THE EFFECT OF GENDER ON SALES MANAGERS' AND SALESPEOPLE'S PERCEPTIONS OF SALES FORCE CONTROL TOOLS

FRANK G. BINGHAM, JR., Bryant College
CHARLES J. QUIGLEY, JR., Bryant College

This article investigates the role of gender on the perceptions of sales managers and salespeople of salesforce control systems. A series of focus groups and a national cross-sectional mail survey were conducted to determine specific components of control systems and perceptions of these systems. Tools associated with behavioral-based and output-based systems were investigated. Findings suggest that differences exist in the tools male and female sales manages use and the tools which "average" salespeople used. These differences do not, however, suggest more frequent use of behavioral or output-based systems by either gender. "Best" salespeople reported no differences in the tools used.

To attain organizational objectives, management needs to influence or direct the actions of subordinates. To accomplish this, management creates systems to control the behavior of organizational members. Systems used to control activities include a variety of tools. This study compares the perceptions of salesmen and male sales managers to the perceptions of saleswomen and female sales managers of control tools that are used to control their behavior or which they use to control the behavior of those who report to them.

A variety of attributes have been ascribed to women which may serve to adjust the manner by which a manager attempts to influence their behavior. These include expressive, nurturant, and service oriented. Salesmen conversely, have been characterized as goal directed, dominant and instrumental (Epstein 1988). If these or other ascribed characteristics are present, they suggest that different tools and techniques may be required (Levy and Sharma 1994).

BACKGROUND

Control issues which have been investigated include the effectiveness of control systems on output, the components which comprise control systems, the relationship between control systems and organizational climate and structure, and the effect of management style on control systems (Cravens, Ingram, LaForge & Young, 1993, Jaworski, 1988, Merchant, 1988, Avila, Fern, and Mann, 1988). A variety of gender issues have also been examined including wage and earnings differences, role conflict, job satisfaction, adaptive selling, and image (Siguaw and Honeycutt 1995, Levy and Sharma 1994, Cook and Corey 1991).

Control systems can be broadly classified as output-based or behavioral-based (Anderson and Oliver 1987). A behavioral-based control system uses high levels of management direction and interaction while an output-based control system provides minimal direction and does little monitoring of effort. While some organizations use an output-based system or a behavioral-based system exclusively, many organizations employ a combination of both systems (Cravens, et al. 1993, Anderson and Oliver, 1987).

Applied to the sales force control issue, behavioral-based systems focus on the process by which sales are attained and not specifically on the outcome, or sale itself (Anderson and Oliver 1987). In behavioral-based systems, greater management interaction with salespeople is expected. Tools that would be used include frequent group meeting,

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feedback from managers, training programs, incentive programs, scheduling and territory management. For output-based systems, focus is upon end results, usually sales and profits. Compared to behavioral-based control systems, less interaction between management and the salesforce is expected. Tools which would be used include sales and profit reports, salary and bonus. Composite systems utilize tools from both behavioral and output-based systems (Anderson and Oliver 1987). Sales performance and the effort to attain sales levels are monitored, and a variety of methods are utilized to direct the actions of salespeople (Bingham and Quigley, 1994).

The influence of gender on sales performance has been the subject of conflicting findings. Some studies evidence sexual stereotypes suggesting that saleswomen are poorer performers than their male counterparts or are lacking important characteristics affecting sales performance (Swan and Futrell 1978, Kanuk 1978, Swan, Rink, Kiser, and Martin 1984). Other studies provide evidence which suggests that these stereotypes do not exist and that saleswomen are on par with or even superior to their male counterparts on important attributes (Russ and McNeilly 1995, Siguaw and Honeycutt 1995, Cook and Corey 1991, Bingham and Quigley 1990). Still other studies suggest that while women are on par with male counterparts, they tend to be more satisfied with supervision (Schul and Wren 1992) and tend to depend more upon managers for socialization and information feedback (Schul, Remington and Berl 1990).

OBJECTIVES OF THIS RESEARCH

This study attempts to determine if the perceptions of salesmen and saleswomen and of male and female sales managers of the tools used in control systems are similar or different. Specifically, this study attempts to:

1. Compare which tools are used by male sales managers and female sales managers to control their salespeople.
2. Compare the perceptions of salesmen and saleswomen of how control tools are determined.
3. Relate gender of the sales manager to the assessment of the salespersons' performance.

