ALIGNMENT OF FRONT-LINE PERSONNEL: A PRELIMINARY ATTEMPT AT SCALE DEVELOPMENT

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Organizations need to be adaptable and innovative, and also adept at exploiting their assets and capabilities to be competitive in the current business environment. One such capability is the alignment of personnel from various business units to create value for their customers. Our paper presents a first attempt at developing a metric to determine to what extent Front-line (sales, support, and service) personnel are aligned. A scale is developed and presented, consisting of 4 dimensions of alignment.

Introduction

The following announcement which appeared in the *Strategic Account Management Association 43rd Annual Conference 2007* brochure illustrates the importance that the business community is placing on the topic of "alignment" in the workplace.

> "The execution of strategy in today's larger, more complicated organizations requires alignment across a myriad of functional, geographical and product-focused silos. For those managing strategic customers, attempts to mobilize resources and people are often met by a wide range of obstacles including apathy, contending priorities and even active resistance. This track is dedicated to the actions that firms and individuals can take to remove or minimize the obstacles that matrixed organizations give rise to. Sessions address various forms of internal alignment (cross-business, cross-function) and external alignment (cross-channel, customer-supplier). Approaches range from the science of alignment, via processes and measurement, to the art of alignment, via relationship management and communication."

Birkinshaw and Gibson (2004) observed successful firms are not just adaptable and innovative, but they are also adept at exploiting their assets and capabilities. An organization's personnel a valuable asset and, when appropriately used, can yield sustained competitive advantage (c.f., Huselid 1995). Organizations are focusing more on increasing use of salesperson teamwork and formal sales teams. Such teams are comprised of "specialists" with diverse abilities who must align, coordinate contacts with customers, and develop relationships with others in the sales organization to achieve success (Ingram et al. 2005).

According to Collins and Porras (1994), truly outstanding companies employ business pieces that fit together and have synergy resulting from linkages among them. Fuchs, et al. (2000), corroborates this notion, reporting that successful firms align direction, product-market focus, resources and capabilities, and organization culture. According to Connors and Smith (1999), alignment refers to a shared understanding of the results an organization should achieve and the strategies and tactics needed to achieve results. Alignment is based on the notion that there is some preferred order of business

elements. The basic alignment idea is the expectation that professionals who represent various business units work together to create value for customers (Hansotia 2004).

Evidence suggests that sales organizations often view marketing as being out of touch with reality (c.f., Rouzies et al. 2005). Sales professionals view marketing strategies as being disconnected from and not relevant to market conditions (c.f., Donath 2004). Poor sales and marketing relationships are characterized by non-cooperation, conflict, and mutual negative stereotyping (c.f., Homburg, et al. 2008). Much of the research examines an internal sales and marketing relationship and is of great concern. A focus of this research is on building stronger connections between the two functions, employing concepts such as integration, collaboration, and alignment. Research has uncovered several potential problems related to the seemingly poor relationship between sales and marketing: 1) physical separation (Lorge 1999), 3) different goals (Strahle et al. 1996), 3) differences in thought worlds (Homburg and Jensen 2007), 4) interfunctional conflict (Dawes and Massey 2006), 5) cultural differences (Kotler et al 2006), and lack of alignment (Guenzi and Troilo 2006).

For strategic marketing efforts to succeed, marketing and sales must function seamlessly. This paper asserts that internal alignment involves more than sales and marketing. Other functions must be examined to keep pace with business alignment practices (e.g. Holland et al. 2000). Consider the following quotes from various executives with whom the researchers conversed:

- "The biggest challenge is getting **everyone** on the same page and determining desired outcomes and agreeing on them". **Wilsonart Sales Executive**

- "Communication, shared prioritization, different incentives, and different motivations are challenges in creating **cross-functional teams** because the client teams in aligned and territory models report to different organizations. One rep may meet his quota but the client executive may not meet his quota, thus resulting in a low performance team. Different functions have different priorities, so it is important to make sure our priorities are aligned. Team leadership is also necessary to make sure the team comes together and functions as a whole**". **IBM Sales Executive**

- "**Cross-functional teams** are crucial to our business, especially when evaluating customer opportunities. When you can get lab, marketing, and sales working together, you can close opportunities a lot faster when these functions are aligned". **3M Sales Executive**

- "Our team functions extremely well as it relates to **cross-functional** training. The key is the principle SEEK FIRST TO UNDERSTAND, THEN TO BE UNDERSTOOD. Once we all understand each role we play, the team functions at a high level". **Tom James Sales Executive**

Cross-functional is the key term in the above quotes. Cross-functional teams usually consist

of people from diverse backgrounds with diverse talents, different responsibilities, but common goals. The sales and marketing interface appears in need of improvement, based on existing literature. Does the same sub-optimality of relationships hold for sales, service, and support personnel? This paper seeks to build on the knowledge generated from studies of the sales and marketing interface by examining Front-line personnel alignment. Front-line personnel (sales, support - telephone customer support, pre-sales support, technical specialists, and service - everyone who provides service or implements projects, including service managers), being close to the customer, are in position to identify moving customer targets.

The current research is driven by the recognition of the need for both internal and external alignment as called for by Cox, et al. (2004). There is considerable attention being given to the idea that selling effectiveness requires the participation of many individuals (c.f., Weitz and Bradford 1999). In their work, Weitz and Bradford (1999) noted that increased use of partnering has shifted the unit of analysis from salesperson to sales team. Accordingly, the purpose of this paper is to present a first attempt at developing a metric to determine to what extent Front-line personnel are aligned.

ALIGNMENT

The focus is on internal alignment, which is defined as a state in which Front-line personnel in an organization demonstrate similar perceptions and behaviors regarding working jointly or apart to achieve common customer objectives and the overall corporate

strategy and organizational goals that are focused on business success. As noted in the opening quote, complete assessment of alignment requires an examination of external and internal aspects of the organization. One challenge to alignment research is articulated by Cox, et al. (2004), "….understanding what should be done externally does not resolve the problem of internal alignment within organizations" (p. 369). When external misalignment was observed, the failure to realign was mostly related to internal opposition.

