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Developing Instrument for Micro-Skills of Selling for Sales Professionals in the Thai Petrochemical Industry

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Abstract

Sales professionals play an important role in securing revenue and continued profitability for any industry. This research aimed to develop a scale for micro-skills in selling that contains research-based items specifically for sales professionals in Thai petrochemical industries. An exploratory sequential mixed-methods design was used for the development of the scale. In the first part of the qualitative phase, data were gathered through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 10 experienced sales professionals to explore the main factors of micro-skills for selling. Five primary themes were identified through thematic analysis. Then the results of the qualitative phase were used to develop an instrument. In the quantitative phase, the micro-skills of selling scale, with 23 items measured on a 5-point Likert scale, was administered to 250 petrochemical industry sales professionals in Thailand. The quantitative data were analyzed by multivariate statistics and exploratory factor analysis (EFA). The implication of this study is that it would enhance knowledge about micro-skills of selling, which are accountable factors for the sales professionals' performance in the petrochemical industries in Thailand.

Keywords: micro-skills of selling, exploratory sequential mixed method research, measurement instrument, Thailand.

JEL Classifications: L1; L65; M31; Y4

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1. Introduction

The petrochemical industry is one of the major industries in the world, especially in Thailand, and petrochemical product prices have historically changed in a cyclic pattern (Khanunthong, 2020). Petrochemical complexes (production units) usually receive continued investment from the petroleum industry (Khanunthong, 2020). The petrochemical industries use petroleum products as feedstocks or raw materials in the production of final petrochemical products, typically referred to in the industry as the downstream petrochemical industry, which is a part of the petrochemical industries. The products from the downstream petrochemicals industry are the raw materials and important basic materials for other industries, i.e., packaging, automobiles, electronics, construction, etc. (Khanunthong, 2020). The petrochemical market is a large market that is connected globally; therefore, petrochemical product prices, including downstream petrochemical product prices, have historically been determined by global supply and demand, including production costs, as they relate to the concept of Laggard-driven pricing. To survive in a competitive market and still achieve a profitable business while selling at high prices in an oversupply situation, salespeople assume an important role in maintaining revenue and continued profitability for businesses, including the petrochemical industries. Besides, customers expect salespeople to be more knowledgeable, respond faster, and provide value-added, customized solutions to their problems (Jones et al., 2005, as cited in Ricks et al., 2008). Therefore, to understand the wants and needs of customers and also persuade or lead them to buy appropriately, the micro-skills of selling are essential, which include listening, questioning, and presentation skills.

The industry faces increasing challenges, i.e., the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, advancing technological development, pricing fluctuations as a result of myriad market mechanisms, expanding complexity of competitive advantages, and improved customer experiences that lead to sophisticated customer expectations. Customers demand faster and smarter responses, contemplate value-added or customized solutions calculated to solve their unique specifications, and seize new opportunities from more knowledgeable salespeople (Jones et al., 2005). These salespeople need to know more about and have a closer, more durable, and more sustainable relationship with their customers in a normal environment. With the COVID-19 pandemic, the “new normal” environment has been practiced everywhere, including the business world. Ray (2020) indicated that non-face-to-face communication with supplier organizations is becoming a preference for customers. However, the sales process still carries on; salespeople need to provide services and sustain the relationship with their customers through digital means with even more critical listening, questioning, and presentation skills (Rangarajan et al., 2021). Hence, salespeople not only change their roles from the past substantially, but they also need to develop themselves to respond quickly to all changes (Ricks et al., 2008).

Selling is an example of persuasion that almost everyone experiences (Sternberg & Horvath, 1999). Selling is to persuade by adjusting the beliefs, attitudes, and behavior of others (Sternberg & Horvath, 1999). People’s desires are typically prioritized by their wants and needs. These wants and needs build up internally and cause people to wish to buy products or services. People also buy for both practical (rational) and psychological (emotional) reasons (Futrell, 2011). Therefore, salespeople require translatable skills, qualifications, and knowledge, in order to understand the specific specifications, emotional wants, and practical needs of customers and persuade and anticipate how to

lead customers to buy appropriately. For example, fundamental questioning skills are designed to not only ask customers the obvious but also do the "probing and insightful questioning that uncovers their buying situation and needs" (Shoemaker & Johlke, 2002). Effective listening for fact-finding from customers or buyers has been agreed upon among industrial salespeople as the most important skill needed to be successful (Shepherd et al., 1997). On the contrary, sales executives agree that poor listening skills are the most important factor contributing to salespeople's failure (Shepherd et al., 1997). Sales presentation skills relate to the selling process, in which salespeople need to engage with, persuade, or influence customers (Johlke, 2006). Both salespeople (Chonko et al., 1993) and sales managers (Peterson & Smith, 1995) report that sales presentation skills are necessary for sales success. In other words, sales skills or sales competencies are the accountable factors for the salespeople's performance (Punwatkar & Varghese, 2014).

Interpersonal skills, salesmanship skills, and technical skills are the three main components of selling skills (Ford et al., 1987, as cited in Rentz et al., 2002). A meta-analysis conducted by Churchill et al. (1985, as cited in Rentz et al., 2002) discovered that much research has been focused on two primary areas of selling skills: the micro-skills stream and the macro-skills stream.

An evaluation and synthesis of the relevant literature on the micro-skills of selling identified several areas that should contribute to overall selling skills. For example, salesperson cues and questioning (Stafford, 1996; Whittler, 1994; Schuster & Danes, 1986, as cited in Rentz et al., 2002) or listening skills (Comer & Drollinger, 1999; Castleberry & Shepherd, 1993, as cited in Rentz et al., 2002) are posited as being representative of overall selling skills. Similarly, presenting the sales message or knowing how to make a presentation to customers has been captured in the second dimension of selling skills —salesmanship skills (Ford et al., 1987, as cited in Rentz et al., 2002). The micro-skills stream of research has focused on individual sales skills, for example, listening skills or interpersonal listening skills, questioning skills, and presentation skills.

Surprisingly, there is a quite limited measure of micro-skills in selling such as listening, questioning, and presentation skills for salespeople that contain a "more practical" number of items. The available scales are for three main selling skills dimensions, which measure general interpersonal skills more than sales-related actions (Rentz et al., 2002) or specific skills such as listening (Ramsey & Sohi, 1997; Castleberry et al., 1999; Drollinger et al., 2006), and presentation skills (Inamizu et al., 2017; Johlke, 2006), all of which contain quite a number of items.

By using exploratory sequential mixed methods, information on micro-skills of selling from salespeople in the petrochemical industries in Thailand was obtained to better understand their actions. Before the device is administered, this design aims to include developmental variables tailored to the specific study population (Creswell, 2018). Exploratory sequential mixed methods begin by examining qualitative data and analysis, followed by the development of the traits to be tested. In the quantitative phase, create new survey instruments, experimental procedures, or variables to test this feather (Creswell, 2018). In the development and administration of new survey instruments, exploratory sequential designs are frequently used (Munce et al., 2021).

