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Empowerment of the Sales Forces in 2000s

Leslier Maureen Valenzuela Fernández and Francisco Javier Villegas Pinuer

Abstract

This chapter discusses the importance of customer value orientation to achieve good results from the sales team. The text analyzes how the management of several variables in human resources is fundamental towards good performance of the sales force. Their behavior and attitude is essential in helping companies develop long-term profitable relationships with customers. Hence, by assessing employee perceptions on incentive policies, and the training they have received, positive impacts on job satisfaction and customer orientation can be found. The career stage of the sales force has a relevant effect on management decisions as the life cycle influences the expectations of the sales force, the type of training, the incentive policies, and the level of commitment to the organization. In order to achieve good performance, it is essential to consider the dynamic and changing context where the omnichannel variable has a high presence in the reality of the sales area. For this reason, this chapter presents a model that can contribute to the empowerment of the sales force.

Keywords: sales force, empowerment, customer value orientation, sales force effectiveness and motivation

1. Introduction

Customer value-oriented management is a higher-level marketing approach in which the company places the customer at the center of the business, prioritizing its interaction with them to bring financial success and competitive advantages [1]. The philosophy bases itself on the premise that resources are scarce, and must therefore be carefully assigned to those who hold more value to the company, thus ensuring business success [2]. Hence, customer value-oriented management is a critical and relevant variable in the marketing field.

Customer-oriented firms are willing to prioritize customer interests and develop business strategies aimed at understanding them and satisfying their needs [3]. This corporate philosophy is important to embrace as a better understanding of the clients can produce positive changes in portfolio management [4–6] and sales results [7, 8].

This is achieved by careful management of the sales force. In respect to the strategy, the former should increase customer-orientation by working on maintaining close relationships with them with the aim of getting information to create long term competitive advantages. Customer-oriented sales personnel should avoid conducting actions that artificially alters the interests of clients. This includes actions either, for the purpose of improving the likelihood of making an immediate sale [9]

or of generating a new sale in the foreseeable future. Workers and managers are motivated to protect their client's interests as this will be compensated by positive customer reciprocity (word-of-mouth, loyalty), which generates new customers hence greater value for stakeholders [10, 11].

This chapter discusses customer-oriented management as a fundamental approach to achieve sales volume and profitability. Through the literature review, authors analyze how the management of the sales force—focused on specific human resource variables—is relevant to achieve good performance from the sales team. This motivates sellers, satisfying them to continue contributing to the organizational goals. The authors have also specifically analyzed relevant variables such as incentive policies, training, motivation, and perception of the sales force regarding involvement and job satisfaction.

It is important to note the authors have raised the discussion regarding changes in the paradigms of the sales processes, and models of empowerment for the sales force. Sales have changed substantially in the last 15 years, product of digitalization which has become an ever more important factor in the field. As consequence, dynamism in company business models has flourished, actively taking into consideration new trends; for instance, the thorough breakdown of geographical barriers in relation to sales [12].

Since consumers are constantly changing and incorporating the new trends, they affect the way and time of consumption of goods and/or services. This takes into account that (currently) there are new methods and systems to encourage consumption, possibilities that did not exist a few years ago; for example, companies incorporate mobile applications to "activate" the consumption of their customers.

Hence, the way in which companies conduct the sales process should also be updated to this dynamism, where the costs of change for consumers are increasingly lower considering the range of supply and the underlying competitiveness.

2. Factors influencing sales force's effectiveness

2.1 Customer value orientation

Customer value can be defined as a subjective notion of an individual customer's judgment on the value of a product or service [1]. People's perceptions depends on sellers or workers who provide the service. Thus, managers can influence the customer-value-perception through worker management and human resource practices. Schneider [13] recognizes how this can increase the extent to which sales people care about customer service experience. This aspect is key as it helps create the foundations for employees to deliver corresponding customer service.

By understanding *sales people* as human resources, and taking into account human resource management practices, business profitability can increase through value-delivered to the customers. Stanton et al. [14] affirms that employee perception regarding the relevancy of service to business success, sustained with implemented human resource management practices, effectively affects the degree of the sales people's customer-orientation level.

Zoltners et al. [15] suggests that the sellers' skills, abilities, values and motivation influences customer behavior, having an impact on organizational performance. This indicates that the characteristics and attitudes of a worker will have an effect in customers' perception regarding their orientation.

