

SALESPERSON AND SALES MANAGER PERCEPTIONS OF SALESPERSON JOB CHARACTERISTICS AND JOB OUTCOMES: A PERCEPTUAL CONGRUENCE APPROACH

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Inconsistencies in perceptions between salespeople and sales managers have the potential for adverse effects on salesperson job-related outcomes. This study investigates the extent to which the direction and absolute size of these differences influence salesperson job-related outcomes. The results indicate salesperson-sales manager perceptions regarding job characteristics differ and that these differences are related to salesperson role ambiguity, job satisfaction, qualitative and quantitative performance and commitment. Managerial and research implications are advanced.

INTRODUCTION

There can be little disagreement that the most important individual affecting a salesperson's job related outcomes, besides the salesperson and his/her customers, is the sales manager. Sales managers are largely responsible for the training a salesperson receives (particularly on-the-job training) (Gordon 1986; Wotruba and Simpson 1992), motivating the salesperson (Wotruba and Simpson 1992; Churchill et al. 2000), supervising (Churchill et al. 2000) and dismissing salespeople who are not performing up to company standards (Murphy 1988). While these responsibilities of a sales manager's job are not unique in supervisor-subordinate relationships, sales managers frequently must fulfill their job with the added burden of geographic separation from the salesperson and limited time for direct interaction.

As a result, the salesperson's job involves a context that requires flexibility and adaptability, and at the same time is fraught with the potential for misunderstanding between salespersons and managers (Weitz, Sujan and Sujan 1986). What is unclear is the extent to which perceptual congruence between salespeople and their sales managers with respect to the job is relevant in determining salesperson job-related performance. If sales management has designed or perceived the design of jobs for salespeople to be different from the perceptions of the job as viewed by salespeople, are there consequences regarding various job-related outcomes (job satisfaction, job commitment, ambiguity and job performance)?

Research in the sales area has established a connection between how salespeople view their jobs and these various outcome measures. What has not been explored, and what is the subject of this paper, is how the difference between the sales manager's and salesperson's perception of the sales job may impact these same outcomes.

The next sections explore background literature related to job design and perceptual congruence, the constructs investigated, a model and research propositions, the methodology employed, and the results and a discussion of implications.

JOB DESIGN AND PERCEPTUAL CONGRUENCE

It is important to recognize that perceptions of job characteristics do not necessarily reflect reality. Yet, they can effect how employees respond to that reality. This may be particularly true in the context of organization boundary spanners (e.g., salespeople) where the boundary spanner performance may be impacted by a variety of externalities outside of the boundary spanner's/salesperson's ability or effort (Staw 1986).

Numerous studies/frameworks have been conducted/advanced that address the potential for incongruity between management

level job expectations and those of the salesperson. These contradictions have primarily been investigated in the context of role ambiguity and role conflict (e.g., Walker, Churchill and Ford 1975; Singh 1993; Singh, Verbeke and Rhoads 1996). While there appears to be sufficient evidence to support the contention that role ambiguity and conflict are inherent and not necessarily undesirable characteristics of many sales jobs (e.g., Churchill, Ford, Hartley and Walker 1985; Singh 1993), it is not clear how well sales managers understand salespersons' perceptions of their job and whether this congruence, or lack thereof, is at all meaningful in determining salesperson job-related outcomes.

Research in the management and sales literature regarding manager-employee attitudinal congruence has generally found that attitude similarity between managers and employees is linked positively to job-related outcomes (Senger 1971; Wexley et al. 1980; Apasu 1987; Weeks, Chonko and Kahle 1988). What remains unclear is the extent to which a common understanding between sales managers and salespeople toward the sales job influences salesperson job-related outcomes. In short, while the job attitude literature in general might suggest some relationship between manager and employee attitude congruence and job outcomes (see above), no study to date has looked specifically at how the perceptual congruence between the salesperson and manager with regard to the sales job influences job-related outcomes.

KEY CONSTRUCTS

Four job-related characteristics and four job outcomes serve as the independent and dependent variables respectively for this study. The four job characteristics investigated in this study consist of feedback, autonomy, task significance and skill variety. These are four of the five core characteristics that have been previously proposed by Hackman and Oldham (1975) to significantly influence job-related outcomes such as work performance, job satisfaction, commitment, and role ambiguity. Task identity was the only job characteristic not investigated, since the JDS task identity measures focus specifically on task closure, a factor difficult to identify in a sales context (Hackman and Oldham 1975). A brief discussion of each of the job related characteristics and each of the four outcome variables investigated in this study and their relationship to congruence follows.

OPERATIONALIZATIONS

Job Characteristics

Feedback

Supervisor feedback has been defined as "the degree to which the employee receives clear information about his or her performance" (Hackman and Oldham 1975, p. 162). In a sales context, Teas and Horrell (1981, p. 51) define it similarly: "Feedback [is] the degree to which salespeople receive information that indicates the quality of their performance."

