

Sales Organization Communication Quality and Salesperson Performance

By Louis J. Zmich and Mark D. Groza

As sales cycles become more digital, effective communication between internal organizational stakeholders and the organization's salesforce increases in importance. Business-to-Business buyers are more informed than ever, and salespeople must cooperate with their team to share information and collaborate to satisfy buyer needs. As such, management is tasked with the difficult challenge of finding ways to properly engage with their less cooperative salespeople in a way that is helpful to both the salesperson and the buyer. The current study provides insight into how communication quality within the sales function affects individual outcomes like salesperson job satisfaction and job performance, while also shedding light on how the personal cooperativeness of the salesperson moderates these relationships. Analyzing data collected from a sample of B2B salespeople, the current study supports the prediction that sales organization communication quality is positively related to salesperson job satisfaction and job performance. Further, the results suggest that personal cooperativeness moderates the communication quality – salesperson performance relationship.

INTRODUCTION

Capturing the attention of buyers continues to be an increasingly expensive endeavor for sales organizations as acquiring and disseminating knowledge amongst a sales force is complex and not easily imitated (Arnett, Wittmann and Hansen, 2021). As such, sales organizations are investing billions of dollars into software that can help strengthen the communication channels among organizational members (e.g., marketing, R&D, logistics, accounting, design, etc.), including the salesforce (Karim, Bari, Rahman, Berawi and Jaapar, 2007; Liu, 2019).

The degree of information sharing is one of the most critical dimensions of how well a sales team works with each other (Yilmaz and Hunt, 2001; Cadogan, Lee, Tarkiainen and Sundqvist, 2009). Proper communication between internal stakeholders of an organization and the organization's salesforce is becoming increasingly important as sales territories increase in size and scope while customer demands

increase in complexity (Cadogan et al., 2009; Bolander, Satorino, Hughes and Ferris, 2015). At the salesperson level, communication skills along with a propensity to cooperate with others have been identified as important in determining whether a salesperson will fit in with the sales team (Amor, 2019). Despite research confirming this and the importance of organizational-level communication quality on firm-level outcomes, less is known about how variability in information flow within the sales function affects individual salespeople.

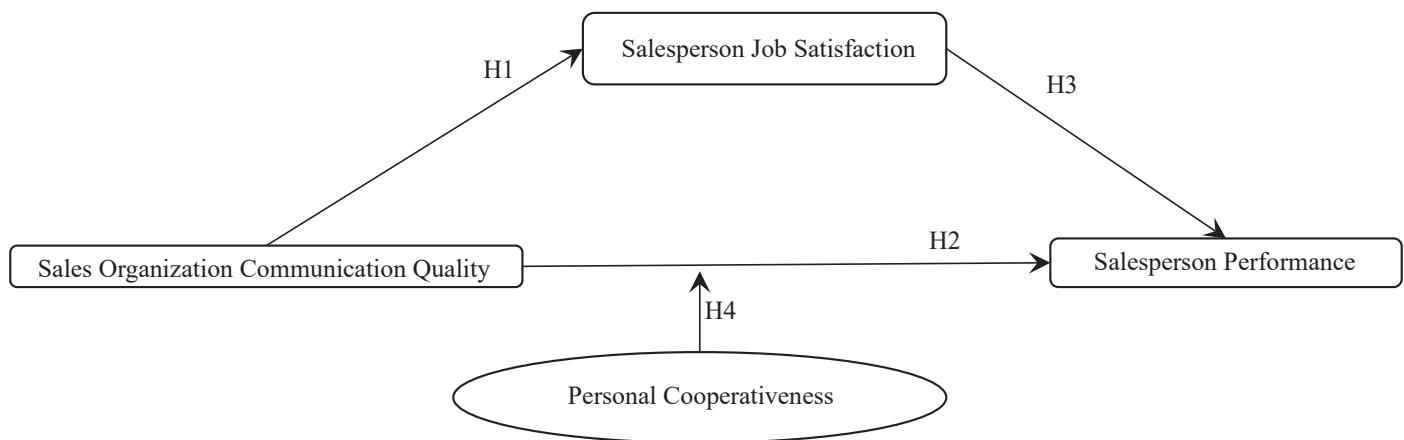
The affect sales organization communication quality has on salespeople is likely dependent on the personal disposition of the individual salesperson (Flaherty, Lam, Lee and Mulki, 2012). For example, highly cooperative salespeople are more likely to have a greater buy-in of company initiatives as they often acquire important contextual information informally from colleagues and other cross-functional organizational stakeholders like marketing, design, purchasing, manufacturing, assembly, and management (Karim et al., 2007). Salespeople with a more uncooperative predisposition, however, may need robust communication from direct sales managers regarding organization-level initiatives for the adoption process to take place. Such individuals likely need a high level of clarity in terms of the 'why' behind organizational actions. And while employers may strive to hire individuals who are cooperative by nature, in a competitive job market, this is not always possible.

