

A Winning Sales Formula: Using Sales Manager Coaching to Maximize Salesperson Effectiveness

By Michael Peasley

Salespeople are key revenue producers within organizations, yet, even with billions spent on sales training, many salespeople fail to reach their annual quotas leaving managers searching for methods to improve performance. If managers can find ways to increase salesperson effectiveness in developing prospects and acquiring new customers, salespeople will be more likely to reach their annual quota. Thus, two forms of sales coaching, providing quality feedback and imitative role-modeling, are presented in this paper as tools that managers can implement for maximizing salesperson effectiveness. This paper (1) evaluates the impact of sales coaching, (2) its influence on the relationship between conscientiousness and neuroticism, and (3) salesperson effort and effectiveness in prospecting and acquisition activities.

Traditionally, salespeople's primary tasks involve growing revenue by putting effort into hunting activities designed to develop prospects, establish needs, present solutions, manage objections, and negotiate contracts. Managers, as organizational leaders, are faced with the dilemma of ensuring their sales force puts forth sufficient effort to meet revenue goals. As a result, U.S. companies spend over \$70 billion annually on sales training to improve salesperson's skills, abilities, and efforts (Cespedes and Lee, 2017). Yet, approximately 50% of salespeople fail to reach their annual quota (Ahearne et al., 2012), leaving managers searching for new strategies to coach their salespeople and improve revenue generation.

Coaching can be defined as a "process of equipping people with the tools and knowledge they need to become more effective" (Peterson and Hicks 1996, 14). More specifically, sales coaching has been described as providing feedback, portrayed as guidance and suggestions, and role modeling, which allows the salesperson to emulate the sales habits of their manager (Rich, 1997). Broadly, sales coaching is unique in that there are various forms, such as managerial versus consultant, individual versus team, and short- versus long-term. Thus, to narrow the focus in the present research, managerial coaching is examined primarily on a personal level and over some time for two reasons. First, this approach involves a sales manager coaching a

subordinate, which embodies the process of equipping another individual (Peterson and Hicks, 1996). Second, the extended timeframe allows the salesperson to learn through continual feedback and consistent managerial behavior (Badrinarayanan et al., 2015; Rich, 1998).

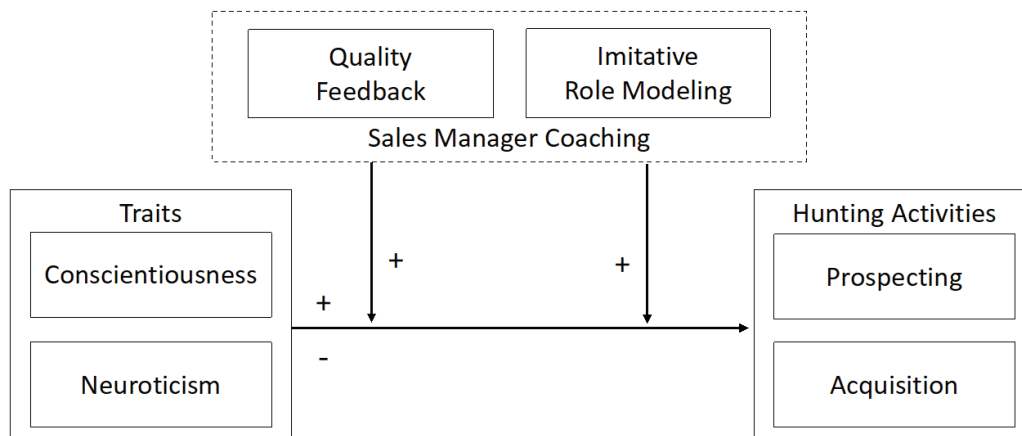
Except for a few seminal papers (e.g., Rich 1997, 1998), limited research exists within the sale coaching domain, limiting academia's influence and guidance of marketing practice. Recently, researchers have begun to answer the call for more exploration of sales coaching, including an integrative review and research agenda (Badrinarayanan et al., 2015), a qualitative study of the behaviors that constitute coaching (Peesker et al., 2019), an examination of the effects of coaching (Dahling et al., 2016; Onyemah, 2009), and a scale development for how to measure coaching (Nguyen et al., 2019). The current research examines the influence of sales manager coaching on the relationship between salesperson traits and salesperson effort and effectiveness in prospecting and customer acquisition activities.

