The training of sales managers: current practices

Geoffrey L. Gordon

C. David Shepherd

Brian Lambert

Rick E. Ridnour

Dan C. Weilbaker

Follow this and additional works at: https://huskiecommons.lib.niu.edu/allfaculty-peerpub

Article information:

For Authors

If you would like to write for this, or any other Emerald publication, then please use our Emerald for Authors service information about how to choose which publication to write for and submission guidelines are available for all. Please visit www.emeraldinsight.com/authors for more information.

About Emerald www.emeraldinsight.com

Emerald is a global publisher linking research and practice to the benefit of society. The company manages a portfolio of more than 290 journals and over 2,350 books and book series volumes, as well as providing an extensive range of online products and additional customer resources and services.

Emerald is both COUNTER 4 and TRANSFER compliant. The organization is a partner of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) and also works with Portico and the LOCKSS initiative for digital archive preservation.

The training of sales managers: current practices

Geoffrey L. Gordon
Department of Marketing, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Illinois, USA

C. David Shepherd
Department of Management, Marketing, and Logistics, Georgia Southern University, Statesboro, Georgia, USA

Brian Lambert
Forrester Research, McLean, Virginia, USA, and

Rick E. Ridnour and Dan C. Weilbaker
Department of Marketing, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Illinois, USA

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine sales manager training approaches, methods, and instructors (as well as their perceived effectiveness, frequency, and assessment).

Design/methodology/approach – Utilizing a survey approach, data were collected (and analyzed) from 355 members of two associations: the United Professional Sales Association and the American Society for Training and Development.

Findings – First, internal training approaches and instructors are most commonly used and perceived as most effective. Second, sales managers are exposed to a wide variety of training content as part of their training activities. Third, the frequency, duration, and assessment of training vary widely among respondent organizations.

Research limitations/implications – The utilized sample of sales managers and trainers are employed by firms within the USA. Cultural differences could exist in training practices, training content, and perceptions of effectiveness among respondents from other countries.

Practical implications – First, sales manager training activities lie on a continuum that complicates effectiveness measurement. Second, sales manager training should be provided in the field by those who are either senior to or more knowledgeable on the training topic(s) than the sales manager. Third, internet-based training methods are still in their infancy. Fourth, the complexities associated with the sales manager position lead to a need for varied training being delivered by diverse instructors.

Originality/value – Almost a decade has passed since the last empirical studies of the "nuts and bolts" of sales manager training practices were published. The current study builds on previous work by utilizing a larger sample and incorporating technology advances and new content areas (e.g. financial analysis, networking, partnering, cross-functional activities).

Keywords Sales manager, Training, Survey research, United States of America, Sales management, Sales training, Training methods

Paper type Research paper

An executive summary for managers and executive readers can be found at the end of this article.

1. Introduction

In today's challenging business environment companies are relying more than ever on the sales function to maintain and grow revenues. As the emphasis and pressure on the sales function grows and shifts (Piercy, 2010), so does the role of the sales manager in leading and carrying out the charge for revenue generation (Noble, 2008; Shoemaker, 2003). As a result, some consider the sales manager's job to be one of the toughest and most important in management (Chitwood,

2007). In fact, research shows that the future success of salespeople depends more on the ability of the sales manager to develop their skills than on any other business variable as the sales manager is the critical link between an organization's senior management and the firm's revenue-generating personnel: the sales force (Chitwood, 2007; Deeter-Schmelz and Kennedy, 2002; Russ *et al.*, 1996).

Garrido *et al.* (2005) go so far as to suggest that attracting, retaining, and satisfying the developmental needs of sales managers are crucial to guaranteeing the long term survival of organizations. Too often, however, there seems to be an assumption by senior management that outstanding sales skills are sufficient to allow the sales manager to lead the sales team effectively (Wilkinson, 2009). While sales managers may learn on the job this process could take years as sales

managers have hundreds of sales competencies they must master in order to be successful (Lambert *et al.*, 2009). Knowing this, organizations continue to expend large sums of time and money on sales training. Estimates of total annual spending on sales and sales management training have ranged up to $15.0 billion (Salopek, 2009). Although exact spending estimates for sales manager training are not broken out, the American Society for Training & Development (ASTD) noted in a recent year that about 9 percent of developed learning content was dedicated to individuals in a managerial or supervisory role (Kranz, 2007). Regardless of estimate, the large amounts spent on training endeavors reinforce the notion that it remains critically important for firms to employ methods to continually enhance marketing productivity and effectiveness (LaPlaca, 2009).

Perhaps surprisingly given the sizable annual investment in sales management training, and it's importance to the success of the firm, our knowledge of this training process is limited to a handful of studies conducted a decade or more ago (Shepherd and Ridnour, 1995; Anderson *et al.*, 1997; Dubinsky *et al.*, 2001). The purpose of the current study is to help alleviate this research shortcoming by examining and evaluating current sales manager training and development practices. The study begins with a review of the findings from previous studies that examined sales managers as it relates to their training and development needs. Second, results of an empirical study of sales managers and trainers are presented. The specific issues investigated in the study include:

- What types of training approaches and instructors are used in the training of sales managers?
- What training methods are used in the training of sales managers?
- What is the content of present training for sales managers?
- How long and often do training programs last for sales managers of varied experience levels?
- How often are sales training programs evaluated?

Managerial implications, limitations of the current study, and directions for future research are then provided.

2. Literature review

The importance of sales managers has been chronicled back to the late nineteenth century when they performed such tasks as carving up the nation into sales territories, providing the sales force with product information, supplying leads, and, more important, offering inspiration, enthusiasm, and an effective sales message to the sales force (Friedman, 2006). While the high value associated with an effective sales manager can be seen as a self-evident truth, less clear is the path that leads one to become successful at sales management. To a large degree, most sales managers come from the salesperson ranks although salespeople themselves are increasingly being hired from a variety of functional areas (Steward *et al.*, 2009). Moving from a salesperson to a sales manager can be a difficult adjustment and success in the field is not a certain predictor of success as a manager (Marchetti, 2006). Sufficient evidence exists that promoting the best sales rep often results in hiring a bad sales manager and losing a great sales rep (Russ *et al.*, 1996). Therefore, it is not enough to have been a successful salesperson; rather, the individual has a team to develop and must realize the new job requires a

completely different skill set than the one that got him/her there in the first place (Iizuka, 2008).

It remains essential that proper training take place to ensure organizational goals are met and that individuals are not just "born but also made" into successful sales managers. Trying to do a sales manager's job with a sales representative's state of mind just will not work (Jordan, 2009). Sales management requires possession of very specific skills (Peters, 2007). The importance of sales manager behaviors on sales force outcomes has been well documented in the literature (DeCarlo *et al.*, 1999; Jaworski and Kohli, 1991; Teas, 1981; Tyagi, 1985). However, the answers to the question, "What are the proper specific ingredients of a successful sales management training program?" to a large degree still remain murky.

Past studies suggest that the training of sales managers has been neglected in a good number of companies, and many sales managers report no formal development for their management role (Anderson *et al.*, 1997; Dubinsky *et al.*, 2001). In fact, only 43 percent of companies responding to a recent study said they even had a formalized sales training program (Stein, 2008) from which one can infer that training programs for sales managers were even scarcer.

Chakrabarty *et al.* (2008) report that in order for sales managers to succeed, they need to be competent in coaching their salespeople. Honeycutt *et al.* (1995) state that the ability to provide supervisory feedback plays a crucial role in improving sales force productivity, with a need for training sales managers in that trait. DeCarlo and Agarwal (1999) argue that perceptions of inappropriate managerial behaviors can adversely affect a salesperson's job satisfaction and overall performance, and so it can be inferred that topics related to behavior modeling should be part of a training agenda. Shoemaker (2003) advocates that sales managers must partner with individual salespeople instead of simply focusing on the sales force as a group.

During the late 1990s, several studies specifically investigating the training of sales managers were undertaken. Shepherd and Ridnour (1995) reported that while businesses at the time were focusing on traditional sales management skills such as coaching, motivation skills, and time management abilities, there was a need to incorporate business skills development (i.e. quota setting and forecasting) into training practices. Later studies (Anderson *et al.*, 1997; Dubinsky *et al.*, 2001) found that not only did many companies not offer training but most training was directed at senior level management.

