

**MANAGEMENT**

**AN OVERVIEW OF THE DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF SALES MANAGERS**

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**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study is to conduct an overview of the duties and responsibilities of sales managers. Accordingly, based on a literature review and the findings in previous studies, the duties and responsibilities of sales managers are listed, examined and evaluated. In the extant literature, it has been observed that the tasks of this management position have not been widely evaluated, although sales managers are the key elements in effective salesforce management and are crucial to a company's achievements. This research contributes to the existing literature, as the topic is not only reviewed with respect to the current literature but also supported by the personal interpretation of the author based on his own professional experiences as a sales manager in various companies. In addition to findings from the current literature on the duties and responsibilities of sales managers, this study emphasizes the importance of stakeholder relations management for sales managers and recommends researchers to consider including this dimension in relevant future researches. To conclude, the study proposes some practical managerial implications for sales managers in fulfilling their duties and responsibilities.

**Keywords:** *Management, Sales Managers, Stakeholder Relations Management*

**YÖNETİM**

**SATIŞ MÜDÜRLERİNİN GÖREV VE SORUMLULUKLARININ GENEL DEĞERLENDİRMESİ**

**ÖZ**

Bu çalışmanın amacı, satış müdürlerinin görev ve sorumluluklarını genel olarak ele almaktır. Bu doğrultuda, konu ile ilgili alan yazını taramasına ve geçmiş araştırma bulgularına dayanarak satış müdürlerinin görev ve sorumlulukları listelenmiş, incelenmiş ve değerlendirilmiştir. Mevcut literatürde, işletmelerin başarısı ve etkili satış gücü yönetimi için kilit unsurlar olmalarına rağmen ilgili yönetici pozisyonuna ait görevlerin yaygın olarak irdelenmediği gözlemlenmiştir. Araştırma mevcut literatüre katkı sağlarken, tespitler yazarın çeşitli işletmelerdeki profesyonel satış yönetimi rolü deneyimlerine bağlı olarak kişisel yorumu ile de desteklenmiştir. Satış müdürlerinin görev ve sorumluluklarına ilişkin literatürden elde edilen bulgulara ek olarak, bu çalışma satış müdürleri için paydaş ilişkileri yönetiminin önemini vurgulamakta ve araştırmacılara bu boyutu gelecekte konu ile ilgili yürütülecek araştırmalara dahil etmelerini tavsiye etmektedir. Araştırmanın sonucunda satış müdürlerine görev ve sorumluluklarını yerine getirirken önem vermeleri gereken bazı pratik yönetsel uygulamalar önerilmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Yönetim, Satış Müdürleri, Paydaş İlişkileri Yönetimi*

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

In response to economic, social, technological, and political pressures and to rapidly changing customer demands and dynamic purchase experiences, companies continuously adapt their capacities to the environment. To achieve a competitive advantage in the market with respect to rivals, sales capabilities are crucial. It is thus no surprise that many companies continue to spend time and money strengthening their sales fundamentals, professionals and teams.

In all markets, companies and their salespeople try to sell their products to buyers. However, to differentiate oneself from competitors and to go a step further in a trading relationship, greater efforts must be made. In this context, some researchers mention that buyers' and suppliers' approaches to developing alliances may differ (Heide & John, 1990, p. 34). From Weitz & Bradford (1999)'s perspective, a vital parameter that must be considered in this relationship is that buyers often have greater loyalty to salespeople than to firms (p. 241). The literature shows that salespeople are critical to creating value in competition.

The purpose of this study is to conduct an overview of sales managers' duties and responsibilities. In the current literature, it has been observed that the tasks involved in the position of sales managers have not been widely evaluated, even though sales managers are the key elements in successful salesforce management and a company's achievements. The literature review is also supported by the personal interpretation of the author, given his own professional experience as a sales manager in various companies. Therefore, this research may provide the existing literature with another viewpoint in this context.

## **2. CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND**

The nature and aim of selling is to complete a sale. Selling is the interaction of one person with another with the aim of persuading or influencing an individual or transferring an idea in order to realize a purchasing transaction. Companies train their sales employees to improve their selling competencies. Salespeople are the most significant links to customers. A good company strategy may fail because of an incompetent salesforce. The core business of sales teams is to sell the company's product portfolio or services in order to reach company goals by managing customer relationships.

