

Enhancing motivation and work performance of the salespeople: The impact of supervisors' behavior

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Abstract

This study examines the importance of authoritarian and positive achievement motivation behavior of the supervisors in enhancing salespeople's motivation and work performance. Survey data were collected from all 105 sales employees in two retail organizations. Supervisors' ratings were collected on all 105 of the salespersons. All hypotheses were tested using regression analysis and Pearson correlations controlling for background variables of gender, marital status, and ethnicity. The findings indicated that to the extent that supervisors engaged in positive motivational behaviors, salespersons' intrinsic motivations were increased, which, in turn, increased their performance. Implications and a number of recommendations are discussed.

Keywords

Authoritarian Behavior, Positive Achievement Motivation Behavior, Intrinsic Motivation, Extrinsic Motivation, and Work Performance

Introduction

Supervisors being in direct contact with their subordinates play a crucial role in motivating their subordinates and, therefore, the relationship between supervisors and their subordinates has always drawn special attention. The purpose of this study has, therefore, been undertaken to examine the impact of the supervisory behaviors on salespersons' work motivation and performance.

There has been a vast amount of research into the relationship between supervisors' behavior and subordinates' motivation and work performance (e.g., Bass & Avolio, 1993; Oliver and Anderson, 1994; Keillor et al, 1999; Bass et al, 2003; Bass 1997; Dubinsky et al. 1999; Yamamarino et al, 1997; Castleberry and Tanner, 1986). In all of these studies a considerable attention has been devoted to the study of transformational, transactional and

charismatic supervisory styles and their impact on organizations (e.g., Awamleh and Gardner, 1999; Bass and Avolio, 1993; Avolio et al, 1999). The impact of supervisory behavior on salespersons' motivation and work performance has also been recognized in sales force management (Henry, 1975; Walker, Churchill & Ford, 1977; Baldauf et al, 2001; DeCarlo et al, 1999).

However, supervisory behavior may vary considerably in the same job situation. For example, supervisors frequently use punishment, yet we have little knowledge of its impact on salespeople (Kholi, 1985). Since supervisors differ along behavioral dimensions, much research is, therefore, needed to examine the role of these behavioral dimensions and their impact on salespersons' motivation and work performance. Sales managers should understand how espousing certain supervisory behaviors could help or counter motivation and job performance.

A supervisor may adopt a positive achievement motivation behavior (e.g., recognition, praises etc) or an autocratic behavior (e.g., punishment, criticizing etc) when interacting with employees. Built on theories and researches on supervisory behavior, this paper examines the effects of supervisory behaviors on salespersons' motivation and work performance from the perspectives of autocratic and positive achievement motivation behavior. Our understanding is that is that the effects of these two supervisory behaviors have, however, not been examined in the setting of salespeople, which is a void in literature that this paper attempts to fill.

Literature Review

Supervisors' Behavior and Work Motivation

The literature on supervisors' behavior in sales management is voluminous. The well known University of Michigan and Ohio State (Stogdill, 1974) identified two dimensions of supervisory behavior commonly known as consideration (employee-centered) and initiating structure (production-centered leadership). Others extended his research (e.g. see Blake and Mouton, 1964).

Several studies provided examples of supervisory behaviors (e.g., Fleischmann and Harris (1962) and House, Filley, and Derr (1971). Meyer (1968) investigated the effects of leadership perceptions regarding Theory X and Theory Y and found that workers exposed to Theory Y supervisory behaviors felt greater responsibility, more warmth, and personally rewarded.

Following these researches, a number of researchers, in sales management, have outlined the forms of supervisory sales behavior (e.g., Kohli, 1985; Tyagi (1985). Kohli (1985) has identified four types of supervisory behavior: (1) contingent approving behavior, (2) upward influencing behavior, (3) achievement oriented behavior, and (4) arbitrary and punitive behavior.

Contingent Approving Behavior

This consists of giving recognition for outstanding work, praising when performance is good, criticizing when performance is bad, showing approval for best efforts etc. This is contingent upon effective efforts and/or performance (Fulk and Wendler, 1982). Research by Greene (1976), Podsakoff et al (1984), suggests that leaders who administer rewards contingent upon performance cause increases in subordinates' satisfaction. Kohli (1985) found a strong relationship between contingent approving behavior and job satisfaction among salespeople.