Numerous challenges continuing to face sales managers including (but not limited to) volatile business environments, globalization, developing account strategies, and building and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships with increasingly demanding customers (Bradford and Weitz, 2009; Deeter-Schmelz *et al.*, 2008; Deeter-Schmelz and Kennedy, 2002; Marshall and Michaels, 2001; Zallocco *et al.*, 2009) all have been identified as suitable issues around which training could be designed. Other activities and tasks that sales managers have responsibility for and could be better trained in include territory design; interaction with other functions including marketing; and selection, training, motivation (including both financial and non-financial approaches), supervision, leadership, evaluation, performance improvement and trust of salespeople (Mallin *et al.*, 2010; Dubinsky, 1999; Morris *et al.*, 1990; Piercy *et al.*, 1999; Malshe, 2011; Singh and Koshy, 2010; Zoltners *et al.*, 2008).

The sales function is increasingly being asked to adopt and use a greater variety of technologies (Senegal *et al.*, 2007). The introduction and evolution of information, CRM (Avlonitis and Panagopoulos, 2005), and intelligence gathering systems (Le Bon and Merunka, 2006), as well as a variety of other new technologies (Avlonitis and Panagopoulos, 2005; Buehrer *et al.*, 2005) have forced sales managers to lead the way in incorporating new technology into the sales function through support and use in their own sales management processes (Schillewaert *et al.*, 2005). Sales technology tools represent not just means to cut costs but also mechanisms for creating revenues and meeting/exceeding customer needs (Hunter and Perreault, Jr, 2006; 2007). Related, many organizations are moving more toward on-line versus traditional training, yet wide variances still exist (Blair and Sisakhti, 2007). Ethics remains a requisite training focus as evidenced by many recent articles devoted to the topic (Schwepker and Good, 2007; Valentine, 2009).

Noting the above diversity of undertakings, Fine (2007) reports that the management of selling and salespeople is a highly complex and highly contextual challenge with no one right formula for sales force management success. The sales manager's job remains incredibly important and difficult; yet, too often it is the most under-trained job in the entire organization (Kahle, 2005). To remedy this situation, and to create and sustain a competitive advantage (and avoid obsolescence) sales organizations must foster a culture of learning (Jones *et al.*, 2004). Ingram *et al.* (2002) state that sales managers must lead a renaissance of genuine rebirth and revival but only after having received the training and support to provide such appropriate leadership.

Sales managers of the future must take a far more holistic approach and draw from multiple leadership models. Ingram *et al.* (2002) believe little work has been done to identify specific skills needed for success in sales management. Deeter-Schmelz *et al.* (2008) concur, suggesting that because of scarce research investigating the characteristics of effective sales managers; and given the degree of influence sales managers have on salespeople and their organization, establishing a better understanding of sales manager effectiveness is paramount. Others (Piercy *et al.*, 2009) support the call for more time and resources being invested into training sales managers. Jantan *et al.* (2004) propose that the more effective organizations are in implementing the combined elements of the sales training process, the greater is the likelihood that the organization will achieve business success. Successful sales leaders are changing the way they lead their groups (Ledingham *et al.*, 2006). Consequently, there is a need for new leadership behaviors by sales managers due to the changing role of the salesperson (Shoemaker, 2003).

3. Methodology

The focus of the current study is to investigate sales management training practices in what can be considered to be organizations that presumably (due to their association membership) place a major focus on selling activities. The initial survey instrument was developed based largely upon work completed by Shepherd and Ridnour (1995) and Dubinsky *et al.* (2001) as part of their research into sales manager training practices as well as the results of the World-Class Sales Competency Model created by the American Society for Training and Development (Lambert *et al.*, 2009).

The authors then incorporated newer concepts into the instrument, heeding consultants' and researchers' calls as to the importance of financial items and technology advances (Reday *et al.*, 2009).

Six leading sales consultants reviewed the survey instrument resulting in the authors' making revisions and additions to the instrument. The survey instrument was then pre-tested among 40 members of a professional selling advisory board and their feedback was incorporated into the final instrument. The survey was sent to 3,000 sales managers and trainers employed by firms across the United States using contact lists provided by the United Professional Sales Association, a membership organization comprised of sales manager and sales representative members, and the American Society for Training and Development A cover e-mail message explained the nature and purpose of the study, guaranteed the participant that his/her participation would be anonymous and that all individual responses would be held in strict confidentiality. Each recipient of the cover email message was directed via an imbedded link to a website at which the survey resided. The survey instrument consisted of numerous closed-and-open-ended questions and Likert-type scales that were designed to capture and evaluate respondent opinions regarding training practices.

As a first step in completing the survey instrument, respondents were asked whether they directly managed, supervised, or led salespeople who have a quota and whether they were responsible for designing, developing, or leading in-house sales management training. The results from those who did not answer affirmatively to either of the two questions were not utilized for analysis purposes. Usable surveys were received from 355 respondents reflecting a response rate of 11.8 percent. The response rate was lower than hoped. Nevertheless, both the response rate and total number of completed surveys remains in line with or is higher than those reported in other recent studies examining:

- sales and other managers involved in B-to-B markets (Ettlie and Kubarek, 2008; Nevins and Money, 2008; Carr and Lopez, 2007; Green *et al.*, 2006; Ozer and Chen, 2006; Garrido *et al.*, 2005; Schwepker and Good, 2004);
- salesperson perceptions of sales manager activities (Chakrabarty *et al.*, 2008); and
- sales training practices (Valentine, 2009; Pelham, 2006).

According to a direct mail list broker, a response rate of 5 percent is deemed acceptable for business-to-business surveys (GreatLists, 2006).

4. Results

Demographics of the sample

Spiro *et al.* (2005) state that a sales manager's span of control should be relatively small (as a guideline not more than eight salespeople). Using this rule of thumb as a standard, 65 percent of respondents reported a span of control of eight or less salespeople while the remaining 35 percent reported a span of control of nine or more. Approximately 56 percent of the respondents worked for organizations employing less than 100 salespeople, 32.9 percent for organizations employing between 101 and 1,000 salespeople, and 10.9 percent for organizations with more than 1,000 salespeople. The participating organizations varied widely in size with reported annual sales revenue ranging from $500,000 to $69 billion (mean = $2.81

billion). Of responding organizations, 21 percent categorized themselves as service-driven, 26 percent as product-driven, and 53 percent as both product-and-service-driven. Respondents came from a very diverse set of industries with no one industry representing five percent or more of respondents. The sample was well-educated with 46.9 percent holding bachelor degrees and 41 percent holding advanced degrees beyond the baccalaureate degree. Of those responding, females made up almost one-third of the sample (32.1 percent). In terms of job tenure, the mean number of years that respondents had held their current position was 4.68 years. The average number of years that respondents had held a sales management position was 9.49. Finally, with a range of 0 to 40 years, the respondents reported having an average of 13.5 years in total sales and/or sales management experience.

Training approaches and types of instructors

Tables I and II present the relative usage of various training approaches and types of instructors. Each of these tables presents the percentage of respondents who report not using, slightly using, moderately using, or extensively using each of the training approaches and instructors. Also presented is the perceived effectiveness for each of the approaches and instructor types, as well as whether significant differences between results existed based on relevant comparisons. The effectiveness rating is simply the mean of the ratings given by the respondents on a scale of 1 to 7 where 1 denotes a rating of "not at all effective" and 7 denotes a rating of "extremely effective." As seen in Table I, on-the-job training (45 percent) and mentoring by a senior sales manager (37 percent) are the most extensively used training approaches utilized followed by classroom instruction (26 percent) and mentoring by other senior managers (22 percent). On-the-job training and mentoring by a senior sales manager were also deemed most effective (ratings of 4.92 and 4.87 respectively).

