

Abstract of Doctoral Thesis

Customer Creation by the Sales Force —Sales Force Innovation in Business Market—

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This purpose of this study is to reconsider Japanese research on sales primarily in the 1990s, and to focus on knowledge labor, which had not been emphasized at that point, to identify the critical elements determining management structures where the salesperson's creativity in value creation and freedom and responsibility in managing that creativity determine the quality of that organization's sales. This study will also offer new ideas to management regarding customer creation.

Japanese research on sales began in earnest with research on logistics in the 1990s by the likes of Masanori Tamura, Junzo Ishii, and Katsuyoshi Takashima of Kobe University. These researchers envisioned a shift away from traditional individual sales that rely on a limited number of highly talented individuals to an organizational sales model that leverages IT in a new sales configuration of “sales using databases,” “process management,” and “team sales.” To say that this research formed the foundation for subsequent and current research on sales in Japan is no exaggeration.

However, not all companies found success in this sales revolution, and some clearly did not. It was discovered that, while the successful companies had effectively operating customer management systems that used databases, tracked the progress of sales activities, and employed interdepartmental collaboration, there were also cases of companies with the mistaken notions about sales force control and sales regimentation, as well as implementation of systems with insufficient explanation to those in the field, so the systems were unable to function properly and were mere pretenses.

In our review of literature, we considered the characteristics of salesforce management research according to marketing theory in the U.S. since the 1920s, as well as the significance of and issues involved in “sales process innovation” as propounded by Takashima. Based on recent discussions regarding the creativity of salespeople in the U.S., we have proposed a theoretical framework for customer creation (customer-oriented practices in an organization, discovery of opportunities for innovation, and

customer creation through marketing) that is based on the theories of Drucker. With respect to case study research, we have noted three cases of sales success by production goods companies and have considered them in relation to the aforementioned framework.

The primary conclusions of this study are as follows. In regard to topic (1), customer-oriented practices in an organization, the mission of companies' sales organizations is to contribute to their customers' businesses, rather than taking the stance of selling the company's particular products and services. We found that when salespeople take this broader perspective, they recognize the importance of sales to their organization and correct their personal biases to become more customer oriented. In doing so, salespeople in the field will proactively use databases and generate ideas and strategies for improvement.

In regard to topic (2), discovery of opportunities for innovation, companies implementing their own process management face potential changes in their markets and their customers. In addition to developing salespeople's capabilities (to create opportunities from change), we found that process management can also be used as a means of reading markets and potential customer needs.

In regard to topic (3), customer creation through marketing, we found that salespeople become their own coordinators in merging disparate businesses and differentiate themselves from competitors by providing comprehensive services in response to the business lifecycles of their customers, while also contributing to value creation for their customers. In doing so, salespeople will craft business stories on their own initiative and leverage team sales to create knowledge and new customer value that integrates this knowledge.

Studies such as this one show that companies effectively leverage their sales organizations and create customer value by developing and managing sales as a form of knowledge labor.