



The moderating effect of control systems on the relationship between commission and salesperson intrinsic motivation in a customer oriented environment

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ABSTRACT

Using a social psychology theory, Cognitive Evaluation Theory (CET), the authors show how commission compensation can be viewed as a sales performance contingent reward and the extent of its use to reward performance, coupled with a sales control system, impacts salesperson intrinsic motivation in a relationship selling environment. In essence, the sales control mechanisms modify the impact of the commission based on whether it is perceived as controlling or informative. This is empirically tested using a sample of business-to-business salespeople. Partial support for three hypothesized relationships is shown providing preliminary evidence that CET is a way to study the integration of commission compensation rewards, sales control systems, and motivational impact. Implications of the findings for theory and for managers are considered, along with suggested directions for future research.

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What are the most pressing issues facing sales managers today? Motivating and directing the salesperson to increase productive customer relationships while rewarding performance is likely to be at or near the top of the list. The number of articles in *Sales and Marketing Management* or *Selling Power* that address these issues substantiates this need (e.g., Anderson, 2005; Chang, 2005; Cramer, 1999; Wiley, 2007 to mention a few). Separately, motivation, customer relationship building, compensation, and sales control have a vast academic literature and theoretical basis that is well-established. So as sales academics, we should be able to synthesize these critical sales force management topics to better understand how they work together, right? The truth is, while we possess some limited knowledge about any one of the topics, we are far from being able to put them together to assist the practicing manager.

In an epic undertaking in the 25th anniversary issue of the *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management*, researchers came together to try to establish an agenda for future sales research (Brown & Jones, 2005). In addressing the area of motivation, control and compensation, Brown, Evans, Mantrala, and Challagalla (2005) call for these research topics to be better integrated. They point out that the disconnected literatures have remained, for the most part, separate. But, in today's dynamic selling environment, the challenge for a sales executive becomes how to design both control and compensation systems that impact salespeople's motivation in a way that channels

customer relationship building into increased sales productivity (Brown et al., 2005; Jones, Brown, Zoltners & Weitz, 2005).

Separately, there is a well-established body of literature supporting a correlation between customer relationship building and salesperson intrinsic motivation (Badovick, Hadaway, & Kaminski, 1993; Sujan, 1986; Tyagi, 1982; Walker, Churchill, & Ford, 1977; Weitz, Sujan, & Sujan, 1986), compensation and sales control systems (Cravens, Ingram, LaForge, & Young, 1993; Krafft, 1999; Oliver & Anderson, 1994) and between sales control systems and motivation (e.g., Baldauf & Cravens, 2003; Oliver & Anderson, 1994). However, yet to be researched is how compensation and sales control systems work together to impact salesperson intrinsic motivation especially when customer relationship building is the goal. There is, however, theory and evidence outside of the selling domain suggesting that the types of rewards and how these rewards are viewed have a significant impact on intrinsic motivation.

Cognitive Evaluation Theory—CET (Deci, 1972, 1980; Deci & Ryan, 1985) supports the notion that intrinsic motivation may be impacted depending on how an individual perceives a reward as either a controller of behavior or as an informational indicator of competence. Pullins (2001) conceptually applied CET to the sales domain by addressing the types of salesperson compensation and its expected impact on intrinsic motivation. Via a qualitative study, she developed a set of propositions suggesting a link between the salesperson reward system (i.e., compensation), feedback mechanism (i.e., managerial controls), and salesperson intrinsic motivation. Although yet to be empirically tested in the sales force domain, this work begins to address the synthesis of customer relationship building, sales compensation, control, and intrinsic motivation that the sales academic community is calling for. The purpose of our article is to

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answer this call (Brown et al., 2005) and bring together these diverse literature bases into one integrated perspective. In addition, we offer some initial empirical evidence that the individual components could work together. We do this by extending the work of Pullins (2001) to show that in a relationship selling environment, commission compensation represents a performance contingent reward for a salesperson. Sales control systems then focus salespersons' perceptions of the reward as controlling or informative. It is the perceptions of the rewards that ultimately impact intrinsic motivation. We then present a limited empirical test using data collected from business-to-business salespeople for the relationships we propose. The results enable us to speculate how CET theory may be extended to the sales force domain to better understand how rewards, control systems, and motivation work together. Finally, implications of the findings for managers to consider along with suggestions for advancement of theory and research are offered.

1. Relevant literature

Since our investigation involves salespeople operating within a relationship selling environment, we begin by reviewing the importance of a salesperson's relationship orientation to intrinsic motivation. Next, we discuss a framework for understanding how compensation can be viewed according to the type of reward it provides, and thus how this can impact intrinsic motivation. Then we will consider sales control systems, how they relate to intrinsic motivation, and how they may combine with rewards to moderate (or alter) the effect on intrinsic motivation. Once we have reviewed the literatures that we are attempting to integrate, we develop three hypotheses that will be tested to support this research.

1.1. Intrinsic motivation and relationship orientation

Motivation is a salesperson characteristic shown to be a key antecedent to selling performance (Churchill, Ford, Hartley, & Walker, 1985; Walker et al., 1977). One type of motivation, intrinsic, suggests that an individual will be driven to put forth effort on a given task(s) based on the notion that he/she views the performance contingent rewards associated with the task(s) to be intrinsically appealing (Tyagi, 1982; Vroom, 1964). Examples of such intrinsic rewards include pride, sense of accomplishment, satisfaction, and enjoyment (Tyagi, 1982; Weitz, Castleberry, & Tanner, 2000). Thus, the intrinsically motivated salesperson values things such as personal achievement and success as well as selling for the mere challenge and feeling of performing a useful service (Oliver & Anderson, 1994). Since intrinsic motivation results in a series of moods and abilities that are consistent with relationship building, (e.g., Badovick et al., 1993; Weitz et al., 1986), there is evidence to suggest that intrinsic motivation is consistent with successful performance in today's customer oriented selling environment (Pullins, 2001). Support for this notion can be found outside as well as within the domain of sales.

