Does the Quality of Consulting Related Behaviors Mediate the relationship Between those Behaviors and salesperson Effectiveness?

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This study sought to develop a model of performance including well documented salesperson behaviors (adaptive selling and customer orientation) as well as little studied salesperson behaviors (listening and sales consulting) to measure the relative impact of these behaviors. The study also sought to determine if the quality of those behaviors, measured by the extent of value-added for customers, mediated the relationships between behaviors and performance variables (customer retention and quota percentile). The results also suggest that the extent of value added for the customer, fully mediates four of six possible behavior-performance relationships. An examination of direct and indirect effects reveals that sales consulting behavior has the largest effect on customer retention, while active listening behavior has the largest effect on quota percentile. The authors discuss explanations for, and the implications of, these results.

INTRODUCTION

Growing recognition of the importance of customer retention has influenced modification of sales management programs to encourage sales force consulting in order to create value for the customer and not merely communicate it. Baber (1997) suggests that the objective of a sales consultant is to "to develop industry, customer, and/or technical knowledge, become an expert in some area of value to the customer, and then look for and solve customer wants, needs, problems, and opportunities related to that knowledge and expertise" (p. 162). Effective sales consulting activities lead to lower customer operating costs in the use of the product for the customer and/or lower supply chain costs.

Pelham's studies (2002a, 2002b, 2006), documented links between consulting-oriented sales management programs and firm sales growth and profit. However the models documented in those studies were at the firm level, not the at salesperson level, and did not study the impact of multiple consulting related salesperson behaviors on performance outcomes more under the control of salespeople.

This study seeks to investigate whether multiple consulting behaviors directly impact performance outcomes, such as customer retention and quota percentile, or indirectly impact those outcomes, through the quality of those behaviors. At the salesperson level, Plank and Reid (1994) suggest an expansion of the Walker, Churchill, and Ford (1979) model of the antecedents and consequences of salesperson's behaviors. Plank and Reid suggest that the immediate outcome of a salesperson selling interaction (e.g. persuading purchase to decision makers) or a non-selling interaction behavior (e.g. a contact with non-decision makers to service an existing account) is behavioral quality. Plank and Reid also suggest that most salesperson research is in the context of the selling interaction with buyers, neglecting the impact of salesperson behaviors outside of the selling interaction, such as interactions with

users. For example, studies of adaptive selling (Spiro and Weitz, 1990), customer orientation (Saxe and Weitz, 1982), and active salesperson listening (Castleberry and Shepherd, 1993) have been in the context of the selling interaction. Those studies (see Franke and Park's 2006 meta-analysis) document positive bi-variate relationships between adaptive selling, customer orientation, listening, and salesperson effectiveness outcomes such as achievement of quota. However, as suggested by Plank and Reid (1994) salespeople's effectiveness are also dependent on the quality of interactions with buyer personnel other than decision makers such as information gathering from users or technical employees or exploring solutions to customer problems. There have been no studies of adaptive selling or customer orientation in this context of salesperson consulting. In addition, there has been no study of comprehensive relationships between adaptive selling, customer orientation, listening, and consulting behaviors and the outcomes of those behaviors.

Plank and Reid (1994) indicate that salespeople are only partially responsible for effectiveness outcomes such as profit and sales growth. At the salesperson level and the firm level, sales growth and profit are affected by the actions and decisions of other functions. The implication of their suggestions is that sales managers should consider more emphasis in evaluation and reward programs on behavioral quality to complement traditional output oriented evaluation and rewards. They suggest that the quality of behaviors mediate the relationships between behaviors and salesperson effectiveness (e.g. sales versus quota).

This study sought to test their model by measuring the quality of salesperson customer orientation, adaptive selling, listening, and consulting behaviors, and the whether that quality mediates the relationships between behaviors and appropriate effectiveness measures. One measure of salesperson behavioral quality would be based upon Pelham's (2002b) construct of consulting effectiveness, the extent of value added to the product/service from sales-force suggestions to buyer to reduce costs. Therefore the purposes of this study are to :1)determine the relationship between salesperson adaptive selling, listening, customer orientation and salesperson consulting behaviors, 2) measure the quality of those behaviors in terms of consulting effectiveness, and 3) test Plank and Reid's (1994) model by determining if consulting effectiveness mediates the relationships between salesperson behaviors and quota performance and customer retention.

HYPOTHESIZED RELATIONSHIPS

Salesperson Consulting

Salesperson consulting behaviors provides a crucial conduit for customer need information to the technical and marketing personnel of the selling firm. Pelham's (2006) results suggest that successful firms involve customers early in the product development effort, resulting in enhanced performance for the buyer and the seller. The salesperson's ability to develop a deep understanding of customer goals and problems, as well as the ability to develop potential solutions allows the selling firm to be more innovative and increases the potential for successful product modifications. To be an effective consultant it would be expected that the salesperson would practice adaptive, customer oriented, and listening behaviors.

Salesperson consultants would tend to spend a higher percentage of their time, compared to other salespeople, seeking to solve my

customers' problems, compared to the time making sales presentations. Salesperson consultants would also tend to spend more time, relative to other salespeople, listening to users of the product than the time spent in the buyer's office making presentations. Salesperson consultants would spend more time consulting, compared to other salespeople, with current clients seeking to lower their costs, at the expense of time spent developing new accounts.

Adaptive Selling

Adaptive salespeople (Spiro and Weitz, 1990) have a greater tendency, compared to non-adaptive salespeople to experiment with different sales approaches, to be flexible in the selling approach used, and to use a wide range of selling approaches. Because of these tendencies, adaptive salespeople have the ability to gather appropriate customer information, correctly process that information, and correctly adapt and adjust their interactions to the unique nature of the situation. Thus, they are more likely to perform better than salespeople who are less able to adapt their interactions (Spiro and Weitz, 1990). Adaptive salespeople adjust messages in response to customer reaction, which is related to customer oriented behaviors and listening behaviors designed to uncover the needs of customers in order to satisfy those needs. Franke and Park (2006) argue that adapting to customers entails focusing on their individual needs and preferences, which should lead to a customer-centered, problem-solving orientation (customer orientation) Their results suggest that the direction of influence goes from adaptive selling (e.g. flexibility and trying to understand how one customer differs from another) to customer orientation (trying to find out which products would be most helpful, taking a problem solving approach, and having the customers' best interests in mind).

Customer Orientation

Customer oriented salespeople (Saxe and Weitz 1982) try to figure out a customer's needs, have the customer's best interests in mind, and take a problem solving approach in selling products or services to customers. Customer-oriented behaviors include recommending products that are best suited to solving customer problems.

