The Impact of Realistic Job Previews and Perceptions of Training on Sales Force Performance and Continuance Commitment: A Longitudinal Test

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Abstract:

This study uses a an adaptation of the Dubinsky et al. (1986) socialization framework to test the impact of realistic job previews and perceptions of training on sales force performance and continuance commitment. Seven hundred sixty-two insurance salespeople in 54 companies were surveyed four times over a two-year period. The findings indicate that the socialization of new recruits should be focused on two parallel tracks: factors that primarily influence performance and those that primarily influence turnover.

Keywords: job previews | socialization framework | sales force performance | training

Article:

Among the most important responsibilities of managers is facilitating the entry and adjustment of new employees to an organization. Organizational socialization has been defined as "a process by which an individual comes to appreciate the values, abilities, expected behaviors, and social knowledge essential for assuming an organizational role and for participating as an organizational member" (Louis 1980, pp. 229–230). Techniques such as job previews, training, education, cooperation, apprenticeships, and mentoring are used to socialize individuals in organizations. Socialization techniques are essentially a means of producing behaviors consistent with corporate goals resulting in outcomes that support the needs and objectives of the organization (Baker and Feldman 1991).

Sales force socialization applies concepts from organizational socialization in a personal selling context. The available research on organizational socialization suggests a wide range of factors may potentially affect a new hire's socialization. The socialization process, combined with a new hire's expectations regarding their job, affects his or her role clarity, self-esteem, and level of job-related stress. These constructs, in turn, affect job satisfaction, performance, and organizational commitment.

The consequences of inadequately socializing salespeople can be disastrous. In the short run, inadequately socialized salespeople may damage valuable customer relationships. Longer-term, poor salesperson socialization may result in lower organizational commitment, greater turnover, and lost sales. An important aspect of sales force socialization is sales training. Expenditures devoted to training salespeople are among the largest components of total training expenditures. In 2001, total training expenditures were $57 billion (Galvin 2001). To further underscore the importance of sales force socialization, salespeople receive more training (37 hours per year) than any other occupational category ("1994 Industry Report" 1994). Sales training represents approximately 11.3 percent of total training hours and accounts for nearly $6 billion in expenditures ("1994 Industry Report" 1994). It may take months, and possibly even years, before a firm is able to recoup their investment in training a new salesperson (Reichheld 1996). Salespeople who leave a firm before the costs of their training is recovered negatively affect that firm's profits. There are clear benefits to be gained from improving the procedures used to train and socialize new salespeople.

Despite the monetary importance of sale force socialization to business firms, relatively little attention has been devoted to socialization in the sales management literature. The paucity of research on salesperson socialization is surprising. It was identified as a "key topic for future research" by participants in both the 1992 and 1999 AMA Faculty Consortiums on Personal Selling and Sales Management (Ingram 1992; Marshall and Michaels 2001). Leigh and Marshall (2001), in a paper titled "Research Priorities in Sales Strategy and Performance," discuss seven "best practices" identified by the Chally Group and their implications for academic research in sales. They indicate that an understanding of socialization is needed that reflects both initial socialization, but also salesperson development throughout their career. The absence of socialization research in the sales literature is particularly surprising since socialization has been widely studied in the general management literature.

Only a few studies constitute the body of research that has been conducted on sales force socialization. Grant and Bush (1996) examined the influence of socialization tactics on value congruence among new hires. Evans et al. (1995) examined the socialization of salespeople selling professional services. Kennedy and Lawton (1992) compared newly recruited male and female salespeople on several socialization dimensions. One of the most extensive studies of socialization in the sales literature is that of Dubinsky et al. (1986). That article was voted one of the ten most influential articles in a recent poll of sales researchers (Leigh, Pullins, and Comer 2001). In their study, Dubinsky et al. (1986)

> adapted and empirically tested the leading descriptive model of organizational socialization to the sales management context. Prior thinking had focused primarily on the selection and training of salespeople without examining the many forces that impacted upon the salesperson when joining an unfamiliar organization. Moreover, they noted that sales jobs were unique in many ways that suggest the need for special socialization programs. . . . Because of its managerial implications, it has been widely read and incorporated into most sales management textbooks. (Leigh, Pullins, and Comer 2001, p. 220)

The results of their test of Feldman's model led them to propose an alternative to Feldman's model.

Our hypothesized model (presented in Figure 1) tests an adaptation of the one proposed by Dubinsky et al. (1986), which has never been tested. We have adapted and extended their proposed model based on later findings (e.g., Johnston et al. 1990) and based on our use of secondary data. Our model serves as a conceptual framework to explore the impact of realistic job previews and perceptions of training on performance and continuance commitment. The model is tested using a multi-panel longitudinal data set and structural equations modeling.
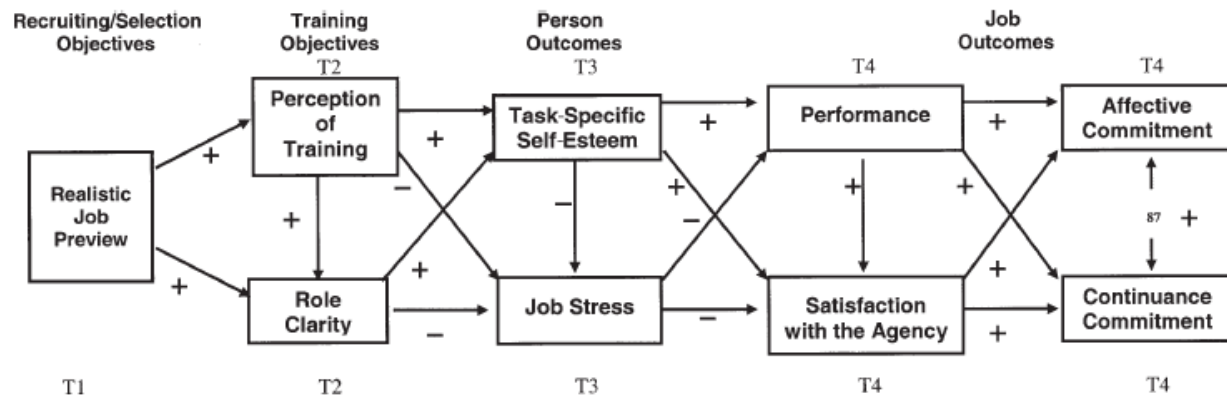

