buying Company/Purchasing Manager Emotions/Trust
(1 1 16)	Buying Company/Purchasing Manager Emotions/Humiliated
(1 1 17)	/Buying Company/Purchasing Manager Emotions/Humble
(1 1 18)	/Buying Company/Purchasing Manager Emotions/Unresponsive
(1 1 19)	Buying Company/Purchasing Manager Emotions/Relationship Damaged
(1 1 20)	Buying Company/Purchasing Manager Emotions/Expectations
(1 2)	/Buying Company/Communications Issues
(1 3)	/Buying Company/Pricing Issues
(1 4)	Buying Company/Partnership
(1 5)	Buying Company/Buying Teams
(1 6)	Buying Company/Creativity/Innovation
(1 7)	Buying Company/Sales Presentation
(1 8)	Buying Company/Credibility
(1 9)	Buying Company/Deal Maker/Deal Breaker

(1 10)	Buying Company/Brand Name
(1 11)	Buying Company/Competition
(1 12)	Buying Company/Transition
(1 13)	Buying Company/Consider in the Future?
(1 15)	Buying Company/Trust
(2)	Selling Company
(2 1)	Selling Company/Dollar Amount of Sale
(2 2)	Selling Company/Date of Investigation
(2 3)	Selling Company/What Company Does
(2 4)	Selling Company/Incumbent?
(2 4 1)	Selling Company/Incumbent?/Advantages as Incumbent
(2 5)	Selling Company/Win Bid? Why Win or Lose?
(2 6)	Selling Company/Pricing & Profitability Issues
(2 7)	Selling Company/People

4. Findings

Negative emotions seemed to dominate our data, with four emotions discussed that were relatively negative (worry, discontent, anger, and shame), and two emotions (contentment and confidence) that were more positive in nature. We also had the emotions of surprise and expectations that were described in both positive and negative ways, depending on the specific context in which they were discussed. The predominance of negative emotions may be expected since much of the data set was collected from buying center participants that did not select the sales proposals about which they were being interviewed. Examined in this light, the number of positive comments about the losing sales proposal was somewhat unexpected.

Thus, our first proposition offered is:

P1. : B2B Buying team decisions illustrate a wide variety of emotions as the buying team works with key account sales teams during the bidding process when selecting multi-million dollar sales proposals.

The high number of positive feelings about sales proposals that were not accepted, suggests that, overall, the key account sales teams involved in these proposals were still doing a lot of things right. Thus, in some cases although the losing company was not selected, it was because their competitors were simply stronger. In other cases, though, clear mistakes were made with these key accounts that resulted in companies not winning the sales contract. In addition to learning of the emotions generated during the key account sales proposal selection process, another goal of this research project was to develop a better understanding of the behaviors that were associated with these emotions. We will first explain the emotions generated during the sales proposal presentation process, and then we will list antecedent behaviors generated from those emotions. Each emotion is discussed in the order of its prevalence in the data.

4.1. Contentment

The emotion that was mentioned the most was that of feeling impressed which, based on the CES scale, was categorized under the emotion of contentment, with feeling impressed or feeling some form of positive affect mentioned in 16 of the 20 organizations' transcripts. One key account company involved in the financial services industry described the supplier as being "more responsive, honest, forthright and easier to work with than its competitor." The purchasing manager believed that the company was "very easy to work with". In contrast to its competitors, the buyer was "impressed" with the supplier's "responsiveness, quick turnaround of changes" and the company's "open, honest and forthright" sales approach. Providing examples, the purchasing manager said that this supplier did not engage in "last minute changes" or back out of "terms" that were "agreed on already". Furthermore, they did not "play any games" and "stuck to everything" they committed to. This led the financial services company to the assessment that "overall" this supplier was "a lot better to work with" than their competitor. The company representatives also believe that this supplier has superior brand recognition. The purchasing company often found that, in the past, its employees would use this company – which was supposed to only be used as backup supplier – simply because they would think of them first, basically due to this supplier's "higher brand recognition" than the competitor. This extended list of superlatives illustrates that the buying company was impressed with many of the characteristics of the supplier's company, and the things they did right to earn that positive emotional response from the buyer.

In the illustrative statement below, the manager indicates that he was impressed with how the supplier they selected "set the stage for a completely different standard":

> Moderna seemed very engaged with our customers and got very creative in their proposal, literally inside out. They focused the proposal on our customers. That's what really impressed me the most."
>
> (Business Manager)

Positive affect, also falling under the emotion category of contentment in the CES scale, was described by several buying center participants. As a Procurement Manager explained, "I was very impressed by the Williams company and viewed the company in a very positive fashion." 'The Williams team was perceived as doing an excellent job." Williams's lead manager was singled out in glowing terms as being, "professional, thorough, and extremely knowledgeable." … "My organization perceived Williams to have a great operation and product, and rated it second to the company we selected. We would be eager to work with Williams if things don't work out with the company we selected. We would call Williams in a heartbeat." In this situation, the buying team explained Williams didn't do anything wrong during the sales proposal process; instead they simply had very stiff competition and in the end, came in second. This result came up repeatedly in the data, illustrating how competitive the landscape often was with these key account sales proposals.

Multiple company buying teams also discussed being impressed with a supplier that they still did not select, sometimes because they felt they could not afford all of the services offered. One buying company suggested that they were impressed with a potential supplier's client list that was included as part of the sales proposal. The buyer described that client list as impressive, but said it also suggested that with so many prestigious companies on their client list, it signaled this supplier was probably very expensive. A Vice President of Facilities for this organization went on to explain that the client list was a "double-edged sword,"… "impressive in terms of the prestigious associations on the list,” but also sensitizing him to the fact that this supplier may well be out of their price range.