Addressing the dearth of analysis in the study of sales skills for salespeople in the petrochemical industries for developing measures of micro-skills of selling such as listening, questioning, and presentation skills that contain a more practical number of items, this study focuses on constructing micro-skills of selling scale for sales professionals. The main objectives of the study are (1) to explore the meaning and

identify factors of micro-skills of selling and (2) to develop micro-skills of selling scale for petrochemical industry sales professionals in Thailand.

2. Review of Literature

The roles of salespeople can vary from company to company, business to business, or industry to industry (Futrell, 2011). Futrell (2011) proposed nine of the most important job functions for professional salespeople as follows: 1. creates new customers. 2. sells more to existing customers. 3. builds long-term relationships with customers. 4. solves customers' problems. 5. provides service to customers. 6. helps customers resell products to their customers. 7. helps customers use products after purchase. 8. builds goodwill with customers. 9. provides the company with market information. Not only are there nine important job functions for professional salespeople that they have to perform, but to compete in this "cutthroat" market such as the petrochemical market and still be a profitable business while selling at lower prices in an oversupply situation, salespeople assume the important role of, at least, maintaining revenue and continued profitability through their sales skills. These salespeople need to know more about and have a closer, more durable, and more sustainable relationship with their customers. Hence, salespeople need to develop themselves to respond quickly to all changes. Therefore, the skills and knowledge of salespeople are crucial for understanding customers' needs and enticing customers to buy appropriately. In order to understand the wants and needs of customers and also persuade customers, the micro-skills of selling are essential, which include listening, questioning, and presentation skills.

If salespeople are to plan and execute a sales call successfully, they must first master certain fundamental selling skills—the skills that form the foundation for everything salespeople do in their careers. The steps that make up the sales process represent fundamental selling skills (Manning et al., 2012). In most cases, the sales process includes the following activities (Manning et al., 2012): 1. Approach 2. Need discovery 3. Presentation 4. Negotiation 5. Close 6. Servicing the sale. This is similar to the sales study results in Japan, which indicate that there are five steps in the sales process (Inamizu et al., 2017): 1. Preparation 2. Approach 3. Interview 4. Presentation and 5. Closing. The sales process, at each step, clearly represents fundamental selling skills (e.g., listening, questioning, presentation), as well as more complex processes such as negotiation skills.

Successful selling requires salespeople to become more capable and be prepared for the challenges of the business environment. Acquiring conceptual, human, and technical skills is necessary for salespeople to be successful (Futrell, 2011). Professional selling is defined as the personal presentations by an organization's sales force or salespeople for engaging customers, making sales, and building customer relationships (Kotler et al., 2018).

The definition of selling skills describes two general types relevant to professional salespeople: (1) Vocational skills (2) Sales presentation skills, which are related to effectively conducting the personal selling process. (Churchill et al., 1997, as cited in Johlke, 2006)

Selling skills comprise three distinct components (Ford et al., 1987, as cited in Rentz et al., 2002). 1. Interpersonal skills 2. Salesmanship skills 3. Technical skills. Since the meta-analysis, a considerable amount of research has focused on two primary areas of specific aspects of selling skills: the micro-skills stream and the macro-skills

stream (the three distinct components of selling skills) (Churchill et al., 1985, as cited in Rentz et al., 2002)

A review and synthesis of the relevant literature on the micro-skills of selling identified several areas that could contribute to overall selling skills. For example, communication style (William et al., 1990, as cited in Rentz et al., 2002) salesperson cues, questioning (Stafford, 1996; Whittler, 1994; Schuster & Danes, 1986, as cited in Rentz et al., 2002), or listening skills (Comer & Drollinger, 1999; Castleberry & Shepherd, 1993, as cited in Rentz et al., 2002) are posited as being representative of overall selling skills. Similarly, presenting the sales message or knowing how to make a presentation to customers has been captured in the second dimension of selling skills — salesmanship skills (Ford et al., 1987, as cited in Rentz et al., 2002). Furthermore, the recent research findings showed that 110 sales skills, including listening skills, questioning skills, and presentation skills, were important to a salesperson's success (Razmak et al., 2022). The micro-skills stream of research has focused on individual sales skills, for example, listening skills or interpersonal listening skills, questioning skills, and presentation skills.

Rentz et al. (2002) proposed and tested a scale incorporating three main selling skill dimensions, which consisted of micro-skills of selling and identified several areas (e.g., listening skills, questioning skills, etc.) that could contribute to overall selling skills: (1) "interpersonal skills" (e.g., verbal and non-verbal communication proficiency); (2) "salesmanship skills" (e.g., sales presentation abilities); and (3) "technical skills" (e.g., the salesperson's knowledge of the technical capabilities and features of his/her products and product portfolio) (Rentz et al., 2002). The final questionnaire, which is the self-rated one, included fifteen items covering the three components. The items were a Likert-type response format (l=highly unskilled to 7=highly skilled) (Rentz et al., 2002).

Listening skills have been recognized as a crucial basic skill, especially the importance of effective listening for a business-to-business sales position (Shepherd et al., 1997). Interpersonal listening has been defined as the "cognitive process of actively sensing, interpreting, evaluating, and responding to the verbal and nonverbal messages of present or potential customers in the selling context" (Castleberry & Shepherd, 1993). Active empathetic listening was proposed as a means by which salespeople establish good communication skills, developing trust and mutually beneficial relationships with customers (Drollinger & Comer, 2013). This aligns with the definition of listening as "the selective process of attending to, hearing, understanding, and remembering aural symbols, by which listening is judged one of the communication skills that are significant to direct sellers in achieving their sales goals" (Omar, 2017).

Listening skills in this research are the ability to accurately receive and interpret messages in the sales communication process with customers. There are several studies regarding the importance of listening skills in the context of selling. Castleberry and Shepherd's research concluded a positive relationship between listening skills and sales performance (Rentz et al., 2002). Effective listening that extracts facts from the customer or buyer has been agreed upon among industrial salespeople as the most important skill needed to be successful (Shepherd et al., 1997). Research has also indicated that active listening improves sales performance (Arndt et al., 2018). Active empathetic listening, defined as listening practiced by salespeople in which active listening is combined with empathy to achieve a higher form of listening, was proposed as an antecedent to a salesperson's communication skills, impacting the quality of the relationship between the buyer and seller and their mutual ability to build trust (Drollinger & Comer, 2013). A result from another study suggests customers assess the attentiveness of sellers' listening skills by observation of body language and signals of

inattentive visual communication (Omar, 2017). Furthermore, more recent research indicates that customer-oriented salespeople express their care toward customers through listening and salesperson relationships, and sales performance is driven by listening through direct and mediated mechanisms (Itani et al., 2019). In addition to that, other research results show that adaptive selling, listening, and communication by salespeople, influence salespeople's behavior and create value with their customers (Alnakhli et al., 2021).

