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Building a winning team is an integral part of being a successful sales manager in any sales environment. In a competitive marketplace, it seems clear that salesperson performance can be influenced by those around them, but more often overlooked are the sources and specific



manifestations of those influences. Our research aimed to address one factor of this phenomenon, namely personal identification with supervisors.

Based on prior research, we define *personal identification* as “an individual’s intrapersonal perception of oneness with another individual.”¹ What makes this definition of personal identification different from other forms

of social identification is that it does not necessarily have to reflect reciprocity. Salespeople could identify strongly with their supervisors based on personal characteristics, motivations, work ethic, or any of several other factors, but their supervisors need not feel the same way about them. Of course, as with most things, this type of identification may also be reciprocal. Our research focuses on how personal identification with supervisors affects individuals’ motivation-performance relationship as well as the outcome-performance relationship and turnover intentions among salespeople.

Intrinsic motivation centers on salespeople’s need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, so that motivation is not induced by external factors but by the person’s own internal drives to demonstrate expertise and success. Extrinsic motivation focuses on compliance with various factors in the environment, which would include supervisors as a factor in supporting various salesperson motivations for performance and achievement.

The Study

To address the aforementioned issues, we measure how salespeople’s identification with their supervisors (or managers) influence salespeople’s intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation, which in turn influence three key outcomes. These outcomes include salespeople’s turnover intentions, outcome performance, and behavior performance. Outcome performance refers to such performance goals as hitting sales targets and profit margins. Behavior performance refers

to such accomplishments such as providing excellent customer service or writing high-quality sales proposals.

What we expected to find from the study was that salespeople's perceived personal identification with their supervisor would be positively related to intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. We also hypothesized that intrinsic motivation would lead to greater outcome performance and behavior performance, while being negatively related to turnover intentions. But while we expected similar results from extrinsic motivation for outcome performance and behavior performance, we expected high-performing salespeople to seek better compensation/incentive plans, thus predicting higher likelihood of turnover intentions.

The Results

The results from our survey largely indicated that our hypotheses were correct. We found that higher levels of salesperson identification with their supervisor do in fact lead to higher levels of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. In addition, we found that all our assumptions about the effects of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation on results variables (performance and turnover intention) held to be true, as well. Among the mediated effects that we tested for, the only one that lacked sufficient evidence was the mediating effect of extrinsic motivation on the relationship between identification with supervisor and turnover intention. This confirms that regardless of a salesperson's level of extrinsic motivation, their identification with their supervisor will not directly influence their turnover intentions. Our findings add important contributions to understanding how identification with supervisors can influence motivation levels, but also how this identification affects sales results directly.

Real Estate Implications

Especially within larger real estate organizations, it's important to take note of how well salespeople identify with their supervisors, as that relationship will necessarily impact their



levels of motivation and performance. Therefore, it could be helpful to staff salespeople under supervisors who share similar goals, worldviews, and motivations as themselves. Within independent real estate or smaller organizations, this impact can still be important to understand. For a smaller real estate firm, understanding personal identification may facilitate more informed hiring decisions that will result in better long-term success. Independent

real estate agents may think of themselves as their own boss but may also identify others to admire and learn from to help harness their own motivation.

Recommended Reading

Mallin, Michael L., Tyler D. Hancock, Ellen B. Pullins, and Bashar S. Gammoh (2022), “Salesperson’s Perceived Personal Identification with Supervisor and the Relationship with Turnover Intention and Performance: A Mediated Motivation Model,” *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, 42(3), 243-264.

Reference

1. Ashforth, Blake E., Beth S. Schinoff, and Kristie M. Rogers (2016), “I Identify with Her. I Identify with Him: Unpacking the Dynamics of Personal Identification in Organizations,” *Academy of Management Review*, 41(1) 28-60.

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Dr. Michael Mallin (PhD – Kent State University) teaches and researches in the area of sales and sales management. His research interests include salesforce leadership, motivation, and performance issues. His research has appeared in the *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, *Journal of Selling & Major Account Management*, *Direct Marketing - An International Journal*, *Journal of Entrepreneurship Education*, *American Marketing Association Educators Conference Proceedings* and the *National Conference for Sales Management Conference Proceedings*, among other publications. Prior to joining the University of Toledo, his industry experience includes positions as Sales Director for The SBC Corporation, Sales & Marketing Manager, and Account Executive for AT&T Corp.

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Dr. Ellen Pullins (PhD – The Ohio State University) teaches and researches in sales, marketing, international business, and related areas. In addition, she provides curricular oversight for the Edward Schmidt School of Professional Sales. Dr. Pullins' research interests include sales force development and customer response to personal selling, among other subjects. Her research has appeared in *Journal of Marketing Research*, *Journal of Academy of Marketing Science*, *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management*, *Industrial Marketing Management*, and many more. She has won the DeJute Teaching Award, COBA Research Award and Brunner Service Award at UT. Dr. Pullins' industry experience includes time with the Hobart Corporation and as a consultant for Performance Training Professionals.

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Dr. Bashar S. Gammoh (PhD – Oklahoma State University) teaches a wide variety of courses, ranging from undergraduate Principles of Marketing to MBA level courses in Strategic Brand Management and Market Driven Strategy & Analysis. When not teaching, his research interests primarily focus on branding and brand management, while branching into other areas such as salesperson brand relationships and consumer-brand interactions. His research has been featured in publications such as *Journal of Product and Brand Management*, *International Journal of Electronic Commerce*, *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, *Journal of Marketing Theory & Practice*, among many others. Dr. Gammoh has received numerous awards including the Emerald Publishing Highly Commended Paper Award, COBI Brunner Service Award, UT Faculty Excellence Award, and more.



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