

Factors Influencing the Impact of Sales Training: Test of a Model

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Received: September 25, 2013 Accepted: October 15, 2013 Online Published: January 22, 2014

doi:10.5539/ijms.v6n1p1 URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ijms.v6n1p1>

Abstract

A model is derived and tested drawing from I/O psychology and sales management literature addressing sales training. Findings suggest consistent influences of the organization and sales manager on training transfer. Relationships between organizational variables, such as training climate and manager behaviors, and training outcomes are discussed. A chief take-away of the model test concerns evidence that sequential linkages exist between individual determinants (e.g., locus of control, self-efficacy beliefs, learning orientation), salespeople's satisfaction with training, transfer of training materials (skills, time management, product knowledge), and performance.

Keywords: sales training, transfer of training, impact of sales training, satisfaction with training, training/performance nexus

1. Introduction

The contemporary selling arena is enveloped by heightened dynamism. Sales personnel and their managers are constantly being buffeted by a confluence of seemingly novel influences that can tax even the most adroit sales professionals. For instance, today's sales position is increasingly multifarious and the demands on it increasing (Cron et al., 2005). Also, technology (e.g., the Internet, sales force automation) has led to the altering of relationships between buyers and sellers and between salespeople and their organizations (Sarin et al., 2010). Furthermore, customers have more information with which to present their cases to purveyors and competition is especially keen owing to globalization of markets (Roman, Ruiz, & Munuera, 2002). Moreover, establishing a sales operation in foreign countries is prominent yet replete with problems because of cultural differences that can affect sales force success (Attia, Honeycutt, & Jantan, 2008). In addition, product life cycles have become incessantly shorter and product/service adaptations rife (Ingram et al., 2005).

1.1 Importance of Sales Training

The foregoing selling milieu mandates that sales personnel have an abundance of knowledge, skills, and abilities with which to execute their job responsibilities effectively (Lassk et al., 2012). As Jones et al. (2005, p. 106) state: "The various dimensions of change in the selling environment...tend to create heavier cognitive demands on salespeople...[requiring them] to process, internalize, and manage increasing information loads." Sales training is frequently perceived as the means with which to abet salespeople to acquire requisite capacities to fulfill their job roles (Artis & Harris, 2007). "Training investments...are crucial. Managers who skimp on training...risk losing staff—and sales" (Cummings, 2004, p. 26). Accordingly, companies are often beneficent when providing resources for sales training (Attia, Honeycutt, & Attia, 2002). U.S. companies spend in excess of \$10 billion annually in sales training (Hair et al., 2009). Masked training costs, however, exist. For instance, sales training is often provided in sales meetings. Such direct cost-based estimates exclude the cost of a sales manager's time spent in training and developing salespeople (Dubinsky, 1996).

1.2 Overview of Germane Sales Training Research

The import of sales training has led to research examining various aspects of it. Scholars have explored avenues such as conceptual models for developing effective sales training programs (Attia, Honeycutt, & Leach, 2005;

Attia, Honeycutt, & Jantan, 2008), problems in assessing sales training (Attia, Honeycutt, & Attia, 2002), salespeople's satisfaction with their current training (e.g., Chonko, Tanner, & Weeks, 1993; Dubinsky & Staples, 1981), means of reducing sales training cycle time (Bashaw, Ingram, & Keillor, 2002), impact of self-directed learning on salesperson performance (Artis & Harris, 2007), influence of sales training on sales force outcomes (Roman, Ruiz, & Munuera, 2002), effect of self-regulation training on salespeople's job-related responses (Leach, Liu, & Johnston, 2005), influence of sales training timeliness, training formalization, and learning orientation on training effectiveness (Sarin et al., 2010), effects in a sales context of Kirkpatrick's (1976) 4-stage training model (Leach & Liu, 2003), impact of consultative training on sales performance (Pelham, 2002), effects of sales training on salespersons' behavior-level and results-level improvement (Attia & Honeycutt, 2012), and validity of assumptions about sales training (Dubinsky, 1996).

Wilson, Strutton, and Farris (2002) tested two different models of sales training—behavior-driven and attitude-driven. The former model included the effects of three individual variables (external locus of control, task-specific self-efficacy, and learning orientation) on training transfer (making use of the training—a behavior), as well as the impact of training transfer on salesperson performance. The latter model explored the influence of the same individual factors on training satisfaction (trainee attitudes) and also the association between training satisfaction and salesperson performance. Although that study provided valuable knowledge and many of its hypotheses were supported, a major weakness of that work was the failure to *combine* the two models ('a la attitudes leading to behavior). The two models were examined separately owing to "imperfect conceptualization..." (Wilson, Strutton, & Farris, 2002, p.78). Further, the models did not include extra-individual variables that have been noted in employee training literature (subsequently discussed) to facilitate or influence training outcomes.

1.3 Study Purpose

The current investigation builds on Wilson, Strutton, and Farris (2002). Using results from their study, as well as germane training literature in I/O psychology and sales management, their hypothesized models are reconceptualized and reanalyzed. The same data set is utilized. A unique feature of the current investigation is that it *concurrently* considers *individual* (locus of control, task-specific self-esteem, learning orientation, training satisfaction), *sales manager* (manager-support actions and feedback), and *organizational* (serial socialization, organization support for training, training climate) factors that putatively affect training transfer, which in turn affects performance. Shown in Figure 1 is the model of the study. Justification for the model and its concomitant hypotheses is now provided, followed by a discussion of the methodology, findings, and implications of the investigation.

