

## SALES CAREERS STAGES: TESTING FOR SEQUENTIAL CHANGES

*By Susan DelVecchio and Ryan J. Perkins*

Despite two decades of studying career stage theory, sales management studies have yet to agree on whether significant changes occur sequentially. Given the methodological hurdles of any one study, it is not surprising to find this lack of agreement. Thus, the purpose of this study was to pool the results from previous studies to compare sequentially a larger set of respondents in each stage. We found numerous job outcomes will change between the exploration and establishment stages. This finding indicates the practice of making early investments in sales training will yield positive returns in the very next career stage. Far fewer changes occur, however, between the maintenance career stage and the disengagement career stage. While salespeople in the last career stage express lower levels of extrinsic motivation, we found no support for other commonly held beliefs concerning changes occurring between the last two career stages. Salespeople may be engaging in more maintenance than disengagement activities during the latter part of their careers.

### INTRODUCTION

Theoretically a salesperson's motivation, satisfaction and even performance levels should change as they progress from one career stage to another. (Cron 1984; Super, Savickas and Super 1996). For more than two decades sales management studies have sought to confirm the existence of these changes. While these studies offer confirmation regarding differences between the early and late career stages, studies do not agree on sequential changes. 80

This lack of agreement is disconcerting. If career-stage theories hold true we should see changes from one stage to the next as well as those at the beginning and end of a career span. Given this expectation and the study results to date, this research effort will focus on sequential changes in job outcomes. To that end, we first offer a description of each career stage followed by a discussion of the sequence of expected changes.

In his seminal work Super (1957) described four stages of a career (i.e. exploration stage, establishment stage, the maintenance stage and ends with the disengagement stage). Each career

stage is named for the principal developmental tasks associated with the chronological age. During the first stage the salesperson implements an occupational choice by securing a position in sales, completing the necessary training and engaging in skill acquisition (Goodman 1994; Savickas 1994). Predominantly a stage of self-discovery, this career stage is marked by a need to establish an initial professional image. In the next stage labeled the establishment stage the salesperson seeks stability and security. During the establishment stage the salesperson is consolidating his or her position by demonstrating positive work attitudes and productive work habits (Super, Savickas & Super 1996). In the third stage the salespersons' actions shift to those that will maintain or sustain their current achievement level. The salesperson achieves maintenance by building on previous achievements, updating skills and knowledge or innovating new ways to do routine tasks. The fourth and final stage has been labeled disengagement stage and represents a time of transition from working to retirement (Super 1990; Gouws 1995). This stage involves the

career development tasks of deceleration from career advancement as the salesperson considers retirement planning. The salesperson in the disengagement stage turns over tasks to younger colleagues as they engage in more mentoring of others. The salesperson in this stage is less likely to seek out more ambitious sales goals and more likely to plan their transition to retirement living. As the salesperson moves from each stage, they are engaging in a different level or type of career activity. Thus the names of each career stage are exploration, establishment, maintenance and disengagement. One would expect, therefore, that job outcomes should differ as the salesperson moves from one career stage to the next.

Comparisons of motivation, satisfaction and performance levels across these four stages do not consistently find significant differences between sequential stages. As noted on Table #1 the evidence is mixed and few pairwise comparisons arrive at the same conclusion. In fact we found in only two situations did this occur (i.e. Three studies seem to agree that the satisfaction levels expressed by salespeople in the establishment career stage do not differ from salespeople in their maintenance career stage.) The more common outcome seems to be a mixed one (i.e. studies finding and failing to find significant pairwise differences). Even in those cases where more than one study does find significance, the direction of those differences can be contradictory. For example, two studies did find changes in extrinsic motivation, one finds extrinsic motivation is increasing and the other claims it is decreasing as the salesperson moves from the establishment to maintenance career stage (Miao, Lund and Evans 2009; Ornstein, Cron and Slocum 1989). (See Table 1 for directional arrows noted.)

This lack of consistency is not surprising given the methodological hurdles facing any one study. Gathering sufficient responses from salespeople in each career stage requires substantial resources. Ideally comparisons between career stages should be based on a variety of salespeople in each stage. Since many industries are known for high turnover in the initial stages of a sales career, it may be reasonable to expect the variability of job outcomes to be very high in the exploration stage. Employees with higher levels of tenure may be more homogeneous. Thus any one study that compares many salespeople starting their career to a few more established salespeople may suffer from restricted range as well as insufficient cell sizes. A stronger test of pairwise differences may be offered with larger sets of respondents from each career stage. Thus the purpose of this research effort was to address the limitations of an individual study. To this end we pooled the results of numerous studies to reflect a wider cross section of salespeople in each of the four career stages. In so doing we focus on testing for the existence of changes in sequential career stages. The direction and nature of those changes in motivation, satisfaction and performance are addressed in the subsequent sections.