Figure 1. Longitudinal Model of Sales Force Socialization

BACKGROUND

Organizational socialization theory has been extensively developed in the general management literature where management theorists have developed descriptive models of the process. One category of socialization models suggests that organizational socialization is a process composed of a series of sequential stages. Buchanan (1974) proposed a three-stage model of organizational socialization made up of (1) basic training, (2) performance, and (3) organizational dependability. Porter, Lawler, and Hackman et al. (1975) posited a three-stage model of organizational socialization composed of the following stages: (1) prearrival, (2) encounter, and (3) change and acquisition. Schein (1978) suggested a three-stage model made up of the stages of (1) entry, (2) socialization, and (3) mutual acceptance. A four-stage model of socialization was proposed by Wanous (1980) based on a synthesis of prior socialization models. The Wanous model includes: (1) confronting and accepting organizational reality, (2) achieving role clarity, (3) locating oneself in the organizational context, and (4) detecting signposts of successful socialization.

Each of these "stage" models of organizational socialization has weaknesses. For example, the models proposed by Schein (1978) and Wanous (1980) fail to include pre-entry cognitions, and neither model has been operationalized. The Porter, Lawler, and Hackman (1975) model includes pre-entry cognitions, but has not been operationalized. Buchanan's (1974) model has been operationalized, but fails to include "pre-entry" cognitions.

Feldman (1976) also proposed a four-stage model of organizational socialization that includes pre-entry cognitions. The Feldman model has been operationalized, serving as the basis for the sales force socialization model proposed and tested by Dubinsky et al. (1986). Some of the key constructs included in the Dubinsky et al. or Feldman model are realism, role definition, task-specific self-esteem, role conflict, satisfaction, performance, and commitment.

Model Constructs

Realism

Realism is the degree to which new recruits have a complete and accurate understanding of what life is really like in the firm. Research has found that realism can affect job performance (Gomersall and Myers 1966), turnover (Weitz 1956), and job satisfaction and survival (Hartenian, Hadaway, and Badovick 1994; Wanous 1973). Realism is traditionally assessed through the existence or perceptions of realistic job preview (RJP) (Hom et al. 1998; Miceli 1985; Premack and Wanous 1985; Wanous 1973). For a meta-analysis of the effects of RJP, the interested reader is referred to Phillips (1998).

Role Definition

Role definition pertains to explicit or implicit agreement with the work group that articulates what tasks recruits are to perform, what the priorities of the tasks are, and how recruits should allocate their time among the tasks. Taormina (1998) defines role definition as an understanding by new hires of their work role and how their organization functions. If recruits' roles can be defined satisfactorily to both the recruits and the organization, favorable results should accrue to both parties (e.g., Dansereau, Graen, and Haga 1975).

Task-Specific Self-Esteem

Task-specific self-esteem refers to an employee's feelings of competence in performing job-related tasks. Shoemaker (1999) suggested that task-specific self-esteem is equivalent to self-efficacy. Kohli (1985) found that task-specific self-esteem was an important antecedent of salesperson performance. Bagozzi (1978, 1980) reports that feelings of competence were directly related to salespeoples' performance and indirectly related to their job satisfaction.

Role Conflict

Individuals who have not effectively addressed conflicting demands and have not created decision rules for resolving the conflict may spend too much time dealing with conflict and too little time dealing with work-related activities (Feldman 1976). Role conflict has been shown to be inversely related to job satisfaction (Bagozzi 1978; Churchill, Ford, and Walker 1976; Ford, Walker, and Churchill 1976; Pruden and Reese 1972) and performance (Bagozzi 1978; Pruden and Reese 1972). Ashforth and Saks (1996) and Bauer and Green (1994) found that socialization tactics can reduce newcomer's perceived role conflict. Jones (1986), however, found that when socialization tactics are individualized (as opposed to institutionalized), they actually increase

role conflict. Jones (1986) collapsed Van Maanen's (1978) six socialization tactics into a single continuum with two dimensions: individualized tactics versus institutionalized tactics.

Satisfaction

This outcome constitutes an overall measure of the extent to which a person is satisfied with his or her work (Hackman and Oldham 1976). Differences in individuals' job satisfaction have been found to be related to the nature of jobs or work situations (Vroom 1964). Riordan et al. (2001) found evidence that socialization tactics positively affect job satisfaction. Jones (1986) found that job satisfaction was positively related to institutionalized socialization tactics (as opposed to individualized). Sales research suggests that overall job satisfaction is inversely related to role conflict, role ambiguity, and role innovativeness, and positively related to closeness of supervision and salesperson influence in determining performance standards (Churchill, Ford, and Walker 1976).

