



Customer involvement in new product development in B2B: The role of sales

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ABSTRACT

Developing new products, and customer involvement in the process, have been frequent topics in the management literature. Focusing on the benefits and risks of customer involvement, prior research mostly black-boxed the process through which customers are involved. Little has been reported on the activities and timing related to customer involvement in new product development (NPD), and the literature provides limited guidance for how to orchestrate customers' involvement. Building on a longitudinal case study of the development of a new product over five years, we offer a comprehensive model of customer involvement in the NPD process, and elaborate on the role of sales in customer involvement. The contribution of this paper is threefold: first, we develop the concept of customer involvement as a pattern of interactions at the interface of the customer and supplier organizations. Second, we posit that NPD in a B2B context is an iterative process consisting of various parallel sub-processes. Third, we demonstrate that in a B2B context, sales function plays a central part in interfacing the supplier and customer organizations. Based on our findings we identify organizational capabilities critical for developing an effective customer-supplier interface.