Interpersonal Listening in Personal Selling

Salespeople are competent listeners if they ask appropriate questions, uncover the customer's problems/needs, and seek appropriate feedback throughout the interaction (Castleberry et al., 1999). Ramsey and Sohi (1997) argue that successful implementation of a customer orientation requires that salespeople have the necessary listening skills to effectively gather information about the customer.

Castleberry et al., (1999) tested a scale to measure Interpersonal Listening in the Personal Selling Environment (ILPS). The items seek to measure the extent of active listening behaviors such as avoiding interrupting customers, using a lot of probing questions and continuing questions, and reading non-verbal communication. They found that this construct was associated with higher quality of sales presentations as well as output measures such as closing sales, dollar volume of sales, and converting prospects into customers.

Functional Integration Theory

Functional integration theory (Griffin and Hauser, 1992) suggests that the marketing/R&D interface is critical because it integrates knowledge about market needs with knowledge about how to create a product to meet those needs. Thus, successful salesperson consulting is

critical in the ability to deliver value added products to customers. In this study salesperson consulting is defined as time spent by salespeople seeking to solve customers' problems as well as time consulting with current clients to lower their costs. Franke and Parke (1996) found a causal relationship between adaptive selling. In the model that will be tested in this study, we will expect relationships between all salesperson behaviors, but limit causal links to those between consulting related behaviors, behavioral quality, and salesperson effectiveness (customer retention and quota percentile).

SOCIAL EXCHANGE THEORY AND RELATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS THEORIES

Social exchange theory (Heider, 1958) and relational communications theory (Alloy and Tabachnik, 1984) provide further support for the supposition that a salesperson's consulting and related behaviors should be positively related to consulting effectiveness and its outcomes. These theories are based upon the thinking process about the expected behaviors of the other party within the contexts of social norms in their roles and relationships. Personnel in the buying firm may expect typical salespeople to push and manipulate to sell their products, with little regard or understanding of the needs or problems of that firm. Salesperson consulting behaviors signal buying firm personnel that the salesperson intends to understand the firm's goals, needs, and problems. These behaviors signal buyers of the salesperson's desire to collaborate in seeking solutions to problems and indicate problem-solving competence. This results in buying firm personnel being more willing to cooperate with the sales consultant in the process to seek solutions to the buying firm's problems, leading to a greater ability to uncover and solve customer problems. As problems are uncovered and solved to the satisfaction of customers there is likely to be an increase in the salesperson's sales and improvement in that salesperson's customer retention. Sales consulting behaviors which result in reduced customer costs should lead customers to value the relationship with the seller, lead to longer relationships, and, thus, higher level of sales. Based upon the Plank and Reid (1994) model, the influence of consulting behaviors on customer retention or quota percentile sales may be mediated by the quality of those behaviors. However, based upon the Walker, Churchill, and Ford (1979) model and the theories discussed above we present the following hypotheses:

H1: There is a positive relationship between Sales Consulting (SALCONS) and Consulting Effectiveness (CONSEFF).

H2: There is a positive relationship between Sales Consulting (SALCONS) and customer retention.

H3: There is a positive relationship between Sales Consulting (SALCONS) and percent of quota.

In this study additional measures of Sales Consulting and Consulting Effectiveness will be tested for reliability and validity to provide a more comprehensive view of those constructs, compared to the more limited measures in Pelham's (2002b and 2006) studies. In this study measures of constructs will be based on those previously found to be reliable and valid by other researchers. The methods section the results of further validation to eliminate items that load on multiple constructs.

Various studies, at the firm level, discuss the benefits of enhancing product value for customers, including reduced customer costs, customer satisfaction, customer retention, sales growth, and profitability (Wisner, 2001).

Customers are likely to be more loyal to vendors who provide continuous product value improvements and who provide consulting suggestions that decrease operational costs. Pelham (2002b; 2006) discussed why sales-force efforts to reduce customer costs should also result in customer satisfaction/retention, leading to selling firm growth and profitability. For the same reasons, at the salesperson level, there should be a positive relationship between salesperson consulting effectiveness and measures of salesperson effectiveness.

When a salesperson's consulting efforts add value to the product/service by reducing costs or enhancing customer revenue, customer satisfaction should increase and the customer should desire to continue their relationship. Salespeople who are effective in their consulting effort should have higher levels of customer retention and sales performance, compared to salespeople who have lower levels of consulting effectiveness. Thus:

H4: There is a positive relationship between salesperson Consulting Effectiveness (CONSEFF) and salesperson customer retention

H5: There is a positive relationship between salesperson Consulting Effectiveness (CONSEFF) and salesperson percentile of quota achievement.

It is possible that adaptive selling, customer orientation, and active listening could have direct influences on consulting effectiveness, and not just indirect influences through consulting behaviors. Salespeople who practice adaptive selling modify sales presentations across and during customer interactions in response to the perceived nature of the sales situation (Spiro and Weitz, 1990). This could result in a more cooperative, rather than adversarial, relationship with customer personnel, leading to a more conducive context for effective problem solving. A number of studies (e.g. Spiro et al., 1990; Johlke, 2006) have provided the theoretical justification for expectation of a positive relationship between adaptive selling and various measures of salesperson effectiveness, such as sales growth. Those studies and others (see Franke and Park, 2006) have documented the significance of those relationships. It is possible, however, that in a model with other related salesperson behaviors, that the relationship between adaptive selling and measures of salesperson effectiveness may be indirect. Also, based on the Plank and Reid (1994) model, it may be possible that the relationship between adaptive selling and salesperson effectiveness may be indirect through the quality of adaptive selling behaviors. But, consistent with the theories discussed above, previous empirical evidence, and the Walker, Churchill, and Ford (1979) model we present the following hypotheses:

H6: There is a positive relationship between Adaptive Selling and Consulting Effectiveness (CONSEFF).

Franke and Park (2006) summarize studies documenting links between adaptive selling behaviors and customer orientation (Saxe and Weitz, 1982). Franke and Park's argue that the adaptive salesperson would tend to take a problem-solving orientation. In a similar fashion, adaptive selling behaviors, designed to modify interactions with customers based on the unique nature of the situation, should be positively related to consulting behaviors that implement a salesperson's customer oriented motivation to figure out a customer's needs and are consistent with the salesperson's motivation to keep the customer's best interests in mind. Thus:

H7: There is a positive relationship between Adaptive Selling and Salesperson Consulting (SALCONS).

