

-RESEARCH ARTICLE-

ANALYZING KEY FACTORS AFFECTING SALES PERFORMANCE AMONGST MALAYSIAN SMES: A STRUCTURAL PATH MODELING APPROACH

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Citation (APA): Ahmed, S., Chowdhury, B., Khalil, I., Haque, R., Senathirajah, A. R. B. (2022). Analyzing The Factors Affecting Sales Performance Amongst Malaysian Smes: A Structural Path Modeling Approach. *International Journal of eBusiness and eGovernment Studies*, 14 (3), 560-577. doi:10.34111/ijepeg.202214127

—Abstract—

This study investigates the sustainable factors impacting sales performance in Malaysia's direct sales sector, which is dominated by small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs). The growth of small and medium-sized businesses (including direct sales businesses) has created additional job opportunities (Yang et al., 2018). This study aimed to analyze sales performance data from small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) in Klang Valley, Malaysia, to derive managerial conclusions on what factors most influence sales success. It was essential to understand factors in Malaysian sales performance. Therefore, we conducted both a descriptive analysis of respondent demographics and a structural path analysis of the interactions between variables. The data pool included responses from 207 working professionals from SMEs in Malaysia. Several sustainable factors were discovered to influence sales performance, including individuals' levels of innate drive, how much they valued their profession, and how much they were paid for it. The results did not demonstrate a connection between employees' work-life balance and their sales performance at SMEs, but this does not imply it is of no importance. If a small or medium-sized business (SME) wants to improve its sales performance via the adoption of management, it has to increase the number of its members who earn bonuses and the value of the bonuses they get. As a bonus, it will motivate members to enhance sales by incentivizing them to make more pretty things with more selling power.

Keyword: Sustainable Performance, Job Satisfaction, Motivation and Achievement, Work Life Balance.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

One of Proctor & Gamble's recruiting objectives is to have candidates become recognized authorities on their brands, categories, target audiences, and the market as a whole (Lutz et al., 2020). The P&G Sales professional must be in charge of his or her destiny. According to recent research, everyone can display some level of creative thinking, but their extent and manner differ widely (Lutz et al., 2020). In addition, creativity should be seen as a personal appraisal of one's action as original and valuable in a particular setting. In the context of a sales job, *creativity* is defined as the presence of novel ideas and actions on the salesperson's part (Wang, 2000). There are several methods to demonstrate creativity in sales. There are several ways in which a salesperson's creativity may be shown, such as when they find innovative methods of resolving old problems, come up with unique ideas, look at current problems from a new perspective, define new challenges, and create imaginative sales presentations (Groza et al., 2016; Meng et al., 2017). A different approach to resolving sales issues would be drawing on other sectors' expertise. Unstructured, unplanned obstacles may be overcome with the aid of these new concepts and actions. Their job and the company's overall performance need to be enhanced by them." For this discussion, we will take a closer

look at the role of creative thinking in predicting sales staff performance. In an individual-level model, salespeople's inventiveness, labor effort, and selling experience are directly related to their performance (Nilakantan, 2021).

To meet the expanding phenomena of direct trade with clients in the global company, direct selling businesses play an essential role since they are a huge business. As of 2014, the World Federation of Direct Selling Association (WFDSA) estimates that direct selling organizations generated more than \$178 billion in sales in 2013 (Djoni et al., 2016), with over 96 million independent distributors (salespeople) engaged in this profession throughout the globe. The start-up costs of a direct selling firm are low. Regarding location and product supply, the corporation has already taken care of such details. A team of managers is on hand to assist distributors with their administrative tasks. A distributor is not only selling to customers but are also recruiting new distributors (Gleim et al., 2019). Direct selling highlights the need to develop a network to extend the company's distribution network. Distributors might earn more money if they have a broader network. Because the company relies on network power, this concept's business may reach more people and develop rapidly. One technique to organize and compensate salespeople is by creating compensation programs/plans that allow them to be compensated in two ways (Wang, 2000).

To begin, salespeople may be paid when they sell items and services to customers on their own. They will also be compensated for sales made by individuals they have sponsored or recruited, and sales made by the group or network they have sponsored or recruited (Djoni et al., 2016). Nutrilite, the American firm that first began direct selling in the United States in 1930, has dramatically increased direct sales worldwide. A global business may be an option for prospective entrepreneurs to the traditional business or store selling via channels such as shops (supermarkets and malls, etc.). Entrepreneurs of all backgrounds, regardless of school, employment experience, or gender, are welcome to apply, as long as they are at least 17 years of age and desire to work hard and take advantage of this business opportunity (Le et al., 2020).