For insights into response variation across types of organizations, responses were compared between small and large span of control organizations, small and large firms

Table I Training approaches: use and perceived effectiveness

Training approach	Not used at all (%)	Used slightly (%)	Used moderately (%)	Used extensively (%)	Effectiveness[a] rating
On-the-job training	5	17	33	45	4.92[i]
Mentoring/Senior Sales Manager	8[b]	21[b]	34[b]	37[b]	4.87[j]
Mentoring/Other Senior Manager	15[g]	34[g]	29[g]	22[g]	4.28
Classroom "Lecture style"	10	30	34	26	4.24
Outside sourses	18[c]	42[c]	30[c]	10[c]	3.49
Internet based	19[h]	38[h]	27[h]	16[h]	3.21
Home study	33	35	23	9	2.65
Video conferencing	39[d]	34[d]	20[d]	7[d]	2.65
Wikis, Blogs, Online	52[e]	30[e]	11[e]	7[e]	2.35[f]

Notes: [a]Based upon seven-point scale with (1) indicating highly ineffective and (7) indicating highly effective; [b]Significant difference – product/service firms (t (137) 2.66, $p = 0.009$); [c]Significant difference – product/service firms (t (137) 2.53, $p = 0.012$); [d]Significant difference – product/service firms (t (135) 2.31, $p = 0.022$); [e]Significant difference – product/service firms (t (135) 2.90, $p = 0.004$); [f]Significant difference – product/service firms (t (135) 2.87, $p = 0.005$); [g]Significant difference – small/large firms (t (161) 2.68, $p = 0.008$); [h]Significant difference – small/large firms (t (171) 2.19, $p = 0.03$); [i]Significant difference – small/large firms (t (171) 2.01, $p = 0.046$); [j]Significant difference – small/large firms (t (171) 2.42, $p = 0.016$)

Table II Training instructors: use and perceived effectiveness

Training instructor	Not used at all (%)	Used slightly (%)	Used moderately (%)	Used extensively (%)	Effectiveness[a] rating
Senior Sales Manager	21	25	31	23	3.79[i]
Staff Sales Trainer	31[bg]	17[bg]	21[bg]	31[bg]	3.73[cj]
Senior Salesperson	19	30	35	16	3.69[k]
Regional Sales Manager	24[d]	21[d]	32[d]	23[d]	3.66[ej]
Sales Vice President	28[h]	37[h]	19[h]	16[h]	3.59
Consultant (external)	27	35	24	14	3.54
National Sales Manager	37	26	24	13	3.17
Senior Manager (Other)	36	31	24	9	2.80
Human Resources	49[f]	30[f]	15[f]	6[f]	2.23
Other sales trainers	84	6	5	5	1.74

Notes: [a]Based upon seven-point scale with (1) indicating highly ineffective and (7) indicating highly effective; [b]Significant difference – span of control (t (265) 2.92, $p = 0.004$); [c]Significant difference – span of control (t (209) 3.31, $p = 0.001$); [d]Significant difference – product/service (t (138) 2.57, $p = 0.011$); [e]Significant difference – product/service (t (138) 2.03, $p = 0.044$); [f]Significant difference – product/service (t (156) 2.65, $p = 0.009$); [g]Significant difference – small/large (t (169) 4.63, $p = 0.001$); [h]Significant difference – small/large (t (165) 2.85, $p = 0.005$); [i]Significant difference – small/large (t (171) 2.62, $p = 0.010$); [j]Significant difference – small/large (t (171) 5.67, $p = 0.001$); [k]Significant difference – small/large (t (171) 2.39, $p = 0.018$); [l]Significant difference – small/large (t (171) 2.44, $p = 0.016$)

based on a median split of reported annual sales revenue, and product versus service oriented firms. Throughout these comparisons, an alpha level of 0.05 was used for the statistical test. A comparison of the results between organization with a small span of control (eight or less salespeople reporting to the lowest level of management) and large span of control (nine or more salespeople reporting to the lowest level of management) revealed no significant differences in usage or perceived effectiveness in training approaches. However, a comparison of small and large firms based on reported annual revenue indicated that large (revenue) firms were more likely to use internet-based training approaches while smaller firms were more likely to use coaching/mentoring by senior management outside the sales area in their training. Additionally, the large and small firms significantly varied in their perception of the effectiveness of on-the-job and Internet-based training, with large firms viewing both approaches more positively than small firms. Finally, a comparison of product versus services oriented firms indicated that service firms were significantly more likely to use mentoring/coaching by senior sales management, outside courses/seminars, video conferencing, and wikis, blogs, and other online peer-generated content than product oriented firms ($p = 0.009$, 0.012, 0.022, and 0.004 respectively). Interestingly, wikis, blogs, and other online peer-generated content was the only item on which the two groups varied significantly ($p = 0.005$) in perceived effectiveness ratings with respondents from service firms providing higher ratings.

Companies most likely prefer on-the-job training and mentoring due to their practicality, the ability for successful managers to pass on their wisdom, and their ability to keep sales managers in the field. As one manager commented in the study, "The ability (in multiple conversations) to pass on to our new sales managers all the do's and don'ts of managing our sales force is far more valuable than sitting in a classroom all day listening to some outside instructor go blah, blah, blah." Of interest is the fact that, while internet-based training methods such as webinars, wikis, and blogs are beginning to make inroads as evidenced by the fact that 81 percent of respondent organizations used them to some degree, they still are used moderately or extensively by less than half of the respondent organizations with a perceived effectiveness rating of 3.21. Indeed, comments were mixed as to the effectiveness of internet-based training. Many respondents lauded the use of the internet as an effective means to carry out low-cost, varied training while others thought the internet still remains more useful in delivering content via e-mail and articles versus two-way interactions. What is apparent is that the more help technology tools (such as internet-based training) provide sales managers (much like salespeople) in carrying out their jobs, the more they will be embraced (Mallin and DelVecchio, 2008).

Organizations prefer to carry out training using their own employees (see Table II) with staff sales trainers (31 percent), senior sales managers (23 percent), and regional sales managers (23 percent) being used most often. These same types of individuals were also accorded the highest effectiveness ratings with scores of 3.73, 3.79, and 3.66 respectively. It should be noted that while high on a relative basis, these rating scores leave much room for improvement on an absolute basis. While external consultants were used at least slightly by 73 percent of respondent organizations,

comments revealed that their use was largely limited to serving as "experts" on selected topics in which internal staff were deemed to possess inadequate knowledge. Given a choice between internal and external presenters, there was a strong preference for internal staff due to cost issues and familiarity with the organization (i.e. the ability to present examples germane to the audience).

A comparison of the results revealed that large span of control organizations were more likely than small span of control organizations to use full time staff sales trainers in the training of sales managers ($p = 0.004$). Additionally, large span of control organizations perceived these type training instructors as being more effective than small span of control organizations ($p = 0.001$). Similarly, large (revenue) organizations were more likely to use staff sales trainers and less likely to use sales and marketing vice presidents in their training programs. Additionally, large organizations perceived senior and regional sales management, senior salespeople, and staff sales trainers to be more effective than did small organizations. When comparing product versus service firms, product oriented firms tended to be more likely to use regional sales managers for training ($p = 0.011$) and to perceive regional sales managers to be more effective as trainers ($p = 0.044$) when compared to service organizations. Finally, product oriented firms tended to use human resources personnel more in sales manager training activities ($p = 0.009$) than did service oriented firms.

Training methodologies

Respondents were next asked to evaluate how often various methodologies were used in the training of sales managers and the associated effectiveness of these methodologies. As reported in Table III, role plays, field travel (which consists of sales managers shadowing or working directly with other sales managers), and workshops were the three methodologies used extensively by more than 30 percent (36 percent, 37 percent, and 32 percent respectively) with more than 80 percent of respondent organizations reporting at least slight use of these methodologies. It should come as no surprise that these three methodologies were not only used most often but also rated most effective (effectiveness ratings of 4.63, 4.3, and 4.18 respectively). As one manager stated, "It is always best to learn how to manage when you are working with or observing others who are either in or have been facing the same situation(s). Training should be as hands-on as possible." Many others shared the common thought that more time should be devoted to one-on-one training with new sales managers traveling and being mentored by seasoned sales managers.

No other methodologies were mentioned as being extensively used by more than 18 percent of the respondents with self-study and seminar attendance holding the next places in order. A comparison of the results from small and large span of control organizations revealed no significant differences in usage of the various training methodologies. The only training methodology found to vary in usage between product and service firms was role-play ($p = 0.009$) with service firms tending to use it more frequently.