As indicated above, Ramsey and Sohi (1997) argue that salespeople listening skills are necessary to successfully implement the motivational component of customer orientation. If salespeople cannot ask appropriate questions they cannot uncover the explicit and implicit customer's problems/needs and therefore would be unlikely to engage in consulting behaviors. Wotruba (1996) argues that in order to create value for a customer, the salesperson must sense and diagnose customer needs and problems, which require listening behaviors. These listening behaviors should be necessary elements of salesperson consulting efforts to diagnose and solve customer problems. The salesperson must effectively listen to understand, not only the symptoms of those problems, but uncover the important causes of the problems before solutions are explored with the customer. Thus:

H8: There is a positive relationship between Interpersonal Listening in Personal Selling and Salesperson Consulting (SALCONS).

Salesperson customer orientation requires salespeople to be motivated to understand customer needs, to be motivated by the customers' interests, and to recommend products that are best suited to solving customer problems. Therefore, it is necessary that the customer-oriented salesperson perform diagnostic and problem solving behaviors associated with salesperson consulting. It would be expected that salesperson customer orientated motivation and behaviors would lead to behaviors designed to uncover and solve customer problems. Thus:

H9: There is a positive relationship between Customer Orientation and Salesperson Consulting (SALCONS).

Since active listening or ILPS creates the impression that the salesperson sincerely cares about what the customer's employees are saying this should lead to stronger relationships with those employees. The stronger relationships enable more productive exploration of customer needs and a more appropriate match between those needs and the seller's products and services. Consistent with the theories discussed above we suggest that:

H10: There is a positive relationship between Interpersonal Listening in Personal Selling (ILPS) and Consulting Effectiveness.

Social exchange theory (Heider, 1958) and relational communications theory (Alloy and Tabachnik, 1984), in a selling situation, would lead to the expectation that the customer-oriented behaviors of salespeople provide informational cues to buyers as to the salespersons' intentions to solve customers' problems, leading to a consultative and reciprocal dialogue. This expectation is reinforced by the finding by Saxe and Weitz (1982) of a positive association between salesperson customer orientation and buyer cooperation, as well as repeat purchase, trust, and lack of conflict. Thus:

H11: There is a positive relationship between Customer Orientation (CO) and Consulting Effectiveness.

Franke and Park's meta-analysis (2006) summarize the theoretical justification for expectation of relationships between adaptive selling, as well as customer orientation, and salesperson effectiveness. They found a significant relationship between ADAPTS and effectiveness measures. That meta-analysis

discusses studies providing empirical evidence supporting those expectations and evidence of relationships between those adaptive selling and effectiveness measures such as sales versus quota.

As indicated above, based on the Plank and Reid (1994) model, it may be possible that the relationship between salesperson behaviors and salesperson effectiveness measures may be indirect through the quality of adaptive selling behaviors. But, consistent with the theories discussed above and the Walker, Churchill, and Ford (1979) model we present the following hypotheses:

There is a positive relationship between:

H12: Adaptive Selling and Customer Retention.

H13: Adaptive Selling and Percent Quota.

Customer Orientation (Saxe and Weitz, 1982) is described as behaviors directed toward determining and understanding the needs of the target customer and adapting the selling organization's response in order to satisfy those needs better than the competition, providing a competitive advantage, leading to superior salesperson effectiveness. Empirical studies have supported this supposition (e.g. Sigauw et al., 1994). It is possible, however that the presence of other salesperson behaviors in a more comprehensive model may result in insignificant links to effectiveness measures. It is also possible that, consistent with the Plank and Reid (1994) model that the quality of customer orientation behaviors may mediate relationships between customer orientation and effectiveness measures. However, consistent with previous empirical evidence the theories discussed earlier, and the Walker, Churchill, and Ford (1979) model we hypothesize that:

There is a positive relationship between:

H14: Customer Orientation and Customer Retention.

H15: Customer Orientation and Percent Quota.

The link between active listening, Interpersonal Listening in the Personal Selling Environment Castleberry et al., (1999), and measures of salesperson effectiveness would be expected based on Kohli et al.'s (1998) conclusion that the accumulated knowledge and learning of individual organizational members are the only sources of sustainable competitive advantage. Castleberry et al., (1993) discuss how Spiro and Weitz (1990) arguments for the adaptive selling-performance link also provide a theoretical justification for the expectation of a relationship between salesperson listening and salesperson effectiveness. Sharma and Lambert's (1994) study found that inaccurate salesperson's perceptions of customers led to negative salesperson effectiveness. These links may be mediated by the quality of listening behaviors, consistent with the Plank and Reid (1994) model. However, consistent with previous empirical evidence the theories discussed earlier, and the Walker, Churchill, and Ford (1979) model we hypothesize that:

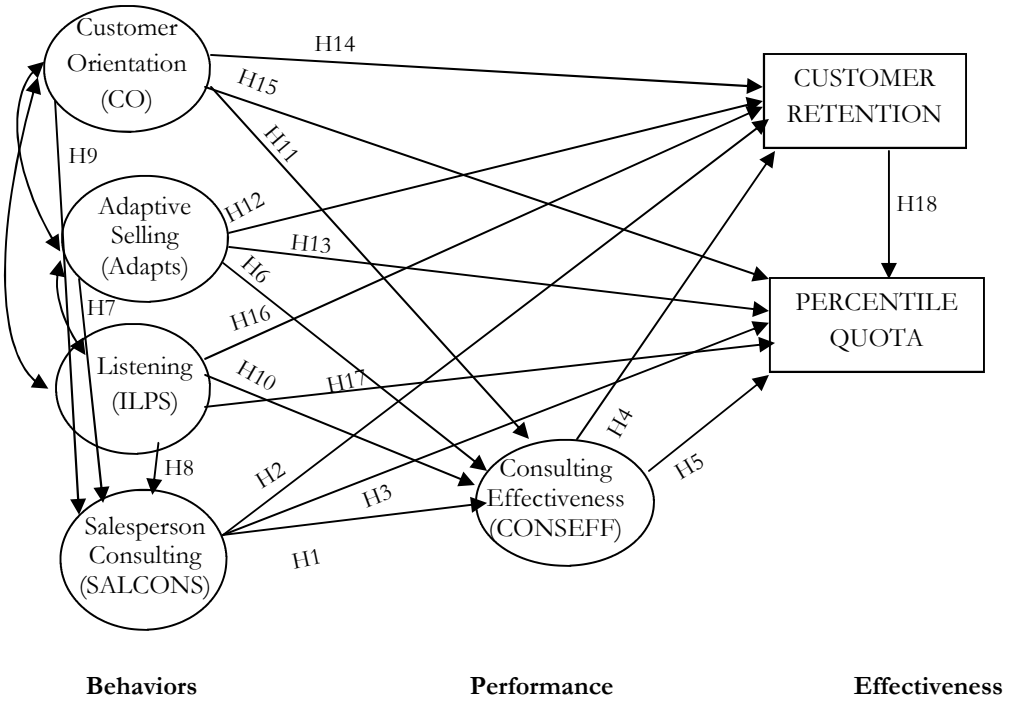
There is a positive relationship between:

H16: Interpersonal Listening in Personal Selling and Customer Retention.