Social psychologists have found that the role of intrinsic motivation is positively related to adult relational behaviors and positive relationship outcomes (e.g., Blais, Sabourin, Boucher, & Vallerand, 1990; Remple, Holmes & Zanna, 1985). In sales, such behaviors are associated with a relationship oriented selling approach (Dubinsky & Hartley, 1986; Grewal & Sharma, 1991; Harris, Mowen, & Brown, 2005; Pettijohn, Pettijohn, & Parker, 1997) that include: active listening, adaptive selling, needs identification, teamwork, problem solving, sales planning, and sales support activities (Geok & Hsueh, 2003; Piercy, Cravens, & Morgan, 1998; Roman, Ruiz, & Munuera, 2005). Relationship oriented selling has been advocated over the past two decades and has been commonly referred to as customer-oriented selling (Saxe & Weitz, 1982). Similar to the definition of customer oriented selling, we define relationship oriented selling as the selling activities and strategies directed toward providing customer satisfac-

tion and establishing mutually beneficial long-term customer relationships. Although much has been done since its introduction in the way of (customer oriented selling) scale development, validation, and revision (Saxe & Weitz, 1982; Thomas, Soutar, & Ryan, 2001) little is known about the factors that affect a salesperson's predisposition to engage in such relationship selling behaviors.

Relationship orientation is important in business-to-business sales since success in modern day selling has been linked to the development of productive buyer–seller relationships (Badovick et al., 1993; Sujan, 1986; Weitz et al., 1986). In this relationship selling environment, salespeople are compensated using a mix of commission and salary (Galea, 2005) to reward the generation of sales outputs (units, revenue, profitability, etc.) as well as behaviors required to build long-term customer relationships (needs identification, solution oriented proposals, service after the sale, etc.). The importance of a relationship orientation requires an understanding of how the reward system impacts a salesperson's motivation to develop these critical customer relationships.

1.2. Compensation and intrinsic motivation

A useful theory for understanding the linkage between rewards and motivation is the framework of Cognitive Evaluation Theory (CET) developed by Deci (1972, 1980) and Deci and Ryan (1985). CET provides a theory of intrinsic motivation based on an individual's need for autonomy and competence, so the effect of a reward depends on how it impacts perceived self-determination and perceived competence. According to CET, the recipient can interpret a reward as either a controller of behavior or an informational indicator of competence, thus having differential effects on intrinsic motivation. This theory is conceptually applied to the area of salesperson compensation by Pullins (2001). Pullins considered the question of how compensation structure impacts sales strategy (for example, long-term relationship building and customer retention), via intrinsic motivation as defined by Deci and Ryan (1985).

The social psychologists have looked extensively at the impact of rewards, like compensation, on intrinsic motivation (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 1985). One reward type that is particularly applicable in the sales force domain is *performance contingent* (Deci, 1972, 1980; Deci & Ryan, 1985). A performance contingent reward is given for attainment of some specified level of performance (e.g., sales units, revenue, sales proposals, customer satisfaction, etc.). Seeing that a salesperson's total compensation is partially tied to commissions paid for achieving stated sales goals (Galea, 2005), motivating salespeople toward attainment of this type of reward is of particular interest to sales managers. The impact of performance contingent rewards on intrinsic motivation depends on how the rewards are perceived by the recipient. Those rewards perceived as *controlling* behaviors have a negative impact on intrinsic motivation (Jordan, 1986); while those that offer up *informational feedback* may positively effect intrinsic motivation (Ryan, Mims & Koestner, 1983). Ryan et al. (1983) found that if they gave a performance contingent reward and highlighted controlling aspects, it hurt intrinsic motivation. However, if informational components were highlighted, intrinsic motivation was increased. Swann and Puttman (1977) found that providing positive feedback about performance could offset the negative effects of a reward. Pullins (2001) noted that sales commission is performance contingent because the reward is salient and expected when a specific result is achieved.

Pullins (2001) combined the CET theoretical base with a qualitative study of sales managers to develop a series of propositions related to salary and commission and relationship development with customers. Included in these propositions was the idea that commission that is perceived as controlling would decrease salesperson intrinsic motivation, while commission perceived as informative would increase salesperson intrinsic motivation. She does not, however, propose any

mechanism for altering these perceptions and her propositions have not been specifically tested. She does however, provide an organizing framework for integrating compensation with motivation, and later, we will show, also with control systems, the mechanism for altering perceptions of commission.

There is good reason to consider that Pullins (2001) framework will be useful, as research outside the sales field has continued to show support (e.g., Burton, Lydon, D'Alessandro, & Koestner, 2006 in social psychology; Benabou & Tirole, 2003; Harvey, 2005, in economics). For example Harvey (2005), basing his work on social psychology's empirical evidence, builds economic models supporting the notion that extrinsic motivation crowds out intrinsic motivation when rewards are perceived as controlling. Since CET has continued to show useful insight in other settings, the potential for use in sales becomes even more likely and in need of study to support its application. So if CET relates compensation and motivation, how can we integrate the notion of sales control systems as mechanisms to alter the (controlling/informative) perception of rewards? The following overview of the sales control literature and its interrelationship to compensation and intrinsic motivation begins to address this question.

1.3. Sales control systems and motivation

Sales control systems (SCS) are used by managers to ensure the attainment of desired organizational objectives (Challagalla & Shervani, 1996). Sales managers will use various SCS in order to increase the likelihood that the sales force will perform the necessary functions in order to meet the sales organization's goals. Anderson and Oliver (1987, 1995) developed a series of research propositions suggesting that managers should choose strategies to manage their salespeople using a balance of sales control systems to monitor and direct sales outcomes (e.g., unit and revenue production) and behaviors (e.g., pre-call planning, number of sales calls, customer proposals, customer satisfaction, etc.).