Performance

Job performance relates to the accomplishment of job-related tasks. The relationship between socialization and salesperson performance has been examined by Dubinsky et al. (1986), Grant and Bush (1996), and Evans et al. (1995).

Commitment

Commitment is the extent to which a person is committed to his or her work (Lodahl and Kejner 1965). It has been associated with the learning that takes place in the socialization process (Katz and Kahn 1966; Weiner and Gechman 1975) as well as motivation and general satisfaction (Hackman and Lawler 1971). In this study, we examine two dimensions of commitment: affective commitment and continuance or calculative commitment.

Realism is one of the key antecedents of organizational socialization. Realism should improve a new recruit's understanding of his or her role definition. Training efforts should also be directed toward developing improved role definition and initiation to the task. Werbel, Landau, and DeCarlo (1996) examined new insurance agents' realistic positive and negative expectations about a job and their impact on organizational commitment. Better role definition and improved initiation to the task should, in turn, help reduce role conflict while increasing task-specific self-esteem. Finally, lower levels of role conflict and greater levels of task-specific self-esteem should enhance job satisfaction, job involvement/commitment, and performance.

Support for hypothesizing socialization as a means of increasing role clarity and improving task-specific self-esteem can be found in sales management research. Kohli (1985) found that role clarity is positively related to both task-specific self-esteem and job satisfaction. Brown and Peterson (1993) affirmed the positive relationship between role clarity and job satisfaction in a meta-analysis. They found that role ambiguity and role conflict consistently serve as antecedents of job satisfaction. Their findings indicate that satisfaction and performance affect commitment, which, in turn, is linked to turnover intentions. A wide range of factors may potentially affect a salesperson's socialization. Previous research suggests that the adequacy of initial training and

quality of supervision received may have a decided influence, though possibly indirect, on a salesperson's turnover decision (Jolson, Dubinsky, and Anderson 1987; Muchinsky and Tuttle 1979).

Organizational commitment has received considerable attention in both the management literature and in the sales literature. It is important because it has been shown to be related to impact both performance and satisfaction. Organizational commitment in a sales context has typically been measured as a single construct (Commeiras and Fournier 2001). However, the management literature treats organizational commitment as having two dimensions: affective commitment and continuance commitment. Commeiras and Fournier (2001) indicate that most sales researchers, in measuring organizational commitment as a single construct, are tapping affective commitment. Affective commitment is "a strong belief in and acceptance of the organizational goals and values, a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization and a strong desire to maintain membership in the organization (Mowday, Porter, and Steers 1982, p. 27). On the other hand, continuance commitment, sometimes termed calculative commitment, is "the outcome of an individual's decision to remain with an organization because of the personal time and resources already devoted to the company and because of the financial costs of changing jobs" (Commeiras and Fournier 2001, p. 239). Continuance commitment has typically been ignored in sales research.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses secondary data collected by the Life Insurance Market Research Association (LIMRA), an insurance industry trade association. The sampling frame included newly hired, full-time insurance salespeople from U.S. and Canadian life insurance companies. Enis (1979), in a taxonomy of sales positions, classifies insurance sales positions as "new business" and "creative," as opposed to "technical," "trade," or "responsive." A total of 54 firms are represented in the data. The number of respondents per firm ranged from one to 72, with 10 being the median. The sampling frame, which encompasses multiple firms in a single industry, eliminates the need to assess industry effects while allowing for within-industry variation and generalizability (Cravens et al. 1993; Oliver and Anderson 1994).

The data were collected in four different time periods. The first data collection was initiated within the first 60 days of a sales agent's employment ($t1$). Realistic job preview was measured in the first time period. Subsequent data collections occurred after the first six months ($t2$), at the end of the first year ($t3$), and then at the end of the second year ($t4$). Perception of training and role clarity were measured on the second survey. The measures for task-specific self-esteem and role stress were measured by the third survey. Performance, job satisfaction, affective commitment, and continuous commitment were all measured using the fourth survey. The majority of the constructs and the items were based on measures that have appeared before in the literature. Precedent for using different measures from different time periods in socialization research is found in Cable and Parsons (2001) as well as in marketing studies including Pelham (2002). Marketing studies using structural equation modeling in which constructs are measured at different times include Jap (1999) and Brown, Cron, and Slocum (1997).

Only those salespeople who answered all four surveys were retained in the analysis. A total of 947 salespeople responded to all four surveys. This number represents 20 percent of the respondents to the first survey. The use of a static panel of respondents reduces any potential bias from nonrandom sampling effects (Goodman and Blum 1996). Following Johnston et al.'s (1990) recommendation to maximize cohort similarity, only those salespeople who had no previous sales experience were included in the analysis. This resulted in a usable sample of 762 newly hired salespeople without past selling experience. While this number represents 20 percent of the original group, two factors should be kept in mind. First, the rate of response compares favorably to other longitudinal studies of socialization. A three-wave study by Cable and Parsons (2001) resulted in a response rate on the third wave after two years of only 10 percent. Second, the salesperson turnover rate in the life insurance industry is very high. Lucas et al.

(1987) indicate that turnover can be as high as 50 percent per year. Considering these two factors, that 20 percent of the original group returned four surveys over a two-year period is actually quite good.

Description of the Sample

The average age of the salespeople in our sample was 35 years. Their ages ranged from 19 to 49 years. Forty-nine percent of the respondents had a bachelor's degree or graduate education. Seventeen percent held associate degrees and 34 percent had a high school diploma. Less than 2 percent had less than a high school diploma. Eighty percent of the salespeople in our sample had been employed previously. Twenty-two percent were employed in managerial positions outside of the insurance industry. Eighteen percent had been employed in managerial positions in the insurance industry. Ninety percent of the respondents were white. Seventy-one percent of the salespeople were married, and 68 percent had one or more children. Approximately 90 percent of the sample was male, which is representative of the life insurance industry sales force.

