



2019 National Conference in Sales Management  
Jacksonville, FL  
March 27<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup> 2019

Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront Hotel  
225 E Coastline Drive  
Jacksonville, FL 32202

# PROCEEDINGS

|                              |    |
|------------------------------|----|
| Mission Statement.....       | 1  |
| Forward .....                | 2  |
| Heritage of Leadership ..... | 3  |
| Reviewers.....               | 5  |
| Agenda .....                 | 6  |
| Abstracts by Session.....    | 10 |
| Extended Abstracts .....     | 16 |

## **National Conference on Sales Management Mission Statement**

The mission of the National Conference on Sales Management (NCSM) is to create and disseminate knowledge on professional selling and sales management. This mission has three legs: Research, PSE, and Business Involvement.

**Research** – The conference should be a focal point for the development and transfer of knowledge on sales and sales management. We should provide a forum for the development of quality research in the sales and sales management area.

**PSE** – A related leg is to encourage growth that strengthens PSE and its educational component. The NCSM should be designed whenever reasonable to support the PSE faculty advisors. Our activities should be structured in a fashion that recognizes their important role in the dissemination of sales and sales management knowledge as advisors to students.

**Business Community Involvement** – The final leg consists of our role in recognizing the opinions and contributions of the people who are working in the field of sales and sales management. Business people can make an important contribution in evaluating the research we are doing and in sharing ideas on trends in sales management and selling. NCSM seeks to enhance the practice of professional selling and sales management by fostering the dialogue between academicians and practitioners.

Through adherence to the mission, the National Conference on Sales Management (NCSM) exists to create the premier national conference for disseminating knowledge in the areas of sales management and professional selling.

## FOREWORD

This thirty-fourth volume of the Proceedings from the National Conference in Sales Management contains articles and abstracts of presentations made at the 2019 Conference held March 27-29 at the Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront Hotel. Each article was selected after a blind competitive review process and will be presented at the conference by at least one author. In addition, the three-day Conference devotes three sessions to The University Sales Center Alliance (USCA) sponsored Best Sales Teaching Innovation methods. As always, the 2019 Conference continues to provide the outstanding socializing and networking opportunities that are hallmarks of the NCSM.

As interest in sales research and education has significantly expanded over the years, Conference attendance by both academics and practitioners continues to be strong. The 2019 Conference hosts 62 participants, 5 of whom are doctoral students. This is possible only by the combined efforts of the PSE Staff, NCSM Executive Board, authors, reviewers, session chairs, sales professionals and special presenters who have contributed their time, effort and expertise to the Conference.

Special recognition for this 2019 Conference goes to:

- Joan Rogala, Executive Director of Pi Sigma Epsilon for her expert support and guidance throughout the conference planning process, Kristin Pearson of PSE for supporting the online access of the Proceedings, and all the staff of Pi Sigma Epsilon for all they do behind the scenes.
- The NCSM Executive Board – Scott Widmier of Kennesaw State University for his leadership and guidance as the Executive Director of the NCSM; Greg Rich of the Bowling Green University for serving as Competitive Sessions Chair; Nathaniel Hartmann of the University of Hawaii at Manoa and Catherine Johnson of the University of Toledo for serving as Co-chairs of the Doctoral Student Sales Research Program; Stacey Schetzle of the University of Tampa for serving as Sales Education Track Coordinator; Stefanie Boyer of Bryant University for serving as Special Sessions Coordinator; Christine Lai of the Université Laval and Rebecca Dingus of Central Michigan University for serving on the executive board in an at-large capacity.
- All the paper reviewers for their constructive feedback to help authors advance their research.
- The University Sales Center Alliance for its continued support and sponsorship of the Best Sales Teaching Innovative Method award and Best Doctoral Student Paper award
- Access Capon/Tanner, Honeycutt, and Erffmeyer, for continued sponsorship of the NCSM Best Paper Award.
- Our generous sponsors including Wessex, University of West Florida, Gartner, Interact, and USCA.
- The PSE National Education Foundation for sponsorship of doctoral student fellowships.
- All of the contributors and supporters of the Conference who put their valuable time into making this Conference a success.

The goal of the National Conference in Sales Management is to serve as a forum for professionalizing selling and sales management by bringing together a broad spectrum of academics and practitioners. Thanks to the support and effort of everyone associated with this thirty-third event, this goal continues to be met.

Lisa R. Simon  
Program Chair  
California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo

David Fleming  
Proceedings Editor  
Indiana State University

## HERITAGE OF LEADERSHIP FOR NCSM

| Year | Program Chair   | Proceedings Editor  |
|------|---|---|
| 1986 | E. James Randall<br><i>Georgia Southern University</i>        | E. James Randall<br><i>Georgia Southern University</i>  |
| 1987 | E. James Randall<br><i>Georgia Southern University</i>        | E. James Randall<br><i>Georgia Southern University</i>  |
| 1988 | E. James Randall<br><i>Georgia Southern University</i>        | David J. Good<br><i>Central Missouri State University</i>   |
| 1989 | David J. Good<br><i>Central Missouri State University</i>     | David J. Good<br><i>Central Missouri State University</i>   |
| 1990 | David J. Good<br><i>Central Missouri State University</i>     | James B. Deconinck<br><i>Central Missouri State University</i>  |
| 1991 | E. James Randall<br><i>Georgia Southern University</i>        | Roberta J. Good<br><i>Central Missouri State University</i>   |
| 1992 | Ramon A. Avila<br><i>Ball State University</i>                | Dan C. Weilbaker<br><i>Northern Illinois State University</i>   |
| 1993 | Ramon A. Avila<br><i>Ball State University</i>                | Dan C. Weilbaker<br><i>Northern Illinois State University</i>   |
| 1994 | Dan C. Weilbaker<br><i>Northern Illinois State University</i> | Rick E. Ridnour<br><i>Northern Illinois University</i>  |
| 1995 | Dan C. Weilbaker<br><i>Northern Illinois State University</i> | Timothy A. Longfellow<br><i>Illinois State University</i>   |
| 1996 | Timothy A. Longfellow<br><i>Illinois State University</i>     | Michael R. Williams<br><i>Illinois State University</i>   |
| 1997 | Timothy A. Longfellow<br><i>Illinois State University</i>     | Michael R. Williams<br><i>Illinois State University</i>   |
| 1998 | Michael R. Williams<br><i>Illinois State University</i>       | Michael A. Humphreys<br><i>Illinois State University</i>  |
| 1999 | Michael R. Williams<br><i>Illinois State University</i>       | Michael A. Humphreys<br><i>Illinois State University</i>  |
| 2000 | Michael A. Humphreys<br><i>Illinois State University</i>      | Jon M. Hawes<br><i>The University of Akron</i>  |
| 2001 | Michael A. Humphreys<br><i>Illinois State University</i>      | Jon M. Hawes<br><i>The University of Akron</i>  |
| 2002 | David A. Reid<br><i>The University of Toledo</i>              | Jon M. Hawes<br><i>The University of Akron</i><br>Scott A. Inks<br><i>Middle Tennessee State University</i> |

|      |  |  |
|------|--|--|
| 2003 | David A. Reid<br><i>The University of Toledo</i>                                 | Scott A. Inks<br><i>Middle Tennessee State University</i>                        |
| 2004 | Scott A. Inks<br><i>Ball State University</i>                                    | C. David Shepherd<br><i>Kennesaw State University</i>                            |
| 2005 | Scott A. Inks<br><i>Ball State University</i>                                    | C. David Shepherd<br><i>Kennesaw State University</i>                            |
| 2006 | C. David Shepherd<br><i>Kennesaw State University</i>                            | Mark C. Johlke<br><i>Bradley University</i>                                      |
| 2007 | Mark C. Johlke<br><i>Bradley University</i>                                      | C. David Shepherd<br><i>Georgia Southern University</i>                          |
| 2008 | Mark C. Johlke<br><i>Bradley University</i>                                      | Ellen Bolman Pullins<br><i>The University of Toledo</i>                          |
| 2009 | Mark C. Johlke<br><i>Bradley University</i>                                      | Ellen Bolman Pullins<br><i>The University of Toledo</i>                          |
| 2010 | Ellen Bolman Pullins<br><i>The University of Toledo</i>                          | Concha R. Neeley<br><i>Central Michigan University</i>                           |
| 2011 | Ellen Bolman Pullins<br><i>The University of Toledo</i>                          | Concha R. Neeley<br><i>Central Michigan University</i>                           |
| 2012 | Concha Allen<br><i>Central Michigan University</i>                               | Michael L. Mallin<br><i>The University of Toledo</i>                             |
| 2013 | Concha Allen<br><i>Central Michigan University</i>                               | Michael L. Mallin<br><i>The University of Toledo</i>                             |
| 2014 | Michael L. Mallin<br><i>The University of Toledo</i>                             | Scott M. Widmier<br><i>Kennesaw State University</i>                             |
| 2015 | Michael L. Mallin<br><i>The University of Toledo</i>                             | Scott M. Widmier<br><i>Kennesaw State University</i>                             |
| 2016 | Scott M. Widmier<br><i>Kennesaw State University</i>                             | Lisa R. Simon<br><i>California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo</i> |
| 2017 | Scott M. Widmier<br><i>Kennesaw State University</i>                             | Lisa R. Simon<br><i>California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo</i> |
| 2018 | Lisa R. Simon<br><i>California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo</i> | David E. Fleming<br><i>Indiana State University</i>                              |
| 2019 | Lisa R. Simon<br><i>California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo</i> | David E. Fleming<br><i>Indiana State University</i>                              |

## National Conference in Sales Management 2019 Reviewers

Conference Chair: Lisa R Simon, *California Polytechnic State University*

Competitive Papers Chair: Gregory Rich, *Bowling Green University*

Reviewers:

|                     |                                      |
|---------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Gary Hunter         | Clemson University                   |
| Felicia Lassk       | Northeastern University              |
| Jon Hawes           | University of Akron                  |
| Jay Mulki           | Northeastern University              |
| Jane McKay-Nesbitt  | Bryant University                    |
| Adam Rapp           | Ohio University                      |
| Rebecca Dingus      | Central Michigan University          |
| Emily Tanner        | West Virginia University             |
| Dawn Deeter-Schmelz | Kansas State University              |
| Howard Dover        | University of Texas at Dallas        |
| Earl Honeycutt      | Elon University                      |
| Charles Schwepker   | University of Central Missouri       |
| Lisa Beeler         | Ohio University                      |
| Harish Sujana       | Tulane University                    |
| Blake Nielson       | Weber State University               |
| Brian Rutherford    | Kennesaw State University            |
| David Locander      | University of Tennessee, Chattanooga |
| Mark Johlke         | Bradley University                   |
| Frederick H.K. Yim  | Hong Kong Baptist University         |
| Andy Wood           | James Madison University             |
| Raj Agnihotri       | University Of Texas At Arlington     |
| John Hansen         | University of Alabama at Birmingham  |
| Matt Lastner        | Illinois State University            |



# THE 2019 NATIONAL CONFERENCE IN SALES MANAGEMENT

*Wednesday, March 27*

| Time          | Session  |
|---------------|--|
| 11:00 to 1:00 | <b>Doctoral Pre-Conference Session and Doctoral Lunch</b><br><i>River Terrace 3, Level 3</i>   |
| 1:00 to 1:15  | Welcome from the NCSM Board<br><i>River Terrace 3, Level 3</i>   |
| 1:15 to 2:15  | <b>Research Session 1</b><br><b>Chair: Greg Rich (Bowling Green University)</b><br>Desiree Jost (Justus-Liebig University), "Revising the customer-orientation performance link"<br>Michael Peasley (Middle Tennessee State University), Rajesh Srivastava (Middle Tennessee State University), "What happens at home doesn't stay at home: Evaluating the impact of personal stress on salesperson burnout and performance"<br>Bruno Lussier (HEC Montréal), Nathaniel Hartmann (University of Hawai'i at Mānoa), Willy Bolander (Florida State University), "Protecting against the effects of emotional exhaustion on unethical behaviors: The moderating roles of perceived supervisor support and salesperson grit" |
| 2:30 to 3:15  | <b>Teaching Session 1</b><br><b>Chair: Ricky Ferguson (Nova Southeastern University)</b><br>Charles Ragland (Indiana University), "Sales position analysis"<br>Rebecca Dingus (Central Michigan University), Jeffrey Hoyle (Central Michigan University), "Please don't hang up: Integrating cold calling and phone skills in the professional sales classroom"<br>Charles Howlett (Northern Illinois University), "Professional selling in the field"<br>Greg McAmis (Mercer University), "An options-based final project in personal selling"  |
| 3:15 to 3:35  | <b>Pi Sigma Epsilon (PSE)</b>  |
| 3:35 to 4:35  | <b>Research Session 2</b><br><b>Chair: Bruno Lussier (HEC Montréal)</b><br>Christopher Nelson (Duquesne University), James Brown (West Virginian University), "Trust recovery in the buyer-seller relationship"<br>Bryan Hochstein (University of Alabama), Willy Bolander (Florida State University), Benjamin (Ben) Britton (University of Alabama), Alexander Pratt (University of Alabama), "Face-to-face B2C sales value delivery: Knowledge brokers and consumer informedness"<br>Juliana White (Southeastern Louisiana University), James 'Mick' Andzulis (Ohio University), Vincent Jeseo (Louisiana State University), "Relationship selling and value co-creation: Enhancing customer loyalty"                 |

**4:45 to 5:30 Do you Teach Sales from a Script? Try a Dose of Improv**

**Chair: Andy Arts (University of South Florida)**

Join us for fun, laughs and instruction on how to implement improv in the classroom. We will share techniques to help you use improv workshops in your sales classes for groups, small groups, mass instruction, games and more. Learning has never been more fun!

Robert Peterson (Northern Illinois University), Stefanie Boyer (Bryant University)

**5:30 to 5:45 Carew International**

**6:30 to 8:30 Welcome Reception Sponsored by Carew International**

*Morton's The Steakhouse, located on the lobby level of the Hyatt Regency Hotel*

All NCSM attendees are invited to this networking event with representatives from our hosts, Carew International, PSE partners, faculty and members of the PSE National Leadership Team. Enjoy delicious cuisine and a memorable experience.

## ***Thursday, March 28***

| <b>Time</b>           | <b>Session</b>  |
|-----------------------|---|
| <b>8:00 to 8:30</b>   | <b>Breakfast</b><br><i>River Terrace 3, Level 3</i>   |
| <b>8:30 to 9:30</b>   | <b>Research Session 3</b><br><b>Chair: Michael Mallin (University of Toledo)</b><br>Anna Abramova (Hanken School of Economics), "Sales-service interface on a team level: How inclusion of service employees in a sales team influences customer satisfaction"<br>Gary Schirr (Radford University), Maneesh Thakkar (Radford University), Laurel Schirr (Virginia Tech), Richard Buehrer (University of Toledo), Lisa R. Simon (California Polytechnic State University), "Relevant research for sales managers and professionals"<br>Elina (Yihui) Tang (University of Illinois at Chicago), Murali Mantrala (University of Missouri), "Business-to-business selling with tandem customer needs in mind" |
| <b>9:30 to 10:15</b>  | <b>Meet the Editors</b><br><b>Chair: Stefanie Boyer (Bryant University)</b><br>Editors from the Journal of Marketing Education, Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management, and Journal of Selling share their vision for future research. Be sure to join us for this session and find out how your latest research can get accepted.<br>Vicky Crittedon, Journal of Marketing Education<br>Doug Hughes, Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management<br>Rob Peterson, Journal of Selling  |
| <b>10:30 to 11:30</b> | <b>Research Session 4</b><br><b>Chair: Nathaniel Hartmann (University of Hawai'i at Mānoa)</b><br>Michael Mallin (University of Toledo), Ellen Pullins (University of Toledo), Susan Shultz (University of Toledo), "Sales leadership development gap: What Sales Managers are saying"<br>Allison Crick (Indiana State University), David Fleming (Indiana State University), Concha Allen (Central Michigan University), "Empirical investigation of employee preference based typology for adaptive leadership"<br>Nawar Chaker (Elon University), Andrea Dixon (Baylor University), "Teaching political skill to students in formal sales education"   |

**11:30 to 11:45** Wessex

**11:45 to 1:30** PSE Networking Luncheon and Keynote Speaker, Jeffrey Hayzlett - CEO, The Hayzlett Group  
*Grand Ballroom 5-8, Level 2*

**1:45 to 2:45** **Teaching Session 2**

**Chair: Eddie Inyang (The College of New Jersey)**

*River Terrace 3, Level 3*

Stefanie Boyer (Bryant University), Michael Rodriguez (Campbell University) "Mix it up: Teaching sales students about AI with the help of salesforce.com"

Harvey Markovitz (Pace University), "Teaching students how to turn cold calls into 'gold calls'"

**2:45 to 3:05** USCA

**3:15 to 4:15** **Special Session 3 - Demystifying Digital Sales Tools: Opportunities in Digital Transformation**  
**Chair: Rebecca Dingus (Central Michigan University)**

The sales role is rapidly changing and so are the tools salespeople use to recruit, train, and serve their customers better. In this session, you will discover how your students can get their hands on AI and machine learning tools for free and participate in a virtual sales competition. You will also find out about the latest technology and most impactful tools salespeople are using to perform their jobs better.