An underlying logic for the need for alignment of sales, support, and service personnel is the *handoff*. The handoff by Front-line personnel at different points in the customer decision process is illustrative of one of the many internal connections that might be missed by sales organizations lacking in alignment (Acclivus Research Report 2005). This handoff is a dynamic process in which salespeople continue to be involved in managing a customer relationship, but other personnel are instrumental in maintaining/ growing the relationship. When salespeople handoff customer responsibilities to support or service personnel, there is little continuity in the exchange when there is little internal dialogue between the sales organization functions (Acclivus Research Report 2005). Kotler et al. (2006) note the negative implications that occur when an organization's marketing personnel do an inadequate job in the handoff to sales professionals during the customer decision process. Firms are acknowledging the importance of the handoff in a variety of ways. Roadway (2006) includes the following in their job description for

salespeople…"Execute the handoff to/from the customer Care Center including service, sales, and support, and driver leadership" (p. 1). Jumpstart APAC Sales Consultants (2006) include the subject of handoffs in their training for sales in Asia–Pacific businesses. Metal Sales and Service Inc. (2006) incorporates information on the handoff in their engineering solutions information provided to customers.

Problems associated with poor handoff are brought to further life in different venues. For example, in a good business-to-customer organization, marketing and sales manage handoffs with marketing generating the leads and the sales organization making calls and closing sales. But such alignment is not often the case with business-to-business firms as marketing is more challenging with large customers and many firms do not have strong marketing organizations (Ramsey et al 2006).

Delery and Doty (1995) asserted that alignment is important for effective performance. As noted by Griffith and Gibson (2001), alignment as a descriptor of some desirable organizational trait has no clear origin. Most articles discussing the subject seem to act on an implicit assumption that alignment is a well understood concept (Griffith 1997). Over two decades ago, Schein (1980) alluded to the problem of alignment among employees (internal alignment) observing that a key problem with groups is the challenge of making them effective in achieving both organizational and individual goals. He submitted a second problem, establishing conditions under which group members enhance each others' productivity.

Even five decades ago, the importance of strategic alignment was asserted to be grounded in conceptual and empirical work whose basic proposition is that performance is a result of a fit among various organizational factors such as culture, strategy, and technology (c.f., Lawrence and Lorsch 1967). Fit among organizational factors involves a search for aligning the organization with its environment and organizing resources to support alignment (Miles and Snow 1984).

Workman et al (2003) observed that there is a lack of research that focuses on internal alignment - emphasizing cross-functional aspects of salespeople with others on the sales team. He calls for use of selling teams as a management response strategy, with subsequent research opportunities concerning selling team role definition, team dynamics, and performance measurement. Kahn et al (2004) note that working together naturally yields some conflict, while Ingram (2004) asserts that, despite such conflicts, sales organizations must work together internally to meet customer needs and expectations. Ingram (2004) further asserts the need for more internal joint participation between sales, marketing, and other functional units. He posits that research investigating orchestration activities among these units can be encouraged and rewarded.

As an organization's people face the task of ensuring alignment (e.g. Cobb et al. 1998), the human capital aspects associated with business problems must be an aligned and effectively implemented system (Becker et al. 1997). In this context, the relevance of investigating Front-line personnel alignment is emphasized

by Piercy (1997) who noted that people are the greatest constraint to marketing strategy implementation. The integration of Front-line personnel functions would seem to be consistent with the assertions of Gratton (1994) and Piercy (1997) regarding alignment of workforce capabilities with customer focused strategies.

To examine alignment in sales organizations, a lengthy process ensued which included individual discussions with Front-line personnel, conducting focus groups and the administration of a survey. Supplier roles identified by Rossomme (2003) include sales, support, service, technical resources, and customer/service supply chain. Crosby (1988) suggested that sales/service personnel can enhance buyer-seller relations by bringing value added in such ways as personal assurance and benefit reinforcement. Service personnel also provide value via ease of ordering and delivery, while support personnel add to value through conduct of surveys of product attributes, training, and coaching.

METHOD

A comprehensive scale development process, consistent with previous research, was used to develop an alignment scale for Front-line professionals, (c.f., Churchill 1979; Devellis 2003). The scale developmental procedures followed in this research will be described in three phases. The first phase concerns the agreement on a conceptualization and definition of alignment that would serve as a guide for development of an alignment metric. The second phase consists of efforts focused on generating scale items for the alignment metric. The third phase focuses on scale purification.

Conceptualization of Alignment

A thorough search was conducted to identify literature related to the present study's focus, alignment among Front-line personnel. No empirical literature specific to Front-line personnel alignment was found. The investigation of alignment began with eight meetings (four in person and four phone conference calls) with two executives from an international consulting organization. These two executives had worked with alignment issues in client organizations and were knowledgeable about the subject of alignment and its impact on organizations in a variety of industries including medical, manufacturing, and technology. In their research with many selling firms, they recognized a recurring pattern – salespeople were critical of support and service while support and service asserted that salespeople hindered their efforts by not being on the same page. Thus, the domain of the construct internal alignment for Front-line professionals was the focal point. The definition of alignment cited at the beginning of this paper served as a guide for these discussions. The theoretical foundation for these discussions was rooted in sales organizations in which a team effort is required by the people who touch their customers to achieve the goals of increasing profitable revenue, improving customer and internal relationships, and enhancing business results. Further, theoretical discussions were fueled by need to bridge gaps and build stronger linkages between sales, support, and services functions. Available sales and marketing interface literature provided additional guidance for discussion, providing introduction of concepts like interfunctional coordination efforts, enhancing collaboration, establishing trust relationships, reducing

inter-group conflict, and bridging competences (c.f., Massey and Dawes 2007; LeMeuneir-FitzHugh and Piercy 2007). Early discussions took the following focus, "What activities do sellers undertake to provide value to customers and, thereby, receive value in return?"