Measures

The measures used in the study were adapted from those used in previous research. All multi-item scales were subjected to both exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis to purify the scales, along with tests of internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha. The items for each construct along with their means and standard deviations are found in Table 1.

Realistic Job Preview

Realism was operationalized as realistic job preview. Realistic job preview was measured on the first survey. A single-item measure was used. The RJP item was: "Based on your knowledge of the agent's career, how accurate was what you were told about your current position before contracting and during your initial training?" It was assessed using a five-point scale that ranged from 1 = very inaccurate; 2 = somewhat inaccurate; 3 = neither accurate nor inaccurate; 4 = somewhat accurate; and 5 = very accurate. The mean of the RJP item was 4.31 and its standard deviation was 0.83.

Table 1. Individual Measurement Items

		Mean	Standard Deviation	$\lambda_{i,j}$	z
Realistic Job Preview		4.31	0.83		
Performance		4.41	0.27		
Perception of Training					
Activity plans and review.	λ_{12}	3.51	1.00	0.74	24.68
Case preparation and review.	λ_{22}	3.08	1.04	0.76	26.37
Agency meetings/classes.	λ_{32}	3.05	0.89	0.56	17.16
New agent class.	λ_{42}	3.54	1.15	0.62	19.24
Role-playing.	λ_{52}	3.08	1.13	0.72	23.82
Joint calls.	λ_{62}	3.05	1.21	0.63	19.49
Selling skills.	λ_{62}	3.53	0.93	0.68	22.37
Role Clarity					
I know exactly what is expected of me.	λ_{13}	4.23	0.63	0.61	16.64
I have a clear-cut authority I need to accomplish the tasks required of me.	λ_{23}	4.18	0.66	0.44	12.33
I know exactly what my supervisor expects of me.	λ_{63}	3.96	0.70	0.73	19.88
Jobs Stress					
Being accepted in the agency.	λ_{14}	1.84	0.68	0.50	18.24
Communication skills.	λ_{24}	2.12	0.68	0.66	18.37
Accepted by clients.	λ_{34}	2.26	0.73	0.71	11.72
Meeting supervisors' expectations.	λ_{44}	2.67	0.84	0.71	16.02
Task-Specific Self-Esteem					
Prospecting	λ_{15}	2.98	0.87	0.27	6.56
Fact-finding and needs analysis.	λ_{25}	3.29	0.85	0.64	19.47
Selling/closing.	λ_{35}	3.33	0.89	0.73	22.76
Planning/goal setting.	λ_{45}	3.08	0.77	0.58	17.47
Personal/professional development.	λ_{55}	3.25	0.85	0.69	21.48
Satisfaction with the Agency					
The company does a good job selecting its field management.	λ_{16}	4.13	0.99	0.75	23.07
The company gives serious consideration to complaints from agents in the field.	λ_{26}	3.30	0.05	0.67	20.25
Affective Commitment					
I feel like "part of family" at this agency.	λ_{17}	3.63	1.07	0.77	27.47
I enjoy discussing my agency with people outside it.	λ_{27}	3.56	1.02	0.54	18.77
I feel "emotionally attached" to this agency.	λ_{37}	3.29	1.08	0.77	27.50
I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this agency.	λ_{47}	3.83	0.98	0.79	19.67
I really feel as if this agency's problems are my own.	λ_{57}	3.41	0.99	0.90	33.93
Continuance Commitment					
It would be too costly for me to leave my agency in the near future.	λ_{18}	3.23	1.18	0.70	22.11
Right now, staying with my agency is a matter of necessity as much as desire.	λ_{28}	3.11	1.18	0.53	16.64
Too much in my life would be disrupted if I decided to leave my agency now.	λ_{38}	3.25	1.07	0.80	27.68
It would be very hard for me to leave my agency right now, even if I wanted to.	λ_{48}	3.06	1.17	0.72	23.03

Notes: Measurement model fit: χ^2 (df) = 818 (384), GFI = 0.93, AGFI = 0.91, CFI = 0.93, TLI = 0.94, RMSEA = 0.03, RMR = 0.04, SRMR = 0.04.

Perception of Training
The perception of training measure consisted of seven items and was measured on the second survey. The reliability of the measure, assessed using Cronbach's alpha, was 0.85. The mean was 3.43 and the standard deviation was 0.66. Items were assessed using a five-point scale, which asked respondents: "Using the scale below, how would you rate the training you have received in each of the following areas?" 1 = very poor; 2 = poor; 3 = neutral/unsure; 4 = good; 5 = very good.

Role Definition

Role definition was operationalized with a measure of role clarity. A three-item scale on the second survey was used. The scale assessed the extent to which the salesperson understands the requirements of his or her job. The scale items are adapted from the Teas, Wacker, and Hughes (1979) measure to match the position being studied and were based on the work of Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman (1970). The Cronbach's alpha for this measure was 0.63. The mean and standard deviation were 4.12 and 0.50, respectively.