Michael Rodriguez (Campbell University), Salesforce Tools

Stefanie Boyer (Bryant University), Virtual Sales Competitions

Scott Randall (RNMKRS), Virtual Sales Competitions

**6:00 to 10:00** **Top Golf**

*10531 Brightman Blvd, Jacksonville FL*

*Board bus at 5:45pm at the Newnan Street exit located on the Lobby Level of the Hyatt for a prompt 6:00pm departure*

Share in an evening of music, fun, games, food and drinks with your favorite colleagues at Top Golf, Jacksonville.

## ***Friday, March 29***

| <b>Time</b>         | <b>Session</b>   |
|---------------------|--|
| <b>8:00 to 8:30</b> | <b>Breakfast</b><br><i>River Terrace 3, Level 3</i>  |
| <b>8:30 to 9:30</b> | <b>Research Session 5</b><br><b>Session Chair: Christine Lai (EMLYON Business School)</b><br>Benjamin (Ben) Britton (University of Alabama), "I know what I want, and it's yours: Managing the envy of competitive salespeople"<br>Hatem Bata (Albany State University), Earnell La'Shaun Seay (Albany State University), "Problems in selling of green information system from a procuring manager's view"<br>Ricky Ferguson (Nova Southeastern University), Thomas Morgan (Shippensburg University), "Information sharing within the supply chain: the criticality of salespeople" |

**9:30 to 9:50 Gartner**

**10:00 to 10:45 Teaching Session 3**

**Chair: Ellen Daniels (Kent State University)**

Lisa R. Simon (California Polytechnic State University), "Sales role play popcorn"

Don Thacker (Kent State University), "The future generation that modifies the approach to teaching professional selling"

Robert Peterson (Northern Illinois University), Howard Dover (University of Texas-Dallas), "Design thinking via post-it note approach"

Kelly Blay (Kent State University), "Mastering a money making personality: Demonstrating a technique or assignment"

**10:45 to 11:45 Special Session 4 - The Chally Assessment: Bringing the Opportunity to You and Your Students**

**Chair: Stefanie Boyer (Bryant University)**

In this session you will learn about how students can evaluate their potential for sales careers through the Chally Group Assessment. During the session, you will get a mini certification so that your students can take the Chally Assessment for FREE! Hear from your colleagues how they are using this tool.

Marty Holmes, Sales Education Foundation

**11:45 to 1:45 Lunch/NCSM Board Meeting**

**1:45 to 2:00 Report from the NCSM Board, Awards Presentation**

*River Terrace 3, Level 3*

**2:00 to 2:20 University of Western Florida**

**2:20 to 3:00 Research Session 6 - with beverages**

**Chair: Catherine Johnson (University of Toledo)**

Mary Shoemaker (Widener University), Robert Hooker (University of South Florida), Richard Plank (University of South Florida), "A comparison of social media usage by industrial buyers and sellers: A user objectives/goals perspective"

Aaron Arndt (Old Dominion University), "The sensing-interpreting-responding model of dialogue exchanges"

**4:00 to 7:00 Escape Room and Dinner**

*Board bus at 3:45pm at the Newnan Street exit located on the Lobby Level of the Hyatt for a prompt 4:00pm departure*

Can you escape? Join us for this team building exercise that will put your brain to the test and help you get to know your awesome colleagues. Each team has 1 hour to escape from their room using clues and patterns to solve puzzles. Dinner follows your escape!



## 2019 NCSM Short Abstracts by Session

### Research Session 1: Wednesday 1:15 to 2:15 PM

#### **“Revising the customer-orientation performance link”**

Desiree Jost (Justus-Liebig University)

While scholars and managers have assumed a positive relationship between salesperson customer orientation and performance, extant research does not provide evidence for a consistent relationship. To date, research cannot explain why. Drawing on a qualitative approach, this study shows how customer-oriented behaviors influence performance by reducing the customer’s perceived level of risk and increasing customer trust in the salesperson and supplier. Furthermore, we illustrate the influence of situational factors on the customer orientation-performance link. The study thereby integrates past research, and provides guidelines for future research on the relationship between a salesperson’s customer-oriented behaviors and performance outcomes.

#### **“What happens at home doesn’t stay at home: evaluating the impact of personal stress on salesperson burnout and performance”**

Michael Peasley (Middle Tennessee State University), Rajesh Srivastava (Middle Tennessee State University)

Sales careers routinely involve a significant level of work stress. In addition, salespeople also face stress incurred from their personal life. Personal stressors such as health ambiguity, relationship conflict, and financial overload can pose a threat of a loss of personal resources. This impacts job burnout when personal-related stress accelerates the depletion of resources in which causes the employee to feel overextended, become disengaged in their work, and lose confidence in their abilities to perform adequately. To address this challenge, we shed light on the negative impact of personal-related stress and the need for organizations to implement programs that reduce its impact.

#### **“Protecting against the effects of emotional exhaustion on unethical behaviors: The moderating roles of perceived supervisor support and salesperson grit”**

Bruno Lussier (HEC Montréal), Nathaniel Hartmann (University of Hawai'i at Mānoa), Willy Bolander (Florida State University)

Research has shown the undesired consequences of the emotional exhaustion, yet little is known about the factors that can alleviate its influence on unethical behavior. To remedy this, we draw from self-control theory to develop a novel theoretical framework. The hypotheses are tested using a dataset consisting of 123 matched business-to-business (B2B) salesperson-manager dyads. The findings show that emotional exhaustion is negatively associated with ethical behaviors and sales performance, ethical behaviors are positively associated with sales performance, perceived supervisor support attenuates the negative association between emotional exhaustion and ethical behaviors, and grit strengthens the negative association between emotional exhaustion and ethical behaviors.

## **Research Session 2: Wednesday 3:35 to 4:35 PM**

### **“Trust recovery in the buyer-seller relationship”**

Christopher Nelson (Duquesne University), James Brown (West Virginian University)

While trust is the cornerstone of marketing exchange relationships. Even the best salespeople can damage a buyer’s trust. Drawing on equity theory, we theorize how a salesperson’s actions shape a buyer’s perceptions of fairness after the buyer’s trust has been damaged. We contend that fairness provides a reliable signal as to whether the salesperson can be trusted in the future and that behavioral repair strategies (i.e., actions) are effective mechanisms for increasing perceptions of fairness. The results of a longitudinal experiment with 234 insurance buyers and a field survey with 204 professional purchasing agents provide evidence for this theory.

### **“Face-to-face B2C sales value delivery: Knowledge brokers and consumer informedness”**

Bryan Hochstein (University of Alabama), Willy Bolander (Florida State University), Benjamin (Ben) Britton (University of Alabama), Alexander Pratt (University of Alabama)

The current research examines what happens when high informedness consumers and salespeople interact. Consumer informedness is defined as *the degree to which consumers perceive themselves as being knowledgeable about products or services in the marketplace in regard to a specific purchase decision before the purchase process and/or interaction with a frontline employee formally begins*. The findings of the study suggest that salespeople should focus on gaining a deeper understanding of the high informedness consumer’s determinant attributes, which allows them to present attribute-specific information that when paired with corrective information leads to greater acceptance of salesperson recommendations for high informedness customers.

### **“Relationship selling and value co-creation: Enhancing customer loyalty”**

Juliana White (Southeastern Louisiana University), James ‘Mick’ Andzulis (Ohio University), Vincent Jeseo (Louisiana State University)

This research examines the intersection of relationship marketing and sales strategy by exploring the mechanisms that drive successful buyer-seller interactions. As salespeople are increasingly expected to initiate and build customer relationships, understanding how best to maintain such relationships while ensuring customer satisfaction is critical. Through data collected from the customers of a sales organization, this study provides preliminary evidence of the importance of relationship-enhancing activities on buyers’ perceptions of relationship quality. The key finding suggests that value co-creation is a crucial element of successful buyer-seller interactions. Managerial implications and future research directions are offered.

### **Research Session 3: Thursday 8:30 to 9:30 AM**

#### **"Sales-Service Interface on a Team Level: How Inclusion of Service Employees in a Sales Team Influences Customer Satisfaction"**

Anna Abramova (Hanken School of Economics)

Customers find deployment and post-deployment activities very important in their buying process, while salespeople do not always address these activities in the sales process. A siloed understanding of the sales process and post-purchase activities may lead to customer dissatisfaction. The hypotheses proposed for this experimental design study suggest that presence of service employees in a sales team (team level sales-service interface) influences customer satisfaction. In line with expectation disconfirmation and promise theories, service employees should be involved early in the sales process to set clear customer expectations and be aware of promises made by sales people since they will be responsible for keeping them.

#### **"Relevant Research for Sales Managers and Professionals"**

Gary Schirr (Radford University), Maneesh Thakkar (Radford University), Laurel Schirr (Virginia Tech), Richard Buehrer (University of Toledo), Lisa R. Simon (California Polytechnic State University)

A survey about research in selling and sales management showed that sales professionals:

- \* Were interested in topics covered in major journals,
- \* Rarely read academic journals,
- \* Felt that reading about selling was important but didn't read enough, and
- \* Especially younger ones, preferred information in summary digital or video/audio form.

The authors categorized articles in the leading sales publications, finding that article topics reasonably matched what sales people said they were interested in. In a follow-up survey sales professionals were also asked about their interest in selected recent sales articles and in consuming those articles in various media forms.

#### **"Business-To-Business Selling With Tandem Customer Needs In Mind"**

Elina (Yihui) Tang (University of Illinois at Chicago), Murali Mantrala (University of Missouri)

In B2B selling, it is important to consider not only the needs of direct customers, but also the needs of indirect or downstream customers - the "tandem needs". A latent class joint segmentation model is developed by explicitly considering such tandem customer needs. B2B survey data is collected to empirically test the model. The model incorporates benefits desired by a media firm's customers - advertisers and the advertisers' customers as distinct segmentation dimensions, and considers their interrelatedness. Empirical results show more meaningful, actionable, and precise segments that can aid salespeople in sales messaging.

#### **Research Session 4: 10:30 to 11:30 AM**

##### **“Sales Leadership Development Gap: What Sales Managers Are Saying”**

Michael Mallin (University of Toledo), Ellen Pullins (University of Toledo), Susan Shultz (University of Toledo)

What are sales managers saying about the leadership challenges they face and the development opportunities they are receiving to address these challenges? Insights were gathered via a thematic analysis of structured interviews with 30 sales leaders/managers from a cross-industry sample. Findings revealed that major challenges included recruiting, hiring and developing sales people, as well as motivating across the generations. A leadership competency gap existed in the areas of coaching, people skills, and behavior management. A discussion is presented which focuses on the opportunities for further research and curriculum development in this important area of sales leadership development and pedagogy.

##### **“Empirical Investigation of Employee Preference Based Typology for Adaptive Leadership”**

Allison Crick (Indiana State University), David Fleming (Indiana State University), Concha Allen (Central Michigan University)

One challenge facing managers is optimizing how they lead their employees. Sales managers in particular must identify the style of leadership preferred by each employee and adapt their own leadership style to best suit each individual to optimize salesperson performance. This paper empirically tests a conceptual full range model of sales leadership to determine whether it is possible to identify an employee’s optimal leadership style using two leadership behavior preference scales (hands on/hands off leadership and transactional/transformational leadership) versus four longer scales currently used to measure preferred leadership style (charismatic, servant, laissez-faire, and autocratic).

##### **“Teaching Political Skill to Students in Formal Sales Education”**

Nawar Chaker (Elon University), Andrea Dixon (Baylor University)

Demand for college graduates with sales skills is strong and continues to accelerate, leading more universities to develop sales programs. However, most curricula focus on dealing with external customers, placing scant attention on the development of students for managing internal customers, an increasingly important issue in today’s modern sales landscape. This research thus explores ways in which targeted pedagogical approaches can improve student’s political skill, which can be used to strategically navigate the internal sales environment. We conduct two studies to provide support for the efficacy of teaching political skill to undergraduate students in two different educational settings.

## **Research Session 5: Friday 8:30 to 9:30 AM**

### **"I know what I want, and it's yours: Managing the envy of competitive salespeople"**

Benjamin (Ben) Britton (University of Alabama)

The current research explores envy through a unique paradigm where a salesperson's competitive psychological climate (CPC) fuels benign (positive) and malicious (negative) forms of envy that yield positive and negative effects on sales performance, respectively. The current study contributes to the literature by: 1.) Studying CPC in relation to envy, 2.) Investigating the effects of malicious and benign envy on sales performance, and 3.) Testing how sales manager support plays a moderating role in relation to CPC and envy, and sales performance. The findings indicate that as CPC increases benign/malicious envy responses have positive and detrimental effects on sales performance.

### **"Problems in Selling of Green Information System from a Procuring Manager's View"**

Hatem Bata (Albany State University), Earnell La'Shaun Seay (Albany State University)

This paper examines the purchasing or procuring manager's point of view on green the importance of green information system. This paper aims to make sales professionals become aware of purchasing managers' individual views of green technology, the external factors in the business environment that impact the manager's decisions, and characteristics of green information systems salesperson that may help or hinder the selling of green information system.

### **"Information Sharing Within the Supply Chain: The Criticality of Salespeople"**

Ricky Ferguson (Nova Southeastern University), Thomas Morgan (Shippensburg University)

In today's ever-evolving global markets, the complexities of strategic decisions increase dramatically as the firms look to develop competitive advantages in the marketplace. Rapidly changing customer needs and expectations coupled with disruptive innovation means companies require agility in their responses to change. A firm's decisions regarding supply chain operations can be key to success or failure (Whipple and Roh 2010). As such, global competition has transitioned from firm-firm to supply chain versus supply chain (Slone 2004). In using the backdrop of resource-advantage theory to explicate the critical nature of salespeople in information sharing within the supply chain, this paper addresses the call for research into theoretical groundings in the field of supply chain management (Kauppi 2013; Winter and Knemeyer 2013) and extends the work of Hunt and Davis (2008) toward grounding sales and supply chain management in resource-advantage theory.

## **Research Session 6: Friday 2:20 to 3:00 PM**

### **“A Comparison of Social Media Usage by Industrial Buyers and Sellers: A User Objectives/Goals Perspective”**

Mary Shoemaker (Widener University), Robert Hooker (University of South Florida), Richard Plank (University of South Florida)

This research examines how social media is being used by both buyers and sellers. The idea that social media should be a conversation suggests that both buyers and sellers should be using and deriving value from social media. A formative measure, using the Groundswell (Li and Bernoff 2008) model was developed by combining the sales literature and supply chain literature for examples of how social media has been used successfully. Results from using that measure to survey 117 sales function employees and 110 buying function employees suggest that buyers use and value social media more than sellers.

### **“The Sensing-Interpreting-Responding Model of Dialogue Exchanges”**

Aaron Arndt (Old Dominion University)

To advance the sales discipline, researchers should study the dialogue-exchange between salespeople and customers. However, because most theory in marketing has been developed for phenomena at higher levels of analysis, new theory needs to be built specifically for customer and salesperson dialogues. Consequently, conversation theory from cybernetics is combined with the Sensing-Interpreting-Responding (SIR) model from active listening. According to conversation theory, exchanges follow three steps: (1) one party issues a statement/question, (2) the other party responds, and (3) the first party acknowledges the second party's response. The SIR model can be added to understand the cognitive processes between each conversational step. Combined, the SIR model of dialogue-exchanges can be used to predict a variety of specific salesperson and customer behaviors that occur during a sales encounter.