According to Qualitas—Hispania [16], a company needs the sales force to understand the business, customers, trends, and market implications to develop customer orientation. This helps build and maintain good relations with the clients,

differentiating themselves from the competition. Another advantage of this method is that the company will better optimize resources thus ensuring proper interaction with its customers. Qualitas also states that it is crucial for a company to possess a sales force that accompanies the client to advise and listen to their concerns, formulate solutions, and to find ways to make profits. Thus, it is necessary to work with the sales force to improve customer value orientation.

Schneider [13] proposes that human resource management practices facilitate a more positive experience for sales people within the company, increasing the prospects to deliver quality-service. Hence, the chapter suggests that human resource management practices affects customer-value-orientation in the company through the sales force.

2.2 Incentive policies

Milkovich and Newman [17] notes that employee remuneration plays a key role in company-employee relationships, being the source of good results by the sales force. One component of remunerations are incentives, which come in the following frequent forms: commissions, bonuses, benefits, and non-monetary incentives.

Special commissions and bonuses are important for workers, making them feel secure to their contributions to the organization by: placing them in a position to face financial burdens, setting their standard of living, achieving targets for employment and social status [18].

Many studies in the literature analyze the effects of incentive policies on management of sales [19, 20]. In regard to this, authors have discovered that among the affected elements the key ones are: low personnel rotation and increased sales productivity [21], positive changes in employee behavior [17], and positive changes in seller behavior—even during critical moments for companies—[22]. Other studies demonstrate that incentive policies must be a combination between monetary incentives and non-monetary incentives to impact intrinsic motivation [19, 23–25]. This has an effect on employee job satisfaction [26]. Hence, the *sales force's* perception regarding company incentive policies would be positively related to perception of employee job satisfaction.

Zoltners et al. [15] explains that incentive policies represent an investment greater than the sum aimed at advertising, affecting a company's financial benefits. For an incentive system to be effective it is crucial to be designed in accordance to the characteristics of an organization such as customer preference and buying behaviors and relevant changes in customer environment [27–30]. The effects of incentives on a company's profitability is obtained only when the remuneration policy is designed on a long term and consistent method [21, 23]. Thus, incentive policies become a key factor in management of sales since output—performed by the sales force—is linked to their performance, thus affecting their productivity.

Good incentives policies should also improve worker performance, motivating them to align their behavior to the established goals to improve their salaries. When a company marketing strategy is customer-value-orientated, the sales force must devote considerable resources to fully adopt their roles and satisfy customer needs [31]. Jones et al. (2003) suggests that training, market information, and incentives are important artifacts to the sales force in managing their roles regarding customer orientation. According to the aforementioned evidence of previous studies, it is possible to conclude the following: Seller perception of a company's incentive policy would be positively related to their perception of customer-value-orientation regarding employee sales. Marking it more important than the sales force job satisfaction perception.

2.3 Training

Training is one tool that companies have to successfully acquire knowledge and skills for their members to perform better at their jobs. This can be done informally by introducing those who join the company into the company's defined working behavior, or formally by keeping the employee in continuous training. In different cultural contexts such as the United States, Europe [32], Asia [33], and Africa [34], company policies become crucial in firms that have applied them when compared to others that have not.

Thus, sales force training programs must be focused on raising employee ability and capabilities while also motivating them to improve their service delivery skills. This allows a company to claim that it has been providing training to their sales force to improve their motivation and involvement in their jobs. The perception of the sales force regarding training is positively related to employee perception of job involvement.

Schlesinger and Heskett [35] note that it is ideal for a company to decide to develop a customer-oriented philosophy. To this matter companies should provide training, resources, and good reward systems to support and motivate the sales force. Firms must also provide tools to generate an effective oriented customer value sales force. Babin and Boles [36] explain that the supply of key resources, such as equipment and training, is crucial to facilitate good employee performance. Koka and Hein [37] conclude that training encourages employees and that through this their work performance can improve. Kushnir et al. [38]; Longenecker [39]; Martin [40]; Stone [41] conclude with similar arguments, highlighting that a good training level can motivate employees to increase productivity and performance in their job. Empirical evidence supports the claims as training level is an important factor that influences the degree of customer orientation.

To this end marketing and sales training serve in maximizing customer lifetime value (CLV), which is understood as the present value of all future benefits generated by customers [42]. Valenzuela et al. [43] and Valenzuela and Villegas [44] empirically corroborate that the behavior of a sales force oriented to CLV is essential in increasing company customer equity. Thus, managers must train and closely monitor CLV orientation of the sales force in their duties. This establishes profitable long-term relationships with the clients with the greatest business potential.