Since small and medium-sized businesses are booming, direct selling is essential to their development (Gleim et al., 2019; Zang et al., 2020). Among the most noteworthy aspects of a firm's direct selling approach is the fact that the company does not utilize television, radio, or newspapers to promote its goods; instead, the corporation relies nearly entirely on individual selling to promote its products and introduce them to customers (personal selling) (Djoni et al., 2016; Valle et al., 2019). As an element of the company's overall strategy, a balanced scorecard is a tool for assessing current and future performance and uncovering the secret to the company's success. Hence, the present study aims to analyze the relationship of overall job satisfaction, recognition, work-life balance motivation and achievement with sales employee performance.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Foundation

Any sales and marketing organization's success ultimately rests on the success of individual salespeople since their performance directly influences the firm's bottom line, both in the short term and over the long term (Cescon et al., 2019). Customer connections are developed, trust is built, loyalty is maintained, value is created for the customer, and knowledge about the market is provided to management due to salespeople's interactions with buyers and sellers (Cescon et al., 2019; Yuliansyah et al., 2018). Salespeople's position as relationship managers in the marketing department is more important than ever since customer behavior is evolving and becoming more diversified (Hutahayan, 2020). Despite technological advances, the need for salespeople has been rising and will continue to expand. Recruiting, selecting, and training salespeople is becoming more expensive. Managers in the field want to know what it takes to get their employees to perform at their best, and salespeople are no exception (Bento et al., 2018; Imtiaz Ferdous et al., 2019).

Sales companies place a premium on various factors when evaluating their salespeople's effectiveness. Generally, salesman performance has been defined and assessed by either objective or subjective viewpoints. A company's success is defined and assessed in terms of the number of new customers it acquires, and the number of units sold (Cescon et al., 2019; Yuliansyah et al., 2018). However, supervisors, customers, coworkers, or salespeople evaluate subjective performance in areas like communication effectiveness, sales volume, customer relations, cost control, territory management, mastery of sales skills, teamwork, and the provision of information to manage other areas (Ojra et al., 2021).

Whether salespeople's performance should be assessed objectively or subjectively and, if subjective metrics are employed, whose opinions are the most trustworthy; one theory is that the researcher might base his or her decision on the parts of performance in which he or she has the most significant interest. Several scholars have suggested that self-evaluations are legitimate and acceptable for judging the performance of personnel who cross boundaries, such as salesmen.

This dissertation attempts to stress the quantitative result component of performance to explore the impact of various characteristics of salesperson behavior on performance. Accordingly, *sales employee performance* is defined here as the salesperson's assessment of his or her overall accomplishment in selling, particularly about the number of sales accomplished, as contrasted to his or her colleague salespeople.

2.1.1 Overall, Job Satisfaction

We cannot overstate the significance of salesman effectiveness. To a large extent, every sales and marketing company's bottom line is directly impacted by its salespeople's

effectiveness (Akroyd et al., 2016). Salespeople generate new business, establish customer confidence, maintain long-term relationships, offer value to clients, and provide management with market knowledge via buyer-seller engagement and communication (Guay, 2014). Salespeople's position as relationship managers in the marketing organization is more critical than ever since customer behaviour is evolving and becoming more diversified (Guay, 2014). The need for salespeople has been rising and will continue to rise despite technological advances. In addition, the expenses involved with recruiting, selecting, and training salespeople are rising (Akroyd et al., 2016; Cescon et al., 2019). Because of this, sales managers, organizations, and salespeople are always interested in learning how to improve salesperson performance.

While all sales organizations are concerned with salespeople's success, businesses place differing emphasis on various components of performance. Generally, *salesman performance* has been defined and assessed from objective and subjective viewpoints. Objective performance is defined and measured in terms of unit sales volume, dollar sales volume, contribution to profit, number of new customers, and the like (Ojra et al., 2021). However, supervisors, customers, coworkers, or salespeople evaluate subjective performance in areas like communication effectiveness, sales volume, customer relations, cost control, territory management, mastery of sales skills, teamwork, and the provision of information to management. For example, there is a debate on whether salesperson performance should be judged objectively or who is appraisal is the most accurate if subjective measurements are employed (Cescon et al., 2019). One theory is that the researcher might base his or her decision on the parts of performance in which he or she has the most interest. Employees who work across departments, such as salesmen, have been urged by some experts to use self-evaluations to gauge their effectiveness.