## 2019 NCSM Papers & Extended Abstracts

## REVISING THE CUSTOMER-ORIENTATION PERFORMANCE LINK

Desirée Jost, Justus-Liebig University Giessen

A salesperson's customer orientation is still a key concern of managers and researchers alike. More than 35 years after its introduction to the sales literature (Saxe and Weitz 1982), the customer orientation of salespeople still receives managerial attention and scholarly interest (e.g., Lussier and Hartmann 2017). Managers' big investments in customer orientation are based on the premise that the higher the salespeople's customer orientation, the higher their performance. However, the performance enhancing benefits of a strong customer orientation have not been conclusively found in past research (Franke and Park 2006).

Why does salesperson customer orientation not consistently increase performance? Despite the need for studies to better understand how and why a salesperson's customer orientation influences his or her performance and eventually answer this question, three important concerns with prior research limit our understanding. First, past research has rarely focused on the customer's perspective, although a customer's purchase decision is a pre-requisite for a salesperson's performance (Homburg, Müller, and Klarmann 2011). Second, a sound theoretical framework to thoroughly investigate the relationship between customer orientation and performance is still absent. Third, although Saxe and Weitz (1982) have already suggested the impact of situational factors on the relationship, research on their influence on the effectiveness of a customer-oriented selling approach is still limited.

The objective of this study is to address these issues by drawing on in-depth interviews with 39 purchasing and 40 sales experts from various B2B industries. Specifically, the study (a) incorporates the customers' perspective, (b) proposes perceived risk and the development of trust as the conceptual mechanism of the customer orientation-performance link, and (c) identifies situation-specific factors influencing the effectiveness of customer-oriented behaviors.

### METHODOLOGY

We conducted semi-structured interviews and relied on a theoretical sampling procedure to identify individuals with experiences in sales and/or purchasing in a B2B setting, and across various hierarchy levels and industries. Overall, the sample consisted of 39 purchasing managers or purchasers and 40 sales managers or salespeople as well as CEOs from a broad range of German B2B companies. Interviews revolved around the understanding of customer-oriented behaviors, its impact on their purchase decision and situational factors increasing or decreasing the importance of customer-oriented behaviors throughout the sales process. The interviews were coded according to grounded theory (i.e. open, axial and selective coding).

### FINDINGS

In a purchase decision, customers are trying to reduce their perceived level of risk about product-related aspects such as relevant alternatives or purchase outcomes. In purchase decisions with at least some degree of perceived risk the customers engage in risk-reducing behaviors and turn to salespeople who they perceive to be credible and benevolent to provide them with information. A salesperson's customer orientation is an important means to reduce the customer's perceived level of risk. For the customers, the salesperson is the face of the company and a customer-oriented selling approach indicates how the company is going to perform after a deal has been closed. A customer-oriented salesperson signals to the customer that the salesperson and the supplier company can be trusted. A customer-oriented selling approach is especially important in the long-term as it increases trust in the salesperson and the company's offering and helps to establish a beneficial relationship for both parties. When the customer is searching for a reliable and trustable business partners, a customer-oriented salesperson is seen as a promise that the relationship with the company will be based on the same principle. A purchasing manager in the pharmaceutical industry explains,

*"I assume that a long relationship is the result of a high customer orientation by the salesperson. I have*

*gained the feeling that the salesperson understands me- he can convince me and take me with him. In this instance a close relationship is the consequence of a good customer orientation.”*

A customer-oriented selling approach is especially important in purchase situations characterized by a high level of perceived risk and a strong desire to build relationships with the salesperson and supplier. More precisely, in order to make a purchase decision, a customer’s level of perceived risk needs to be reduced, while, trust becomes more important when the customer wants to establish a relationship with the supplier. A customer’s level of perceived risk and desire to build a relationship is influenced by situational variables, such that it can be higher or lower. For example when purchasing a highly complex product the customer’s level of perceived risk will be higher as well as his/her desire to build a close relationship with the supplier. The customer is dependent on the salesperson to provide a satisfactory product after the deal has been closed and it becomes costly for the customers to switch suppliers once the product is in use. Hence, a customer-oriented selling approach is from great importance to reduce the customer’s level of perceived risk and to establish trust in the salesperson and the supplier. The CEO of a food wholesaler explains,

*“If you have a very complex decision, with high risk on the customer side, then you have a much higher chance for customer orientation, because you naturally have to engage in a dialogue, because you have to invest more to persuade the customer. This means that the customer wants the salesperson to convince him/ her. Of course, the rational factors also have to be fulfilled afterwards, but the space for customer orientation is way higher in these situations.”*

#### **IMPLICATIONS**

Theoretically, the paper contributes to past literature by combining implications from research on perceived risk and trust to provide a theoretical framework of the customer orientation-performance link and highlights the influence of situational factors. Managerially, the results indicate that salespeople and their managers should pay closer attention to situational factors in their decision to engage in customer-oriented behaviors to save resources (e.g., costs associated with a customer-oriented selling approach) by adapting the intensity of their customer orientation.

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## **WHAT HAPPENS AT HOME DOESN'T STAY AT HOME: EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF PERSONAL STRESS ON SALESPERSON BURNOUT**

**Michael Peasley, Middle Tennessee State University**  
**Rajesh Srivastava, Middle Tennessee State University**

Sales careers routinely involve a significant level of stress. Salespeople are susceptible to high levels of stress because they are tasked to create and manage relationships with prospects and customers that typically have different objectives and conflicting priorities with the organization. As such, salespeople are often required to meet increasing customer demands with constrained organizational resources and differing managerial directives (Hollet-Haudebert, Mulki, & Fournier, 2011). While organizations may be tempted to gloss over the problem of salesperson stress, ignoring it could be detrimental to the organizations. Employee stress cost organizations over \$300 billion annually as a result of accidents, absenteeism, employee turnover, diminished productivity, workers compensation, tort judgments, and medical, legal, and insurance costs (American Institute of Stress, 2018).

Typically, researchers and organizations have focused on the environmental conditions and demands within the workplace culture that tax individuals (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Job stress related to role ambiguity, role conflict, and role overload are frequently studied in the literature (Cavanaugh, Boswell, Roehling, & Boudreau, 2000; Lepine, Podsakoff, & LePine, 2005) and related to job burnout, deviant behavior, and poor performance in the workplace (e.g., Meier & Spector, 2013), including their linkage through negative emotions (Rodell & Judge, 2009). While this research stream is both robust and informative, job-related stress may only provide a partial picture into the negative impact of stress on employees. Thus, an incomplete understanding of the sources of stress and a limited set of tools for helping employees cope with stress.

Habitually overlooked within organizations and academic research is the impact of stress from employee's personal life. Personal stressors such as health ambiguity, relationship conflict, and financial overload can pose a threat of a loss of personal resources. This threat of loss drives individuals into certain levels of stress (Hobfoll, 1989, 1998). In fact, a study by the American Psychological Association (2014) found that after job-related stress, money, health, and relationships were the top causes of stress in the United States. Job- and personal-related stress negatively impact sales performance and organizational commitment through salesperson burnout – emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. This occurs when job- and personal-related stress accelerate the depletion of resources in which causes the employee to feel overextended (Maslach & Jackson, 1981), become disengaged in their work, and lose confidence in their abilities to perform adequately (Maslach & Jackson, 1981).

Unfortunately, workplace- and personal-related stress harms the salesperson and therefore the well-being of an organization and its other members. Moreover, this problem is prevalent throughout many organizations and often cannot be easily eliminated. To address this challenge, we seek to accomplish two goals through a study of business-to-business salespeople. First, we shed light on the negative impact of personal-related stress and the need for organizations to implement programs that reduce its impact. Second, we test two salesperson traits that organizations often seek and cultivate in their salespeople – grit and self-efficacy – to determine if they can serve as buffering conditions for the negative relationship between stress-related salesperson burnout and performance. Results show that person-related stressors increase salesperson burnout and the boundary conditions explored are not always enough to reduce the negative impact of burnout on performance. The findings should encourage academics to take a broader approach to understanding salesperson stress and motivate managers to implement programs that improve the holistic wellness of their salespeople.

# PROTECTING AGAINST THE EFFECTS OF EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION ON UNETHICAL BEHAVIORS: THE MODERATING ROLES OF PERCEIVED SUPERVISOR SUPPORT AND SALESPERSON GRIT

Bruno Lussier, HEC Montréal  
Nathaniel Hartmann, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa  
Willy Bolander, Florida State University

## 1. Introduction

Many have noted that the pressures imbued in the sales role can serve as a breeding ground for potential emotional exhaustion (Rutherford, Hamwi, Friend, & Hartmann, 2011) and unethical behaviors (Agnihotri & Krush, 2015). Managers then have a compelling interest to understand how to help salespeople avoid unethical behaviors. The present work seeks to provide some insight into this issue. Specifically, we extend the application of self-control theory (Baumeister, 2002) – where self-control describes the ability of an individual to regulate their urges, behavior, or desires in the face of temptations and impulses – to the B2B context, and advance theory pertaining to why emotional exhaustion may diminish ethical behaviors in the sales context. We also extend the sales literature by theorizing why perceived supervisor support and grit may serve as important social and personal resources that protect and replenish salespeople's transient resources, thereby attenuating the negative influence of emotional exhaustion on ethical behaviors.

– Insert Figure 1 about here –

## 2. Research model and hypotheses

Dealing with high levels of pressure, adversity, conflict and failure is a constant part of the sales profession (Dixon & Schertzer, 2005). Based on this premise, the numerous demands and challenges make emotional exhaustion an almost inevitable obstacle for salespeople (Jaramillo, Mulki, & Boles, 2011). Not surprisingly, scholars have shown that emotional exhaustion can negatively influence attitudes, behaviors, and sales performance (Babakus, Cravens, Johnston, & Moncrief, 1999). Formally stated:

***H1a. Emotional exhaustion is negatively related to sales performance.***

Because emotional exhaustion is regarded as a state of depleted emotional resources which contributes to breakdowns in self-control (Baumeister, 2002), we argue that emotionally exhausted salespeople will be inclined to conduct unethical behaviors for at least three reasons. First, pressure can lead to salespeople being tempted to sell at all costs to meet their goals. Second, salespeople may be more inclined to behave unethically because they often operate out of the sight of their supervisor (Singh & Rhoads, 1991). Third, because self-control is the act of aligning one's behaviors with an ideal, which is effortful and costly in terms of salespeople's energy and resources. Therefore:

***H1b. Emotional exhaustion is negatively related to ethical behaviors.***

Prior ethics-related research in a sales context has shown a positive linkage between ethical behaviors and performance (Schwepker & Schultz, 2015). Similarly, recent sales research has shown the positive influence of ethical behaviors on sales performance in a B2B selling context (Agnihotri & Krush, 2015). Furthermore, research has reported that the positive impact of salespeople's ethical behaviors on customer value enhances sales performance (Schwepker & Schultz, 2015). Thus:

***H1c. Ethical behaviors are positively related to sales performance.***

We examine the influence of perceived supervisor support on the relationship between emotional exhaustion and unethical behaviors because of its particular relevance to salespeople (Lewin & Sager, 2008) and because it represents a type of relatively stable resource not likely affected by the day-to-day pressures of the sales job. Moreover, supervisor support can strengthen employees' felt obligation to reach their goals, with a reduction in engaging in negative behaviors (Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, Vandenberghe, Sucharski, & Rhoades, 2002), such as being unable to resist temptation leading to unethical behaviors. Such a stable resource, we argue, will be useful in countering the effects of emotional exhaustion. Accordingly:

***H2. The negative effect of emotional exhaustion on ethical behaviors is reduced when perceived supervisor support is high.***

Next, grit is a higher order personality variable that conveys stable resources that can positively impact an individual's success (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007), and overall work ethic (Meriac, Slifka, & LaBat, 2015). We argue that gritty salespeople have this stable resource necessary to do the task of selling "over time" while remaining focused even in the face of increased workload, objections, demands, and challenges. That is, we expect gritty salespeople to be engaging in ethical behaviors. To the best of our knowledge, we are the first to examine grit as a higher order factor in a sales context. In doing so, we answer the call of examining the relationship of grit with other commonly studied variables in the sales literature (Dugan, Hochstein, Rouziou, & Britton, in press), such as emotional exhaustion. Formally:

***H3. The negative effect of emotional exhaustion on ethical behaviors is reduced when grit is high.***

### **3. Method**

A total of 123 complete responses were received from salespeople (89.8%) and 21 matched managers (95.5%) from a high technological firm. These 123 B2B salesperson-manager dyads were used to perform the analysis. All measures used in our study are well-established in the marketing and psychology literature and self-reported by the salesperson with the exception of performance which was manager reported—grit (Duckworth et al., 2007), perceived supervisor support (DeConinck & Johnson, 2009), emotional exhaustion (Rutherford et al., 2011), ethical behaviors (Schwepker & Schultz, 2015), and manager perceived sales performance (Dubinsky, Yammarino, Jolson, & Spangler, 1995). Grit was modeled as a higher-order formative construct comprised of two lower-order dimensions. All measurements used a 7-point scale (1 = disagree; 7 = agree). Partial least squares (PLS), variance-based structural equation modeling (using SmartPLS 3.2.7), was used to test hypotheses. Given its ability to overcome some identification issues associated with co-variance based SEM, PLS-SEM is well suited to estimate complex models that include formative constructs and/or use a small sample (Hair, Hult, Ringle, Sarstedt, & Thiele, 2017).

### **4. Results**

Emotional exhaustion is negatively associated with sales performance ( $b = -.24, p < .01$ ) and ethical behaviors ( $b = -.19, p < .05$ ), supporting H1a and H1b. Ethical behaviors is positively associated with sales performance ( $b = .42, p < .01$ ), in support of H1c. Overall, the hypothesized main and control effects only model explains 14.1%, 9.3%, and 33.7% of the variance in emotional exhaustion, ethical behaviors, and sales performance, respectively.

The interaction of emotional exhaustion and perceived supervisor support is significant and positive ( $b = .17, p < .05$ ), supporting H2. A high level of perceived supervisor support attenuates the negative influence of emotional exhaustion on ethical behavior. Surprisingly, the interaction between emotional exhaustion and grit was significant ( $b = -.15, p < .05$ ), but contrary to the hypothesized direction, not supporting H3. When emotional exhaustion is low, a high level of grit results in higher ethical behavior.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1 Theoretical implications

This research makes several unique theoretical contributions to the literature. First, we apply self-control theory to the sales context. The findings show that emotional exhaustion reduces both ethical behaviors. While expected, these findings offer credence to the applicability of self-control theory within the sales context and, in particular, to extending the sales literature to encompass the negative impact of emotional exhaustion on ethical behavior. Second, results of the post-hoc analysis also indicate that emotional exhaustion negatively influences sales performance indirectly ( $b_{\text{indirect}} = -.08, p < .05$ ) through ethical behavior. Hence, emotional exhaustion reduces sales performance directly and indirectly by reducing ethical behaviors. Third, we proposed that perceived supervisor support and grit each attenuate the negative relationship between emotional exhaustion and ethical behavior. As expected, the findings show that perceived supervisor support attenuates the negative emotional exhaustion-ethical behaviors relationship. This is an important finding as it highlights the ability of social resources to protect and replenish salesperson's self-control. However, the findings show that instead of attenuating the negative emotional exhaustion-ethical behaviors relationship, grit amplifies it. This is an interesting finding that casts some doubt on the, to date, nearly ubiquitously positive perception of this variable.

### 5.2 Managerial implications

This paper also offers contributions to practice in a number of important ways. First, our study confirms the negative effects that stem from emotional exhaustion while also identifying perceived supervisor support as a moderator that can reduce these negative effects and grit as a moderator that can amplify them. Second, novel to the sales literature, our findings show that emotional exhaustion is negatively associated with ethical behavior. Therefore, identifying and managing early signs of emotional exhaustion becomes a key success factor for managers and sales organizations. Third, our results provide evidence that maintaining favorable ethical behaviors leads to better sales performance. Notably, our research has implications for managers to encourage their salespeople's ethical behaviors, for the benefit of the sales firm as well as the benefits of each salesperson. Fourth, our findings show that perceived supervisor support appears to attenuate the negative relationship between emotional exhaustion and ethical behavior. Our work extends this notion and suggests that managers would benefit from identifying those salespeople who are close to experiencing emotional exhaustion, regardless of their typical performance ranking. Last, the findings reveal an unexpected and counter-intuitive that as grit increases, the negative effect of emotional exhaustion on ethical behaviors becomes stronger. Therefore, grit should be seen by managers as how you recharge, not how you endure.