In the sales research field, the listening skills measurement instrument in the sales context has been developed and adopted from "*salesperson listening*" (Ramsey & Sohi, 1997, p. 128), "*interpersonal listening in personal selling*" (Castleberry et al., 1999, p. 32); and "*active empathetic listening*" (Drollinger et al., 2006, p. 162). All three instruments have been utilized to determine the dimensions of listening in a sales context, specifically, the salesperson's ability to demonstrate listening skills in customer-salesperson interaction. The scales were arrayed on both 5-point Likert scales (Castleberry et al., 1999) and 7-point Likert scales (Drollinger et al., 2006) (Ramsey & Sohi, 1997).

The salesperson's questioning skill is "the ability to ask customers probing and insightful questions that uncover their buying situation and needs" (Shoemaker & Johlke, 2002). The natural corollary to insightful questioning is effective listening, therefore, questioning skills have also been defined as a key component of active listening in the response stage of the selling process (Drollinger & Comer, 2013). Hence, questioning skill is the action of asking customers questions in order to explore an issue, an idea, or something intriguing effectively. Several studies have been done regarding the importance of questioning skills in sales. Both salespeople and sales managers emphasized the importance of having listening skills, the ability to ask questions, and engaging in dialogue with the customer (Koponen et al., 2019). Acquiring facts from a specific customer or buyer is agreed upon among industrial salespeople as the most important skill required for success (Shepherd et al., 1997). Research has shown that questioning also improves customers' purchase intentions (Arndt et al., 2018). The ability to ask pertinent questions to understand the situation and the customer's needs actually plays a role that results in greater sales performance (Sugiyarti, 2018).

Sales researchers have developed scales to measure questioning skills in the sales context by either following a procedure commonly used to develop sales-related scales (Shoemaker & Johlke, 2002) or developing from the interviewing expert results (Inamizu et al., 2017). Both questioning skills measurement items utilized 7-point Likert scales (Shoemaker & Johlke, 2002) (Inamizu et al., 2017), which measure the salesperson's ability to ask questions in the customer/salesperson interaction or customer interviewing phase.

Sales presentation skills are related to the selling process, which salespeople need to engage with to persuade or influence customers (Johlke, 2006). The sales presentation acts as the "main body" of the sales call (Moncrief & Marshall, 2005). Hence, sales presentation skills are the actions of presenting information about a product or service that attempt to persuade customers by using a planned sales presentation strategy for a product or service designed to initiate and close a sale of that product or service. Several studies showed that both salespeople (Chonko et al., 1993) and sales managers (Peterson & Smith, 1995) reported that sales presentation skills are necessary for sales success. Furthermore, the salesmanship dimension —sales presentation abilities — was found to be the principal set of skills that leads to greater sales performance (Wachner et al., 2009). This aligns with the results from the study of developing soft skill training for salespersons to increase total sales, which indicated presentation skills are among the

several factors that influence the level of salespersons' sales (Mardatillah et al., 2018). Research on developing a conceptual model of sales force performance targeted an empirical examination of the effects of presentation skills, questioning skills, and adaptation skills on selling skills. The study suggests a focus on sales training to develop and improve presentation skills will influence sales success and establish better relationships with customers in the future (Sugiyarti, 2018). More recent research suggests that aspects of B2B seller skills —i.e. interpersonal presentation and communication skills, degree of adaptiveness regarding abilities to modify sales approach and sales behavior, selling-related knowledge about customers and product/technology knowledge, and sales technology use —provide a solid foundation for evaluating and tracking sales performance (Høgevold et al., 2021).

In the field of sales research , several sales presentation skills measurement instruments have been developed. Johlke (2006) developed the questionnaire to assess or measure sales presentation skills by following a procedure commonly used to develop sales-related scales. The questionnaire was designed to measure several skills: active listening skills, handling objections skills, sales closing skills, negotiation skills, and prospecting skills. The questionnaire was developed from the interviewing expert results for the presentation section in the selling process. This questionnaire measures the salesperson's ability to; effectively suggest products, services, or solutions; eliminate customer resistance, dissatisfaction and objections; and persuade a customer to make a purchase or get into an agreement (Inamizu et al., 2017). Both sales presentation skill measurement items utilized 7-point Likert scales (Johlke, 2006; Inamizu et al., 2017).
An exploratory sequential mixed methods design was used to understand information about micro-skills of selling from petrochemical industry salespeople in Thailand. Obtaining and comprehending information about the micro-skills of selling from salespeople (Creswell, 2018). The exploratory sequential mixed method begins by exploring with qualitative data and analysis, then builds a new feature to be tested, such as a novel survey instrument, redefined experimental procedures, or additional variables, and then proceeds to test this feature in a quantitative phase (Creswell, 2018). The exploratory sequential mixed-methods design is normally used for the development and administration of a new survey instrument (Munce et al., 2021). Drollinger et al. (2006) developed the active empathetic listening scale by using exploratory sequential mixed methods, starting with a literature review for listening and empathy scales, in order to generate items for the scale. Followed by purposive interviews with key informants and then administered for pilot testing, replicating discriminant and nomological characteristics that confirmed consistent construct validity.

3. Methodology and Data

The present research was explored under mixed methods research, which is an exploratory sequential mixed method (Creswell, 2018). This study adopted a three-phased approach to scale development to develop the preliminary items and test the scale for measuring micro-skills of selling in the context of petrochemical industry sales professionals in Thailand.

3.1 First phase

This phase aimed to explore the micro-skills of selling for sales professionals in the petrochemical industries in Thailand.

Participants

Purposive sampling was used to select participants in Study 1. There were 10 sales professionals who have a minimum of 10 years of experience in sales in petrochemical industries in Thailand, each one meeting one or more of the following criteria and qualifications: receipt of the sales award, holding management or executive level at present, or meeting at least 90 % of their sales target (on average) during their sales career.

Data collection

Purposive interviews were conducted online with 10 sales professionals. Inclusion criteria were that they have a minimum of 10 years of experience in sales in the petrochemical and downstream petrochemical industries in Thailand, each one meeting one or more of the following criteria and qualifications: receipt of the sales award; holding management or executive level at present; or meeting at least 90 % of their sales target (on average) during their sales career. The semi-structured, in-depth interview questionnaires were developed for exploring micro-skills of selling and developing micro-skills of selling scale for sales professionals in petrochemical industries in Thailand (see Appendix 1). All questions showed an Item Objective Congruence (IOC) greater than 0.6. Ten in-depth interviews occurred between February – March 2022. All ten in-depth interviews lasted between 34 and 52 minutes and were recorded via Zoom (https://zoom.us/) and a web-based recorder. During the interview, the participant responded to open-ended questions related to his or her sales experience, and follow-up questions were asked based on the responses of the participants, the interview questionnaire, and the research objectives. The interviews were transcribed by the researcher himself and reviewed for accuracy by all participants.

Data analysis

The data analysis was done through thematic analysis. Quotes were grouped by category code: constructs and sub-constructs, which respond to the concepts and theories. The themes not only reflected the participants' original words and thoughts but also the researcher's interpretations.

