

GENDER EFFECT ON MANAGING AND SUPERVISING SALESPERSONS: A STUDENT PERCEPTION

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Abstract

This study investigates student perceptions of the gender effect on managing and supervising efforts. Based on 385 surveys, the results for the entire sample of students, as well as for male and female samples, showed the existence of a significant gender effect for some aspects of managing and supervising. Also, comparisons of male students and female students found some significant differences between the two genders for training and motivating recruits. The study presents managerial implications of these findings for developing and managing an effective sales force.

Keywords: Students, gender, managing, supervising, motivating

Introduction

Females have proven to be successful in the traditionally male-dominated field of selling, but, women still face some barriers in gaining entry to some selling jobs (Fugate et al., 1988; "Pink Ghetto in Sales" 1988). Some previous studies (Comer and Jolson, 1991; McNeilly and Russ, 2000; Russ and McNeily, 1988; Swan and Futrell, 1978; Swan et al, 1984; Akinyele, 2009) of women in sales situations suggest that stereotypes of women in selling still exist from both potential customers and from managers.

The studies that examined gender effects in selling have covered such issues as female managers' leadership style (Comer et al., 1995; Yammarino et al., 1997); sex-role identity (Jolson and Comer, 1992); stereotypic behaviour and perceptions of sex stereotyping (Comer and Jolson, 1991; Russ and McNilly, 1988); and professional status (Gable and Reed, 1987). Previous research (Crosby et al., 1990; Smith, 1998) suggests that gender similarity between sales persons and

customers is positively related to the quality of the sales person/customer relationship and sales performance. The research findings of Crosby et al. (1990) support conventional wisdom that exchange relationships are easier to develop with similar others (Churchill et al., 1997). On the other hand, recent studies have shown that female salespeople are just as effective as male salespeople, and gender similarity is not a significant factor in sales performance (Dwyer et al., 1998; Akinyele, 2007). In addition, consumers may be more accepting of salespeople who are dissimilar to themselves (Jones et al., 1998).

Several prior studies have investigated sex bias during the employment interview and attempted to separate the effects of applicant sex and recruiter sex on recruiters' evaluations (Arvey and Faley 1988; Powell 1987). These studies produced mixed results about the effects of the similarity of applicant sex and recruiter sex on interview outcomes. For example, while personnel managers regarded same-sex applicants as more similar to

themselves than opposite-sex applicants, sex similarity was not a factor in ratings of likeability or suitability for the job (Gallois et al. 1992). In a more recent study, Hardin et al. (2002) found that the gender of a hypothetical recruit did not affect the rating assigned by recruiters, regardless of recruiter gender.

Much of the research addressing gender effects in the sales field have been based on three main theories; the Similarity-Attraction Paradigm (Byrne 1971; Byrne and Neuman 1992; Graves and Powell 1995), Self-Categorization Theory (Turner 1982; 1985), and Social Identity Theory (Tajfel 1982; Tajfel and Turner 1986). The similarity-attraction paradigm suggests that individuals tend to be attracted to those similar to themselves (Byrne 1971). Social identity theory (Tajfel 1982; Tajfel and Turner 1986) indicates that an individual's self-identity formation is partly a result of group membership. An important and integral part of the above theories involves self-categorization. Self-categorization theory (Turner, 1982; 1985) indicates that individuals take socially defined categories into account when making evaluations about others, and that those characteristics similar to self would likely be regarded as positive and vice-versa.

All three theories indicate that a positive self-identity of individuals is maintained by seeking to maximize inter-group distinctiveness and to perceive out-group members as being less attractive (Jackson et al. 1992; Kramer 1991). These theories may provide a foundation to explain the recruiters' evaluations of the applicants for sales positions and expected sales performance of the applicants.

The purpose of this study was to investigate students (applicant) perceptions of the gender effect on managing and supervising efforts. The specific objectives of the study are to determine whether applicants perceive (1) they

would prefer to work for male versus female managers (supervisors); (2) that male versus female managers would provide the best training for the first sales position; (3) that male versus female managers would be most capable of motivating the applicants to excel in their sales jobs; and (4) that male versus female managers would be most likely to satisfactorily reward the applicants' selling efforts. The measurement of these research questions and others are addressed in the methodology section of this paper.

