

# Examination of Selected Precursors and Outcomes of Sales Manager Behaviors

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## Abstract

A model is proposed and tested that represents how salespeople perceive and respond to their sales managers' behaviors. Tests of the model indicated that salespeople's perceptions of their managers' behaviors influenced their satisfaction with the sales manager but not their overall satisfaction with the job. A direct implication of the adjusted model was that sales managers need to be trained to exert positive behaviors and establish consistent reinforcements for positive behaviors in order to develop a favorable working relationship. However, the company more so than the sales manager was viewed as responsible for providing a climate that facilitates learning. A learning-oriented climate facilitated both self-efficacy beliefs and overall job satisfaction of salespeople. Satisfied salespeople were likely to intend to remain with the company.

**Keywords:** sales manager behaviors, arbitrary and punitive behavior, achievement-oriented behavior, contingent and approving behavior, locus of control, self-efficacy beliefs, job satisfaction, learning-oriented climate, withdrawal intentions, sales personnel

## 1. Introduction

Sales managers play a key role in selecting and developing salespeople. Accordingly, in recent years organizations have renewed interest in methods that can be used to develop salespeople as human assets, owing to the growing need to initiate and develop relationships between vendors and customers in both business-to-business and business-to-consumer settings (e.g., Blocker, Cannon, Panagopoulos, & Sager, 2012; Evans, McFarland, Dietz, & Jaramillo, 2012; Fu, Richards, Hughes, & Jones, 2010; Geiger & Finch, 2011; Hamwi, Rutherford, Barksdale, & Johnson, 2013; Hass, Snehota, & Corsaro, 2012; Marin & Ruiz de Maya, 2013; Marshall et al., 2012). Attention has focused on understanding how sales managers *behave* (e.g., Ahearne, Haumann, Kraus, & Wieseke, 2013; Boichuck et al., 2014; Jaramillo, Grisaffe, Chonko, & Roberts, 2009; Kemp, Borders, & Ricks, 2013; Panagopoulos & Dimitriadis, 2009; Valentine, 2009). As such, rather than focusing solely on attitudes and behavior of *salespeople*, investigation can also be placed on how *sales manager behaviors* influence salespeople.

Because the nature of managing salespeople and selling differ from many other kinds of company positions (Dubinsky et al., 1987), problems exist in selecting, training, and developing sales managers (Anderson, Dubinsky, & Mehta, 1999). One plausible reason for the problem encountered when promoting high sales performers into sales management is the need for knowledge concerning *how* sales managers interact with salespeople (Anderson, Dubinsky, & Mehta, 2014; Shepherd, Lambert, Ridnour, & Weilbaker, 2012)—that is, the nature of the behaviors in which they engage.

Some researchers have developed and tested theoretical models intended to depict the management of salespeople. One approach, developed by Schriesheim (1978) and colleagues, looks at manager behaviors in terms of leadership consideration, leadership role clarity, and initiating structure (e.g., Fry et al., 1986; Johnston

et al., 1990; Jones et al., 1996; Matsuo, 2009; Piercy, Cravens, & Lane, 2009; Strutton et al., 1993). Another alternative examines sales managers as leaders (Dubinsky, Yammarino, Jolson, & Spangler, 1995; Dubinsky, Yammarino, & Jolson, 1995; Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013; MacKenzie et al., 2001; Panagopoulos & Avlonitis 2010; Russ et al., 1996; Shannahan, Blush, & Shannahan, 2013; Smith, Andras, & Rosenbloom, 2012; Schwepker & Good, 2010; Yang, 2012). A third focuses on behavior control systems organizations implement through their first-level sales managers (e.g., Challagalla & Shervani, 1996; Futrell et al., 1976; Shoemaker, 1999). The dyadic perspective views the manager-to-salesperson relationship as an exchange between the parties (e.g., Brashear, Bellenger, Boles, & Barksdale, 2006; DelVecchio, 1998; Edmondson & Boyer, 2013; Flaherty, Lam, Jay, & Dixon, 2012). Still other efforts consider the manager's use of power (Brashear, Manolis, & Brooks, 2005; Busch, 1980; Valentine, 2009) and communication practices (Johlke et al., 2000; Massey & Dawes, 2007).

Kohli et al. (1998, p. 270)—and recently Miao and Evans (2012)—urged researchers to disaggregate “supervisory behaviors to distinguish between those that focus on activities and those that focus on capabilities [of salespeople].” This suggestion implies that salesperson behavior should be distinguished from manager behavior in a unified approach to understanding how manager behaviors affect sales personnel. The foregoing advice led to the present investigation.

The present study proposes and tests a causal model that integrates three supervisory behaviors proposed by Kohli (1985) with climate for learning and training and core self-evaluation constructs in a structural format. The model proposed and tested builds on the Kohli et al. (1998) work. It integrates an individual trait (locus of control [a core self-evaluation]) and an organization-based construct (climate for learning and training) with three manager behaviors developed by Kohli (1985) (arbitrary and punitive, achievement-oriented, and contingent and approving behaviors). The trait, climate, and supervisory perception variables are posited to influence salespeople's self-efficacy beliefs for selling, as well as their satisfaction with the sales manager, overall job satisfaction, and intention to remain with the firm. The logic of the model is that a work climate seen as facilitating learning and training, along with a personal orientation to be accountable for results (locus of control), is associated with perceived sales manager behaviors, which are related to confidence (self-efficacy), satisfaction (with the manager and the job), and longevity intention of sales personnel. Shown in Figure 1 is the conceptual model of the study.