### 5.3 Limits and opportunities for future research

Some limitations of this research merit discussion. First, the cross-sectional research design excludes causal inference. Second, the data were collected in a single company operating in one industry in North America. Third, the relationships are tested using a limited number of salesperson-sales manager dyads ( $n = 123$ ). Future research should re-examine the proposed relationships using a greater number of salesperson-manager dyads. Moreover, researchers may explore, compare, and contrast alternative processes (i.e., mediators) and consider may examine what can attenuate or amplify (i.e., moderators) to the negative effect of emotional exhaustion on unethical behavior.

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# TRUST RECOVERY IN THE BUYER-SELLER RELATIONSHIP

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## RESEARCH QUESTION

Even the best salespeople can damage a buyer's trust. Specifically, it is estimated that salespeople lie on sales calls (50%), make unrealistic promises (34%), and sell buyers unneeded products (22%) (Marchetti 1997; Strout 2002). These behaviors can produce outcomes that are perceived to be negative in the buyer's mind. Sales researchers therefore have a substantial stake in understanding the consequences of those negative outcomes on trust and how to implement successful trust repair strategies that recover trust and allow the exchange relationship to continue.

Implementing a suboptimal trust repair strategy can lead to a failure to recover trust which is detrimental to both the buyer and the salesperson. Damaged trust that goes unrepaired often manifests itself through the termination of a relationship or through the deterioration of a relationship in the form of neglect and opportunism (Anderson and Jap 2005). This can interfere with an otherwise successful collaboration that yields returns for both parties. When using appropriate trust repair strategies, salespeople can view damaged trust as an opportunity to engage in a substantive repair effort that may ultimately bolster the relationship and allow for the development of higher levels of trust. So, if a salesperson damages buyer trust, what trust repair strategies should be utilized?

## THEORY

We suggest that when a salesperson damages the trust of a buyer, it creates an aversive state that if left unmitigated could end the exchange relationship. Prior theorizing has indicated the optimal way to repair damaged trust is to shift responsibility for the negative outcome that damaged trust away from the transgressor (Kim et al., 2009). This contradicts a foundational exchange principle, which suggests that when a negative outcome occurs that the transgressor should attempt to "rebalance the scales" and restore fairness (i.e., equity) to the relationship. Increasing fairness in a relationship has been shown to positively impact perceptions of trust (Colquitt and Rodell 2011). As a result, we predicted that a salesperson's verbal (i.e., social accounts or words) and behavioral (i.e., actions) strategies would be effective in recovering trust to the extent that those strategies improved perceptions of fairness. Further, we argue that verbal and behavioral repair strategies can be complementary in increasing perceptions of fairness as they can be used to rebalance the relationship in fundamentally different ways.

## METHODS

We conducted two empirical studies: (1) a critical incident technique study with 204 professional purchasing agents and (2) a longitudinal experiment with 234 insurance buyers (consumers). In the first study, we established external validity by conducting a field study with professional purchasing agents across 36 industries (e.g., financial services, computer services, industrial manufacturing, healthcare, consulting) in ongoing business-to-business exchange relationships. The second study provided the requisite control that was necessary to establish internal validity while also allowing for a causal test of our theory. In both studies, our measurement models demonstrated good fit. Convergent and discriminant validity were demonstrated using accepted practices. We estimated and controlled for common method variance using the correlational marker technique. Non-response bias was not an issue in our studies. A regressions based approach was used for hypothesis testing. Mediation procedures were employed based on recommendations from Hayes (2013) and moderation procedures were employed based on recommendations from Cohen and colleagues (2002).

## **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

Study 1 evaluated the effect of individual behavioral repair strategies on perceptions of fairness and examined whether fairness mediated the relationship between behavioral repair strategies and trust recovery in a field setting. We found that behavioral repair strategies that include immediate problem solving activities designed to offset the harm associated with the damaged trust (i.e., restoration) or that set up a system to assure trustworthy behavior in the future (i.e., regulatory controls) are key to achieving trust recovery through increasing fairness in the relationship. Contrarily, tangible, future compensation (e.g., a discount or a complimentary service on a future order) and salesperson punishment were not found to increase fairness nor achieve trust recovery.

Study 2 builds on Study 1 by examining the main effect of behavioral repair strategies on fairness using a longitudinal experiment while controlling for alternative explanations in the literature. The results of Study 1 were confirmed with restoration and regulation having a positive impact on trust recovery as mediated by fairness. Study 2 also provided an ideal environment for isolating the interactional effects of verbal (i.e., words) and behavioral repair strategies on trust recovery as mediated through perceptions of fairness. The results indicated that verbal repair strategies did not enhance or detract from the effectiveness of behavioral repair strategies.

## **CONTRIBUTIONS**

This study makes several contributions to the literature. First, while previous research has focused primarily on changing attributions of the harmed party to recover trust, this essay has shown that reducing the inequity (i.e., increasing perceptions of fairness) is also key to trust recovery. This can be accomplished through using behavioral repair strategies such as restoration or regulatory controls to tangibly improve equity for the buyer. Our studies show that these strategies (specifically, restoration and regulatory controls) can increase the buyer's perceptions of fairness, which is a key missing mediating variable in the current trust recovery literature. The importance of fairness in the process of trust recovery is evident as it mediated the relationship between both restoration and regulatory controls (Study 1 and 2) on trust recovery.

Additionally, verbal and behavioral repair strategies are often used in combination in practice. This research provides evidence that there is not an interactive effect between verbal repair strategies and the behavioral repair strategies (Study 2). Apparently for behavioral repair strategies, "actions speak louder than words" and those actions can be eroded by "too much talk." This could be a function of the buyer's focus on reducing tangible inequity through salesperson action where the reduction of psychological inequity through the salesperson's words does not enhance the effectiveness of these actions. Thus, salespeople should focus on the effectiveness of the behavioral strategies rather than focusing on "cheap talk" that does not tangibly improve the buyer's outcomes.

Finally, the empirical trust recovery research to date has tested theory using experiments. This research consists of two separate studies, a field study (Study 1) and a longitudinal experiment (Study 2), partially for the purpose of determining if the same theory that is effective in experimental settings still holds in marketing practice. In both studies, the behavioral repair strategies of restoration and regulatory controls are shown to be effective in trust recovery through improving perceptions of relationship fairness. The field study provided evidence for the external validity of our theory and the longitudinal experiment provided additional evidence for our theory while controlling for the dominant theory in the literature (i.e., attribution theory).

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## FACE-TO-FACE B2C SALES VALUE DELIVERY: KNOWLEDGE BROKERS AND CONSUMER INFORMEDNESS

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Organizational frontlines have evolved to include a growing list of frontline interactions that occur outside of the traditional *face-to-face* (f2f) frontline interaction (Singh et al. 2017). However, traditional f2f consumer interactions still occur, and for those tasked with these roles, a new approach is required to offset/validate the myriad of additional interactions that take place prior to a f2f interaction (see, Singh et al. 2017). In these pre-f2f interactions, new technologies and avenues are driving consumer informedness (e.g., Singh et al. 2017; Rust and Huang 2014; Ostrom et al. 2015). Consumer informedness is defined as *the degree to which consumers perceive themselves as being knowledgeable about products or services in the marketplace in regard to a specific purchase decision before the purchase process and/or interaction with a frontline employee formally begins* (Hochstein, et al. 2018). The current research focuses on how consumer access to large amounts of information from nearly limitless sources, that occur pre-f2f, requires new approaches to frontline f2f interactions.

Traditionally, f2f interactions have been value additive as an important source of information during the early stages of the buying process (e.g., Beatty and Smith 1987; Schmidt and Spreng 1996). Today, that dynamic has clearly changed. For example, a Microsoft (2015) report reveals that consumers now interact with a B2C salesperson after being 70% of the way through the buying process. In addition, Forrester reports that 60% of buyers prefer not to interact f2f with retail sales employees. The study adds that 68% of buyers prefer to conduct their own research and 62% say they develop their own selection criteria for purchase, without aid of the f2f frontline interaction (Thompson 2018). Understanding how this change affects f2f frontline interactions, as well as how salespeople<sup>1</sup> should react is of great importance because firms are struggling in this area and looking for new strategies to address this change (Deloitte 2014).

Consumer informedness is pervasive, yet only a limited amount of scholarly literature addresses the topic. Some conceptual (e.g., Ostrom et al. 2015; Rapp et al. 2014) and empirical (e.g., Leigh et al. 2014; Verbeke, Dietz, Verwaal 2011) works have described the changing knowledge based frontline landscape. In addition, the emerging domain of *Organizational Frontline Research* (OFR) has developed. OFR captures the changing landscape of these frontlines across f2f interaction and into technology driven/aided interactions (Singh et al. 2017). In essence, a goal of OFR is to address how these “moving frontlines” can best be managed by sales-service firms. However, despite the increasing number of ways consumers can interact with service firms, the reality is that f2f interactions are still how many products/services are purchased by consumers (i.e., 86% of US shoppers indicate that they value asking questions in a f2f setting, in addition to online research, see Smith and Anderson 2016).

Interestingly, service firms’ efforts to engage customers in pre-f2f interactions has been described as disruptive to the f2f interaction (Hochstein and Bolander 2018). In essence, those with higher levels of informedness often think they know more than they actually do and are often less open to discussing various alternatives that may add value. To address the disruptiveness that informedness can bring to f2f interactions, one recent study described and empirically tested consumer informedness as a basis for adaptive frontline selling, offering insight into effective influence strategies based on consumer informedness levels (Hochstein et al. 2018). The present research builds on this foundation and empirically investigates how salespeople can best assess/approach varying levels of consumer informedness at a granular level (i.e., information type and novelty) to identify causal mechanisms that

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<sup>1</sup> For simplicity in this research, we utilize “salespeople or salesperson” to reference those engaged in B2C f2f interactions of complex products to consumers.

drive frontline employee persuasion. Informedness does not always reflect reality, as it can, and often is, flawed (Hochstein et al. 2018). Thus, developing a deeper understanding of the consumer's informedness is critical to effectively delivering value in the form of a correct solution.

## Results

The primary objective of the current research is to examine what happens when high informedness consumers and salespeople interact. The study drew upon regulatory focus theory as a basis for hypothesis development. Two experiments were conducted, the findings of which provide support for all but one of the hypotheses. H1 (a-c) adds empirical support for the assertion that for high informedness consumers, attribute-specific information is a more effective means of value creation than the general information approach. On the three value outcomes (WTB, interaction satisfaction, and WOM), attribute-specific information was shown to provide significantly higher scores than general information. This finding suggests that salespeople should focus on gaining a deeper understanding of the high informedness consumer's determinant attributes, which will allow them to present critical attribute-specific information. H2 and H3 separate gap-filling and corrective scarce knowledge application, respectively. The results provided mixed support concerning the interaction of attribute-specific information and scarce knowledge, based on this distinction. Interestingly, the mixed results provide support for the idea that scarce knowledge has at least two dimensions, which operate differently. The significant findings of H3 support the conceptual and theoretical development by indicating that the interaction of attribute-specific information and corrective leads to a higher consumer willingness to buy a frontline employee recommended product when informedness is high.

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## **RELATIONSHIP SELLING AND VALUE CO-CREATION: ENHANCING CUSTOMER LOYALTY**

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With the growing emphasis on relationship marketing in sales organizations and business firms, research exploring the mechanisms that drive successful buyer-seller relationships is critical. The importance of examining buyer-seller relationship outcomes is most clearly presented in Schrock et al. (2016). In this study, bibliometric analysis is used to uncover underlying themes in *The Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management*. Schrock et al. (2016) point to thematic developments in sales literature and indicate that relationship marketing in the context of sales is a valuable future direction for sales researchers to undertake. This study attempts to address the need for sales researchers to closely explore the effects of relationship factors on salesperson-customer interactions, and further to understand ultimate implications for customer loyalty, customer trust, and financial performance.

As notions of sales and customer service continue to merge in the organizational climate (Vargo and Lusch 2004; Moncrief and Marshall 2005), salespeople are increasingly being required to initiate, build, and maintain close customer relationships long after the initial point of sale. This study offers an important contribution to this area of research as it examines the effects of relationship-oriented selling behaviors on customer outcomes.

Gonzalez et al. (2005) define relationship selling formally as the development of long-term, mutually satisfying buyer-seller relationships. Relationship selling is customer-oriented, focused on building trust and enhancing customer value, and allows salespeople to provide goods and services that closely match a customer's strategic priorities (Schwepker 2003). While the power of relationship marketing in the context of sales has been well-established in the literature (Bettencourt and Brown 2003; Netemeyer et al. 2005), there is a dearth of research that explores such phenomena from the perspective of the customer.

This study directly addresses this need by utilizing a dataset collected from customers (n=206) of a mid-size sales organization. The focal sales organization operates in the business to business space and has a culture which emphasizes customer engagement and the building of close relationships between buyers and sellers. Salespeople at the firm are encouraged to foster meaningful relationships with their buyers by engaging in relationship-enhancing activities (Palmatier et al. 2007). This dataset which offers customer perspectives is a notable differentiating factor of the present research as much sales research offers only the perspective of the salesperson or the sales organization (Johnson et al. 2014).

Further, Tuli, Kohli, and Bharadwaj (2007) found statistically significant differences between customer and salesperson perspectives on customer solutions, customer services, and customer relationship maintenance. This finding offers further credence to the study at hand as data taken from the customers' perspectives offers valuable insight into buyers' thought processes and perceptions which cannot be discerned from salesperson data. The use of a customer-oriented dataset is directly called for in Johnson et al. (2014) and allows this research to make a strong contribution to the entire sales literature domain.

This study attempts to demonstrate the unique ways in which customers are influenced by salesperson relationship-building tactics and behaviors. The researchers explore the ways in which relationship-enhancing actions undertaken by salespeople play a pivotal role in strengthening customer perceptions of the buyer-seller interaction and overall measures of sales performance. Value co-creation is the mediating mechanism in the proposed conceptual model, offering insight into the process by which value can drive relationship selling to create customer loyalty and more favorable salesperson performance.

Relationship selling is captured by the antecedent variable customer extra-role performance. The origins of customer extra-role performance stem from services literature (Bettencourt and Brown 1997).

Both service employees and salespeople strive to maintain positive customer relationships, and both attempt to uncover and address customer wants, needs, and expectation due to their close proximity to customers (Netemeyer et al. 2005). Close customer contact is the cornerstone of customer relationship management and has been shown to have a positive influence on customer retention (Parasuraman and Grewal 2000; Srinivasan, Anderson, and Ponnnavolu 2002), and profitability (Ryals and Knox 2001).

Defined as the “degree to which the service employee ‘goes the extra mile’ in serving customers during the employee-customer interface”, customer extra-role behavior gives insight into how customers perceive their salesperson’s attempts to strengthen the buyer-seller relationship. While the definition captures a broad base of many different service employees, this research specifically applies the construct to the sales domain. The measures associated with customer extra-role behavior elucidate the salesperson’s level of engagement with their buyer and the degree to which these customers perceive that their salesperson understands their needs and concerns.

The mediating variable value co-creation attempts to measure the increasing importance of dynamic customer-firm interactions. As buyers become better-informed and seek more meaningful interactions with firms, discrete, transactional exchanges have evolved into value exchanges which are critical to a sales organization’s function (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004). Value co-creation is defined as “the integration of resources during interactions between buyers and sellers” (Jaakkola and Hakanen 2013). The definition gives insight into the process by which value co-creation occurs: customers are active in the exchange and as such are co-creators of the value created by the exchange. The researchers propose that value co-creation will have a mediating influence on the relationship between customer extra-role behavior and customer loyalty.