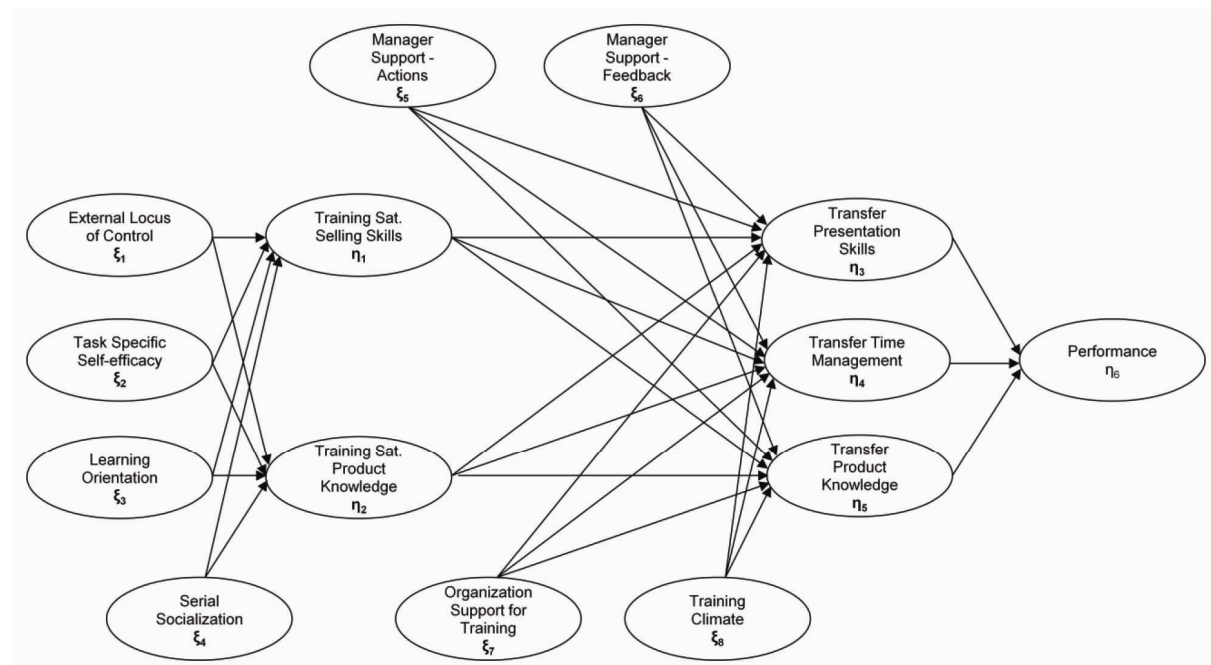


Figure 1. Hypothesized model

2. Background Literature

2.1 Extant Literature Providing Support for Model Constructs

Scholars in I/O psychology (explicitly or implicitly) have averred that antecedents of training transfer encompass factors at the individual, manager, and organizational level (e.g., Blume, Ford, Baldwin, & Huang, 2010; Burke & Hutchins, 2007; Kupritz, 2002; Tracey & Tews, 2005). At the *individual* level, for example, in their review of the training transfer literature, Burke and Hutchins (2007) included “learner characteristics” (e.g., conscientiousness, openness to experience perceived training utility) as potentially important predictors of training transfer. After reviewing ten years of training evaluation and effectiveness research, Alvarez, Salas, and Garofano (2003) incorporated individual characteristics (e.g., cognitive ability, experience, training motivation) in their model of training evaluation and effectiveness. A recent meta-analytic study of antecedents of training transfer ascertained that a litany of individual-level variables have frequently been investigated (Blume et al., 2010). Essentially, then, employee-related factors (i.e., personal characteristics, knowledge, skills, and abilities) are believed either to serve as facilitators or impediments to successful transfer. As shown in Figure 1, one individual-level variable—*training satisfaction*—was included because it represents sales trainees’ perceptions (attitudes) toward the training program, which have been determined to be a facilitator of training transfer (subsequently discussed). Furthermore, this variable is posited to be influenced by three individual-level factors—sales trainee locus of control, task-specific self-efficacy, and learning orientation—as well as an organization-level variable, serial socialization (justification is subsequently discussed).

A clutch of *manager*-level factors has been posited and found to influence training transfer. One such variable that generally has been consistently found to be a critical variable vis-à-vis transfer is manager support (e.g., Kupritz, 2002; Tracey, Tannenbaum, & Kavanaugh, 1995; Tracey & Tews, 2005; see also review by Burke & Hutchins, 2007). Whether through participation in the training, role modeling, coaching, feedback, or encouragement of training usage, such supervisory/manager behaviors can provide instructive guidelines to trainees, thus facilitating their utilization of training. In fact, the Blume et al. (2010) meta-analysis ascertained that manager support has an auspicious impact on transfer. As Arthur et al. (2003, p.242) stated, “...the social context and the favorability of the post-training environment play an important role in facilitating...transfer.” As portrayed in Figure 1, manager support (vis-à-vis manager-support actions and manager-support feedback) were included, as such support has been determined to be a facilitator of training transfer (subsequently discussed).

Organization-level factors have also been ascertained to conduce to positive training transfer (e.g., Alvarez, Salas, & Garofano, 2004). For example, Kupritz (2002) mentioned prior work has discerned that organizational context can either help or hinder usage of training intervention materials. Burke and Hutchins’ (2007) literature review revealed that support of an organization’s objectives and plans have a salutary impact on transfer. Predicated on prior training transfer research, Tracey and Tews (2005) included organizational support in their three-dimensional general training climate scale. Blume et al. (2010) determined that organization constraints can impede training transfer. Implicitly, Tracey, Tannenbaum, and Kavanaugh (1995) found that certain aspects of organization support (via “training transfer climate”) influence transfer. In essence, then, the nature of support that an organization provides trainees—be it, for instance, via sufficient training resource allocation, adequate training time, implementation of policies conducive to training program effectiveness, compatibility of training with trainees’ job requirements, and the like—can be advantageous or inimical to training transfer. Two organization-level variables in the model are hypothesized to influence training transfer. Predicated on I/O psychology research, *organization support for training* is palpably classified under this category, along with *training climate*.

Finally, the model predicts that *training transfer* will have a favorable impact on salesperson *performance*. The findings from Wilson, Strutton, and Farris (2002) do not unequivocally support this contention. However, given the present study’s re-conceptualization of their work, and in light of extant research (subsequently discussed) supporting a positive relationship between transfer and training, a positive nexus between transfer and performance is posited.

2.2 Hypotheses Regarding Salesperson Satisfaction with Sales Training

Training satisfaction has been demonstrated to influence positively post-training perceptions and behavior. Tannenbaum et al. (1991) found a positive relationship between performance during training and post-training self-efficacy beliefs, as well as a positive association between training satisfaction and organizational commitment, self-efficacy, and motivation. Tudor, Pelton, and Strutton (1993) ascertained that salespeople who felt that their company was highly proficient in training perceived their firm’s organizational climate more favorably. Moreover, sales trainees’ reactions to a training program have been found to be indirectly associated with training transfer through its positive impact on sales trainees’ knowledge acquisition (Leach & Liu, 2003).

Three salesperson characteristics—locus of control, self-efficacy beliefs, and learning orientation, and one organizational factor—type of salesperson socialization—are expected to influence salespeople's satisfaction with sales training. These four variables were selected for inclusion in the model owing to their presumed relationships with sales training.

2.2.1 Locus of Control

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). Whether an individual attributes performance to personal efforts or to outside entities or forces (e.g., business environmental forces such as product quality or company reputation, competitors, luck) may influence how the individual perceives his or her training. Individuals possessing an internal locus of control believe that they determine occurrences at work, figuratively controlling their own destiny. Individuals who possess an external locus of control ascribe work outcomes to outside forces (Goldstein, 1993; Rotter, 1966).

Noe and Schmitt (1988) proposed that internals are more likely to respond favorably to management's assessment of their work skills and subsequent training interventions. Conversely, externals believe that work outcomes are beyond personal control. Accordingly, externals are less likely to respond favorably to skills assessment and training. Spector (1988) observed that because locus of control is a personal trait that influences beliefs about the ability to enrich skills, it should be an important determinant of individual trainability. Trainability connotes the ability of an individual to learn and apply the material emphasized in the training program (Noe & Schmitt, 1986).

The foregoing suggests that relative to externals, internals are expected to exert greater exploratory effort toward collecting relevant information relating to the sales job (Noe & Schmitt, 1986). As such, internals are likely to regard training as an opportunity to become more proficient at such exploration efforts. Under Spector and Noe and Schmitt's research, individuals with an internal locus of control should hold stronger expectancies concerning the utility of activities designed to strengthen their abilities or place the selling environment more under their control and thereby be positively disposed to training. Indeed, Noe and Schmitt (1986) identified a negative correlation between external locus of control and pre-training motivation to learn. Wilson, Strutton, and Farris (2002) found that external locus of control is positively related to training satisfaction with selling skills but not with training satisfaction product knowledge. The preceding dialectic leads to the following hypothesis:

H1: The greater a salesperson's internal locus of control, the higher the level of his/her satisfaction with sales training.