As supported by the work of Kashani (2004), alignment works best when sellers educate themselves about the customer's business and implement specific projects and activities designed to improve the customer's business. For example, Tetra Pak faced some trends (e. g. declining milk consumption) that would affect their packaging for their liquid food business customers. In response, they internally aligned their key account management program and then aligned with customers in areas such as market opportunity assessment, customer access to Tetra Pak's database of product and packaging innovation, development of new product launch plans, and performance monitoring of customer's products. Tetra Pak has, as a result of alignment, reduced customer defections, witnessed steady sales growth, and growth in key customers and profitability (Kashani 2004).

Based on these meetings, six domain dimensions were identified for internal alignment of sales, support and service:

1. ***Internal Planning*** -- refers to a broad range of activities such as preparing for a joint presentation, planning a project, or establishing an annual budget.

2. ***Customer Interaction*s** -- refers to circumstances where consistency in working with customers is critical, such as handling current demands or resolving customer problems.

3. ***Insight Sharing*** -- refers to the formal and informal communication focused on customer goals, expectations, policies, histories, and the like.

4. ***Salesperson Trust and Respect*** -- focuses on the frequency with which salespeople engage in trust, respect, rapport, and value activities toward support and services people.

5. ***Service and Support Trust and Respect*** -- focuses on the frequency with which service and support personnel engage in trust, respect, rapport, and value activities toward salespeople.

6. ***Perceived Relationships*** -- perceptions of the relationship quality among Front-line personnel

Item Generation

A qualitative approach was used to generate the initial item pool. The focus of this part of the research is consistent with the call of Gale (1994) who suggested that asking questions of each group within an organization to ascertain how well the organization is aligned constitutes a key step in alignment research. How potential alignment partners viewed alignment was the focus of the next phase of scale development, briefly described below.

- **Interviews with six sales, support and service personnel**. The six alignment dimensions shown above and in Figure 1 served to guide discussions with six Front-line personnel (2 each from sales, service, and support). The interviews with these Front-line professionals occurred at a trade association meeting and provided support for the six alignment domain items presented earlier. In addition, a list of behaviorally-based items was generated

for each of these six alignment dimensions. Items were included until redundancy was observed as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985). The items originated from Front-line professional's observations and discussions concerning challenges encountered by the 6 Front-line

professionals in the performance of their roles.

- **Interviews with 21 sales, support and service personnel**. The initial list of items purported to capture the essence of the six alignment dimensions were also
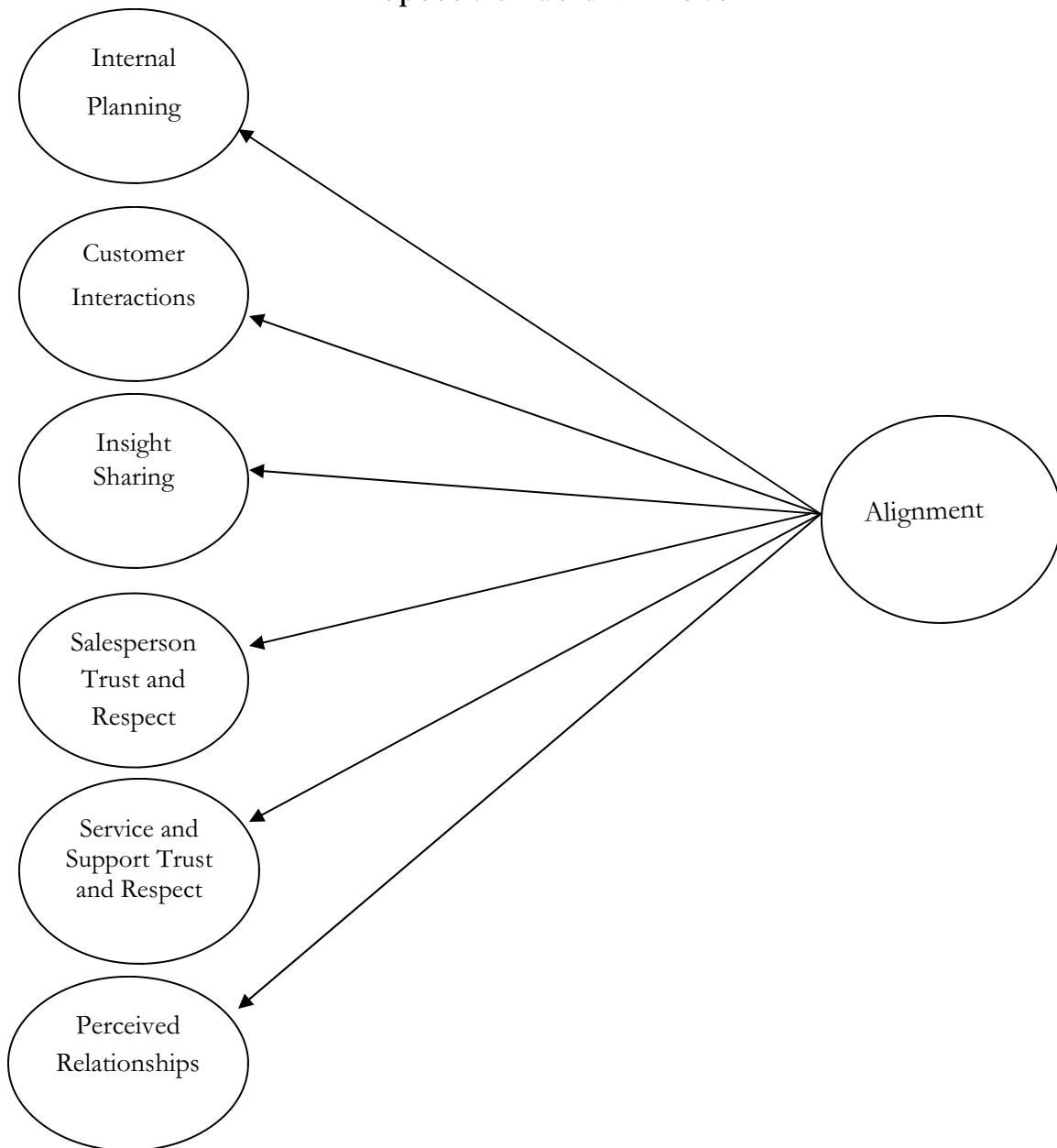
Figure 1