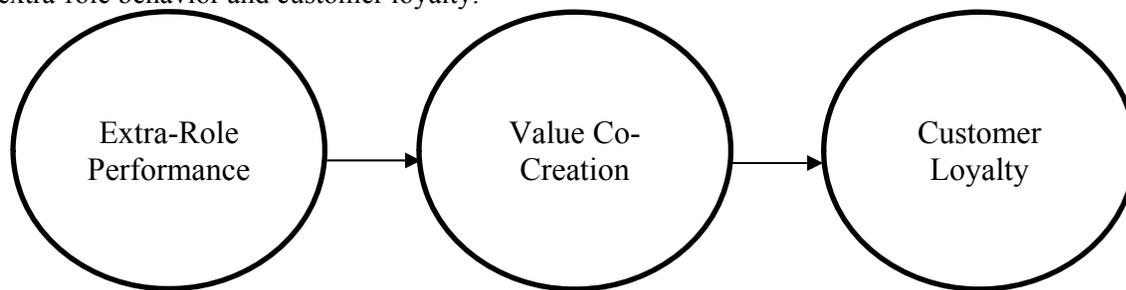


Figure 1.1. Conceptual Model

### Theoretical Grounding and Hypotheses

The conceptual model is compelled by social exchange theory which is an appropriate theoretical framework for understanding how customer loyalty is compelled by extra-role performance (Wetzel et al. 2014). By using social exchange theory, this research may uncover how parties engaged in repeated exchange behaviors (i.e. long-term interactions between salespeople and their buyers), respond to actual and perceived relational benefits with their exchange partners. The proposed model relies on the notion that salespeople engaging in extra-role performance to the benefit of their customers will both improve customer loyalty and be mediated by buyer perceptions of value co-creation.

Relationship selling throughout previous literature has demonstrably proven to provide concrete and discernible benefits to the exchange relationship (Gonzalez et al. 2005). The variable customer extra-role performance captures the level of dedication a salesperson allocates toward building a successful buyer/seller relationship. As such, it follows suit that customer extra-role performance will have a positive influence on value co-creation which captures the customer’s perceived engagement in the joint value realization process (Holbrook 2006, pg. 212). This leads to the first hypothesis:

*H1a:* Customer extra-role performance will have a positive effect on value co-creation.

Social exchange theory provides insight into why value co-creation will have a mediating influence on the relationship of extra-role performance and customer loyalty. The notion of value co-creation suggests that there will be a behavioral response within customers who perceive greater relational benefits in their customer-salesperson relationships (Wetzel et al. 2014). These perceived benefits felt by

customers are hypothesized to lead to positive relational outcomes in the manner of greater customer loyalty. As such, this leads to the second hypothesis:

*H1b*: Value co-creation will have a mediating effect on customer loyalty.

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# **SALES-SERVICE INTERFACE ON A TEAM LEVEL: HOW INCLUSION OF SERVICE EMPLOYEES IN A SALES TEAM INFLUENCES CUSTOMER SATISFACTION**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Customers place a lot of importance on deployment and post-deployment activities in their decision-making in the buying process (Tuli, Kohli, and Bharadwaj 2007). However, these activities do not always receive due attention in the sales process as they happen after the purchase. The sales process and post-purchase activities are siloed in understanding of many B2B sellers. First comes the sales process in which salespeople are engaged with the customer, then, the technical people help to deploy the solution and, later, customer support helps the customer with occurring challenges. Inclusion of specialists in the process is very time-specific, sequential and siloed (Kowalkowski 2008). Such siloed perception can lead to customer dissatisfaction. Customers can have false or unclear expectations towards the whole process. Moreover, service employees, which engage with the customer later, might not keep promises made by salespeople earlier in the sales process. Both, the customer and the seller could benefit from involvement of service employees at the pre-purchase stage. Rodriguez et al. (2018) mention that for setting the right expectations of the process and outcomes, the process should be managed by a team rather than a group of individual specialists.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Current team selling literature only briefly covers inclusion of service employees into the sales team. In their seminal paper Moon and Armstrong (1994), define roles present in the selling team and mention “resource” and “implementer” roles, which could resemble the activities carried out by service employees. Arndt and Harkins (2013) suggest that inclusion of sales support specialists into the sales activities might take different forms ranging from inclusion in the core selling team, provision of external support or no involvement. Jelinek and Jelinek (2011) mention that adopting a sales team approach will signal to the customer a more seamless, transparent, customer-oriented process with a higher probability of meeting customer needs. Further, Rodriguez et al. (2018) suggest that a customer in the process of service purchase should request participation of technical employees from the very beginning of the process. Moreover, the authors also advice that the customer demands that the same technical employees assist them in the implementation process. Generally, team selling has been related to customer-related outcomes like customer satisfaction (Wang et al. 2018; Sleep et al. 2015), customer service expectations and perceptions (Rodriguez et al. 2018), service quality (Wong et al. 2015; Wang et al. 2018) and firm-related outcomes like team performance (Garrett and Gopalakrishna 2017; Sleep et al. 2015; Ahearne et al. 2010; Rapp et al. 2010; Lambe et al. 2009) and individual salesperson’s performance (Garrett and

Gopalakrishna 2017; Schmitz 2013). Although literature mentions that service and technical employees can be involved in the team and that team selling might have positive outcomes for the customer and company, this idea is not developed further to explore the impact that presence of service employees has on customer satisfaction.

As for sales-service interface (SSI) literature, the topic of SSI has been studied on individual sales employee level (Agnihotri et al. 2017; Ogilvie et al. 2017; Gabler et al. 2017) and from multilevel perspective (Yu, Patterson, and de Ruyter 2012; Rapp and Baker 2017; Rapp, et al. 2017). Nevertheless, analysis on team level is lacking for a full multilevel understanding of the phenomenon (Rapp et al. 2017).

Thus, from previous research, we have an understanding that deployment and post deployment stages are important for the customer in the buying process, yet we do not know which role service employees play in the sales team working with the customer. Therefore, the focus of this study would be studying sales-service interface on the sales team level of analysis. Particularly, an impact of involvement of service employees in the sales team on customer satisfaction will be studied with a help of experimental design study.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN DEVELOPMENT**

The hypotheses proposed for this experimental design study are developed based on expectation disconfirmation theory (Oliver 1977) and promise theory (Calonius 1986/2006). Proposed hypotheses suggest that inclusion of service employees early in the sales process is important for two reasons. First, in line with expectation disconfirmation theory, service employees should be involved early in the sales process to accurately set customer expectations. Second, in line with promise theory, service employees should be aware of promises made to the customer in the sales process since they will be responsible for keeping them.

The study implements a 2 x 3 experimental design. Manipulated variables are involvement of service employees in sales team (service employees are present in the sales team / service employees are not present in the sales team) and disconfirmation of customer expectations (unmet expectations / met expectations / exceeded expectations). In total, six treatments are developed to be tested in the experiment. The dependent variable in the study is customer satisfaction. The mediator variable suggested by the chosen theoretical lens is perceived team behavior entitativity. The study is conducted among members of the national purchasing association, who work in B2B context and are involved in purchase of solutions.

## **EXPECTED<sup>1</sup> RESULTS AND INTENDED THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS**

The study aims to identify the moderation effect that inclusion of service employees in the sales team has on the relationship between disconfirmation of customer expectations and customer satisfaction with provider. Furthermore, the study attempts to detect the mediation effect of

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<sup>1</sup> This study is work in progress. Data collection for this study is about to start.

perceived team behavior entitativity. The study also attempts to show how well the hypothesized relationships can be explained by expectation disconfirmation and promise theories.

The study aims to contribute to sales-service interface and team selling streams of literature. Firstly, the article introduces expectation disconfirmation and promise theories into the sales-service interface literature. The paper also answers a call by Rapp and Baker (2017) for more research on ambidextrous teams, consisting of sales and service employees. Secondly, the article also offers some advancement for team selling literature. The article explains the impact that inclusion of service employees into the sales team has on customer satisfaction. It also introduces how other variables such as disconfirmation of customer expectations and perceived team behavior entitativity fit the relationship between team selling and customer satisfaction.

As for managerial implications, this paper equips managers with a better understanding of how companies can improve customer satisfaction and create more value for their customers by involving service employees in the sales process. The article suggests that inclusion of service employees into the sales team will help providers improve their value propositions and fulfillment of those value propositions.

**REFERENCES AVAILABLE ON REQUEST**

## RELEVANT RESEARCH AND MEDIA FOR SALES MANAGERS AND PROFESSIONALS

**Gary R. Schirr, Radford University**  
**Maneesh Thakkar, Radford University**  
**Laurel E. Schirr, Virginia Tech**  
**Richard E. Buehrer, University of Toledo**  
**Lisa Simon, California Polytechnic State University**

Results and recommendations from a previous study of the dissemination of academic research to sales professionals (Buehrer, Simon, & Bieraugel, 2013) included:

- Sales and sales management topics covered in major journals were of interest to practitioners,
- Sales managers and professionals rarely read academic journals that published sales research,
- Sales professions felt that reading about selling was important but they didn't read enough, and
- Younger sales professionals preferred selling information in summary digital or video form.

A survey of 289 sales professionals tested the ideas from the earlier study and expanded its scope (Schirr, Thakkar, Schirr, Buehrer, & Simon, 2015). Topics of interest mentioned by 50 or more subjects were:

| <u>Table 1: Topics</u>                       | <u>#</u> |
|--|----------|
| 1. Specific Product and Industry Information | 184      |
| 2. Selling Tactics                           | 131      |
| 3. Sales Management and Leadership           | 86       |
| 4. Relationship Selling                      | 80       |
| 5. Customer Service                          | 59       |
| 6. Marketing Strategies and Tactics          | 58       |
| 7. Training in Sales Skills and Tactics      | 52       |
| 8. Buyer Behavior and Psychology of Selling  | 51       |

Eliminating the number 1 topic as firm and industry-specific, the authors felt that the remaining seven topics were a reasonable match to a summary of journal article topics in sales and sales management articles from the earlier study (Buehrer, Simon, & Bieraugel, 2013). One difference noted is that Sales Management topics were the majority of topics in the academic journals.

When the sales professionals were asked about the “ideal sales article” to distribute content to sales professionals the top five responses were:

| <u>Table 2: Publication Attributes</u>    | <u>#</u> |
|---|----------|
| 1. Articles should be short and concise   | 58       |
| 2. Articles should contain useful tactics | 42       |
| 3. Articles on motivation and success     | 33       |
| 4. Digital format                         | 21       |
| 5. Simple, practical, down-to-earth       | 19       |

The authors believe that there could be a need for a change in the nature of the content and delivery of selling and sales management research to be accessible and useful for sales professionals. Possibilities could include summarizing recent relevant research in selling, sales management and social psychology in formats such as:

- A short quarterly publication that is a compilation of summaries,
- A weekly or monthly podcast discussing the studies
- A YouTube channel of short videos on each study

The authors of this continuing study feel that one more question needs to be addressed before suggesting a new publication or mode of delivery for research results:

**Would current articles related to selling and sales management in academic journals be useful content to sales professionals?**

**RESEARCH METHODS**

Buehrer, Simon, et al. (2013) conducted qualitative research with selling researchers categorize existing current research on selling and sales management.

Schirr, Thakkar, et al. (2015) used a two-phase survey of sales professionals to gather opinions on reading habits, the importance of information, topics of interest and content delivery methods. A convenience sample of sales contacts at a diverse set of firms was sent a link to an online survey. It produced 56 samples with a 16% response rate. Student investigators (with IRB training) in selling classes surveyed subjects after a day of shadowing. Only 3 subjects refused, yielding an additional 243 survey responses.

*The Current Survey*

The authors surveyed two recent issues of the leading sales journals, the *Journal of Professional Selling and Sales Management* and the *Journal of Selling*, and looked for articles in general marketing journals with the help of the abstracts provided by *JPSSM* (2018) in volume 38, number 2. The authors seek current research content that fits the attributes of “useful” and “practical” and the topics suggested by the sales professionals surveyed, to test interest. The focus was on identifying 8-10 current articles meeting the professional’s criteria; it was not an effort to identify “most relevant” sales related articles.

Ten articles were identified: two each from *JPSSM*, *IMM*, and *Journal of Selling*; and one each from *HBR*, *Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of Marketing Research*, and *Psychology and Marketing*. The articles identified as meeting the criterion were summarized. A survey asks sales professionals:

- How useful and relevant the collection of articles appears to be
- How likely they would be to read, view, or listen to the collection
- Their three favorite articles from the set
- How likely they would be to read, view or listen to each identified article

The survey is being tested on a small sample. The article summaries are shown in the following section.

**THE ARTICLES**

The Performance Impact of Sales Collaboration with Marketing and Customer Service (Claro, 2018).

This is a look at networks across functions within firms. An interesting result from a study of salespeople in a chemical firm was that sales performance was better among salespersons who had:

- fewer, but stronger ties with counterparts in the marketing function, but had
- more, but weaker ties with counterparts in customer service.

The conclusion is that a salesperson should make a few good friends in marketing and know a lot of customer service people.

Reciprocal Value Promises: Buyer-Seller Value Proposition Disparity in Professional Services

(Baumann, Meunier-FitzHugh, & Wilson, 2017). The authors conducted in-depth interviews to examine value co-creation in the context of professional services. They found that the value propositions offered by customers are largely consistent with those sought by sellers. Value propositions offered by sellers, however, were very different from what was sought by customers. The authors suggest that the misalignment might lead to service failure and impede the development of long-term relationships.

The Role of Humor Usage on Creativity, Trust, and Performance (Lussier, Grégoire, & Vachon, 2017). The manuscript tests hypotheses with data from 144 salespeople and their business customers. Findings demonstrate that humor usage increases sales revenue through mediating processes involving salesperson creativity and customer trust. By helping their customers laugh, salespeople can not only sell more but also increase customer referrals and the likelihood of future sales. However, humor is context specific and negative consequences could occur with its improper usage.

Salesperson Solution Involvement and Sales Performance: The Contingent Role of Supplier Firm and Customer-Supplier Relationship Characteristics (Panagopoulos, Rapp, & Ogilvie, 2017). The study provides a conceptualization and measure of salesperson solution involvement and examines its effect on sales performance. Customer solution involvement enhances sales performance. This effect is amplified under conditions of (1) high sales unit cross-functional cooperation, (2) high levels of firm's product portfolio scope (i.e., number of product lines and number of product variants in each product line), and (3) strong customer-supplier relationships characterized by closeness and reciprocity.

Under the Sway of a Mobile Device During an In-Store Shopping Experience (Rippé, Weisfeld-Spolter, Yurova, Dubinsky, & Hale, 2017). The study provides a general framework for implementation of tactics for the retailer and salesperson when dealing with the mobile-dependent consumer. The more searching consumers do on their phones, the more they experience increases in perceived control, which fosters their purchase intentions. It is suggested that adaptive selling techniques be included in the salesperson's training.

Why Do Salespeople Quit? An Empirical Examination of Own and Peer Effects on Salesperson Turnover (Sunder, Kumar, Goreczny, & Maurer, 2017). The authors investigate antecedents of salesperson turnover and propose a framework that links individual salesperson factors (i.e., relative performance, customer satisfaction, and goal realization) and peer group factors (i.e., peer turnover and variance of peer performance) to probability of salesperson turnover. Results reveal negative effects of relative performance, customer satisfaction, and variance of peer performance on salesperson turnover propensity. The results also show an inverted U-shaped effect of goal realization and a positive effect of peer turnover on salesperson turnover propensity.

From selling to managing strategic customers - a competency analysis (Lacoste, 2018). An increasing number of companies select strategic customers, who are then treated differently from standard customers. This article provides a comprehensive overview that compares the competencies of salespeople with the competencies of strategic account managers. The article's objective is to highlight a competency path that can lead salespeople to transition successfully into strategic account managers. The article helps practitioners draw a competency grid to assess both salespeople's ability to succeed in their role transition and the training required to support this transition.

Developing Social Selling Influence: ... Content Strategies & Influence Tactics (Barry & Gironda, 2018). This research examined the role of content marketing and influence tactics in establishing social influence for sales personnel. From content evaluations of leading social media influencers, cluster variates and survey instruments were derived in search of a behavioral structure that represents the inspirational appeal and consultation style of leading social influencers. The analyses support a two tiered typology epitomized by either inspirational appeal (impassioned or envisioned) or consultation style (engaging or enlightening) exhibited by the influencer. Cluster solutions suggest that sales personnel can best grow their social influence as one of:

- “Edu-tainers” (impassioned inspiration and enlightening consultation),
- “Motivators” (impassioned inspiration and engaging consultation),
- “Strategists” (envisioned inspiration and enlightening consultation) or

- “Mentors” (envisioned inspiration and engaging consultation).