In terms of worldwide evaluation, many firms adopted a sales orientation as the level of competition began to increase in the early 19th century. From that time onward, many improvements have continued to be made in sales management as businesses have kept growing. The salesforce comprises people from a variety of backgrounds. In an organization, employees have the mission to achieve sales objectives. The sales function is very important for a company, as the members of this team have more interactive and customer-oriented roles than any other employees (Pehlivanoglu & Civelek, 2019, p. 2073). The salesforce is the most highly empowered team in many companies, while salespeople have a critical impact on customer relationships. Every salesforce member has a chance to improve

sales revenues and contribute to top-line performance (Zoltners, Sinha, & Lorimer, 2008, p. 115). The role of sales is to stimulate demand for products. Salespeople use selling techniques to persuade customers that they need a supplier's product (Weitz & Bradford, 1999, p. 243).

There are various interpretations of the functions of sales management. The duties and responsibilities of sales managers in the literature can be summarized as follows: determining objectives and goals; forecasting and budgeting; salesforce organization and leadership; selection, recruitment and training; evaluation of sales performance and control (Jobber & Lancaster 2011, p. 15; Sharma, 2014, pp. 25-26; Tyagi & Kumar, 2004, pp. 235-236). These listed dimensions are the duties of the sales management team in a modern company to manage the sales functions and achieve the company's objectives and goals. Additionally, this study emphasizes the importance of another dimension named "stakeholder relations management" for sales managers and recommends researchers to consider including this dimension in relevant future researches. Stakeholder relations management is essential for sales managers to be successful in all their duties and responsibilities. All the duties and responsibilities of sales managers are discussed in detail in the following paragraphs.

### **2.1. Determining Objectives and Goals**

To lead any team, a manager must have an objective and goals. As Maciariello (2009) mentions, an objective is the prerequisite for a work assignment, and objectives serve as the vehicle for the implementation of a strategy (p. 37). The general objectives of companies are filtered down into periodical targets, goals and measures. In sales, these objectives are usually determined based on data gathered by the sales force or market researchers (Tyagi & Kumar, 2004, p. 5). Employees without goals may feel inefficient and unaware of the value they are adding to the organization (Teo & Low, 2016, p. 84).

In sales teams, the sales management team formulates and shares the objectives. To achieve success, managers are required to guide their sellers according to the company objectives they are expected to reach using sales personnel or a sales team. Examples of sales objectives might be percentage growth in sales volume, market share, profitability, service levels, and salesforce costs, etc. Selling objectives are derived from the company's strategy decisions. These objectives should be consistent with other functions such as marketing, finance, supply chain and human resources strategies. Any lack of collaboration between sales and other departments might have a negative impact on achieving the given objectives.

Determining the goals of sales employees and the main objective of the whole company helps employees realize the importance of their contribution to the system. Salespeople live with the motivation of reaching goals. As a sales team reaches a given goal, the company is one step closer to achieving its objectives. Therefore, the duty and responsibility of the sales manager is to set clear goals and share them with the team, so that everybody is aware of where the company is heading.

## **2.2. Forecasting and Budgeting**

Sales forecasting involves estimating the sales potential that the company might achieve. A sales forecast is calculated by the salesforce in cooperation with other stakeholders and is an essential step in preparing company plans. Forecasting is part of sales management as well as of the demand management process generally, in collaboration with the supply chain and marketing. A mistake in the forecasting process may lead to failure to reach company goals.

The demand management process matches the customers' requirements with the capabilities of the supply chain (Croxtton, Lambert, García-Dastugue, & Rogers, 2002, p. 51). To forecast consumer demand accurately is crucial to both retailers and suppliers. By forecasting accurately, product availability can be ensured without overstocking or overproduction (Adebanjo & Mann, 2000, pp. 223-224). Min & Yu (2008) underline the importance of designing an interfunctional and inter-organizational supply chain that might provide benefits to the company, such as reduced inventory, faster product flow, quicker customer response time and increased profit (p. 5). In sales forecasting, the sales team gathers all the data from the field about competitors, customers, potential threats, and risks, etc. to forecast assumptions using clear information. Based on past years and by estimating the potential of the current year, sales managers modify and submit the final forecasts.