Bassett (1994) argues that feedback is the most effective device for improving performance. Empirical research has shown that supervisor feedback is an important predictor of sales force job satisfaction (Churchill, Ford, and Walker 1976; Teas, Wacker, and Hughes 1979; Teas and Horrell 1981; Becherer, Morgan, and Richard 1982), is positively related to commitment (Porter and Steers 1973; Moch, Bartunek, and Brass 1979; Hunt, Chonko, and Wood 1985; Agarwal and Ramaswami 1993; Johlke et al. 2000), and is negatively related to role ambiguity (Teas 1983; Agarwal and Ramaswami 1993).

Autonomy

Hackman and Oldham (1975, p. 162) describe autonomy as "the degree to which the job provides substantial freedom, independence, and discretion to the employee in scheduling the work and in determining the procedures to be used in carrying it out." Autonomy is particularly important in a sales position, as selling jobs are often less structured and allow for more autonomy than most other occupations (Churchill, Ford, and Walker 1976). Several empirical studies have found autonomy to be significantly related to commitment (Rabinowitz, Hall, and Goodale 1977; Hunt, Chonko, and Wood 1985; Losocco 1989; Agarwal and Ramaswami 1993), performance (Hackman and Oldham 1975), and job satisfaction (Katz and Kahn 1978; Becherer, Morgan, and Richard 1982; Kulik, Oldham, and Langer 1988). In addition to these direct relationships, autonomy has been found to indirectly affect both satisfaction and performance through commitment (Steers 1977; Hunt, Chonko, and Wood 1985; Mathieu and Zajac 1990).

Task Significance

Task significance is "the degree to which the job has a substantial impact on the lives or work of other people—whether in the immediate organization or in the external environment" (Hackman and Oldham 1975, p. 161). Empirical research has found task significance to be positively related to job satisfaction (Katz and Kahn 1978; Becherer, Morgan, and Richard 1982; Glission and Durick 1988; Kulik, Oldham, and Langer 1988) and organizational commitment (Glission and Durick 1988), and negatively related to role ambiguity (Glission and Durick 1988).

Skill Variety

Skill variety is described as "the degree to which a job requires a variety of different activities in carrying out the work, which involve the use of a number of different skills and talents of the employee" (Hackman and Oldham 1975, p. 161). Churchill et al. (1985) argue that the skills possessed by the salesperson should have a positive influence on that salesperson's performance on a variety of tasks; that is, the more skill a salesperson has, the better the performance. Empirical studies suggest that skill variety is one of the best predictors of job satisfaction (Becherer, Morgan, and Richard 1982; Glission and Durick 1988) and that job commitment is greater among those who possess a variety of job skills (Hunt, Chonko, and

Wood 1985; Glission and Durick 1988). Conversely, Schlenker and Gutek (1987) found that *role loss* (that is, a reduction in skill variety) has a significant negative impact on job satisfaction.

Items used to capture job characteristics (feedback, autonomy, task significance, and skill variety) were derived from scales developed by House and Dressler (1974), Teas (1983), Teas and Horrell (1981) and Hackman and Oldham (1975). All items used a Likert-type scale with 1=strongly agree to 7=strongly disagree and 0=does not apply. If more than fifty percent of the respondents indicated items were not applicable to their sales job, the items were omitted from the analysis. While this criterion resulted in a reduction of the items from the original scales, the remaining items appeared to exhibit the substantive components of each construct. Both salesperson(s) and the sales manager responded to the same items, with each expressing their independent views of the nature of the salesperson's job.

Outcome Variables

The job outcomes investigated in this study included sales performance (both qualitative/behavioral and quantitative/outcome), job satisfaction, commitment and role ambiguity.

Salesperson Performance

The search for factors which affect salesperson performance has been extensive. Yet, no single determinant has been found to explain a large proportion of the variance in sales performance (Churchill et al. 1985). Churchill et al. (1985) performed a meta-analysis investigating the determinants of salesperson performance. They found over one hundred studies using a broad range of factors thought to impact salesperson performance. These factors were categorized, according to a taxonomy developed by Churchill et al. (1985), into: (1) aptitude, (2) skill level, (3) motivation, (4) role perceptions, (5) personal factors, and (6) organizational and environmental variables. The meta-analysis found role perceptions to exhibit the strongest correlations with performance. The next most important category was acquisition of skill levels. Both of these categories can be strongly affected by the supervisory role of the sales manager.

As Mitchell (1968) found, high congruency of role perceptions (between superiors and subordinates) was correlated with high performance. This is also consistent with Katz and Kahn's (1978) role episode model which suggests that role perceptions are developed with the salesperson through the communication and actions of the sales manager.