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In sum, research to date has focused on the positive outcomes of information sharing, communication skills, and cooperation within an organization (e.g., Groza, Peterson, Sullivan and Krishnan, 2012; Lussier and Hall, 2017). However, little research has examined how communication quality within the sales function in conjunction with a salesperson's innate level of cooperativeness affects their satisfaction and sales performance. The purpose of this paper then is to identify the extent to which communication within the sales function affects salesperson job satisfaction and sales performance. Further, it seeks to understand the extent to which personal cooperativeness affects these relationships. Figure 1 contains the conceptual model.

Figure 1 The effect of sales organization communication quality on salesperson job satisfaction and performance.



Sales Organization Communication Quality

Communication quality within a sales organization refers to the timely and accurate sharing of information between members of an organization through both formal and informal means (Yilmaz and Hunt, 2001; Schetzle and Delpechitre, 2014). As direct supervisors, managers play an important role in shaping both the attitudes and behaviors of salespeople in their organization (Flaherty et al., 2012). Additionally, managers that have direct contact with their salespeople have an opportunity to create a sense of continual support that leads to greater satisfaction with their job (Babakus, Cravens, Johnston and Moncrief, 1996). Research indicates that the frequency and quality of communication between management and their workforce affect company performance (Gardner, Paulsen, Gallois, Callan and Monaghan, 2001; Giri and Kumar, 2010). While previous studies have focused on manager support and the overall performance of the firm, the impact communication quality within the sales organization has on individual salespeople and their performance has received less attention.

Effective communication within the sales organization allows salespeople to be informed of new developments in a timely manner (Bolander et al., 2015). This can include information regarding internal initiatives such as new product launches or marketing campaigns as well as external information such as market trend data and competitor analysis (Krishnan, Groza, Groza, Peterson and Fredericks, 2014). Such insights provide salespeople with relevant information to discuss with current and prospective buyers and help advance those buyers through the sales funnel. High levels of communication quality throughout the sales function help ensure salespeople can tap into relevant knowledge tacit to the sales organization.

Quality communication throughout the sales organization also helps reduce perceptions of job stressors such as role ambiguity (Bhuyan, Menguc and Borsboom, 2005). Role ambiguity has been identified as a major source of job dissatisfaction among salespeople (Boles, Wood and Johnson 2003). Thus, a clear understanding of work expectations can help ensure a certain level of job satisfaction. Finally, open communication

creates a bond among organizational stakeholders, allowing for the free flow of both personal and work-related information. Frequent positive exchanges between and among management, salespeople, and other organizational stakeholders motivate pro-social behavior and bolster job performance (Schetzle and Delpechitre, 2014). Based on these arguments, we propose that communication quality within the sales function will have a positive effect on both salesperson job satisfaction and performance.