3.2 Second phase

This phase aimed to develop micro-skills of selling scale for sales professionals in the petrochemical industries in Thailand.

Participants

About 250 salespeople work for petrochemical industries, both manufacturers and distributors, in Thailand.

Data collection and analysis

Qualitative part: A scale for the Micro-Skills of Selling was developed from the results from the first phase. Quotes were grouped by category code: constructs and sub-constructs. A list of three dimensions was generated from this analysis, namely, listening, questioning, and presenting. Information from the themes served as constructs and sub-constructs for the item's development.

Quantitative part :This phase consisted of two steps.

Step 1: Try out

All items from the Micro-Skills of Selling scale in the qualitative part were reviewed for an Item Objective Congruence (IOC). The IOC score greater than 0.6 was given to twenty salespeople to evaluate the reliability of the scale. The data were analyzed by multivariate statistics and item analysis in SPSS version 26.

Step 2: Scale Validation

All items from the Micro-Skills of Selling scale in the try-out step were given to 250 salespeople to validate the scale. The data were analyzed by multivariate statistics, exploratory factor analysis for item analysis, principal component analysis, and reliability assessment. SPSS v.26.0 was used for the statistical analysis of the data.

4. Results

4.1 First Phase

Ten online interviews were conducted with 10 sales professionals with a minimum of 10 years of experience in sales in petrochemical industries in Thailand, each one meeting one or more of the following criteria and qualifications: receipt of the sales award, holding management or executive level at present, or meeting at least 90 % of their sales target (on average) during their sales career.

Key informants

Details of each key informant as shown in Table 1:

Table 1: Key Informants

Name	Years of sales experience	Present Job title	Petrochemical and related to Petrochemical Industries	Organization
1. Male	25	Head of Commercial - Industrial Solution	Distributor	Multinational company
2. Female	10	Industrial Manager – Industrial Chemical	Distributor	Multinational company
3. Female	10	Industrial Manager – Coatings & Adhesive	Distributor	Multinational company
4. Male	33	Regional Sales Manager	Manufacturer	Multinational company
5. Female	22	Business Unit Manager – Personal Care	Distributor	Multinational company
6. Male	14	Key Account Manager	Manufacturer	Multinational company
7. Male	24	Customer Manager – Plastic Additives	Manufacturer	Multinational company
8. Male	21	Account Manager – Thailand,	Manufacturer	Multinational company
9. Male	15	Business Unit Manager – Rubber	Distributor	Multinational company
10. Male	25	Business Development Manager	Manufacturer	Multinational company

The findings from the first phase are organized by five themes identified through the semi-structured interview questions. The themes are explained in detail.

Theme 1: The sales skills that most contribute to the success of a sales professional career in the petrochemical industries in Thailand.

When the question “which sales skills contributed the most to your success?”, was asked, most participants in this study indicated that the sales skills that most contributed to their success in their professional sales career in the petrochemical industries in Thailand were communication skills. However, when asking participants to

elaborate on communication skills, all indicated listening or questioning, or presentation skills. Therefore, three subthemes emerged as factors that contributed the most to salespeople's success: listening, questioning, and presentation skills.

Listening skills

Five participants indicated that listening skills contributed the most to their success. For example, the head of commercial mentioned, *"There are a lot of skills within the sales skills area. To make it simple, I think, personally, listening is the most important and basic sales skill that contributes to sales success."* This aligned with the business manager who expressed, "*Listening is the first one. First thing first, we need to study and understand our products before going out to sell them. In terms of technical knowledge, it comes from learning, listening, and understanding. Once we understand, we must put it into easy-to-understand language, know how to summarize the key messages or key points, and develop the introduction to get the customer's attention and listen to us."* The findings illustrated that listening skills contributed the most to their success.

Questioning skills

Two participants indicated that their questioning skills contributed the most to their success. For example, a regional sales manager stated, *"There are 3-4 skills. I think the first one is questioning skills, followed by listening skills, and the third one is closing skills. I have been practicing these skills for more than 20 years."* Furthermore, the industrial manager also pointed out, *"It may be questioning, probing, or even general talking, then observing what customers want from the communication."* This finding also points out that questioning skills contributed the most to their success.

Presentation skills

Three participants indicated that presentation skills contributed the most to their success. For example, the business development manager addressed, *"Personally, I think it is the talking. Some may say you must listen a lot, but I think listening to a customer a lot would not help if the customer were not talkative. Talking is either talking to get information or talking to present. So, talking is my number one."* The account manager also mentioned, *"Although technical knowledge is a must, it needs presentation skills to make the customers visualize the benefits that they would get."*

Theme 2: Sales skills that are important or crucial to their success.

When the question "which sales skills are important or crucial to your success?", was asked, participants in this study answered that the sales skills that were important or crucial to their success were in several areas: presentation skills, listening skills, negotiation skills, questioning skills, sales closing skills, technical skills, analytical skills, etc. As the industrial manager emphasized, "*Actually, it is how we choose questions to ask to help us sell. If we ask good questions to customers and get the pain points or key points for the project, it would be easier to succeed and can solve customers' problems better."* Another industrial manager also mentioned, *"Yes, all these skills: technical skills, questioning skills, listening skills, presentation skills, and negotiation skills are important to my success."* The key account manager commented indirectly, *"It still takes analytical skills to find customer needs and respond to or match those needs. I think this is still the key. However, other contributors —interpersonal skills and listening skills— are the important foundation. To be able to analyze, you need to have enough raw materials and enough information. This will lead to the analytical part:*

whether it takes place or not, right or wrong, it is all about the appropriate relationship, obtaining the right information from customers, having good listening skills, and asking the right questions. All these are giving the input for analyzing." Even the account manager stated clearly, *"The importance depends on the situation. Questioning, listening, presenting, and negotiating— I think they are equally important, depending on the situation that we are going to utilize."*

Theme 3: Why are those skills important to their success?

When participants were asked the question, "Why are those skills important to their success?", all participants indicated that those skills —micro-skills of selling, and macro-skills of selling —were helping them to succeed. Those skills were increasing efficiency in their selling, as the regional sales manager stated, *"Yes, macro-skills of selling are important. I think these are the skills that all salespeople should have. The micro-skills of selling are the skills that help us succeed. It is increasing the efficiency of selling."*

Besides, the micro-skills of selling, such as listening skills, questioning skills, and presentation skills, were mentioned further for their importance in helping participants' success. The business unit manager mentioned, *"From those basic skills, I grew up from a low-level salesperson to be the manager today because I closed the deals for big projects. I use these skills —listening, questioning, presenting, and other skills such as interpersonal skills — to deal with all kinds of customers."*

Apart from micro-skills of selling, macro-skills of selling and other skills were also mentioned for their importance to participants' success, as the customer manager mentioned, *"I depend on three skills: communications, talking with customers, and personality. When we talk to customers, we also need to listen and be able to get the key point. The third one, I am not sure if it is sales skills. It is the personality. We have to show friendliness and listen to their problems or needs. In summary, communication, listening, and being sincere when dealing with customers are the three things that I use for work, and they are good until the present.".*

Theme 4: The utilization of listening skills, questioning skills, and presentation skills in a sales career.