Proposed Structural Model

Table 1
Initial list of variables

Internal Planning* (Question: How often do your sales, support, and services professionals *PLAN TOGETHER* when….)
A1 Formulating a strategy for an important account
A2 Preparing for a sales or service call
A3 Configuring and pricing a solution for a customer
A4 Agreeing on staff resources required to implement a project
A5 Developing an annual operating plan or budget
Customer Interactions* (Question: How often do your sales, support, and services people take a *CONSISTENT APPROACH* when….)
B1 Engaging a customer to diagnose problems and identify needs
B2 Recommending and presenting a solution
B3 Responding to a customer demand during the sales process
B4 Resolving problems and complaints after the sale
B5 Tracking results and closing the loop with customers
Insight Sharing* (Question: How often do sales, support, and services people *SHARE* with one another *INSIGHT* as…..)
C1 History of the account relationship, including customer politics and sensitive issues
C2 Current customer business goals and objectives—not just specifications
C3 Customer expectations of product/service benefits
C4 Customer dissatisfaction or complaints
C5 Sales opportunities or leads for new projects
Salesperson Trust and Respect* (Question: How often do your *SALESPEOPLE*….)
D1 Express appreciation for the efforts and contributions of services and support people
D2 Display genuine rapport with services and support people
D3 Trust services and support people to engage customers in a sales situation
D4 Avoid making over-commitments on behalf of services and support people
Service and Support Trust and Respect* (Question: How often do your *SERVICES* and *SUPPORT* people….)
D5 Demonstrate respect for the efforts and contributions of salespeople
D6 Display a genuine rapport with salespeople
D7 When necessary, openly share concerns with salespeople about what they are proposing to customers
D8 Help salespeople establish new relationships in the customer organizations to grow the business
Perceived Relationships** (Question: Overall, the relationships between our sales and our support/services people are *CHARACTERIZED* by……)
D9 Conflict   < ----- >   Collaboration
D10 Separation < ----- >   Connection
D11 Frustration < ----- >   Satisfaction
D12 Animosity   < ----- >   Goodwill
D13 Suspicion   < ----- >   Trust

*5-Point Likert-scale was used with 1 = Never/0%, 2 = Rarely/25%, 3 = Sometimes/50%,
4 = Frequently/75%, and 5 = Consistently/100%. (High score is desirable)

**Semantic Differential scale, whereby the five possible responses for each variable were coded 1-5 to be consistent with the Likert scales for the analysis.

Note: Italicized items, D1-D8 were deleted later due to cross-loadings and poor face validity for items loading on the same factor.

presented to a second set of 21 Front-line professionals (seven each from sales, support, and service functions) who represented one specific company. The purpose was to solicit their feedback regarding the salience of these items to alignment. These 21 folks agreed with the six dimensions, making no additions, but making some scale item suggestions. The above interviews ranged in length from 15 to 45 minutes.

- **Focus groups with 25 sales, support, and service personnel**. Based on these second interviews, a refined list of items was created and presented to three focus groups consisting of 25 Front-line personnel (sales (n=10), support (n=7), and service personnel (n=8)) to obtain feedback regarding alignment items. The items that emerged from the above interviews, and meetings that are considered representative of the six Front-line personnel alignment dimensions, are shown in Table 1.

- **Interviews with six sales, support and service personnel**. The initial pool of alignment items was further scrutinized by six other Front-line experts (two each from sales, support, and service) (Devellis 2003) who took a preliminary survey consisting of measures of the alignment dimensions described above. Consistent with the preliminary alignment focus, respondents were asked to evaluate the frequency with which various alignment activities occurred. Responses to alignment questions were structured in

Likert format using the following response categories: 1) never (0%), 2) rarely (25%), 3) sometimes (50%), 4) frequently (75%), and 5) consistently (100%). A "not sure" response option was also provided to respondents.

A total of 58 sales, support, and service personnel participated in this phase of the development of an internal alignment metric.

Purification and Data Collection

Churchill's (1979) scale development procedure calls for a preliminary set of data to be collected once the domain is specified. He further calls for generation of scale items. The purpose is to identify items that perform poorly regarding item-to-total correlation and that can violate an expected factor structure. Data reported in this study was collected by way of a survey of Front-line professionals. First, a description of the sample and survey methodology employed to collect alignment data is presented. Then the process undertaken to create a preliminary alignment metric used in the survey of these individuals is described.

Consistent with the call for future joint research projects between academicians and the business community (Ingram et al. 2002), data was collected in several venues. Initially, an email blast was sent to readership of two trade publications as well as members of one trade association announcing the study and directing interested parties to an on-line survey site for completing the survey. The trade association and trade publications were selected for the sampling population due to their diverse audiences (e.g., technology

members of association and sales, sales management, service, and training subscribers to publications) which would provide different and richer perspectives regarding the study's focus on alignment. The survey site was managed by a consulting organization. Next, a paper copy of the survey accompanied by a cover letter from the publishers and the trade association was mailed to their members along with a business reply envelope, giving the respondents the option of completing a paper survey or an online-survey. Self-report surveys have frequently been used in sales research (c.f., Weeks et al. 2006). Respondents were instructed to mail their completed paper surveys directly to the consulting organization, to insure respondent anonymity. The researchers were assured that the respective samples contained only sales, support, and service personnel who had direct contact with customers and were also involved in handoff activities. The consulting organization also distributed 17 surveys at a training session. The number of respondents contacted by our research partners were trade association, 5,000, first publication, 5,000, second publication, 5,000, as well as The Top 100 award winners for one of the magazines, and the Top 25 who won the annual award for the second publication, for a total of 15,1**25** sales, support, and service professionals. Of the 350 surveys returned, 226 were deemed useable (124 were eliminated due to incomplete responses) for the current study, providing a response rate of 1.5%.

