

A structural model of sales management processes and salesperson behavior performance: The roles of control strategy and supervisor orientation

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Abstract: This study examines how sales management control strategy and supervisor orientation influence sales organization effectiveness through salesperson behavior performance. Drawing on established sales management and organizational behavior literature, a structural model is developed and empirically tested using survey data collected from 534 salespeople across multiple commercial sectors in Saudi Arabia. Structural equation modeling is employed to assess the relationships among managerial control practices, supervisory orientation, frontline behavioral performance, and organizational effectiveness. The findings indicate that both sales management control strategy and supervisor orientation have significant positive effects on salesperson behavior performance. In turn, salesperson behavior performance is strongly associated with sales organization effectiveness, highlighting the central role of frontline behaviors in translating managerial practices into organizational outcomes. The results underscore the importance of aligning formal control systems with supportive and development-oriented supervisory approaches to enhance sales effectiveness. By adopting a process-oriented perspective, this study contributes to sales management theory and offers practical insights for managers operating in fast-evolving socio-economic and organizational contexts.

Keywords: Sales management control strategy, Sales organization effectiveness, Salesperson behavior performance, Supervisor orientation.

1. Introduction

The significance of sales management has been extensively documented in the literature [1]. To succeed, sales management teams need clear guidelines for sales management practices [2]. The current paper extends the established literature by testing a structural model based on the core sales management processes. In the theoretical background section, each of the core processes is defined, and the main studies concerned with those processes are discussed. Studies related to factors affecting or affected by each process are also summarized. Drawing on this foundation, the study develops a set of hypotheses about the relationships among core sales management constructs and tests them using structural equation modeling. The study also shows how formal control and supervisory practices function within evolving organizational and cultural environments. Rather than examining sales management control and supervisor orientation as isolated managerial tools, this study positions salesperson behavior performance as a central behavioral mechanism through which managerial practices translate into sales organization effectiveness. By modeling behavior performance as an intervening process, the study moves beyond prior research that examines organizational outcomes as direct consequences of control systems or supervisory styles.

2. Theoretical background

Although sales management control, supervisor orientation, and salesperson performance have each received substantial attention in prior research, these constructs have often been analyzed solely in

isolation or within narrowly delineated models. As a result, less is known about how formal control systems and supervisor orientation operate jointly to shape salesperson behavior and sales organization effectiveness. The present study adopts an integrative perspective by linking these core sales management processes within a single structural framework. The discussion begins with sales management control strategy, as it is the primary formal mechanism through which organizations guide and regulate salesperson behavior.