This paper is important because we believe it is the first paper to address these issues of managing and supervising of salespeople from the applicant's point of view. Understanding applicants' perceptions of these issues could provide different perspectives of gender issues in managing and supervising the sales force. This could be helpful for companies in developing and designing their sales training programs for their sales people as well as for managers and supervisors.

Methodology

In order to accomplish the study objectives, a research instrument (questionnaire) was developed, which was adapted from Hardin et al. (2002) and further modified and improved to meet the objectives of this study. The survey instrument included a number of questions to examine students' (as potential applicants) perceptions of the gender effect on managing and supervising efforts. Students were instructed to assume that they were hired as a salesperson by one of their preferred companies and were asked several questions concerning their perceptions of managing and supervising provided by their future managers.

The survey instrument was processed to acceptable face validity of the constructs (Churchill, 1979; Churchill and Iacobucci, 2005; Narver and Slater, 1990). The survey questions were measured on a semantic differential type of scale ranging from -5 to 5,

where a score of -5=definitely males, a score of 0=equally likely, and a score of 5=definitely females. On the actual survey, the negative signs were omitted in order to eliminate any potential confusion and/or association with negative numbers.

The was administered to business students in the faculty and colleges of business at five universities in Nigeria , three of which were State universities while the other two were Private universities. A special effort was made to select general business classes so that the study would include students with different majors as well as different classification levels. These classes were considered as clusters and every student in each selected class was surveyed, which is called one-stage cluster sampling (Churchill and Iacobucci, 2005). This process produced 385 useable surveys for analysis purposes.

Selected profiles of the respondents indicate that 51.4% of the respondents are males and 48.6% are female, and the average age of respondents is 23.7 years of age. The distributions of student classification indicate that 1.0% is freshmen, 5.5% are sophomores, 28.2% are juniors, 39.9% are seniors, 24.3% are graduate students, and 1.0% is other. In term of majors, 27.9% are majoring in marketing, 24.8% in management, 13.1% in accounting, 11.0% in finance, 1.6% economics, 1.0% in computer science, 1.8% in management information systems, and 18.2% in other. While the survey was intended to include students from different business majors by targeting general business courses, the distribution of the majors shows that marketing and management majors are the largest groups of respondents, followed by accounting. However, these majors seem to be the most popular majors in Nigeria business schools, the results might be the reflection of and consistent with the general distribution of majors in business schools.

Results

The main objective of this research is to investigate applicant perceptions of the gender effect in managing and supervising of salespersons. In order to test whether there is any perceived gender effect for managing and supervising by male versus female managers, a one sample t-test was conducted where the test value = 0. Since the scale used in the study ranged from “-5=definitely males” to “5=definitely females” with “0=equally likely,” the sign of the mean shows the direction of any gender effect, and the t-significance would indicate if the gender effect was statistically significant. The analyses were conducted for all students (male and female) and the results are presented in Table 1. Based on the results of the one sample test for all responses (Table 1), students indicate that they would most prefer working for male managers (mean of -.60, $p < .01$), and they would be offered the best training by male managers (mean of -.26, $p < .05$). Regarding motivation and rewarding, students feel that they would be equally motivated and rewarded by both male and female supervisors. These results suggest an existence of a perceived gender effect (bias) for managing and supervising where students as a whole prefer to work for male managers and feel that male managers/supervisors would offer them the best training for their first sales positions.

In addition to a gender effect for all students (potential applicants), separate analyses were conducted to determine whether or not there were gender effects for male students and female students and the results are also presented in Table 1 The results show that male students most prefer to work for male managers (mean of -.54, $p < .01$), and they feel that male managers will offer them the best training in how to conduct sales for their first sales position (mean of -.67, $p < .01$). It also appears that they believe male managers would be the most capable of motivating them

to excel in their sales jobs (mean of -.29, $p = .07$). These findings indicate an existence of gender effect (bias) for sales managers. Applicants also feel that male managers are most likely to reward them (mean of -.02), but

it is not significant ($p = .890$), which suggests that male students feel they will receive equally satisfactorily rewards by both male and female managers.