A budget is a formalized plan of management objectives. Budgets serve as a guide for strategy implementation and control the use of resources (Egbunike & Unamma, 2017, p. 25; Raghunandan et. al., 2012, p. 111). Shim & Siegel (2005) define a budget as the formal expression of plans, goals, and objectives of management for a designated time period (p. 1). For Zinyama & Nhema (2016) budgeting is about who gets what and about the functioning of the financial control of inputs, management of ongoing activities, planning, setting priorities and accountability (p. 35). Budgets are expressed in numbers, such as a unit of currency, units/items, kilograms, hours, and manpower, etc. Sales expenses can include manpower, travel and others. A sales budget is prepared for each channel, territory, customer and salesperson.

Forecasting and budgeting are important duties and responsibilities of sales managers aiming to achieve company objectives. These tools enable managers to monitor and control the compatibility of the results obtained by teams with given objectives. When forecasts and budgets are incompatible with the agreed-upon strategy, revisions to the targets or strategies might be required.

## **2.3. Salesforce Organization and Leadership**

Determining the salesforce organization, managing the team and leadership are among sales managers' duties and responsibilities. The sales managers must design effective plans and manage sales organizations in line with company strategies. An organized and well-planned sales organization will help a company attain its targets in the field.

A salesforce organization comprises physical assets and human assets. Physical assets are offices, office equipment and staff equipment such as cars, mobile phones, laptops, iPads, and sales order-taking terminals. Human assets are primarily the people working as part of the salesforce and their knowledge, competencies and relationships (Anderson & Schmittlein, 1984, pp. 386-387). There are many ways to manage, divide, combine and integrate the different sales channels, teams and functions. In general, the salesforce is managed by determining geography with respect to regions of the country, sales channels such as retailers, pharmacies, hospitals, ecommerce, restaurants, and hotels, and brands or product lines such as selling X, Y, or Z. Salespeople are always on the frontline of companies and assume a wide diversity of selling roles. In today's sales organization structures in various companies, these individuals can be divided into six general categories: merchandisers, sales representatives, sales executives, sales managers, sales efficiency or technical support officers, and category and channel development officers.

In terms of leadership, it is essential to bear in mind that a sales manager's success depends on his or her team and that the manager's job is to accomplish work through other people (Calvin, 2001, p. 5). According to Ingram et al. (2009), sales management is the management of an organization's personal selling function, and sales managers are involved in strategy and in the people aspects of personal selling (p. 5). Salespeople play pivotal roles in organizations, and the overall success of that organization is dependent on its salesforce; therefore, salespeople's motivation is very important (John, Francis, & Innocent, 2012, p. 620). As discussed in previous studies on general people management, improving the working conditions of employees, rewarding them, providing career opportunities, listening to an individual's needs and ensuring a fair wage compensation mechanism might contribute to employees' job satisfaction and motivation. As the result, organizational performance and productivity increase (Kose, 2019, p. 145). A salesforce undergoes a huge amount of daily work-related stress. Selling a product and collecting revenues are themselves stress coefficients. Manzoor (2012) mentions that to ensure that employees do their best at work even under challenging conditions can be accomplished through motivation and good leadership (p. 3). Motivation boosts performance and motivated employees in direct contact with customers make essential contributions to company success (Ferreira, 2017, p. 60). No matter what the numbers say, salespeople always expect to be rewarded for their efforts. Incentives can be both monetary and nonmonetary compensation and implementing compensation and other incentives and reward programs might motivate and inspire the team (Schwartz, 2006, p. 97).

Employees are a company's most valuable assets. The effective leadership and motivation of a salesforce toward organizational goals are especially important for achieving success. The duty and responsibility of a sales manager is to create an effective sales organization with respect to the company resources at hand and provide the expected leadership.

