GO-TO-MARKET & PRICING

The buyer is not the user in a B2B journey

The person authorizing a purchase and the person living with its outcome need different evidence. Map both value events before calling a journey complete.

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MANAGEMENT SUMMARY

A B2B journey can contain a buyer who authorizes an exchange and a user or operator who later experiences whether it works. They may be the same person, but the evidence required from each role is not the same. Buyer-side research on failed key-account opportunities highlights decision maker concerns about adaptability, relationships, and cost. Customer-success research separates expected and experienced value-in-use from relationship value and finds that supplier and customer respondents do not weigh every antecedent alike. Journey research also shows that buying states can remain, advance, or return. This literature review turns those findings into an author framework: assign a value event and a disconfirming signal to each role, without claiming that role structure predicts renewal or that every buying center has a fixed taxonomy.

Keywords: B2B buying journey · Buying center · Value in use · Customer success · Buyer and user roles

The buyer authorizes the exchange. The user, operator, or downstream stakeholder experiences whether it works. They may be the same person, but a B2B journey should not assume that one event proves both authorization and value in use.

That distinction is an author framework, not a universal taxonomy. Its purpose is to prevent a seller from treating a signed order as evidence that every person affected by the purchase has received value. It also prevents a usage problem from being misread as proof that the original buying decision was irrational.

What economic risks does the economic buyer evaluate during procurement?

Friend and colleagues study failed key-account proposals through decision-makers on the buyer side. Across 35 cases and 58 decision makers, adaptability, relationship potential, and cost appear as recurring dimensions of sales failure (Friend et al., 2014). The study is qualitative and bounded. It does not provide a universal list of buying-center roles or a frequency estimate for each dimension.

It does provide a useful evidence boundary. The buyer is evaluating a proposed relationship in an organizational context. The question may be whether the seller can adapt, whether the relationship can carry the risk, and whether the cost is defensible. A seller's product demonstration or forecasted value cannot replace those decision-side signals.

How do end-user workflow experiences differ from buyer decision criteria?

Kleinaltenkamp and colleagues distinguish expected value-in-use, experienced value-in-use, and relationship value in their study of customer-success management (Kleinaltenkamp et al., 2022). Their respondents from supplier and customer organizations do not assign the same weight to all antecedents (Kleinaltenkamp et al., 2022). That does not produce a universal formula for adoption or retention. It does show why a value statement made before purchase and an experienced result after purchase should occupy different fields.

The user may care about time saved, fewer exceptions, safer operation, easier coordination, or a different practical result. The buyer may care about approval risk, budget, strategic fit, and the credibility of the seller. A journey map that records only the person who signed misses the second value event. A map that records only user satisfaction misses the authorization constraint.

Table 1 Two roles, two value events

Role or perspective	Decision or value event	Evidence to collect	Disconfirming signal
Buyer or economic sponsor	Authorize, delay, or reject the exchange	Decision criteria, risk, relationship, adaptability, and cost evidence	The stated value does not survive the buyer's approval constraints.
User or operator	Experience whether the exchange works in practice	Workflow change, value-in-use, exceptions, effort, and realized result	The promised change is not visible in the user's work.
Seller	Translate the proposition between roles	Which claim is for authorization and which is for use	One claim is repeated to both roles without role-specific evidence.
Organization	Carry the result across the journey	State changes, handoffs, returns, and outcome definition	The record jumps from signature to success without an intermediate test.

Author's framework grounded in Friend, Curasi, Boles, and Bellenger (2014), Kleinaltenkamp, Prohl-Schwenke, and Keränen (2022), Marvasti et al. (2021), and Biemans, Malshe, and Johnson (2022). The table is a design aid, not a validated buying-center taxonomy.

Why does the B2B buying journey loop back after initial contract signing?

Marvasti et al. model no-funnel, early-funnel, middle-funnel, and late-funnel states, with paths that can remain, advance, or return (Marvasti et al., 2021). The implication is not that every B2B journey should use those labels. It is that a journey map should preserve uncertainty and return paths rather than forcing every event into a straight progression.

A user who cannot make the workflow work can send a purchase back into evaluation. A buyer who has approved a budget can reopen the decision when a risk changes. Those are different events from churn, and they can occur before a renewal record exists. The journey becomes more useful when it records the role that moved, the value event that was expected, and the evidence that changed the state.

Why does reducing buyer and user roles to a static matrix fail in complex deals?