H1: *Sales organization communication quality is positively related to salesperson job satisfaction.*

H2: *Sales organization communication quality is positively related to salesperson job performance.*

While we expect a significant and positive relationship between sales organization communication quality and salesperson job performance, we do expect job satisfaction to partially mediate this relationship. Research has found rather equivocal results when examining salesperson job satisfaction and job performance (Brashear, Lepkowska-White and Chelariu, 2001). For example, in their 1993 meta-analysis of antecedents and consequences of job satisfaction, the link between satisfaction and performance was not found (Brown and Peterson, 1993). However, other studies point to a positive link between satisfaction and performance (MacKenzie, Podsakoff and Ahearne, 1998; Locander, Zmich and Locander, 2021). Research indicates that when employees are satisfied with their job, they feel that they are an important part of the organization and put extra effort into their work which should enhance job performance (Haryono, Ambarwati, and Saad 2019; Loan, 2020). At face value, salespeople who are more satisfied with their job are more engaged in their work, more committed to their organization, and expend more effort to ensure the success of the organization (MacKenzie et al., 1998). Because of the somewhat conflicting outcomes from previous job satisfaction research and given the strong positive effect high levels of sales organization communication have on increasing salesperson job performance, we predict that satisfaction only partially explains sales organization communication's effect on salesperson performance.

H3: *Salesperson job satisfaction will partially mediate the relationship between sales organization communication quality and salesperson job performance.*

Personal Cooperativeness

Broadly, social psychologists define interpersonal cooperation as individuals "acting together, in a coordinated way at work, leisure, or in social relationships, in the pursuit of shared goals, the enjoyment of the joint activity, or simply furthering the relationship (Lu and Argyle, 1991 p. 4)." Interpersonal cooperation is a personality trait where individuals tend to willfully contribute to their group in order to achieve some mutual objective (Deutsch, 1949; Borg and Johnston, 2013). In other words, cooperative individuals are 'team players' who work not just for their personal success but also for the success of the whole.

Yilmaz and Hunt (2001) were among the first researchers to apply the construct of interpersonal cooperativeness to the context of the salesforce. These authors predicted and empirically supported the idea that traits like an individual's personal cooperativeness would lead to salespeople's cooperative behaviors. That is, salespeople with high levels of cooperativeness exhibited more team-oriented behaviors such as sharing information and collaborating with fellow sales representatives. Interestingly, research further suggests that when salespeople collaborate and work well with each other, management may have less influence on salespeople's information-sharing behavior (Lai and Yang, 2017). In other words, when salespeople are highly cooperative with one another, the dynamic culture in the sales function affects the salesperson's behaviors more than the communication coming from their sales manager. As salespeople form these relationships cross-functionally with other internal organizational members, they begin to transfer knowledge and utilize that knowledge to perform their customer relationship management role better (Claro and Ramos, 2018).

Sales organizations may benefit from having highly cooperative salespeople as collaborative selling and group work are now more commonplace in the modern salesforce (Mullins and Panagopoulos, 2018; Groza, Zmich and Rajabi, 2021). Additionally, salespeople

who are more cooperative may have a reduction in their tendency to view company objectives and corporate missions as unrelated, as sales managers and salespeople are on the same page for objectives, values, and strategies (Arnett et al., 2021). However, salespeople who are uncooperative by nature may need more clarity and consistent communication regarding company objectives and strategies as these individuals are less likely to acquire such information tacitly through informal interactions with internal stakeholders.

Based on the arguments above, we propose that a salesperson's personal cooperativeness serves as a moderating condition between sales organization communication quality and salesperson performance. That is, when a salesperson's personal cooperativeness is high, sales organization communication quality will have a relatively weak impact on their performance. However, among salespeople who are low in terms of personal cooperativeness, sales organization communication quality will have a more pronounced impact on their performance. In other words, salespeople low on the cooperativeness trait, have more to gain from a high level of communication quality as they are less likely to acquire relevant information from informal channels personally cultivated.