The New Sales Imperative (Toman, Adamson, & Gomez, 2017). The authors provide guidelines to a proactive approach to handle customers overwhelmed with information and feeling powerless to handle the data. They prescribe an approach whereby the supplier works with customers to understand their journey in the purchase process, identify the challenge they face at different buying stages, and provide customers with tools to handle these challenges. Suppliers track the progress of the purchase and are ready to jump in to keep the progress on track. This approach resulted in an increase in ease of purchase and decreased the likelihood of buyer's remorse.

Understanding the Role of Trust and Expertise When Developing B2B Relationships in France (Newell, Lapoule, & Leingpibul, 2018). Developing strong international business associations is essential in global business ventures. This research compares results from studies based in the U.S. to a study in France by investigating how the components of credibility (expertise and trust) of both the sales rep and the company interact to create long-term business relationships. The results indicate that while perceptions of both the rep and company are important in maintaining these B2B relationships, contrary to previous research in the U.S., they do not have a direct effect on loyalty. Similar to studies based in the U.S., company expertise and trust do have a direct and significant role in creating loyalty perceptions for French businesses. What we think we know about selling may be subject to the culture of our clients.

### CONCLUSIONS

Current thoughts: There are multiple ways to meet this identified need.

- A new publication (print, audio or video) could provide some mix of new research and research summarized from other sources).
- One of the selling journals could expand “abstracts” to create an “abstracts for practice” and deliver enriched summaries of its own and other journals targeted to sales professionals.
- Each journal could provide appealing summaries for professionals and be indexed for search. Third parties, such as the NCSSM or PSE, could aggregate the links for sales professionals.

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## **BUSINESS-TO-BUSINESS SELLING WITH TANDEM CUSTOMER NEEDS IN MIND**

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In B2B selling, in order to be truly customer-centric, it is important to consider not only the needs of direct customers, but also the needs of indirect or downstream customers as related to the direct customer's needs - the "tandem needs". The characteristics of downstream customers should be accounted in marketing strategy (Kleinaltenkamp and Ehret 2006; Piercy and Lane 2003), especially with decisions regarding segmentation which drives all marketing strategies (Kotler et al. 2010). Ironically, B2B research often neglect the consequences of derived demand, the managerial challenge it causes, and solutions to deal with them. Motivated by this research gap, we conceptualize and develop a B2B segmentation strategy for sales force deployment with customer tandem needs in mind. A market segmentation model is built using a method which distinguishes between immediate and downstream customers' characteristics. The proposed method explicitly accounts for both sets of customer variables in deriving richer, more meaningful, and actionable segments for B2B sales force. In the model, distinct sets of customer variables are considered different segmentation bases, also referred to as segmentation dimensions in the literature.

B2B sales deployment will especially benefit from such joint segmentation. Take, for example, the empirical data setting for the current research. A media company owns TV stations and newspapers. Its sales people sell advertising space to advertisers. The advertisers are customers of the media company, but they also have their own customers, often consumers. A local restaurant is a client to the media company as it buys advertising space, but it is also a business itself with its own customers or patrons. To develop effective selling messages, the media company should use a market segmentation scheme that considers immediate customers (such as restaurants and car dealerships) as well as the downstream customers (usually consumers). Accordingly, we develop a model that incorporates the characteristics of derived demand while segmenting immediate or direct business customers, such as the advertisers in this example. The proposed model uses joint segmentation methods (Ramaswamy, Chatterjee and Cohen 1996). It preserves the conceptual distinction between two or more segmentation bases while accounting for the possible association or correlation between them. Each customer is *simultaneously* (instead of separately) placed in its appropriate segments on both dimensions. Therefore, information on each dimension is fully utilized in the segmentation exercise. The model incorporates benefits desired by the advertisers and the advertisers' customers as distinct segmentation dimensions, and considers their interrelatedness.

One might question why is a new model necessary. Models that ignore customers' customer as a distinct segmentation dimension produce segments that are undifferentiated in terms of benefits desired by customers' customers. Salespeople will be facing customer segments that are heterogeneous in terms of benefits wanted by customers' customer; hence their selling effectiveness will be negatively affected (Mantrala et al. 2010, Zoltners et al. 2009). In contrast, the proposed model considers multi-dimensional segmentation bases, and also incorporate dependent variables (DV) through latent class regression so that one may observe responses to some independent variables (IV). For each DV, IV on all segmentation bases serve as regressors. The resulting segments are both homogeneous with respect to IVs, and also in terms of response of the DV to the IVs.

The model is tested first through Monte Carlo simulation studies. A dataset with three interrelated segmentation bases for 1,000 customers is generated. The segment structure, segment size (joint probability), distribution of the IVs on each dimension, and response parameters for each joint segment are assumed. The value of the DV can then be computed as a linear combination of the product between IVs and their corresponding response parameters. To analyze the simulation data, membership

information is deleted from the simulated dataset and the proposed model is estimated. AIC/BIC scores were used to recover segment structure. The model correctly identified number of segments on each dimension. This test was repeated for 100 datasets and AIC/BIC scores consistently recovered the correct segment structure. Estimated values for joint probability and parameter estimation are very close to the true joint probability values. Overall correct classification rate is 82%.

To further test the model, we collected data through collaboration with a media company in Midwest U.S. The company runs one of the largest newspapers in the United States with over 1 million readers each week. The metropolitan area that it operates in has a population of 2 million. The company was experiencing declining advertisement space sales and the top management believe the advertiser segmentation plan is ineffective. The existing advertiser segmentation plan uses geographic variables and industry variables only and does not consider benefits desired by either the advertisers or their downstream customers, as in a B2B2C market. We collected data through a phone survey to develop a B2B market segmentation model that reflects the immediate and downstream customers simultaneously, so that the media sales force can better target advertisers. The sampling frame includes single location businesses with annual sales revenue over \$250,000. The average annual sales revenue is \$3.5 million. The estimated average annual advertising expenditure is \$28,000. We drew a proportional random stratified sample of businesses from the retail (30.4%), services (40.5%), FIRE (13.1%) and other industries (16%). Altogether, 2,307 telephone numbers were dialed. Qualified managers in 566 eligible businesses were reached. Overall, 313 survey interviews were completed. So the response rate is  $313/566=55\%$ . Respondents were asked to split 100% of their advertising budget over a variety of media outlets. They then rated the importance of various benefits of advertizing. The last set of questions, which is key to our conceptual contribution and unique for the B2B market, is about benefits desired by customer's customers. The DV is the print advertising dollars share of the total advertising budget of businesses. Two segmentation bases were used in the empirical model: (1) benefits desired by advertisers and (2) benefits desired by advertisers' customers. Conceptually, they are distinct as one comes from advertisers and the other from consumers. These two dimensions are also interrelated. For example, if the advertiser's customers are brand-emphasizing, then the advertisers are likely to seek the benefit of building brand image when they purchase ad space. BIC score suggested that the best-fitting model has a six-segment structure. Senior executives selected two out of the six segments as focus of the sales effort. For example, one of the chosen segments consists of "brand image builders". Accounts in this segments have large annual sales and one of the highest annual ad spending. On the first segmentation basis, advertisers value brand image building and new product introduction. These are also positive drivers for the print ad share in total ad budget. On the second segmentation basis, advertisers' customers are brand and service-emphasizing. To target advertisers in this segment, the salesperson should highlight why this newspaper is an excellent medium for building brand image as well as introducing new products. It is also beneficial to show that the newspapers' readers care about quality, and therefore fits the profile of advertisers' own desired target audience. Overall, the empirical analysis shows that the resulting customer segments are well differentiated on each of the segmentation dimension, and the segments are more meaningful and actionable segments for the sales force. The model generated more precise segments that will aid salespeople in sales messaging.

In conclusion, this research provides a conceptual contribution to the B2B sales management literature by explicitly considering the tandem customer needs. Methodologically, it advances the state of the art of latent class finite mixture models in the market segmentation literature by extending the latent class regression models. Managerially, the proposed model is used to segment a real B2B market in the US, adding to the sparse number of actual B2B market segmentation applications reported in the literature.

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## THE SALES LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT GAP: WHAT SALES MANAGERS ARE SAYING

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What are sales managers saying about the challenges they face and the development opportunities they are receiving to address these challenges?

(paraphrased from actual interviews)

*I find it exceedingly important to understand how to motivate the younger generation of sales reps (and different generations for that matter).*

*It is critical that I implement my role in hiring and talent recruitment, putting people in the right role, setting them up for success, and providing training and development opportunities for them.*

*I need to be able to teach sales reps how to be profitable. To do this, I need to be more analytical.*

*Having the skill set to better understand a P&L sheet would help me to get better at mentoring and teaching sales reps to do this as well.*

*Emotional intelligence, empathy, coaching, holding people accountable, understanding individual differences in salespeople, using technology ... these are some of the skills sets that I feel I could become better at.*

Sentiments like these (revealed by interviews with sales managers) suggest that there are pervasive and pressing issues that contemporary sales leaders face. So, what are these challenges? What competencies are needed and what is being done to prepare sales leaders to address these issues and challenges? These are but a few questions that senior sales leaders may be asking when assessing the readiness of their salesforce to exceed organizational goals and objectives. Addressing these questions are critical to better understand the type of sales leader development programs that are needed, yet to this point, the answers remain elusive.

According to the 2016 Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Outlook Handbook, sales managers represent a sizeable occupation that is projected to grow by 5% through the year 2024. Given this, a better understanding of what sales managers see as significant challenges, issues, and needed competencies is of utmost importance to begin to address the need for more formalized developmental programs. It also provides the basis for continued academic research and formation of best industry practice. To answer this call, the purpose of this research study is to qualitatively address the following research questions:

*RQ1: What are some of the most pressing issues and challenges sales leaders/managers face today?*

*RQ2: What are some of the most important competencies needed to adequately address these issues and challenges?*

*RQ3: What opportunities currently exist for sales leaders/managers to develop and/or enhance needed sales leadership competencies?*

We begin to explore the insight from these questions through a thematic analysis of the results of structured interviews conducted with 30 sales leaders/managers from a cross-industry sample during four focus group sessions.

## METHODOLOGY

Our approach to addressing our research questions centers on a rich base of qualitative data collected using four focus group sessions across 30 salesforce leader participants over a 6-week period. The purpose was to gain insight into our research questions. The focus groups were led by a professional focus group facilitator. Each focus group was transcribed to closely reflect the actual comments made by each participant during the questioning sessions. Upon transcription, each was analyzed and coded in order to group together common categories and themes relative to each question. The following section provides a thematic analysis of our findings providing the basis for further qualitative insight.

## RESULTS

*RQ1 What are the most pressing issues and challenges sales/leader and managers face today?*

One of the challenges (themes) reported was a major change in talent development focus within the selling organization. Professional sales as a career choice has earned widespread acceptance. Case in point is the increasing number of universities providing an academic career track at the undergraduate level. Companies are supporting university sales programs (via financial partnerships) and universities boast new hire rates for their undergraduates in professional sales programs nearing 100 percent. As one respondent indicated, [*“University sales programs are replacing traditional training programs. The coaching job for the sales leader has become difficult because the students are learning to ‘pitch’ in college. Part of coaching involves retraining them to [our]... selling process.”*] This has caused a shift in the type of coaching and development the sales manager needs to provide new hires after they arrive. Coaching and training are shifting from the traditional onboarding to the development of the salespeople beyond basic selling skills. There seems to be a need for development of sales representatives at the entry and mid-level career tracks and development of those individuals who wish to pursue sales leadership roles. Sales managers are called to lead these efforts. One participant suggested [*“... developing people is most important and we need to be able to coach people at all career stages and age levels.”*] This notion was identified by 23 percent of focus group participants as one of the most pressing issues facing a sales leader today.

The second major issue was talent acquisition and hiring as indicated by 27 percent of the participants: [*“... selection, hiring and training new talent is an area where we do not have a formalized training process and this causes problems in finding and hiring the right people.”*] One respondent verbalized the link between recruiting and (the previously mentioned) developmental challenge [*“Once we find talent, we don’t have the resources to train and teach sales.”*]

The third pressing issue was related to motivation across the generations as 30 percent of focus group participants felt they faced major challenges in this area. [*“There is a disconnect with a millennial new hire and me as a manager, this is a challenge.”*] [*“Bringing in the younger generation of salespeople and keeping them motivated is difficult.”*] In addition, there was some concern projecting how to address the motivational challenges brought by the next generation. [*“Millennials have been around for some time now... so what will be the next set of characteristics of folks entering the workforce...how do we deal with them?”*]

While the concern with motivating the younger generation was palpable, the participants did not address what exactly it is about a millennial employee that makes it so difficult for sales leaders. Discussion did center on a few ideas. One manager noted that non-monetary factors such as paid time off motivate millennials. Millennials may also be more intrinsically motivated than their older counterparts in the workplace. This may cause a motivational disconnect in a profession whose culture is wrapped around compensation packages and other financial motivators. Based on all of this, motivating younger generation sales people represents a major and on-going challenge.

*RQ2 What are some of the most important skills needed to adequately address these issues and challenges?*

The pressing issues sales leaders face require competencies in the areas of coaching, hiring, people skills and behavioral management. Fifty percent of all the competencies listed by the participants related to understanding *human behavior, managing, motivating and coaching* sales people. *Sales analytics* and *quantitative* competences accounted for approximately 20 percent of the responses; the remaining 30 percent were a mixture of *strategy* and understanding *technology*.

Overall, the participants listed the following skills relating to the development of people: Adapting to new ways of communication; Understanding individual differences in salespeople; Understanding the personalities of salespeople; Managing relationships within the company and across departments; Behavioral Management; Coaching; Emotional intelligence; Empathy; Holding people accountable.

A second set of skills pointed to more analytical, strategic, and tactical competencies such as: Financial and analytical skills; Ability to better analyze data to run sales teams; Time management; Negotiation; Strategic skills; Being innovative and forward-thinking anticipating market change and reacting accordingly; Thinking outside the box with creative solutions; Critical thinking and problem solving.

The comments from group participants indicated a desire to be proficient in generational awareness and its impact on decision-making, motivation, leadership and corporate culture. Sales leaders were looking for help in understanding personal values and belief systems and how these values and beliefs affects the course of a sales career and success of sales persons. Assistance in these areas can provide valuable insight for today's sales leaders in motivating their sales teams.

*RQ3 What opportunities currently exist for sales leaders/managers to develop and or enhance needed leadership competencies?*

The majority of participants in the focus group sought assistance in developing the competencies mentioned in research question two. Selling organizations have the choice of developing their own training internally or seeking external sources. There was consensus that this area was not well addressed and a variety of different methods (e.g., certificates, academic master's degree programs, executive education, internal sales management training) were identified as useful. When asked about opportunities to enhance their sales leadership skills. Forty three percent of the focus group participants indicated that they sought assistance with development and training issues external to the organization. Comments from some of the participants were positive on their resources: [*"We have created our own library of sales leadership books and list of developmental programs for our sales leaders."*] [*"We have good senior sales level training through work."*] The remainder either did not know how to address the issue or were not actively seeking development themselves [*"Personally for myself and because of my age I would not participate, but I would promote it though."*] There was a clear sense that sales leadership development represented a gap in most sales organizations [*"...these opportunities may be unique to larger companies but are likely not available to smaller or entrepreneurial sales organizations."*]. Overall, we saw convergence of qualitative findings across the four focus groups and all participants. There were clear majority held positions with little to no disagreement on these specific points.

## **DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

We know that sales manager efforts are critical to the long-term success of the sales organization (Honeycutt Jr, 2002; Czinkota et al., 1997) and that they are one of the most important assets in an organization, although they receive little development efforts. Our research confirmed that development of sales management talent is one of the most pressing issues facing the sales organization, along with how sales leaders develop their salesperson subordinates. While not surprising, this confirms what many

have proposed from other research indications and anecdotal evidence (e.g., Longenecker et al. 2014; Mallin 2018).