As the Director explained,

> They have some of the most prestigious organizations in the industry as clients. When you look at our organization and you look at those you think that they have money; those are big names. It must be expensive.
>
> (Director)

Although this director was impressed with the client list, it did not serve to strengthen the sales proposal being submitted. In this case, the selling company's proposal was too impressive, causing the purchasing company to feel that they probably could not justify the cost of doing business with that supplier. Thus, we suggest the following proposition:

P2. : Proposals should be developed with a specific client company in mind. Examples of current clients included in sales proposals should be as similar as possible to the demographic characteristics of the client company for whom proposal is developed.

4.2. Discontentment

Feeling discontented, disappointed, uncertain, or unhappy, are referred to as discontentment according the CES scale (Richins, 1997). This was the second most stated emotion from our purchasing managers, occurring in 12 out of the 20 documents in our data set. The disappointment expressed by our buying teams' members was derived from negative experiences prior to and during the bidding process, including: poor execution of the current contract with current suppliers; not investing the time or interest to learn enough about the purchasing company; omitting key components requested in the RFP; sales proposal presentations that lacked enthusiasm or knowledge; promises made in proposals without a clear explanation of how the supplier could fulfill those promises; and, a sales team without the authority to negotiate and make decisions on their own without first getting clearance from their corporate headquarters. The reason mentioned most commonly for their disappointment was poor performance on a current contract initiating the subsequent RFP. Several of our companies went out for bids purely because they grew dissatisfied with their current supplier. The following employee with the title of Corporate Food Service Liaison, explains:

> We had seen the trend of the last few years, of how the program had been running. We wouldn't have been in this position if we thought things were overly effective to begin with. We wouldn't have necessarily gone out to bid if we would have felt completely comfortable with how the things had been running with Princeton Services. (Corp Food Svc Liaison)

The Director of Engineering & Building Services from the same purchasing team explains his disappointment with this supplier:

> They knew that we wanted a quality food service program. I wasn't going to walk into the back every day and tell them that the Coke machine or the bottled water case is empty. I wasn't going to tell them that the signs weren't up. I wasn't going to ask what the plan was to increase from 30% the number of people coming in at lunchtime when the industry says 40% should be coming in. Our supplier is supposed to be a leader in this industry, not me. As a leader, they should be bringing to their client fresh ideas, proposals, thoughts, considerations. This is what they should be thinking about every day. We don't do this, we think about managing the facilities, the real estate, and the corporate services. We expect our vendors to be working with us in partnership and letting us know what is out there in the market. What things might work or what might not work. They are not supposed to sit there and wait for the phone to ring. This has been going on for several years.
>
> (Director Engineering and Building Services)

The buying teams were also disappointed when a company bidding for their business didn't invest enough time or energy to properly learn about their company, its goals, objectives and its vision. For example, Mooncrest didn't feel that Princeton Services made appropriate efforts to understand Mooncrest compared to the other companies that also submitted a bid for their business. Mooncrest felt that there was a "disconnect" between the local and corporate U.S. Princeton teams. Their corporate team did not visit any of Mooncrest's sites, causing Mooncrest to question whether Princeton Services was able to "truly understand their business needs". During its tour of the base plant, too, the Mooncrest management team said that Princeton sales team asked few, if any, questions. This was also interpreted to mean that the deal wasn't very important to Princeton Services and that Princeton Services was not very motivated to understand their company's vision. Mooncrest expected Princeton Service's senior management to "visit and see the environment" given the pending contract size, but only lower level employees visited Mooncrest's sites. Princeton Services was not awarded this contract. Thus, we offer the following proposition:

P3. : Site visits are a part of the bidding process in most multi-million dollar sales proposals. Companies bidding on sales proposals are being evaluated by their participation in site visits, and by their employees' statements and behaviors during the site visits.

a: Companies accepting bids for their RFP's evaluate bidding companies based on the quality of the questions they ask during the site visit, as well as the number of questions asked. The questions asked serve as a signal to the buying team regarding the level of the commitment of the sellers to learn about and dedication to serve the purchasing company.

b: Companies accepting bids for their RFP's evaluate bidding companies based on the number of employees sent to the site visit.

c: Companies accepting bids for their RFP's evaluate bidding companies based on the employees' organizational levels in the company hierarchy of the employees that participate in the site visits, with higher level employees signaling greater motivation on the part of the bidding company.

Our data set included several companies perceived by the purchasing company as simply not spending enough time to get to know their company. One Vice President for Strategic Sourcing explained:

> I would have to say that Princeton Services was not the best in that presentation. If you walk through the café, it's pretty upscale. I don't think the types of products presented and the discussions and strategies were particularly aligned with our company. In the presentation itself, there was not a sense that Princeton Services really understood the requirements of our company, and even the products they brought in were disappointing. This is in comparison to the other two companies that bid [on our contract]. (VP, Strategic Sourcing).

These purchasing companies listened carefully to the types of questions raised during the pre-bid site visits, as a signal indicating the bidder's level of interest and motivation to learn necessary information to be a proficient supplier. The buying companies in turn expected that the more interested companies would prepare a presentation and a sales proposal that reflected their greater knowledge and insight about the purchasing company. Thus, the buying companies often were far more comfortable with the bidder(s) that sent in higher level managers to attend the site visits, and with those company representatives that asked good questions during the site visits.

From Bradford University's perspective, Princeton Services “completely bombed” the meeting with the student advisory committee, causing Princeton Services' elimination during the first round of proposal reviews. Princeton Services' proposal was viewed as “canned”, and centered upon Princeton Services and not the prospect that generated the RFP. Bradford University's executive committee agreed that there was a noticeable lack of enthusiasm in their sales presentation. The advisory committee members attending the sales presentation felt like they were treated with “arrogance”. This was a letdown for Bradford's executive team, as they had very high expectations that Princeton Services would submit a “fabulous” proposal. The Bradford executive team felt that Princeton Services was not interested in identifying their stated requirements or in taking advantage of meeting with students and visiting the facility. As a result, most of the prospect's requirements were not addressed in Princeton Services' proposal. Their interaction with Bradford was not relaxed, and this was viewed to result from Princeton Services not asking good questions and thus not understanding the prospect's specific requirements. Thus, the following propositions are suggested:

P4. : Sales presentations should be energetic and convey the biding company's strong enthusiasm for winning the contract.

a: Knowledge and facts learned about the company during the bidding process should be incorporated into the presentations to reflect this knowledge gained during this period.

b: Higher level managers participating in sales presentations will improve the bidding companies' competitive standing during the sales presentations in the final selection process.