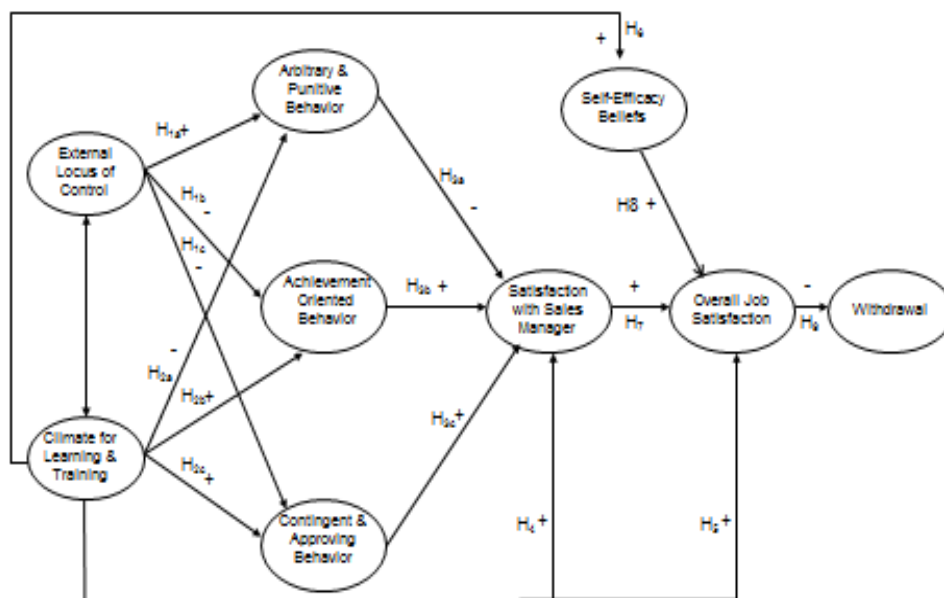


Figure 1. Hypothesized model of salespeople's perceptions of sales manager's behaviors and their outcomes

## 2. Conceptual Model and Hypotheses

Kohli et al. (1998) and others (Choi, Dixon, & Jung, 2004; Matsuo, Hayakawa, & Takashima, 2013; Miao & Evans, 2012; Miao & Evans, 2013; McFarland & Kidwell, 2006; Wang, Dou, & Zhou, 2012) observed that manager behaviors directed toward salespeople's capabilities (i.e., selling skills, abilities) and end- results jointly facilitate a *learning orientation* in salespeople. Although researchers have found little support for learning

orientation as a predictor of salespeople's performance, they have discerned that *developing salespeople's capabilities* and *facilitating their learning* characterize a long-term strategy commonly associated with *relationship building and account penetration* (Bell, Menguc, & Widing, 2010; Boichuck et al., 2014; Kohli et al., 1998).

### 2.1 Sales Manager Behaviors

The three sales manager behaviors of interest in this study were arbitrary and punitive, achievement-oriented, and contingent and approving behaviors. These three were chosen for inclusion for three reasons. First, Kohli (1985) developed, measured, and tested these scales, which possess adequate reliability and validity (e.g., Kohli, 1985; Kohli et al., 1998). Second, the three exhibit both positive and negative managerial behaviors. Third, they have been found to be associated with various salesperson job-related outcomes (e.g., Kohli, 1985; Kohli et al., 1998).

*Arbitrary and punitive behavior* connotes punishment the sales manager applies (Podsakoff, Bommer, Podsakoff, & MacKenzie, 2006). *Achievement-oriented behavior* refers to the sales manager's facilitating performance of salespeople and recognizing their accomplishments and learning (Amyx & Alford, 2006). *Contingent and approving behavior* implies actions the manager takes that help the salesperson learn proper job procedures and approaches—an operant conditioning approach (Matsuo et al., 2013). Together, the three behaviors comprise a skill set of the sales manager.

Evidence suggests that perceptions of the sales manager and his/her skills may relate to salespeople's attitudes and outcomes (e.g., Sager, Dubinsky, & Wilson, 2009; Miao & Evans, 2012; Miao & Evans, 2013). Generally, salespeople's motivation is more positive to the extent that they see their sales manager as soliciting their input and developing a closer relationship (Kemp et al., 2013; Tyagi, 1985). Kohli (1985) and (Podsakoff et al., 2006) found that contingent and approving behaviors related positively to salespersons' perceptions of instrumentality of rewards and job satisfaction. Kohli et al. (1998) and Miao and Evans (2012) discerned that capability orientation (i.e., contingent and approving behaviors) is predictive of salespeople's learning orientation. Kohli (1985) found less support for the influence of achievement-oriented behaviors. Surprisingly, Kohli (1985) and Oren, Tziner, Nahshon, and Sharoni (2013) ascertained that perceptions of sales manager arbitrary and punitive behaviors were *positively* predictive of salespersons' self-efficacy beliefs. Although counterintuitive, the finding fits with theory in the area of punishment, as Arvey and Ivancevich (1980) articulated; it reflects operant conditioning (negative reinforcement).

### 2.2 Precursors of Perceptions of Sales Manager Behaviors

The model incorporates two precursors of salespersons' perceptions of sales manager behavior: locus of control and climate for learning and training. Spector (1988) defined *locus of control* as an individual's generalized expectations that rewards, reinforcements, or outcomes in work are controlled either by one's actions (internal) or by other forces (external). It was included in the present study because whether an individual attributes performance to personal efforts (internal locus of control) or to outside entities or forces (e.g., business environmental phenomena such as product quality or company reputation, competitors, luck [external locus of control]) could conceivably influence the individual's reactions toward his or her job situation (perceptions of the manager's behavior toward the salesperson in this investigation). *Climate for learning and training* (CLT) refers to the degree to which individuals perceive that the firm fosters an environment for learning and training (Furnham, 1991). It was incorporated into this work because the environment of the organization is likely to reflect the kind of managerial behavior exhibited by sales managers (an organizational culture) and because it has been found to have an impact on salespersons' job-related outcomes (e.g., Sager et al., 2014).