The findings provide several contributions to the body of research on salesperson traits and sales coaching. First, this study examines antecedents – desirable salesperson traits – to effectiveness in prospecting and customer acquisition, thus guiding managers in hiring salespeople. Identifying characteristics (e.g., conscientiousness and emotional stability) that can predict sales success is a valuable tool for practitioners who frequently use personality tests to screen candidates during the hiring process (Deeter-Schmelz and Sojka, 2007; Randall and Randall, 2001). Traits

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related to precision and organization in tracking prospects, following up with customers and potential customers, and building positive relationships with partners is essential to valuable sales outcomes. Second, this study helps managers understand how sales coaching behaviors can impact the effectiveness of salespeople high or low in conscientiousness or neuroticism. Knowledge of the benefits of quality coaching feedback and imitative role modeling provides managers with a strategic tool to raise salesperson effectiveness. Thus, this research offers relevant insights into understanding the interactive effects of sales coaching on a range of traits within the sales environment (See Figure 1 for a graphical depiction of the model).

Figure 1. Conceptual Model



HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Effort has been recognized as one of the most important constructs in sales and organizational behavior research (Naylor, Pritchard, and Illgen, 1980; Walker, Churchill, and Ford, 1977). It has been described as the “force, energy, or activity by which work is accomplished” (Brown and Peterson 1994, p. 71). In sales, this implies that effort involves the activities that begin, facilitate, complete, and manage revenue-generating transactions. Yet, tangible effort in activity and energy is challenging to define. Salespeople often function in a “relatively autonomous environment” during their day-to-day activities and thus enjoy a “considerable degree of discretion” in terms of the activities they give attention to and the degree of effort they place on those responsibilities (Fu, Richards, Hughes, & Jones 2010, p. 61; Spiro, Rich, and Stanton, 2007). This autonomy sets the burden on the salesperson to be proactive in putting forth effort in prospecting for new customers and closing new accounts to produce effective outcomes.

Put simply; prospecting is the process of identifying potential customers and includes lead generation, information gathering, cold calling, pre-call planning, and scheduling initial meetings or sales presentations. Searching for new customers is necessary for building a pipeline of prospects to draw from in acquiring new customers. Next, customer acquisition involves activities designed to sign up new accounts (often referred to as closing accounts) and secure initial orders from new customers. This process consists of making sales presentations, managing objections, and negotiating pricing and terms to secure orders from customers.

Naturally, salespeople may be more or less effective in prospecting or customer acquisition based on their traits, such as personality factors. Personality tests have become standard practice for employers to screen job applicants. These assessments can play a valuable role in the hiring process, particularly when the traits assessed have been validated as appropriate for the part the manager is looking to fill. Two personality traits, conscientiousness and neuroticism (vs. high emotional

stability), are evaluated in the current research because they are typically screened during the hiring process and perceived as most relevant to salesperson career outcomes (Judge et al., 1999; Shanks, 2016), and generally characterized as positive and negative in the literature (for meta-analyses, see Barrick and Mount, 1991; Kotov, Gamez, Schmidt, and Watson, 2010). Given the perception of these traits in the literature and a desire for managers to hire conscientious and emotionally stable salespeople, an understanding of the effects on salesperson effort and effectiveness with hunting activities is essential, as it guides managers who, for strategic reasons, may need to shape salesperson behaviors away from or toward such behaviors.

Conscientiousness. Conscientious individuals are dependable, organized, and achievement-oriented, whereas those low in conscientiousness are careless, lackadaisical, and undependable (Digman, 1990). Thus, there are several reasons for sales managers to expect the trait of conscientiousness to be related to salesperson effectiveness in customer prospecting and acquisition. In prospecting, effort and effectiveness require precision and organization in tracking, following up, and converting prospects to customers. Because conscientious salespeople are more committed to their tasks and goals (Barrick, Mount, & Strauss, 1993; Barrick, Stewart, & Piotrowski, 2002), they are likely to meet their job responsibilities consistently. These job responsibilities include cold calling prospects, updating their CRM (customer relationship management) database, or combing through a database for opportunities, even when they perceive little support for their actions (Colbert, Mount, Harter, Witt, & Barrick, 2004).