Task-Specific Self-Esteem

The scale consists of five items assessing the salesperson's satisfaction with their performance on various performance dimensions. It was measured on the third survey. The scale is conceptually and operationally similar to scales used by Bagozzi (1978) and Kohli (1985). Salespeople were asked to respond to the following: "Based on the experience you have in your current position, rate each of the following broad categories according to how much you prefer or enjoy each. Use the scale to the left to rate the activities. Then, for each activity category, rate how satisfied you are with your own performance." The response scales was 1 = never; 2 = sometimes; 3 = often; 4 = quite frequently; 5 = always. The five-item scale had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.65, a mean of 2.33, and a standard deviation of 0.48.

Job Stress

This measure was composed of five items scored on a 1–5 scale, with larger values associated with greater levels of role stress. It was captured on the third survey. Items included in this scale are those that life insurance experts felt were of considerable importance to agents. Salespeople were asked: "What kind of apprehensions or worries do you have about your career as an agent? Use the scale to indicate how concerned you are about each of the following issues: 1 = have not thought about this at all; 2 = not at all concerned; 3 = slightly concerned; 4 = moderately concerned; 5 = extremely concerned." The scale had an alpha of 0.76, a mean of 2.45 and standard deviation of 0.44. The items are similar to items in Kahn's 1964 measure of job tension.

Satisfaction with the Agency

A two-item scale was used on the fourth survey to measure satisfaction with the agency. Given that one outcome of interest is commitment to the agency as a place to work rather than commitment to the sales profession, satisfaction with the agency was used rather than a general job satisfaction measure. Respondents were asked to: "Rate each of the following statements

according to how much you agree or disagree." The response scale ranged from: 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neutral/do not know; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree. The inter-item correlation was 0.81. The scale mean was 3.62. The standard deviation for the scale was 0.67.

Performance

A composite measure of sales performance was created consisting of self-reported totals for total commissions and the number of policies sold in the past year. Self-reported performance has been shown to be reliable in previous sales force research (Churchill et al. 1985). The number of policies sold is an industry standard for performance and composite measures of salesperson performance have been used in previous sales studies (MacKenzie, Podsakoff, and Ahearne 1998). Performance was captured on the fourth survey.

Affective Commitment

Two dimensions of commitment were included in the study: continuance and affective commitment. The items used were adapted from measures developed by McGee and Ford (1987). For both types of commitment, affective and continuance, respondents were asked to: "Rate each of the following statements according to how much you agree or disagree." The scale ranged from: 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neutral/do not know; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree. Affective commitment measure resulted in a six-item scale with an alpha of 0.87, a mean of 3.14, and a standard deviation of 0.77.

Continuance Commitment

The continuance commitment measure was composed of four items with an alpha of 0.77. The mean and standard deviation were 3.47 and 0.75, respectively. Both forms of commitment were assessed on the fourth survey.

Data Analysis

The model was analyzed using structural equation modeling with LISREL 8.30 (Jöreskog and Sörbom 1996). The first step in the analysis was the specification and testing of the measurement model (Anderson and Gerbing 1988). Only the multi-item measures were included in this analysis. All items had high loadings on their prespecified factor. There were no signs of significant cross-loadings or correlated errors. These results reflect convergent and discriminant validity (Anderson and Gerbing 1988). Individual loadings and fit indices are seen in Table 1 and the covariances among the constructs are presented in Table 2.

The measurement model had a good overall fit. The goodness of fit index (GFI) was 0.93. The adjusted goodness of fit index was 0.91. The comparative fit index (CFI) and Tucker Lewis index (TLI) were 0.93 and 0.94, respectively. The root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) was 0.03, and the standardized root mean residual (SRMR) was 0.04. The χ^2 fit statistic for the measurement model was 818, with 384 degrees of freedom ($p < 0.001$). Given the large sample size, the significance of the statistic is expected. Overall, the various fit indices are equal or better than accepted levels for good fit.

Table 2. Covariance Matrix

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Realistic Job Preview	0.44								
2. Training	0.13	0.25							
3. Role Clarity	0.03	0.04	0.23						
4. Task-Specific Self-Esteem	–0.02	–0.03	–0.07	0.20					
5. Job Stress	–0.03	0.01	0.04	–0.04	0.52				
6. Performance	0.16	0.10	0.07	–0.03	0.05	0.48			
7. Satisfaction with the Agency	0.05	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.18	0.60		
8. Affective Commitment	0.17	0.09	0.04	–0.03	–0.01	0.34	0.30	0.58	
9. Continuance Commitment	0.14	0.10	0.04	–0.03	0.02	0.14	0.03	0.12	0.67

The next step involved the testing of the structural model. Due to the number of measures, paths, and complexity of the model, the multi-item measures were replaced with summated scores (Babin and Boles 1998; MacKenzie, Podsakoff, and Ahearne 1998) and the error terms were fixed accordingly (Hayduk 1987). The model was specified and estimated to test the hypotheses. Results are seen in Table 3. Of the 18 specified paths, 13 were significant. The χ^2 was 148, with 18 degrees of freedom. The GFI was 0.96 and the AGFI (adjusted GFI) was 0.90. The CFI was 0.89, the TLI was 0.77, the RMSEA and the SRMR were 0.09 and 0.08, respectively.

Overall, the model exhibited a moderate fit. A review of the correlations and modification indices suggested that two additional paths leading to satisfaction with the agency could improve the model fit. Paths from perceptions of training and role clarity to satisfaction with the agency were examined. The addition of these paths improved the fit of the model substantially. The χ^2 fell to 34.82, with 16 degrees of freedom. The GFI was 0.99 and the AGFI was 0.97. Significant improvement was also seen in the CFI to 0.99 and the TLI to 0.96. The RMSEA fell to 0.03 and the SRMR dropped to 0.04. Sixteen of the 20 paths were significant, with the original path from performance to satisfaction with the agency becoming significant in the revised model. Of the original specified paths, only the path between task-specific self-esteem and satisfaction showed any major attenuation from adding the additional paths.