#### 2.2.1 Locus of Control

External locus of control is a *core self-evaluation* aligned with those developed in social learning theory (Bandura, 1986; Lam, Kraus, & Ahearne, 2010; Lee & Bell, 2013; Venkatesh, Challagalla, & Kohli, 2001). Locus of control is an estimate of the extent to which a person believes he/she can influence his/her environment (Boyd, Lewin, & Sager, 2009; Sager, Strutton, & Johnson, 2006; Hamwi, Rutherford, Boles, & Madupallo, 2014; Jelinek & Aheame, 2006; Lewin & Sager, 2010; Spector, 1988). "Externals" believe that the job environment dictates what happens to them (e.g., "The environment happens to me") and are characterized as having a more *external* locus of control—outside forces determine their fate. Individuals believing that they influence the job environment (e.g., "I happen to the environment")—"internals"—are typified as having a more *internal* locus of control (i.e., personal actions determine their fate). Internal locus of control is consistent with the accountability or "ownership" aspect of the sales job.

To the extent that sales personnel are externally-oriented, they are expected to regard their managers' behaviors as arbitrary and punitive. After all, externals ascribe their performance partly as being strongly influenced by their manager (Hamwi et al., 2014). Also, externals are expected to view negatively achievement-oriented and contingent and approving behaviors the sales manager enacts. Moreover, externally-oriented salespeople are less inclined to perceive favorably *responsive* behaviors on the part of their immediate sales manager (Jelinek & Ahearne, 2006). Externals want the manager to provide concrete structure and procedures; that orientation may explain the counterintuitive findings for closeness and supervision reported by Jones et al. (1998).

Conversely, salespersons with an internal orientation perceive themselves as being ultimately responsible and accountable for their achievements. As such, they do not feel particularly affected by their managers' efforts. Therefore, internals will likely view their managers favorably when they engage in achievement-oriented and contingent and approving department. To the extent that locus of control is *internal*, salespersons should perceive their managers' behaviors as less punitive and more guidance oriented. So the personal perspective that the salespersons adopt—their core self-evaluation—influences how they perceive the manager's behavior (Boyd, Lewin, & Sager, 2009). Internally-oriented salespersons should regard the sales manager as a coach and a resource who can aid them, rather than as a taskmaster or a nuisance (Jelinek & Aheame, 2006).

Based on the foregoing, the following hypotheses are offered:

- H1a: The greater degree to which a salesperson has an external locus of control, the more the sales person perceives his/her sales manager as engaging in arbitrary and punitive behavior.
- H1b: The lower degree to which a salesperson has an external locus of control (i.e., the higher the internal locus of control), the more the salesperson perceives his/her sales manager as engaging in achievement-oriented behavior.
- H1c: The lower degree to which a salesperson has an external locus of control (i.e., the higher the internal locus of control), the more the salesperson perceives his/her sales manager as engaging in contingent and approving behavior.

### 2.2.2 Climate for Learning and Training

The model draws on social learning theory in its use of CLT and manager behaviors as affecting attitudes and outcomes. An environment that a salesperson views as fostering learning and training should facilitate positive perceptions of the sales manager's behavior and also contribute to satisfaction with the sales manager. That is, the learning and training aspect of a sales job is conceivably positively related to salespersons' perceptions of behavior and evaluations of (i.e., satisfaction with) the sales manager.

The model taps "valuation," an assessment of some aspect of the environment of a workplace (CLT here). In essence, salespersons interpret and evaluate their environment. Valuation is "a cognitive representation of the features of the environment...interpreted in light of the individual's values and in terms of its significance for the individual's well-being" (Brown & Leigh, 1996, p. 358). From the researcher's perspective, the environment in which a salesperson operates serves as a basis (or constant) for inferring salesperson behaviors and attitudes. Aspects of the salesperson's environment include the task-based environment (job itself) (Lam, 2012; Medhurst & Albrecht, 2011), the supportive environment (e.g., support for training and learning) (Boichuk et al., 2014; Kemp et al., 2013), abilities of senior management (Chakrabarty, Brown, & Widing, 2012; Mulki, Jaramillo, & Locander, 2009), and product development capabilities of the firm (Fu et al., 2010; Joshi, 2010).

Specifically, CLT is expected to facilitate achievement-oriented and contingent and approving behaviors of sales managers (Matsuo, Hayakawa, & Takashima, 2013). In line with social learning theory, an environment that is seen as fostering learning should also promote learning-oriented behaviors of sales managers. Such an environment should foster satisfaction with the sales manager and indirectly promote satisfaction with the overall sales job (Matsuo, Hayakawa, & Takashima, 2013).

Based on the preceding dialectic, the following hypotheses are posited:

- H2a: The greater the degree to which a salesperson perceives the organization as providing a climate for learning and training, the less the salesperson perceives his/her sales manager as engaging in arbitrary and punitive behavior.
- H2b: The greater the degree to which a salesperson perceives the organization as providing a climate for learning and training, the more the salesperson perceives his/her sales manager as engaging in achievement-oriented behavior.
- H2c: The greater the degree to which a salesperson perceives the organization as providing a climate for learning

and training, the more the salesperson perceives his/her sales manager as engaging in contingent and approving behavior.