A number of promising approaches that promote CLV-oriented behaviors among the sales force exist in the literature. One obvious approach focuses on CLV-oriented attitudes when hiring new employees. This means that applicants are screened in terms of their CLV orientation, which is developed through training, coaching, and incentive programs [34, 39, 40]. It is thus implied that the sales force should be educated on the importance of CLV orientation, and its relevance to them and the firm.

By observing CLV-oriented leadership styles, the sales force can learn CLV-oriented attitudes from their supervisors [45]. Therefore, their perception regarding the company's provided training would be positively related to their perception regarding employee customer value orientation. This is more important to employee job involvement perception.

2.4 Job involvement and job satisfaction

Employees with high degrees of job involvement will have more attention to their tasks and will feel that their jobs are a central aspect in their lives [27, 46]. Empirical evidence shows that job satisfaction depends on involvement, which is the degree to which individuals psychologically identify themselves to their work

[25, 47, 48]. In this matter, job involvement has been found to be related to the efforts of any person to achieve his/her company business objectives and goals. These findings are based on several different studies regarding [49] absenteeism [23], degree of boredom, job satisfaction [4], and customer value orientation of an organization [50]. Hence, a sales force perception on employee job involvement would be positively related to perception of employee job satisfaction.

Rabinowitz and Hall's [51] model proposes a method where job involvement is part of employee disposition (employee's attitude toward their work), context (work environment), and interactions (employment effects). In addition, individuals who are more involved in their jobs tend to display higher levels of job skills (Abutayeh and Al-Qatawneh [52]) and manage better their work.

As authors believe that job involvement influences the attitudes of the employees, this is a critical factor for the quality of management sales and delivered-service to the customer. Therefore the sales force perceptions regarding a company's job involvement would be positively related to the perception of employee customer-value-orientation. This is more important than employee job involvement perception.

Stanton's et al. [14] theory and evidence in the literature give credit to the idea that the level of customer-value-orientation possessed by a sales team also depends on job satisfaction. This is understood as a function of the perceived relationship between what one wants in a job and what is offered, thus involving all the characteristics of the job and its environment where sellers can feel more/less satisfaction. Therefore, if the degree of satisfaction is higher, the commitment to the organization and to the customer will be higher [53]. Empirical evidence supports that the sales force perceptions on employee job satisfaction is positively related to perception of employee customer value orientation.

3. Motivating the sales force

The concept of motivation is used to explain what causes certain behaviors in people. There are different visions both in the conceptual and in the empirical fields. Robbins [54] defines motivation as a willingness to exert a high level of effort towards organizational goals, conditioned by the capacity of the effort to satisfy some individual need, thus introducing the concept of objectives in the organizational scope. Johnston and Marshall [55] define motivation as the desire and willingness of sales people to spend their efforts on performance and achievement of results in a visible manner. Fu [56] defines motivation as an individual choice, as sellers cannot be motivated unless they want it. Hence, motivation represents a critical driver of work performance, generated by the impulses of the individual and by the environment that determines if the behavior is akin to satisfy a need, objective, or goal.

According to the theory of expectations or VIE model [57], motivation is a cognitive representation that considers humans as a thinking and rational being focused on results or rewards. Thus, the actions of an individual are driven by the expected consequences according to their calculations and/or expectations.

The VIE model is composed of individual desires toward specific rewards (Valencia), performance of activities, perception of the received rewards (Instrumentality), and belief that certain behaviors will allow the acquirement of certain rewards (expectations). These will guide the efforts to complete the activity, performance, achievement of results, satisfaction, and valence [57].

Valence is understood as the attractiveness, preference, indifference, or rejection of a result for a particular person. Strictly defined, it is the recognition that

people have desires or needs. Valence can be positive, negative or indifferent depending on the benefit it provides, as well as the anticipated satisfaction of a result. A person who chooses or wishes to achieve a result is defined as positive valence (represented by +1); A person who refuses or refuses to reach a result is defined as negative valence (represented by −1); a the result that does not represent any interest for the person in question (or if he/she is indifferent to it) is represented with the value "0" [57].

Effort is the visible action of individuals who focus on a particular end. The goal is performance, and effort is an internal reaction that can be observed in the form of behaviors ranging from tasks, duties, and responsibilities (performance) [58]. The level of effort depends on the goal and on which individual wants to invest so much to achieve that particular goal or reward.

