Exploring Cross-Generational Sales Coaching and Training: Millennials and Gen Z

By Dawn R. Deeter-Schmelz

This paper addresses two areas identified as critical to practitioners and researchers alike: sales coaching/training and managing across generations. Today's salesforce is seeing a shift; as Baby Boomers retire, Millennials move into managerial positions, and Generation Z enters the workforce. What are the similarities and differences between Millennials and Generation Z, and what are the potential implications for sales coaching and training? This study reviews the relevant literature and develops a series of research propositions. Directions for future research and implications for practitioners are also discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Researchers and practitioners have identified sales coaching as one of the most impactful ways to influence sales performance (Corcoran et al. 1995; Dixon and Adamson 2011; Peesker et al. 2019; Sales Management Association 2014; *Selling Power* 2010; Shannahan, Bush, and Shannahan 2013). Martin (2015) identified coaching skills as one of the essential skills of top sales managers, and Deeter-Schmelz, Goebel, and Kennedy (2008) found that coaching skills are a crucial component of effective sales management. As stated by Edinger (2015), "If you want to improve the capability of your sales organization… coaching is the most powerful lever you have" (p. 4). Both industry and academia have called for the prioritization of sales coaching in practice and research activities (Badrinarayanan et al. 2015; Bradford, Rutherford, and Friend 2017).

Sales coaching has been defined as the development of knowledge, skills, and abilities (e.g., Badrinarayanan et al. 2015). This definition naturally lends itself to a discussion of sales training designed to develop the same knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs). Cespedes and Lee (2017) noted that U.S. companies spend over $70 billion annually on sales training. This expenditure equates to approximately $1459 per salesperson, 20% more than that spent on the training of other

Dawn R. Deeter-Schmelz (Ph.D., University of South Florida), Professor & J.J. Vanier Distinguished Chair of Relational Selling and Marketing, Director, Kansas State University National Strategic Selling Institute, ddeeter@ksu.edu

employees. Yet the results achieved by this training are disappointing (Cespedes and Lee, 2017).

Solid research exists and continues in sales coaching (e.g., Badrinarayanan et al. 2015; Dahling et al. 2016; Nguyen et al. 2019) and sales training (e.g., Lassk et al. 2012; Leach, Liu, and Johnston 2005). Still, generational differences related to sales coaching training have not been explored in the sales literature. Such research is warranted as today's workforce is experiencing a generational "changing of the guards." As the last of the Baby Boomers retire, Generation X (Gen X) members are moving into senior-level positions, Millennials are moving into managerial positions, and members of Generation Z (Gen Z) are becoming the latest entrants to the workforce. As noted by Gabrielova and Buchko (2021), "we have moved beyond asking 'How should we manage Millennials?' as Millennials have become managers themselves" (p. 490). Similarly, Pullins et al. (2020) note a "generational shift of power" as Millennials move into leadership positions (p. 25). Further, research suggests differences in generational learning styles could affect sales training needs and methodologies (Gabrielova and Buchko 2021).

Most researchers agree that generations share certain traits due to shared experiences, affecting interpersonal interactions and job outcomes (e.g., Pasko et al., 2021). Not surprisingly, companies are eager to manage and coach the latest generation of salespeople. Unfortunately, sales research on generational theory is scant, and existing research outside of sales focuses mainly on individual characteristics and human resource issues (Hershatter and Epstein 2010; Kuron et

al. 2015; Ng, Schweitzer, and Lyons 2010; Rosa and Hastings 2018; Twenge 2010; Twenge and Campbell 2008; Twenge, Campbell, and Freeman 2012; Twenge et al. 2010; Twenge, Zhang, and Im 2004). Although this research provides helpful insights, more sales coaching and training-specific research is needed to understand the challenges of Millennials coaching and training Gen Z.

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to explore sales coaching and training in the context of Millennials managing Gen Z salespeople and develop a series of research propositions. The following sections introduce the literature on generational theory, particularly as it relates to Millennials and Gen Z, and review the literature on sales coaching and training. Finally, based on these reviews, research propositions are offered, with implications for researchers and practitioners.