Climate for learning and training is posited to be positively related to salesperson self-efficacy beliefs. Bandura (1986) defined task-specific self-efficacy as a belief in one's ability to perform a particular task. Mulki, Lassk, and Jaramillo (2008, p. 292) averred that “self-efficacy provides salespeople with the focus and confidence needed...to get the sales job done...” An environment that fosters learning should enhance self-efficacy beliefs—which is why self-efficacy was included in the model. Indeed, Sager et al. (2014) observed that training climate is positively related to salesperson ability to use sales training materials in the field. Thus, the following hypothesis is proffered:

H3: The greater the degree to which a salesperson perceives the organization as providing a climate for learning and training, the higher the salesperson's self-efficacy beliefs.

### 2.3 Outcome Variables

Satisfaction with the sales manager, overall job satisfaction, and intention to remain with the organization (withdrawal) were the job-related outcomes of the study. The three were included in the study because of their importance in extant sales management research and to sales practitioners, as well as their impact on other salesperson response variables (e.g., organizational commitment, job involvement, emotional exhaustion).

The three sales manager behaviors are expected to determine the salesperson's satisfaction with their sales manager. To the extent that the manager's behaviors are viewed as arbitrary and punitive, the salesperson should be *less* satisfied with the sales manager. Conversely, to the extent that the sales manager is perceived as exerting achievement-oriented and contingent and approving behaviors, the salesperson should be *more* satisfied with the sales manager.

Taken together, the three proposed relationships imply that to the extent that the manager *reinforces* positive behaviors on the salesperson's part, the salesperson should be *more satisfied* with the manager. To the degree that the manager employs negative behaviors, the salesperson should be *less satisfied* with the sales manager (e.g., Jelinek & Aheame, 2006).

The previous discussion leads to the following hypotheses:

H4a: The greater the degree to which the salesperson perceives his/her sales manager as engaging in arbitrary and punitive behavior, the lower his/her satisfaction with the sales manager.

H4b: The greater the degree to which the salesperson perceives his/her sales manager as engaging in achievement-oriented behavior, the higher his/her satisfaction with the sales manager.

H4c: The greater the degree to which the salesperson perceives his/her sales manager as engaging in contingent and approving behavior, the higher his/her satisfaction with the sales manager.

### 2.4 Proposed Mediating Relationships for Sales Manager Behaviors

The three manager behavior variables are posited as *mediating* the relationship between the two precursors of sales manager behaviors (CLT and locus of control) and satisfaction with the sales manager. Shown in Figure 1 is the presumed mediation. A salesperson's perceptions of his/her manager's behaviors are predicated on a salesperson's locus of control and CLT; those perceived manager behaviors presumably influence one's satisfaction with the sales manager.

Possibly other relationships exist between CLT and outcome variables *beyond* those exerted through manager behaviors (Slocum 1974). H5 posits that a *direct* relationship exists between CLT and satisfaction with the sales manager *over and above* the indirect relationships proposed in H2a, H2b, and H2c and H4a, H4b, and H4c. A full mediation test entails comparing the hypothesized model with the model augmented by H5 and with a model *omitting* H4a, H4b, and H4c but including H5.

The relationships proposed in H2a, H2b, and H2c and in H4a, H4b, and H4c convey the idea that CLT influences satisfaction with the sales manager through the three manager behaviors. However, CLT may *directly* affect *another* outcome variable—overall job satisfaction (H6). Also, as noted earlier, conceivably a positive learning and training climate (CLT) affects salespersons' self-efficacy beliefs—H3—and those beliefs have an impact on overall job satisfaction (H7) (e.g., Sager et al., 2014).

The foregoing disquisition leads to the following hypotheses:

H5: The greater the degree to which a salesperson perceives the organization as providing a climate for learning and training, the higher the salesperson's satisfaction with the sales manager.

H6: The greater the degree to which a salesperson perceives the organization as providing a climate for learning and training, the higher the salesperson's overall job satisfaction.

H7: The greater the self-efficacy beliefs of the salesperson, the higher his/her overall job satisfaction.

Satisfaction with the sales manager is expected to channel salespersons' perceptions of their managers' behavior through to overall job satisfaction. In causal terms, satisfaction with the sales manager putatively mediates manager behaviors and overall job satisfaction (Edmondson & Boyer, 2013). An alternative configuration, though, is possible. Perceptions of sales manager behavior may *directly* influence *overall* job satisfaction—and also affect overall job satisfaction through satisfaction with the sales manager. That relationship is tested through an alternative structural model.

H8: The greater the salesperson's satisfaction with the sales manager, the higher his/her overall job satisfaction.

Lastly, overall job satisfaction will presumably have a positive impact on salesperson intentions to remain with the firm. After all, if sales personnel have a favorable affect toward their job situation, they are less likely to look for other job alternatives or to consider leaving the organization (e.g., Naletelich et al., 2014).

H9: The greater the salesperson's overall job satisfaction, the higher his/her intentions to remain with the firm.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1 Research Context and Data Collection

Data used to test the model of sales manager behavior were gathered from salespeople employed in a manufacturer and distributor of specialty chemicals. Nine hundred ninety-six salespeople, the company's U.S. sales force, received a ten page questionnaire from the researchers through the company (internal) mail system. The questionnaire included a letter from the national sales manager offering support for the study and assuring anonymity of response. Completed, usable questionnaires were received from 458 salespeople (46 percent response rate).

#### 3.2 Measures

All constructs in the model were operationalized using established measures. A Likert-type response format was used wherever possible. Shown in Table 1 are construct items and their respective loadings and reliabilities. Fourteen items were eliminated across the constructs to enhance reliability and avoid substantial cross-loading. The lowest composite reliability was .87—for arbitrary and punitive behavior; the lowest average variance extracted was .56—for external locus of control. Item loadings exceeded twice the standard error in all cases. The phi matrix of construct correlations for the measurement model and the covariance matrix of eta and ksi were examined to assess discriminant validity and potential for structural relationships. Direction and magnitude of the coefficients suggested that constructs were interrelated yet distinct.