2.1. Sales Management Control Strategy

Sales management control has a significant impact on the ability of management to achieve sales objectives, including the effectiveness of sales personnel and the organization as a whole. A substantial body of research emphasizes that well-designed sales management control strategies provide guidance for directing salesperson behavior and aligning activities with organizational goals. Several empirical studies have examined how different managerial approaches influence salesperson behavior and organizational outcomes. In a study of sales management control, Babakus et al. [3] investigated the relationship between incentive pay and management control, as well as their effects on salesperson performance and sales organization effectiveness, in India, Malaysia, and Greece. The authors distinguished between 1) behavior-control systems, where monitoring, evaluating, and directing functions depend on the behavior of sales personnel and compensation mainly involves fixed salaries, and 2) outcome-control systems, which evaluate and compensate sales personnel based on their results, with compensation primarily consisting of incentive pay. Thus, with behavior control, management responds more passively to personnel behavior, whereas with outcome control, management uses personnel performance as an incentive to influence behavior. Behavior control was the only predictor of behavior performance in Greece, while territory design was the strongest predictor across all three countries. Regarding sales, all four aspects examined, unit effectiveness, management control, incentive pay, and territory design, were found to be important predictors in each country. In a study examining business-to-business (B2B) sales force productivity, Siguaw, Kimes, and Assenheimer [4], developed a framework for using revenue management to improve the effectiveness of allocating sales force time in B2B settings. The framework proposed strategies to manage time, price, and customers. Customer management uses a categorization process that aims to provide customers with good service while optimizing revenues for the company. The goals of time management are reducing the uncertainty of contact duration, reducing the uncertainty of demand, and reducing the contact interval. The goal of price management is to commit customers to specific market segments, thereby reducing uncertainty in demand over time. The study illustrates how this framework can be used both to increase revenue and to enhance customer perceptions of price fairness. In a study of sales management control strategies, Bharadwaj and Shipley [5] compared behavior-based sales management control and outcome-based sales management control in the United Kingdom and Austria. The study found a positive relationship between behavior-based sales management control strategies and the following attributes of sales personnel: sales performance, outcome performance, motivation, attitudes, and capabilities. In a study aimed at improving the conceptual and measurement foundations of sales force control systems, Brown et al. [6] examined existing control frameworks and identified various shortcomings in prevalent measurement methodologies. The authors suggested improved scales for evaluating behavior-based and outcome-based control, contending that accurate and dependable measurement is crucial for managers aiming to execute effective control tactics. Their investigation showed that unclear control metrics can lead managers to make poor decisions and inconsistent performance evaluations. Challagalla et al. [7] conducted an extensive assessment of sales management control strategies, integrating over thirty years of research on the impact of various managerial control types on salesperson behavior and organizational results. Their investigation showed that behavior-based, outcome-based, and capability-based controls are still the main ways that managers direct salesperson activities and keep performance under check. The authors stressed that well-organized control systems give managers better rules for monitoring salespeople's behavior and ensuring that their actions are in line with the company's plan.

The review also showed that sales management control strategies remain useful today as the primary way for companies to improve organizational performance. These studies underscore the importance of sales management control strategies in guiding salesperson behavior and enhancing organizational effectiveness, supporting their inclusion in the current research framework.

2.2. Supervisor Orientation

Supervisor orientation is a crucial method to change the attitudes, motivation, and performance of salespeople, as supervisors are the key link between what a firm wants and what its frontline salespeople do. Extensive research has examined the influence of diverse supervisory styles on salesperson behavior and performance outcomes. In a study of control and motivation in sales management, Cooke [8] reviewed the interaction between control and motivation with respect to the personnel compensation plan. The paper viewed salary as a control tool and commission as a motivational tool, arguing that to maximize one of these, the other should be minimized. The author concluded that a compensation plan that includes both a salary and a commission can serve as a supervisory tool. In a study of supervisor orientation and salesperson work outcomes, Dubinsky [9] examined the differences between managing co-located and remotely located salespeople. Among co-located sales staff, an end-results orientation among supervisors was positively related to satisfaction with supervisors. However, for remotely located salespeople, this relationship did not hold. Nonetheless, the study found no differences between the two sales groups with respect to the relationship between activity orientation and performance, nor with respect to the relationship between capability orientation and salesperson satisfaction with supervisors. Fatima et al. [10] conducted a study that directly connected supervisory leadership style to sales force ethics, investigating the impact of sales managers' transformational leadership practices on the moral judgment of salespeople. The findings suggest that a transformational supervisory approach can affect how salespeople judge morally unclear circumstances, which in turn can change how they feel and what they plan to do in the field. The findings indicate that supervisor orientation significantly influences salespeople's role interpretation, responses to managerial expectations, and overall performance. Overall, this research establishes a solid basis for incorporating supervisor orientation as a critical element in the current research model.