Buying companies also voiced disappointment when they received a sales proposal that omitted key components that were specified in their RFP. As this Business Manager explains,

> "I mean, they did address some requirements, but overall, they missed about 14 of the 16. We were pretty disappointed, because we had higher expectations of them versus what we saw them deliver here. It stood in stark contrast to what I have seen [them do elsewhere]. "
>
> (Business Manager)

The Executive Vice President agreed, "Princeton Services did not completely address all items that were outlined in the RFP document we issued," causing this supplier to be eliminated from the bidding process early on.

Our data also suggest that purchasing managers are disappointed when proposals make big promises without explaining how they expect to meet those service levels. National Shippers did not explain, for example, how they planned to meet a critical requirement of their client's needs. The potential buying company also felt that there were definite inconsistencies between what the top-level executives promised in a previous sales presentation compared to what was promised from the team that would carry out the contracted services, as the vignette below explains:

> "The presentation that was made in response to the RFP and the presentation that we got were totally not in alignment – there was a complete disconnect.. . "The most critical aspect of our business requirements was the need to assure a higher level of control and dependability over the retrieval and transportation of our test material from test administration sites. They were simply not able to demonstrate their ability to effectively meet this need."

As a result, National Shippers, Inc. failed to explain how one of their key requirements could be met, and thus, they were not awarded the contract. It was instead awarded to a much smaller competitor. Thus, the following proposition is suggested:

P5. : Companies bidding on sales proposals should respond to all requests for services listed in the RFP's. Omitting requested points and services significantly weakens the position of that bidding company and may result in that bidding firm being eliminated from consideration.

The emotion of discontent also includes feeling unhappy which was discussed by several of our informants – as the Assistant Vice President for a national hospital chain explains:

> For the maintenance contract we were unhappy with Princeton Services because our customer satisfaction scores for how clean our facilities were perceived to be were very low. We had a tremendous amount of complaints by our senior professionals at a number of our facilities. Not all of our facilities, but at a number of our facilities. The comments were that we were not able to keep the facilities as clean as they needed to be.
>
> (Assistant Vice President)

Our data also reflect that sometimes the buying team decided to not award a bid because they felt that the bidding company would be unhappy with the partnership, and the purchasing company team members were concerned that the bidding company would be disappointed with their profit level from this potential partnership. The following managers for the fast food chain explain:

> Ultimately, the price. I just think that Princeton Services would have not been happy with this piece of business. I think it's better to be a partner in the design stage than a vendor in the other three areas. Princeton could handle this business just fine, but it's not the ideal type of business for them. It could ruin a successfully established relationship in the design of uniforms.
>
> (Operations Services & Programs Manager)

> Absolutely. I would recommend other areas where they could leverage more of their core competencies, however. This would make both companies happier with each other.
>
> (Director Supply Chain Services)

This was an issue that came up repeatedly in the data. Buying team members asked themselves, “What kind of a partnership would this union create?” Buying team members repeatedly discussed the importance of creating partnerships that were mutually beneficial. Thus, the following proposition is suggested:

P6. : Companies bidding on RFP's should emphasize in their proposals that they want to gain that client's business. Any synergies or efficiencies that this additional business would provide should be explained so that the purchasing company understands the bidding companies' desire to obtain the business for which the company is bidding.

4.3. Confidence

Mentioned in 10 of 20 company transcripts was the emotion of confidence, which according to the CES scale includes feeling assurance and having positive expectations. Confidence was a very important component of winning sales proposals, and without it, companies did not stand much chance of winning the sales contract. Buying team members required a feeling of confidence in the winning proposals. Our data suggest that this important component of confidence can be the results of: a strong assurance from the sales team, from a positive history with a supplier, and from in-depth detailed explanations of promises within the proposal. The following statement from a Procurement Manager illustrates how the winning company's responsiveness helped to instill enough confidence in the buying team to win the sale:

> They were very eager and incredibly responsive. They were local, and that helped them. They made sure and communicated that they would do everything and anything in their power to make this program successful. This program would be the cornerstone in their business so they had to be successful at it. They did a very good job in communicating to our team that they were going to take every necessary step to make sure that this program was a success. They gained the confidence of the team that they would make things happen. That was a big plus for them.
>
> (Procurement Manager)

Providing a great deal of detail in sales proposals and sales presentations was also cited as a reason for the buying team to feel confidence in sales proposals. This sometimes provided the buying team with the information to determine confidently whether the supplier would be able to follow up on their promises, illustrated by the following Director of Facility Support:

> When I looked at all of the companies, the main thing I looked at was their systems. I wanted a confidence level that what they would put in place would meet the standards that we expected. I want to make sure they have the infrastructure, the systems, the training to achieve the standards that we expected from them. (Dir. of Facility Support).

Below the same idea is communicated by the Chief Operations Officer of a different company:

> …The detail of the proposal and the savings were greater. It appeared they did a whole lot more in terms of homework and analysis and they shared enough of that with us to make us feel comfortable. No concern in meeting our target. I'm sure Princeton Services did the analysis, [too,] but they didn't provide the analysis on how they would achieve our goals. Moderna outlined very specifically about what they would recommend in each sector and how it will affect the savings and the quality and so on. Also, they (Moderna) had significantly higher savings involved and we believed them to be more accurate than Princeton Service's simply because they had a very detailed analysis to back it up.
> (Chief Operations Officer)

Thus, we suggest the following proposition:

P7. : Companies responding to RFP's should explain in-depth how they will accomplish what they are promising to do to instill confidence and assurance that the bidding company is fully capable of accomplishing the work.