H17: Interpersonal Listening in Personal Selling and Percent Quota.

A salesperson cannot be customer oriented unless he/she develops a good understanding of customer needs through effective listening (Ramsey and Sohli, 1997), 2) analyzes and understands customer problems, and 3) tailors products and services to meet customer needs and solve their problems (Saxe and Weitz, 1982).

Figure 1: Theoretical Model



Model Fit: Chi-square 333, d.f. 151; NFI .932; FRI .905; IFI .961; TLI .946; CFI .961; RMSEA .054; PNFI .670; SMC SALCONS: .335; SMC CONSEFF: .246; SMC Percent Quota: .317; SMC Retention:

Given the documented relationships between those behaviors, the model will assume covariance links between those behaviors. Figure 1 illustrates the hypothesized relationships, which assume both direct links from behaviors to effectiveness (Walker, Churchill, and Ford model) and indirect links (Plank and Reid model).

Reicheld (1996) document a positive relationship between customer retention and firm performance (sales and profit). This implies a possible equivalent relationship at the salesperson level. Thus the following is a replication hypothesis:

H18: There is a positive relationship between Customer Retention and Percent Quota.

METHOD

The sample was obtained by utilizing an Internet panel operated by Markettools.

ZoomPanel, an actively managed on line panel community devoted to supporting market research. Controls are established to detect questionable survey taking behavior and remove bad data from the data set. An invitation to participate in this study was sent to the 2,316 panelists who indicated that their profession was full-time, non-retail sales. In addition, a screening question to eliminate those involved in retail

sales was utilized as a panelist may have changed occupation since joining the panel.

Given Weitz's (1981) conclusion that much of the previous research on sales performance was contradictory or inconclusive because of overgeneralization across too many situations, this study's sample was limited to non-retail salespeople. Non-retail salespeople are less likely to engage in purely transactional selling, providing more opportunities for consulting. Four hundred and twenty panelists completed the entire questionnaire. The response rate is 18.1% (420/2,316) for respondents meeting the screening criteria. There were 27 respondents who did not meet the screening criteria. The composition of respondents were: 22% manufacturing, 12 % professional services, 2% pharmaceutical representatives, and 65% other services. By way of comparison, the composition of non-retail salespeople, as measured by the 2000 U.S. Census of Business, is 32% manufacturing/wholesale sales representatives and 68% service sales representatives. Early responders and late responders were compared based on the above proportions, as well as a comparison of the means for the constructs of interest and there were no significant differences (Armstrong and Overton, 1977).

There could be a concern that the diversity of this study's sampling frame could mask relationships if there are significant differences in relationships across types of selling situations. Pelham (2002a) discusses why the extent and outcomes of sales consulting could differ across typologies of selling positions. But his (2002b) study found that the there were few significant differences in levels of sales force consulting behavior or consulting effectiveness across types of manufacturing industries although the relationship was somewhat stronger in low customer/product differentiation industries. A study of means of the variables of interest found no difference between manufacturing salesperson's responses and service salesperson's responses. For instance, the mean for salesperson consulting (with a scale from 1 to 7) in the manufacturing sub-sample was 4.6 (s.d. 1.3), compared to 4.7 (s.d. 1.4) for the service sub-sample. The mean for consulting effectiveness (with a scale from 1 to 10) in the manufacturing sub-sample is 5.0 (s.d. 1.3), compared to 4.9 (s.d. 1.4) for the service sub-sample.

A study of correlations between variables of interest, with the sample split between manufacturing and service firms, found no significant differences, which is consistent with Franke and Park's (2006) conclusion in their meta-analysis that there is little evidence of moderators of ADAPTS or CO.

Hypotheses were tested using SEM (AMOS 5.0). Bi-variate correlations indicated that none exceeded the level of .8 indicated by Gujarati (2003) as an indication of a serious level of multicollinearity. Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) levels were examined and no variable exceeded the level of 10, considered by Kleinbaum (1988) to indicate a highly collinear variable.

Although the survey items were derived from scales validated in previous research, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted, given the documented high correlations between behavioral constructs. Some items were eliminated from these previously validated scales due to low loadings on the appropriate construct. These low loadings on validated constructs are due to the high correlations between salesperson behaviors in this study. This was not the situation when those scales were validated in the original studies. Researchers can contact the authors for the items used to represent constructs and the results of CFA.

The measurement model achieved good fit indices. The model fit statistics were: Chi-Square 188.4, d.f. 71; p= .000; NFI .95; RFI .93; IFI .969; TLI .95; CFI .97; and RMSEA .063.The SMC (squared multiple correlation) score for a latent performance variable combining quota performance and retention performance was below .50 and therefore it was not possible to include a multiple item effectiveness construct. The parameters for the items measuring the latent variables were significant. The average variance extracted of .50 equals the cutoff level of .50 level suggested by Bagozzi and Yi (1988).

The average variance extracted values for the remaining latent variables are at 50 or above (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988). Discriminant validity is indicated for all constructs by noting that the squared correlations of the constructs with each other is less than the average variance extracted values for each construct (Hair et al. 2006). All items had significant regression weights on the construct. However, there were three construct items included in the model with SMC scores below .5, which negatively affected model fit. Future studies should seek to improve construct measurement to deal with the high correlations between behavioral variables.

Four items were chosen from Robinson et al.'s (2002) shortened five item version of Spiro and Weitz's (1990) ADAPTS scale. These four Adaptive Selling items achieved a good coefficient alpha score of .86. SMC levels range from .46 to .74. The item eliminated (I try to understand how one customer differs from another.) was eliminated because of a low factor loading and SMC score. It also tends to measure a motivational aspect of adaptive selling versus the behaviors which the focus of this study.