METHODOLOGY

To accomplish the study objectives, a two-stage approach was used. The first stage included a review of past research and the implementation of a series of focus group interviews. This stage's objective was to identify the types of tools which are used by sales managers to control the activities of their salespeople and to identify factors which may influence the selection of specific tools and techniques. The second stage used the findings of the first stage to develop a questionnaire which was administered by mail to a national cross-sectional sample of sales managers and salespeople that reported to these sales managers.

Stage 1: Focus Group Findings

Three focus group sessions were conducted. The first group included salespeople who had sales territories in the New England region. The second group included only sales managers, also representing firms selling in the New England area. The third group was a combination of six salespeople and six managers, none of whom had participated in either of the two previous sessions. Males and females were equally represented in all groups. Ages ranged from the mid-twenties to the mid-fifties, with a broad range of products and services represented. Companies represented included Fortune 500 companies and regional firms.

Discussion of Focus Group Results

The focus group discussions revealed that salespeople and sales managers agreed that three broad categories of control elements were used to influence behavior. These elements were:

1) Performance expectations and objectives
2) Control tools used
3) How information is exchanged.

Performance expectations and objectives of both male and female sales managers related to profit, sales, and revenue expectations which their salespeople were expected to attain. A concern of salesmen and saleswomen was whether these objectives were established by national or regional offices, or were negotiated between themselves and their sales managers. Saleswomen noted that although they believed they were given great latitude in decision making, they thought that more interaction with their sales manager was necessary. Salesmen, however, voiced no desire for greater interaction with their sales mangers.

Control tools which were identified by sales managers and salespeople included salary, commission rates, bonuses, quotas, itineraries, incentives, training, and promotions. Factors noted by both salesmen and saleswomen concerning the exchange of information included the types of information exchanged, the form that the information was in, the quantity of information exchanged, the time to collect and distribute the information, and the frequency of communication between the sales manager and salesperson. Saleswomen identified a desire to communicate directly, or one-on-one, with their sales managers. Salesmen were more comfortable in group sessions.

Although salesmen and saleswomen and male and female sales managers agreed on many facets of effective control systems, the focus group discussions suggested that females desire greater use of tools commonly associated with behavioral-based systems while men do not voice this concern.

Stage 2: Sales Force Survey

The findings from the first stage of this study served as the basis for constructing a questionnaire. In addition to demographic characteristics of salespeople and sales managers, the following types of information were sought:

1) The type of performance reports, control tools used and their frequency of usage,
2) How performance reports and control tools were determined, and
3) The quantity, form and time spent to collect and distribute information.

Performance reports identified were sales, profit, expense and call reports. Control tools used were compensation schemes (quota, salary, commission, bonus), territory itineraries, incentive programs, training, and promotions and/or title change. Sources associated with each type of control tool included the sales manager, company policy, mutual negotiation, and by the salesperson. Categorical responses (used, not used) were established for each type of report. Frequency was specified as the number per month and categories were assigned for each identified source of report and tool.

Information exchange methods sought were the amount of time spent collecting information, whether the information was specific or general, the quantity of information provided, and the frequency of one-on-one meetings and group meetings. Five point semantic differential scales were used to measure information exchange methods.

A questionnaire was developed and pre-tested using twenty-two sales managers and salespeople from the local area. A national, cross-sectional sample was used to obtain information. A list of sales managers was obtained from a national list broker. One thousand five hundred sets of questionnaires were mailed to sales managers during the summer of 1993. Sales managers were asked to respond to a questionnaire and to distribute additional enclosed questionnaires which were sealed in envelopes, to the salesperson they considered to be their best performer and another salesperson whom they felt was an average performer. "Performance" was left up to the sales manager to define. This approach allowed sales managers to use their own criteria for selection.

Accompanying each salesperson's questionnaire was a letter of introduction explaining the purpose of the study and assuring the salesperson of confidentiality. The salespeople were asked to mail the completed questionnaires directly to the researchers. Each salesperson's questionnaire was pre-coded to identify which salesperson was responding. Follow-up letters were sent to sales managers one month after the initial mailing. Comparison of responses received in the second mailing to responses received in the first mailing demonstrated no differences in response patterns.

