

Narrow personality traits and sales performance

Ole I. Iversen

Norwegian School of Management BI/Assessit AS

and

Morten Hatlem

Schibsted ASA

Research shows consistent relations between the broad five factor personality traits and job performance. This study investigates the relationship between narrow personality traits, motivation and sales performance for 75 salespeople working in the media sector. Findings indicate that motivation can explain variance in sales performance on top of personality. Furthermore the findings indicate that personality and motivation is more important than experience for sales personnel. However, no relationship is found between extrinsic motivation and sales performance, indicating that many companies waste time and money on individual bonus systems.

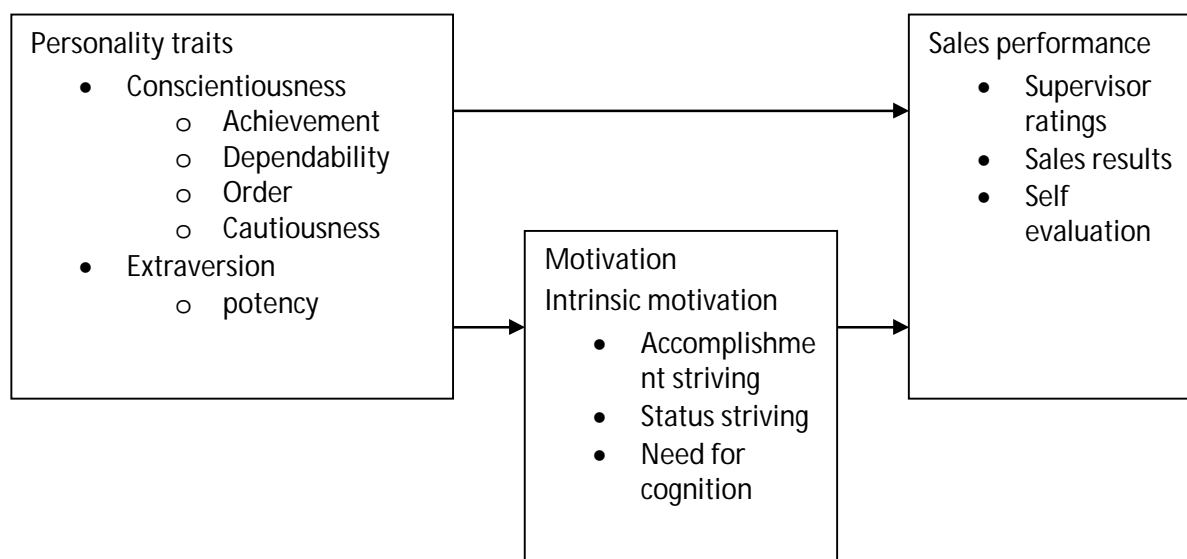
INTRODUCTION

In today's competitive marketplace an effective sales force is an asset for a company and there has been an increasing awareness of the importance of personality as a predictor of job success the last couple of decades. Companies that are capable of identifying and recruiting the best sales people, and at the same time minimize the risk and cost of hiring poor performers, will have a competitive advantage. A number of researches have investigated the relationship between personality and job success (Barrick et al, 2002; Barrick and Mount, 1991; Conte and Gintoft, 2005; Salgado 1997). The "Big Five" has been the most frequently used taxonomy in this research as these five general factors (Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness) underlie traits of most personality inventories. Despite the broad acceptance of the "Big Five" model, other researchers have suggested that more narrow traits may be useful in predicting job performance (Schneider et al., 1996; Tett and Christiansen, 2007). A recent meta-analysis examining the intercorrelations and the incremental validity of narrow traits of the global factor Contentiousness (Achievement, Dependability, Order and Cautiousness) (Dudley et al., 2006). Highest validity was found for Achievement (.28), Dependability (.26) and Order (.19). For sales positions the percentage of variance explained by the narrow traits over and above global conscientiousness was 5.4%, a clear indication that narrow personality traits do incrementally predict performance above and beyond the global and broader big five factors. Findings reporter by Vinchur et al., 1998 also suggest that there are benefits using narrow personality traits in the prediction of performance. There is a general agreement that measures of personality traits link to work behaviour through proximal motivational constructs (Kanfer, 1991; McCrae & Costa, 1996). But an accepted framework does not exist for measuring motivational constructs (Barrick et al., 2002). Within sales it seems to be generally assumed that compensation frameworks are the primary determinant of motivation (Oliver, 1974). Extrinsic rewards have been seen as the main driver for motivation, there has been a general assumption that a positive correlation between extrinsic rewards, including monetary rewards, incentives and bonuses, exists (Chonko, 1986; Komaki et al., 1996; Oliver, 1974; Walker et al., 1977). However, the relevance of these findings in the work place today have been

questioned as more recent research have found intrinsic motivation to be more important than extrinsic motivations for performance (Devine et. Al, 1997; Kuvaas, 2006). Other motivational constructs found relevant for sales performance are striving for status and accomplishment (Barrick et al., 2002), both constructs are considered being cognitive goals. Based upon the personality trait research there are evidence that three of the broad “big five” factors are relevant for predicting sales performance, namely Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability and Extraversion. Furthermore, more narrow personality traits like Potency, Achievement, Dependability, Order and Cautiousness predicts performance above and beyond the broad “big five” dimensions. When it comes to work motivation there is evidence for a significant relationship between intrinsic motivation, Status striving, Accomplishment Striving and need for cognition. Previous research findings are summarised in Figure 1, and indicate a direct link between personality and sales performance as these personality traits in previous research are found to be predictors of sales performance.