H4: *Personal cooperativeness moderates the effect sales organization communication quality has on salesperson job performance such that when salesperson cooperativeness is low, communication quality will have a stronger effect on performance.*

METHOD

Sample

To empirically test the proposed relationships, we drew a sample that consists of employed U.S. business-to-business (B2B) salespeople. The sample was created by contracting with Qualtrics, where a data professional was assigned to the study and helped manage its progression. To ensure a representative sample, multiple screening rounds were conducted, and several quality checks were performed to ensure that the respondents were both salespeople in B2B industries and were located within the U.S. Finally, a panel project

manager was hired to increase objectivity in selecting and screening respondents and cleaning the initial data set (Babin, Griffin and Hair, 2016).

The final data set consists of 315 valid responses from a diverse set of B2B salespeople. Respondents work in a wide range of industries (manufacturing - 19%; professional, scientific, or technical services - 11%; wholesales trade - 10%; finance or insurance - 8%; retail trade - 6%; information - 5%; construction - 4%; Health care or social assistance - 3%; services - 3%; utilities -3%; other - 27%) and worked in organizations that ranged in size (22% of the sample work in organizations with fewer than 50 total employees, 33% work in organizations with between 50 and 499 employees, and 44% work in organizations with 500 or more employees). Additionally, the sample is 42% female, has an average age of 42 years, and has an average sales experience of 15 years.

Measure and Measurement Model

We measured each of the study's constructs by adapting existing scales (see Table 1). All Likert scale items were measured from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). Both sales organization communication quality and personal cooperativeness were measured using the original scales from Yilmaz and Hunt (2001). Before answering the communication quality scale items, respondents first read the prompt, "In working relationships with my selling organization:" For example, "In working relationships with my selling organization: We keep each other informed of new developments." Before answering the personal cooperativeness scale items, respondents first read the prompt, "Throughout my life, I have always..." For example, "Throughout my life, I have always... Enjoyed activities that involve a high level of cooperation with other people."

Job satisfaction was measured using Bagozzi's (1980) scale, where respondents first saw the prompt, "To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of these features of your present job?" The original scale items were adapted to read in the first-person point of view instead of the second-person point of view. For example, "To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of these features of your present job? *I* would advise a

friend looking for a new job to take one similar to *mine*.” Finally, a shorten version of Behrman and Perreault’s (1982) job performance measure is utilized, which is in line with past sales research (Locander et al., 2015). The control variables were gender, firm size, and sales experience. Firm size was measured using a 9-point scale ranging from 1 (less than 5 total employees) to 9 (1000 or more employees).

Table 1 Measurement items	Loading
Sales Organization Communication Quality	
<i>In working relationships with my selling organization:</i>	
We keep each other informed of new developments	.79
We provide each other with timely information	.84
We frequently discuss accounts and opportunities	.82
We sometimes hold back on telling each other what we know about accounts and opportunities (r)	--
We communicate well about our expectations for each other’s performance	.82
We provide each other with frequent positive feedback on our performance	.91
Personal Cooperativeness	
<i>Throughout my life, I have always...</i>	
Enjoyed activities that involve a high level of cooperation with other people	--
Been known as a team player	.64
Preferred to work independently rather than in a group (r)	--
Found more satisfaction working toward a common group goal than working toward my individual goals	.65
Found it more difficult to do things with others than by myself (r)	--
Found joint projects with other people very satisfying	.83
Believed that teamwork is the best way of getting results	.73
Satisfaction	
<i>To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of these features of <u>your present job?</u></i>	
Promotion opportunities are wider in jobs other than mine (r)	--
I would advise a friend looking for a new job to take one similar to mine	.65
I feel my pay is as high in comparison with what others get for similar work in other companies	--
I am satisfied with my general work situation	.83
I feel it is easy to demonstrate my ability and initiative in my job	.71
I think that there is as much a feeling of security in my job as in other jobs	.67
I find my work challenging, exciting, and it gives me a sense of accomplishment	.71
I have control over my work activities such as the number of calls required in a week, etc.	--
Job Performance	
Building effective relationships with customers	.84
Making effective presentations to customers	.87
Keeping expenses at acceptable levels	.63
Achieving sales targets and other business objectives	.83
Understanding our products and services	.89
Providing feedback to management	.78
Understanding customer needs and work processes	.87
Contributing to my sales unit's revenues	.81
Note: -- item was removed after initial CFA	