At other times the confidence was generated from a successful partnership history between the buyers and an incumbent supplier that was hard for a non-incumbent to overcome. Many decision makers were very averse to take on the risk of working with a new supplier, as the following Vice President of Dining and Hospitality Services explains:

> Moderna's pre-existing relationship and operating history with our company gave them a distinct edge. It provided a level of comfort that was likely one of the key tipping points toward awarding the contract to Moderna. Even though Princeton Service's "non-traditional" proposal to remit all profits to our company once the financial projections were reached resonated well with the evaluation team, this did not affect the decision. All of the finalists were so close, financially. With a level playing field, that's where the comfort level comes in. Who do we have a comfort level with, and who meets the expectations of our leadership? We didn't have a relationship or track record with Princeton Services… "I don't think Princeton Services missed the mark in any particular one reason. When we got to the final evaluation there was not a big difference in the bottom line. The way we manage the evaluation process, bank leadership just felt it was less risky staying (with Moderna)… [and that it] would be worth staying with the incumbent. This translates directly to comfort level. At the end of the day, all costs being

> equal, it just got into that we retained the incumbent and there was a comfort level. No change.
>
> (Vice President of Dining & Hospitality Services)

Not surprisingly, when the management team loses confidence in a vender it seems to be the kiss of death for that company. It's very hard to win that confidence back once lost. One of the executives describes the system as a "completely ineffective "and "pointless solution." This caused the hospital's management team to completely lose confidence in Princeton Services. They were so dissatisfied with Princeton Service's effectiveness that management at this company decided to bring those functions back into the company. The company's Chief Operating Officer explains:

> There was no competitor that won the contract. We lost our confidence in outsourcing plant maintenance and property management. After the contract expired we have completely moved both areas back in-house. After canceling facilities management with Princeton Services, we have now successfully moved the service in-house.
>
> (Chief Operating Officer)

Thus, being confident about a perspective supplier was very important, and sometimes was key for the purchasing company, and more of a concern than the financials. The Assistant Vice President of Materials for a hospital explains is this way:

> For us it was very simple. It wasn't a big complicated situation. It was just who we felt could clean our facility. We placed importance on the relationship and the ability to execute in order to achieve results. I think from a value perspective, it was not a major issue. The issue was more about who we felt comfortable with and who we believed. It was more an issue about credibility in respect to execution than the actual value from a black and white financial analysis (Assistant Vice President Materials).

Our data illustrate that maintaining the purchasers' confidence is paramount. Medallion Health Services felt that Princeton Services did not maintain the same level of integrity in their relationship after their previous supplier was bought out:

> "We felt like a second-grade customer and lost trust with them. When Princeton Services acquired Assistance Providers, Inc., it lost a lot of on-site employees. This affected the quality of the relationship with the hospital. The relationship was further compromised by a lack of response to phone calls and Princeton's limited executive involvement. Princeton's focus appeared to be on selling and not on meeting the hospital's requirements."
>
> (Chief Operating Officer)

4.4. Surprise

Surprise was mentioned by managers in 5 of the 20 interview transcripts. It was often mentioned in a negative connotation, typically referred to high prices, a lack of innovation in proposals and in what was perceived to be indifference and apathy to concerns raised to current suppliers. The following Director of Engineering and Building Maintenance for a large health care insurance provider explains his surprise over the lack of anything new being offered by a current supplier:

> Something that surprised me most was that Princeton Services didn't give us solutions that were new. Their presentation was about what they have done for the last 28 years. They weren't ready to talk about the future. They wanted to go on their past success and our history together rather than what we were looking for and what could be offered in the future. They didn't understand what we were looking for.. .. They did tell us about an online healthy food tool but that same morning we saw one that was a little bit better than theirs [presented by a competing supplier]. Princeton Services wasn't on top of it enough to know that someone else was already doing it. The team that they put together for us didn't come across like they were going to give us anything new. (Director Engineering & Building Services.)

A consultant hired by Professional Testing Services to solicit and evaluate bids for transportation of their test results also explained his surprise over the price quote for National Shippers, Inc.:

> And when it came to cost, I almost fell off my chair. They were completely out of line! They were 30% more than the other carriers – not even in the ballpark. Maybe they underestimated how badly the other carriers wanted the business, but when I told them how high their prices were, they didn't come back with much lower prices. Their attitude seemed to be "We're high-priced and that's that."
>
> (Consultant)

Managers also voiced surprise when suppliers didn't take advantage of opportunities to learn more about their companies to enhance their ability to put together a more competitive proposal, as the following Manager for Site Services, for a global energy company explains:

> Compared to the other companies, Princeton Services didn't make appropriate efforts to identify Mooncrest's objectives. During its tour of the base plant, Princeton asked few, if any, questions. This gave the impression that Princeton was not interested in understanding Mooncrest's vision. I was somewhat surprised that they didn't ask many questions during the site tour. I don't know that there were obvious questions, but I would think that in terms of understanding what our end objectives were and wanting to understand what our vision was in terms of how we envisioned our service delivery and whatnot, I was surprised that there were very few questions. I know that there was a lot more clarity sought from other proponents than there was from Princeton Services.
>
> (Manager of Site Services)

Some buying center members were surprised at the seeming indifference of some suppliers when concerns were raised about their current service partnership. In some of the company transcripts, it was this perceived indifference that initiated the RFP. The following Chief Operating Officer for a large hospital explains:

> Preventive maintenance was a completely neglected area in our facility. Additionally, the relationship worsened when our VP had a serious falling out with our service