Due to the broad nature of behavior SCS, Challagalla and Shervani (1996) determined the need to further divide behavior SCS into two components: 1) *activity control* and 2) *capability control*. This provided a framework to delineate day-to-day selling behaviors from more long-term developmental behaviors. Specifically, activity control addresses the monitoring and supervision of activities in pursuit of the sale (e.g., making sales calls, delivering proposals, presentations, and customer demonstrations, etc.). This form of SCS might be perceived by the salesperson as controlling or manipulative of his/her behavior since it involves more prescriptive direction (from the manager) as to how the selling job should be performed. In contrast, capability control emphasizes the development of salesperson skills and abilities designed to improve their longer-term behavior performance.

Using capability control, managers provide their salespeople with information, feedback, and guidance (i.e., mentoring and coaching) to improve their skills and knowledge in areas such as product knowledge, customer problem solving, and negotiations. This form of behavior SCS is likely to be perceived by the salesperson as the manager's desire to facilitate skill building that will enable the salesperson to ultimately act more autonomously to satisfy customer needs as well as to manage his/her career. This type of SCS is important since studies have shown that such skill and capability development leads to higher levels of salesperson behavior performance (Babakus, Cravens, Grant, Ingram, & LaForge, 1996; Baldauf, Cravens, & Piercy, 2001, 2005; Cravens et al., 1993; Piercy et al., 1998) and customer relationship building (Piercy et al., 1998).

Results of research studies, however, directly linking behavior controls to intrinsic motivation are somewhat mixed. Early on, Oliver and Anderson (1994) did not support the behavior control–intrinsic motivation relationship. However, more recent studies (Baldauf et al.,

2001; Baldauf & Cravens, 2003; Piercy, Cravens, & Lane, 2001) confirm the linkage. Maybe, such varied findings suggest that SCS moderate (versus directly impact) the effect on intrinsic motivation. A moderator is a variable that affects the direction and/or strength of the relationship between an independent (predictor) and dependent (outcome) variable (Baron & Kenny, 1986). For our research, this would suggest that the SCS which managers use serves to either increase or decrease intrinsic motivation for the commissioned salesperson. To further understand, why this might be the case, the Dual Factor Theory (DFT) of motivation is introduced to describe how a salesperson's perception of a SCS as either controlling or informative of behavior may impact intrinsic motivation.

Herzberg's DFT of motivation (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959) suggests that worker motivation is a function of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with various aspects of the job. They studied workers from accounting and engineering firms and found factors (i.e., "satisfiers" such as achievement, recognition, the work itself, responsibility, advancement, and growth) that, when perceived present, positively impacted workers intrinsic motivation. Alternatively, factors such as company policy, supervision, relationship with supervisor, and work conditions were perceived as hygiene factors and when insufficient or unattractive, were perceived as "dissatisfiers" and negatively impacted worker motivation. The DFT was later tested in various occupations (see Dunnette, Campbell, & Hakel, 1967; Ewen, 1964; Lindsay, Marks, & Gorlow, 1967; Shipley & Kiely, 1986; Winer & Schiff, 1980) but each study provided different results relative to which factors were perceived as satisfiers and dissatisfiers. This suggests that workers perceptions are a moving target and can change based on a host of factors (e.g., personal characteristics, age, time, and work context).

In their study of UK industrial salesperson motivation factors, Shipley and Kiely (1986) found that how the company and manager interact with salespeople can be potentially perceived as hygiene/dissatisfiers and impinge upon intrinsic motivation. For example, salespeople indicated that earnings potential, when unattractive negatively impacted motivation. Likewise, managerial acknowledgment of effort, promotion opportunities, required job tasks, training provided, and relationship with manager, when insufficient negatively impacted motivation. Thus, there is evidence from DFT motivation studies that the salesperson's reward (i.e., compensation) system as well as managerial interactions with salespeople (i.e., sales control system) may impact salesperson intrinsic motivation.

In the sections to follow, we integrate this background theory to develop testable hypotheses to better understand the relationships between the salesperson reward system, managerial sales control, and intrinsic motivation.

1.4. Hypothesis development

Sales researchers (Flaherty, Dahlstrom, & Skinner, 1999; Pettijohn, Pettijohn, & Taylor, 2002; Siguaw, Brown, & Widing, 1994; Verbeke, Belschak, & Bagozzi, 2004) have made some inroads by showing a correlation between salespeople that have high levels of pride and satisfaction with their job and customer relationship oriented selling behaviors. Perhaps the desire to provide customers with a more satisfying buying experience (via needs identification, problem solving, and service after the sale, to mention a few) would provide a catalyst to increase intrinsic motivation.

Psychologically, the satisfaction stemming from providing the customer a more positive experience increases the salesperson's feeling of achievement, accomplishment, and personal growth in their work (Oliver & Anderson, 1994). Based on this view, we propose that a salesperson with a relationship orientation will have a greater psychological predisposition to sacrifice short-term sales gains for the benefits of a longer-term customer relationship. This in turn

provides the salesperson with a sense of (intrinsic) fulfillment in his/her selling job. Thus, our first hypothesis suggests:

H1. As salesperson customer relationship orientation increases, intrinsic motivation will also increase.

Based on the established research linkages between SCS and motivation, behavior SCS can be viewed relative to the reward systems framework of Deci (1980). Specifically, behavior activity control can be viewed as a form of task-oriented control. In this case, the sales manager is controlling the salesperson's participation in and completion of the shorter-term selling tasks or activities leading up to the sale (making sales calls, conducting demos, proposal generation, etc.). The nature of these selling activities calls for less monitoring, supervision, evaluation, and feedback to the salesperson. Any commission rewards associated with evaluations from behavior activity control will likely focus the salesperson on the normative, controlling aspects of the reward. It is unlikely that pay that involves commission combined with this type of control will result in increased intrinsic motivation. This is because behavior activity control is focused on individual task completion, without feedback as to why the task was successful or a failure.