Performance is the behavior of an individual that is given in terms of their ability and qualities to perform a job, as well as the willingness to do so with an objective in mind [59]. Both effort and performance are uniquely different, but similar in the nature that both pursue an end. For instance, when an employee is tested for a position, it is understood that they will attempt to pass the test. In respect to this, passing the exam is the goal/objective, while the qualification obtained will be equivalent to the performance of the pursued goal.

According to the theory of expectations, sellers are subject to the influences of many personal and environmental factors. This theory explains that motivation is a process of choices made between different behaviors that are under the control of people. Employees will behave in a certain way if they want to receive a raise or other reward. The theory of expectation dates from several decades, finding itself present in the empirical representation of motivation. Hence, the human component in sales will continue to have a preponderant role; however, it will be increasingly moderated by new technologies, and by the evolution of the decision-making processes of the consumers.

An important factor highlighted by researchers and managers when considering the career of sellers is the life cycle that said careers have in the field. For instance, aging in the sales force means gaining more experience, accumulating more knowledge, and sharpening sales skills. Furthermore, as a person's family grows, financial obligations likely change. Consequently, younger and less experienced sellers may have different estimates of expectations and reward preferences than older and more experienced sellers. Sales managers and training professionals need to pay particular attention to the unique needs of each sales force team to find the best motivational strategies. **Table 1** identifies and conceptualizes the four stages of the sales force career: (1) exploration, (2) establishment, (3) maintenance and (4) disconnection [55].

The start of a seller's career is the exploration stage. At this stage they have less experience, possess little skill development, and are often not sure if selling is the right occupation for them. Thus, sellers in the exploration stage tend to have low expectations and estimates of instrumentality.

Sellers in the establishment stage are usually preoccupied with monetary and non-monetary incentives. These are relevant motivational factors that generate trust in them to be able to progress in the development of their careers.

Sellers in the maintenance stage (which generally happens at the age of 40) seek for different motivations such as caring of safeguarding their position and finding respect from their experience in the organization.

The disconnection stage is understood as the moment when sellers are approaching retirement and have lower levels of concerns (approaching 60 years of age). They no longer show an attachment to incentives, but can continue to be a contribution to the organization until they fully withdraw from their work. This process is

Stages of the seller's career development	How to manage it
Exploration	Focus on product knowledge Communicate company policies Deliver and level the team's sales skills Deliver feedback in a constant and timely manner
Establishment	Focus on financial incentives (bonuses, rewards) Determine the most relevant non-monetary incentives (psychological rewards)
Maintenance	Motivate through respect Consider their needs so that their motivation allows them to develop their work efficiently and effectively
Disconnection	Consider them in the process of forming the sales teams delivering their experience Deliver your knowledge to sales force in training

Source: Johnston and Marshall [55].

Table 1.
Stages of the sales force career and incentives related to their growth.

different for each provider, and companies must be aware of the signs of behavior, perceptions and needs of the suppliers.

Depending on the stage that a seller is in their career, a relevant strategy is required to determine the efficient way to motivate them. An example of this is that for new sales force members, feedback from their superiors and clients can be more valuable as they are in search of confidence and security in their career development. For sellers in the establishment stage, incentives of the extrinsic type are more valuable such as bonuses and commissions.

Hence, knowing how managers and trainers influence motivation of their sales force is crucial to improving productivity. In general, sellers are constantly being evaluated by their managers and their clients.

While the evaluation from clients is based on more subjective aspects such as the quality of attention, kindness, and cordiality, evaluation from headquarters is often merely objective and measured the number of clients, amounts of sales, and time taken in the sales process.

Thus, managers must ask themselves: Are the incentives and goals enough to motivate the sales force? Will this complex context be the real cause of the demotivation of the sales force? These questions must take into consideration that there is probably a high level of ignorance on the part of the managers or chief executives regarding what happens in the sales process, with little to no direct feedback coming from the sales force themselves.

For instance, Fu [56] raises the theory of motivation as an action-reward analysis. Motivation in the sales force is much more likely to come from the constant wave of feedbacks they receive from very disconnected people. This produces a highly stressful environment due to the characteristics of their work, the pressure that customers sometimes exert, and being forced to solve problems without being responsible or possessing the resources to attend them properly [60].

Thus, training professionals requires adjustment in communication and strategies according to the different career stages of a sales force member. This best optimizes the effectiveness of their training intervention and attainment of compliance for the vendors. For sellers in the exploration stage, focus should be on product knowledge, company policies, and basic sales skills. Providing feedback in a timely manner is also critical for these rookie vendors to gain much needed experience.