> representative. We tried to escalate the issues to the Regional Vice President and never received a call back. We were not sure of whether he sided with the service representative or simply was not interested. We were surprised, because we have never experienced such an issue with our previous supplier, who was technically the incumbent provider, which was bought out by Princeton Services. I don't think they have a true understanding of our most critical needs. Our previous supplier was always very happy to work with us and learn more about the facility.
>
> (Chief Operating Officer)

Some of our informants said they were shocked with responses they received during the bidding process, as the following manager for a health insurance provider illustrates:

> They copied and pasted our existing contract and that is what they planned to work with. That came across to us as a bit of a shock. Their initial response didn't address anything to do with the service agreement. We responded back that we had provided them with the service agreement and asked for objections and they didn't provide us with any. When we asked them specific questions about the new contract all they did was reference the old contract and offered to agree to the old contract. We are proceeding with the assumption that they agree with this service agreement in its entirety. Princeton then responded back with a cut and paste of the existing contract.
>
> (Corp Food Svc Liaison)

Another buying team member for the organization seemed to sum up the feelings of surprise echoed by the others in the buying team:

> "It goes back to the same old story; they didn't put enough effort into what we were asking for in the new contract." (Director Engineering & Building. Services.)

Thus, the following proposition is offered:

P8. : Sales proposals should be carefully customized for each specific customer. Failing to do so for such large dollar proposals suggests to the buying company that the bidding company is not very interested in their business.

4.5. Worry

According to the CES scale, worry also includes feelings of stress, anxiety, concern, and uncertainty. We found these emotions discussed in 5 out of 20 transcript documents. Worry, concern or anxiety could be caused by any number of incidents, including: awarding a low-profit contract to a current business partner, the small size of a supplier, the lack of experience with a customer like the buyer, and a company that planned to subcontract out some of the work in the sales proposal. The following Procurement Manager discusses his concern over the lack of experience of one of his suppliers:

> The small size of CF can be a detriment. They don't have a ton of experience with companies such as ours. As a matter of fact, their experience is limited. That is a concern.

> We feel that we can get them through most of that. Occasionally, something will pop up and we will think that they should have known but their lack of experience ended up biting us. They have handled some accounts our size, but not a whole lot. We bring some new wrinkles to the party. (Procurement Manager).

A manager from a different firm was concerned about awarding an additional contract to a current supplier because they worried that it would not be profitable enough for the company. They were concerned that it might damage the relationship they already had with that supplier. Interestingly, this came up repeatedly in the data: companies wanted to award contracts to companies that could mutually benefit from the partnership. Many company decision makers were reluctant to award a contract if they didn't think that it would be beneficial enough for the supplier. Thus, if a company is trying to low-ball their bid, it is helpful to the purchasing company for the supplier to explain how the relationship would still be profitable enough for them or beneficial enough for them. One Purchasing Manager explains his apprehension:

> We were concerned that awarding this low-margin contract involving a lot of risk for Princeton Services could damage the good relationship that we have already established with[them] (Purchasing Manager).

The following decision maker discussed his concerns over a less efficient delivery system and the possibility of having to train employees to use a new company and a new software system:

> Our company was concerned that National Shipper's use of independent contractors would negatively reflect upon their company. Platinum Candles believed that National Shippers uses branded independent delivery firms to make deliveries in some areas. This was perceived to impact reliability and consistency of National Shipper's service. They did not overcome this concern. They were not able to sufficiently minimize shipping time due to their inability to electronically transmit package data digitally to Mexican and Canadian customs. This was the "deal breaker."… Additionally, most of Platinum Candles' employees know our current supplier and they naturally don't like change. As a result, resistance to the use of a new software package also naturally played a role against [selecting] National Shippers. (Purchasing Manager).

Our data repeatedly discuss the importance of site visits in being a deciding factor when awarding new contracts. The following Manager discusses how the poor showing on the site visit probably doomed the company from receiving the sales contract:

> We took major points away from Princeton Services for an announced site visit. Not only did the cleanliness of the facilities not "wow" our prospect, a dirty restroom caused then to have significant concerns. On a positive note, Princeton received high marks for having "hard core" documentation that showed how problem areas were being addressed. In contrast, we were impressed by Moderna's (a competitor) site visit, and it had a significant positive impact on the final decision.
>
> (Manager)

We also heard from one buying center team about a perspective supplier that bypassed them and went over their heads, talking to their managers, during the bidding process. This behavior doomed their prospect of winning the bid. The manager explains what transpired:

> … National Shipper's behavior caused our company great concern and was one of the main reasons for their company not being awarded the contract. “Gamesmanship”--- going around me. I don't blame them and I am not agitated, but I can't help but feel a lack of professionalism [on their part]. Given the multi-million dollar size of the pending agreement, our company did not want to be working with someone who is willing to make their potential client's life harder. (Purchasing Manager).

Thus, we suggest the following proposition:

P9. : Key Account Sales Teams should work within the parameters of the buying team members. Going over the head of the buying team by communicating to individuals within the organizations that occupy higher hierarchical levels within the company can hurt their chances of winning the bid.

The data provided several instances of worry and concern when a contractor didn't seem to be able to make decisions without going back to their corporate headquarters. The buying center members viewed the sales professional for National Shippers as lacking decision-making authority, in contrast to their two closest competitors:

> This caused our company to be unsure of what was going on with National Shippers --- whether National Shippers couldn't or didn't want to incorporate what we were asking for in the RFP. This sales person had to continually contact his upper level management before responding to questions from the members of our buying center.
>
> (Manager)

4.6. Anger

We also saw managers self-identify very negative emotions during the bidding process, once again contradicting the idea that the purchasing team makes purely unemotional and cognitively based decisions. According to the CES scale, anger also can be identified by the emotions of offense, frustration, and distrust. We found instances of each of these in the transcripts. Bradford University was vocal about their interactions with how Princeton Services had completely “bombed” their meeting with students. The Corporate Liaison said their constituents were treated with “arrogance”. He was offended by their behavior and he described how disappointed the executive committee was with their presentation and arrogance. The following hospital manager discusses how the behavior of one of his suppliers “endangered” the facility and its customers by its reckless behavior:

> Princeton Services failed to pay bills and compromised our ability to purchase critical equipment to “administer life-sustaining treatments”. Princeton Services purchased supplies locally with invoices issued in the hospital's name. Princeton Services's failure to pay vendors “severely tarnished” the hospital's reputation. This was viewed as

> "inconsiderate, rude, and almost reckless". Most importantly, one hospital was denied credit when attempting to purchase spare parts for a defibrillator. This "endangered" the facility ability to administer life sustaining treatments.
>
> (Hospital Manager)

The following Vice President discusses how he was offended by the behavior of a supplier explaining how instead of answering their questions about the value of their proposed solution, they gave the buying center participants a marketing brochure listing case studies of other hospitals using the proposed solution:

> Unfortunately, the interactions can be best described as pompous and arrogant. Pardon my French, but the guy and the other high-level executive, were real smart asses. They seriously tried to tell me how to run my business and what canned solution is best for me. I tried to respectfully disagree and challenged them with the question about what the full value is to us in the proposed solution. They failed to answer the question. Instead, they showed me a marketing brochure listing case studies of other facilities using the proposed solution. I knew some of the facilities mentioned and know that these facilities not only have a significantly different size, but also some of them did not use Princeton Services anymore. It was kind of funny to be pitched with a solution that is designed for a larger size hospital that's not using the solution anymore (Vice President).

Another buying center member discussed how he felt that one of his suppliers had disclosed what he believed to be proprietary information. This caused the Corporate Food Service Liaison to question the ethics and values, impacting their trust of the perspective supplier:

> Specifically, in Princeton Services' proposal every few pages included customer comment emails that they had received which praised them on the job they had done. That's fine except for the fact that they came through my corporate email system. They didn't ask these people for permission to put their comments in the RFP. It really rubbed me the wrong way. It struck me as a breach of trust and confidence that they took emails that were proprietary to my company and they were reproducing them in this RFP without our prior consent.
>
> (Corp Food Svc Liaison)

Frustration is also a dimension of anger, according to the CES scale, and it too, was an emotion that our informants reported repeatedly in their dealings with potential suppliers during the bidding process. The Business Manager from Bradford University explains:

> Princeton Services did not follow Bradford's repeated direction to focus strictly upon food. The company's continued effort to include other services in the bid further illustrated a lack of understanding of the school's requirements. While Bradford understood Princeton Service's desire to cross sell its services, it was "frustrating" to the school that Princeton Services ignored our repeated direction to focus only upon food. I repeatedly told these guys that we do have a very cost-effective and competent program that we manage to perform this service and we appreciate them being thoughtful of added

> services, but that, in this case, we were not interested in outsourcing that department. The message was apparently not received.
>
> (Business Manager, Bradford University)

Another informant also explained how he was frustrated by one of the bidders for their RFP:

> One of the businesses we've changed at Professional Testing Services is the XY Program – which has been enormously successful with National Shippers, Inc., but it shouldn't have taken the amount of push that it did with National Shippers executives to make it happen. We got an enormous amount of pushback from the National Shippers sales execs on this program and then I finally went to a station manager who told me that it would work and wouldn't be that difficult. It was frustrating that I should have to go to a station manager; that the sales executives wouldn't support it – but this program was a big positive for National Shippers, Inc.
>
> (Purchasing Consultant)

4.7. Shame

According to the CES scale, feelings of shame include both humiliation and embarrassment. Some of our informants talked about feelings of shame during the bidding process, including the following Assistant Vice President of Materials:

> The Chief Operating Officer at Richmond, our biggest facility, told Princeton Services that she had been humiliated by the professional staff again because the facility isn't clean. She asked that Princeton tell her what they need to get the facility clean. I don't feel that we were holding Princeton's feet to the fire. Princeton might have a different story. In the meeting I attended she conveyed that it didn't matter what they needed. She didn't want to go to another professional staff meeting to talk about clinical issues only to hear about how dirty the facility is. Princeton Service's past performance was a concern and had a terrible impact – [and they] just couldn't get the job done” (AVP Materials).

5. Discussion

The role of emotions in key account sales literature has typically been represented as subsidiary and relatively unimportant, with individuals involved in buying center decisions characterized as being relatively objective, technical, and unemotional, in their bid determinations (Bagozzi, 2006). Cognition has been theorized to be far more important than emotions, rendering emotions “epiphenomenal or irrelevant” in these social exchanges (Lawler, 2001, p. 324). Our findings suggest that the role of emotions is very important in large B2B sales, and that a wide array of emotions are often initiated first, and involuntarily, and that cognitions naturally follow the emotions felt by the buying team members.

5.1. Theoretical implications

Our data demonstrate that although individuals involved in multi-million dollar sales proposals have expertise and are certainly making technically informed, relevant and cognitively based decisions, strong emotions also play an important role. Our data supports social exchange theorists who argue that emotions are often immediate, internal, and involuntary. These emotions, in turn, influence the cognitive analysis made by individuals in the buying teams. Thus, informants demonstrated strong emotional reactions to the behaviors of their vendors, which in turn generated cognitive-interpretive processes (Lawler, 2001).

Our findings suggest that within the phases of the B2B buying decision process (Ingram et al., 2015) a range of several specific steps can have a profound impact on the success of the key account team. As outlined in Fig. 1., we find that the site visit, the behaviors, the questions asked, as well as the discussion initiated by the key account selling team, the number of key account sales team members present, and the team members' hierarchical positions within their company can have a strong influence of the emotions and thus the cognitions and decisions of the buying center team members. In addition, we find that each large sales proposal must be customized for every specific key account customer and that the sales team must work within the understood corporate hierarchy of that buying company. How the sales proposal is written, what is included, and an explanation of how each objective will be accomplished can also strengthen the cognitions and thus the acceptance of the proposal presented.