This dissertation is being made to emphasize performance's quantitative output to analyze the consequences of particular parts of salespeople's conduct (i.e., innovative behaviour) (Cescon et al., 2019). In light of the widespread use and acceptance of self-evaluation measures of salesperson performance, sales employee performance is operationalized here as the salesperson's perception of his or her overall Achievement in sales, especially in the number of sales achieved, as compared to his or her fellow salespeople.

H1: A significant positive relationship exists between Overall Job Satisfaction and Sales employee performance.

2.1.2 Recognition

The connection between performance and incentives is still crucial in the sales organization. Thus, sales literature has given rewards and recognition much attention. Professionals who have been socialized differently are likely to have different motivating tools, and these techniques must be modified to the generational disparities

in salespeople (Hutahayan, 2020). Researchers have shown that various aspects of recognition appeal to each of these two groups. People who have been in the workforce for a long time are more likely to consider promotion, title, and increased salary as evidence that they have done an excellent job (Quesado et al., 2018). According to research, many Baby Boomers have spent their whole professional lives focused on advancing inside their current organizations. They are the original workaholics who had no concept of work-life balance when they were young.

No wonder salesmen are so eager to be recognized for their success. Boomers, on the other hand, are more likely to care about the big picture of a company's performance, such as how well the staff as a whole work together (Ilmudeen et al., 2019). Workplace recognition and gratitude are more important to baby boomers than younger generations. Plaques, certificates, and other keepsakes are typical ways to show appreciation for hard work and accomplishments. Boomers are known for having a wall full of trophies to show off their achievements. Competitive triumphs may be seen in concrete ways. Boomers will prefer this kind of acknowledgment, based on the overwhelming data (Hutahayan, 2020). However, it is not confident that Millennials will likewise embrace this similar need for concrete awards. Millennials may share an interest in gathering concrete evidence of their accomplishment, not as a sign of triumph but as a way to show that they made a sincere effort. There was no apparent distinction between victors and losers in many sports and hobbies in many sports and hobbies when Millennials were children. As a token of appreciation, everyone was given a medal or trophy (Quesado et al., 2018).

There might be a close pleasant connection with these physical goods even if the prizes were not provided in the same setting – competitive vs. participative. They were awarded. Millennials may not share boomers' driving ideas and ideals in part because most Millennials' primary motivation is not to pursue a profession. The truth is that, contrary to popular belief, for many people, employment serves primarily as a means to an end rather than as an integral part of who they are. Due to the importance of work-life balance, many millennials are likely to express an interest in flexible job options (Alabdullah, 2019). The generational divide is widening, according to recent research. Millennials gain more from flexible work schedules, performance-based incentives, and professional development programs than Boomers. This generation is looking for quick performance feedback, more regular evaluations, and nonmonetary incentives such as job stability and social commitment in their workplaces. Their primary motivation is to satisfy one's desires, not those of others. Millennials are looking for immediate gratification (Zuriekat, 2020). They look to their bosses for approval and appreciation. Because they see their coworkers as social companions, it has been proposed that they anticipate any acknowledgment to be given throughout the workday.

H2: There is a significant positive relationship between Recognition and Sales employee performance.

2.1.3 Work-Life Balance

Employee-manager relationships are critical in sales, maybe more so than in any other industry (Dhamija et al., 2019). Accordingly, companies are looking for managers that can maximize individual performance while creating a work environment that fosters employee satisfaction." In this research (Diana et al., 2020), salespeople and sales managers provided data, and it was shown that abusive supervision was a negative influence on both of these objectives. A valuable sales manager harms the sense of workplace fairness, according to justice theory. Because of this, salespeople who are subjected to abuse and managers who administer it suffer lower levels of life satisfaction due to this false sense of fairness (Feng et al., 2020). Furthermore, an abusive manager's unfair workplace might hurt sales performance. Finally, we identify normative and ongoing commitment characteristics that might reduce this negative association (Oksa et al., 2021). To escape the "double whammy" of harmful effects associated with abuse, salespeople who think their work is necessary or have some moral or ethical commitment to their company may ignore it (Fuertes et al., 2020).

In many businesses, the business rationale for implementing work-life balance strategies focuses on recruiting better recruits and decreasing the work-life conflict among current workers to improve the firm's overall performance. Suggest that the business case may need to be modified to reflect the number of ways work-life balance practices can influence organizational performance, such as enhanced social exchange processes, increased cost savings, improved productivity, and reduced turnover (Alabdullah, 2019). There are many elements that might affect these processes, including country context, job level, and management assistance. Research examining the long-term impact of these behavior's is highlighted.