Sample

A total of 337 usable questionnaires were returned (283 from the first mailing and 54 from the second mailing). Of this total, 140 were from sales managers (9.3% response rate), 97 from "best" salespeople, and 100 from "average" salespeople. Table 1 provides characteristics of these respondents. Subjects were also matched into sets of sales manager and "best" and "average" salespeople reported to the manager. This produced a total of 74 complete sets, consisting of a sales manager with both "best" and "average" salesperson, and 31 partial sets, consisting of a sales manager and either a "best" or an "average" salesperson.

As demonstrated in Table 1, women respondents were, on average, younger than their male counterparts. Men constituted a larger percentage of sales managers, average and best salespeople. The percentage of women declined, moving from average salesperson (39%) to best salesperson (36%) to sales manager (21%).

The profiles of the women respondents differed from those of the men respondents on a number of characteristics. A greater percentage of women are single and have no children. Women tend to have less formal education, sales experience, managerial experience and have been in their current position for shorter periods of time than men. Women also tend to work for smaller firms and have less household income than men. The discrepancy in income may be accounted for by less education and experience but may also be partially explained by the large percentage of women respondents who are single compared to a majority of men who are married and possibly have an additional household wage earner.

To check for differences between salespeople characterized as "best" and those characterized as "average" by their sales managers, salespeople were asked to evaluate their own performance. Two questions using a Likert scale were used to measure their self-appraisal. Salespeople identified as best performers by their sales managers more strongly agreed that they were one of the best salespeople in their organization than did salespeople identified as average by their sales managers. Although the difference in responses between best and average salespeople was marginally significant (P=0.06), there was no significant difference between the responses of saleswomen and salesmen to these questions.

Table 2 provides the responses of male and female sales managers, best salesmen and saleswomen, and average salesmen and saleswomen to the control tools which they used to influence their activities. If women are more inclined to respond to behavioral-based systems, differences between men and women should be expected in the types of control tools used.

Tools and techniques which would be associated more with output-based systems include those designed to provide motivation for individuals who tend to act independently of the organization. These include the use of commission rates in the compensation package and the offering of incentives and incentive programs designed to motivate the superior performing salesperson. Likewise, reporting is kept to a minimum, predominantly involving performance measures of sales and profits.

Tools and techniques associated with behavioral-based systems are designed to control behavior. These include salary, sales quota and bonus in compensation packages, the use of itineraries, training and promotions. Reporting is expanded and requires more interaction and exchange between manager and salesperson.

A lower percentage of female salespeople (best and average) reported receiving feedback from their supervisors than did male salespeople. However, a greater percentage of female salespeople reported providing information to their managers using customer call reports, expense reports and sales volume reports than did male salespeople. A smaller percentage of female salespeople also reported the use of direct observation by their manager than did

TABLE 1
Respondent Profile

GENDER	MALE	FEMALE
AGE **SD**	40.57 yrs. 9.12 yrs.	35.04 yrs. 8.04 yrs.
SALES MANAGERS	110 (79%)	30 (21%)
"BEST" SALESPEOPLE	62 (64%)	35 (36%)
"AVERAGE" SALESPEOPLE	61 (61%)	39 (39%)
MARITAL STATUS	15.5% single 84.5% married	46.2% single 53.8% married
FAMILY STATUS	24.3% no children, 75.7% with children	51.9% no children, 48.1% with children
HOUSEHOLD -20 **INCOME** 20-40 **($000)** 40-60 60-80 80-100 100+	0.1% 10.6% 22.6% 31.0% 15.9% 18.6%	5.9% 26.7% 21.8% 23.8% 7.9% 13.9%
EDUCATION 0-11 (yrs.) 12 13-15 16 16+	0.0% 4.7% 22.8% 50.4% 21.6%	0.0% 9.7% 30.1% 47.6% 12.6%
YEARS IN CURRENT POSITION SD	11.68 yrs. 7.41 yrs.	9.05 yrs. 5.59 yrs.
YEARS WITH CURRENT EMPLOYER SD	5.34 yrs. 4.61 yrs.	3.51 yrs. 3.19 yrs.
YEARS OF SALES EXPERIENCE SD	9.00 yrs. 8.16 yrs.	4.57 yrs. 4.77 yrs.
YEARS OF MANAGEMENT EXPERIENCE SD	14.27 yrs. 8.96 yrs.	8.33 yrs. 5.41 yrs.
NUMBER OF SALESPEOPLE IN FIRM SD	157.23 589.97	15.33 25.59
GROSS SALES OF FIRM		
Less than $1 mill	1.9%	13.3%
$1 mill - $5 mill	11.3%	33.3%
$5 mill - $10 mill	11.3%	26.7%
$10 mill - $20 mill	20.8%	1.0%
$20 mill - $100 mill	28.3%	1.0%
over $100 mill	26.4%	6.7%