## CAREER STAGE CHANGES IN MOTIVATION

The process of changes in motivation arises from self-concept adaptations (i.e. the process of changing self perceptions in light of work-related events). For example, motivations in the earlier career stages are likely to be influenced by external stimuli (societal expectations) as compared to the pursuit of intrinsically selected tasks later in life (Sheldon, Houser-Marko and Kasser 2006). Accordingly this section describes the comparison of sequential stages (i.e. from exploration to establishment  $\Delta_a$ , from

**Table 1**  
**Summary of Past Studies**

| Sequential Change   | Outcome                | Studies Showing <sup>1</sup> Differences  | Studies NOT Showing <sup>1</sup> Differences  |
|---|------------------------|---|---|
| Exploration to Establishment Stage  | Motivation (Extrinsic) | *Cron, Dubinsky & Michaels '88  | ◦Miao, Lund & Evans '09<br>◦Ornstein, Cron & Slocum '89<br>◦Hafer '86<br>◦Mehta, Anderson & Dubinsky '00      |
|   | Motivation (Intrinsic) | *Ornstein, Cron & Slocum '89  | ◦Miao, Lund & Evans '09<br>◦Menguc & Bhuian '04   |
|   | Satisfaction           | *Flaherty & Pappas '02<br>*Ornstein, Cron & Slocum '89  | ◦Menguc & Bhuian '04<br>◦Hafer '86  |
|   | Performance            | *Ornstein, Cron & Slocum '89<br>*Hafer '86<br>*Rapp, Ahearne & Forbes '07                               | ◦Dalrymple & Strahle '90<br>◦Weeks & Kahle '90  |
| Establishment to Maintenance Stage  | Motivation (Extrinsic) | *Miao, Lund & Evans '09 ↓<br>*Ornstein, Cron & Slocum '89 ↑   | ◦Cron, Dubinsky & Michaels '88<br>◦Hafer '86  |
|   | Motivation (Intrinsic) | *Miao, Lund & Evans '09   | ◦Menguc & Bhuian '04<br>◦Ornstein, Cron & Slocum '89  |
|   | Satisfaction           |   | ◦Flaherty & Pappas '02<br>◦Ornstein, Cron & Slocum '89<br>◦Hafer '86  |
|   | Performance            | *Hafer '86  | ◦Dalrymple & Strahle '90<br>◦Rapp, Ahearne & Forbes '07<br>◦Ornstein, Cron & Slocum '89<br>◦Weeks & Kahle '90 |
| Maintenance to Disengagement Stage  | Motivation (Extrinsic) | *Cron, Dubinsky & Michaels '88 ↓<br>*Ornstein, Cron & Slocum '89 ↑<br>*Mehta, Anderson & Dubinsky '00 ↓ | ◦Miao, Lund & Evans '09<br>◦Hafer '86   |
|   | Motivation (Intrinsic) | *Miao, Lund & Evans '09   | ◦Ornstein, Cron & Slocum '89  |
|   | Satisfaction           |   | ◦Menguc & Bhuian '04  |
|   | Performance            | *Dalrymple & Strahle '90  | ◦Hafer '86<br>◦Rapp, Ahearne & Forbes '07<br>◦Ornstein, Cron & Slocum '89<br>◦Weeks & Kahle '90               |
| <sup>1</sup> Comparisons were reported in published article or sufficient statistics were provided to conduct comparisons.<br>↓Notation represents a Sequential Increase   ↑Notation represents a Sequential Decrease |                        |   |   |

establishment to maintenance  $\Delta_b$  and finally between maintenance and disengagement  $\Delta_c$ ) for extrinsic and intrinsic motivation levels.

Early changes in extrinsic motivation levels are driven by self-concept and later changes by shifting values. More specifically the exploration

stage is marked by the development of a realistic self-concept (Johnson 2001). During this, the first stage, the salesperson is testing and uncovering their skills in light of frequently unrealistic financial expectations. During the subsequent stage of establishment, financial

rewards serve the purpose of validating acquired skills and carry more personal importance. It is during this stage (i.e. establishment stage) that extrinsic rewards provide validation (of competency or achievements) and this is important since during the establishment career stage the employee is concerned with advancement (Super, Savickas and Super 1996). After achieving advancements sought in the establishment stage, the salesperson in their maintenance career stage becomes aware of the limited future opportunities for promotion. Thus their emphasis shifts from extrinsic rewards associated with promotion to those of more immediate monetary rewards (Cron 1984). During the disengagement stage extrinsic motivation levels should be lower than that experienced in the maintenance stage since by definition the salesperson is *disengaging from* rather than *attracted to* the substantial effort required to achieve extrinsic rewards (Kanfer & Ackerman 2004). Based on this evidence and logic we should expect the sequential changes in extrinsic motivation to be as follows:

H<sub>1</sub>: The level of extrinsic motivation between sequential career stages will change.

H<sub>1a</sub>. Extrinsic Motivation will be higher in establishment stage than in exploration stage.

H<sub>1b</sub>. Extrinsic Motivation will be higher in maintenance stage than in establishment stage.