Five items measuring salesperson customer orientation were derived from Periatt et al.'s (2004) shortened version of Saxe and Weitz's (1982) customer orientation component of their SOCO (Selling Orientation/Customer Orientation) scale. The coefficient alpha score for these five items was .93 and SMC levels range from .64 to .84.

Factor analysis reduced the original fourteen-item ILPS scale (Castleberry and Shepherd, 1993) to four items (Appendix 1). The four-item scale resulted in a coefficient alpha score of .87 (compared to .93 for the full 14 item scale). All four items achieved significant regression weights on the construct and squared multiple correlation levels ranged from .57 to .69. .The four items retained were: I wait for the buyer to finish speaking before evaluating what has been said; I ask clarifying questions like "I'm not sure I know what you mean"; I restate what the buyer has stated or asked; I summarize what the buyer has said. Some of the items eliminated measured motivation rather than behavior, such as: I make an effort to understand the buyer's point of view; I try to find things I have in common with the buyer. Other items eliminated were very similar to the retained items and seem to be included in the original scale to measure respondent consistency.

There is concern whether the four items measure the same construct as the original one. However, when the shortened four-item construct was substituted for the full fourteen item construct in multiple regression models there was no significant differences in the size of the parameters or their significance.

Three sales consulting (SALCONS) items, of seven items tested, achieved acceptable squared multiple correlation scores. These measures sought to provide more detail than Pelham's (2002b) single measure of non-buyer consulting time, which used a constant sum question to comparing salesperson's time talking (about

experiences /problems with the company's product) with engineers, users, and other customer employees, compared to time spent talking to buyers/purchasing agents.

Salesperson Consulting Effectiveness (CONSEFF) was measured with two items based on the measures from Pelham's (2002b) study. The parameters for the items were significant in the measurement model. The correlation between the two measures of consulting effectiveness was .63.

The use of salespeople as respondents for independent and dependent variables and the high level of correlations between variables of interest raise the issue of common method variance. However, those high correlations were also found in other studies of relationships between salesperson behaviors and relationships between salesperson behaviors and outcomes (Franke and Park, 2006; Castleberry et al.1999; Pelham, 2002b; Ramsey and Sohi, 1997). A salesperson's reports of the levels of behaviors and performance could have an upward bias due to desires for social acceptability. However, Churchill et al. (1985) conclude in their meta-analysis that self-report measures of performance do not demonstrate any particular upward bias. Recently, Franke and Park's (2006) meta-analysis noted significant correlations between self-rated, manager rated, and objective measures of performance. Tests were conducted to estimate the extent of common method variance. Applying Harmon's one factor test (Podsakoff and Organ, 1986) did not reveal one general factor accounting for most of the covariance between independent and dependent variables. Confirmatory factor analysis, assuming one factor with all items, revealed a poor model fit (RMSEA = .15). Poor fit was consistent in both high and low performance sub-groups. Partial correlations between SALCONS and CONSEFF, as well as CONSEFF and the combined performance variable, remain significant, controlling for the "method factor."

RESULTS

Table 1 provides the standardized regression parameters, their significance, and model fit for the theoretical model testing direct and indirect links between behaviors, performance, and effectiveness. The results of a reduced model results, a nested model with only significant effects, is provided in the last column, this reduced model gives an indication as to whether the influence of a behavior on outcomes is direct or indirect. The theoretical model fit statistics indicate a reasonable fit with fit indices above .9 and RMSEA at .054. The model's p statistic is below .05, reflecting the large sample size (n = 420). The Hoelter (1983) statistic indicates that the sample size would have to be less than 228 for the significance level to exceed .05. The SMC (squared multiple correlations) for dependent variables indicate a reasonable amount of variance explained (SALCONS .34; CONSEFF .25; PERCENT QUOTA .32; and RETENTION .34). The NFI, RFI, IFI, TLI, and CFI fit statistics for the reduced model are very similar to the theoretical model, while the PNFI and PCFI fit statistics are improved in the reduced model due to the reduced number of parameters.

The parameters linking Sales Consulting (SALCONS) to Consulting Effectiveness (CONSEFF) and Customer Retention are positive and significant (.242, $p < .01$; .190, $p < .01$), leading to acceptance of hypotheses 1 and 2. The link from SALCONS to Percent Quota is not significant. Thus hypothesis 3 is rejected. This lack of significance is due to the inclusion of CONSEFF in the model as a mediating variable, since the bivariate correlation between SALCONS and Percent Quota is

Table 1: Simultaneous Equation Model Statistics (n = 420)

Hypotheses	Independent-	DependentVari-	Theoretical	Reduced Model 2;
1	SALCONS	CONSEFF	.242**	.337***
2	SALCONS	RETENTION	.190**	.200***
3	SALCONS	PER-	-.057	
4	CONSEFF	RETENTION	.325***	.354**
5	CONSEFF	PER-	.454***	.493***
6	ADAPTS	CONSEFF	.163*	.248***
7	ADAPTS	SALCONS	.135*	.179**
8	ILPS	SALCONS	.395***	.484***
9	CO	SALCONS	.140	
10	ILPS	CONSEFF	.143	
11	CO	CONSEFF	.074	
12	ADAPTS	RETENTION	.075	
13	ADAPTS	PER-	-.02	
14	CO	RETENTION	.160*	.207***
15	CO	PER-	.045	
16	ILPS	RETENTION	.012	
17	ILPS	PER-	.120*	.149**
18	RETENTION	PER-	.106	
Chi-Sq.			332.8	349.7
d.f.			151	160
Chi.Sq./d.f.			2.204	2.186
p			.000	.000
NFI (2)			.932	.928
RFI (3)			.905	.906
IFI (4)			.961	.960
TLI (5)			.946	.947
CFI (6)			.961	.959
RMSEA (7)			.054	.053
PNFI (8)			.670	.707
PCFI (8)			.691	.731
Hoelter (9)			228	229
SMC		CONSEFF	.246	.243
SMC		PER-	.317	.311
SMC		RETENTION	.343	.345
SMC		SALCONS	.335	.348

Note: 1. * = p < .05; ** = p< .01; *** = p< .001

positive (.17) and significant ($p < .001$). Since the link between CONSEFF and PERCENT Quota is significant, CONSEFF serves as a mediator in the relationship. Thus the influence of sales consulting on percent quota is indirect. This result provides only partial support for Plank and Reid's (1994) mediating model since the link between SALCONS and Customer Retention is significant.