2.2.2 Task-Specific Self-Efficacy

Bandura (1986) defined task-specific self-efficacy as a belief in one's ability to perform a specific task. High self-efficacy has been discerned to be associated with salespersons' attributions for failure (Dixon & Schertzer, 2005), beliefs regarding ability to perform (Bouffard-Bouchard, 1990; Taylor et al., 1984), and actual performance—both directly (e.g., Krishnan, Netermeyer, & Boles, 2002) and indirectly (Fu, Richards, & Jones, 2009). Self-confidence has traditionally been considered a critical factor for success in selling (Reday, Marshall, & Parasuraman, 2009). Accordingly, salespeople who strongly believe that they are able to perform a specific task learned during training (e.g., overcoming objections, demonstrating products) will likely have a higher degree of satisfaction with the training than those sales trainees with lower self-efficacy beliefs subsequent to training.

High self-efficacy is a theoretical antecedent to training effectiveness and transfer of training (Tannenbaum & Yukl, 1992). Indeed, Artis and Harris (2007) averred that trainees' confidence in certain sales training skills is positively associated with their willingness to use the training. Chowdhury (1993) demonstrated the utility of self-efficacy beliefs concerning performance on a selling task relative to one's ability to sell. Tannenbaum and Yukl (1992) found that individuals who commence training with the belief that they can master the training materials and training content are prone to learn or comprehend more during training. Gist, Schwoerer, and Rosen (1989) discerned that trainees with higher self-efficacy beliefs antecedent to training and individuals reporting higher self-efficacy at the midpoint of training performed better than trainees who registered lower self-efficacy.

Logically, then, salespersons who exit a training program with a belief that they will successfully perform their job tasks because of their training are more likely to be able to endure and overcome obstacles experienced during the transfer process that occur in the months and perhaps years following formal training (Chowdhury, 1993; Marx, 1982). Indeed, Hill, Smith, and Mann (1987) demonstrated that employees who hold higher self-efficacy beliefs adapted job practices by trying new approaches. Furthermore, self-efficacy of sales personnel has been ascertained to be inversely related to job stress (Barksdale et al., 2003) and role stress and work overload (e.g., Mulki, Lassk, & Jaramillo, 2008, p. 292): "Self-efficacy provides salespeople with the focus and confidence needed...to get the

sales job done without being overwhelmed....” Moreover, Wilson, Strutton, and Farris (2002) observed that self-efficacy is positively related to training satisfaction.

The foregoing discussion implies that task-specific self-efficacy beliefs may engender favorable affect about the training received (Tannenbaum & Yukl, 1992). Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proffered:

H2: The greater a salesperson’s task-specific self-efficacy beliefs, the higher the level of his/her satisfaction with sales training.

2.2.3 Learning Orientation

High-performing employees and organizations learn continually (e.g., Cespedes, 1995; Senge, 1990). A *learning orientation* entails values that permit salespeople to question extant knowledge (Sinkula, Baker, & Noordewier, 1997), and thereby it constitutes the degree to which sales organization members are encouraged to learn. Sackman (1991) observed that little learning will occur in work organizations that confer a low value on learning. Conversely, salespeople who possess greater learning orientation are likely to adopt new behavioral patterns (Silver, Dwyer, & Alford, 2006).

Individuals possessing a strong learning orientation seek to increase their ability to master new tasks (Sujan, Weitz, & Kumar, 1994), and they might actually enjoy the process of learning how to sell effectively. They may well view sales training as having value in and of itself and thus be satisfying. Such individuals are more willing to learn from challenging situations and could even gratify themselves through developing skills or knowledge (Sarin et al., 2010). The learning-oriented salesperson may concentrate on learning product characteristics, learning how the user buys the product, planning calls, and analyzing the territory. As such, salespeople characterized by a higher learning orientation are likely to perceive intrinsic value in sales training, thus holding favorable perceptions about it. Interestingly, Wilson, Strutton, and Farris (2002) discerned that learning orientation is unrelated to salesperson satisfaction with training. Withal, despite their finding, the foregoing disquisition leads to the following hypothesis:

H3: The greater a salesperson’s learning orientation, the higher the level of his/her satisfaction with sales training.

2.2.4 Type of Socialization

Socialization entails the process wherein employees are transformed from organizational outsiders to organizational members (e.g., Feldman, 1981). During socialization, the new employee surrenders pre-existing attitudes, behaviors, and values (Van Maanen, 1978); acquires new self-images and commitments (Caplow, 1964); and learns and adopts organizational rules and goals (Schein, 1978). Thus, socialization is a transformational process. In a selling context, socialization gets new sales employees “up-to-speed” or up the learning curve (Spiro, Stanton, & Rich, 2007). Positive socialization may also be helpful in gaining commitment and ultimately enhancing retention of newly hired salespeople (Dubinsky et al., 1986).

Louis (1980) averred that recruits’ development depends on the kinds of socialization practices organizations employ. Those tactics determine the type, sequencing, and format of information newcomers receive. Van Maanen and Schein (1979) categorized socialization tactics as institutionalized (i.e., collective, formal, sequential, fixed, serial, investiture) or individualized (i.e., individual, informal, random, variable, disjunctive, divestiture). *Institutionalized* socialization tactics provide a common initiation and learning experience to facilitate newcomers’ personal adjustments. *Individualized* tactics provide a new member with unique initiation and learning experiences, affording newcomers greater opportunity to develop their role more innovatively (Jones, 1986). Lopez and McMillan-Capehart (2003) promulgated that whether individualized or institutionalized socialization tactics are utilized can have a marked difference on how sales personnel ultimately fit into the organization. Results from Dubinsky et al. (1986) argue for using socialization tactics whereby job candidates are provided with a realistic impression of the sales job and the working environment (e.g., Wanous, 1980).

Of particular relevance to sales training are two socialization tactics: serial versus disjunctive. *Serial tactics* involve providing a role model to each new hire; *disjunctive tactics* offer no organizational role model, so newcomers must develop their own definitions of situations perhaps because no role incumbents are present. Serial tactics involve organizational interventions that facilitate sales training efforts. Specifically, by observing a job incumbent as a role model, a trainee may be able to better see materials disseminated through sales training transfer to the field. Indeed, Bandura (1977) and Rotter (1966) averred that social learning (role modeling) can have a salutary influence on individuals’ outcomes. Therefore, salespeople’s satisfaction with sales training is likely to be enhanced via serial socialization tactics. Thus, the following hypothesis is offered:

H4: The greater the use of serial socialization tactics, the higher the level of a salesperson’s satisfaction with sales training.

2.3 Hypotheses Regarding Salesperson Transfer of Training

Trainees often learn something in an artificial environment and then use that knowledge or skill in the actual environment (Bashaw, Ingram, & Keillor, 2002). Transfer of training connotes to what extent the foregoing occurs. If the ultimate objectives of sales training are changes in behavior and improved sales performance, and if training is assumed to be germane, then trainees can be expected to employ materials, techniques, and knowledge acquired during sales training to meet job objectives. Although transfer of training can be positive, neutral, or negative (Goldstein, 1993), the goal of sales training is to induce positive transfer. The model promulgates that satisfaction with training, along with perceptions of various kinds of organizational and sales management support for training, affects transfer of training.