Upward Influencing Behaviors

It is directed at maintaining a good rapport between the supervisor and his or her subordinates and influencing them to act favorably on behalf of the work unit (Fulk and Wendler1982). This type of supervisory behavior is likely to be able to obtain resources and rewards for salespeople from the higher management.

Achievement Oriented behavior:

This consists of setting challenging goals, expecting high levels of performance, and expressing confidence that salespeople will meet these goals and expectations (House and Mitchell, 1974). Managers who set challenging goals for salespeople, encourage continual improvement in their performance, and show confidence in their abilities to attain these goals may expect their salespeople to be more sure of what is expected of them and more satisfied with their jobs (Kohli, 1985).

Arbitrary and Punitive Behavior:

Arbitrary and punitive supervisors are more autocratic, and attempt to ensure conformity to work methods they prescribe, and increase performance through punishment (Schriessheim, House and Kerr, 1976). They criticize, "needle", and ride the employees. This behavior is expected to lead to dissatisfaction among the salespeople (Fulk and Wendler, 1982; Schriesheim, House, and Kerr, 1976). Kohli (1985), however, found a significant relationship between supervisor's arbitrary behavior and job satisfaction.

We suggest, from the above literature, that all of the above supervisory or leaders' behavior can be grouped into two as (1) authoritarian and (2) positive achievement motivation behavior. In authoritarian behavior, the supervisors exercise autocratic control to ensure conformity to work methods they prescribe. Under positive achievement motivation

behavior, the supervisors attempt to create a positive work environment through encouragement and positive reinforcement of appropriate behavior. The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of these two supervisory behaviors on salespersons' motivation and performance.

Authoritarian Behavior

Authoritarian leaders are those who guide and motivate their followers in the direction of established goals by clarifying goals and task requirement (Robbins, 2003). Information from different studies on leaders' behavior indicate that the authoritarian behavior leads to de-motivation among employees (Fulk and Wendler, 1982; Podsakoff et al (1984), and Scoriesheim, House and Kerr (1976). Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

H1: There is a significant relation between salespersons' motivation, performance and their perceptions of their supervisors' Authoritarian Behavior (AB).

Positive Achievement Motivation Behavior

Positive Achievement Motivational leaders are those who inspire followers to transcend their self-interests and who are capable of having a profound and extraordinary effect on followers (Robbins, 2003). Demonstrating positive motivational behavior becomes instrumental in motivating employee work performance (Greene, 1976, House and Mitchell, 1974, Mumford et al., 2002, Robbins, 2003, Chowdhury, 2000, 2004). The hypothesis, therefore, is:

H2: There is a significant relation between salespersons' motivation, performance and their perceptions of their supervisors' Positive Achievement Motivation Behavior (PAMB).

Motivations and Work Performance

Motivation is a process of arousing and sustaining goal-directed behavior. Of several work motivation theories, both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation plays an important role in influencing employee work performance. It is widely held view that in general, employees' value both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards available in organizational settings.

Intrinsic motivation

Intrinsically motivated salespeople seek peer recognition and put the organizations and the customers before their own interests (Kunz and Pfaff 2002; Anderson and Oliver, 1987). Thus they have no goal conflict with the sales manager (Wright 2001). Therefore, the hypothesis is:

H3. The more the sales persons are intrinsically motivated, the more their work performance.

Extrinsic Motivation

Extrinsic motivators have long been thought, both theoretically and practically, to affect employee motivation and performance (Bjorklund, 2001). Extrinsically motivated salespersons are motivated when outside forces, e.g. rewards, money or promotion are involved (Kunz and Pfaff 2002; Pullins 2001). Therefore, the hypothesis is:

H4: The more the salespersons are extrinsically motivated, the more their work performance

Methodology

Data were collected through self-administered questionnaire on 105 salaried sales employees (sales associates) working in two retail organizations under the supervision of seven managers. This involved visits and distribution of questionnaires rather than interviewing the supervisors. The author felt that questionnaire method would generate rich

data while at the same time minimizing the time and effort required of the respondents. Supervisor ratings were collected on all 105 salespersons.