#### **2.4 Selection, Recruitment and Training**

The salesforce selection, recruitment and training processes are crucial to forming competent sales teams. All of these are living processes and should be continuously active in companies. Companies' success in a competitive environment are in tandem with their sales efforts. Therefore, determining the quality and competency of salespersons are distinctive skills in organizations. The work allocation of a salesforce is decided during the selection and recruitment processes. Selection is choosing the right person for the job. According to Calvin (2001), the most important function that a sales manager performs is hiring, and yet this is an area they have little training and experience in implementing (p. 10).

To form a competent sales team, sales managers should be aware of the skills needed for their organization and system. Marshall, Goebel, & Moncrief (2003) specify that the characteristics of modern selling require a wide range of skills for salespeople, such as "Presentational skills, listening skills, follow-up skills, ability to adapt sales style from situation to situation, tenacity (sticking to the task), organizational skills, verbal communication skills, proficiency in interacting with people at all levels, demonstrated ability to overcome objections, closing skills, personal planning and time management skills" (pp. 247-255). These skills are needed in terms of attracting and gaining customers, analyzing and meeting potential customers, understanding customer needs, properly questioning, developing and representing solutions, negotiating, handling customer objections and questions, and closing the sale (Johlke, 2006, p. 312). The skills may vary from industry to industry. For example, Özçam & Yalman (2012) mention that in the banking industry, sales representatives should have good communication skills, exhibit trust, focus on the customer, accomplish sales closures, share the sales process and have an ethical approach (p. 312). These necessary skills could be extended with examples from other industries based on various academic research findings.

Sales managers should focus on training salespersons to create better customer relationships and to increase their sales and management competencies. These goals can be accomplished through on-the-job training, coaching and mentoring, classroom training, and online training, etc. Koponen & Julkunen (2017) recommend that training focus on strengthening salespeople's professionalism and interpersonal communication skills and on informing them about speech codes (p. 38). Companies seek the right salesperson to train and motivate (Varinli, Yaraş, & Başalp, 2009, p. 114). The sales manager should manage all resources efficiently, most importantly, human resources.

The sales manager's duty and responsibility involve not only recruitment and training but also the maintenance of successful teams and employees. As mentioned earlier, buyers are often loyal to salespeople. Therefore, if a salesforce already understands the existing competence level of team members, working to improve their competencies should be considered a first step because salesforce turnover might entail costs to a company. According to Darmon (2008), few organizations are aware of the reasons that salespeople quit or the causes of salesforce attrition. These

individuals may leave the company voluntarily for better jobs with higher salaries or as a shift in career. They may also be dismissed due to poor performance or downsizing. Salespeople might leave the company for unavoidable reasons such as death, illness, or retirement (pp. 211-212).

### **2.5. Evaluation of Sales Performance and Control**

The selling effort of the sales function must somehow be measured, evaluated and controlled while salespeople are being paid by their employers and companies. There are usually some objectives given to the salesforce by the management team, such as sales turnover, profits, expenses, market share, customer satisfaction level and other financials. The sales indicators and measurement scale of the individual, team or business varies from company to company. According to Zallocco, Pullins, & Micheal (2009), sales performance measures must be consistent with the organizational mission and objectives. In addition, objectives must encourage salespeople to act in a manner that enables them to reach the desired outcomes (p. 604). Several commonly measurement scales are used to evaluate the sales performance of an individual or a team. Ahmad et al. (2012) indicates that “any company that sells products to customers uses a form of sales performance measurement to evaluate an employee’s quality of work and help pinpoint development areas” (p. 101). These scales can be categorized as quantitative and qualitative performance measures with respect to the given objectives.