The parameters linking Consulting Effectiveness (CONSEFF) to Customer Retention and Percent Quota are positive and significant (.325, $p < .001$; .454, $p < .001$). Thus, hypotheses 4 and 5 are accepted. CONSEFF is responsible for the largest influence on those two measures of effectiveness, when both direct and indirect effects are considered (Table 2). These results, at the salesperson level, are similar, to Pelham's (2006) results, indicating a positive link between sales-force consulting effectiveness and firm performance. Given the non-significant link between Salesperson Consulting and Percent Quota and the significant link between Sales Consulting and Consulting Effectiveness, we can conclude that Consulting Effectiveness acts as a full mediator in the relationship between Salesperson Consulting and Percent Quota.

The parameters linking Adaptive Selling (ADAPTS) to CONSEFF AND SALCONS are positive and significant (.163, $p < .05$; .135, $p < .05$), leading to the acceptance of hypotheses 6 and 7. Given these results, it can be concluded that Salesperson Consulting partial mediates the relationship between Adaptive Selling and Consulting Effectiveness. The parameters linking ADAPTS to Customer Retention, as well as Percent Quota are not significant, leading to rejection of hypotheses 12 and 13. These results appear contrary to those cited in Franke and Park's (2006) meta-analysis, however those results were bivariate correlations. This study's non-significant parameters are due to the inclusion of other behaviors and consulting effectiveness into the model. The correlations between ADAPTS, Retention, and Percent Quota based upon the data in this study are .34 ($p < .001$) and .22 ($p < .001$) which are consistent with the studies cited by Franke and Park. Since the link from ADAPTS to CONSEFF is significant, CONSEFF acts as a full mediator in the relationship between ADAPTS and Percent Quota as well as Customer Retention. These results support Plank and Reid's (1994) model.

The parameter linking active listening (ILPS) and SALCONS is positive and significant (.395, $p < .001$). Therefore, hypothesis 8 is accepted. However, the link between Customer Orientation (CO) and SALCONS is not significant, leading to the rejection of hypothesis 9. This lack of significance is due to the inclusion of other correlated antecedent behaviors in the model, since the bivariate correlation between CO and SALCONS is positive (.32) and significant ($p < .001$). The correlations between variables are provided in Appendix 3. As indicated in Table 2, providing both direct and indirect effects, ILPS has the largest total effect on Salesperson Consulting.

The parameter linking ILPS to CONSEFF is not significant, leading to the rejection of hypotheses 10. This result is due to the inclusion of SALSONS in the model, since the bivariate correlation between ILPS and CONSEFF is positive (.51) and significant ($p < .001$). Thus Salesperson Consulting acts as a full mediator in the relationship between ILPS and CONSEFF. The link between ILPS and RETENTION is not significant, leading to rejection of hypothesis 16. This result is not consistent with Ramsey and Sohi's (1997) significant relationship between ILPS and customer intentions to continue future

Table 2
Standardized Total, Direct, and Indirect Effects Reduced Model of Significant Effects Only

	Independent Variables					
Dependent Variable	CO	ILPS	ADAPTS	SALCONS	CONSEFF	RETENTION
Total:						
SALCONS	.14	.40	.14			
CONSEFF	.11	.24	.20	.24		
RETENTION	.22	.16	.16	.27	.33	
PERCENT QUOTA	.11	.22	.08	.08	.49	.11
Direct:						
SALCONS	.14	.40	.14			
CONSEFF	.08	.14	.16	.24		
RETENTION	.16	.01	.08	.19	.33	
PERCENT QUOTA	.05	.12	-.02	-.06	.45	.11
Indirect						
SALCONS						
CONSEFF	.03	.10	.03			
RETENTION	.06	.15	.08	.08		
PERCENT QUOTA	.06	.10	.10	.14	.03	.00

interactions. However, the bivariate correlation (see Appendix) between ILPS and Customer Retention in this study is positive and significant (.44, $p < .001$). Since the link between ILPS and SALCONS and the link between CONSEFF and RETENTION are significant, Salesperson Consulting and the immediate outcome of Salesperson Consulting (Consulting Effectiveness) mediate the relationship between active listening and Retention.. However, the parameter linking ILPS to PERCENT QUOTA is positive and significant (.12, $p< .01$) , leading to the acceptance of hypothesis 17. The parameter linking active listening (ILPS) to Customer Retention is not significant, leading to rejection of hypotheses 16. These results provide only partial support for Plank and Reid's (1994) mediating model. The parameter linking CO to SALCONS is not significant, leading to the rejection of hypothesis 10. Again, this result is due to the inclusion of other antecedent variables since the bivariate correlation between CO and SALCONS is positive (.32) and significant ($p< .001$). The parameter linking CO to CONSEFF is not significant. Thus, hypothesis 11 is rejected. This result is due to the inclusion of SALCONS as a mediating variable, since the bivariate correlation between CO and CONSEFF is positive (.41) and significant ($p < .001$). As indicated in Table 2, indicating direct and indirect effects, with the inclusion of other

behaviors in the model, CO has the weakest influence on CONSEFF.

The parameter linking CO to Customer Retention is positive and significant (.16, $p < .05$), leading to acceptance of hypotheses 14. This finding is consistent with Williams' (1998) results, which found a strong link between customer orientation and customer commitment. However, the parameter linking CO to Percent Quota is not significant, leading to rejection hypotheses 15. It should be noted, however, that the bivariate correlation between CO and Percent Quota is positive and significant (.29, $p < .001$). Again, the lack of a significant parameter between those two variables may be due to the inclusion of other behaviors in this study's model. These results do not provide support to Plank and Reid's (1994) model.

The parameter linking salesperson Customer Retention to salesperson Percent Quota is not significant. Thus, hypothesis 18 is rejected. There is, however, a positive and significant bi-variate correlation between these two variables (.36, $p < .001$), which consistent, with Reicheld's study (1996) documenting a positive relationship between firm level customer retention and firm performance. The lack of a significant parameter link between the variables is due to the strong influence of CONSEFF on both Customer Retention and Percent Quota.