These two retail organizations sell family apparel, jewelry, shoes, accessories, and home furnishings. The sales force was predominantly female (60.6%) and young, with nearly two-thirds (64.2%) under 30 years of age. An additional one-quarter (26.9%) was between 31 and 40 years of age. Most (53.4%) were single; slightly less than one-third (31.1%) were married. The workforce was multiracial and multicultural. Nearly half (45.6%) of the sales staff were of Hispanic or Latino background; slightly less than one-quarter (24.9%) were African American; 14.5% were white; 10.4% were Asian. Nearly half (48.7%) of the sales staff had completed high school, 28% had attended some college, and 6.2% had college diplomas. Slightly more than one-tenth (11.9%) had not earned a high school diploma

Data Gathering Instruments

Supervisor behavior was measured through Company Personnel Survey (CPS) by having employees report on their supervisor's behavior. Supervisor behavior was scaled into two variables derived from items constructed by Kohli (1985) and House and Mitchell (1974) with eight items each. One scale was termed "Authoritarian Behavior (AB)," since it dealt with the supervisors' authoritative behaviors. The other was termed "Positive Achievement Motivation Behavior (PAMB)," since the items that comprised it dealt with supervisor's attempts to positively influence salespersons' performance. A typical item was, 'my supervisor gives me recognition for improvement in my performance.' All supervisor behavior scales were keyed to 5-point Likert-type response modes from "very false" (1) to "very true" (5). All of the supervisor scales reported by Kohli (1985) began with the generic

pronoun “he”. This was changed to a term of “My supervisor”. This change brought the items into conformance with the mandates of *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 4th edition (1994)*, which advises the avoidance of the “generic he” construct. It also reflects the fact that women are in supervision, and hence more accurate. Both scales had alpha reliability coefficients higher than .90, indicating strong internal consistency.

In addition to supervisor behavior scales, several demographic items were included in the CPS. They were: age, sex, marital status, ethnicity, educational attainment, experience etc.

To measure intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, the instrument developed by Oliver and Anderson (1994) was utilized. Scale for intrinsic motivation (6 items) demonstrated adequate internal consistency (alpha .816) and for extrinsic motivation (3 items) alpha was .826. One item of intrinsic motivation was: If I were independently wealthy, I would still work for the challenge of it and one item of extrinsic motivation is: If it were not for money, I would not be in a job.

Job performance measures were obtained by having supervisors evaluate the performance of the salespeople under their supervision. The Supervisors’ Employee Evaluation survey (SEES) was completed by participating sales workers’ supervisors. The SEES contained five items keyed to 5-point Likert-scale from “ far below most of his/her peers,” (1) to “ far superior to his /her peers,” (5). The scale demonstrated internal consistency (alpha .76).

Data Collection

One important factor in data collection was that the researcher was able to match supervisor evaluations with employee survey instruments while maintaining the confidentiality of responses. Therefore, the researcher received from each participating supervisor a list of salespersons that he or she supervised. These lists were then coded with four-digit code numbers that were keyed as follows: the thousand and hundred column digits identified the supervisor and the tens and unit columns identified the individual salesperson. For example, ID No. 1307 indicated salesperson number 07 who was supervised by supervisor 13. That is salesperson ID numbers were nested with supervisor IDs. Therefore, for each participating salesperson, there were two completed surveys with identical numbers: the CPS completed by salesperson and SEES completed by the supervisor. Only the researcher had the key that matched the respondent to the code numbers.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed a correlation design. The purpose of correlation design is to investigate the extent to which variations in one factor correspond with variations in one or more factors based on correlation coefficients (Isaac and Michael, 1990) The perceived leader behaviors were examined as degree of relationship to subjects work motivation and performance. Hypotheses testing were done to analyze the direct effects of supervisor variables on employee work motivation and performance, while controlling for salespersons' background variables.

Results

Table 1 presents correlation coefficients and other descriptive statistics for all variables assessed in this study.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Intercorrelations Among All Variables

Variables	Mean	SD	AB	PAMB	INTRN	EXTRN	PERFORMANCE
AB	22.82	4.62	1	.308**	.070	.169	.110
PAMB	32.55	4.47	.308**	1	.330**	-.170	.309**
INTRN	18.00	2.20	.070	.330*	1	-.107	.277**
EXTRN	15.64	2.05	.169	-.170	-.107	1	-.213*
PERFORM	20.22	3.58	.110	.309**	.277**	-.213*	1

** Correlation is significant at 1% level of significance.

* Correlation is significant at 5% level.