According to CET, the impact of performance contingent rewards (i.e., commission) on intrinsic motivation depends on how the rewards are perceived by the recipient. Those rewards perceived as *controlling* behaviors are expected to have a negative impact on intrinsic motivation. In other words, we expect that this form of control will alter the direction of the relationship (e.g., increasing to decreasing) between compensation and intrinsic motivation. An example here is a commission-based salesperson that is given a lead list of customers to call on by his/her manager. In addition, directions are provided as to what product is to be sold and how it is to be pitched to the customer. In this example, the behavior activity SCS imposed by the manager is perceived by the salesperson as controlling and we would expect the impact on the salesperson's intrinsic motivation to decrease. Based on this, we propose:

H2. Behavior activity control will negatively moderate the relationship between the percentage of commission as a portion of total salesperson compensation and salesperson intrinsic motivation.

Unlike activity control, which is focused on the *completion of selling tasks*, behavior *capability* control can be viewed as focused on developing the necessary salesperson skills and capabilities needed to impact performance (Challagalla & Shervani, 1996). Here, in an attempt to develop salesperson skills, feedback is provided to the salesperson specifically indicating *how the particular task is/was performed*. For example, Baldauf et al. (2001) found that aspects of behavior SCS included the manager's evaluation of the salesperson's adaptive selling skills. This form of evaluation provides feedback and adds informational value to the salesperson by telling them how they were/weren't effective at adjusting to an unexpected customer situation (personality style, new/additional decision makers, changing needs, etc.).

The nature of behavior capability control calls for higher levels of managerial contact and evaluation (Challagalla & Shervani, 1996). Coaching and mentoring are examples of a capability control strategy and studies have shown that when used, salespeople are more organizationally committed and satisfied with their jobs (Oliver & Anderson, 1994; Piercy et al., 2001). Close communication also provides opportunities for managers to encourage salespeople and recognize their improvement and accomplishments.

Seeing that most industrial salespeople are paid in part by some commission component of their compensation (Galea, 2005), it is reasonable to propose a positive relationship between the extent of commission (as a portion of total compensation) coupled with behavior capability control and intrinsic motivation. The commission portion of pay is the performance-contingent reward, tied to behaviors being

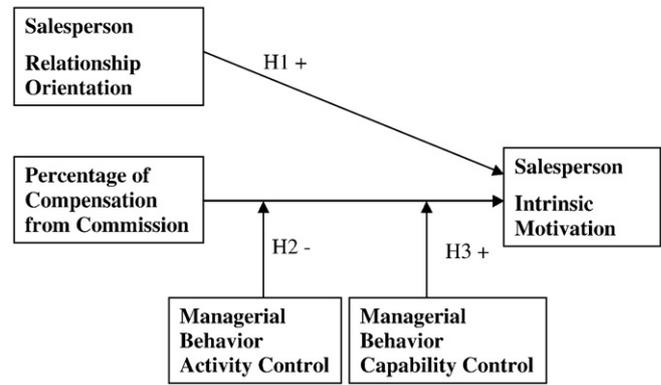


Fig. 1. Hypothesized relationship between salesperson relationship orientation, commission compensation rewards, behavior-based sales control, and salesperson intrinsic motivation.

evaluated, and informed by the behavior capability SCS, which adds the informational value. According to CET, those rewards perceived to offer *informational feedback* may positively effect intrinsic motivation.

Applying Herzberg's DFT and the results of Shipley and Kiely's (1986) salesperson motivation study also supports this proposed relationship. For example, Shipley and Kiely (1986) found that satisfaction from doing a good job and ability to satisfy customer needs were two of the highest rated salesperson motivators (i.e., satisfiers). Thus, managers utilizing behavior capability SCS will center on the training, coaching, and skill development support role necessary to provide information and feedback to the salesperson on their job and customer satisfaction performance. Such informational feedback should positively effect intrinsic motivation. Therefore, we propose:

H3. Behavior capability control will positively moderate the relationship between the percentage of commission as a portion of total salesperson compensation and salesperson intrinsic motivation.

Fig. 1 has been included to describe and summarize the hypothesized relationships developed in this section.

2. Method

In order to test the hypotheses, a questionnaire survey was provided to salespeople across different firms and industries. Prior to deployment, a sample of twelve salespeople was selected to pre-test the survey and measures. Test subjects were asked to fill out the survey and provide comments on length of time to complete, instruction and question clarity, and overall survey flow. Changes were made to the survey based on test respondents' feedback and scale reliability issues.

As an extra-credit assignment, students in three professional sales curriculum classes (at a Northwest Ohio University) were offered the opportunity to administer the survey. Students were given explicit instructions that the survey participant had to 1) be a business-to-business salesperson and 2) complete and sign a consent form identifying the subject's name, title, company, and contact information (phone and email). Upon receiving the completed surveys, those not meeting the above criteria (three surveys) were removed from the subject pool. Additionally the researchers reviewed all of the consent forms to identify any that were suspect (e.g., missing information, the title didn't appear "b-to-b sales" in nature, or the researchers didn't recognize the company).

Random checks, including phone and email contact with the participants were made on 10% of the sample to verify the accuracy and integrity of the data collection method used. In the end, this process netted a total of 275 usable respondents. Demographic statistics reveal that our sample was 69% male, average age—34.3 years, average years of

experience—9.5, and average percentage of compensation from commission—35%. The top three industries represented were manufacturing (26%), financial services (19%), and business services (12%). The geographic distribution included salespeople from Northwest Ohio (69%), Southeast Michigan (21%), and Northeast Ohio (10%). Compared to national averages for age of salespeople (36.4 years—U.S. Census Bureau, 2006) and percentage of salesperson compensation from commission (36.5%—Galea, 2005), our regional sample is representative.