While the response rate is low, it is not unprecedented given low response rates are often common for industrial research

(Harmon 2006). Other sales studies have experienced low response rates such as that by Amyx et al. (2008), who reported an 8.81 percent response rate among salespeople. Outside of industrial sales research, response rates have dropped as low as 6.3 percent (Dwyer and Welsh 1985). Hunt (1990) asserts a low response rate does not necessitate the exclusion of otherwise credible research, but it increases the chance for non-response error (Armstrong and Overton 1977). Given the low response rate of our study, non-response bias was assessed.

The possibility of non-response bias was assessed by comparing the early respondents with the late respondents (Armstrong and Overton 1977; Frazier and Rody 1991) for the alignment variables. No significant differences were detected, indicating there is no evidence of non-response bias.

Churchill (1979) provides no guidelines with respect to sample size and scale development. The literature suggests item-to-response ratios range from 1:4 (Rummel 1970) to 1:10 (Schwab 1980) for each set of scales to be factor analyzed. On the subject of sample size, Devellis (1991) suggests 300 while Spector (1992) recommends 100 to 200. Our response rate and sample size are both lower than desirable. However, the ratio of sample size to number of scale items is not out of line with other studies, ranging from 33.9 (Moorman et al. 1992) to 1.6 (Castelberry et al 1999) and 1.1 (Kohli et al. 1993). Thus, there appears to be precedent for our size of sample and sample size to ratio of number of scale items of approximately 8.1. Table 2 provides a brief description of the sample.

Table 2
Sample Description

Descriptor		Trade Association	First Magazine	Second Magazine	Consulting Organization
Industry	Banking/ Finance	2.5*	14.3	2.3	23.5
	Business Services	8.2		9.1	11.8
	Computers	38.6		9.1	5.9
	Government	.6			
	Healthcare	13.3		6.8	17.6
	Hospitality	.6		2.3	
	Manufacturing	13.9		52.3	11.8
	Retail/ Wholesale	1.9	28.6	6.8	5.9
	Telecommunications	7.6		4.5	5.9
	Transportation	1.3	14.3		
	Other	11.4	42.9	6.8	17.6
Role in Firm	Sales	11.4	28.6	72.7	52.9
	Support	17.7	71.4	15.9	35.3
	Service	70.9		11.4	11.8
Position in Firm	Senior Executive	55.8	71.4	28.6	35.7
	Manager	41.0	14.3	66.4	57.2
	Professional	3.2	14.3	4.8	.1
Sales Cycle	Less than 1 month	2.7		5.0	20.0
	1-2 months	25.3	14.3	27.5	40.0
	3-6 months	41.1	14.3	32.5	6.7
	More than 6 months	30.8	71.4	35.0	33.3
Sample Size		158	7	44	17

Note: * Reported as Percent

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ANALYSIS

Upon completion of a white paper for the international consulting firm with which we conferred (Acclivus Research Report 2005), we undertook further analysis of the alignment scale. The original 28 scale items first were subjected to a purification process using Principal Components Factor Analysis and Coefficient Alpha Analysis to gain evidence of the level of internal consistency among the items, as well as their dimensionality. Accordingly, the sample was split into two sub-samples. Both sub-samples included 113 respondents. Sub-sample 1 was used to purify the measures, and sub-sample 2 was used to assess unidimensionality and reliability issues.

Sub-sample 1

Dimensionality Assessment. Factor analysis was conducted to investigate the dimensionality and factor loadings. We acknowledge the value of larger sample sizes. While our sample size to variable ratio is lower than desired, as noted above, our ratio of 1:4.0 (113 respondents to 28 variables) does fall at the lower end of published research (Rummel 1970). Items were deleted based on loadings on multiple dimensions, low factor scores, and/or loadings on dimensions that did not have face validity. After five iterations, a total of *11* alignment items were deleted, leaving 17 alignment items for the study. The items deleted based on the factor analysis were, A4-A5, B3, C1-C5, D3, D8, and D9. A second factor analysis was run using varimax rotation that produced a four-factor solution that was also supported by the scree plot and the

"eigen values greater than one" rule. Items with factor loadings greater than 0.4 were retained for further analysis (c.f., Moncrief et al. 2006). The four factors that remained are, Internal Planning, Customer Interactions, Front-line personnel Trust and Respect (Salesperson Trust and Respect, and Service and Support Trust and Respect merged into one factor), and Perceived Relationships.

Reliability Analysis. Consistent with Churchill's recommendation, coefficient alpha was computed to identify any questionable items. He supports the use of alpha as a means of eliminating items prior to factor analysis. We acknowledge the work of Miller (1995) who questions the use of alpha as a "proof" of unidimensionality of scale and Cortina (1993) who asserted that "weak" items may be evidence of more than one factor. Nunnally and Bernstein (1994) recommend a minimum coefficient alpha of .60 for new measures. Reliability analysis indicates that all four dimensions have a coefficient alpha greater than .78.

Measure Validation with Sub-sample 2

Unidimensionality Assessment. The second sub-sample was used as a validation sample to assess unidimensionality and reliability of the alignment scales. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was applied to sub-sample 2 and the alignment measures, *Internal Planning, Customer Interactions, Front-line personnel Trust and Respect*, and *Perceived Relationships.* CFA results indicate that the measurement model produced an acceptable fit to the data (Chi-Square$_{112}$ = 181.508, p = 0.00, CFI [critical fit index] = 0.941, and

RMSEA = 0.074. The standardized factor loadings confirm that the scale items appropriately load only on the respective latent constructs (see Table 3). Again, we recognize the lower than desirable sample size to variable ratio. Our ratio of 1:6.6 is similar to Krishnan, Netemeyer, and Boles (2002), who used LISREL8 in their Study 1 and reported a ratio of 1:6.5.

Reliability Analysis. The analysis for sub-sample 2 indicates that all four dimensions have a coefficient alpha greater than .78.