Furthermore, because salespeople high in conscientiousness are both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated to achieve (Barrick, Stewart, & Piotrowski, 2002), managers may expect that conscientious individuals have a stronger desire to perform tasks with precision and excellence. While relatively high rejection rates make closing new accounts very difficult (Hancock et al., 2011), conscientious salespeople know that customer acquisition represents perhaps the most critical strategy in sales because revenue is often the organization's lifeblood. Therefore, they may be more

inclined to be proactive and work hard to overcome the conversion process challenges (Szymanski, 1988). Thus, conscientious salespeople should find themselves more effective at winning over prospects because they are more likely to persist in customer acquisition efforts even in the face of difficulty and long conversion windows.

H1: Conscientiousness (unconscientiousness) will be positively (negatively) related to salesperson effectiveness in (a) prospecting and (b) customer acquisition.

Neuroticism. Individuals high in neuroticism are more vulnerable to emotional turmoil and more likely to encounter and provoke negative experiences in their lives, while those low in neuroticism (i.e., high in emotional stability) tend to easily experience positive emotions (Maertz & Griffeth, 2004; Watson & Clark, 1984). Thus, there are several reasons for sales managers to expect those with high levels of neuroticism to be negatively related and those with low levels (i.e., emotional stability) to be positively related to salesperson effort and effectiveness in customer prospecting and acquisition. First, those high in neuroticism are not always capable of managing their emotions, which leads to difficulties building positive relationships with partners (e.g., customers, coworkers, supervisors) and a higher frequency of interpersonal conflicts (Spector & Jex, 1998). Fostering relationships with prospects and customers is an essential part of salespersons' daily responsibilities. Therefore, personality patterns of emotional turmoil and stress will likely hinder the salesperson's participation in building sustainable stages of the selling process. Conversely, managers may find emotionally stable salespeople attractive because they will be less prone to worry or have doubts and more likely to see their future on favorable terms and have positive expectations for how things will work out (McCrae & John, 1992).

Further, salespeople high in neuroticism will likely focus more on avoidance of loss than the pursuit of gain (Carver & White, 1994), which will inhibit their ability to take risks in fostering relationships with prospects and making attempts to close sales. Finding and building relationships with prospects is characterized by uncertainty (Weitz, 1981) and is typically more

complex than interacting with existing customers who have relatively well-defined, easily communicated, and commonly understood needs (Blattberg and Deighton, 1996). Given a choice to make an extra call or attempt to land a prospect or cross-sell a customer on a new product or service, the highly neurotic salesperson may choose not to. Avoiding uncomfortable prospecting tasks such as cold calling depletes the prospect pipeline, and fewer potential clients often mean fewer new customer acquisitions, sales, and commissions. Therefore, a salesperson who abandons the challenge at the first sign of adversity in the short-term faces long-term consequences that could cost them their job and their organization's key revenue accounts.

H2: Neuroticism (emotional stability) will be negatively (positively) related to salesperson effectiveness in (a) prospecting and (b) customer acquisition.

Sales Manager Coaching

Salespeople rate coaching as one of the top skills of their best sales managers (Martin, 2015). This perception, along with research that shows coaching skills can differentiate the perceived performance of sales managers (Deeter-Schmelz, Goebel, and Kennedy, 2008), emphasizes the potential benefits of coaching. However, sales managers oversee complex sales environments with diverse personalities and unique customer issues. Therefore, the sales manager must balance multiple roles, including providing direction for the sales staff. Ideally, this direction includes leading by example by modeling desired behaviors and giving quality feedback to guide sales teams. Newly hired salespeople need to know that they can rely on their managers to provide coaching, guidance, and helpful feedback to improve their sales skills. They also need to know that they can look to their manager for examples of adequately performing key sales behaviors.

Sales research has shown that sales managers willing to coach and teach their salespeople by providing *quality feedback* can positively influence their effort and effectiveness (Franke and Park, 2006; Rapp et al., 2006). Furthermore, this coaching and verbal feedback have been found to provide guidance, wisdom, and motivation that is beneficial in directing salespeople's

prioritization of selling activities (e.g., prospecting and acquisition activities) (Palmatier, Gopalakrishna, and Houston, 2006). This outcome is especially seen in managers who anticipate remaining in their position for a long time, as they are more willing to coach salespeople in their prospecting and acquisition efforts, including verbally encouraging the salesperson's efforts at targeting more challenging but potentially more rewarding prospects (Johnson and Selnes, 2004).