2.1. Measures

Each salesperson was asked questions pertaining to his/her perceptions of the type of SCS that his/her manager uses, percentage of compensation from commission (PC), level of intrinsic motivation (IM), and customer relationship selling orientation (CRO). To identify the extent of the commission component of a subject's compensation, they were asked to specify this as a percentage of their total cash compensation. To measure the type of behavior SCS used (activity and capability), existing scales were used and adapted. Four 7-point Likert scale items from Piercy et al. (2001) behavior control scale were used to measure behavior activity sales control systems (B_aSCS). In similar fashion, four 7-point Likert scale items from Piercy et al. (2001) behavior control scale were used to measure behavior capability sales control systems (B_cSCS). The items for each of these two scales were chosen because they closely reflect salesperson behaviors that were task-oriented (i.e., activities) or skill based (i.e., capabilities).

Percent commission (PC) was measured directly by asking subjects to state what average percent of their total compensation was from commission. PC was computed by dividing this value by 100. The IM orientation of the salesperson is a measure of how much the “higher-order” rewards of selling are valued by the salesperson. A high IM orientation indicates that the salesperson values things such as personal achievement and success as well as selling for the mere challenge and feeling of performing a useful service. Four 7-point Likert scale items for this scale were adapted from the survey method of Oliver and Anderson (1994). A high score indicated a more IM oriented salesperson.

Customer relationship orientation is a measure of the tendency for the salesperson to engage in behaviors that are conducive to advancing productive customer relationships. This was measured by asking a subject to rate himself/herself on a continuum ranging from 1 (low in CRO) to 7 (high in CRO) on nine separate dimensions of how they approach their sales job; each pertaining to a dimension of productive customer relationship building (e.g., *transaction* focused versus *relationship* focused, *tell* customer what they need versus *ask* customers what they need, *push* products/services versus *help* customer solve problems, etc.). The items for this scale were adapted from the customer orientation part of the S.O.C.O. scale developed by Saxe and Weitz (1982). Psychometric properties, sources and items of each scale used are available in the paper's Appendix A. Finally, to control for differences between salesperson subjects, we included two demographic variables in our analysis: salesperson *gender* and total years of selling *experience*.

2.2. Measure validation

To ensure that our construct (PC) was not biased by salesperson level of performance, we compared PC reported by lower performing salesperson as compared to higher performing salespeople. To do this, a median split of a measure of salesperson outcome performance² produced 142/133 lower/higher performing salespeople. No statistically significant difference in PC reported by each performance group was found.

² Measure of salesperson outcome performance computed by averaging the following four items (1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree): “I make sales of those products with the highest *profit margins*”, “I generate a high level of *dollar sales*”, “I identify and sell to major accounts in my territory”, “I exceed all of my sales targets and objectives”.

To investigate the fit properties of the measurement model, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted using AMOS 6.0. The results suggested an acceptable fit in that they are within structural equation measurement model parameters as recommended by Fornell and Larcker (1981)—($\chi^2=49.4$, degrees of freedom [df]=19, $p=.000$; root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA]=.08, $CI_{90\%}=.06$ to .10; comparative fit index [CFI]=.92; normed fit index [NFI]=.88, and relative fit index ([RFI]=.82). Convergent validity of the independent construct measures was confirmed by computing the average variance extracted (AVE). These values are reported among the descriptive statistics in Table 2 and all exceed the 0.50 acceptable threshold suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981). In addition, all measurement items had significant loadings on their corresponding constructs. This, combined with the acceptable composite reliability measures indicates convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

To test for discriminant validity, we conducted an analysis to ensure that each item is associated with only one construct, that is, no item loaded more highly on another construct than it did on the construct it intends to measure (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Green, Salkind, & Akey, 2000). In the first step of this analysis the correlations were computed for each of the independent construct items (four behavior activity SCS items and four behavior capability SCS items). In the second step we compared these item correlations with the correlation for the total (summed) score for each of the individual SCS scales. Discriminant validity is determined where a single item has a higher correlation to its own scale compared to that item's correlation to the other scale. Table 1 illustrates that all single items' correlation (to its own scale) exceeded that of the other scale, thus demonstrating discriminant validity of the independent SCS constructs.

To ensure against distortion due to a non-normal distribution, all variables were tested for excessive skewness and kurtosis. This was done by calculating the skewness and kurtosis indices from SPSS, converting them to z-scores, and comparing the result to ± 2.58 for a .01 level test (Avlonitis & Panagopoulos, 2006). All skewness values fell into acceptable ranges. The lowest was *intrinsic motivation* (−1.33) and the highest was *years of experience* (1.33). A similar test showed that all kurtosis values were acceptable with the lowest value for *gender* (−1.13) and the highest value for *intrinsic motivation* (2.48). Based on this as well as the checks for reliability and validity discussed, we conclude that the measures used in our study appropriately represent the constructs of interest.

2.3. Analysis technique

Prior to our analysis, all variables were mean centered. The three hypotheses were tested using a linear regression model on the entire

Table 1
Discriminant validity results.^a

Observed variable/items	Behavior activity SCS	Behavior capability SCS
<i>Behavior activity SCS items</i>		
Regularly reviews sales call reports from salespeople.	.42	.30
Regularly reviews sales activity reports ... from salespeople.	.46	.44
Compensates salespeople based on the quality of their sales activities.	.49	.41
Rewards salespeople based on their sales activities.	.50	.42
<i>Behavior capability SCS</i>		
Items actively participate in training salespeople42	.63
Regularly spend time coaching salespeople	.38	.68
Evaluate the professional development of salespeople	.47	.65
Provide performance feedback to salespeople based on selling skills and capabilities.	.49	.63

^a Results illustrate correlations of each item with its own scale (bold) relative to the other two scales.