Combined Sample Analysis

Potential Submission Method and Role Effects. An analysis was conducted on the alignment variables in order to determine if there was a significant overall difference depending on whether respondents used the on-line survey or mailed their surveys. Out of 28 variables, one was shown to vary based on the respondent's role, suggesting that

Table 3
Confirmatory Factor Analysis
Constructs

	Internal Planning	Customer Interactions	Front-line Personnel Trust and Respect	Perceived Relationships
A1	0.200			
A2	0.202			
A3	0.224			
B1		0.186		
B2		0.300		
B4		0.088		
B5		0.096		
D1			0.147	
D2			0.204	
D4			0.087	
D5			0.121	
D6			0.198	
D7			0.060	
D10				0.344
D11				0.199
D12				0.086
D13				0.139

Note: Chi-Square $_{112}$ = 181.508 p = 0.000, CFI = 0.941, RMSEA = 0.074

responses were not influenced by the data collection method that was used.

An analysis was also conducted on the alignment variables in order to determine if there was a significant overall difference across the respondent's roles. Out of 28 variables and 84 possible contrasts, we found four contrasts that were significant at p = .05, suggesting again that the data were not influenced by the respondent's roles.

Correlation and Reliability Analysis. The correlation matrix and coefficient alphas for the alignment items are provided in Tables 4 and 5.

Validity Assessment. The measurement model, discussed below, provides a confirmatory assessment of discriminant validity and convergent validity. Given acceptable discriminant validities, the test of the structural model then constitutes a confirmatory assessment of nomological validity (Anderson and Gerbing 1988).

The scale items purported to measure employee and customer loyalty to the organization were subjected to a Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The customer loyalty scale was comprised of three items that measured customer satisfaction, retention, and willingness to recommend product, service or company to others. The items were preceded by the question "when it comes to your company's customer loyalty, what is the current need for improvement in:", which was answered on a six-point scale ranging from "optimal now" to "significant." The employee loyalty scale was comprised of three items that measured employee satisfaction, retention,

and commitment. The items were preceded by the question "when it comes to your company's employee loyalty (among sales, support, and services people), what is the current need for improvement in:", which was answered on a six-point scale ranging from "optimal now" to "significant." Given, organizational profitability was comprised of a one-item scale, it was not possible to include it in the CFA analysis. CFA results indicate that the measurement model produced an acceptable fit to the data (Chi-Square$_7$ = 15.675, p = 0.028, CFI [critical fit index] = .989, and RMSEA = .074. Furthermore, reliability analysis for employee and customer loyalty scales produced coefficient alphas of .889 and .871, respectively. The alignment, organizational profitability, employee loyalty, and customer loyalty variables were then submitted to a correlation analysis procedure. As, expected, an organization's alignment has a significant association with its profitability (r = .245, p = .001), employee loyalty r = .272, p = .001), and customer loyalty (r = .316, p = .001). The more an organization's Front-line personnel are internally aligned, the higher its profitability, and the more its employees and customers are loyal to the firm. These results provide empirical support for predictive validity.

Structural Model Analysis. The final structural model including the posited relationships among the constructs provides an acceptable fit to the data (Chi-Square$_{114}$ [critical fit index] = 260.74, p = 0.001, CFI = 0.933, and RMSEA = 0.076). Figure 2 reports the standardized coefficients and associated t-values for each of the hypothesized paths: 1) Internal Planning (.69,

Table 4
Descriptive Statistics

Dimensions of Alignment	Mean	Standard Deviation	Alpha
Internal Planning* (Question: How often do your sales, support, and services professionals PLAN TOGETHER when….)	**3.49**	**.779**	**.782**
A1 Formulating a strategy for an important account	3.59	.911	n/a
A2 Preparing for a sales of service call	3.17	.923	n/a
A3 Configuring and pricing a solution for a customer	3.72	.966	n/a
Customer Interactions* (Question: How often do your sales, support, and services people take a CONSISTENT APPROACH when…)	**3.75**	**.711**	**.835**
B1 Engaging a customer to diagnose problems and identify needs	3.68	.836	n/a
B2 Recommending and presenting a solution	3.77	.839	n/a
B4 Resolving problems and complaints after the sale	4.00	.902	n/a
B5 Tracking results and closing the loop with customers	3.57	.932	n/a
Front-line Personnel Trust and Respect* (Question: How often do your salespeople…)	**3.33**	**.683**	**.876**
D1 Express appreciation for the efforts and contributions of services and support people?	3.46	.971	n/a
D2 Display genuine rapport with services and support people?	3.09	.967	n/a
D4 Avoid making over-commitments on behalf of			

*5-Point Likert-scale was used with 1 = Never/0%, 2 = Rarely/25%, 3 = Sometimes/50%,

4 = Frequently/75%, and 5 = Consistently/100%. (High score is desirable)

**Semantic Differential scale, whereby the five possible responses for each variable were coded 1-5 to be consistent with the Likert scales for the analysis.

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Table 4 (Continued)
Descriptive Statistics

Dimensions of Alignment	Mean	Standard Deviation	Alpha
(Questions: How often do your Services and Support people….)	n/a	n/a	n/a
D5 Demonstrate respect for the efforts and contributions of salespeople?	3.27	.803	n/a
D6 Display a genuine rapport with salespeople?	3.36	.879	n/a
D7 When necessary, openly share concerns with salespeople about what they are proposing to customers?	3.56	.884	n/a
Perceived Relationships** (Question: Overall, the relationships between our sales and our support/services people are CHARACTERIZED by….)	**3.41**	**.794**	**.901**
D10 Separation <——> Connection	3.29	.929	n/a
D11 Frustration <——> Satisfaction	3.23	.946	n/a
D12 Animosity <——> Goodwill	3.55	.869	n/a
D13 Suspicion <——> Trust	3.41	.930	n/a

*5-Point Likert-scale was used with 1 = Never/0%, 2 = Rarely/25%, 3 = Sometimes/50%,

4 = Frequently/75%, and 5 = Consistently/100%. (High score is desirable)

**Semantic Differential scale, whereby the five possible responses for each variable were coded 1-5 to be consistent with the Likert scales for the analysis.