2.3. Salesperson Behavior Performance

Salesperson behavior performance serves as a determinant of sales effectiveness, reflecting the daily activities and effort levels through which sales personnel implement organizational strategy in practice. Previous research has examined the evolution of salesperson behavioral performance, its correlation with managerial practices, and its impact on overarching organizational outcomes. In a study of sales force performance in organizations that use behavior-based sales management processes, Li et al. [11] examined the relationships between sales management and salesperson performance, the impact of salesperson performance on outcome performance, the relationship between salesperson organizational commitment and performance, and the role of territory design on salesperson performance. The study found that salesperson behavior outcome has a positive relationship with salesperson outcome performance. Thus, higher salesperson behavior performance leads to higher salesperson outcome performance. In a study of dysfunctional behavior among salespeople, Lussier et al. [12] found that salespeople were less likely to engage in dysfunctional behavior when they received output information. However, when sales staff received activity information, they were more likely to engage in dysfunctional behavior. Moreover, capability was found to be unrelated to dysfunctional behavior. Additionally, the study found that there was no relationship between a salesperson's supervisory participation and dysfunctional behavior; that providing salespeople with capability information and engaging them in supervisory activities increased their trust in supervisors; and that increased trust in supervisors made them less likely to engage in dysfunctional behavior.

Malek et al. [13] provided further insights into salesperson performance by examining the application of adaptive tactics by middle managers within sales units. The authors demonstrated that

adaptive implementation methods, such as tailoring techniques to meet local requirements and providing explicit guidance, enhance the clarity and alignment of salesperson actions, resulting in improved performance outcomes. Their findings corroborate the notion that a salesperson's efficacy is influenced by factors beyond their individual competencies, including the management processes that advise, help, and improve their frontline sales behavior. These studies illustrate that salesperson performance is influenced by a confluence of managerial systems, strategy implementation approaches, and individual psychological resources. Whether performance results from the alignment of motivational and control mechanisms, the strategic direction offered by middle managers, or the personal and social support that shields salespeople from performance-impeding pressures, the evidence consistently underscores the complex nature of performance in sales environments. Thus, these studies show that salesperson behavior plays an important mediating role between managerial practices and organizational outcomes, supporting its inclusion as a central construct in the present model.

2.4. Sales Organization Effectiveness

Sales management control has a significant impact on management's ability to achieve sales management objectives, including the effectiveness of sales personnel and the organization as a whole. Sales organization effectiveness reflects the cumulative impact of sales management practices, salesperson behavior, and organizational conditions. In a study of sales personnel job satisfaction, Matsuo et al. [14] examined retail sales management theory in a transitional economy. Data revealed that role ambiguity was negatively related to performance, job satisfaction, and turnover intention, while role conflict was negatively related to job satisfaction and organizational commitment. However, performance was unrelated to satisfaction. Additionally, performance and satisfaction were positively related to organizational commitment, which, in turn, was negatively related to turnover intention. These findings led the authors to conclude that Western sales management theory is applicable in a transitional economy. In a study on the cultural impact of European staffing decisions on sales management, Mehta et al. [15] investigated the role of staffing decisions on sales force management and tested hypotheses derived from surveying managers from six European countries. The framework focused on the selection and promotion of sales personnel in a cross-cultural setting. The framework proposed that the selection and promotion of sales staff in a cross-cultural setting is a process governed by regional culture, sales personnel characteristics, and other variables, including international openness, seniority, and firm size. Regional culture and sales personnel characteristics were identified as playing an important role in the selection and promotion of sales staff in cross-cultural settings. Miao and Evans [16] examined how effective communication by salespeople affects their performance in current digital selling environments. Considering video-based observations of buyer–seller interactions, the authors developed a comprehensive framework demonstrating how auditory cues (i.e., what a salesperson says and how they say it) and visual cues (i.e., facial expressions, body posture, and movement) together affect how customers respond and, ultimately, how effective the salesperson is. Their research shows that selling in a digital environment involves more than just traditional selling skills; it also encompasses a salesperson's ability to speak effectively, read nonverbal cues, and adapt to new technology-based interaction forms. The study demonstrates how communication practices influence customer cognition, affect, and behavioral outcomes, reinforcing the emerging perspective that salesperson performance depends on both relational skills and digital communication proficiencies. These ideas offer significant conceptual foundations for understanding salesperson behavior and performance in modern selling environments. Although many prior studies focus on sales management practices at the individual or managerial level, their implications extend to the effectiveness of the sales organization as a whole. These findings demonstrate that a variety of managerial practices, organizational conditions, and cultural contexts influence overall sales organization effectiveness, reinforcing its role as the key outcome variable in the proposed model.