Salesperson *imitative role modeling* of their manager involves imitating manager habits, attitudes, and behaviors modeled for them through sales coaching. Salespeople obtain a significant amount of their behavior by observing and imitating others, thus learning and developing skills through role modeling (Rich, 1998). By providing an example to follow – demonstrating actual selling activities or modeling positive attitudes and habits – sales managers have the opportunity to play a role in shaping the routines and patterns of their salespeople.

The influence of coaching on conscientious salespeople.

Because salespeople high in conscientiousness are committed to their goals and are both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated, it's reasonable to expect that they will be receptive to coaching and feedback from their managers. Therefore, feedback can increase their sense of duty to their employer and customers while also impacting their effort to meet their job responsibilities, such as cold calling prospects, combing through a lead database for prospects, managing objections, or negotiating terms of a contract. Furthermore, because sales research has shown that salesperson imitative role modeling has a positive yet indirect impact on sales performance (Rich, 1997), managers can likely influence conscientious salespeople's effort and determination. By their nature, conscientious salespeople may be more likely to be shaped by their manager's example of modeling appropriate salesperson behaviors. Thus, it's expected that conscientious salespeople – who desire to perform tasks with precision and excellence – will learn new skills and sales tactics from their managers and be able to apply them in sales situations. For example, the impact of conscientiousness may increase as the sales manager coaches and demonstrates sales behaviors such as securing the appointment, presenting

solutions, and handling objections. Coaching should help the conscientious salesperson do the same tasks more effectively.

H3: The positive effect of salesperson conscientiousness on (a) prospecting and (b) customer acquisition is greater when the salesperson has a manager who provides quality feedback.

H4: The positive effect of salesperson conscientiousness on (a) prospecting and (b) customer acquisition is greater when the salesperson practices imitative role modeling of their manager's behaviors.

The influence of coaching on highly neurotic (versus emotionally stable) salespeople. Because those high in neuroticism are unlikely to set ambitious goals for themselves, in part because they are less likely to believe that such goals are realistic for them (Judge & Ilies, 2002; Wang & Erdheim, 2007), sales coaching can be beneficial for goal setting, accountability, and attainment. Regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1997) posits that individuals low in emotional stability are prevention-focused rather than promotion-focused and thus tend to be more attuned to the losses associated with their job rather than the potential benefits. They tend to be less confident, less likely to possess high initiative, and hold a fluctuating desire to serve customers and meet their needs. Their inconsistency of emotion may be associated with a weakened ability and motivation to serve customers

well (Brown et al., 2002). They may be less likely to believe prospecting and customer acquisition activities will produce positive outcomes. However, with manager coaching and input, neurotic salespeople should be more willing and able to work through difficult situations and with complex customers that provide premium value to the organization (Homburg, Müller, and Klarmann, 2011; Verbeke et al., 2008). Further, as they observe and imitate their managers, they draw on their knowledge, experiences, and suggestions, which may increase confidence, effort, and effectiveness.

H5: The negative effect of salesperson neuroticism on (a) prospecting and (b) customer acquisition diminishes when the salesperson has a manager who provides quality feedback.

H6: The negative effect of salesperson neuroticism on (a) prospecting and (b) customer acquisition diminishes when the salesperson practices imitative role modeling of their manager's behaviors.

METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

Data Collection and Measures

Data were collected from a large U.S.-based B2B (business-to-business) sales organization that sells sales support, research, and consulting services. The salespeople are tasked with creating relationships with prospective clients, establishing needs, and moving the prospects through the sales process to close sales by securing contracts. With their manager's approval, a

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlation Matrix

	Prospecting	Acquisition	Conscientiousness	Neuroticism	Feedback	Role Modeling
Prospecting	1.00					
Acquisition	.69*	1.00				
Conscientiousness	.12*	.14*	1.00			
Neuroticism	-.08	-.09	.03	1.00		
Feedback	.02	.03	.08	.02	1.00	
Role Modeling	.05	.12*	.12*	.10	.65*	1.00
Mean	4.71	4.58	5.44	3.31	4.97	4.91
Standard Deviation	1.14	1.22	1.11	1.46	.95	.92
α	.86	.92	.83	.82	.88	.90

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

link to an online survey was sent to the sales staff, and completed responses were received from 199 salespeople.