To confirm the psychometric properties of the study constructs, we fit the data to a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). The initial analysis yielded overall model fit statistics lower than acceptable levels [$\chi^2(df) = 895 (371)$, $p < .001$; IFI = .901; CFI = .900; RMSEA = .067 (CI90 = .061, .073)], and several factor loadings were below .6. A second CFA fit after removing seven items with factor loadings below .6 yield satisfactory overall model fit statistics [$\chi^2(df) = 463 (201)$, $p < .001$; IFI = .943; CFI = .942; RMSEA = .064 (CI90 = .057, .072)] (see Table 1 for list of removed items). All but four factor loadings were above .7, all average variance extractions (AVEs) are above .5, and the Cronbach alphas were above established standards (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988). All construct reliabilities exceeded .7, supporting internal reliability. Discriminant validity was confirmed as the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) values for each pair of constructs was greater than the corresponding correlations. Table 2 contains the means, standard deviations, AVE values, Cronbach alphas, and intercorrelation matrix for the measures of the study.

Table 2 Correlation matrix and descriptive statistics (N=315)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Firm Size	1						
2. Sales Experience	-.14*	1					
3. Gender (female = 1)	.01	-.15**	1				
4. Sales Org. Communication Quality	-.05	-.01	-.09	1			
5. Personal Cooperativeness	.09	.00	-.03	.27**	1		
6. Satisfaction	.02	.03	-.05	.52**	.26**	1	
7. Job Performance	.04	-.04	.17**	.23**	.06	.30**	1
M	6.59	14.93		4.94	5.07	5.03	5.80
SD	(2.40)	(11.07)		(1.30)	(1.00)	(1.09)	(0.96)
Alpha				0.93	0.8	0.84	0.94
AVE				0.7	0.51	0.51	0.67

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Analysis and Results

We use the PROCESS (Hayes, 2013) procedure to analyze the data. First, we estimate the mediation-only model by using PROCESS Model 4 (see Model 1 in Table 3). In support of Hypothesis 1 and 2, sales organization communication quality has a significant and positive effect on salesperson job satisfaction ($b=.41$, $p < .01$) and salesperson job performance ($b=.09$, $p < .05$). Salesperson job satisfaction, in turn, has a significant and positive effect on salesperson job performance ($b=.22$, $p < .01$). To further investigate the significance of the mediation effect, we used bias-corrected 95% bootstrap confidence intervals (CI) for the indirect effect (Preacher and Hayes, 2008). The indirect effect of sales organization communication quality on job performance through satisfaction is indeed significant ($b = .09$, lower-level CI .04, upper-level CI .16), lending support to H3. In sum, these results suggest job satisfaction partially

mediates the effect sales organization communication quality has on salesperson job performance.

To test the proposed moderation effect personal cooperativeness has on the sales organization communication quality to salesperson performance relationship we used PROCESS Model 5 (see Model 2 in Table 3). Using PROCESS Model 5 we added a sales organization communication quality X personal cooperativeness (CQ x PC) interaction term to the model predicting salesperson job performance. To assuage concerns about multicollinearity we first mean-centered the variables before creating the interaction term (Aiken, West and Reno, 1991). Using PROCESS offers the advantage of estimating bias-corrected bootstrapped confidence intervals of the conditional direct effect of sales organization communication quality on salesperson performance at different levels of personal cooperativeness.