TABLE 2
Control System Components Used
(% reporting use)

	Sales Manager		Best salesperson		Average Salesperson	
System Component	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Communication Methods						
a) Customer Call Report	70.9	90.0	66.1	68.6	67.2	76.9
b) Expense Report	92.7	83.3	82.3	85.7	80.3	84.6
c) Sales Volume Report	93.6	93.3	74.2	85.7	78.7	79.5
d) Company Profit/Sales Feedback	88.2	76.7	83.9	74.3	88.5	82.1
e) Territory Profit/Sales Feedback	70.9	50.0	66.1	45.7	77.0	59.0
f) Individual Performance Feedback	73.6	76.7	79.0	65.7	75.4	71.8
g) Direct Observation	96.4	76.7	77.4	65.7	77.0	69.2
Control Tools						
a) Salary	95.5	93.3	91.9	100.0	91.8	94.9
b) Commission Rate	81.8	83.3	91.9	80.0	82.0	82.1
c) Bonus	84.5	90.0	75.8	82.9	75.4	87.2
d) Quota	80.0	80.0	83.9	77.1	75.4	74.4
e) Itinerary	88.2	90.0	90.3	91.4	78.8	89.7
f) Incentives	81.8	93.3	75.8	80.0	75.4	82.1
g) Training	98.2	100.0	87.1	91.4	93.4	92.3
h) Promotion	90.9	86.7	85.5	85.7	85.2	87.2

male salespeople. These findings do not necessarily imply that behavioral-based or output-based control systems are used predominately on one gender, but may indicate that female salespeople are more frequently required to provide information to, and are less likely to receive information from their managers than male salespeople.

Differences are also noted between the control tools used on salesmen and saleswomen. The differences in specific tools do not however, suggest a tendency toward either a behavioral or an output-based control system. A larger percentage of female salespeople reported the use of salary, bonuses, and incentives than did male salespeople. More "average" saleswomen reported the use of itineraries than did "average" salesmen. More male salespeople reported the use of quota and more "best" salespeople reported the use of commission as control tools. Little difference was reported between salesmen and saleswomen concerning the use of promotions and training.

This information suggests that saleswomen are required to provide more information, receive less feedback, and that salary and bonuses are used to influence their activities. Salesmen, while required to provide less information, receive more feedback and have their activities more influenced by commission.

Gender differences were noted in responses of sales managers. Nearly 20% more male sales managers reported using territory profit/sales feedback and over ten percent more reported using company-wide profit/sales feedback than female sales managers. More female managers, however, reported using individual performance feedback than male managers. This may suggest that female sales managers focus on one-on-one relationships while their male counterparts focus on group or team performance. A larger percentage of woman managers also reported the use of call reports and a lower use of expense reports and direct observation methods than did male managers.

Male and female managers report little difference in the use of salary, commission rate, quota, itinerary, or training as tools to direct the activities of their salespeople. A greater percentage of female sales managers however, reported using bonuses and incentives than did male managers while a larger percentage of male sales managers reported using promotions as a control tool.

Differences in the requirements for reporting and in their use of control tools suggest that female sales managers are more oriented to using behavioral-based control systems while male sales managers tend toward using output-based systems. Women managers appear to require more personalized communication and more information about daily activities while male sales managers provide and receive information in a non-personal manner concerning sales, profits and costs.

Table 3 provides the responses of sales managers and salespeople to questions concerning characteristics of information exchanged. This table reveals that responses of male and female sales managers and salespeople are similar concerning the quantity of information exchanged between them. Female sales managers however, reported that the information they provided and received from their salespeople was more detailed than the information which male sales managers provided and received. Female sales managers also reported more frequent use of group meetings and one-on-one meetings than did male managers.