H<sub>1c</sub>. Extrinsic Motivation will be higher in maintenance stage than in disengagement stage.

While extrinsic rewards provide validation of a successful self-concept, self-determination theory claims it is intrinsic motivation that will keep a salesperson pursuing this career path and will have an effect on effort level (Deci, Connell and Ryan 1989). A salesperson in the

exploration stage is still in the process of developing their work-related self-concept and thus may not be fully committed to a career in sales. It is this commitment level that differentiates the exploration stage from the establishment stage (Flaherty and Pappas 2002; Jones, Chonko, Rangarajan and Roberts 2007). A salesperson that has made that commitment (i.e. entered the next stage of establishment), however, will be more concerned with the long-term effects of their work environment. They now have a vested interest in a sales career and find sales tasks to be intrinsically motivating. Additionally, the establishment stage differs from the exploration stage in that the salesperson has progressed beyond basic selling skills and has received the validation of continued employment. A salesperson in the establishment stage seeks stimulating tasks as they have demonstrated basic selling skills. Thus intrinsic motivation increases as a salesperson at the establishment stage has the confidence to seek more challenging tasks instrumental in developing skills required for advancement.

Following the stability of the establishment stage, a salesperson in the maintenance stage will seek to keep their current status by engaging in more innovative tasks (Pazy 1996; Simpson, Greller & Stroh 2002). The stimulation or task enjoyment is higher in the maintenance stage as the salesperson engages in more creative, new or specialized tasks. Disengagement as the label for the last career stage may imply the salesperson expresses lower levels of any form of motivation. There are reasons, however, to expect intrinsic motivation in the disengagement stage to be *higher* than intrinsic motivation levels experienced during the maintenance stage. A salesperson in the later stages of their career has

developed strong and deep customer-relationships. Intrinsic motivation in this situation may arise from the pursuit of tasks related to fulfilling the obligations to those customers. A salesperson in this stage of his or her career will find it difficult to disengage from long standing customer-relationships. The disengaged salesperson has not terminated their customer commitments – and one could argue these customer-relationships may take on more meaning and provide a higher level of intrinsic motivation.

H<sub>2</sub>: The level of intrinsic motivation between sequential career stages will change.

H<sub>2a</sub>. Intrinsic Motivation will be higher in establishment stage than in exploration stage.

H<sub>2b</sub>. Intrinsic Motivation will be higher in maintenance stage than in establishment stage.

H<sub>2c</sub>. Intrinsic Motivation will be higher in disengagement stage than in maintenance stage.

### **CAREER STAGE CHANGES IN SATISFACTION**

The majority of empirical tests tend to conclude there is a positive relationship between age and job satisfaction (Bernal, Snyder and McDaniel 1998; Brush, Moch and Pooyan 1987; Kalleberg and Loscocco 1983). Conceivably these findings are attributable to the theory that as people develop and adapt, their personal values will more closely match their work-related pursuits (Jepsen and Sheu 2003). If career stages are characterized by changing self-concepts to accommodate the workplace it is logical to expect salespeople who remain in this career track will express higher levels of satisfaction.

During the exploration stage, the salesperson's awareness of the workplace realities increases dramatically (Johnson 2001). It is more likely

the salesperson in the exploration stage will experience a larger gap between desired and actual outcomes and as a result their satisfaction levels are likely to be lower. Beyond the exploration stage, salespeople are altering their expectations or aspiration levels and finding a match between actual and desired conditions. These adaptations give rise to more positive feelings about their own job (Clark and Oswald 1996). The salesperson in the disengagement career stage believes their current employer will be their last and this belief leads to more positive affect concerning their employer (Carstensen, Isaacowitz and Charles 1999; Carstensen, Fung and Charles 2003). For these reasons we may expect changes in job satisfaction from one career stage to the next.

H<sub>3</sub>: The level of satisfaction between sequential career stages will change.

H<sub>3a</sub>. Satisfaction will be higher in establishment stage than in exploration stage.

H<sub>3b</sub> Satisfaction will be higher in maintenance stage than in establishment stage.

H<sub>3c</sub> Satisfaction will be higher in disengagement stage than in maintenance stage.

### **CAREER STAGE CHANGES IN PERFORMANCE**

Given the complexity and ambiguity surrounding the sales task, performance levels for those starting a sales career should be lower (Ackerman 1988). Once these basic skills have been acquired, performance levels should increase substantially (Super, Savickas and Super 1996). Following the rapid pace of improvements in the establishment stage, the optimal performance levels should be maintained. Performance levels during the maintenance stage should be stable, reflect the skills acquired and be attributable to well-learned processes. This level, while based on acquired