2.5. Hypothesis Development

The relationships proposed in this study are grounded in the sales management literature, which delineates the influence of managerial control systems, organizational processes, and supervisory practices on salesperson outcomes. Sales management control strategies influence salesperson outcomes not only by monitoring results but also by shaping how salespeople plan, prioritize, and execute their day-to-day selling activities. In particular, behavior-based control provides guidance, feedback, and structure that translate managerial expectations into concrete behavioral routines. Research on sales management control strategies has demonstrated that behavior-based and outcome-based controls significantly affect sales performance and the efficacy of sales organizations, as managers employ monitoring, evaluation, and incentives to steer salesperson activities toward desired results [17]. More recent research shows that middle managers can better translate strategic priorities into clear instructions for the sales force if they have well-designed control and implementation processes. This ability, in turn, improves performance on the front lines [18]. Consequently, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H₁: Sales management control strategy has a positive effect on salesperson performance.

Supervisor orientation influences salesperson performance by clarifying role expectations and supporting the development of selling capabilities. Supportive and capability-enhancing supervisory approaches enable salespeople to enact desired selling behaviors. Previous studies on sales supervision and leadership indicate that the manner in which supervisors communicate goals and assist their sales personnel significantly impacts salesperson satisfaction, role perceptions, and performance outcomes [19]. Recent research indicates that helpful supervisory behavior improves salesperson performance [20]. Thus, the next hypothesis is proposed:

H₂: Supervisor orientation has a positive effect on salesperson performance.

The behavior of salespeople is generally regarded as a crucial factor influencing organizational performance. Salespeople who follow established rules, prioritize customer needs, and effectively manage their sales responsibilities contribute to the overall efficiency of the sales team. It is expected that higher levels of behavioral performance will result in increased effectiveness within the sales organization. Research on sales force behavior shows that elevated behavioral performance, characterized by diligent effort, adherence to role expectations, and customer-centric behaviors, correlates with improvements in outcome performance and sales unit effectiveness [21]. Thus,

H₃: Salesperson behavior performance has a positive effect on sales organization effectiveness.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design and Sample

This study used a cross-sectional survey design to test the proposed model. The population of the study consisted of salespeople in various commercial sectors in Saudi Arabia. Data were collected using an online questionnaire. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed that their answers would remain confidential and be used solely for research purposes. After removing incomplete entries, 534 usable responses were retained for analysis.

3.2. Measurement Instruments

The questionnaire consisted of instruments drawn from prior sales management research and adapted to the present study. All statements were rated on a seven-point Likert scale. The items related to sales management control strategy were adapted from Baldauf et al. [22]. Supervisor orientation items were adapted from Challagalla et al. [23]. The items used to assess salesperson performance were also based on these two studies. Finally, sales organization effectiveness was measured using items adapted from Baldauf et al. [24].

4. Results

4.1. Measurement Model

The measurement model was first assessed to examine the reliability and validity of the constructs. All items loaded clearly on their intended factors, and no cross-loadings or anomalies were observed. Internal consistency was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR). As shown in Table 1, all constructs exceeded the conventional threshold of 0.70. Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.85 (supervisor orientation) to 0.89 (sales management control strategy and sales organization effectiveness), and composite reliability values all exceeded the minimum acceptable level of 0.70. Convergent validity was assessed using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). AVE values for all constructs were above the minimum threshold of 0.50.

Table 1.
Construct reliability and convergent validity.

| Construct | Items | Cronbach's α | CR | AVE |
|-----------------------------------|-------|---------------------|------|------|
| Sales Management Control Strategy | 4 | 0.87 | 0.89 | 0.66 |
| Supervisor Orientation | 3 | 0.85 | 0.85 | 0.66 |
| Sales Organization Effectiveness | 3 | 0.85 | 0.85 | 0.66 |
| Salesperson Behavior Performance | 4 | 0.88 | 0.87 | 0.62 |

Discriminant validity was evaluated using both the Fornell–Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio (HTMT). As reported in Table 2, each construct's AVE square root was greater than its correlations with all other constructs, satisfying the Fornell–Larcker criterion. In addition, all HTMT values were well below the 0.85 guideline (see Table 3), with the highest ratio observed between salesperson performance and sales organization effectiveness (HTMT = 0.58). Taken together, these results provide strong evidence that the four constructs are empirically distinct while still meaningfully related.