Table 3 provides the variance accounted for in each criterion variable by the structural equations between the two models explained in the hypothesized and the revised models. The final model with only the significant paths is presented in Figure 2. By revising the model to include both the direct and indirect effects of training and role clarity on satisfaction, the variance explained for satisfaction increased from 15 percent to 30 percent. There was also a decrease in the variance explained for task-specific self-esteem from 14 percent to 8 percent and slight decreases in stress and affective commitment. Table 4 presents the squared multiple correlations for all constructs for both the original model and the revised model.

**Table 3.** Structural Model Coefficients (Original and Revised Models)

		Path	Sign	Original Estimate	Original z-value	Revised Estimate	Revised z-value
Realistic Job Preview	→ Perception of Training	γ_{11}	+	0.30	8.07	0.31	7.39
Realistic Job Preview	→ Role Clarity	γ_{21}	+	0.19	4.52	0.18	3.98
Perception of Training	→ Role Clarity	β_{21}	+	0.54	8.67	0.53	8.61
Perception of Training	→ Task-Specific Self-Esteem	β_{31}	+	0.08	1.03	0.02	0.03
Perception of Training	→ Stress	β_{41}	−*	0.17	2.53	0.13	1.91
Perception of Training	→ Satisfaction with Agency	β_{61}	+			0.32	5.35
Role Clarity	→ Task Specific	β_{32}	+	0.35	3.89	0.29	3.36
Role Clarity	→ Stress	β_{42}	−	0.11	1.66	0.19	2.48
Role Clarity	→ Satisfaction with Agency	β_{62}	+			0.20	2.83
Task-Specific Self-Esteem	→ Stress	β_{43}	−	0.46	7.66	0.42	6.76
Task-Specific Self-Esteem	→ Performance	β_{53}	+	0.08	1.54	0.10	1.72
Task-Specific Self-Esteem	→ Satisfaction with Agency	β_{63}	+	0.17	3.19	0.18	3.12
Job Stress	→ Performance	β_{54}	−	0.10	2.29	0.11	2.10
Job Stress	→ Satisfaction with Agency	β_{64}	−	0.06	1.34	0.03	0.62
Performance	→ Satisfaction with Agency	β_{65}	+	0.10	2.89	0.09	2.40
Performance	→ Continuance Commitment	β_{75}	+	0.01	0.22	0.01	0.40
Performance	→ Affective Commitment	β_{85}	−*	0.11	2.67	0.12	2.89
Satisfaction with Agency	→ Continuance Commitment	β_{76}	+	0.37	9.86	0.39	9.74
Satisfaction with Agency	→ Affective Commitment	β_{86}	+	0.78	4.23	0.78	3.63
Continuance Commitment	→ Affective Commitment	ψ_{87}	+	0.36	4.33	0.31	8.94

Notes: Original structural model fit: χ^2 (df) = 148.17 (18), GFI = 0.96, AGFI = 0.90, CFI = 0.89, TLI = 0.77, RMSEA = 0.09, RMR = 0.03, SRMR = 0.08 (n = 762). Revised structural model fit: χ^2 (df) = 49.59 (16), GFI = 0.99, AGFI = 0.97, CFI = 0.98, TLI = 0.96, RMSEA = 0.04, RMR = 0.01, SRMR = 0.04 (n = 762).
* The sign of the coefficient was contrary to what was expected.

Table 4. Squared Multiple Correlations

	Models	
	Original	Revised
Perception of Training	0.09	0.09
Role Clarity	0.38	0.38
Task-Specific Self-Esteem	0.14	0.08
Job Stress	0.23	0.23
Performance	0.03	0.03
Satisfaction with the Agency	0.15	0.30
Affective Commitment	0.16	0.15
Continuance Commitment	0.80	0.81
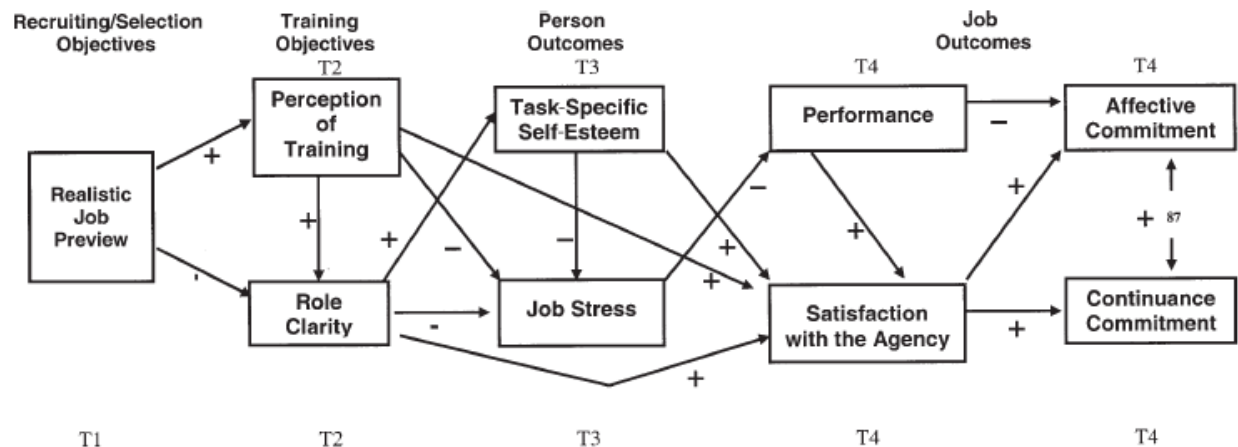
Figure 2. Final Model of Sales Force Socialization (Significant Paths Only)

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Overall, we believe that our findings indicate that sales managers need to focus on two separate, parallel tracks when thinking about socializing new salespeople. One track involves working to make new recruits more productive in terms of sales performance. The second track emphasizes improving salesperson satisfaction with the firm, which is one means of increasing commitment and reducing turnover. The two tracks, improving salesperson performance and reducing sales force turnover, appear to be sufficiently different to warrant consideration.

