
Motivation of sales teams-the case of Cisco

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ABSTRACT: The task of supervising and managing frontline professionals can be a difficult, demanding and sometimes frustrating job. 'Frontline' workers, who are in direct, regular contact with clients and managers, can be a special group, within organizations. Whether they are salespeople or support product/service delivery processes, they tend to shoulder and internalize the demands/complaints of both customers and organizations. On the one hand they have to satisfy customers, while on the other hand they have to comply with formal guidelines, informal norms regarding organizational culture, etc. These employees can often have valuable insights for the parties involved. In addition, their contribution to organizational success, their difficult position or the knowledge they may bring may not be recognized. It is important that supervisors who manage "frontline" employees and managers recognize their accomplishments, their contributions to organizations, and their positive, job-related performance. Nothing should be taken for granted, as it is very easy for frontline workers to develop feelings of injustice. Their work can be intense and emotionally demanding, and it can be very easy for them to develop feelings of bitterness and resentment, for the 'people in the office'. Motivation of sales is a conceptualization that must be further explored. In this project it was investigated at a theoretical level and through the analysis of a case study of Cisco.

KEYWORDS: Cisco, motivation, salespeople, supervision, expectancy theory, job satisfaction, sales force.

1. INTRODUCTION

The task of supervising and managing frontline professionals can be a difficult, demanding and sometimes frustrating chore (Larson & Hewitt, 2005). 'Frontline' employees, who are in direct, systematic contact with clients and managers, can be a special group, within organizations. Whether they are salespeople or support product/service delivery processes, they tend to shoulder and internalize the demands/complaints of both customers and organizations. On the one hand they have to satisfy customers, while on the other hand they have to comply with formal guidelines, informal norms regarding organizational culture, etc. These can lead to increased internal conflicts or intense, internal turmoil.

These employees can often have valuable insights for the parties involved. In addition, their contribution to organizational success, their difficult situations or the potential knowledge they may bring that could help organizations differentiate themselves or achieve a competitive advantage, may not be recognized.

It is important that supervisors who manage "frontline" employees and managers of the same category, recognize their achievements, their contribution to the organizations and their positive, work-related performance. Nothing should be taken for granted, as it is very easy for frontline workers to develop feelings of injustice. Their work can be intense and emotionally demanding, and it can be very easy for them to develop feelings of bitterness and resentment, for 'people in the office' who don't understand them or 'do them an injustice without their knowledge'.

In general, job placements that have been well thought through at the design level, are likely to lead to job satisfaction, motivation and meaningful contribution from the workers' perspective. On the other hand, jobs and duties, where appropriate understandings have not been developed, and where requirements have not been approached holistically, may contribute to negative, work-related experiences and deep feelings of dissatisfaction. Effective managers tend to understand the importance of employee recognition and can link specific recognition techniques to employees' unique needs. Effective communication, honest listening to problems/concerns and ongoing encouragement can be key dimensions of effective human resource management.

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In the same context, the concepts of motivation and work productivity have been significantly linked in many contexts and in a number of scientific studies, while the concept of organizational effectiveness is being studied. Both of the above concepts are vital in assessing the value of human resources as central, productive factors (Hussein & Simba, 2017; Mulema, 2019). In the same vein, Carlsen, (2003) argued that a mobilized workforce can contribute to the achievement of a competitive advantage and to the development of organizational effectiveness. As a competitive advantage, may come from a unique, difficult to imitate and replicate situation related to the product/service being pronounced, the relevant knowledge of 'frontline' personnel can be valuable.

Leadership has the key responsibility of developing policies and practices that lead to enhancing workplace motivation in order to ensure organizational productivity. Lack of work motivation, can lead to significant problems; in addition to low performance and high turnover levels, hostile actions towards the organization can be observed. Various phenomena have been observed, such as a lack of respect for the infrastructure, the spread of negative comments, etc.