Mallin (2018) identified three core areas that sales leaders need to demonstrate competencies. Our results seem to support these key competency areas, and the need for further development in each. First, managers need competencies in *salesforce planning and organization*. Many of the specific skill sets identified by our focus group participants fit in this area, such financial and analytical skills; time management, and strategic planning skills. Training for existing sales managers can help to assure sales managers have these skills. Instilling the skills at earlier stages would also assure that needed competencies are available as these sales leaders advance in the organization. As with sales planning and organization, our results also pointed to specific skills related to *development of the sales force*. This area was the most important focus in the pressing issues discussion. In particular, our respondents indicated they struggle with having the skills and knowledge needed to deal with millennial salespeople and the next generation coming up. They also indicated that they need further understanding and skill sets for providing needed development and management of salespeople across different career stages. Much of this generational insight exists, and programs within or outside the organization that provide insight and understanding in these areas, as well as help with stereotype breaking regarding generations would be useful. The third area from the Mallin (2018) work was in *salesforce evaluation and control*. Our findings indicated that sales managers did identify several competencies from this area where they feel they need additional skill and knowledge development. In particular, the ability to better analyze data to run a salesforce was emphasized and financial and analytical skills were discussed in light of evaluation as well as planning.

Our results point to a need for the development of a variety of educational and training programs. Internal training can address the transition to sales management. Ironically, the need for this development falls on existing sales leaders. Training efforts will help to improve the professionalism, effectiveness and efficiency of sales leaders. Sales executives in practice need to advocate for internal sales training to support these valuable resources. In addition, organizations should consider ways to provide mentoring and development through special projects to enhance needed skills sets. Having a formalized mentoring program where a salesperson works closely with a highly competent sales manager (think student teacher or executive mentoring) would allow the salesperson to both try the position for motivation, but more importantly to develop the needed skills. Special project work would be a way to tap and test salespeople for sales management, or first line sales managers for higher level promotion, while at the same time providing support for skill development. While training in each of these competency areas is necessary within the organization, academic programs, whether executive education or degree granting, represent an important path for development sales leadership. Programming, whether sales management courses within undergraduate degree programs, specializations within an MBA program, or specialized master programs would be able to very specifically develop these skills in a way that provides for specific application to the salesforce. University curriculum should be aware of this need and consider future initiatives.

In conclusion, we believe that this paper provides a valuable first step in delineating the need for specific sales leadership competencies and skill sets. Developmental efforts in practice and in academic education can gain valuable insight from this research. In addition, we believe this helps to set a stage for future research into the area.

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# AN EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION OF A FULL RANGE MODEL OF SALES LEADERSHIP

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## Purpose

One challenge facing managers is optimizing how they lead their employees. Anderson and Sun (2017) called for a new full-range model of leadership as the existing one fails to integrate much of the current leadership theory. Sales managers in particular must identify the style of leadership preferred by each employee and adapt their own leadership style to best suit each individual to optimize salesperson performance. This paper empirically tests a full range model of sales manager leadership using an existing conceptual model of employees' leadership style preferences. The study will verify whether it is possible to identify an employees optimal leadership style using two simple and short scales (preference for hands on/hands off leadership and preference for transactional/transformational leadership) versus four longer scales currently used to measure preferred leadership style (charismatic, servant, laissez-faire, and autocratic). Managers optimizing how they lead their employees will result in better performance of individuals.

Adaptive leadership refers to the concept that the situation and stakeholders are analyzed and the appropriate leadership style selected to achieve optimal organizational performance (Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky 2009). According to Allio (2013) a leader should respond to changing situations and events, and needs to utilize numerous behaviors and attributes from more than one of the traditional leadership theories. Kohles et al. (2012) noted that followers each have different needs and perceptions of leaders, and that leaders' are faced with the challenge of understanding the differences in each of their followers and tailoring their leadership methods through the use of adaptive skills to account for these differences.

## Leadership Theories

Hersey, Blanchard and Natemeyer (1979) introduced situational leadership (SLT) where a leader applies a different style of leadership based on the maturity level of the employee. The challenge of SLT for sales managers is how to categorize salespeople by maturity when often experience and performance are not directly correlated due to many outside factors (e.g., Ko and Dennis 2004). McClesky (2014) notes that situational leadership as originally proposed has problems related to internal consistency, conceptual uniformity and clarity among other weaknesses.

A similar conceptualization is full range leadership theory (Avolio and Bass 1991) which uses a single model suggesting that leaders use elements of transactional, transformation, and laissez-faire leadership based on situational contexts and adapt which of the three they use accordingly. Anderson and Sun (2017) espouse the belief that the current version of full range theory is outdated due to the limited amount of leadership theories it contains and there needs to be an expanded model of full range leadership that is more open to the dynamic nature of society and organizations.

Adaptive leadership (Heifetz 1994) is a counter to the more static traditional theories of leadership. Adaptive leadership focuses on leadership as a process rather than on the capabilities of the leader (Heifetz et al., 2009) and on the specific problems at hand. The leader needs to modify past behaviors to accommodate the new situation. This should induce a more creative solution from all involved in the leader-follower dynamic and lead to a positive change owned by those who will implement the solution. Full range leadership theory differs from adaptive leadership in that full range only draws from the three aforementioned leadership theories while adaptive leadership suggests that the leader draw from elements from any theory (Heifetz, 1994). However, in this theory the focus is on the problem rather than on the relationship between the leader and followers or the needs of the followers that can be addressed by the leader.

Flexible leadership literature (e.g., Yukl and Mahsud 2010) notes that rapid changes that affect organizations have increased in pace. Managers have increasingly encouraged values that support the ability of the company to quickly detect, interpret, and translate signals in order to develop new behaviors to respond to these changes. Kaiser and Overfield (2010) note that the assessment of flexibility of leadership is commonly based on coworker ratings of general tendencies of an individual to adapt their behavior to changes in the environment.

### **Leadership Types**

**Laissez-Faire Leadership** Laissez-faire is translated from its French origin as “leave it alone” or “let it be” and the leader has a hands-off, transactional role and employees typically make the decisions. Effective laissez-faire leaders work well with employees who are skilled, self-motivated, and comfortable working without close supervision (Gill, 2014).

**Autocratic Leadership** Autocratic leadership bestows power on the leader because of their position. Leaders have power as those who were in the position previously had power and control. They maintain information ownership and are not as likely to listen to ideas and suggestions. Autocratic leadership is hands-on and transactional as it seeks to oversee and monitor others closely. They have short-term objectives with division of labor and guidance by rules and regulations (Keulder, 2010).

**Servant Leadership** Greenleaf (1970) coined the phrase of “servant leadership” as a leader primarily focused on the well-being of the people they work with and the community they work in (Daft, 2016). Leaders that use servant leadership are hands-on and transformational as they listen closely to others while striving to understand and empathize as they can ultimately nurture the growth of employees (Daft, 2016).

**Charismatic Leadership** Weber (1958) identified charismatic leadership type as gaining followers by personality and charm instead of authority or other external power. Followers’ self-concepts are engaged in the interest of the mission stated by the leader. Leaders that use charismatic leadership are hands-off and transformational as they attract followers and lead them to feel inspired to take action (Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993).

### **Hypothesis**

This empirical study will verify whether it is possible to identify an employee’s preferred leadership style using two simple and short scales transactional/transformational and hands-on/hands-off versus four longer scales currently used to measure preferred leadership style. It also unifies several of the common leadership theories and style into a single, coherent, updated full range model of sales leadership as called for by Anderson and Sun (2017).

***Hypothesis 1: Employees that have a preference for a transactional leadership style will have a greater affinity for the following leadership types: laissez-faire and autocratic.***

***Hypothesis 2: Employees that have a preference for a transformational leadership style will have a greater affinity for the following leadership types: charismatic and servant.***

***Hypothesis 3: Employees that have a preference for a hands-on leadership style will have a greater affinity for the following leadership types: servant and autocratic.***

***Hypothesis 4: Employees that have a preference for a hands-off leadership style will have a greater affinity for the following leadership types: charismatic and laissez-faire.***

### **Research Implications**

From an academic perspective, this study presents further investigation to confirm the construction of the typology development from previous literature reviews. The research conducted provides evidence about whether a leadership style can be identified based off measures of employee

preferences in leadership styles. The study also creates a full range model of sales leadership that combines Autocratic, Servant, Charismatic, Laissez-Faire, Transactional and Transformational leadership theories into a single model as called for by Anderson and Sun (2017).

For practitioners, sales leaders are able to determine which style should be used in a given situation. Leaders that adapt to their employees best enable their salespeople to navigate the unpredictable business environment. The use of the classification grid will prove to be helpful for salespeople and managers to understand how to function; however, it is critical that the approach for each individual is reviewed on a regular basis. As people are adapting in their roles of an organization, they will likely have varying preferences as they develop professionally in the organization. This can be implemented as the annual performance review is conducted at all levels of management and potentially more frequently for newer employees. Employees that have certain preferences could also benefit from being assigned a different manager based on their leadership style they typically use if one or more managers in an organization is unwilling to adapt their style to individual sales person needs.

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## TEACHING POLITICAL SKILL TO STUDENTS IN FORMAL SALES EDUCATION

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Demand for college graduates with sales skills is strong and continues to accelerate, leading more universities to develop sales majors, minors, and certificates (Fogel et al. 2012). Given the increasing demand from industry and the inevitable placements in a sales-related role, business educators must prepare students for sales-related opportunities. Very recent research shows that organizations hiring off the college campus for sales-related roles are looking for talent with the right personality/temperament who are prepared to take on customer-facing sales activities, administrative activities, and non-customer-facing activities while having demonstrated skills (communication, organization, interpersonal, sales, technology, business acumen, and analytical) (Deeter-Schmelz et al. forthcoming).

As university sales programs grow, program directors at these universities wish to learn faster, thereby fueling membership growth in the University Sales Center Alliance (USCA). Today, the USCA boasts 50 members today, up from eight member schools in 2002 ([www.universitysalescenteralliance.org](http://www.universitysalescenteralliance.org)). A recent USCA exercise shows that USCA member school curricula tend to focus on business-to-business sales as it relates to dealing with and serving *external* customers. Sales text books are also very external customer-centric (cf., Tanner and Castleberry 2018). Surprisingly, by and large, these programs, courses and textbooks place scant attention on the education and development of students for managing internal customers, an increasingly important issue in today's modern sales landscape (Plouffe et al, 2016).

One skill important to facilitating and managing internal customers is political skill, which has only recently received attention in the marketing and sales literature (Bolander et al. 2015; Kalra et al. 2017). Political skill, stemming from the organizational behavior literature, is “the ability to effectively understand others at work, and to use such knowledge to influence others to act in ways that enhance one's personal and/or organizational objectives” (Ferris et al. 2005, p. 127). Political skill is positively associated with a wide-range of organizational outcomes, such as job performance (Blickle et al. 2008). Considering how important it is for modern salespeople to navigate the internal sales environment (Plouffe et al. 2016) and how political skill can be strategically used to help, sales education should explicitly make students aware of political skill as a tangible tool for success. However, the ability to shape students' political skill through educational exercises represents a gap in the literature. As such, the objective of this research is to explore ways in which targeted pedagogical approaches can improve student's political skill.

In this study, we present political skill as an important topic that should receive focus in formal sales programs and argue that students need to develop political skill to navigate the complex *internal* sales environments present in today's business milieu. More specifically, we conduct two separate studies to provide empirical support for the efficacy of teaching political skill to undergraduate students in both traditional classroom and extra-curricular (i.e., sales competition) settings.

Our study makes several contributions to the literature. First, we formally introduce the notion of political skill into the sales education literature. As sales curriculums and programs continue to evolve in order to keep up with the ever-changing dynamic nature of the sales profession, educators must not only be focused on teaching new “external” skills but also devote time to developing “internal” skills – namely, political skill and its associate dimensions – for students. Second, our research contributes to the scant literature on salesperson political skill, which has heavily emphasized the benefits of political skill in sales settings. We expand on this literature by exploring how political skill can be introduced and taught in formal sales educational programs and that it does not necessarily need to only be offered as part of training to current employees (Ferris, Davidson, and Perrewé 2010). Lastly, we offer two distinct pedagogical approaches to effectively implement the education of political skill in undergraduate sales programs.

With regards to practical implications, our research provides guidance for both sales educators

and company managers. For educators, political skill should be at the forefront when it comes to teaching students about creating value for the different “key relationship groups” that salespeople are often responsible for managing, especially those that are internal to the organization (company support staff, management personnel) (Manning, Ahearne, and Reece 2014). To most effectively convey and train students on political skill, educators should go beyond traditional classroom instruction and provide students with the opportunity to apply the tenets of political skill in more experiential learning and hands-on settings such as role-plays and sales competitions.

For managers, particularly those who are hiring entry-level salespeople, political skill should be actively screened for during the interview and recruitment process. Managers should use behavioral and scenario-based questions to assess a candidate’s familiarity with the elements of political skill and the student’s current comfort levels with navigating internal sales environments.

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## **I KNOW WHAT I WANT AND IT'S YOURS: MANAGING THE ENVY OF COMPETITIVE SALESPEOPLE**

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Sales managers are often forced to drive sales performance through promoting competition within their salesforce. This is often accomplished via the use of salesperson comparisons that stimulate competition among their salesforce (Beltramini and Evans, 1988). Managers use these techniques based on the tenets of social comparison theory (SCT) as it implies that people may often be stimulated to perform certain activities based on their comparisons of themselves against others. The current study explores the potential for envy engendered by this managerial practice, as all envy is a de facto product of social comparison in one form or another (Smith and Kim, 2007). For example, a sales manager might post the results from a successful salesperson's closed sale on the company CRM/social media platform before an audience of his/her peers in order to stimulate competition amongst them. Envy is likely to result as a comorbid outcome where salespeople become envious of the successful salesperson. In this illustration, it is obvious that effects of both envy and competition are at play. Thus, the current research explores two distinct types of envy (benign vs. malicious) as to their relative effects on sales performance.

The efforts of sales managers to create competition via social comparisons across individuals in the sales team, invariably leads to increased perceptions of a competitive psychological climate (CPC, see Brown et al., 1998). To study salesperson perceptions of these purposeful practices, the current study utilizes the concept of CPC to explore how benign and malicious envy might be engendered as a result. The current research explores salesperson performance through a unique paradigm in that salespeople, when operating with the perception of a CPC, will experience one of two conditions of envy (either benign or malicious) that have differential effects on their performance outcomes. Benign and malicious envy are both conceptualized as playing a role in different sales performance outcomes, where benign envy elicits a positive effect and malicious envy a negative effect. Manager social support is conceptualized as a moderator that has an effect on this relationship where its increases elicit a counterintuitive effect on the CPC and benign/malicious envy pathways.

Despite the breadth of extant research on the topic of sales management, the current study identifies three primary gaps in the literature. First, as stated, the present research focuses on the relationship between CPC and salesperson envy. The underlying mechanism of envy is proposed to better explain some prior mixed results on the effects of CPC on sales performance. For example, comparison-based competition has been demonstrated to motivate positive salesperson outcomes (Plotkin 1987; Brown and Peterson 1994); whereas in other studies it has yielded less than desirable outcomes (Krishnan, Netemeyer, and Boles 2002; Schwepker and Ingram 1994). Second, the focus on envy subtypes (i.e. malicious and benign) addresses an area largely unstudied within the sales literature as this concept is explored in regards to how it affects sales performance. Finally, the concept of manager social support, often used to help offset CPC, is explored in an ostensibly counterintuitive manner. The current research focuses on unintended consequences of manager social support, where it increases malicious envy, while decreasing benign envy as CPC increases.

These research gaps are tested via a sample of 170 salespeople who completed surveys measuring their perceptions of CPC, manager support, and dispositions regarding benign and malicious envy. These survey results were then compared to their individual, objective sales-performance outcomes over the three month period preceding their completion of the survey. The current research contributes to the literature in several unique ways. First, ambiguity concerning the mixed performance outcomes, both positive and negative, in relation to increased competition are explained by differing experiences of envy, either malicious or benign, on the behalf of salespeople. This exploration of CPC and Envy advance the sales and marketing literatures, which have largely overlooked these topics across empirical and

conceptual research (see Table 1). Second, despite some research into the effects of malicious envy on performance outcomes, empirical study of benign envy's effect on sales performance is not found across literature. Thus, the present study adds to the marketing and sales literature by investigating the forms of envy and their relationship to objective sales performance (see Table 1). Finally, a contribution of this research is to propose the counterintuitive outcomes of manager social support, as it interacts with CPC to *reduce* benign envy and *increase* malicious envy, which is presumably opposite of what managers intend.