**Table 2:**  
**Motivation Measures and Response Scales**

| <b><u>Study</u></b>  | <b><u>Extrinsic Motivation—pay</u></b>   | <b><u>Scale</u></b>  |
|--|--|----------------------|
| Cron, Dubinsky & Micheals, 1988  | Valence for a ten percent pay increase.  | Thermometer scale*   |
| Hafer 1986   | Materials ambition: 8 items<br>Desire for money and material thing   | 1 to 5               |
| Mehta, Anderson & Dubinsky   | Salary and commission: Imprtnance of this reward to sales manager respondents  | 1 to 7               |
| Miao, Lund & Evans 2009  | Compensation seeking: 3 items (Sample item: I am strongly motivated by the money I can earn through my sales job.)       | 1 to 7               |
| <b><u>Study</u></b>  | <b><u>Extrinsic Motivation—promotion</u></b>   | <b><u>Scale</u></b>  |
| Cron, Dubinsky & Micheals 1988   | Valence for promotion: value placed on this outcome  | Thermometer scale*   |
| Hafer 1986   | Achievement motivation: the desire to achieve and get ahead in ones job. 8 items   | 1 to 5               |
| Mehta, Anderson & Dubinsky, 2000   | Importance of this reward (opportunities for promotion) to sales manager respondents                                     | 1 to 7               |
| Ornstein, Cron & Slocum 1989   | Promotion aspiration: rate desire to get promoted or not promoted  | 1 to 7               |
| <b><u>Study</u></b>  | <b><u>Intrinsic Motivation—challenge</u></b>   | <b><u>Scale</u></b>  |
| Menuguc & Bhuian 2004  | Task variety: 4 items (Sample item: My job provides me with the opportunity to do different things.)                     | 1 to 5               |
| Miao, Lund & Evans 2009  | Challenge seeking : 3 items (Sample Item: the more difficult the sales problem are the more I enjoy trying to solve it.) | 1 to 7               |
| Ornstein, Cron & Slocum 1989   | Job Challenger: 4 items. Extent to which salesperson feels their jobs are challenging and utilize their skills           | 1 to 7 <sup>2</sup>  |
| <b><u>Study</u></b>  | <b><u>Intrinsic Motivation—competence</u></b>  | <b><u>Scales</u></b> |
| Ornsteni, Cron & Slocum 1989   | Salespersons feelings of competence– 6 items<br>Psychological success  | 1 to 7               |
| Miao, Lund & Evans 2009  | Task enjoyment—3. items (Sample item: It is important for me to have an outlet for self-expression through my job)       | 1 to 7               |
| *This scale included more intervals than the standard five-point scale. To capture the variation around the average rescaling anchored the average value on the original scale to the midpoint on the five-point scale (used the conversion factor to publish averages). |  |                      |
| <sup>2</sup> Reversed the values before converting since original scale valued 7 as not wanting promotion  |  |                      |

skills, is thought to erode as the pre-retirement salesperson turns attentions elsewhere (Craft, Doctors, Shkop & Benecki 1979; Rosen &

Jerdee 1976; Skinner 1983).

Few disagree that performance levels in the

exploration stage will be lower than those of the establishment stage (Sturman 2003; Waldman and Avolio 1986; Wright and Bonett 2002). Further some of these sources suggest performance levels are not maintained but may be higher in the establishment stage (Sturman 2003; Waldman and Avolio 1986). The change in performance, which may occur during the last career stage, is very much in question. Some studies suggests the performance level of professionals is less affected by career stage – and point to the possibility of accumulated depth of tacit knowledge as a reason for higher performance levels for older employees (Sturman 2003; Waldman and Avolio 1986). Most sales management studies, however, hypothesize a negative relationship (i.e. performance levels during the disengagement stage will be lower than those demonstrated during the maintenance stage). This hypothesis is certainly supported by earlier empirical work (Craft, Doctors, Shkop & Benecki 1979; Rosen & Jerdee 1976; Skinner 1983). Current conditions in sales may suggest the findings of these earlier studies are applicable today. Decreased performance levels of salespeople in the last career stage may be attributable to trends such as technological advances and industry consolidation (resulting in fewer more powerful buyers). The salesperson in this stage of his or her career is shifting attention away from work related activities (such as those required in a competitive environment by demanding buyers) or the need for investing time in learning new technologies. If the disengaged salesperson turns attention to more personal and less professional pursuits, sees his or her employment time horizon as an obstacle to learning new technology, then we may expect lower performance levels.

H<sub>4</sub> The level of performance between sequential career stages will change.

H<sub>4a</sub> Performance will be higher in establishment stage than in exploration stage.

H<sub>4b</sub> Performance will be higher in maintenance stage than in establishment stage.

H<sub>4c</sub> Performance will be higher in maintenance stage than in disengagement stage.