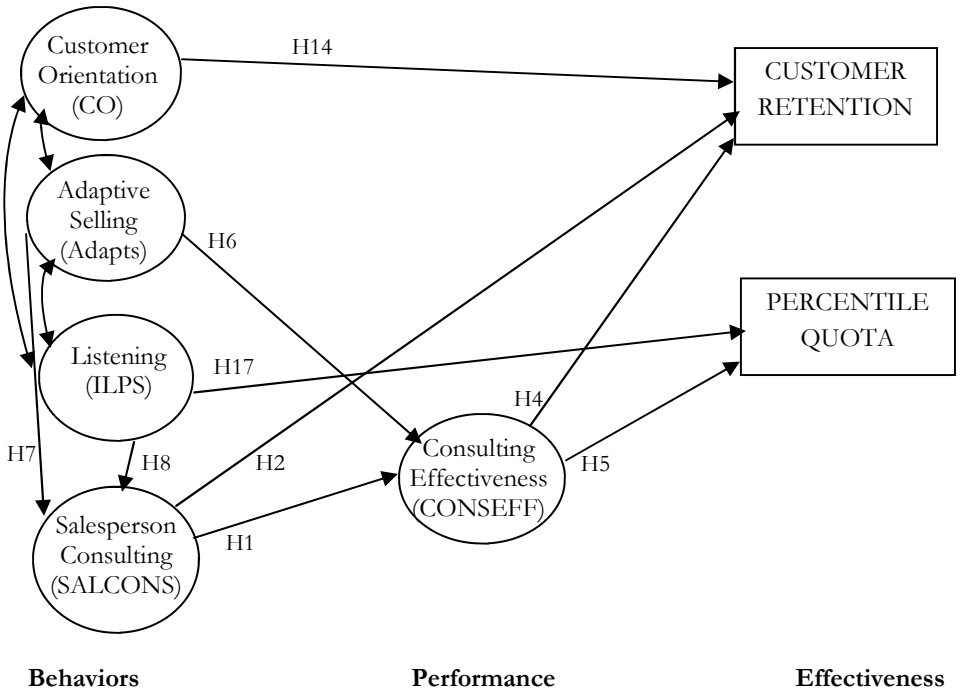
It should be noted that the covariance links between ADAPTS, CO, and ILPS are positive and significant, as would be expected from the studies cited in Franke and Park's meta-analysis. The covariance link between ADAPTS and CO is .54 ($p < .001$). The covariance link between ADAPTS and ILPS is .428 ($p < .001$) and the covariance link between CO and ILPS is .57 ($p < .001$). Therefore, it can be concluded that, while some of the links between those behaviors and outcome variables were not significant, those variables do have an influence on those variables though supporting relationships with other behaviors.

Figure 2 illustrates a model with only the significant links documented in the last column of Table 1. The model fit statistics provided at the bottom of Figure 2 indicate that there is little change in the fit statistics in this reduced model, compared to the full model with all links. The few direct links (two of six) between the antecedent variables of ADAPTS, CO, and ILPS with effectiveness variable provide partial support Plank and Reid's (1994) model suggesting that the influence of salespeople's behaviors are mediated by immediate behavioral quality variables. It is possible that the direct effects found in this study between behaviors and quota or retention may be due to the lack of inclusion of selling behaviors with buyers/ decision-makers. Future research should rectify this omission to provide a more robust test of the Plank and Reid (1994) model.

DISCUSSION

This study's results suggesting the full or partial mediating influence of Consulting Effectiveness in relationships between salesperson behaviors and measures of effectiveness provide partial support for Plank and Reid's (1994) model. This study extends the findings of Pelham's (2006) firm level study of the impact of consulting behaviors, by indicating the supporting role of adaptive, customer oriented, and listening behaviors in the influence of those consulting behaviors on the quality of those behaviors (consulting effectiveness). The results of this study, at the salesperson level, extend Pelham's

Figure 2: Significant Effects Model



(2006) findings, at the sales-force level, of a positive influence of consulting effectiveness on ultimate firm performance (profit). It does so by measuring the influence of salesperson behaviors and salesperson consulting behaviors on individual performance outcomes more directly under the control of the salesperson, namely the retention of the salesperson's customers and quota performance. In this study, consulting effectiveness was the strongest influence on customer retention and percent quota, reinforcing Reicheld's (1996) suggestions as to the benefits of enhancing product value for customers. This study's finding of a significant link between Adaptive Selling, as well as Listening, and Salesperson Consulting and the finding of significant links between Adaptive Selling, as well as Salesperson Consulting, and Consulting Effectiveness, at the salesperson level, extend Pelham's (2002B) results, at the firm level. This study also extends Pelham's (2002B) results by providing more comprehensive measurement of the Salesperson Consulting construct.

This study's finding of direct and indirect links between sales consulting and salesperson effectiveness measures is similar to Anglin et al.'s results, (1990) finding a significant relationship between their Adaptive Selling behavior of contacting others in the buying organization and objectively measured salesperson market share. The results of this study also lend support to

arguments of Flaherety et al., (1999) that salespeople should focus more on solving customer problems and adding value to the customer's business. This study results suggest that management, in appropriate business-to business contexts, should encourage their sales-force to increase consulting activities with their customers and evaluate the quality of those outcomes.

The significant influence of active listening supports Wotruba's (1996) argument that salesperson listening is crucial for the development of mutually beneficial long-term relationships with customers. The indirect influences of ILPS on customer retention reinforce Ramsey and Sohi's (1997) finding that the customer's perception of listening behavior is positively related with the anticipation of future interaction with the salesperson.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Given the importance of salesperson consulting effectiveness suggested by this study, the implication for sales managers is that sales training, evaluation, and reward programs should be adjusted to foster more high quality consulting related behaviors. Sales training today still is heavily oriented toward product knowledge and the feature/benefit/closing aspects of the selling encounter. Pelham (2002a) found little sales training content related to active listening exercises or problem diagnosis exercises, despite studies indicating that customers are seeking more assistance in problem solving. He cited studies indicating that poor salesperson listening skills and inadequate problem diagnosis skills were leading causes of poor performance.

If a firm does not provide adequate active listening/diagnostic question training and follow-up evaluation by sales managers, then a salesperson who seeks to engage in consulting efforts with customers can only learn consulting skills through trial and error. The lack of such training or evaluation also sends a message that these behaviors are not valued by the firm, reducing the likelihood of salesperson consulting.

Pelham (2002b) found that an evaluation program that includes measures of the quality of consulting efforts has a more powerful influence on sales-force consulting than the commission program. This study reinforces the need to pay more attention to the immediate outcomes of consulting efforts in terms of savings in the use of the product. Such emphasis might include sales managers accompanying salespeople on service visits with product users, technical personnel, and production personnel. The sales manager would then be in a position judge the quality of diagnostic questions in these encounters. Sales managers could also follow up with customers to monitor the outcomes of previous consulting efforts.