GENERATIONAL THEORY

Generational theory (Mannheim 1952) argues that every generation shares unique characteristics shaped by political, social, and economic developments as the members of that generation grow up and mature (Fishman 2016; Glass 2007; Howe and Strauss 2000). Strauss and Howe (1991) identified four distinct generational groups: G.I., born 1901-1924; Silent, born 1925-1942; Boom (now Baby Boomers), born 1943-1960; and 13th (now Gen X), born 1961-1981. Later, Howe and Strauss (2000) described individuals born between 1981-1996 as Millennials, with individuals born between 1997-2012 described as Generation Z or Gen Z (Jennings 2017). Baby Boomers are moving into retirement as the first wave of Gen Z employees enters the workforce (Dimock 2019). Meanwhile, by 2025, approximately 75% of the workforce will consist of Millennials (Grossman 2018).

Research has shown that members of different generations hold significantly different preferences regarding work-related attributes. For example, Pasko et al. (2021) found significant differences between generations concerning job security, the potential for advancement, work/life balance, and company leadership. As Millennials begin to dominate the workforce and take on managerial roles, and as Gen Z

begins to enter the workforce, it is vital to understand the differences between Millennials and Gen Z within the context of the salesforce, including sales coaching and training.

Characteristics of Millennials

Research suggests Millennials are significantly different from previous generations regarding work-related concepts such as technology use, work-life balance, job security, and leadership (Heimlich 2010; Pasko et al. 2021). For example, Millennials' intense engagement with technology has led some researchers to argue that Millennials possess a different approach to work and the workplace (e.g., Hershatter and Epstein 2010). Ng et al. (2010) note that Millennials are less concerned with organizational leadership roles and more concerned with creative expression and entrepreneurial thinking. Although differences in work ethic exist across all generations, research by Meriac, Woehr, and Banister (2010) reveals that Millennials score the lowest of all generations measured. Millennials are also skilled in teamwork (Espinoza, Ukleja, and Rusch 2010) and multi-tasking (Oblinger and Oblinger 2005) and prefer working in teams rather than independently (Gabrielova and Buchko 2021).

Finally, Millennials tend to be "deep generalists." Rather than possessing specialized skills in one specific area, they strive for broad-based knowledge applied across situations. For example, having witnessed the financial crisis of 2008, Millennials found a way to ensure they can be qualified for a wide variety of roles (Grossman 2018).

What do We Know About Millennials as Managers?
Although research examining Millennials as employees is readily available, few studies have examined Millennials in managerial roles. In one of the few articles addressing this topic, Grossman (2018) argues that Millennial managers will be vastly different from Baby Boomers and Gen X, given their need for social responsibility, frequent communication, and their ability to exploit the value of teamwork. In addition, Karsh and Templin (2013) describe Millennial managers as possessing the assets of being collaborative, hopeful, tech-savvy, and possessing multi-cultural awareness.

Millennials' focus on communication suggests they will excel at providing feedback to employees. However, because they prefer technologically-mediated communication, Millennials are less likely to provide feedback in person (Grossman 2018). Further, Millennials tend to avoid confrontation more than previous generations. As a result, they lack the skills to deal with difficult employees (Karsh and Templin 2013), resulting in weak managerial behaviors or a passive-aggressive work environment (Grossman 2018). In addition, Millennials dislike menial work and possess confidence beyond their abilities (Karsh and Templin 2013). Finally, Grossman (2018) suggests that although Millennials are comfortable working with metrics and data, they tend to get "into the weeds" and are less likely to see the "big picture." This tendency could lead Millennial sales managers to become "CRM desk jockeys," focusing on the data in the system rather than engaging with salespeople in the field to improve their performance (Weinberg 2012).

Characteristics of Gen Z

Also known as iGen because of their high level of engagement with technology (cf. Grossman 2018), Gen Z includes anyone born in 1997-2012 (Dimock 2019). Although Millennials make up the majority of the workforce today (Grossman 2018), Gen Z is the largest generation of the two, representing nearly 30 percent of the U.S. population (Fortune 2017).