Relationships between PAMB, intrinsic motivation ($r = .330$) and performance ($r = .309$) variables are generally as predicted. However, the table shows the negative relationship between extrinsic motivation and work performance ($r = -.213$), though there is a positive but not significant relationship between authoritarian behavior and salespersons' extrinsic motivation ($r = .169$) and work performance ($r = .110$).

Hypothesis Testing

Hypotheses 1 and 2

Consistent with hypotheses 1 and 2, regression results (Table 2) indicate that there is a positive but not significant correlation between Authoritarian Behavior (hypothesis 1) and salespersons motivation and performance.

Table 2: Regression Results for Leaders' Behavior as Predictor Variables

Leader Behavior	<u>Intrinsic Motivation</u>			<u>Extrinsic Motivation</u>			<u>Performance</u>		
	B	T	SIG	B	T	SIG	B	T	SIG
AB	.035	-.36	NS	.24	2.45	.016	.017	.168	NS
PAMB	.341	3.47	.001	-.25	-2.46	.015	.304	3.06	.003
	Adjusted R ² .093			Adjusted R ² .065			Adjusted R ² .078		

The result indicates that there is a negative correlation between PAMB and salespersons extrinsic motivation. As expected, Positive Achievement Motivation Behavior (hypothesis 2) has produced a significant influence in salespersons intrinsic motivation and performance. This indicated salespersons' beliefs that, to the extent their supervisors exercise achievement orientation behavior, the greater likelihood that intrinsic rewards would be generated for greater performance.

Hypotheses 3 and 4

Consistent with hypothesis 3 and 4, regression results (Table 3) indicate that extrinsic motivation had negative relationship with salespersons' work performance. As compared to extrinsic motivation, intrinsic motivation is shown to produce relatively a greater impact on performance

Table 3:
Regression Results for Relationships between Intrinsic/Extrinsic Motivation and work Performance (intrinsic and extrinsic motivation as predictor variables)

Motivation	Performance		
	B	T	Significance
Intrinsic Motivation	.257	2.73	.007
Extrinsic Motivation	-.185	-1.97	.052
Adjusted R ² = .093			

Discussion

For the two supervisory behaviors under study, the authoritarian was expected to have weak relationship with overall motivation and performance as opposed to positive achievement motivation behavior. The data suggest that to the extent that supervisors engaged in positive motivational behaviors and expected greater performance from their salespeople, employee intrinsic motivation was increased.

The findings of the study are in consonant with a vast number of studies demonstrating that autocratic behavior leads to dissatisfaction among employees (e.g., Fulk and Wendler, 1982; House and Kerr, 1976). A number of studies (e.g., Greene, 1976; House and Mitchell, 1974, Chowdhury, 2000, 2004) also demonstrate that positive achievement motivation behavior produce strong intrinsic motivation among the salespeople. Generally speaking, salespersons' work and performance can be more positively influenced by emphasizing leadership behavior due to the unstructured nature of sales jobs, where salespersons seek greater autonomy (Tyagi, 1985).

Implications

Supervisory behavior strongly influences salespersons' motivation and work performance. It is, however, to be noted that salespeople's perceptions of supervisory behaviors have considerable impact on their motivation and work performance. Of the two supervisory behaviors investigated, the more important one is supervisor's using positive methods of motivation for their sales force. Determining salient rewards based on salespersons' perceptions, monitoring their intrinsic and extrinsic motivations regularly by their immediate supervisor will positively affect their work motivation and performance (Tyagi, 1985). All these imply that creating a positive environment through encouragement

and positive reinforcement of sales behavior will improve salespersons' work motivation and performance.

Recommendations For Further Research

The study used a specific type of sales population. Since this population may not be representative of sales population in other industries, it will be desirable to examine the current results in the context of other sales population (Tyagi, 1985). It would also be interesting to explore the impact of supervisory behaviors on salespeople with different characteristics such as locus of control, self-efficacy, sales experience (Kohli, 1985). Since the supervisors evaluated the work performance of the salespeople, further study is needed to explore the influence of supervisor expectancies on salespersons' work evaluations. Finally, future researchers may pursue research on directing the high level of goal orientation to salespeople's performance.

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