Table 3. Unstandardized Coefficients

Dependent Variable	Model 1				Model 2			
	Satisfaction		Performance		Satisfaction		Performance	
	b	s.e.	b	s.e.	b	s.e.	b	s.e.
Control Variables								
Firm Size	.02	.022	.02	.022	.02	.022	.02	.021
Sales Experience	.00	.005	.00	.005	.00	.005	.00	.005
Gender	.01	.107	.36***	.104	.01	.107	.38***	.104
Main Effects								
Sales Org. Communication	.41***	.042			.41***	.042		
Quality (CQ)			.09**	.047			.09**	.046
Personal Cooperativeness (PC)	.13**	.055	-.03	.053	.13**	.055	-.03	.053
Satisfaction			.22***	.055			.22***	.055
Interaction								
CQ x PC							-.06*	.035
R2	.29		0.13		.29		0.14	
f-model	24.90		7.96		24.90		7.34	

NOTE: * $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$

The significant and negative coefficient associated with the interaction term ($b = -.06$, $p < .10$) lends initial support to H4. Support for H4 is further offered as the direct effect of sales organization communication quality on salesperson performance is conditional on the level of personal cooperativeness (See Table 4). Specifically, when personal cooperativeness is low (-1 standard deviation from the mean) communication quality has a significant and positive effect on salesperson job performance ($b = .15$, lower-level CI .037, upper-level CI .262). However, at average (mean) and high levels (+1 standard deviation from the mean) of personal cooperativeness, communication quality has no significant relationship with job performance. This suggests the effect sales organization communication quality has on job performance is particularly strong for those salespersons who have low levels of personal cooperativeness. Alternatively, among salespeople who have high levels of personal cooperativeness, communication quality has little impact on their job performance.

Table 4 Conditional direct effect of sales organization communication quality on performance at values of personal cooperativeness.

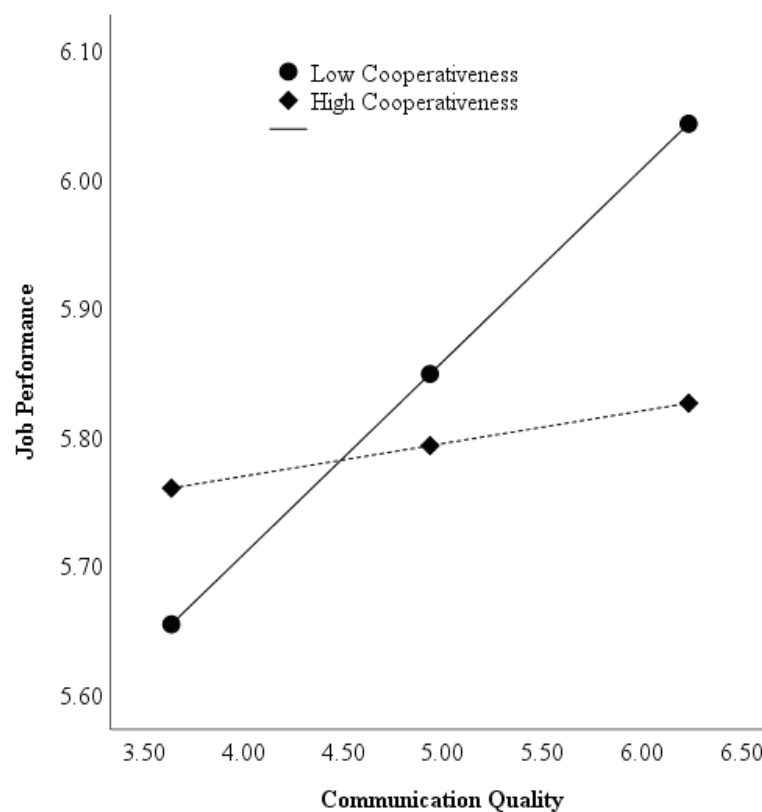
Moderator	Effect	Boot SE	Bias Corrected bootstrap 95% CI	
			Lower	Upper
4.07	.15	.06	.037	.263
5.07	.09	.05	-.004	.179
6.06	.03	.06	-.090	.141