In terms of mean effectiveness rating, seminars (3.54), panel discussions (3.29), self-study (3.15), and workbooks (3.12) followed those mentioned above. Worth noting is that methodologies such as DVD-based training, online streaming

Table III Training methodologies: use and perceived effectiveness

Training method	Not used at all (%)	Used slightly (%)	Used moderately (%)	Used extensively (%)	Effectiveness[a] rating
Role play	10[bg]	20[bg]	34[bg]	36[bg]	4.63[m]
Field travel	19[j]	17[j]	27[j]	37[j]	4.3
Work shop	12[h]	23[h]	33[h]	32[h]	4.18[n]
Case studies	23[f]	27[f]	36[f]	14[f]	3.7[k]
Seminar	19	29	34	18	3.54
Panel discussion	33	29	24	14	3.29[o]
Self-study	19	31	32	18	3.15
Work books	33	25	30	12	3.12[l]
Computer/Simulation	41[i]	23[i]	24[i]	12[i]	2.82
Written material with video	44	26	22	8	2.57
DVD based training	50	25	18	7	2.38[c]
In-basket exercises	51	30	16	3	2.27
Online streaming video	55	29	13	3	2.17
Audio-tape	59	25	11	5	2.14
Video-tape	61	21	13	5	2.09
College courses	64	24	9	3	2.06[d]
Correspondence courses	66	25	6	3	1.88[e]

Notes: [a]Based on seven-point scale with (1) indicating highly ineffective and (7) indicating highly effective; [b]Significant difference – product/service (t (136) 2.66, $p = 0.009$); [c]Significant difference – span of control (t (163) 2.44, $p = 0.016$); [d]Significant difference – span of control (t (159) 1.98, $p = 0.049$); [e]Significant difference – span of control (t (265) 2.42, $p = 0.016$); [f]Significant difference – small/large (t (171) 2.50, $p = 0.013$); [g]Significant difference – small/large (t (171) 2.49, $p = 0.013$); [h]Significant difference – small/large (t (171) 2.14, $p = 0.009$); [i]Significant difference – small/large (t (171) 2.47, $p = 0.014$); [j]Significant difference – small/large (t (171) 3.10, $p = 0.002$); [k]Significant difference – small/large (t (171) 2.33, $p = 0.021$); [l]Significant difference – small/large (t (171) 2.26, $p = 0.025$); [m]Significant difference – small/large (t (171) 2.63, $p = 0.009$); [n]Significant difference – small/large (t (159) 3.15, $p = .002$); [o]Significant difference – small/large (t (171) 2.29 $p = 0.023$)

video, audio tapes, computer simulation, and video tapes, while finding some support, did not figure prominently among the ones used by the majority of respondent organizations. In conversations with some sales managers after the pre-test, it was noted that sales management logically remains a profession made up of former salespeople who are inclined to prefer training methodologies that encompass other "live" individuals.

In addition, because technology often requires interaction among many entities (Lee and Qualls, 2010), there may be an inherent preference for simpler training methodologies. Just as sales managers need to work toward reducing the complexity of integrating technology into a salesperson's routine (Rangarajan et al., 2005), likewise, management and IT staff must reduce the complexity involved with technology-related training tools. A comparison of the results by span of control revealed that large span of control organizations were more likely than small span of control organizations to find value in their perception of the effectiveness of DVD based training methodologies ($p = 0.016$), college courses ($p = 0.049$), and correspondence courses ($p = 0.016$). Large firms were found to be more likely than small firms to use case studies, role plays, workshops, computer simulations, and field travel in their training programs. Additionally, large firms gave case studies, work books, role play, workshops and panel discussions significantly higher effectiveness ratings than small firms. No significant differences were found in the responses of product versus service firms to the perceived effectiveness of the various training approaches.

Training topics

The previous discussion primarily related to the questions of "how" content is delivered. Attention now turns to the equally (and perhaps more managerially) relevant issue of "what" content is delivered. Table IV reports the results associated with this question. The topics reported as receiving moderate or extensive coverage by a majority of respondents include the following items:

- setting standards and goals (69 percent);
- motivational skills (61 percent);
- time management (59 percent);
- forecasting (59 percent);
- technology (58 percent);
- conducting meetings (57 percent);
- team building (57 percent);
- business ethics (56 percent);
- pre-call coaching (55 percent);
- problem-solving (55 percent);
- national account management (55 percent);
- territory planning (54 percent); and
- competitive analysis (54 percent).

While no other content areas were mentioned by more than 50 percent of respondent organizations as being covered extensively or moderately, only two of the thirty-one content topics asked about (managing receivables and terminating staff) were mentioned by fewer than 40 percent of the respondents as receiving moderate or extensive coverage.

Other findings needing emphasized include the growing importance of sales manager knowledge related to financial variables such as P&L statements; cross-functional relationships with marketing; and potential legal issues

Table IV Content of sales management training

Content area	No coverage at all (%)	Slight coverage (%)	Moderate coverage (%)	Extensive coverage (%)
Performance reviews	12	24	27	38
Setting standards and goals	13	18	32	37
Motivational skills	15	24	29	32
Business ethics	22	22	24	32
Forecasting	19	22	28	31
Team building	20	23	29	28
Conducting meetings	23	20	30	27
Problem solving	19	26	28	27
National account management	23	22	28	27
Time management	15	26	33	26
Competitive analysis	23	23	29	25
Territory planning	25	21	29	25
Technology	19	23	34	24
Quota setting	31[b]	23[b]	22[b]	24[b]
(Pre-call) coaching	24	21	33	22
Training techniques/skills	26	30	22	22
Financial P&L	27	30	21	22
Managing change	21	30	28	21
Managing a budget	23	31	25	21
Integrating marketing and sales	23	30	27	20
Transition to management	30[a]	23[a]	27[a]	20
Recruiting and selection	26	26	29	19
Analyzing reports	27	27	27	19
Developing a business plan	32	24	25	19
Internal networking/partnering	30	27	24	19
Remote management (lg. geo. area)	34	25	22	19
Managing diversity	24	28	30	18
Sexual harassment	28	30	24	18
Facility/staff management	32	23	28	17
Order processing	30	29	25	16
Managing receivables	39	26	21	14
Terminating	31	31	25	13

Notes: [a]Significant difference − span of control (t (265) 1.98, $p = 0.05$); [b]Significant difference − small/large organizations (t (160) 2.13, $p = 0.034$)

such as discrimination and sexual harassment. These results show the need for sales managers to possess knowledge on a wide variety of topics in order to effectively manage their sales force. It is no wonder that more companies are either seeking out managers with advanced degrees or supporting educational efforts on the part of staff to attain master's degrees while serving in their sales manager positions. The comparisons of the topics covered (and associated effectiveness) as part of sales manager training reveal many more similarities than differences. A comparison of small span of control with large span of control organizations revealed only one significant difference. Large span of control organizations were found to be more likely than small span of control organizations to cover managing the transition from sales to sales management in their training program ($p = 0.05$). Small organizations were found to be more likely to cover quota setting in their training programs ($p = 0.034$) No significant differences existed in any comparisons between product versus service oriented firms.

Amount, frequency, and evaluation of sales manager training activities

Respondents were asked to answer several questions related to the amount and frequency of training that sales managers received in their first year and then thereafter. As seen in Tables V and VI, the amount of training provided individuals in their first year as sales manager varies widely with 35 percent of respondent organizations providing 0-5 days of training, 25 percent providing 6-10 days, 15 percent providing 11-15 days, and 25 percent providing 16-plus days of training. Less variation exists in the amount of training provided to sales managers after their first year with 64 percent receiving 0-5 days of additional training, 22 percent receiving 6-10 days, 7 percent receiving 11-15 days, and 7 percent receiving 16-plus days of training.

Logically, if the amount of training decreases after the first year, so should the frequency of training. A total 50 percent of respondents reported that sales managers received (during their first year) training once a quarter, 24 percent reported every six months, and 26 percent stated once during the year. Thirty-four percent of respondents reported that sales

Table V Amount and frequency of sales manager training activities

	Days			
	0-5 (%)	6-10 (%)	11-15 (%)	16 + (%)
How many days of training does your company provide to individuals in their first year as a sales manager?	35	25	15	25
What is the average length of time spent in training after the first year as sales manager (number of days)?	64	22	7	7

Table VI Amount and frequency of sales manager training activities

	Once a quarter (%)	Once every six months (%)	Once per year or longer (%)
What is the average frequency of on-going training for sales managers who have been with the company for less than one year?	50	24	26
What is the average frequency of on-going training for sales managers who have been with the company for one year or more?	34	21	45

managers received (after their first year) training once a quarter, 21 percent reported every six months, and 45 percent stated once per year or longer. Several managers commented on what they perceived to be the correlation between frequency and effectiveness of training. Representative of these thoughts was the following statement by one sales manager of a large company who remarked that, "I can never understand why we train every 26 weeks, yet we know the shelf life of a good training program is only 5 weeks." No significant differences were found when results were compared by span of control, size (revenue) of the organization, or by product versus service firms.