H3: There is a significant positive relationship between Work-Life Balance and Sales employee performance.

2.1.4 Motivation and Achievement

Two personality traits—narcissism and achievement motivation—and three aspects of the sales role—attraction, satisfaction, and performance—were linked (Rasyad et al., 2019). It was projected that salespeople were more self-absorbed and had a greater desire for success than those who had never worked in sales (Mabaso et al., 2018). On the other hand, the urge for success was unrelated to sales happiness, negatively associated with comfort with morally problematic sales practices, but favorably connected to sales personnel performance. Sales recruiters and trainers will benefit from these insights (Kanaya et al., 2005). Extrinsic and intrinsic (I/E) motivation is essential in sales control because of its relationships with sales control and employee performance, but the global character of I/E motivation prevents a complete understanding in the context of sales control (Mabaso et al., 2018). Researchers have found empirical evidence that the

cognitive and emotional aspects of I/E motivation have different antecedents and outcomes that are not otherwise reflected by global motivation frameworks.

H4: There is a significant positive relationship between Motivation and Achievement and Sales employee performance.

2.2 Conceptual Framework

Based on the above literature discussion and hypotheses development the following research framework has been developed in [figure 1](#) below

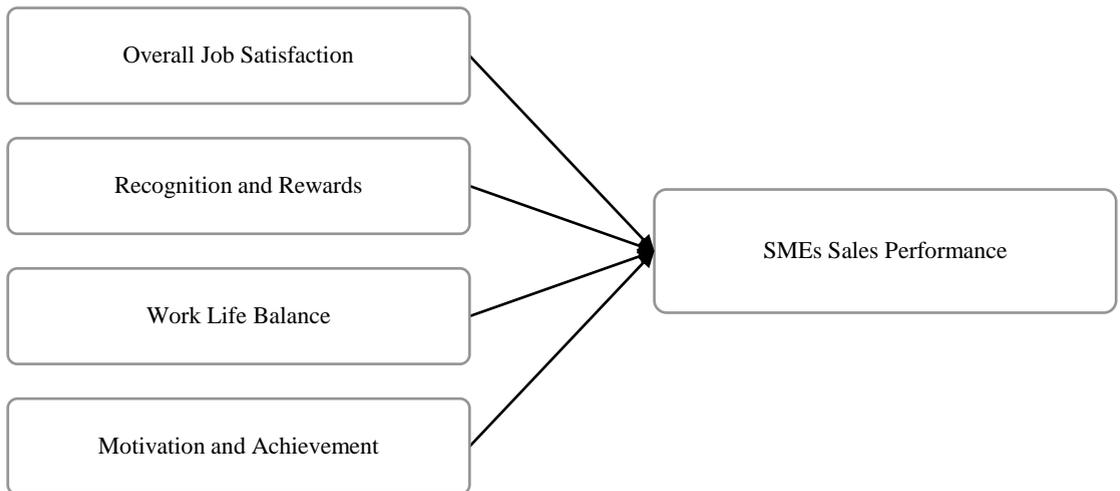


Figure 1. Research Framework

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study has adopted cross-sectional and quantitative research design. The data was collected from 207 respondents using self-developed questionnaire. The respondents to the study were selected from salespersons working across different outlets & various areas in Malaysia. The survey method has been used for the collection of primary data & review method for the collection of secondary data. Primary Data is to be collected with the help of a structured questionnaire prepared per the study's objectives. The questionnaire is designed in English and contains both open-ended and closed-ended questions to have the convenience and ability to collect from many versatile reference groups. For it is easier for the respondents and has the facility of depth responses as required. The questionnaire begins with a simple introduction and instructions for the respondents, divided into two sections. Section A is for the social demographic profile that asked about gender, nationality, race, age, family members, income, education, and occupation. Section B validates the hypothesis and the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The respondents are

required to answer questions linked to each variable to obtain the information needed using the six-point Likert Scale. The collected data was analysed using PLS-SEM approach using SmartPLS software.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Demographics Statistics

The demographic analysis of the target respondents in this study is presented in the [Table 1](#) below. From the respondents' demographics analysis, 143 males and 64 women participated in this research, with 30.8 percent and 69.1 percent of the population, respectively.