The members of Gen Z are more similar to their Gen X parents than they are to members of the Millennial generation (Miller 2018). Gen Z members watched their parents struggle with money and job loss and, as a consequence, are more financially conservative (Gale 2015). Like Millennials, Gen Z values immediate feedback (Fry 2018; Gale 2015; Miller 2018). Members of the Gen Z generation are highly competitive due to years spent competing in youth sports. Nevertheless, they prefer working independently rather than in teams and embrace change (Fry 2018; Miller 2018). Further, they are realistic and do not expect rewards just for showing up (Jennings 2017).

Unfortunately, because the members of Gen Z are just now entering the workforce, little research exists to provide insights. Nevertheless, we can make inferences based on their unique characteristics. First, because they tend to be financially conservative (Gale 2015; Miller 2018), members of Gen Z tend to value financial stability over workplace engagement and enjoyment. Second, although Millennials prefer teamwork, members of Gen Z prefer to work privately and independently (Jennings 2017; Miller 2018). Third, members of Generation Z are highly tech-savvy, having used mobile phones and tablets since childhood (Gale 2015), and prefer face-to-face communication (Alton 2017; Miller 2018). Finally, Gen Z members desire employment with a company aligned with their values (Jennings 2017).

Similarities and Differences between Millennials and Gen Z

Table 1 highlights the similarities and differences between Millennials and Gen Z. As shown, both generations share an entrepreneurial mindset (Miller 2018; Rodriguez et al. 2019), heavy engagement with technology (Gale 2015; Hershatter and Epstein 2010; Taylor and Keeter 2010), and a desire for frequent feedback: that is, frequent feedback for Millennials and constant feedback for Gen Z (Gabrielova and Buchko 2021; Rosa and Hastings 2018; Twenge et al. 2010). They also share a desire for work/life balance (Ng, Schweitzer, and Lyons 2010; Pasko et al. 2021). The differences, however, are more prevalent than the similarities.

Millennials tend to share traits with their Baby Boomer parents (Freud 2014), whereas Gen Z tends to share traits with their Gen X parents (Miller 2018). Millennials prefer teamwork and working collaboratively (Karsh and Templin 2013), while Gen Z members are competitive and prefer working independently (Gabrielova and Buchko 2021; Miller 2018). Millennials have been characterized as overly optimistic with a lesser work ethic (Cole, Lucas, and Smith 2022; Meriac, Woehr, and Banister 2010); alternatively, Gen Z has been characterized as being realistic, possessing grit, and valuing competence (Gale 2015; Miller 2018; Rodriquez et al. 2019). Members of Gen Z are financially conservative and prefer a job with financial security (Gale 2015). On the other hand, Millennials seek workplace engagement (Twenge et al. 2010). Millennials prefer creative expression over organizational leadership roles (Ng et al. 2010), while

Table 1. Millennials and Gen Z: Similarities and Differences

Similarities
Entrepreneurial mindset (Miller 2018; Rodriguez et al. 2019)
Highly engaged with technology (Gale 2015; Hershatter and Epstein 2010; Taylor and Keeter 2010)
Demand frequent or constant feedback (Gabrielova and Buchko 2021; Rosa and Hastings 2018; Twenge et al. 2010)
Value work-life balance (Ng, Schweitzer, and Lyons 2010; Pasko et al. 2021)