Effectiveness in prospecting and acquisition was measured using Brown and Peterson's salesperson effort and effectiveness scale (1994). Salespeople rated themselves compared to other salespeople in the firm on a scale of one to seven, from "among the least in the company" to "among the most in the company." Each sales activity (prospecting and customer acquisition) was measured with three items that assessed the salesperson's effort, time, and effectiveness. *Conscientiousness and neuroticism* were measured using scales from Donnellan et al. (2006). *Manager's quality feedback* was measured using a three-item scale

from Steelman et al. (2004). Finally, the salesperson's *imitative role modeling* of their managers was measured using a three-item scale from McCullough (2013). All of the items measured can be found in the Appendix.

All models were estimated with Mplus 8.2, using a maximum likelihood estimator with robust standard errors (Muthén & Muthén, 2017). The multi-item constructs were subjected to confirmatory factor analysis to examine factor unidimensionality. The measures in the model reflected the intended underlying constructs and the results indicate that the measurement model fits the data reasonably well ($\chi^2_{48} = 110.88$, $p < 0.01$, CFI = .95, RMSEA = .08, SRMR = .06). All items have significant loadings ($p < .01$) on their intended

Table 2. Model Results

Hypotheses	Predictor		estimate	t-value
Main Effects				
H1a + Supported	Conscientiousness	→ Prospecting	.15**	1.97
H1b + Supported	Conscientiousness	→ Acquisition	.17**	2.25
H2a - Supported	Neuroticism	→ Prospecting	-.15*	-1.76
H2b - N.S.	Neuroticism	→ Acquisition	-.12	-1.49
Moderating Effects				
	Feedback	→ Prospecting	.03	0.25
	Feedback	→ Acquisition	-.07	-0.76
	Role Modeling	→ Prospecting	.04	0.43
	Role Modeling	→ Acquisition	.20**	2.08
H3a + Supported	Feedback*Conscientious	→ Prospecting	.18*	1.87
H3b + Supported	Feedback*Conscientious	→ Acquisition	.21**	2.38
H4a + N.S.	Role Modeling*Conscientious	→ Prospecting	-.03	-0.27
H4b + N.S.	Role Modeling*Conscientious	→ Acquisition	-.06	-0.52
H5a + NS	Feedback*Neuroticism	→ Prospecting	-.14	-1.38
H5b + Counter	Feedback*Neuroticism	→ Acquisition	-.21**	-2.15
H6a + Supported	Role Modeling*Neuroticism	→ Prospecting	.19*	1.88
H6b + Supported	Role Modeling*Neuroticism	→ Acquisition	.24**	2.43
Controls				
	Salesperson Experience	→ Prospecting	.03	0.98
	Salesperson Experience	→ Acquisition	.01	0.30
	R ²	Prospecting	.17	
	R ²	Acquisition	.22	

**p ≤ .05, *p ≤ .10

constructs, suggesting convergence of the indicators with the relevant underlying factors (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988), and all coefficient Alphas were above .70. The measures for all constructs displayed both convergent, and discriminant validity as each underlying construct explained at least 50% of the variance in its indicators (i.e., all AVEs > .50) and had an AVE larger than the shared variance (Φ^2) between the constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Table 1 presents the correlations of the variables, means, standard deviations, and scale reliabilities (α). These results collectively suggest that the measures have strong psychometric properties.

Results

Table 2 presents the overall goodness of fit indices, r^2 values, significance tests, and standardized path estimates for the structural model about the results of salesperson personality on effectiveness in customer prospecting and acquisition (H1-H2) and the moderating influence of coaching feedback and imitative role modeling (H3-H6). Overall, the results of the structural model support the proposed model and offer some interesting insights ($\chi^2_{125} = 319.38$, $p < 0.01$, CFI = .93, RMSEA = .09, SRMR = .09). The detailed results are discussed below.