Sellers in the established stage should focus on financial incentives such as bonuses and psychological rewards in the form of recognition associated with performance and personal improvements. In retrospect, it is fundamental to show respect and recognition to sellers in the maintenance and disengagement stages. This implies that managers should take advantage of remembering that they are active workers who are valuable employees with a wealth of experience to share. Following this, turnover of the sales force can happen in an organic way by incorporating that experience into the sales training programs.

Although maintenance vendors respond positively to recognition, it is not the same for disconnection vendors. Sellers in the disconnection stage may be motivated by the opportunity to share their experience and *war stories* with other sales force members. Hence, one option to motivate them is to involve them in the same company sales training programs.

3.1 The sales force in the omnichannel context

At present, the consumer intervenes in different stages of the sales process, according to their degree of involvement with the product and/or service. For some consumers, this process begins with the search for information through different information channels (digital, in person, reference groups, membership, among others). Brynjolfsson et al. [12] states that the differences perceived by consumers between online distribution channels and the face-to-face ones have been steadily disappearing.

In the case of consumers, for some this process begins in the evaluation of alternatives (since they have enough information and are not limited by their set of options at the beginning of this stage), while for others it begins at the purchase of an already selected product in some distribution channel (face-to-face, online or online inside the store).

Based on the aforementioned, companies should consider these changes in consumers in the formation of their sales teams and specifically, in the role of the sellers. In this context, the concept of omnichannel is becoming increasingly important in the business world; Cummins et al. [61] defines omnichannel in the field of sales as the synergistic integration of the points of contact of consumers and sellers. This interaction gives the opportunity to generate a unified brand experience for consumers, independent of the usual sales channels or platforms. Thus, sales no longer have a linear structure as people can be informed by many means, and can evaluate and buy in (or from) different locations. Furthermore, people participate in different instances of the sales process based on their degree of involvement in the purchase.

An important element within the omnichannel concept is the case of online sales, as it incorporates a new feature within the decision of purchase by the consumer such as reputation. Thompson and Haynes [62] explain that reputation becomes important as consumers now have much more information at their disposal than before to determine and/or establish a level of reliability regarding the place of purchase, and distribution channel among others. This comparative capability for the consumer in the decision-making process is based on the massification of online comparison sites that introduce a new scenario that greatly facilitates the process of evaluating alternatives for the consumer; where people can find comparison sites segmented by industry, types of services, products, among others. This becomes a relevant factor that affects the willingness to pay due to transparent information being provided in a simple and easy way to understand.

There is another important aspect that relates to reduction of information asymmetry and professionalization of purchase by the consumers. The concept

of functionality of a product and/or service means that buyers are unconsciously concerned regarding the performance of delivery, and how they can verify the truth in a given value proposition.

For example, when a consumer is going to buy a drill for domestic use, the sellers can meet an occasional consumer who uses it sporadically to solve problems in the low frequency household, where the evaluation process of alternatives is preferable given by recommendations. However, there are worries regarding functionality such as duration, and convenience, among others. At the same time, the sellers can find another type of consumer that uses the product more intensively and with a more "professional" look even for domestic use, which considers other relevant variables such as performance, safety, more technical functionalities, and product reinforcement. Although one can see these consumers differently, they have a point in common; they both have a concept of "metric" behind their choices, either from a simple or a more technical aspect. Regardless, the consumers are becoming more professional in their choices.

Nonetheless, the appearance and consolidation of a greater number of distribution channels generate a greater possibility of points of contact between companies and consumers. This implies that companies must increase the interconnection and compatibility between their strategies, as well as considering the different life cycles that their consumers may have [61].

So … What about the sellers in the omnichannel context in which the sale is located?

3.2 Changing paradigms in selling

Within the context of the omnichannel, researchers find themselves faced with several key questions, such as: Does the need for a vendor diminish in the context where digital tools and distribution channels have proliferated enormously, helping more and more the sales process for the consumer? When a customer goes to a shop for a product, many times they will visually confirm how the product is whilst also already having decided to buy online. Thus, what elements does omnichanneling require to be successful and what role does the sales force play in that success?

In addition, omnichannel also affects the relationship between sales, consumers, and profitability. So what happens after a sale is made? Who takes charge of the customer? How is customer retention affected? What aspects of returns and profitability are modified? Is the client's life value altered? And although these questions do not have a single answer, one thing is clear, the seller's role must evolve.