Differences	
Millennials	**Gen Z**
Born 1981-1996 (Dimrock 2019; Howe and Strauss 2000)	Born 1997-2012 (Dimrock 2019; Jennings 2017)
More similar to Baby Boomers (Freud 2014)	More similar to Gen X (Miller 2018)
Collaborative, prefer teamwork (Karsh and Templin 2013)	Competitive, prefer individual work (Gabrielova and Buchko 2021; Miller 2018)
Overly optimistic (Cole, Lucas, and Smith 2002)	Realistic (Gale 2015; Miller 2018)
Needy, entitled (Wright 2017)	Financially conservative (Gale 2015)
Prefer workplace engagement (Twenge et al. 2010)	Prefer financial stability (Gabrielova and Buchko 2021)
Less concerned with work ethic (Meriac, Woehr, and Banister 2010)	High levels of grit (Rodriguez et al. 2019)
Dislike menial work, confident beyond their abilities (Karsh and Templin 2013)	Value competence (Miller 2018)
Prefer technology-mediated communication (text, e-mail) (Grossman 2018)	Prefer face-to-face communication and expect face-time with the boss (Maloni et al. 2019; Miller 2018)
Avoid confrontation (Karsh and Templin 2013)	Seek constructive feedback (Randstad 2016)
Less interested in leadership, more interested in creative expression (Ng, Schweitzer, and Lyons. 2010)	More interested in leadership and making a difference (Miller 2018)

Gen Z members pursue leadership opportunities and relish the chance to make a difference (Miller 2018). Finally, Gen Z members expect substantial face-to-face communication with the sales manager (Maloni, Hiatt, and Campbell 2019; Miller 2018), whereas Millennials prefer technology-mediated communication modes like e-mail or texts and avoid confrontation (Grossman 2018; Karsh and Templin 2013). These differences raise interesting questions concerning sales coaching and training with Millennials as sales managers and Gen Z as salespeople.

SALES COACHING AND TRAINING

Various definitions are used to describe sales coaching (see Table 2). These definitions highlight providing

hands-on assistance and instruction (Peesker et al. 2019), providing positive feedback, serving as a role model, and developing trust (Rich 1998), developing salesperson knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) (Badrinayanan et al. 2015; Peterson and Hicks 1996), and engaging in conversations and activities that lead to ongoing feedback and encouragement (Corcoran et al. 1995). Although some differences are apparent, these definitions share a commonality: that through sales coaching, the sales manager can help the salesperson improve performance.

Table 2. Definitions of Sales Coaching from the Literature

Definition:	Source:
Providing individualized hands-on assistance and instruction to help salespeople recognize opportunities to improve their job performance.	Peesker et al. (2019)
An action-oriented process of equipping salespeople, sales managers, and senior sales executives with appropriate KSAs that will contribute to cognitive, emotional, and behavioral development and effectively achieve sales task-related and organization-related goals and objectives.	Badrinarayanan et al. (2015)
Sales coaching includes three components: (1) positive feedback, (2) role-modeling, and (3) trust that leads to improved productivity in salespeople.	Rich (1998)
Process of equipping people with the tools, knowledge, and opportunities they need to develop themselves and become more effective.	Peterson and Hicks (1996)
The sequence of conversations and activities that provide ongoing feedback and encouragement to a salesperson or sales team member to improve that person's performance.	Corcoran et al. (1995)

Sales training also provides opportunities for salespeople to improve performance, albeit through more formalized methods. The literature on sales training has covered a wide variety of topics. Lassk et al. (2012) and Cron et al. (2005), for example, argue that sales training must move beyond knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) to include the full range of competencies developed and applied throughout a salesperson's career. Boyer et al. (2012) studied self-directed learning as a more efficient and effective way to train salespeople. Rayburn et al. (2021) note the need for what they identify as "continuous techno-training," i.e., training on sales technologies, to help salespeople keep pace with the advancements in sales enablement tools. Torres et al. (2020) recommend mobile devices to deliver sales training, and Singh et al. (2022) recommend online training.

Although several constructs have been identified as components of sales coaching and important to sales training, five variables have received consistent support. These variables are most relevant to generational theory: providing feedback, role-modeling, trust in the sales manager, salesperson coachability, and developing knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs). In the following sections, these ideas are discussed, and research propositions are developed. Table 3 lists the constructs, definitions, and research propositions.