In the area of salesperson performance, our study indicates that providing a realistic job preview directly helps improve a salesperson's role clarity and also results in more positive perceptions of training. Role clarity and positive perceptions of training tend to help reduce salesperson role stress, which is negatively related to performance. In addition, role clarity is positively related to task-specific self-esteem. Whereas task-specific self-esteem is not related to performance in this study, previous research suggests that it is positively related to performance in, at least some types of sales positions (Bagozzi 1978). Therefore, when examining results from the current study, one must recognize that the task-specific self-esteem to performance link may be an important one in other sales settings beyond the ones included in the current research.

Findings from our study, in combination with those of previous studies, indicate that providing a realistic job preview directly enhances the salesperson's initial understanding of what the job

requires and may give the salesperson a better understanding of why specific types of training are important. Indirectly, a realistic job preview reduces salesperson role stress, which is a commonly occurring problem for many salespeople. Previous research indicates that role stress is related to turnover.

Our study further indicates that performance is not directly related to continuance commitment and is negatively related to affective commitment to the firm. Evidently, top performing salespeople view themselves as a valuable asset whose value is not related to the firm that they work for, but is instead based on their ability to sell, irrespective of the firm for which they may be working. Thus, the very employees a firm wants to retain may feel very little personal affinity for their firm.

High performers' low affective commitment brings us to the second track on which our study indicates a sales manager must be focused. This track involves salesperson satisfaction with the firm. Once again, a realistic job preview is an important part of the process. It is indirectly related to satisfaction with the firm. Having salespeople be satisfied with the agency where they work is an important issue since satisfaction with the agency is directly related to affective commitment. Of even greater importance is the fact that satisfaction with the agency is very strongly related to continuance commitment. Commitment is an essential dimension of salesperson loyalty to the firm since low levels of commitment have been found to lead to turnover (Johnston et al. 1990).

The negative relationship between performance and affective commitment means that managers need to seek additional ways of linking top performers to the firm. Whereas continuance commitment is based on a calculation of the cost of leaving a firm, affective commitment is more of a personal belief regarding one's fit with the firm and the firm being a good place to work. If a salesperson is mainly linked to the firm due to a calculative-based commitment, that person is subject to defect to another company after comparing the economic alternatives available. However, if he or she is affectively committed to an agency, deciding to stay or leave is not just an economic decision but also has other costs associated with moving. Thus managers need to find ways of developing some degree of affective commitment among the top salespeople— though this may not be easily accomplished.

There are several potential actions that may help generate some degree of affective commitment among top performers. One approach may be to tie company spending on additional training to performance and tenure. The longer a top performer stayed with a firm, the more training the firm would provide—thereby further enhancing that individual's selling skills. A second approach may be to demonstrate to the salesperson during the early socialization process that the firm is a very good place to work. To do this, a firm may provide RJP's from top performers who are affectively committed to the agency as well as through the training program. The training program could point out specific aspects of the firm that make it a superior place to work and build a career. Continually recognizing the extent to which high performers are valued by the firm, both through publicly providing them with honors and awards and through more tangible rewards such as additional bonuses or benefits, is a third way to help demonstrate how the firm values the individual.

Throughout the early socialization process, managers and peer trainers (if they are used) should emphasize that the agency is a concerned and caring place to work. These approaches could give top performers some additional reasons to believe that the firm is a good place to work and increase their level of affective commitment. Our results suggest that enhancing affective commitment among high performers is not easy, but it is a worthwhile undertaking nonetheless.

With regard to reducing turnover by increasing continuance commitment, it is critical to enhance satisfaction with the agency. This can be accomplished in several ways. First, the realistic job preview must be both accurate and thorough. Given that many sales calls made by life insurance agents may take place during the evening, it is critical that an individual's family also be exposed to the RJP. By doing this, a firm may be able to reduce the level of work–family conflict (WFC) (Boles, Johnston, and Hair 1997) experienced by the salesperson. This is important since WFC is negatively related to job satisfaction. Further, the training provided for new hires must be effective and clearly linked to the tasks necessary to becoming a top performing salesperson. If a salesperson receives an accurate RJP and useful training, he or she is more likely to clearly understand the salesperson's role in that industry. In turn, this will increase that individual's task-specific self-esteem and reduce his or her role stress. All of these actions together will increase satisfaction with the firm and indirectly increase continuance commitment.

These results also indicate that performance may be indirectly and positively linked to continuance commitment through satisfaction with the firm. Salespeople who are top performers are also more likely to be satisfied with the firm where they work. Evidently, a firm that provides the training and workplace support that it takes to be successful in sales results in better performance and salespeople who are happier with their agency.