Sellers have different points of interaction to relate to a consumer, therefore, it is important to understand what role the seller must fulfill in the sales process [63]. The consumer considers that the seller's intervention in this stage is, in many occasions, a specific source of referential information on the decision making process. This means that the authors should not think that the seller ceases to have relevance, even if managers are wondering how to transform the role in this stage into the sales process. This means that managers must understand the role as a "consultant" rather than a sales force executive, with a greater level of specialization than usual. The seller must be able to deliver solutions and recommendations to the consumer rather than just information. Nevertheless, the seller's role can be influenced by contextual variables and characteristics.

Figure 1 shows this relationship; the type of market (customers or companies) establish the complexity of the process and the knowledge level of the buyer. The characteristics of the product and/or service is relevant. A key element is the stage of the sales process (it is different for a seller to interact with an already informed customer who is looking to evaluate their decisions and alternatives,
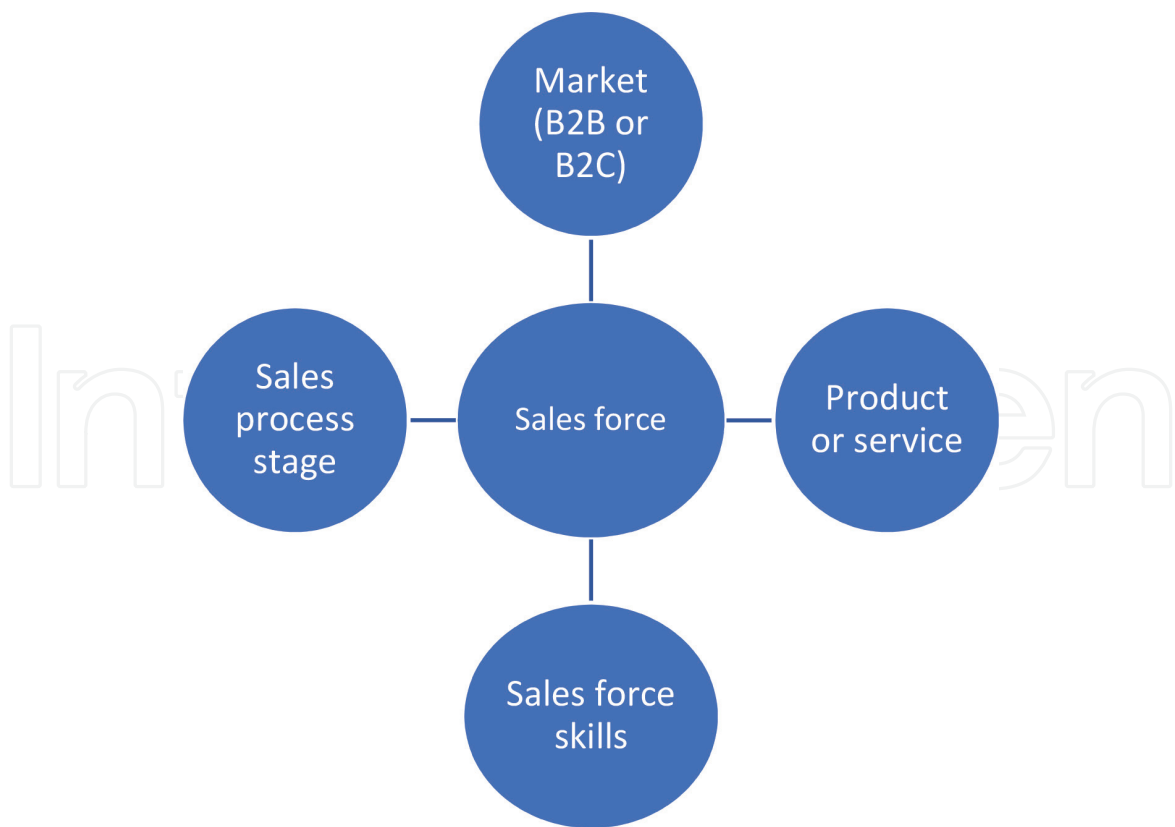
Figure 1.
Variables and characteristics that affect the seller's role. Source: Self-elaboration based on [61, 63].

than a customer that has not researched information on what they want or need). Furthermore, the skills of the seller (personality, experience) are important in developing and exploiting their potential. **Figure 1** conceptualizes the importance of these relationships where these variables affect the development of the sales force [61, 63].