## METHODOLOGY

Studies were identified by searching indices of both journal and conference publications (i.e. American Business Index, PsychLit, El-Mar sources). Studies identified through these indices that met two criteria were deemed appropriate for inclusion in this analysis. Those two criteria are (1) measures of at least one the variables of interest (i.e. extrinsic motivation, intrinsic motivation, satisfaction or performance) and (2) the reported sufficient statistical information. Extrinsic motivation measures included two forms: one based on the value or importance of achieving pay or promotion. (See Table 2). Measures of intrinsic motivation included dimensions tapping the enjoyment of undertaking a challenging task and the enjoyment of demonstrating competence in completing the sales task. Measures of extrinsic motivation also tapped two forms as well (one measuring motivation to achieve increases in pay and one measuring motivation to achieve promotion).

To make full use of the heterogeneity within each career stage we calculated weighted (by sample size) and pooled the averages. While response scales for motivation and satisfaction measures tended to follow the standard Likert interval scale, performance measures were far more varied (See Table 3). Performance

**Table 3**  
**Satisfaction and Performance**  
**Measures and Response scales**

| <u>Study</u>   | <u>Satisfaction Measure</u>  | <u>Scale</u>            |
|--|--|-------------------------|
| Flaherty & Pappas 2002   | Job Satisfaction - 6 items   | 1 to 5                  |
| Hafer 1986   | Job satisfaction - 8 items   | 1 to 6                  |
| Menguc & Bhuian 2004   | Job Satisfaction - 4 items   | 1 to 5                  |
| Ornstien, Cron & Slocum '89  | Overall Satisfaction - 5 dimensions .  | 0, 1 or 3               |
| <u>Study</u>   | <u>Performance Measure</u>   | <u>Scale</u>            |
| Dalrymple & Strahle 1990   | Sales to Quota<br>Contribution %   | 0 to 100+*<br>0 to 100* |
| Hafer 1986   | Combination of value of insurance sold and financial rewards to sp.  | 13,000 to<br>102,000*   |
| Ornstein, Cron & Slocum 1989   | Summated managerial ratings of both objective and subjective dimensions (Sales volume, new acct dev, full line selling, leadership, planning, initiative, resourcefulness) | 1 to 7                  |
| Panagopoulos & Dimitriadis 2009  | Summated self-reported achievement relative to sales quotas for five outcomes (e.g. profit, new accts)   | 1 to 5                  |
| Rapp, Ahearne & Forbes 2007  | Percent of quota   | 0 to 100+*              |
| Weeks & Kahle 1990   | Summated managerial ratings of subjective dimensions (willingness to work hard, attitude, ability, improvement, planning and product knowledge)                            | 1 to 7                  |
| *This scale included more intervals than the standard five-point scale. To capture the variation around the average rescaling anchored the average value on the original scale to the midpoint on a five-point scale (and used the conversion factor to published averages). |  |                         |

measures were predominantly objective indicators (such as quota achievement or sales volume) with one study relying solely on subjective indicators (i.e. managerial ratings of salesperson attributes). Given the differences in these performance indicators, we compared pooled averages with and without the study using subjective indicators.

If the pattern suggested by life-span career theories exists, we should see evidence of these changes in sequential pairwise comparisons. To that end, the comparison conducted here focused on three pairwise comparisons (i.e. explore to establish, establish to maintain and maintain to disengage). Pairwise comparisons

were based on t-statistics that assumed unequal variances and calculated pooled standard deviations. Where pooled standard deviations were not complete we repeated the pairwise comparisons each time using those available estimates to test for convergent pattern of conclusions. Since this analysis will examine pairwise comparisons under these conditions, we attempted to reduce the type II error rate by a priori setting a high alpha level (and thus would consider a test statistic significant only at a probability level less than .05).



## RESULTS

Extrinsic motivation for promotion (but not for pay) is higher in establishment stage than in exploration stage ( $3.68_{\text{Est}} > 3.51_{\text{Exp}}$ ) with a t-statistic of 2.70 ( $\text{prob}=.0072$ ). (See Table 4 for t-statistics and Table 5 for averages). Thus  $H_{1a}$  is partially supported as salespeople in the establishment stage seek and are more motivated than their counterparts in the exploration stage by the opportunity for advancement. We anticipated the level for extrinsic motivation would be higher in the maintenance than in the establishment stage ( $H_{1b}$ ). Results did find significant differences but in counter-hypothesized direction. Levels of extrinsic

motivation (pay and promotion) were found to be significantly lower in the maintenance stage compared to the establishment stage ( $3.61_{\text{Est,pay}} > 3.20_{\text{Main,pay}}$  and  $3.68_{\text{Est,promo}} > 3.18_{\text{Main,promo}}$ ) with a t-statistics of 6.24 and 9.61 respectively. These results indicate there are significant differences in extrinsic motivation between establishment and maintenance stages but those levels are decreasing rather than increasing. The direction of the differences in both forms of extrinsic motivation continues to be significantly lower in the disengagement stage. Consistent with expectations of  $H_{1c}$  we found substantial declines in extrinsic motivation for pay and promotion between the maintenance and disengagement stages ( $3.20_{\text{Main,pay}} > 2.97_{\text{Dis,pay}}$  and  $3.18_{\text{Main,promo}} >$