It should be emphasized, that negative comments coming from within an organization can be extremely powerful and influential, as it is perceived that there exists some 'internal knowledge and credibility'. Singh et al. 2012 (in Bawa, 2017), have defined productivity as the optimal utilization of resources in the production of goods and services that meets predetermined objectives. Motivation has been understood as the appropriate guidance of employees in order to direct their efforts towards achieving organizational goals, increasing their job performance and the ability to manage their multiple roles (Ran 2009; Armstrong, 2006).

Enhanced motivation can therefore result in increased alignment in regards to personal and organizational goals and enhanced ability to manage multiple, often conflicting job roles. Management should not just be limited to the provision of material resources, equipment and material support, but the total efforts should be directed towards increasing the understanding of deeper employee needs and the factors influencing work motivation in order to enhance productivity and organizational performance.

Researchers have not agreed as to the provision of a commonly accepted definition of the concept of work motivation (Reid & Parsons, 1995). One direction that many scholars have converged on, is the approach of the concept as the willingness of an individual to exert high levels of effort towards fulfilling organizational goals while satisfying his or her needs.

Mikkelsen et al. (2017), reported that the concept is related to deep, internal factors that may reinforce action and external factors that can also act as catalysts. They further emphasized that the concept of motivation has 3 central dimensions; direction, intensity and duration/resilience. Therefore, motivation can be an internal force that determines the direction of individual efforts, their intensity and their durability over time.

The attempt to understand the different motivational styles of employees can contribute to the improving of the internal reality of organizations (Hsiung & Tsai, 2017). Although individuals may present significant variations, in terms of their "individual motivation mix", it can be emphasized that there are common patterns and factors that should be taken seriously by organizations. According to Cameron and Green (2019) the internal force that provides energy to individuals in order to achieve organizational and personal goals is known as work motivation. Work motivation has therefore been reported as an internal process that can help the initiation and the sustainability of efforts in regards to achieving specific performance standards (Larsson et al., 2018).

Something significant may be the following: the alignment of individual needs and organizational goals should not be understood literally. Obviously individual and organizational needs can differ. What can be achieved is a mutually beneficial relationship (win/win situation) where individuals satisfy their deepest needs while fulfilling the organizational aspirations. Organizations that make these connections, between the fulfilling of the organizational goals and the satisfaction of the deepest, internal needs of employees, will tend to be successful.

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The most important form of motivation is now considered to be the intrinsic dimension, where individuals are activated by the simple pleasure of engaging with a task itself or by satisfying deep, internal needs (Beal, 2017). According to Cameron and Green, (2019) motivation can be linked to the tendency of individuals to acquire competencies and skills. From this point, the importance of individual motivation for organizations can be realized, as it is a means of enhancing individual performance and effectiveness.

Motivation is related to both individual performance and to the enjoyment of one's work life (Reid & Parsons, 1995). Motivation has been defined as the purposeful behavior of achieving certain things and satisfying unmet needs. Regardless of their size, too many organizations face problems at the level of work motivation. This can lead to job dissatisfaction, falling morale, increased absenteeism, etc. Often managers notice this situation, and are unable to take appropriate action. More accurately, many managers have not been proactive in terms of strengthening the conditions for enhancing motivation. On the contrary, they are called upon, to manage situations of reduced motivation, often adopting piecemeal measures in a panic mode.

Motivation plays a very important role in a person's life, whether it is about personal improvement or the contributing to the performance of an organization. Highly motivated employees do not need detailed instructions, tend to take initiatives, are willing to take on additional responsibilities, and are innovative and creative. Employees with high levels of motivation can contribute (Doda, 2022):

- To the enhancement of a positive atmosphere within the organization
- In ways that their colleagues are happy and feel safe at work
- to the development of satisfied customers and interest groups
- to the achievement of superior performance results

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the classic, scientific literature, the best-known motivational theory is possibly that of Abraham Maslow, where he developed the theory of the hierarchy of needs (Bawa 2017). Maslow emphasized the existence of different levels of employee needs, as the physiological, the safety and security, social, self-esteem and self-actualization (Timoti, 2020).