In the present context, performance measures were chosen such that they were appropriate across the sales positions surveyed. Performance was divided into two categories. Perceived qualitative performance (four items) was represented as the salesperson's perception of his/her performance level with respect to accomplishing sales

behaviors, such as communicating presentations, working out solutions, listening to customer concerns and exhibiting empathy (Behrman and Perreault 1982). Quantitative performance measures (two items) included both perceived ability to increase market share and perceived ability to improve sales volume. The items were obtained from scales developed by Behrman and Perreault (1982) and Bagozzi (1978).

Salesperson Satisfaction

Salesperson satisfaction is one of the most widely studied constructs in sales force research (Brown and Peterson 1993). The interest in sales force satisfaction has been suggested to reflect the increasingly humanistic orientation of modern management (Bagozzi 1978). In their meta-analysis of the antecedents and consequences of job satisfaction, Brown and Peterson (1993) note that salesperson role perceptions have typically been found to be an important determinant of both job performance and satisfaction. Further, job satisfaction has been postulated to lead to lower turnover in the sales force, a significant cost for the firm (Futrell and Parasuraman 1984).

Satisfaction in this study was depicted as the salesperson's statement of satisfaction with various aspects of his/her job. These aspects include company, job, compensation, customers, peers, and supervisor and were measured using a modified version of the salesperson job satisfaction instrument developed by Churchill, Ford, and Walker (1974) in conjunction with items associated with Porter and Lawler (1968) and Smith, Kendall, and Hulin's (1969) Job Diagnostic Inventory. A total of twelve (12) satisfaction items were used.

Salesperson Commitment

In general commitment is a measure of the salesperson/employee intention to stay with his/her present employer (Hunt, Chonko, and Wood 1985). Commitment is expected to lead to lower turnover and, thus, to higher organizational performance (Mowday, Steers, and Porter 1979).

Commitment was operationalized as the salesperson's desire to achieve organizational goals, willingness to expend effort, degree of personal involvement and importance of the job. The seven (7) measurement items were based on Mowday, Steers and Porter's (1979) Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ). A reliability alpha of .90 was previously reported for the full scale for salespeople (Michaels et al. 1988).

Role Ambiguity

Perceived role ambiguity occurs when salespeople do not think they have the necessary information to perform the job adequately (Churchill et al. 2000). Churchill et al. (2000) comment that salespeople experiencing role ambiguity feel uncertain about how to do certain tasks, what the sales

manager expects in a particular situation, or how their performance will be evaluated. In their study, Ford, Walker, and Churchill (1975) found that salespeople are particularly uncertain about what their sales managers expect. Other research suggests less role ambiguity is experienced when salespeople are closely supervised and have some influence over standards used to control and evaluate their performance (Walker, Churchill, and Ford 1975; Kohli 1985). Closely supervised salespeople have been found to be more aware of the expectations and demands of their supervisors; similarly, salespeople who have an input in determining the standards by which they are evaluated tend to exhibit lower levels of role ambiguity (Churchill et al. 2000).

Role ambiguity was depicted as the nonambiguous understanding the salespeople have for their job requirements (e.g., job tasks, priorities, allocation of time). Six (6) items for the measurement of role ambiguity were the original items developed by Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman (1970) and previous studies have reported Cronbach's alpha reliability values of .82 (Teas 1983) and .85 (Michaels et al. 1988).

Perceptual Congruence

Supervisor-subordinate perceptual congruence and job-related attributes have been found to be positively related to subordinates' job satisfaction (Taves, Crowin, and Haas 1963; Greene 1972; Wexley, Greenwalt and Couch 1980; Hatfield and Huseman 1982). In addition, Bernardin (1979) found that supervisor-subordinate discrepancy in the perception of the salesperson's role (role ambiguity) was significantly related to work satisfaction.

For the purpose of this study, perceptual congruence was operationalized as a difference score (salesperson's score minus his/her sales manager's score). Differences were obtained by having salespeople and their sales manager respond to the same set of questions regarding the nature of the salesperson's job and job outcomes. The resulting difference score subsequently reflects both the magnitude and the direction of the perceptual congruence. Large perceptual congruence is derived if the difference in either direction is smaller than the median cutoff. Small perceptual congruence is demonstrated by absolute differences larger than the median cutoff. Negative congruence is derived if the sales manager's score is larger than the salesperson's score, and positive congruence is derived if the sales manager's score is smaller than the salesperson's score. [Note: If the congruence was 0, the dyad was not included in the valence (direction) analysis.]