**Table 4**  
**Results: t-statistics and probability**



| <b>Extrinsic – Pay</b>        | <b>t-stat.</b> | <b>Probability level</b> | <b>Conclusion</b>          |
|-------------------------------|----------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| Explore to Establishment      | 1.48           | .1406                    | $H_{1a}$ Not supported     |
| Establish to Maintenance      | 6.24           | <.0001                   | $H_{1b}$ Counter-Direction |
| Maint.to Disengagement        | 2.42           | .0161                    | $H_{1c}$ Supported         |
| <b>Extrinsic – Promotion</b>  |                |                          |                            |
| Explore to Establishment      | 2.70           | .0072                    | $H_{1a}$ Supported         |
| Establish to Maintenance      | 9.61           | <.0001                   | $H_{1b}$ Counter-Direction |
| Maint.to Disengagement        | 7.26           | <.0001                   | $H_{1c}$ Supported         |
| <b>Intrinsic – Challenge</b>  |                |                          |                            |
| Explore to Establishment      | 2.21           | .0272                    | $H_{2a}$ Supported         |
| Establish to Maintenance      | .52            | .6016                    | $H_{2b}$ Not supported     |
| Maint.to Disengagement        | 1.27           | .2046                    | $H_{2c}$ Not supported     |
| <b>Intrinsic – Competence</b> |                |                          |                            |
| Explore to Establishment      | 3.83           | .0002                    | $H_{2a}$ Supported         |
| Establish to Maintenance      | .11            | .9127                    | $H_{2b}$ Not supported     |
| Maint.to Disengagement        | .47            | .6380                    | $H_{2b}$ Not supported     |
| <b>Satisfaction</b>           |                |                          |                            |
| Explore to Establishment      | 2.41           | .0160                    | $H_{3a}$ Supported         |
| Establish to Maintenance      | 5.62           | <.0001                   | $H_{3b}$ Supported         |
| Maint. to Disengagement       | 1.17           | .2426                    | $H_{3c}$ Not Supported     |
| <b>Performance</b>            |                |                          |                            |
| Explore to Establishment      | 3.17           | .0016                    | $H_{4a}$ Supported         |
| Establish to Maintenance      | .26            | .7967                    | $H_{4b}$ Not Supported     |
| Maint.to Disengagement        | .14            | .8845                    | $H_{4c}$ Not Supported     |

2.65<sub>Dis.promo</sub>). The probability associated with these test statistics were .0161 for pay and less than .0001 for promotion (t-statistics of 2.42 and 7.26 respectively). Accordingly we hypothesized and found differences in extrinsic motivation between every sequential stage pooled average.

Intrinsic motivation is higher in the establishment stage than the exploration stage. This held true for both forms of intrinsic motivation. The pooled average intrinsic motivation for challenge was 3.09 in the exploration stage and 3.21 in the establishment stage (t-statistic 2.70<sub>prob.0072</sub>). The average intrinsic motivation for competence was 3.64 in exploration and 3.88 in establishment (t-statistic 2.21<sub>prob.0272</sub>). These comparisons support H<sub>2a</sub>. All other comparisons of pooled average intrinsic motivation levels (for both challenge

and competence) were not significantly different and thus H<sub>2b</sub> and H<sub>2c</sub> were not supported. This suggests intrinsic motivation changes will most likely be reflected in early in a salesperson's career (i.e. as the salesperson moves from the exploration stage to the establishment stage) rather than during subsequent (i.e. later) sequential stages.

The pairwise comparison of pooled averages for each of the career stages indicates satisfaction levels expressed by those salespeople in the exploration stage are less than those expressed by salespeople in their establishment stage. The resultant t-statistic of 2.41221 was significant at a probability level of .0186. (See Table 4) Additionally the average satisfaction level of maintenance stage is larger than the average of the establishment stage (3.53 for maintenance

| Table 5  |                    |                      |                    |                      |
|--|--------------------|----------------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| Results: Pooled Weighted averages  |                    |                      |                    |                      |
|  | <u>Exploration</u> | <u>Establishment</u> | <u>Maintenance</u> | <u>Disengagement</u> |
| <b><u>Extrinsic Motivation</u></b>   |                    |                      |                    |                      |
| Pay  | 3.72               | 3.61                 | 3.20               | 2.97                 |
| (n)  | (211)              | (257)                | (318)              | (73)                 |
| Promotion  | 3.51               | 3.68                 | 3.18               | 2.65                 |
| (n)  | (254)              | (383)                | (471)              | (111)                |
| <b><u>Intrinsic Motivation</u></b>   |                    |                      |                    |                      |
| Challenge  | 3.09               | 3.21                 | 3.24               | 3.34                 |
| (n)  | (256)              | (478)                | (422)              | (86)                 |
| Competence   | 3.64               | 3.88                 | 3.88               | 3.92                 |
| (n)  | (105)              | (252)                | (267)              | (86)                 |
| <b><u>Satisfaction</u></b>   | 3.13               | 3.26                 | 3.54               | 3.65                 |
| (n)  | (321)              | (523)                | (551)              | (85)                 |
| <b><u>Performance</u></b>  | 2.89               | 3.24                 | 3.27               | 3.24                 |
| (n)  | (359)              | (734)                | (582)              | (96)                 |
| Arrows indicates significant differences (between sequential stages)   |                    |                      |                    |                      |
|  Bold arrow indicates increase; |                    |                      |                    |                      |
|  Thin arrow indicates decrease  |                    |                      |                    |                      |