Findings from the current research indicate that there is a real need to include emotions in studies of B2B sales and business buyer behavior. The role of emotions appears to be considerable in weighing competing proposals and in feelings of trust in the supplier going forward. In this investigation we used the self-identified emotional responses to draw attention to specific behaviors of the sales teams. Our investigation results suggest that the emotions that arose during the bidding process are strongly associated with trust, (Wood, Boles, Johnston, & Bellenger, 2008) and as such, can be crucially important factors in key account purchase decisions. We illustrate our empirical findings presented above with the conceptual framework presented in Fig. 1, below.

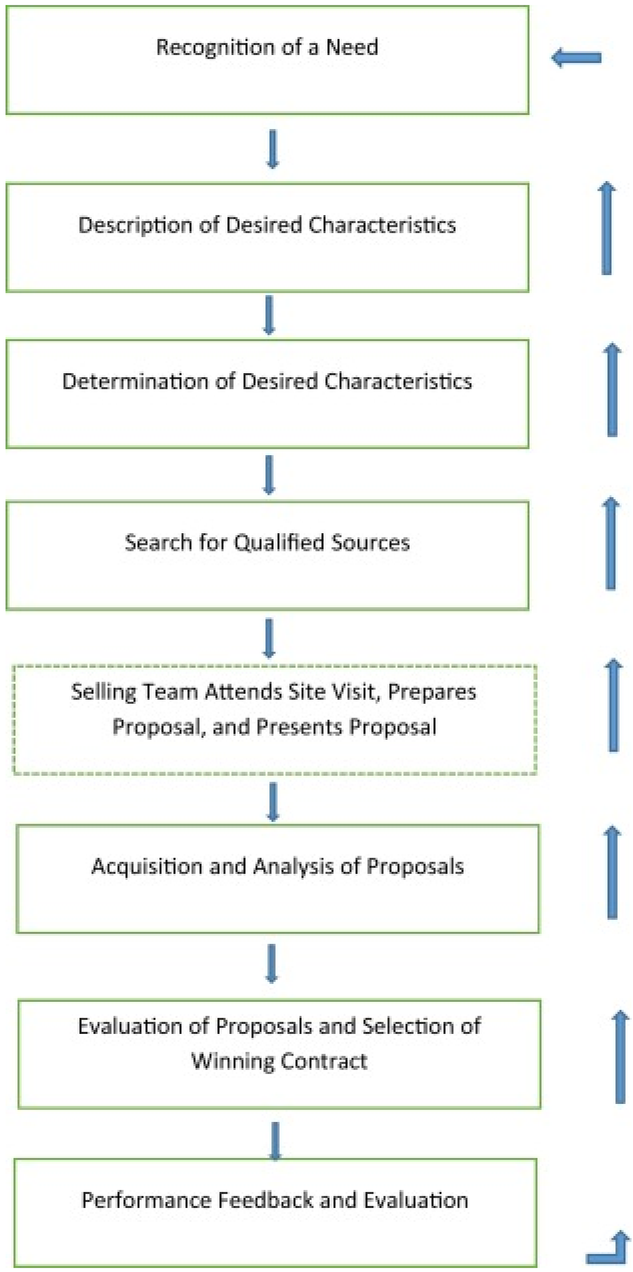

Fig. 1. B2B Buying decision process with recognition of seller's additional proposal preparation phase.

5.2. Managerial implications

We did not find our informants to be dispassionate individuals mechanically and technically selecting the "best" vendor, but instead, they were individuals who cared deeply about their effectiveness, their image within their companies, and their careers. In this research, primarily based on data resulting from lost major sales opportunities, in many instances it is clear what behaviors of the selling company representatives led to the lost sales. We present a list of antecedent behaviors that initiated emotions discussed in this research in Table 2. These emotions in-turn produced cognitive processes that led to behaviors from not supporting specific companies' bids to undermining the bidding process for some firms (See Table 3). Further, our findings document that emotions stimulate cognitive-interpretive processes in B2B multi-million dollar sales (Lawler, 2001) which should be acknowledged.

Table 2. List of emotions elicited from purchasing team members.

Feeling/Emotional state	**Retrieval percent within data set**[a]
Contentment	
Impressed	Retrievals in 13 out of 20 documents; 65%
Positive	Retrievals in 3 out of 20 documents; 15%
Confidence	
Assurance	Retrievals in 8 out of 20 documents; 40%
Positive expectations	Retrievals in 1 out of 1 documents; 5%
Surprise	Retrievals in 4 out of 20 documents; 20%
Worry	
Stressed/Anxiety	Retrievals in 1 out of 20 documents; 5%
Concerned	Retrievals in 1 out of 20 documents; 5%
Uncertain	Retrievals in 1 out of 20 documents; 5%
Discontent	
Disappointed	Retrievals in 10 out of 20 documents; 50%
Uncertain	
Unhappy	Retrievals in 2 out of 20 documents; 10%
Anger	
Frustrated	Retrievals in 2 out of 20 documents; 10%
Offended	Retrievals in 3 out of 20 documents; 15%
Distrust	Retrievals in 2 out of 20 documents; 10%
Shock	Retrievals in 2 out of 20 documents; 10%
Shame	
Humiliated	Retrievals in 1 out of 20 documents; 5%s
Embarrassed	

[a] Although this is a qualitative research investigation and we are in no way suggesting the generalizability of these findings from a relatively small and non-random sample, we have provided percentages of the occurrence of the emotions listed to provide the reader with a reference point for the relative use of each of these emotions within our data set.

Table 3. Emotions and antecedent behaviors.