4. A model of empowerment for the sales force

When exposing the questions about the role of the sales force, the big question becomes, what tools can the authors give to the sellers to be a contribution in the companies in the dynamic and changing context in which the market is located?

A first step is the motivation of the sales force, for this, the authors must consider three important variables: direction, intensity and persistence.

For sellers to be motivated, they must have a clear direction, that is, have guidelines that allow them to focus on his/her work. In addition, there must be intensity, as the effort it puts into the relationship of its work, as well as persistence, is measured through the perseverance it places in the development of its work [64]. All the aforementioned points means that the seller must use their efforts in the appropriate tasks; a better seller is not one who works more, but one that has a clear direction to perform their work. It is important how the authors work each of these points with the sellers.

It is important to note that all sellers are different, so their perceptions regarding the three mentioned elements are moderated by different aspects such as their personality, background, experiences, and knowledge, among others. As any type of perception, these could be changed through training and incentives. Therefore, an important factor in the stage of the sales force career, like all work careers, is a development cycle with different stages. When a sales force starts his/her career,
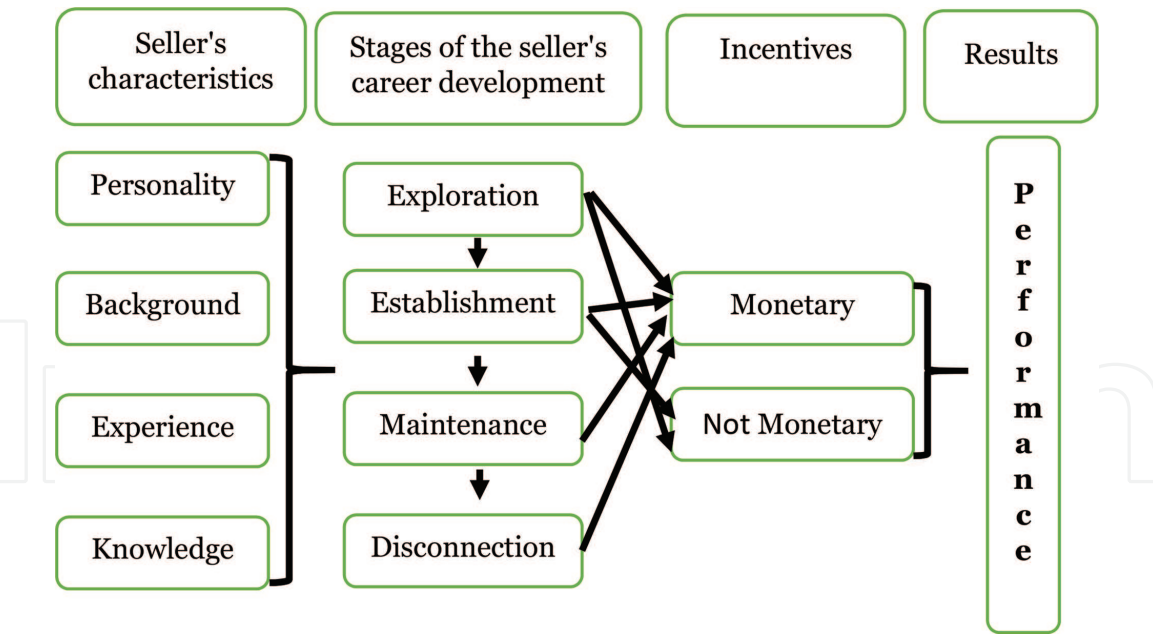
Figure 2.
Scheme of empowerment of the sales force. Source: Self-elaboration based in [56, 64].

they gain knowledge and accumulate a series of experiences that improves his/her skills as a sales force member from the professional side. At the personal level, his/her needs grow as his/her family and financial stage is also becoming more demanding. Therefore, expectations and the type of compensation that they expect will also be different, so companies should be aware of these differences in the type of needs that sellers are presenting to find the best strategies and tactics of motivation in each particular case that helps the development and personal growth as well as the intensity, and persistence of the seller.

In that context, the authors propose a scheme of empowerment for the sales force based on the seller's background, their development in time [56], and their relationship with the stages of the seller's career development [64]. **Figure 2** shows the importance of considering the seller's characteristics in their professional development and the connection with the incentives. This generates a combination of performance that can be sustainable over time [56, 64].