Table 2.
Fornell–Larcker criterion.

| Construct | Sales Management Control Strategy | Supervisor Orientation | Salesperson Behavior Performance | Sales Organization Effectiveness |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Sales Management Control Strategy | 0.813 | | | |
| Supervisor Orientation | 0.315 | 0.812 | | |
| Salesperson Behavior Performance | 0.452 | 0.383 | 0.790 | |
| Sales Organization Effectiveness | 0.327 | 0.299 | 0.511 | 0.822 |

Table 3.
Heterotrait–monotrait ratio (HTMT).

| Construct | Sales Management Control Strategy | Supervisor Orientation | Salesperson Behavior Performance | Sales Organization Effectiveness |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Sales Management Control Strategy | — | 0.364 | 0.514 | 0.368 |
| Supervisor Orientation | 0.364 | — | 0.441 | 0.342 |
| Salesperson Behavior Performance | 0.514 | 0.441 | — | 0.579 |
| Sales Organization Effectiveness | 0.368 | 0.342 | 0.579 | — |

4.2. Hypothesis Testing

The measurement model demonstrated a good fit to the data: $\chi^2(87) = 168.958$, $\chi^2/\text{df} = 1.942$, CFI = 0.982, TLI = 0.978, GFI = 0.961, AGFI = 0.946. The results indicated that both sales management control strategy and supervisor orientation had positive and statistically significant effects on salesperson behavior. Structured control practices, combined with supportive and development-oriented supervision, were associated with higher levels of reported salesperson behavior performance. The two

predictors jointly explained a meaningful portion of the variance in salesperson behavior performance ($R^2 \approx 0.27$), suggesting that managerial controls and supervisory style play a significant role in shaping frontline sales behaviors. In turn, salesperson behavior performance had a strong positive effect on sales organization effectiveness. Higher levels of behavior-based performance correlated with greater perceived organizational effectiveness, with salesperson behavior performance accounting for a substantial share of the variance in sales organization effectiveness ($R^2 \approx 0.26$). These findings support the hypothesized relationships (see Table 4): sales management control strategy enhances salesperson behavior performance (H1), supervisor orientation strengthens salesperson behavior performance (H2), and salesperson behavior performance contributes positively to sales organization effectiveness (H3). The results confirm the influence of managerial control systems and supervisory style on salesperson behavior and organizational effectiveness.

Table 4.
Structural model results.

| Path | Estimate | S.E. | C.R. | p | Supported |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|-------|--------|-----|-----------|
| Sales Management Control Strategy → Salesperson Behavior Performance | 0.438 | 0.046 | 9.206 | *** | Yes |
| Supervisor Orientation → Salesperson Behavior Performance | 0.327 | 0.046 | 6.998 | *** | Yes |
| Salesperson Behavior Performance → Sales Organization Effectiveness | 0.576 | 0.059 | 11.602 | *** | Yes |

Note: *** $p < 0.001$.