TABLE 5

CORRELATION MATRIX FOR ALIGNMENT VARIABLES

Item	A1	A2	A3	B1	B2	B4	B5	D1	D2	D4	D5	D6	D7	D10	D11	D12	D13
A1	1																
A2	.55	1															
A3	.53	.56	1														
B1	.34	.32	.34	1													
B2	.46	.40	.44	.73	1												
B4	.33	.33	.37	.49	.52	1											
B5	.43	.39	.42	.47	.53	.54	1										
D1	.32	.31	.35	.38	.40	.31	.33	1									
D2	.38	.38	.41	.36	.37	.32	.29	.73	1								
D4	.34	.34	.35	.38	.40	.23	.36	.56	.52	1							
D5	.25	.25	.31	.34	.29	.27	.37	.56	.56	.48	1						
D6	.34	.34	.38	.40	.40	.35	.29	.75	.75	.48	.70	1					
D7	.29	.29	.36	.32	.32	.27	.34	.43	.43	.41	.49	.48	1				
D10	.45	.41	.42	.31	.42	.31	.36	.41	.49	.44	.43	.71	.44	1			
D11	.31	.29	.33	.27	.34	.28	.33	.36	.48	.42	.41	.68	.34	.74	1		
D12	.31	.27	.32	.31	.29	.25	.23	.33	.45	.37	.33	.69	.38	.60	.66	1	
D13	.33	.31	.40	.27	.33	.30	.31	.36	.47	.40	.38	.69	.39	.70	.70	.77	1

Note: all correlations are significant at p = 0.01

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t = 7.38, p = 0.001), 2) Customer Interactions (0.63, t = 6.51, p = 0.001), 3) Front-line personnel Trust and Respect (0.92, t = 9.76, p = 0.001), and 4) Perceived Relationships (0.84, p = 0.001).
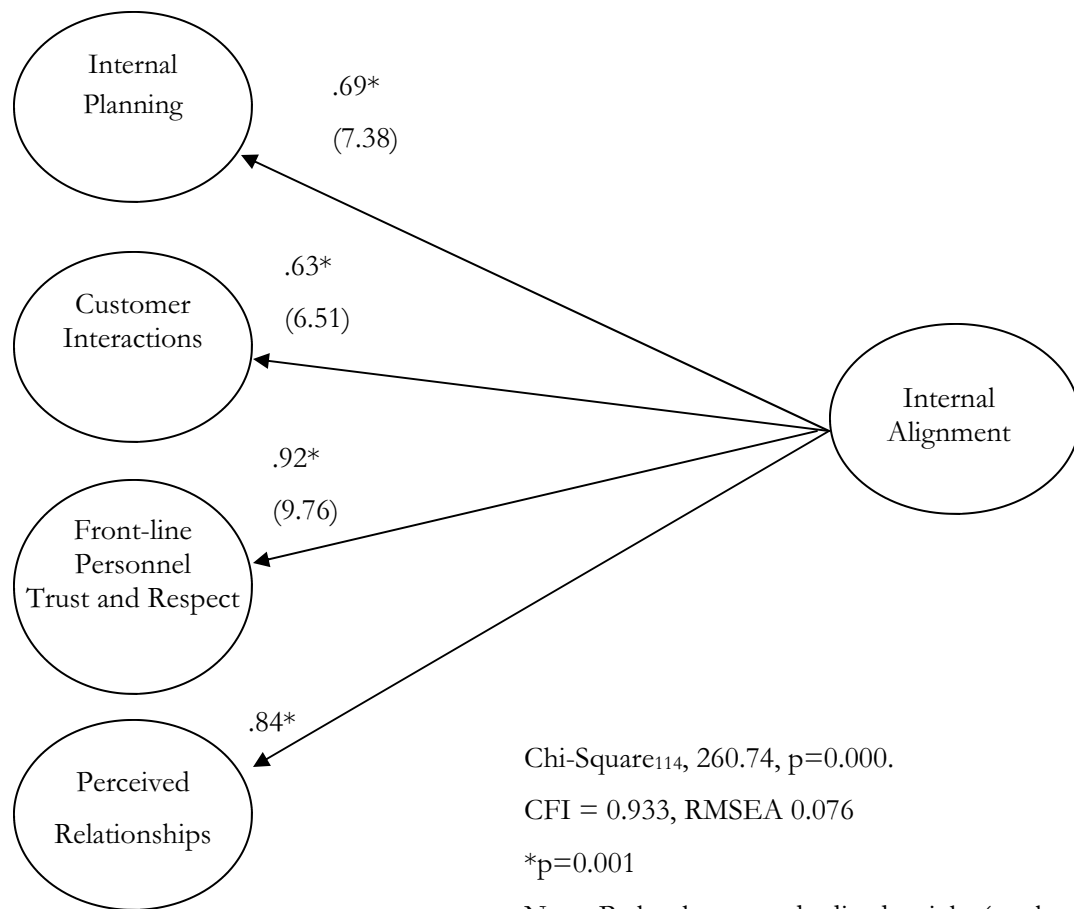
DISCUSSION

Limitations

The current study is far from being free of limitations. This study is limited by the willingness of the respondents to provide accurate and honest responses. The sensitive nature of the questions may have diminished the response rate (Good and Stone, 1995). Another limitation of this study is that demographic information for the sample i.e., age, education, and so forth was not collected. Replication of this study with another sample, while collecting demographic information will allow the researchers to determine if the measures are reliable across samples and at the same time if such constructs as career stage influence the relationships that were found in the current study.

While an attempt was made to increase the generalizability of the study's findings by using

Figure 2
Structural Model

Chi-Square$_{114}$, 260.74, p=0.000.

CFI = 0.933, RMSEA 0.076

*p=0.001

Note: Paths show standardized weight (t-values).

a sample that represents a variety of industries, it is important to be cautious in overstating the generalizability of the study's findings due to the limited response rate. Conversely, as this research delves into a particular area, the low response rate is not always an indicator of poor generalizability (Tanner 2002). In the current study the focus was on development of a preliminary alignment scale using behaviorally-based scale items to assess alignment.