It should be noted that the inferences drawn from positive or negative congruence may be either "good" or "bad" based on the nature of the construct or its indicators. For example, negative congruence for satisfaction may occur when the salesperson is moderately satisfied, while the sales manager perceives the sales job to be more satisfying for his/her sales people. Positive congruence occurs when the sales manager underestimates the salesperson's perception (i.e., reports a

lower level of performance than the salesperson reports). Explanation of what may contribute to either positive or negative congruence is not within the scope of this study.

MODEL AND RESEARCH PROPOSITIONS

The foregoing literature review suggests the following model and research propositions. (see Figure 1)

FIGURE 1
PERCEIVED JOB CHARACTERISTICS AND
JOB OUTCOMES IN THE SELLING TASK

The model posits that a positive perception on the part of the salesperson with regard to his/her job will impact positively on job outcomes. Further, to the extent that the sales manager and salesperson are congruent in their perceptions of the job, this, too, will have a positive influence. Hence, the following research propositions are suggested.

RESEARCH PROPOSITIONS

The foregoing review suggests the following propositions:

- Proposition 1: The more the salesperson perceives the job characteristics to be present in his/her job the more positive will be the salesperson's outcome measures.
- Proposition 2: Salespeople and their sales managers will differ in their perceptions of the sales task.
- Proposition 3: Salesperson-sales manager dyads with high levels versus low levels of perceptual congruence (i.e., absolute difference between salesperson's and sales manager's perception) relative to job characteristics will lead to significantly more favorable levels of salesperson job outcome measures.
- Proposition 4: Positive perceptual congruence (i.e., the salesperson perceives a greater congruence than the sales manager) as compared to negative perceptual congruence associated with job characteristics will yield significantly more favorable levels of salesperson job outcome measures.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

Data to test the propositions advanced in this study were collected employing a mail survey of sales representatives and their managers. In order to ascertain the stability of the construct relationships across various types of sales categories, three firms representing a service, consumer product, and industrial product sales organization respectively, were selected to participate in this research. In addition to these companies, data were collected from a fourth group representing sales managers from a variety of industries (service, consumer and industrial) who were attending a training seminar.

Sample members were limited to salespeople who had been with their present organization a minimum of one year but not more than five years. The rationale for this sample restriction was to capture those salespeople who had made relatively recent adjustments to the job of their present employer versus career salespeople with the same organization. This criterion was imposed consistent with the socialization literature's discussion regarding the influence of managers in communicating job-related roles to subordinates (Dubinsky et al. 1986; Zahrlly and Tosi 1989; Chatman 1991; Jackson, Tax, and Barnes 1994; Waung 1995). The responsibility of sales managers as opposed to other supervisors in role communication may be particularly significant given that the salesperson role may require greater innovation and creativity, and the job itself may involve considerable uncertainty, resulting in high potential for role ambiguity and dissatisfaction (e.g., Churchill, Ford and Walker 1974).

Sales managers were asked to respond to a single survey describing what they believe to be the characteristics of the job design for their salespeople. As job design is believed to be a means by which management seeks to influence employee motivation to perform, as well as to provide job satisfaction, these perceptions should be stable, that is they should not vary across individual salespeople. In fact, should managements' perceptions of the salesperson's job vary across salespeople, serious questions may arise as to the effectiveness of job design and salespeople socialization into these jobs (Dubinsky et al. 1986). Further, management's perception of the extent to which certain job characteristics are or are not present within a given job design should, in part, impact upon other supervisory and motivational interventions that are used to influence employee behavior (Staw 1986).

Survey Procedures

Sales force participants were selected from a regional census of a financial service firm and a national census of the consumer products and industrial products firms. The mixed group was comprised of sales personnel attending a training seminar at a university in the northeast region of the United States. The questionnaires were distributed to sales managers in each of these sample settings. These sales managers were

asked to distribute up to twenty (20) questionnaires to salespeople in their organizations who met the experience criterion. Both sales managers and salespeople were asked to complete questionnaires addressing the constructs advanced in the study. Of the 212 sales manager surveys distributed 68 were returned for a response rate of 32%. Of the 473 surveys distributed to salespeople 330 were returned for a response rate of 70%. Matched pairs of sales manager and salesperson surveys yielded 48 usable sales manager responses and 274 usable salesperson responses. In total, the sample sources contributed the following proportion to the matched pair (sales manager-salespeople) sample:

Financial services firm:	40% sales managers/24% salespeople
Consumer products firm:	7% sales managers/12% salespeople
Industrial product firm:	23.5% sales managers /39% salespeople
Mixed industry participants:	29.5% sales managers /25% salespeople.