and 3.26 for establishment stage). This too was significant at a probability level less than .0001 (since the t-statistic was 5.62). No significant differences in satisfaction levels exist between those expressed by salespeople in the maintenance stage as compared to those in the disengagement stage (t-statistic of 1.16 with probability of .24). Exploration is higher than establishment, maintenance higher than establishment – but no difference between the last two stages (i.e. maintenance and disengagement). Thus  $H_{3a}$  and  $H_{3b}$  but not  $H_{3c}$  were supported (See Table 5).

The performance levels of salespeople in the exploration stage are lower than those in the establishment stage ( $3.24_{Est} > 2.89_{Exp}$ ). This comparison resulted in a t-statistic of 3.17 with an associated probability level of .0016 and provides support for  $H_{4a}$ . According to the other two sequential comparisons (i.e. establishment to maintenance and maintenance to disengagement), however, none of these pooled averages were significantly different. The pooled average performance levels of 3.24 for establishment did not differ from the 3.27 for maintenance and similarly maintenance did not differ from the 3.25 of disengagement. While we did find substantial increases in performance levels between the first two career stages, sequential comparisons failed to support expected differences (i.e.  $H_{4b}$  and  $H_{4c}$ ). This pattern was unaltered by deleting the study using subjective performance indicators.

## CONCLUSIONS AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

In summary we find sequential changes in extrinsic motivation seem to be common – in fact more common than finding sequential changes in performance or intrinsic motivation. Five of the possible six comparisons were

significant for extrinsic motivation (3 for pay and 3 for promotion) but only one pairwise comparison was significant for intrinsic motivation or performance. Generally the pattern also suggests strongly that when these dramatic changes do occur, they are more likely to occur as the salesperson moves from exploration to establishment (i.e. five of the six comparisons were significant).

By pooling averages of numerous career stage studies we conducted a test of sequential changes in career stage job outcomes. The resultant large number of salespeople in each of the four stages provided a heterogeneous cross section – and thus offers the promise of increasing the external validity of any one study. This type of validity is important given the common practice in sales management studies of attributing findings to career stage theory. This type of test is needed since sales management studies find significant age or experience effects and attribute these effects to career stage theory as the reason (Franke and Park 2006; Venkatesh, Challagalla and Kohli 2001). In the current study we pool data to identify levels of motivation, satisfaction and performance at different stages of career development to test the degree to which sequential stages change. Pooling results from B2B sales positions strengthens the applicability of career stage theories as past studies have found career path decisions and directions for salespeople are not the same as other occupations (Segers et al 2008). Results of this analysis indicate we are safe in attributing differences to career stages when the sample includes a large portion of salespeople in the exploration and establishment stages.

In this combination of a wide array of types of selling positions and industries, we found consistently significant changes do occur between the exploration and establishment

stages. Intrinsic motivation, satisfaction and performance are all lower in exploration than establishment. Promotion as an extrinsic reward provides less motivation to those salespeople in the exploration stage –and more of a motivator for those in the establishment stage.

The preponderance of changes between these two early stages of a salesperson's career carries meaningful managerial implications as well. In this combination of a wide array of types of selling positions and industries, we found dramatic increases occur between the exploration and establishment career stages. Since the exploration career stage is highly resource intensive, sales managers can take heart. The investments of training, coaching and managerial attention during the start of a salesperson's career bring dividends. These dividends arrive in the very next phase of the salesperson's career and take the form of attitude (higher levels of satisfaction) as well as behavior (higher levels of performance). Similarly we found intrinsic motivation for taking on challenging tasks and for demonstrating competence increase. These forms of motivation may be associated with (perhaps even precursors to) higher levels of performance. Thus, the timing and frequency of managerial feedback concerning a novice salesperson's competency levels should be crucial as the salesperson advances from the exploration career stage to the establishment career stage. Similarly motivation to take on challenging tasks increases at this career juncture. Practically speaking, providing feedback to help build competency levels can serve two purposes. First our study indicates this is one form of intrinsic motivation that should improve and add value to the salesperson in the establishment career stage. Second, the sales manager can use the competency indicators to determine which types of more challenging sales tasks he or she

should assign to the salesperson. Salespeople in the establishment stage of their career express higher levels of intrinsic motivation in pursuit of these challenges. Sales managers should expect to see the biggest strides in the tenure of the salesperson to be those that occur between the exploration and establishment stage. While managers have long been aware of the importance of initial training period, results here point to the opportunity to leverage changes occurring between the exploration and establishment stages. This leverage may take the form of coaching, providing information to help the salesperson build competence, identify challenges and secure advancement. The salesperson in the exploration stage will respond more strongly to managerial feedback aimed at helping them build selling skills.