All participants indicated that they have been utilizing these micro-skills of selling altogether within a sales call in their sales careers. Furthermore, some also mentioned these skills were part of daily life. The Head of Commercial expressed, *"When we listen to customers, we will know problems they face or their needs. However, if it is not clear to us, we must use questioning skills to ask for clarification and understand the customers' needs. Then we process the information and find out the solutions or products that solve the problems. After that, we utilize our presentation skills to present how our products or solutions can solve customers' problems." "Listening, questioning, and presenting are not for selling only. They can be used in life in both personal and professional settings. For example, when talking to my team, I still have to sell to my subordinates. I must sell to them the benefits they will get if they do this project, how the company will gain the benefits, etc. This is not selling to customers, but selling to my subordinates for them to buy in!! Being the supervisor, it is not to order or command the subordinates but to sell to them. For listening, we must listen to subordinates too."* The regional sales manager also stated, *"These three skills — listening, questioning, and presenting — are all important. From my experience, in my sales call process, all these skills are there. They are mixed and cannot miss any skills. However, the use of each one is different in each individual situation. For example, if we*

meet with customers who love to talk, we listen more than we ask and present. We may just ask and probe a little; customers will just talk —how they are, what they want. In contrast, if we meet quiet customers, we must ask a lot and listen a lot."

Theme 5: The development of micro-skills of selling

When the question "How have you developed your micro-skills of selling?" was asked to participants, most of the participants also informed that their organizations also provide sales skills training as the starting point for their micro-skills of selling development. However, participants emphasized utilizing or practicing parts in real life after the training. For example, a business manager shared, *"I learned from failure and training. In the first company, I was lucky. They saw sales training as an important part of sales. I got a lot of training and a lot of role plays. I also went through the learning by doing period.",* which was similar to what the head of commercial experienced, *"Every organization will provide the training for salespeople when we start working. That gives a good basic… after that, after the good basics, salespeople themselves must adopt what they learn from training to use in real life."*

4.2 Second Phase

Item development

A scale for the micro-skills of selling was developed from the results of the first phase. Quotes were grouped by category code: constructs and sub-constructs. A list of three dimensions, listening, questioning, and presenting, was generated from this analysis. Table 2 presents a sample of scale item development from the data of the first phase.

Table 2: Creating Scale Items from Qualitative Data

Constructs	Sub-constructs	Qualitative Data	Sample of Scale Items
Micro-skills of selling	Listening	*Yes, really paying attention to listen to the customer and definitely keeping eye contact.*	I tend to listen to customers seriously.
Micro-skills of selling	Listening	*When we meet a customer, we may have to get the important details, such as what the customer needs are, 1 2 3 4 and repeat to the customer whether it is complete as the customer mentioned or not.*	I repeat details of a conversation to make sure that I understand what the customer is saying.
Micro-skills of selling	Questioning	*Questioning here is not directly or straightforward, asking what happened, what the problems are, or what information.*	I use the questioning technique to understand customers' withheld concerns.
Micro-skills of selling	Questioning	*If we want information regarding competitors, some customers may rather listen than tell. Then we may ask questions such as "Do customers keep the inventory locally?", "Do I understand correctly?" It may have to be these*	If the customer seems to avoid answering my question first, I "rephrase" the question before asking again later.

Constructs	Sub-constructs	Qualitative Data	Sample of Scale Items
		lead questions.	
Micro-skills of selling	Presenting	*When I present it to customers, I still put the information in the value offer form.*	I effectively present unique value proposition to the customer.
Micro-skills of selling	Presenting	*What are the benefits that customers will get? It is how it solves customers' problems. Any other benefits a, b, c, or d? These can be better price, better supply, and better performance. This must be highlighted.*	I present a cost/benefit argument that is tailored to the customer.

Quantitative part

Step 1: Try out

The scale first listed and defined the three dimensions. Each dimension consisted of ten items. All thirty items in a 5-point Likert-type scale of items ranging from "Never" to "Always." Table 3 presents the "First listed" Micro-Skills of Selling scale.

Table 3: The "First listed" Micro-Skills of Selling scale.

Item	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Very often	Always
Listening skills					
1. I tend to listen to customers seriously.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I repeat the details of a conversation to make sure that I understand what the customer is saying.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I think about what the customer means, not just what he/she says.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I listen actively, attentively, and interactively to verify my understanding of what the customer said.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I keep listening to customers, even if it is not related to the sales/work.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I listen without interruption when customers speak.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I note down the key details of the conversation with customers.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I ignore the distractions around me when talking to Customers.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I display interest in conversations with customers, i.e., make eye contact, nod, or smile.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I anticipate the intent behind customers' non-verbal cues.	1	2	3	4	5
Questioning skills					
11. I ask informational and follow-up questions with customers.	1	2	3	4	5
12. I ask questions to identify and understand	1	2	3	4	5

Item	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Very often	Always
changes that affect customers' businesses.					
13. I use the questioning technique to understand customer's withheld concerns.	1	2	3	4	5
14. If the customers seem to avoid answering my question first, and I will "rephrase" my question before asking again later.	1	2	3	4	5
15. I outline and use question techniques to explore customers' needs, goals, and objectives.	1	2	3	4	5
16. I tend to use both "open-ended" and "close-ended" questions with customers.	1	2	3	4	5
17. I use questions to successfully find out what my customers expect and what they value.	1	2	3	4	5
18. If customers avoid answering certain questions more than once, I save the questions for asking later if needed.	1	2	3	4	5
19. I effectively ask questions to help customers determine the true cost of their choices.	1	2	3	4	5
20. I use more probing questions with customers when I do not understand or "get a clear picture" of the Business.	1	2	3	4	5
Presentation skills					
21. I effectively present recommendations for solutions to customers.	1	2	3	4	5
22. I have clear objectives before planning a presentation to the customer.	1	2	3	4	5
23. I effectively present a unique value proposition to the customer.	1	2	3	4	5
24. I develop an introduction that will catch the attention of customer.	1	2	3	4	5
25. I present a cost/benefit argument that is tailored to the customer.	1	2	3	4	5
26. I observe for uncommon circumstances or behavior that might suggest customer concern when I present.	1	2	3	4	5
27. I offer effective presentations and recommendations within customer time constraints.	1	2	3	4	5
28. I present my ideas to customers effectively.	1	2	3	4	5
29. I tailor my presentation approach to persuade customers by reading their responses.	1	2	3	4	5
30. While I am presenting, I pay attention to my nonverbal behavior, such as eye contact, to make sure I stay engaged with the customer.	1	2	3	4	5

All thirty items in the "First listed" Micro-Skills of Selling scale version were validated for content and language (Thai and English). Only 25 items showed an Item Objective Congruence (IOC) greater than 0.6. Therefore, items # 4, 11, 19, 24, and 28 were removed from the list. Furthermore, Items # 5, 14, 17, 18, 21, 22, 23, 25, 26, and 30 were amended for the English statement. Table 4 presents the 25-item scale for micro-skills of selling.