2.3.1 Satisfaction with Training

Goldstein (1993) discusses two theories used to describe the conditions necessary for transfer of training. One condition, *identical elements theory*, espouses that transfer will occur as long as identical elements exist in the training and application arenas. When stimuli and responses are interchangeable between training and transfer, trainees essentially are practicing the final task during the training program that should lead to positive transfer (Sadler-Smith, 2006). To some extent, role plays of selling situations fit identical elements theory. *Transfer-through-principles theory* suggests that training should focus on the general principles requisite to a task. The trainee will apply those principles to solve problems in the actual job environment to perform job tasks (Goldstein, 1993). For instance, during sales training, salespeople would be informed that they will learn to apply the training principles conveyed in a lecture on buyer behavior on the job or through joint calls executed with their field trainer or sales manager.

Through either or both of the two training transfer theories, if salespeople have a favorable affect toward their training vis-à-vis the preparation it provided them to execute their job tasks, such perceptions may impel them to utilize their training. That is, they may feel adequately prepared to enact their job tasks owing to the training that they received. Indeed, some research has found that sales trainees' reactions toward the training program are positively associated with training transfer (Leach & Liu, 2003). Moreover, perceived value of the training has been discerned to be positively related to training transfer (e.g., Cheng & Ho, 1998). The prior discussion leads to the following hypothesis:

H5: The greater the level of a salesperson's satisfaction with sales training, the higher his/her degree of transfer of sales training.

2.3.2 Organizational Support

Salespersons' *perceptions* of how adequately the firm conveys germane information, has a sound training infrastructure, and provides a facilitating pre- and post-training environment constitute organizational support. Russell, Terborg, and Powers (1985) discerned that organizational support of training methods relates positively to employee performance. Company support for sales training can be garnered from three key factors: (a) the organization itself (e.g., degree of formalized training policies and procedures, higher-level management), (b) perceptions of the training climate of the firm, and (c) the immediate sales manager (Burke & Baldwin, 1999). These three facets can conduce to either positive (favorable) or negative (unfavorable) support for training.

Training support from the *organization itself* (independent of the immediate sales supervisor) involves salespeople's perceptions of how well the firm conveys information and provides access to tools salespersons use in carrying out the job. Examples of tools salespeople may need include order-processing services, competitive and market information, technical support, pricing services, shipping information, and account information (but excludes those provided by the immediate sales manager). Salespeople also seek approval, guidance, internal competitive information, new product information, and other forms of support from the company. Such support has particular significance to a salesperson in light of the general absence of regular contact between salespeople and non-sales coworkers or corporate management (Dubinsky et al., 1986).

The organization or senior management of the organization plays a role in reinforcing salespeople's perceptions of support through its advocacy of and succor (e.g., financial, physical, personal) with the sales training program. Such undergirding sets an initial expectation and perception regarding the attitude of senior management towards the sales force. Trainees conceivably look to top management for validation of such programs. Fecteau et al. (1995) found that support from top management (e.g., financial support, time support, advocacy) provides enhances transfer of training. Rodgers, Hunter, and Rogers (1993) analyzed the literature relating to the influence of top management commitment on management program success. They determined that a substantial increase in managers' job satisfaction occurs when total management commitment and active participation exist. This finding

suggests that by expressing its support for training programs, top management can achieve greater transfer of training to the field.

Accordingly, organizational support should positively influence transfer of training. The more the salesperson believes that the senior management of the organization supports the training process through materials, time, and information, the greater transfer of training is likely to be. Salespeople who use the material from the training process are more likely to succeed if the company reinforces the use of training material through follow-up information and other direct forms of assistance. Such support could include new product demonstrations, computerized systems for territory management and order processing, and regular direct contact with senior management. The foregoing discussion allows the following hypothesis to be proffered:

H6: The greater a salesperson's perceived company support of sales training, the higher his/her transfer of sales training.

The work environment can have a key impact on how well a trainee applies his or her learned behavior on the job (Attia, Honeycutt, & Leach, 2005; Kupritz, 2002). More specifically, employees' perceptions of aspects of their job milieu that abet or impede training transfer will affect use of training knowledge (Burke & Baldwin, 1999). After all, individuals react to their circumstances predicated on how they perceive them (James & James, 1989).

Training climate refers to the employee's affective response to the organization vis-à-vis the training atmosphere (Furnham, 1991). Sales trainees are involved with the supportive aspect of a sales organization's climate at the local or district (work group) level. To what extent do the sales manager, fellow salespeople, and local trainers (if any) aid the new salesperson in learning the job and succeeding? Russell, Terborg, and Powers (1985) examined co-worker and management practices to determine whether these personnel were using methods similar to those taught in training. If those individuals are using approaches similar to those presented in training, the trainees would be further influenced to use such behaviors in the workplace. Their findings indicated that this kind support of training methods is associated with employee performance.

From a sales training perspective, a salesperson who perceives a supportive training climate toward the training program seemingly will recognize the important role that sales training could have on his or her performance in the field. Furnham (1991) averred that such a transfer-oriented climate is positively associated with the extent to which learned behavior is transferred onto the job (separate from the degree to which the trainees had learned the material in the training program). Goldstein (1993) suggested that when managers work to provide opportunities for the support of trainees' learned behavior in the work environment, the training climate facilitates training transfer. Thus, the following hypothesis is posited:

H7: The greater a salesperson perceives a positive training climate, the higher his/her degree of sales training transfer.

Sales manager support of training refers to the extent that the salesperson believes the sales manager advocates and reinforces the formal training the salesperson receives. Deeter-Schmelz and Ramsey (1997, p. 59) observed that "supervisors (i.e., sales managers) and top management need to become aware of what they can do to provide support to salespeople." Sales trainees likely enter training programs with preconceived notions about various aspects of their sales training (Wanous, 1980). Sales managers' support for the program can validate the materials and thereby augment their transfer to the job environment. Their support of initial training plays a vital role as the new salesperson moves upwards and outwards along the training curve. Sales managers' reinforcement of the principles covered in initial training includes giving personal attention to sales trainees' efforts, coaching, and encouraging the salesperson to use the procedures and practices specified during training (Jolson, 1974). The manner in which the sales manager provides a propitious work environment and encourages and helps trainees to apply the training should then influence training transfer (Lupton, Weiss, & Peterson, 1999).

Goldstein (1993) identified situational cues as a major component of a transfer climate. Situational cues are actions that trainees' managers take to reinforce what the trainees learn during training. For example, the manager could ensure that trainees have an opportunity to use the training materials immediately on-the-job; or managers might share their own training experiences with trainees (vicarious learning). Alternatively, sales managers might offer training aids trainees can use on the job (e.g., a planning guide or card).

Sales manager support of training is posited to have a positive relationship with transfer of training. Salespersons using the procedures and materials gained from the training process are more likely to succeed if their sales managers reinforce use of training. Conversely, salespersons that only initially transfer the training material without receiving reinforcement from their manager are less likely to succeed. In such instances, the sales manager either undermines the base training through neglect of the salesperson's learning process or sabotages the base

training by providing different sales coaching. The preceding arguments allow for the following hypothesis:

H8: The greater a salesperson perceives sales manager support for sales training, the higher his/her sales training transfer.