Maslow argued that employees are motivated by a higher, hierarchical need that has not been met. Therefore, when lower-level needs are satisfied, individuals will tend to feel a strong internal need to satisfy "higher needs" (Bawa, 2017). Herzberg, conducted studies to identify the factors in an individual's workplace that can cause satisfaction or dissatisfaction (Rounok & Parvin, 2011, at Timoti, 2020). His major contribution consists of separating the concepts of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. A factor may not necessarily lead to satisfaction, but to the enhancement of dissatisfaction. Therefore, there are factors (hygiene factors) whose fulfilment does not lead to an increase in satisfaction but to the non-development of dissatisfaction.

The real motivators are the factors that actually lead to increased satisfaction. These factors have to do with the higher, hierarchical needs of individuals, such as the sense of achievement, self-realization, recognition, development, taking responsibility, deriving pleasure from the work itself, etc. (Bawa 2017). Dissatisfaction stems from the lack of factors such as satisfactory salary, effective supervision, prestige, relationships with colleagues, benefits, etc. (Bawa 2017; Rounok & Parvin 2011). The literature in the service delivery sector suggests that these factors matter. Common reasons front line workers cite for their desire to leave an organization are relational difficulties with colleagues, poor supervision, and low wages and benefits (Larson, Lakin, & Bruininks, 1998).

Other very important theories related to the concept under study are equity theory, self-determination theory and expectancy theory. The first involves the development of hypothetical comparisons, from the perspective of individuals, between inputs (effort, resources consumed, education, etc.) and outputs (wages, benefits, development, etc.). This dipole is compared with other individuals (inside or outside the organization) or even with the same individual at other time. If perceived mismatches are found, feelings of injustice may arise that can

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dramatically reduce motivation.

Expectancy theory relates to an individual's expectation that an action will lead to an attractive outcome or reward (Russell, 1999, at LaLiberte, Hewitt & Larson, 2005). The theory focuses on the following three relationships: effort-performance, performance-reward, and reward-personal satisfaction. Individuals are expected to be motivated if they believe that their effort will result in a performance that will be accepted/respected, at the same time that it will be associated with certain significant rewards that will be valued (De Simone, 2015). Self-determination theory emphasizes that individuals are mainly motivated in relation to the acquisition of autonomy, competence and relational (proximity) benefits (Cherry, 2022).

As highlighted before, although intrinsic motivation is considered an optimal form of motivation and has been linked to multiple benefits, such as enjoyment, persistence and increased psychological well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2008), extrinsic motivation can sometimes be useful for initiating action in relation to activities that are not intrinsically interesting (for example, recycling, reading, obeying to traffic rules, etc.).

In other words, coercing or conforming individuals to social norms that define desirable behavior can often conflict with maintaining individual autonomy. At the opposite extreme, however, it has been found that external cues can in the long run carry substantial costs in terms of learning (Kohn, 1999). Moreover, the use of external rewards tends to reduce the likelihood that genuine interest is maintained and developed.

It can be challenging for service organizations to understand and explain the influencing factors of internal motivation. Front line employees are often not recognized for the diverse responsibilities and demanding roles they internalize within an organization, and there may be few opportunities for advancement for those employees who honestly want to grow (Jaskulski & Ebenstein, 1996, at LaLiberte, Hewitt & Larson, 2005).

The distinction between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation can be very useful for the organizations, as it gives them a clear direction of action. Intrinsic motivation refers to engaging in behaviors that are intrinsically satisfying or enjoyable. This form of motivation is not linked to external rewards. It can be understood as a child running, jumping, etc., simply for the pleasure of that activity.

It is very important for the organizations to separate tangible/monetary incentives from non-monetary/intangible incentives. Monetary incentives can be understood as the beginning of the "existence of a pulse or a heartbeat", while non-monetary incentives as the continuation of the existence of this pulse (Bravo well, 2019). This means that material benefits cannot ensure the long-term existence of motivation. Employees can be motivated initially through extrinsic (material) rewards, but intrinsic ones will ensure that this process continues. In relation to extrinsic incentives there should be a thorough investigation in regards to what constitutes a good deal overall (salary, benefits, etc.). In terms of intrinsic rewards, conditions should be developed where people are attracted and developed, and where there is a fit between them and the organization.