Table 1: Nigerian Students' Perceptions of Gender Effect in Recruiting and Managing Process

	<i>All Respondents</i>			<i>Male Respondents</i>			<i>Female Respondents</i>		
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>St.Dev.</i>	<i>P.sign</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>St.Dev.</i>	<i>P.sign</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>St.Dev.</i>	<i>P.sign</i>
<i>Managing and supervising</i>									
<i>Which type of supervisor would you most prefer working for you?</i>	-0.60	2.58	0.000	-0.54	2.52	0.003	-0.67	2.66	0.001
<i>Which do you feel would offer the best training on how to conduct sales for your first sales position?</i>	-0.026	2.22	0.021	-0.67	2.07	0.000	0.16	2.30	0.353
<i>Which would be most capable of motivating you to excel in your sales job?</i>	0.01	2.27	0.946	-0.29	2.26	0.077	0.31	2.22	0.060
<i>Which would be the most likely to satisfactorily reward your selling efforts?</i>	0.08	2.13	0.455	-0.02	2.08	0.890	0.21	2.18	0.198
<i>Scale: Definitely Males -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4 5 Definitely Females</i>									

The results show that female students also prefer to work for male managers (mean of -.67, $p < .01$), which suggest a significant gender effect (bias). Female students seem to feel that female managers would be most capable to motivate them to excel in their sales jobs (mean of .31, $p = .06$). The positive means for training and rewarding suggest a preference for female managers. However, since the means are not significant, female students feel that both male and female managers are equally capable of motivating

and satisfactorily rewarding them, which suggests no gender effect (bias). Finally, the study compared male vs. female student perceptions of the gender effect for managing and supervising, and the results are presented in Table 2. Comparisons of the mean scores suggest that there is no significant difference between male and female students in their preferences for the type of supervisor ($p = .610$) and being rewarded by male versus female supervisors. However, the negative

signs of the mean scores for type of supervisor indicate that both male and female students most prefer to work for male supervisors. The results show that

while male students feel that male supervisors would offer them the best training for their first sales positions (mean of -.67), female students feel that female supervisors would offer them the best training for their first sales positions, where the difference between male and female student preferences is statistically significant ($p < .01$). Similar comparisons indicate that male students feel that male

supervisors would be most capable of motivating them to excel in their sales jobs (mean of -.20), whereas female students feel that female supervisors would provide them the best motivation to excel in their jobs (0.31), and the difference is statistically significant ($p < .01$).

The results based on student (applicant) perceptions suggest a significant gender effect (bias) regarding training and motivating the sales people, which could have important managerial implications for developing a strong sales force.

Table 2: Comparisons of Nigerian Male vs. Female Applicant Perceptions of Gender Effect in Recruiting and Managing Process

	Male Applicant		Female Applicant		<i>P.sign</i>
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>St.Dev.</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>St.Dev.</i>	
Managing and supervising					
Which type of supervisor would you most prefer working for you?	-0.54	2.52	-0.67	2.66	0.610
Which do you feel would offer the best training on how to conduct sales for your first sales position?	-0.67	2.07	0.16	2.30	0.000
Which would be most capable of motivating you to excel in your sales job?	-0.29	2.26	0.31	2.22	0.010
Which would be the most likely to satisfactorily reward your selling efforts?	-0.02	2.08	0.21	2.18	0.298
Scale: Definitely Males -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4 5 Definitely Females					

Discussion and implications

This study examined applicant (student) perceptions of gender effects on managing and

supervising salespeople. Separate analyses were conducted for all students, male and female students, as well as comparison of male versus female students. The results for the entire sample of students showed the existence of a significant gender effect for aspects of managing/supervising. Students as a whole have the most preference to work for male managers/supervisors and feel that male managers/supervisors would offer them the best training in how to conduct sales for their first sales position. These findings suggest that companies might have to assign male managers to the new recruits and also make sure that their training is provided by male managers/supervisors.