Reproduced covariances from structural model tests paralleled the structure of the phi matrix. Notably, the manager behavior constructs correlated among themselves and with manager satisfaction. The manager behavior constructs also correlated strongly with CLT. The higher correlations were borne out in a test of correlated residuals.

Table 1. Constructs, items, and reliabilities

Construct	Item	$\lambda_i$	Item Rel.
MPB	SM6 Rules with an iron hand.	.71	.51
	SM8 Speaks in a manner not to be questioned.	.58	.33
	SM10 Refuses to give in when I disagree with his or her suggestions.	.78	.61
	SM12 Needles me for greater effort.	.51	.27
	SM14 Demands more than I can do.	.66	.43
	SM16 Rides me if I make a mistake.	.78	.61
	SM18 Insists that everything be his/her way.	.89	.79
AOB	SM7 Encourages continual improvement in my performance.	.86	.74
	SM9 Consistently sets challenging goals for me.	.80	.63
	SM13 Lets me know that I need to perform at my highest level.	.71	.50
	SM15 Demonstrates confidence in my ability to meet most objectives.	.71	.50

CAB	SM11 Gives me recognition for improvement in my performance.	.83	.69
	SM17 Gives clear recognition for outstanding work.	.87	.76
	SM19 Praises me when my performance is especially good.	.99	.98
	SM20 Shows approval for me when I put forth my best efforts	.96	.92
SEB	SE1 I am good at selling.	.70	.49
	SE2 It is difficult for me to put pressure on a customer. (reverse scored)	.51	.26
	SE3 I know the right things to do in selling situations.	.75	.56
	SE4 I find it difficult to convince a customer who has a different viewpoint than mine. (reverse scored)	.61	.37
	SE5 My temperament is not well-suited for selling. (reverse scored)	.50	.25
	SE6 I am good at finding out what customers want.	.71	.51
	SE7 It is easy for me to get customers to see my point of view.	.70	.48
MSAT	SM1 My sales manager does a good job of helping me develop my potential.	.93	.86
	SM2 In general, I am satisfied with my sales manager.	.98	.96
	SM3 I enjoy working with my sales manager.	.85	.72
	SM4 My sales manager is too interested in his or her personal success to care about my needs. (reverse scored)	.68	.46
	SM5 My sales manager sees that I have the things I need to do my job.	.77	.59
OJSAT	JS1 I find real enjoyment in my job.	.90	.80
	JS2 I like my job better than the average worker does.	.88	.78
	JS3 I am seldom bored with my job.	.76	.58
	JS4 I would not consider taking another job.	.62	.39
	JS5 Most days I am enthusiastic about my job.	.88	.77
	JS6 I feel fairly well satisfied with my job.	.82	.67
WITH	W1 During the next six months, I intend to search for another full-time job.	.97	.95
	W2 I intend to leave this division during the next six months.	.96	.92
	W4 I regularly think about quitting my job.	.83	.69
ELOC	L5 Getting the job you want is mostly a matter of luck.	.70	.49
	L6 Making money is primarily a matter of good fortune.	.72	.51
	L8 In order to get a really good job you need to have family members or friends in high places	.78	.60
	L9 Sales success is usually a matter of good fortune	.80	.64
	L10 When it comes to landing a really good job, who you know is more important than what you know	.67	.45
	L12 To make a lot of money you have to know the right people.	.70	.49
	L13 It takes a lot of luck to be an outstanding employee on most jobs.	.78	.62
CLT	L16 The main difference between people who make a lot of money and people who make a little money is luck.	.76	.58
	LT1 My sales manager reviews my performance on a regular basis.	.74	.54
	LT2 There are appropriate induction procedures in this division.	.53	.28
	LT3 I have received the training I need to do a good job.	.71	.51
	LT4 In this division, we are committed to helping each other learn from our own sales experiences.	.80	.64
	LT5 In general, this division learns as much as possible from its successes and its failures.	.80	.65
	LT6 The training I receive is of high quality.	.78	.61

MPB = Arbitrary and Punitive Behavior, AOB = Achievement-Oriented Behavior,

CAB = Contingent and Approving Behavior; SEB = Self-Efficacy Beliefs;

MSAT = Satisfaction with Sales Manager; OJSAT = Overall Job satisfaction,

WITH = Withdrawal Intentions; ELOC = External Locus of Control; CLT = Climate for Learning and Training.

### 3.3 Analyses

#### 3.3.1 Evaluation of the Structural Model

A general goal of the structural model analyses was to assess to what extent the *theory model* comprised of nine hypothesized paths accounts for *unique variation* in the range of chi-square occurring between the just-identified

model and the structural null model (Williams & Holahan 1994). A second goal of the analyses was to examine the mediating role of manager behaviors as a set. As Anderson and Gerbing (1988) urged, two anchor models were employed as reference points for comparing chi-square driven statistics generated for the theory model: the just-identified (all paths) model and the structural (null or no paths) model. Because it incorporates all possible unidirectional paths, the all paths model should have the lowest chi-square. The structural null model should have the highest chi-square, as it lacks structural paths.

In Table 2, the theory model and its variants are arrayed within the range between just-identified and structural null models. For each structural model, the analyst can note changes in reproduction of the covariance matrix as reflected by chi-square and the fit indices. An objective of the analyst is to evaluate the utility of each path added to or trimmed from the model and to determine the extent of mediation effected through manager behaviors.