If this fit does not exist, there is a risk that organizational resources are wasted. Although individuals and organizations differ, there may be ways in which organizational values will tend to attract the right people, that can be motivated in the future. The outcomes of the concept of motivation are presented schematically below.

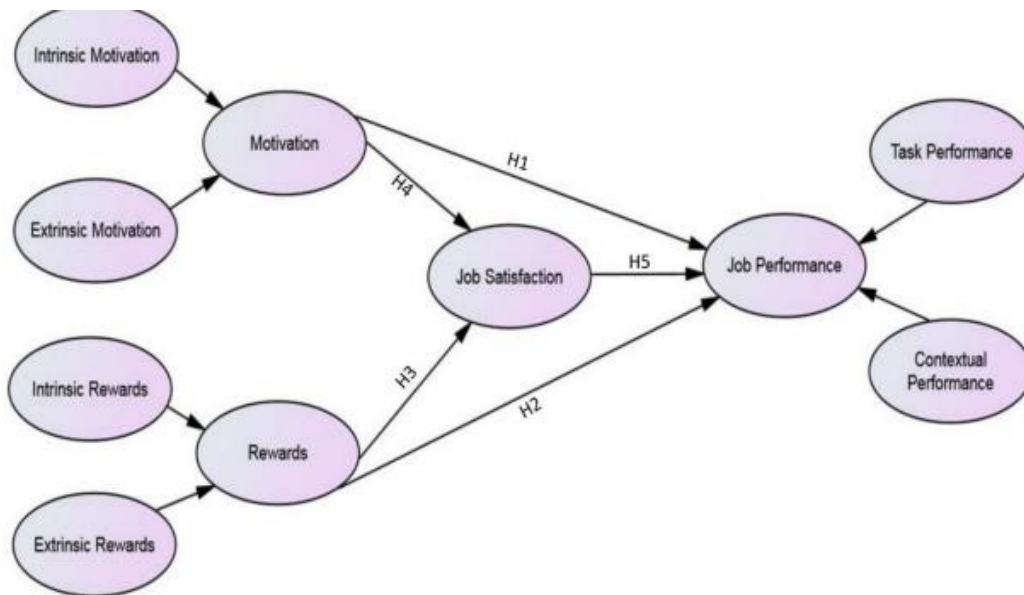


Figure 1. Relationships between motivation/ rewards, job satisfaction and job performance

Source: Kumari et al., (2021)

In the figure above, it appears that motivation (internal and external), as well as rewards, can affect job performance, through job satisfaction. Therefore, motivated employees tend to be satisfied and to perform in positive ways. The concept of motivation can include elements such as an individual's desires, needs and drives (Badura et al., 2020), while it concerns the internal processes of individuals in order to achieve their goals (Liu et al., 2021).

Motivation is considered as a source of enhancing job satisfaction (Catharina & Victoria, 2015). According to Nyinyimbe, (2020), motivation is an ideal tool for achieving superior performance in the workplace, which can lead to organizational effectiveness. Aizza et al. (2018) pointed out that intrinsic and extrinsic motivators can form the basis of developing strong bonds between organizations and employees.