The findings support the hypothesized direct and positive relationship of conscientiousness with effectiveness in (H1a) prospecting ($\beta = .15$, $t = 1.96$) and (H1b) new customer acquisition ($\beta = .17$, $t = 2.25$). The findings also support H2a, the negative relationship between neuroticism and effectiveness in prospecting ($\beta = -.15$, $t = -1.76$); however, the hypothesized relationship between neuroticism and new customer acquisition is not statistically significant. Next, the moderating role of sales manager coaching on the relationship between conscientiousness and effectiveness was examined. Results show that the positive relationship between conscientiousness and effectiveness

Figure 2. Quality Feedback x Conscientiousness

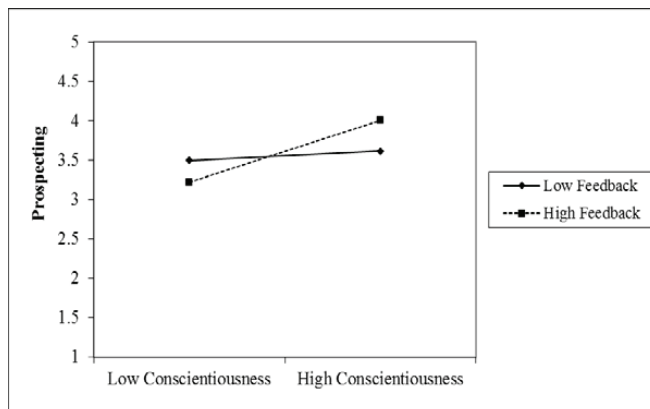


Figure 2a. The moderating effect of quality feedback on the relationship between conscientiousness and prospecting.

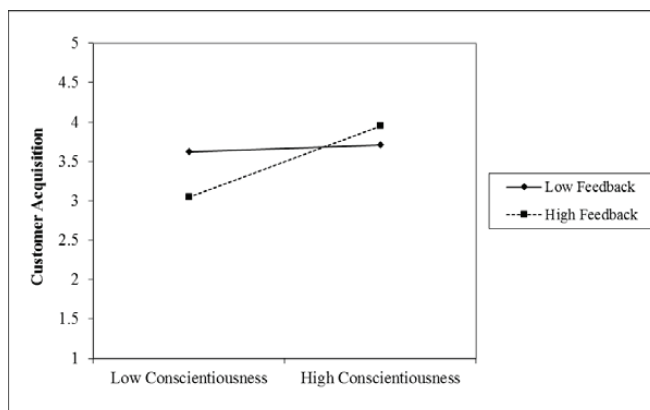


Figure 2b. The moderating effect of quality feedback on the relationship between conscientiousness and customer acquisition.

was more pronounced when sales managers provided quality feedback. Results show increased effectiveness on (H3a) prospecting ($\beta = .18$, $t = 1.87$) and (H3b) new customer acquisition ($\beta = .21$, $t = 2.38$). Figure 2 provides a graphical representation of the moderating impact of quality feedback on prospecting and customer acquisition.

Finally, the moderating role of sales manager coaching on the relationship between neuroticism and salesperson effectiveness was examined. First, in the opposite of the hypothesized direction, the results show that the negative relationship between neuroticism and effectiveness in customer acquisition activities was more pronounced when sales managers provided quality feedback (H5b; $\beta = -.21$, $t = -2.15$). Next, as hypothesized, the negative relationship between neuroticism and effectiveness in prospecting and customer acquisition activities were mitigated when imitative role modeling was high, in support of both H6a (prospecting) ($\beta = .19$, $t = 1.88$) and H6b (acquisition) ($\beta = .24$, $t = 2.43$). Figure 3 provides a graphical representation of the moderating impact of imitative role modeling on prospecting and customer acquisition.