2.4 Hypothesis Regarding Salesperson Performance

Formalized sales training has been found to enhance trainees' perceptions of training effectiveness and their ability (à la performance) (Sarin et al., 2010). Salesperson performance can be defined as the execution of salesperson behaviors and the results of those behaviors relative to the achievement of organizational goals (Hyman & Sager 1999). A major reason for conducting training is to provide the basis for generating a form of behavior change in the recipient of the training (Hair et al., 2009; Kirkpatrick, 1976). "...Training enhances learning so that salespeople reach more acceptable performance levels in less time than learning through direct experience alone" (Roman, Ruiz, & Munuera, 2002, p. 1346). Specific behaviors advocated in training are intended to achieve specific performance outcomes (Artis & Harris, 2007). A chief assumption of behavior-based training is that specific behaviors can be attributed to specific outcomes. As such, if there is no change in performance when transfer of training is evident, then clearly the training's effectiveness is called into question. A positive relationship between trainee training transfer and salesperson performance is anticipated, as was observed to some extent in previous research (Wilson, Strutton, & Farris, 2002; Leach & Liu, 2003). Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H9: The greater a salesperson's transfer of sales training, the higher his/her job performance.

3. Method

3.1 Sample and Procedure

The sample consisted of the entire U.S. sales force ($n = 1,200$) employed by a national organization that manufactures several lines of cleaning supply items. Sales representatives were full-time, solely employees of the manufacturer. The organization employed its own sales recruiters and sales trainers. Except for the initial introductory training period when they were compensated by a draw against commission, sales representatives were compensated through a straight commission system. The organization employed its own sales recruiters and sales trainers. A total of 452 surveys were returned for a response rate of 37 percent.

A self-administered questionnaire was mailed to the entire sales force. Cover letters from the senior vice-president of sales and the researchers accompanied the questionnaire. The letters expressed the rationale for the survey and assured confidentiality. A label affixed to the questionnaire included the salesperson's name and territory number. Each survey had a unique serial number allowing the researchers to identify respondents. This information allowed for matching performance information provided by the organization subsequent to survey administration. Questionnaires were returned directly to the researchers using a pre-addressed, self-mailing, postage paid system. Four weeks after the initial mailing, another survey was mailed to those salespersons not responding to the original survey.

3.2 Measures

Study constructs were measured using established scales taken from the sales management and organizational behavior literatures, as well as those developed specifically for the study. The response format for all scales except training satisfaction was a five-point scale, from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. The training satisfaction scale response format was a five-point scale, from 1 = very unsatisfied to 5 = very satisfied. Shown in the appendix is the final set of items for each construct.

3.2.1 Locus of Control

Spector's (1988) sixteen-item scale was utilized to assess locus of control. The response format entailed a five-point scale. Higher scores suggest an external locus of control. Factor analyses revealed an eight-item, one-factor solution that explained 58 percent of the variance ($\alpha = .85$).

3.2.2 Task Specific Self-Efficacy

Task-specific self-efficacy was measured using the work of Bandura (1984) and Chowdhury (1993). Responses were arrayed on a five-point Likert-type format. Higher scores imply greater task-specific self-efficacy. A four-item, single factor was extracted (variance explained = 57.8 percent; $\alpha = .73$).

3.2.3 Learning Orientation

Learning orientation was assessed using nine items developed by Ames and Archer (1988); a Likert-type response format was employed. Higher scores reflect a higher learning orientation. Factor analyses produced a one-factor

solution that explained 58 percent of the variance ($\alpha = .74$).

3.2.4 Socialization

Socialization was measured using items from Jones' (1986) work socialization instrument. *Serial versus disjunctive* socialization was assessed with four items. A three-item, one-factor solution was extracted (variance explained = 68 percent; $\alpha = .77$).

3.2.5 Training Satisfaction

Tannenbaum et al.'s (1991) training fulfillment scale (similar to training satisfaction) was utilized to tap training satisfaction. Two factors were extracted (explaining 69.2 percent of the variance). The factors represented satisfaction with *selling skills* training and *product knowledge* training. Selling skills represents to what extent the salesperson is satisfied with the amount or quality of selling skills knowledge imparted during initial training. Product knowledge connotes to what extent the salesperson is satisfied with the amount or quality of product knowledge developed during initial sales training. Scale reliabilities were .86 and .78, respectively.

3.2.6 Organizational and Sales Manager Support of Training

Items reflecting organizational support and sales manager support of training were designed to assess the sales trainee's perceptions of the support for sales training demonstrated by the trainee's organization as a whole and his or her immediate sales manager. The scales were developed specifically for this study by the researchers and the organization's director of recruiting and training. One factor containing four items was extracted for *organizational support*; it explained 68 percent of the item variation. Scale reliability was .85. Two two-item sales manager factors (manager's supporting actions, manager's feedback) were extracted for *sales manager support* of training; they explained 85 percent of the variance ($\alpha = .90$ and .76, respectively).

3.2.7 Training Climate

Items developed by Furnham (1991) were utilized to assess training climate. The items tap the climate concerning learning and training. A three-item, one-factor solution was extracted (variance explained = 50 percent; $\alpha = .77$).

3.2.8 Transfer of Training

Transfer of training was measured using eleven items developed specifically for the study. The items were developed to assess the extent to which sales trainees employed the concepts, knowledge, skills, and abilities developed during sales training. A three-factor solution—time management skills (two items; $\alpha = .81$), sales presentation skills (three items; $\alpha = .81$), product knowledge (2 items; $\alpha = .62$)—that explained 59 percent of the variance. Time management concerns the extent to which the sales representative uses the time management techniques presented during sales training. Sales presentation skills relates to how similar or dissimilar the salesperson's sales presentations are to the sales presentation ideas imparted during sales training. Product knowledge refers to how much of the product knowledge presented during sales training the salesperson uses.

3.2.9 Performance

Sales performance was assessed by examining organization records of each respondent's total dollar sales. This value was then used to determine the individual's most recent three-month sales revenue average.

3.2.10 Statistical Analysis

Statistical analyses entailed two steps. First, unidimensionality was assessed using confirmatory factor analysis. Convergent and discriminant validity and reliability of all scales measuring proposed constructs were also assessed. Second, the hypothesized relationships among the constructs were tested through a two-step covariance structure analysis proposed by Anderson and Gerbing (1988). The first step (confirmatory measurement) specified the relations of the observed measures to their proposed underlying constructs with the constructs allowed to inter-correlate freely. The second step (confirmatory structural model) then specified the causal relationships among the constructs as posited by theory (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988).

4. Results

4.1 Confirmatory Factor Analysis

The dimensionality of the items used to identify research constructs was assessed using confirmatory factor analysis within the rubric of covariance structure modeling. Confirmatory factor analysis is used to validate hypothesized relationships instead of exploring underlying dimensions as was done in the earlier evaluation (Kim & Mueller, 1978). A confirmatory factor analysis was conducted on all the research constructs of interest in order to reassess dimensionality and to gain additional evidence of discriminant validity. Statistics for all multi-item constructs (fit indices, root mean squared residual, Tucker-Lewis Index, completely standardized loadings, and

squared item correlations) essentially were acceptable (not shown for brevity).