Scale Reliability

All items were pretested with sales managers and field sales representatives for readability, clarity, relevancy, and face validity. Individual items were subsequently modified as needed to reflect the appropriate sales context. Each of the factors had reliabilities above .70 except for task significance and skill variety (both of which had lower reliabilities than in previously published work deploying these scales). Instead of using single item scales for these measures, multi-item scales were retained consistent with the theoretically relevant elements that contributed to the original construct. Reliabilities were as follows: job characteristic constructs - feedback $\alpha = .82$, autonomy $\alpha = .72$, task significance $\alpha = .45$, and skill variety $\alpha = .68$ // job outcomes measures - role ambiguity $\alpha = .83$, job satisfaction $\alpha = .79$, job commitment $\alpha = .85$, qualitative job performance (e.g., listening and presentation skills) $\alpha = .87$, and quantitative job performance (e.g., market share and dollar sales volume) $\alpha = .88$.

Scale Validity

In the present study, the measurement instrument used selected items from previously validated scales. One indication of scale validity would be that the observed relationships between the various constructs being measured would be consistent with those found in the literature. Table 1 presents the salesperson correlation coefficients for the job related outcome constructs and mean scores/standard deviations on the job outcome variables.

Feedback was found to have a significant positive relationship with job satisfaction and commitment ($p < .01$) and a significant negative relationship with role ambiguity. Autonomy was found to have a positive relationship with job satisfaction, commitment and qualitative job performance measures ($p < .01$)

and a negative relationship with role ambiguity. Task significance and skill variety both have a positive relationship with job satisfaction, commitment, qualitative and quantitative job performance ($p < .01$) and negative relationship with role ambiguity.

Positive relationships are also found to exist among the job characteristics and among the outcome measures. Each of the job characteristics was significantly related to each other. Among the job outcome constructs, role ambiguity has a negative relationship with job satisfaction, commitment, and qualitative and quantitative job performance. All relationships were found to be significant. These results are consistent with the extant literature and provide further support for construct validity, and, in turn, support Proposition 1.

RESULTS

Salesperson-Sales Manager Overall Differences

The analytical strategy employed in this study was to conduct a series of comparisons investigating the impact of salesperson-sales manager perceptions of job characteristics and the congruency of these perceptions on each of the job-related outcomes investigated. As the focus of the study was on the impact of the congruency of the salesperson-sales manager perceptions across each of the job characteristics on job outcomes, the most appropriate analytical approach was to investigate the proposed relationships individually; hence, paired comparison (t tests) were performed.

Salesperson and sales manager responses were contrasted for each of the job characteristics (see Table 2). Significant ($p < .01$) differences were found to exist for each of the JCs with sales managers consistently over estimating the job characteristics as compared to the salespersons' perceptions. (Please note that only salesperson perceptions of job-related outcomes were captured in the study.)

On the basis of these results, there appears to be considerable support for Proposition 2. Recently initiated salespeople and their sales managers differ in their perceptions of the salespersons' job characteristics. The directions of these differences are identified in Table 2. (It should be noted that congruence valences were consistent across sales forces, which means that while the absolute size of the congruence may vary slightly, the direction of the difference in sales manager and salesperson perceptions does not. In other words, sales managers across the diverse industries represented in this study were consistent in their over- or under-estimation of their salespersons' perceptions.)

Relationships of the JC Perceptual Congruence and Job-Related Outcomes

An important contribution of this study is to determine effects of the magnitude and valence of the perceptual congruence of job characteristics on job outcomes. To meet this objective, several comparisons were made between the job characteristics

congruence (feedback, autonomy, task significance and skill variety) on each job outcome variable (role ambiguity, job satisfaction, job commitment, and qualitative and quantitative job performance). Each analysis was run separately on magnitude (large vs. small congruence) and on valence (salesperson < sales manager negative congruence vs. salesperson > sales manager positive congruence). The results of these analyses are shown in Tables 3 and 4.

Both the valence and magnitude of perceptual congruence on the job characteristics significantly influenced the related job outcome measures. There were thirteen (out of 20) significant congruence differences when magnitude was used to characterize congruence. Two more were marginally significant at .053 (feedback and role ambiguity) and .052 (autonomy and quantitative performance). There were eighteen (out of 20) significant congruence differences when valence (direction) was the criterion for measuring congruence. These results were consistent with the extant literature. The magnitude of congruence appears to suggest that greater difference between the sales manager and salesperson on feedback and skill variety yield lower levels of salesperson job satisfaction and commitment. Role ambiguity is elevated under conditions where sales manager and salespeople have less as opposed to greater perceptual congruence regarding skill variety; however, in the case of feedback, the influence of the magnitude of perceptual congruence only approaches significance (significant at .053). Another set of results suggests that larger congruence on autonomy or task significance produces higher levels of salesperson perceptions on a number of job-related outcomes (i.e., job satisfaction, job commitment, qualitative job performance and role ambiguity).