Finally, respondents were asked a series of questions related to the assessment of training efforts. As seen in Table VII, in response to the question of whether there is a written set of objectives for their overall sales manager training program, 54 percent answered yes, 38 percent answered no, and 8 percent did not know. Respondents were then asked if sales managers formally evaluated each sales manager training program. Of respondents 50 percent answered yes to this question, 42 percent answered no, and 8 percent stated that they did not know. As important as training are the follow up procedures to reinforce training. Respondents were asked whether their organizations provided follow up procedures. Thirty-eight (38) percent answered yes, 52 percent said no, and 10 percent did not know. As a final question, respondents were asked if their organizations formally evaluate the effectiveness of the sales manager-training program. Thirty-nine percent of the subjects responded positively to this question, 49 percent responded negatively, while 12 percent reported not knowing. No significant differences were found when results were

compared by span of control, size of the organization, or by product versus service firms.

5. Managerial implications, limitations, and directions for future research

Managerial implications
The current study provides managers and researchers with structured information regarding the methodologies employed; content contained in, and associated effectiveness with sales manager training program variables as conducted by a number and differing types of companies. Results of the current study lead to the following managerial implications. First, it appears that engagement in sales manager training activities is not a black-and-white or discrete issue. In other words, the vast majority of organizations do not either engage in or not engage in sales manager training activities. Rather, it can be safely assumed that most firms engage in some level of sales manager training activities. What differs between organizations is the degree of their engagement in such activities. Of the 355 usable responses to the current study, there were very few returned (less than 5 percent) in which the respondent stated that his/her organization was not engaging (to some extent) in sales manager training.

Even in those cases in which no or little training was being conducted, the respondents commented on the need for sales management training. As one respondent aptly stated, "We are rarely trained on how to manage our salespeople. We train on products but not on management. I certainly fall in this category." As such, sales manager training should be viewed

Table VII Evaluation of sales manager training activities

	Yes (%)	No (%)	Do not know (%)
Is there a written set of objectives for your overall sales manager-training program?	54	38	8
Do sales managers formally evaluate each training program?	50	42	8
Is there a formal follow-up procedure to reinforce the sales manager-training program?	38	52	10
Does your company formally evaluate the effectiveness of the sales manager-training program?	39	49	12

as a continuum on which an organization's level can be measured by its location between extremes. This complicates the measurement of effectiveness for it dictates that one speak of sales manager training in terms of levels or degrees and that firms can be "somewhat" training their sales managers. Especially in those firms where limited time is given to sales manager training, it is imperative that time spent on training is meaningful, productive and that the training brings about profound change. Thus, companies need to focus on the most effective ways to train and not try to save money (on training) by selecting less expensive and simultaneously less effective training methods and training instructors.

Second, as advocated in an earlier study which explored satisfaction with sales manager training (Dubinsky *et al.*, 2001), emphasis should be placed on providing sales manager training in the field and by those who are either senior to the individual being trained or more knowledgeable on the topic(s) on which the sales manager is being trained. A major contribution of the current study over earlier ones is the finding that this type training methodology is perceived as being more effective than other means (although firms should work on improving the effectiveness associated with all methods employed). Interestingly, the results of this study indicate that product oriented firms tend to value and use regional sales managers more highly and often than service oriented firms.

Third, training methods need to be highly interactive and participative. Learning is obtained better and more often when sales managers have the opportunity to process and think about other viewpoints. This result is consistent with an earlier study (Shepherd and Ridnour, 1995), which also found that role play is the most used and effective training method. Most sales managers would have had some experience with role plays from their salesperson training. Role plays allow for customized simulations and immediate feedback, resulting in specific skill building and rich discussion.

While internet-based training methods are gaining in use and perceived effectiveness (by default as they were omitted or rarely mentioned in earlier empirical studies), they can still be considered in their infancy or introductory stage. This is somewhat surprising given that sales managers play such a large role in technology implementation among the sales force (Ahearne *et al.*, 2005). When discussing this finding, a sales manager friend of one of the authors somewhat jokingly stated that until he could use an avatar to effectively manage his sales force or grow company sales, he was skeptical of internet-based training (Hmm – makes one wonder what the future will hold). Blair and Sisakhti (2007) note that three factors influence the move to online training: cost management and reduction, the type of audience and the company's learning infrastructure investment. Toward this end, familiarity should encourage use and until more effective interactive methods of training become available via the Internet, in-person and "live" methods will continue to be the most widely favored and utilized.

Another aspect of technology based sales manager training that needs to be considered is the type of content being presented as this can dictate how the material can best be delivered. If the content is of a cognitive nature (like policies and procedures), then the use of technology is both appropriate and also cost effective. On the other hand, if the content is behavioral in nature (like coaching or

interviewing), the instructor led-interactive type format is the delivery method of choice due to certain limitations associated with the technology platform. It is difficult to develop scenarios for technology that contain all of the aspects of live interaction and instructor directions, leading to a less effective training methodology. The money spent (even though less than instructor led) is thus wasted.

As a result, rather than spending time and money on activities that do not yield effective results, organizations should limit the methods to those that are effective, eliminating the rest. This will require trade-offs by the company. Those methods that are personnel intensive are the most costly but at the same time are deemed more effective. Since little time is spent training sales managers now, why not make the most of the limited training time and only employ the most effective methods. This, for now, would require forgetting about trying to offer many other types of training (which take additional time, both on and off the job) just to feel like something is being done.

Fourth, it appears a wide variety of (internal and sales-related) instructor types can be viewed as being somewhat effective in the training of sales managers. Five distinct types of instructors were grouped together with instructor effectiveness ratings of between 3.5 and 3.79. None exceeded that mark, which leads to the recommendation that a diverse (in terms of experiences and background) group of individuals be used to conduct training depending on topic covered. Toward this end, companies should be urged to focus on using the talent and sales knowledge they have within the organization. Even though firms are collaborating more with external entities in many aspects of marketing and sales (Rampersad *et al.*, 2010), trainers from outside the organization and internal managers (who have little or no sales experience) are perceived as being much less effective than those internal to the organization. So again, why waste valuable time and money on those sales manager training efforts? Instead, focus on internal expertise and sales knowledge (which again will save time and possibly some money).

Fifth, an analysis of the effectiveness ratings reveals that no one type approach, instructor, or methodology received an average effectiveness rating of higher than 4.92. The effectiveness rating is the mean of the ratings given by the respondents on a scale of 1 to 7 where 1 denotes a rating of "not at all effective" and 7 denotes a rating of "extremely effective." The fact that no values exceeded 5 largely could be due to the complexities associated with the sales manager position; thus, leading to the need for varied training being delivered by diverse instructors. Further, the low results point to the need for organizations to train their trainers/instructors. Just as a successful salesperson may not become a successful sales manager, it is as likely that an individual who is a successful sales manager may not inherently possess the requisite skills to successfully teach others needed skills.

Sixth, there is no "flavor of the day" as it relates to the needed content in effective sales manager training programs. Rather, there exist a good number of topics of which at least moderate coverage is desired. Of the 32 content areas evaluated in the current study, 29 were deemed important enough to be at least moderately covered by 40 percent or more of the respondent organizations. Only the termination (38 percent) and managing receivables (35 percent) topic areas were given moderate or more coverage by less than 40 percent of respondent organizations. However, of the 32

content areas, 18 were found to have over 50 percent of respondent organizations reporting no or slight coverage. These content areas included: quota setting, training techniques/skills (mentioned above as a need), terminating, managing diversity, sexual harassment, and financial P & L. One can easily see how damaging it could be to an organization should a sales manager poorly handle a termination, diversity, or harassment issue, as it could easily lead to a lawsuit. In addition, not adequately teaching skills such as financial P & L and quota setting could lead to situations where profits are not maximized. The authors are finding an increasing amount of sales and marketing students graduating from their institutions lacking advanced financial analysis skills; thus, pointing to a need for such training later in individual's careers.