4.2 Model Testing

Hypotheses were tested simultaneously using structural equation modeling. The LISREL 8.12a program (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993) was used. A two-step protocol recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1988) was employed to test the model. The two-step approach requires the measurement model to be developed and evaluated separately from the structural model. After establishing dimensionality, the structural model of interest is tested.

An analysis of structural coefficients, percent variance explained, and fit indices ($\chi^2=1874.62$, $df=978$, $TLI=.81$, $PGFI=.69$, and $RMR=.065$) presents a number of interesting observations. The model yielded expected results, yet the level of reproduction of sigma (the covariance matrix) was lower than anticipated.

Presented in Figure 2 are the results for the full model and in Figure 3 for the trimmed model. H1 posited that salespeople possessing a higher level of an internal locus of control would be more satisfied with the training. Locus of control, however, had no significant influence on either satisfaction with selling skills ($\gamma_{1,1}=-.02$, $p>.05$) or with product knowledge ($\gamma_{2,1}=.13$, $p>.05$) training (Figure 3). Thus, a salesperson's locus of control does not appear to be associated with his or her satisfaction with the training received. Accordingly, H1 was rejected.

H2 proposed that task-specific self-efficacy beliefs would be positively related to satisfaction with sales training. Satisfaction with selling skills ($\gamma_{1,2}=.66$, $p<.01$) and product knowledge ($\gamma_{2,2}=.55$, $p<.01$) training is influenced positively by the trainee's level of task specific self-efficacy. To the extent that a trainee believes and is confident that he or she can be effective on the job, then he or she is satisfied with the selling skills and product knowledge imparted during sales training. Consequently, H2 was supported.

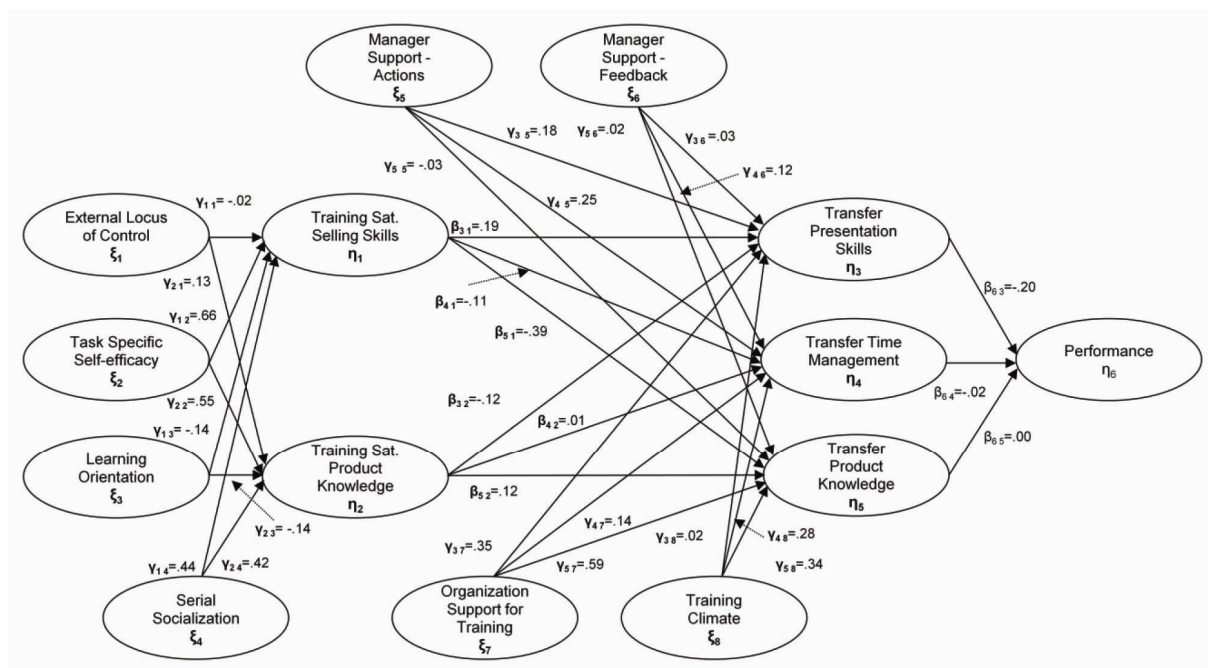


Figure 2. Full model

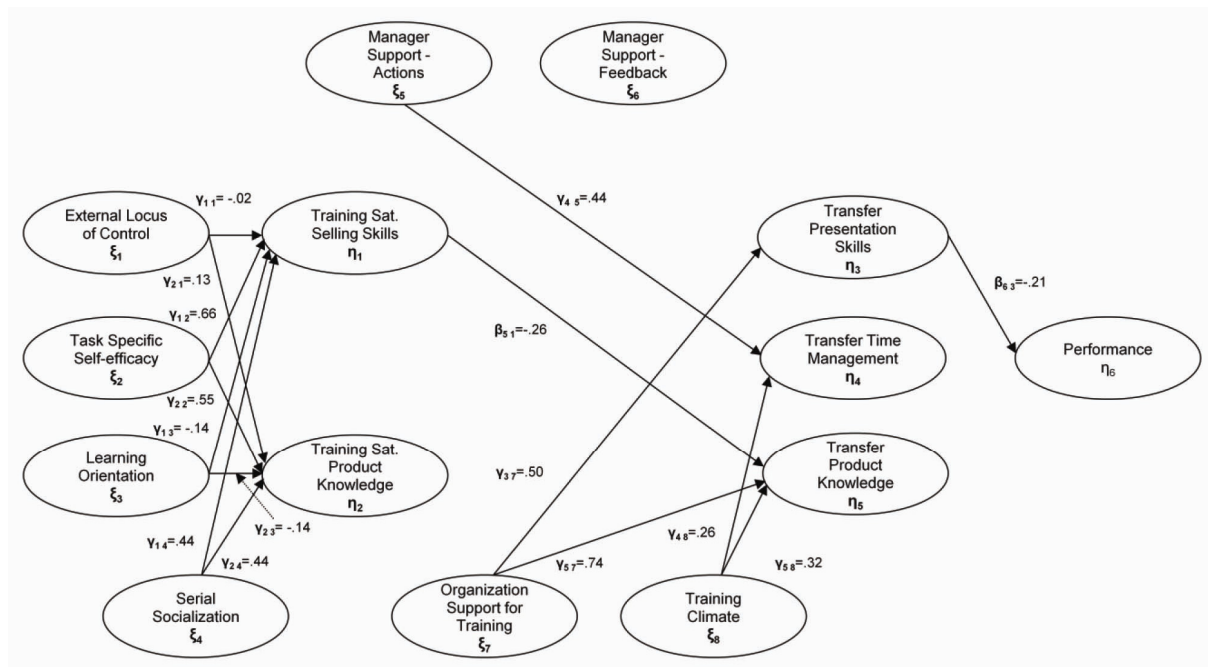


Figure 3. Trimmed model

Note: Percent of variance explained for the endogenous variables is as follows: training satisfaction with selling skills—59%; training satisfaction with product knowledge—40%; transfer of presentation skills—26%; transfer of time management skills—22%; transfer of product knowledge—52%; and performance—4%.