Table 1. Demographic Analysis

		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Female	64	30.9
	Male	143	69.1
Age	16-20	19	9.2
	21-25	58	28.0
	26-30	49	23.7
	31-35	61	29.5
	36+	20	9.7
Education	Degree	95	45.9
	Diploma	45	21.7
	Doctorate	5	2.4
	High School	16	7.7
	Master's	46	22.2

Grouping responses into age groups for ease of analysis Five continuous scales have been used: 16-20, 21-25; 26-30; 31-35; 36+. Only 29.5 percent of respondents fall into the 31-35 age bracket, with the second-largest group falling into the 21-25 bracket (28 percent), followed by 9.2 percent, 23.7 percent, and 9.7 percent, respectively. There were more than 45.9% and 22.2% of respondents with a bachelor's or master's degree, respectively. Some 21.7 percent have a diploma, 7.7 percent have a high school diploma, and just 2.4 percent have a doctorate.

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics of the variables in the research are shown in the [Table 2](#) below. The values show that most of those who took the survey seem to agree with the comments.

Table 2. Descriptive Analysis

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Sales performance	1.67	5.00	3.8196	.73896
Job Satisfaction	1.17	5.00	3.5106	.81639
Recognition of Work	1.75	5.00	3.3333	.66828
Work Life Balance	1.50	5.00	3.9831	.73179
Motivation and Achievement	2.00	5.00	3.8135	.71774
Valid N (listwise)				

4.2 Convergent Validity Analysis

The first phase of PLS-SEM analysis is to establish the convergent validity. The convergent validity is established by meeting the threshold of reliability analysis (i.e., Cronbach's Alpha, rho_A and composite reliability) and average variance extracted (AVE). The Cronbach's Alpha, rho_A and composite reliability value should equal or exceed 0.7 (Amoah et al., 2020). Similarly, the cut-off value of AVE is 0.5. Table 3 presented the values of reliability and AVE analysis and met the minimum threshold; hence, the convergent validity is established.

Table 3. Convergent Validity

	Cronbach's alpha	rho_A	Composite reliability	AVE
Motivation and Achievement	0.748	0.792	0.827	0.638
Overall, Job Satisfaction	0.898	0.908	0.921	0.547
Recognition and Rewards	0.671	0.292	0.415	0.512
SMEs Sales Performance	0.862	0.914	0.900	0.539
Work Life Balance	0.786	0.842	0.853	0.546

4.3 Discriminant Validity

After establishing the convergent validity, the next phase was to establish discriminant validity. In this study the discriminant validity was established using Fornell and Larcker criterion and presented in the table 4 below. According to the findings of the study, the discriminant validity of the constructs is established as the values of AVE square root is greater than the correlation of other variables with the targeted construct.

Table 4. Fornell and Larcker Criterion

	Sales employee performance	Job Satisfaction	Recognition of Work	Work Life Balance	Motivation and Achievement
Sales employee performance	0.734				
Job Satisfaction	0.612	0.736			
Recognition of Work	0.264	0.188	0.715		
Work Life Balance	0.611	0.622	0.210	0.739	
Motivation and Achievement	0.575	0.607	0.271	0.767	0.799

4.4 Path Analysis (SEM)

4.4.1 Goodness of Model Fit

The coefficient of determination is a quantitative measure of the predictive ability of a model and is computed as the squared correlation between the actual and anticipated values of an endogenous component (Jenkins et al., 2020). The value of R2 in the present study is 0.60 which means that the 60% of the variance explained in the endogenous variable is due to the exogenous variable and is considered strong. In addition, the Stone-Geisser predictive relevance test is often employed in PLS modeling as an additional measure of GOF (Duarte et al., 2010). Q2 is used to indicate predictive significance. According to Hair et al. (2016), the Q value is determined by blindfolding oneself and evaluating the parameter estimations as well as the way values are constructed around the model. The findings were recovered from the blindfolding output of PLS using the variable score, which was used to extract cross-validated redundancy. This cross-validation demonstrates the model's ability to predict endogenous variables and also provides an explanation for the model's quality. Additionally, the model's endogenous reflective latent variables are blindfolded, and their predictive significance is determined by their Q2 value being higher than 0 (Hair et al., 2016). In this study the Q2 value is 0.558 that means the research model has 56% predictive relevance that is also considered as strong thus, the goodness of model-fit is established.

4.4.2 Direct Relationship

The hypothesis of the study was tested using bootstrap analysis. The t-statistics indicate the strength of the relationship between the independent and dependent variables, while the p-value indicates the relationship's significance.