DISCUSSION AND THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION

Building on salesperson traits and an emerging research stream in sales coaching, the current research examines the influence of sales manager coaching on the relationship between conscientiousness and neuroticism and salesperson effectiveness in prospecting and customer acquisition activities. The results of this study provide several contributions to the body of research in sales. First, this research contributes to understanding desirable salesperson antecedents that produce positive outcomes. This research identifies the influence distinct traits have on salesperson effectiveness

Figure 3. Imitative Role Modeling x Neuroticism

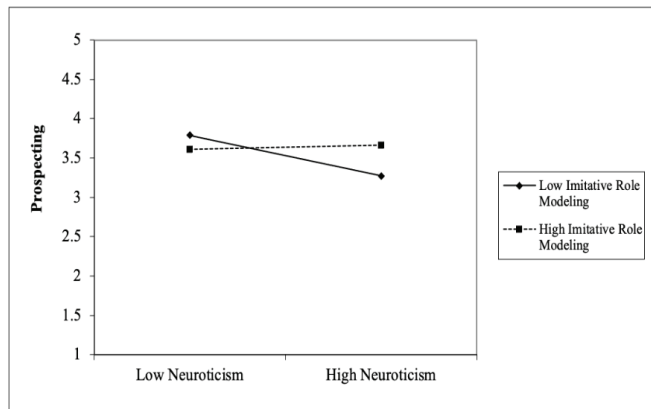


Figure 3a. The moderating effect of imitative role modeling on the relationship between neuroticism and prospecting.

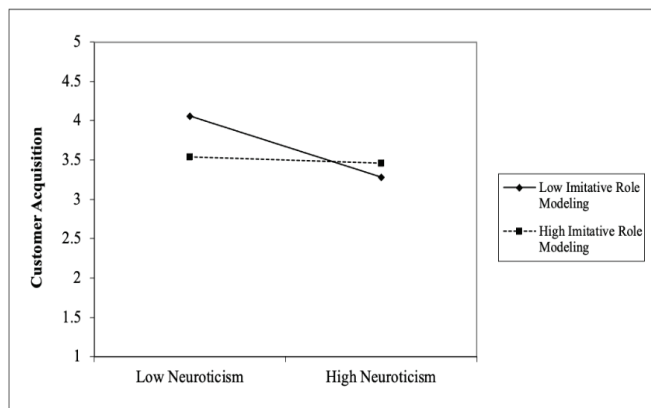


Figure 3b. The moderating effect of imitative role modeling on the relationship between neuroticism and customer acquisition.

in hunting activities related to prospecting and customer acquisition by considering salesperson traits. These traits contribute to an understanding of what characteristics exist in salespeople who are more likely to be effective in sales activities such as identifying potential customers and closing sales.

Second, this research contributes to the sales coaching literature by empirically examining managers' influence on the relationship between salesperson traits and effectiveness. The findings demonstrate that quality feedback and personality traits on salesperson effectiveness vary within different personality traits. For example, the influence of sales manager coaching suggests that quality feedback amplifies the effort level of the conscientious and emotionally stable salesperson but does not enhance and can harm the neurotic salesperson. As the findings propose, conscientious salespeople are likely to be influenced by their managers' feedback because conscientious salespeople are achievement-oriented and care deeply about improving. They're looking to make the right decisions and maximize their contributions to the organization. Thus, quality and helpful feedback can be an effective coaching strategy for salespeople high in conscientiousness.

However, quality feedback backfired when used on salespeople high in neuroticism, further mitigating the salesperson's level of effectiveness, perhaps because insecurities may drive neurotic salespeople. Thus, salespeople higher in emotional stability benefit more from quality coaching feedback. The impact of feedback on neurotic salespeople raises awareness that they may not want feedback or may not enjoy being called out for not being good at what they are doing. Further, countervailing effect (quality feedback increases the negative relationship between neuroticism and effectiveness) suggests that feedback may be a more complicated coaching technique than it appears. Different salespeople may perceive feedback differently, or initial feedback may be undermined due to poor communication or observable and unobservable barriers.

Finally, the results reveal that imitative role modeling effectively increases the effectiveness of salespeople high in neuroticism. Though neurotic salespeople may be less inclined to listen to coaching, they can be influenced by the role modeling behaviors of their sales

managers. This finding highlights the importance of the sales manager and provides hope for managers who may be frustrated with motivating salespeople, especially highly neurotic salespeople. By modeling professional behaviors and sales-related skills, managers can influence the outcomes of neurotic salespeople, as they are typically more challenging to inspire and less likely to improve performance.