Seventh, senior management must come to grips with post training issues if real change is to occur. For example, if sales managers do not support and encourage the behavior change associated with salesperson training then the salesperson will revert back to the undesired behavior exhibited prior to the training (wasting both time and money). The same is true with senior management's relationship to sales managers. If the sales manager is not supported and held accountable for changing his/her behavior post-training, then the desired change will either not occur or be lasting (again, wasting valuable resources).

Eighth, based upon answers to the questions related to assessment of training efforts, it appears more rigor can be (and is starting to be) applied in this area. Accountability and the proper measurement of performance are of increasing concern to organizational executives (McDonald, 2010). Much as it has taken decades for metrics to become part of the fabric of strategic marketing evaluation efforts, it will take time for formal evaluation of sales manager training efforts to become standardized. Due to the plethora of possible measurement criteria, organizations struggle to define "what should be the results of sales manager training efforts?" The authors and managers reading this study should be pleased to know a good number of companies do formally evaluate their sales manager training programs. A goal for the future and mentioned below is that knowledge should be collected and actively disseminated as to how the effectiveness of sales manager training programs (especially on a results basis) is measured.

Finally, based on comparisons made between organizations where there is a small versus large span of control and product versus service oriented firms, there appear to be many more commonalities than differences among organizations. This leads the authors to advocate that sales managers be open to the notion that they can learn from others across a wide variety of industries. Rather than insulate themselves in such a mentality as "my company or product/situation is different," sales managers should actively seek new knowledge whenever and wherever they can. This point is reinforced by the fact that the greatest variation in response was shown when large (revenue) organizations were compared to small organizations. Large organizations may have been able to utilize more approaches and methodologies than small organizations because of greater resource availability, but they also tended to ascribe higher effectiveness ratings to a broader set of approaches and methodologies. Perhaps this finding suggests that smaller firms should be willing to embrace a broader mix of training approaches and methodologies.

Limitations and directions for future research

Several limitations to this study and associated directions for future research should be noted. First, the study is descriptive in nature. Further, the sample reflects only the responses of individuals employed by firms within the United States. Future research should focus on perceptions of managers outside of the United States, as it can be hypothesized that cultural differences would impact the selling process and thus affect training practices, training content, and perceptions of effectiveness. Additionally, sales managers and internal sales trainer's provided the information collected in the study. As such, these individuals, based on their position in the company, could be biased in their views and subsequent evaluations of the effectiveness of various training. Finally, differences could very well exist due to the industry in which a firm competes. By design, the sample was cross-industry and therefore did not contain sufficient numbers in any specific industry to allow for cross-industry analysis. However, even with that limitation, there were signs that cross-industry variations exist. For example, when comparing the few financial services organizations (17) in our sample with the general sample, we noted that the financial services organizations were less likely to use coaching/mentoring by senior sales management or to ask sales management to formally evaluate each training program. As such, differences across industries could be significant and should be examined in future research.

A future study could also specifically address differences between past sales manager training practices (before internet training was available) and those used currently (training using technology). Studies in this area would help to determine if the low ratings for training using technology are due to the inferiority of the method or to the relative newness and lack of familiarity of the training technology.

Additional research could also explore the differences between what training sales managers desire as well as how much training they need. In addition, new research needs to determine what type(s) of training methods they are currently receiving (and in what quantity) and compare that to how effective the training is perceived.

Further research needs to develop and utilize more objective measures of sales manager training effectiveness such as employee turnover, additional customers gained, improved sales results, etc, versus the perceptual measures used in the current study. In that area as well, new studies need to be done to reduce the potential bias in responses by soliciting input from the customer, salespeople or even senior management on the effectiveness, content and methodology used to train sales managers.

Finally, Hunter and Perrault Jr (2007) note that sales technology is an area where scholarly guidance for management has been scarce. Toward this end and giving credit to reviewers for noting, the use and acceptance of technology in sales training (both for salespeople and sales managers) is a fertile area for future research. This research stream could very well examine complexity as it relates to selling and sales management processes and the amount of variability encountered with differences in span of control, focus of the sale (product vs service) and the size of the organization. It could be hypothesized that the less variability there is in any of the above areas, the more effective use of technology in the training process would be (since it would be easier to standardize the content and training).

6. Conclusion

Quality sales managers continue to be one of the most important assets organizations can possess in their quest to remain financially and strategically viable. Efforts to increase not only the number of quality sales managers but also the quality associated with these same managers remains paramount. If organizations are serious about developing quality sales managers, efforts to increase the variety, quality, and frequency of sales manager training efforts must grow. Results of the current study should serve to not only provide guidance to those responsible for developing and delivering sales manager training programs, but also researchers interested in further study of the topic.

References

Ahearne, M., Jelinek, R. and Rapp, A. (2005), "Moving beyond the direct effect of SFA adoption on salesperson performance: training and support as key moderating factors", *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 34 No. 4, pp. 379-88.

Anderson, R., Mehta, R. and Strong, J. (1997), "An empirical investigation of sales management training programs for sales managers", *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management*, Vol. 17 No. 3, pp. 53-66.

Avlonitis, G.J. and Panagopoulos, N.G. (2005), "Antecedents and consequences of CRM technology acceptance in the sales force", *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 34 No. 4, pp. 355-68.

Blair, D. and Sisakhti, R. (2007), "Sales training: what makes it work", *T & D*, pp. 28-33, August.

Bradford, K.P. and Weitz, B. (2009), "Salespersons' management of conflict in buyer-seller relationships", *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management*, Vol. 29 No. 1, pp. 25-42.

Buehrer, R.E., Senecal, S. and Pullins, E.B. (2005), "Sales force technology usage – reasons, barriers, and support: an exploratory investigation", *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 34 No. 4, pp. 389-98.

Carr, J.C. and Lopez, T.B. (2007), "An improved causal model of market orientation: insights into market oriented culture, conduct, and employee responses", *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, Vol. 15 No. 2, pp. 113-25.

Chakrabarty, S., Oubre, D.T. and Brown, G. (2008), "The impact of supervisory adaptive selling and supervisory feedback on salesperson performance", *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 37 No. 4, pp. 447-54.

Chitwood, R. (2007), "Toughest job in management? The sales manager", available at: http://seattle.bizjournals.com/seattle/stories/2007/06/11/smallb4.html (accessed 29 April 2009).

DeCarlo, T.E. and Agarwal, S. (1999), "Influence of managerial behaviors and job autonomy on job satisfaction of industrial salespersons: a cross-cultural study", *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 28 No. 1, pp. 51-62.

DeCarlo, T.E., Rody, R.C. and DeCarlo, J.E. (1999), "A cross national example of supervisory management practices in the sales force", *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management*, Vol. 19 No. 1, pp. 1-14.

Deeter-Schmelz, D.R. and Kennedy, K.N. (2002), "An exploratory study of the internet as an industrial communication tool: examining buyers' perceptions", *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 31 No. 2, pp. 145-54.

Deeter-Schmelz, D.R., Goebel, D.J. and Kennedy, K.N. (2008), "What are the characteristics of an effective sales manager? An exploratory study comparing salesperson and sales manager perspectives", *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management*, Vol. 28 No. 1, pp. 7-20.

Dubinsky, A.J. (1999), "Salesperson failure: sales management is the key", *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 28 No. 1, pp. 7-17.

Dubinsky, A.J., Mehta, R. and Anderson, R.E. (2001), "Satisfaction with sales manager training: design and implementation issues", *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 35 Nos 1/2, pp. 27-50.

Ettlie, J. and Kubarek, M. (2008), "Design reuse in manufacturing and services", *Journal of Product Innovation Management*, Vol. 25 No. 5, pp. 457-72.

Fine, L.M. (2007), "Selling and sales management", *Business Horizons*, Vol. 50 No. 3, pp. 185-91.

Friedman, W.A. (2006), "Give me that old-time motivation", *Harvard Business Review*, p. 24, July.

Garrido, M.J., Pérez, P. and Anton, C. (2005), "Determinants of sales manager job satisfaction: an analysis of Spanish industrial firms", *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 16 No. 10, pp. 1934-54.