Learning orientation of salespeople was proposed to be positively related to satisfaction with sales training (H3). Learning orientation, though, was found to have no significant influence ($p > .05$) on satisfaction with selling skills ($\gamma_{1,3} = -.14$) or with product knowledge ($\gamma_{2,3} = -.14$) training. Therefore, H3 received no support.

H4 stated that serial socialization tactics would be positively related to trainee satisfaction with sales training. The structural coefficients between serial socialization and selling skills and product knowledge training satisfaction ($\gamma_{1,4} = .44$, $p < .01$; $\gamma_{2,4} = .44$, $p < .0001$) supported H4. So, salespeople evidently are more satisfied with both selling skills and product knowledge training when they have organizational members acting as role models (serial socialization) rather than having to develop their own definitions of situations (disjunctive socialization).

Trainee satisfaction with sales training was presumed to be positively associated with training transfer (H5). Only one path from a training satisfaction construct (selling skills) remained in the model after all paths with non-significant coefficients were eliminated. The result, however, is *opposite* from the putative relationship—satisfaction with training is negatively related ($\beta_{5,1} = -.26$, $p < .01$) to transfer of product knowledge training. Thus, H5 was not supported.

H6 and H7 pertained to positive relationships between organizational support and sales manager support and training transfer. Sales manager support-action (but not sales manager support-feedback) was positively related to transfer of time management skills ($\beta_{4,5} = .44$, $p < .01$), but not to sales presentation skills or product knowledge. Succor from the sales manager seemingly facilitates more effective time management behaviors. Organizational support was positively related to transfer of sales presentation skills ($\beta_{3,7} = .50$, $p < .01$) and product knowledge ($\beta_{5,7} = .74$, $p < .01$) but not to time management. To the extent sales representatives believe that they are supported by the company, they seemingly apply sales and product materials in the field. These results offered partial support for H6 and H7.

H8 proposed a positive association between training climate and training transfer. Training climate was found to be positively related to transfer of time management skills ($\beta_{4,8} = .26$, $p < .05$) and product knowledge ($\beta_{5,8} = .32$, $p < .05$) but not to sales presentation skills. As such, salespersons who perceive a positive training climate tend to transfer more time management and product knowledge training. Thus, H8 received some support.

Training transfer was presumed to have a positive influence on salesperson performance (H9). Product knowledge and time management transfer were not significantly related to performance. Presentation skills transfer, however, was observed to be associated with performance, but *negatively* ($\beta_{6,3} = -.21$, $p < .05$). Therefore, H9 was not

supported.

5. Discussion

This study presumably is the first attempt to test a model of sales training that *integrates* salespeople's individual and organizational factors, attitudes, perceptions, and behavior. Individual and organizational variables included locus of control, task-specific self-efficacy, learning orientation, and type of socialization. Attitudes entailed satisfaction with sales training. Perceptions pertained to adequacy of sales training materials and sales manager and organizational support imparted during and after initial sales training, as well as the training climate of the firm. Behaviors included transfer of training and sales performance.

Transfer of training is an important variable in that it refers to the trainee's ability to learn (Wexley & Latham, 1991) something in one environment and use that learned skill or knowledge in another environment (Goldstein, 1993). Transfer of training is a useful construct because of the skill-based nature of the sales job. For this reason, recognizing and understanding personal characteristics, attitudes, perceptions, and organizational influences that promote transfer, as well as assuring that the selling strategy corresponds with market needs, are critical. Salespersons are physically and emotionally separated from the organization. The sales manager is seldom on hand to promote correct behaviors (e.g., selling techniques, correct use of product knowledge, proper time management). In that sense, proper practice of selling skills and product knowledge becomes extremely important. In order for salespersons to enact those behaviors, they must know the correct behaviors. Knowledge of correct behavior is derived from and reinforced through sales training. If sales training is correctly oriented to the market, it becomes functional only if salespeople transfer it into the selling environment.

5.1 Summary of Expected Findings

Several results merit elaboration. One involves the impact task-specific self-efficacy beliefs have on salespeople's satisfaction with the sales training program. This influence is reflected by a positive relationship between task specific self-efficacy and selling skills and product knowledge training. This finding suggests that organizations should develop programs that focus on building mastery. The mastery should be in areas such as product knowledge and sales presentation skills. Mastery should enhance task-specific self-efficacy, thus conducing to a favorable affect toward the sales training.

Another result concerns serial socialization. Serial socialization positively influenced selling skills and product knowledge training satisfaction. Serial socialization refers to the organization's providing role models for sales trainees during the initial socialization experience of sales training. Role models for salespeople could be other sales personnel, sales managers, or sales trainers. Serial socialization is important because sales trainees learn how to perform the job correctly and to behave correctly by observing behaviors of role incumbents. They also see the resulting reinforcements or punishments associated with various behaviors. By learning vicariously (via a role model), sales trainees' adoption of correct behaviors likely accelerates. Salespeople who experience no observable role incumbents or mentors must learn the appropriate behavior via classical or instrumental conditioning (i.e., a failure to sell leads to negative reinforcement—no income). Vicarious learning for salespeople is much faster than conditioning because salespeople do not have to experience the gamut of situations before succeeding consistently.

A further set of results pertains to the relationships manager support-actions, organizational support, and training climate have on training transfer. Manager support-actions related positively to transfer of time management skills training. Organizational support was associated positively with transfer of training vis-à-vis sales presentation skills and product knowledge. Training climate was ascertained to be related positively to transfer of product knowledge and time management skills training. The consistency that emerges from these findings is that these three constructs appear to complement each other, thus helping provide an ambience that facilitates positive transfer of training.

5.2 Summary of Unexpected Findings

One unexpected finding involves the absence of a relationship between locus of control and satisfaction with sales training. A positive relationship between internal locus of control and training satisfaction was posited. At least one potential rationale can be offered for the finding obtained here. Internally-oriented salespeople may believe that subsequent success or failure is due to their own efforts, irrespective of company-provided training. That is, they are self-driven and have a high regard for their own job-related outcomes. Externally-oriented sales personnel ascribe work outcomes to outside forces over which they have no control. As such, they may perceive sales training as something neutral—neither especially beneficial nor detrimental. If the foregoing presuppositions are correct, then the association between locus of control and training satisfaction could have been attenuated.

A second unanticipated finding deals with learning orientation. Learning orientation was expected to positively

influence training satisfaction. Salespeople who seek to learn about the selling job were presumed to enjoy learning about selling and be more likely to approach sales training as an opportunity to learn how to do the job better. Such individuals were expected to be more satisfied with training they receive. Perhaps simply aspiring to acquire enhanced knowledge about the job will not automatically confer a favorable attitude toward the training program. Those with a learning orientation may evaluate the training program in light of their on-the-job situation and their ability to enhance their performance from the training material, not merely view the training as an opportunity to learn about the job. That is, those with a keen learning orientation want the training to be germane, not merely an exercise in learning enrichment.