5. Discussion

This study advances sales management theory by clarifying how formal control systems and supervisor orientation jointly influence sales organization effectiveness through salesperson behavior performance. Rather than treating managerial practices as having a direct influence on overall performance, the findings highlight the central role of salesperson behavior as a behavioral mechanism linking managerial actions to effectiveness at the organizational level. The study thus moves beyond prior work examining control systems and supervisory styles in isolation and instead offers a more process-oriented explanation of how sales management practices shape organizational effectiveness. Sales management control strategy is shown to have a significant impact on salesperson behavior and performance. When control systems emphasize behavioral guidance, monitoring, and feedback, salespeople are more likely to enact selling behaviors that meet established expectations. This result is consistent with earlier work showing that control strategies work best when they guide frontline employees' day-to-day activities instead of relying solely on outcome measures. In this sense, sales management control operates as a mechanism that translates strategic priorities into actionable routines used in everyday selling activities. Supervisor orientation was also found to have a strong positive effect on salesperson behavior performance. Supportive and development-oriented supervisory practices appear to help salespeople interpret role expectations more clearly and apply managerial guidance more consistently in their selling efforts. This result is consistent with leadership and supervision research showing the importance of feedback, mentoring, and job clarity in improving frontline performance. Finally, salesperson behavior performance emerged as a key determinant of sales organization effectiveness. Specifically, salespeople who engage in customer-focused, effortful, and role-consistent behaviors contribute to sales organizational effectiveness. This means that organizational outcomes are influenced not by strategy or managerial systems alone but, rather, by how well those systems are put into practice at the frontline. By positioning salesperson behavior performance as a central link between managerial practices and organizational outcomes, the study provides empirical support for behavior-based explanations of sales effectiveness.

5.1. Theoretical Contributions

This study makes three key contributions to research on sales management. First, salesperson behavior performance is positioned as a central behavioral mechanism linking sales management control strategy and supervisor orientation to sales organization effectiveness. While prior research has examined control systems and supervisory styles separately, the present study combines these constructs to explain how managerial practices shape organizational outcomes through frontline behavior. Second, the findings help clarify sales management in a more process-oriented way by showing that formal control systems and managerial orientations work together instead of separately. This combined perspective extends existing theory by clarifying the manner in which formal frameworks and interpersonal managerial practices together influence salesperson behavior. Third, the study shows the applicability of established sales management approaches to fast-evolving organizational contexts. Evidence from Saudi Arabia suggests that core principles of sales management control and supervision remain effective under conditions of rapid socio-economic and institutional change.

5.2. Managerial Implications

The study has direct implications for sales managers and decision makers. First, the findings suggest that sales managers should pay close attention to how control systems and supervisory practices work together in day-to-day sales management. Management using isolated tools or policies is unlikely to be effective on its own. Instead, when monitoring and supervision are aligned, managers are better able to influence how salespeople behave and perform in their roles. Second, the results provide useful guidance for managers operating in Saudi Arabia and similar fast-growing markets. The evidence shows that commonly used sales management practices, such as behavior-based control and supportive supervision, continue to be effective even in different cultures. Managers do not need to abandon established approaches; rather, they should adjust them to local organizational norms and expectations. Finally, the findings highlight the importance of salesperson behavior and performance as an important connection between managerial actions and organizational outcomes. From a managerial perspective, this means that focusing only on final sales results may overlook an important part of the performance process.

6. Conclusions

This research explored how sales management control strategy and supervisor orientation relate to sales organization effectiveness through salesperson behavior performance. Based on survey evidence from 534 salespeople in Saudi Arabia and analysis using structural equation modeling, the results show that both formal control practices and supervisory approaches are closely associated with how salespeople behave in their roles, and these behaviors are strongly linked to organizational effectiveness. From a process perspective, the findings draw attention to how frontline actions translate managerial practices into tangible outcomes. Rather than operating only through formal structures, control systems and supervision appear to shape effectiveness by influencing what salespeople actually do in their daily work. The evidence, therefore, points to the importance of coordinating control practices with supportive and developmental supervision to encourage productive selling behaviors. Taken together, these results enrich the understanding of how sales management operates in fast-changing organizational settings and suggest several directions for continued inquiry into the behavioral paths through which managerial actions are reflected in performance.

7. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Despite its contributions, this study has some limitations that offer opportunities for additional research. While the model includes significant sales management practices, other factors like company culture, pay plans, and general market conditions may also affect how salespeople perform their jobs; thus, these factors should be considered in subsequent models. Future research can also examine the

interaction between conventional sales management and modern digital technologies, especially in business settings that change quickly, such as Saudi Arabia. Accordingly, the present findings offer research avenues not only for sales management research but also for interdisciplinary scholarship concerned with organizational practices and cultural change.

Transparency:

The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

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