Table 2. Fit statistics for manager-based and attribute-based models

Model	$\chi^2$	df	$\chi^2/df$	RMSR	TLI	PGFI	CFI	apb	cab	aob	sebs	msat	oisat	withd	withd
Measurement Model	4160.00	786	5.31	.06	.92	.64	.93								
Just-identified Model	4412.53	786	5.61	.08	.92	.63	.93	.25	.47	.55	.23	.77	.41	.53	
Hypothesized Model (Figure 1)	4553.95	804	5.66	.10	.92	.63	.92	.25	.47	.57	.12	.76	.28	.49	
mediator checks:															
omit H3 paths	4745.63	807	5.88	.11	.91	.62	.92	.32	.65	.79	.08	.76	.16	.49	
omit H1, H2 paths	5070.68	810	6.26	.24	.91	.62	.91	--	--	--	.10	.63	.10	.47	
Adjustments to theory model:															
add seb → ojsat	4516.07	803	5.62	.098	.92	.64	.92	.23	.47	.56	.10	.76	.33	.49	
Trimmed path model (Figure 2)	4526.83	807	5.61	.098	.92	.64	.92	.25	.47	.59	.10	.76	.35	.49	
Absolute null model	50337.3	861													

RMSR = root mean square residual; TLI = Tucker Lewis Index (Non-Normed Fit Index); PGFI=Parsimonious Goodness of Fit Index; CFI = Comparative Fit Index. "apb," "cab," "aob," "msat," "ojsat," "withd" = coefficients of determination for arbitrary and punitive behavior, contingent and approving behavior, achievement-oriented behavior, self-efficacy beliefs, satisfaction with sales manager, overall job satisfaction, and withdrawal intentions, respectively.

### 3.3.2 Test of Mediating Relationships

A mediating relationship is the way an independent variable influences a dependent variable both directly and through another variable—the proposed mediator. In the structural model, the set of the three manager behavior mediated between the two precursors and satisfaction with the sales manager. Theoretically, within the backdrop set through locus of control and CLT, the behaviors the manager manifests affected salespeople's satisfaction with the sales manager, and perhaps also influenced, to some extent, salespeople's overall job satisfaction. Baron and Kenney (1986) and Holmbeck (1997) addressed directly the role of mediation in a causal network.

To assess the mediating relationship for manager behaviors, several structural models were evaluated:

- 1) The effect of CLT on satisfaction with the sales manager;
- 2) The effect of the three manager behaviors and CLT on satisfaction with the sales manager; and
- 3) The effect of the three manager behaviors net of CLT on satisfaction with the sales manager.

Evidence of mediation by the set of manager behaviors existed to the extent that the joint effects of *both* CLT and manager behaviors exceeded that of CLT alone, as evidenced by variation in satisfaction with the sales manager or the extent of covariance matrix reproduction achieved. If the coefficient of determination is greater or the chi-square for the second model is less than that for the first model, the manager behavior constructs accounted for a unique effect of CLT on satisfaction with the sales manager through the manager behaviors (Baron & Kenney 1986). If, for the third model above, the coefficient of determination for satisfaction with the sales manager is substantially lower or the chi-square generated for the third model is less than that for the first



or second models, manager behaviors contributed directly to manager satisfaction, and CLT either failed to contribute uniquely as measured or was embedded within the manager behaviors. The implication of supporting the second model above was that a positive CLT evinced through manager behaviors contributed uniquely to salespeople's satisfaction with the manager beyond the direct effect posited in H5. And that structure was what was desired in this study.

### 3.4 Tests of the Model

#### 3.4.1 Theory Model Fit

The measurement model exhibited acceptable fit (Tucker-Lewis Index = .91), per Bagozzi and Heatherton (1999) and Hu and Bentler (1999). Hypothesized relationships were evaluated through structural equation modeling.

Both the theoretical model in Figure 1 and mediation models were evaluated. Mediator analyses entailed comparing the theoretical model linkages with models lacking linkages between manager behaviors and manager satisfaction and models lacking linkages between locus of control and CLT and manager behaviors. The range of fit, depicted in Table 2, extended from a chi-square of 4412 for the just-identified model to a chi-square of 50,337 for the absolute null model. Within the range, the theoretical model exhibited a chi-square of 4554. It appeared to do a reasonable job of approximating a model with all possible unidirectional paths—although the root mean square residual estimates exceeded the .09 benchmark suggested by Hu and Bentler (1999). The proposed model was useful, but it could better capture variation within the sample covariance matrix. Consider, though, that the model was specified to evaluate the influence of perceived manager behaviors relative to CLT and locus of control rather than for optimally capturing all possible relationships between the model constructs.

#### 3.4.2 Support for Hypothesized Paths

Mixed support existed for the relationships hypothesized in H1a, H1b, and H1c. The  $\kappa^2$  coefficient suggested that externally-oriented salespeople appeared likely to perceive the sales manager as exhibiting arbitrary and punitive behavior (thus supporting H1a). However, no support was found for relationships between locus of control and achievement-oriented or contingent approving behaviors (thus rejecting H1b and H1c).

Consistent support existed for relationships posited in H2a, H2b, and H2c. Salespersons' perceptions of the sales organization climate (CLT) related *positively* to perceptions of sales managers' achievement-oriented and contingent and approving behaviors and *negatively* to their views of sales managers' arbitrary and punitive behaviors. Coefficients of determination depicted in Figure 2 and summarized in Table 2 indicated that CLT explained considerable variation in perception of managers' behaviors, particularly for achievement-oriented behavior. These findings suggested that a work climate emphasizing high CLT promoted positive perceptions of manager behaviors directed toward achieving goals and reinforcing salespeople's efforts to achieve targets. Moreover, CLT was positively associated with salesperson self-efficacy beliefs (thus supporting H3).