Table 4: The 25 Items Scale for Micro-Skills of Selling

Item	Never	Rarely	Some-times	Very often	Always
1. I tend to listen to customers seriously.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I repeat the details of a conversation to make sure that I understand what the customer is saying.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I think about what the customer means, not just what he/she says.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I keep listening to customers, even if it is not related to the sales/work.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I listen without interruption when customers speak.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I note down the key details of the conversation with customers.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I ignore the distractions around me when talking to customers.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I display interest in conversations with customers, i.e., make eye contact, nod, or smile.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I anticipate the intent behind customers' non-verbal cues.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I ask questions to identify and understand changes that affect the customer's business.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I use the questioning technique to understand the customer's withheld concerns.	1	2	3	4	5
12. If the customers seem to avoid answering my question first, I will "rephrase" my question before asking again later.	1	2	3	4	5
13. I outline and use question techniques to explore customers' needs, goals, and objectives.	1	2	3	4	5
14. I tend to use both "open-ended" and "closed-ended" questions with customers.	1	2	3	4	5
15. I use questions to successfully find out what my customers expect and what they value.	1	2	3	4	5
16. If customers avoid answering certain questions more than once, I save the questions for asking later if needed.	1	2	3	4	5
17. I use more probing questions with customers when I do not understand or "get a clear picture" of the business.	1	2	3	4	5
18. I effectively present recommendations for solutions to customers.	1	2	3	4	5
19. I set clear objectives before planning a presentation to the customer.	1	2	3	4	5
20. I can effectively present a unique value proposition to the customer.	1	2	3	4	5
21. I present a cost/benefit argument that is tailored to each individual customer.	1	2	3	4	5
22. When I am giving presentations, I can observe any uncommon circumstances or behaviors that might suggest customer concern.	1	2	3	4	5

Item	Never	Rarely	Some-times	Very often	Always
23. I offer effective presentations and recommendations within customer time constraints.	1	2	3	4	5
24. I tailor my presentation approach to persuade customers by reading their responses.	1	2	3	4	5
25. While I am presenting, I pay attention to my nonverbal behavior, such as eye contact, to make sure I stay engaged with the customer.	1	2	3	4	5

Calculation, interpretation, and reporting of Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the Micro-Skills of Selling Scale

The 25-item scale for micro-skills of selling was developed and given to 20 salespeople working for petrochemical industries, both manufacturers and distributors, in Thailand to evaluate the reliability of the scale. All 20 completed questionnaires were received, with a response rate of 100%.

Table 5 shows the item-analysis output from SPSS version 26 for the micro-skills of selling scale. A description of the sections and related terms is as follows:

1. Statistics for Scale—These are summary statistics for the twenty-three items on the scale. The total scores ranged from 23 to 115.
2. Item means— Here are the summary statistics for twenty-three individual item means.
3. Item Variances—These are summary statistics for the twenty-three individual item variances.
4. Inter-Item Correlations—This is descriptive information about the correlation of each item to the sum of all remaining items. In Table 4, 23 correlations are calculated. Correlation of the first item with the sum of the other twenty-two items, correlation of the first item with the sum of the remaining twenty-two items, and so on. The first number listed is the mean of these twenty-three correlations (.45 on this scale), the second number is the minimum of the twenty-three (-.11), and so on. The mean of the correlations between items (.45) is the r in the _ = rk / [1 + (k -1) r] formula, where k is the number of items considered.
5. Item-total Statistics— The items in this section are as follows:
   5.1 Scale Mean if Item Deleted—Except for the individual item listed, all other items on the scale for all individuals (20 for this try-out phase) are summed to give the mean of total items. In Table 5, the mean of the total scores excluding item 1 is 94.95.
   5.2 Scale Variance if Item Deleted—Except for the individual item listed, all other items on the scale for all individuals (20 for this try-out phase) are summed to give the variance of the total items. In Table 5, the variance of the total scores excluding item 1 is 113.42.
   5.3 Corrected Item-Total Correlation—This is the correlation between the labeled item and the total score for all other items. In Table 5, the correlation between item 1 and the total score is .81. A critical value for Pearson's correlation coefficient for any given df is that these values should be at least .42 when df =20 and Level of Significance of a Two-Tailed or Nondirectional Test or $\alpha = .05$ (Weathington et al., 2010). Therefore, items 5 and 7 were removed. The correlation between items 5 and 7, and the total score is .42 and -.05, respectively.

5.4 Cronbach's alpha if item deleted— This represents the scale's Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for internal consistency if the individual item is removed from the scale. In Table 5, the scale's Cronbach's alpha would be .94 if item 1 were removed from the scale. This value is also compared to Cronbach's alpha coefficient at the bottom of the table to see if the item was selected to delete. The present scale has only twenty-three items, whereas the original scale had twenty-five. Using the above information, removing items 5 and 7 resulted in an increase in Cronbach's alpha from .93 to .94.

5.5 The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of internal consistency—This is the most widely used Cronbach's alpha coefficient.

5.6 Standardized Item Alpha: The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of internal consistency when all scale items are standardized. This coefficient is used only if the individual scale items are not scaled the same.

Table 5: Item-Analysis

	N	**Mean**	**Variance**	**SD**		
Statistics for Scale	23	99.5	124.26	11.15		
	Mean	**Min**	**Max**	**Range**	**Max/Min**	**Variance**
Item Means	4.33	3.45	4.8	1.35	1.39	0.08
Item Variances	0.51	0.27	1.1	0.83	4.03	0.04
Inter-Item Correlations	0.45	-0.11	0.85	0.96	-7.93	0.03

Item Total Statistics	**Scale Mean If Item Deleted**	**Scale Variance If Item Deleted**	**Corrected Item Total Correlation**	**Cronbach's Alpha If Item Deleted**
Item 1	94.95	113.42	0.81	0.94
Item 2	95.25	112.93	0.59	0.94
Item 3	95.05	113.52	0.7	0.94
Item 4	95	117.58	0.48	0.94
Item 6	94.9	112.94	0.67	0.94
Item 8	94.7	116.12	0.7	0.94
Item 9	94.8	114.38	0.78	0.94
Item 10	95	115.37	0.65	0.94
Item 11	95.2	114.69	0.52	0.94
Item 12	95.45	113.63	0.56	0.94
Item 13	95.45	111.1	0.66	0.94
Item 14	95.25	113.88	0.64	0.94
Item 15	95.35	113.29	0.74	0.94
Item 16	95.2	110.8	0.84	0.94
Item 17	95.15	116.98	0.47	0.95
Item 18	95.45	118.15	0.44	0.95
Item 19	95.05	113.1	0.55	0.94
Item 20	95.15	115.19	0.69	0.94
Item 21	96.05	109.21	0.64	0.94
Item 22	95.1	113.15	0.84	0.94
Item 23	95.35	116.55	0.5	0.94
Item 24	95.2	112.06	0.75	0.94
Item 25	94.95	113.31	0.82	0.94

	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Item
Reliability Coefficients for Item 23	0.95	0.95

Source**:** Author**'**s own estimates

Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient ranges between 0 and 1, but the closer Cronbach's alpha coefficient is to 1.0, the better the internal consistency of the items on

the scale. As a rule of thumb, Cronbach's alpha coefficients are >0.9 - excellent, >0.8 - good, >0.7 - acceptable, >0.6 - doubtful, >0.5 - poor, and < .5 – unacceptable (George, 2011). Satisfactory values of Cronbach's alpha of .94 - .95 for the range of all items and .95 for the total items together.