Another enigmatic result was obtained between the presumed positive association between training satisfaction and training transfer. Specifically, satisfaction with selling skills training was found to be negatively related to transfer of product knowledge. This may have occurred because a focused selling skills training (social selling in the case of the host company) de-emphasizes use of product knowledge by salespeople. Perhaps salespeople who are satisfied with selling skills training may tend to rely on sales skills instead of incorporating product knowledge into their sales presentations. Alternatively, a salesperson who is dissatisfied with selling skills training may rely extensively on product knowledge to sell. The salesperson may perceive that the company's method of sales presentation is counter-productive or underpowered.

A final unexpected result deals with the negative association between training transfer and salesperson performance. A positive relationship was proffered. Instead, a negative relationship was observed between transfer of sales presentation skills and performance. This might imply that the type of sales training used by the host company may be less than optimal. The sample organization's initial sales training concentrated on product demonstrations and a "social" approach to selling. The social selling approach was designed to make the customer feel relaxed and comfortable. It placed little emphasis, though, on product benefits or on identifying buyers' needs. That is, it focused on how sales personnel can ingratiate themselves with buyers. The social selling approach was not designed to elicit potential customer needs and for that reason may be ineffective at enhancing salesperson performance.

5.3 Theoretical Implications

Findings of the study lead to at least two theoretical implications. First, the results illustrate the importance of socialization that occurs during the training program. Feldman (1981), Dubinsky et al. (1986), and Jones (1986) promulgated the utility of socialization during organizational entry. In particular, serial socialization plays an important role in building self-efficacy beliefs of salespeople and indirectly facilitating transfer of behavior. Salespeople who believe that they can observe role modeling are more satisfied with training and hence more adaptive of behaviors derived from sales training. That is, salespersons evidently are more satisfied with initial sales training when incumbent salespersons are present to act as role models and mentors.

Second, the influence of serial socialization supports the influence of vicarious (social learning) or behavioral learning on training satisfaction and transfer of training. Salespersons experiencing serial socialization were more satisfied with training elements and transferred more materials from training into the job setting. Heretofore, models have ignored the critical impact socialization has in a sales training context.

5.4 Managerial Implications

Study findings offer several managerial implications. If salespersons believe that they have the ability (task-specific self-efficacy) to perform requisite tasks for successful selling, then that salesperson will be satisfied with training. Also, if the salesperson is confident in his or her ability to use product knowledge (task-specific self-efficacy), then he or she is more likely to be satisfied with product knowledge training. Therefore, initial training efforts should concentrate on monitoring task-specific self-efficacy and on developing high levels of task-specific self-efficacy. Sales training needs to be directed at enhancing salespeople's sales job proficiencies and beliefs in those proficiencies.

Findings concerning reinforcement of training imply that sales organizations can assist salespeople by providing role models and mentors during initial sales training. Sales trainees are more likely to be satisfied with training if role models continuously and consistently demonstrate correct and expected selling behaviors. Of course, if behavior of role models is inconsistent with training, ambiguity perceptions of salespeople may emerge.

Managers should seek to develop and foster a favorable training climate. Providing organizational and sales manager support, as well as a positive training climate, aids in trainees' successful transfer of training. Offering valuable training aids, reinforcing the training content, practicing what is "preached" (taught) in the sales training program, working closely with the trainees subsequent to the conclusion of the training program, and exposing

trainees to opportunities to use the training are means of creating a salutary training climate.

A social approach to selling (i.e., “social selling”) was found to have a detrimental impact on training utilization. The social selling approach concentrates on building rapport between the salesperson and customer. This rapport is a result of a personal relationship-building process that is unrelated to customer needs. Essentially, social selling depends on the notion of “buying from a buddy.” Sales trainees need instruction in product knowledge, applications, and usage so that they can present cogent solutions to customers’ problems in order to satisfy buyers’ needs. Salespeople also desire sufficient customer knowledge and customer understanding so that they might more easily recognize customer needs.

5.5 Limitations and Future Research

The study has certain limitations that are suggestive of future research avenues. One limitation pertains to the timing of the research. Salespeople were surveyed all at one time, some proximal to sales training and some distal from the initial training event. Future empirical efforts should survey subjects (newly hired and trained salespeople) immediately as a cohort after completion of initial sales training and then performance data could be analyzed over subsequent periods.

Another limitation involves generalizability of the findings. The sample consisted of salespersons employed in a chemically specialty product organization. Consequently, study findings may be sample specific and not be representative of all kinds of salespersons. So, future work should utilize samples of sales personnel in a variety of companies and industries.

Another limitation pertains to the measurement instrumentation of two of the study’s constructs. The items tapping training transfer were somewhat limited in scope. A more robust measure is needed to operationalize transfer of training. Also, only one measure of salesperson performance—three-month average sales revenue—was employed. In the present study the relationship between transfer of training and performance was not supported. This may have occurred because there may be a lag effect between the end of training and the generation of sales revenue. Therefore, other performance measures that may be logically related to transfer of training should be investigated. Such measures might include number of presentations made, sales presentation ability, and closing ratio.

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Appendix: Scale Items

Locus of Control

Getting the job you want is mostly a matter of luck.

Making money is primarily a matter of good fortune.

In order to get a really good job you need to have family members or friends in high places.

Sales success is usually a matter of good fortune.

When it comes to landing a really good job, who you know is more important than what you know.

To make a lot of money you have to know the right people.

It takes a lot of luck to be an outstanding employee on most jobs.

The main difference between people who make a lot of money and people who make a little money is luck.

Task-Specific Self-Efficacy

I am good at selling.

I know the right things to do in selling situations.

I am good at finding out what customers want.

It is easy for me to get customers to see my point of view.

Learning Orientation

An important part of being a good salesperson is continually improving your selling skills.

It is important for me to learn from each selling experience.

It is worth spending a great deal of time learning new approaches for dealing with customers.
Learning how to be a better salesperson is of fundamental importance to me.

Serial Socialization

I receive/received little guidance from experienced salespeople as to how I should perform my job. (R)
I have little access to other people in this organization. (R)

Selling Skills Training Satisfaction

Qualifying prospects
Closing the sale
Handling prospects' objections
Warming up/approaching the prospects
Gaining control over the sales presentation

Product Knowledge Training Satisfaction

Developing product knowledge
Understanding how prospects use our products

Sales Manager Support—Actions

My immediate manager helps me practice qualifying prospects.
My immediate manager and I regularly practice overcoming customers' objections.

Sales Manager Support—Feedback

My immediate manager criticizes what was presented in my initial sales training.
My immediate manager makes suggestions that are contrary to my initial sales training.

Organizational Support

My sales training materials were not as extensive as I expected. (R)
The division doesn't seem to care about sales training for new representatives. (R)
The division doesn't provide enough initial sales training. (R)
The division doesn't provide enough continuing sales training. (R)

Training Climate

I have been through training specifically designed to give new salespersons a thorough knowledge of job related skills.
I did not perform any of my normal selling activities until I was thoroughly familiar with my division's procedures and work method.
Much of my job knowledge has been acquired on a trial and error basis. (R)

Product Knowledge Transfer

I seldom use the product demonstration ideas the division provides. (R)

I regularly use the product applications information I receive.

Sales Presentation Skills Transfer

I usually employ training I received on warming up prospects.

I seldom use the training I received on handling a buyer's objections. (R)

I use very little of the technical information I receive. (R)

Time Management Transfer

I regularly employ the time management training I receive.

I rarely use the territory planning training I receive. (R)

(R) = item was reverse scored/coded.

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