Regarding the motivation and rewarding aspects of managing/supervising, students feel that both male and female managers are equally capable of motivating them to excel in their sales jobs and satisfactorily rewarding their selling efforts.

The results by gender indicate that male students most prefer to work for male managers, and feel that male managers would offer them the best training in how to conduct sales for their first sales position, and male managers are most capable of motivating them to excel in their sales jobs. These findings suggest a gender effect (bias) for male students who seem to prefer male managers, which are consistent with the predictions of the Similarity-Attraction Paradigm (Byrne 1971; Byrne and Neuman 1992; Graves and Powell 1995), Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel and Turner, 1986), and Self-Categorization Theory (Turner, 1982, 1985). These theories suggest that individuals tend to be attracted to, or seek membership in, groups that are (demographically) similar to themselves. The implication is that there would be a perceived attraction between a salesperson and a manager/supervisor based on perceived similarity. A similar analysis for female students shows that female students

also most prefer to work for male managers, which contradicts the predictions of the above theories. However, since female students believe that female managers are most capable of motivating them to excel in their sales jobs; this suggests a gender effect (bias) as predicted by the above theories. Finally, this study found no gender effect for both male and female students concerning rewarding selling efforts, and no gender effect for female students for training for the first sales position. These results imply that manager gender has no impact for these managing/supervising functions, which are inconsistent with the Similarity-Attraction Paradigm (Byrne 1971; Byrne and Neuman 1992; Graves and Powell 1995), Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel and Turner, 1986), and Self-Categorization Theory (Turner, 1982, 1985).

Comparisons of male students vs. female students found some significant differences between the two genders for training and motivating (new) recruits. The results show that while male students perceive that male managers (same gender) would offer them the best training and would be not capable of motivating them to excel in their sales jobs, female students perceive that female managers (same gender) would do the same things for them. These findings for both male and female students are consistent with the predictions of the Similarity-Attraction Paradigm (Byrne 1971; Byrne and Neuman 1992; Graves and Powell 1995), Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel and Turner, 1986), and Self-Categorization Theory (Turner, 1982, 1985). These findings are also consistent with the findings of Crosby et al. (1990), who reported that same-gender relationships seem to be associated with greater relationship investment, more open communication, and greater trust and satisfaction within relationships. Some findings, however, are not consistent with the Crosby et al.'s findings (1990). It appears that companies might be

better off in matching student (new recruit) gender with the gender of the sales managers for better training and motivating of these new recruits. However, both male and female students prefer to work for male managers, where female students' preferences for male manager contradict the above theories.

The overall goal of the research was to investigate applicant (student) perceptions of gender effects on managing and supervising efforts. Understanding student perceptions of gender effects on different aspects of managing and supervising could have several managerial implications for companies in developing and managing their sales force. The first managerial implication deals with assignment of new recruits to their managers/supervisors. Since both male and female students most prefer to work for male managers/supervisors, companies might assign male managers to new recruits so that the new recruits may have an easier transition period at their new job. This may increase the retention rate of the new recruits.

The second managerial implication is that since students feel that they male managers would offer them the best training in how to conduct sales for their first sales positions, companies might want to make sure that their initial sales training is provided by male sales managers for better sales training results. Students (new recruits) may perceive that male sales managers have more experience and/or knowledge about the sales jobs than female sales managers. These student (new recruit) perceptions seem to be consistent with gender stereotyping in the sales field (Comer and Jolson, 1991; McNeilly and Russ, 2000; Russ and McNeilly, 1988; Swan and Futrell, 1978, Swan et al., 1984).

Another managerial implication deals with motivating new recruits. The results indicate that since male students feel that male

managers would be most capable of motivating them and female students feel that female managers would most capable of motivating them, companies might have to match student (recruit) gender with manager gender to achieve the best outcome and sales. The final implication is that this study provides a better understating of different aspects of managing and supervising new recruits in a sales force. The results of this research suggest that companies might have to utilize different managers to match the preferences of new recruits, especially at the initial stages of employment.

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