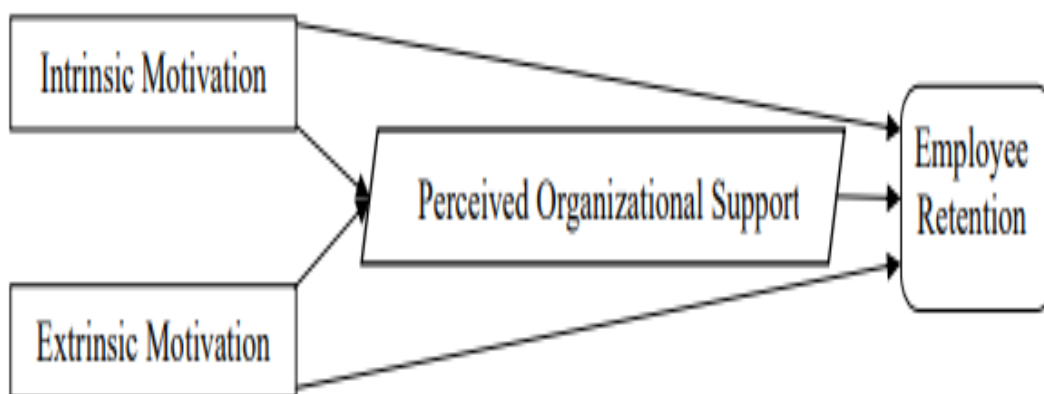


Figure 2. Relationships between motivation, perceived organizational support and employee retention

Source: Shah&Asad, (2018)

Research by Shah & Asad, (2018) showed that motivation can enhance employee retention in organizations, through (mediation process) perceived organizational support. The concept of POS is very important and concerns the employees' perceptions of the extent to which the organization values their contribution, and cares about their

deepest needs and their well-being.

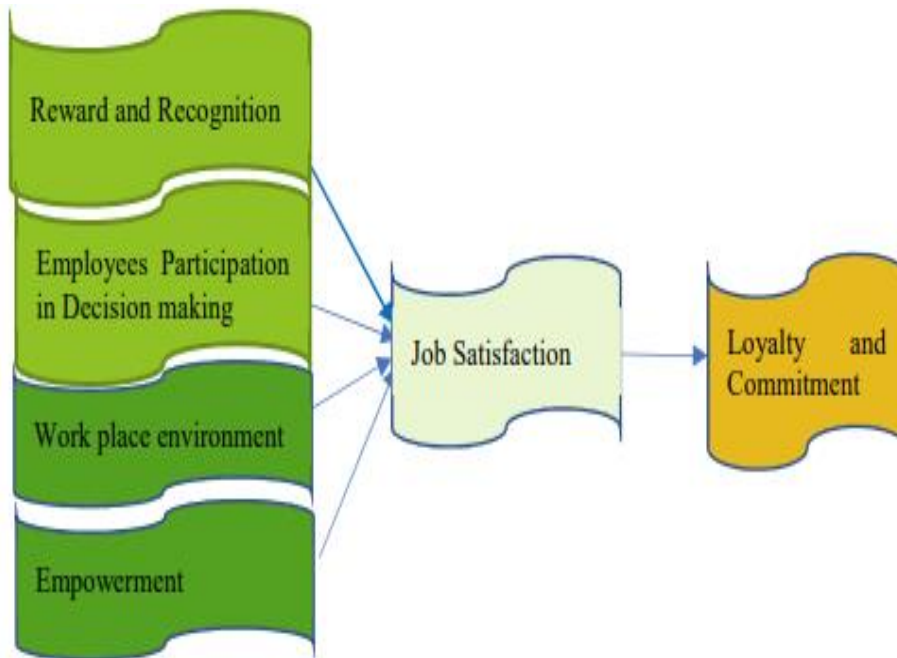


Figure 3. Relationships between motivation factors, satisfaction, loyalty and commitment

Source: Frempong et al., (2018)

From the figure above, it can be seen that the motivating factors (recognition, employee participation in decision-making, positive environment and empowerment) are associated with satisfaction and subsequently with loyalty and work commitment.

3. COMPANY PROFILE

Cisco Systems is an American technology company, which has a global presence and is known for its computer networking products. As a B2B company, Cisco never became widely known, but it is one of the largest companies in the US (Lewis, 2023). It was founded in 1984 and is headquartered in San Jose, California. Cisco Systems was founded by Leonard Bosack and Sandra Lerner, a couple who had met while being students at Stanford University. After graduating from the College, they worked in the faculty, managing the computer facilities of different departments. Bosack discovered a way to connect computer networks. He and Lerner were able to recognize that existing technology could be adapted to use large-scale connections. In December 1984, they founded Cisco Systems, from the city with the same name in San Francisco.