Table 2
Means, standard deviation, and correlation among variables.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. IM	(.81)						
2. Gender (M=1; F=2)	.08	1					
3. Experience	.13*	-.08	1				
4. CRO	.31**	-.05	.15*	(.79)			
5. PC	.16**	-.06	.04	.19**	1		
6. B _a SCS	.30**	-.07	.01	.07	.04	(.74)	
7. B _c SCS	.21**	-.07	-.17	.08	.02	.55**	(.82)
Mean	5.90	1.30	9.51	5.57	0.35	4.89	4.76
S.D.	0.96	0.47	9.15	0.87	0.35	1.33	1.38
Avg. Var. Extr.	0.66			0.62		0.55	0.67

IM=Intrinsic Motivation, Gender (1=male, 2=female), Experience measured in years, CRO=Customer Relationship Orientation, PC=Percent Commission, B_aSCS=Behavior-Activity Sales Control System, B_cSCS=Behavior Capability Sales Control System.

N=275 for all observations.

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

() Cronbach's alpha scale reliability score on diagonals.

sample of 275 salespeople. Demographic variables (*gender and years of experience*), independent variables (CRO, PC, B_aSCS, B_cSCS) and the interactions (PC*B_aSCS and PC*B_cSCS) were regressed against the dependent variable IM. The purpose of testing the interaction effects was to confirm the moderating relationships predicted in H₂ and H₃.

3. Results

The results of the analysis are illustrated in Tables 2 and 3, and Fig. 2. Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics and correlations among variables. Multicollinearity does not pose a problem, as the largest variance inflation factor (VIF) is 3.39 (*for years of experience*). The model was significant ($F=8.85, p<.01$) and is illustrated in Table 3. The variables of the model account for 21.0% of the variance of IM (R -squared=.210, Adjusted R -squared=.187). Among the demographic control variables, both gender ($b=.12, p<.05$) and years of experience ($b=.19, p<.05$) are significant. In support of H₁, we show a significant and positive direct effect between CRO and IM ($b=.25, p<.01$). This confirms that *as salesperson customer relationship orientation increases, intrinsic motivation will also increase*.

To test the moderator effects of both forms of behavior control (*activity control* in H₂ and *capability control* in H₃) we tested and compared both the direct (PC, B_aSCS, and B_cSCS) and interaction (PC*B_aSCS and PC*B_cSCS) effects on IM. Evidence of a moderating effect exists when the moderator variable changes the form of the relationship between another independent variable and the dependent variable (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998). In this case, PC was positive and significant ($b=.10, p<.10$), B_aSCS was positive and significant ($b=.23, p<.01$) and B_cSCS was positive and non-significant ($b=.06$).

Fig. 2 graphically illustrates the effect of the moderator variables B_aSCS and B_cSCS between PC and IM. H₂ can be confirmed based on the significant interaction effect of PC*B_aSCS ($b=-.13, p<.05$) on IM. In addition, the slope of the relationship changes from positive to (significantly) negative at various levels of B_aSCS, confirming a moderating effect. To confirm this, a simple slope test was conducted to explore the form of the interaction (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003). In the first graph (see Fig. 2), the slope of the relationship between PC on IM at high and low levels of B_aSCS were estimated (i.e., one standard deviation above for high and one standard deviation below for low). The results are plotted using unstandardized estimates. This analysis indicates PC has a negative impact on IM at high levels of B_aSCS but not at low levels. Thus, *behavior activity control will negatively moderate the relationship between the percentage of commission as a portion of total salesperson compensation and salesperson intrinsic motivation*. Based on a non-significant relation-

ship between PC*B_cSCS and IM ($b=.03$) support for H₃ was not found. Fig. 2 also confirms that the change in slope between high and low levels of B_cSCS have relatively little impact on the PC to IM relationship.

4. Discussion, limitations, and future research

The purpose of our study was to apply a limited test to some of the CET based propositions developed by Pullins (2001) and show that in a relationship selling environment, commission compensation represents a performance contingent reward for a salesperson and that sales control systems may focus perceptions of these rewards as controlling or informative, thus impacting salesperson intrinsic motivation. Our results suggest that there is preliminary evidence of our proposed relationships. This provides the foundation to speculate how managers can use our findings to develop their salespeople and paves the way for further research on this topic. Furthermore it supports the ability of CET to integrate these various topics.

To begin, we first needed to test the linkage between relationship selling and salesperson intrinsic motivation. Based on our results, we found support of H₁. Here, as the level of a salesperson's customer relationship orientation increased, so did his/her level of intrinsic motivation. The literatures show that relationship selling behaviors are very important to salesperson performance (Badovick et al., 1993; Sujan, 1986; Tyagi, 1982; Walker et al., 1977; Weitz et al., 1986). Furthermore, in a changing environment where salespeople are compensated to function as relationship managers, the ability to identify and satisfy customer needs/problems will lead to higher levels of customer satisfaction and repeat orders. As the salesperson derives the satisfaction of knowing he/she was instrumental in helping the customer, a sense of enjoyment, pride, and accomplishment develops. These feelings fuel a sense of achievement, enjoyment and fulfillment, increasing overall intrinsic motivation with the selling job. Via this study we show that if managers are looking for ways to impact salesperson intrinsic motivation, then fostering a customer relationship-building environment is key. However, to integrate motivation and compensation, the role that managerial control and feedback must be considered.

According to our application of CET in the sales domain, how a particular reward is viewed by a salesperson will determine the ultimate effect on intrinsic motivation. We develop the notion that managerial sales control is one way to alter a salesperson's perception of commission compensation as a performance contingent reward. Our study of two forms of behavior SCS and their moderating effect on commission rewards to impact salesperson motivation produced some mixed findings. First off, our results confirmed (H₂) that

Table 3
Results of regression model (Dependent variable=IM).