Table 3. Constructs, Definitions, and Research Propositions

Constructs	Definition	Research Questions
Feedback	A conversation between the manager and salesperson designed to reinforce positive behaviors by identifying strengths and opportunities for growth (McHardy and Marshall 2003).	RP1: Gen Z salespeople will desire frequent and immediate feedback on performance from Millennial sales managers. RP2: Millennial sales managers will be more effective at providing positive feedback and less effective in providing constructive feedback to salespeople. RP3: Millennial sales managers will prefer technology-mediated channels when providing feedback to Gen Z salespeople. RP4: Gen Z salespeople will prefer face-to-face communication when receiving feedback from Millennial sales managers. RP5: Millennial sales managers' preference for technology-mediated communication and tendency to avoid confrontation will conflict with Gen Z salespeople who prefer face-to-face communication and actionable feedback.
Role-modeling	The sales manager sets a positive example for the salesperson (Rich 1998).	RP6: Millennial sales managers will be less effective at role-modeling due to their preferences for data analysis and technologically-mediated communication. RP7: Differences between Millennial sales managers and Gen Z salespeople concerning work ethic and desire for organizational leadership opportunities will affect the effectiveness of Millennials' role-modeling.
Trust in the Sales Manager	The extent to which the salesperson is confident in the sales manager's ability to help the salesperson improve abilities and performance (Deeter-Schmelz, Kennedy, and Goebel 2002; Rich 1998).	RP8: The generational differences between Millennial sales managers and Gen Z salespeople will affect the level of trust in the sales manager.
Salesperson Coachability	The degree to which salespeople are open to seeking, receiving, and using external resources to increase their sales performance in a personal selling context (Shannahan et al. 2013, p. 41).	RP9: Gen Z salespeople are more coachable than salespeople from previous generations. RP10: The coachability of Gen Z salespeople will be affected by their desire for constructive feedback, the preferred method of communication, and preference for individual work.
Developing KSAs	Equipping salespeople with the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to achieve sales and organizational goals and objectives (Badrinarayanan et al. 2015)	RP11: Gen Z salespeople have different training needs than those salespeople representing other generations. RP12: Mobile and online training delivery options are effective mediums for delivering sales training to Gen Z salespeople. RP13: Self-directed learning is an effective method for training Gen Z salespeople.

Providing Feedback. Rich (1998) identified supervisory feedback as one of three components of sales coaching in his seminal study on sales coaching. According to Rich (1998), supervisory feedback is related to positive feedback on performance above expectations. Similarly, based on an integrative review of the literature and depth interviews, Badrinarayanan et al. (2015) identified the provision of feedback as one of five components of sales coaching. Dahling et al. (2016) corroborated these findings in a study of pharmaceutical sales representatives, as did Peesker et al. (2019) in a qualitative study of 36 I.T. sales professionals. Relatedly, Deeter-Schmelz, Kennedy, and Goebel (2002) identified effective feedback as a critical component of sales manager effectiveness.

Peesker et al. (2019), drawing from MacKenzie, Podsakoff, and Rich (2001), note supervisory feedback involves praise for good performance or reprimands for poor performance. It is, at its roots, a transactional leadership approach. Yet sales coaching methodologies suggest proper coaching occurs when managers "partner" with salespeople to develop self-managers (McHardy and Marshall 2003). Within this context, feedback can be defined as a conversation between the manager and salesperson designed to reinforce positive behaviors by identifying strengths and opportunities for growth (McHardy and Marshall 2003).

Generational research suggests Millennials appreciate frequent communication (Gabrielova and Buchko 2021), albeit technologically mediated instead of face-to-face (Grossman 2018). Millennials tend to avoid confrontation and struggle with providing constructive or negative feedback (Karsh and Templin 2013). Members of Gen Z also value immediate feedback (Fry 2018; Gale 2015; Miller 2018), although they prefer communication to be face-to-face (Gabrielova and Buchko 2021). These similarities and differences between Millennials and Gen Z lead to the following research propositions relative to sales coaching:

RP1: Gen Z salespeople will desire frequent and immediate feedback on performance from Millennial sales managers.

RP2: Millennial sales managers will be more effective at providing positive feedback and less effective in providing constructive feedback to salespeople.

RP3: Millennial sales managers will prefer technology-mediated channels when providing feedback to Gen Z salespeople.

RP4: Gen Z salespeople will prefer face-to-face communication when receiving feedback from Millennial sales managers.