Note: Values for personal cooperativeness is at the mean and +/- 1 standard deviation from the mean

Discussion

This study contributes to our understanding of the nuances regarding sales organization communication quality and salesperson performance outcomes. This research sought to explore how sales organization communication quality, in conjunction with levels of personal cooperativeness affects salesperson satisfaction and performance. In general, the results support the prediction that communication quality is positively related to salesperson job satisfaction and sales performance. Further, the study predicted that personal cooperativeness would moderate the effect communication quality has on salesperson job performance. The analysis indeed offered support for personal cooperativeness's moderating effect on the communication quality–performance relationship. Figure 2 depicts this significant interaction effect. The figure shows that among salespersons with low levels of cooperativeness the level of communication quality has a more pronounced effect on the performance of the salesperson.

Figure 2 Interaction effect of personal cooperativeness on the sales organization communication quality – job performance relationship.



As Amor (2019) suggests, sales managers and their salesforce require superior teamwork skills to create a suitable work environment, reduce conflicts, and reach better overall salesperson performance. Personality traits that are linked to interpersonal skills like cooperativeness can be difficult to manage as a salesforce may have many salespeople, all with their own levels of communication and behavior skills (Borg and Johnston, 2013). In a selling environment, uncooperative salespeople may be reluctant to share information with other salespeople, be it client needs or general information about the key account (Yilmaz and Hunt, 2001; Cadogan, Lee and Sundqvist, 2008). These uncooperative salespeople present a challenge to sales managers as sales teams often have little direct contact with their sales manager when dispersed in large territories tending to multiple clients (Cadogan et al., 2008). One way to overcome the potential negative effects of a lack of cooperativeness is to increase the quality of organizational communications. Clear communication may help send important signals to uncooperative salespeople that they are not “invisible” or operating in isolation (Cadogan et al., 2008). The results here suggest that salespeople who have a lower proclivity to cooperate with others may have the most to benefit in terms of job performance from the quality of organizational communications. Additionally, the results here suggest that the quality of the sales organization communication may come from a sales managers’ ability to facilitate information across organizational functions. This internal communication is key to the success of their salespeople, especially those who are naturally less cooperative.

Our empirical results also suggest that sales organization communication quality has a strong and positive direct influence on job satisfaction. Salespeople who operate in organizations with good communication quality are simply more satisfied with their job than those who operate in organizations with poor communication quality. Finally, in line with past research that has found equivocal results on salesperson job satisfaction and performance (Brown and Peterson, 1993; Brashear et al., 2001), the current study supports similar findings (i.e., Locander et al., 2021) suggesting that when sales managers and salespeople communicate well together, salesperson job satisfaction increases, creating an environment to perform better with their customers.

Managerial Implications

While it may be difficult to judge in the interview process how cooperative a salesperson will be when hired, there are several recommendations for sales managers the current study can extrapolate. First, management would benefit from continuously maintaining open lines of communication with all salespeople but especially with less cooperative salespeople. Phone and desktop applications like Slack, Salesmate, and Basecamp are quick and easy ways for sales managers to communicate with individual salespeople, but also in collective teams depending on the client project. Technology allows sales managers to facilitate the buyer-seller relationship quickly and thoroughly. Continuous communication strengthens the sales process as everyone from the client to the sales manager is on the same page during the sales process (Amor, 2019). Additionally, new technology training may be in order as salespeople who are naturally less cooperative may be resistant to adding on another tool to utilize while maintaining their busy client-facing schedule (Amor, 2019).

