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Consequences of sales management control in field sales organizations: a cross-national perspective

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Abstract

In this study we explore the effects of behavior-based sales management control on salesperson characteristics, salesperson performance and sales organization effectiveness with data collected from field sales managers in Australia and Austria. Considering this cross-national perspective, knowledge should be added to the limited international sales management literature. The study findings provide strong support for positive relationships between behavior-based control and salesperson characteristics, salesperson outcome performance, and sales organization effectiveness. The results offer encouraging support of the cross-national relevance of the sales management behavior-based control model.

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A research stream focusing on management control in marketing is unfolding and interestingly, there is evidence that scholars from the sales area have devoted major emphases to management control issues (Agarwal & Ramaswami, 1993; Anderson & Oliver, 1987; Challagalla & Shervani, 1996; Cravens, Ingram, LaForge & Young,

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1993; Darmon, 1998; Jaworski, 1988; Jaworski, Stathakopoulos, & Krishnan, 1993; Krafft, 1999; Oliver & Anderson, 1994, 1995; Stathakopoulos, 1996). Sales management control strategy is defined as the extent to which sales managers monitor, direct, evaluate and reward salespeople in carrying out their responsibilities (Anderson & Oliver, 1987). Managers employing behavior-based control are primarily concerned with monitoring, directing, and evaluating salespersons' inputs and using high levels of fixed salary when compensating their salespeople. In contrast, under outcome-based control systems, salespeople are not given specific direction by managers, are not closely supervised and are compensated at high levels of incentive pay for their sales achievements. Sales organizations may alternatively employ a hybrid form of control involving combinations of both behavior and outcome control (Oliver & Anderson, 1995).

Sales management control research has important implications for researchers and executives as conceptual and methodological developments not only increase the knowledge base but also offer managers valuable guidelines in their decision making efforts. Though, an increasing body of knowledge—primarily based on findings from the US—has been accumulated in recent years, there are several variations and inconsistencies in the research results. Considering distinct philosophical perspectives, researchers have used different measures of management control. In addition, a variety of control consequences have also been examined empirically, though the organizational consequences of management control have received limited attention. For example, the issue of how different control forms impact the performance of the sales organization is an important research concern.

Most of the sales management control research efforts have been directed either to salespeople or top-level sales managers, rather than field sales managers. Considering the pivotal role of the field sales manager in implementing control strategies, it is surprising that researchers have concentrated their attention on exploring salesperson's perceptions and reactions concerning control. Oliver and Anderson (1994) point to the importance of conducting research on sales managers' control activities and managers' perceptions of salespeople's attitudes, motivations, and behaviors. The field sales manager is responsible for a group of assigned salespeople, and plays an essential role in applying the sales management control strategy. Field sales managers have primary responsibility for directing and evaluating salespeople and achieving the organizational effectiveness of the sales unit. Thus, examining management control and its consequences from this management level is recognized as an essential research concern.

Considering the effects of sales management control strategies several unanswered questions exist. The findings are mixed concerning the antecedent role of behavior-based sales management control strategy on salesperson outcome performance (e.g. achieving sales, market share). Oliver and Anderson (1994) report a weak negative relationship at the salesperson level, whereas Cravens, Ingram, LaForge and Young (1993) found a positive relationship at the chief sales executive level. Conceptually, neither of these sales management control studies considers management control from the perspective of the extent of monitoring, directing, evaluating, and rewarding activities, even though the Anderson and Oliver (1987) propositions are stated in

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