RP5: Millennial sales managers' preference for technology-mediated communication and tendency to avoid confrontation will conflict with Gen Z salespeople who prefer face-to-face communication and actionable feedback.

Role-Modeling. Rich (1998) also identified role-modeling as a critical component of sales coaching. Role modeling was defined as the sales manager setting a positive example for the salesperson (Rich 1998). Other researchers have corroborated this assertion, including Dahling et al. (2016). In addition, Nguyen et al. (2019) found that the extent to which the manager engages in role-plays and joint sales calls with the salesperson represents a component of effective coaching. Identified by Nguyen et al. (2019) as involvement, this construct appears to be related to role-modeling.

Several generational differences between Millennials and Gen Z could affect the role-modeling process. First, Millennials are more inclined to focus on data points than the big picture (Grossman 2018). Will this tendency to concentrate on data (e.g., from a CRM system) lead to coaching via the data rather than coaching via role-modeling? Further, will the preference for technologically-mediated communication lead salespeople to avoid engaging salespeople in the field and having the opportunity to participate in role-modeling?

Second, Millennials have the lowest stated work ethic of any generation and are less interested in organizational leadership (Meriac, Woehr, and Banister 2010; Ng et al. 2010). Alternatively, Gen Z members have high grit levels and are very interested in organizational leadership opportunities (Fry 2018; Miller 2018). These differences in work ethic and interest in organizational leadership could affect the role-modeling process.

Based on the previous review, the following research propositions are offered:

> *RP6: Millennial sales managers will be less effective at role-modeling due to their preferences for data analysis and technologically-mediated communication.*

> *RP7: Differences between Millennial sales managers and Gen Z salespeople concerning work ethic and desire for leadership opportunities will impact the effectiveness of Millennials' role-modeling.*

Salesperson Trust in the Sales Manager. Trust represents the third component of Rich's (1998) three-dimension definition of sales coaching. In this context, trust was identified explicitly as the salesperson's trust in the sales manager (Rich 1998). This construct can be defined as how the salesperson is confident in the sales manager's ability to help the salesperson improve abilities and performance (Deeter-Schmelz, Kennedy, and Goebel 2002; Rich 1998). Trust in the sales manager has been identified as a characteristic of effective sales management (Deeter-Schmelz, Kennedy, and Goebel 2002; Deeter-Schmelz, Goebel, and Kennedy 2008). In addition, Peesker et al. (2019) found that effective coaching led to improved trust between the sales manager and salesperson, although too much coaching can be perceived as micromanagement. Finally, Nguyen et a. (2019) identified rapport as a critical component of effective sales coaching. Defined as the extent to which the manager and salesperson have a personal relationship, it seems logical that rapport would be related to trust.

As shown in Table 2, the previously reviewed literature on generational theory suggests more differences than similarities between Millennials and Gen Z. While Millennials prefer to be collaborative, Gen Z members prefer to work individually. Millennials are overly optimistic, while Gen Z members are realistic. Millennials tend to be needy and entitled, while Gen Z members tend to be financially conservative. Do these differences affect the ability of the Gen Z salesperson to trust the manager? Or, are members of these two generations able to connect on their similarities of an entrepreneurial mindset, being technologically adept, and preferring frequent feedback?

> *RP8: The generational differences between Millennial sales managers and Gen Z salespeople will affect the level of trust in the sales manager.*

Salesperson Coachability. In a study of healthcare sales professionals, Shannahan et al. (2013) identified salesperson coachability as playing an important role, fully mediating the relationship between transformational leadership and sales performance. Shannahan et al. (2013) define salesperson coachability as "…the degree to which salespeople are open to seeking, receiving, and using external resources to increase their sales performance in a personal selling context" (p. 41). This construct focuses on the ability of the salesperson to be coached, as opposed to the sales manager's coaching abilities (Shannahan et al., 2013). Salesperson coachability has apparent implications for sales coaching; the more coachable the salesperson, the more effective the coaching. Further, research has linked salesperson coachability with a positive impact on sales performance (cf. Allen et al. 2021).