A further implication of the current study suggests that salespeople who are communicated with consistently find more satisfaction with their work, and thus, perform better. This finding aligns with the literature definition of communication quality, “timely and accurate sharing of information through both formal and informal means” (Yilmaz and Hunt, 2011, p. 340). In the context of Yilmaz and Hunt (2001), this definition applied to salespeople communicating with each other. However, the present study demonstrates how communication from the organization to the salesperson can be of equal benefit, enabling better access to motives and intentions behind the work asked for by managers, and completed by salespeople (Yilmaz and Hunt, 2001). As such, sales managers would benefit from forming a company culture that clarifies ambiguities and role conflicts with the work salespeople are doing, providing concrete deliverables and impact outcomes for their salespeople throughout the sales cycle (Cadogan et al., 2008). This is critical as communication quality has a similar impact on job satisfaction regardless of the level of cooperativeness of the salesperson. When management creates an environment where the success of the company is dependent on the support of its workers, the

organization is rewarded for information sharing, quality communication, and an overall sense of commitment to cooperating adequately with everyone on the team (Cadogan et al., 2008). As salesforces continue to work remotely, communicate virtually, and interact with clients digitally, more communication is needed from sales managers to form trusting relationships with their salespeople. Daily face-to-face interaction at the office formed a sense of purpose and group comradery, whereas now the increase in digital interaction has seen an increase in isolation (Mulki, Locander, Marshall and Hensel, 2013). This sense of isolation can create feelings of organizational dissatisfaction with both coworkers and management (Mulki et al., 2013).

Lastly, managers would benefit greatly from showing their salesforce how quality communication can benefit their sales performance given the changing customer landscape of the modern B2B buyer. In 2014 and shown again in 2018, 94% of B2B buyers self-educated through online research before beginning the sales process (Ahearne, Hall, Krishnamurthy and Pourmasoudi, 2019), and 70.2% of B2B buyers wait until their needs are fully identified before engaging with a salesperson (CSO Insights, 2018). This realization can damage the salesperson-customer relationship if salespeople continue to use a one-size fits all approach to their tactics when interacting with buyers (CSO Insights, 2018; Ahearn et al., 2019). The results are salespeople who provide sub-par recommendations and outdated, mediocre service to their buyers. This process can greatly be strengthened with communications training for sales managers and their salesforce. Information sharing training for the digital age can benefit from more robust lead generation as customers contacting salespeople in different stages of the buying process are met with salespeople equipped with that knowledge ahead of time. Additionally, self-educated customers can be paired with salespeople who know the customer's situation and thus can manage that interaction more effectively (Ahearne et al., 2019). Rather than resisting technology and the self-education of buyers prior to contacting salespeople, proper training on information sharing throughout a salesforce can create advantages as buyers come to the conversation with more knowledge than ever before. This opens the door to more complex, needs-identifying conversations which, in turn, can create stronger value-based relationships.

Limitations and Future Research

The current study makes several contributions to the literature surrounding sales organization communication quality and salesperson performance. However, this study is not without limitations that open paths for future research opportunities. First, obtaining panel data from salespeople in any study presents an issue of identifying whether the respondents are indeed salespeople and whether their responses are representative of the population. While the use of Qualtrics panels helps ensure the quality of these data, future research would greatly benefit from either interviewing sales managers and their salesforce or obtaining survey data from a B2B salesforce in the field. Second, the self-reported performance measure is a common limitation within sales research, given that obtaining objective performance measures is often safeguarded by organizations (Yang, Kim and McFarland, 2011; Locander et al., 2021). Future research would benefit from working with companies to test whether uncooperative salespeople benefit from using communication tools to strengthen their prospecting, lead generation, and needs identification with their buyers.

Future research would also benefit from working with sales managers to test whether communication and cooperation training displays an increase in salesperson satisfaction, job performance, and overall feelings of inclusion in the salesforce. In conclusion, future researchers should continue to examine the effect sales organization communication quality, at all levels within the selling organization, has on the company-seller relationship and the performance of salespeople.

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