Step 2: Scale Validation

A second survey was conducted to validate the scale of the twenty-three items for micro-skills of selling using a different sample of salespeople from the sample of salespeople in the try-out phase. The scale for micro-skills of selling was sent to 250 salespeople. A sample of 202 completed questionnaires was received, with a response rate of 80.8%. The data were analyzed by exploratory factor analysis for item analysis, principal component analysis, and reliability assessment. SPSS v.26.0 was used for the statistical analysis of the data.

Item Analysis

The sampling adequacy test (K-M-O test) and test for assessing the normality of data (Barlett's test of sphericity) were conducted prior to conducting the analysis. The KMO value was observed as 0.92, and Barlett's measure of 2204.93 was found highly significant ($p < 0.001$) with 253 degrees of freedom. Therefore, it was concluded that the sample is acceptable and suitable for applying factor analysis to the surveyed data.

Principal Component Analysis

As a result of the first EFA analysis, principal component analysis with varimax rotation was chosen for extracting the initial factors, and eigen value >1 was applied as the criterion. The twenty-three items were grouped under four factors to explain 58.04% of the total variance, as shown in Table 6 below. All communalities' values were between 0.40 and 0.72. Pallant (2011) indicated that the common variance (communalities) values below .30 were not suited to other items in the same factor; however, a value below .30 was not found in any items in the current scale. At this point, the items that did not have cross-loadings greater than .15 were selected for removal from the scale. The removed items were Items #3, 8,11,13,20, and 23.

Table 6: Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% Of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% Of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% Of Variance	Cumulative %
1	9.32	40.54	40.54	9.32	40.54	40.54	4.58	19.92	19.92
2	1.62	7.05	47.59	1.62	7.05	47.59	3.23	14.04	33.96
3	1.35	5.85	53.44	1.35	5.85	53.44	3.07	13.34	47.30
4	1.06	4.60	58.03	1.06	4.60	58.03	2.47	10.74	58.03
5	.96	4.19	62.23						
6	.80	3.47	65.70						
7	.78	3.40	69.10						
8	.74	3.23	72.33						
9	.72	3.14	75.47						
10	.58	2.54	78.01						
11	.58	2.52	80.53						
12	.54	2.34	82.86						
13	.50	2.16	85.02						
14	.47	2.06	87.08						
15	.45	1.97	89.05						
16	.42	1.84	90.89						
17	.40	1.75	92.64						
18	.36	1.57	94.22						

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% Of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% Of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% Of Variance	Cumulative %
19	.31	1.35	95.57						
20	.29	1.28	96.85						
21	.27	1.15	98.00						
22	.24	1.06	99.06						
23	.22	.94	100.00						

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Source**:** Author**'**s own estimates

Prior to conducting the final EFA analysis, the KMO value was observed as 0.90, Barlett's measure of 1352.77 was found highly significant ($p < 0.001$) with 136 degrees of freedom. This final EFA analysis, principal component analysis with varimax rotation, was chosen for extracting the final factors, and eigen value >1 was applied as the criterion. The seventeen items were grouped under three factors to explain 54.972% of the total variance. The communalities' values rotated factor loads for the scale, and the variances explained by different factors are presented in Table 7.

Table 7: Communalities' Values and Factor Load Values

Items	Communalities' values	Component		
		1	2	3
19	.61	.78		
18	.70	.78		
16	.58	.71		
21	.56	.66		
17	.56	.63		
22	.50	.58		
2	.59		.76	
9	.58		.73	
12	.61		.73	
14	.47		.53	
15	.47		.52	
10	.37		.52	
1	.41		.38	
5	.34		.38	
6	.71			.81
7	.72			.77
4	.55			.70
Total Variance explained %54.97		%20.88	%18.98	%15.11
Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items α = .90				

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.
a. Rotation converged in 5 iterations.
Source**:** Author**'**s own estimates

The final EFA results offered a three-factor structure, as presented in Table 7. Items to be factored should have a factor loading of at least 0.30 (Pallant, 2011). As shown in Table 7, the first factor included 6 items with factor loads within the range of .58 and .78; the second factor included 8 items with factor loads within the range of .38 and .76, and the third factor included 3 items with factor loads within the range of .70

and .81. It was observed that all factors explained 54.97% of the total variance. The first factor explained 20.88% of the total variance and was named presentation skills" with the guidance of the developing items phase. The second factor explained 18.98% of the total variance and was named "questioning skills." The third factor explained 15.11% of the total variance and was named "listening skills." The analysis results showed that all items matched the hypothesized dimensions except for three items. These three items (1, 2, and 5) were considered under the listening skills dimension during the developing items phase; however, EFA results categorized them under the questioning skills dimension. Post-analysis expert opinion agreed that these three items could be placed under the listening skills dimension, according to content validity. For example, item #5 : "I note down the key details of the conversation with customers," presents the action (taking note) that shows salespeople are listening to customers during the sale call. The taking note behavior is the cue that indicates one is listening.

The seventeen items from the final EFA were assessed for their reliability by item analysis using item-to-total correlations, as presented in Table 8. Item analysis results show that item-total test correlations for the listening skills factor ranged between.19 and .66. item-total test correlations for the questioning skills factor ranged between .26 and .49. For the presentation skills factor, item-total test correlations ranged between .37 and .59. Although, item-total correlations were implied, each item in the scale could measure the factor it aimed to measure and be able to differentiate individuals based on the factor it measured. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for internal consistency indicated the reliability of the scale. Conducted reliability analyses produced a Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient of 0.90 for the whole scale. Further evaluating factor-based Cronbach alpha coefficients showed that Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.77 for the listening skills factor; 0.78 for the questioning skills factor, and 0.84 for the presentation skills factor. Therefore, it could be concluded that the micro-skills of selling scale has an acceptable level to measure what it aims to measure.