Importantly, salesperson coachability plays a critical role in self-management, an essential concept in sales coaching and training (McHardy and Marshall 2003). Boyer et al. (2012) discuss self-directed learning as a form of sales training that takes advantage of self-management skills and, as a consequence, might benefit from salesperson coachability. Self-directed learning allows salespeople to customize their sales training according to their unique needs. Boyer et al. (2012) recommend a specific form of self-directed learning, i.e., synergistic, because salespeople can choose to participate rather than being forced to participate.

Given Gen Z's preference for constructive feedback and face-to-face communication, one might expect that members of this generation are more coachable than previous generations, including Millennials. Alternatively, Gen Z's preference for individual work might impact their ability to work with and respond to a coach. Thus, the following research propositions are offered:

> *RP9: Gen Z salespeople are more coachable than salespeople from previous generations.*

RP10: The coachability of Gen Z salespeople will be affected by their desire for constructive feedback, the preferred method of communication, and their preference for individual work.

Developing Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSAs).

In their framework of professional sales coaching, Badrinarayanan et al. (2015) include developing KSAs and monitoring the acquisition of these KSAs. Further, these authors posit that the characteristics of the salesperson and the sales manager serve as antecedents to these components of the sales coaching process. Although not mentioned explicitly by Branrinarayanan et al. (2015), these characteristics could be related to generational differences.

The importance of developing KSAs in salespeople seems obvious. Salespeople need to develop the skills required to perform their jobs effectively. Rayburn et al. (2021) noted that these skills include the ability to embrace, understand, and use the various technological tools chosen by the organization to enable sales performance. KSAs could also include improving salesperson coachability.

The delivery methods for developing KSAs also warrant research attention. For example, researchers have recommended mobile learning (Torres et al. 2020) and online training (Singh et al. 2022) as viable options for a geographically-dispersed sales force. However, the impact of this type of training has been shown to vary based on the sales role and territory (Singh et al. 2022).

Two issues arise when discussing the development of KSAs. The first issue is the types of KSAs that need to be developed in Gen Z. Although this generation is advanced in some areas, it lacks areas taken for granted by other generations such as Baby Boomers, Gen X, and Millennials. Consider, for example, that members of Gen Z generally communicate via text, emoji, and video and maintain connections via social media (Turner 2015). Gen Z salespeople likely need to develop skills in phone conversations and writing e-mails in a professional manner, along with training in questioning and listening skills. Further, they will need training on the multitude of technologies associated with today's sales role (Torres et al. 2020). Although the members

of Gen Z are very adept at using technology, as are Millennials (Gale 2015; Hershatter and Epstein 2010; Taylor and Keeter 2010), they are not familiar with the strategic use of technology, nor are they familiar with the specific sales enablement tools.

The second issue is the medium used for training delivery. This Gen Z characteristic of technology adeptness suggests mobile and online training might be effective options for this group. Further, because members of Gen Z are eager to gain competencies and deliver value in the workplace (Miller 2018), they may be good candidates for self-directed learning. They are motivated to improve and will likely appreciate being empowered to manage their learning.

Building on these ideas, the following research propositions are offered:

RP11: Gen Z salespeople have different training needs than those salespeople representing other generations.

RP12: Mobile and online training delivery options are effective mediums for delivering sales training to Gen Z salespeople.

RP13: Self-directed learning is an effective method for training Gen Z salespeople.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

With research propositions developed, the next logical step is to test the propositions. Several steps can be taken to operationalize this recommended course of study.

First, qualitative research should be undertaken to understand better the generational differences affecting Millennial sales managers and Gen Z salespeople. In-depth interviews with sales managers and salespeople representing the generations of interest are valuable because they allow respondents to speak openly about their experiences and perceptions (Fontana and Frey 1994). In addition, in-depth interviews provide rich data that can help researchers and practitioners understand the most impactful generational differences and the result of that impact. For example, qualitative research can provide insight into the KSAs needed by Gen Z salespeople and the preferred methods of

communication for each group. The data collected via in-depth interviews can also inform the scale development process.