As posited, manager behaviors accounted for considerable variation (76 percent, Table 2, Figure 2) in satisfaction with the sales manager, thus supporting H4a, H4b, and H4c. Indeed, manager behaviors accounted for considerably more variation in satisfaction with the sales manager through testing of the theory model than did CLT through its direct path (thus rejecting H5). The finding fit the logic that salespeople compartmentalize their job. A network of relationships existed with the sales manager. Another network of relationships appeared with work climate. Accordingly, the environment the company sustains (fostering CLT) and the three behaviors of its sales managers *jointly* influenced affective constructs.

CLT accounted for considerable unique variation in overall job satisfaction, supporting H6 (Table 2, Figure 2). Apparently, a climate that fostered salespeople's attaining skills and belief in their skills (strengthening their self-efficacy beliefs) also facilitated overall satisfaction with the job—*independently* of the sales manager. Conversely, satisfaction with the sales manager appeared to contribute little to overall satisfaction (thus rejecting H8). When a path was extended from self-efficacy beliefs to overall job satisfaction, the proportion of overall satisfaction explained augmented to .39 (Figure 2). It appeared that a salesperson's confidence in his/her selling skills and belief that the organization supported learning drove overall job satisfaction, independently of the manager's influence (thus supporting H7).

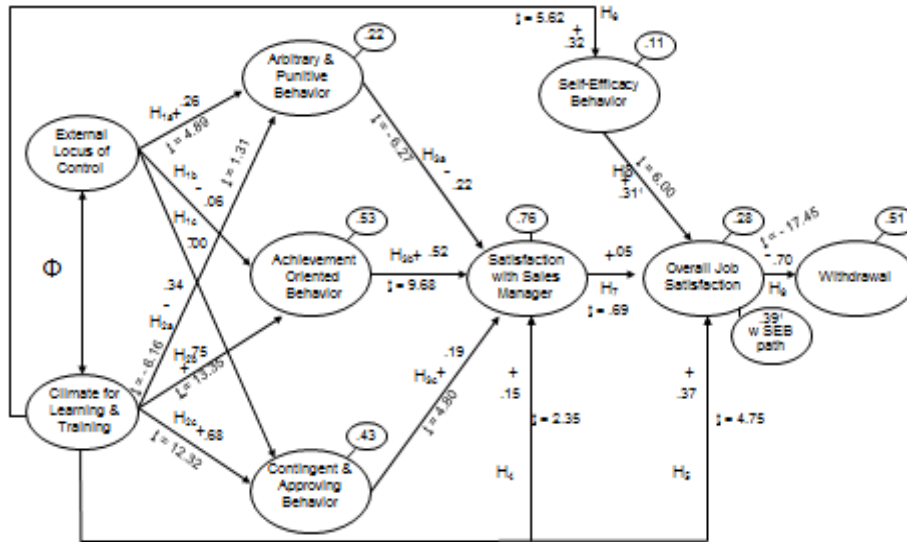
The model accounted for over fifty percent of variation in withdrawal intentions, supporting H9. The influences of CLT and self-efficacy beliefs occurred *through* overall job satisfaction—*not* through manager behaviors. Therefore, a work environment that facilitated overall job satisfaction positively influenced longevity intention of salespeople. Salespeople who derived positive skill beliefs and overall satisfaction from their jobs desired to stay with the organization.

Manager behaviors affected satisfaction with the manager, but were independent of withdrawal intentions. The

finding may be peculiar to sales environments, where experienced salespeople operate more or less independently. However, the finding also suggested that salespeople as boundary spanners may depend on the organization to a greater extent than they do on the immediate manager. Support systems that the organization offers through its communication structure may facilitate positive affect to a much greater extent than was previously thought to be the case.

3.4.3 Mediating Relationships

As shown in Table 2, the *hypothesized* model fit *better* than did the mediator check models. Fit indices were lower and residual variation more extreme for the two mediator checks. Sales manager behaviors appeared to influence satisfaction with the sales manager more so than did CLT and locus of control.



1. Path from self efficacy to overall job satisfaction was tested in a separate model (a), as indicated in Table 2.

Figure 2. Findings for manager based (theory) model test

4. Discussion and Implications

The hypothesized mediating model (Figure 1) reproduced the sample covariance matrix nearly as well as did all the paths (just-identified model) (Table 2). The trimmed path model performed better than the hypothesized model. Yet both the hypothesized model and the trimmed path models accounted for substantial variance in outcome constructs with the exception of self-efficacy.

Structural model testing supported a mediating role for manager behaviors as a determinant of satisfaction with the sales manager. Locus of control and perceptions of a learning-oriented climate affected the way sales managers’ behaviors were viewed. But the way salespeople perceived their managers’ behaviors was the chief determinant of their satisfaction with the sales manager.

External locus of control predicted only arbitrary and punitive behaviors on the manager’s part. It appears that locus of control and perhaps other individual traits may not be particularly useful predictors of manager-related constructs. Conversely, climate for learning and training, a work setting where learning and training are supported, was related to manager behaviors in a positive matrix, and through those behaviors were highly predictive of satisfaction with the sales manager. The climate the manager and salesperson function in seemingly reinforce manager behaviors.