Cisco Systems grew rapidly in the early 1990s. The company in 1993 began acquiring other companies. Its first purchase, Crescendo Communications, allowed Cisco to move decisively into the field of network switching devices. In 1994 the company moved its headquarters from Menlo Park, California to San Jose. The new CEO continued to follow the strategy of growth through acquisitions. In 1998 Cisco acquired Selsius Systems, a company with expertise in Internet telephony.

In 2006 Cisco launched Telepresence, an evolution of video conferencing that aims to allow people in different locations to interact as if they were in the same room. Cisco's expertise in networking has made it a leading provider of Internet of Things (IoT) products, a concept often thought to be associated with Cisco.

4. RESEARCH-ANALYSIS

According to Surber, (2014), who has worked in sales for over 18 years and is a partner of Cisco, sales professionals have a common need for recognition. Only 5-20% of salespeople are "intrinsically motivated" meaning that they truly enjoy the selling process, while 80% seek constant encouragement, praise and recognition. According to her, many sales managers who may inherently enjoy their work may not understand that almost 80% of salespeople need something more.

This awareness gap can cause serious morale and productivity problems if the deeper needs of sales teams are not adequately addressed. According to Surber, (2014) a study found that people in performance positions tend to experience a ratio of positive to negative emotions of at least 3:1 (3 negative to one positive). Therefore, within their organization they should experience at least the reverse: a 3-to-1 ratio of positive compared to negative interactions. Negative feedback is an integral part of a salesperson's daily life, so one can imagine the importance of praise and recognition.

What sales managers can do is to recognize and praise their salespeople on a regular basis. A multitude of initiatives and programs can be utilized that do not cost money, but can produce a positive bottom line. Providing recognition can take several forms:

- Monthly, or weekly contests for top sellers
- Earning a small trophy for top sellers
- Reward sellers more often with small items of low value
- Constant verbal praise (a simple thank you)

Cisco, in addition to the above, has developed a complete rewards program for its partners (external vendors), as it has been understood that the success of partners is equal to its own success. The system is about external partners earning points that can be redeemed for valuable items.

Therefore, it appears that the company under study takes very seriously into account the reward and motivation process of its salespeople, whether they are internal or external partners. The philosophy in relation to the above is based on demonstrating recognition of the efforts of front-line employees, unlike many companies where they have a more superficial approach.

5. CONCLUSIONS/ SUGGESTIONS

As shown by the analysis of the organization under study, the main force behind the existence of labor motivation, was the practical demonstration of recognition. Intrinsic motivation or intrinsic rewards can be a significant factor in achieving differentiation and fulfilling competitive advantage in organizations. It may be much easier for organizations to engage in planning monetary rewards and benefits, thinking that in doing so, they have achieved their goal. Nonetheless, monetary rewards/benefits should not be underestimated, as their poor management can lead to perceived feelings of unfairness, which can be extremely influential. Internal rewards on the other side, can be labyrinthine, complex and more personalized. From the scientific literature, it can be argued that intrinsic motivation may be mainly related to feelings of self-actualization/development, to feelings of belonging to something wider, to feelings of competence/autonomy, or to the pleasure of the work itself. The above (which may have structural relationships and connections) should be satisfied, so that there are no issues of reduced motivation, increases in absenteeism, turnover rates, etc.

A critical point might be the following: although employees may seek different dosages within a mixture, they tend to seek the same "motivational mix". As Alderfer (Parvin & Rounok, 2011) pointed out, employees may have physical, relational, and developmental needs that may combine in intensity. Therefore, it does not mean that the satisfaction of one level will inevitably lead to the creation of motivation for the fulfillment of the higher one. Enjoyment of work itself can be a personal matter. This is why empowerment is important. When employees can control key dimensions of their work, the likelihood of them deriving intrinsic job satisfaction may increase. Furthermore, when they control these conditions, they may derive satisfaction from the results of their work, as

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they will tend to credit themselves and their choices rather than external factors. Intrinsic satisfaction can also be linked to the perceived meaning of work. The role of leadership can be decisive at this point. An organization's vision and the practices it adopts can significantly influence the meaning of work for many employees. Employees are most likely to derive satisfaction from work that serves an overall, "good cause," and that contributes to society and communities. If this is not immediately visible, efforts should be made to achieve it to some extent.