The results are similar when assessing the valence of the congruence measures. In all but two cases, the outcome measures (job satisfaction, job commitment, qualitative and quantitative job performance, and role ambiguity) are reported by the salespeople to be higher when there is positive congruence as opposed to negative congruence on each of the JCs (feedback, autonomy, task significance, and skill variety). This finding indicates that job outcome measures are likely to be higher if the direction of the congruence is in favor of the salesperson reporting higher scores than the sales manager on the job characteristics (i.e., the salesperson reports higher levels of task significance than the sales manager). The only exceptions were the relationships of the valences for feedback and autonomy on quantitative job performance.

These results provide support for the majority of the relationships advanced in Proposition 3 and Proposition 4. The valence and the magnitude of the congruence between the salesperson and sales manager perceptions of the salesperson's job characteristics lead to significantly different salesperson perceptions of outcome measures.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study provide statistical support for the proposition that salesperson-sales manager perceptual congruence is a valuable approach to understanding the relationship between salesperson job characteristics and job outcomes. Further, the less the congruence between the salesperson's and sales manager's perception of job characteristics, the less positive the salesperson's perception of job-related outcomes. Conversely, the greater the congruence, the more positive the salesperson's perception of job-related outcomes. Finally, the direction of the congruence also exerts an influence, with positive congruence (salesperson's perceptions on job characteristics more positive than the sales manager) associated with higher qualitative and quantitative job performance and job commitment, and lower role ambiguity. In turn, negative congruence (sales manager perceptions on job characteristics more positive than their salespeople) yielded the opposite effects on the job outcome variates.

The results also provide support for the proposition that there is a relationship between perceptual differences among job characteristics within the salesperson-sales manager dyad and the important salesperson outcome measures of job satisfaction, performance (both qualitative and quantitative), job commitment, and role ambiguity. Additionally, in cases where the sales manager reported higher scores than the salesperson for the JC (negative congruence), the outcome measures were lower.

Managerial Implications

This study demonstrates that differences in the sales manager and salesperson's understanding of the sales job appear to have a significant impact upon salesperson job-related outcomes. While addressing these differences would appear to provide a logical basis for formulating strategies and tactics to ensure consistent expectations and experiences on the part of the salesperson, first these differences must be recognized! Simply, if sales managers have a different perception of the sales job than their salespeople, but do not know it, they are in no position to take corrective action. One obvious implication, then, is that management needs to understand better how their salespeople view their roles and their jobs.

Managers must be mindful, too, of the relative magnitude as well as the valence of the differences between their salesperson's and their understanding of job characteristics. Overestimation of the presence of certain job characteristics by management relative to that of their salespeople can lead to ineffective job design, inappropriate application of motivational principles and ineffective supervision, particularly when the magnitude of difference is great.

TABLE 1
CORRELATIONS BETWEEN SALESPERSON JOB CHARACTERISTICS AND
SALESPERSON JOB-RELATED OUTCOMES

Construct	JRC				OUTCOMES				
	FEEDBK	AUTO	TASKSIG	SKVAR	RA	SAT	COM	QUAL PERF	QUANT PERF
Feedback	1.000								
Autonomy	.297 ^a	1.000							
Task Significance	.297 ^a	.703 ^a	1.000						
Skill Variety	.335 ^a	.582 ^a	.578 ^a	1.000					
Role Ambiguity	-.275 ^a	-.447 ^a	-.455 ^a	-.428 ^a	1.000				
Satisfaction	.563 ^a	.472 ^a	.538 ^a	.544 ^a	-.491 ^a	1.000			
Commitment	.332 ^a	.533 ^a	.579 ^a	.762 ^a	-.406 ^a	.547 ^a	1.000		
Qualitative Performance	.119	.299 ^a	.328 ^a	.242 ^a	-.505 ^a	.208 ^a	.262 ^a	1.000	
Quantitative Performance	.046	.103	.220 ^a	.181 ^a	-.256 ^a	.135 ^b	.182 ^a	.383 ^a	1.000

a: $p < .01$ b: $p < .05$

Additionally, findings of this study are relevant in light of current environmental trends. For instance, middle management is being trimmed, resulting in broader spans of control and increases in the size of territories served. To accomplish many of these changes, firms have increased salesperson autonomy (i.e., running a territory as an individual business). These changes in management roles and salesperson job responsibilities inevitably contribute to misperceptions of job characteristics throughout the sales organization. This potential reinforces the importance of carefully monitoring salesperson perception of the job.

Of immediate relevance to management is the finding that the perceptions of sales managers in this study not only were not congruent with those of their salesforce, but that they consistently overestimated their perceptions of the job relative to their salespeople. The prevalence of these misperceptions may suggest the need for more effective mechanisms for sales managers to keep in touch with salesperson perceptions of their job. This, of course, is likely to be increasingly more challenging as managers rely more extensively on electronic communication. The traditional means of field supervision will need to be displaced or augmented with techniques that permit management to handle larger numbers of salespeople yet keep in touch with the reality of the salesperson's job.