Case studies also provide a practical methodology for developing an initial understanding of the issues arising from Millennial sales managers coaching Gen Z salespeople. Case study research is appropriate when the research questions tend to be "how" and "why" questions; that is, the research seeks to explain a situation (Yin 2018). For example, in the context of Millennial sales managers coaching Gen Z salespeople, a case study could explain the preliminary issues facing this coaching relationship and provide a more extensive description of the relationships between the variables.

Once qualitative research has taken place, with key constructs identified and clarified, empirical research is warranted. Descriptive studies can be helpful initially to confirm, for example, the characteristics of Millennials and Gen Z as identified in previous generational research. For example, do Millennials sales managers have a lower work ethic than other sales managers, as suggested by Meriac, Woehr, and Banister (2010)? Are Gen Z salespeople financially conservative (Gale 2015)? Studies are needed to confirm these findings, especially in Gen Z salespeople, where research is lacking.

Finally, theoretical models should be developed and tested empirically. This study has taken the first step by offering preliminary research propositions. To truly help companies with this issue, however, researchers must develop and test theoretical frameworks that result in actionable recommendations for practitioners.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTITIONERS

Research suggests Gen Z salespeople want constant feedback and face-time with the manager (Maloni, Hiatt, and Campbell 2019; Miller 2018). Yet other studies suggest Millennial managers prefer technology-mediated communication (Grossman 2018). To assist with retention, it may be incumbent on the Millennial manager to adapt to the salesperson's needs (cf. Nguyen et al. 2019). Gen Z salespeople are realistic and seek frank feedback to develop competencies and improve performance. However, are Millennial managers—who tend to be overly optimistic—prepared

to provide constructive criticism? Randstad (2016) noted that Millennial managers lack the emotional intelligence and soft skills necessary for managing others effectively. Therefore, millennial sales manager training will be critical to Gen Z salespeople's coaching and training. Practitioners should take steps to help Millennial managers develop their emotional intelligence and soft skills, such as handling conflict and providing feedback, as these skills will be crucial to the sales organization's success.

Given their preferences for different communication mediums, Millennial managers and Gen Z salespeople might also benefit from awareness of the available communication channels and the most appropriate channels to use in certain situations. This information could be incorporated in sales training, as Gen Z salespeople need to know how to communicate with customers representing different generations and how to communicate with their Millennial sales managers. Again, this recommendation relates to the adaptability of both roles. Awareness and training on this issue might help alleviate any workplace tensions that could arise due to different communication styles.

Millennial managers might also benefit from training and coaching on being effective role models. Baby Boomer and Gen X senior managers might need to engage in role modeling for the Millennial managers to help those managers become better role models themselves. A formal mentoring program within the firm could help strengthen this process and improve the coaching abilities of Millennial managers. It will be essential to encourage Millennial managers to get away from managing via data analysis (e.g., being a CRM desk jockey) and get out into the field with the salespeople to coach and role-model appropriate behaviors.

Practitioners should pay close attention to the relationship between the Millennial sales manager and the Gen Z salesperson. Is trust developing between the two parties, or are generational differences impeding the trust development process? If the latter occurs, interventions may be needed to help both sides cope and adapt to the other party's style.

Finally, practitioners should review sales training content and delivery mechanisms to ensure it has the

desired effects. For example, care should be taken to develop skills lacking in Millennial managers (e.g., soft skills) and Gen Z salespeople (e.g., phone conversations, written correspondence). Further, practitioners should ensure that the methods for delivering sales training are most effective for the recipients. Finally, the mechanisms should match the desired preferences of the training group, i.e., Millennials or Gen Z, to maximize training effectiveness.

Providing Millennial sales managers and Gen Z with the training needed to be successful should benefit sales managers, salespeople, as well as the organization as a whole. Millennial managers will benefit by increasing coaching effectiveness and reducing the frustrations and workplace tensions associated with managing salespeople (cf. McHardy and Marshall 2003). Gen Z salespeople will benefit by developing their skills and improving their performance as a result of the increased coaching effectiveness. Ultimately, the entire sales organization will benefit from improved sales performance.

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