Independent variable/construct	B-value	T-value	P-value	Hypothesis supported
Intercept		0.09	.93	
Gender (M=1; F=2)	.12	2.13	.03	
Experience	.19	1.92	.05	
CRO (H ₁)	.25	4.48	.00	Yes
PC	.10	1.73	.08	
B _a SCS	.23	3.42	.01	
B _c SCS	.06	0.94	.35	
PC*B _a SCS (H ₂)	-.13	-1.96	.05	Yes
PC*B _c SCS (H ₃)	.03	0.49	.63	No
Model statistics				
R ²	.210			
Adj. R ²	.187			
F-value	8.85			

IM=Intrinsic Motivation, Gender (1=male, 2=female), Experience measured in years, CRO=Customer Relationship Orientation, PC=Percent Commission, B_aSCS=Behavior-Activity Sales Control System, B_cSCS=Behavior Capability Sales Control System. N=275 for all observations.

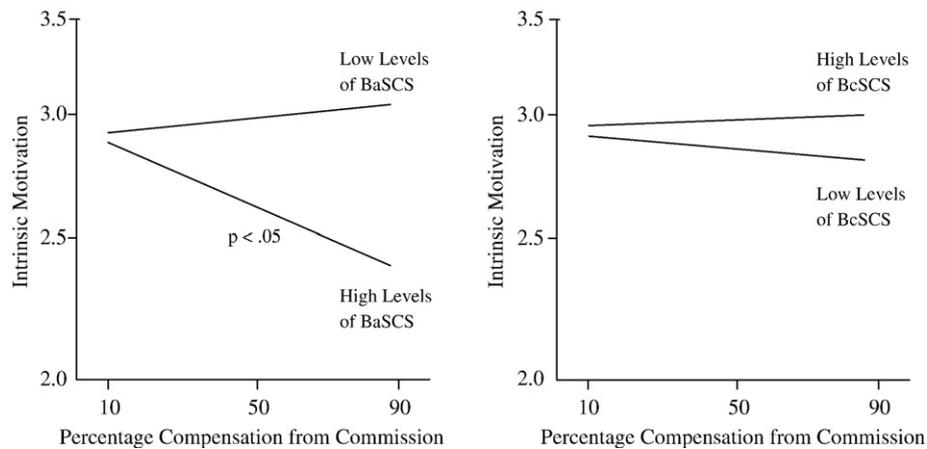


Fig. 2. Interaction of percentage of compensation from commission and behavior sales control systems on salesperson intrinsic motivation.

behavior activity control changes the direction of the relationship between the percentage of commission as a portion of total salesperson compensation and salesperson intrinsic motivation. We confirm this by showing that $PC * B_aSCS$ is negative and significant and that the direction of the PC on IM relationship significantly changes as the level of B_aSCS varies. As expected, managers exerting this form of behavior SCS will be closely scrutinizing the daily routine sales activities of the salesperson. Such activities include number of sales calls made, proposals written, demos conducted, etc. None of this activity monitoring provides any useful feedback to the salesperson as to how he/she might improve his/her skills or capabilities over the long-term to best manage the customer relationship. In this situation, the behavior activity SCS is short-term and manipulative in nature and leads to the performance contingent reward being perceived as controlling; thus the overall effect is detrimental to IM. The controlling aspect of this type of SCS combines with the commission reward to hurt intrinsic motivation because the likely result is to reduce job enjoyment, satisfaction, and overall feeling of providing a useful service to the customer.

Our results were not supportive of H_3 , that behavior capability control will positively moderate the relationship between the percentage of commission as a portion of total salesperson compensation and salesperson intrinsic motivation. Although the relationship was directionally correct (positive), the result was not significant. One possible explanation for this is that the performance contingent reward (i.e., commission compensation) given for shorter-term sales goals (i.e., closing sales) and the long-term informative feedback from the behavior capability SCS is incongruent. In essence, the coaching and development feedback provided is viewed primarily by the salesperson as not relevant to the selling task(s) at hand (e.g., may be considered hygiene/dissatisfiers that are perceived as insufficient). For our highly experience salesperson sample (mean level of experience is 9.5 years), coaching and skill development information may not impact intrinsic motivation the way it might to a salesperson at an earlier career stage. For example, the career stage literature (Cron, 1984) suggests that salespeople during the exploration stage (between ages of 20 and 30) are more likely to value more intrinsic aspects of the job (e.g., learning the skills required to do the job well and having a challenging position) than a salesperson in the establishment (30s) or maintenance stage (40s) where using skills to produce results and maintaining high levels of performance are valued. Perhaps our more mature salesperson sample desires more practical and immediate managerial support to impact current customer needs and performance contingent compensation rewards. It is not merely enough for managers to provide feedback for improvement on future sales rather there is the need to mix in actionable support of current selling efforts.

Because our study results were mixed, we must be careful not to generalize our findings; rather, we offer some preliminary and speculative insight into how managers might utilize this information to develop their salespeople. The context of our insights apply mainly to the type of selling founded upon customer relationship building and reward systems leveraged in part by commission compensation (e.g., selling parts to auto manufacturers; group life insurance policies for company employees; consulting services to small/mid-sized businesses). Finding that (in some cases) commission compensation and sales control strategy work together to affect salesperson motivation, especially when relationship selling is the goal, we can speculate how managers can effectively balance the developmental needs of their salespeople.

In one example, conventional wisdom suggests that salespeople early in their careers require more “hands-on” behavior activity control so that they can be assured of performing the required tasks and “doing the right things” to be successful at their job. Managerial monitoring of number of sales calls, proposals, product demos, etc. are examples of this type of behavior control. However, salespeople at this stage of their careers seek out intrinsically motivating work experiences (e.g., learning new skills, challenging work assignments, etc.) and desire more capability development than what may be provided by management. So practically speaking, the developmental and psychological needs of these early career salespeople may be at odds. Given that our findings suggest that behavior activity SCS used in a commissioned-based reward environment can hurt intrinsic motivation, managers might use this sales control strategy sparingly. Instead, using a SCS approach that is tailored to the individual salesperson may be considered. For example, a hybrid approach combining elements of both types of behavior SCS may maximize the positive impact of behavior capability control and minimize the negative impact of behavior activity control on salesperson intrinsic motivation.