4.1 Domains of the Salesperson’s Existence

The model of manager behaviors was highly predictive of satisfaction with the sales manager and moderately predictive of overall job satisfaction and withdrawal intentions. It is reasonable to portray overall job satisfaction as having determinants other than the sales manager (e.g., job characteristics, organizational characteristics, role stress). Satisfaction with the sales manager correlated .33 with overall job satisfaction, suggesting partial overlap. These results reinforce the notion that the domain of the salesperson/sales manager relationship diverges from

that of the job in general and the organization as a whole. That concept jibes with work conducted in the area of job satisfaction in general (e.g., Smith, Kendall, & Hulin 1969). It also corresponds to the manager/salesperson dyadic relationship (e.g., Ahearne et al. 2014; Brashear et al. 2006).

At this point a definitive representation for the domains of an outside salesperson would be helpful. Domains of existence are a broader concept than the role construct. Roles could serve as the fiber for the overlap. The notion of domains should be a useful rubric for researchers in the area of salesperson behavior. The domains are a way to acknowledge that bases for causal modeling need to be limited or restricted. Circumscribing an area of study to correspond with the way a salesperson views work aligns analyses with perspective and thought vis-à-vis the unit of analysis.

#### *4.2 Role of the First-Level Sales Manager*

The finding that satisfaction with the manager was independent of overall job satisfaction was not spurious. It is well established that in the sales setting, the outside salesperson operates independently—representing an organization he/she may never see except through a sales manager or area sales office. Contact with the company may at best occur once or twice a year. Otherwise, the sales manager or regional manager is the sole contact the individual has. Such was the case with the host company.

So the behaviors the sales manager exerts are most important to attaining satisfaction with that manager, but not necessarily with the firm. Further, behaviors the sales manager manifests and satisfaction with the sales manager were only marginally predictive of withdrawal intentions. So, researchers now confront the question of whether the behaviors of the manager influence whether the salesperson intends to stay or leave the job. Perhaps the manager is viewed by the salesperson largely as a facilitator of work but not as a determinant of longevity. Instead, perchance salespersons' beliefs in their selling abilities and the climate of the sales organization drive overall satisfaction with job thoughts of leaving the firm.

Interviews with sales managers and former sales managers in the host company offer a basis for interpreting the findings. Sales managers indicated that they allocated their time chiefly for working with salespeople to *new* sales reps. The learning curve for the sales job was twelve months. Managers knew that they had to get salespeople to a base level of performance in three months. The firm offered only on-the-job training by the sales manager. Experienced salespeople seldom contacted the sales manager. However, written comments provided by salespeople indicated that the work climate the manager and organization provided was important to them. Most of the salespersons operated out of their homes or out of small sales offices. To experienced salespeople, the sales manager was one venue for communication with upper management.

#### *4.3 Role of Climate for Learning and Training*

As important to attaining satisfaction, self-efficacy beliefs, and thereby retention, is the climate for learning and training the salesperson perceives. Climate for learning and training appeared to serve as a key for a relationship between the salesperson and the sales manager. It also appeared to affect self-efficacy beliefs, overall satisfaction, and withdrawal intentions. This duality between manager and organization implies that the salesperson understands that the sales manager can create and support a climate—and the organization can also facilitate a climate for learning and training.

#### *4.4 Directions for Future Research*

##### *4.4.1 Salesperson as a Learner*

Theorists maintain that humans have a need to learn. Leavitt (1978) proposed that humans are a learning machine. Each person senses, remembers, and practices rules of assimilation and judgment. Therefore, the more closely oriented a work environment is aligned to learning, the more satisfied and stable the worker is likely to be. For a salesperson to learn how to better pursue the job, a mechanism must exist for information regarding the effectiveness of the salesperson's behaviors. The sales manager serves as one mechanism for the role of providing that feedback. The study findings reinforce this idea.

Questions exist, however, as to what types of access to information do salespeople need. What are expectations as to how the manager and organization can provide specific types of information, particularly information that experienced salespeople need to perform? Also, future research needs to determine more fundamental and tactical questions from the standpoint of the sales manager's behavior. For example, what should the sales manager actually do to facilitate active learning by the salesperson? That is, what types of territories, tasks, and projects facilitate a salesperson's learning to solve the problems commonly encountered in a specific type of sales job? This type of question involves studying specific selling situations, observing salespeople, conducting depth interviews of salespeople, classifying problems by novices and experts, and developing matrices. However,

empirical efforts also need to be devoted to explaining how learning climates emerge and to develop means to help sales management ascertain how to facilitate learning and development among salespeople. Perhaps learning climate research might focus particularly on two areas: thinking (i.e., how salespeople conceive problems) and problem solving (how salespeople pursue solutions to problems that they have identified).

#### 4.4.2 Population and Workforce Sales Management Concerns

The pool of incumbents sales organizations utilize is aging. The trimmed model may well reflect the composition and needs of a dominant proportion of members of contemporary sales forces—more to point the situation sales management confronts regarding managing and developing the outside sales force. General trends in the composition of the domestic U.S. population (aging of the population) and correlated aging effect on the workforce dictate that sales management researchers consider what types of needs and environment such individuals seek. Considering that the salespeople studied were largely more experienced (tenure) and “more senior” in their careers, it is worthwhile to extrapolate what needs the findings here truly reflect.

Older salespeople engaged in learning and performing in a complex, challenging business environment need a climate that supports learning. Theorists in the area of adult development and learning observe that adults can learn and do learn when confronted with complex and challenging tasks. Employing cognitive structures, listening skills, and other offsets to declining endurance and physical skills, older learners seek ways to develop. As such, the type of support and content sales forces devote to developing salespeople’s skill sets becomes important to an older sales force—which is beyond the traditional leadership and manager behaviors salespeople seek. Also, the type of managerial behaviors and practices older salespeople respond to and expectations they hold for management and the organization may vary from those commonly used.

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