Biemans and colleagues' systematic review identifies distinct domains and themes in the sales-marketing interface (Biemans et al., 2022). That supports a boundary, not a prescribed operating model. Different organizations will place product, procurement, finance, operations, and executive roles in different relationships. The framework should therefore ask what each role must authorize or experience, rather than insisting on one named buying-center diagram.

Use the table as a conversation structure. For every important claim, write the role it is meant to move and the value event that should follow. Then write what would show that the event did not occur. If the same evidence is used for every role, the journey map is probably carrying the seller's perspective rather than the organization's.

What occurs when commercial contract authorization diverges from daily tool adoption?

The buyer can make a defensible authorization decision and the user can still experience a weak outcome. Implementation may alter the workflow, the expected baseline may be unavailable, or the value event may belong to a role that was not present in the sale. The reverse can also happen: a user may find a practical benefit while the buyer cannot approve the risk, cost, or relationship terms. These are not contradictions. They are different evidence events.

Friend and colleagues' buyer-side findings make the first event visible. Adaptability, relationship potential, and cost shape whether a proposal can survive the buyer's decision context (Friend et al., 2014). Kleinaltenkamp and colleagues make the second event visible by distinguishing expected and experienced value-in-use and relationship value (Kleinaltenkamp et al., 2022). The two studies do not provide one journey formula. Together they justify keeping authorization evidence and use evidence separate.

This separation protects the organization from retrospective blame. A signed order is not proof that delivery was easy. A difficult adoption is not proof that the original buyer ignored the evidence. The review should ask which event failed and whether the failure was present before the exchange or introduced at the handoff.

Why does the handoff between sales closing and user onboarding carry the highest churn risk?

The space between buyer and user is where a value statement can change its meaning. A seller may describe reduced operating effort to an economic sponsor, translate it into implementation work for an operator, and later measure it as a finance result. Each translation can change the unit, period, beneficiary, or baseline.

Biemans and colleagues' systematic review identifies distinct domains and themes at the sales-marketing interface rather than one universal handoff mechanism (Biemans et al., 2022). The broader lesson is that role boundaries are part of the evidence design. Record who owns the claim before the sale, who experiences the change after it, and who can challenge the baseline.

A useful handoff note has three sentences. The buyer sentence says what decision is being authorized. The user sentence says what observable work should change. The bridge sentence says how the first claim will be translated into the second. If the bridge is missing, the journey may be complete in the CRM and incomplete in practice.

How should revenue operations map customer events across the full lifecycle?

Roles can change during one journey. A technical evaluator can become an operator. A procurement contact can become a budget gate. An executive sponsor can leave while the user remains. Marvasti's state model allows a journey to remain, advance, or return (Marvasti et al., 2021), which is a useful reminder not to treat the initial role map as permanent.

The map should therefore carry dates and transitions, not only names. For each stage, record the role, the expected value event, the evidence observed, and the signal that would disconfirm the interpretation. If the buyer changes, preserve the authorization history. If the user changes, preserve the use evidence. Do not overwrite one with the other.

This is especially important when the organization returns to evaluation. A failed use event can reopen a buying decision. A new buyer can reopen a relationship that seemed settled. The return is information about the journey, not evidence that the earlier role map was foolish.

How can commercial leadership conduct an effective two-perspective deal review?

For one neutral journey identifier, answer four questions for the authorization side and four for the use side:

1. What was the decision or work event expected?
2. Which evidence made that event plausible?
3. Which role owned the observation?
4. What result would make the interpretation weaker?

Then compare the two records. If the buyer evidence is strong but the user evidence is absent, the next task is a delivery observation. If the user evidence is strong but authorization is blocked, the next task is translation or risk clarification. If both sides rely on the same seller assertion, the journey has not yet earned independent support.

The framework stays useful precisely because it does not force every organization into the same buying-center diagram. It gives each role a testable event and leaves the structure open to evidence.

Boundary

The held research supports separate buyer-side, value-in-use, interface, and journey perspectives. It does not support the claim that buyer and user are always different, that a role split predicts retention, or that a value-in-use signal proves renewal. The contribution is a disciplined map of different evidence events.

The role split connects to what a voice-of-customer acquisition can prove and the channel that books the sale but may not own the customer, where reported preference and operational ownership are kept separate. This analytical distinction reinforces why voice of customer is not observed choice, separating declared survey intent from contractual commitment.

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END OF ESSAY

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