For the later career stage salesperson, perceptions of motivating factors can change. For example, more mature salespeople who once viewed high pay and professional skill development opportunities as motivators/satisfiers, over time begin to view these as a hygiene factors and unless maintained they become dissatisfiers—negatively impacting intrinsic motivation (Shipley & Kiely, 1986). Because these salespeople now value maintenance of tangible rewards and high performance over more intrinsically motivating attributes of the job, managers might consider utilizing appropriate levels of behavior activity SCS without fear that performance levels will suffer. Similar logic can be applied for other factors, such as training and coaching. For these mature or later career salespeople, managers might allocate just enough resources to keep these salespeople’s skills sharp, however, too much of this type of managerial control may not provide

the intended motivational lift. These examples are provided to stimulate further thought as to how managers might utilize our tentative findings suggesting that commission compensation and managerial sales control work together in a relationship selling environment to impact salesperson intrinsic motivation.

The theoretical implications are equally important from this research. This research provides a limited empirical test of an application of Cognitive Evaluation Theory to the sales rewards domain as conceptually applied by Pullins (2001). It appears to be a useful theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between sales force reward and control systems, salesperson motivation, and customer relationship orientation, a dire need in our field (Brown et al., 2005). In addition, these findings help to explain a heretofore-problematic area of SCS work. Seeing that earlier studies (i.e., Oliver & Anderson, 1994) lack empirical evidence of a compensation–intrinsic motivation relationship and applications of Herzberg's DFT have produced mixed results across subject characteristics and context studied, we are able to use CET to explain varied findings from prior research. Such explanations should be helpful in understanding what situations we might expect salesperson intrinsic motivation to be impacted.

Some limitations of our study exist and should be pointed out. First off, our results suggest that female (more so than male) salespeople are more intrinsically motivated. Since studying gender effects was not a focal point of our study, we didn't develop a hypothesis specifically predicting this relationship. In addition, the female distribution of our sample (31%) was lower than the average U.S. population of female salespeople (48%—U.S. Census Bureau, 2006) so any significant relationships found based on gender could be considered speculative at best.

Second, our sample of salespeople seemed to derive the majority of their sales compensation from salary (approximately 35% of their compensation was from variable commissions). This may indicate that, on average, our sample is being paid to build longer-term relationships with their customers and less emphasis on short-term sales goals. Based on this, there may be a bias toward increased relationship orientation and intrinsic motivation. Utilizing a sample that is more balanced relative to fixed and variable compensation may potentially yield slightly different findings. An additional limitation is that our sample is relatively mature. The average total years of selling experience is 9.5 years. This experience level may also attribute to increased levels of relationship orientation and intrinsic motivation. Also, as presented in the paper's discussion, the salesperson's perception of motivating factors may be clouded by their experience, career stage, and other personal factors. The explanatory power of our intrinsic motivation model could be greatly increased by incorporating more personal variables as well as traits of the salesperson (e.g., self-efficacy, self-esteem, etc.) that have been shown to impact intrinsic motivation. Because of these limitations, managers should view the results presented in this paper as speculative and recognize that additional factors need to be taken into account when adjusting their managerial approach toward sales force motivation. For researchers, our results should provoke further thought and stimulate interest in subsequent research on the impact of managerial sales control on salesperson motivation.

There are a number of natural and important substantive extensions from this study that may serve to address a number of additional interesting questions. For example, what is the role of salary? Does the impact of SCS found here hold up under task non-contingent (salary) situations, or is the positive impact of salary on intrinsic motivation itself sufficient to overwhelm the SCS employed? What happens to SCS under task-contingent rewards (like Spiffs)? Would the feedback from a behavior-based control system counteract the typically negative impact of task-contingency on intrinsic motivation? What about competitively contingent rewards? Do the findings of Deci and his colleagues in non-sales domains on all these three types of rewards hold up as well in the sales literature as the performance contingent reward perspective has in this study? These are all questions that can be addressed using the CET framework presented in this paper. We believe that this paper may

potentially introduce a framework for carrying on the call by Brown et al. (2005) for advancing the future of this research area. Only more and varied research employing Cognitive Evaluation Theory will show whether that bears out.

Appendix A

Salesperson intrinsic motivation ($\alpha=0.81$), Adapted from Oliver and Anderson (1994)

For the following statements, circle the number that best describes your performance (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree).

When I perform well, I know it's because of my own desire to achieve
I sell because of the feeling of performing a useful service
I obtain a sense of accomplishment from my work
I feel a sense of personal growth and development in my work

Customer relationship orientation ($\alpha=0.79$), Adapted from Saxe and Weitz (1982)

Use the following continuum to describe how you approach your sales job (1 = more like the description to the left, 7 = more like the description to the right).

Order taker	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Order getter
Transaction focused	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Relationship focused
Create customer needs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Uncover customer needs
Tell customers what they need	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Ask customers what they need
Push products/services	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Help customers solve problems
Sell products/services	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Sell solutions
Short term focused	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Long-term focused
Provide no after sales support	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Emphasize service after the sale
Product focused	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Customer focused

Behavior activity sales control system ($\alpha=0.74$), Adapted from Piercy, Cravens, and Lane (2003)

For the following statements, circle the number that best describes to what extent your sales manager exhibits the following practices (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree)

Regularly reviews sales call reports from salespeople.
Regularly reviews sales activity reports (proposals, demonstrations, presentations) from salespeople.
Compensates salespeople based on the quality of their sales activities.
Rewards salespeople based on their sales activities.

Behavior capability sales control system ($\alpha=0.82$), Adapted from Piercy, Cravens, and Lane (2003)

For the following statements, circle the number that best describes to what extent your sales manager exhibits the following practices (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree)

Actively participate in training salespeople on the job
Regularly spend time coaching salespeople
Evaluate the professional development of salespeople
Provide performance feedback to salespeople based on selling skills and capabilities.

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