This study reinforces Pelham's (2002a) arguments for the importance of salesperson consulting, in business-to-business contexts, given its mediating influence in relationships between adaptive selling/listening behaviors, consulting effectiveness, and customer retention. The implication for sales managers is that there should be more attention paid in salesperson evaluation to the quality of salesperson behaviors, including consulting related behaviors. The quality of behaviors is under more salesperson control, compared to output measures, such quota performance. Unfortunately, given senior management pressure to achieving quarterly sales results, there is the natural tendency for a sales manager to be preoccupied with inputs such as prospecting or sales calls and outputs such as orders. Pressures

to achieve short term sales results can also result in too much emphasis on sales presentations to secure orders at the expense of service calls to strengthen long term customer relationships. If salespeople are only measured and rewarded based upon input and output quantity, disregarding the quality of the inputs, there is the also potential for counterproductive behaviors. Some examples of the counterproductive behaviors are: excessive discounting, premature closing, and pushing products/services that do not adequately solve customer problems. Inadequate emphasis on active listening and problem diagnosis in training and evaluation programs reinforce those counterproductive behaviors because salespeople will tend to shorten the needs discovery step in the sales process, leading to premature presentation of product features and benefits before adequate understanding of the customer's situation.

But if the quality of a salespersons' behaviors, especially consulting behaviors, is adequately measured this should encourage more of those behaviors and as well as greater motivation to improve the effectiveness of those behaviors. Behavioral quality evaluation would be most effectively measured by sales management observation. But given the limited time available to perform these observations of the salespeople reporting to a sales manager, formal customer surveys of the extent of value added from salespersons' efforts could supplement observation.

Post sales call reviews by sales managers should include critiques of pre-call information gathering on the customer and customer's industry. The sales manager should: 1) review the salesperson's depth of understanding of the customer's situation, including the customer's goals and obstacles to those goals, 2) review the extent and quality of the salesperson's diagnostic questions raised with customer production or technical personnel, 3) evaluate the salesperson's ability to dig deeply with his/her questions into the customer's processes searching for inefficiencies 4) evaluate the salesperson's ability to aid the customer in reduction of process steps 5) evaluate the salesperson's ability to participate in product modification designed to increase customer efficiency, 5) evaluate the salesperson's ability to suggest appropriate outsourcing of activities and 6) evaluate the salesperson's ability to aid customers in efforts to increase sales through enhanced product quality or more effective marketing efforts.

Sales managers who appreciate the value of effective salesperson consulting to enhance product/service value should modify the nature of sales meetings. In addition to recognition of star sales versus quota performers, salespeople who saved their customers the most money should also be recognized. In sales meetings, experienced sales consultants should share how they went about discovering money-saving efficiencies in the use of their products or services. Sharing of customer cost-saving scenarios would also benefit experienced salespeople by expanding their ability to creatively modify solutions across differing customer environments. Star salesperson consultants would probably share how they developed a deep knowledge of the customer's industry, such as participation in customer trade associations. These consulting related sales meeting events would positively influence the motivation of less experienced salespeople to increase consulting activities, as well as suggest scenarios that could act as a framework for consulting behaviors.

The direct links, in this study, between consulting related behaviors and quota percentile suggest potential benefits in sales presentation

effectiveness. The modification of sales training and evaluation programs to include more active listening and diagnostic skill training would not only enhance the quality of consulting activities with current customers, but also should improve the effectiveness of selling activities with prospective customers. The skills needed to adequately uncover inefficiencies in the customer processes and to work with customers on solutions would be beneficial in working with prospective customers on their problems, leading to increased levels on new customers.

Sales management activities that encourage consulting efforts and monitor the effectiveness of those efforts would also tend to influence the firm's culture to be more market oriented, characterized by widely held values emphasizing customer satisfaction. If this were to occur the firm would begin to see the benefits associated with high customer retention.

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

A limitation of this study is that it measured the quality of adaptive, customer oriented, listening, and consulting behaviors only from the standpoint of the extent of value added for the customer from non-selling activities. This study did not measure or investigate the influence of other possible measures of the quality of selling activities, which could have also mediated the influence of these behaviors on salespeople's effectiveness. An example of such a measure might be customer feedback as to the persuasiveness of sales presentations. The lack of such a selling activity outcome variable could explain this study's finding of some direct influences of salesperson behaviors on measures of effectiveness. Future studies should rectify this omission. The model tested in this study is an incomplete model of the antecedents and consequences of salesperson buyer/non-buyer interaction behaviors. The model did not include organizational and environmental variables that should moderate the influence of salesperson interaction performance and effectiveness, consistent with Weitz's (1981) contingency model of salesperson effectiveness

The model examined in this study did not include salesperson interaction behaviors with buyer/decision makers and the outcomes of those behaviors. An indication of the need to include these behaviors in future models of salesperson performance and effectiveness is indicated by the results of a study by Anglin et al., (1990) which found significant correlations between various subjective measures of salesperson interaction performance, such as clear presentations and handling of objections, and salesperson effectiveness measures. Inclusion of these variables would provide a more thorough test of Plank and Reid's (1994) model.

The model also did not include other salesperson consulting behaviors, such as the involvement of the salesperson with internal selling firm personnel in the modification of the product or service to better meet customer needs. Future studies should include other key constructs in testing of the relationships between sales consulting behaviors, sales consulting performance, and salesperson effectiveness.

In addition, the retention and quota percentile measures in this study did not successfully combine into one effectiveness construct. Future studies should develop a composite effectiveness outcome variable with multiple items.

As indicated in the methods section, the respondent for both independent and

dependent variables were salespeople. Despite tests indicating that common methods variance did not present a serious problem, future studies should endeavor to measure performance based on sales manager reports. Thus, the conclusions based on this exploratory study must be considered tentative due to factors stated above. Future studied should also endeavor to utilize longitudinal performance and effectiveness data in order to draw causal implications.

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Appendix

Correlations of Constructs (N = 419)

	Mean/ (S.D)		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. ADAPTS	5.16		.86						
	(1.13)	.							
2. CO	6.06		.56	.93					
	(.98)	.	***						
3. ILPS	5.61		.47	.64	.87				
	(1.02)	.	***	***					
4. SALCONS	4.55		.32	.33	.45	.73			
	(1.10)		***	***	***				
5. CONSEFF	4.90		.36	.43	.53	.46	.83		
	(1.17)		***	***	***	***			
6. RETENTION	5.27			.34	.40	.48	.40	.47	
	(1.27)		***	***	***	***	***		
7. PERCENT	7.06		.22	.29	.34	.24	.32	.36	
QUOTA	(2.65)		***	***	***	***	***	***	

Note: 1) * = p < .05; ** = p< .01; *** = p< .001