Among best salespeople, the only major differences between males and females was in the detail of information received from their sales manager and the frequency of group meetings. Males reported more detailed information received from managers than did female salespeople and female salespeople reported more frequent use of group meeting than males did.

Among average salespeople, discernable differences between males and females occurred in the detail of information provided, the time to collect and provide information, the use of one-on-one meetings and the use of group meetings. Males reported that they provided more detailed information than females and spend more time to collect and provide information to their managers than females did. Males also reported more frequent use of one-on-one meeting with their sales managers than did females. Females reported more frequent use of group meetings than did males.

Information contained in this table indicates that responses from female sales managers differ from those of male sales managers. Females reported greater detail in the information which they provided and received from their salespeople, spend more time to collect and provide information to their salespeople, provided and received greater quantities of information from their salespeople, and met more frequently on a one-on-one basis and in group meetings than did male sales managers. This reinforces the implications derived from information in Table 2 concerning the use of behavioral-based control systems. Female sales managers are more inclined to use elements of behavioral-based systems than male sales managers are. This may also suggest that female sales managers exert more time and effort and are more demanding in their role as sales manager than are males.

This information also indicates that little difference exists between best male and best female salespeople concerning these information exchange issues. There are however, noticeable differences between average male and average female salespeople. This may indicate that average salesmen may be expending more time and effort in their roles than their female counterparts.

TABLE 3
Information Exchange Factors

Factor	Sales Manager		Best Salesperson		Average Salesperson	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Detail provided(A)	1.86	1.57	1.84	1.86	1.73	2.08
Detail received(A)	2.26	1.79	1.97	2.34	1.79	1.95
Time to collect and provide (B)	2.66	2.57	3.08	3.09	2.71	3.03
Quantity provided(C)	2.38	2.23	2.59	2.34	2.33	2.49
Quantity received(C)	2.79	2.60	2.56	2.66	2.36	2.34
One-on-one meetings(D)	2.02	1.97	2.16	2.14	1.95	2.41
Group meetings(D)	1.99	1.28	2.00	1.82	2.28	1.56

(A) - 1 (Specific and detailed) - 5 (General, no detail)
(B) - 1 (Long) - 5 (Short)
(C) - 1 (Extensive) - 5 (None)
(D) - 1 (Frequently) - 5 (Never)

SUMMARY

The results of this study suggests that gender does not dictate an organization's choice of behavioral-based or output-based control systems for their salespeople. Evidence does however, indicate that differences exist between men and women in their demographic characteristics, reported use of different control tools, and the characteristics of information exchanged between sales managers and salespeople.

Differences between gender suggests that organizations may employ composite control systems, borrowing elements from both behavioral and output-based systems. The selection of specific tools may be influenced by gender considerations, such as the use of group meetings or one-on-one meetings to convey information between managers and salespeople. Female sales managers tend to use more elements commonly associated with behavioral-based systems and female salespeople indicate a desire for greater use of tools commonly employed with a behavioral-based system.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Limitations of this study include the method used to assign salespeople into performance groups and the sample size. The selection of which salesperson was assigned as a best or as an average salesperson was based solely on the assessment of the sales manager. Although the instructions accompanying the questionnaire suggested criteria the sales manager could use, the final selection was determined by the sales manager. A related problem was assigning only two categories of performance - best and average. This limited the variability in an important dependent measure.

In this study the sales organization was defined as the sampling unit. Although this allowed comparison of salespeople with their sales managers, it limited the number of sampling units in the study. An additional problem was the failure to obtain industry information. This assumed that the role of the salesforce is similar across industries, which may not be a good assumption. It may be expected, for example, that industries associated with capital goods would use their salesforce differently than those in consumer goods industries. The objectives assigned to the salesforce may influence the control systems used and how they are used.

Characteristics which should be further explored are the influence of the salesperson's life cycle stage and gender on the use of sales control systems. Another area of future research would be to investigate the influence of sales control systems when the salesforce is assigned different sales objectives. For example, the control elements which may be effective for missionary selling may be ineffective with other types of sales roles.

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