Table 8: Means, Standard Deviation and Correlation* Matrix for the Micro-Skills of Selling Scale

Items	**1**	**2**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**9**	**10**	**12**	**14**	**15**	**16**	**17**	**18**	**19**	**21**	**22**
1	1.00																
2	.34	1.00															
4	.43	.19	1.00														
5	.42	.27	.28	1.00													
6	.28	.23	.40	.32	1.00												
7	.41	.31	.49	.34	.66	1.00											
9	.33	.44	.27	.28	.32	.30	1.00										
10	.25	.28	.31	.33	.24	.32	.43	1.00									
12	.36	.58	.25	.30	.35	.38	.47	.26	1.00								
14	.34	.27	.37	.34	.36	.39	.42	.49	.46	1.00							
15	.40	.30	.26	.32	.29	.37	.41	.38	.42	.40	1.00						
16	.34	.24	.28	.31	.22	.39	.27	.28	.39	.32	.44	1.00					
17	.48	.34	.28	.44	.28	.39	.34	.32	.39	.36	.44	.44	1.00				
18	.42	.30	.25	.38	.18	.39	.29	.30	.39	.33	.47	.58	.59	1.00			
19	.27	.12	.24	.18	.09	.23	.18	.20	.15	.21	.24	.46	.45	.48	1.00		
21	.34	.25	.31	.32	.36	.39	.30	.27	.41	.32	.35	.50	.43	.51	.45	1.00	
22	.32	.28	.32	.29	.33	.44	.26	.33	.38	.33	.388	.42	.42	.50	.37	.57	1.00
Mean	4.73	4.55	4.63	4.35	4.80	4.71	4.17	4.16	4.37	4.20	4.32	4.24	4.41	4.34	3.86	4.21	4.44
S.D.	.54	.74	.55	.84	.45	.52	.90	.91	.79	.91	.72	.66	.69	.67	.87	.70	.68

* $p > .05$

Source**:** Author**'**s own estimates

5. Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Main Findings and Discussion

The present study developed and evaluated the validity of a scale that focuses on the skills of salespeople, especially the micro-skills of selling: listening, questioning, and presentation skills. Results support a tri-factor scale.

As shown from the results of this research, a 17-item scale was developed to measure the micro-skills of selling —listening, questioning, and presentation skills — in the context of sales professionals in petrochemical industries in Thailand. A systematic procedure for scale development was followed based on exploratory sequential mixed methods (Creswell, 2018). A rule of thumb is that Cronbach's alpha coefficient should be > .7, which is acceptable (George, 2011). The new scale items met the requirements for test validity and reliability. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the micro-skills of the selling scale was .90 for the total items together.

Furthermore, an exploratory factor analysis of the micro-skills of selling scale was conducted, and three distinct factors were identified. Additional analyses showed high internal reliability for all three factors of the micro-skills of selling scale. Factor-based Cronbach alpha coefficients showed that Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.77 for the listening skills factor, 0.78 for the questioning skills factor, and 0.84 for the presentation skills factor. Each factor was examined and discussed from theoretical and research perspectives.

The micro-skills stream of research has focused on individual sales skills such as listening skills, interpersonal listening skills, questioning skills, and presentation skills. Listening skills in this research explain the ability to accurately receive and interpret messages in the sales communication process with customers. There is supporting evidence for the listening skills factor from the previous research. Drollinger & Comer (2013) defined active empathetic listening as listening practiced by salespeople in which active listening is combined with empathy to achieve a higher form of listening, impacting the quality of the relationship between the buyer and seller and their mutual ability to build trust. More recent research indicates that customer-oriented salespeople express their care toward customers through listening, and salesperson relationships and sales performance are driven by listening through direct and mediated mechanisms (Itani et al., 2019). However, the findings from this research indicated that the listening skills factor is more than just the ability to accurately receive and interpret messages in the sales communication process with customers. Listening skills are also pointed out as an important sales skill that increases efficiency in selling and contributes to their success.

According to the findings of this research, in terms of the other two factors — questioning skills and presentation skills —questioning skill is the action of asking customers questions in order to explore an issue, an idea, or something intriguing effectively. The previous research result indicated that questioning also improves customers' purchase intentions (Arndt et al., 2018). Another research also shows that the ability to ask pertinent questions to understand the situation and the customer's needs actually plays a role in resulting in greater sales performance (Sugiyarti, 2018). Sales presentation skills are the actions of presenting information about a product or service that attempt to persuade customers by using a planned sales presentation strategy for that product or service designed to initiate and close a sale of that product or service. Several studies showed that sales presentation abilities were found to be the principal set of skills that lead to greater sales performance (Wachner et al., 2009). This aligns with the results from the study of developing soft skill training for salespersons to increase total sale,

which indicated presentation skills are among the several factors that influence the level of salespersons' sales (Mardatillah et al., 2018). More recent research confirms that aspects of B2B seller skills, including interpersonal presentation and communication skills, provide a solid foundation for evaluating and tracking sales performance (Høgevold et al., 2021). Furthermore, the recent research findings showed that 110 sales skills, including listening skills, questioning skills, and presentation skills, were important to a salesperson's success (Razmak et al., 2022). However, the findings from this research indicated that both questioning skills and presentation skills are also highlighted as important sales skills that not only contribute but are also crucial to salespeople's success.

5.2 Limitations and future research avenues

This research was limited in its scope as it only examined the sales professionals in the petrochemical industries in Thailand. Therefore, further development and evaluation of scale are needed. The data used in the current survey is specific to both industry and geography. Future research suggests a replication study using this developed measurement to test for micro-skills in selling for salespeople in other industries or businesses and in other geographic locations.

5.3 Conclusion and implications

The main contribution of this research was to develop and test a new micro-skill of selling scale. Five primary themes were identified through thematic analysis. The emerging micro-skills of selling scale consist of three factors and have shown good validity and reliability.

Measuring sales skills, especially the micro-skills of selling —three crucial basic skills —would be useful for researchers studying the behavior of highly skilled salespeople. Separating behaviors that make experienced salespeople unique can be helpful in selecting and training salespeople. This means that sales leaders can start by selecting sales candidates with these behavioral traits and train existing salespeople to strive for these positive traits. The implication of this study is that it provides incontrovertible focus and enhances knowledge about micro-skills of selling, which are accountable factors for the sales professionals' performance in the petrochemical industries in Thailand.

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Appendix

Table A1: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Objectives	Key Questions	Follow-up questions
To explore the meaning and identify factors of micro-skills of selling for Petrochemical and related industries sales professionals in Thailand.	1. In your view, what are the sales skills that most contribute to your success in your sales professional career in the Petrochemical industry in Thailand? 2. In the scope of skills, which sales skills are important/crucial to your success?	(If participants did not mention sales skills.) Follow up questions #2.1 In your view, could you please list the five important sales skills? #2.2 Can you elaborate further regarding those sales skills that you mentioned? (If participants did not mention Micro-skills of selling) #2.3 Consider those skills that you mentioned, in your opinion, could you please share if there any micro-skills of selling that provide important support or foundation for those skills?
	3. Can you elaborate/explain more about why and specifically name which basic skills are important to your success? 4. Can you specifically name basic micro-skills and illustrate how you utilize each to advance your career? 5. How have you developed your Micro-skills of selling?)	