Limitations such as these do not eliminate the contribution of this study. The procedure employed to create the current alignment metric answers the call of Churchill (1979), Bagozzi (1980), Peter (1981), and Anderson and Gerbing (1982). Peter (1981, p. 133) asserted, "...Because construct validity pertains to the degree of correspondence between constructs and their measures, construct validity is a necessary condition for theory development and testing. Thus, it is enigmatic that marketing researchers have given little explicit attention to construct validation, as is well documented in the marketing literature."

Construct validity relates to how well ideas and/or theories are translated into metrics. A definitional approach to construct validity requires a construct be defined so precisely that it can be straightforwardly operationalized. An alternative perspective is that phenomena are not black and white. The current internal alignment metric does not purport to capture the entire construct of internal alignment. It does purport to provide a basis for subsequent research that examines

internal alignment, adds to knowledge of the construct, and, perhaps, even changes the definition of what is proffered in this paper. Thus, the internal alignment presented in this paper is consistent with Cialdini's (2001, p. 32) full cycle approach in which research programs are processes of "...continual interplay between a) filed observation of existing phenomena, b) theorizing about the causes of the phenomena, and c) experimental tests of theorizing."

Managerial Implications

Selling firms must cope with the trade-off between response effectiveness and efficiency. The task of managing the trade-off is made more difficult by the presence of product changes and customer changes that necessitate multiple people who represent the seller who seek to respond to all customer needs. Lack of alignment is one obstacle to overcoming the effectivensss-efficicieny trade-off.

A selling firm's total sales revenue is a result of identified opportunities that are in the sales pipeline multiplied by the average sales volume achieved with purchasing customers. Shorter sales cycle times also impact total sales revenue as does the rate at which the sales force can communicate and consummate sales with customers. The better sales, support, and service (or any other functional personnel in the sales firm) are aligned, the more likely each of these revenue impacting factors can be improved. For example, service and support personnel can discover opportunities that can be proffered to the sales force. The sales force can expedite service and support provision when customers experience problems.

The sales force must be flexible and adaptable to change if growth is to be sustained. A key to adaptability is alignment and consistency in policies, procedures, and behaviors. These are key aspects of any sales organization and the importance of multiple personnel being on the same page with respect to these must be emphasized. When everyone who has customer contact accountabilities is on the same page, change is more easily managed.

Homburg, et al. (2008) asserts that managers should place an emphasis on alignment when prioritizing customers. Firms can enhance customer prioritization efforts by aligning organizational resources including personnel. Internal alignment is essential for external alignment, a pillar of supply chain management (Van Hoek and Mitchell 2006). Any selling firm is challenged in its ability to manage suppliers and customers if its own personnel are not on the same page with respect to policies and procedures.

When customer contact personnel do not share the same priorities, thus viewing customers differently, selling firms face a crisis. Mentzer (2004) asserts that firms cannot coordinate functions across the companies in their supply chains if they cannot first align functions within the company. Nevertheless, it is a commonly held conception that supply chain firms are aligned.

More complex selling situations require higher levels of alignment than less complex situations. Similarly, stable markets demand less alignment than turbulent markets that call for immediacy of response. In either case, frustration between customer contact functions will diminish performance. The case for the value of alignment must be clearly communicated, up front and regularly to sales, service, and support personnel, the subject of this paper on alignment. For example, the following critical aspects of training must be institutionalized:

1. Use training as a channel of communications for the importance of alignment

2. Avoid function-specific jargon and technical language unless it is common across all customer contact personnel

3. Create a shared language that describes the sales task in terms of objectives and priorities

4. Communicate frequently about progress and results, both sales and alignment process

Customer contact personnel might agree on the strategic objectives of the selling firm – develop world class customer service or the need to be internally aligned. But, they must also agree on the value and nature or work required to achieve these strategic goals. Thus, selling firms must provide incentives, functional objectives, and training that focus on the importance of each role in achieving strategic and tactical goals. There exists a need for cross-training and skill set enhancement in the areas of communication.

A salesforce alignment architecture must replace the architecture that has territory salespeople matched to accounts and a turf. The switch to an alignment architecture requires culture change. In order to effect such change, activities such as the following are suggested:

- A management commitment to the alignment process coupled with internal efforts to highlight the differences between a territory focus and an alignment focus.

- A training program that incorporates introductory materials on alignment and provides on-going training that continually emphasizes both the importance of and the results obtained from alignment. Including in this program is a focus on cross-functional training in which service and support people, for example, learn selling skills and salespeople learn sales and support skills.

- Provision of a budget that is adequate to fund the alignment program.

- Program participation by corporate officers that reinforces company commitment to alignment

- Development of clear, realistic, and meaningful goals by top management in conjunction with sales, support, and service personnel and others impacted by alignment.

- Development of a concrete plan for achieving goals that includes activities required of sales, support, service and other personnel as well as metrics to assess progress toward goals.

- A program of constant vertical and horizontal communications reinforcing personnel efforts and encouraging the alignment focus. Communications should include a focus on mission, suggestions for achieving goals, and rewards for participants in the alignment program.

- A promotion program focused on ensuring that every member of the alignment team understands how he/she brings value to the firm. Sales, support and service personnel must know that their actions do move the company forward . And they must know how the actions of others, in concert with their own actions, move the company forward.

- A program for monitoring results and communicating those results to the alignment team. Included with this program is a continual improvement focus in which change ideas may be voiced by anyone associated with the alignment program

While considerable emphasis on managing costs is placed in building better products cheaper, managing delivery deadlines, and perfecting technology, to fulfill promises made, most firms can improve in their efforts to align those personnel who make those promises upon which the firm must act.

CONCLUSION

This research has presented a preliminary attempt to measure alignment among Front-line personnel in sales organizations. The scale development process undertaken has resulted in a four dimensional alignment scale. A key to aligning Front-line personnel is to develop and encourage dialogue between the functional groups – a task that can be compounded if there exists a lack of trust and a lack of respect among these functions. The four alignment dimensions developed in this paper represent the starting point for those discussions.

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