GreatLists (2006), "Frequently Asked Questions about B2B Lists", available at: http://greatlists.desyne.com/faqs.htm (accessed 20 January 2006).

Green, K.W., Inman, R.A. and Brown, G. (2006), "Just-in-time selling: definition and measurement", *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 37 No. 2, pp. 131-42.

Honeycutt, E.D. Jr, Ford, J.B. and Rao, C.P. (1995), "Sales training: executives research needs", *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management*, Vol. 15 No. 4, pp. 67-71.

Hunter, G.K. and Perreault, W.D. Jr (2006), "Sales technology orientation, information effectiveness, and sales performance", *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, Vol. 26 No. 2, pp. 95-113.

Hunter, G.K. and Perreault, W.D. Jr (2007), "Making sales technology effective", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 71 No. 1, pp. 16-34.

Iizuka, I. (2008), "If you want to improve, train your brain", *Sales and Marketing Management*, Vol. 160 No. 1, pp. 22-3.

Ingram, T.N., LaForge, R.W. and Leigh, T.W. (2002), "Selling in the new millennium: a joint agenda", *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 31 No. 7, pp. 559-67.

Jantan, M.A., Honeycutt, E.D., Thelen, S.T. and Attia, A. (2004), "Managerial perceptions of sales training and performance", *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 33, pp. 667-73.

Jaworski, B.J. and Kohli, A.K. (1991), "Supervisory feedback: alternative types and their impact on salespeople's performance and satisfaction", *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 28, May, pp. 190-201.

Jones, E., Chonko, L.B. and Roberts, J.A. (2004), "Sales force obsolescence: perceptions from sales and marketing executives of individual, organizational, and environmental factors", *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 33 No. 7, pp. 439-56.

Jordan, J. (2009), "From sales star to sales supporter", *Sales and Marketing Management*, Vol. 161 No. 2, p. 1.

Kahle, D. (2005), "The most common mistake sales managers make", *Agency Sales*, Vol. 35 No. 11, pp. 24-7.

Kranz, G. (2007), "A higher standard for managers: part 1 of 2", *Workforce Management*, Vol. 86 No. 11, pp. 21-5.

Lambert, B., Ohai, T. and Kerkhoff, E. (2009), *World Class Selling: New Sales Competencies*, ASTD Press, Alexandria, VA.

LaPlaca, P. (2009), "Improving B2B marketing processes", *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 38 No. 3, pp. 237-8.

Ledingham, D., Kovac, M. and Simon, H.L. (2006), "The new science of sales force productivity", *Harvard Business Review*, pp. 124-33, September.

Lee, J. and Qualls, W.J. (2010), "A dynamic process of buyer-seller technology adoption", *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, Vol. 25 No. 3, pp. 220-8.

Le Bon, J. and Merunka, D. (2006), "The impact of individual and managerial factors on salespeople's contribution to marketing intelligence activities", *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, Vol. 23 No. 4, pp. 395-415.

McDonald, M. (2010), "A brief review of marketing accountability, and a research agenda", *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, Vol. 25 No. 5, pp. 383-94.

Mallin, M.L. and DelVecchio, S.K. (2008), "Salesforce automation tool selectivity: an agency theory perspective", *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, Vol. 22 No. 1, pp. 52-61.

Mallin, M., O'Donnell, E. and Hu, M. (2010), "The role of uncertainty and sales control in the development of sales manager trust", *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, Vol. 25 No. 1, pp. 30-42.

Malshe, A. (2011), "An exploration of key connections within sales-marketing interface", *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, Vol. 26 No. 1, pp. 45-57.

Marchetti, M. (2006), "Moving on up", *Sales and Marketing Management*, Vol. 158 No. 1, p. 14.

Marshall, G.W. and Michaels, R.E. (2001), "Research in selling and sales management in the next millennium: an agenda from the AMA faculty consortium", *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management*, Vol. 21 No. 1, pp. 15-17.

Morris, M.H., Avila, R. and Teeple, E. (1990), "Sales management as an entrepreneurial activity", *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management*, Vol. 10 No. 2, pp. 1-15.

Nevins, J.L. and Money, L.B. (2008), "Performance implications of distributor effectiveness, trust and culture in import channels of distribution", *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 37 No. 1, pp. 46-58.

Noble, C.H. (2008), "The influence of job security on field sales manager satisfaction: exploring frontline tensions", *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management*, Vol. 28 No. 3, pp. 247-61.

Ozer, M. and Chen, Z. (2006), "Do the best new product development practices of US companies matter in Hong Kong", *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 35 No. 3, pp. 279-92.

Pelham, A. (2006), "Do consulting-oriented sales management programs impact sales force performance and profit", *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, Vol. 21 No. 3, p. 175.

Peters, D. (2007), "Five sins of sales bosses", *Sales Management*, Vol. 26 No. 1, p. 52.

Piercy, N.F. (2010), "Evolution of strategic sales organizations in business-to-business marketing", *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, Vol. 25 No. 5, pp. 349-59.

Piercy, N.F., Cravens, D.W. and Lane, N. (2009), "Sales management control level and competencies: antecedents and consequences", *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 38 No. 4, pp. 459-67.

Piercy, N.F., Cravens, D.W. and Morgan, N.A. (1999), "Relationships between sales management control, territory design, sales force performance and sales organization effectiveness", *British Journal of Management*, Vol. 10 No. 2, pp. 95-111.

Rampersad, G., Quester, P. and Troshani, I. (2010), "Examining network factors: commitment, trust, coordination and harmony", *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, Vol. 25 No. 7, pp. 487-500.

Rangarajan, D., Jones, E. and Chin, W. (2005), "Impact of sales force automation on technology-related stress, effort, and technology usage among salespeople", *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 34 No. 4, pp. 345-54.

Reday, P.A., Marshall, R. and Parasuraman, A. (2009), "An interdisciplinary approach to assessing the characteristics and sales potential of modern salespeople", *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 38 No. 7, pp. 838-44.

Russ, F.A., McNeilly, D.M. and Comer, J.M. (1996), "Leadership, decision making and performance of sales managers: a multi-level approach", *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management*, Vol. 16 No. 3, pp. 1-15.

Salopek, J.J. (2009), "The power of the pyramid", *T&D*, pp. 70-6, May.

Schillewaert, N., Ahearne, M.J., Frambach, R.T. and Moenaert, R.K. (2005), "The adoption of information technology in the sales force", *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 34 No. 4, pp. 323-36.

Schwepker, C.H. Jr and Good, D.J. (2004), "Sales management practices: the impact of ethics on customer orientation, employment and performance", *The Marketing Management Journal*, Vol. 14 No. 2, pp. 134-47.

Schwepker, C.H. Jr and Good, D.J. (2007), "Sales management's influence on employment and training in developing an ethical sales force", *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management*, Vol. 27 No. 4, pp. 325-39.

Senegal, S., Pullins, E.B. and Buehrer, R.E. (2007), "The extent of technology usage and salespeople: an exploratory investigation", *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, Vol. 22 No. 1, pp. 52-61.

Shepherd, D.C. and Ridnour, R.E. (1995), "The training of sales managers: an exploratory study of sales management training practices", *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management*, Vol. 15 No. 1, pp. 69-74.

Shoemaker, M.E. (2003), "Leadership behaviors in sales managers: a level analysis", *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, Vol. 11 No. 2, pp. 17-29.

Singh, R. and Koshy, A. (2010), "Determinants of B2B salespersons' performance and effectiveness: a review and synthesis of literature", *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, Vol. 25 No. 7, pp. 535-46.

Spiro, R.L., Rich, G.A. and Stanton, W.J. (2005), *Management of a Sales Force*, McGraw-Hill Irwin, Burr Ridge, IL, p. 93.

Stein, D. (2008), "Smart sales: when sales 101 isn't enough", *Sales and Marketing Management*, Vol. 161 No. 1, p. 8.

Steward, M.D., Hutt, M.D., Walker, B.A. and Kumar, A. (2009), "Role identity and attribution of high-performing salespeople", *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, Vol. 24 No. 7, pp. 463-73.

Teas, K. (1981), "An empirical test of models of salespersons' job expectancy and instrumentality perceptions", *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 18 No. 2, pp. 209-26.