Figure 1.

Summary of research findings



There is also a direct link between motivation and sales performance. The different criteria's used in the previous mentioned research is indicated in the figure. As most of the previous research has focused on sales jobs in general using the broad “Big five” taxonomy it would be useful to investigate the relationship between narrow personality traits and sales performance further. Furthermore, the link between personality and motivation is somewhat unclear. Even though Barrick et al. (2002) report a positive relationship between the broad factor Conscientiousness and Accomplishment striving, and between Extraversion and Status striving, more research is needed to investigate this link. The aim of this research is therefore: 1) to investigate the link between narrow work related personality traits and sales performance, 2) to investigate the link between work related motivation and sales performance and whether work related motivation can explain sales performance above narrow personality traits, and 3), to investigate the link between narrow work related personality traits and work motivation.

METHOD

The sample consist of 88 sales in a Nordic company working within the media sector. Age

varied from 24 to 61, with an average of 37 years. The Occupational Personality Questionnaire (OPQ) from SHL was used to measure personality. This is a work related personality measure with 32 relatively narrow traits. Internal consistency for the 32 dimensions are between .66 and .88 (Iversen, 2003). OPQ is widely used for selection purposes in the work place. Motivation Questionnaire (MQ) from SHL was used to measure work related motivational constructs and contains 18 motivational dimensions. 144 questions have to be answered on a scale from 1 to 5. Sales performance was measured objectively by actual sales results for 2008 (in percentage of set budget for 2008). Performance was also rated by superiors rating all personnel on overall job performance on a scale from 1 to 4 where 1 is below average and 4 is outstanding.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The performance data was initially inspected for normality distribution, and after removing four outliers and respondents with missing data, both kurtosis and skewness had an absolute value of less than 1.0. The sales index measure (sales performance in % of budget) had a minimum value of 57 and a maximum value of 164, with a mean of 100.41 and SD 20.03. Significant correlations were found between sales index and the four personality traits controlling (0.291), conventional (-0.339), though minded (0.234) and rule following (-0.231). Significant correlations were also found between the more subjective overall job performance rating and the three personality traits controlling (0.422), conventional (-0.250) and achieving (0.311). A linear regression analysis indicated and that the four personality traits (controlling, conventional, though minded and rule following) explained 19.5% (adjusted R square 14.9%) of the sales index variance. The traits controlling, conventional and though minded all have similar contribution with coefficient around 0.2, whereas rule oriented hardly have any contribution. Experience in term of length in role or length in sales or gender did not influence the sales index. Only two of the 18 motivational dimensions correlated significantly with sales index, namely fear for failure (0.269) and flexibility (0.229). A regression analysis including these two dimensions as independent variables and sales index as the dependent variable revealed an explained variance of 10.5% (adjusted R square = 0.078). Including the motivational dimension in the model increased the R square to 0.242 (adjusted R square 0.175).

Table 1.
Model summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.442 ^a	.195	.149	18.47761	.195	4.245	4	70	.004
2	.492 ^b	.242	.175	18.19220	.047	2.107	2	68	.129

a. Predictors: (Constant), Controlling, ThoughMinded, RuleFollowing, Conventional

b. Predictors: (Constant), Controlling, ThoughMinded, RuleFollowing, Conventional, Fear_Failure_Raw, Flexibility_Raw

c. Dependent Variable: Sales_Index

The result indicates that motivational dimension explains variance in performance on top of personality traits. No significant correlations were found between the OPQ related extrovert dimensions (persuasive, outgoing, social confidence and affiliative) and the MQ related status striving dimensions. A correlation analysis was conducted between the OPQ related conscientiousness dimension (conscientiousness, rule oriented, detail oriented and achieving) and the MQ related accomplishment striving dimensions (level of activity and achievement).

A relatively weak correlation of 0.234 between conscientious and level of activity was the only significant finding.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was threefold, namely to investigate the link between work related narrow personality traits and sales performance, between work motivation and sales performance and between work related personality traits and work motivation. Findings from previous research presented in Figure 1 have been tested. The low sample size of must be taken into account when the findings are interpreted. No relationship were found between the OPQ related extrovert dimensions and sales success, nor was any significant correlations found between the OPQ related conscientious related personality traits and sales performance. Previous research findings (Barrick et al., 2002; Conte and Gintoft, 2005; and Vinchur et al., 1998) were not supported. However, significant correlations where found between four narrow personality traits (controlling, conventional, though minded and rule following) and sales performance. Even though the correlations are relatively weak the four traits explained around 15% of the variation in sales success. Surprisingly enough, no relationship were found between experience (length in sale and length in role) and sales performance indicating that personality is more important for sales success than experience. Interestingly enough, no relationship was found between the MQ related extrinsic motivation domains (material reward, status, progression). Among MQ related intrinsic motivation dimensions (interest, flexibility, autonomy) only flexibility had a positive correlation with sales performance. The findings partly support the assumption that intrinsic motivation is more important than extrinsic motivation for sales performance (Devine et. Al, 1997; Kuvaas, 2006). Furthermore, the two motivational dimensions flexibility and fear for failure could explain variance in sales performance on top of personality traits. Even though the most of the results from this study does not support previous research findings within the field some interesting findings are reported. First of all the importance of personality and motivation for sales performance are underlined, secondly the indications that personality and work motivation are more important than experience should be investigated further in future research as this could have consequences for the selection of sales personnel. The missing relationship between extrinsic motivation and sales performance could indicate that many companies are wasting time and money on complicated individual bonus systems.

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