Quantitative measures of performance are a numeric evaluation of the salesperson. These measures are sales value, sales volume, the addition of new customers to the system, average sales calls per day, gross profit by product/customer per day/month/year, total sales orders, customer visit performance, sales order realization performance, total country/region or customer-based market share performance, write-off performance, customer trade terms, customer terminal dates, homogenous customer growth performance, product or customer penetration performance, number of new assortments and shelf designs, field and customer stock management in terms of stock days, average pricing, sell-in to the customer and sell-out from the customer, number and frequency of merchandising services to stores, and customer retention, etc. Qualitative measures of performance represent the salesperson’s major job activities. These criteria are characteristics, behavior or results that cannot be expressed in numbers. Qualitative performance results comprise a subjective evaluation by reviewers (Munshi & Hanji, 2014, p. 39). Therefore, this type of performance can be evaluated only subjectively. An example of qualitative targets can be the extent of a salesperson’s product and service knowledge. Hinson, Adeola, & Amartey (2019) remark that salespeople who fail to meet qualitative targets commonly fail to meet quantitative targets (p. 7).

In studies measuring the business performance of companies, sales growth criteria is a commonly used performance indicator. For example, Gemsera & Leenders (2001) rate firm performance according to total profit, profit growth, and turnover growth (p. 32). Similarly, Weinzimmer (2000) uses sales data to measure organizational growth (p. 37). Selvam et al. (2016) identify firm performance determinants such as

profitability performance, growth performance, market value performance, customer satisfaction, employee satisfaction, environmental performance, environmental audit performance, corporate governance performance and social performance (p. 93). According to Singh & Gupta (2016), “for finance, economics and strategy researchers, organizational performance means firm performance, profits and sales, return-on-investment (ROI), return-on-asset (ROA) and other financial parameters” (p. 3).

In terms of control, the objectives of a sales team are generally followed and controlled by KPIs (Key Performance Indicator), which are important management tools, especially for the evaluation and management of sales teams. KPIs clarify what success is and show whether salespeople or teams meet or exceed expectations. Teau & Protopopescu (2015) state that KPIs help improve business results, ease the decision-making process and evaluate performance. KPIs lead to better execution, behavior change and skill improvement, and they set expectations and improve communication (pp. 65-71). In addition to KPIs, sales managers are responsible for controlling their teams in terms of managing customers, communicating with teams, managing budget and expenses, producing work on time, attending assigned meetings, and using company equipment and resources efficiently, etc.

In studies measuring sales teams’ or individuals’ sales performance, these are usually measured as year to date, month to date, and year end. In addition, performance is evaluated for each quarter and half-year. Sales managers use both qualitative and quantitative sales performance measurement approaches in order to assess the differences among regions, customers, sales staff and products. By analyzing gaps, actions can be taken to improve performance. The duty and responsibility of the sales manager is to operate a fair performance evaluation process and control the salespeople.

## **2.6. Stakeholder Relations Management**

A company’s stakeholders have strategic importance given their ability to influence the organization’s very existence (Dohnalova & Zimola, 2014, p. 886). According to Jones (1995), the term ‘stakeholder’ applies not only to customers or employees but also to subgroups of customers and employees who may have interests (p. 408). For sales managers, stakeholders comprise all individuals inside and outside of the company who can influence the sales managers’ duties and responsibilities.

Managing consistent and successful relationships with all stakeholders is a management ability and a matter of experience. According to Smudde & Courtright (2011), the three dimensions of stakeholder management, which are creating stakeholders, maintaining relationships with them, and improving those relationships, are everyday matters and an inherently rhetorical activity. Communication is the key to managing relationships with stakeholders (pp. 139-142). Sales managers lacking a respectable stakeholder relations management ability might succumb to inefficiency or fail in each task discussed earlier in this article. Below, each duty and responsibility are briefly considered from a stakeholder relations management perspective.



To determine the objectives and goals of the sales team, the sales managers should be managing the top management, peer managers working in different functions, and employees. The sales manager should be aware that in some cases, the sales teams' success might depend on some other functions that must be performed via teamwork. In modern companies, most key departments have some dependent and some independent objectives. In forecasting and budgeting, the sales manager must cooperate with all the stakeholders, including finance, supply chain, marketing, sales team members and customers, as a mistake in the forecasting process may lead to failure in reaching not only company goals but also stakeholder goals. In the salesforce organization task, sales managers must manage sales organizations in line with company strategies. To do so, effective plans must be prepared in conjunction with stakeholders. The sales manager must analyze the market, the level of competition, the business needs, and the needs of the company. The ownership of the sales team by all the units of the company and the stakeholders would facilitate success.