Managerial Implications

In addition to the theoretical contributions, this study offers guidance for managers in hiring salespeople and understanding how their sales coaching behaviors can impact the effectiveness of different salespeople. First, the salesperson's traits that contribute to time, effort, and effectiveness in prospecting and customer acquisition are identified. Identifying traits (e.g., conscientiousness and emotional stability) that can predict sales success is a valuable tool for practitioners who frequently use personality tests to screen candidates during the hiring process (Deeter-Schmelz and Sojka, 2007; Randall and Randall, 2001). Organizations looking for salespeople who conduct precision and organization in tracking prospects, updating customer relationship management (CRM), keeping information and records straight, showing up for work and meetings on time, and following up with customers and potential customers should look toward hiring highly conscientious salespeople.

On the contrary, salespeople high in neuroticism are more likely to have difficulties building positive relationships with partners (e.g., prospects, customers) and are more likely to experience interpersonal conflicts (Spector & Jex, 1998). Fostering relationships with prospects and customers is an essential part of a salesperson's daily responsibilities. Therefore, managers may benefit from screening applicants high in neuroticism, which may bring more difficulties into the position, and identify applicants high in emotional stability.

Second, this study helps managers understand how their sales coaching behaviors can impact the effectiveness of salespeople high or low in conscientiousness or neuroticism. Third, managers benefit from understanding the methods and tools they can use to be effective in their role (Deeter-Schmelz, Goebel, and Kennedy, 2008). For example, in the present study,

conscientious and emotionally stable salespeople were more likely to be influenced by quality feedback from their managers. Knowledge of the benefits of quality feedback guides managers with a strategic tool to raise salesperson effectiveness levels.

It's also crucial for managers to be aware that neurotic salespeople may be negatively influenced by quality feedback from their managers. For example, the neurotic salesperson may find the feedback offensive, take any advice as a personal attack, or feel threatened by the additional attention feedback may cause. Therefore, managers should be cautious in providing their neurotic salespeople with too much feedback, regardless of how helpful the input may be. On the other hand, salespeople's imitative role modeling of their manager's sales-related behaviors can benefit neurotic salespeople. Because the salesperson draws on their manager's example, the manager impacts their habits, attitudes, and behaviors. Thus, firms should consider investing resources into developing and training managers in role modeling and coaching different types of salespeople.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

As with all research, the current study should be interpreted within the context of a few limitations. First, data were collected from a single firm within the United States. While looking at a single firm provided some essential benefits, including controlling for variety in training, compensation, and corporate culture, further research exploring these relationships across multiple firms and industries will help determine the generalizability of these findings. Second, although we have shown that sales manager coaching can positively impact the relationship of conscientiousness and neuroticism with salesperson effort, it is beneficial for further research to consider several other salesperson traits. For example, future studies could consider the role of ambition, motivation, resiliency, self-efficacy, and training in positively impacting these behaviors. Third, future research could explore the interaction of traits, such as the possibility for conscientiousness to attenuate the negative impact of neuroticism. Fourth, future research may benefit from a longitudinal research design and examining the time-varying and interaction effects of sales coaching not examined herein. Fifth,

future research could explore quality feedback, such as feedback related to avoiding consequences or loss versus feedback focusing on how to succeed or gain, which could provide managers with more precise insights for maximizing salesperson effectiveness.

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Appendix. Measurement Items

Sales Manager Coaching (7-point Likert scale, strongly disagree to strongly agree)

Quality Feedback

My supervisor gives me useful feedback about my job performance.

The performance feedback I receive from my supervisor is helpful.

The feedback I receive from my supervisor helps me do my job.

Imitative Role Modeling

I have borrowed from my supervisor's approach to situations.

I have implemented specific skills and behaviors I observed in my supervisor

I have directly modeled key behaviors taken from my supervisor

Salesperson Traits (7-point Likert scale, strongly disagree to strongly agree)

Conscientiousness

I get tasks done right away

I like order

I always put things back in their proper place

Neuroticism

I get upset easily

I have frequent mood swings

I have a hard time relaxing

Salesperson Effectiveness (compared to other salespeople in the firm on a scale of one to seven, from "among the least in the company" to "among the most in the company")

Prospecting

My overall effort in identifying and contacting prospects

The amount of time I spend identifying and contacting prospects

My overall effectiveness in identifying and contacting prospects

Customer Acquisition

My overall effort in acquiring new accounts

The amount of time I spend acquiring new accounts

My overall effectiveness in acquiring new accounts