The most dramatic and frequent changes in job outcomes are more likely to occur between the exploration and the establishment stage. This finding carries some managerial warnings as well. If the biggest gains are realized early then recruitment and selection take on even more importance. It is important that managers spend resources to make sure salespeople hired and trained in the exploration stage stay to demonstrate those improvements in the establishment stage. Unfortunately the exploration stage is one that typically suffers from higher turnover rates (Flaherty and Pappas 2002). Thus the investments of managerial attention in developing sales trainees may not come to fruition. The direction and severity of the changes between exploration and establishment provide a strong justification for investing in selection and recruitment tools. Realistic job previews and stringent selection methods may reduce these losses.

By pooling the responses we were able to conduct a comparison on a larger set of

disengagement career stage salespeople. In doing so we found significant differences in only one outcome, extrinsic motivation. While results here indicate extrinsic rewards hold less motivating force, the same cannot be said of any other job-related outcome compared here. Perhaps sales managers should question the assumption that salespeople who are pre-retirement suffer from declines. Salespeople in the disengagement career stage were thought to express lower levels of satisfaction, to find sales tasks less intrinsically motivating – and to allow their performance to erode. In our comparison of salespeople in their maintenance career stage to salespeople in their disengagement stage, we found no support for these expected decreases. This lack of significant differences calls into question the practice of labeling this stage as the disengagement career stage. Salespeople in this last stage may not be disengaged, may not see their current employer as their last and may in some cases be maintaining rather than disengaging. This suggests a note of caution to managers operating under the assumption that salespeople in the latter career stages have disengaged. In part this may be attributable to an age-cohort effect. The tendency to delay retirement is becoming more common among Baby-boomers and this may have increased the variability in the responses among respondents in the maintenance career stage or the disengagement career stage. This may in part explain why fewer changes were observed as we compare maintenance to disengagement stage salespeople. At the very least these findings suggests managers' should not discount the most senior members of their sales force.

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The studies combined and compared in this research effort relied on both age and perceptual measures to categorize respondents into one of the career stages. While these two methods seem to converge with respect to earlier career stages (for example all studies categorized exploration salespeople as those under the age of thirty), latter career stages included a much wider variation on age ranges. This may have resulted in masking differences between the last two career stages. This comparison is especially important as salespeople in these later stages delay retirement and remain in the workforce longer than their previous generational counterparts. Currently the salespeople in what is now termed disengagement are extending their current job responsibilities and not following the traditional 'pre-retirement' path. In this case (and perhaps in others) administering the 'Career Concerns Inventory' as a method of categorizing respondents may be more appropriate.

We expected extrinsic motivation (for pay or promotion) to decrease in the latter comparisons (i.e. between the maintenance career stage and the disengagement career stage). We did not, however, expect extrinsic motivation levels to decrease as the salesperson transitions from the establishment career stage to the maintenance stage. The fact that these significant differences were applicable to both forms of extrinsic motivation (i.e. pay and promotion) may suggest this is not an anomaly. Theoretically these findings may be attributable to concepts offered by self-determination theorists (Vansteenkiste et al 2007). Self-determination theories claim extrinsic rewards are less effective motivators and this is especially the case over longer periods of time.

The combination of responses from multiple studies allowed us to conduct pairwise differences in salespeople selling services (such as insurance products), industrial goods as well as those engaged in more missionary sales (i.e. pharmaceutical). This comparison, however, was restricted to pairwise comparisons and not overall patterns. Analysis that examines overarching patterns may be fruitful in demonstrating career span patterns suggested here. Specifically the pairwise comparisons here suggest satisfaction levels (and possibly intrinsic motivation levels) may be linearly increasing for the entire career span. Finally, our results concerning satisfaction levels do not consider the possible impact of role perceptions. Role conflict and role ambiguity have both been found to have a pronounced effect on satisfaction and performance (Brown and Peterson 1993). Recent empirical work by Jones, Chonko, Rangarajan and Roberts (2007) suggest role perceptions (such as role overload) may have a more pronounced effect depending on the salesperson's career stage. While repeatedly we find age, experience or career stage have an effect on our empirical studies, it would be far too simplistic to assume career Stage alone explains substantial variability..

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Susan DelVecchio Associate Professor of Marketing and Supply Chain Management, College of Business—Bate Buuiling East Carolina University, Greenville, NC 27858-4353 (252)328-6595; Fax: (252)328-4095

Ryan J. Perkins obtained his MBA from East Carolina University and is currently employed as Financial Manager. with Clinical Trials Management Group 1800 NorthGreene Street, Suite B Greenville, NC 27834 (252)752-8553; Fax (252)752-4373

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