For sales organization and leadership, having close relationships with stakeholders helps the sales manager obtain critical information about his or her subordinates so that the manager can manage the team members' expectations and understand their motivations. During selection, recruitment and training, the sales manager should be working in cooperation with the human relations function and the team. A sales manager who enjoys good relationships with stakeholders could obtain information about candidates and attract qualified employees and trainers from the market to the company. In evaluating sales performance and control, the sales manager needs all the necessary information from stakeholders to determine both quantitative and qualitative evaluations. In addition, in order to control the team and processes, gathering information from stakeholders could help the sales manager realize opportunities and handle threats in a shorter period.

### **3. CONCLUSION**

All employees, companies and their stakeholders are affected by the changing environment; therefore, the duties and responsibilities of sales managers are concurrently affected. Under the current circumstances, the tasks of sales managers are challenging, and these individuals must also react and adapt to a flexible environment. Jaramillo, Grisaffe, Chonko, & Roberts (2009) point out that in times of rapid change, innovation and knowledge are essential for success (p. 258). Today's salespeople and those of the future must consider that each innovative idea and piece of information arising from the inconsistent environment regarding the market, competitors or customers could be a valuable contribution to the company's strategies in its efforts to reach consumers. Obtaining consumer data is becoming more difficult every day, especially in the aftermath of new regulations on data privacy in many countries. As the closest function of a company to the field, the sales function is still able to observe and obtain key data on consumers, customers, markets, competitors, industry and even the economy. These valued data can be

gathered and used in company strategy implementation by sales managers under the effective management of the sales team and stakeholders.

Currently, the use of digitalization and artificial intelligence technologies is becoming part of sales management. In a dynamic business environment, it is inevitable that sales professionals will become more informed about how technologies will shape how sales and sales organizations function. Future technological developments may affect the sales occupation more than many other professions, while in numerous industries, sales remain heavily based on personal communication. Singha et al. (2019) note that these technologies may create opportunities and threats for the sales profession in terms of creating value for stakeholders and sales professionals, such as the self, seeking growth, fulfillment, and status (p. 1). Under environmental circumstances and job competition among individuals, salespeople must continuously improve themselves by means of personal and company training in technology to adapt to changes in the markets and to be able to offer value-added services to customers.

Salespeople manage numerous people from inside and outside organizations. Sales is a very time-consuming and human relations-based occupation. To achieve effective management, this article suggests that all managers form a sales management or lead team consisting of team managers. By creating sales lead teams and organizing scheduled team meetings with members, sales managers can increase their control, better manage their time, strengthen teamwork and enjoy the opportunity to listen to voices at all levels. All the sales managers' duties and responsibilities reviewed in the literature are essential to good sales team management. This research recommends that sales managers always rethink and remember (a) the significance of stakeholder relations management for success in all tasks, (b) the benefits of quick data and information gathering for companies, (c) the positive influence of good leadership and democratic team management on people, (d) the value of ownership of objectives and goals by all employees, (e) the importance of an objective evaluation of results and control over each member through KPIs, (f) the constructive impact of collaboration and teamwork on the entire system, (g) the importance of improving one's own and team competencies in keeping with the changing environment through training, and (h) the significance of maintaining successful teams and employees, as losing them might entail costs to the company.

This study contributes to the literature by examining and evaluating the dimensions of the duties and responsibilities of sales managers. The research provides a list of dimensions with respect to the existing literature and additionally emphasizes the importance of "stakeholder relations management" dimension. The final list of dimensions are as follows: determining objectives and goals; forecasting and budgeting; salesforce organization and leadership; selection, recruitment and training; evaluation of sales performance and control; stakeholder relations management. These dimensions are the duties and responsibilities of the sales

management team in a modern company to manage the sales functions and achieve overall objectives. In the stakeholder management relations section of the study, all the dimensions are interpreted with respect to stakeholder relations management perspective. Stakeholder relations management is essential for sales managers to be successful in all their duties and responsibilities and therefore the study recommends researchers to consider including this dimension in relevant future researches.

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