In general, these findings indicate that the proper socialization of salespeople begins with providing an adequate preview of the job and the selling process through the use of a RJP. This step is particularly important in defining the salesperson's role, and also in getting them to value the training they receive and understand why that training is important. Both of these constructs, in turn, influence a salesperson's future level of role stress—which is negatively related to performance. In addition, role clarity (at six months) positively influences a salesperson's task-specific self-esteem in later time periods. Role clarity and perceptions of training also lead to salesperson satisfaction with the firm, which is directly linked to continuance commitment.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The research design employed in this study has several limitations. The time lags between the stages and the construct measurements reduce potential methods bias, but may also reduce the correlations between the constructs or mask any extraneous factors that could have occurred between time periods. Further, there has been no agreed upon time frame to measure the effects of such things as realistic job preview and training, or for the other relationships tested in the model.

The benefits of using secondary data mentioned in Lucas et al. (1987) would apply to this study as well: longitudinality and reality. The scope of the data collection effort is remarkable. Numerous salespeople from 54 companies participated in multiple waves of surveys. However,

as Lucas et al. mention, there are also significant disadvantages that may emanate from the use of secondary data. Lucas et al. state: "Chief among the study's limitations is the fact that the researchers were not involved in the research design and data collection. Therefore the researchers did not construct the measures used and pretest them to ensure high levels of validity and reliability" (1987, p. 53). Our use of secondary data constrains our ability to use a number of variables that might have added to the analysis. In addition, the training measure that was collected is more properly termed a measure of the respondent's perception of the training they received. Finally, our affective commitment measure and the continuance commitment measures do not assess commitment to the sales profession. Instead, they measure commitment to the firm where the salesperson works, which may be more relevant in an industry such as life insurance, where turnover can be very high.

Another limitation is the use of a single-item realistic job preview measure. Although the literature suggests multiple items are more reliable (Nunnally 1978), the use of single-item measures has been used when measuring general attitudes to such things as satisfaction (Bernhardt, Donthu, and Kennett 2000; Mittal and Kamakura 2001). Other studies have looked at realistic job preview as categorical (e.g., Meglino, Denisi, and Ravlin 1993). In this study, we were interested in a general attitude of the respondents with regard to their job previews.

A particularly fruitful area of future research is the study of socialization tactics and practices that assist in the socialization process, such as role modeling, training, education, cooperation, apprenticeships, and mentoring. For example, in sales management, Rich (1997) has found that role modeling plays an important role in building trust. Role modeling is also a key element of the mentoring process (Kram 1985), and the effects of sales force mentoring have been relatively unexplored in the sales literature (Pullins, Fine, and Warren 1996). The structure of socialization programs is also important to study. Grant and Bush (1996) used the framework developed by Van Maanen and Schein (1979), which contains institutionalized and individualized forms of socialization. In the mentoring literature, the most effective structure—formal versus informal— has not been determined (Seibert 1998).

Within the area of socialization tactics, there is a lack of investigation into the most appropriate socializing agent. To date, no research has looked at who is the most appropriate socializing agent. Although similar to role modeling and mentoring research, in traditional hierarchical organizations and among regular employees and managers, is it a manager or a peer who is the most influential? In the sales force, managers may have less contact with salespeople and are more detached from the daily activities of the employee than is true for many occupations. Therefore, a more comprehensive investigation of who is the appropriate socializing agent or leader is needed.

The outcomes of the socialization process also need to be further examined. Results of this and other studies suggest that the socialization process reduces negative outcomes such as role conflict and stress while increasing both satisfaction with the agency and commitment. Baker and Feldman (1991) note that tactics are not an end but a means to reach organizational goals. Therefore other important outcomes related to organizational goals must be examined, such as non-prescribed or extra-role behaviors. Gruen, Summers, and Acito (2000) framed the development of a relationship mind-set to the socialization process among marketing employees.

Likewise, other salesperson behaviors are believed to be developed or learned, such as organizational citizenship behavior (MacKenzie, Podsakoff, and Ahearne 1998; Netemeyer et al. 1997), adaptive selling behaviors (Spiro and Weitz 1990), or a learning orientation versus working orientation (Sujan 1986; Sujan, Weitz, and Kumar 1994).

Further research into the effects of socialization practices on such outcomes would be of great importance to sales organizations as they attempt to create a more relational, learning, prosocial sales force. More "big picture" research on the stages of sales force socialization would be particularly beneficial. Finally, additional studies need to be designed that employ longitudinal data to map the socialization process. The socialization process cannot be well-understood using cross-sectional data. Our understanding of sales force socialization will be greatly improved by obtaining measures at several different times beginning shortly after the salesperson's date of hire until they have been with their employer for two or more years.

CONCLUSION

Sales force socialization is an important topic that has received little attention in the sales management literature. The current study offers one of the first true multi-wave tests of a socialization model. The current study tracks 762 sales recruits from 54 firms, with multiple data collections over a two-year period. Longitudinal studies of socialization are recognized as superior to cross-sectional studies, particularly for socialization models based on a stages paradigm. They may also offer greater generalizability. Because the measures in the model were assessed at four successive time periods rather than with a cross-sectional design and a retrospective approach, a more rigorous test of the overall model is provided.

This paper provides a test of a model of salesperson socialization proposed by Dubinsky et al. (1986) but never tested. Their paper has been recognized as one of the ten most influential papers by sales researchers (Leigh, Pullins, and Comer 2001). Our study demonstrates the importance of realistic job previews in the sales socialization process. In addition, it helps to clarify an important distinction between the mechanisms that drive performance and those that drive turnover. Finally, it calls attention to the difference between affective and continuance commitment in salesperson performance.

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