

ON EXPANDING THE ROLE–APTITUDE–SKILL–MOTIVATION MODEL OF SALESPERSON PERFORMANCE: EVIDENCE FROM DIRECT SALES ORGANIZATIONS

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ABSTRACT

The Role-Aptitude-Skill-Motivation model of salesperson performance (e.g., Churchill, Ford, and Walker 1997) has spawned an extensive body of research in marketing.¹ Practically all such research, however, suggests that salesforce management efforts should focus only on the organizational antecedents to role perceptions, skill level, motivation, and sales aptitude. In doing so, the research takes the following for granted:

1. The administration of rewards to salespeople is at least partially if not fully controlled by the sales manager.
2. A salesperson's membership in the salesforce (e.g., employment) is at least partially if not fully controlled by the sales manager.
3. Skill and aptitude play a significant role in the salesperson's ability to achieve desired outcomes, giving the sales manager an opportunity to influence performance positively through training.

What happens when these assumptions no longer hold? What recourse is left to sales managers who do not have direct control over salespeople's rewards or employment? And what should managers do if skills and aptitude have little influence sales performance because of the technical simplicity of the product being sold? What techniques should sales managers use to influence motivation and performance under such circumstances?

Answering these questions is necessary for surviving and succeeding as sales managers in direct selling organizations, such as Amway, Mary Kay Cosmetics, Longaberger Basket, and others. Direct selling organizations rely on approximately 25 million independent contractors worldwide to sell their products and services directly to consumers. Because they are recruited, trained, and supervised by their peers, these contractors or salespeople are by definition not subject to the same employer-employee conventions that bind managers and subordinates in traditional sales organizations. Despite these differences, however, sales managers must still find ways to keep direct sales personnel motivated and focused on selling and recruiting tasks. The dramatic

growth and financial success of direct selling organizations suggest these organizations have devised ways to overcome their lack of traditional controls. This study seeks to understand the motivation and performance management techniques used by direct sales organizations and compares them to the scholarly standard (Churchill, Ford, Walker 1997) that has instructed the field for the past two decades.

Understanding the sales management practices of direct sales organizations demanded a array of diverse of data gathering methods (ethnographic analyses, archival analyses, open-ended interviews, and semi-overt participant observation) and the study of several organizations (Amway, Mary Kay Cosmetics, and Longaberger Basket). Utilizing multiple techniques in multiple organizations allowed us to triangulate findings from different data sources for the purpose of building stronger interpretations. We took a theory-building research approach to achieve a detailed first-hand understanding of the companies' motivational practices, the philosophy behind such practices, and the influence that various techniques have on salespeople. Given our expectations that direct sales organizations could not apply traditional motivation tactics, using standardized survey measures and methods that had been validated with traditional sales personnel would have been misleading.

Our study reveals that direct sales organizations rely on role management and cognitive-emotional management to motivate sales personnel (see Figure 1 below). *Role management* involves two interrelated techniques that affect motivation: (1) sales managers making role conflict and role ambiguity highly salient to sales recruits, and (2) sales managers reducing or neutralizing role ambiguity and conflict by means of task-focused stories and anecdotes. The first technique induces anxiety and is used to instill a sense of dependence in salespeople on their sales managers. The second technique capitalizes on this dependence by giving sales managers the opportunity to reinforce the recipes for selling and recruiting that the companies have developed; recipes which in turn give sales managers more control over salesforce behavior.

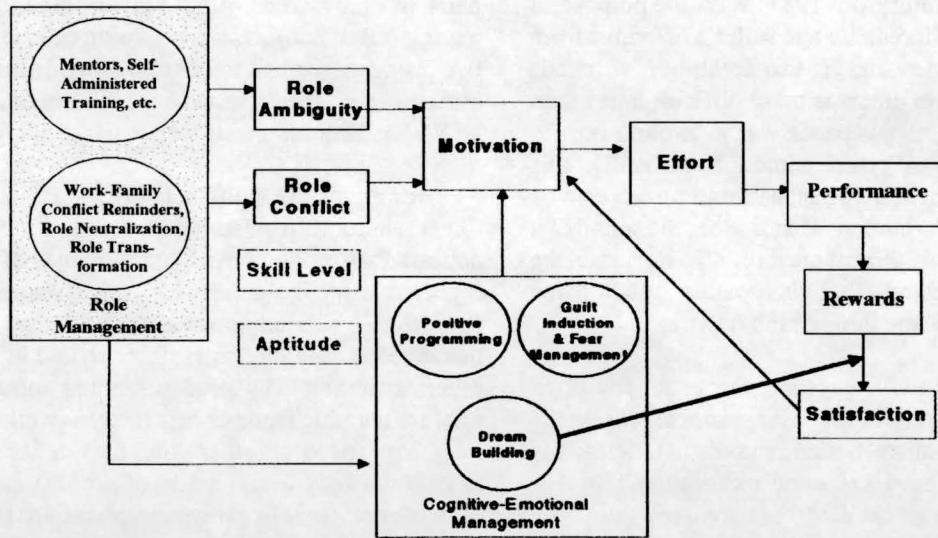
Cognitive emotional management, as the name implies, involves inducing or reducing positive and nega-

tive thoughts and feelings in sales personnel. The techniques used include dream-building, positive programming, and guilt induction. They are used to influence motivation and satisfaction by controlling sales recruits' focus on rewards (both intrinsic and extrinsic) and their exposure to information that may reduce their enthusi-

asm for the sales and recruiting tasks.

We conclude by discussing the implications of role and cognitive-emotional management on theoretical models of salesforce management and sales management practices.

FIGURE 1
A Revised Role-Aptitude-Skill Motivation Model



ENDNOTE

Walker, Jr. (1997), *Sales Force Management*. Chicago: Irwin, 342-360.

¹ Churchill, Gilbert A., Jr., Neil M. Ford, and Orville C.

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