

ACHIEVEMENT MOTIVATION AND QUALITY OF SELLING PERFORMANCE: AN EXPLORATION

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ABSTRACT

In today's rapidly changing selling climate characterized by increasing physical separation of salespeople from their managers and greater salesperson empowerment, performance outcomes depend to a large extent upon the degree to which salespeople are able to sustain their self-motivation. This paper takes an exploratory look at one aspect of salespeople's self-motivation, their achievement motivation, in relation to their job performance. It explores the way components of achievement motivation contribute to the quality of salespeople's performance.

A heterogeneous judgment sample of persons based in the Southeastern United States ($n = 62$) completed a self-administered questionnaire and returned it to the researchers in a self-addressed envelope. Participating salespersons were order getters, and sold a variety of products including computers, real estate, insurance and financial services. Approximately half sold to business consumers while the remainder sold to in-home consumers. The sample was balanced as to gender and spanned a wide range of ages and experience in sales. Approximately 50% were college graduates.

Components of achievement motivation--work, mastery, and competitiveness--were measured by self-reports on three sub-scales of the Work and Family Orientation Scale (Helmreich and Spence 1978). Quality of selling performance was measured by self-reports of performance of the personal selling process, operationalized as six functions of selling and non-selling activities (Jolson 1974) that had been used previously in the literature (Comer 1996). A set of importance weights were used to combine the function scores into an overall measure of performance quality. A series of personal characteristics of the salesperson and characteristics of the sales job was also measured to provide statistical control and to rule out alternative explanations.

Regression analysis showed a significant positive relationship between the components of achievement motivation and overall quality of performance score (Adjusted $R^2 = .249$; $F_{8,53} = 3.128$, $p < .006$). The standardized regression coefficient for mastery motivation was positive and significant ($\beta = .32$, $p < .022$), but the coefficients of the other two motivation variables were not. Multivariate regression of the seven individual performance quality scores on the components of achievement motivation revealed a significant Wilk's lambda ($\Lambda = .149$, $F_{56,258} = 1.959$, $p < .001$). Relationships between selling effectiveness and mastery motivation were significant only for the functions of contacting, probing for needs, stimulating desire, retaining, and non-selling activities. The analysis suggests that mastery motivation is a highly desirable characteristic for salespeople that is likely to affect quality of performance and should be investigated further. Work and competitiveness did not impact quality of performance, but their impact on other aspects of performance, e.g., effort, needs to be investigated.

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