5. Conclusions

In general, the sales force receive continuous pressure from managers based on sales goals. This complex environment grounded on results and not good practices generates confusion, perverse incentives, and work stress in many sales teams. Additionally, the establishment of individual and group goals based on figures fosters a competitive and often uncomfortable environment even for the client. From the point of view of management, unrealistic goals generate frustration in sales teams. The changes that the client has experienced in their decision-making process, as well as the way they uses the sales channels, generate a complex maelstrom of management which is reflected in the disconnection of executives with the market and ignorance of the possible seasonality of sales. From the sellers' point of view, the sales force mostly faces consultative and complex buyers.

Therefore, it becomes crucial for the sales force to become aware that customer value orientation (CVO) is essential to achieve efficient performance and long-term profitable customer relationships. Likewise, a leadership style on the part of senior management focused on customer value generates a positive perception of the sales

force team on the company, which produces greater satisfaction, involvement, and motivation. This would allow the creation of positive experiences that generate sustainable competitive advantages.

With regard to incentive policies, they play an important role in the relationship between sales force and senior management being an important factor to generate good results. Determining the best incentive structure (monetary, non-monetary) will depend, among other factors, on the career cycle of the sales force, the environment, and personal expectations. In that sense, employee empowerment has an important role as alignment in this level of organizations can lead to better performance [56].

Training is a valuable management tool for the growth of the sales force not only in technical aspects of their work, but also for the increase of their motivation and involvement with the development of their work. Managers must remember that the training process must take into account the profile of the vendor, the life cycle of the career, the type of market, the profile of the client portfolio, and the cultural context, among others. In addition, training generates a meeting space for the sales team that helps contribute to business growth and the organizational climate.

A consequence of the good management of the aforementioned variables is the degree of involvement and job satisfaction that the sales force has in a company. In that sense, how the employees can be empowered through the correct skills, abilities, and the support of the organization is key for their commitment and achieving corporate goals. This makes it easier for the sales force to have greater commitment to organizational objectives and greater customer orientation. That is, if the managers are able to achieve that when the company achieves its objectives, the sales force will feel these results as their own. This generates a greater sense of belonging and cohesion in the team, for which, each time the company obtains a good performance, this will also be for the sales force, thus generating a source of sustainable competitive advantage organically over time.

Taking into consideration the variables described and their effects on the development and performance of the sales force, managers must not forget the dynamism of the competitive and technological context in which find ourselves. In effect, consumers have countless alternatives when it comes to finding information, evaluating alternatives, and purchasing decisions (regardless of the degree of involvement that the purchase generates), which is why it is preponderant that the sales force have a high understanding of these phenomena, and have the skills to use information and communication technologies according to the field in which they operate. This nonetheless being relevant to the management of customer feedback and customer relations proactively and efficiently, with the aim at reducing uncertainty and anxiety with which the sales force coexists in their day to day.

The stage of a sales force member's career is a relevant point when it comes to generating a better interaction between a company and its customers. The authors must consider that sellers have different objectives according to their stage of development, and that these stages are influence by personal development (family and social) that generates different needs and expectations in the sellers. Therefore, it is necessary that the management and administration of these human needs be incorporated into the policies of incentives, guidelines, and guidelines of the sales force in the organizational business field. This comes with the purpose of generating motivation, involvement, and job satisfaction, all relevant variables to achieve sustainability and sustainable performance in companies.

In this context, training professionals has the opportunity of contributing significantly to sales motivation, a fact generally ignored by executives and even coaches. The experience and frequent interaction that training professionals can establish with sales force allows them to be important motivators. However, coaches

need to recognize that they do not have line authority over sellers. Therefore, coaches should strive to build relationships with sales managers and work together to motivate the sales force.

In relation to the aforementioned, it is important to take into consideration Burnout Syndrome, described as "the exhaustion of energy experienced by workers when they feel overwhelmed by the problems of others" [65]. This depletion of energy is the hidden demotivation and the open secret of the sales field since the work has to be done regardless of existing conditions.

Thus, leading and motivating a sales force is one of the biggest challenges facing the sales managers in present times. This not only considers the economic motivation, but also takes into account empathy, teamwork, segmentation according to the life cycle of the career, needs and expectations, training, incentive policies, and knowledge of the work that needs to developed. Today, the empowerment of sales forces has an important place in satisfying the consumers' needs and wants in a best way.

Author details

Leslier Maureen Valenzuela Fernández[1] and Francisco Javier Villegas Pinuer[2*]

1 Department of Business Administration, School of Economics and Business, University of Chile, Santiago, Chile

2 Faculty of Economy and Enterprise, Autonomous University of Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain

*Address all correspondence to: fvillegasp@fen.uchile.cl

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