The present study offers a variety of managerial implications. First, the aforementioned literature gaps are addressed as the malicious and benign subtypes of envy are shown to have negative and positive effects (respectively) on sales performance in response to heightened levels of CPC. This finding advances the sales literature as the underlying effects of malicious/benign envy help explain some of the ambiguity in relation to a CPC's effect on sales performance. The literature is also advanced by the exploration of the counter-intuitive moderating effect that CPC and manager social support has on a salesperson's experience of malicious/benign envy and thus, his/her sales performance. These findings carry theoretical implications as they imply that a manager's attempts to support his/her sales team ought to be made with discretion, as they may inadvertently exacerbate a toxic response of malicious envy from their salespeople. Considering this, managers should attempt to create competitive sales teams, but they should keep in mind that both forms of envy are a likely outcome of this activity.

As the current research shows, envy is not an inherently counter-productive response from salespeople, it is only the malicious form of envy that erodes sales team performance. Therefore, it would behoove sales managers to encourage benign envy while being wary of engaging in activities that may induce malicious envy in their salespeople. Armed with this knowledge, sales managers may then more effectively engender competition within their sales teams and respond with increased efficiency and accuracy when addressing counterproductive salesperson behaviors. The implications shown in this study represent "real-world" situations where managers are in the middle of revenue and sales goals, while also desiring to support and "work with" their salespeople. While the current study does not lead to an answer of how to manage envy in a competitive environment, it does point out the serious implications of simply taking intuitive management action, such as support. In these cases, it seems that the "do what I say (I support you), not what I do (only selling matters)" approach is deemed as being disingenuous in the eyes of salespeople. This paradigm, and clear need for solutions, invokes many interesting future research questions.

There are many future research avenues that scholars may explore within the context of CPC, salesperson envy and sales performance. For instance, the current research explored envy subtypes as a potential explanation of differences in salesperson performance. Given the need for solutions to the issues highlighted within this research, additional boundary conditions should be tested. For instance, there exist many potential moderating factors other than (or in conjunction with) manager social support that can be explored regarding the determination of envy subtypes. Salesperson locus of control is one construct in particular that may be a fruitful moderator to explore in this regard. This same concept could be tested further but with additional dependent variables, (e.g. job satisfaction, turnover intention, ethical behavior, stress, etc.) where envy subtypes induced by CPCs are explored in the context of outcomes they affect in addition to salesperson performance.

## **INFORMATION SHARING WITHIN THE SUPPLY CHAIN: THE CRITICALITY OF SALESPEOPLE**

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As the global landscape of competition changes, it is not just the focal firm competing anymore, it is the entire supply chain. With these continual changes, the knowledge required to stay competitive is a very dynamic need that extends beyond the walls of any individual firm. According to Vargo and Lusch (2004), co-creation of value within business partnerships can lead to achievement of greater competitive advantage. Additionally, the co-creation of knowledge has been directly tied to the relationship between customer and supplier; affecting participation, citizenship behavior and commitment (Delpechitre, Beeler-Connelly, & Chaker, 2018). Boundary spanning behaviors have also been positively associated with relationship quality through dyadic behaviors (Huang, Luo, Liu, & Yang, 2013) increasing the strength of the relationship, levels of trust and an increased level of knowledge transfer. This enhancement of the customer/salesperson relationship results in the development of innovation as opposed to simply discovery of existing ideas.

According to Stock et al. (2010), “In recent years, organizations have found it difficult to effectively and profitably compete without establishing collaborative relationships and mutually beneficial partnerships within and beyond their own enterprises” (p. 32). Stronger relationships lead to higher levels of trust and information sharing between firms. Information sharing between supply chain members has shown to be beneficial to both individual members and overall supply chain performance (Khanjari et al. 2012). As postulated by Hunt and Morgan (1995), resource-advantage theory categorizes resources as financial, physical, legal, human, organizational, informational, and relational. For an organization, salespeople can be not only a human resource but can provide informational and relational resources through their boundary-spanning role. Salespeople are in a unique position to connect organizational resources between the firm and customer as the informational conduits between the firm and its customers. Hunt and Morgan (1995) asserted that “consumers have imperfect information concerning products that might match their tastes and preferences, and obtaining such information is often costly in terms of both time and money” (p. 6-7). Firms must capitalize on the boundary-spanning capabilities of salespeople as a resource to minimize the time and costs of gathering information. Consistent with Hunt and Morgan’s (1995) tripartite typology of resource-advantage, this article depicts the unique facilitation of the salesperson role on seminal resources used to fortify supply chain relationships and develop a competitive advantage. Salespeople are essential boundary-spanners between a firm and its customers and a linchpin between buyer-seller exchanges that inevitably affect relationship quality, trust, and the propensity for information sharing.

The criticality of maintaining quality relationships is embodied within the very definition of supply chain management used by the Global Supply Chain Forum. According to Lambert (2014), “supply chain management processes are necessary to manage the links across intra- and inter-company boundaries” (p. 2). Salespeople as boundary-spanners influence a number of supply chain management processes. Increasingly, firms must consider the interactions with customers and suppliers as part of their supply chain management decisions (Julka et al. 2002). Hunt and Davis (2008; 2012) examines a basis for grounding supply chain management in resource-advantage theory by positing a relationship marketing, competence-based, and knowledge-based approach to purchasing strategy. Moreover, in addition to grounding purchasing strategy in resource-advantage theory, inter-organizational communication and information flow via sales strategy can also be grounded in resource-advantage theory. Resource-advantage theory recognizes the role of the diverse resources that are factors within the supply chain, including human, organizational, and relational resources (Hunt and Davis 2008). Yet, there is a conspicuous absence of research attention to the singular role set that essentially intermediates human,

informational, organizational and relational resources.

To date, no research literature examines salespeople as a tangible resource through the lens of resource-advantage theory. Although the original premise of Hunt and Davis (2008) focused on the potential of grounding supply chain management in resource-advantage theory through purchasing strategies, it is reasonable to assume that there are other strategies within supply chain management that can also be developed as resources and thus competitive advantages. As this article posits, the boundary-spanning perspective of the salesperson is indispensable in the success of the overall supply chain. "Resource advantage theory brings into focus many of the issues that face supply chain management" (Hunt and Davis 2008, p. 19). As supply chain complexity is increasing, the interface between logistics and sales becomes more crucial for effective supply chain management. Today's salesperson is perceived as "a relationship manager, primarily responsible for establishing, developing, and maintaining customer relationships" (Garver and Mentzer 2000, p. 114).

Supply chain management and sales literature alike are focusing on the behaviors (problem solving, information sharing, strategic planning) related to this role shift as well as their effects on relationship development (Craven 1995). Through the intra- and inter-organizational transfer of information, salespeople can help minimize uncertainty and reduce risk across the supply chain. Their intimate knowledge of the needs of both the firm and customer helps smooth out variables such as perceived risk, organizational and customer complexities, and customer demand as well as making salespeople a valuable resource within the firm and the overall supply chain. This paper conceptually grounds sales strategy and supply chain management in the resource-advantage theory of competition. Additionally, it demonstrates that resource-advantage theory can be used to explain, predict, and understand how salespeople and sales strategies can provide a competitive advantage in resources across the supply chain. Through this examination of real-world factors impacting the supply chain, resource-advantage theory substantiates the conclusion that sales strategies contribute to an organization's competitive advantage within the marketplace. Sales and supply chain management literature as well as practitioners will benefit from the exploration of resource advantage theory implications. These implications, tied to boundary spanning relationship building, will allow firms to further develop a competitive advantage by realizing and utilizing the salesperson as a tangible resource. In addition, there exists the need for empirical research on buyer-seller relationships within a supply chain as evidenced by the unified thematic structure provided by Stock et al (2014), the conceptual framework offered by Lambert and Cooper (2000) and Garver and Mentzer (2000) argument that while salespeople need logistics expertise to improve relationships with customers, current literature is deficient in furthering examining this idea.

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## **A COMPARISON OF SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE BY INDUSTRIAL BUYERS AND SELLERS: A USER OBJECTIVES/GOALS PERSPECTIVE**

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Organizations are advancing toward integrating social tools into all aspects of their activities. Almost 60% of B-to-B companies reported that social business initiatives had a positive impact on business outcomes (Kane et al. 2014). While marketing is usually the first initiative for social media, the interactive nature of social media is drawing buyers into the conversation as well. Organizations have come to realize that conversations are taking place outside the traditional media (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010). Customers talk to one another and suppliers are themselves also interconnected. Supply chain members and customers are empowered to search for information and communicate in many places. Marketing and sales must pay attention to conversations that occur in the marketplace not initiated by their own organization. Salespeople in B-to-B organizations should be cognizant of supply chain trends and shifts to best serve their customers. Buyers must determine if and how these technologies can be used to further their goals. An understanding of whether buyers and sellers are truly having a conversation, and if so, how and why the conversation is occurring would be of value to both parties. If social media is most valuable when it enables a conversation, it is essential to look the areas of interaction between buyers and sellers, not just what sellers would like buyers to know, but what buyers would like sellers to provide.

### **Groundswell Model**

The Groundswell Model identifies five objectives that buyers and sellers might have that induces them to use social media. The groundswell objectives that executives should incorporate into their strategic plans in order to become more customer-centric are described (Bernoff, Li 2008): Listening, Talking, Energizing, Supporting and Managing. Listening can be described as gaining new insights about the business environment by paying attention to what people are saying about their interactions, experiences, thoughts and feelings with the company, the competitors, the suppliers and markets. Bernoff and Li (2008) indicate that companies traditionally associate listening with marketing research. The objective of using social media to talk is explained as “talking with”, distinct from “shouting” or “talking at”. “Talking with” implies moving from one-way mass communication to timely interactive responsive discussion. Energizing refers to getting customers to interact with one another to evangelize a product. Supporting includes enhancing customer connections and information communication to become more responsive to customer needs. Managing suggests that the increased interconnectivity allows better selection of customers and suppliers as appropriate business partners.

### **METHOD**

A formative measure, using the Groundswell model was developed by combing the sales literature and supply chain literature for examples of how social media has been used successfully. We talked to B2B sales professionals and asked them about how they used social media. The purpose of developing a formative measure is to understand the full domain of social media (Diamantopoulos, Siguaw 2006) as it pertains to buyers and sellers. A professional marketing research survey organization was contacted to provide 100 to 120 sales function employees, either salespeople or sales managers, and 100-120 buying function employees to complete the survey which was collected online. A total of 117 sales function employees and a total of 110 buying function employees completed the survey.

### **FINDINGS**

Generally, the responses cover the entire range and are not normally distributed, illustrating some

significant kurtosis on all but one item, but no skewness. For the sales function sample, means ranged from a high of 2.54 for value to listen to a low of 3.13 for use to engage. All means are significantly different from zero. Not surprisingly, the correlation between usage and perceived value was high. For the buying function sample, means for ranged from a high of 1.82 for listening, to a low of 2.40 for managing. All means are significantly different from zero.

### DISCUSSION

Given that very limited knowledge about usage actually exists by salespeople and buyers, a baseline study was deemed necessary to begin to define the parameters of what we mean by social media use and its value. Choosing formative measures reflects the need to capture the social media domain. In this dual sampling study, it does appear that buyers have more usage of social media and value it more than do sellers. Not only are there differences between samples but both usage and perception of value also vary by communication objective, although these differences are of a much lessor magnitude than what we find between the two groups.

For managers, and especially sales managers, the question they need to ask is why do the buyers seem to use and value this more and what does this mean for them. To some extent it appears that this question has been answered in academic research. The buying process has changed over time and entire customer journey has seen some significant changes which changes the sales funnel. For example, there is ample and ongoing evidence that buyers collect a lot more information, especially for new purchases prior to them seeing their first salesperson (Bunn, Butaney, and Hoffman 2001; Richardson 2010).

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## THE SENSING-INTERPRETING-RESPONDING MODEL OF DIALOGUE EXCHANGES

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In the New Horizons Sales Conference 2018, a call was raised for new theory in the discipline of personal selling and sales management. Personal selling theory is particularly complex because there are more levels of analyses than in many other marketing disciplines. Levels of analysis are analogous to a “microscope” social scientists may use to study phenomena in greater detail. Physical scientists typically research phenomena at multiple scales. For example, biologists interested in the health of a type of tree not only study the tree overall, they also study its parts (e.g., leaves, roots, etc.), microscopic structures, cells, and genes, as well as the forest in which the tree grows. In the social sciences, the process by which constructs are studied at different scales is explained by multilevel theory (which is actually a meta-theory). Central to multilevel theory is the “level of analysis,” which is the scale at which a phenomenon is studied. Business scholars have already acknowledged and studied the group and individual level of analysis; in other words, individual employees and the organizations where they work. However, in sales research there are also levels of analysis below the individual person.

The individual level in personal selling research is the salesperson and includes his/her enduring traits, orientations, and characteristics. Each salesperson typically sells to multiple customers; thus, nested under individual salespeople are individual customer relationships. Salespeople often meet customers multiple times, so nested under each customer is the specific customer interaction/meeting. Sales meetings are then comprised of a longitudinal dialogue of call-response-acknowledgement exchanges between the salesperson and the customer. The dialogue exchange is the lowest meaningful level of analysis because statements in a conversation have no meaning without studying the response of the other participant(s).

While no level of analysis is inherently more important than another, to fully understand phenomena, it is necessary to systematically conduct research at multiple levels of analysis. However, personal selling research tends to focus on salesperson traits, characteristics, and “typical” sales approaches. The lower the level of analysis, the fewer the number research studies. Indeed, there are only two studies of personal selling at the dialogue-exchange level thus far, Arndt et al. (2014) and Singh et al. (2018). Thus, there is a need for personal selling research at levels lower than the individual salesperson.

A key difficulty of conducting research at the dialogue-exchange level is that most sales scholars are trained in marketing or management programs, which do not traditionally study phenomena at the dialogue-exchange level. Traditionally, marketing and management scholars have drawn theories from economics (e.g., agency theory), sociology (e.g., the similarity-attraction effect), and management (e.g., the resource-based view). These disciplines do not study the dialogue-exchange level and the theories they generate are not intended to be used to explain conversational phenomena. Sales scholars should consider drawing theories from academic disciplines that specialize in dialogue-exchanges, such as clinical psychology, counselling, linguistics, and cybernetics. For example, cybernetics scholars studied speech patterns between people and found that conversational exchanges follow predictable entailment patterns, which has been dubbed conversation theory (Pask 1976).

According to conversation theory, each exchange follows three steps: (1) one party issues a statement/question, (2) the other party responds, and (3) the first party acknowledges the second party's response. These steps do not necessarily need to be verbal. Conversation theory can be combined with the Sensing-Interpreting-Responding (SIR) model to understand sales dialogue-exchanges. The SIR model was originally created to explain active listening. The SIR model explains that people receive a communication, interpret it, and then acknowledge it (Castleberry and Shepherd 1993). The SIR model shows the cognitive process between each conversational step presented by conversation theory. Thus, when one party makes a call, the second party interprets it and then responds. Meanwhile, the first party

senses and interprets the second party's response when forming their acknowledgement.

The SIR model of dialogue-exchanges can be applied to a variety of phenomena at the exchange-dialogue level. To illustrate, it could be applied to adaptive selling in order to predict when and why salespeople alter their sales approach. Arndt et al. (2014) showed that when a salesperson used an expertise statement for rapport building, and customers reacted negatively to it, salespeople were less likely to continue using an expertise approach for addressing customer concerns. SIR model would then predict that when (1) a salesperson makes an expertise statement, (2) the customer makes a verbal or nonverbal response, which the salesperson interprets as positive or negative, and then (3) acknowledges the customer's response. Thus, a single dialogue-exchange incident may lead to a long lasting adaptation of sales strategy. Using this model, researchers can answer a large number of research questions related to adaptive selling such as: How often does adaptation occur within a sales interaction? What elements of a sales approach are adapted and does it depend on customer response? Do successful salespeople make the same choices about when and how to adapt as less successful salespeople?

In sum, it is recommended that sales scholars devote far more attention to research at the dialogue-exchange level of analysis in order to advance the sales discipline.

## References

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