Contentment
Responsive supplier, quick turn-around with necessary changes;
Open, honest and forthright sales approach;
Superior brand recognition among our employees;
Addressed all stated specifications in RFP;
Asked good questions during pre-proposal visit, addressed all concerns in sales presentation;
On-site employees differentiate supplier from others;
Asked good questions on the site pre-proposal visit;
Included a more senior level team in the sales process;
Focused on satisfying and pleasing our customers;
Added a credible and sincere sustainability component to their proposal;
Aggressively pursuit of our business;
Impressed with the pricing in sales proposal;
Discontentment

Poor Execution of current contract with incumbent supplier;
Not investing enough time or interest to learn enough about the purchasing company;
Omitting requested information in proposals;
Sales proposal presentations that lack enthusiasm or knowledge;
Proposals that lack a clear explanation of how the supplier would fulfill promises;
Sales team that lack authority to negotiate and make decisions;
Confidence
Previous sales contracts well executed, thus creating a positive history;
Strong assurances from the sales team;
In-depth explanations of how promises would be kept within the sales proposals;
Surprise
Very high prices in sales proposals;
Lack of innovation in sales proposals;
Perceived indifference and apathy to purchasing company concerns;
Worry
Awarding a low-profit contract to a current business partner;
Working with a supplier that is, comparatively, a very small company;
A sales proposal with a supplier who will subcontract some of work specified;
Anger
Using proprietary information in sales proposal without permission;
Supplier's continued push to cross sell services/products were not wanted/needed;
Being forced to go over the salesman's head in their corporation to have request fulfilled;
Receiving a 'canned presentation' for a multi-million dollar sales contract;
Supplier made purchases in purchasing company's name and failed to pay for supplies affecting purchaser's reputation and credit in company's business territory;
Interactions with sales team that were described as arrogant and pompous;
Providing buying team with a sales brochure when the solutions offered is challenged;
Being told by sales team how to "run my business"
Shame
Poor execution of contract that reflects negatively on buying center, purchasing manager, and/or management

First and foremost, we highlight the importance of the site visit prior to submitting a sales proposal. The sales teams' behaviors and questions, as well as the number of company representatives, and their positions within their corporate hierarchy were also of importance and noted during the bidding process. The response to the RFP was also crucial, with purchasing companies irritated when stated objectives were omitted, and when they perceived that the proposal was not customized for their specific organization. They also disliked it when bidding companies included a discussion for bidding on services and products not included in the RFP.

When unleashed, emotions can stimulate a cognitive process and an associated attribution process as purchasing company representatives seek to understand the causes of their felt emotions and to initiate cognitive analysis suggesting the resulting behaviors. The attribution process can thus hinder or help companies competing to win a key or strategic account contract. Our results suggest that the role of emotions in key account sales should be understood and accounted for in practice and in theory. Assuming that buying-center participants are purely objective, rational, and unemotional actors will result in less than optimum results, and lower explanatory powers in theoretic models.

Overall, our findings suggest that the emotions felt and discussed by research participants were almost always related to cognition and then attribution processes, which ultimately related to the buying center participant's feelings of whether they should trust a perspective supplier. The linking of emotions and the antecedent selling/supplier behaviors provides some clear evidence of how sales teams can avoid generating negative emotions among these major customers.

Our data suggests that emotions serve as a mediator, impacting trust in many cases. If trust is high for all perspective suppliers for these multi-million dollar contracts, then technical, rational, and unemotional techniques are employed to determine the best supplier for a given contract. However, this data also conversely suggests that if these emotions lead to cognitions and negative attributions, then instead, one or more suppliers are eliminated because the resulting trust with them is low, or is lost completely. Illustrating this, one of our informant companies went so far as to bring a contract back under the control of their company, instead of contracting that service out to a supplier. They lost trust in the supplier that had won the previous contract, and the purchasing company did not trust the perspective suppliers enough to risk awarding another contract.

5.3. Limitations and future directions

This research is based on data from members of 20 different buying teams and the teams selling these contracts assembled from Fortune 500 companies that served as our informants. They were interviewed regarding multi-million dollar sales contracts that were awarded. As such, this is a qualitative investigation, based on an in-depth analysis of a relatively small sample of individual companies and multiple buying center participants. Thus, we are not suggesting that this is an exhaustive list of all of the emotions encountered by members of buying teams when selecting multi-million dollar contracts. Further, we are not suggesting that our results can be generalized to a larger population, since we did not employ a large random sample in conducting this research. Any numerical representation discussed in this project is provided solely to provide the readers with some idea of the prevalence of the findings in our sample.

Instead our data suggest that there is a strong emotional component to key account B2B purchase decisions, which has not been explicitly acknowledged or examined in the key account sales process literature to date. A preponderance of the literature treats buying teams, and their decisions, as if these contracts were awarded through a completely objective and emotionless process. We suggest that this is not the case. Simple and possibly innocent acts of indifference, arrogance, or circumventing the company's organizational charts may seem innocuous if using a purely objective or rational calculus. However, in an actual buying situation with individuals making the final decisions, emotions play a role, and can sometimes lead to contract awards that a purely objective calculous would not have selected.

Appendix A. Exhibit 1 Interview guide

I appreciate you taking the time today to discuss your perceptions, beliefs and findings related to your recent request for proposals. I have reviewed that proposal and I'd like to better understand what transpired during the sales proposal process, from initial contact until the contract was awarded.

1. What were your team's needs and expectations for this contract?
2. Who were the individuals that were a part of the buying team?
3. Who was responsible for making the final decision?
4. How important was the price of this contract?
5. How relevant were the service components of this contract?
6. How relevant were the response levels to this contract?
7. How effective do you feel the Sales Team was? Please explain.
8. Please tell me about the different companies that were competing for this contract.
9. Please tell me about the performance of the different companies bidding on this contract.
10. Please explain the Value Proposition of the companies bidding on this contract. What were their strengths and weaknesses?
11. What factors turned out to be especially important in the decision to award this contract?
12. Please tell me how this decision was made.

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