Table 5 Hypothesis Testing

	Beta Value	Standard deviation	T statistics	P values
Motivation and Achievement -> SMEs Sales Performance	0.233	0.077	3.022	0.003
Overall, Job Satisfaction -> SMEs Sales Performance	0.402	0.064	6.248	0.000
Recognition and Rewards -> SMEs Sales Performance	0.236	0.071	3.313	0.001
Work Life Balance -> SMEs Sales Performance	0.085	0.085	0.997	0.319

According to bootstrap analysis presented in table 5, There was a statistically significant relationship between overall job satisfaction and SME employees Sales Performance (p=0.000, t= 6.248). Findings like these are consistent with the structural model's

predictions. Consequently, it may be inferred that the hypothesis H1 is substantial and that the effect is proven. SMEs Sales performance and job satisfaction are crucial in studying organizational psychology. In addition, a substantial influence on SME employee's sales performance is shown in ($p=0.001$, $t=3.313$) by Recognition and Rewards. Findings like these are consistent with the structural model's predictions Boomers who have competed their whole lives tend to regard promotions, titles, and more money as evidence that they are doing a good job. According to empirical surveys, many Boomers have concentrated on rising the ranks of their organizations throughout their careers. However, Work-Life Balance wasn't found to be substantial impacts SME employee's sales performance ($p= 0.319$, $t= 0.997$). Finding like this is inconsistent with the structural model's predictions. This research reveals that one element that has a detrimental influence on both of these aims is abusive supervision based on data obtained from salespeople and sales managers. Integrating justice theory into a sales management framework, we argue that abusive sales managers influence the impression of workplace fairness. Finally, Motivation and Achievement have a significant influence on SME employee's sales performance ($p= 0.003$, $t=3.022$).

5. IMPLICATION OF THE STUDY

The present study has several implications to research and practice. First, the managers increase member incentives and bonuses to encourage them to work more and sell more. In order to improve sales performance, it is necessary to increase the bonus and introduce additional short-term incentive programs. In Roman's opinion, sales personnel must emphasize communicating with customers about the products they sell 2002. Because members are enticed to buy more than one of the goods in the series, having various products that may be gathered as bonuses would improve sales. Both the quality and diversity of the product incentives members get could be enhanced. This review includes a look at ways to enhance the conditions of product incentives for employers. Because of its scale and variety, the company should be able to quickly identify and exploit new opportunities for product development and marketing activities. To win the competition, a company must use the current opportunities available.

6. LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

As with any study, the research limitations must be considered while analysing the outcomes. Self-reporting was used to collect data for all model components, including the external and internal ones. This has obvious limitations. As a result of the study's methodological diversity, the discovered correlations may be exaggerated. Nevertheless, it is improbable that those who took the survey could accurately identify the assumptions therein. Because of this, it is doubtful that those who provided data were influenced by the methods used to collect it.

It is also conceivable that the study's reliance on self-reported performance data has a flaw. However, despite previous studies showing the validity of self-reported performance measures, the relationships between performance and its predictor constructs may have been inflated by self-evaluations, and the results may have been different if some objective performance measures were used to test the model in advance. Because of this potential bias, various methodologies were used in the research design. In order to eliminate a performance evaluation bias, both samples should remain anonymous and confidential. The ability of students to achieve a specific goal was evaluated rather than their overall performance. Earlier chapters discussed the connections between the measure and other types of performance data and management ratings. In advertising data, self-evaluation was more closely connected to objective performance data than management assessment. We cannot make any judgements about the efficacy of self- or management-assessment in measuring performance over time in terms of cause and effect because the data is cross-sectional, even though the purpose of this study was to identify individual or personal qualities that influence sales performance. This is a limitation. Without a well-designed and well-controlled experimental investigation, there is no evidence of cause and effect.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE STUDY

Organizations need to develop new incentive programs for their workers rather than depending on regular ones that are presently in place to raise sales performance and increase employee loyalty. This is followed by creating more aesthetically attractive product incentives for members that are more unique in terms of their designs, colors and sizes than the ones already offered by the company. If corporations engage in better training for their staff, salespeople may substantially influence their organizations and their bottom lines. "Sales volume may be increased by developing a network of distributors with trustworthy, knowledgeable, diligent and customer-focused employees hired by direct selling firms. Businesses are looking for individuals with solid presentation abilities, negotiation skills, and sales power. Another critical need is product knowledge. In direct selling, a person's ability to sell is intimately tied to their confidence in their products and their ability to attract customers and prospective downline members via their specific selling proposal. In future research, it is also essential to examine other variables of sales performance, such as corporate leadership and product pricing. Other analytical methods might be used to examine the factors affecting sales performance in direct selling businesses.

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