TABLE 2
CONTRASTS BETWEEN SALESPERSONS AND SALES MANAGERS ON JOB-CHARACTERISTICS
AND SALESPERSON RESPONSE TO JOB OUTCOME CONSTRUCTS

Factor	Salesperson Mean (n)	Salesperson SD	Sales Manager Mean (n)	Sales Managers SD	T Value	d.f.	2-tail probability
Job Related Constructs							
Feedback	4.589 (258)	1.674	5.430* (258)	0.974	- 7.19	257	0.000
Autonomy	6.092 (273)	1.019	6.482 (273)	0.594	- 5.63	272	0.000
Task Significance	5.907 (273)	1.052	6.476 (273)	0.597	- 8.44	272	0.000
Skill Variety	5.477 (271)	1.077	5.677 (274)	0.935	- 2.47	270	0.014
Salesperson response to job Outcome Measures							
Role Ambiguity	2.610 (243)	1.109					
Satisfaction	4.853 (243)	0.908					
Commitment	6.196 (271)	0.787					
Qualitative Performance	5.802 (271)	0.874					
Quantitative Performance	5.031 (259)	1.431					

*Shaded means indicate sales manager or salesperson exhibits statistically significant ($p < .05$) higher scores on Job Characteristics.

The increased interest in relationship marketing suggests additional managerial implications. For instance, over- or under-estimation by sales managers of the sales job environment regarding the nature of competition or changes in buyer preferences may have a negative effect on quota and territory assignments, as well as the effectiveness of performance evaluations and motivational programs. Thus, relationship marketing should be extended to cover important internal partnership/relationships (Morgan and Hunt 1994) such as those suggested in this study.

Research Implications

Further investigation of the implications of perceptual congruence/incongruence of sales managers-salesperson perceptions of job characteristics is certainly warranted. The evidence in this study suggest that the size and direction of incongruence plays an important role in influencing salesperson perceptions of job outcomes. These misperceptions, in turn, undermine the effectiveness of management in directing salesperson efforts on behalf of the

TABLE 3
MAGNITUDE OF SALES MANAGER - SALESPERSON PERCEPTUAL CONGRUENCE ON JOB CHARACTERISTICS
ON SALESPERSON INFLUENCE JOB OUTCOME VARIABLES

Job Char./Outcome	Job Characteristic Congruence (Small Gap *) - Lower Tercile		Job Characteristic Congruence (Large Gap*) - Upper Tercile		T Value	d.f.	2-tail probability
	Mean (n)	SD	Mean (n)	SD			
Feedbk/Sat	5.170 (72)	.811	4.460 (59)	1.006	4.60	131	.000
COM	6.325 (81)	.664	6.023 (80)	.959	2.32	140	.022
Qual Perf	5.828 (80)	.789	5.858 (79)	.985	-.21	149	.836
QuanPerf	5.071 (78)	1.395	4.968 (77)	1.523	.44	153	.661
RA	2.479 (80)	1.054	2.840 (79)	1.267	-1.95	157	.053
Auto/Sat	5.290 (68)	.842	4.586 (115)	.856	5.41	181	.000
COM	6.588 (78)	.486	5.884 (124)	.852	7.47	198	.000
Qual Perf	6.099 (78)	.783	5.590 (125)	.888	4.16	201	.000
Quan Perf	5.231 (78)	1.526	4.825 (120)	1.361	1.95	196	.052
RA	2.141 (77)	.886	2.988 (123)	1.169	-5.80	191	.000
Tasksig/Sat	5.2134 (57)	.797	4.396 (72)	.890	5.42	127	.000
COM	6.615 (66)	.568	5.746 (77)	.871	7.16	132	.000
Qual Perf	6.064 (66)	.827	5.584 (77)	.778	3.57	141	.000
Quan Perf	5.087 (63)	1.610	4.787 (75)	1.349	1.19	136	.235
RA	2.042 (64)	.866	3.162 (76)	1.151	-6.56	136	.000
Skvar/Sat	5.018 (132)	.900	4.6074 (90)	.878	3.37	220	.001
COM	6.390 (146)	.598	5.8565 (96)	.921	4.95	147	.000
Qual Perf	5.855 (145)	.868	5.714 (97)	.934	1.20	240	.230
Quan Perf	5.043 (141)	1.445	5.011 (93)	1.433	.17	232	.869
RA	2.406 (144)	.985	2.892 (96)	1.177	-3.34	178	.001

Note: FEEDBK = feedback from supervisor; AUTO = autonomy; TASKSIG = task significance; SKVAR = skill variety; RA = role ambiguity; SAT = satisfaction; COM = commitment; QUAL PERF = behavioral performance; QUAN PERF = outcome performance.