This can be very important for sales teams. It can be important for them to know that sales, in addition to their personal success, can contribute to a larger cause. The role of corporate social responsibility can be important here. Even though an organization's products/services may not be immediately visible as socially positive (for example, a company may sell chips), organizational actions in relation to CSR can have a significant impact on this.

The second level of internal motivation may concern the deep needs of social inclusion and belonging. Individuals tend to have deep needs in regards to feeling a sense of belonging and in developing relationships with other people. In an organization this can be determined by the intensity of the overall effort to create conditions for the development of healthy relationships internally. Leadership and conflict management when properly applied, can enhance the overall climate and culture of the organization, something that can facilitate the development of meaningful relationships. Elements such as the obsession with formality, the lack of tolerance for diversity etc. can undermine a climate where healthy relationships can develop, based on trust and the exchange of fruitful perspectives.

Most sales people, although they may tend to be competitive, certainly have something to gain from operating in an environment where there is tolerance for error and failure, as there is a direction of mutual push forward through knowledge sharing. Recognition can be in the same context, extremely important, for sellers, for a number of reasons. Initially, recognition may mean that leadership and the organization understand the inherent difficulties of the position (such as the pressure for results, the need to protect morale since most sales involve negative results, etc.) and the importance of the position (the sellers are brand ambassadors). In this way, salespeople can feel that they are being treated fairly, and can engage in developing healthy relationships within the organization.

Salespeople have an extremely demanding job, where elements such as resilience and flexibility are essential. Both of these elements/qualities can be enhanced by human relations within the organization, as well as by practical organizational support. A sense of security can be very important for sellers, knowing that the results do not always depend on them and the quality of their efforts.

Managers' efforts to develop trusting relationships with salespeople are expected to be appreciated. Managers should be able to listen attentively and actively and provide appropriate feedback (McKee, 2022). Trust can be extremely important in managing sales teams, as their work is extremely difficult and often involves unpredictable factors. The protection of the work-life balance can be another crucial element, since the hardness of the professional conditions is indirectly recognized and there is an organizational support combined with the respect of the individual, outside the work context.

Finally, the dimension of self-fulfillment and personal development may depend on appropriate training/ overall support and the fair offer of development conditions. Many front-line workers (such as salespeople) may feel that not only is their overall contribution to organizations not being recognized, but also that there are barriers to their personal development. For example, personal development should not depend on individual sales, but to a salesperson's contribution to group sales and organizational success. One way is to listen and to encourage salespeople's suggestions in terms of boosting sales and improving customer service and experience.

Salespeople who are evaluated on the basis of sales may develop cynical perceptions of customers and the organization. Conversely, salespeople who are encouraged to offer insights into the overall customer experience

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may show increased engagement levels. This can be judged as a group rather than individually. For example, sales teams that consistently present valuable insights and solutions to customers and their problems may receive significant rewards. In addition, people who present corresponding proposals may be promoted within the groups and later, within the organization. This can be a simple way of enhancing the internal motivation of salespeople, since there is an essential process of development and growth, linked to an essential organizational development.

6. EPILOGUE

Salespeople and front-line employees in general can be a special form of human resources. Their systematic contact with customers can create strong emotions and conditions. As pointed out, salespeople can be the intermediaries of the demands for a range of groups: customers, managers, leaders, salespeople's families, etc. Sales are associated with resistance to failure, as most candidates will be negative. The protection of the morale and durability are considered the greatest virtues in order to properly and effectively represent a brand.

Modern organizations should learn to delve deeper into the concept of sales force motivation, as they are the vanguard of organizations. For this reason, perhaps the most important variable in relation to the motivation of sales teams, appears to be recognition.

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