Tyagi, P. (1985), "Relative importance of key job dimensions and leadership behaviors in motivating salesperson work performance", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 49 No. 3, pp. 76-86.

Valentine, S. (2009), "Ethics training, ethical context, and sales and marketing professionals satisfaction with supervisors and coworkers", *Journal of Professional Selling and Sales Management*, Vol. 29 No. 3, pp. 227-42.

Wilkinson, J. (2009), "A good salesman may not make a good sales manager", *The Advertiser*, p. 34, December.

Zallocco, R., Pullins, E.B. and Mallin, M.L. (2009), "A re-examination of B2B sales performance", *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, Vol. 24 No. 8, pp. 598-610.

Zoltners, A.A., Sinha, P. and Lorimer, S.E. (2008), "Sales force effectiveness: a framework for researchers and practitioners", *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management*, Vol. 28 No. 2, pp. 115-31.

Further reading

Costello, D. (2006), "Leveraging the employee life cycle", *Customer Relationship Management*, Vol. 10 No. 12, p. 48.

Leigh, T.W. and Marshall, G.W. (2001), "Research priorities in sales strategy and performance", *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management*, Vol. 21 No. 2, pp. 83-93.

Sheth, J.N. and Sharma, A. (2008), "The impact of the product to service shift in industrial markets and the evolution of the sales organization", *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 37 No. 1, pp. 260-9.

Tanner, J.F. Jr (2002), "Comments on 'selling in the new millennium: a joint agenda'", *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 31 No. 7, pp. 569-72.

Tanner, J.F. Jr and Shipp, S. (2005), "Sales technology within the salesperson's relationship: a research agenda", *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 34 No. 4, pp. 305-12.

Williams, B.C. and Plouffe, C.R. (2007), "Assessing the evolution of sales knowledge: a 20-year content analysis", *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 36 No. 4, pp. 408-19.

About the authors

Geoffrey L. Gordon is Chair and Professor of Marketing at Northern Illinois University. Dr Gordon earned his PhD in Marketing at the University of Kentucky. Dr Gordon has published over 40 articles in leading academic journals. His current research interests are in new product/service development, sales management, grudge-holding, and marketing in recessionary times. Geoffrey L. Gordon is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: ggordon@niu.edu

C. David Shepherd is a Professor of Marketing at Georgia Southern University. Dr Shepherd earned his PhD in Marketing at the University of Tennessee. He has published extensively in the field of sales and sales management. His primary research interests include the cognitive processes of salespeople and the challenges inherent in the sales and sales management positions.

Brian Lambert is a Senior Analyst with Forrester Research serving sales enablement and sales training professionals in large, complex technology companies. Dr Lambert has published three books on professional selling. His current research interests are in helping sales, marketing, and product leaders bridge the gap between strategy and execution with more buyer-relevant sales, sales training, sales management, and learning and development initiatives.

Rick E. Ridnour is Enterprise Rent-A-Car Professor of Sales in the Department of Marketing at Northern Illinois University. Dr Ridnour has published numerous articles in leading academic journals. His current research interests are in sales management, personal selling, listening, and major account management. Dr Ridnour earned his PhD at Iowa State University.

Dan C. Weilbaker is the McKesson Pharmaceutical Group Professor of Sales and Director of the Professional Sales Program at Northern Illinois University. Dr Weilbaker earned his PhD in Marketing at the University of South Carolina. He is currently the editor of the *Journal of Selling & Major Account Management* and his current research interests include personal selling and sales management.

Executive summary and implications for managers and executives

This summary has been provided to allow managers and executives a rapid appreciation of the content of the article. Those with a particular interest in the topic covered may then read the article in toto to take advantage of the more comprehensive description of the research undertaken and its results to get the full benefit of the material present.

If an organization is to be financially and strategically viable, it must recognize that quality sales managers are one of its most important assets. They are the pivotal link between senior management and the revenue-generating sales force. If organizations are serious about developing quality sales managers, efforts to increase the variety, quality, and frequency of training efforts must grow.

As for variety, there's quite a choice – on-the-job, mentoring by a senior sales manager or other senior manager, classroom-style lectures, outside courses, internet-based instruction, home study etc. According to Geoffrey L. Gordon *et al.* in "The training of sales managers: current practices", companies tend to prefer on-the-job training and mentoring due to their practicality, the ability for successful managers to pass on their wisdom, and their ability to keep sales managers in the field. As one manager said in the US-based study: "The ability (in multiple conversations) to pass on to our new sales managers all the do's and don'ts of managing our sales force is far more valuable than sitting in a classroom all day listening to some outside instructor go blah, blah, blah."

Organizations like to use their own employees with staff sales trainers, senior sales managers, and regional sales managers being used most often. While external consultants were used at least slightly by 73 percent of respondent organizations, comments revealed that their use was largely limited to serving as "experts" on selected topics in which internal staff were thought to have inadequate knowledge. Given a choice between internal and external, there was a strong preference for internal staff due to cost and familiarity with the organization (i.e. the ability to present relevant examples). The study's specific questions were:

- What types of training approaches and instructors are used in the training of sales managers?
- What training methods are used?
- What is the content of present training?
- How long and often do training programs last for sales managers of varied experience levels? and
- How often are sales training programs evaluated?

Even in the cases in which little or no training was being conducted, respondents commented on the need for it. One said: "We are rarely trained on how to manage our salespeople. We train on products but not on management."

Especially in those firms where limited time is given to sales manager training, it is imperative that time spent on training is meaningful, productive and that the training brings about profound change. Companies need to focus on the most effective ways to train and not try to save money by selecting less-expensive and less-effective training methods.

Emphasis should be placed on providing training in the field by those who are either senior or more knowledgeable on the topic(s) on which the sales manager is being trained. This is perceived as being more effective than other means (although firms should work on improving the effectiveness associated with all methods employed). Interestingly, product oriented firms tended to value and use regional sales managers more highly and often than service oriented firms.

Training methods need to be highly interactive and participative. Most sales managers will have had experience with role-playing from their salesperson training. Role-play allows for customized simulations and immediate feedback, resulting in specific skill-building and rich discussion.

While internet-based training methods are gaining ground, they are still in their infancy. Until more effective interactive methods of training become available via the internet, in-person and "live" methods will continue to be the most widely favored. It is difficult to develop scenarios for technology that contain all of the aspects of live interaction and instructor directions, leading to a less-effective training methodology.

Rather than spending time and money on activities that do not yield effective results, organizations should limit the methods to those that are effective. Those methods that are personnel intensive are the most costly but at the same time are deemed more effective. Since little time is spent training sales managers now, why not make the most of the limited training time and only employ the most effective methods? There is evidence that a focus on internal expertise and sales knowledge will save time and possibly some money.

Senior management must come to grips with post-training issues if real change is to occur. For example, if sales managers do not support and encourage the behavior change associated with salesperson training then the salesperson will revert back to the undesired behavior exhibited prior to the training. The same is true with senior management's relationship to sales managers.

Accountability and the proper measurement of performance are of increasing concern to organizational executives. Much as it has taken decades for metrics to become part of the fabric of strategic marketing evaluation efforts, it will take time for formal evaluation of sales manager training efforts to become standardized.

(A précis of the article "The training of sales managers: current practices". Supplied by Marketing Consultants for Emerald.)

This article has been cited by:

1. Richard E. Plank, David A. Reid, Steven E. Koppitsch, Jeffrey Meyer. 2018. The sales manager as a unit of analysis: a review and directions for future research. *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management* **38**:1, 78-91. [Crossref]

2. LinYu-Tse, Yu-Tse Lin. 2017. Praise sales personnel for talent or effort? Person versus process-focused feedback, goal orientation and performance. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing* **32**:8, 1073-1086. [Abstract] [Full Text] [PDF]

3. ReidDavid A., David A. Reid, PlankRichard E., Richard E. Plank, PetersonRobert M., Robert M. Peterson, RichGregory A., Gregory A. Rich. 2017. Examining the use of sales force management practices. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing* **32**:7, 974-986. [Abstract] [Full Text] [PDF]

4. Alfonso J. Gil, Jorge L. Garcia-Alcaraz, Mara Mataveli. 2015. The training demand in organizational changes processes in the Spanish wine sector. *European Journal of Training and Development* **39**:4, 315-331. [Abstract] [Full Text] [PDF]