*Large gap = upper tercile of salesperson less sales manager perceptions

*Small gap = Lower tercile of salesperson less sales manager perceptions

Shaded rows indicate statistically significant (p<.05) difference on outcome variables for large versus small JC congruence

firm (Dubinsky et al.). Therefore, the authors make several suggestions for further research. First, this study examined the impact of perceptual congruence between salespeople and their managers with regard to the sales job. In other words, it looked at how managers and salespeople view the sales task. It did not look at how those managers thought their salespeople viewed the task. This is a subtle but potentially intriguing

difference. Second, this study did not look at the situation where sales/sales management perceptions are congruent and negative, and what the impact was on job outcomes. Third, it would be interesting to study how implementing remedial actions effect congruence of outcomes. Fourth, the length of time salespeople have been with the company could be examined to see if perceptual congruency improves.

TABLE 4
VALENCE OF SALES MANAGER - SALESPERSON PERCEPTUAL CONGRUENCE ON JOB CHARACTERISTICS EFFECT ON SALESPERSON JOB OUTCOME VARIABLES

Outcome Scores	Negative Congruence (SP < SM)		Positive Congruence (SP > SM)		T Value	d.f.	Prob.
	Mean (n)	SD	Mean (n)	SD			
Feedback Congruence							
Satisfaction	4.657 (143)	0.884	5.172 (67)	0.800	-4.05	208	.000
Commitment	6.059 (153)	0.856	6.397 (78)	0.629	-3.41	200	.001
QualPerf	5.652 (153)	0.905	6.064 (78)	0.836	-3.36	229	.001
QuantPerf	5.037 (150)	1.411	5.074 (74)	1.574	-0.18	222	.857
RA	2.833 (153)	1.129	2.340 (74)	1.052	-3.15	225	.002
Autonomy Congruence							
Satisfaction	4.548 (116)	0.828	4.961 (62)	0.902	-3.07	176	.002
Commitment	5.795 (125)	0.848	6.473 (67)	0.579	-6.54	179	.000
QualPerf	5.562 (125)	0.763	5.884 (67)	1.036	-2.24	105	.027
QuantPerf	4.888 (121)	1.295	5.094 (64)	1.554	-0.90	110	.368
RA	3.061 (123)	1.121	2.424 (66)	0.966	-3.90	187	.000
Task Sig Congruence							
Satisfaction	4.567 (135)	0.877	5.208 (54)	0.829	-4.61	187	.000
Commitment	5.875 (149)	0.819	6.554 (56)	0.485	-7.27	165	.000
QualPerf	5.590 (148)	0.783	6.048 (57)	1.008	-3.09	131	.003
QuantPerf	4.826 (144)	1.350	5.536 (56)	1.324	-3.35	198	.001
RA	2.999 (149)	1.139	2.312 (54)	0.792	-4.82	135	.000
SkillVar Congruence							
Satisfaction	4.603 (119)	0.908	5.068 (95)	0.829	-3.86	212	.000
Commitment	5.848 (129)	0.864	6.548 (104)	0.519	-7.65	215	.000
QualPerf	5.618 (129)	0.820	6.060 (104)	0.867	-3.99	231	.000
QuantPerf	4.680 (128)	1.419	5.475 (101)	1.293	-4.38	227	.000
RA	3.008 (130)	1.212	2.294 (101)	0.878	5.19	228	.000

Note: Task Sig = task significance; Skill Var = skill variety; QualPerf = behavioral performance; and QuantPerf = outcome performance; RA = role ambiguity

Shaded rows indicate statistically significant ($p < .05$) difference in the means outcome variables for positive versus negative valence perceptual congruence.

Admittedly, the cut off point used in this study was an arbitrary number. Finally, as mentioned earlier a more effective measure of task identity for salespeople that permits cross industry comparisons could prove to be beneficial should marketers expand the application the job characteristic research in the sales context.

Certain limitations are present in this study which need to be addressed in future research. While a cross section of firms was selected for this study, there is no assurance that they are representative of the firms in their industries. Further, future research might focus on a different set of supervisory and motivational variables and their relationships with sales

manager - salespeople perceptual congruence on job characteristics or, more broadly job design-related issues.

In summary, this examination of salesperson's and sales manager's perceptions of selected job characteristics and outcomes revealed various dyadic perceptual incongruities. Inconsistencies in perceptions within the salesperson-sales manager dyad have the potential to adversely effect salesperson job-related outcomes. A better understanding of these inconsistencies may prove useful as sales managers seek to supervise sales forces that are increasingly more diverse, autonomous and less directly accessed.

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